**Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University**

*for tomorrow*

# Supportive Strategies for Teachers and Parents who deal with learners experiencing mild intellectual barriers to learning
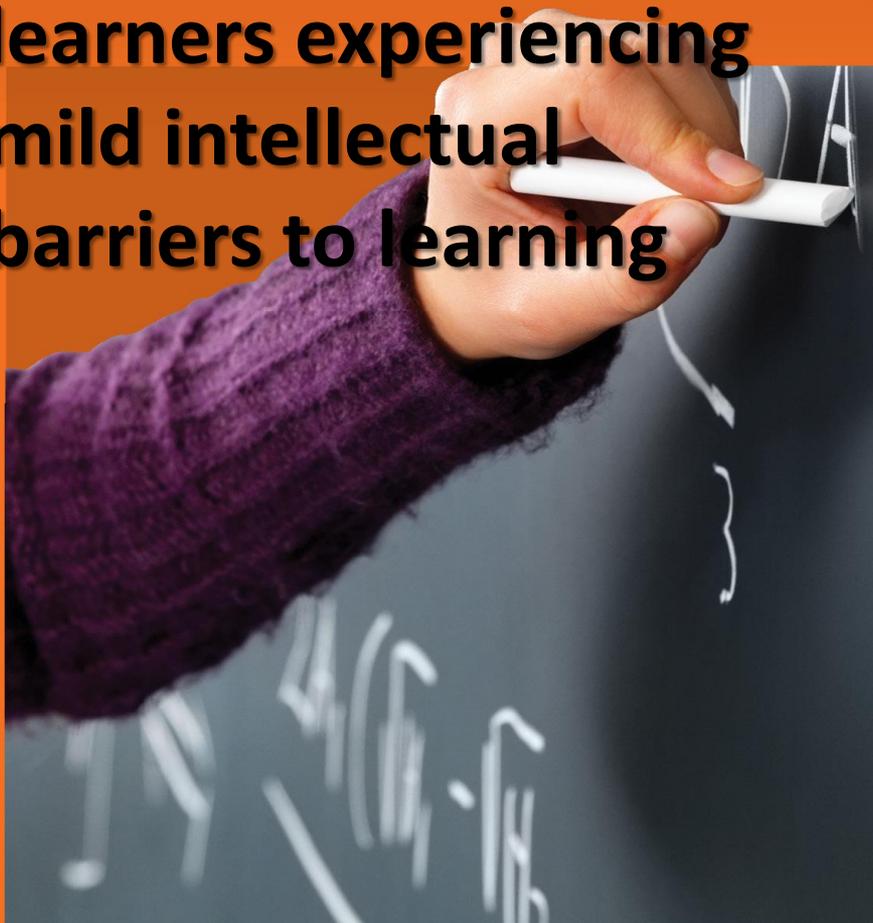
- Within the diversity of learners attending schools in South Africa, there is a likelihood that some learners may experience Mild intellectual barriers to learning. Learners who experience *Mild intellectual barriers to learning display significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour (AAIDD, 2010:6).*

- Significant changes have taken place since the adoption of Education White Paper 6 (2001), including the proclamation which entitled all learners to the right to equal and quality education (Mitchell, 2008) together with their peers and in mainstream schools located in their neighbourhoods (Phasha, 2010). This pronouncement declared that all learners, regardless of special needs or barriers, such as mild intellectual barriers to learning, have the right to be educated in mainstream schools.

- The changes effected by Education White Paper 6 (EWP), also include the acknowledgement of the central role that parents and teachers occupy in the education process as indicated in Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001:7).

- **However**, Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002; 2010) observed that **(education)** models inherited from the past still have a pervasive effect on the ground. This is partly because South Africans were exposed to a pedagogy of domination for a long period of history, and the effects of these beliefs and teachings are still engrained in the minds of some of its people (Phahsa, 2010).

- Thus, transformation to a pedagogy of inclusive Education (Mampane, 2015: 105) to support learners who experience mild intellectual barriers to learning, their parents and teachers, is not without challenges.

- Researchers have observed that the implementation of inclusive education practices, particularly in South Africa, experiences major obstacles with regards to large classes, negative attitudes towards learners who experience barriers to learning, a lack of support services, rigid teaching methods, and a lack of parent involvement (Mitchell, 2008:28; Walton, 2011; Walton & Lloyd, 2011; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel & Tlale, 2015).

- However, while the Education White Paper 6 acknowledges the central role that teachers and parents occupy in supporting learners with special educational needs, such as those who experience Mild intellectual barriers to learning, *there is an existing gap in the conversion of such policies to practice by means of strategies to support teachers and parents.* Therefore this study investigated this gap to propose strategies for supporting teachers and parents who deal with learners experiencing Mild intellectual barriers to learning.

