

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

**THE MAINSTREAMING DEBATE: A SURVEY OF PARENTS' VIEWS IN A SPECIAL SCHOOL
FOR INTELLECTUALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN IN A DISADVANTAGED CONTEXT IN
THE WESTERN CAPE**

A minor dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in
Education (Educational Psychology)

by

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the range of beliefs that a certain group of South African parents held about the appropriate educational placement of their children with mild to moderate intellectual handicaps.

The sample consisted of 14 parents of children with mild to moderate intellectual handicaps attending at a special school for intellectually handicapped children in a disadvantaged context in the Western Cape.

In line with the qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews with open ended questions were used to collect the data. Interviews were used rather than questionnaires because parents were illiterate and they felt more comfortable and confident with a personal interview and were able to use their own language. The data were analyzed according to Glaser and Strauss' Constant Comparative method as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994).

As has been found in other research studies, the parents in this study were not in principle against mainstreaming or inclusion of their children. Rather, they were at present not supportive of it as they perceive the conditions at the ordinary school to be unstable for their children. The qualitative analysis outcome revealed that parents were concerned about teacher qualities, acceptance of their children by the ordinary school children and the ordinary school curriculum which they felt was only focusing on academic subjects.

Parent involvement and inclusion are central concepts in the reconstruction of education in South Africa. Inclusion of intellectually handicapped learners is being considered by policy

makers but it is not likely to be successful without parent support. This study is a small contribution to the debate.

Since the data were collected in a single school that has been disadvantaged in terms of resources, additional research of this nature is needed to establish whether the opinions of these parents are comparable to the opinions of parents in other parts of the country.

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CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

Introduction

Mental or intellectual handicap forms part of the broad field of special needs education. For the historically privileged sector of the South African community, special needs education was an extensive separate system and learners with special needs, including the intellectually handicapped were referred from regular education to special schools or classes. In the case of ex-Department of Education and Training (DET) schools, children with special educational needs remained in the ordinary classroom not by choice but because there were no other alternatives. Some simply did not attend school.

The pattern of racial inequality in South African education resulted in totally inadequate provision for African children. As a result it failed to serve their needs. This created confusion for some parents of children with special needs as to where they should send their children for education. This became evident during my experience as a school guidance counsellor. There were many children who had learning difficulties, but there was one child who was exceptionally different from other children. After assessing the child and discussions with the parent of the child, I recommended him to be put into a special school for intellectual handicapped children where I believed the child would get special care. But the parent rejected my suggestion, stating that the work in the special school is "insufficiently demanding and underestimate the pupils' abilities". She also thought that special schools were for those children who were severely mentally handicapped. Since then, I became increasingly aware that there are misunderstandings between professionals and parents concerning children's educational needs. Because parents had no experience of special schools, some parents were suspicious of them and hoped that the mainstream schools could somehow teach their children.

At present there is a debate about mainstreaming children with special educational needs including those with moderate to mild intellectual handicaps. Integrating these learners in the regular classroom, it is argued, promotes their integration in society and facilitates skills development (Paul, Turnbull and Cruickshank, 1977; Apter, 1982; Drew, 1990; Watts, 1990). Many countries are embracing the principle of integrated/inclusive schooling for children with special educational needs and are acknowledging the fact that the ordinary school should be the first option for every child (Saleh, 1996). More than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organisations met in Salamanca, Spain in 1994 to further the objective of education for all. What was clear from the conference was that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their handicaps (UNESCO, 1994).

The education system in South Africa is, however, currently undergoing reorganisation. There are some encouraging documents on learners with special educational needs. For example, the White Paper on Organisation, Governance and Funding of schools clearly states that the education of learners with special needs should be provided for within the continuum of integrated services in both ordinary and special schools (cited in Schoeman, 1994:8). In addition, the public discussion document of the National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training (NCSNET) (1997:11) recommends:

Appropriate and effective education must be organised in such a way that all learners have access within a single education system that is responsive to diversity. No learners should be prevented from participating in this system, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, language, or other differences.

unless policy makers can find effective means of ensuring a shared understanding of the meaning of education with these parents, the intent of the policy could seriously be undermined.

The questions to which this research seeks answers are the following:

Broad question:

What does a particular group of parents believe to be the appropriate educational placement of their children who are mildly or moderately intellectually handicapped?

Specific questions:

- (i) What are the parents' expectations about what education can achieve for their children?
- (ii) How do parents perceive their children as different from other children attending an ordinary school?
- (iii) How do parents perceive special school as different from the ordinary school?
- (iv) Under what circumstances would parents be happy for their children to be in the ordinary classroom?

Terminology and Definitions

Nell (1996) points out that the terms special and specialised have been used with little logic in South African context, and recommends the use of the term special educational needs and I use this term throughout my work to avoid confusion.

Intellectual handicap: I am aware that terms such as mental handicap and cognitive disability are also in use, but I use the term

intellectual handicap in my work because it is both clear in meaning and familiar.

Moderate intellectual handicap : IQ 40-55 (SSAIS-Xhosa Version)

Mild intellectual handicap : IQ 50-70 (SSAIS-Xhosa Version)

Parent: Biological parent of the child

Care giver: A person responsible for looking after the child in the place of a parent.

Inclusion: The education of all children, including those with special education needs, in the same classroom, in the same local schools, under the same education authority which must be flexible enough to accommodate all.
 "Inclusive education starts with radical school reform, changing the existing system and rethinking the entire curriculum of the school in order to meet the needs of all children." (Mittler, 1995:105)

Integration/Mainstreaming: The placement of learners with special educational needs in ordinary schools or classes under certain circumstances.
 "Integration/Mainstreaming do not necessarily assume such a radical process of school reform. Children may receive a modified or adapted curriculum but they have to fit into the existing structures." (Mittler, 1995:105)

If either mainstreaming or inclusion is to be successful in South Africa the committed support of the mainstream itself is an essential component. As Donald and Lazarus (1994:122) state: "...engaging key representatives of the users of change is just as important. Without their support and ownership of the process, change is likely to be resented..." The mainstream consists not only of teachers but also of the communities they serve. The public discussion document of the NCSNET (1997:13) states:

Partnerships between parents and other educators should be developed. This partnership should include involvement in the planning, development, implementation and monitoring of education and support. This partnership should be facilitated through processes such as training to empower parents to develop their capacity to participate in their children's education.

Since there is now a gradual move, from a view of parents as passive observers to that of active participants in the education process, parents are obviously key role players.

