Academic gains of students with special needs in an independent religious school

Ivanka Saric
Edith Cowan University

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ABSTRACT

The number of children who are performing poorly in school-wide tests seems to be increasing in an independent religious school in the metropolitan area. Several children have been identified "at risk" or having special needs but they seem to show little if any improvement as they get promoted to higher grades. The study investigated the instructional and assessment strategies that upper primary school teachers were using in their classrooms to improve the academic and social skills of children defined as having special needs. Teachers' perceptions were examined to determine whether there had been any observable increases in the academic performance of students from years five to seven. Attitudes that teachers displayed towards the school were also studied in relation to the effect that they had on children with special needs. Teachers' reported that the design and implementation of both instruction and tests were found to inhibit full inclusion of children with special needs. Religious and structural restrictions placed on children with special needs were also found to impede their academic success. The discussion focused on the instructional and assessment strategies that teachers perceived would benefit the academic achievement of children with special needs. Ways of overcoming the restrictions placed on teachers' use of instruction and assessment strategies were also examined.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

(iii) Contain any defamatory material.

Candidate's signature:

Date: December 9, 2002.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Concern is growing in a metropolitan independent school in regard to the level of progress children with special needs are making throughout their years of primary school education. Many of these students have not been diagnosed as "disabled" but are consistently receiving results that are below 50% on fortnightly tests, some as low as 0%. Over the years of primary school education, there seems to be little if no progress made by many children with special needs that constantly get the same below standard grades indicated by student records. Teachers report that many low achieving students have low attendance records. Year seven teachers are faced with students who cannot read and write at an age appropriate level, with many falling below year two level standards. In the school, children's standards are measured on a term basis using six main tests: The Holborn Reading Scale, The South Australian Spelling Test, The Wood and Lowther Math Test; and NSW English, Mathematics and Science Tests (Rutherford-Bryant, 2000).

The Department of Education in Western Australia defines children with special needs as those "with an intellectual or physical disability, a sensory impairment or autism" (Policy guidelines for the education of students with disabilities, 1993, p. 27). Slavin and Madden describe children with special needs as those "who [are] in danger of failing to complete his or her education with an adequate level of skills" (1985, p. 4). In the context of this study, children with special needs are defined as those children who consistently receive marks in tests below 50%; find it difficult to concentrate in class; display either disruptive or withdrawn behaviour, and cannot grasp concepts after repeated demonstration and explanation.
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study is that by identifying teachers' perceptions of the reasons as to why students with special needs consistently get low marks it will be possible to outline and implement strategies to improve the academic and social achievements of these children. Academic achievement encompasses classroom learning, student work output and social interaction. Social achievements involve children with special needs working in collaborative groups, and interacting positively with their peers and teachers. The study examines established models of teaching focusing on curriculum based measurement strategies. Due to the fundamentalist religious nature of the school, some of the strategies explored may be opposed to the philosophy of the school.

The results of this study, therefore, provide a broad framework for teachers to evaluate their teaching practices and encourage the school to put structured systematic programs into place that would help children with special needs to succeed academically and socially.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

All children, including those with special needs, are educated in regular primary classes within this school. Inclusion occurs when children are placed in general classrooms with regular children for most (if not all) of their education (Woolfolk, 1995). Researchers such as Salisbury, Gallucci, Palombaro and Peck (1995); Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dylan, Wasik, Shaw, Mainzer and Haxby (1991); and Garalnick, Connor and Hammond (1995) believe that an important advantage of inclusion is the social interaction that occurs between children with disabilities and children without disabilities. Inclusion could affect children with special needs positively as they would be given access to the same educational structures as their "normal" peers despite what they could or could not do (Wisniewski & Alper, 1994). Teachers' perceptions of the results of the fortnightly reports over the past three years in this school, however, has shown that children with special needs are not improving in an observable or statistical way.
The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions as to why this may be happening and to identify ways to improve:

(i) the academic achievement of students in real terms such as improvements in literal, inferential and evaluative comprehension, and

(ii) the transfer and generalisation of knowledge.

It examined ways in which the restrictive religious school environment could be modified (without ignoring religious doctrines) to best suit the requirements of children with special needs and what teachers can do within the classroom at one independent school in Perth, WA.

The study also examines (from the point of view of teachers) whether the self-esteem of these students was affected from continuously performing poorly and being perceived as "failures" (Beane, 1982). Such self-perceptions may not encourage increased academic performances but decrease performance, which may be reflected in the static performance levels of students and generally poor classroom behaviour across three grades of primary school. Teachers' perceptions of the effect of low self-esteem on classroom behaviour and achievement were also examined.

The study is mainly qualitative in nature (with quantitative data informing the qualitative data) and focuses on teachers' perceptions of the problems they encounter when teaching children with special needs in a religious independent school. While the study is confined to a fundamentalist religious school in Western Australia, the theory of role conflict that emerged outlines the problems associated with conflicting ideologies between schools and teachers which provides a new perspective on the central research question of teachers' perceptions of why children with special needs continue to fail in any educational environment.
OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

In the context of this study, an independent religious school refers to a school that is only partially funded by state and federal government educational departments and provides alternative curricula that is religiously based.

Fundamentalist religions involve a movement away from the new age movement that is optimistic and utopian (Saliba, 1999). Fundamentalist religions oppose the acceptance and recognition of different religions and spiritual beliefs and encourage a literal interpretation of sacred texts wherever possible with no consideration given to the historical context in which it was written (Thornhill, 1990). Fundamentalist schools rely on the literal teaching of sacred texts, for example the Bible.

HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL

The school is a fundamentalist religious institution that has three campuses north, south and east of the Swan River, in Perth, Western Australia. There are 895 students enrolled in the primary school which operates across all three campuses and 250 students in the secondary school which is only operating at one campus. Primary school students receive seven sessions related to different subject areas per day. For primary school children from kindergarten to year seven, the school day consists of seven and a half hours. All students receive seven 40 minute sessions of religion and associated language studies per week. The religion lessons are given by non-educationalist religious staff who have some knowledge of the religion or have spent time studying the religion. Often, religious classes are unstructured and consist of students reading the religious texts by themselves. Religious classes are often divided so that one religious staff member will work with the “weaker” children and the other with the “stronger” children. All children spend 20 minutes per day in prayer after lunch.
Religious restrictions are imposed upon both staff members and children. Music, various art forms such as drawing or painting certain subjects and theatre are discouraged or strictly forbidden. Physical education is not regarded as a priority and the programs run are poorly structured and do not cater for a variety of skills.

The school has no qualified remedial teachers but often people are employed to teach children who are performing badly in class. These staff members are almost always non-educationally trained (except for two remedial teachers in the secondary school) and have their degrees in other disciplines such as accounting. Remedial programs are only implemented sporadically throughout the school year depending on the availability of staff members. Students who perform poorly in class are withdrawn and sent to “remedial” staff members to receive additional tuition with little or no liaison with class teachers.

Many of the students in the school are from non-English speaking backgrounds so the school is classified as largely ESL. Prior to 1998, all primary classes were streamed so that students performing below age levels were placed in “B” level and those working at appropriate age levels were placed in “A” level, for example, 7A and 7B. This system was abolished in 1998 due to concerns that students in “B” levels across the primary school were not improving academically and displaying miscreant behaviour.

Empirical results are emphasised by the school, which includes testing children from kindergarten to year seven fortnightly on the subjects of language, mathematics, science and social studies. The teachers in each grade level construct the tests jointly and all children in a particular grade level receive the same test. Fortnightly testing seems to have had no positive long-term impact on students that have been identified as having special needs. The school has decided that a result of below 60% means that the student requires remediation and they are sent to the computer room to work on computer software packages, **EDU Math** or **EDU English** with no liaison with the classroom.
teacher. According to the principal of the school, the 60% benchmark appears to be randomly chosen having no legitimate reasoning behind it other than student test results.

Parental involvement was minimized in the school and there was no P& C or board to which the school was accountable. Parents need to be involved in the education of children with special needs (Bjork-Akesson & Granlund, 1995).

A hierarchy had developed within the school system where the owner or administrator of the school was responsible for all budgetary matters, parent complaints and personnel problems concerning the three primary campuses and the high school. The principal was responsible for matters concerning the primary schools and the headmaster was responsible for those concerning the high school. As this study is concerned with the primary schools, only the hierarchy of the primary schools is discussed. The principal had appointed four heads of primary, two in Campus A, one in Campus B and one in Campus C. The heads of primary were responsible for overseeing that the directions of the principal were carried out in each campus.

While the principal of the school held a Master of Education degree, the owner of the school and the two heads of the secondary school held degrees in fields other than education. In many cases, the principal has reported being confined by the non-educationalist views of the owner of the school who was ultimately in charge of all final decisions. The principal has indicated that on many different occasions the owner of the school vetoed decisions that were made. This made it difficult for the principal to operate the school in an educationally appropriate manner.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The central research question and subsequent subsidiary questions were specifically linked to the instructional and assessment models used by classroom teachers when
teaching children with special needs and the restrictions imposed upon them by the school.

The central question underpinning the study is:

What do teachers perceive as being the main reasons as to why students with special needs consistently get low marks throughout primary school education with little or no improvement?

The following four subsidiary questions were developed to answer the central research question.

1. What are the current instruction and assessment strategies being used by teachers and do teachers believe that these practices are effective in helping children with special needs achieve academically?

2. Do teachers view curriculum based measurement strategies as important to ensuring the academic success of children with special needs?

3. Do teachers believe that academic performance of students with special needs is best served by frequent formal testing and do the tests actually reflect the students' acquisition of knowledge?

4. Do teachers believe religious restrictions on learning impede the success of children with special needs in this environment?
An investigation of the literature has identified models of instruction and assessment that have been found effective in improving the academic and social achievement of children with special needs. The models proven to be most effective when teaching children with special needs are direct instruction, Individual Education Plans, curriculum based measurement and computer aided learning.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter one has provided an overview of the study. Chapter two provides a review of the literature in relation to instruction and assessment strategies that are used by teachers to teach children with special needs in inclusive educational environments. The importance of considering the requirements of children with special needs from non-English speaking backgrounds is also examined. The theoretical background, conceptual framework and data gathering techniques are discussed in Chapter three. Chapter four present the data analysis of the subsidiary research questions in order to answer the central research question. A discussion of the findings in relation to the central research question, implications of the study and suggestions for further research are provided in Chapter five.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review considers models of instruction and assessment that have been identified as having positive affects on the achievement of children with special needs (Beane & Lane, 1990; Cole & Chan, 1990; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986; Phillips, Hamlett, Fuchs & Fuchs, 1993).

Both instruction and assessment strategies are vital to teaching children with special needs. The academic performance of children with special needs is often poorer than children who operate at an age appropriate level in class. This may be due to problems associated with giving these children the extra instructional time that they need in an inclusive classroom (Westwood, 2000; Jenkins, Pious & Jewell, 1990). Even though children with special needs require more instructional time, however, the benefits that these children receive in terms of imitation skills which lead to parallel play, social and reciprocal skills are essential to their development (Guralnick, Connor & Hammond, 1995). Karge, McClure and Patton (1995) indicate that if children with special needs are exposed to their non-disabled peers, they can observe socially acceptable behaviour and become motivated to achieve higher order thinking skills and better academic results.

Five models of instruction and assessment are reviewed in relation to teachers’ perceptions of their effectiveness in helping to improve the academic achievement of students with special needs. The models of instruction and assessment reviewed include traditional methods of instruction that involve unsystematic strategies, direct instruction, curriculum based measurement and computer aided instruction. Many of these instruction and assessment strategies overlap and can be used in conjunction with each other.
TRADITIONAL METHODS OF INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

Traditionally, assessment of children with special needs was aimed at testing what students know and don’t know but not at helping educators ensure that students had mastered learning. Phillips, et al., (1993) propose that it is essential to find alternative methods of assessing students due to the increasing number of students with special needs entering mainstream educational settings. Assessment needs to be relevant to all students and able to provide students and teachers with feedback that will enable teachers to improve student learning. According to Ysseldyke, Algozzine and Thurlow (2000), traditional methods of instruction and assessment do not take into consideration the learning differences of children with special needs.

Most procedures currently used in schools are based on unsystematic instruction and assessment using worksheets and unreliable teacher-made tests that do not correspond directly to curriculum requirements (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986). These traditional assessment strategies tend to focus on norm-referenced approaches that highlight individual learning deficits rather than what educators and learners can do to change deficient behaviours (Jitendra & Kameenui, 1993). Traditional methods of instruction and assessment fail to use inclusive practices that enable students to progress along a developmental continuum at their own learning pace (Munro, 1999). Westwood (2000) states, however, that many traditional methods of instruction and assessment such as the use of phonics and cloze exercises, amongst others, can be effective when teaching children with special needs in the general or inclusive classroom. In practice, children with special needs are often unable to keep up with the learning pace of their non-disabled peers in a general classroom using traditional methods of instruction and assessment. According to Kerns, Childs, Dunlap, Clarke & Falk (1994) traditional methods do not use systematic functional assessments that ensure children with special needs are achieving academically. When assessment is unsystematic, children with special needs often do not perform well and teachers cannot accurately measure actual academic gains that have been made. Unsystematic instruction and assessment
strategies can be defined as those having no clear rationale behind their implementation and difficult for other professionals to understand and implement (Cambourne, 1999).

Traditional methods of assessment are limited because they do not evaluate instructional strategies nor do they examine the direct effects of instruction on student academic growth (Jitendra & Kameenui, 1993). The evaluation of instructional strategies and academic achievement is vital to ensuring successful education for children with special needs. Such methods are more concerned with summative evaluation that leads to a preoccupation with product rather than the processes behind learning (Bransford, Delclos, Vye, Burns & Haselbring, 1987).

Constructivist approaches to teaching are often synonymous with traditional methods of instruction and assessment. Constructivist approaches to instruction rely heavily on students ‘discovering’ concepts, rules and cognitive strategies in the absence of carefully tested sequences of instructional units and explicit instruction from teachers; with minimal teacher correction of errors; and without an emphasis on distributed (planned) practice to the point of mastery - to ensure fluency, retention and independence (Kozloff, LaNunziata, Cowardin & Bessellieu, 2001, p. 54).

The main problem with traditional or constructivist methods of instruction and assessment is that the manner in which knowledge is acquired is often overlooked. Teachers using traditional methods of instruction often fail to delineate the steps involved in acquiring concepts, rules, cognitive strategies and skills. The relevancy of what is being taught is not made explicit so children with special needs are less likely to be able to transfer newly acquired knowledge to different settings.

Proponents of the constructivist view of education such as Driver (1989) and Fosnot (1996) argue that concept learning is a reconstruction of meaning based on the relationship between prior knowledge and what is experienced in the environment.
Children are encouraged to relate what has been newly taught and learnt to what they already know. This is a valid argument and is supported by Kozloff and Bassellieu who state "as children advance developmentally, instruction moves from more explicit (teacher directed) to more implicit (discovery) learning formats [such as those used in the constructivist approaches]" (2000, p.10). Teacher directed instruction is important because it enables students to learn how to discover new concepts, rules and relationships.

Traditional methods of instruction and assessment generally support the partial exclusion model, which involves students being taken out of the mainstream classroom and given special or remedial instruction (Ashman & Elkins, 2002). Arguably, taking children with special needs out of the classroom for remedial instruction gives them the opportunity to be taught concepts that they could not acquire in the general classroom environment. Ysseldyke, et al., (2000) consider exclusion to have a negative affect on the self-esteem of children with special needs in relation to academic achievement, how these children perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Frequently, children become withdrawn from and ostracised by, other children because they are perceived as different. In many instances, children with special needs miss out on valuable and relevant instruction in the general classroom while they are receiving remediation.

