

**THE ROLE OF THE GRADE FOUR TEACHER IN PROVIDING  
SUPPORT FOR THE COGNITIVELY GIFTED ENGLISH SECOND  
LANGUAGE (ESL) UNDERACHIEVER**

by

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# DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

Student number: 37389904

I declare that *The role of the Grade Four teacher in providing support for the cognitively gifted English Second Language (ESL) underachiever* 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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A Wissing

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Date

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to all the bright-eyed, inquisitive, exceptional learners who stepped over the threshold of my classroom for more than two decades and who delighted me with their brilliance and sparkle.

Please continue to marvel at the world and to fill it with your radiance.

## SUMMARY

Inclusive education requires of teachers, as managers and facilitators in classrooms, to deal with all aspects regarding effectively addressing barriers to learning. Of specific concern are the cognitively gifted learners who are not taught in their mother tongue but who attend schools where the language of learning and teaching is English. This qualitative study deals with the support provided by Grade Four teachers to cognitively gifted English Second Language (ESL) underachievers. The research indicates that the teachers are aware of English Second Language (ESL) learners who show behaviours associated with cognitive giftedness but who, when considering their potential, underachieve. These learners do however not receive support in the classroom to address their specific barrier to learning, which is the dual exceptionality of cognitive giftedness co-occurring with poor English proficiency. Support for all aspects of the cognitively gifted Grade Four English Second Language (ESL) learner's needs is recommended.

Key words: inclusive education; cognitive giftedness; ESL learning; underachievers; South Africa; support; barriers to learning; classroom teachers; Grade Four; double exceptionality.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
DoE	Department of Education
ESL	English Second Language
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
LAD	Language Acquisition Device
LASS	Language Acquisition Support System
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
NCESS	National Committee on Education Support Services
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training
SBST	School Based Support Team
SGB	School Governing Body
TPR	Total Physical Response
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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## Chapter 1

# ORIENTATION

### 1.1 Introduction

The reality of education in a South African classroom opens one's eyes to the multitude of problems experienced in this environment (Faller 2006:5). Faller (2006: 5) refers to the looming educational crisis in South Africa and lists a number of negatives, such as the poorly understood curriculum and large classes. An issue which can cause concern is learners who are underachieving scholastically when their potential is taken into account. Of specific concern are cognitively gifted learners who are not taught in their mother tongue but attend schools where the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is English (Nel 2005: 150). Often, a lack of academic English proficiency results in an inability to perform appropriately according to their potential. These learners' barriers frequently go undetected as their cognitive ability allows them to compensate for their learning difficulties (Nel 2005: 151-156). Moon (2009: 275) refers to these twice-exceptional learners as possibly the most at risk group. They face challenges and complex issues at school which could result in a negative experience. Kokot (2005: 469) discusses the specific South African situation where the struggle is for the provision of adequate education for many average learners. High potential underachieving children may never be recognised as having special gifts and their underachievement may never be addressed (Kokot 1999: 62). For the purpose of this study, the terms “twice-exceptional” and “dual exceptionality” (Moon 2009: 275) will be used when referring to these learners.

Some of the most basic characteristics of cognitive giftedness are those concerning language proficiency, verbal reasoning skills and an advanced vocabulary (Deiner 2010: 356). In the area of developmental differences in children, verbal skills are likely to be very apparent. Young cognitively gifted children's identification “focusses primarily on early receptive and expressive language development” (Deiner 2010: 356). It is often assumed by teachers that any child who is cognitively gifted should display precociousness regarding academic language competence.

However, in the current South African situation, many learners are being schooled in a language which is not their mother tongue and which could therefore be unfamiliar to them. The complex and difficult issues of second language acquisition, as well as second language learning, as explained by Fleisch (2008: 98), are now the daily reality of many South African learners.

The concern addressed in this study is based on the consideration that there are learners in classrooms who are underachieving because of a lack of language proficiency. Underachievement can be due to the fact that cognitive giftedness is not realised because of a lack of academic language proficiency. It is also possible that learners may not be noticed as underachievers, and their barriers therefore not addressed, because of their giftedness allowing them to circumvent their learning difficulty. The learning difficulty in this regard might be the disabling effect of schooling in an unfamiliar language which might hamper the fulfilment of their potential. Both exceptionalities may therefore appear less extreme. Although there is a consistent drive to move away from labelling learners, for the clarity of the study it is necessary to describe this specific subpopulation of gifted learners as the “cognitively gifted ESL underachiever”.

The loss of such potential for the individual, as well as for society at large, would be a considerable price to pay. We should all be troubled when we think of the unfulfilled lives and the talent gone to waste in our world due to misunderstanding and the lack of insight we have for the gifted (Gallagher & Gallagher 1994: 393).

Teachers, as managers and facilitators in the classrooms, are the ones who will have to deal with all the aspects of teaching these cognitively gifted ESL underachievers. White Paper 6 (DoE 2001: 29) acknowledges that teachers are responsible for how effectively barriers to learning will be addressed. It is therefore important to learn more from them regarding their supportive role when addressing barriers to learning. These barriers could be emotional, social and behavioural or it could be learning difficulties regarding English Second Language (ESL) learning. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning is not relevant to this study and will therefore not be examined. For the purpose of this study, Grade Four teachers' knowledge and skills in recognising and addressing ESL barriers for the cognitively

gifted learner will be researched. The refinement and development of these skills are pivotal to the supportive role required of teachers.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

### **1.2.1 Introduction**

This study departs by using an intensive literature study which is the process of digging into a body of knowledge which was compiled by previous researchers (Babbie 2009: 507). To investigate how scholars generate knowledge, as well as how that knowledge can be contextualised and theorised, will help the researcher to identify the niche regarding her own research (Babbie 2009: 507; Henning 2004: 27). Mouton (2001: 87) refers to the literature study as the study of a “body of accumulated scholarship”.

The aspects of cognitive giftedness and English second language as the LoLT are, in view of the aforementioned, identified as the focus areas of this study. The study thus rests on these two pillars as its grounding principles. Underachievement, as a manifestation of the twice exceptionality of cognitive giftedness combined with ESL learning, is also discussed. The current South African educational context and the use of English as the LoLT receive attention. The principles of inclusive education form the structure for these issues to be examined. Following this point of departure, a framework is established to highlight the significance of the study. While consulting the literature, topical studies were favoured but seminal studies were consulted and included.

### **1.2.2 Second language acquisition and learning**

A discussion of language acquisition should start with reference to the theories of the Nativists, specifically Chomsky’s nativist hypothesis that a child is born with a language acquisition device (LAD) (Chomsky 2000: 102). According to the Nativists’ viewpoint, the LAD permits language to be interpreted. The Non-Nativists, with specific reference to Bruner’s interactionist approach, argues that the language acquisition support system (LASS) allows for language to be structured through social exchanges (Johnson 2004: 2). The critical period hypothesis argues that language acquisition must take place during a specific time, which ends at about the age of puberty (Birdsong 1999: 5). Ellis (1997: 42) explains that the first language

influences the order of development of the second language. Others argue that the differences between first and second language acquisition in children include variables such as the child's age, place and time of second language acquisition as well as individual learning style.

Any discussion on second language learning also needs to include a reference to Krashen's Monitor Model, with specific mention of the input hypothesis which argues that “we acquire language by going for meaning first, and as a result, we acquire structure” (Krashen 1982:21). Krashen's explanation of the ‘silent period’ and the fact that children in ESL classes are often not allowed a silent period as they are asked to produce before they have acquired enough “syntactic competence”, is a reflection of many classrooms (1982: 27). Many ESL learners do not have the freedom of sufficient time, focus and exposure to rules to obtain academic competence in English. According to Guerrero (2004: 177) an ESL learner can require seven to ten years to be on par with a native English peer. The researcher witnessed, in her years of experience in ESL classrooms, that ESL learners often just do not have that luxury of sufficient time.

The focus is therefore on learners’ ability to use a second language in everyday communication and social routines compared to the degree of cognition required for learning. This difference is explained by Cummins as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) in contrast to Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 1999: 2, 3). The distinction between these two terms also explains the different time periods required by children to “acquire conversational fluency in their second language as compared to grade-appropriate academic fluency in that language”, as stated by Cummins (in Baker & Hornberger 2001: 113). Children's seemingly effortless acquisition of their first language apparently has a lot to do with the environment and social surroundings, and it would be beneficial if the second language could be acquired after the first language concepts are obtained (Baker & Hornberger 2001: 63-66). Second language learning for many learners, however, means immersion in a school where the LoLT is English. This often happens at a time before a solid foundation of language skills in the native language is acquired, with the result that conversational fluency in the second language, but not necessarily accuracy of academic usage, is established (Baker & Hornberger 2001: 113; Ovando & Collier 1985: 63, 64).

Ritchie and Bhatia (1996: 1) explain that second language learning has been probed and analysed and studied and yet we still understand relatively little about it. The addressing of barriers to learning by accommodating second language learners fully will hopefully have an impact on effective learning and allow for these learners' potential in the inclusive classroom to be reached (Nel 2005: 151).

The focus of the study will be to enquire how teachers support Grade Four learners with a lack of second language academic proficiency, in order to enhance these learners' cognitive giftedness within the context of inclusion. Narrowing the focus to the South African situation highlights some issues discussed in the following paragraphs.

Former education minister Pandor comments, in reference to inclusion that: "We must promote the broadest possible view of inclusion, in the sense of social inclusion, which poses challenges for every school that has one or more children who are different in some way" (Pandor 2006: [www.info.gov.za](http://www.info.gov.za)). These differences will include the cognitively gifted, ESL underachievers, as they too experience barriers to learning. According to White Paper 6 (DoE 2001) 'all' learning needs are to be addressed. Davidoff and Lazarus (1997: 35) focus on the development of a school as a place where all learning needs are to be addressed and as a learning environment where adjustments take place because of new insights and realities. Within the parameters of inclusion we find non-English learners attending English schools with the consequence that they are confronted with simultaneously acquiring a second language and learning in it (De Klerk 2002: 2). Despite all the benefits of mother tongue schooling, the majority of South Africans prefer their children to attend schools where English is the LoLT (De Wet 2002: 119).

The reality of the inclusive classroom for many teachers and learners in South Africa consequently features second language learning, sometimes resulting in underachieving cognitively gifted learners. This concept of cognitive giftedness will now be discussed.

### **1.2.3 Cognitive giftedness and underachievement**

Recognising giftedness is the first step towards providing gifted learners with an appropriate education that will help them in fulfilling their potential. Gardner looked at



giftedness from a multiple intelligences perspective. According to his theory of multiple intelligences, each intellectual potential can function independently of the others. Gardner termed the intelligences linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal (Ramos-Ford & Gardner 1997: 55, 56). This idea of varying degrees of various gifted behaviours challenged the absolute view of being either gifted or not gifted (Brown, Renzulli, Gubbins, Siegle, Zhang & Chen 2005: 77).

Recent research on cognitive giftedness and perceptions of cognitive giftedness does not, however, allow for such a narrow point of view. Moon (2009: 237) comments on the practice of equating giftedness with a high intelligence quotient as problematic. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and Sternberg's triarchic view of giftedness are examples of current perceptions regarding intelligence (Colangelo & Davis 1997: 43, 55). The dimensions of giftedness, as well as the usual reliance on verbal ability as important for school achievement, have been challenged (Ramos-Ford & Gardner 1997: 55). According to Thompson, Detterman and Plomin (1991:158), the link between cognitive abilities and scholastic achievement is being increasingly questioned. Although cognitive giftedness is usually associated with very advanced intellectual abilities, these intellectual skills may manifest in other unusual ways, such as keen spatial skills or a high abstract reasoning ability (Joseph & Ford 2006: 43).

Giftedness is a label of potential which might include combinations of outstanding abilities or high performance (Gagne 2007: 102). Cognitively gifted learners are highly observant, convergent thinkers using varied and flexible thinking, as explained by Wiechers and Kokot (1994: 252, 253). Verbal precociousness and advanced verbal reasoning skills are characteristics that are listed as describing cognitively gifted learners (Joseph & Ford 2006: 43). In a country dominated by second language learning, this may pose real difficulties. Underachievement, which is described as the discrepancy between ability and achievement, might now be more apparent (Gallagher & Gallagher 1994: 399). Kokot (in Van der Westhuizen & Maree 2006: 270) comments on the plight of the gifted learner and emphasises that "many gifted students may not possess high verbal skills, or may be compelled to study in a second or even a third language". The LoLT, in addition to aspects regarding second language acquisition and learning, may conceal a cognitively gifted learner's

giftedness when such a learner underachieves. The concept of underachievement, when seen as a possible result of ESL learning, is a discussion of learners who seem to have special abilities but who do not achieve accordingly (Kokot 1999: 59).

A usual perception of underachievement is found in the following definition: "Underachievement is experienced by individuals who work well below their known potential" (Van den Aardweg & Van den Aardweg 1999: 246). The underachiever is often portrayed as bored, poorly adjusted and with low expectations. The environmental factors of overcrowded classrooms, inflexible teachers and poor socio-economic circumstances are listed as contributing to the phenomenon of underachieving (Rimm 2006: 5). There are, however, a group of underachievers whose underachievement is most probably due to the situation of being enrolled at schools where the LoLT is English. Pierce (2002: 3) refers to the "achievement gap" of ESL learners compared to first language learners. These ESL learners are taught all Learning Areas through the medium of English and are expected to have acquired a proficiency level which is adequate to deal with demanding academic content.

The barrier faced is therefore limited English proficiency, but due to their cognitive giftedness, these twice exceptional learners tend to compensate for this limitation and are consequently not always perceived as having a learning difficulty. They do, however, not perform according to their potential, and can be wrongly perceived as average learners (Assouline, Nicpon & Whiteman 2009: 1). This intersection of cognitive giftedness and a learning difficulty creates a twofold barrier to optimal learning. Firstly, the cognitive giftedness may not always be recognised and therefore not encouraged and nurtured to its full fruition (Joseph & Ford 2006: 44). Secondly, the support regarding English as the LoLT may not be provided as the learner is not perceived as having such a barrier (Assouline et al. 2009: 1). In view of the fact that teachers "make it easier for learning to happen", as explained by Green (1999: 129), teachers will be the focus of the study as they address barriers in an inclusive classroom. The provision of support by the Grade Four teacher, for the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever, will assist in minimising the needs of the learner.

#### **1.2.4 Inclusive education**

The philosophical paradigm of full inclusion challenges, in its educational focus, the segregation of learners with barriers. Engelbrecht (1999: 5) explains that the dimensions of inclusion transcend considerations focussed narrowly on schools and rather indicate to a broader understanding of inclusion in society. The concentration is on “abilities rather than disabilities, and on social justice and equity rather than isolation and neglect” (Engelbrecht 1999:7). Inclusive education follows the notion of an inclusive society and schools should be increasingly adapted to allow for all learners to be perceived as valued individuals. In this dynamic process, the focal point is the participation of all learners through the identification and addressing of their barriers to learning. It also emphasises the role of the school in improving academic achievement while not neglecting personal and ethical development (Engelbrecht 1999: 9).

During the World Conference on Special Needs Education, held in 1994 (UNESCO 1994), a framework was established which focussed on the ability of ordinary schools to accommodate all children. This principle of ‘Education for All’, explained in ‘The UNESCO Salamanca Statement’ (UNESCO 1994: viii), recognises “the necessity and urgency of providing education for all children within the regular education system”.

The inaccurate view that inclusion is solely about ‘mainstreaming’ learners with special educational needs should be replaced. It should rather be seen as the improvement of practices within schools to ensure that all schools are inclusive environments for all children (Farrell 2001: 3). Inclusive practices are established to ensure that all learners’ needs are met (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 8).

South Africa's viewpoint of inclusive education is that of a constitutional imperative which reflects the development of an inclusive community (Naicker 1999: 22). Dreyer (2008: 22) explains how research indicates that the success of inclusive education lies within the provision of adequate support for learners who experience barriers to learning. Learning support replaces remedial support which was based on the medical model. The role that mainstream teachers play in addressing the diverse needs of learners is emphasised (Dreyer 2008: 22). This role that teachers play in making the curriculum accessible to all learners within the supportive community of a

school has been emphasised as important for inclusion to function properly (DoE 2001: 29). According to “A guide for parents, caregivers and communities”, based on Education White Paper 6 (2003: 11), classroom teachers will be regarded as the main resource to address the barriers to learning that learners encounter.

In this context, teachers are not remediators of deficits but facilitators of the learning process by designing, encouraging and interacting. A dynamic teacher is expected to fulfil many roles, of which supporting learners with barriers to learning is an important one. Focussing on the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever, the role of teachers in nurturing the whole child requires maintaining a balance between developing areas of giftedness and assuring that areas of weakness receive appropriate attention (Mitchell 2008: 27).

The supportive role of the teacher also involves the wider community, as the educational environment is not confined to the classroom but reaches beyond it to involve parents and support networks. Teachers, however, should be responsive to all learning needs by planning and implementing support strategies in an effort to minimise barriers (DoE 2001: 26). The inclusive classroom needs a competent teacher who provides conditions that will most effectively ensure that every learner’s specific needs are met, thereby achieving education for all.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

The concept of support for the cognitively gifted Grade Four learners whose mother tongue is not English, but who are attending a school where the LoLT is English, will be explored. These learners' limited exposure to English could have as a result that they do not always reach their potential in an inclusive environment. It is a fact that ESL learners who have acquired English communication skills sometimes lack academic language proficiency (Fleisch 2008: 102). There are, therefore, learners who display characteristics of cognitive giftedness but who are probably underachieving due to their cognitive giftedness being inhibited by the barrier of a lack of academic language proficiency. Teachers, who manage inclusive classrooms, are ideally positioned to aid in research into this specific aspect of support. In an inclusive environment they identify barriers to learning and design support strategies using cognitive and affective interventions (Montgomery 2000:

127). Teachers assess learner progress and monitor the intervention programmes (Bousnakis, Burns & Hopper 2008: [www.aegt.net.au](http://www.aegt.net.au)).

The research question can therefore be formulated as follows:

How do Grade Four teachers fulfil their supportive role when addressing barriers to learning as experienced by the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever?

This question will be connected to the following sub-problems:

What are the characteristics of Grade Four learners with the dual exceptionalities of cognitive giftedness combined with English second language learning?

What support strategies do Grade Four teachers use when addressing the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever's barriers to learning?

#### **1.4 Aim of the research**

The aim of this study is to concentrate on the core issue of support for the Grade Four cognitively gifted ESL underachiever. Support, as a term in an inclusive context, echoes the philosophy of quality education for all. The concept of 'Education for All', as defined in South African education policies such as White Paper 6 (DoE 2001), implies quality education for all – also for the cognitively gifted learner being hampered by a lack of academic language proficiency. Teacher support should assist learners by realising their potential and addressing barriers in order for unrealised possibilities to emerge. The role that teachers play, and their response when supporting learner needs, will be central to the study. As stated by Green (1999: 182), "Teachers are central to the success of inclusion", and teachers will therefore be the participants of the study. The research is thus focussed on the supportive role of Grade Four teachers who teach in an ESL environment; their points of view regarding effective support as well as their meaningful supportive relationships with their learners.

The function of teachers to address, as a barrier to learning, the limited academic language proficiency of the cognitively gifted underachiever, will be explored. This will shed some light on teacher support in the Grade Four inclusive classroom.

## 1.5 Motivation for the research

The inclusive classroom with its demands can be quite a daunting place for teachers. They are expected, regardless of their already considerable duties, to provide intervention strategies for learners experiencing barriers to learning (Lomofsky 1999: 74). A variety of learners, requiring a variety of intervention strategies, depend solely on the classroom teacher who might have numerous academic, administrative and extended educational duties (Faller 2006:5). These teachers, as managers of inclusive classrooms, are responsible for identifying a barrier to learning, planning appropriate intervention strategies, finding the time and opportunity to implement these strategies and monitor individual progress. This input, which is expected from the classroom teacher, can result in teachers feeling despondent and isolated (Best 1996: 105).

Teachers are expected to own the teaching task and feel accountable for the quality of the professional service provided (Sayer 1996: 10). Best (1996: 100) refers to the diffuseness of the teacher's role as causing tension. He quotes Hargreaves' attempt to identify the roles which comprise teaching and mentions "fount of knowledge, parent substitute, police officer, judge, resource manager, assessor, evaluator, instructor, etc." (Best 1996: 100). The effort in playing such diverse roles leaves teachers feeling diluted and fuzzy. Best (1996: 105) also mentions the rapid and substantial changes in education and how this has implications for how these roles are perceived by the teacher and all other role players.

The fact that some of the tension experienced by teachers has to do more with 'role' overload than with 'work' overload is also mentioned by Best (1996: 108). He links these diverse roles to the anxiety of functioning in an environment of constant change. The boundaries of these roles are therefore blurred and are connected to the numerous changes in the education system. A teacher who assumes that she is only responsible for filling empty heads with curriculum knowledge, will find that she is actually sharing parental responsibility for the complete well-being of a learner (Best 1996: 109). Sayer (1996: 16) also comments on the fact that a teacher's accountability is "complex and multiple". In this regard, Best (1996: 109) refers to the blurring of a teacher's role and sub-roles and McManus (1996: 116) comments on

the fact that teachers are expected to possess competencies as well as moral qualities like prudence and fortitude.

From this discussion it is clear that teachers' roles are multiple and their numerous responsibilities can create confusion and tension. It can be expected that teachers' professional morale can be low and that they may feel overwhelmed by expectations. Teachers, therefore, need as much support as possible, so that they can, in turn, effectively support the learners in their care. It is therefore important, from the viewpoint of the researcher, that teachers do not feel isolated when managing an inclusive classroom, but that they are aware of the approach and the process followed by other Grade Four teachers in supporting learners. The specific group of learners who will be considered is the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever.

Although children's schooling experiences vary, they share developmental stages which are influenced by culture, environment, health, temperament and personality (Wood 2007: xv). Wood (2007: 107, 108) comments on the worrying and confused age of nine, and that nine year olds often struggle to cognitively understand ethical behaviour. In most South African schools this is the Grade Four year when these learners are expected to move from the comfort and security of the Foundation Phase to the first year of Intermediate Phase with its tests, multiple teachers, many Learning Areas, changing of classes and academic demands. For the purpose of this study, which is focussed on the Grade Four teacher working with the Grade Four learner, certain concepts are highlighted as applying to this specific stage of development.

From the researcher's life and professional experience two encounters ignited the curiosity that was already present. At the school where the researcher taught previously, it was the decade-old system to assemble all the learners outside, next to the carports, when evacuating the classrooms during a fire drill. Randy, who was an ESL learner and a below-average achiever, commented on the fact that it was probably not the best idea to assemble 600 children around 25 cars with fuel tanks during a fire drill. How could it be that for many years many intelligent people followed this system and never displayed Randy's level of critical insight? But as Randy did, could it be that he had a dual barrier to optimal learning? A duality which

refers to a lack of English language proficiency that is combined with cognitive giftedness? Randy made me aware of these exceptionalities co-existing in a learner and the specific support required in addressing both in an inclusive classroom.

The second experience was much more personal in that it involved a member of the researcher's immediate family. This boy could, before his ninth birthday, already discuss issues such as the role of a person's subconscious when dreaming, whether Hitler was born evil, the sad fate of the Mars Exploration Rovers and the possibility of quantum theory time travel. At the school which he attends the curriculum was adapted slightly, but not sufficiently to suit his specific level of cognitive giftedness. It was a concern that in the inclusive system of education for all, the 'all' did not always extend to the cognitively gifted learner. These two personal encounters sparked an interest and, combined with teaching experience, the motivation for the research to be undertaken.

A Nexus search was done to locate research that has been carried out in this area. The search has shown that teachers' general feelings concerning inclusion, as well as the separate concepts of second language learning, underachievement and giftedness have received attention. However, these concepts combined, concentrating on a specific group of learners, and teachers' supportive role regarding this specific group's barriers to learning, have not been researched in South Africa.

With this as background, it motivates the research as important for teachers and their management of inclusive classroom environments and for the personal fulfilment of cognitively gifted learners. This could be significant for South Africa where many learners in Grade Four function in an ESL environment. Furthermore, neither the potential for self-fulfilment of the individual learner, nor the expansion of support strategies to reach more learners with this specific learning difficulty should be neglected.

The researcher's personal motivation for undertaking the research stems from years of teaching Intermediate Phase ESL learners. To catch a glimmer of cognitive giftedness in a learner, but not to see it realised in the school situation reminds one of the complexities of cognitive giftedness combined with ESL learning. Where these two exceptionalities co-exist, underachievement is often the result. The researcher sees it as equally important that, in the reality of the inclusion classroom, both these



learning difficulties receive adequate support. Firstly, that all cognitively gifted ESL learners be supported and guided towards English language proficiency, and secondly, that all cognitively gifted ESL learners be supported to cultivate their gifts and pursue excellence. The repetition of the word 'support' in both cases emphasises the fact that the supportive role of the teacher will be the focus of the research.

Colangelo and Davis (1997: 3) warn that to not treat cases of excellence as part of education for all is destructive to sound education practices. The educational need of every learner, and for the purpose of this research specifically the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever, should be realised and addressed. This learner requires a system of support which will provide intervention geared towards communicative and academic language proficiency. Simultaneously, this learner requires a system of support which will enhance cognitive giftedness by providing, for example, possibilities for advanced thinking, reasoning and problem solving (Kokot 1992: 199). Ritchie and Bhatia (1996: 691) refer to three types of competencies expected of the ESL learner, which are linguistic, grammatical and pragmatic competencies. Using these competencies as background, we can begin to understand the implications for the learner and the resulting instructional provision and intervention which will be the responsibility of the classroom teacher.

For the researcher, it is a significant step in the right direction to fulfil inclusive education's role by providing a whole suite of provisions for a learner with barriers. To enquire how teachers provide support in such situations is the researcher's ultimate objective. The motivation is therefore personal and professional but culminating in a system that will provide for the accessibility of learning support for all learners, particularly the Grade Four cognitively gifted ESL underachiever.

## **1.6 Research methods and design**

### **1.6.1 Qualitative research**

Considering that qualitative research is based on a constructivist philosophy that "assumes reality as multilayer, interactive, and a shared social experience interpreted by individuals", it allows for this method of research to be used in this study (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 396). Qualitative research was therefore

decided on due to the level of understanding it yields (Babbie 2009: 326). As the research problem revolves around the supportive role of teachers, it would interrelate the topic, case and methodology and these teachers will be engaged in interactive face-to-face interviews as participants. The goal is to determine how the participants fulfil their supportive role. The research hence focusses on the supportive role of teachers on one phenomenon, namely the cognitively gifted Grade Four underachiever in the ESL inclusive context. The teachers of these learners are individuals who are in similar teaching circumstances but who are not interacting with each other. The data can thus assist in understanding the phenomenon (Henning 2004: 4).

McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 91) state that most qualitative research interests come from personal experiences, accompanied by some measure of interest, which allow for the researcher's interest in these topics. Although previous research has been done separately in the fields of the aforementioned areas of cognitive giftedness and ESL learning, as already mentioned, this particular research problem has not been explored from the viewpoint of the combination of these aspects and teachers' management thereof. Certain aspects, which will now be indicated, are required to ensure the structuring of the research design.

In qualitative research design the following aspects have to be considered:

- Constructivism

One of the paradigms of qualitative research is constructivism, which views knowledge as dynamic and reflectively constructed (Golafshani 2003: 600). To indicate the direction of this study, the theoretical framework will focus on constructing meaning as the researcher seeks illumination and understanding. Golafshani (2003: 603) refers to the construction of a meaningful reality and says that the aim of qualitative research is to probe for deeper understanding and that constructivism may facilitate toward that aim. The understanding and analysis of others' construction will be important when attempting to answer the research question (Golafshani 2003: 604).

- Sampling

The samples were chosen because they were likely to be knowledgeable and informative (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 401). Consequently, Grade Four teachers were approached who are teaching at government primary schools in Pretoria where the LoLT is English but where the learner body is primarily comprised of English second language learners. Six primary schools will be approached and the researcher's request is for a Grade Four teacher, that is, one participant per school. A sample size of six was decided upon to ensure that enough in-depth data is generated and to assure that most of the important support strategies are likely to be documented. Due to the flexible approach of the research, the sample size can be expanded if necessary until saturation is reached and the interviews reveal no new data. This type of purposeful sampling allows for the selection of participants who will be effective (Babbie 2009: 514).

- Site selection

Purposeful sampling of six conveniently situated government primary schools in Pretoria which have English as the LoLT. In these schools most of the learners are not English mother tongue speakers and ESL learners usually start their English schooling as from Grade One.

- Researcher's role

The researcher will be part of the research process and in this interactive process, will firstly explain the procedures and gain the participants' trust. Thereafter, the researcher will be personally involved in conducting the interviews, giving feedback to the participants and analysing and presenting the data. The transcripts of in-depth interviews will be used as records to form a descriptive narrative. This method of inductive reasoning will form the framework for reporting the findings.

- Data collection through in-depth interviewing

Data will be collected, from the participating teachers, by means of semi-structured interviews. Questions will be set beforehand in an interview guide,

but the interviewees will be encouraged to speak without interrupting their train of thought. The approach will be flexible, using verbal communication and observation in this context dependent situation. In order for the participants to express their thoughts more freely and to not be confined by the structure, open ended questions will be used. The five features of interviewing, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007: 7, 8), will be carefully followed:

- The researcher will see all detail, in other words, every action, word and gesture will be regarded as significant.
- Data will be descriptive.
- The concern will be as much with the process as with the outcomes.
- The researcher does not assume to know all the important questions prior to the interview process, but discovers the important questions as the interview develops.
- All transcripts and recorded material are shown to each participant to ensure that the researcher's interpretations are true and accurate.

Raeder (2007: 8) lists the advantages of semi-structured interviews, mentioning, for example, the ability to compare responses and analyse data. Semi-structured interviews will permit as much meaning to be brought to light. In addition, it will enhance the pursuit for understanding by focussing on a variety of discursive aspects (Henning 2004: 54).

### **1.6.2 Ethical considerations**

As ethical principles are to be considered throughout all stages of planning and data collection and especially considering face-to-face interactive processes, the following ethical guidelines are to be followed (Mc Millan & Schumacher 2001: 420):

- Voluntary informed consent

Babbie (2009: 65) explains that the concept of informed consent includes voluntary participation and no harm to participants. All participants must understand why their participation is necessary and for this reason they need to be familiar with the process. Participation will, however, always be voluntary and participants may opt out at any stage.

- Confidentiality and anonymity

Schools and participants will not be identifiable in print and consequently names of participants and locations will be coded. Raw data will be stored safely.

- Fairness

A sense of fairness in approach and interviewing style will be a characteristic of the research process. Participants will be assured that the research will have no adverse effect but that they nevertheless will have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process.

- Feedback

As the research interprets support for cognitively gifted Grade Four underachievers in the inclusive ESL classroom from the participants' perspectives, feedback of the results will be conveyed to the participants.

All research is guided by the principle of respect for the quality of educational research. At the same time professional ethics and personal morality are incorporated.

### **1.6.3 Organisational consent**

Given the facts of the research process, as noted earlier, consent was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education and the specific District Office and, equally importantly, from the principals and School Governing Bodies of the selected schools.

### **1.6.4 Proposed time periods**

The time periods indicated are approximations, intended to allow for variable circumstances. From commencement until the obtaining of organisational consent should not take longer than 4 to 6 weeks. The process regarding the orientation to the field setting, establishment of rapport and trust with the interviewees, commencing the interviews, data collection and recording is proposed to take 5 to 8 weeks.

Following this process will be a continuation of the basic data collection process with tentative interpretations. With basic data collection the researcher is no longer caught up in adjustments to the newness of the setting or the interviewees, as explained by McMillan and Schumacher (2001:406), so there is room for interpretations. Conceptualisations and descriptions are summarised and this is envisaged to take 5 to 8 weeks.

Depending on the depth of data collected, the data collection process will then close and the verifications of interpretations should take 5 to 8 weeks. The completion of the process, with formal analysis and the final formulation of interpretations, has an assumed duration of 8 to 12 weeks.