Problem Statement

Given the above, the purpose of the study is to investigate what parents or care givers believe to be the appropriate educational placement of their children who are mildly or moderately intellectually handicapped. This is very important to study since there has been a call that parents be involved in the education of their children. Furthermore, since the policy makers have proposed that children who are mildly to moderately intellectually handicapped could probably be accommodated in ordinary classroom in the mainstream, they need to be aware of what parents think about it. This is very important because,

Outline

This study is presented as follows:

Chapter one introduces the study, identifies the problem, explains the research goals/aims and the structure of the work.

Chapter two provides a brief background on the provision of special education in South Africa and the debates surrounding mainstreaming/inclusion. Lastly the chapter focuses on the current situation in South Africa with regard to the education of children with mild to moderate intellectual handicaps.

Chapter three provides review of literature with particular references to the research that has been conducted so far on the attitudes of parents of children with mild to moderate intellectual handicaps.

Chapter four describes the methodology which was followed.

Chapter five provides an analysis of the data.

Chapter six presents a discussion of the issues, explain their implications and also points out the limitations of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR INTELLECTUALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Introduction

The debate around provision for children who are intellectually handicapped is located within a broader debate about the education of all learners with special educational needs. In developed countries special needs education has moved historically from total absence, to separate provision, to partial integration (mainstreaming) to full integration (inclusion). Current international thinking favours inclusion. In South Africa, the situation is complicated by the history of unequal provision under the apartheid regime.

This chapter will, therefore, a) provide a brief overview of the history of special needs education in South Africa, b) highlight the major issues around mainstreaming and inclusion and c) outline the present situation in South Africa with regard to the education of children who are intellectually handicapped.

Provision of special needs education in South Africa

Compared with European countries, special needs education was introduced relatively late in South Africa. For example, towards the end of the 19th century, a beginning was made with the education of special needs children, which mainly functioned on the basis of initiatives by religious organisations. Several special schools were founded then, at first for deaf children and later on for children with intellectual handicaps. In the early part of the 20th century, education authorities were obliged to recognise these schools (du Toit, 1996).

As mentioned earlier in chapter one, one aspect, however, distinguishes the development of special needs education in South Africa from other countries, namely the extent of apartheid influences. Apartheid was problematic in South African education generally. Children with special educational needs were doubly disadvantaged. Kriegler and Farman (1994) indicate that special needs education has been racially fragmented by apartheid policies, divided amongst different ministerial and provincial departments and categorically segmented.

According to du Toit (1996), special needs education for white children was quantitatively and qualitatively expanded during the apartheid regime. Behr (1988) indicates that existing special schools were enlarged and new ones established. However, while remarkable changes were being made in the field of special needs education for whites, educational provision for children with special educational needs from other population groups developed much more slowly leading to severe discrepancies in both the quality and quantity of such provision (du Toit, 1996). Special schools for White, Coloured and Asian children were established to address the needs of most learners. Black children however, who have had neither compulsory schooling nor strong parent groups, were very poorly provided for. In communities where provision was adequate, it was, however, segregated rather than integrated, emphasising separate schools and classes.

It is evident from the above that there is a need to redress the injustices of the past especially in the field of special needs education. Education authorities need to achieve a transformed, new and just education for all South Africans in terms of both racial discrimination and disability discrimination.

Mainstreaming/ inclusion debate

Recently much discussion and controversy has been generated regarding the mainstreaming or inclusion of children with special educational needs. This is because mainstreaming has been successful in some cases in developed countries while in others it has not. The South African situation with regard to mainstreaming and inclusion of children with special educational needs has been explored by policy makers and by those who are involved in special needs education, for example, Skuy and Partington (1990); Green (1991), Donald (1993) and Kriegler and Farman (1994).

According to Green (1991) mainstreaming can mean different things to different people. Apter (1982) defined mainstreaming as the conscientious effort to educate handicapped children in the least restrictive setting which is appropriate to their learning needs. But Green (1991) argues that most people would agree with Cantrell's statement that mainstreaming requires that exceptional children be educated in the same environment as all other children whenever possible. A new term, inclusive education, is now being used increasingly in the field of special needs education (Mittler, Brouillette and Harris, 1995; UNESCO, 1994).

Although in the past, it was always assumed that some children with special education needs would be such that they would require separate provision, the current movement towards inclusion challenges this view. It implies that schools and classes for children with special educational needs are not acceptable (Nell, 1996). Inclusive education also includes changing the existing system and the curriculum of the school in order to meet the needs of all learners. In contrast with inclusion, mainstreaming does not necessarily assume such a radical process of school reform. Children may receive a modified or adapted

curriculum but they have to fit into the existing structures (Miller, 1993).

According to Nell (1996), inclusion does not merely imply the dumping of children with special educational needs in the mainstream classes. It implies that a child is placed in a mainstream class but with the necessary support to be able to cope in the classroom. It implies that children with special educational needs must be confronted with a differentiated curriculum and evaluation system which will enable them to progress at their own rate and at their own levels while placed in mainstream schools.

At international level there is a lot of emphasis on the inclusion of children with special educational needs. For example, in countries like the United States, Sweden and Italy, most children with special educational needs are integrated and educated in ordinary classes (Watts, 1990). There are arguments for and against inclusion, which are summarised in the following paragraphs.

The mainstreaming or inclusion debate has been highlighted in the international literature on special needs education. It is argued that social justice demands that children be placed in the least restrictive environment consistent with their needs. Integrating children with special educational needs, it is claimed, will promote their integration in society and facilitate skills development (Apter, 1982; Drew 1990; Watts, 1990; Danby and Cullen, 1988).

Some educators (Gartner and Lipsky, 1987; Reynolds, Wang and Walberg, 1987; Thousand and Villa, 1990; Ryndak, Dowling, Morrison & Williams, 1996) believe that by integrating intellectually handicap learners in ordinary classrooms, all children will benefit. After (1982) argues that mainstreaming can be justified legally, morally and socio-culturally. For example, it is morally regarded as a means of reducing

isolation and prejudice while promoting an understanding and acceptance of individual differences. Legally, it is said to ensure that all pupils have equal rights and protection under the law. From a socio-cultural perspective, it increases the potential contribution of handicapped children to society.

Many experts in the field believe that children with and without handicaps can help one another, based on their individual strengths and needs, as well as promoting friendship and interaction among them (Stainback and Stainback, 1990). It is believed that integration will also lead them to accept each other as individuals with common needs and aspirations. It is also going to make them independent, self-reliant adults which is believed to be something that cannot be obtained in special schools. Inclusionists further argue that integration with non-disabled students in ordinary schools removes the emphasis on labels and improves the self concept of students with special needs (Murphy, 1996).