A study conducted in Australia from 1984 to 1989 by Center and Ward (cited in Avramidis, Bayliss & Burdon, 2000) found that traditional methods of education encouraged teachers to perceive the inclusion of children with special needs in a negative manner. These attitudes of teachers toward children with special needs were found to be a result of unsystematic school organization, lack of teacher training in using systematic instruction and assessment methods; and a lack of specialised resources.

Westwood (2000) identifies various positive instruction and assessment strategies in traditional methods such as modelling, self regulated learning and problem solving. Many of the traditional strategies of instruction and assessment are used in other more
systematic methods. Westwood states, "the use of [traditionally] unstructured, child-centred enquiry methods tends to make too many unrealistic assumptions concerning children's motivation and their ability to teach themselves" (Westwood, 2000, p. ix). Consequently, while traditional instruction and assessment strategies can be effective, they are only successful when applied in a systematic manner. This results from not taking into consideration what instruction children need in order to motivate them to learn and to be reflective learners.

Foshee, et al., (1991) believe that traditional methods of assessment are unreliable because they don't test students extensively enough to determine whether or not they have acquired the ability to generalise or transfer skills. Foshee, et al., (1991) insist that traditional methods tend only to train students how to perform in tests, rather than really testing them on whether they have mastered certain skills. A major problem facing educators who use traditional assessment methods is that they cannot only incorrectly classify students as needing remediation but that they do not suggest instructional strategies to improve academic learning. Curriculum Based Measurement, however, identifies what skills students have mastered and then suggests strategies to improve learning or mastery of skill deficiencies. Setting goals for students is an important part of the instruction and assessment process. Wesson (1991) posits that traditional goals are too vague and sees no evidence that traditional instruction and assessment methods improve student achievement, especially those with special needs.

Traditional methods of instruction can include instruction techniques such as teacher-directed teaching that can have a positive affect on the academic achievement levels of students with special needs (Simmons, Baker, Fuchs, Fuchs & Zigmond, 1995). This method of instruction can include explicit teaching or direct instruction that have been found by Pressley and McCormick (1995) to have a positive affect on the acquisition of knowledge by children with special needs. Direct and explicit instruction involves the teacher presenting concepts to students, guiding students' practice, providing feedback to students and providing students with the opportunity to generalise the newly acquired concept (Rosenshine, 1987). In addition, traditional methods also use other affective
strategies such as group work, drama, individual education programs, frequent testing, feedback and reinforcement for positive behaviours. While these strategies have been proven as effective, traditional methods of instruction and assessment tend to use them in an unsystematic and unrelated manner.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Direct instruction is a teaching strategy that can provide children with highly structured teaching sequences in a general classroom environment helping them to acquire concepts and other knowledge forms (Wisciewski & Alper, 1994). The use of modelling concepts, joint-construction of tasks and group work such as peer tutoring also enable children with special needs to receive adequate support in relation to knowledge acquisition. Kameenui and Carnine explain that:

Direct Instruction curricula are organised around big ideas...Big ideas are those concepts, principles, or heuristics that facilitate the most efficient and broadest acquisition of knowledge...Challenged [students] are likely to benefit from thorough knowledge of the most important aspects of a given content area (1998, p. 8).

While knowledge acquisition is important to the academic achievement of children with special needs, the ability to generalise or transfer newly acquired knowledge to different settings is just as important. Direct instruction strategies ensure that children with special needs have the opportunity to generalise newly acquired knowledge.

Direct instruction is based on instructivist approaches to education which focus on teaching children to acquire knowledge and is "guided by the concepts behaviour and learning" (Kozloff, et al., 2001, p. 60). Direct instruction involves teacher-directed guidance towards the mastery of skills based on the use of structured curricula, cues, target responses, practice, corrective feedback and continued evaluation of student performance.
Many children with mild intellectual disabilities have an inability to generalise. The perceived success of direct and explicit teaching is due to systematically teaching generalisation skills (Ward, Center & Bochner, 1994). Generalisation skills enable children to transfer what they have learnt to new environments. For example, Hayes and Conway state:

The generalisation of learned skills across environments has also been identified as a particular problem in the instruction and training of people with intellectual disability... This failure to generalise may, in part, be attributed to the difficulties that people with intellectual disability have in forming conceptual representations of learned stimuli and skills (2000, p. 218).

Consequently, in order to learn generalisation skills and apply them to different situations, this depends on a systematically explicit method of instruction. Constructivist methods of enquiry are opposed to direct instruction. Constructivist approaches to instruction and assessment are based on discovery learning with little interference from the teacher in terms of instruction and correction (Chall, 2000). The focus is not on mastering particular concepts and consequently can fail to lead to the retention of knowledge that allows for generalisation of skills across different environments. In a school environment where children are from a non-English speaking background and their language skills are poor, they will be unable to acquire the basic skills such as reading and reasoning which provide the framework for higher learning if teachers solely use constructivist methods of instruction and assessment. Arguably, in such an environment, children with special needs benefit more from focused, systematic, contextualised and explicit teaching.

A study by Simmons, et al., (1995) found that while teachers perceived direct instruction positively, they seldom used the procedure in their classrooms. The results of the study suggested that teachers needed to be extensively trained in order to use methods of direct instruction effectively that would lead to higher academic performance and achievement of children with special needs. Teachers needed to have confidence in their ability to
effectively use direct instruction to teach children with special needs in a general classroom environment.

Direct instruction is frequently criticized for being too teacher-centred and prevents students from using their initiative to discover and explore new concepts (Millar, 1989). Teachers direct most student learning with little opportunity for discovery other than independent practice of taught concepts which usually consists of worksheets. According to Kozloff and Bassellieu (2000), however, direct instruction incorporates many of the instruction and assessment strategies they consider important. They claim a variety of strategies are used in direct instruction.

Strategies used in direct instruction include small group work, the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction after each lesson based on an analysis of student performance and frequent systematic student feedback. Instruction is designed so students can actively construct meaning that is relevant to their environmental and cultural contexts, which enables them to transfer knowledge to different settings. The curriculum is meticulously planned and monitored according to ongoing analyses of student needs, while catering for social rules that govern socially acceptable behaviour. Curricula based on direct instruction generally follow a developmental progression of learning which leads to higher order thinking skills.

An important component of direct instruction is group work where children learn cooperatively in small groups. Studies have shown that group work (either peer groups or the teacher working with small groups of children) has a positive affect on the acquisition of knowledge for the child with special needs (Phillip, et al., 1993). Peer tutoring, which generally involves a more-abled student explaining concepts to a less-abled peer or peers, is often effective in enabling children with special needs to acquire and generalise new concepts (Phillips, et al., 1993).
All of these strategies have been claimed as effective for teaching children with special needs (Headley & Dunston, 2000). Lloyd (1997) conducted a comparative study of reading methods used to educate children with special needs and found that direct instruction was the most successful. Lloyd’s study, however, did not take into consideration factors such as non-English speaking backgrounds and the difficulties students with special needs might face in differing environments.

In summary, direct instruction has, therefore, been proven as an effective strategy to use when teaching children with special needs (Lloyd, 1997). The effectiveness of direct instruction results from the integration of various other strategies such as group work, individual student needs analysis, systematic assessment and a relevant curriculum.

**INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS (IEPs)**

Individual Education Plans (referred to in the United States and the United Kingdom as Individualized Education Programs) involve the preparation of an individualized, specially designed instructional program by teachers, psychologist, special educators and parents. IEPs are quite effective when implemented in mainstream classrooms (Smith & Brownwell, 1995). While IEPs are not intended to be plans for the total instruction of children with special needs, they are supposed to identify the agreed focus for the students programming that provides direction, not detailed teaching instruction (Tieppo, 2002). These plans need upgrading on a regular basis and allow the curriculum to be varied so that it meets the requirements of students with special needs. In the Australian context, Ashmann & Elkins define Individual Education Plans as:

a written commitment of resources and relevant services. It records the participants’ responsibilities, a management device that states goals and objectives and ensures the availability of resources and services, a statement of agreement by the stakeholders (e.g., parents and school staff), and an ongoing evaluation device for measuring student progress (2002, p. 63).
Rosenberg, Oshea and Oshea (1998) found that successful Individual Education Plans resulted from focusing on including children with special needs in the general classroom with their peer group and limiting withdrawing children for special instruction. Rosenberg, et al., (1998) proposed that a collaboration of specialist teachers such as the special education teacher, the physical education teacher and arts teacher, amongst others need to work closely together on teaching children with special needs. The general classroom teacher following the Individual Education Plan should direct all teaching.

Generally, successful instruction and assessment programs involve both teaching and assessing familiar, functional skills outlined in the curriculum (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986). By teaching and assessing these skills, children with special needs know what is expected of them, what goals they need to achieve and the steps needed to achieve those goals. Instruction and assessment components of the Individual Education Plan need to complement short-term and long-term goals that have been chosen by teachers based on dynamic assessment procedures (Jitendra & Kameenui, 1993). Goals are determined by functional systematic assessment, teacher and specialist observation. After a goal is determined for each student, their performance on a single “globe task” (Bean & Lane, 1990, p. 39) needs to be repeatedly measured and assessed over a set period of time. Based on goal measurement, instruction can be modified and children can receive more or less instruction depending on their needs (LeRoy & Simpson, 1996). In addition, objectives and goals can differ from student to student depending on their skill deficit and instructional needs. All assessment has to be highly relevant to what is occurring in the classroom, thus utilizing the children's knowledge of the curriculum and representing exercises that they encounter on a daily basis (Kameenui & Simmons, 1990). Consequently, relevancy of instruction and assessment is important if IEP instruction methods are to be successfully used in improving the academic performance of children with special needs.

Rothstein (1990) supports the view that the Individual Education Plan is vitally important in the special education process because the way it is implemented can
determine whether or not the child with special needs will achieve academically. There are, however, criticisms of Individual Education Plans. Criticism includes little or no relationship between the objectives of the general classroom curriculum and the objectives of the Individual Education Plan (Ysseldyke, et al., 2001). Such a disparity between objectives can place children with special needs at a disadvantage. Frequently, when the Individual Education Plan is implemented in the general school setting, there is inadequate specialist support and the documentation accompanying the plan is incomplete or poorly structured allowing for little or too much flexibility (Biklen, 1989). As a result, there is often little cooperation between support staff and the general classroom teacher.

Despite criticism, it can be deduced from the literature that most attitudes towards the effectiveness of the Individual Education Plan are positive (Kliwer & Landis, 1999; Westwood, 2000; Keel, Dangal & Owens, 1999). Westwood (2000) considers the Individual Education Plan as important in providing children with special needs with the best education possible. Individual Education Plans also hold service providers accountable and give parents or caregivers input into the education of their children.

CURRICULUM-BASED MEASUREMENT

Curriculum based measurement involves the ongoing systematic assessment of observable student behaviour and consequently, is an accurate measure of tasks students have and have not mastered. According to Shinn, Habedank, Rodden-Nord and Knutson, curriculum based measurement "provides a visible method for determining standards for satisfactory achievement in special environments" (1993, p. 204). This is done using very brief but direct measures of student achievement (in the form of small tests) that result in the establishment of very reliable criteria. Wesson (1991) believes curriculum based measurement are important when teaching children with special needs because measurement is directly related to instruction. Materials used in curriculum based measurement is also important because measurement is directly related to instruction. Assessment items used in curriculum based measurement are taken from the
Phillips, et al., (1993) have used curriculum based measurement in conjunction with class wide peer tutoring where students who had mastered skills taught in the classroom tutor students who had not mastered skills. They conducted a study of forty general education teachers involved in grades two to five. Each teacher had to identify one learning disabled child, one low achieving child and one average achieving child to represent three types of learners. Ten teachers were assigned curriculum based measurement with peer tutoring, ten teachers were assigned curriculum based measurement only and twenty teachers were assigned to the control group and received no curriculum based measurement. Phillips, et al., (1993) used computer-managed curriculum based measurement and peer tutoring in instruction to determine effects on student learning and outcomes. They found that by applying weekly tests, entering the scores into a computer database and giving credit for partially correct answers, students’ achievement could be systematically monitored. Each fortnight, students were given a computer generated graph and skills profile which described their performance over a two week period. The graph and skills profile were analysed by students thus enabling them to determine whether or not they had mastered a skill or whether more examples needed to be given.

The purpose of the graph and skills profile was to provide students with feedback and to teach them how to be reflective and analytical when it comes to their learning. Reflective questions encouraged students to learn transferable learning skills which regulated and affected how they learned. Consequently, students were encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Feedback to teachers was provided via a skills profile of each student accompanied by a graph. This was followed by a computer generated class graph and class skills profile outlining the 25th, 50th and 75th percentile scores of the teacher’s class tests throughout the year. The profile outlined possible instructional methods to teach whole-class and small groups. It also highlighted specific skills that individual students needed to work on and then suggested software to serve
this purpose. Trends of class performance were specified clearly via an analysis of the ranking of each student in the class. Consequently, it recommended students who could act as coaches (peer tutors) and those who needed help in acquiring skills initially taught in class (players).

Intervention involved class wide peer tutoring consisted of coaching and practice (Phillips, et al., 1993). Peer tutoring sessions lasted for approximately thirty minutes of class time, twice a week. An assignment was given to each coach and player and remained the same for two weeks. The content of the assignment was dependent on the coaches' grasp of skills matched to players' skill deficits. After the two week period, teachers received an updated skills profile which suggested ways of modifying assignments. It also enabled every child to act as a coach in a six month period.

The results of the test groups showed that students who received curriculum based measurement and peer tutoring achieved the biggest improvement in academic learning. The control group where teachers used traditional instruction and assessment procedures achieved very little improvement. Curriculum based measurement, in conjunction with peer tutoring, provided opportunity for children with special needs to interact with their non-disabled peers which ultimately lead to more confidence and the imitation of socially appropriate behaviours. Consequently, children with special needs not only benefited academically from Curriculum Based Measurement and peer tutoring, but also socially.

Biggs and Telfer (1987) found that peer tutoring and curriculum based measurement worked well in all subject areas for most children (not just those children with special needs). Curriculum Based Measurement and peer tutoring have been found to enhance metacognitive learning via teaching and encouraging the use of reflective questioning. This is especially important when teaching children with disabilities how to learn and providing them with techniques that will enable them to transfer knowledge and be more affective at generalising acquired knowledge. Crooks (1993) sees the implementation of
peer tutoring and Curriculum Based Measurement as aiding in developing strategies which are important to learning.

Conversely, studies by Brady, Shores, McEvoy, Ellis and Fox (1987) showed that not all students with disabilities respond well to peer tutoring and Curriculum Based Measurement academically. Peer tutoring may not be structured in a way that allows children with special needs to grasp concepts. Curriculum Based Measurement is often time consuming and the general classroom teacher cannot always implement it in a thorough manner due to the demands of their daily routine (Gickling & Thompson, 1985). This is due to the amount of data that needs to be collected and organised. In addition, Curriculum Based Measurement methods are more effective in helping students to acquire mastery in tasks that are a component of short term goals but less affective in measuring student progress to mastering long-term goals (Shapiro, 1996).

According to Cole and Chan (1990), peer tutoring should be encouraged in the form of closer contact between non-disabled students and children with special needs. They propose that this will only be effective if programmes are well prepared and suit the skills that need to be mastered. Also, instruction needs to be clear and based on data obtained from curriculum based measurement. This emphasises Brady, et al., (1987) findings that peer tutoring and curriculum based measurement increased the social interaction of disabled children because of their frequent collaborative grouping with their non-disabled peers.

Fuchs, Deno and Mirkin (1994) found that curriculum based measurement enabled and encouraged students to take a more active part in their learning. Curriculum based measurement was found to enable students to articulate their goals accurately and determine whether they would be able to achieve their goals. Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett and Allinder (1991) found that curriculum based measurement lead to the construction of better programs that are relevant to student needs. Curriculum based measurement is
seen as integral to instructional change and benefits children with special needs as it enables teachers to pinpoint children's areas of weakness.