## **1.7 Chapter Division**

The study will comprise of seven chapters which are outlined as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

This chapter introduces the research topic, provides the background to the study with the problem statement and includes an explanation and clarification of concepts.

- Chapter 2: Inclusive education with reference to the Grade Four learner in an inclusive setting.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on inclusive education and its support structures.

- Chapter 3: Second language acquisition and learning with reference to the South African context.

The current and basic applied knowledge in the field is researched by consulting the literature. Second language acquisition and learning as well as the complexities of language of instruction in South Africa are discussed.

- Chapter 4: Cognitive Giftedness

The key concepts of cognitive giftedness, its underlying characteristics and the aspects of underachievement are discussed.

- Chapter 5: Research design and methodology

The research design indicates the methodological steps and explains the continuity between activities. All methodology is aimed at the research purpose, which is to establish how the participants support cognitively gifted underachievers in an inclusive Grade Four ESL classroom. The chapter will include the theoretical paradigm of constructivism, the context, purpose and actual research techniques of data collection and analysis.

- Chapter 6: Analysis and discussion of results

This is primarily an inductive process of organising the data through coding topics and generating categories. The analysing of data and the presentation of findings are described in this chapter.

- Chapter 7: Summary, recommendations and limitations

This chapter serves as a conclusion by summarising and interpreting the research results. In a reflective manner, recommendations originating from the study, in connection with the broader education field, are considered. The contribution that the research can make to the knowledge foundation of education is noted.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

Albers, Kenyon and Boals (2009: 75) refer to the ESL learner learning academic subjects and learning the English language as the “curriculum’s double demand”. These learners are those whose lack of English language proficiency excludes them from accessing and processing content on the accepted level (Albers et al. 2009: 75). The ESL learner, as perceived in this research, may seem to overcome language barriers quite adequately and cope with grade-level demands. They may get average results and might, casually observed, not seem to need intervention. Nevertheless, the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever deserves guidance, instruction and the minimising of barriers to learning so that both the exceptionalities can be addressed. The ESL factor should be adequately addressed, and at the same time, the cognitive giftedness should be enhanced with the result that the underachievement factor can be reduced. The Grade Four teachers, as the

managers of the inclusive classroom, share their strategies for supporting these learners.

In this chapter the background, statement of the research problem, aims and programme of the study have been stated. In Chapter Two the researcher, by using a comprehensive literature study, explores the intention of inclusive education and the subsequent supportive role of teachers.



## Chapter 2

# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION WITH REFERENCE TO THE GRADE FOUR LEARNER IN AN INCLUSIVE SETTING

*“Inclusion is a moral issue, a goal, indeed a value we decide to pursue or reject on the basis of what we want our society to look like.”*

*~ Douglas Biklen (1985: curriculum.wcape.school.za) ~*

### 2.1 The dimensions of inclusion

The transformation of the education system in many societies has signified a fundamental change. This is significant whether we refer to Norway’s ‘A school for all’, the United States’ ‘Leave no child behind’, or the United Kingdom’s Inclusion Charter which supports an end to all segregated education (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 4; Dyson & Forlin 1999: 25). The philosophical paradigm of full inclusion challenges, in its educational focus, the segregation of learners with special needs, and moves the focus to learning and developing in the least restrictive environment. Engelbrecht (1999: 5) explains that the dimensions of inclusion transcend considerations focussed narrowly on schools and rather indicate to the wider implication of inclusion in society. The concentration is no longer on disabilities and isolation but rather on abilities and social justice. Inclusive education follows the notion of an inclusive society and schools can be increasingly adapted to allow for all learners to be perceived as valued individuals (Engelbrecht 1999: 7, 8).

This adaption of schools allows for the creation of equal opportunities for all learners, which is one of education’s current fundamental concerns. The whole debate on inclusive education is inextricably linked to democratisation and redressing of social structures (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 4-6). The constitutional principles of rights and equality are reflected in documents dealing with inclusive education (UNESCO 1994; DoE 2001). In this dynamic process the focal point for education is the participation of all learners by the identification and addressing of their barriers to learning, and their right to receive quality education (Dyson & Forlin 1999: 29). It also emphasises the role of the school in improving academic achievement while not neglecting personal and ethical development (Lazarus, Daniels & Engelbrecht 1999: 47). Idol (1997: 385) summarises the implication of inclusion as “the existence of only one

unified education system that encompasses all members equitably". Inclusive education is not just educating learners with special educational needs in regular schools, but rather providing a whole arrangement of provisions. Mitchell (2008: 27) lists these provisions as "an adapted curriculum, adapted teaching methods, modified assessment techniques and accessibility arrangements". When distinguishing inclusive education from integration, inclusive education is described as a mega-strategy. Integration is, however, outlined as the process of assisting learners with special educational needs on a part time basis in so called regular classes (Mitchell 2008: 27).

## **2.2 International influences on South African policies**

A number of significant events helped to develop the idea of inclusive education. Mitchell (2008: 28) mentions the philosophy of normalisation supported by the Scandinavian countries. Normalisation was the process of including disabled people in everyday circumstances that are as close as possible to the regular ways of life in society. The civil rights movement, which occurred in the United States of America during the 1960s and 1970s, focussed on racial equality but also on the teaching of handicapped children in the least restrictive environment (Mitchell 2008: 28). The World Conference on Special Needs Education was held in 1994 and attended by representatives of ninety-two governments and twenty-five international organisations (UNESCO 1994). During this conference a framework was established which focussed on the ability of ordinary schools to accommodate all children (Engelbrecht 1999:9). The framework highlighted the guiding principle which is that "ordinary schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions" (UNESCO 1994). This principle of Education for All, explained in the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994), recognises that it was urgent and necessary to provide education for all children within the regular education system. The UNESCO 1999 Education for All conference in Jomtien followed up on this by designing a commitment to the eradication of illiteracy (Heugh 2009: 169).

The influence on South African policy was reflected, among others, in the National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education and Support Services (NCESS) towards a system that

caters for the diverse needs of all learners (Naicker 1999: 16, 17). In South Africa, White Paper 6 is the paramount reference for all issues regarding inclusive education. The move towards inclusion in South Africa relates to a “rights discourse” committed to equal opportunity and self-reliance and stems from a human rights perspective (Naicker 1999: 14, 15). In the United States of America, the Jarvis Act of 1988 deals with the tuition of learners with exceptionally high abilities and describes this phenomenon as being in the field of special education, that is, requiring an adaptation of the curriculum. Gifted learners’ learning needs differ considerably from the general population and they therefore require special education services (Levy & Palley 2007: 7). Inclusive schools are therefore expected to reflect society’s values of respect for diversity and optimal participation (Lazarus et al. 1999: 46).

## **2.3 Schools as inclusive environments**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

The commitment to inclusive education, as demonstrated by the Salamanca Statement, includes the following statement: “Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (UNESCO 1994: ix). Inclusive education is necessary in order to ensure the availability of programmes for all learners. In addition to this, inclusive education should provide appropriate modifications for learners with special learning and behavioural needs. The right of each learner to receive individualised education which provides choices and offers support while meeting each learner’s needs are emphasised (Idol 1997: 384-385).

The systemic issues essential for implementing inclusion are discussed in the literature (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 18-20; Prinsloo 2001: 345). Not only should inclusive practices be established to ensure that all learners’ needs are met, but inclusive communities and education systems are developed to honour the concept of inclusion. Prinsloo (2001: 345) mentions the restructuring of South African schools and the collaboration of a variety of stakeholders. Idol (1997: 395) notes that inclusive schools imply a unified structure which encompasses all learners fairly and impartially. Schools are therefore responsible to assist with the increase of learner achievement, ensuring that all staff members and learners are valued and that they

all receive equal opportunities for participation (Lazarus et al. 1999: 47). The success of inclusive education is dependent on society viewing it as a system that transcends the classroom. The success of inclusive education also depends on daily happenings in classrooms, teachers' skills and the level of leadership at district, provincial and national level (Mitchell 2008: 29). The creation of a positive school ethos should reflect the values, principles, attitudes, traditions and norms shared by its members (Mitchell 2008: 78).

### **2.3.2 Educational inclusivity in a social context**

Mitchell (2008: 29) names three things that ought to be developed in inclusive schools:

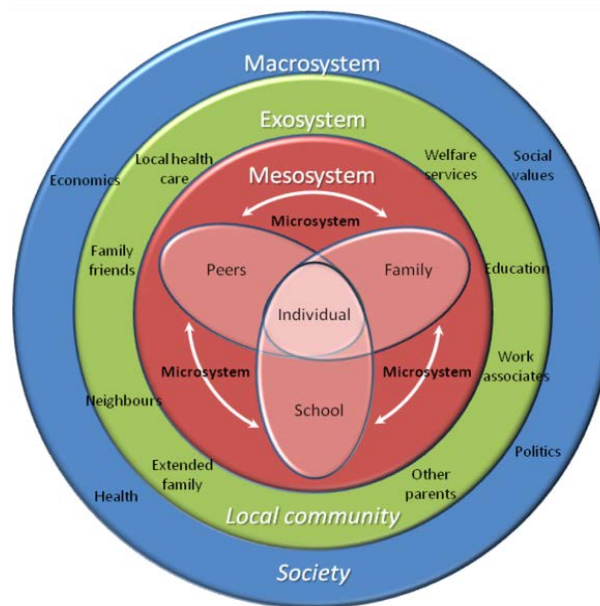
- A strong commitment to accepting and celebrating diversity
- A sensitivity to cultural issues
- Setting high but realistic standards

These challenges of development cannot be separated from the fact that individual people function in relation to their social context. All these systems, as described by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of development (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 10), place emphasis on contexts. These contexts have direct or indirect influences on a learner's life and development. Swart and Pettipher (2005: 10-15) discuss the bio-ecological model broadly as a group of interrelated systems. Summarised, it refers to the contexts of the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem as follows:

- The microsystem is a person's immediate environment and the people and events closest to one's life.
- The mesosystem is a system of microsystems. To implement inclusion there must be awareness of the relationships between a learner's different microsystems, for example, the school-family dynamics. The role of the teacher and the parents' relationships with the school are all important factors of this system.
- The exosystem refers to environments which have a direct influence on the learner although it does not involve the learner as an active participant, for example, poor health services and a chronically ill child.

- The macrosystem refers to a specific society's and culture's beliefs, values and ideologies which may be influenced, or in return influence, any of the other systems.
- The chronosystem refers to the developmental time-frames which run through all these systems and interact with a learner's stages of development.

To visually present the concepts discussed under 2.3.2, the various systems are indicated as an interrelated system in the following model.



**Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model (Adapted from Swart & Pettipher 2005: 11)**

As complex multiple systems have an influence on learners and their learning, it is easy to understand the significance of Bronfenbrenner's theory on inclusion. Each system in a learner's life contributes to a dynamic interactive relationship with the other systems (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 13). When working with an individual learner or teacher, one should always approach it from the viewpoint of the entire system of an individual's functioning. The impact of Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model on the process of teachers providing support for learners with barriers will be revisited in Chapter 7.

For inclusive education to be successful, Mitchell (2008: 29) suggests a formula of elements that should be present when defining quality for all learners. The formula is: Inclusive Education = V + P + 5As + S + R + L, where

- V = Vision
- P = Placement
- 5As = Adapted curriculum, Adapted assessment, Adapted teaching, Acceptance, Access
- S = Support
- R = Resources
- L = Leadership

To guarantee that such a formula would ensure proper standards of inclusive education for all learners, it is important to link it to Bronfenbrenner's model where systems continuously interact. The role of the teacher in providing all the support elements in the classroom cannot be emphasised enough.

Lazarus et al. (1999: 47) discuss the micro level system as the concept of access in an inclusive school. They relate it to three important aspects:

- Access to all aspects of the curriculum to facilitate learning. The teacher in the classroom makes the curriculum accessible by minimising barriers to learning.
- The ability of the psychosocial environment to facilitate positive learning and the development of all learners. Teachers create safe learning spaces and ensure that the classroom atmosphere combines serenity and flexibility with a variety of learning experiences.
- Access to the physical environment of the school. The physical aspects of a classroom are managed by the teacher so that the physical environment contributes to the support given to all learners with barriers to learning.

To ensure these goals of inclusivity, the culture and organisation of the school must support adaptable approaches to learning (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 19). The management of the school and the visionary leadership of the principal will ultimately assist to determine the atmosphere of the school as a supportive community. In this regard the teacher's role includes informing and advising all the role players. These role players are specifically responsible for creating a variety of practices and involving multiple individuals and organisations which are all focussed on support and collaboration. Swart and Pettipher (2005: 19) refer to support as the "cornerstone" of adequate inclusive education. This is, in other words, the creation of protected, challenging and educative environments. To foster the creation of such

environments implies that not only schools but all the systems of life, as indicated by Bronfenbrenner, should be included. South Africa's viewpoint of inclusive education is that of a constitutional imperative which reflects the development of an inclusive community (Naicker 1999: 22).

The intention of inclusive schools is thus to determine the most educationally strengthened environment for learning. Such an environment would also be sensitive to barriers to learning, as one of the systems influencing a learner (Idol 1997: 384).

### **2.3.3 Barriers to learning**

According to Swart and Pettipher (2005: 18), barriers to learning and development are defined as "those factors which lead to the inability of a system to accommodate diversity, which lead to learning breakdown or which prevent learners from accessing educational provision". Factors that can become barriers may be located within one or more of the following: the learner, the school, the educational system and the broader social, economic and political content (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 17, 18). In the South African context, these barriers are described as:

1. Socio-economic deprivation, for example, poverty
2. Barriers arising from impairments, for example, sensory impairments
3. Negative attitudes to diversity
4. An inflexible curriculum
5. Language of learning and teaching
6. Inadequate provision of support services
7. Inadequate policies and legislation
8. Lack of parental involvement

It should be noted that the LoLT is mentioned as one of the eight barriers. Teachers are also mentioned as a possible barrier to learning in points 3, 4, 5 and 6. Point 8 refers to a learner's barrier to learning when there is a lack of parental involvement and co-operation with the school. These possible barriers will all be emphasised again in Chapter 7.

The continuum of barriers to learning will become even more complicated when taking into account South Africa's diversity and subsequent complex society (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 21). Learners are immersed in a variety of home and school

environments and not all of these are supportive environments where literacy growth and enriching learning are enhanced. The classroom teacher, who is the focus of this study, is the primary resource in the inclusive education system to be sympathetic to diverse backgrounds and to minimise barriers. The teacher is also the one person who can plan, provide and monitor support on a daily base.

## **2.4 Teachers as providers of support**

*“A short tempered person should not become a teacher” ~Maimonides; 12th century Jewish philosopher ~ (McManus 1996: 115)*

The aim of education is to equip children with the ability to achieve a balance between independence and interdependence so that they, as citizens, can lead full and satisfying lives (Mitchell 2008: ix). Another viewpoint defines the objective of an education system as providing quality education for all learners so that they will realise their dormant capabilities that can contribute to society (Prinsloo 2001: 344). Teachers, as the managers of the inclusive classroom, will be responsible for providing the needed support. Traditionally, teachers acted as mainstream and remedial teachers. In an inclusive environment, however, these labels do not exist and the principles of inclusion indicate the classroom teacher as the provider of support (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 4, 5; Landsberg 2005: 68).

Inclusive education signifies that all teachers are responsible for the quality education of all learners (Dreyer 2008: 64). According to research, the success of inclusive education lies within the provision of adequate support for learners who experience barriers to learning. Learning support replaces the concept of remedial support which was based on the medical model (Dreyer 2008: 22, 63, 64). Dreyer (2008: 22) also emphasises the role that teachers play in addressing the varied needs of learners. The role of teachers in making the curriculum accessible to all learners within the supportive community of a school has been emphasised as important for inclusion to function properly. According to “A guide for parents, caregivers and communities”, based on Education White Paper 6 (DoE 2003: 11), classroom teachers are the main resource to address the barriers to learning that confront learners. Mitchell (2008: x), in this regard, comments on the current widespread commitment to inclusive education and the fact that every teacher is regarded as a teacher of learners with special educational needs. The fact that the



provision and delivery of individualised support takes place in the mainstream classroom now requires the classroom teacher to accommodate the system (Dreyer 2008: 1).

In this new role, teachers cannot continue to only impart knowledge but need to fulfil the seven roles, as published in the 1998 edition of Norms and Standards for teachers. Landsberg (2005: 68–70) lists these.

The teacher as:

- learning mediator
- interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials
- philosopher
- facilitator
- assessor
- bridger
- change-maker

As each of these roles denotes numerous competencies, qualities and attitudes, teachers use these to create an environment where every learner can succeed (Landsberg 2005: 77).

In this context, teachers are not remediators of deficits but facilitators of the learning process by designing, encouraging and interacting. The term remediator is in itself a reference to the medical model which uses the pattern of patient-diagnosis-treatment. In the medical model, the learner and her impairment is the source of the problem and also the reason for scholastic failure (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 5). The remediation process, as part of the medical model, followed a system of changing the learner to cope with the requirements of the world. No clarity regarding guidance to evaluate the educational impact of the learner's difficulties was important when utilising the medical model, just particular diagnostic criteria (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 5).

The idea that barriers are actually contextual, and exist in areas like the curriculum and the methods of instruction, brings the responsibility to all concerned, and not just to the learner (Landsberg 2005: 67). The focus on the individual's circumstances, as a factor of the social ecological model, moves the responsibility from the learner to fit

in and adapt to the world as it is (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 6). All the emerging varieties of inclusion practices have, regardless of different approaches, common principles, of which schools' responsiveness towards diversity is an important one (Lazarus et al. 1999: 48). Teachers, as part of the human resource aspect of an inclusive school, are therefore a central element in this context (Lazarus et al. 1999: 60),

A dynamic teacher is expected to fulfil many roles, of which identifying and supporting learners with barriers to learning is an important one (Landsberg 2005: 68). This challenges teachers' traditional role tremendously and sets the challenge of addressing, within the classroom, the diverse needs of all learners. The supportive role of the teacher also involves the wider community, as the educational environment is not confined to the classroom but reaches beyond it to involve parents and support networks (Lazarus et al. 1999: 55-57). Parents, specifically, are a key component in ensuring school success for their children. A support network at school level implies that a team is to determine the learning environment that will be educationally enhancing for the targeted learner. The School Based Support Team (SBST) suggests and structures the provision of support needed to achieve that goal (Idol 1997: 384). Following the specialist advice of the support team, the teacher is then responsible for the intervention process (Lazarus et al. 1999: 55). These processes can include, for example, strategies like differentiation and scaffolding. Differentiation refers to a variety of teaching approaches which will maximise the teaching and learning that occur within learning experiences. This could refer to the delivery of the curriculum in a variety of ways, the varied methods by which the skills and knowledge are attained and the range of tasks offered to the learner. Scaffolding has as its outcome the learner as an independent and self-regulating scholar, so the teacher facilitates a learner's ability to integrate prior knowledge and internalise new content. As the learner's competency increases, the support frameworks are decreased.

Teachers should be responsive to all learning needs by planning and implementing support strategies in an effort to minimise barriers. The inclusive classroom needs a competent teacher who provides conditions that will most effectively ensure that every learner's specific needs are met, thereby achieving education for all (Lomofsky 1999: 70). Teachers' pivotal role in promoting inclusive education unfortunately also

highlights their negativity and resistance. Mulhern (2003: 7) notes that teachers represent the single greatest obstacle to inclusive education because of their insights and attitudes. This he blames on tensions and confusions because of contradictions of policy to actual classroom practice (Mulhern 2003: 8).

Teachers' professional morale is a prerequisite which will enhance their service delivery (Sayer 1996: 14). Best (1996: 108) comments on teachers' anxiety and uncertainty as the results of functioning in a system of continuous change. The fact that a teacher's responsibility has no fixed boundaries implies added tension. Even the relevant stakeholders are unsure of the borders that structure teachers' accountability and role expectations (Best 1996: 105, 109).

Parsons (1996: 77) comments specifically on the teacher in the primary school. He observes that primary schools often have to contend with learners living in distressed circumstances. In this regard, teachers' accountability increases so as to contribute to the provision of a healthy academic and encouraging environment (Parsons 1996: 77). The pressures on teachers' time as well as them working with limited resources when considering extra-curricular activities also add to the tension experienced by teachers (Sayer 1996: 16). Teachers often suffer a lack of self-respect due to society's perspective of teachers as lazy and untrustworthy (Prinsloo 2001: 345). When considering all the pressures on teachers, in addition to their role as having to address barriers to learning and development, their role and sub-roles become quite complicated (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 18).

In examining the supportive role of Grade Four teachers for the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever, the special qualities of the Grade Four teachers are highlighted. Wood (2007: 107-113) comments on the teacher of the Grade Four learner as the kind of person who:

- needs a sense of humour to counteract the seriousness of the Grade Four learner
- needs to provide positive language and encouragement
- needs to give directions and provide clarity when setting expectations
- needs to avoid sarcastic humour
- needs to laugh with the Grade Four learner and not get exasperated

Although Grade Four is not entirely easy to teach, many teachers find it extremely interesting (Ames & Haber 1991: 94).

Allington and Johnston (2000: 1) discuss knowledgeable, skilful teachers and specifically state that no other intervention can make the difference in the learning process that these teachers can make. It is therefore crucial that teachers' effective intervention strategies are highlighted, especially considering teachers' realities in South Africa. Many teachers in South Africa are confused because of changes which have transformed their professional environment and they often feel inadequate to face the demands of, for example, curriculum changes, diversity, large numbers of learners in classrooms and the general lack of parental involvement. Issues regarding school restructuring, teacher retraining and continuous re-curriculating leave teachers despondent and discouraged (Prinsloo 2001: 345). Narrowing the issues further in pertaining specifically to the Grade Four situation now see teachers dealing with, *inter alia*, matters of grade and phase transition, second language learning and learners who cannot read at grade appropriate level.

Focussing on the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever, teachers are required to nurture the whole child while maintaining a very fine balance between developing those areas of giftedness and ensuring that areas of weakness progress appropriately (Lomofsky 1999: 72). Second language learners are not to be disadvantaged when simultaneously learning English and learning the curriculum in English (Gibbons 2002: 5). The issue of second language learning is such a controversial matter in South Africa and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. The regular classroom teacher has the dual responsibility of the learners' subject learning in addition to their continuous language development. For second language learning to be developed concurrently with curriculum knowledge depends on the classroom teacher. The teacher in the inclusive classroom is therefore responsible for providing an environment that is supportive as well as planning and monitoring carefully to ensure that subject content, thinking skills and language development are all integrated (Gibbons 2002: 6, 38).

Because of the focus of the study, a closer look at some typical characteristics of the Grade Four learner is necessary.

## 2.5 The Grade Four learner

*“My ninth year was certainly more exciting than any of the others. But not all of it was exactly what you would call fun”.*

*~ Danny, the Champion of the World ~ Roald Dahl (1975: 24)*

When Allington and Johnston (2000: 2) refer to Grade Four as the “fourth grade hump”, that is, the point at which previously successful learners begin to experience difficulties, we begin to understand the complexities of this age. They call Grade Four a high-stakes teaching assignment and they comment on the fact that Grade Four has long been regarded a perilous juncture in the primary school. The transition from Grade Three to Grade Four has been blamed, as well as the specific demands of the Grade Four experience with formal assessments, a variety of Learning Areas and academic challenges. Up to now the demands of each succeeding grade has been just slightly more difficult than that of the preceding grade. The transition to Grade Four, however, now implies a quantum leap. To deal successfully with the challenges of Grade Four demands new ways of thinking and abstracting as well as fresh ways to use information (Ames & Haber 1991: 87). The Grade Four learner also comes with her own set of behaviours, which will now be highlighted.

Although there are predictable stages in child development, each child goes through the basic stages a little differently. The common patterns of behaviour will therefore vary according to own individuality but, even as far back as 1955, Ilg and Ames (1955: 3–5) already described the kind of person the Grade Four child might often be. The following characteristics, as described by Wood (2007: 107–113), depict specific facets of the Grade Four learner. Grade Four learners are at an age which is often marked by confusion and deep seriousness, although they can be comfortable and flexible. They need opportunities to practise test taking and they learn better on their own as they master basic skills. These learners tend to be very individualistic, industrious and intellectually curious. Meier, Minirth, Wichern and Ratcliff (1991: 176) refer to Erikson’s Social-Emotional Theory where he describes these learners as developing either industry or inferiority, while Wood (2007: 107–113) reminds us that these learners can manage more than one concept at a time and that they are now reading to learn instead of learning to read. Piaget (in Meier et al. 1991: 178) called this the stage of concrete operations where these learners master mathematical operations, measurement, language and spatial concepts. They can, however, give

up on tasks easily and need adults to build their fragile sense of competence. This will include continuous motivation and honest praise. Ames and Haber (1991: 5) describe the nine year old as anxious and worried. These anxieties of the nine year old will diminish when the cheerful age of ten arrives. Nine year old learners can be very self-critical and sarcastic humour from adults can be very hurtful (Wood 2007: 113). Their emotions vary, as do their behaviour. The Grade Four learner is thus highly variable in emotional responses, what Ames and Haber (1991: 7) call a highly individual and unpredictable age.

Wood (2007: 114, 115) describes some examples of opportunities provided by the curriculum. The Grade Four learner is, among other tasks, expected to tackle assignments that involve doing basic research, mastering capitalisation and punctuation and improving spelling, developing dictionary skills taught in earlier grades, working extensively with word problems and exploring poetry. The academically demanding nature of these tasks can be quite daunting for the learner, as well as the teacher who facilitates these learning opportunities. In demonstrating the practical applications of these expectations, the following is taken from a school's communication with parents regarding the demands of Grade Four (Reflection Primary, Introduction Newsletter 2011). The Grade Four learner is expected to:

1. be sensitive to how their actions affect others
2. enjoy working on group tasks
3. participate actively in the learning process
4. work independently
5. be increasingly able to investigate and compare information
6. enquire critically about the world around them
7. use methods they have already learnt in new contexts

From an educational perspective it is clear that for the demands made by the tasks to be successfully applied, the Grade Four learner and the Grade Four teacher need to work together effectively. These students are, by nature, excellent students and are ready to tackle most challenges (Ames & Haber 1991: 81).

Such challenging academic demands are then also linked to the specific nine to ten year old learner who is the Grade Four learner in many South African classrooms. The clustering of abilities which refer to a specific stage reveals the levels of

maturity and learning of these learners (Meier et al. 1991: 174). Kohlberg, in his *Stages of Moral Development*, refers to these learners as reasoning within a structure where the approval of others is dominant (Meier et al. 1991: 181). Ilg and Ames (1955: 290) comment on this ethical sense of the learner when they establish that although younger learners can tell right from wrong, they are not always emotionally ready to do what is right and avoid the wrong. The Grade Four learner, however, is intellectually able to understand the difference between acceptable and unacceptable and emotionally ready to conform to parents' and teachers' wishes of doing the right thing. Fowler, who built on the work of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg, developed a theory of how children relate to what is important in life (Meier et al. 1991: 182). According to Fowler, these learners see the meaning of life as presented in stories, where facts are clearly separated from fantasy. Fowler also mentions how these learners develop a sense of belonging and responsibility by participating in groups and sharing chores.

To summarise some of the distinct character traits of the Grade Four learner, the following are mentioned (Wood 2007: 107–115; Ames & Haber 1991: 12–14). The Grade Four learner (or the nine to ten year old learner) shows interest in detail, is interested in scientific exploration, displays a remarkable amount of self-reliance and capability, is very competitive and takes pride in attention to detail. Where the nine year old may be slightly rebellious and tends to complain about work being too hard, ten is described as an age of comfortable equilibrium. Ames and Haber (1991: 94) refer to your typical Grade Four learner as an especially endearing child who actually enjoys school.

The Grade Four teacher, as the classroom manager and composer and provider of intervention and support strategies, is expected to deal with these interesting learners. This poses tremendous demands for the Grade Four teacher. As mentioned, not only are nine year olds so significantly different from ten year olds, who are all in the same class, but these learners demand individual assistance and their teacher's complete attention. They want to please and thrive on praise and motivation. The Grade Four learner is, however, often apprehensive about her ability to do what is expected of her and often underrates herself (Ames & Haber 1991: 8). These learners are such individualists and have marked likes and dislikes. Coupled with the transitional difficulties of Grade Four and the fact that most Grade Four

learners have an abundance of physical energy, the learners and their teachers are faced with various tribulations and obstacles. Added to these obstacles are the barriers to learning of the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever.

## **2.6 Theory in practice**

The conceptuality of theory in practice is consequently a real dilemma. Even the sound principles of inclusion regarding the identification and addressing of barriers to learning do not always fully provide for asynchronous development, as teachers would often concentrate on just one barrier that needs addressing. The twice exceptional situation of cognitive giftedness coinciding with a learning difficulty might present some complications in the inclusive classroom (Winebrenner 2003: 137). Learners with easy to recognise physical and sensory barriers might have their difficulties identified much quicker than learners with learning difficulties, as these often exist without outward signs (Dreyer 2008: 49). A group of learners who remain vulnerable in the education system are those learners who experience barriers to learning within the existing environment. They are already enrolled in education but for a variety of reasons do not achieve adequately (Prinsloo 2001: 344).

It becomes clear that just opening the doors of your school to all learners does not guarantee inclusive practices. It most certainly does not guarantee effective education which will benefit all learners. The establishment and delivery of effective education should be characterised by support for the learner and the teacher (Green 1999: 129). This can only be achieved by reforming the whole school through strategic planning and management of learning support systems (Idol 1997: 385). Implied in such a whole school approach is the support of the principal, School Governing Body and District Office in acknowledging the heterogeneity of educational needs and the diversity of all learners (Lazarus et al. 1999: 63). Within the larger philosophy of inclusion is the true belief that all children can learn and that they deserve support in their learning (Dreyer 2008: 31). Such a viewpoint embraces the adaptation of the system to benefit the learner.

The Grade Four teacher's support for the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever within an inclusive education system anchors the focus of the study in inclusive education. It also allows for the aspects of second language learning and cognitive giftedness to be linked. Such a link ensures the correlation between these issues in drawing



attention to the concept of support, specifically support for the twice-exceptional Grade Four learner dealing with cognitive giftedness and a lack of academic English proficiency due to ESL learning. Support, in this regard, might close the gap between inclusive theory and practice. The study's research findings and the recommendations which follow will provide a link between cognitive giftedness, ESL learning and the support provided by teachers in an inclusive environment.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the dimensions of inclusion and briefly examined how international concerns influence South African policies. Schools, as inclusive environments, were discussed with reference to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model. Certain systems which could influence a learner's educational experience were examined. These systems, within the context of this study, are a learner's social contexts, barriers to learning, the Grade Four teacher's particular experience and the distinct characteristics of the nine to ten year old Grade Four learner. Some of the theoretical concepts of inclusive education were translated into practice so as to demonstrate the practical implications of such a philosophy. The chapter focussed on inclusive education which seeks to empower teachers with knowledge and skills so as to establish valuable support systems in classrooms. Second language learning and cognitive giftedness are discussed in the following chapters but are underpinned by the principles of inclusion and its specific viewpoint of support.

Literature recognises the complexity of second language acquisition and learning. The next chapter will analyse a number of these issues.

## Chapter 3

# SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LEARNING WITH REFERENCE TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

*“What is thy sentence then, but speechless death, which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?”  
~ Mowbray in “The Tragedy of Richard the Second”, act one, scene three, by William Shakespeare ~  
(1994:485)*

### 3.1 Introduction

Language acquisition is a major intellectual achievement. Even though this rapid process is frequently taken for granted, children’s acquisition of language is one of the most fascinating and intriguing phenomena studied by scientists ( Cho & O’Grady 2005: 464). Second language acquisition is when people attain proficiency in a language which is not their mother tongue.

Not only is second language acquisition affected by age and individual differences, but also by affective and cognitive factors (Cho & O’Grady 2005: 527). Ellis (1997: 3) defines second language acquisition as the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue. Second language acquisition can also be influenced by aptitude and the role of the first language. Second language aptitude may be an asset but it does not guarantee success in second language acquisition (Krashen & Terrell 1995: 40, 50). On the role of the first language, some research supports ‘interference’, where the first language interferes when we try to use the second language. They are, however, of the opinion that errors which show the influence of the first language are basically the result of falling back on the first language when speakers are unsure of a specific rule (Krashen & Terrell 1995: 41). Learners also tend to over generalise rules when they acquire the grammar of the second language, as in using ‘goed’ for went and ‘breaeked’ instead of broke when forming past tense verbs. The kinds of errors are dependent on the proficiency level of the acquirer and are, according to Cho and O’Grady (2005: 506, 507), usually errors regarding the lexical, morphological or syntactic use of language.