On the other hand, opponents of mainstreaming argued that it could lead to a drop in the academic standard of general education to an unacceptable level. They also argued that handicapped children would not cope in ordinary classrooms as the curriculum for the regular class was drawn up with the so-called "average child" in mind. Furthermore, they argued that teachers were not trained to effectively teach both children with special educational needs and average children in the same class. They expressed the concern that disabled children would be at the risk of social isolation and rejection. They also expressed concern that the teachers in inclusive classrooms would have significantly less time and attention to give to students who do not require special assistance (Murphy, 1996; Kaufman, Gerber, & Semmel 1988; Lieberman, 1985; Messinger, 1985; Vergason & Anderegg, 1989). With specific regard to the integration of intellectually handicapped learners, Danby and Cullen (1988) make the point that integration may

be morally and socially desirable, but we need to look at whether it will necessarily be the most effective learning environment.

The same debate is happening in South Africa. According to Schoeman (1994) the arguments among the opponents of inclusive education include the fact that regular educators are not trained enough to work with learners with special educational needs. Also, they claim, it will require excessive amounts of teacher time, thereby impeding the progress of other pupils. They also argue that regular educators and peers have negative attitudes towards children with special educational needs which will result in the isolation and stigmatisation of pupils. Davies (1995) however, found that at least some South African teachers were in favour of mainstreaming and inclusion.

Although many educators (like Green, 1991, Skuy and Partington, 1990; Donald, 1993; Nkabinde, 1993; and Kriegler and Farman, 1994) support the inclusion of most children with disabilities in ordinary classrooms and policy proposals have been made (For example, the progressive mainstreaming model), final decisions about policy have not yet been made.

In an attempt to redress the imbalances of the past and improve the quality of education for all the South Africans, especially for the children with special educational needs, a number of influential reports were published. These reports include the Educational Renewal Strategy (DNE, 1991), the report of the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI): Support Services (1992), the report on Learners with Special Educational Needs (DNE, 1994) and the ANC's A Framework for Education and Training (1994) and the White Paper on Education and Training in Democratic South Africa: First Steps to develop a new system (1995).

Some general trends regarding the future of specialised education are already noticeable. The recommendations in the summary discussion document recently published by the National Commission for Special Needs Education and Training (1997:18) are that:

Provinces, districts and centres of learning should ensure that staff and institutional development programmes include issues pertaining to diversity and overcoming and preventing barriers to learning, to ensure ongoing improvement of education and support for all learners. This includes supporting educators to develop their capacity to develop inclusive practices and address diverse needs.

Recent studies on mainstreaming or inclusion have shown it to be beneficial for both handicapped and non-handicapped children if proper support is available (Hanline and Harvosen, 1989; McDonnell, 1987; Mlynek, Hannah and Hamlin, 1982; Reichart, Lynch, Anderson, Svobodny, Dicola and Mercury, 1989). Although the change in the educational environment is significant for handicapped learners, the concept of inclusion also brings up new issues for the regular education. For example, it requires a change in the curriculum and teaching methods to accommodate the handicapped children (McDonald and Hardman, 1989). The perception is that both the regular education and special education students will benefit socially from inclusion in a regular education program (Marchetti, 1991). It is believed that an inclusive orientation will provide the majority of children with effective education and improve the efficiency and ultimately cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (Wedell, 1995). In South Africa it may not be wise to insist on inclusion while systems and educators lack the capacity to support it.

A brief review of the situation in South Africa with regard to education of learners with moderate or mild intellectual handicaps

In this work intellectual handicap is defined in terms of the IQ: moderate (IQ 40-55, SSAIS-Xhosa), mild (IQ 50-70, SSAIS-Xhosa), this is in line with the American Association on Mental Deficiency's (AAMD) categories of moderate and mild mental retardation and is the system used by the school investigated. This is an oversimplified way of understanding intellectual handicap and I acknowledge that this is not the only way to define it. It is important to note that the very notion of intellectual handicap is in itself relative and not absolute. It depends on how it is perceived and interpreted in a particular social context (Morss, 1996).

"...Any discussion of the prevalence of mental handicap among South African children is complicated by the lack of reliable census statistics..." (1997). Based on 1990 school enrolment figures a conservative estimate of the number of learners with moderate and severe intellectual handicaps in South Africa is approximately 48000, that is, 0.5% of the school going population (Donald, 1993). This number excludes learners with mild intellectual handicaps who are already in school and children with more severe handicaps who are not in school. What education is available for these children ?

In the case of moderate intellectual handicap, children classified as White under the apartheid education system were provided with special schools, and provision was gradually extended to similar schools for children classified as Coloured or Indian. Children from Black communities had limited provision and had to rely largely on assistance from non-state organisations.

Under the apartheid system the provincial education authorities took responsibility for the education of mildly intellectually handicapped

learners. They provided special classes in schools for children then classified as White and, later, adaptation classes in school for children then classified as Coloured. Limited provision was made for African children although in 1986 a report appeared entitled "Die filosofie van die onderwys vir die gestremde, met besondere verwysing na die swart kind", recommended the state to take immediate responsibility for the provision of education for Black handicapped children.

The new education system in South Africa is integrated and has dismantled the old divisions based on race. With regard to disability the policy is not yet clear but it seems likely that some form of integration will be recommended. In the meantime, 'mainstreaming by default' (Donald, 1993) continues and some small scale inclusion projects are underway.

to Wade and Moore (1992) parents have access to crucial information about their children's needs and they carry the main responsibility for aiding their children's development and potential. This means that parents are meant to play an important role. Hegarty and Pocklington (1982) argue that the needs of many children will not be met unless parents are persuaded and equipped to take an active part in the education of their children with special needs. It is therefore reasonable to include them in the planning of their children's education.

Wade and Moore (1992) further argue that this shift of involving parents has not only placed more responsibility on the parents of children with special educational needs, but has also given them the ability to take initiatives and to feel part of the process of helping their children to achieve educationally. The international trend to involve parents of children with special education needs in the decision making process with regard to the education of their children has also motivated the South African parents of children with special education needs to take initiatives. Organizations like the Down's Syndrome Association, Disabled Children Action Group (DICAG) and Parents for Children with Special Education Needs (PACSEN) are some of the organizations where parents have accepted the responsibility of being involved in the education of their children with special needs. Furthermore, much of the initial pressure for change in South Africa to make inclusive education available has come from parents.