Curriculum based measurement instruction and assessment strategies lead to more flexible instruction as this helps teachers to deal with students on an individual needs basis. This means that traditional instruction methods can be modified to include such things as non-verbal and pictorial modes of teaching which are dependent on teachers' evaluations of student needs. In addition, empirical evidence exists to support the notion that curriculum based measurement strategies increase student performance where skill deficits had previously existed (Wesson, 1991).

Consequently, curriculum based measurement is dynamic and can be incorporated into traditional methods of assessment to make them more reliable. The main advantage of curriculum based measurement methods over other instruction and assessment methods is that they are directly related to the curriculum and goals and reflect standardized skills that student should have acquired. Curriculum based measurement leads to the construction of better programs that are more relevant to student needs. Curriculum based measurement is integral to instructional change and benefits children with special needs as it highlights their areas of weakness, encouraging them to take a more active part in their learning.

COMPUTER AIDED LEARNING

The systematic use of educational computer software packages has had a positive impact on the academic performance of children with special needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986). Computer generated graphs and skills profiles for students can teach them how to be reflective and analytical when it comes to their own learning (Phillips, et al., 1993). Computer aided learning also provides teachers with class skill profiles and graphs that highlight specific skills individual children need to work on and then to suggest software designed to suit this purpose. Many computer programs such as the Basic Spelling Software automatically graph student performance, display graphs indicating student
performance, and student scores over a period of time, a goal line (starting at the base line), a line of best fit and then provide a skills analysis (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett & Allinder, 1991).

Computer software packages frequently enable students to improve a variety of skills such as word recognition, decoding, sentence completion, spelling, comprehension and numeracy skills (Westwood, 2000). Software identified by Ashman and Elkins (2002) such as Successmaker, Electronic spell-check, Write Out hand, Text Help and Penfriend help to provide students with information in graded steps. Each software package delineates the rules of the program and provides students with feedback in relation to their performance. This encourages students to engage in critical and reflective learning by evaluating their own progress toward the program. Montegue and Fonseca (1993) outline the importance of computer aided instruction in providing students with confidence in a variety of skills such as writing and comprehension.

Loughrey (cited in Westwood, 2000) found that children with special needs who used educational software had higher degrees of motivation to achieve academically than those who did not. Educational software was also found to give the greatest opportunity for students to engage in drill and practice exercises without boredom. It also helped children with special needs develop their ability to recall facts and keep up with their non-disabled peers.

The main problem associated with computer assisted learning is that children with special needs may find it difficult to transfer knowledge to different settings (Ashman & Elkins, 2002). It is important that students are given as many opportunities as possible to transfer what they learn via educational software to different settings.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS FROM NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUNDS
The lack of consideration for children with special needs from non-English speaking backgrounds is reflected in legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act (1992). No reference is made to children with special needs from non-English speaking backgrounds in this legislative document. This is in spite of the fact that Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) report that there are 5% of children with special needs in Australia who had some form of school restriction. A large number of those children were from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Report (2001) stated that 85% of children with special needs received some support but it did not indicate if that support was effective. In Western Australia the 1998 Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability and Ageing and Carers found that 16.8% of people had a disability and of those, approximately 6% were from a non-English speaking background.

According to Germanos-Koutsounadis (2001) children with disabilities from non-English speaking backgrounds have specific needs that are different from other children. Consequently, both cultural and linguistic factors have to be taken into consideration when developing instruction and assessment programs for children with special needs from non-English speaking backgrounds.

In conclusion, the five models of instruction and assessment that have been identified were traditional methods, IEPs, curriculum based measurement and computer aided learning. Even though these models of instruction and assessment have proven successful in general educational settings very little information exists in the application of these models to alternative school environments. In addition to this, these models have not been extensively applied to children with special needs from a non-English speaking background.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an account of the research design and methodology of the study. The chapter includes a theoretical framework for the study, the rationale for using curriculum based measurement as a main instructional and assessment program, and an explanation of the importance of focusing on teachers’ perceptions of instruction and assessment strategies. A description is provided of how the data were collected and analysed, the procedures used to validate the study and the limitations of the study. Finally, ethical considerations are made.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Grounded theory is the primary theoretical basis of this thesis. The importance of using grounded theory was that it enabled a contextualised diagnostic study of subjects and their environments and presented a more realistic view of what teachers in the school perceived children identified with special needs were actually learning and what could be done to improve the academic achievement of these children. Dick states that grounded theory “is explicitly emergent... It sets out to find what theory accounts for the research situation as it is” (2000, p. 4). Through interviewing teachers, it was possible to identify the recurring issues that could be coded by extracting them from interviews and the developing themes that formed a theoretical basis for the thesis.

Strauss and Corbin define grounded theory as being “inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents [where] data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other” (1990, p. 23). This reciprocity is employed in this research to allow inductive inferences and verification of emergent variables to be drawn through interviews with teachers, a focus group discussion and the questionnaire in order to come to a theoretical understanding of why children with special needs...
consistently get low grades throughout their primary education in the school. According to Glaser, grounded theory is "based on the systematic generating of theory from data [obtained from] social research" (1978, p. 2). Consequently, due to the religious context of the school in which children identified as having special needs was studied, grounded theory provided a foundation upon which embedded assumptions and biases preventing increased academic achievement of these children could be challenged and modified. It focused on social interaction, which was very important when observing and identifying the various classroom and social practices that occurred in the fundamentalist religious environment of the school.

A secondary quantitative-based questionnaire was used to inform the themes identified after the data had been collected. According to Hutchinson, "qualitative research should not be viewed as antagonistic toward or incompatible with quantitative methodologies" (1988, p. 132). The justification for using a questionnaire to reinforce the collection of data from teacher interviews was that teachers would be able to give their perceptions of the reasons why children with special needs were failing in the fundamentalist religious context of the school in an unbiased way due to the confidential and anonymous nature of the questionnaire.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the synthesis of the views of teachers as to why children identified with special needs are failing in the school (determined by consistent results of less than 50% in their fortnightly tests). The relationship between teachers' perceptions of various teaching models in use and advocated by the school are explored in light of the problems faced by children with special needs and the implementation (or lack of implementation of) curriculum based measurement strategies.

The concepts developed in Chapter Two served as a focal point that guided the interview questions, the analysis of teachers' views on different instruction techniques and their
methods for evaluating which techniques they perceived as successful in improving the academic achievement of children with special needs. Much of the information from the literature related to instruction and assessment techniques was retained in order to construct an initial basis upon which to begin a comparative analysis of teachers’ perceptions. The constant comparative analysis of the emergent theory with both the literature and data (teacher perceptions of the actual achievement of children with special needs) generated a framework for each of the major themes or categories that emerged throughout the study.

According to Kirk and Miller (1989), grounded theory is qualitative in nature because it encourages researchers to take a naturalistic approach that involves “watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language” (p. 9). In the case of this study, the “language” of the participants consisted mainly of educational jargon. This is reinforced by Merriam (1988), who also emphasised the importance of the researcher taking a neutral role that does not influence the participants in the study and carefully interpreting what has been observed or said. It recognised, however, that the use of interview questions, focus group discussions and questionnaires influence the participants to some extent, structuring the way in which they think. Consequently, the researcher is not taking a truly neutral role.

It is important to understand the types of instruction and assessment strategies teachers perceived as being important to ensure the success of children with special needs in a restrictive fundamentalist environment. The approach used in this study will generate a plethora of information regarding what can be done to alter the achievement of children with special needs through the perspectives of sixteen individuals working with low achieving children in the religious environment of the school. According to Fuchs, et al., (1991) and Tindal and Marston (1990), curriculum based measurement strategies have cogency in a wide range of special education settings. This study examined whether teachers in the school view curriculum based measurement strategies as important to ensuring the academic success of children with special needs.
The conceptual framework represents an interrelationship that exists between the instruction and assessment strategies adopted by teachers, teachers’ perceptions of those strategies, school programs, and the ethos of the school. An analysis of these interrelationships enabled a thorough examination of the effectiveness of instruction and assessment strategies teachers used in their classrooms to improve the academic level of children with special needs.

Teachers’ perceptions frequently affect the academic achievement of children with special needs (Ysseldyke, et al., 2000). The behaviour of teachers towards children with special needs is an important factor in determining whether or not those children will succeed. An expectation of what children are capable of learning can influence teachers to adopt inferior instruction and assessment strategies or none at all (Avramides, et al., 2000). This occurs if teachers are unwilling to meet the needs of students with special needs. Consequently, teachers’ perceptions have a profound impact on the academic success of children with special needs and are central to the development of the conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework for this study uses a qualitative model of determining the instruction and assessment strategies teachers are using in the school to improve the academic achievements of children identified as having special needs. A grounded approach enabled the questions concerning the impact of student failure, educational models used, frequent formal testing and religious restrictions to be addressed via an analysis of teachers’ perceptions. Data for all the questions were gathered concurrently and constantly compared until the data were saturated.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design for the study was based on an emergent model of enquiry, which utilised a deeper understanding of the perception of teachers in relation to the effectiveness of instruction, and assessment strategies they used in their classrooms.
The research questions were developed through observation of the continued failure of children with special needs in the school and the literature. A number of items based on an initial hypothesis as to why children with special needs were constantly failing in the school were used to inform the research questions.

The interview questions employed in the qualitative method emphasised the different phenomena, such as religious restrictions, many students' non-English speaking backgrounds, set programs and frequent testing that influenced teachers' attitudes towards children with special needs (Appendix A). As teachers' perceptions of instruction and assessment strategies were identified, an analysis was applied to determine which instruction and assessment strategies were most effective.

Probe questions were used in the interviews to generate more detailed responses to the interview questions. The probe questions were developed prior to the interviews and based on teachers' responses to the questionnaire. Examples of probe questions used in the interviews are shown in Appendix A.

Participants

In November 2001 questionnaires were distributed to all fifty primary teachers working in the three campuses of the school. They were invited to participate in the completion of the questionnaire.

All upper primary teachers of years five to seven were selected to be interviewed. Teachers of children with special needs and "educationally" non-qualified staff were also interviewed if they had taught upper primary. In February 2002, 14 upper primary teachers (including one teacher of children with special needs) and two religious staff members who taught years five to seven in the school were contacted by telephone and asked if they would volunteer to be interviewed. All sixteen teachers agreed to participate in the interviews. Each participant was given a number and referred to as
Respondent 1 to 16. They were also asked to submit a written outline detailing the strategies used to improve the academic achievement of children with special needs. In addition, a focus group was convened with a session lasting 60 – 90 minutes.

The focus group consisted of nine teachers, three representatives from each year level (years five to seven). Each teacher who was interviewed was asked if they would agree to participate in a focus group that would take place in March 2002. The teachers were selected on the basis that they taught upper primary for a minimum period of two years. From the twelve who agreed, nine were chosen by the researcher to form the focus group.

DATA GATHERING

The data for this study were collected from November 2001 through to March 2002. The sequence of events related to data collection were:

(i) the submission of written outlines by the sixteen teachers who were selected to be interviewed detailing the strategies used to improve the academic achievements of children with special needs,

(ii) the distribution of questionnaires to all 50 primary school staff members,

(iii) the selected sixteen teachers were interviewed, and

the convening of a focus group session lasting 60 – 90 minutes.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire, cover letter and envelope to ensure confidentiality were distributed to all primary staff (excluding teacher aides) in November 2001 (Appendix B). The principal distributed copies of the questionnaire to the Heads of Primary from the three campuses of the school. They distributed copies of the questionnaire amongst the staff by placing it in each teacher’s pigeonhole. Teachers were asked to return the completed
questionnaire to their respective Head of Primary by a specified date. Teachers were given two weeks to complete the questionnaire.

Interviews

The major source of data was collected from semi-structured interviews with sixteen teachers. The interviews took approximately 60 – 90 minutes using the probe questions to clarify issues (Backstrom & Hursh-Cesar, 1981). Interviews took place in the school conference room and were taped after gaining the interviewee’s permission. Interviews were not transcribed but issues were documented as they arose from repeated listening of the taped transcript.

Focus Group

Following the completion of the interviews spanning five weeks, a focus group discussion took place so that the teachers could comment on the themes that emerged. The ideas generated were placed on a whiteboard allowing participants to see the interrelationship between their ideas and the data that had been collected.

The focus group involved a “group interview or ... discussion, where the focus is on a particular topic of interest” (Hawe, Degeling & Hall, 1990, p. 174). General questions were used to begin the focus group session, which were followed by probe questions in order to allow the researcher to clarify issues that arose (Appendix C). Questions used by the researcher were minimised so that the flow of discussion by the group was not interrupted. According to Dick (1998), participants in focus groups can aid the researcher with the interpretation of data. The relevance of the focus group discussion in this study was that it collaborated information gleaned from the interviews and the written outlines.
DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews and focus group were employed to determine the consistency of teacher responses and the ways that the school and classroom teachers could ensure improvements in the academic levels of students identified as having special needs.

A questionnaire reinforced the findings where teacher responses to the question helped to inform the theoretical issues arising from interviews.

Questionnaire

The purpose of the teacher questionnaire was to determine teachers' attitudes to the instruction and assessment strategies used and promoted by the school to improve the academic performance of children with special needs. The teacher questionnaire utilized a four-point Likert scale ranging from Never (1), Sometimes (2), Usually (3), to Always (4). Mean responses were calculated for each item of the scale. Subscale means were also determined.

Data were analysed using the SPSS statistical package. The questionnaire consisted of thirty-five questions. Thirty-three of those questions were rating questions, divided into three subscales and each subscale consisted of three to four items. Items 34 and 35 were open-ended questions. Item 34 asked respondents to give their opinions of the steps the school needed to take in order to improve the academic achievement of children with special needs. Item thirty-five asked respondents to add any comments that they were unable to express in the other questions.

Gender, religion (Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Hindu) and classification (classroom teachers, teachers of children with special needs, religion teachers and computer teachers) were treated as independent variables when analysing questionnaires.
Interviews and Focus Group

Data from the interviews was reviewed using the three level coding method (Hutchinson, 1988). Level I (in vivo or substantive) codes were gleaned from interviews and written outlines. Key words were recorded and constantly compared with new data gathered from interviews. Level II codes involved identifying categories from key words, which lead to Level III codes that developed core theoretical concepts or themes.

VALIDATION OF THE STUDY

The trustworthiness of the study was tested through a thorough analysis of questions used in the interview and questionnaire by three academics from the university, two teachers and the principal from the school, in addition to the participants in the study. After interviewing the participants and analyzing their responses to the questionnaire and their written outlines, the researcher made the themes identified available to them. Participants then indicated whether they concurred with the themes that had emerged from the study. This was done in the form of a focus group involving nine of the teachers who were interviewed. All members of the focus group had the opportunity to confirm, reject and modify the themes that provided the foundation for the theoretical basis of this study to ensure that they were not misrepresented.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study recognised that there were restrictions in place that may have had a hindering effect on the academic achievement of children with special needs. Religious restrictions tended to be rigid and not open to change. The sample size was small and only the upper primary teachers were involved in the interviews and focus group.

Recognition of the differences between mainstream educational settings and fundamentalist religious educational settings was important. Religious and cultural differences experienced by teachers in the school may have influenced their use of instructional and assessment strategies in unexpected ways. Expectations of teacher
behaviour may differ in the two educational settings. In addition, the responses to questionnaires and interviews may not reflect the teaching practices of teachers adequately.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In January 2001 approval was sought from the principal of the school to conduct research into the attitudes of teachers in relation to the success of instruction and assessment strategies that were advocated by the school. The principal fully supported the research proposal and endorsed it by signing a form agreeing to allow the research to be taken place in the school (Appendix D).