Second language acquisition is qualified as the acquisition of language after the first language, often termed the mother tongue or native language, has already become established in the person. Two critical ways in which the second language learner differs from the first language learner are described. Firstly, that the second language learner's process of acquisition starts at a time when she has grown past the phase where the first language is usually acquired, and secondly, that the second language learner already has a language system in place (Ritchie & Bhatia 1996: 1). In this regard, Ellis (1997: 4) contrasts first language acquisition with second language acquisition, by describing second language acquisition as learning an additional language after the acquisition of the mother tongue. There is not only one way for a learner to acquire knowledge of a second language, but it is rather the combination of a variety of factors pertaining to the learner and the learning situation. Different learners, who find themselves in different, or even in similar situations, will learn a second language differently. Also emphasised is the complexity of the process of second language acquisition, which involves a variety of interrelated aspects (Ellis 1997: 4-6).

The chapter will therefore begin by introducing various theories on second language acquisition and learning. Some interrelated factors of second language acquisition are then examined, followed by discussions on the important aspects of language proficiency and academic language proficiency. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the specific South African context regarding LoLT and the consequential effects on the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever.

## **3.2 Theories of second language acquisition and learning**

### **3.2.1 The Nativist theory of language acquisition**

Any concept of language acquisition should include a reference to the theories of the Nativists, specifically Chomsky's nativist hypothesis that a child is born with a language acquisition device, or LAD (Chomsky 2000: 102). The LAD allows for language to be interpreted. Chomsky has argued that language learning in children is facilitated through specific natural abilities. He refers specifically to a component in the brain, which he terms the 'language faculty', which is committed to language and its use. For each individual, this language faculty is biologically inherited. With the language faculty's reciprocal activity with other systems, for example the cognitive

system, the sound and comprehension of expressive language are determined (Chomsky 2000: 77, 168).

The critical period hypothesis argues that language acquisition must take place during a specific time, which ends at about the age of puberty (Hoff 2005: 63). Regarding this, Chomsky concludes that the environment initiates a growth procedure, which is stabilised around puberty. The 'language acquisition device' implies that children have inborn, language specific abilities which can affect language learning positively or negatively (Chomsky 2000: 77, 78). The child is therefore innately programmed to pay attention to specific facets of language, determined by what she is exposed to (Flynn 1996: 125). The route of second language acquisition is similar to that of first language acquisition. This similarity of acquisition concerns the order in which rules and structures are learnt (Hoff 2005: 350). There are also suggestions that the differences between first and second language acquisition in children are dependent on issues such as the child's age, the place and time of second language acquisition and a learner's specific style of learning (Dale, Harlaar, Haworth & Plomin 2010: 635). This theory thus states that humans have evolved language-coded areas in the brain which are prepared to acquire language.

### **3.2.2 The Behaviourist theory of language acquisition**

In contrast with the biological approach of the Nativists which states that language will automatically be acquired through exposure to it, is Skinner's idea that language, because it is behaviour, is learnt like any cognitive behaviour (Ellis 2003: 14, 34). This verbal behaviour is learnt by imitating others. As the child goes through trial and error, proper 'behaviour' is reinforced through feedback such as smiling and approval. Depending on the accuracy of the 'teacher', proper pronunciation and sentence structure are acquired.

This theory of operant conditioning looks, for example, at a baby making a noise and a mother approximating the sound to a word. The mother would then reinforce the behaviour of the baby by repeating the word and praising the child. Problems experienced during this period of development, for example, a child who is hard of hearing or one who is subjected to an environment that is linguistically inferior, will affect normal language development (Taylor 1999: 36).

The behaviourist theory therefore believes that learning will take place through stimuli and responses relationships. Learning has only taken place when it results in a change in behaviour.

### **3.2.3 The Social Interactionist theory of language acquisition**

In social constructivism, interactions between people allow for learning. This theory is not in contrast with the viewpoints of the Nativists or the Behaviourists, but adds the idea of the 'language acquisition support system'. The Social Interactionist theory, with specific reference to Bruner's interactionist approach, has the roots of language acquisition in conversation (Ellis 2003: 34). The language acquisition support system, or LASS, allows for language to be structured through social exchange, for example, the early interactions between infants and caregivers. Emphasis is therefore on the pragmatics of the language. Hawkins (2005: 26) uses the term "social apprenticeship" to explain any learning that takes place through a social interaction.

A child does not learn a language for the sake of linguistic knowledge but rather learns to use the language. Vygotsky proposed that the origin of speech is social and that all language in a child develops during interaction with another person (Taylor 1999: 37). The Social Interactionist theory therefore emphasises the social and communicative facets of language.

### **3.2.4 Stephen Krashen and the Monitor model**

When discussing second language learning, a specific reference to Krashen's Monitor Model, and the input hypothesis, is important. The input hypothesis argues that people acquire language by formulating meaning, with the result that they afterwards acquire structure (Krashen 1982: 21). The input hypothesis states that humans do not learn, but acquire language by understanding input that is just slightly beyond their current level of proficiency. The hypothesis focusses on listening comprehension and reading. It indicates ability as emerging only after the individual has built up enough competence through comprehending input (Krashen & Terrell 1995: 32). According to this model, language teaching has the best results when it is not taught for conscious learning, but when language is used to transmit messages. Acquisition depends on the ability to recognise the meaning of elements in the

expressive language and will therefore not take place without comprehension of vocabulary (Krashen & Terrell 1995: 155; Hawkins 2005: 34). The learner in a school where the LoLT is not her mother tongue, might thus remain unable to express an idea, ask for information or assimilate subject knowledge (Guerrero 2004: 183, 194).

The importance of concentrating on one skill, especially in the early phase of language learning, was recognised by the Total Physical Response technique. This strategy is utilised to enhance listening comprehension by following a verbal command with a physical action. Starting with one-word instructions, the morphological and syntactical complexity can already be increased within thirty minutes. For children, second language comprehension can be accelerated through physical responses. Asher (1969: 4, 17) established this as far back as 1969. The principle of this approach is to deepen learning by linking physical activity to comprehensible input. It is, however, significant to note that the learning must take place in an environment that is non-threatening (Tomlinson & Masuhara 2009: 647). It is claimed that the Total Physical Response technique allows for a whole-brain approach to language learning where learners use the right brain for nonlinear experiences and the left brain more for analytical learning in an academic environment. Tomlinson developed a modification on Asher's TPR technique, which he coined TPR Plus, and which involves not only actions following verbal commands, but also a combination of actions to dramatise a story or play a physical game. The view is that physical games can provide second language learners with varied and rich opportunities for language usage (Tomlinson & Masuhara 2009: 647).

Krashen's explanation of the "silent period" (in Guerrero 2004: 178) focusses attention on the ESL learner. These learners are often not allowed a silent period as they are asked to function on an expected academic level before they have acquired sufficient proficiency. Many ESL learners do not have the freedom of sufficient time, focus and exposure to rules to obtain academic competence in English. The communication strategies that Krashen and Terrell (1995: 182) refer to, for example, the comprehension of vocabulary, speech production and listening skills should be practised, preferably in a classroom. These skills include requesting clarification, not losing one's place when mentally searching for a word and indicating that you are unsure and has not understood (Krashen & Terrell 1995: 182). These are crucial

skills in an academic environment and they are often overlooked when dealing with English second language learners. Ellis (1999: 240) mentions Krashen's idea that acquisition will take place when:

- the input is changed to ensure that it can be understood
- it contains language features just slightly more demanding than the learner's current ability
- the learner is emotionally ready to deal with the input.

These affective readiness factors can play a crucial part when a second language is acquired (Nel 2005: 155).

### **3.2.5 Immersion and submersion theories**

As the study focusses on the support for learners' ability to use a second language, the proficiency of two levels of language is compared. These are everyday communication and social routines compared to the degree of cognition required for learning. This difference was termed Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) in contrast to Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 1999: 2). The distinction between these two concepts explains the different time periods required by children to acquire conversational fluency in their second language as compared to academic competence in that language (Cummins 1999: 3). Children's seemingly effortless acquisition of their first language has a lot to do with the environment and social surroundings, and it would be beneficial if the second language could be acquired after the first language concepts are obtained (Hoff 2005: 349; Ouane & Glanz 2010: 32). Second language learning for many learners, however, means immersion in a school where the LoLT is English. This often happens at a time before a solid foundation of language skills in the native language is acquired, with the result that conversational fluency in the second language, but not necessarily accuracy of academic usage, is established (Ouane & Glanz 2010: 33; Heugh 2009: 97).

More language skills are required to deal with academic demands than what is required for everyday conversations. Many ESL learners seem to cope with basic language at school, yet they often have problems in class that are literacy related (Gibbons 2002: 1, 2). As language learning is not a linear process, it is not just about getting grammar correct, but of understanding the most appropriate language

to use for a specific context (Gibbons 2002: 4). The distinction between everyday conversational language and the more academic language of school also explains the differences in acquisition and development between BICS and CALP (Cummins 1999: 2, 3). The language that is used in schools is highly specialised. Learners need to accumulate adequate proficiency in the LoLT so as to learn using abstract concepts (Ouane & Glanz 2010: 27).

Immersion education indicates that the learner is in an academic environment where the LoLT is not the learner's home language. The assumption formulated by Cummins (1999: 2, 3) is that although learners in immersion programmes do become moderately fluent in the LoLT, they usually encounter academic problems somewhere along the way. In addition to the language issue, aspects regarding creative thinking, spontaneity and emotional adjustment are mentioned as areas of concern in an immersion programme (Baker & Hornberger 2001: 96). Guerrero (2004: 178) mentions the sociocultural change of learning in a second language and the consequent adjustment period.

The immersion model is contrasted with a method that Cohen and Swain call submersion (in Baker and Hornberger 2001: 150). Cummins (in Baker & Hornberger 2001: 150) calls it a "sink or swim" approach and refers specifically to school programmes that do not allow for adjustments regarding differences of language and culture. This is particularly observed in the instructional approach. Learners in submersion programmes are often reminded of their academic failure, that is, their inability to 'swim' (Hawkins 2005: 35).

To comprehensively develop CALP, learners should be able to generate new knowledge, manipulate social realities which touch their lives and create literature and art (Cummins 1999: 6).

### **3.2.6 Language and second language acquisition theories and the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever**

In summarising the language and second language acquisition theories, the following concepts are noted. The innate capacity of the human mind to acquire language is the biological approach to language acquisition, as proposed by the Nativists. The acquisition of language through principles of condition is the



behaviourist approach, as proposed by Skinner. The social interactionists' approach allows for language acquisition through social relationships and association. In contrast to pure acquisition of language, the Monitor model focusses on the comprehensible input. Emphasised by the cognitive approach is the stimulating environment in which language acquisition occurs, as seen in the immersion theory.

By relating these issues to language acquisition and learning in a school environment, it is clear that the ESL learner might often encounter obstacles. These obstacles are often found when cognitive academic language proficiency is required. The cognitively gifted ESL learner might require support strategies to allow for proficient academic language usage to enhance the enriched work such a learner is capable of.

### **3.3 Interrelated factors when investigating second language acquisition**

Gregg (1996: 53) notes that first language acquisition is usually successful and that the study of second language acquisition has grown out of practical concerns, for example, language teaching. The theories regarding second language acquisition are not about linguistic behaviour, but rather the intellectual organisation that forms the foundation of that behaviour (Gregg 1996: 53).

Ellis (1994: 194) uses a framework of three interrelated factors when discussing second language acquisition:

- Situational factors, which refers to the linguistic environment in which learning happens.
- Learner differences, which encompass the scope of learner factors that can influence second language acquisition. The key elements are age, aptitude and intelligence, motivation and needs and personality and cognitive style.
- Learner processes, for example, knowledge of the mother tongue as well as the second language and general knowledge.

None of these factors can be considered in isolation and are connected with linguistic input and output. Linguistic input, in this regard, pertains to the process of second language acquisition while linguistic output changes second language acquisition.

For the Grade Four ESL learner the process has an added complexity. The learner is expected to learn the curriculum by using the second language while still acquiring the second language.

### **3.4 The distinction between learning a second language and acquiring a second language**

Second language, in this study, refers to English as the language which is not the mother tongue and sometimes English may even be a learner's third or fourth language. Some researchers distinguish between acquisition and learning (Krashen & Terrell 1995: 27). Acquisition is described as a process of acquiring a language through exposure. According to this view, it is possible for learners to acquire or to learn rules independently and at separate times (Ellis 2003: 14). Consciously learned grammar structures might not appear directly when the learner communicates. This lack of connection between learning and conversational use is explained through the assumption that learning does not automatically change into acquisition (Hoff 2005: 348).

Second language acquisition is contrasted with second language learning and it is assumed that these are different processes. This explanation is an indication of the distinction drawn between these two concepts. Krashen and Terrell (1995: 27) define the characteristics of acquisition and learning and they note that second language acquisition is similar to a child's first language acquisition. This picking up of a language is characterised as inherent subconscious knowledge for which formal teaching does not help.

Learning, on the other hand, is the formal knowledge of a language which is conscious and specific and assisted by formal teaching (Krashen & Terrell 1995: 27). Zaki and Ellis (1999: 171) explain this by referring to the learning of vocabulary, where some acquisitions of meanings can happen quite quickly, sometimes immediately. The acquisition of grammatical structures and rules is, however, typically a slower process which involves access to a variety of opportunities to use over time.

The Grade Four ESL learner often does not have the luxury of time which is required for a natural process of language internalisation. The formal teaching of language

structures, again within a limited time period, does not necessarily provide the learner with the language proficiency needed for the academic demands of the curriculum. For the purpose of this study, both the acquisition of English and the learning in English of the second language learner are discussed from the perspective of its manifestation as a learning difficulty. The fluency in English which is required to ensure that a cognitively gifted learner fulfils her potential might pose a problem in the South African context of English second language learning. Both exceptionalities, which are English second language learning as well as cognitive giftedness, require the intervention and support of the teacher in the inclusive classroom. Within an inclusive environment, a teacher needs to provide support by planning interventions to minimise ESL limitations while simultaneously enriching the learning experience. The inclusive policy in South African schools require of the classroom teacher to support the dual exceptionality of the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever (Kokot 2005: 478).

### **3.5 Competencies and developmental order in second language acquisition and learning**

The learner whose mother tongue is different to English, as the LoLT of the school, is still expected to possess not just communicative English proficiency, but academic English proficiency (Hawkins 2005: 31). This refers to the knowledge of academic language, such as mathematical and scientific terminology, and the knowledge of specialised subject matter (Gibbons 2002: 4, 5). Guerrero (2004: 183) defines this simply as the language needed to understand content.

The field of second language acquisition should address both proficiency and communicative competence. It should also enable learners to use language in a way that is context appropriate (Cho & O'Grady 2005: 507; Hawkins 2005: 31). To illuminate the concept of competence, Cho and O'Grady (2005: 508, 509) list four competencies:

- Grammatical competence, which is the knowledge of the core components of the grammar, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics.
- Textual competence, as it refers to a text as not just consisting of a sequence of grammatical utterances, but also to the rules that string sentences together to combine it into a well-formed text in the spoken or written language.

- Sociolinguistic competence, referring to second language learners' need to be able to produce and comprehend a variety of social dialects. These dialects refer to an ESL learner's ability to understand and produce language within a specific context and social setting.
- Illocutionary competence, which is the ability to understand a speaker's intent, and to produce a variety of syntactic structures to convey a particular intent in various circumstances.

Second language acquisition usually proceeds by following a predicted developmental order (Cho & O'Grady 2005: 521; Ellis 1997: 12). The complication facing the learners who form the focus of this study, namely ESL learners, is that they do not always have the opportunity to acquire English as a second language along normal acquisition routes. They are required to start learning 'in' English before understanding the language and before being able to use it to communicate for academic purposes (Guerrero 2004: 177). Their exposure to the LoLT is often confined to the classroom and, to a lesser degree, the school environment (Hawkins 2005: 33, 34). Krashen and Terrell (1995: 19) use the term "incomprehensible input" and explain it by using the example of someone hearing an unfamiliar language on the radio. This incomprehensible input does therefore not provide an opportunity to acquire the language. Krashen and Terrell (1995: 210) indicate that "comprehension precedes production". Unfortunately, many ESL learners are often required to produce academically demanding assignments before really understanding English. Many learners exit Grade Three with limited English competence and are then expected to deal with the academic demands of Grade Four.

In this regard Hawkins (2005: 35) mentions how complicated it actually is to achieve conversancy with academic texts before the target language's concepts and vocabulary are acquired. From these statements it can be deduced that learners in similar situations do not always have the opportunity to acquire grammatical structures necessary for fluent academic functioning. Grammatical structures are acquired in a predictable order, and Cho and O'Grady (2005: 521) list them as:

- The present participle affix.
- The copula 'be', for example: I am late.
- Articles.

- The auxiliary 'be', for example: She is reading.
- The plural 's'.
- The irregular past tense verb, for example: He taught Latin.
- The regular past tense.
- The third person 's', for example: She sings beautifully.
- The possessive 's', for example: The boy's crayon.

The ESL learner does not always have the time to acquire these competencies naturally. They are often expected to deal with a high level of academic English proficiency before these basic structures have been internalised.

For the ESL learner in South Africa, it is often difficult to listen to English, as its phonological system, phonotactic rules and tone may differ from the first language (Nel 2005: 152). Stress is not phonemic in the indigenous South African languages and they follow the phonological rule of lengthening the penultimate syllable. In speaking and reading, the Sotho languages deal with a seven-vowel system and a complex consonantal system. This may, for example, result in the pronunciation of a trilled /r/ sound or the consonant cluster /kl/ pronounced as /t'l'/. English, on the other hand, has twelve vowels and nine diphthongs (De Klerk & Gough 2002: 5).

Wissing (1987: 40 – 166) investigated these differences already in 1987, and discusses the following linguistic errors made by ESL learners who are mother tongue speakers of South Africa's indigenous languages:

- Spelling: The orthography of the indigenous languages are more uniform than English, where spelling can be logical and phonetic but can also appear as having little correlation with its pronunciation. A typical error example is the vocalic error *bed / bad*.
- Nouns: The indigenous languages are all based on the system of dividing nouns into classes while English works on three genders. A typical error example is found in the use of the pronouns *him / her*.
- The article: There is no equivalent in the indigenous languages for the articles of English. A typical error example is that articles are therefore often omitted.
- Concord: In English the number of the subject influences the tense marker. This does not happen in the indigenous languages. A typical error example is found in the following sentence: *My problem are why she decide to go there*.

- Verbs: English has a variety of verbs to indicate similar ideas, for example, the verb 'may' which can indicate possibility, expressing a wish, request or permission. A typical error example would be the sentence: *I have take the keys*. The participle 'taken' is not used.
- Syntax: Indigenous speakers often use the syntax of their own languages when thinking and writing in English. A typical error example to highlight this would be the sentence: *I think I cannot do this work*.

In addition to these examples, Wissing (1987: 80, 108, 151, 166) mentions, because of English-indigenous language differences, how ESL learners struggle in English with lexical errors, punctuation, prepositions and conjunctions. A lack of vocabulary and reading errors results in poor comprehension (Nel 2005: 152). Mispronunciation, as in the classic example "She took a 'sheep' (ship) from Durban", can seriously hamper comprehension.

The learner whose mother tongue is different to English, as the LoLT of the school, is still expected to possess not just communicative English proficiency, but also the level of academic proficiency which will make optimal learning possible. As explained by Guerrero (2004: 183), this is basically the language which learners require to comprehend academic essence. For the South African ESL learner to build up a competent linguistic repertoire that is required for coping adequately with the academic demands of Grade Four is quite a daunting task. The differences between the phonetic systems and grammatical structures of a learner's mother tongue and English as the LoLT of the school add to an already complex situation.

### **3.6 Language proficiency**

Language proficiency reflects familiarity with language concepts and allows access to learning in the LoLT. This implies that second language learners initially acquire the language and then learn in it. The pre-teaching of vocabulary or grammatical structures is underpinned by the idea that learners must first learn aspects of language before it can be used. For the second language English learner it suggests the attainment of language competency far beyond basic vocabulary and grammar (Gibbons 2002: 50; Guerrero 2004: 181). The admiration for English as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in South Africa has the implication that learners often learn 'in' English before they have adequately acquired the composite of skills

required to be academically competent. In this regard, Gibbons (2002: 5) notes a second language learner's limited range of contexts in English when learners are expected not only to learn a second language but to learn in it as well. Guerrero (2004: 179) explains the complexity of acquiring English for academic use. He also refers to this decontextualised use of language as cognitively complex (Guerrero 2004: 179, 181). The staggering amount of linguistic knowledge that ESL learners must possess before dealing proficiently with academic content complicates the situation. It is therefore not surprising that they may fall behind their native English-speaking peers who are learning in a language they have been familiar with for so long. First language speakers are exposed to approximately nine thousand hours of their native language before their sixth birthday. It is therefore much easier for them to assimilate knowledge and form mental and social associations in an academic environment (Guerrero 2004: 181, 194). Natural languages are full of aspects that give rise to problems for second language learners. Smith (in Chomsky 2000: xii) mentions some of these complexities, for example, declensional paradigms (the feminine noun forms of she, her and hers are provided as examples in this regard) and irregular verbs (for example, the past tense of go being went and not 'goed'), to illustrate their semantic complexity. ESL learners can take up to ten years to reach the age and level of their English first language peers (Guerrero 2004: 177). Lacking in general language proficiency will translate into problems regarding specific academic language proficiency.

### **3.7 Academic language proficiency**

The English second language learner desperately needs academic language proficiency to be successful at school. Poor linguistic competence not only has as a result poor communication in English, but even more worrying, the misunderstanding of subject matter. These learners must simultaneously deal with the complexities of English and the demands of academic content. Learners whose mother tongue is not English but who attends a school where the LoLT is English, tend to exhibit lower academic achievement than their peers (Guerrero 2004: 183, 194). Similar negative tendencies are seen in other educational aspects such as the repetition of a year and school dropout. Many of these learners struggle throughout their school careers or never complete their schooling. Some are even erroneously referred to specialised education (Klingner, Artiles & Mendez-Barletta 2006: 108).

ESL learners' academic development cannot be put on hold while they are learning the LoLT. Gibbons (2002: 5, 81) lists the theories of literacy pedagogy where she comments that learners need to "engage in the technology of written script" while connecting the text with his or her own background knowledge. This issue is further complicated by the variety of literacies and the learners' need to engage successfully with texts (Hawkins 2005: 31). Learners are expected to interact; as such interaction assists their understanding of dealing with particular texts. ESL learners are supposed to critically recognise what texts assume or imply. These issues all explain the complexity of language proficiency for the second language learner. This complexity is further highlighted by Hawkins (2005: 35) as the negative influence when using terminology and ideas that have not yet been acquired in the LoLT. The ESL learner is therefore learning 'about' language, as well as 'learning' it and learning 'through' it (Gibbons 2002: 132).

### **3.8 The South African Context**

#### *Walking with Language*

*Some have carried it, held it close, protected. Others have pulled it along like a reluctant child. Still others have waved it like a flag, a signal to others. And still, some have filled the language with rage and dare others to come close. And there are those who find their language a burdensome shackle. They continually pick at the lock.*

*~ Ofelia Zepeda ~ (Santa Ana 2004: xiii)*

#### **3.8.1 Introduction**

The South African Constitution (1996: 1243) specifies human dignity and the building of a humane and caring society. Reflecting this, the development of an integrated system of education in which barriers to learning are to be minimised and in which learners participate critically in the process of learning, was introduced as inclusive education (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 4). The movement towards inclusive education reflected the philosophical shift experienced globally with the demise of the medical model and the emerging human rights approach (Dreyer 2008: 31). Exclusion was slowly turned into inclusion as the social model became accepted as a philosophy of acceptance and respect (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 7). The South African Constitution (1996: 1255) honours the sentiment of the rights to basic education and language of choice. However, the reality of the South African situation which is described next looks different to the intended sentiments of the South African Constitution.



### **3.8.2 English as language of learning and teaching**

According to Ouane and Glanz (2010: 5) mother tongue schooling has been proven as beneficial. They affirm that every child should receive basic education in the language with which she is most familiar. If meaningful education is described as moving from the known to the unknown, learners will fare better if they are allowed to move from the mother tongue to a second language (Hoff 2005: 347). It is now accepted that mother tongue education might be beneficial, at least for the first three years of school. The too early interruption of mother tongue education can lead to a disruption in a learner's cognitive and academic development (Heugh 2009: 97). It is nearly impossible for a child to learn enough of a second language to function comfortably and productively in that language in an educational setting (Guerrero 2004: 177). In this regard Cummins (Ovando & Collier 1985: 63 – 65) states that learners who work academically in their second language need five to seven years to master age and grade accepted expectations. Murray (2007: 70) comments on the variety of studies that has demonstrated the strong and positive correlation between literacy in the mother tongue and learning English.

The authors of the South African Constitution have regarded language rights as being of such central importance that these rights were addressed and protected in the basic provisions of the document. The South African Constitution states: "Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable" (Bill of Rights 1996). It is important to note that it does not specifically refer to mother tongue education, but to the language of their choice. The choice regarding language of instruction lies, for all practical purposes, in the hands of the parents (Saunders 2009: [www.givengain.com](http://www.givengain.com)).

It is obvious, when observing the South African environment, that parents and their children favour English as the LoLT. The reason for this is that knowledge of English is perceived as imperative for economic empowerment (De Wet 2002: 119, 120). Samuel (2002: 10) refers to the fact that South Africans give a high status to English. There is an admiration for English and many learners aspire to possess this precious asset. English is often perceived as superior to other languages as it carries the crucial concepts of academic, political and scientific achievement (De Wet 2002:

120). This same phenomenon is considered when discussing levels of integration in English schools. Hofmeyr (2000: 7, 8) attributes this concept to the overwhelming desire of black parents to have their children learn English, as they believe English will provide the way to employment. South Africans have a positive view of the instrumental value of English (De Klerk & Gough 2002: 2). The appeal of the ex-Model C schools is also located in the facilities and teacher expertise on offer to previously disadvantaged speakers of African languages. In this regard it is also noted how black parents are desperately seeking access to participation in wider society, which they see as accessible through English (De Klerk 2002: 3).

Parents are making major investments in English which are focussed around access to the curriculum (Heugh 2009: 98). Parents' decision to change a child's language of instruction causes them considerable soul-searching and concern. Eight reasons are provided by Xhosa speaking parents, on why they have decided to enrol their children at English primary schools in Grahamstown. These reasons are listed by De Klerk (2002: 2, 6, 7):

- English-medium schools offer their children more sport and cultural facilities, a more meaningful education, a more stable learning environment free from problems such as a lack of discipline, high learner numbers, poor facilities and chaos.
- English, as an international language, is necessary to prepare a child for the modern world and develop cultural awareness, tolerance and communication with other groups.
- To provide their children with better opportunities in life than they had had themselves.
- The belief that English would open the door to more job opportunities and equip the child with a competitive edge as it is the language most used in the workplace; a language of science and technology.
- English is vital to educational success as it is the key to other subjects and the South African medium.
- It is a question of prestige, as English is never inferior.
- English could bestow certain social advantages on their children, for example, confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline and assertiveness.

- They wish for their children to mix with mother tongue speakers naturally and easily.

The movement of black learners to former white, usually English speaking neighbourhoods and schools, resulted in an almost complete black learner enrolment at some of these schools, especially those schools in city centres or in the suburbs close to the city centres (Hofmeyr 2000: 7). The benefits of mother tongue education, especially the essential first years of schooling, do not seem to play any significant role when parents choose a school with English as the LoLT (De Wet 2002: 119). The ESL learners who move to English-medium schools are confronted with obstacles they would not face in a school where they could learn through their mother tongues. These problems result in learners with barriers to learning and teachers having to facilitate processes to help these learners acquire linguistic skills (De Klerk 2002: 2).

De Wet (2002: 121) provides research findings where, without exception, all the respondents of all the South African language communities who took part in the research process indicated the same response. They all indicated English as the most important language regarding trade and industry, education, science and technology and politics. Such an approach needs to be viewed against the background of English as a home language of only 9,01 per cent of the South African population. It is, however, the LoLT of more than 90 per cent of South African learners (De Wet 2001: 121).

This current trend in favouring English is continuing, regardless of the proven benefits of mother tongue education. In this regard Murray (2007: 70) mentions the research of the New York State Education Department of 2000 and Cummins's 1989 study. Fleisch (2008: 113–117) cites researchers who affirm that every child should receive basic education in the language which she is most familiar with. He also, contrary to that belief, refers to studies that do not support the 'mother tongue is best' thesis. Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh and Wolff (2006: 11) comment on African communities where reliance on foreign sources of knowledge and information create a negative attitude towards mother tongue education. The sensitivity and historical complexity of languages in Africa contribute to the complicated issue of language of instruction. It would therefore seem that English is

becoming more dominant. This dominance, combined with the economic, social and academic status of English are reflected in the current situation of learners who are not only acquiring a second language, but learning in it. De Klerk (2002: 3, 6) calls English the “South African medium”, a medium which allows South Africans to communicate but which also complicates education for many ESL learners.

### **3.8.3 ESL learning and cognitive giftedness in an inclusive environment**

Schools have a responsibility to accommodate all learning needs, including all linguistic barriers (DoE: 2001). Specific to this study it will include the cognitively gifted English second language underachiever, in her experience of barriers to learning. Davidoff and Lazarus (1997: 35) focus on the development of a school firstly as a place where all learning needs are to be addressed, and secondly as a learning environment where adjustments take place because of new insights and realities. The reality of the inclusive classroom for many teachers and learners in South Africa consequently combine the requirements to address barriers regarding the problems of second language learning which sometimes result in underachieving cognitively gifted learners (Matthews & McBee 2007: 168).

South Africa, as well as these specific individuals, cannot afford cognitive giftedness to be unrealised and undernourished (Gallagher & Gallagher 1994: 393). This may be due to a lack of sufficient English proficiency or the incompetence to engage with academic content through this medium. These special learners are exceptional because of their strengths and their limitations and they need support for their needs to be adequately met.

### **3.8.4 Facing a crisis**

Fleisch (2008: v) mentions a crisis in South Africa’s primary education system. He notes that the reasons for the crisis are varied and multiple. His interpretation is that all the reasons are influenced by the “degree of alignment between children’s language repertoire and the language of schooling”.

Less than ten per cent of South Africa’s children speak English as their first language. By the end of Grade Three, English is the language used for teaching and assessment of most South African learners (Fleisch 2008: 98). Empirical studies that do and do not support the assumption that mother tongue education is best are

discussed (Fleisch 2008: 114–116). In this regard Fleisch quotes Howie, where she summarises her findings on language and achievement by providing the most significant factor that allows learners to learn science and mathematics as whether they are fluent in English (Fleisch 2008: 99). Broom's study regarding reading tests and the fact that the results show the difficulty second language learners experience when reading age-appropriate English texts, is described. The interpretation of academic texts is a significant step to comprehension and decoding of meaning. Two other important facts from Broom's study contribute to our understanding of language and achievement, and Fleisch (2008: 102) lists them as the complicated multilingual situation in advantaged and disadvantaged urban schools and the very factor of learning in a second language resulting in ESL learners lagging behind their English mother tongue peers.