- **AIM OF THE STUDY**

- The main aim of this study is to determine what strategies can be proposed for teachers and parents dealing with learners with Intellectual Barriers in the primary schools in the Nelson Mandela Metropole.

- SUB-AIMS

- To determine the implications the policy of Inclusive Education holds for learner support in schools.

- To establish how Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory can assist with the understanding of the provision of support.

- To determine the roles of teachers and parents in learner support in the primary school.

- To establish how teachers can support all the learners to overcome their barriers to learning in the primary school, especially those who experience Intellectual Barriers?

- To establish how primary school teachers can provide parents with guidance to help them support the learning of their children with intellectual barriers?

- The study was conceptualised within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) eco-systemic framework.

- Several researchers assert that Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system's theory remains an important model to support the connection between the home and the school systems (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2002:51; Nel, Nel and Hugo, 2013:11; Pienaar and Raymond, 2013:19; Springate and Stegelin, 1999:16).

- Within an education system which depends on support provision, such as inclusive education,  such support encompasses the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems if it is to be successful.
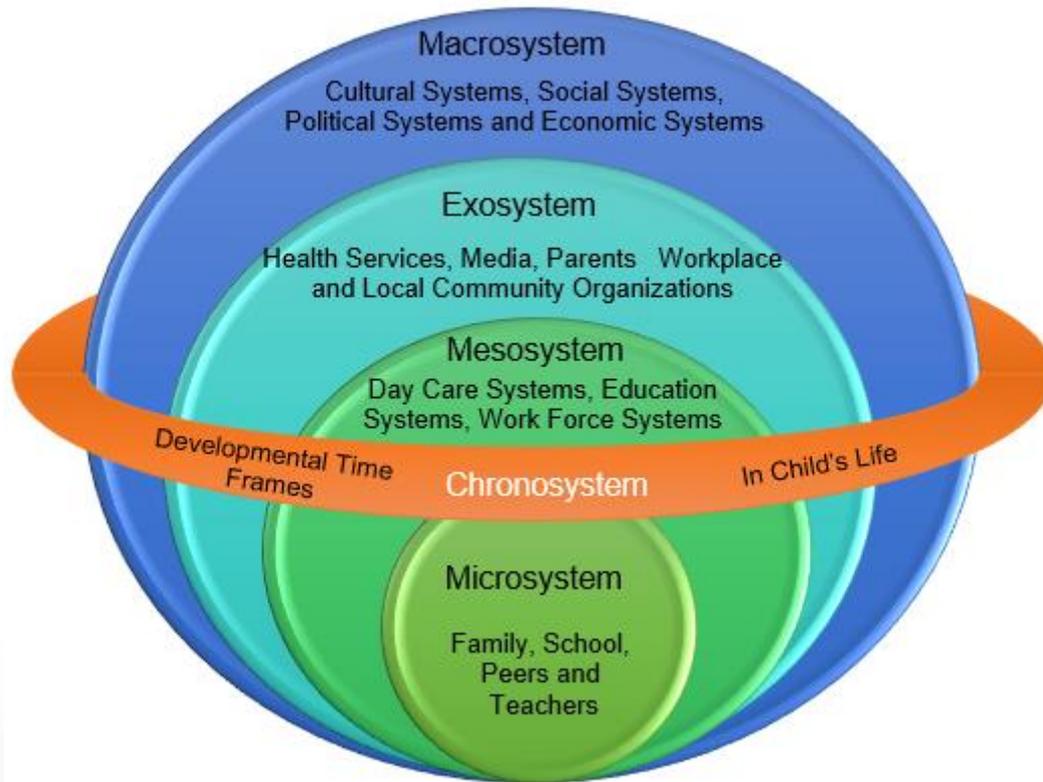
- For the purpose of this research, the researcher utilised a qualitative research design within an interpretive paradigm, from an ontological perspective that the reality (of participants' perceptions) is subjective and can only be constructed through the emphatic understanding of the research participants' meaning of their life worlds (Fouche and Shurink, 2011, 309-310).

- Sampling: the sample consisted of four teachers and four parents from two different primary schools in the lower socio-economic Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth, renowned for social problems which impact negatively on education provision and support. The researcher employed a combination of judgement, convenience and purposive sampling techniques.

- The researcher utilised semi-structured interviews with both teacher and parent participants, according to a predetermined interview schedule.  These interviews were held at the respective schools and the participants were interviewed individually. These interviews continued until the data was saturated.