The researcher gave the principal of the school clear guidelines as to the nature of the research that was going to be conducted and the data gathering processes that would be used. The principal was given a copy of the semi-structured interview questions that the researcher was proposing to use in the interviews with teachers and religious staff. Anonymity of the participants of the study was guaranteed and any personal details released would only be used to inform the research where pertinent. Personal information would include percentage descriptions of religions teachers belonged to (if any), years of teaching experience, the amount of time spent teaching in the school and degrees held. The researcher ensured the principal that the names of the school, the principal, and any teachers and students referred to would not be disclosed. Consequently, an ethics approval was granted from the university.

The participants of the study were asked to complete a general consent form (Appendix E) prior to the interviews to ensure their cooperation. The consent form outlined what the research involved and how their interviews would be used in the study. They were also ensured that their contributions would be treated with strict confidentiality.
To ensure teachers understood the purpose of the questionnaire they were asked to complete, a questionnaire cover letter explaining the proposed research accompanied it. The letter made explicit the fact that the completion of the questionnaire was voluntary.

Focus group validation of the study by selected teachers who were involved in the interviews ensured that the themes and issues in the individual questionnaires and interviews protected the anonymity of the participants and reflected teachers' perception of why children with special needs were failing in the school.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research findings of the study. These will correspond to each of the subsidiary research questions that were developed to answer the central research question that asked; What do teachers perceive as being the main reasons as to why students with special needs consistently get low marks throughout primary school education with little or no improvement? The results of this study are organised into two broad sections. They consist of quantitative evaluation findings and interview and focus group findings.

The questionnaire evaluation findings were initially analysed to determine teachers' perceptions of support provided by the school, teachers' perceptions of formal testing, and teachers' perceptions of models of instruction and assessment. The individual interviews (N=16) and focus group findings involved a thematic analysis of teacher interviews and the focus group discussion. Major themes were based upon the theory of role conflict that emerged from the research. This represented teachers' perceptions of what they feel is most effective in enabling them to cater for the varying developmental levels of children with special needs in their classrooms.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions relating to demographics and 35 questions relating to teachers' perceptions of children with special needs in the school. Item 1 to Item 33 employed a four-point Likert scale and Items 34 and 35 provided teachers with an opportunity to add any further comments on the issues raised in the questionnaire.
Demographics

Forty-one completed questionnaires were received from primary teachers in the school. Twenty percent of teachers were male. Fifty-nine percent of respondents had taught at the school for more than two years. Forty percent of teachers had taught less than one year in the school. The mean number of years teachers worked in the school was 3.6 years. Approximately, 83% were classroom teachers while the rest were composed of religious, remedial, ESL or administrative staff such as the principal. Two of the respondents indicated having formal qualifications that enabled them to teach children with special needs.

Almost 44% of teachers had ten or more years teaching experience with some having more than 25 years of experience. Twenty-seven percent of staff members had five to ten years teaching experience with the remainder having less than five years experience. The mean number of years teaching experience was about ten years. Nearly 39% of the respondents taught upper primary (years six to seven), 23% taught middle primary (years five to six) and approximately, 28% taught junior primary (kindergarten to year three). The remainder taught all year levels in the primary school.

Fifty-six percent of teachers had one degree only, usually comprising of a three year Bachelor of Arts (Education). Thirty percent had two degrees and another thirty percent had more than two degrees. In relation to higher degrees, approximately 29% had a Graduate Diploma of Education and 15% held a Masters degree. Approximately 7% of Master degrees were in fields other than education.

The respondents come from widely varying cultural and religious backgrounds. Twenty percent of teachers were English, 12% from South Africa, 7% from India and Australians accounted for 18% of the teaching population in the school. The rest of the
teaching staff came from Singapore, Cyprus, Holland, Denmark, Spain, Fiji, Scotland, Ecuador, Egypt, New Zealand, Indonesia, Burma and Malaysia. The majority identified themselves as Christian (approximately 70%), 25% identified themselves as Muslim and a minority of people identified themselves as Hindu or Jewish.

Questionnaire subscales

The questionnaire consisted of three subscales. The mean response for each subscale (see Table 1) indicated a similar agreement in the *sometimes* to *usually* range towards the three aspects investigated. Each subscale will be analysed separately to determine the most pertinent issues perceived by respondents. The percentage responses to the four-point Likert scale, the mean and standard deviation for each item in the three subscales (support provided by the school for children with special needs, formal testing in the school, and models of instruction) are displayed in Tables 2 to 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Mean Responses for each Subscale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subscale</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Support provided by the school for children with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Formal testing in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Models of Instruction and assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Mean responses range from 1 (*never*); 2 (*sometimes*); 3 (*usually*); 4 (*always*).*

Subscale 1: Teachers’ perceptions of the support provided by the school

The mean score of the subscale was 2.65 indicating that teachers believed they only sometimes receive adequate support from the school when teaching children with special needs. The most critical item affecting the support for children with special needs was Item 3 (see Table 2). Teachers indicated the school did not provide the necessary resources and support in terms of in-service courses to implement various programs constructed by psychologists and other specialists when they were requested.
Table 2
Support provided by the school for children with special needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Never %</th>
<th>Sometimes %</th>
<th>Usually %</th>
<th>Always %</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>sd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provides remedial programs for children with special needs.</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provides correct advice on how to access psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and other specialists.</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Provides necessary resources and support in the form of inservice courses to implement various programs constructed by psychologists and other specialists when requested.</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in educating children with special needs.</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>39.03</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Colleagues work together to improve the academic level of children with special needs.</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Uses information from parents, other staff members and specialists to help construct Individual Education Plans.</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The principal addresses student underachievement.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The principal puts appropriate strategies in place to help teachers address student underachievement.</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mean responses range from 1 (never); 2 (sometimes); 3 (usually); 4 (always).

The responses to Item 7 suggested that the majority of teachers believed that the principal usually or always addressed student underachievement (M=3.15, sd=0.98). Although the principal addressed student underachievement, teachers felt that the principal was not using appropriate strategies. Item 8 related to the appropriateness of the strategies implemented by the principal. Responses indicated that teachers believed that the principal only sometimes put appropriate strategies into place (M=2.73, 0.98).
Item 6 revealed that teachers only sometimes used information from parents, other staff members and specialist staff, such as psychologists when constructing Individual Education Plans (M=2.49, sd=1.03).

Subscale 2: Formal testing in the school

The subscale had a total mean of 2.74 indicating that teachers believed that the school usually used tests too frequently. Seven items were identified to be the most critical factors affecting formal testing in the school (see Table 3). Those identified were items 10, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20 and 21.

Fifty-nine percent of teachers indicated that they never had any say in how frequently tests should be administered to children with special needs (Item 17). Twenty-seven percent of teachers indicated that they only sometimes had an input into how often tests should be administered (M=1.61, sd=0.86). Most teachers believed that they usually were involved in the construction of tests (M=3.07, sd=1.03). Teachers also believed that they sometimes had enough time to provide students with the opportunity to engage in practice tests covering required concepts (M=2.22, sd=0.96).
Table 3  
**Formal testing in the school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Never %</th>
<th>Sometimes %</th>
<th>Usually %</th>
<th>Always %</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>sd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Time to prepare students for tests.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Have time and support to provide opportunities for students to sit practice tests covering concepts that will be formally tested.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Students are taught learning and testing strategies to enable them to study more effectively.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Tests are used to develop and modify instruction.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Formal testing is used as the main tool in evaluating and assessing students’ acquisition of knowledge.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Test results are used to plot and follow student progress through out the year.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Test results that students with special needs achieve adequately reflect what they can and cannot do.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Teachers have an input into the construction of tests.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Teachers have a say in how often often tests should be administered.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Students repeat the same tests through the year.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Frequent formal testing helps improve the grades of children with special needs.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Testing requires students to repeat material covered in textbooks.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Formal testing is the main method of evaluation and assessment.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Mean responses range from 1(never); 2(sometimes); 3(usually); 4(always).*
Another area that teachers perceived negatively was formal testing being used as the main method of evaluating students' mastery of skills (Item 13). Ninety-eight percent of teachers indicated that the school usually (or always) used formal testing as the main tool in evaluating and assessing students' acquisition of knowledge \((M=3.59, sd=0.55)\). Teachers also indicated that test results for children with special needs only sometimes reflected what these children could and could not do \((M=2.44, sd=0.95)\). Responses to Item 20, which concerned the issue of students repeating material covered in textbooks during tests, indicated that teachers believed that this was usually the case \((M=2.88, sd=0.87)\).

A critical issue that arose from responses to Item 21 was that tests were used by the school as the main method of evaluation and assessment \((M=3.51, sd=0.68)\). Only 44% percent of teachers believed that frequent formal testing helped to improve the academic achievement of children with special needs \((M=2.44, sd=1.03)\).

**Subscale 3: Models of instruction and assessment**

The mean of the subscale was 2.80. This mean indicated that most teachers believed that they were usually able to use effective models of instruction and assessment to teach children with special needs. Four items were found by teachers to affect their use of instruction and assessment strategies in the school (see Table 4). The Items identified were Items 28, 29, 30 and 31. Eighty-eight percent of teachers indicated that they were never or only sometimes given the opportunity to use drama and theatre arts to teach children with special needs \((M=1.83, sd=0.77)\).
Table 4: Models of Instruction and Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>sd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22. Teachers decide what strategies to plan and teach when considering students with special needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Teachers cater for the individual needs of low achieving students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Teachers are encouraged to measure the effectiveness of their instruction and assessment methods after each lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Teachers are expected to provide clear goals in each lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Teachers are encouraged to identify more attainable goals for students with special needs that may differ from other students in the school.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Setting attainable goals for students with special needs helps them achieve better results.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Teachers are given the opportunity to use drama and theatre arts to teach children with special needs.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Teachers are provided with computer packages and given information on how to use them.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Teachers have the opportunity to integrate art, physical education, information technology, technology and enterprise, and music with the subject areas to promote and provide children with different ways of learning.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Computer classes help children with special needs improve academically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Remedial classes are effective in improving the results of children with special needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Religious and associated language lessons do not take time that could be used more efficiently in giving children with special needs extra tuition.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mean responses range from 1 (never); 2 (sometimes); 3 (usually); 4 (always).
Most teachers indicated that they were only sometimes given the opportunity to integrate art, physical education, information technology, technology and enterprise, and music with other subject areas to expose children with special needs to alternative ways of learning (M=2.24, sd=1.02).

Another issue identified by teachers involved the provision of computer packages by the school and information on how to use them. Teachers indicated that they only sometimes received computer packages and were given information on how to use them (M=2.12, sd=0.83). Fifty-eight percent of teachers believed that computer classes sometimes helped children with special needs improve academically (M=2.44, sd=0.87).

While the majority of teachers indicated that they were always expected by the school to provide clear goals in each lesson (M=3.63, sd=0.54), they believed that they were only sometimes encouraged to identify attainable goals for students with special needs (M=2.78, sd=0.94). The majority of teachers believed that religious and associated language lessons did not take up time that could be used more efficiently in giving children with special needs more lesson time (M=3, sd=0.97). Conversely, 33% of teachers indicated that religious lessons took up valuable learning time for children with special needs.

Relationship between the items and independent variables
Analysis of variants (ANOVA) was employed to determine any significant difference in response to the items for independent variables. There were no significant differences for nationality, the number of degrees held and teaching experience.

Significant differences, however, were found for years in the school (p<.05). Teachers who had been at the school between 10 and 13 years (Mean=4.00) considered testing to be the main method of evaluation, whereas those who had been in the school one to three years (M=3.44) indicated significantly lower agreement to this item.
A small number of teachers (N=4) taught across all year levels. These teachers recorded the lowest levels of agreement with Item 7 (M=2.25, sd=0.50). Teachers who taught in the middle primary (M=2.89, sd=0.60) indicated significantly less support for the principal addressing student underachievement than those in the upper primary (M=3.40, sd=0.74) and junior primary (M=3.27, sd=0.65).

Teachers who taught across all year levels also had a lower agreement with Item 11 (M=1.75, sd=0.50). Teachers who taught upper primary (M=3.00, sd=0.85) had the highest level of agreement with Item 11 (which stated that students were taught learning and testing strategies to enable them to study more effectively) than those who taught middle primary (M=2.78, sd=0.67) and junior primary (M=2.91, sd=0.83).

Significant differences were found for gender (p<.05). Females reported stronger agreement (M=3.45, sd=0.62) with Item 27 than male teachers (M=2.88, sd=1.13). Male teachers indicated that they only sometimes believed that setting attainable goals for children with special needs helped them to achieve better results, while females believed that it usually was effective.

Muslim teachers (N=10) and Christian teachers (N=28) showed significant differences in their agreement with Item 31 (p<.05). Muslim teachers had higher agreement with computer lessons benefiting children with special needs (M=3.90, sd=0.32) than Christian teachers (M=3.39, sd=0.74). Other significant differences for religion related to Item 33. Christian teachers had lower agreement with Item 33 (M=2.68, sd=0.98) than Muslim teachers (M=3.70, sd=0.48).

INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Sixteen upper primary teachers were interviewed. Thirteen teachers were classroom teachers (years 5 to 7), one teacher taught children with special needs and two were religious teachers. A focus group consisting of nine teachers was convened to validate the themes that emerged from the interviews. The use of semi-structured questions and
probes were employed for the interviews and focus group discussion. A three-level coding system was used to analyse the data and included substantive or 'invivo' coding, axial coding and selective coding (O’Donoghue & Chalmers, 2000). Teachers’ perceptions of effective instruction and assessment strategies were used as Level I or substantive codes (Glaser, 1992). The narrative was developed after the issues identified through coding were synthesised to explain the way in which they were connected (Calloway & Knapp, 1995). Five major themes emerged from the study that were derived from the research questions. These will be explored separately.

1. Instruction and assessment strategies used by teachers in the school

This section will examine teachers’ perceptions of the instruction and assessment strategies encouraged by the school, and the match between what teachers perceive as being effective instruction and assessment strategies and those strategies that they are actually using.

Based on the information provided in the interviews, nine instructional strategies were identified. Teachers employed these strategies to assist children with special needs who were having trouble coping with the regular class curriculum.

(i) Peer tutoring

Peer tutoring was seen as the most effective instruction strategy by six of the teachers interviewed from across the three campuses. Peer tutoring was used by teachers to describe students working in groups or in pairs. They felt that peer tutoring did not take up much of their time, which they felt was better utilized by marking tests or providing extra tuition to children experiencing difficulties with newly taught concepts. Peer tutoring provided an avenue where children with special needs could increase their skill performance, acquisition of knowledge in various subject areas and their individual differences could be addressed. As Respondent 6 explained,

I have introduced peer tutoring in Maths. This has worked extremely well, across the whole classroom. This enables all students to clarify and
reinforce lessons studied. The majority of my class has difficulty with comprehension, so my focus is on ensuring all students are able to understand words and terms used in all subject areas by peer based reading and discussion. The process of peer tutoring allows remedial children to learn alongside their peers and they improve their progress which is shown in whole class discussion sessions.

The teachers who used peer tutoring in their classrooms perceived that the use of more able students tutoring less able students resulted in a more thorough acquisition of knowledge for the latter. Peer tutoring also enabled children with special needs to receive individual tutoring more frequently than what the teacher could provide. Consequently, when teachers were faced with restrictions on their time they tended to employ other instruction techniques such as peer tutoring which enabled children with special needs to get the instruction time they required.