Fleisch (2008: 105-112) comments on the five actual causal links that have been suggested as interconnected between school language practices and academic failure:

- Transfer theory and the density of unfamiliar words: The shift from the mother tongue to the second language means that learners seldom master the knowledge and skills as required by the school. Although popular assumptions indicate that the earlier one learns a second language the better, Fleisch (2008: 105) mentions the work of Heugh and Cummins where they state that if children do not have a deep understanding of their mother tongue, they do not have the ability to transfer comprehension to a second language. Even children's familiarity with their mother tongue will not help them when they are expected to traverse cross-curricula learning. Hoff (2005: 351, 357) notes that competence in a first language usually predicts the level of success when learning a second language. Her research is, however, based on immigrant studies where the learners had the opportunity to first establish competency using their first language in an academic setting. These learners had the opportunity to practise academic proficiency which assisted with the transfer of academic skills to a new language.
- Emotions of second language learning: Learners often try to avoid embarrassment and ridicule by becoming quiet and passive (Fleisch 2008: 108). In an academic setting where much depends on verbal interaction, ESL

learners may become anxious and anxiety is disadvantageous to learning (Ouane & Glanz 2010: 4)

- Code-switching: Research concludes that this practice seldom prepares learners for the language of assessment and can therefore actually assist academic failure (Fleisch 2008: 109).
- English language infrastructure: The language infrastructure argument looks at the differences in South Africa between urban schools where exposure to English is made easier by access to native speakers and a variety of media in comparison to rural schools where this is usually not the case. Fleisch (2008: 111) refers to English in the urban schools as an additional language while he uses the term foreign language for the rural schools. Taking this into consideration, there cannot be a simplistic explanation which states that the absence of mother-tongue language instruction is necessarily and always insufficient. It is the language resources which will ultimately determine the difference between the attainment of academic achievement, or not (Fleisch 2008: 111).
- Language and power: Social relations, class values and community perceptions all influence language teaching as these aspects cannot function isolated from social and political issues (Fleisch 2008: 112).

Fleisch (2008: 119) places a lot of emphasis on the South African situation where ESL learners are not a homogenous group. For example, different ESL learners have different levels of access to the English language. This 'access' can also be termed the amount of exposure to the language, which influences the rate of mastery of the language (Hoff 2005: 347). Ellis (1997: 5) goes so far as calling it the most important external factor when learning a second language. In South Africa, the level of access to English is different when referring to learners from urban townships than when referring to learners living in informal settlements and deep rural areas. Due to their different contexts, learning in English may be described as a barrier for the ESL learner from the urban township, while for the learner from an informal settlement, it may be regarded as a liability (Fleisch 2008: 119).

One of the ways to address the crisis which Fleisch refers to, as described in this section, is for teachers to establish sound support strategies. This supportive role of

the Grade Four teacher for the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever is the focus of this study. In the researcher's opinion, most learners at schools where English is the LoLT do have some level of access to good models of English. This access might unfortunately not be adequate to enhance an ESL underachiever's linguistic experience sufficiently.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The aspects of second language acquisition and learning, which were discussed in this chapter, focus on the typical South African situation where English is often the LoLT. The learners' situation reflects a BICS/CALP dichotomy (Cummins 1999: 1–3). As a foundation to discuss second language acquisition, some theories of language acquisition were listed and briefly discussed. Factors of second language acquisition were examined against the specific situation where English, as a second language, is used as the LoLT. Learners are therefore expected to not only achieve conversational proficiency but also academic language proficiency in English. An overview of the specific South African situation allowed for an examination of why many parents favour English as the language of choice for schooling and general upward mobility. The general crisis in the South African primary education system was mentioned to explain the specific reality of the ESL learner and teacher. The addressing of barriers to learning, by accommodating second language learners fully, will hopefully have an impact on effective learning (Nel 2005: 167). More importantly, it will allow for the potential of learners in the inclusive classroom to be reached.

Ellis (1997: 3) provides the following quote, which acts as a broad summary of the aforementioned issues: "As never before, people have had to learn a second language, not just as a pleasing pastime, but often as a means of obtaining an education or securing employment."

The next chapter investigates cognitive giftedness so as to sketch a comprehensive picture of the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever for whom support is required in an inclusive environment.

## Chapter 4

# COGNITIVE GIFTEDNESS

*“One of his (Schulz’s) Peanuts comic strips featured someone asking Peppermint Patty whether she was gifted. She replied, ‘I think I’m gifted. I receive a lot of presents at Christmas!’”*

*Siegle (2008: 111)*

### 4.1 Introduction

Terman (in Kokot 2005: 461) states in the preface to his seminal 1925 study on giftedness: “It should go without saying that a nation’s resources of intellectual talent are among the most precious it will ever have”. The support of cognitively gifted ESL learners in an inclusive environment, as the focus point of this study, is seen as an attempt to nurture this precious resource. Teachers’ behaviour and choice of instructional approaches influence the level of learners’ effective learning (Van Tassel-Baska, Feng, Brown, Bracken, Stambaugh, French, McGowan, Worley, Quek & Bai 2008: 298).

Although numerous researchers have listed characteristics of giftedness, none of these can be regarded as complete (Kearney 1996: 2; Winner 2000: 153). Gagne (2007: 102) mentions the concept of precocity and how learners behave beyond the expected benchmarks of their chronological age. He refers to this precocity as the “hallmark of giftedness” (Gagne 2007: 102). Gifted individuals have distinct qualities regarding their strengths, weaknesses, eccentricities and potential (Kokot 2005: 474). Kokot (2005: 473) mentions how gifted learners differ from others regarding, among other issues, their learning pace, critical thinking, ability for independent learning and conceptualisation skills.

Piaget’s (1936: 35–379) stages of development assist with the understanding of cognitive development. These stages in the development of childhood indicate the changes of the child’s cognitive structures (Piaget 1936: 15). The precocity of children in these stages led to the realisation of accelerated structures of mental development (Kokot 1999: 13). A definition of giftedness seems increasingly elusive.



## 4.2 Definitions of cognitive giftedness

The question on what exactly constitutes cognitive giftedness and how its attributes are defined is being rewritten continuously. The question of whether this is a single measure, a multifaceted concept or simply a case of high general intelligence is at present still being answered (Gallagher 1997: 11). Many researchers have offered varied definitions of giftedness (Sternberg 1997: 43; Borland 2009: 237; Kokot 2005: 470) and are still continuing to do so. To indicate how the umbrella concept of giftedness has changed, Ramos-Ford and Gardner (1997: 55-57) propose the existence of multiple intelligences, that is, linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, body-kinaesthetic, intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. They explain that these intellectual potentials are independent functioning concepts. Renzulli (in Winner 2000: 153) argues for the inclusion of creativity and motivation when a definition of giftedness is constructed. Winner (2000: 154, 155), in her attempt to understand what constitutes giftedness, notes the importance of an intense drive and hard work. She also comments on the nurture versus nature debate and the fact that we cannot dismiss the significance of an innate component. Another variable in this attempt to define giftedness is the fact that intelligence can be developed (Sternberg 1997: 44). Gagne (2007: 96) refers to the possession of innate abilities on a level that places a learner among the top 10 per cent of her age peers. Frasier (1997: 498) mentions recommendations and evidence by Gardner, Renzulli and Sternberg when discussing giftedness as multidimensional. It is thus clear that numerous variations exist in an attempt to define giftedness. For the purpose of this study, IQ scores will not be considered and cognitive giftedness will be comprehensively viewed against the background of the cognitively gifted learner's problems with English as the LoLT.

In the absence of an encompassing definition, Frasier's (1997: 508, 509) "ten core attributes associated with the giftedness construct" are listed:

- Motivation: forces that initiate, direct and sustain behaviour.
- Interests: activities or objects that have special significance and are given special attention.
- Communication: transmission and reception of signals or meanings through a system of symbols.

- Problem solving: process of determining a correct sequence leading to successful completion of a task.
- Memory: exceptional ability to retain and retrieve information.
- Inquiry: seeking of knowledge and understanding of information.
- Insight: sudden discovery of the correct solution following incorrect attempts based on trial and error.
- Reasoning: highly consciously controlled, intentional thought.
- Imagination/Creativity: processes of forming mental images of objects, qualities, situations or relationships that are not immediately apparent to the senses, problem solving through non-traditional patterns of thinking.
- Humour: exceptional sense of timing in words and gestures, ability to synthesise key ideas or problems in complex situations in a humorous way.

The learners who are discussed in this study are the cognitively gifted ESL underachievers in an inclusive environment. It is important for the support of these learners that attributes associated with the giftedness construct are noted. It is, however, equally important to note that a single attribute or a single intelligence quotient number can never define giftedness. Gallagher (1997: 11) notes that the nature of intelligence is not seen as a large store of information but rather as a “network of interrelationships”. According to this viewpoint, the gifted learner is the one who has richer knowledge structures and the meta-cognition to continue expanding that structure.

Kokot (1999: 27) summarises this through a mathematical metaphor where giftedness equals intellectual, social and chance factors added together and divided by emotional factors. She explains that this metaphor shows the significant ingredients which need to be realised for giftedness to become demonstrated. Aspects regarding giftedness are now discussed.

### **4.3 Aspects concerning cognitive giftedness**

History has evidence of thriving cultures educating their gifted. Documented evidence names ancient Egypt, China, Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages in Europe and Africa, the Middle East and its Islamic universities, Polynesia and the modern era (Barkan & Bernal 1991: 144). Many civilisations did not neglect the enriched

education of the cognitively gifted individual. Kokot (1999: 22, 23) argues that some learners stand out “by virtue of their abilities” and that we may never ignore them and their particular needs.

An aspect which deserves attention is the recognition of giftedness. Recognising giftedness is the first step towards providing gifted learners with an appropriate education that will help them in fulfilling their potential (Gallagher & Gallagher 1994: 393). Giftedness does not equal effortless and cognitively gifted learners deserve support to help them realise their potential (Kokot 1999: 22). As discussed under 4.2, many researchers have attempted to define the concept of cognitive giftedness and the commonalities shared by all cognitively gifted learners in an attempt to recognise giftedness (Brown et al. 2005: 69). Multiple criteria, such as the Kranz Talents and the Clark’s Checklist, have been implemented to indicate a learner’s possible giftedness and subsequent outstanding academic achievement (Kokot 1992: 94, 95). The monumental Terman study, for example, discusses the interests of gifted children and that these children learn to read easily (Gallagher & Gallagher 1997: 38). It is not surprising to learn that the children were chosen for the study on the basis of their verbal skills. Deiner (2010: 356) notes that developmental differences in children are likely to be more apparent in the area of verbal skills.

Since the development of the Binet-Simon intelligence test in 1905, the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the classic formula for intelligence testing applied (Winner 2005: 153). According to this, a normal intelligence quotient ranges from 85 to 100 and only 1 per cent of the people in the world have an IQ of 135 and over (Kaufman & Lichtenberger 2006: 4). Intelligence was therefore synonymous with the result of the test as the IQ was seen as an absolute measure of intelligence. Intelligence testing was regarded as the only method by which cognitive giftedness could be verified. Brown et al. (2005: 69) explain how a child can be labelled as gifted or not by a score on an intelligence test. When viewing giftedness as a score, it is thus often seen as a static concept and not as something dynamic that changes according to situations. To see giftedness as an absolute concept focusses on the view that a learner is either gifted or not. In contrast to that, Brown et al. (2005: 77) discuss a relative view where giftedness is viewed as a dynamic concept, that is, varying degrees of gifted behaviours that are seen in certain learners “at certain times and under certain circumstances”. Regardless of the realisation that cognitive ability

cannot be summarised as a test score, many people still believe that a high IQ test score indicates giftedness (Brown et al. 2005: 68; Borland 2009: 237).

The more relative approach, which acknowledges the dynamic nature of intelligence, requires a broader base of recognition (Brown et al. 2005: 68). It is noted that intelligence tests should be used for diagnostic purposes rather than for classification. Borland (2009: 236) comments on the fact that in educational practice, “the idea that giftedness either equals or requires a high IQ is far from dead”. This viewpoint of equating IQ and giftedness is problematic for many reasons, for example, the fact that the quantitative expression of IQs seems to have the effect that many people take them much too seriously (Borland 2009: 237). Sternberg (1997: 43) refers to his triarchic view of giftedness when he explains that giftedness can never be captured by a number. Kokot (2005: 470) also dismisses the IQ score as fully measuring intelligence, and refers to giftedness as genetic potential that can only come to fruition within an interrelated system. She emphasises innate potential, which might be dormant or unrealised, for outstanding achievement. Important for this study is her insistence that the realisation of the potential relies on the essence of the individual’s experience of home, school, society and self (Kokot 2005: 472). Current wisdom and broadened conceptions thus ask for a viewpoint of cognitive giftedness that lies beyond the context of individually administered intelligence tests (Borland 2009: 237).

Gardner (in Ramos–Ford & Gardner 1997: 55, 56) widens the context of giftedness to include seven areas of various talents, which he names “multiple intelligences”. For education, this has the implication of catering for a variety of strengths, weaknesses and learning modalities. Sternberg’s (1997: 43) Triarchic Theory of Intelligence focusses on how information is processed, how past information is used to deal with current situations and how we adapt to real-life environments. He refers to giftedness as three rings having “analytic, synthetic and practical abilities” and explains the three rings as follows (Sternberg 1997: 43):

- Analytic giftedness is the ability to dissect an issue and understand the various parts.
- Synthetic giftedness is noted in people who are intuitive, creative and insightful, and who are masterful when dealing with novel situations. Practical

giftedness involves the application of analytic and synthetic abilities to realise situations (Sternberg 1997: 43).

Although school performance differs from significant adult achievement (Gallagher & Gallagher 1994: 42), Simonton (2008: 252) notes that precocious development during childhood and adolescence actually foretells the distinction of achievement in adulthood. Gagne (2007: 102) describes this precociousness as “behaving beyond the typical behaviours of one’s chronological age”. Kearney (1996: 2) comments on this precocity and the asynchronous development which accompanies it. Asynchronous development can refer to different rates for physical, cognitive and emotional development (Kokot 2005: 472; Kearney 1996: 2).

Barkan and Bernal (1991: 145) note that the education of the gifted should include:

- The identification of all learners from all levels of society who possess exceptional abilities. These abilities could be potential or actual manifestations in the areas of general intellectual ability, academic aptitude or achievement.
- Challenging learners who are thinking on the highest standard of ability.
- The encouragement of underachieving learners with high achievement potential.
- The promotion of higher level thinking skills for the purposes of creation and production.

Gifted learners are usually highly observant, consistent thinkers who use a variety of flexible mental processes (Wiechers & Kokot 1994: 252). Some characteristics of giftedness are now discussed.

#### **4.4 Characteristics of giftedness**

The characteristics found in gifted learners are not necessarily unique, but it is the precocity and amalgamation of these elements that differentiate them (Gallagher & Gallagher 1994: 18). Some researchers view giftedness as potential, that is, the qualities learners possess which will make it more likely for them to achieve exceptional results at school while other researchers focus only on the actual presentation of remarkable work (Gallagher & Gallagher 1994: 6). Some of these commonalities are listed by Frasier (in Gallagher & Gallagher 1994: 409):

- The ability to meaningfully manipulate some symbol system held valuable.

- The ability to think logically.
- The ability to use stored knowledge to solve problems.
- The ability to reason by analogy.
- The ability to extend or extrapolate knowledge to new situations or unique applications.

Gallagher and Gallagher (1994: 43) also quote Rogers' list of seven characteristics to indicate the superiority of gifted students in these areas:

- Recognising the problem to be solved.
- Readily and spontaneously generating a series of solution steps.
- Setting priorities for the directions to take in solving a problem.
- Selecting representation of information more like an expert would.
- Deciding which resources to allocate to a problem-solving task.
- Monitoring solutions systematically.
- Taking longer preconceptual time in solving a problem.

These characteristics indicate that the cognitively gifted learner is not necessarily the one with the most content information.

Borland (2009: 237) notes that giftedness is not just something that happens but should rather be referred to as a "social construction". This viewpoint relates to Kokot's (2005: 470) "interrelated system". She summarises the characteristics of young gifted children as follows (Kokot 2005: 473):

- unusual alertness during infancy
- long attention span
- high activity level
- less need for sleep
- advanced development through milestones
- keen powers of observation
- extreme curiosity
- excellent memory
- early and excellent vocabulary development
- rapid learning ability
- abstract reasoning

- sensitivity
- perfectionism
- advanced ability to play with puzzles, mazes or numbers.

Kokot's summary highlights the characteristics of gifted learners and links it to these learners' life world experiences. She emphasises the relationships in a child's life which could hinder or enhance the realisation of her giftedness (Kokot 2005: 472). Some researchers are of the opinion that a gifted learner's development greatly improves when the home and school provide increasingly demanding knowledge and skills (Kokot 2005: 472). The overarching concern, which this study attempts to address, focusses not only on the cognitively gifted learner's characteristics, but how the school supports these learners in an inclusive ESL environment. It is therefore important that a teacher should be aware of some of these characteristics so as to recognise cognitive giftedness and provide relevant support. Rogers (2007: 383, 385, 391) mentions some of these specific characteristics of gifted learners:

- Gifted learners are likely to prefer independent study and self-instructional content.
- Gifted learners are more likely to change to an alternative method when faced with a mathematics problem they cannot resolve than to employ a trial and error strategy.

It should be kept in mind though, that as cognitive giftedness is such a difficult concept to describe, using characteristics to attempt such a description should always emphasise exceptions to the mentioned characteristics. Gallagher and Gallagher (1994: 36) consequently state that whatever conventional statements are made regarding the characteristics of gifted learners, there will always be distinct exceptions. The focus is now narrowed to the cognitively gifted learner.

#### **4.5 The cognitively gifted learner**

Gifted learners are different from others in that they have an exceptional proficiency or ability in some area (Kokot 2005: 474). Rogers (2007: 383) notes these learners' ability to deal with material beyond their expected age or grade level.

Verbal precociousness and advanced verbal reasoning skills are characteristics which are often listed when describing cognitively gifted learners (Kokot 2005: 472).

Deiner (2010: 356), for example, mentions that gifted children have extensive vocabularies that they use correctly. In a country dominated by English as the LoLT, this may pose real difficulties. Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2006: 270) comment on the predicament of the gifted learner who may not possess high verbal skills. Not all gifted learners show exceptional verbal ability (Kokot 2005: 472). Many ESL learners do not have the necessary vocabulary or levels of expressive language to answer questions in English. Lacking comprehension skills can also result in academic texts not interpreted correctly. So, even a learner with an efficient neurologically functioning brain could experience difficulties with second language learning (Kokot 1999: 26).

Where intelligence tests are used, bias results with learners of limited English proficiency or those who are developmentally behind a norm group (Joseph & Ford 2006: 43). Joseph and Ford (2006: 43) note that these tests are constructed in a way which assumes that the individual can understand instructions and respond verbally. Even with new theories and a widened understanding of giftedness, the habitual way is still directed by cognitive ability test scores (Brown et al. 2005: 68). Borland (2009: 236) notes that in education practice, the idea that giftedness requires a high intelligence quotient continues to be supported. Peterson (2009: 280) refers to gifted learners as a diverse group with a variety of strengths and vulnerabilities. An IQ score or academic test results cannot be sympathetic to language difficulties experienced in an ESL environment.

Cognitively gifted learners' giftedness may also co-occur with learning difficulties, heightened sensitivities or overexciteabilities, possibly contributing to frustration and underachievement (Peterson 2009: 280). Kokot (2005: 473) notes how even normal challenges, as experienced by peers, might be reacted to with intense trauma and anxiety. The already mentioned asynchronous development may result in social and emotional development being less advanced than the cognitive development (Kearney 1996: 2). Gifted learners' differentness often causes them to face difficulties. Kokot (2005: 474) lists these difficulties as resulting from:

- myths surrounding giftedness
- unrealistic expectations regarding their behaviour
- pressure to perform



- pressure to conform
- constant criticism or praise
- difficulty finding friends

Cognitively gifted learners function in a variety of social contexts while being influenced by numerous systems and relationships. The inclusive classroom is but one of these environments where such a learner needs to be supported in order for potential to grow into giftedness (Kokot 1999: 29).

Bouchard (2004: 341) mentions gifted individuals' extremely emotional and sensitive nature. The high expectations of teachers and parents often create the situation that the cognitively gifted learner will rather hide problems and compensate for concerns (Peterson 2009: 281). Anti-intellectualism in institutions of learning further adds to these learners' discomfort and their uniqueness which adds to their specific vulnerability (Kearney 1996: 2, 4). Gallagher and Gallagher (1994: 52) explain how these learners are in danger of following the rules of the stereotypes which culture or society has created for them.

Kokot (2005: 474-476) explains how certain characteristics of the gifted learner also translate into a source of problems. In this regard she mentions the following characteristics:

- Sensitivity; an emotional supersensitivity and intensity of feeling.
- Perfectionism; the conflict between what is and what ought to be.
- Values and morals; troubled over problems of morality and religion.
- Perceptiveness; quick assessment of people and situations.
- Questioning authority; arguing is a form of mental exercise.
- Imagination; tends to fantasise.
- Need for self-expression; psychological freedom to express themselves.
- Vulnerability to stress; susceptible to stress because of sensitivity.

Other researchers have also commented on cognitively gifted learners' experiences, dispositions and sense of motivation. To emphasise these learners' sensitive nature, Assouline, Colangelo, Ihrig and Forstadt (2006: 286) explain how gifted learners attribute their academic failure to a lack of ability. Winner (2000: 154) comments on gifted learners' intense motivation to achieve and that they can work without external

reinforcement. These learners also make discoveries and pose challenges for themselves. Winner (2000: 154) suggests that gifted learners' development is not just more rapid but also qualitatively different. Some of the characteristics can actually indicate specific talents (Gagne 2007: 98). In this regard there is a specific reference to the Dabrowskian overexcitabilities (Bouchard 2004: 349). For the purpose of this study, some of the characteristics, or overexcitabilities, are noted as part of the research of recognising cognitively gifted learners.

#### **4.5.1 Characteristics of giftedness based on the Dabrowskian overexcitabilities.**

The term "overexcitabilities" do not refer to abilities but are described as ways of interacting with and reacting to the world. Translated from the original Polish word 'napobudliwosc' used by Dabrowski, it means to be superstimulated. It does not, however, have the connotation of hyperactivity, but rather an "innate supersensitivity to stimuli" (Bouchard 2004: 341). These stimuli can refer to conditions in any of these five areas: psychomotor, sensual, imagination, intellectual and emotional. It is therefore significant to consider all these areas, as giftedness is not a single factor of intelligence but rather a variety of characteristics. These characteristics that are listed by Dabrowski are "modes of experiencing the world" (Bouchard 2004: 341) which can assist us in recognising and understanding the cognitively gifted learner better. Teachers should be aware of these characteristics so as to recognise and support these learners in a classroom situation. The characteristics reflect more than just the cognitive domain and it is therefore significant that teachers are also aware of the variety of levels incorporated here. The characteristics which follow are compiled in quite a comprehensive list. The cognitively gifted learner is therefore described in the light of the following characteristics:

- Paces or walks around when upset or distraught.
- Has an explosive temper; hurts others physically when angry.
- Talks a lot or chatters.
- Tends to act impulsively.
- Has nervous habits, for example, chews pencils, bites nails, drills holes in desk with pencil.

- Excitement over ideas leads to movements like leaping to her feet or dramatic gesturing.
- Always needs to be doing something.
- Responds to sounds that others tune out or do not hear.
- Comments on changes in lighting and temperature.
- Has an appreciation for beauty, spatial arrangements, bulletin boards, etcetera.
- Has a hard time not touching everything.
- Strong preferential tastes or pleasure in food or drinks.
- Either loves or hates messy activities like playing with finger-paint, mud, sand or clay.
- One of the first to complain when things are too loud, or is fearful of loud noises.
- Responds easily to guided visualisation, or when asked to imagine being in a different place, or to being someone different.
- Daydreams frequently.
- Has a facility for mixing truth and fiction, or for stretching the truth.
- Doodling reflects imagination and fantasy.
- Engages in visionary thinking, such as “Wouldn’t it be great if ...?”
- Enjoys imaginal and fantasy play with toys or other children, inventing situations and characters.
- Does not like to do things the usual or expected way and is strongly motivated to be original.
- Has wild or impractical ideas.
- Easily changes lyrics to create new songs or verses.
- Strong interest in science fiction or fantasy stories.
- Can take the random or disorganised ideas from a group and suggest a solution or consensus.
- Strong interest to find solutions to problems.
- Has difficulty with multiple choice tests because several items are equally “correct” if seen from a different perspective.
- Can comprehend, with almost nonverbal cues, implications that other children need to have “spelled out” for them.

- Tries to discover the how and why of things.
- Wonders about the meaning of things or of life and asks existential questions about purpose.
- Asks questions that are open-ended or philosophical.
- Shows strong curiosity, asks many questions, or a few questions with depth.
- Can become so absorbed in a topic that she does not want to move to other topics.
- Requires or responds best to logical, reasoned explanations.
- Judgemental about right and wrong, fair and unfair.
- Questions authority, reasons for requirements, or religious practices and may even play devil's advocate.
- Fascinated by a topic and driven to know more about it. May be an expert in a topic.
- Looks for similarities and differences in events, people and things.
- Attracted to mental puzzles, brain teasers or riddles.
- Shows hurt or cringes when others are criticised, hurt or punished.
- Tries to comfort others who are in pain.
- Invests writing or art with strong emotions.
- Shows empathy for others or offers sincere sympathy.
- Displays a wide range of emotion, from exuberance and joy to depression and grief.
- Argues passionately and with conviction.
- May throw tantrums or overreact to frustration.
- Takes criticism of work personally.

Not only are these characteristics tied to the foundation of giftedness but the list clarifies the nature of giftedness (Bouchard 2004: 340). A learner who does not perform academically may not be regarded as cognitively gifted. Reminders of the construct of cognitive giftedness, as provided by this list, for example, prompt teachers to look beyond school performance when considering cognitive giftedness in their learners. Many teachers tend to view only the neat, well behaved, obedient learner as gifted (Kokot 1999: 9). A teacher may not recognise a learner's cognitive

giftedness when this giftedness does not translate into high academic achievement. The characteristics and behaviours, listed as Dabrowski's overexcitabilities, provide insight into how cognitively gifted learners experience the world. For the purpose of this study, it allows for a broader perception of cognitive giftedness.

According to the focus of the study, a cognitively gifted learner may also lack English language proficiency. Although early language development is a reliable sign of high potential, schooling in another language as the mother tongue may mask the cognitive giftedness as a learner struggles to cope. Many South African learners are expected to learn and be taught in English as the LoLT, which is often not their mother tongue. Such a double barrier of cognitive giftedness coinciding with a lack of English proficiency is referred to as a dual exceptionality.

#### **4.6 Dual exceptionality and the cognitively gifted learner**

A specific sub-problem of this study is: What are the characteristics of learners with the dual exceptionalities of cognitive giftedness combined with second language learning? In the South African situation, this refers specifically to learners who are expected to deal effectively with English as the LoLT.

There are numerous reasons why cognitive giftedness may go unnoticed. Gallagher and Gallagher (1994: 393) state that the realisation that many gifted learners' talents go unrecognised has been highlighted as a loss of potential for these learners and their country. Gifted learners who also have a learning difficulty are often overlooked because their "average academic performance was not failure enough" (Assouline, Nicpon & Whiteman 2009: 102).

When dual exceptionality refers to physical disability, for example, giftedness combined with cerebral palsy, or to behavioural problems, for example, giftedness combined with deviant and disruptive conduct, it can usually be identified quite easily. The cognitively gifted learner with limited English proficiency is more difficult to pinpoint as they can often camouflage both exceptionalities (Montgomery 2003: 7). Their giftedness allows them to use their intelligence to circumvent their difficulty and their difficulty is not realised as they compensate for it by employing their intellectual abilities (Winebrenner 2003: 132). Frasier (1997: 505) refers specifically to those gifted learners who lack English proficiency or who are non-English

speaking. She notes that learning the habits of a new culture can be regarded as an immediate barrier.

If we conclude that giftedness is colour-blind, found across all socio-economic levels and distributed in equal quantities in male and female populations (Montgomery 2003: 7, 8), we have to concede that these cognitively gifted learners are sitting in all the classrooms of South Africa. Montgomery (2003: 8) notes that learning difficulties may be experienced by cognitively gifted learners. All involved should strive to recognise, value and nurture, not just the cognitive giftedness, but the limited language proficiency concealing the giftedness. Kearney (1996: 4) emphasises the establishment of an inclusionary school environment so as to ensure that language interactions are not detrimental to any child. As inclusive education concentrates on the addressing of barriers to learning (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 19), these twice exceptional learners might be at serious risk due to missed opportunities for intervention. They need the opportunities to pursue their specific interests and areas of giftedness while schools also provide structures for intervention and addressing the barrier of limited English proficiency (Stewart 2003: 33).

The possibility to treat these learners with concern is reduced when their specific area of weakness is not realised and therefore not accommodated, as well as when their area of strength is not realised and intervention therefore not concretely structured (Stewart 2003: 33). All involved need to ensure that the cognitively gifted learner's potential for high levels of accomplishment is nurtured and realised by ensuring that individualised instruction is relevant and accountable. Rogers (2007: 383) explains that substantial development occurs when "a concerted effort has been made at both school and in the home to provide the talented child with increasingly complex knowledge and skills". It is therefore important to ensure that the twice exceptional learner's specific situation is recognised, so as to design intervention strategies.

#### **4.7 Recognition of twice exceptional cognitively gifted learners**

It serves no purpose to recognise gifted learners if we do not plan to do something distinctive about their education (Gallagher & Gallagher 1994: 5). In the absence of biased, culturally insensitive intelligence testing scores, teachers require a variety of available techniques to assist them with the recognition of cognitively gifted learners.

It is commonly, and incorrectly, assumed that these learners will be academic achievers. With the reality of English second language learning, many cognitively gifted learners may never excel at school due to their limited proficiency in the LoLT, which is their daily reality. Freeman (2000: 38) provides the international example of language difficulties experienced by the Gypsies in Hungary or the Turks in Germany. Due to language difficulties, many gifted learners may not achieve academically.

The fact that cognitive giftedness is not stagnant but falls on a continuum means that no two learners will act, learn or respond exactly the same. Montgomery (2000: 134) defines cognitive skills as internal capabilities which will guide a person's attention, learning, thinking and remembering. Kokot (1999: 9) refers to some people's stagnant view of giftedness, especially as it is perceived by quantitative measurement of intelligence. The many shortcomings of the isolated numerical results of the quantitative approach are summarised as the unfair method of equating a person with a figure without taking biographical factors into consideration. In contrast to this, the qualitative approach considers the individual in all its facets and not just intelligence as an isolated concept (Kokot 2005: 472). For the sake of the twice exceptional learner, no identification may rely on an intelligence test.

Just as disabilities and impairments are identified as a way of recognising individual learners' uniqueness, the manifestations of potential giftedness are to be identified. Moon (2009: 275) comments that many twice-exceptional learners are not identified. These learners tend to experience frustration and they often underachieve. It is now accepted that there is more than one standard for exceptional performance. This viewpoint challenges traditional views, still observed at many schools, that intelligence is a single capacity (Winner 2000: 153). This multi-faceted perspective of cognitive giftedness complicates recognition even further. Rogers (2007: 391) mentions that cognitively gifted learners often prefer to try alternative strategies when experiencing a mathematics challenge they cannot resolve. She also mentions that gifted learners are likely to prefer independent tasks and study. These learners also prefer materials with instructions they can interpret by themselves (Rogers 2007: 385).

In relation to the cognitively gifted English second language learner in the South African classroom, their double exceptionality may manifest as one of the following (Montgomery 2003: 8):

- The difficulty masks the abilities.
- A linguistically disadvantaged background but with average functioning, which indicates that a great deal of compensation is frequently occurring.

Teachers should therefore pay specific attention to the learner who, for example, asks unconventional questions, is curious about a variety of subjects, observes details and can think abstractly (Kokot 2005: 472).

Montgomery (2003: 7) states that there are at least five or six potentially gifted learners in every class. To assure that the cognitive giftedness and the learning difficulties of the twice exceptional learner are accommodated, optimum learning conditions should be created (Winebrenner 2003: 137). Kokot (2005: 470, 479) notes that facets of giftedness cannot be measured directly, but that behaviour manifestations can be observed. The threat of learners remaining unidentified, as well as misidentified, is always present. The goal with identification is not just to ascertain that cognitively gifted learners have been indicated, but how they will be supported in the classroom to provide for their particular needs. An in-depth look at the learner, specifically her traits and abilities, is necessary to determine the learner's capability for excellence. Kokot (2005: 470–472) focusses on the whole child by constituting a realistic picture of the complete learner. In the absence of intelligence tests, this comprehensive image can be achieved by a multidimensional approach. This learner functions in a life world with a variety of relationships and her holistic description includes physical, cognitive, affective and conative facets. Barkan and Bernal (1991: 147) refer specifically to an education system that can not only meet the need of these learners, but that can be enriched by them.