How parents feel about mainstreaming

A number of studies that have been conducted in developed countries on parents' attitudes towards the integration of their children with mild to moderate intellectual handicaps suggests that parents hold positive attitudes towards integration. For example, Kidd and Hornby's survey

(1993) of parents of British children who transferred to mainstream schools from special schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, reveals great satisfaction among parents. In a survey by Anderson and Bachor (1990) parents felt that integration was of benefit to special need students and regular students.

Ryndak, Dowling, Jacqueline and Morrison (1995), Hanline and Halvorsen (1989), Lanier and Jones (1988) and Abrahamson, Wilson, Yoshida and Hegarty (1983) all found that parents were positive about the practice of integrating their children with intellectual handicaps in the ordinary schools. Parmenter and Nash (1987) working with parents of moderately mentally handicapped children found that parents were willing to allow their children to be integrated in the ordinary schools if adequate resources were provided. Simpson and Myles (1989) working with 53 parents of children with educable mental handicaps provide similar findings.

On the other hand, Dawson and Kierney (1988) surveyed parental perception of special schooling for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. They found that parents were satisfied with the education and care their children were receiving in the special school and were unwilling to allow them to be integrated in the ordinary classroom. In a similar study by Hegarty (1987) on parents of children with moderate learning difficulties, it was found that parents were positive about the placement in the special school.

Myles and Simpson (1990), Green and Shinn (1994) and Reichart, Lynch, Anderson, Svobodny, Dicola and Mercury (1989) argue that the investigation of parents' views should not only focus on parents' willingness to support mainstreaming but should also identify factors that contribute to or hinder parental support of such a practice. This is because the lack of such information could restrict the successful implementation of educational reform movements. Therefore, the

following section will look at the factors that contribute to or hinder their support for integration.

The Kinds of Issues Parents raised

A study by Sheldon (1994) revealed parents' preference for modifications that yielded direct benefits to their children. For example, 70% of the parents interviewed preferred reduced class-size, while 24% preferred teacher planning, that is, teachers be given additional time to plan lessons for their students. In a similar study by Hegarty and Pocklington (1982) results revealed that parents were dissatisfied about the education in the special school, a criticism being that there was insufficient home-work. They were also dissatisfied about the fact that their child was grouped with large numbers of other pupils who were handicapped in different ways. In another study by Kidd and Hornby (1993) parents were concerned about the demands which academic work in mainstream schools made on their children. In a study by Hanline and Halvorsen (1989) parents were concerned about transportation changes accompanying integration. The child's safety, the attitudes of regular education staff and non-disabled students and the success and quality of the students' educational programme were identified as concerns by parents in this study.

Simpson and Myles (1989) reported that parents recommended modifications that led to direct services such as smaller class size, more paraprofessionals and the availability of other support personnel such as psychologists. They also recommended that there should be teacher inservice training that will focus primarily on behaviour management and instructional techniques. Although parents agreed that integrated settings promote positive social contact for all children, they were concerned about the possibility of negative interactions with peers. Another concern for parents was the possible decrease in the

overall quality and quantity of specialised services their child would receive in an integrated setting (Galant and Hanline, 1993). In another study by Bates, West and Schenerl (cited in Simpson and Myles, 1989) it was found that 69% of parents with mildly mentally handicapped children surveyed preferred an integrated programme for their child. They believed that it would facilitate improved self-concept and provide exposure to normally achieving peer models.

On the other hand, parents' preference for the special school was based on the belief that it focused on the emotional and social well-being of their child rather than on academic success. They also made references to the positive teacher attitudes, care and attention demonstrated in respect of their child (Dawson and Kierney, 1988). In another study by Green and Shinn (1994) parents were satisfied with the extra help or individual attention their child was receiving in the special school. Parents were also satisfied about the protected environment their child was in. In a similar study by Leadbetter and Leadbetter (1993) parents preferred the special school setting because their child was protected from the perceived threat of other children's bullying. In another study by Harry (1992), although parents supported the special school setting, they were very angry about the nature of the curriculum which they thought only involved painting and colouring.

According to Ryndak et al (1995) parents also identified a major change in their children's attitude towards school as compared to their experience while in the special school. They reported dramatic improvement and growth in speech, language and communication skills following inclusion. They indicated that their children developed social skills after inclusion. For example 11 of the 13 parents reported that there had been an increase in opportunities for their children to participate in extra-curricular activities. They also reported perceptions of their children as being happier and having greater self-esteem after inclusion. Parents felt that positive future

options had become more available for their children following inclusion. Some of these options related to future employment.

DISCUSSION

From the studies reviewed above, one may conclude that until parents believe that their children will receive a quality education in integrated settings, many will be hesitant about moving their children from special schools into inclusive settings. Interestingly, in the studies reviewed, a large majority of parents of students who had experienced integrated programmes tended to be satisfied and felt comfortable with them. Nevertheless, some parents continue to support separate placements. It would seem, therefore, that educational authorities that want to move toward integrated and inclusive programs will have to convince doubting parents that their children will not suffer any adverse consequences when attending ordinary schools.

Given South African special education as described chapter two, it seems likely that the contexts of the research reported in this chapter were different from South African conditions. The research cited above appears to have been carried out in communities in which caring provision outside the mainstream was an option for all children. It would therefore be misleading to assume that the South African parents would feel the same, but it would be interesting to compare them with those from other countries mentioned. Therefore, chapter five will look at what a group of South African parents believe to be the appropriate educational placement of their children with intellectual handicaps.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Research is a systematic and intensive process of investigation (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993). According to Patton (1990); Taylor and Bogdan (1984); Maykut and Morehouse (1994) there are two major theoretical perspectives that have dominated social science and educational research. The first one is positivism which focuses on facts and the causes of phenomena. The second one is the phenomenological approach which focuses on the participants' perspectives in order to understand social phenomena. It also focuses on understanding the meaning events have for the persons being studied.

Since the positivists and phenomenologists use different ways to understand the problem or phenomena, their research demands different methodologies. Positivists use quantitative methods whereas phenomenologists use qualitative methods to address their own research problem (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

Research Goal

The research goal was to explore parents' attitudes to the educational placement of their intellectually handicapped children. The study focussed on parents of mildly to moderately intellectually handicapped children currently in a special school.

Research Design

In order to meet the objectives of my study, qualitative inquiry was used. This was because it focused on the people's direct words and was helpful as the focus of my research was to find out not only what parents think about the appropriate education for their children but

also the kind of ideas they have about it. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) point out, qualitative research can be best used when we want to know the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the target population. Qualitative research wants the research participants to speak for themselves rather than presenting peoples' ideas mathematically and this approach increased my understanding of the parents' ideas (McMillan and Schumacher,1993; Taylor and Bogdan,1984).