(ii) Group work

Group work is a form of peer tutoring where children work in groups of three or more. Teachers perceived group work as being an effective instruction tool to improve the academic achievement of children with special needs. All teachers indicated they used group work where possible. Some teachers expressed that the administration of the school did not look favourably upon group work. Respondent 15 explained,

My class was engaged in small group work. They were working very hard in their groups and as they got more enthusiastic, their noise level increased. [The head of primary] was walking past my class and came running into my class to shout at the children because they were making too much noise. [S]he told me that I needed too have more control over my class, in hearing range of the children. In my opinion, they were working very well and their noise level was in no way excessive. [S]he only heard them because she was standing at the door.

Many teachers believed that the administration of the school did not view group work as being a valid instruction and learning tool. As the above incident explicitly described, the administration viewed group work as an indication that teachers had little control over the behaviour of their students. This teacher later expanded on the statement, saying that the Head of Primary would probably have submitted a report to the principal
indicating that (s)he had a problem with classroom discipline. What led the teacher to believe this was that other teachers had been reported to the principal concerning similar incidents that had only been made known to them after the principal approached them. This made the teacher feel very frustrated and disempowered. While group work was a favoured instruction technique, the teachers interviewed were reticent about using it due to repercussions from the administration of the school.

(iii) Repetition

Another instruction and assessment strategy that all teachers mentioned using was the repetition of concepts. New concepts were introduced, continuously repeated and teachers asked questions or gave quizzes to ensure that the concepts were mastered. Even though this strategy was used widely, it was seldom used systematically. Once a concept had been taught and repeated, teachers started teaching new concepts, whether or not the children had mastered the original one. This can be indicated by:

I use repetition a lot in my classroom. I repeat new concepts learnt constantly and then I ask children questions to see whether or not they have acquired the concepts. Sometimes I give children brief quizzes so I can determine how much they have learnt. Generally, a concept is only repeated over a two week period, because I have to introduce new concepts (Respondent 2).

Due to the amount of material in the curriculum that teachers had to complete, they had little time to systematically repeat concepts or use new and stimulating ways to repeat them. Though one teacher indicated that board games were used to reinforce concepts.

(iv) Direct instruction

Direct instruction seemed to be the most frequently used mode of instruction by teachers in the school and encompassed teacher-directed instruction, the repetition of concepts and the use of peer tutoring. The major difference between direct instruction strategies and those that the teachers were using in the school was the systematic nature of direct instruction. The teacher controlled what was to be taught when using direct instruction strategies, however, many teachers in the school perceived that they had little control
over what was taught. One teacher expressed the general consensus of teachers in the following manner,

I have identified many things that I need to teach the children in my class with special needs. However, those things are not covered by the test and I don’t have time to teach them. I feel that I have no control over what I teach children. Programs are written by all teachers in each year group and texts are prepared for the year, before we even meet the children (Respondent 16).

Teachers generally expressed their concern over their inability to control the content and instruction methods they used to teach children. In the face of such extensive testing, most teachers reported that they managed to use direct instruction strategies that included teacher modelling of desired responses, guiding students’ practice, providing independent practice and informally assessing student responses. Many teachers believed that the frequent formal testing catered for monitoring student progress even though they did not view these tests as beneficial.

Attitudes toward direct instruction in the school were generally negative. The majority of teachers perceived direct instruction to be a boring and outdated mode of instruction and assessment. These responses were recorded in spite of the fact that all of the teachers interviewed described using some strategies derived from direct instruction. The teachers who felt that direct instruction was effective in enabling children with special needs to acquire new knowledge were those who had higher degrees such as a Master of Education. Most teachers indicated that they thought that the school advocated the use of direct instruction, which they believed did not cater for the individual developmental needs of children with special needs.

(v) Computer aided learning

Computer aided learning in the form of generated worksheets and programs were a main instructional method used by many teachers. Teachers reported that they often did not have the time to give students instructions on how to use computer programs and complete computer generated worksheets properly. The majority of teachers assumed that this information would have been given to the students in the computing classroom.
Students were expected to work at their own pace, either on a computer package or on a computer generated worksheet. The following statement encapsulated teachers' use of computer packages and worksheets:

Usually, I get students to work with computer packages in the classroom. If I have a student who needs extra time to learn a concept, I get them to practice using a computer package by themselves while I am teaching the rest of the class. My biggest reservation about this is that I cannot really spend time helping children while they are working on the computer. Also, I don't have time to explain the packages to children who have difficulty working them (Respondent 9).

Teachers believed that they did not have enough time to teach children with special needs how to use the computer packages appropriately. Many assumed the computer teacher had already taught children, which in many cases, was an erroneous assumption. They expressed that they often became dissatisfied with the computer packages, even though they had been proven as effective tools for helping children with special needs acquire knowledge and master skills (Montegue et al., 1993). The responses to Item 29 in the questionnaire reaffirmed the dissatisfaction of teachers in the school with computer aided learning. Almost sixty-four per cent of teachers believed they needed more instruction on how to use computer aided learning effectively so that children with special needs benefited academically. This was also reflected by,

I'm pretty confused about how to use computer programs to help children with special needs. I don't know how to use many of them myself. I would have really appreciated some sort of workshop to show me how to use them (Respondent 4).

Workshops and inservice courses instructing teachers how to use computer aided learning effectively was believed to be beneficial to both teachers and children with special needs. The main problem in the school in relation to computer aided learning seemed to be a lack of teacher confidence and knowledge.
(vi) Individual Education Plans

The use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) was not a widespread practice among the teachers interviewed. Most teachers adapted the curriculum to some extent to cater for children with special needs but did not indicate that they used IEPs. Only two of the sixteen teachers reported using IEPs to differing extents. One teacher had extensive IEPs drawn up for four students who had what she identified as having profound learning difficulties. The teacher had liaised with parents, the school psychologist and other teachers when constructing these programs. According to the teacher's belief, the IEPs had benefited the four students greatly and (s)he had seen improvements in their academic levels. When questioned further, the teacher indicated that the improvements for three out of the four students were marginal when considering their grades in the fortnightly tests. The teacher believed that their mastering of skills and acquisition of knowledge was more positive than the numerical grades they received in their fortnightly tests.

The other teacher who used IEPs did so without consultation with anyone. The plans were based on an initial analysis of each student's weaknesses and strengths via examining their first test results. Short-term and long-term goals were determined for each student who was identified “at risk”. Goals were determined according to the content of the standardised programs and the tests. The teacher reported that students “at risk” achieved their goals but almost always fell short of receiving 50% or more in tests. Consequently, both teachers who used IEPs indicated that they believed them to be very effective in enabling children with special needs improve their academic achievement regardless of test results.

(vii) Individual conferencing

Individual conferencing or one-to-one instruction proved to be another popular strategy used by the teachers interviewed in the school. Many teachers stated that they used individual conferencing as often as they could. Most teachers revealed that they often used recess and lunch times as opportunities to conduct individual conferencing sessions. Some teachers indicated that individual conferencing was done on a voluntary
basis where children would approach the teacher if they needed individual tuition. They also suggested a desire for more opportunities and time to conduct more one-to-one instruction sessions. For example, Respondent 8 stated,

I use intensive one-to-one instruction. I try to use stimulating learning materials such as flash cards, readers, interesting literature and computer programs. As for assessment, I assess formally and informally according to specific learning objectives. I also make frequent feedback and exchange of information and observations with the remedial and computer teacher. I just wish I had more time to give intensive one-to-one instruction to more children who need it.

Not all teachers expressed their use of individual conferencing in such a manner. Some teachers viewed it as an opportunity to discuss student progress and go through texts and homework that students may be having problems with. Teachers who used individual conferencing in combination with direct instruction reported seeing more improvements in the skill mastery of children with special needs.

(viii) Remedial classes

External remedial classes were seen by two teachers to be the most successful option to improve the academic achievement of children with special needs. These teachers did not believe that teaching children with special needs was their job and did not adjust their instruction and assessment strategies to meet individual children's needs. They complained that they did not get enough help with children with special needs in their classrooms and suggested that more external remediation would benefit these children. Respondent 12 stated,

Because the programs are based solely on textbooks, I teach according to the text. The instruction strategies I use are explaining the content in the text, asking children questions to see what they understand and repeating the process if necessary. Then I get them to answer questions on their own. I send weak students to [omitted name] for remedial work in coordination with the year 6 syllabus. The remedial program caters for the weaker students.
This teacher believed that it was not his/her responsibility to modify the instruction and assessment strategies used in the classroom to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties. The teacher was depending on the one hour of remedial tuition that the children received daily, which signified that they were not receiving adequate instruction the rest of the school day. In effect, the overall instruction and assessment strategies that this teacher used were limited.

Another reason why children with special needs were continuously performing below their academic level in tests was perceived by teachers as being the result of the principal of the school implementing inappropriate strategies. Teachers interviewed identified these strategies as the dispatching of students who received 50% or less to the computer teacher or to poorly structured remedial classes. It was reported by teachers that there was often little communication or coordination between remedial and classroom teachers. This was perceived as being the result of remedial teachers not being qualified to teach children with special needs. In campus B, the remedial teacher was a teacher aide and had no formal qualifications. Respondent 12 expressed this concern by,

I'm concerned that my students who go to the remedial teacher are not getting the instruction they need. I have students who come back from remedial classes and they tell me they couldn't understand a thing the teacher was saying.

When talking about qualifications, the remedial teacher interviewed stated,

I have a Bachelor of Arts in Education. I have no real experience or qualification to teach children with special needs. When I applied for a job, the school said that they needed a remedial teacher and here I am (Respondent 1).

(ix) Alternative methods

The general belief among the sixteen teachers who were interviewed was that they were unable to use instruction and assessment strategies they considered beneficial to children
with special needs. Many indicated that they depended on teacher directed instruction as the most common form of instruction and assessment was generally always school based. Three teachers expressed this view in different ways:

The main teaching method I use is getting up in front of the class and lecturing to them. Sometimes I feel so sorry for them. It must be so boring being lectured to day after day so that they will be ready to sit for the million tests they get (Respondent 11).

I follow the standardised programs and teach from the text. When an opportunity arises, I will use group work but there isn’t any time for other instruction techniques which in my opinion, would benefit children far more greatly. My assessment strategies consist of the fortnightly tests (Respondent 7).

My use of instructional strategies are constricted by the standardised programs and the testing. Even so, I manage to make time to use different approaches to teaching to make the content more interesting and available to children having difficulties (Respondent 13).

All teachers expressed the concern that their teaching methods were restricted by time but some managed to include eclectic instruction and assessment strategies. All of the teachers who purported to use various instruction and assessment strategies had been teaching in the school for at least three years. Other than teacher directed methods of teaching and assessment, very few teachers specified what instruction and assessment strategies they used. The most common instruction strategies that teachers mentioned included peer tutoring, repetition of concepts, the use of computer and worksheets, the use of Individual Education Plans, individual conferencing or depending on external remedial programs.

When faced with restrictions, teachers initially tended to make alterations to their methods of teaching even though they may not have felt comfortable about such changes. These changes reflected the socio-cultural and religious climate of the school they were working in. When teachers got used to the restrictive environment, they tended to use alternative methods in order to apply some of the assessment and instruction strategies they believed were effective. Such methods may have included not
following the rigid fortnightly tests, but constructing their own tests. For example, one teacher stated,

I don’t give the children with special needs the standardised tests because I feel that they don’t do anything but promote failure. I give the children tests that cover the content that they have mastered. Of course, they don’t master as many concepts as normal children because I have to use lots of repetition until they get what’s being taught (Respondent 15).

Teachers believed that these methods in restrictive environments enabled children to perform as well as they developmentally could in tests while acquiring actual knowledge and skills. While confronted with expectations from the school administration about what class averages each teacher should achieve every fortnight, teachers were struggling to use effective and efficient instruction strategies to improve the skill mastery of children with special needs. This was often dichotomous to the practices of the school, which were solely based on test results. Many teachers expressed their concerns that the emphasis on testing resulted in children not being instructed properly or mastering skills and acquiring essential knowledge. A comment made by Respondent 3 reinforces these concerns,

I want to instruct students in a way that will cater to their developmental standards. Whenever I can, I use instructional techniques like choral drilling, repetition of concepts, systematic explanation of concepts, giving lots of examples and group work. But if I want to get a good class average, I have to spend lots of time using teacher exposition methods of instruction and lots of rote learning. So, while I want children to learn and I would prefer to work at each individual student’s pace, I can’t use instructional strategies that will let me do this. Students have to be ready for the test.”

Consequently, the instruction and assessment strategies used by the teachers interviewed in the school varied. Most felt constrained by the fortnightly tests, which they believed required teacher directed methods of instruction. There was little time for teachers to engage in one-to-one individual instruction or to construct Individual Education Plans that may have helped student acquisition of knowledge and skill mastery but possibly not enabled them to achieve 50% or more in their fortnightly tests. The majority of teachers felt they were limited to using teacher-directed methods of instruction and saw
this practice as not being effective in helping children with special needs achieve academically. Instruction and assessment strategies that teachers managed to use infrequently were the ones that they perceived as being most effective for children with special needs. These included individual instruction, Individual Education Plans, teacher modelling of concepts, repetition, group work and peer tutoring.

While the principal was seen by teachers as having implemented strategies to address children with special needs, the principal was not addressing their actual needs. Arguably, the principal was also not addressing the needs of the teachers. To paraphrase one teacher, there was a perceived communication gap between the students, teachers and the administration of the school. In order for children with special needs to improve their academic achievement, the perceived communication gap had to be breached.

Another pertinent issue as to why the specified children in the school are constantly failing was the lack of information provided to teachers by people such as parents, other teachers, psychologists, occupational therapists and speech therapists. All of the teachers interviewed and the focus group expressed the need for input from others who had dealt with low achieving children when constructing instruction and assessment strategies that would benefit them. Teachers reported that this usually did not happen in the school, though most teachers were unable to articulate why.

2. Teacher understanding and use of curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies

Teachers in the school did not display an in-depth understanding of curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies even though they used many of these strategies. Direct observations and analysis of the learning environment were constantly made by teachers who were trying to do what they could to improve the academic achievement of children with special needs in a restrictive environment. Few teachers broke down complex tasks into their components to analyse whether students had mastered them. Few teachers indicated that they identified attainable goals for children with special needs that were different from other children in the classroom. Most teachers expressed
an inability to set up finite and attainable goals that researchers indicated could improve the academic performance and achievement of children with special needs (Ysseldyke, et al., 2000). Respondent 2 articulated an example of this view,

It takes up too much of my time to set up individual goals for students with special needs. The goals are already established before I even know my class and what their needs are. Goals are based on the tests that children are given each fortnight. Individual goals would not allow students to have any chance to be prepared for the tests. Even if the children don't understand all the concepts of the tests, at least they are familiarised by the content.

This contrasted with the responses to Item 26 in the questionnaire where sixty-three percent of respondents indicated that they were encouraged to identify more attainable goals for students with special needs. Responses gleaned from interviews suggested that teachers were given very little opportunity to devise specific goals for children with special needs because they were expected to achieve high class averages in tests. Most teachers interviewed indicated that they would prefer to set attainable goals for children with special needs because they believed these children would be more likely to master a wider range of skills and a more thorough acquisition of knowledge. Item 27 of the questionnaire reinforced this where approximately eighty-eight per cent of teachers identified providing alternative goals for children with special needs as being beneficial to their achievement. Male teachers who responded to the questionnaire and those interviewed, however, indicated that setting alternative goals for children with special needs were not important and only sometimes affected children's academic performance positively. Conversely, the majority of female teachers believed that individual goals were important in improving the achievement of children with special needs.