Bereday and Lauwerys (in Passow 1997: 528) observe that civilised societies accept the undertaking of encouraging the talented to “cultivate their gifts and to pursue excellence”. Passow (1997: 532) comments on education's responsibility to assist each gifted individual for the sake of self-fulfilment, in addition to society's requirement for brainpower. Johnson, Karnes and Carr (1997: 516) list the contributions of, inter alia, Thomas Edison, Vincent van Gogh, Beethoven, Helen



Keller and Albert Einstein as examples of historical figures who were twice exceptional. These individuals all possessed talents and difficulties and still made an impact on society (Johnson et al. 1997: 516).

In the South African situation such respect towards dual exceptionality will be reflected in a school system where all learners receive support for all their barriers to learning. Furthermore, it will reflect a system where the cognitively gifted ESL learner receives the calibre of enriching education and support to nurture all their remarkable qualities. In a responsible education system, there would be opportunities for all learners to receive quality education. If this does not happen, it might lead to the cognitively gifted learner underachieving due to the dissonance between her specific needs and the education system. Kokot (1999: 21) highlights the importance of an education system that offers “equality of opportunity for all levels of ability”.

#### **4.8 Underachievement**

“Underachievement is experienced by individuals who work well below their known potential” (Van den Aardweg & Van den Aardweg 1999: 246). This definition describes the usual definition of underachievement. The underachiever is often portrayed as bored, poorly adjusted and with low expectations (Lovett & Lewandowski 2006: 521). The environmental factors of overcrowded classrooms, inflexible teachers and poor socio-economic circumstances are listed as contributing to the phenomenon of underachieving (Parsons 1996: 77). Whitmore’s (1985: 2) definition states that underachievement is basically academic achievement that is much lower than what the evidence suggests regarding the learner’s potential. She also comments on why it is important to identify gifted underachievers by listing three reasons (Whitmore 1985: 2):

- The possibility that society might experience the loss of such an individual’s potential contribution.
- The underachiever’s vulnerability to social and mental health problems.
- The fact that early identification allows for reversing underachieving.

Rimm (in Gallagher 1997: 15) discusses learners who seem to possess substantial intellectual potential but whose scholastic performance is mediocre or worse. There are, however, a group of underachievers whose underachievement is most probably due to the situation of being enrolled at schools where the LoLT is English. Freeman

(2000: 35) explains that language links our perceptions when we perform highly complex functions. She lists some of these functions as analysing and synthesising information, encoding and perceptually organising the world. Freeman (2000: 35) also emphasises the important role of language as it provides a foundation for complicated processes. A lack of language proficiency for the cognitively gifted learner can result in learning difficulties and underachievement (Joseph & Ford 2006: 44). Pierce (2002: 3) refers to the “achievement gap” of ESL learners compared to first language learners. These learners are taught all learning areas through the medium of English and are expected to have acquired a proficiency level which is adequate to deal with demanding academic content.

The barrier faced is therefore limited English proficiency, but due to their cognitive giftedness these learners tend to compensate for this limitation and are consequently not always perceived as having a learning difficulty (Joseph & Ford 2006: 44). They do, however, not perform according to their potential, and can be wrongly perceived as average learners. Underachievement, as a result of this double exceptionality, is defined as “... an inability to perform appropriately for one’s age or talents, in other words, unfulfilled potential” (Westminster Institute of Education 2006: 1). These underachievers are not a uniform group (Montgomery 2000: 3) and they might be cognitively gifted learners with a lack of English language proficiency. These learners may appear to be average achievers but require enriched learning as well as intervention and support. These intervention strategies, used to support the learner, are to be provided by the classroom teacher in an inclusive environment. Montgomery (2000: viii) states that all learners are entitled to “an enriched and enriching inclusive education”.

Kokot (1992: 111) refers to underachievement as a social tragedy. She concludes that it is difficult to determine but that the extent is probably significant. She also refers in this regard specifically to underachieving gifted learners as learners who “hint at special ability but who do not achieve excellence”. Assouline et al. (2009: 103) refer to the underachievement phenomenon of the twice exceptional learner as the significant difference between cognitive ability and achievement. This might of course be true of many underachieving learners, but for the purpose of this study, it refers specifically to underachievement when considering the cognitively gifted ESL learner. The supportive role of the teacher in this regard is significant.

## **4.9 The supportive role of teachers**

*“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” ~The Lorax ~ by Dr. Seuss (1971: 58)*

### **4.9.1 Introduction**

Teachers are responsible for providing support in the inclusive classroom. This support is for all learners, but for the focus of this study, the specific support for the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever is emphasised.

Stewart (2003: 33) notes that teachers might notice the learning difficulty and fail to see the learner’s gifted aspect. Montgomery (2003:7) mentions the learners whose learning difficulties are hidden and often not recognised. She states, regarding the co-occurrence of giftedness and learning difficulties, that these concepts “cancel each other out and to all intents and purposes the learner appears average in ability and attainment” (Montgomery 2003: 7). This intersection of cognitive giftedness and a learning difficulty creates a twofold barrier to optimal learning. Firstly, the cognitive giftedness may not always be recognised and therefore not encouraged and nurtured to its full fruition. Secondly, the support regarding English as the LoLT may not be provided as the learner is not perceived as having such a barrier. Assouline et al. (2009: 103) express concern for the twice exceptional learner when they note that a learning difficulty may mitigate such a learner’s academic achievement. Siegle’s (2008: 112) opinion is that provision must be made for giftedness to “surface and flourish”. It is therefore clear that the system of support is quite complicated.

### **4.9.2 What is expected from teachers as providers of support**

Teachers may fail to recognise cognitive giftedness, especially among those learners who display deviant behaviour and for whom the expectations to perform are set low (Baker, Bridger & Evans 1998: 7). Teachers are expected to identify underachievement as a result of ESL learning of the cognitively gifted learner. They are also expected to provide an adapted curriculum and pastoral support (Joseph & Ford 2006: 43). In view of the fact that teachers “make it easier for learning to happen”, teachers are the focus of this study as they address barriers in an inclusive classroom (Green 1999: 129). Whitmore (1985: 3) specifies this role of providing for the gifted underachiever as adapting the curriculum to be challenging and valid. The

teacher must ensure a balance between developing foundational skills and enhancing learning that is beyond the expected curriculum. Stewart (2003: 33) comments on the role of the teacher as the one who should attempt to focus attention on the development of the learner's gift and supply a programme for advanced enrichment. In an inclusive environment, those learners who arrive at school with difficulties can be assisted by meeting all their needs (Assouline et al. 2006: 4). These needs are varied and could represent needs from, for example, a social-economical, linguistic, physical or intellectual nature.

Many issues co-exist in this process of intervention. Winebrenner (2003: 133) warns against a system where time is taken away from enhancing the cognitive giftedness by using more time to work on the lack of English language proficiency. Baker et al. (1998: 7, 9) note the misalliance between the needs of the learner and the school environment. This mismatch suggests that the learner's specific needs are not addressed. From their specific American perspective, they assume that up to 40 per cent of gifted learners are at risk for serious underachievement or scholastic failure (Baker et al. 1998: 5). Lovett and Lewandowski (2006: 517, 520) note that learners sometimes achieve average academic results which may mask giftedness as well as a learning difficulty. They describe these twice exceptional learners as "undetected or misdiagnosed".

Montgomery (2000: 127) explains how, in an inclusive environment, a teacher should meet the needs of the learner. She mentions various inclusive models which organise the curriculum by consolidating activities into a complete learning experience (Montgomery 2000: 147). Kearney (1996: 2) emphasises the role of inclusive classrooms as determined to serve all learners. This includes teaching both the gifted learners and the ones with barriers to learning (Kearney 1996: 2). It is important to note that Kearney (1996: 2) specifically highlights that teaching entails much more than the learners just being in attendance. Teachers are beginning to acknowledge the dichotomy which defines the twice exceptional learner (Winebrenner 2003: 132).

To teach the cognitively gifted learner will involve using enrichment materials that will allow the learner to develop higher order thinking abilities, explore new information and offer opportunities for independent learning (Montgomery 2000: 132). It will also

focus on problem solving approaches and emphasising abstract concepts. To teach the ESL learner who lacks English language proficiency will involve a number of intervention strategies regarding literacy difficulties (Montgomery 2000: 172). To teach learners who are cognitively gifted combined with a lack of English proficiency will demand structured support from the classroom teacher. Wills and Munro (2000: 89) comment that these learners need teachers who understand why some learners underachieve and who can deal with the support process in a positive way. Diaz (1998: 107) lists fifteen school related behaviours of gifted learners underachieving in school. They are listed here as:

- a negative attitude towards school
- test phobia.
- incomplete school work
- restless, inattentive, disorganised
- easily distracted
- bored
- difficulty with analytical tasks
- lively imagination
- inventive
- avoidance of competition
- good at abstract thinking
- rebellious, impulsive
- tendency to withdraw
- unreliable
- sense of external locus of control

These behaviours might assist the teacher when attempting to design and implement supportive intervention strategies.

Both the identification of the difficulties and the intervention strategies are dealt with in the classroom by the teacher. Van Tassel-Baska et al. (2008: 298) note that the literature in gifted education accentuates teacher behaviour and the teacher's role. They comment on effective teachers and stress the role of sound teaching practices. Mills (2003: 273) notes that exemplary teachers are focussed on achievement. She

lists three significant characteristics which describe effective teachers of gifted learners:

- enthusiasm
- flexibility
- expertise in the area being taught

It is important to note in this regard that cognitively gifted learners do not necessarily require cognitively gifted teachers. The teacher should just acknowledge the learner's giftedness, understand her special talents and problems and be a bright, enthusiastic person (Kokot 2005: 484).

Van Tassel-Baska et al. (2008: 298) relate the evidence that suggests teacher behaviour in a classroom and teachers' choice of instructional approaches affect the level of learners' learning. With the specific circumstances of the twice exceptional learner, teachers are often caught between "belief and disbelief" (Winebrenner 2003: 132). Winebrenner (2003: 133–135) gives some teaching strategies for teachers when teaching twice exceptional learners:

- Teach learners to appreciate individual differences.
- Be aware that many learners who have learning difficulties prefer visual and tactile-kinaesthetic formats for learning success.
- Always teach content by teaching concepts first and detail second.
- Teach learners how to set realistic short-term goals and to take credit for reaching those goals, even if they represent only a partial amount of the entire task.
- Teach in a way that ties past learning to new content.
- Immerse all the senses in learning activities.
- Provide specific instruction in organisational techniques.
- Find and use any available technique that will improve a learner's productivity.

Teachers are therefore responsible for the daily classroom support and strategies. They are expected to ensure an adapted curriculum that includes exposure to increasingly difficult content (Rogers 2007: 383). Assouline et al. (2009: 105) note that the identification of barriers, as well as the intervention for the barriers, is implemented in the classroom. Adaptive instruction should create a stronger link between a learner's needs and the classroom experience (Winebrenner 2003: 133).

In an inclusive class there is really no space for a regular curriculum. All learners deserve appropriate teaching and support through a programme of learning, training and practising (Siegle 2008: 112).

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the critical areas surrounding cognitive giftedness, its definitions and challenges. It specifically highlighted the plight of the cognitively gifted learner who carries the double exceptionality of giftedness combined with a lack of English language proficiency. The paradigms of cognitive giftedness should allow for the complete inclusion of twice exceptional learners, specifically the twice exceptionality that lies on the intersection of cognitive giftedness and a lack of English language proficiency. Language and communication can either impede or enhance the exceptionality that is cognitive giftedness. When a cognitively gifted learner's English second language learning masks her cognitive giftedness, both areas deserve teacher support and attention.

Such support, as provided by the Grade Four teacher, is the focus of the research. Chapter 5 concentrates on an appropriate research design and methodology to investigate the indicated support.

## Chapter 5

# RESEARCH DESIGN

### 5.1 Introduction

This research asks the specific question: How do Grade Four teachers fulfil their supportive role when addressing the barriers to learning of the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever? Chapters 2, 3 and 4 dealt with related literature, which places the study in an ongoing discourse regarding the topics (Marshall & Rossman 1999: 23). This chapter will focus on the research design that was selected to achieve the outcomes, as identified in Chapter 1.

According to Babbie (2009: 92, 93), three of the most useful purposes of research are exploration, description and explanation. Exploration concentrates on breaking new ground in research but its shortcoming lies in the fact that it often does not provide satisfactory answers for research questions. In descriptive research, the researcher firstly observes and then describes accurately and precisely what was observed, while explanation sets out to answer the explanatory question of why. For the purpose of this study, where the supportive role of the Grade Four teacher for the cognitively gifted English second language underachiever is researched, the focus will fall on emancipatory research. McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 397) describe this research purpose by stating the following illustrative research question: “How do participants describe and explain their problems and take possible action?” To be able to attempt answering the stated research question, the chapter follows the following route.

Firstly, a description of the research paradigm is discussed. Following that description, the qualitative research design, focussing on the research method, the data collecting techniques and the data analysis process are explained. In conclusion, the trustworthiness of the research, with reference to validity and reliability are discussed.

### 5.2 The research paradigm

The Oxford Dictionary (1976: 798) describes a paradigm as an example or pattern, that is, simplified examples that we use to illustrate procedures, processes and



theoretical points. Considering that qualitative research is based on a constructivist philosophy that assumes reality as “multilayered, interactive and a shared social experience interpreted by individuals” (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 396), it allows for this method of research to be used in this study. Employing this specific perspective allows the interviewed teachers to form constructions in order to make sense of the concepts and to reorganise these concepts as viewpoints. As knowledge is socially constructed it may change when different circumstances are taken into account (Golafshani 2003: 603). For the purpose of this study, the following points regarding a constructivist research paradigm are deemed important (Golafshani 2003: 603, 604):

- Meaningful reality is constructed from interaction between people and their world.
- The focus is not on the examination of surface issues but on the search for deeper understanding.
- There are various constructions of reality.

Such definitions allow for a research approach which seeks clarification and insight.

As the research problem revolves around the supportive role of teachers, it would inter-relate the topic with the methodology and these teachers will be engaged as participants in interactive face-to-face interviews. The goal will be to determine how the participants fulfil their supportive role. The research will therefore be focussed on the supportive role of Grade Four teachers on just one phenomenon, namely the cognitively gifted Grade Four underachiever in the ESL inclusive context. The teachers of these learners will be individuals who are in similar teaching circumstances. McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 91) explain that qualitative research interests are often derived from personal experience. They state that these research interests reflect the concern or curiosity of the researcher. The research problem was decided on because of the researcher’s personal previous involvement with ESL learners. Prior knowledge of some aspects of the particular problem allows for the researcher’s involvement and concern.

Although previous research has been done in the separate fields of cognitive giftedness, second language learning, underachievement and inclusive teaching in a South African context, this particular research problem has not been explored from

the viewpoint of the combination of all these aspects and teachers' management thereof. Marshall and Rossman (1999: 21) comment in this regard that research is a process by which one tries to gain a better understanding of the complexities of human experience.

Certain aspects, which will be indicated under the next sub-heading, are required to ensure the structuring of the research design. These aspects were chosen to assist when attempting to explain, describe or explore the research topic (Marshall & Rossman 1999: 22).

### **5.3 Qualitative research design**

Babbie (2009: 112) describes qualitative research design as involving a series of decisions regarding the topic, the population, the research methods and the purpose. One of the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research can be found in the search for understanding, which qualitative research allows (Henning 2004: 3). According to Henning (2004: 3), a qualitative study will not be focussed on the "quantity of understanding", but rather on the profundity of understanding. She explains that the phenomenon we are studying should not be placed within the quantitative boundaries of an instrument, as this will limit the data (Henning 2004: 4). McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 395) mention how qualitative studies cater for the improvement of educational practice. This particular qualitative research approach will inform the research design. The research design is the process by which a study's perspectives are focussed (Babbie 2009: 112).

#### **5.3.1 The qualitative interview as research method**

##### ***5.3.1.1 The structure and procedure of the interview as research method***

Henning (2004: 50, 67) states that the research interview, one of many types of interviews, assumes that the individual's perspective is important. The interviewee is, however, not just conversing naturally, as an interview is a planned social interaction. The interviewer guides the questions and focusses the study (Kvale 1996: 88). The interview is therefore meticulously planned in three stages (Henning 2004: 70). The first step is to find the participants and to organise the interview as described in the research design. Secondly, the interview is conducted and recorded and thirdly, the data is analysed and interpreted. The interview does not produce

data, but is simply a mechanism that brings data to light. Henning (2004: 60) also notes that the interview does not take place in a social vacuum, but that the interviewee has a specific identity.

As the method of providing an overview of people's thoughts in a relatively short space of time, interviews are useful in finding answers to the research problem. Kvale (1996: 88) lists seven stages of an interview investigation:

1. Thematising, which allows for the description of the research objective and the topic.
2. Designing, which refers to obtaining the intended content.
3. Interviewing, which is the actual conducting of the interviews by using an interview guide.
4. Transcribing, which refers to the transcription of the oral speech to a written script for the purpose of analysis.
5. Analysing, using a specific method as determined by the purpose of the research.
6. Verifying, which is to ascertain whether the study investigates what it intended to investigate.
7. Reporting, which allows for the findings to be communicated.

These stages provide a framework for the purposeful structuring of the interview. Although the study focusses on semi-structured interviews, it is still imperative to follow a structure as guideline for the whole interviewing process.

### **5.3.1.2 Interview goals**

The goal with the interviews will be to determine what the participants perceive as their supportive role. Their feelings, ideas and actions will be included, as the participant is not a holder of information, but is rather perceived as a collaborator (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 444). Roulston (2010: 15) mentions that the qualitative interview rests on a constructivist foundation, which is concerned with the way in which realities are constructed. The teachers, as participants, will be invited to speak for themselves by offering their perspectives, experiences and knowledge regarding support in words and actions. These interviews are built on the assumption that questions asked by the interviewer will be answered by the participant (Roulston 2010: 11).

### **5.3.1.3 The semi-structured interview**

Semi-structured interviews are specifically chosen for this study as they are constructed in such a way so as to allow for the recruiting of a specific member for the purpose of conducting an interview. For the focus of this study, it therefore allows for the selection of Grade Four teachers at primary schools where the LoLT is English but the enrolment reflects learners who are English second language learners. To utilise the interview's basic unit of interaction, which is the question-answer sequence, these selected teachers are interviewed. The interview data are generated and contribute to the research topic (Roulston 2010: 3, 10).

Semi-structured interviews also permit the interviewer to devise predetermined questions as part of the interview guide, so that each of the interviewees will respond to a similar set of questions. The choice of semi-structured interviews allows for the combination of open-ended and pre-coded interview structures, so that the interviewer has a schedule but the participants' responses and the process can still be flexible (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 444). Open-ended questions give the researcher freedom to ask probing questions and pursue other topics as these topics emerge during the interview (Mouton 2001: 151). The probing questions allow the researcher to seek further detail and description (Roulston 2010: 15). The interviewer has the opportunity to encourage informal conversation while at the same time steering the conversation by consulting a prepared script. Babbie (2009: 318) mentions that these interviews are not locked in stone and the process therefore has the flexibility to be redesigned. Roulston (2010: 15) comments on the use of an interview guide as allowing the same starting point for each interview as it assumes a common set of topics to be discussed. The semi-structured interview therefore allows for a fairly open framework which can foster communication which is focussed but also conversational. It is less intrusive to the interviewees than structured interviews because they not only get to provide answers, but reasons for their answers as well.

### **5.3.1.4 The advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews**

The advantages of the semi-structured interview can be summarised as follows (Raeder 2007: 8): Responses can be compared and data analysed more easily. There is a reduction of interpersonal bias, topics are not missed and participants are not constrained by rigid answers. Partington (2001: 1) highlights, as a definite

advantage, the interviewer's control of the process and the interviewer's freedom to follow new leads as and when they arise.

Raeder (2007: 8) also lists some of the disadvantages of semi-structured interviews: The interviewer sacrifices some flexibility, there could be a reduction in rich data due to the way questions are worded and there are limits to generalisation. Coding responses are unfortunately still subject to bias. The neutrality and objectivity which are strived for in the interviewing process can be compromised to the detriment of the study. Other limitations involve the risk of becoming too personally involved and the problems with fatigue. Partington (2001: 1) discusses the problems of interviewers when he states that the data that are obtained might be corrupted by "inappropriate questioning, inadequate listening or the absence of desirable interpersonal skills on the part of the interviewer". According to Babbie (2009: 324) there can never be complete understanding and the interviewer will only reach partial understanding. The interviewee will have complex and conflicting perspectives and it is not possible to fully comprehend the experience of another person (Partington 2001: 2).

### ***5.3.1.5 Elements of semi-structured interviews***

Kvale (1996: 118) states, regarding responsible qualitative research, that the researcher has a scientific responsibility to ensure that "a research project yields knowledge worth knowing" and that the project is as controlled and as substantiated as possible. The knowledge yielded refers to the investigation and consequent improvement of a human situation. Through the research process, the interviewer creates meaning from the responses of the interviewees. For this process to be successful, the interviewer needs to construct a frame which represents the parameters of the interview (Partington 2001: 2). These parameters are based on the preparation of the interview process so that this process allows for structure and flexibility throughout the interaction. As the basic elements of an interview are words and ideas, the types of questions must be carefully prepared so as to ensure rich and meaningful communication that will generate in-depth data. Babbie (2009: 318) describes an interview as interaction between an interviewer and a participant in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry, including the topics to be covered. What is not necessary is a set of questions that must be asked using specific wording and in a particular order. He however emphasises that the

interviewer must be completely familiar with the questions to be asked so as to allow for a smooth and natural progression of the interview (Babbie 2009: 320).

Henning (2004: 75) mentions that it may become necessary to summarise some of the conversation. This serves the purpose of allowing the interviewer to get the bigger picture of what was said as well as checking whether the interviewer's understanding corresponds with that of the participant. All transcripts and recorded material are shown to each participant to ensure that the researcher's interpretations are true and accurate (Mouton 2001: 244). This also allows the researcher to request a clarification or an expansion of a concept by the participant (Henning 2004: 75). To ensure the smooth functioning of the interviewing process, Henning (2004: 78, 79) mentions the following elements to be considered:

- A gentle tone of voice
- Avoid judgemental phrasing
- Adopt a projective approach
- Do not include the phrasing of the research theme directly in the interviewing questions
- Start with the less threatening questions and ease into more difficult ones

As the research is following a constructivist framework, it will also follow a constructivist conception of the interview. Roulston (2010: 59, 60) explains that being concerned with the ways in which people construct their worlds will result in emphasising the participants' definitions of terms and situations during the interview. The primary data of qualitative interviews are therefore the "verbatim accounts" of everything that takes place during an interview session (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 449).

### **5.3.2 The data collection process**

The following aspects will be included in the data collection process:

#### **5.3.2.1 Sampling**

The samples are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 401). Babbie (2009: 193) mentions that it is appropriate to select a sample on the basis of the researcher's judgement about which ones will be competent to answer. Consequently, Grade Four teachers were

approached who are teaching at primary schools where the LoLT is English but where the learner body is primarily comprised of English second language learners. Six primary schools were approached and the researcher's request was for a Grade Four teacher, that is, one participant per school. A sample size of six was decided on to ensure that enough in-depth data are generated and to ensure that most of the important support strategies are likely to be heard. Due to the flexible nature of the research, the sample size can be expanded if necessary until saturation is reached and the interviews reveal no new data. Babbie (2009: 258, 259) comments on the fact that respondents must provide information and do so reliably. They should therefore be competent and willing to answer.

#### ***5.3.2.2 Site selection***

The site selection will be arranged according to the purposeful sampling of six government English primary schools situated in a single district in Pretoria. As previously mentioned, the most important factor is that these schools all have English as the LoLT, but that the learner body is predominantly comprised of learners whose mother tongue is not English. The specific district was also chosen so as to represent an area of the city outside the researcher's personal and professional involvement.

#### ***5.3.2.3 Researcher's role***

The researcher is part of the research process and in this interactive process the researcher firstly explains the procedures and gains the participants' trust. Thereafter, the researcher is personally involved in conducting the interviews, giving feedback to the participants and analysing and presenting the data. Henning (2004: 59) mentions that a certain amount of cultural knowledge is needed to draw from the experience. The researcher's teaching background will assist in this regard. The researcher's role can therefore be summarised as the objective to produce a lucid explanation of the phenomenon that is being studied.

#### ***5.3.2.4 Data analysis process***

Marshall and Rossman (1999: 22) note that, by using a specific theoretical framework, research design and methodology, the researcher will generate data which can answer the research question. This generated data are to be analysed so as to select, categorise, compare and interpret the phenomenon (McMillan &

Schumacher 2001: 462). Babbie (2009: 394) refers to the qualitative data analysis as the “non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations”. Henning (2004: 101) explains how it is important to capture understanding of the data. A researcher starts with a set of data, in this case, a verbatim transcription of an interview, and reads it repeatedly until units of meaning are identified (Henning 2004: 104-106). These units of meaning, or codes, are grouped and categorised until a meaningful relationship is seen among them. McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 462) refer to this as “making sense” of the data.

To structure the concepts surrounding qualitative data analysis, Henning’s (2004: 127, 128) seven principles of analysis are listed:

1. Qualitative analysis takes place throughout the data collection process. As such the researcher will constantly reflect on the data while collecting it.
2. An analysis commences with reading all the data and then dividing the data into smaller units. Mouton (2001: 108) refers to this part of the analysis as “breaking up” the data. He defines the aim of analysis as understanding the various components of the data and to see whether themes can be identified, isolated and established, which links with the following points.
3. Data units are organised into a system that is derived from the data. The data analysis is therefore inductive. The participants’ answers to the questions are transcribed verbatim and then colour-coded to cluster it into categories (Henning 2004: 104–106). The categories are then organised.
4. The researcher uses comparisons to build groups and to discover patterns.
5. Categories are not stagnant and can be modified during the analysis.
6. The analysis must reflect the participants’ perceptions. The “context and quotations of participant language” are the data that will thus be analysed to answer the research question (McMillan and Schumacher 2001: 494).
7. The result of an analysis is a kind of synthesis in the form of a description, themes or theory.

These principles are applied to the study. For the purpose of data analysis in this study, the data will be managed manually. The categories that will be built, will relate to the barriers experienced by ESL learners, recognition of cognitively gifted underachievers, support strategies and intervention procedures mentioned by the



participants. These support tactics focus specifically on the Grade Four cognitively gifted ESL underachiever in an inclusive context.

#### **5.4 Ethical considerations**

Ethical principles are to be considered throughout all stages of planning and data collection (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 420). Especially when using face-to-face interactive processes, the following ethical guidelines are to be followed (Mouton 2001: 242–244):

1. Voluntary informed consent, where all participants understand why their participation is necessary and for this reason they are familiar with the process. Participation is, however, always voluntary.
2. Confidentiality and anonymity, which means that schools and participants will not be identifiable in print. Names of participants and locations are coded. The raw data is also carefully and safely stored and not made available. Babbie (2009: G2) defines confidentiality by explaining that a researcher can identify a specific participant's responses but undertake not to do so publicly.
3. Fairness, which indicates a sense of fairness in approach and interviewing style, is a characteristic of the research process. Participants are assured that the research will have no adverse effect but that they nevertheless have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process.
4. Feedback, which refers to the feedback of results being conveyed to the participants. For the purpose of this research, it will be the feedback of results regarding the support, provided by teachers, for the cognitively gifted Grade Four underachiever in the inclusive ESL classroom.

All research should be guided by the principle of respect for the quality of educational research incorporating professional ethics and personal morality.

#### **5.5 Trustworthiness of the research**

To protect and ensure the integrity of qualitative research, a number of strategies are built into the research to ensure both reliability and validity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers 2002: 18). These strategies, which are discussed further-on, will allow the concepts of reliability and validity to be constructed in the research paradigm. Morse et al. (2002: 17) explain that when these strategies are used

appropriately, it helps the researcher to focus the direction of the study resulting in validity and reliability being present in the completed project.

Morse et al. (2002: 15) quote Guba and Lincoln who said that all research must have “truth, value, applicability, consistency and neutrality”. They comment on the proposed criteria in the qualitative paradigm to ensure trustworthiness, and they specifically mention credibility, auditability and confirmability. Discussing the characteristics of the researcher to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, Morse et al. (2002: 15) list sensitivity, responsiveness and adaptability to changing circumstances, having professional immediacy and the ability to clarify and summarise findings. Mays and Pope (1995: 110) note that the integrity of qualitative projects should be protected. In this regard they mention two goals:

- To create an account of method and data which can stand independently
- To produce a plausible explanation of the phenomenon being researched

### **5.5.1 Validity and reliability**

According to Morse et al. (2002: 19), the concepts of reliability and validity can be appropriately used in all research paradigms as overarching concepts. The following verification strategies are suggested to ensure reliability and validity of data (Morse et al. 2002: 18):

1. Ensuring that the questions match the method which matches the data and the process of analysis.
2. Confirming that the sample consists of participants who have knowledge of the topic.
3. Collecting and analysing data so that one realises the connection between what is known and what one needs to know.
4. Constantly checking data and thinking theoretically.
5. Developing a theory which is well constructed by understanding the data conceptually.

As qualitative studies usually aim at the extension of findings rather than generalisation of results (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 424), the focus will be on increased validity and not on generalisability. In qualitative research, validity is enhanced by clearly and expressly stating all aspects of the research. Henning (2004: 151) suggests that reliability and generalisability are included in the precision

of procedures and documentation. In this study, these concepts were ensured by continually checking the interview questions against the data, by selecting information rich interviewees and by ensuring that all aspects of the research were transparent and clear to all involved.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with a detailed description of the study's research design. The use of a constructivist research paradigm was mentioned and the choice of the semi-structured interview as data collection technique was substantiated. The appropriate and required ethical principles were discussed. The processing of qualitative data, by a system of coding, was mentioned as well as the strategies used to guarantee the trustworthiness of the research. The next chapter presents the findings, that is, the presentation of the participants' answers and discussions.

## Chapter 6

# DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

*“In real estate, the maxim for picking a piece of property is ‘location, location, location’. In elite interviewing, as in social science generally, the maxim for the best way to design and conduct a study is ‘purpose, purpose, purpose’.”*

*Aberbach and Rockman (2002: 673)*

### 6.1 Introduction

The study wishes to describe the support given by Grade Four teachers to cognitively gifted ESL underachievers. Data analysis started with the commencement of the collection of the data. Qualitative data analysis implies that there were no standardised methods of analysis, but that the interviews with Grade Four teachers were transcribed and interpreted. This chapter therefore allows for themes to emerge from the data collection and for these themes to be discussed.

Interviews were used as a data collection method, as these provide in-depth information regarding the teachers’ experiences (Turner 2010: 754). In analysing the data, the researcher specifically looked for a vertical line running through the interviews allowing for valid inferences made from the transcriptions. Certain themes that appear reflect the answers to the semi-structured interview guide’s questions, as well as the conversations surrounding that. Krippendorff (2004: 27) notes that participants are allowed to speak freely in these types of interviews. The researcher then analysed the transcripts of these conversations. According to Krippendorff (2004: 81) data are hence made, and not found.

As indicated in Chapter 5, the following research procedure was followed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at six primary schools in Pretoria where the LoLT is English, but where the majority of the learner body is not first language English speakers. The researcher interviewed six Grade Four teachers. All interviews took place after school hours so as not to disrupt the duties of the teachers. During these interviews, the teachers’ responses were recorded electronically by using both the ‘Audacity’ software as well as a mobile recorder serving as a back-up device. A researcher needs to create records of “transient phenomena such as spoken words” (Krippendorff 2004: 84). The initial elements

regarding the conducting of the interview, as already discussed, were included. The interviewer attempted a gentle tone so as to put the teachers at ease and started with the less threatening questions, easing into the more challenging interview questions as the interview progressed. As the teachers answered and elaborated, the interviewer was conscious not to allow any judgemental words, gestures or tone of voice to enter the process.