In line with the qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews with open ended questions were used to collect the data. I was aware that interviews can be used quantitatively, but for this study they were used qualitatively as I wanted to understand the parents'views or ideas. Interviews were used rather than questionnaires because parents were illiterate and they felt more comfortable and confident with a personal interview and were able to use their own language. Through the interviews I tried to gain a sense of parents' sincerity and insight . Interviews also gave me a guarantee that all questions were going to be attempted and I was sure of obtaining the data. As Bailey (1982) stated, interviews make the interviewees respond in their own words rather than letting others answer questions on behalf of the respondents. He further stated that interviews were flexible in the sense that one can probe for more specific answers and can repeat the question when the response indicates that the respondent misunderstood the question.

PROCEDURE

Research Participants

The research was conducted with 14 parents or care givers of children with mild to moderate intellectual handicaps attending a special school. These were the parents who agreed to be interviewed. The parents are from disadvantaged communities in Cape Town which are

characterised by lack of adequate health care, unemployment, inadequate housing and lack of specialised educational services. The school in question was selected because it was reasonably accessible for interview purposes. It helped me meet the objectives of my study, as most of the children at the school had measured IQ's within the mild to moderate range of intellectual handicap. A few had not been formally assessed but were referred on the basis of the observed level of their scholastic progress.

Design of the Interviews

The type of interview used to collect the data was semi-structured. Open-ended questions were developed prior to the interview. As the interviewer, I engaged in an open discussion with the respondents and maintained a non-domineering role. I reflected their answers to make sure whether I fully understood what they were saying and also to give them a chance to correct me in case of any misunderstanding. Additional questions were asked to get a clear understanding of parents' or care givers' ideas. I hypothesized that parents' attitudes would be affected by their perceptions of their child's potential, their understanding of special education and their experiences of special and mainstream education. So in order to find out what the parents believed about the appropriate educational placement of their children, questions asked during interviews were informally structured around the following:

- (i) What are parents' expectations about what education can achieve for their children?
- (ii) How do parents perceive special education as different from the mainstream?
- (iii) Under what circumstances would parents be happy for their children to be in the mainstream?

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Western Cape Department of Education, provided the school agreed. I also discussed the objectives of my study with the principal and asked her to inform the parents in advance about myself. During the parents' meeting, I met the parents and introduced myself.

The purpose of the meeting was to develop trust and friendship with the parents and explain the aims of my research and the importance of their involvement. I also asked to interview them and assured confidentiality. They all agreed to participate and granted the principal permission to issue their names and addresses so that I could visit and interview them in their homes.

During the second meeting with each parent, they were interviewed individually for about 30 to 40 minutes. I was granted permission to audio record whatever was said during the interview and did so. I also wrote notes on their responses so as to stay close to the data. This was also done as a precaution in case of equipment failure. I also had a copy of recorded responses. All interviews were dated, giving details of the place, context and who was present. I noted my personal responses during the interview.

The data gathered were transcribed by the interviewer (myself). Silverman (1995) regards this as very important because the field conditions might cause some lack of perfect audibility in the tape and the interviewer would be less likely to make errors in transcribing. To ensure what transpired at the interviews was transcribed accurately, the interviewer then read the transcripts while listening to the audiotapes. Corrections, additions or deletions when necessary were made during this process. The interviewer translated all of the responses into English and they were checked by a person who has had

experience as a translator. This person read through the transcripts while listening to the recorded responses. This was done as the parents preferred to be interviewed in their mother-tongue. The pages of the transcripts were then coded and this allowed the source of each transcript to be identified.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through the interviews were analyzed by using Glaser and Strauss's Constant Comparative method (1987) as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994).

The discovery process of forming categories involved reading through the data collected and noting the recurring words, phrases, topics, patterns and themes in the data.

These were written on a large clean sheet of paper. Lincoln and Guba (1985:347) in Maykut and Morehouse (1994:134) describe a useful way of coding or categorising:

The essential tasks of categorizing are to bring together into provisional categories those cards that apparently relate to the same content; to devise rules that describe category properties and that can, ultimately, be used to justify the inclusion of each card that remains to be assigned to the category as well as to provide a basis for later tests of replicability; and to render the category internally consistent.

This means that the units of meaning in the data were identified by reading through the transcripts and marking, classifying or dividing on the pages. These units were then cut out and pasted on index cards for easy manipulation. A word or phrase was written to indicate the essence of each unit. These formed a set of initial categories of opinion referred to by parents.

The data cards were compared, grouped and taped under each of these categories. A new category was formed through the "look-like" process as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which involves comparing each data card with others already categorized to determine whether it fits those categories. If it doesn't fit, a new category is formed. Categories were established when four or more responses reflect the same ideas. These were considered reasonably common clusterings.

According to Goertz and Le Compte (1981) (cited in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) the above process allows for continuous refinement, changing or merging initial categories. The categories were refined by identifying the meaning carried in the cards. This process was also facilitated by making use of the basic questions used for the interviews.

VALIDITY

The important feature of the Constant Comparative method is that it provides an "audit trail" which can be followed to check the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Furthermore, to validate my research, parents were given feedback before the categories and their content could be finalized. According to Sarantakos (1993), this allows the judgement of the quality of the original findings. In other words, this was done so that the parents could confirm whether the research findings reflected the essential meaning they wanted to convey and also to delete anything that they felt may infringe on confidentiality.

There is, therefore some check that the findings are accurate reflections of people's opinions. The other aspect of validity is generalisability. A qualitative study of this kind makes the no claim that its findings are generalisable to a broader population. This was a case study of parents from a particular community, at a particular

school. It illustrates the diversity of perspectives which need to be taken into account rather than claiming to summarise a general view.

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CHAPTER FIVE: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Introduction

The interviews were conducted with 14 respondents with the purpose of investigating what parents believed to be the appropriate educational placement of their children with intellectual handicaps. In line with Constant Comparative method of qualitative data analysis, the results of the interviews were arranged according to the major themes which emerged, and their sub-divisions in order of prominence as recommended by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The results of the data analysis are presented below.

Research Findings

Broad issues covered in the interviews will be indicated with the letters A,B,C etc. Categories of opinion commonly expressed by parents about these issues will be indicated with the numbers 1,2,3, etc. Specific responses given by parents will be indicated with the Roman figures i,ii,iii, etc. The particular parent is indicated by the letter in brackets, for example, (A).