Teachers showed little knowledge of the fact that individual goals should be derived from the curriculum that the teacher is using. In the case of the school, goals needed to be derived from the standardised programs after diagnosing children's weaknesses and strengths. Few teachers indicated that they specified key objectives that they determined would enhance the academic achievement of children with special needs from the
In relation to determining goals, teachers seemed confused as how to begin the process:

When I'm faced with students who are working at a year three level in a year seven class, I don't know where to begin to identify goals for that student. The year seven curriculum is too advanced for them, so I usually go to the curriculum that the student is working at developmentally. That's difficult though, because of the tests (Respondent 14).

This teacher's comment encapsulated the confusion of many of the teachers interviewed. They did not feel confident identifying individual goals for students with special needs even though they indicated that they believed this to be beneficial. The main reason given by many of the teachers was the necessity of preparing students for the frequent school-based tests. None of the teachers interviewed signified that they used the tests to extract individual goals for children experiencing learning difficulties.

Another important component of curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies involved assessing observable behaviour related to the curriculum being taught. This included engagement with new knowledge presented to students and the use of probes which included short assessments to discern what concepts were mastered and which concepts needed more instruction (Rosenberg, O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998). The amount of time children took to acquire concepts was a very important consideration of assessment. Two teachers did indicate that they used short tests and quizzes to test student acquisition of knowledge. They were also using probes to assess children in the whole-class context rather than individually. For example,

Every Friday, I give children two quizzes. One contains questions dealing with the Math we covered and the other deals with questions on English taught during the week. The quizzes are only short and I find they help me to identify areas of difficulty (Respondent 5).

This teacher went on to say that these quizzes were used to plan lessons and what instruction strategies would be used for the next week. The teacher was concerned that spending extra time on instruction and assessment strategies affected the class's overall
performance in fortnightly tests. It was the teacher's firm belief that it was far more beneficial for children with special needs to be mastering required skills than rote-learning information for tests. The teacher indicated that the children identified as having special needs usually managed to achieve an average of 50% in fortnightly tests after they got extra instruction. Concern was expressed in relation to the frequency of tests children were subjected to, which was magnified by the teacher's use of two quizzes every Friday. The teacher ensured that there was a continuous differentiation made between the tests and the quizzes, reassuring children that the quiz results had no impact on their test results.

The other teacher (Respondent 13) used probes in a similar way where daily short spelling tests were given to students and their responses recorded. The teacher gave them five words to spell per minute and concentrated on which words were correct. Students were informed that the purpose of the spelling tests was to compare their performance over a certain period of time (usually one week). The teacher indicated that due to the time constraints faced, only spelling probes could be employed. The teacher believed that the use of daily spelling tests and the analysis of those tests enabled the modification and employment of instruction strategies that addressed the difficulties children were having in this learning area. The main reason for concentrating on spelling was because the teacher felt that spelling was the basis for successful reading comprehension.

Even though both teachers indicated using probes to assess students they did not identify them as such. They modified their instruction to cater for the skills children were having trouble mastering as indicated by children's test performances. The fortnightly tests, however, prevented them from taking curriculum based measurement strategies further.

**Formative assessment**

The use of formative assessment during instruction was used by the majority of teachers to test student understanding of new concepts. Formative assessment consisted of short
frequent measurements of student understanding before, during and after instruction. All of the interviewed teachers indicated that they felt they couldn’t employ as many formative assessment strategies as often as they would like due to the amount of content they had to teach children in order to make sure children were ready for the tests. For example,

I like to begin instruction by setting the scene and asking kids as many questions as possible in relation to what they know about the new topic. When I begin teaching the topic, I like to ask questions to figure out if I’m teaching them in a way they understand. Ideally, if I had enough time after the lessons I would get the kids to play short fun games to test the topic I’ve just taught them. But I’ve got so much material to get through that it’s not funny. Most of the time, I don’t have time to make sure that the kids understood what I taught them (Respondent 6).

The recurring issue concerning a lack of time for teachers to be able to implement the strategies that they would prefer, such as formative assessment, lent further credence to a developing theory of role conflict. Teachers believed that they should be using curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies but felt that they could not use them without compromising their students’ results in tests and their overall class averages.

Modifying goals

A major facet of curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies involved plotting student results on graphs so teachers could make decisions as to what modifications needed to be made in relation to instruction (Blankenship, 1985). All teachers had to tabulate student results for the fortnightly tests in mathematics, English, social studies, science, religion and associated language studies because it was school policy. None displayed test results graphically. Graphical displays of student results could help teachers determine the score trend of students (indicating what they are learning) and whether or not to modify goals for each student. It also made it easier for children with special needs to note progression or regression of their academic achievement due to ascending or descending lines on the graph. The lack of graphical displays used by teachers in the school in relation to testing may be an indication of why
they are reticent about identifying specific goals for students, using the extensive fortnightly tests as a benchmark. While teachers tended to believe that individual goals should be identified for each student, and that those goals may differ from one student to the next, they perceived that the school’s view is that all students have a universal goal. In the words of Respondent 11 who has a Bachelor of Education, specialising in children with special needs,

The only goal this school wants us to specify for each child is that they pass the tests each fortnight. They [referring to the owner, principal and heads of primary] don’t care if the children learn anything, just so long as the numerics are right.

The disenchantment that this teacher displays towards the specification of goals for each student is indicative of what other teachers interviewed felt. The general perception was that teachers were not working in the best interest of children with special needs due to external constraints imposed upon them by the school hierarchy.

Most of the teachers interviewed displayed only a basic or no understanding of curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies. Many teachers had used instruction and assessment strategies that were advocated by curriculum based measurement and assessment methodology. Most viewed these methods of instruction and assessment as vital to improving the academic achievement of children with special needs. The teacher who had experience studying and using curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies felt that to implement such strategies successfully and in their entirety would be very time-consuming and impossible. This teacher believed that a modified, more eclectic version of curriculum based measurement and assessment methodology, using other instructional strategies, would be more beneficial to the academic improvement of children with special needs.

3. Teacher compatibility with instruction and assessment strategies advocated by the school

Teachers in the school did not perceive the instruction and assessment strategies advocated by the school positively. Fourteen out of the sixteen teachers interviewed
believed that their style of teaching was incompatible with the style of teaching promoted by the school. The instructional style of "teaching the test" as more than one teacher interviewed described it, was against their ethical and educational beliefs. Some teachers initially refused to "teach the test", but when their classes received poor class averages they felt that they were at risk of losing their jobs. For example,

I feel very uncomfortable teaching the test. I have always done it because when I first started teaching here, you should have heard the fuss that was being made about a teacher who had gotten class averages below 50% for the last two consecutive tests. They were going to sack her. She managed to hang on to her job by getting the children to get a class average of above 50% in the following test (Respondent 11).

The teacher in question stated:

At first it surprised me that they were taking these tests so seriously. Ok, so my students weren't getting the right averages but they were improving. I had a class where almost all of them were working below their year 5 level. I was aiming at them really learning not just passing a test. Now, I aim at achieving a good class average (Respondent 4).

By making an example of a teacher whose class average was less than 50%, the school pressured most teachers to conform to "teaching the test" in fear that they would lose their jobs. Many expressed their dissatisfaction at having to focus all instruction on preparing students for standardised testing. They have indicated that their role as a teacher had been compromised by the school and that their first priority was not their students, or more specifically, students with special needs but test averages.

Some of the teachers interviewed found that their inability to use drama and theatre arts to teach new concepts proved a major problem. They found that they were generally limited in terms of what they could or could not do to vary instruction. The school administration tended to discourage anything that involved student noise and physical education was limited to only one session (or 40 minutes) per week. Some teachers liked to conduct lessons outside of their classrooms on the school oval but this proved impossible because as Respondent 6 stated,
The oval is off limits because new grass has been put on it. It's been growing now for months, but [the principal's] afraid it will get damaged. So no one is allowed on it.

Integrating subject areas to vary the instructional strategies of teachers in the school was limited due to the problems associated with resources. In addition, the school did not run subjects such as information technology, technology and enterprise, and music. Music was not allowed due to religious restrictions. Information technology and technology and enterprise were subject areas left to the teachers to run. Due to the time they spent on preparing children for tests, very few incorporated these lessons into their daily schedule. Item 30 reinforced this where teachers (N=41) indicated that they only sometimes incorporated different instructional strategies into their teaching routines (M=2.24, sd=1.02).

Consequently, many teachers interviewed were experiencing role conflict, where they had been taught to use particular instruction and assessment strategies that were contradictory to beliefs of the school administration.

4. Formal testing

All teachers interviewed expressed concern about the fortnightly tests. It was not testing itself that they were concerned about; it was generally the manner and the frequency in which the tests occurred. Teachers believed that direct measures of observable behaviour, which included formal and informal testing, were an important guide to instruction. Few felt that they could utilize these tests as direct measures of the achievement of children with special needs. Most expressed their belief that such frequent and standardised formal testing could only result in the continued failure of children with special needs.

Teachers indicated that they could not use the standardised tests as an indication that they needed to modify instruction because children had to be prepared for the next test.
Concepts that had not been learnt by children could not be retaught or retested. Consequently, children were not given any opportunity to acquire knowledge and master skills that they initially couldn’t. This inability to cater to the needs of children with special needs proved frustrating to teachers, indicated by,

“When I saw that a weaker student had failed on a test, I wanted to go over those things to make sure they learnt. However, I just don’t have the time. So those weaker students never catch up in this situation (Respondent 13).

This is a very negative perception of the impact that such frequent standardised formal testing has on students. Teachers believed that the manner in which the school conducted the tests did not promote the academic achievement of children with special needs. One teacher explained,

“The school is encouraging teachers to use outdated methods of teaching. Most of the teachers view the extensive testing as a joke. Well, not really. Our jobs depend on a good class average. Anyway, what we actually teach kids is not an issue. How we teach kids is less of an issue. They just have to get – any way they can – above 50% in the tests. But the boss likes them to have around 80%, so you don’t want too many in your class with 50% (Respondent 2).

Teachers have become more concerned about their class averages in tests than with what knowledge children with special needs have acquired and the skills they have mastered. A teacher from one of the campuses expressed an explicit example:

Just before the distribution of school-based English and Math tests, the head of primary [in this campus] came up to me and said that I had to familiarise the students with the content of the tests, give them a practice run using the actual tests. Then I was supposed to give them the tests after they had been fully familiarised with them. Those who failed were supposed to be left out of the class averages, marked as absent. Apparently, all of the teachers were told the same thing (Respondent 3).

The pressure for children to perform well in tests had been transferred from classroom teachers to the heads of primary from each of the three primary campuses.
Consequently, there was less concern for what children are actually learning than how their test results contributed to the class average, and on a larger scale, the campus average. Throughout the year, each campus’ test averages (represented by a percentage) were tabulated and a table of results and ranking for each campus was announced during morning assembly and placed on the noticeboards. Teachers felt that actions such as this one, promoted competition rather than genuine learning and did not benefit children with special needs in any way.

Teachers were in general agreement that standardised testing might help in the diagnosis of student weaknesses and strengths. After the diagnosis, however, they perceived such tests as being limited in relation to informing instruction since they did not give a thorough description of the broad range of skills and knowledge children already had. Teachers viewed the use of teacher-made tests, carefully linked to instruction and any modifications of instruction, as being the most effective way of observing and evaluating students’ behaviour, acquisition of knowledge and skill mastery. They indicated that the continued use of pre-formulated standardised testing throughout the school year did not cater for the needs of any student, but especially those students identified as having special needs.

Respondent 5 had twenty-five years teaching experience, and expressed concern over what seemed to be an increase in standardised testing by classroom teachers, not only in the school, but also in other schools. Respondent 5 perceived this as a negative assessment strategy and indicated that from his/her experience, children with special needs could not benefit from such strategies. This teacher’s concern was validated by research conducted by Louden, Chan, Elkins, Greaves, House, Milton, Nichols, Rohl, Rivalland and van Kraayenoord (2000) who have shown that more classroom teachers in Australia were using standardised formal testing. Respondent 5 also indicated that (s)he believed that the school had adopted an extreme attitude to testing she had not seen before.
The heads of primary or the principal frequently checked completed test papers to ensure teachers were following the correct testing procedures. This was usually done during teacher assessments, which occurred twice a month. Teacher assessments involved teachers being observed and assessed over one lesson by the principal or a head of primary in each campus. Teachers were given a percentage based on how the principal or head of primary perceived their performance teaching and keeping records of student work. As a result, teachers felt that they could not adapt standardised tests due to constant monitoring by the administrative staff of the school. The teachers who reportedly did adapt or modify tests indicated that they managed to prevent the relevant tests from being examined by the school administration.

Teacher responses to Items 12 to 15 reinforce the findings from the interviews. Approximately ninety-eight per cent of teachers felt that the school depended on formal standardised testing to an excessive degree, which implied that other methods of assessment might be more beneficial to the academic achievement of children with special needs. Teachers also indicated that tests were only sometimes used to modify instruction (M=2.54, sd=1.03) and never used to modify assessment. Most teachers indicated that they believed that standardised tests did not inform teachers what knowledge children with special needs had actually acquired. Consequently, teachers in the school believed that the academic performance of students with special needs was not best served by frequent formal testing. In fact, teachers believed that standardised testing reduced the opportunities of children with special needs to learn. In addition, all the teachers interviewed did not consider test results as being truly indicative of what skills children with special needs had mastered and what knowledge they had acquired. Of those teachers who completed the questionnaire, only fifteen percent indicated that they felt standardised tests always reflected the skill and knowledge levels that children with special needs had achieved.
5. Structural and religious restrictions of the school

**Structural restrictions**

Another issue that emerged from the interview process was the structural restrictions placed on teachers by the school. Structural elements (that ultimately lead to structural restrictions) consisted of the organizational foundation upon which the school operated.

All of the teachers interviewed indicated that they felt uncomfortable with the structural restrictions imposed upon them by the school. One such restriction was the morning assembly. Each morning the principal or religious staff members conducted an assembly in the three campuses. Children were then dismissed according to class levels. Most teachers said that they perceived this as a tedious and pointless process. For example,

> Yeah, the morning assembly. I can see the need for an assembly occasionally, but not every morning. Sometimes there is nothing to say because it's all been said (Respondent 13).

Each day, during the morning assembly, classes put on a performance for the rest of the school. Teachers expressed further concern over the fact that they were expected to prepare a class performance every fortnight for the morning assembly. In addition to this, teachers were required to conduct a presentation that was usually religiously based, for a segment on a television program that the owner of the school was running on one of the community channels. Teachers believed that preparation for their assembly performance and the television show took up a lot of valuable instruction time that many children in the school could not afford to miss out on. Respondent 7 reported,

> I usually enjoy preparing children for class presentations. I feel that they learn a lot from performing in front of their school. But I think that this should be done in moderation, about once a term, if that. Not every fortnight. And on top of that we have to prepare for a television show and the tests.

Again, the issue of role conflict emerges through teachers expressing their inability to spend the time needed on instruction in order to improve the academic achievement of children with special needs. Some teachers also expressed that they were uncomfortable
with the fact that sometimes the administrator of the school used the assembly as a political forum to espouse political views. They felt this was an unethical and inappropriate behaviour to display in a school.

Another concern displayed by the teachers interviewed was the daily afternoon assembly. This resulted from the principal wanting children to be dismissed in a more orderly fashion. After packing up, teachers and children went down to the assembly and lined up in their year levels. Children were then dismissed according to how quiet and straight their lines were. What is concerning teachers is the extent to which the school is structured. The majority interviewed felt that such an extensive school structure was not promoting any sense of self-responsibility in children. Everything children did was monitored and structured by the school. Respondent 2 encapsulated this view in the following manner,

The way every aspect of these kids’ lives are controlled really worries me. How are they ever going to learn to do things in an organised manner independently, if they are continually watched and told what to do and how to do it.

Teachers' perceived that children in the school were given very little opportunity to express their individuality, which was important when considering the social development of children with special needs.