During the individual interviews, the teachers were asked the same pre-formulated questions (see Appendix E) but each interview was allowed to proceed conversationally. The teachers did not consistently answer the exact same questions in the exact same order, as the researcher interchanged the posing of the questions (Turner 2010: 755). Questions could be changed or adapted based on participant responses. It will be evident from the data analysis that each interview has its own coherence although there is a vertical dimension which runs across all six interviews. Certain dimensions were not envisaged and not initially coded but had to be included later on as they appeared regularly (Taylor & Gibbs 2010: [onlineqda.hud.ac.uk](http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk)). Turner (2010: 756) comments that this unfortunately adds to the difficulty surrounding the coding process. To sift through all the narratives is a lengthy and often cumbersome process.

## **6.2 Transcribing the data**

The verbal interview responses that were obtained were transcribed, analysed and categorised so as to distil their significance (McMillan & Schumacher 2001: 502). The first step in this process was the transcription of the recorded teacher interviews. Krippendorff (2004: 88) comments on how qualitative researchers support their interpretations when he refers specifically to the method of interlacing quotes from the analysed texts into the conclusions. This analysis allows making valid and repeatable inferences from texts. The transcribed text therefore needs to be accurate and to the letter. To ensure this the researcher re-checked the transcriptions with the recorded interviews. Although it helps the process, this procedure is extremely time consuming.

The individual interviews produced data in the form of verbatim transcripts (Taylor-Powell & Renner 2003: 1), (Appendix F). These were sorted to attach meaning and

to relate. This process of analysis involved critical thinking and thoughtful connections. An analysis of these interview findings follows in the next section.

### **6.3 Data analysis and interpretation of semi-structured interviews**

#### **6.3.1 The analysis and interpretation process**

Data analysis aims to organise the data in such a way so as to reach a meaningful conclusion. The transcriptions were coded, in other words, the data were combed for themes and marked to ensure easy retrieval later on (Taylor & Gibbs 2010: onlineqda.hud.ac.uk). This procedure makes interpretation easier and simplifies searching, comparing and identifying patterns. Each section of text coded in the same way was judged by the researcher as having the same topic or underpinning the same category (Taylor & Gibbs 2010: onlineqda.hud.ac.uk). Commonalities were identified. A summarised description of what is actually in the transcripts was thus formed. This involved close and repeated reading of the text. Although the coding process started off descriptively, it evolved to become analytical.

The data analysis was focussed by the purpose of the result, in other words, the answering of the research question. It involved the reading and re-reading of the text. The emerging themes from the text allowed the interpretation of the data. Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003: 2, 5) refer to this process of interpretation as “attaching meaning and significance” to the analysis.

As the final component in the whole process, the interpretation of the data allows the researcher to make sense of what was just uncovered. It allows for the data to be opened and for the research question to be answered (Turner 2010: 759).

#### **6.3.2 Biographical details of participating teachers**

All the participating teachers were asked to complete a document regarding biographical detail (Appendix F). The document was compiled in such a way that the teachers were not required to write lengthy explanations but they could merely tick appropriate blocks. As the study focusses on the teachers and their support of barriers to learning, it is important to note their teaching experience, qualifications and role at school.

For the purpose of anonymity, pseudonyms will be used throughout.

Attribute	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
<b>Age</b>	30 - 39	40 - 49	20 - 29	50 - 59	40 - 49	50 - 59
<b>Teaching experience</b>						
Foundation phase		More than 10 years			2 – 5 years	6 – 10 years
Intermediate phase	More than 10 years	More than 10 years	6 – 10 years	More than 10 years	More than 10 years	More than 10 years
Senior phase						6 – 10 years
<b>Current role at school</b>						
Teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grade head		✓	✓	✓		✓
Learning area head	✓					
SBST co-ordinator						✓
<b>Qualifications</b>						
Diploma in Education					✓	✓
Baccalaureus degree				✓		
Baccalaureus in Education (B Ed)			✓			
Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	✓					
B Ed (Honours)		✓				

**Table 1: Particulars pertaining to interview participants**

It is clear from the above table that the interviewed teachers are all well qualified and that they have considerable experience teaching Intermediate Phase learners. Of specific importance are the multiple roles they fulfil within their schools' organisational structures. These positions might assist them when they initiate, plan,

execute and monitor support strategies for the cognitively gifted ESL underachievers in Grade Four. It might even allow them to advocate more awareness and interventions for the cognitively gifted learners who underachieve due to a lack of academic English proficiency.

### **6.3.3 Conceptual knowledge**

For the comprehensive answering of the interview questions, it is necessary for the participating teachers to be familiar with the following aspects. They should be aware of Education White Paper 6 and have a basic understanding of inclusive education. It is expected that they are acquainted with the expectation of rendering support to learners with barriers to learning. The specific behaviours of, and difficulties experienced by ESL learners should also be familiar to them. The term underachievement and its defining layers should also be understood by the participating teachers. The specific context of Grade Four constructs a world within which the texts are analysed. This context allows the data to be reasonably interpreted (Krippendorff 2004: 24).

### **6.3.4 Findings of interviews with Grade Four teachers**

#### ***6.3.4.1 Support expected from classroom teachers regarding barriers to learning***

*The question focussed on the expectations of classroom teachers regarding support for learners with barriers to learning.*

The participants in this study were all aware of their role in supporting learners with barriers to learning. According to the literature study in Chapter Two, inclusive education expects of classroom teachers to address the varied needs of all learners (Dreyer 2008: 22, 64). Teachers are therefore expected to provide the needed support. The teachers were also aware of the need to encourage and praise learners so as to motivate them. Learners' challenging realities and consequent emotional reactions were also commented on.

All the teachers were aware of the expectations regarding support. Petro commented on their difficult circumstances relating to many illiterate parents. She seldom expects homework from the Grade Fours and rarely expects basic research from the learners. Research in a Grade Four context refers to finding out a few facts



regarding a given topic so as to prepare the learners for the demands of the following school phases. Concessions like that are made and all the work is done in class. Julia, on the other hand, mentioned that their school's facilities and the School Management Team's sensitivity toward the teachers enable the teachers to provide creative support. All the teachers indicated that the Department of Education is very specific about what is expected of teachers.

- Thandi: "First you need to identify the learners, identify the barrier, let the School Management Team know about that ... and for there [*sic*] we need to get something to help the child".
- Parvati: "First of all we need to identify them, and once we've done that we need to put a programme in place".
- Julia: " ... apart from that we have the 450s". (The 450s are the official GDE 450 Support Forms which are completed for every learner who needs support as the form stipulates indicators of need and levels of support. It is used to build up a comprehensive, individualised document per learner which informs teachers and district officials and which helps to facilitate the movement of the child across schools.)
- Yasmeen: " ... we have a procedure at the school and when we find that a child is struggling in any way we refer them to our school psychologist ... but the teachers themselves obviously have to develop certain materials ...". She also mentioned the role of the SBST (School Based Support Team) and individuals outside the school environment who lend support.

They further explained their individual support structures. Amy starts with one-on-one explanations, a separate booklet where the same type of activity as what the rest of the class is busy with is presented in a simpler form and an afternoon class where class work is re-taught and consolidated. Yasmeen allows learners additional time and also allows peers to assist the learner with the barrier. Parvati works with the learners on an individual level or in small groups in the afternoon and mentions that "their attention is greater than when I work with them in class". Thandi commented on the constant monitoring of each child with a barrier in the classroom situation. This sentiment is captured by Julia when she explains that "every child in class demands a different kind of intervention". This very individualised angle to

support is repeatedly mentioned by the participants. Julia also lends support during breaks and develops special worksheets for certain learners.

Yasmeen mentioned some learners' utter frustration, due to bullying and teasing, which often manifests as behavioural problems. According to her, certain behavioural problems are generated from barriers to learning as the learner cannot cope with, inter alia, the language and the workload.

A synopsis in quotes of the teachers' attitudes towards support shows their care as well as their frustration:

- "You come to school we make a plan. We do something different. It's a lot of work".
- "And sometimes there's really nothing you can do".
- "And especially if the child always gets it wrong and he sits with you and suddenly it's: 'Aah, I just did my carry over wrong, oh now I understand'. But that doesn't happen often".
- "Yes, but it's worth it. When they get stuff right".

The total commitment of all the teachers to their profession, and the preparedness to support the learners in their care, is evident in these comments. The dedication of a teacher who makes a comment like "You come to school we make a plan" is contrasted with the utter frustration of a comment like "And sometimes there's really nothing you can do". The teachers' dedication to the concept of support is juxtaposed against the harsh reality of their frustrations regarding not always having available time and opportunity. They are aware of this ambivalence and it adds to their frustration.

#### **6.3.4.2 ESL learners and the academic demands of Grade Four**

*The question focussed on the type of difficulties experienced by ESL learners especially when considering the academic demands of Grade Four. Cognitively gifted ESL learners' specific characteristics and behaviours were included in this discussion.*

The participants shared their observations of their ESL learners against the background of the academic demands of Grade Four. They all shared the view that ESL learning hampers a learner's progress, especially if the school is the only

environment where they are exposed to English. The literature study in Chapter 3 refers, at a number of occasions, to the difficulties experienced when learners deal with academic challenges in a second language (Gibbons 2002: 132; Hawkins 2005: 33,34). This is well illustrated in the following statements shared by the teachers.

- Julia: “A restrictive vocabulary hampers their progress. They know what they want to say but they can’t express themselves.”
- Yasmeen: “By the time most of the children are in Grade Four, they can’t read or write”.
- Thandi: “So, at most of the times, children do not at first understand what you’re saying ... It’s comprehension”. Thandi also commented on spelling: “Spelling is a big problem”.
- Parvati: “... the children ... have very little knowledge of sight words”.
- Amy: “ ... they do not hear the sounds connected to the symbols, the letters. So it’s very difficult for them to follow the spelling ...”.
- Both Amy and Petro commented specifically on difficulties experienced with sentence structure and Petro provided the example of children saying: “Ma’am can I throw?” when they want to put something in the rubbish bin.

All the teachers were acutely aware of their learners’ inability to fully comprehend academic content in all the learning areas, for example, Petro said: “ ... because you use English for everything you want to explain to them”. In this regard Amy referred to the learners’ inability to decode their teachers’ explanations or interpret a question in text as “a massive barrier”. Thandi commented on the fact that everything that is said has to be repeated, and Julia expressed her concern about how this influences the working pace in a classroom. Most of the teachers commented on how they have to go back and re-explain something simple which they assumed a Grade Four learner should know. The influence of ESL learning can be summarised in Julia’s comment: “It slows you down”. She was also extremely concerned that taught concepts are never internalised because the meaning of a single word is not grasped. According to her, an ESL learner “has got to live the language”.

Placing the aforementioned issues against the background of the specific demands of the Grade Four year can be most successfully done by quoting Petro’s words: “Also, Grade Four is a very difficult year”. The transition from Grade Three to Grade

Four was mentioned as significant as well as the increase in learning areas, formal assessments, multiple teachers and these teachers' individual demands. Yasmeen commented on the learners' frustration when confronted with all these challenges, which often results in behavioural problems. Petro expresses her perception of the demands of Grade Four as: "It's too big; too big for them".

The academic demands of Grade Four, as the first year of a new and challenging phase, are immense. The transition from Grade Three to grade Four poses an enormous challenge. Petro commented on the fact that the learners get confused with the different Learning Areas and end up doing, for example, Social Sciences work in the Natural Sciences book. The physical demand of moving from one class to another with all your belongings contrasts with Grade Three's ease of having a comfortable, more permanent work station in one class. The Grade Four learner is confronted with a 'reading to learn' environment instead of the 'learning to read' atmosphere of the Foundation Phase. As the ESL learner is continuously more exposed to language issues, for example, subject-specific terminology, the difficulties of learning in a second language become more prevalent. The ESL learner often finds interpreting and decoding printed texts difficult. As many of the Learning Areas now expect of the Grade Four learner to use her interpretation skills to navigate printed text in text books and on notes, the lack of comprehension contributes to the language problems. Adding to this some characteristics of the Grade Four learner, for example anxiousness, restlessness and struggling to understand ethical behaviour (Wood 2007: 108, 112, 113), it is clear to see how demanding this year can be for both the Grade Four learner as well as the Grade Four teacher.

Regarding the discussion on cognitively gifted learners in the Grade Four classes, all the teachers indicated that these learners are indeed present in their classes. It should be noted though, that all the participants referred to learners with high academic results when discussing cognitively gifted learners. This topic will be discussed in more detail under 6.3.4.4, as the topics became naturally paired during the interviews and overlapping occurred regarding questions and especially the answers of the participants.

#### **6.3.4.3 Underachieving Grade Four learners**

*The question focussed on the teachers' experiences with underachieving Grade Four learners.*

According to the literature study in Chapter 4, cognitively gifted underachieving learners seem to possess substantial intellectual potential, but their scholastic performance is mediocre or worse (Rimm in Gallagher 1997: 15). The teachers were asked about general underachievement and then the conversation was navigated towards underachievement of the cognitively gifted learners.

Underachievement was recognised as a definite problem and the teachers commented on their experience thereof. Amy reflected that it might be connected to her perception that the learners' knowledge retention is very weak. Petro mentioned that she observed a total lack of wanting to achieve and a couldn't-care-less attitude. Whether these learners could be cognitively gifted underachievers is difficult for her to establish. Julia commented that many learners have an inflated opinion of themselves which causes them to work less. She commented specifically on their poor work ethic and lack of effort. According to her observations, many learners underachieve because they never internalise the concepts. Thandi echoed this notion by making specific reference to incompleteness of work and laziness. Petro's comment: " ... but when they fall behind, it's really bad", reflects the teachers' concern for these learners.

Two of the teachers related their outlook on underachievement with ESL learning.

- Thandi: "I'm not so sure whether the instruction is rather big [complicated] for them or because they're not sure of what they're doing ..."
- Yasmeen: "However, when it comes to the school work; academically they are just ... they are not able to. They have that potential; it is very difficult for them ..."

The teachers indicated that the problem of underachievement is closely linked with the lack of parental support. They all expressed their frustration at many parents' lack of interest in their children's scholastic achievement. Yasmeen's comment summarises the general sentiment of the teachers in this regard: "Because we do not have that triangular co-operation between the parent, the teacher and the child. Now if that relationship is not sustained, you will see the effect."

It was difficult for the teachers to comment on the specific underachievement of the cognitively gifted learner. They all agreed that those learners are probably in their classrooms but as they often equate cognitive giftedness with high scholastic achievement, there were few responses.

The able underachiever in Grade Four seems to be easily overlooked. The teachers often perceive underachievement as when a learner consciously decides not to work and try. The learner's negative attitude is therefore the reason for the underachievement. Phrases like poor work ethic, lack of effort, a negative attitude and laziness reflect the teachers' impression of these learners. Although this is probably often the case, there seems to be marginal allowance for the able underachiever whose lack of scholastic performance is not solely contributed to these factors, but rather to the fact that her lack of academic English proficiency, and consequent academic backlog, hampers her achievement.

#### **6.3.4.4 Cognitively gifted ESL learners**

*The question focussed on the planning and implementation of enrichment activities for the cognitively gifted Grade Four learners.*

According to the literature study in Chapter 4, teachers are expected to provide an adapted curriculum for the cognitively gifted learner (Stewart 2003: 33). Except for the usual concerns of time and opportunity, the provision of support might be even more complicated. The first step in the process of providing adequate support is the recognition of these cognitively gifted learners. Cognitive giftedness often goes unnoticed if it is not linked to some form of exceptional achievement.

The discussion started with the recognition of cognitively gifted learners in the Grade Four class. The teachers all shared the view that cognitively gifted learners are the ones whose academic achievement is on a high level. They also mentioned the following characteristics observed in the class:

- Yasmeen: "Simply by the fact that their workload, when they get it they're enthusiastic ... they finish their work; and they finish it ahead of time".
- Thandi shared this sentiment by stating: " ... they would finish their work quickly"

They did, however, agree that they were aware of learners who are not necessarily achieving well but who they observe as possibly being cognitively gifted. Parvati mentioned: "... I've got three of them and I can mainly see that there's potential that maybe we do not tap onto [*sic*] a lot." Amy linked the problem to ESL learning by commenting that these learners cannot express their thoughts and they can consequently not show that they are gifted. Parvati also considered ESL learning and shared a very personal belief that teachers, herself included, often make an assumption about the academic level of ESL learners and then treat the learner according to their preconceived assumption. Thandi related a situation of a learner who always adds extra facts to any discussion topic in the Natural Sciences class. To explain fully this learner's level of understanding she used words like knowledgeable, informed and brilliant. However, she concluded this story by saying: "To put this in writing and show me the work, it's very difficult." Thandi even acknowledged that he is more informed about certain topics than she, as the teacher, is. She commented: "It's a giftedness outside the classroom."

It should be noted that the teachers all shared this sentiment that one is much more likely to be aware of an underachieving ESL learner's cognitive giftedness outside the formal structure of the classroom. Amy's comment summarises this when she explained that when you engage with these learners on a more informal basis, you realise how deep and rich their knowledge is.

Regarding the planning and implementation of enrichment activities, the teachers all remarked on the issue of time. Petro's words reflect this when she said: "But there's so little time". The teachers did all describe some enrichment activities and used the terms expanded opportunities and extension work to describe these. Amy referred specifically to the use of the Reading Laboratory. Thandi mentioned extension worksheets and Parvati explained how she accumulated challenging word puzzles. Yasmeen also mentioned additional worksheets and how she lets these learners write stories so that they won't get frustrated with the weaker learners. Petro allows them to do extra worksheets as well and they are allowed to do any sums of their choice. She explained how she sometimes does enrichment activities with the whole class as a method of encouragement. Julia's comment was that the enrichment worksheets allow the cognitively gifted learners to go further with a topic. Three of the teachers specifically mentioned that they ask the cognitively gifted learners to

help the weaker learners. These learners are also requested to organise books in the classroom and basically keep themselves busy. It would be beneficial if these learners could be exposed to a system of enrichment activities that allows them to work independently and apply higher level cognitive functions, such as application or synthesis. The activities should not pose a language barrier but should allow for an increased depth of study of a particular topic. The extension of the regular curriculum, through, for example, word puzzles and memory games would also provide enrichment opportunities.

The following two quotes serve as a synopsis of the frustration expressed by the teachers during this part of the interview. It also serves as a reminder of how exasperating their daily experience is:

- Parvati: “ ... there are some activities of that, that I do with my learners, but not every day, not as often as I like to.”
- Petro: “I must unfortunately say not. Not much.”

The creation and accumulation of enrichment activities is significant for the cognitively gifted learner who is yearning for challenges and who is often bored by the curriculum. Extension work is also positive, but a system of ‘more of the same’ is not necessarily enriching or enhancing. These learners deserve enhancement on a higher cognitive level than just recall and should be challenged to investigate, appreciate, calculate, apply, judge, create and provide alternative solutions to problems. The learner’s role changes from “doer to first-hand-inquirer” (Renzulli in Kokot 2005: 481). The possible potential of the cognitively gifted learner could therefore be reinforced and maximised. Schools should cater for all gifted learners by presenting enrichment programmes that will complement the curriculum and allow the different types of giftedness to be refined. It is, however, disheartening to note how the teachers’ workloads do not allow for this and how enrichment for gifted learners often falls through the cracks.

#### **6.3.4.5 Support for the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever**

*The question focussed on the daily support in the Grade Four class for cognitively gifted ESL underachievers so as to ensure the support of both exceptionalities.*



According to the literature study in Chapter 4, the teacher must adapt the curriculum and in this way ensure a balance between developing foundation skills and enhancing learning that is beyond the expected curriculum (Kokot 2005: 480).

As discussed under 6.3.4.4, the teachers indicated that they seldom get time to do enrichment activities for their cognitively gifted learners as their time is consumed by the learners who need support with foundation skills. When the question was expanded to focus on the support for cognitively gifted ESL underachievers, very little was added by the participating teachers. Although they all agreed that these learners are present in their classes, no one had specific support strategies that would support both the exceptionalities of ESL learning as well as cognitive giftedness. Amy mentioned their school's annual Speech Festival and how learners who cannot write well would have the opportunity to recite their poems and show their giftedness in that regard. This is, however, an extracurricular activity and is therefore not in the domain of classroom support.

Taking an overview of the teachers' responses, it is now clear that underachieving Grade Four learners with the double exceptionalities of ESL learning and cognitive giftedness do not receive specific support for both these exceptionalities. The teachers are all dedicated and willing to help any learner. This position is summarised in the following quotes from three of the participating teachers:

- Parvati: “ ... you know I don't think that we give them the individual attention that they deserve. But the potential is there. Definitely it is”.
- Thandi: “ ... if I as a teacher had the chance to help in a smaller class, problems like these wouldn't happen; it wouldn't happen.”
- Yasmeen: “The moment you can find the time, of course I will. Anytime. Anytime.”

There is quite a stereotyped view of what cognitive giftedness looks like and it is therefore often not recognised and enhanced in the learner with the double exceptionality of cognitive giftedness and ESL learning. The cognitively gifted ESL learner might therefore receive support for the barrier, which is ESL learning, while the giftedness is overlooked. These twice exceptional learners deserve a cognitively challenging curriculum while their learning difficulties are supported. If not, they might become frustrated and ill behaved and their potential might never be

recognised. Focussed support for both exceptionalities is therefore required and teachers should ensure that both barriers are addressed.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

The main focus of this study is to determine how Grade Four teachers fulfil their supportive role when addressing barriers to learning as experienced by the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever. The qualitative data analysis and following interpretations reveal clearly that the participating teachers all address barriers to learning. These barriers are mainly the basic skills required to function adequately in Grade Four.

The researcher presented a synopsis of the research done through conducting semi-structured interviews with Grade Four teachers. It became evident that the teachers are concerned about the impact of ESL learning and how ESL learning can result in underachievement. Teachers indicated that they are aware of cognitively gifted learners in their classes and they all attempt to provide enrichment activities for these learners. They commented, however, on the lack of time and opportunity to provide support strategies for the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever that would address both exceptionalities as barriers to optimal learning.

In the following chapter the findings of the research is summarised. The chapter will focus on the conclusions and recommendations drawn from this research. The possibility of the improvement of teaching practice and further research in this field will be discussed.

## Chapter 7

# SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

*Listen to the MUSTN'TS child,  
Listen to the DON'TS  
Listen to the SHOULDN'TS  
The IMPOSSIBLES, the WONT'S  
Listen to the NEVER HAVES  
Then listen close to me –  
Anything can happen child,  
ANYTHING can be.*

*Shel Silverstein (1974: shelsilversteinpoems.wordpress.com)*

### 7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 presented, analysed and interpreted the data. Chapter 7 now summarises the findings of the literature study and the empirical research. It then concludes the study and discusses its conclusions with reference to the research question and the subsequent findings. This chapter also notes the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for the improvement of teaching practice as well as for further study.

The background of the study focusses on inclusive education and its emphasis on personalised, quality education for all learners. Within this inclusive environment the concepts of ESL learning in a South African context and underachievement of cognitively gifted learners due to the aforementioned ESL learning were discussed. The researcher has undertaken, with this study, to determine how Grade Four teachers fulfil their supportive role when addressing barriers to learning as experienced by the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever.

The qualitative research was constructivist in nature and it explored Grade Four teachers' supportive role.

### 7.2 Summary of the literature study and the research findings

#### 7.2.1 A summary of the findings from the literature study

The literature study in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 had the following headings:

- Inclusive education with reference to the Grade Four learner in an inclusive setting
- Second language acquisition and learning with reference to the South African context
- Cognitive giftedness and underachievement

Each of these was discussed in relation to the research question. This was done in order to focus the research and consult a body of scholarly knowledge so as to gain an in-depth understanding.

### **7.2.2 Inclusive education with reference to the Grade Four learner in an inclusive setting**

The section on inclusion dealt with the dimensions of inclusion as it follows a philosophical and social paradigm. The constitutional principles of rights and equality allow for the participation of all learners in education. Implied in this participation process is the identification and addressing of barriers to learning so that each learner receives quality education. One of the provisions of inclusive education is an adapted curriculum, in other words, it speaks to the right of every learner to receive individualised education that would meet each learner's needs.

The reference to barriers to learning and development qualify that these barriers might be located within the learner, the school, the educational system or the broader social, economic and political content. Teachers, as the managers of the inclusive classroom, are responsible for providing the needed support that will ensure quality education for all learners. For inclusion to function properly the classroom teacher must make the curriculum accessible to all learners.

The Grade Four teacher fulfils a specific role when considering the academic demands and transitional nature of Grade Four. The Grade Four learner displays certain characteristics typical of the nine to ten year old which the Grade Four teacher should also be sensitive to. The teachers have their own realities to deal with. Education transformation and continuous re-orientation, among other stressors, have as a result that teachers' professional morale is often low. Just opening the doors of a school to all learners does not guarantee inclusive practices. Teachers need to establish valuable support systems in the classroom.

### **7.2.3 Second language acquisition and learning with reference to the South African context**

Certain theories on second language acquisition and learning provide the foundation for trying to understand second language learning. Various models are discussed, with reference to both the acquisition of English and the learning in English as a second language. Many learners do not have the luxury to acquire English as a second language along normal acquisition routes. They are expected to produce academically demanding assignments before completely understanding English. Even though these learners might achieve conversational English proficiency, they often struggle with English academic proficiency. The ESL learner is simultaneously learning 'about' language while learning 'in' it and 'through' it.

The fluency in English which is required to ensure that a cognitively gifted ESL learner fulfils her potential might often be a problem in the South African context of second language learning. Although mother tongue schooling is regarded as beneficial, when observing the South African environment, it is obvious that many parents and their children favour English as the LoLT. There is an admiration for English and it is perceived as superior to other languages as it carries the concepts of academic, political and scientific achievement.

Schools have to accommodate all learning needs, including all linguistic barriers. This will allow for the potential of all learners in the inclusive classroom to be reached.

### **7.2.4 Cognitive giftedness and underachieving**

Numerous definitions exist in an attempt to define cognitive giftedness. A typical description notes that cognitively gifted learners behave beyond the accepted behaviours of their chronological age. The characteristics found in cognitively gifted learners are not necessarily unique but the precocity and amalgamation of these elements differentiate them.

The overarching concern, which this study addresses, focusses on how these learners are supported in an inclusive environment. Where cognitively gifted learners are expected to learn in English as a second language they might underachieve. Underachievement refers to learners who work below their potential. Many

cognitively gifted learners may never excel at school due to their limited proficiency in the LoLT. These twice exceptional learners are often overlooked as needing support, as the co-occurrence of cognitive giftedness and a learning difficulty like ESL learning cancel each other out.

Classroom teachers are responsible for daily classroom support and strategies. When a cognitively gifted learner's English second language learning masks her cognitive giftedness, both areas deserve teacher support and attention.

### **7.2.5 Research design**

To answer the specific research question, the research was designed qualitatively to allow for individual interviews with purposefully chosen participants. These interviews were then transcribed, coded and interpreted. As knowledge is socially constructed, the teachers' role of constructing a more meaningful reality for the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever by providing support was examined. The research approach was to seek clarification and insight. This was deemed significant, as this particular research problem has not been explored from the angle of the combination of cognitive giftedness, ESL learning and underachievement as well as teachers' handling thereof.

The research interview perceives the participants' perspectives and contributions as important. Predetermined questions were devised so that the participating teachers each responded to a similar set of questions but the interviewing process was still allowed to be flexible. Data were thus collected, transcribed and analysed.

Throughout all stages of the planning and data collection, the ethical guidelines of confidentiality, anonymity and respect for educational research were adhered to.

### **7.3 A synthesis of the research findings**

The semi-structured interviews were conducted as a reflection of the literature study. The research findings show clearly that the Grade Four teachers, who were interviewed, are all completely aware of their responsibility regarding support for learners with barriers to learning. They provide support through individual attention and through developing individualised material to learners who are weak and in danger of not achieving the outcomes.

The difficulties experienced by the ESL learner regarding academic language proficiency are a concern to them. They specifically indicated the varied methods utilised in order to support the ESL learner in a school where the LoLT is English. The teachers all mentioned the demands of Grade Four and how a variety of factors contribute to the Grade Four experience being threatening and confusing. Underachievement was discussed as a result of many factors including laziness, a lack of effort, ESL learning and not being able to cope with the demands of Grade Four.

Most of the teachers indicated that they attempt to support the cognitively gifted learners by providing them with extension work. They understood the term cognitively gifted as referring to the learners with high academic achievement who work quickly and accurately. These learners then continue on their own or help their peers.

The discussion, which saw all the previously discussed concepts connected so as to focus on support for the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever, brought the following to light:

- The teachers are aware of ESL learners who show behaviours associated with cognitive giftedness but who underachieve when considering their potential.
- These learners do not achieve high results and are therefore not included in the small groups who receive extension activities.
- These learners' support, if any, focusses on minimising their barriers to learning concerning ESL learning.

These learners do not receive support in the classroom to address their specific barrier to learning. This specific barrier to learning is the double exceptionality of cognitive giftedness co-occurring with ESL learning.

## **7.4 Recommendations and implications**

### **7.4.1 General recommendations regarding improvement of school practice**

From the results of the present study, it is recommended that:

- The structures which support the teachers to support the learners are strengthened.
- Teacher pre-service and in-service training programmes highlight characteristics and behaviours of cognitively gifted learners.
- Teacher pre-service and in-service training programmes explicitly teach the recognition and support of learners with the double exceptionality of ESL learning and cognitive giftedness.

## **7.4.2 Specific recommendations regarding improvement of school practice**

### ***7.4.2.1 Support required***

Any barrier to learning requires focussed support and intervention strategies. For the double exceptionality of cognitive giftedness combined with ESL learning, there might be a discrepancy between the potential and the actual achievement of the learner. These learners can compensate for their lack of English proficiency by using their giftedness and the barrier could remain hidden. They might achieve average results while neither the cognitive giftedness nor the barrier to optimal learning is recognised. Their cognitive giftedness might only surface once they are assigned a task that will unlock their ability.

It is therefore imperative that they simultaneously build on their strengths while improving their language proficiency. Teachers should have high expectations of these learners, create a stimulating classroom environment and ensure that their school experience is positive (Dorset LEA Policy 2011: 4). The school should strive to form a genuine partnership with the parents while both parents and teachers should be aware of not becoming too focussed on the lack of English proficiency and thereby discouraging the learner.

### ***7.4.2.2 Recognition of cognitively gifted ESL underachievers***

These twice exceptional learners are difficult to recognise as the barriers to learning can mask their ability. There are stereotyped views regarding how a cognitively gifted learner is supposed to act and teachers often lack specific information on how to recognise double exceptionality. The cognitively gifted learners are also a diverse group with a range of characteristics. Teachers should refer to the characteristics and behaviours of the cognitively gifted learner, and be aware of, for example,



extreme curiosity, an excellent memory, keen powers of observation, abstract reasoning, sensitivity and perfectionism (Kokot 2005: 473). The twice exceptional learner is vulnerable to being overlooked and it is the Grade Four teacher who can avoid this by spotting the potential of the learner. Potential exists only in possibility and needs to be recognised and addressed. For this reason, teachers need to observe indicators of potential (Coleman 2008: 1). Refer to *Figure 2* on pages 120 to 122 for examples of these indicators.

Such an observation may never be viewed in isolation and it is particularly significant that the Grade Four teacher factors in multiple types of information. Contributing to the recognition process are, inter alia, parents and previous teachers. Refer to *Figure 2* for suggestions in this regard.

#### **7.4.2.3 Language support**

To address the barrier to learning, which is a lack of academic English proficiency, teachers can use a variety of strategies. They can start by ensuring pleasurable classroom experiences and concentrate on modelling English accuracy and fluency (Nel 2005: 155, 156). Refer to *Figure 2* for examples of language support strategies.

#### **7.4.2.4 Enrichment activities**

The cognitively gifted learner has a need to explore, discover and create. They need to be confronted with content that presents a real challenge (Kokot 2005: 478, 479). Refer to *Figure 2* for examples of stimulating work.