A. Current level of satisfaction

The following quotations reveal that some parents felt satisfied with the placement while the rest felt dissatisfied. They were most inclined to comment on physical well-being of their children and were satisfied in terms of special teacher attention. What caused concern was the lack of progress shown by their children in the school.

1. Good for child's physical and emotional welfare

- i. I am satisfied because he likes to go to school and that shows that he is happy there. He doesn't have any complaints about the school. (A)
- ii. Otherwise, I like the place because he is safe there. (B)
- iii. He sometimes tells me that he enjoys being at that school (C)
- iv. They are also given food and you don't hear the complaints that he took someone else's food (M)

2. Opportunity for special teacher attention

- i. He is a slow learner, so here he is getting special attention. (E)
- ii. Teachers from the special school have patience and care because they know they deal with children who are handicapped. (A)
- iii. Even the teachers are better because they know how our children function mentally and can accommodate that. (B)
- iv. I found that the teachers have care about our children. (C)

3. An alternative to "doing nothing"

- i. Yes I can say I am satisfied instead of seeing him out of school doing nothing. (B)
- i. It is better for him to be at this special school than to be at the normal school because they were rushing him. (E)

iii. It is better for her to be there than being at home doing nothing. (G)

iv. I like the fact that he is at school rather than staying at home and mix with bad friends when I am at work. (L)

4. Dissatisfaction with the lack of progress

i. I haven't seen any improvement and even her school report like that of a normal school because nothing is shown academically. (D)

ii. I cannot say I am satisfied because I haven't seen any improvement ever since he was admitted at that school. (G)

iii. But since he is now a grown up person , I don't see any skills he has acquired at school so far. (A)

iii. But since he is now a grown up person , I don't see any skills he has acquired at school so far. (A)

iv. But what dissatisfies me is the fact that he cannot write words and is not doing the way he should be doing. (B)

v. With regard to writing, I don't know whether he is worse when you compare him with others. (N)

vi. I can't say I am satisfied because I don't see what they are writing at school as this was the case in the ordinary school. (C)

vii. I am not satisfied with the education as he still can't write a,e,i,o,u and can't read. (K)

B. Level of education expected

The following quotations reveal that some parents had accepted the low level of achievement of their children while others had high expectations. In some cases it sounds as though parents don't have a hope because the school doesn't offer academic standards rather than because the child is understood to be incapable.

1. Child's potential

- i. I really don't know because when he started at the school we were told that he won't do classes like sub A, std 1,2,3. So I don't expect him all of a sudden to do sub A,B, std 1,2 and so on. I am expecting him to learn hand work. (A)
- ii. I don't have a hope because there are no standards like sub A and B on that side. (B)
- iii. It doesn't help to expect so much from the child as she can't reach a certain level of education like Std 10. (D)
- iv. According to the psychological assessment results, he cannot reach std 10 or matric because he has a poor concentration. (F)
- v. I am expecting her to reach a level where she would become a professional like a Social worker. (C)
- vi. I am not expecting very high from him. I only wish him to get matric but I don't know when. Since he can write I have hope that at that school he can make it up to std 10. (E)
- vii. I am expecting him to live in a similar way as other children. For example, if he wants to become a teacher he could that. (J)

- ix. Firstly, she can't fit in her peer group but can only fit in 2 or 3 or 4 year olds. (I)
- x. He has a short concentration span and sometimes he becomes aggressive

D. Parents' perceptions of the difference between a special school and an ordinary school.

The following quotations suggest that almost all the parents perceived the difference as related to teacher qualities. For example, they described the teachers from the special school as patient, caring and having special training for dealing with their children. The teachers from the normal schools are described as careless, impatient and lacking in awareness of how the children follow their lessons. In terms of the curriculum, parents expressed concerns about the content. They felt that it was not academic enough, but were happy about the relationship their children had with the teachers. They seemed disappointed about not knowing how their children are assessed. When they mentioned that point they said it twice.

1. Teacher Qualities

- i. The teachers from the special school have patience, care because they know they deal with children who are handicapped. (A)
- ii. Even teachers from the special school are better...because they know how our children function mentally and can accommodate that.

The teachers (from the normal school) just teach in order to finish the work and they don't consider the intellectual functioning of a child.

(B)

iii. Teachers from the ordinary school are not well trained to cater for the needs of our children. They don't have patience for these children . (C)

iv. Teachers from the special school...have special training to teach our children .

But the question is, will the teachers have patience for them .
(D)

v. The special school teachers can understand him. At the normal school... they were rushing him. They didn't notice that he needs time to understand something. (E)

vi. At the special school, the teachers have got patience. (H)

vii. The teachers can understand their condition and teach them properly. (N)

2. Learners/children

i. In a special school they deal with retarded or handicapped children. At the ordinary school, they deal with normal children who can read and write. (A)

ii. The special school is for children who are mentally handicapped, others are slow learners... (C)

iii. Those at a normal school are all right while those from the special school are handicapped. (E)

- iv. Children from the special school are very slow mentally and children from the ordinary school are taught how to write and they will not forget what they have been taught. (G)
- v. A special school is for children who are mentally retarded. (K)
- vi. A special school is for those who are handicapped. (M)
- vii. An ordinary school caters for normal children and a special school caters for those who need special care. (F)

3. Curriculum

- i. They just learn handwork and play...They are only taught how to be disciplined. (B)
- ii. What they are doing is to draw. Even the report doesn't indicate the subjects like Xhosa, Maths, English and being promoted to the next standard... The report only indicates how he behaves in the classroom, his cleanliness and his appearance. (C)
- iii. She must learn how to dress herself, to do things for herself at home, so that when I am dead, she could know how to take care of herself. She should not be a burden or a problem to others. I would be glad if she could learn domestic work. (D)
- iv. They don't teach but they are only concerned about practical skills more than basic education as they do at the ordinary school. (F)
- v. He learns handwork but they don't learn to write. They only show these children animals. (N)

- vi. I was expecting him to learn to write and to count like 1;2;3;4;5
. (G)

E. Attitude towards integration

The following quotations suggests that some parents were in favour of mainstreaming while others were not. A closer look at these quotations suggests that parents were not in principle against the mainstreaming and inclusion of their children with intellectual handicaps in the ordinary schools. Rather they were not satisfied about the poor conditions under which their children would be learning at the ordinary schools.