Assessment of teachers

Assessments of teachers by the principal and heads of primary was also a major issue that emerged from the interviews. Teachers were assessed approximately twice a term and their performance was given a percentage rating. Of the sixteen teachers interviewed, the majority expressed some anxiety about being formally assessed because they felt that their professionalism was being compromised. In addition, some teachers expressed their concern about being assessed by people who were not as highly educated
and with less educational experience than themselves. One teacher outlined how it felt in the following manner,

I feel annoyed at having people coming into my class, watching how I teach, checking my lesson plans and children's work. It's not so much being assessed; it's the way they do it. I'm in the middle of a lesson, and then either the head or principal comes in, sits at my desk and calls children to bring their work so [s]he can have a look at it. Disturbing my lesson is not an issue. Also, I question the heads' qualifications (Respondent 8).

Generally, teachers are unimpressed by the manner in which they were assessed and don't believe that some of the administration who were assessing them were qualified to do this. They believed that such methods of assessment restricted their ability to modify and adapt instruction to suit children identified as having special needs.

Lack of resources

From the interviews and focus group, the issue relating to the lack of resources and insufficient ovals or playing fields emerged. Lack of resources was a major issue concerning many teachers who did not have access to programs and materials that aided in the instruction of children with special needs. Most teachers have indicated that they have purchased their own texts, computer software and material to cater for the needs of children with special needs in their classrooms.

When purchased by the school, each campus consisted of ovals, basketball courts and other recreational areas. In campuses A and B, the school had sold the oval space, which had been made into residential areas. Consequently, the schools have little space for children to use for sporting and recreational activities. The oval in campus C was in the process of being sold as residential land. Teachers found that this was a major problem for the development of the motor skills of children, especially those with special needs. These problems identified by primary teachers in the school echoed the findings by Pheloung and King (1992) who found that academic skills of children with
special needs benefited from increased structured physical activity that also improved motor skills.

Campus C has a library on the premises. Primary teachers in campuses A and B, indicated that not having access to a library on campus was a major issue. Many teachers identified literacy skills as a major component of teaching children with special needs and believed that access to a library was vital to improving literacy of children with special needs.

The use of inservice courses to help teachers manage their instruction and assessment strategies was seen to be a necessity in enabling children with special needs to succeed academically. Many expressed frustration in the questionnaire and interviews at not being given opportunities to attend inservice courses and believed this was a major impediment to the learning experiences of children with special needs. The focus group reinforced the need for inservice courses, as they believed many teachers did not know how to properly implement effective instruction and assessment strategies to cater for the children with special needs in their classroom.

**Administrative restrictions**

Teachers reported that they had too much administration-based work to contend with, in addition to teaching children with special needs. They indicated that having a full-time teacher assistant in each campus of the upper primary would help them to cater for the needs of low achieving children. Teachers indicated that there was no teacher assistant appointed to the upper primary classes. The focus group discussion corroborated this concern, as it was indicated that having a teacher assistant to assist teachers would free up teacher time to concentrate on improving the academic achievement of children with special needs.

As a result, structural restrictions imposed on teachers were a major issue. From the analysis, it showed that restrictions were extremely problematic because even those who
were trained to teach children with special needs were constrained. The teachers seemed to have good ideas but could not implement them. The focus group discussion validated that these restrictions impeded the ability of teachers to use effective instruction and assessment strategies to improve the academic level of children with special needs.

Religious restrictions

The issue of religious restrictions put into place by the school were perceived by teachers to be an impediment to the academic achievement of children with special needs. Teachers identified religious restrictions as those relating to gender, other religions, dress codes, religious education instruction, associated language instruction and the content of classroom teacher instruction. Areas that had an impact on teachers only consisted of gender, religious education instruction, associated language instruction and instructional content.

Gender issues

The areas of most concern to the teachers who were interviewed involved the demarcation of gender in terms of the promoted segregation of male and female students. One of the major benefits for children with special needs, as perceived by non-religious staff in the school, was exposure to male and female children. Classes in the primary school consisted of both female and male students. According to the teachers interviewed they were told not put female and male students in the same groups together. They were also not to work or play team sports together. Many teachers felt that female students were the most disadvantaged by this policy as they often missed out on recreational time that male students received. For example,

The sport teacher in [Campus A] wanted to take the boys swimming at the [deleted] pool. It was not even an option for the girls, they just weren't allowed to go (Respondent 3).

The general consensus among the teachers interviewed was that the school was promoting institutionalised discrimination against female students as a result of
incidences such as the one above. The gender of teachers had no impact on their view of the way female students were treated in the school. Consequently, if female children with special needs were restricted because of religious considerations put in place by the school regarding what activities they could do, then teachers argued that they were not receiving the best education possible.

Religious education

The majority of teachers who responded to the questionnaires and those interviewed, saw religious education as a positive aspect that installed beliefs and values in students. The positive responses to the amount of religious education classes run in the school, may have been the result of teachers being sensitive to the religious beliefs promoted in the school. Also, religious and associated lessons meant that teachers received three hours of free time per week. A fear of losing some of the seven sessions of free time per week might have affected their responses.

Some teachers indicated that there was a need to reduce the number of religious and associated language lessons (Arabic) that children with special needs received due to the extra instruction time they needed. Respondent 5 expressed,

I see the benefits of religion classes but perhaps children with special needs don’t need so many of them. They might be better off if they were involved in more remedial classes.

This view of religious and language lessons was in the minority as most teachers who responded favourably to Item 32 concerning these classes (M=2.83, sd=0.89), were very negative about the remedial classes reporting that they only sometimes improved the academic achievement of children with special needs.

It can be determined from the responses of teachers in the interviews and questionnaire, that remedial classes in the school were not effective. Teachers generally believed that
children missed out on valuable instruction time while undergoing remedial instruction and therefore, were even more disadvantaged than they would have otherwise been.

Most teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the removal of children from an inclusive classroom environment to an exclusive remedial environment. Many did not agree with using the terms, “remedial classroom” and “remedial teacher” as this highlighted the failure of certain students. The focus group discussion regarding this issue of disengaging students who failed tests from their classrooms resulted in an agreement that this had only resulted in the continued failure of children with special needs. In addition to this, teachers believed not all students who received a test score of less than 50% could be classified as children with special needs. Many teachers questioned this classification and indicated that they could not see any basis for it.

**Context considerations**

In many cases during instruction, teachers revealed that there was content in the curriculum that they were unable to teach due to religious considerations. Some teachers took these restrictions more seriously than others. Teacher related examples of such restrictions included references to particular types of animals, discussion of religious celebrations not pertaining to the religious beliefs of the school, the prohibition of certain art forms and the limited use of drama and theatre arts. Many teachers indicated that they would like to use these instructional strategies in their classrooms to help children with special needs maintain an interest in learning but were concerned about the reaction of the school administration, and in some instances, parents of the children.

Teachers, who had been at the school for three or more years, displayed their willingness to use drama and theatre arts as a part of their instructional repertoire. Respondent 6 indicated that (s)he encouraged the year seven class to put on a play for their graduation:

About three years ago my class did a play about vampires. It was supposed to be a comedy. Unfortunately, it didn’t go down very well
with the owner of the school and the parents. The concept of vampires was, to the parents and owner, a celebration of the devil. It caused quite a furore.

Some teachers indicated that they tended to use dramatic and theatrical arts as an instruction strategy in their classrooms, and for the morning assembly performances, but indicated that they had to be careful of the content of the performance. Generally, teachers managed to incorporate most instructional strategies into their teaching, though their only concern was being discriminatory about content.

The teachers interviewed believed that children with special needs often needed help with their fine motor coordination skills. They often employed drawing to enable children to practice and improve their fine motor coordination skills. Drawing animate objects such as people and animals, in addition to inanimate objects such as houses and cars, were believed by teachers to help improve fine motor coordination, hand-eye coordination and writing skills. Religious restrictions meant that some animate objects were not supposed to be drawn. Quite a number of teachers interviewed, indicated that they frequently encouraged children with special needs to draw animate objects.

Consequently, teachers perceived that religious restrictions did impede the academic achievement of children with special needs in the school to some extent. Most teachers with three or more years experience managed to use instructional strategies that were not encouraged by the religious doctrine of the school because they felt that they had no choice if they were going to provide the children with special needs in their classrooms with the best possible opportunity to learn.

Therefore, key findings included what teachers believed to be the most effective instruction and assessment strategies when teaching children with special needs, and the identification of their concerns. Teachers perceived the most effective strategies in improving the academic achievement levels of children with special needs were peer tutoring, group work, repetition, direct instruction, computer aided learning, Individual
Education Plans and individual conferencing. Teachers who had knowledge of curriculum based measurement strategies indicated that it was effective when used to teach children with special needs. The major concerns identified were frequent formal testing, lack of support from the school administration, lack of resources, use of standardised programs across all year levels, lack of inservice courses and religious restrictions. Teachers believed that these factors helped to contribute to the continued failure of children identified with special needs.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The perceptions of teachers as to why children with special needs were continuing to fail throughout primary school in this study were complex. Teachers frequently discussed their relationships with the school administration (the owner of the school, the principal and heads of primary) when indicating the problems that they faced when teaching children with special needs. Much of what the teachers said related to their frustration at being constrained by the rigid belief systems of the school. For many of the teachers interviewed, working in the school environment caused them to feel that they could not address the problems that children with special needs were facing. For some of these teachers, they felt that their role was being compromised and they were looking for work outside of the school.

The school in question was independent and based on a fundamentalist religious ideology. The primary school operated in three campuses, which were overseen by three heads of primary. Forty-one staff from the school completed the questionnaire and sixteen upper primary teachers were interviewed with nine of those partaking in a focus group discussion.

Via a synthesis of the questionnaire, interview and focus group findings, this chapter provides possible answers to the central research question,

What do teachers perceive as being the main reasons as to why students with special needs consistently get low marks throughout primary school education with little or no improvement?
In this study, support provided by the school, teachers' perceptions of formal testing and models of instruction and assessment were identified by respondents as being the most critical factors that they had to deal with when teaching children with special needs. This research identified what restrictions teachers faced when trying to cater for the specific requirements of children with special needs.

Consequently, a number of themes emerged from the questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion based on the research questions to form the basis for the theory of role conflict. Themes included the instruction and assessment strategies used by teachers in the school, the use of curriculum based measurement strategies, formal testing and religious restrictions.

1. Current instruction and assessment strategies used by teachers in the school and their perceived effectiveness

Teachers working in the school were faced with many restrictions in relation to the instruction and assessment strategies they were able to implement in their classrooms. Many teachers indicated that they believed that the instruction and assessment strategies that were being advocated by the school were too rigid and were not modified in any way to meet the needs of students experiencing learning difficulties. They felt extremely frustrated by the school’s ideology that expected all children to operate at the same developmental and academic level. They also believed that they were unable to be fully aware of, or address, the specific needs of each child in their classroom. The need for the revision of instruction and assessment strategies advocated by the school was seen as being pivotal to changing the continual failure of children who were identified as having special needs. This theme was validated by the focus group discussion.

The restrictions placed on preferred instruction and assessment strategies by the school were perceived by teachers to have an adverse affect on students with special needs. Teachers indicated that their inability to construct different goals to meet the
specific learning areas of children with special needs meant that children rarely acquired the knowledge that they needed. The major concern was the inability to use theatre arts, drama and music to provide alternative instruction methods for children with special needs. In addition, computer packages were not distributed amongst the staff, nor were they given the opportunity to learn how to use them effectively. The lack of information in relation to operating computer packages meant that children with special needs did not benefit from using them in any way. Relating to computer classes, the majority of teachers believed that they were not effective in providing children with computer skills. The general perception among teachers was that the needs of children with special needs were not met. Most teachers looked upon the amount of time children with special needs spent in religious education favourably because they believed that it reinforced beliefs and values.

For some teachers, the restrictions that the school placed on the instruction and assessment strategies that they believed were effective influenced their perception of the way the school dealt with children identified as having special needs. The general perception was that teachers were not able to employ the instruction and assessment strategies that they believed were the most effective when teaching children with special needs.

A number of instructional strategies were deemed by teachers to be effective when teaching children with special needs. These included peer tutoring, group work, repetition, direct instruction, computer aided learning, Individual Education Plans, individual conferencing, remedial classes and alternative methods.

Peer Tutoring and Group Work

The six teachers who used peer tutoring believed that it was one of the most effective instruction strategies when increasing the knowledge and self-concept of
children with special needs. They reported that they found most children with special needs responded favourably to being tutored by a classmate. Children with special needs became more comfortable interacting with their peers, which usually resulted in more social contact out of the classroom. The amount of time children with special needs required to learn concepts was met due to the greater amount of time their peers could spend explaining facts to them. They also believed that children had a clearer way of explaining new concepts to each other because they were “speaking the same language” (Respondent 6). Through peer tutoring, Rosenberg et al. (1998) and Ingleton, Doube and Rogers (2002) reaffirmed these teachers’ beliefs that peer tutoring encouraged student-centred learning, problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills and promoted transferable learning skills. Another positive aspect that teachers attributed to peer tutoring was that it did not counter the belief-system of the school in any way.

The most popular instructional technique that was advocated by all teachers was group work. Many teachers used group work in spite of the noise level that resulted from it. Teachers believed that the administration of the school took a negative view of group work even though they indicated that group discussion helped clarify concepts that children might have been initially confused about. Two respondents had negative experiences with using group work as the school regarded the noise levels made by groups of students working together as excessive. Most teachers were concerned about the lack of administrative support for group work and while continuing to make attempts to use this instruction strategy, they had to be careful about the noise level in their classes drawing any attention. Teachers indicated that they believed group work led to cooperative learning, which was seen by McConnell (1994) to validate ideas of group participants, develop critical thinking and communication skills. Teachers described group work as a vital tool of instruction for not only enabling children to improve their academic skills but also to develop communication skills.
Teachers who used peer tutoring and to a lesser extent, group work felt that they had more time to spend on required duties other than instruction. They felt less stressed than the teachers who did not use peer tutoring and group work because they believed that the specific requirements of children with special needs were being met. Consequently, these teachers felt less guilt toward all their students. This enabled them to develop a calm and friendly atmosphere in their classrooms that they perceived as benefiting children with special needs.

Repetition

The lack of the systematic use of repetition meant that it was not an effective instructional strategy, even though many teachers reported using this strategy. Teachers indicated that they could not use repetition of concepts systematically due to the lack of time they had because of all the other requirements they had to fulfil. Teachers indicated that they felt the school was forcing them due to its rigid structures to use unsystematic repetition. This frustrated them because most believed that the ad hoc way in which they used repetition as an instructional strategy did not benefit children. According to Fuchs, et al. (1986) the unsystematic repetition of concepts is a traditional method of instruction that has very little impact on the academic achievement of children with special needs. Teachers were aware of this and usually became more aware of their roles being in conflict with what they were actually teaching.

Direct Instruction

Most teachers indicated that they felt that they did not have enough control when structuring programs of instruction and content. They felt that they were constrained by the pre-determined content that many believed was irrelevant to the requirements of children with special needs. As a result, teachers were quite perceptive in their beliefs that direct instruction would be unbenefficial to children in the academic environment that they worked in due to their lack of control over the content taught.
to children. The main concern that teachers expressed toward direct instruction methods was that it was a boring technique that would further alienate children with special needs from institutionalised learning. Teachers also tended to believe that the manner in which the school advocated direct instruction was too stringent and uninspiring for children.

*Computer Aided Learning*

Interestingly, teachers also perceived computer classes to have little or no impact on the achievement of children with special needs. The concerns expressed were similar to those expressed about remedial classes. They included the computing teacher not being qualified, students being left to their own devices and the completion of educational software with little or no explanation on how to complete tasks.