### **7.4.3 Guidelines to address the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever's support needs**

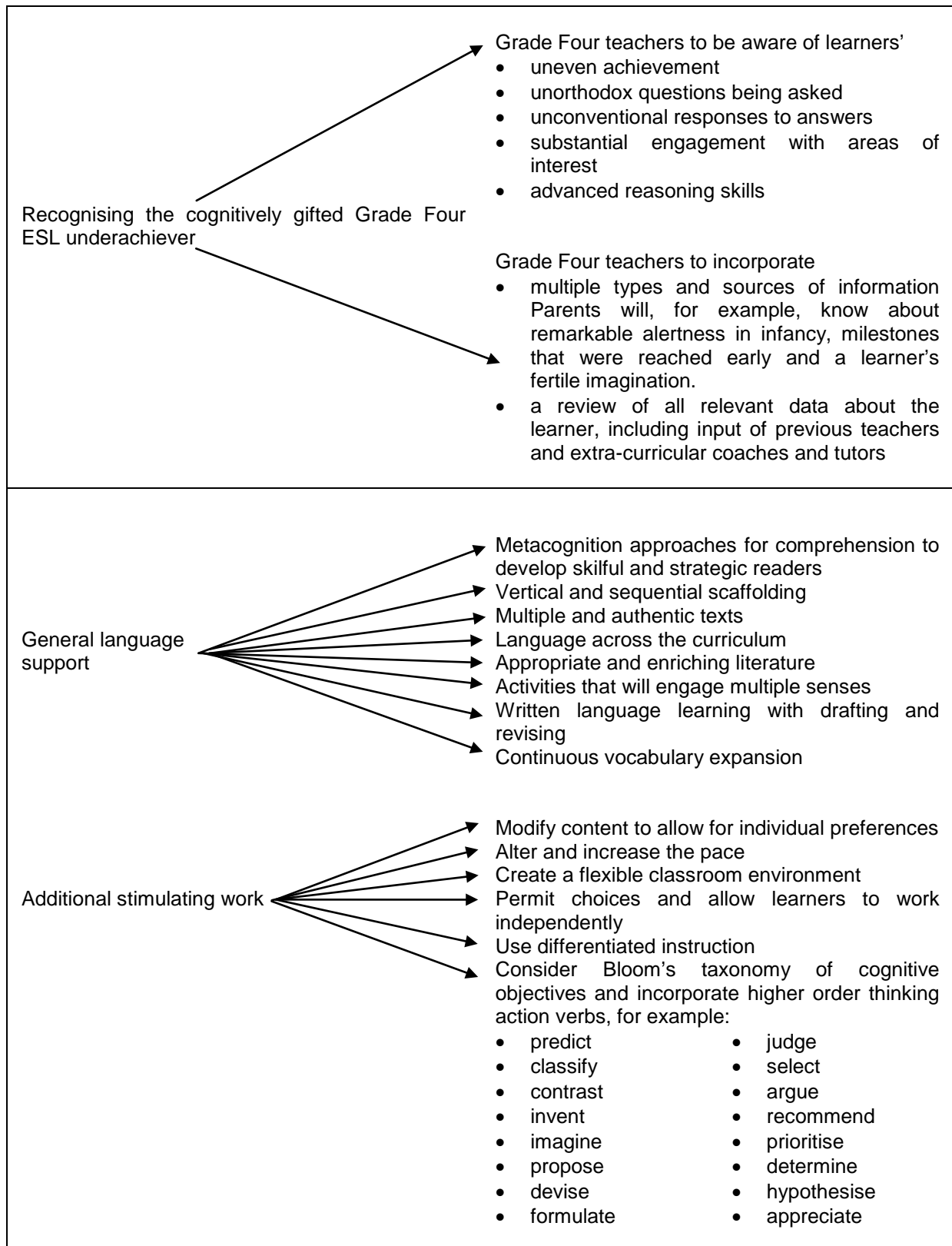
Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model, discussed in Chapter 2, emphasises the "interaction between an individual's development and the systems within the social context" (Swart & Pettipher 2005: 10). The cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever's barriers to learning, and the ways to minimise those barriers, are connected to all the other systems, for example, the classroom, school, family and the South African context. All these influences on a learner's life reflect the complexity of the varied systems that impact on a learner's learning.

To help the system function adequately for the individual learner, in this instance the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever, requires a synergising of all the

sub-systems. Within this unity, the coherence and continuity of support can be utilised to address barriers to learning. For the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever it implies a variety of support structures and support strategies.

In the next figure the various subsystems that can have an influence on the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever's performance are included. Guidelines on how to provide support within each of these subsystems are provided. The teacher is responsible, guided by the principles of inclusion, to support these learners by adapting the curriculum so as to address barriers to learning and allow for optimal learning.

Guidelines to address the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever's support needs



Subject-specific stimulating work

- Offer opportunities to explore Learning Areas/subjects to the level that they want to
- Allow learners to combine knowledge-based and interest-based content
- Extend curriculum themes to a greater breadth and depth

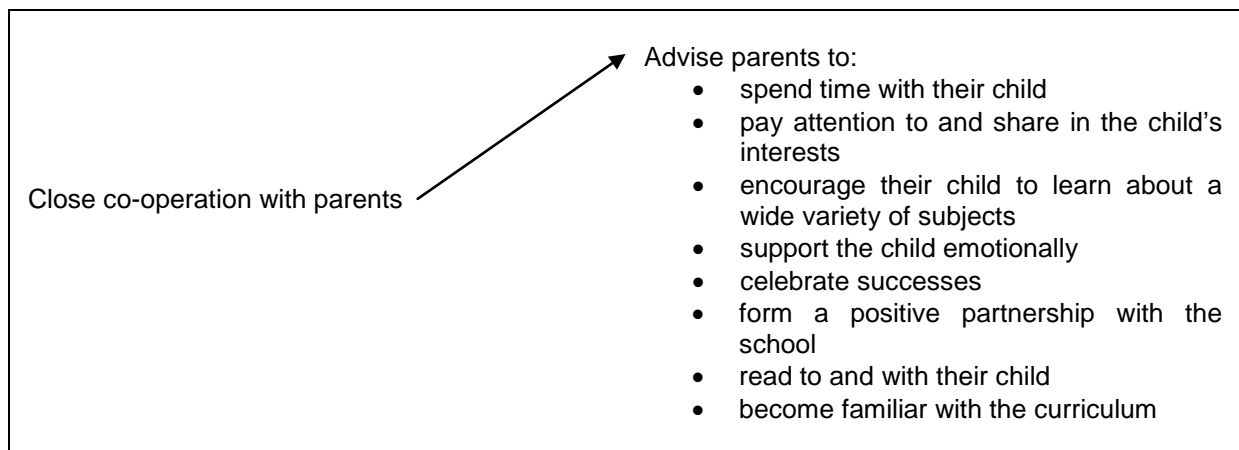
Motivation

- Listen to concerns
- Establish high standards
- Discuss role models with similar experiences
- Continue to encourage and engage. It is a myth that cognitively gifted learners can cope on their own
- Foster a sense of belonging
- Correct in a gentle way
- Celebrate their contributions
- Create opportunities for them to be successful
- Be aware of specific affective characteristics, for example, emotional over-sensitivity, perfectionism and susceptibility to stress
- Be aware of specific behaviours, for example, a learner who questions authority, who is frustrated, withdrawn or defiant

Teaching and learning conditions that best promote ESL learning

The teacher to:

- articulate carefully
- exaggerate stress in speech
- repeat, rephrase, paraphrase; model correct English usage
- use non-verbal cues to assist comprehension
- create a language-rich environment
- use language in meaningful situations
- use a variety of instructional strategies
- use contextual clues to explain meaning in texts
- frequently check understanding
- provide additional 'wait time' for learners' responses to questions
- develop skills in low-stakes situations
- focus on an error or two rather than 'fixing' everything
- provide frequent teacher-learner verbal interaction opportunities
- ensure pleasurable English experiences
- consider the utilisation of IEPs (Individual Education Plans) to modify expectations in the curriculum



**Figure 2: Cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachievers' support needs**  
 (Adapted from: Coleman 2008; Kokot 2005; Lomofsky 1999; Nel 2005; Stepanek 1999)

The above figure is a comprehensive model presenting the support needs of the cognitively gifted Grade Four ESL underachiever. Teachers should be aware of these needs and should, during pre-service as well as in-service training, be exposed to a variety of ways of recognising barriers to learning within subsystems. Of even greater importance is the fact that they should be knowledgeable about various ways to support cognitively gifted ESL learners. These learners should develop their foundational skills while, simultaneously, enhance their learning beyond the expected curriculum. As mentioned in *Figure 2*, the use of appropriate and enriching literature is one of these fundamental issues. Literature is appropriate when it is relevant and well suited to the learner's language level and when it reflects natural language patterns. When it is about topics that are familiar to a learner's life world it is befitting to their personal experiences. Predictable text is also regarded as appropriate as it aids learners when they attempt to recognise words. Not only should the literature be appropriate, but for these learners it also needs to be enriching, as it is required to enhance and supplement the content for them. The scaffolding referred to in *Figure 2* will help support development as it concentrates on the skills that are beyond a learner's ability. Sequential scaffolding refers to units of instruction divided into *teacher presentation - learner interaction - teacher feedback* cycles. Vertical scaffolding, however, has a total task scope and the learner is provided with structural information on the whole task. If the various scaffolding processes are carefully constructed, structured and elegant responses are elicited. The necessity to address all these issues during pre-service, as well as in-service teacher training is confirmed with the guidelines in *Figure 2*.

#### **7.4.4 Implications for future research**

The results of the study have the following implications for future research:

- While conducting the literature study, international research was often considered. There is a need for further research about cognitively gifted ESL underachieving Grade Four learners in the South African context.
- Specific support material and intervention strategies for cognitively gifted ESL underachievers are to be further researched and developed.
- The proper and purposeful implementation of support material in inclusive classrooms requires further research.
- The awareness, recognition and support of different types of giftedness.
- The cognitively gifted ESL underachiever and the role of parents as co-providers of support and partners of the school.

### **7.5 Limitations**

#### **7.5.1 Limitations of qualitative research**

Limitations refer to the known flaws of qualitative research. During the course of the study certain limitations were identified. The most significant of these are:

- Semi-structured interviews as data-collection technique is not wholly reliable, as an interview could not be repeated exactly.
- The scarcity of literature which combine the concepts of ESL learning in a South African context with cognitively gifted underachieving Grade Four learners.
- The study was limited to six primary schools within a single school district.

#### **7.5.2 Limitations regarding the researcher**

As the researcher plays such a vital role during the whole research process, the researcher's limitations are also noted:

- The interview process expected of the researcher to conduct the interviews in a professional manner. The interviewer's close interaction with the participants could lean towards bantering which had to be consciously controlled.
- Great sensitivity and skill are required to conduct interviews effectively. The researcher as novice interviewer had to ensure that objectivity was

maintained. The researcher put in quite a bit of effort in preparing for the interviews and then worked hard in ensuring that the interview process was effectively facilitated.

The findings and recommendations of this study should be viewed against the limitations, as stated above.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

The research question that the study set out to answer was: How do Grade Four teachers fulfil their supportive role when addressing barriers to learning as experienced by the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever? Both the literature study and the research findings reveal that there are major challenges facing classroom teachers regarding the support that is expected of them. This study comprises an exploratory probe into the support strategies that classroom teachers design and implement in an inclusive Grade Four environment. The support is specifically for the learner who is cognitively gifted but who underachieves due to learning through ESL and the consequent lack of English proficiency.

The participant teachers all provide support to many learners with barriers. The cognitively gifted ESL underachiever, however, does not receive specific, individualised support to address these barriers to optimal learning. Guidelines on how to provide support within various subsystems were thus developed.

It is believed that the findings of this study will highlight the plight of these learners to be adequately supported. Their support should comprise the acquisition of foundational English skills while, simultaneously, including enhanced stimulating work. The teachers, as designers and implementers of support and the focus of this study, need additional assistance to furnish relief for their constraints. It is envisaged that in order for teachers to provide individualised support, they require adequate guidance and succour.

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## APPENDICES

- Appendix A Copy of document from the GDE granting permission to undertake the study.
- Appendix B Sample of letter to school principal and SGB requesting permission to conduct the interview.
- Appendix C Sample letter to Grade Four teacher requesting participation in an interview.
- Appendix D Sample letter confirming anonymity to interview participants.
- Appendix E Interview guide.
- Appendix F Particulars pertaining to interview participants.
- Appendix G Interview transcripts.



UMnyango WezeMfundo  
Department of Education

Reference No: D2011/80  
Lefapha la Thuto  
Departement van Onderwys

Enquiries: Diane Buntting (011) 843 6503

Date:	25 February 2011
Name of Researcher:	Wissing A.
Address of Researcher:	289 A Venter Street
	Capital Park
	Pretoria
	0084
Telephone Number:	012 325 5513 / 082 210 2006
Fax Number:	012 382 5987
Email address:	wissinga@tut.ac.za / liela.wissing@gmail.com
Research Topic:	The role of the Grade Four teacher in providing support for the cognitively gifted English Second Language underachiever.
Number and type of schools:	SIX Primary schools
District/s/HO	Tshwane South

**Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research**

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

Permission has been 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.*

Office of the Chief Director: Information and Knowledge Management  
Room 501, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2000 P.O.Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000  
Tel: (011) 355-0809 Fax: (011) 355-0734

**Appendix A: Copy of document from the GDE granting permission to undertake the study**

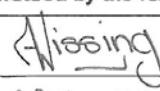
4. A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
5. The Researcher will make every effort 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.
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.

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

  
 Shadrack Phela MIRMSA  
 [Member of the Institute of Risk Management South Africa]  
 CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST: RESEARCH COORDINATION

28 February 2011

The contents of this letter has been read and understood by the researcher.	
Signature of Researcher:	
Date:	2011 - 02 - 28



For the attention of the principal and School Governing Body:

---

Re: Proposed research to be conducted in your school.

Dear ladies and gentlemen

Attached is the document wherein I have been granted permission by the GDE to conduct research for my Master's Degree in Education (Unisa). With this letter I would like to outline the purpose of the research as well as the organisational matters that surround the actual conducting process of the research.

1. Full title of the study.

*The role of the Grade Four teacher in providing support for the cognitively gifted English second language underachiever.*

2. The following is an excerpt taken from the study:

"The reality of education in South Africa opens one's eyes to the multitude of problems experienced in this environment. An issue which can cause concern is learners who are underachieving scholastically when their potential is taken into account. Of specific concern are cognitively gifted learners who are not taught in their mother tongue but who attend schools where the LoLT is English. Often, a lack of academic English proficiency results in an inability to perform appropriately according to their potential. Moon (2009: 275) refers to these twice-exceptional learners as possibly the most at risk group. Teachers, who manage inclusive classrooms, are ideally positioned to aid in research into this specific aspect of support. In an inclusive environment they identify barriers to learning and design support strategies using cognitive and affective interaction. The research question can therefore be formulated as follows: *How do Grade Four teachers fulfil their supportive role when addressing barriers to learning as experienced by the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever?*"

3. Value of the research to education.

The concept of tailored support in an inclusive environment for these specific twice-exceptional learners has not been fully addressed. In an inclusive environment of education for all, it is significant for the individual learner and for society that potential is recognised and enhanced while barriers are addressed and minimised.

4. Organisational matters.

- The research data will be collected through an interview which will be scheduled so as to be convenient for the participant and the researcher. The interview will not interfere with the teacher's responsibilities and duties.
- A Grade Four teacher is requested to participate in an individual interview that will last between forty-five minutes and one hour per interview.
- The interview starts with a few biographical questions, but the rest of the interview will follow a basic question-answer sequence. Although the interview protocol describes the same starting point and the same set of topics for each interview, each interview will vary depending on the individual participant's contribution.
- In compliance with the GDE regulations, all interviews will be completed before the commencement of the fourth term 2011.

5. Confidentiality and anonymity.

Your school and the participating teacher will not be identifiable in print and all research is guided by the principles of quality and ethics.

Please feel free to contact me should there be any queries regarding this proposed research.

Thank you and kind regards

Annelise Wissing

Contact Details:

- 082 210 2006
- 012 382 5746 (Office)
- [wissinga@tut.ac.za](mailto:wissinga@tut.ac.za)
- [liela.wissing@gmail.com](mailto:liela.wissing@gmail.com)

## Appendix C: Sample letter to Grade Four teacher requesting participation in an interview

Dear

Would you please be so kind as to participate in my Master's degree research project?

My research focuses on the supportive role of the Grade Four teacher within an inclusive environment. The support concentrates on the cognitively gifted ESL underachiever.

The research is set in the context of primary schools where the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) is English, but where a large percentage of the learner body is not mother tongue English speakers. This is an opportunity for you to enter into discussion during an interview. Permission to undertake the research has been obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed for the research. All participants are guaranteed anonymity by the researcher and the university by instituting the following measures:

- The school will not be identified in the work.
- The participants will not be identified in the work.
- All data will be safely stored.

The organisational details regarding date, venue and time will be negotiated with you so as to be convenient for us both.

The duration of the interview will be between forty-five minutes and one hour.

Kind regards

Annelise Wissing

## Appendix D: Sample letter confirming anonymity to interview participants

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in my research. This is to assure you that your anonymity will be protected by me, the researcher, as well as by UNISA. The following steps will be taken to guarantee anonymity:

- Neither you nor the school will be identifiable in the study.
- The raw data will be stored safely and will not be distributed to anyone.

Kind regards

Annelise Wissing

## Interview guide

### Semi-structured interviews ~ guiding questions

- What is expected of teachers at your school regarding support for learners with learning problems/barriers to learning?
- What type of difficulties do ESL learners experience when considering the academic demands of Grade Four?
- What specific characteristics and behaviours do you observe when teaching cognitively gifted ESL learners?
- What is your experience with underachieving Grade Four learners?
- How do you plan and implement enrichment activities for your cognitively gifted Grade Four learners?
- How do you, on a daily basis, support cognitively gifted ESL underachievers so as to ensure that both exceptionalities receive support?

**Appendix F: Particulars pertaining to interview participants**

Particulars pertaining to interview participants.

Instruction: Please mark the correct answer with an X in the appropriate block.

1. Gender	
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Age	
20 - 29	<input type="checkbox"/>
30 - 39	<input type="checkbox"/>
40 - 49	<input type="checkbox"/>
50 - 59	<input type="checkbox"/>
60 and older	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Teaching experience				
Phase	0 – 1 years	2 – 5 years	6 – 10 years	More than 10
Foundation Phase	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intermediate Phase	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Phase	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other – please specify	<input type="text"/>			

4. What is your current role at school?	
Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grade Head	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning Area Head	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phase Head	<input type="checkbox"/>
SBST co-ordinator	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Qualifications	
Please indicate only your highest qualification with an 'X' in the appropriate block.	
Certificate in Education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diploma in Education	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix F: Particulars pertaining to interview participants

Baccalaureus degree	
Post Graduate certificate in Education	
Baccalaureus in Education (B Ed)	
Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	
B Ed Honours	
Post Graduate Diploma in Education	
Master's Degree	
Doctorate	

Petro
Interviewer

May we please start with you telling me a little about the background of your school?

Our school was one of the pilot schools in 1997 when they started OBE. We were one of the first schools in Pretoria that took in black learners in a predominantly white area. Our school has progressed to a point where we have only three white learners. The children are not community children. They come mainly by taxi, by bus, by transport of some means or other. Which makes them tired in school. Some of them, as they say, Ma'am we climb the bus at four. We have virtually no extra murals after two. When the bus leaves, the children go. So, in that respect we have to fit it in during the hours that we have the children. Our soccer and netball children and so on are only those with extra transport. With parents who can fetch them in the afternoons. So basically, we work with township children. I don't know if one should hang a label like that around a child's neck, but it describes their background.

It helps if we understand the environment.

A lot of our parents are illiterate .Some are quite educated. We've got quite a few army children. We also find that the children who have a father and a mother, both working, living one family in a house, do perform better at school. We have children who say: Ma'am, I live in a tin house with a mud floor. We have a variety of children.

Taking your background into consideration, what do they expect of you here in terms of support for a child with a barrier? Any kind of learning barrier?

We do not tend to give homework that involves research; that requires major help from the home. It's mainly what we've started in class they must finish at home, for example, times tables, spelling lists. When we do research we use our own media centre, we bring our own magazines. We don't really even get that out of them. We do, when we say collect pictures and paste, and they don't, then we allow them to draw. So we make concessions like that.

So when you say that they don't bring, is it because they really don't have or is it because they don't want to?



They really don't have. But they're also used to it that when they don't have we will provide, so why bother?

Ah, that complacency that I won't go the extra mile.

Exactly!

And specifically your second language learning problem at school. Is that quite a problem for you? Do you feel that the learners' lack of English proficiency is a problem?

Definitely. I mean I'm an Afrikaans speaking person and I teach in English and I don't think my English is horribly bad and even I cannot always find the words to explain and express myself really in a way that I would have done in my own language. I mean they're only ten years old.

And some of them only speak English at school?

Some of them speak English outside the school. But most of them speak in their home language which is not English.

And you see it in their written work? And in their understanding?

Oh sure. When they talk, they say "Ma'am can I throw?", then they want to put something in the bin.

So the sentence formulation is a problem? As well as all aspects of the expressive language?

Very much.

So I understand that the second language leaning is a problem. In all the learning areas? Not just in English, but a manifestation in all learning areas?

Yes, because you use English for everything you want to explain to them.

Of course.

And I think it's a country-wide thing with our country allowing eleven languages and sort of functioning in English. You can't really allow your child to have a mother

tongue upbringing because what will he do with it one day? So it's really ... I don't know ... a country issue.

And not a school issue. Do the learners sometimes realise that they're not proficient enough. Would they say something like: "I knew this answer but I didn't know how to 'put' it" or "I didn't know how to write it". Are they aware that they're struggling?

No, I've never experienced it like that. Maybe older children might think that way.

Do you have children that you would regard as gifted? Cognitively gifted?

Yes! Definitely! There are.

How do you "see" that? How do you pick it up in a normal school day?

Alright. Okay. In their marks, obviously. In the way they converse with you. Mostly they are the children who also speak English at home. They would say that they speak English and Sotho at home. But those who speak no English, they also can be gifted, but you struggle to pick it up and you struggle to work with it. It remains a language problem with them.

So what you're saying is that there may even be more gifted learners.

Oh yes I think so.

But they're not always recognised because of the language problem.

Oh yes.

The ones you then perceive as gifted. You said they show their giftedness because of the way they speak and the way they understand new concepts that show you that something great is going on in that mind?

Not only that. If you have the child in our setup who is well able to speak English, you might experience him as gifted while it is simply a matter that he is able to speak English.

We are impressed by vocabulary.

But you do get children who have a wide general knowledge that maybe is also not gifted but comes from the home. But a child who is not gifted will not absorb it.

So they do sometimes get excited in class about something that they were not aware of?

Definitely.

And then underachievement. Is that something you experience? Especially when you speak to a child and realise that there is something but when you look at the marks, there is just no comparison.

We find really that there is a total lack of wanting to achieve. I couldn't care less if my homework isn't done. If it's not done it's not done. I teach Maths, and sometimes I stand at the door and say if your homework is not done you cannot come into my class. Sit outside and do it until you're done. And very few of them are actually worried about that. It's another period we sit outside and talk. It is really few of them who care if their work is well done or not. And I suppose there could be gifted children who just couldn't care. I don't know. I don't know how to identify them or how to motivate them. Also Grade Four is a very difficult year.

It's such a tough year.

The jump from Grade Three to Grade Four, from one teacher to many; from three learning areas to nine and we don't know which one is which one. We don't know where which paper must go. It's a very hard year for them.

So that can also add to the fact that they're so lost?

Absolutely. We found that children who achieved very well, you know, their level of achievement in Grade Three was very, very good and then they just disappear. Then they would sort of resurface in August or September.

So it takes the year for their transition?

Yes, but you get others who were really mediocre in Grade Three and when they adapt to the setup in Grade Four then they just go. It is really ... when we speak to the Grade Three teachers they are often amazed at our experience in Grade Four with the children that they know. And I think a child with a bit of emotional intelligence copes better.

Grade Four has lots of academic demands, and then, as you mentioned, the whole transition and dealing with a multitude of teachers and learning areas.

And I want my books like this and that one wants his books like that and they must remember that as well. And they're not allowed to be children anymore. So they take back their childhood and do it in the class. We also had Art and Needlework and Singing but it was not exam subjects. It was casual learning. It was enjoyment; it was emotional growth; it was social development. But these days everything must be assessed and every teacher wants his share of it.

So you think the whole process is unfair?

It's too big; too big for them, as I'm concerned.

So from a maths perspective, which is your area of expertise, you might experience the underachievement more than some of the other teachers. In maths they can quickly fall behind if they don't build on the foundation?

To some extent. But on the other hand you require less language for maths. Sometimes they achieve in maths while their marks are poor in the other learning areas. I think that's because ... because ...

The language does not play such a big role?

Yes, but when they fall behind, it's really bad. And some children just hate numbers.

And for others it's so pure and so logical.

And when they get an answer like 12221, they go "Wow".

It just makes so much sense. Listening to what you've been saying about the learners and the background and the academic demands, do you ever get a chance to do enrichment work with your learners?

Enrichment work is to a great extent the ones who are prepared to work and to do extra work. If you do some extra work we give them math puzzles, for example. But if they're finished, they're allowed either to take a little book and work at the back of their books. I've got here, I want to show you, all different kinds of worksheets and they're allowed to take it and work at the back of their books. For every page that

they fill, I don't mark it, I check quickly and they get a sticker. So, it's sort of encouragement. They are also allowed to do any sums of their own choice. If they like round offs and they want to do a page full of round offs and complete it whether it takes them one day or three days, they will get a little sticker. If they ask something that's more complicated than what we're doing, I'll explain. I had a child yesterday who asked me: "Ma'am, will you teach me algebra, then you would basically explain what it is, but I mean you can't personally work with them. I must unfortunately say not. Not much.

Not much?

Unfortunately. In a perfect world maybe, for those smart ones. Sometimes you would take the class, say they struggle with place value, then you would say: "Are you clever? Can you do Grade Five work?" Then you do it with the whole class and sometimes you're surprised at what comes out. You'll take the place values and write the whole board full of expanded notations, starting with hundred thousands, which they don't really do in Grade Four and you explain to them and you're surprised sometimes at how many do actually understand. So that is also, I suppose, a form of enrichment.

It is. Just the fact that you've opened their minds and ventured outside the Grade Four syllabus.

But there's so little time.

So, on a daily basis, you teach Grade Four and Five maths?

I like maths. How did Hannibal always say: I like it when a plan comes together. Every child that goes "Oh"...

When it makes sense?

Ja. And especially if the child always gets it wrong and he sits with you and suddenly it's "Aah, I just did my carry over wrong, o now I understand". But that doesn't happen often. It's mainly drudgery to get through everything they must do and to comply with everything the department wants.

So much to do but you don't get round to it?

You've got to stick to what you have to do. And when they begin to understand, you've got to go on to the next thing and you know half of them will lose what they've gained so far.

So the pace is too fast?

And you've got to go on. It's not basic enough. If you take shapes for instance in Grade Four, I feel know the shapes, know the difference between 2-d and 3-d, I mean know the 3-d shapes but to start rotating a 3-d shape and being able to draw or you give them a pyramid and they must know what it will look like if I turn it on its head and I feel it's not basic and they don't understand it. You've got to do it, you spend time with it and I think those complicated things don't belong in a Grade Four syllabus. That's my opinion.

If I understand what you're saying, it stops them from caring because I-can't-do-it-anyway type of attitude.

Uh-hmmm. I mean like measurement. Teach them measurement, but they've got to convert from kilometres to millimetres at ten years old. And I mean to teach that to a child, takes a lot of time. I'm not saying don't teach it, I'm just looking at the time. And the fact that the basics of mathematics is not inside the children and get lost somewhere. I think it's because we go too fast, we expect too much and it doesn't really get time to become part of them.

The reinforcement?

Ja.

Petro, thanks so much. That is that and we've covered all the discussion points.

It's a pleasure. I don't know if I helped.

You did. Thank you very much.

Julia
Interviewer

Julia, thanks so much for doing this for me. Maybe we can start and you can give me a little background about your school.

Our school is older than 120 years. And it's a wonderful school. We've got all the facilities that we really need. The School Management Team goes out of their way to try and give us the space to be creative in our classes.

That's excellent.

That's like wow! They really give us the tools to do our job and that's what's special. The composition of the school, I would say, we've got very few mother tongue English children because a lot of Afrikaans parents put their little ones in our school because they want their little ones to be ... uhm ...

Fluent in English?

To be fluent in English. But at home they still speak Afrikaans. And then we also have a lot of native speaking languages in our school. I think 70% of our school is not English home language.

And can you see that having an influence on what you do daily in a classroom?

It slows you down. It definitely slows you down because more often than none you've got to go back and explain something simple that they should know.

Something that you assumed they should know?

Often it's just a word. And because they don't grasp that word, like insignificant, because they don't grasp the meaning of that word, the concept is lost. So ja, it really slows you down.

You said that everyone is very supportive. So what is expected of a classroom teacher regarding support of a learner? Let's say someone with a second language learning problem.

The department is very specific about what they want, which is actually just paperwork plus paperwork. I think every child in your class demands a different kind of intervention. Well, every child with a little bit of a learning problem. So you actually have to connect with the child before you can help them.

So a relationship of trust?

When you've connected, and you get to the problem, what you do for that child, will not help for the next.

Okay, so you're talking about individualised support?

Very individualised. Because none of them have got the same problem. And more often it is something that is , just help me here. If I get over this I might be able to help myself. And you've got to be on your feet 24-7 to pick it up. Otherwise ...

Otherwise they disappear in a classroom situation?

You know what it is, they will never ask. You have to smell it, you have to sniff it out.

Detective?

You really have to. They will not say. They don't know what they don't know.

Of course. How will they?

I often take them at break. Actually that's a trend in the whole of the Grade Four group because then you've got time and they think they're special if they're out having break with you. So we do it at break, you go sit next to the child. We've got some children who we develop special worksheets for.

So you actually do that?

Yes, I've got another little one who we discussed only yesterday and we're going to do it for him as well. Rather than him coming to school and battling with the stuff. You come to school we make a plan. We do something different. It's a lot of work.

And it takes extra time?

Yes, but it's worth it. When they get stuff right ... Apart from that we have to do the 450s.



All the departmental procedures?

Yes, but I understand that you rather want to hear what I do in my class?

Please.

Also don't disregard peer assistance.

Their friends?

Yes, yes, yes. Some little onies clamp down when teachers sit next to them, and then what helps them is if you say little Johnny must quickly help Peter.

To explain?

Yes. Very often that is magic!

Do you think it's less stressful and more conversational?

I do. And the attention is not on them, because ooh the teacher is sitting next to him, he can't do the work. And of course the parents. We need involved parents. We've got to have this relationship with parents. We've got to be on the same side. They must support you. A parent cannot say, oh you're the teacher this and that ... And I get the parents in and I say this, this and this. We need to help like this. Don't let him do homework on his own. You've got to sit there. And every time you see him stare into space just touch him, don't say anything.

Refocus?

Yeah, just touch and there we go.

It's important that the parent should be on board and that we should have the same vision for the child.

I must say that I find that the parents are out there making money and they think they're giving their children the best they can, instead of time.

They drop them off at the school gate and the responsibility is yours?

Absolutely. They feel they pay their school fees. And they leave them to play out here until five, six o'clock at night, they're not putting them in After Care so when Johnny

gets home at six, of course mum only fetches him after work and then they want to do homework. And you know then mum's tired.

Everyone is on edge.

Exactly! She's tired and yet she doesn't expect Johnny to be tired.

What a pity. Julia, and then you said that with the second language learning, the pace is the big problem? That you can't follow the pace that you envisage when you do your planning?

Yes.

In the learners' work, what problems do you pick up regarding the fact that they're learning in a second language?

A restrictive vocabulary hampers their progress. They know what they want to say but they can't express themselves. They don't always get the correct message. Wanted to say this but it came out like that. Then I would like to see us using more time teaching the language and not testing it. Because the assessment is eating up the time, where I could use it to empower these kids by giving them the skill. How to answer a question properly. Cause I've got time to do it.