1. In favour

- i. They can be sent back provided all teachers from the special school could also be sent back with them. (H)
- ii. I would like her to learn like other children. (D)
- iii. I don't mind as long as he will be given a special attention at the normal school. (F)
- iv. I do agree with them on the basis that these children should not feel by being in a different school. (J)
- v. Yes I do agree with them as I feel that these children are excluded from the normal education. (N)
- vi. I like that, provided they will understand that he is slow, not stupid. (E)

2. Against

- i. I don't think they can cope in the normal school. (A)
- ii. They can't fit in the ordinary school as she was there before and I know how they teach. (C)
- iii. I don't want her to be taken back to the ordinary school. (E)
- iv. I can't say they must be sent back because she was at the ordinary school before and she couldn't cope. (G)
- v. I don't want him to be taken back to a normal school because he was there before and I know how they teach. (M)
- vii. These children are not the same intellectually, how can they be mixed. (K)

F. Changes proposed in the ordinary school

The following quotations indicate the changes some parents would like to see in the ordinary schools before allowing their children to be mainstreamed. The changes included educating the children from ordinary schools about the children with special education needs, having a special class within the ordinary schools and the changes in the curriculum in order to meet their children's special education needs. As already discussed, some parents also felt that teachers would need to change by caring and giving special attention to their (parents') children.

1. Educating children about special need

- i. The children from the ordinary school should be taught to deal with these children and not to tease them. (C)
- ii. The children from the ordinary school need to be taught about children with special education need so that they cannot label them as stupid. (D)
- iii. If children from the normal school could be taught to relate well with our children, this could be better. (G)
- iv. In the ordinary school, children should be taught not to tease our children. (H)
- v. Furthermore, the children from the normal school need to be taught about our children. (K)

2. Special class

- i. Within the ordinary school, they should have special classes where children can be taught hand work. (A)
- ii. There should be a class to accommodate our children. (H)
- iii. I think the class should have less children so that our children could get teacher special attention. (D)
- iv. I think they need to reduce the number of kids in the classroom to 12 so that the teacher could give each child special attention. (F)
- v. Our children should have a special class. (K)

3. Curriculum

- i. Within the ordinary school ... children can be taught hand-work.
(A)
- ii. I think hand-work or practical subjects must be introduced and they must have a workshop within the school. (B)
- iii. They should also be taught life skills that they can use in future. (H)
- iv. I wish special education could be compulsory in all the schools so that the teachers from the ordinary school could easily identify a child who is a slow learner and help him. (F)

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the range of beliefs that a certain group of South African parents held about the appropriate educational placement of their children with mild to moderate intellectual handicaps. Fourteen (14) parents of the above mentioned children attending a special school participated in interviews. At first, the results suggested that parents held negative attitudes towards the mainstreaming and inclusion of their children in the regular classroom. A closer examination of these parental responses, however, revealed that parents were not in principle against mainstreaming and inclusion. Rather, they were concerned about the poor conditions under which their children would be learning at the ordinary schools. In general, this study supported the findings of similar studies like Simpson and Myles (1989) that have reported that parents are in principle supportive of the mainstreaming and inclusion of their children, provided there are changes made in ordinary schools.

Several important concerns were raised by the parents. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, parents were concerned about teacher qualities in ordinary schools. Parents felt that teachers were too impatient to cater for their children's educational needs. For example, they indicated that teachers had to rush through the syllabus without accommodating their children's low intellectual functioning. This issue was also mentioned in research conducted by Bailey and Wanton (1987). The fact that parents mentioned regular classroom teachers' qualities as a concern, suggests that teachers would need to be trained in order to deal with these children by caring and giving them special attention.

When asked whether they were satisfied about the education their children were receiving at a special school, parents in this study indicated that they were satisfied. They mentioned that it was good for their children's physical and emotional welfare. For example, they indicated that their children were safe and enjoyed being at the special school. They also mentioned that their children were receiving special attention from the teachers. Although parents did not state clearly that these were significant benefits that have influenced them to consider a special school as a better place for their children, it suggested that these were important benefits that they would like their children to get should they be integrated in the regular classroom.

The second concern mentioned was about the acceptance of their children by the regular school children. For example, parents indicated that their children would be teased by the normal children. Parents felt that regular children should be educated about the children with special educational needs. Similar concerns were raised by the parents in a study by Simpson and Myles (1989) where parents were concerned about the possibility of negative interaction with peers.

Another concern was about the ordinary school curriculum which they felt is only focusing on academic subjects, making it difficult for their children to benefit as it did not accommodate children with low intellectual functioning. This may be one of the reasons why parents felt that their children had not made progress in the ordinary school and thus found it difficult to believe that their children would cope in the regular classroom. In a study by Kidd and Hornby (1993) parents were also concerned about the demands which academic work in mainstream schools made on their children. This was because parents felt that the nature of their children's intellectual functioning was different from that of regular classroom children. They saw the difference as relating to their children's low intellectual functioning.

But parents did not want only practical subjects. Although parents acknowledged the services their children were receiving and their happiness at the special school, they were concerned about its curriculum which they felt was not challenging enough for their children. Parents expected the curriculum to also include the academic subjects. For example, they indicated that their children couldn't read and write and that there were no progress reports obtained at a special school which were similar to the ones they used to receive in ordinary schools.

During the interviews, some parents expressed their awareness of their children's low intellectual functioning, but some parents had unrealistic expectations about their children's level of academic achievement. For example, they expected their children to make academic progress and follow the academic stream. This suggested that some parents have a sense that if the school had done something different their child would have achieved more academically. It seems as if some parents do not really realise what is meant by intellectual handicap. There is therefore a need for parent education about intellectual handicap.

When asked to indicate the kind of changes they would like to see for them to allow their children to be integrated into the regular classroom, parents felt that regular education children needed to be taught about the special needs children. Parents also felt that regular education teachers should change by caring and giving special attention to their children. They felt that teachers needed to be trained in order to deal effectively with their children.

Parents also indicated that there should be a special class in the ordinary school so that their children would be able to get special attention from the regular education teachers. The inclusionists would not favour this. Curriculum changes were also considered to be an

important modification which would persuade parents to be positive about integration. They indicated that the curriculum in the ordinary school should not only focus on academic subjects. It should rather also include practical subjects and life skills.

CONCLUSION

In general, as has been found in other research studies, the parents in this study were not in principle against mainstreaming and inclusion of their children. Rather, they are at present not supportive of it as the conditions are poor at the ordinary schools for their children to learn. The parents who were at present not supportive of mainstreaming and inclusion were, however, ready to suggest changes that should be made in the ordinary school before allowing their children to be integrated in the ordinary school. In addition one may speculate from this data that uneducated parents have incomplete understanding of the implications of intellectual handicap and retain the belief somewhere that appropriate teacher could make more of a difference to their child's intellectual functioning.