- After the data was collected, the researcher enlisted the help of the co-researcher to analyse the data for the sake of corroborating the researcher's findings and confirming consensus regarding the authenticity of participants' responses. The co-researcher is also an expert in the field of Educational Psychology.

- The researcher and co-researcher employed Tesch's (1990:154-156) eight step analysis process to analyse the data, and to organise them into emerging themes and subthemes independently of each other. This was done to improve the validity and reliability of the emerging themes.

**Table 5.1 Presentation of the emergent themes and sub-themes of the study**

| THEMES | SUB-THEMES |
|---|---|
| **Theme 1**<br><br>**Challenges in dealing with leaners who experience Mild intellectual barriers to learning** | • Challenges with the curriculum<br><br>• Challenges with assessment<br><br>• Challenges with the implementation of Inclusive education principles |
| **Theme 2**<br><br>**Participation of parents in the education of their children who experience Mild intellectual barriers to learning** | • Participants' feelings about their roles in the education of their children who experience Mild intellectual barriers to learning<br><br>• Participants' feelings about their participation in the education process |
| **Theme 3**<br><br>**The need for collaboration between significant stakeholders in the interest of the learner who experiences Mild intellectual barriers to learning** | • Collaboration amongst teachers and parents at school<br><br>• Collaboration amongst teachers and their colleagues<br><br>• Collaboration with the Department of Education<br><br>• Collaboration with professionals |

- All the participants indicated that they experience challenges with the learners who experience Mild intellectual barriers to learning. These challenges range across all the aspects of the schooling of these learners and includes all the eco-systems identified by Bronfenbrenner (1979:6-8, see also section Chapter 2.4 of Chapter 2) that are involved in these learners' lives, both at home and at school.

- In terms of content and experiences of the different stakeholders, there are unique perceptions held by these groups as a result of the roles they play in the lives of these learners.

- All participants acknowledged that they experience challenges with the current curriculum and its applicability to learners who experience Mild intellectual barriers. Various practical and philosophical reasons for their claims were provided in evidence of their strong assertion of their responses. Teacher 1, School A stated profoundly that: **"*The curriculum does not cater for learners with barriers"*.** When prompted to explain, the participant responded that there is only one curriculum and not an additional curriculum for learners with Mild intellectual barriers.

- The responses gathered from teacher participants on this subtheme indicated that they experienced challenges with assessment as a process in the education of learners with Mild intellectual barriers to learning. Feelings of frustration were evident in the responses of the teachers, particularly concerning the curricular expectations with regards to assessment practices.

- The responses dealing with implementation of inclusive education from both parents and teachers indicated that they experience varying degrees of implementation of inclusive education at the schools which participated in this study. Thus, both groups still experience challenges with the implementation of inclusive education, as is evident in the following responses. Teacher respondent 1 School B declares: *"At the moment they are doing that inclusive education where the special learners are supposed to be accommodated by us."*

- All the parent participants indicated that they feel that they have a responsibility towards their children and are committed to involving themselves in the education of their children at school. The feelings of these parent participants were encapsulated in the declaration of Parent participant 1 School A: *"Ek sal enigiets doen om te help, meneer. Ek het die juffrou ook gesê ek sal enigiets doen."[I will do anything to help. I also told the teacher that I will do anything].*

- Teachers need support to make the paradigm shift to Inclusive Education in order to understand its philosophy towards learners who experience Mild intellectual barriers to learning and to welcome such learners in their mainstream classrooms. This should be encouraged during staff meetings on a monthly basis.

Nelson Mandela
Metropolitan
University

for tomorrow

- Parents need to be educated by teachers about their exact roles are and what is expected from them to support the learning of their children who experience Mild intellectual barriers to learning. Such education should encompass the full spectrum of educational needs, including curricular, assessment and behavioural support. In this regard, parents should be encouraged to create a home environment conducive to learning. These activities can be done when parents collect their children's reports at the end of a term during parent meetings.

- Principals of schools should capture the spirit and philosophy of Inclusive Education in their schools' mission and vision statements and admission policies.  This should be communicated with the SGB at all parent meetings in order for all members in the micro and mesosystems to become aware of the school's commitment to implementing Inclusive Education.

- All these concepts encompass a spirit of Ubuntu. If relevant stakeholders do not adopt a spirit of Ubuntu in their dealing with learners who experience Mild intellectual barriers, much of the recommendations in this study will not come to fruition. Creating a welcoming, caring, accommodating society starts with education, as is aptly stated in the following quotation:

- *"Inclusive, good quality education is a foundation for dynamic and equitable societies" (Archbishop Emeritus, Desmond Tutu).*

- *Thank you very much for your participation.*