Something that's going to benefit them along the way and not just something that's in a test?

Exactly. Yesterday we tried to write a letter of apology. I give them a master, a frame, but sorry. They can't.

There might be so much that they want to express but the vocabulary is just not there.

My problem there is that parents drop the kids off here and this is the only place where they hear English.

Nowhere else?

Nowhere. And not even speaking about Afrikaans né, which is the school's second language. And they pick them up and it's hard on these little ones. And that's why the vocab stays limited.

You can't really build a vocabulary with five hours a day.

No, not at all. You've got to live the language. That's the only way.

Be exposed to it?

That's the only way. When a child starts playing in a language ... then he's got it.

Alright, let's continue to talk about gifted learners. Do you think that there are learners in your class that are cognitively gifted?

I've got a little one, a boy, who is absolutely brilliant. But I can't get him to speak a word in the class, not a word. But he's work is always done, it's always nice, good quality. And then we went away. We went to a game farm with the children. My jaw dropped when I got into a very casual conversation with this little one. He decided that he would do the night walk with me. He never stopped talking! I thought ... what?

Is this the same child?

Is this the quiet child that never utters a word in my class? And do you know that he was so interesting; that he knew so much and that he spoke English perfectly. And he's not a shy boy and he's very popular with his friends. And it's not that he ... I can't think that he would be threatened by me in class. But there, in the ... uhm ...

A more informal situation?

In a more informal situation, wow, he could talk!

That's a lovely story. I like that!

And he was so confident, and he has such an amazing general knowledge. So I said to the teachers, can you believe this child? And they couldn't believe it.

And do you think there are more little ones like him who are maybe not noticed because they withdraw but they might be so intelligent?

I think so. But do you think the system we're following is giving them the space to flourish?

You said that we are testing them to death and then your focus is on the child who really needs intervention. And when a child is coping, we say thanks; one less

learner to worry about. I worry about the child who gets 70, which is great, but could get 90. And he only needs a little push. But you're right. The system does not always allow them to be creative, to think, to grow, to flourish.

I say, be creative. I don't know if you're aware of the Oral Conversation Method of teaching second language?

Yes I am.

And in the Oral Conversation Method, there's so much space for the one that can think for himself. And there's at least help for the one who can't. And I wish that the department would encourage teachers to use the Oral Conversation Method. If you go onto the Internet they say that this is the best way to teach a second language, English, Spanish, Portuguese. You do not manage a language by receiving a worksheet; I don't understand what we're teaching them? I just hand out worksheets. And unfortunately, this OBE thing has created a teaching method of: "Here's a worksheet, complete it".

But the actual teaching, especially then in language?

Con-ver-sa-tion is what I want to see.

I like that very much. Okay Julia, a question about underachievement. Do you sometimes look at your learners and think, this is not you. You can do so much better. Specifically if we're talking about Grade Four and the demands of Grade Four? And then the fact that they are marked with a percentage or a symbol or a rating scale. Do you sometimes feel, this is not what you're worth?

I actually think that children have got an inflated opinion of themselves.

Okay?

They think they are worth much more than they are.

Than your realistic opinion of them?

And that causes them to work less. They put in less effort because they think they are the bees' knees.

And we understand the important place of effort.

You know what? You'll give them work, you explain and you know that when they walk out of here they actually have 50%. Now they have to put in the effort, internalise it and make it theirs. And that doesn't happen.

So that internalisation of a concept?

They have such a poor work ethic. No effort from their side. They want to sit and receive. That is why the first part of the lesson is always lo-o-vely.

It's great fun.

The teacher is giving something to me. You understand?

And the minute the spotlight is on them?

Exactly. So it puts more stress on the teacher but that's the story. So the teacher has to intervene and you get a ... second chance. So the mark actually goes up because I've had two chances. So there's a, b, c, d and e. I put my input in a; he doesn't put his. And I have to give him another chance so that he can pass a. So now the teacher is at his throat the whole time, but what's the problem? He's getting the marks! But it's because of what I've done. Not what he's done. And I've got a problem with that. They think they are so smart, so they don't need to work so hard. And that's when we get into a society where suddenly he applies for a job, he gets it but he's not at all qualified for it. Help me out on this one because I've got a major problem with it.

It is in all the environments we touch.

If you're not competent, you're not competent. And if you get 40% for this test, you get 40% for this test. I should not give you the test again and give you a rewrite.

A rewrite should be for the reason of sickness or absence. It shouldn't be because I didn't do my best the first time and I'm not going to do my best the second time.

And then ... of course the second time, I've got to put some other strategies into place, for instance, I've got to read the paper to you. Maybe twice. Maybe I've got to underline a word and explain the word to you that will lead you to the answer. That's an intervention strategy but the little one's not using the opportunity when it's there.

The fact that you do these things show your amazing capacity as a teacher but I understand your frustration. I see what you want to do. You want to engage them and teach them.

The intervention's good for a child that has a barrier. I don't mind. But giving a child a second and second and second chance ... I always tell the children that if you need to stop at the red robot, you stop! You do not get a second chance. Go over, hit a car and then say: Ooh I want a second chance. It's too late. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

Yes I do.

We are creating an incompetent society by giving them a second chance and a second chance and a second chance.

So, what you're saying is there should be a fine line between intervention which is something positive to do for a child and spoon-feeding that will create a society that will not work to our benefit.

I think when we work with the children as we do; it's on our minds every single day. You know that the children think ridiculing someone is the greatest thing?

They do love it.

Then I wonder, how are we going to stop the violence?

We see it as hurting and harming. Julia, you said now that you do worksheets for intervention. Do you ever do enrichment for learners who are at the top?

Yes, we do. First I do what I have to do. And when I'm happy with what I have to do, there is time for enrichment. But the enrichment can also be done in such a way that it serves as a consolidation. Okay? So, in enrichment the little ones that can, can go further and the little ones who could not and still cannot, they do the consolidation part.

I like that. And are there learners who are so way ahead that they deserve something even more than that?

They normally go into the secret garden that I'm blessed with in front of my class. And I say you guys can go and have some time out in the secret garden so that I can have hands and ears and feet for the others. They do that. And you saw the assignments that were created by kids in this school; little projects.

Yes.

And of course, when I get to that stage the ones that can always help me with the ones that cannot. So that also helps. When we explained how to use the past tense in Afrikaans, I had a little 'onie' that couldn't get it from the teacher, after weeks hey. Then I took an Afrikaans speaking little girl and I said, listen, help, break, secret garden. They came back from break and he clicked suddenly. And you know, when it's something they have to repeat like pronouncing a sound or learning how to say a sound, it helps when you've got a peer. And they feel so cool.

They love that role. So just to bring all the components together of second language learning, cognitive giftedness, my whole purpose is to see, do these learners get support? Are they recognised? Do we recognise and support learners who are gifted but who do not perform well because of a language problem? And I think we've answered that along the way. That you do the interventions, that you see them, that you make a point to work with them individually. And your little one from the game farm. Do you teach him differently now?

I do. He's in his little mode. This is who I am, I'm in the front of the class and I'm not going to talk to anybody. But, I do look at him differently. He might still see me as the teacher in the front, but I definitely do. I do. And, more often than not he would not put his hand up but I will specifically ask him. Because I know he will get it right. But honestly, I haven't done anything else for him. He might just be the kind that doesn't flourish in a group but on a one-on-one situation.

They're also personalities. Not just little numbers.

Goodness, but I can talk!

That's great! I think we've covered it. Julia, thank you so much. I really appreciate it!

Amy
Interviewer

The first thing I would like to ask you is, from the school's side, what do they expect of you in terms of support for learners with barriers?

Yes, in the classroom situation ... in every class we have those learners, and there I would, we would explain to them one-on-one and also have them sitting closer to me and the desk.

Alright?

Yes, because then I can see how far they are along, instead of me walking around. I also have a separate booklet, if the work is too difficult for them, also the same type of activity but just in a simpler form.

So basically what you do with your intervention takes place during class time?

Yes, and I also have intervention after school; an English support programme, once a week for my very weak learners and we consolidate what we do in class.

So, it's just reinforcement because the class time is obviously not enough for them to grasp everything?

Yes.

Okay, that's interesting. Do you use a specific programme?

I go right back to their sounds.

So you go back to the phonics?

Yes, that's where the problems start. A lot of the learners don't hear the different sounds because it might be a second or third language. So they don't hear the sounds connected to the symbols, the letters. So it's very difficult for them to follow the spelling or the ... the..

Expressive language?

The expressive language, yes.



Yes, we always go back to the basics. A lot of your learners are second language learners?

Yes.

They're not mother tongue English speakers. So what do you find with your second language learners' work that might be regarded a learning problem, a barrier?

Definitely the tenses in the language, and although we use different rules from Grade Four, the sentence structure. Definitely, sentence structure is a big problem. The comprehension part of understanding a question ... uhm ...

The decoding?

Yes, it forms a massive barrier because it is not only in the languages, it goes right through to all the learning areas.

So they suffer everywhere?

Yes, in all the classes.

Amy, do you have learners who are gifted?

Yes, definitely. We've got a lovely system, are you familiar with the Reading Lab?

I know the Reading Laboratory, yes.

And that is fantastic. It has the cards, especially the latest one. It has all the different cards and it's not only the language or the spelling it has comprehension as well.

So you use the Reading Lab as an enrichment activity?

Yes, and they know how to use it and they have a booklet that helps.

And they carry on?

Yea they carry on and it has lovely stories.

Do you think that there might be gifted learners sitting somewhere in your class that you don't recognise because their English is not on a proficient level?

Definitely. I find that especially with the learners who have a different language and because they can't express themselves; they can't put into words what they thinking so it's very difficult for them. It's very difficult for them to show that they are gifted, but when you chat with them on an informal basis, you realise how deep their knowledge is and they have so much more.

And they've got interesting interests and a wonderful general knowledge.

And it only comes through when you're sitting with them in a relaxed atmosphere.

Outside the class?

Yes, and I'm also very surprised when it comes to their reciting. Poems, for example. In class they are often the very quiet ones but when the chance comes to do a dramatisation, then I'm really surprised.

Changing the personality completely! And for those learners, do you ever get a chance to do something for them? I know the system bogs everyone down but do you ever get a chance to give them support?

We have a cultural evening coming up and I'm busy with poetry at the moment so that those who are really shining through, they're going to be able to do their poems at the cultural evening. We also have, next week we've got the ... uhm ... can't think of the word now ... where they come in to adjudicate ...

Eisteddfod? Speech Festival?

Speech Festival, so they'll be able to perform there as well. It is very important because even if they're not able to write and it doesn't come through in their marks, they can also show how gifted they are.

And to experience language in a non-threatening way. Then something about underachievement. I know people always have a lot to say about Grade Four because it's such a difficult year. Do you sometimes look at your learners and think, you know that mark, you're worth so much more?

There are so many cracks in the system, and it's such a big jump from Grade Three to Grade Four and you take for granted that they should know that every sentence starts with a capital letter, so I had to go right back to basics things. Go right back at

the beginning of each year and even do songs to remind them about punctuation and do actions. I do find that the retention of the knowledge is very weak and that for me is a big concern. It's always as if there isn't as much drilling anymore, as in the previous years.

And one sees it in Grade Four with its academic demands and that gap in the transition. Alright, Amy, anything else you want to share with me? You seem to do these amazing things with learners to get them involved in language and pick them up.

I've always felt that children think of language as a worry; as a worksheet. In class when it becomes more active, for example when we learn about the different types of punctuation, then we do an action rhythm. I also had teaching experience with a deaf child in my class so I've learnt that they have to sit still, they have to face me and look at my mouth when I'm talking. It's not always ... I think it's become a habit but I need to know that they are listening. So if the eyes aren't making a connection ...

Then you know, the mind is not either ...

So, we have a routine and we have the action movements because it stimulates the brain so much more. So the information can come in. I think it just comes with experience. Going through different situations with different learners so that you just ... just kind of ...

Build up a knowledge base?

And therefore also, when they do their poem they're not so petrified because I also do Art and Culture and I also act around a lot, so it makes them more interested and focussed. But when it's work time I expect them to work.

Balance?

Oh yes!

Amy, thank you so much! You've given me food for thought.

Yasmeen
Interviewer

Thank you Yasmeen, I really appreciate this so, so much. Let's start with you giving a background of the school; just so that I can put everything in place.

The majority of our children here are immigrant children. We have ... we cater for many children here who are actually very weak. They have barriers to learning. Because they're immigrants, they have quite a few barriers like reading and writing and certainly understanding, you know... the emotional intelligence, they struggle with.

And your class sizes?

Our class sizes, we've got more or less about forty per class and we've got four Grade Four classes.

That's tough. So what is expected at your school from teachers regarding these barriers to learning and the support? What do they expect the teachers to do?

Well, what the usual routine is, we have a procedure at the school and when we find that a child is struggling in any way we refer them to our school psychologist. Um ... but the teachers themselves obviously have to develop certain ... um ...adapt materials according to the strength. Either giving them more time or allowing them maybe additional activities to try and improve their marks. But with the same assessment themselves.

So all of this happens in a classroom situation? No one extra comes in to help?

No, no. There are no assistants or anything. It is just the teachers in the classroom and she's got to gauge which children are struggling and how she's going to adapt her lessons according to the children. Either you choose to keep to the same lessons and then assist, but with most of our classes we got an average about five per class, or ... at the moment ... seven. So we're sitting with a situation where we've got so many children so we keep to the same lessons. We give them additional time and we allow others to help them. Ja ... but the expectation is that once they actually

have the barrier, the process, the procedure will be to send them to the school psychologist and then we also refer them to the SBST, which is our body that assists.

The School Based Support Team?

Yes.

So, your school psychologist will do an assessment, but then the actual intervention? Will they do that as well or will they refer the child back to a speech therapist or a language therapist or someone?

Yes. We have parents who obviously can't afford to send them to the various companies or whatever?

Support services?

Yes.

In the classroom situation, what type of difficulties do you see because of this second language learning situation?

You see ... in terms of that I would think they are very lost. They tend to become introverts and they're not very socialised. They tease easily and often, depending on the emotional intelligence of the child, he or she either develops quite easily and is then able to learn and catch up on the other children but in most cases, I think they struggle. They get lost amongst their peers.

And then with the academic demands of Grade Four?

It is very difficult for them, because by the time most of the children are in Grade Four, they can't read or write. Simple things like a, b, c are not there. The foundations for that are not there so when we start with write the date, they can't write the date. Already there they are lost. So already there it starts to ... you can see the behavioural problems, you can see the teasing, the bullying. That really ... that's what's generated from these barriers. Not just all the challenges.

Not just intellectual or academic problems?

No, in the end it tends to spread throughout ...

Affects all areas?

Mmm, because this bullying, which is such a serious problem but it's just because the child can't cope with the language, with the workload, with the amount of work, even though we do downsize, we give it to them in bite-size bits ...but...

Still a problem?

It just depends on the child and the level. And sometimes there's really nothing you can do. Besides referring the child to someone else.

I would assume then that underachievement comes into play. If you look at a child's results but you know this child, you can see that it is not a true reflection. Do you sometimes see that?

Yes! Many times! You can see that a child is very enthusiastic, can follow instructions. However, when it comes to the school work; academically they are just ... they are not able to. They have that potential; it is very difficult for them because there's no support. And from here they will go home where there's no support. Because we don't have that triangular co-operation between the parent, the teacher and the child. Now if that relationship is not sustained, you will see this effect, and usually those are the parents we cannot contact for assistance, for the child, for leading.

So the problem goes much deeper than merely not understanding the language? You describe it as an issue that touches every part of their lives.

Oh yes.

Do you think that among this group of learners, especially the ones with second language learning, that there are ones who are cognitively gifted?

Yes! Yes, I've got quite a few in Grade Four! We've been very fortunate this year that we've had quite a few children who really, they are just very bright. Are you talking only about the underachieving ones?

No. Any learner.

We've got two or three in each class that we've been able to identify.

How did you identify them?

Simply by the fact that their workload, when they get it they're enthusiastic. Some of them are very quiet. Mmm, it depends on their personalities. That has nothing to do in terms of their outgoingness as such. But, they finish their work; and they finish it ahead of time; they're precise when they do it. And they want more work. So, it's brilliant. It's a handful, as you can say, are the overachievers. But definitely gifted. We've got one boy who we wanted to speed up ahead to Grade Five, but emotionally you know, he's not ready. So ... we can't do that. And when he was in Grade Two, they wanted to push him ahead. But emotionally he's not ready. He's not even on a Grade Four level. So, I think it's a mistake to focus on just one child and say that one child is gifted. Because you tend to miss out on all the other ones.

If you think now of your situation and your learners learning in a second language as well as being exposed to all these other issues which you mentioned, do you think there might be little ones sitting here who are definitely gifted but who do not necessarily stand out according to their results?

Yes, it's quite ... I mean there's one girl who's lazy like anything, you wouldn't believe. She's so bright, and I can see it. She's very enthusiastic. She's very clever and I see the potential in her. And I don't understand, I'm unable. Maybe it's a relationship thing. Some kids flourish in other teachers' classes and then sometimes they won't function in mine. It's more of a relationship thing, I think.

A personality issue?

In terms of personality we might not be compatible. I know. But these kids are fantastic. I can honestly say that in Grade Four we detect these things. From Grade Three to Grade Four where they start to change classes, they haven't grown out of Grade Three yet. So they're full of potential. You can see those ones though who have reached their potential and they've developed faster. But, they're the ones who are fabulous.

Would you sometimes, in your lesson, do something enriching specifically for the gifted learner; for your cognitively gifted learners?

I do try. On most things I try. We have additional worksheets where they could just continue with the lesson. They like to write. The ones that I have found that were not so interested in creating a picture ... academically they are more... they want to write something. So I have quite a few things that we do develop with them. Let them write stories, let them, you know, create different banners for people and help others. I think the most important thing is that they do tend to get frustrated with the weaker ones.

*Especially, I would assume, the pace at which the class is progressing.*

What one notices is that the moment they're finished, I do encourage them to rather have something to do in class, in terms of a book or something to read or enjoy to do; even if they draw. I would never stop any child and say that because you're highly gifted, this is what you should be doing in my class. You finish with your work, you do whatever you want because that is your potential. That is who you are; the direction you're going to take. You know I have a little brother and I know how he is. He's so clever! He can explain a circuit to you, you know, coding in terms of computer programming. He's miles ahead of his class. But creatively, he's the best artist that I know.

*Creative giftedness is amazing.*

Yes, you've got to harness that and accept that that is a child that you can't expect to hide. You've got to see it.

*So you say that sometimes you would notice a child and think, okay this child does not achieve well and the English is on a very low level but there is something there.*

Yes.

*And if time allows you would try to encourage them?*

Of course! Yes! The moment you can find the time, of course I will. Anytime. Anytime.

*Thank you. It seems as if we're done.*



Parvati
Interviewer

Thank you for your time. First of all if you would be so kind as to explain your role at Riverdale Primary School.

Okay. I'm an educator who teaches Grade Four. I only teach some of the learning areas.

May I ask what is expected of you as a teacher regarding a learner with barriers? What does the school expect of you?

First of all we need to identify them, and once we've done that, we need to put a programme in place. I normally ... what I do is I run a remedial class of my own, for my own learners, depending on what the barrier is. Also we have some children who come with the LoLT but we do have a language barrier. Even though the language barrier is not extensive, most of them have a learning problem, you know, in different areas. I try to identify that and then take them on different days, because I find that if I work with them on an individual level, or maybe a group of not more than five, their attention is greater than when I work with them in the class. If the problem is something that I can't handle, I obviously call the parents in and ...uhm... explain to them what the problem is. And then we either get the OT or they take the child to an educational psychologist.

To a private person?

Yes, and we get feedback from them and form the feedback, if there are problems that I can run, I do so. Or I will take it to my HOD and they will take it to Mr Webster's office and he will take it on from there.

Okay, your learners who do have second language learning problems; what kind of problems do you experience in the classroom with them regarding second language learning?

Second language learning would be the ... uh ...?

A child whose mother tongue is not English.

Okay, I understand what you're saying. Most of the time I'll start with "Breakthrough to Literacy". I started with "Breakthrough to Literacy" when I started teaching. I find that that is such an excellent way of introducing the language. And of course the children who come from the little areas, you know the outskirts, have very little knowledge of sight words, so I start with the high frequency words.

Alright.

I do drilling. Lots of drilling.

You believe in that?

They have been proven to work. Absolutely they have! And the learners initially have their own little readers with the sight words, because that's what "Breakthrough to Literacy" does. Then they read it, they familiarise themselves with it; now we're extending their vocabulary, and then, we have comprehensions based on their own readers. Then I have them answer those comprehensions, mostly in full, because now they have that ability to see what a comprehension is and how to answer their own. Because what I see is when it's their own work, they identify better than when I take it from a script or a book or a summary.

That makes a lot of sense.

Ja, ja. Now once they have the idea of doing that, they go on to the breakthrough words, they go on to sentences. And very, very, very elementary reading at that level. Once they have 180 to 200 sight words, then I let them read the Grade One reader. And once they start reading from the Grade One reader, I'll base comprehensions on the Grade One reader. Some of them take up to two or three months to take up that, because they haven't got the tools, the elementary background. Then, I take them to the Grade Two and Three readers, and slowly introduce them. At that point in time they do flash and phonic. The flash words with the reader and the phonic with the reader. Before I give the learner the book, he gets the words to learn, so that when he gets the book, he is now familiar with what certain words ... now they have all the sight words, their breakthrough words and the reader words. So now they have more words than the reader that they can familiarise themselves with.

So you see it as a foundation for the next step?

And then if I do problem sums, and then when I do other pages, like you know, we normally give them class scheduling, they're kind of joining into the class a little bit, they're not ... totally, but they're seeing the light, shall I say it? It's sad because they don't have ... that's the only way, I've tried it and ...

You had success with it?

Yes.

Do you sometimes look at the learners you're teaching and think that some of them are really excessively bright? That there's real cognitive giftedness? Not just academic.

Yes. Those that really sit in your class and you want to pull your hair out. Absolutely. At the moment I've got three of them and I can mainly see that there's potential that maybe we don't tap onto a lot. But ... uhm ... I try to give them expanded opportunities. I must confess, my class is more than I can handle. With 42 learners it's so difficult. I have a headache all the time \*laughing\*. I do feel that I, you know, 50% neglect those learners, you know, it's like I give them worksheets, I give them a little bit of extra, but not what I ... what I ...

Really would like to do for them? So your concentration is on your weaker learners?

The weaker learners. Although I do and then I also find that this is not what I should have done. But I do ask them to assist me, you know, with the weaker learners. Which is not actually their job.

Sometimes?

Only sometimes. But, you know, when Kevin doesn't understand this, will you just assist him? And it only happens once or twice a month.

So, if I understand you correctly, you see them, you realise their potential, you want to do so much more for them but the reality of 42 learners in a class?

Not full attention of what you can really do for them.

So what you do for them is basically just what you're busy with, extended. So you would give them an extra book or worksheet?

Or something that's a little bit more out of the box, you know. Sometimes I give them a word puzzle, but the word puzzle, I've got a few of those in my class; I like these. I have accumulated them over the years and it's not the normal word puzzle, it's the one that says, a five letter word starting with an 'a', and all the word puzzles that build a square, kind of. I try to get activities that tap into that, you know, that ... uhm ...

Higher order thinking?

Ja, there are some activities of that, that I do with my learners, but not every day, not as often as I like to.

Do you sometimes look at a child who is not a mother tongue English speaker and whose marks are average or below, but think, there is something about this child, there is something, this child has some giftedness of a sort. Does that sometimes happen?

It does. This year I really did, because I noticed this child and actually I thought, you know, a little sad, because this child was in Grade One and he was just passed and in Grade Two he just went with the system and, you know, when you look at the kid you feel, he could have really done so much more than he is actually performing. He's been filtered through the system and he's been lost somewhere. And ja, ...

So you see something there? But it doesn't necessarily come out in achievement?

Yes.

That's really my concern is that we sit with potential but because of so many factors, English second language being one of them and then of course circumstances, we just ...

Pass them through the system. And they also deserve our attention. And you know sometimes I think that we as educators just look at them as being naughty or being mischievous or they not understanding things so obviously they just ... you know I don't think that we give them the individual attention that they deserve. But the

potential is there. Definitely it is. And there are many of them like that. You know sometimes it worries me, and I'm not, you know ... it's not about anyone else because it's like a personal remark, sometimes I feel that I'm being racist because I just assume this child is black and he's not going to make it. But if you really look at the child, out of everything else, then you think, actually, if you really do what ... you know ... treat this child as though, you don't take his outside circumstances but you treat him as part of your class, you see a lot coming out of that child. You know, so that ... I almost find myself guilty. I have to take two steps back, then I have to think ...

We assume?

We assume the level he's going to be on instead of marking his book and thinking, there's something there. So let me think a little further. And that's one of the things I can do because we don't always think like that. But I am guilty of that.

We all are.

Not all the time but I know I can do so much more!

Thank you so much for your honesty.

Thandi
Interviewer

Please tell me Thandi, what is expected of teachers at your school regarding support for learners with barriers? What do they expect you, as a class teacher, to do for a child with any type of barrier?

First you need to identify the learners, identify the barrier, let the School Management Team know about that, and from there the parents and from there we need to get something to help the child. For example if it's a child who cannot see properly, obviously we have to move her from where ever she was sitting and get her close to the chalkboard. If it's a child who cannot walk properly, we need to organise ramps for the school to support him or her outside, as well as organise things like ... uhm ... wheelchair, you know to make her able to move around like any other normal child.

And then specifically children who are English second language? What type of intervention do you do for the language problem?

Normally we give them lots of books to read and then dictation, spelling, which helps a lot because you can find out why children cannot construct a sentence. Ja, it helps them a lot there. And then the other thing, I think in English lessons they've got things like debate, you know, where they come up in front and do some presentation. In that way the teacher can easily detect where the problem is, or rather, help the child with English as a language barrier in the child's learning.

I assume that children at your school are not first language English speakers?

Yeah, you're right.

So, what kind of things do you see, not just in English but in any subject that you teach? What kind of problems do you see that's specifically connected to the fact that they're second language English speakers?

Okay, the medium of instruction is English, so we teach in English.

Yes.

So, at most of the times, children don't at first understand what you're saying.

So, it's comprehension?

It's comprehension. Then you have to repeat what you're saying and remember we're not allowed to do much of code switching but, uhm ... if they're with me in my class then I code switch, just to explain what I was trying to say.

Terminology?

Yes. I think I ...uhm ... I think it's really a problem to them if you concentrate that they have to speak English at school. Like I say, if you switch over to another language then they understand most, everything is easier for them. They partake, they give lots of answers, and English is something else which they don't speak at home and, and , and ... ja.

And their written work? What do you see in the written work that shows you that this is an English second language learner?

Spelling is a big problem. I also teach Natural Sciences and you know I'm not allowed just to mark wrong spelling. So I look at their work and mostly spelling is a problem.

And sentence construction? Do they also battle?

Not that much with sentence construction. As I say, I could read and understand what the child is trying to say, but the spelling of the word is ...

Atrocious?

\*laughing\*

Thandi, would you say that there are learners in Grade Four who are underachieving? If you could know their real ability, would you say there are learners sitting in front of you in a Grade Four class who are not achieving according to their ability?

I do have such kind of learners. Although it's only a few, not all. In such a way that ... some of the children might understand what I say when I teach them in English but when they have to write what they are supposed to do correctly, it's a problem.

So the conversational English is okay, but the academic writing is a problem?

That's the problem. The other thing is of course the incompleteness of work. I'm not so sure whether the instruction is rather big for them or because they're not sure of what they're doing, but most of the activities are really not complete and that's how they get fewer marks instead of perhaps getting a good average. Ja.

Would you say they're just lazy or is it really a whole problem of understanding and work ethic?

Others are just lazy. But not all. But some are really lazy but you know if you move close to them then they start to work. And if you could have the time to just stand there by them you would get such good results from them.

Do you think you have learners that you teach in Grade Four that are intellectually, cognitively gifted? That are really way ahead of the others?

I do have such kind of learners. Even the ones who would sometimes not complete their work.

Exactly.

Like I say, when you speak to them they'll give you answers just like this, just like this \*clicking fingers\*, but in English you really understand what the child is saying and then we also have the others who are extremely intelligent, gifted yes. Like, they would finish their work quickly, you know, and of course, after finishing their work they would demand your attention.

They want to do something?

Yes, they want to do something. You have to give them extra work of which, if it's this little, they will complete it very quickly and come back to you to say, Ma'am I'm done with my activity. So, those type of children we give them lots of work to do. Or rather, you ask them to keep themselves busy in the class, organising the books you know and taking things to the others who seem to be struggling and so on and so on, because one other thing is the time schedule for our periods. It's really limited, especially at working with children who's doing English as home language but when they're out of the school it is really something that they don't even speak.



So they only speak English at school?

At school only.

And they have to do academic work in English?

They have to do academic work in English, ja, ja.

You say now that you see these gifted kids and they work fast and they're smart. Do you sometimes look into your class and think of a child that's maybe average or below average but you sees something in this child and you wonder, is there not maybe a giftedness somewhere? The child does not necessarily get high marks or is quickly finished with work, but have you ever picked up a child who you thought, there is something special about this child, there is something so smart. Does that ever happen?

Yes it does happen. I've got one child, a boy. Mammy, I'm telling you this child is so intelligent. Every time you come up with a topic he will raise his hand. He will add on to what you're saying. That shows that he's knowledgeable, he? And then I once met the parents because they had to come to school because the child had to sit for detention. So they came and ask me what was his transgressions. And then I had a conversation with the parent and what I was saying to the parent, it was really the opposite of what the child is really at home. You know, like I said, this child is really so informative, when I talk about the moon, he immediately gives you answers, when you talk about the soil, he immediately gives you answers. You know, things that you don't expect him to know by his age. At home, this child is so brilliant he does everything and he doesn't even ask or rather wait for a reminder, but when it comes to school, to put this in writing, like I've said earlier on. To put this in writing and show me the work, it's very difficult. Giving the child a project to go and do at home, give the child homework to go and do at home ... nothing!

So the giftedness does not result in high academic achievement?

Not at all. It's a giftedness outside the classroom. But give him a heading about the sun, he will really tell you about the sun. It's a big ball, it's up in the sky, it doesn't move ... and, and, and ...

He knows a lot more compared to the other learners in the class?

At one stage, this young boy he even came with a book, he, early in the morning he comes and says here's a book about what we talked about yesterday. I saw new things that I didn't even know.

So he adds to your knowledge as well?

Right!

That's actually my concern, that there are learners who are falling through the cracks. You've mentioned about limited time and finishing work and there are learners falling through the cracks, really brilliant kids. They don't get the trophies and the high marks but you do recognise them? Do you sometimes do something extra for them? An extra worksheet?

With the worksheets we do. We make them worksheets. Now there's this child, you know, I think she's got a neural, in the brain a problem you know?

A neurological problem?

Yes, but you know he is really good but when it comes to writing, it is really a problem to him. But the assistance we give him is that we write the work on the chalkboard, we make sure that he has the work here by his side on a sheet so that he can work on a worksheet. But what I realise, but he's a naughty child in the class you know, but what I did was I moved him from where he used to sit, right, close to my table so that I can monitor him at all the times. But, what I like about this child is, he will work, and I'll say, show me, Show Ma'am that you can do this. And then he put his effort on to that but then comes this thing of laziness, as soon as he starts working at his own pace, working at his own pace but you can see that this child really knows exactly what to do and when you ask him if he understands the instructions he will give you back the instructions, same as you put the instructions.

So there are a lot of bright kids?

A lot of bright kids, I'm telling you and ... we've got resources. We try our best for these children, but ... they need you. As you're away from them they become so loose and they start doing things that are not really in line with your academic activity.

So, there's a whole set of other problems that stops them from achieving what they really could?

I think the other thing is, if I as a teacher had the chance to help in a smaller class, problems like these wouldn't happen, it wouldn't happen.

So you link the situation to the problem that the classes are too large and the teacher's attention cannot reach everybody?

Oh yes, yes.

Okay, that's that.

Ag, no man \*laughing\*. That was too short!

It really is. Thank you so much.