The implication of the findings

Most parents currently feel satisfied about their children's physical and emotional well-being in special school. This implies that there is a need to ensure physical and emotional safety in mainstream schools through teacher support and education. Engelbrecht (1994) indicates that handicapped children need a different structure and organisation of learning tasks are concerned. If this is correct, therefore, teachers will need to be more committed in their work to ensure that all children, regardless of disability, achieve their potential when educated in the ordinary classroom. The teachers will also need to be trained to deal with these children. This training must be

comprehensive and completed before the inclusion process takes place. If not, the conditions in the ordinary schools would remain the same and that would create frustration among parents of these children. In South Africa at present, classrooms are not stable, teachers feel insecure and the resources are not available in many cases.

Secondly, the findings in this study imply that some parents do not fully understand what is meant by intellectual handicap. There is therefore a need for parent education about this and simple material need to be developed for them in their own language. This is very important for the parents to understand as they are encouraged to be involved in their children's education.

Thirdly, parents are not in principle against mainstreaming but are at present not supportive of it. Therefore, arguments about inclusion need to be heard against the voices of parents from communities where the mainstream itself is in process of renewal. York and Tundidor (1995), writing about situation where the mainstream is well established, indicated that negative attitudes arising from the lack of skills, experience and training in the provision of services in the inclusive setting, may present a considerable barrier. In South Africa this is of particular concern.

Successful inclusion requires more than simply placing a child with intellectual handicaps in a regular classroom. It requires a restructuring of the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved and it requires educational planning, not only for the child with the disability, but also for families, educational authorities, teachers and mainstream children (Westby, Watson and Murphy, 1994).

whether the opinions of the parents of these children are comparable to the opinions of parents in other parts of the country.

The value of this research is in its calling attention to the range of ways in which parents may perceive special needs education, and the need to take these perceptions into account.

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APPENDIX: (Example of an interview)**INTERVIEWEE A**

This is a full record of an interview except that some things have been taken out to respect confidentiality. The pauses in the conversation are not shown and the text is slightly shorter because it has been translated. The interview took 30 minutes.

The interviewer will be indicated with the letter Q, while the interviewees will be identified by their code letters which were allocated during the data analysis and used in the text.

- Q: Are you satisfied with the education your child receives at the special school?
- A: I am satisfied because I can see they are being cared for. But since he is now a grown up person, I don't see any skills he has acquired at the school so far. May be he is still young for me to expect that.
- Q: So you are satisfied with the education, but you are worried about the lack of skills he has acquired so far. Perhaps, what satisfies you about the education?
- A: I am satisfied because he likes to go to school and that shows that he is happy there. He doesn't have any complaints about the school
- Q: You also indicated that you are worried about the fact that he hasn't acquired skills so far. What kind of skills were you expecting him to acquire by being in that school?
- A: For example, now he is 18 years old and I was expecting him to have by now a definite career line to pursue even if it is handwork like carpentry, tailoring or any thing that can help him to survive. I would then know that there is a career field he is following that he could use in future.
- Q: You mean he hasn't acquired any hand-work skills.
- A: Yes, because he hasn't shown me anything that he has acquired at school and I don't think he has learned anything except minor things.
- Q: What minor things he has learnt at the school?

- A: He likes to write his name but he doesn't do things like maths and science.
- Q: What do you mean when you say they are just minor?
- A: It is because he likes to draw things that are not important and sometimes you can't tell what it is that he is drawing.
- Q: Since your child is at that school, what other things are you expecting him to learn ?
- A: I am expecting them to teach him skills that will be suitable for him, the skills he has an interest on.
- Q: You are expecting them to teach him skills. Perhaps what level of education do you expect him to reach?
- A: I really don't know because when he started at the school we were told that he won't do classes like sub-A, std 1,2,3. So I don't expect him all of a sudden to do Sub A,B, Std 1,2 and so on. But I am expecting him to learn hand-work.
- Q: So you mean you don't expect him to reach sub-A and other standards.
- A: Yes, because we were told that he won't do classes as children from the normal school do.
- Q: What things were you told that he will learn at the school?
- A: Firstly, our child is not in the same intellectual level as the normal kids. For example, when he started there, he could not dress and wash himself. I was expecting him to be taught how to do those things when he was still young. As he becomes older I was expecting him to learn other things.
- Q: From the ones you have already mentioned, are there any skills he has already been taught?
- A: Yes, he can wash and dress himself. For example, he can make food for others at home.
- Q: In other words, you say he has learnt life skills.
- A: Yes.
- Q: Do you see any improvement since he has been at the school?

A: There is no progress, maybe I am impatient. I am not fully satisfied about his progress because we were told that when he is 18 years old he will be transferred to another school where he will learn more skills. I am worried now because he will be 18 years old and I haven't heard anything from them.

Q: You are worried because you don't know what will happen when he is 18 years old.

A: Yes

Q: How different is your child from children attending a normal school?

A: He is different, for example, I was told that he is a Down's Syndrome child. The way he talks is different and sometimes we also become confused when he talks at home.

Q: You say that when he talks he doesn't make sense to you.

A: Yes and we just assume that he wants to say this and that.

Q: Besides that, what is the other difference?

A: He watches TV a lot and imitates the actors. He is also low intellectually. For example, he can't count money and write his name. His memory is poor, he can keep things for few minutes in his memory.

Q: He is slow intellectually.

A: Yes.

Q: Perhaps, what do you think is the difference between a special school and an ordinary school?

A: In a special school they deal with handicapped children. At the ordinary school they deal normal children who can read and write. But I don't think he can cope in the ordinary school because the teachers are impatient to help these children as they are different from normal children. The teachers from the special school have patience and care because they know they deal with children who are handicapped.

Q: In other words you that the teachers from special school have patience while those from the ordinary school are impatient.

A: Yes.

Q: Other people say that these children should be integrated in the ordinary school, what is your view about this?

A: I would like to comment only about my child. As I have already said that intellectually they are not the same, I don't think they can cope in the normal school. This is because he will be teased by other pupils from the normal school. The teachers from the ordinary school are impatient to look after our children. The teachers will just continue with the lessons without giving special attention to them because they don't have time to do that as they have many classes.

Q: You say that your child cannot cope in the ordinary school.

A: Yes.

Q: What needs to be change in the ordinary school for you to agree to send your child back to the ordinary school?

A: Within the ordinary school, they should have special classes where children can be taught hand work. They can only be allowed to mix with normal kids only during lunch time. They also need to have qualified teachers who are trained to deal with these children.

Q: Could you please explain this further?

A: For example, if there is a music period, they should be taught only by a music teacher.