Computer aided learning was regarded by teachers as being ineffectively conducted in the school. Teachers were disappointed about not being able to implement computer aided learning in a manner that would benefit children in their classrooms, especially children with special needs. The possibility of learning how to use computer aided learning was believed by teachers to be beneficial not only to their students but themselves as well. They felt that children in the school were missing out on important computer skills that would increase computer literacy and eventually give children greater learning opportunities. Teachers believed that learning opportunities were varied and well-structured via the use of computer aided learning.

Teachers expressed an overall confusion about the ways in which computer technology could enhance the individual learning of children with special needs even though they generally felt that computer literacy was important. Most teachers expressed their concern that they felt that computer aided learning would cause
children with special needs to become even more isolated from their peers. This is contrary to studies conducted by Frazer, Moltzen and Ryba (2000) that found computer aided learning enhanced collaboration and cooperation among students (including those with special needs) and teachers.

*Individual Education Plans*

Only two respondents used IEPs in their classrooms. Both teachers read widely on the practice of constructing IEPs and had experience working with them in other school settings. They believed that IEPs were essential to enabling children with special needs to develop to their academic potential and that it should become part of the administrative process of the school.

Surprisingly, many of the other teachers interviewed had little knowledge of IEPs and how their implementation would benefit children with special needs. Other teachers who did not use IEPs for children identified as having special needs felt that the infrastructure of the school did not enable them to implement IEPs. Again, the frequency of formal testing was cited as the main reason why children with special needs would not benefit from the construction of IEPs. Teachers believed that IEPs would not enable children with special needs to have any opportunity to be prepared for the standardised testing, thus putting them at an even greater disadvantage.

*Individual Conferencing*

The majority of teachers interviewed found that they resorted to individual conferencing as one of the main instructional strategies used. Many felt stressed that they were unable to spend the amount of time that they believed children with special needs was necessary for it to be of any use. The amount of time teachers spent during their recess breaks, lunchtime breaks and after school increased the amount of work teachers felt that they had to complete. This lack of teaching time in school resulted in teachers feeling alienated from other teachers. Many teachers
reported that they felt isolated from other teachers due to the phenomena of most teachers remaining in their classrooms during breaks. They also indicated that missing out on time spent relaxing from the requirements of teaching duties was taxing and they often went home too exhausted to spend time with their families (especially for those teachers who stayed after school hours to provide children with special needs with extra tuition).

**Remedial Classes**

When faced with a large number of students who were in need of remediation, teachers believed that they should have received extra support from the school administration. The type of support teachers indicated that would be most beneficial to them and to children with special needs included teacher assistant time for the upper primary, inservice courses providing teachers with information on the best instruction and assessment strategies available to improve the academic achievement of children with special needs, and resources that were aimed at making information accessible and improving the skill mastery of children with special needs.

Resources available to children with special needs were limited and teachers found that they had to use the same texts they were using with the rest of their class. This meant that children with special needs were often not learning anything because they could not understand the texts they were using. The teachers in the focus group agreed that correct resources were vital to improving the academic achievement of children with special needs.

The financial strain of providing materials for children with special needs was reported to be a major concern for most of the teachers. A small, but considerable, number of teachers interviewed indicated that they had purchased televisions, videos and software packages to provide children with special needs the best learning opportunities that they could give them. The focus group discussion corroborated
this and the number of teachers was greater than first indicated due to information that teachers who were not interviewed also had purchased costly learning materials for the children in their classes.

Many teachers were unhappy about the lack of structure concerning remedial classes in the school and that remedial teachers were often used as relief teachers at the expense of remediation classes. Teachers found this frustrating especially when they were given little, or in some cases no notice that remedial classes were cancelled for a period of time. Remedial teachers were often moved from their position to teach in classrooms when vacancies arose. This meant that the turn-over of remedial teachers was very high. Consequently, children with special needs were constantly dealing with new teachers who did not know their educational history. The lack of consideration for the requirements of children with special needs by the school was believed by teachers to be one of the major contributing factors to their continued failure. Many teachers refused to send children with special needs to remediation classes due to the belief that it did not benefit such children in any way.

Teachers also indicated that their inability to communicate with remedial teachers proved disturbing as they felt that they were sending children who needed carefully structured lessons the most to a learning environment that was totally unstructured. Teachers were frustrated by the lack of reports received in relation to identified weaknesses, strengths and plans of actions concerning the children in need of remediation. One respondent indicated that the remedial classes organised by the school were chaotic and very confusing for teachers and children with special needs. Conversely, another respondent believed it was solely the responsibility of the remedial teacher to cater for the learning requirements of children with special needs. This view was in the minority as most teachers would liked to have seen greater collaboration between classroom teachers and remedial teachers.
The use of remedial classes by the school was perceived by teachers to be unbenevolent to both children with special needs and teachers. The main issues identified by teachers in relation to remedial classes included remedial teachers not being appropriately qualified, children with special needs not learning new skills, being isolated from their classmates and stigmatised, not having records kept on their progress and little or no liaison between remedial and classroom teachers. The ineffectiveness of remedial classes and the fact that teachers were forced to send children with special needs for remediation, added to teachers’ stress levels and their feelings of role conflict. Many classroom teachers interviewed had little respect for the remedial teacher because of their negative perceptions of remedial classes in the school. The remedial teacher, in turn, felt isolated from other teachers and was highly aware that there were problems with addressing the specific requirements of children with special needs and their classroom teachers. Consequently, the remedial teacher displayed the highest levels of role conflict out of all the interviewees.

**Alternative Methods**

Role conflict was evident when teachers were forced to use instructional strategies that they did not feel were effective, or had to modify what they perceived to be effective instructional strategies. For example, while most teachers were aware of the unsystematic use of instructional strategies, they could not make them systematic due to the time restrictions that they faced. Strategy training that involved training children for tests was perceived by teachers to be vital for all children. Due to the frequency of tests, teachers were unable to teach students the various strategies that would enable them to pass tests. This proved extremely frustrating to teachers because they felt that children were just not able to progress academically.

The forced use of strategies that were in opposition to what teachers believed to be effective and taught at university constituted a dilemma for most. Teachers felt that they were working in an environment that would not let them do their jobs properly.
and were very aware that it was their students (especially those identified as having special needs) who would suffer. A pervasive feeling of guilt that teachers were not providing children with the best education possible was evident in most of the interviews conducted.

It was found that the greater the compatibility of teachers with the instruction and assessment strategies advocated by the school, the more satisfied they were with their professional roles. The teachers who were more positive about their impact on the academic achievement of children with special needs in the school were those who identified with the school the most, and generally consisted of teachers who were Muslim or were from countries where teacher-directed learning was viewed favourably. Teachers who were removed from the culture of the school resulting from their religious and educational beliefs, tended to feel less compatibility with the instruction and assessment strategies advocated by the school. A feeling of engaging in unethical professional behaviour proved a significant factor for the teachers who perceived themselves as incompatible with the school. Teaching-the-test was the most significant issue affecting these teachers, as they believed they were contributing towards an institutionalised culture of cheating. Teachers who had higher degrees (especially those in teaching children with special needs) felt a larger degree of incompatibility with the instructional strategies advocated by the school.

Context issues had a significant influence on how effective teachers perceived their instructional strategies were in improving the academic achievement of children with special needs. Many teachers expressed their frustration at not being able to use instruction and assessment strategies that were proven effective in teaching children with special needs. They felt obliged to use what one respondent termed "old fashioned methods of teaching" that did not cater for the various specific learning requirements of children with special needs. The longer teachers had been at the school, the more comfortable they felt about using instruction and assessment
methods that were discouraged by the school. Some examples of such instruction methods and assessment include the use of art, dramatic and theatrical arts, physical education, music and informal assessment. Teachers who indicated they used alternative instruction and assessment strategies explicitly expressed that they were careful about the content of all alternative strategies so that it did not conflict with the religious beliefs of the school system.

Structural restrictions such as the use of standardised programs by the school (that were related to the testing) was perceived as another major reason as to why children with special needs made no significant improvement in their test results throughout primary school. Teachers gave credence to the idea that standardised programs did not cater for the differing developmental levels of children and could not be used to improve academic performance successfully. This was perceived as being the result of the school's erroneous belief that students from the same year level were at the same developmental level. Many teachers felt uncomfortable and increasingly frustrated working under, what they considered, an uneducated assumption.

The broad view of teachers is that they received marginal support from the school. The highest level of teacher dissatisfaction seemed to result from the lack of resources provided by the school. Such lack of resources meant that teachers believed that they could not address the needs of children with special needs adequately. There was a suggested lack of confidence by teachers when teaching children with special needs, which was reinforced by their concern that inservice courses were not made available to them. The main problem associated with programs constructed for children with special needs was the lack of parental input, in addition to input by paraprofessionals (Rosenberg, et al., 1998). Teachers indicated that they rarely used information from parents and paraprofessionals, which could be a major reason why the strategies they implemented to increase the academic achievement level of children with special needs failed. Stevens and Price (1992) considered the lack of interconnectedness between the school, family and
community context made the acquisition of knowledge for children with special needs extremely difficult due to the reduced opportunities for the generalisation of new concepts.

The focus group concurred with the perception of teachers that they did not receive enough support from the school to adequately meet the individual needs of low achieving children in their classrooms. All teachers felt that the number of children who needed remediation in their classroom was excessive, and all indicated that they could identify at least ten students who were having difficulty passing tests. This was in spite of the fact that most of the teachers who reported having such large numbers of children in need of remediation in their classrooms were managing to attain class averages of above 80%. Teachers interviewed were not reticent, even though they were obviously uncomfortable, about indicating that they often trained children for fortnightly tests.

In addition, teachers indicated that the principal did not address student underachievement appropriately. This might have resulted in wasted time, where children with special needs were not receiving adequate remediation. This was reflected by the static levels of academic achievement of children with special needs.

Consequently, teachers perceived that the main reasons why there has been no improvement in the academic levels of children with special needs was because of a lack of support from the school administration, reliance on frequent formal testing, the use of standardised programs and lack of communication between teachers, parents and professionals. The perceived lack of support from the school administration proved to be the biggest factor preventing children with special needs from succeeding academically. Teachers indicated that they believed that the administration did not value what they had to contribute via instruction and assessment strategies to children with special needs. Such a communication gap
between teachers and the school administration meant that teachers were becoming increasingly frustrated and stressed about not being able to fully fulfil their role as a teacher.

2. Teachers' perceptions of the importance of curriculum based measurement strategies in ensuring the academic success of children with special needs

The critical issue pertaining to curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies were perceived by teachers as being the restriction of time to spend on curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies. The specification of individual goals and systematic formative assessment emerged as being the most important factors concerning curriculum based measurement and assessment strategies. Teachers believed that they did not have enough time to devise individual goals for children with special needs nor conduct what they perceived as useful formative assessment (as opposed to the school's standardised testing).

Not being able to identify and set short-term and long-term goals for children with special needs was also seen as a major impediment to academic success. Teachers believed that they were unable to set any individual goals for children because they all needed to pass the fortnightly test. According to teacher perceptions, this resulted in continued failure of children with special needs.

3. Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of frequent formal testing

Teachers' perceptions of formal testing were negative. The frequency of testing proved to be a major impediment to the achievement of children with special needs. The general assumption that was drawn from the questionnaire, interviews and focus group was that formal testing was used as the main tool of assessment and in many cases it was used as the only tool of assessment. Teachers believed that they did not have the time to spend meeting the specific needs of these children. Due to the lack of input teachers had in tests, they could not modify the tests to cater for the
developmental level of children in their classrooms. Consequently, if children did not understand concepts initially, they were usually not retaught or retested. This resulted in children not being given an opportunity to learn concepts that they could not initially grasp. The use of formal testing as the main method of assessment was believed to be ineffective as testing in isolation did not improve the academic achievement of children with special needs. In fact, the reverse occurred, and children with special needs continued to fail. Teachers were unable to use tests in a systematic and formative manner that allowed them to determine what skills children had mastered, and the knowledge that had actually been acquired. Fuchs et al. (1986) found that systematic formative evaluation increased the academic performance of children with special needs. Testing advocated by the school was not formative or systematic. The majority of teachers perceived testing to entail the imitation of material covered in textbooks. As a result, only children's memories were being tested, not what knowledge they had actually acquired. In many instances, this put children with special needs at a significant disadvantage due to poor memorization skills. Consequently, teachers perceived frequent formal testing as the biggest impediment to the academic achievement of children with special needs and they stated that this was the reason there had been no improvement in their performance levels.

Teachers also indicated that they required more input into formal tests so that they could modify them to assess students' developmental levels that students were operating at. Without more input, teachers felt that they were incapable of assessing the knowledge and skill acquisition of children with special needs. They believed that the construction of programs and tests before teachers knew the capabilities of the children in their classrooms limited their opportunities to determine individual goals and modify instructional strategies. Teachers indicated that modifying programs and instructional strategies were vital in improving the academic achievement of children with special needs. The issue that teachers were most concerned about involved not being able to construct programs to meet the individual instructional requirements of children with special needs.
4. Teachers’ perceptions about whether religious restrictions on learning impede the success of children with special needs

Religious restrictions related to gender played an important role in some of the teachers’ perceptions of their experiences teaching children with special needs in the school. Female teachers tended to be more affected by religious restrictions than males. The type of clothing they had to wear was for many a symbol of inequality and expected subservience. The teachers who felt this way continually expressed their fear that they were communicating inequality to children. They generally believed that gender inequality was transferred to children with special needs. The teachers’ statements reinforced the issue of inequality in that children with special needs were not receiving adequate intervention by the school. Such institutionalised inequities contributed greatly to the role conflict experienced especially by the female teachers interviewed because they felt that they were unable to empower their female students.

Most teachers felt that children with special needs benefited from religious education classes as it reinforced basic values and was believed to cater for the spiritual, emotional and educational welfare of children. The focus group suggested that the positive responses to religious education in the questionnaires and interviews might have been influenced by the increased amount of non-teaching time that teachers received and their fear of losing, what they perceived as, free time.

**EMERGENCE OF A THEORY OF TEACHER ROLE CONFLICT**

According to Malin (1990), the role of the teacher involved the equitable distribution of resources. Resources included the teacher’s responsibility toward students, time, encouragement, use of instruction strategies and high expectations. The general belief of teachers in the school was that the failure or success rate of children with special needs would be determined by the quality of these resources. Teachers believed that they could not provide quality resources to their students due to the
amount of restrictions that were imposed upon them by the school. They also indicated that their supposed roles were in no way encouraged or respected by the school administration. Such a disparity between what teachers believed their roles to be and what the school defined their roles as caused not only role conflict but also resulted in low morale. Research conducted by Magdi (1995) concerning the same school reinforced this study’s findings that teacher moral was very low. Surprisingly, there had been little increase in teacher moral over the last seven years. The most likely cause of this seems to be no improvement in the support provided to teachers by the school and in the academic achievement of children with special.

A conflict of interest resulted from teachers wanting to implement instruction and assessment strategies that they felt would increase the academic performance of children with special needs but were continuously aware that their jobs depended on achieving good class averages in tests. Teachers seemed to believe that their choices were limited in that they could focus on teaching children with special needs in educationally proven ways (for example, using curriculum based measurement strategies) or keep their jobs. Most found that they compromised their teaching ideologies to protect their jobs. This in turn led to dissatisfaction with teaching because it was perceived that they could not use the instruction and assessment strategies that they believed were useful.

Expectations of the school system were deemed by teachers to be unreasonable and extremely rigid. The amount of paperwork they were required to complete was viewed as unnecessary and of little benefit to teachers or students. Consequently, many teachers felt that they were not engaging in productive work. Demands placed upon teachers such as student preparation for tests, performances for morning assembly and the television show, was believed to be essentially detrimental to the achievement of children with special needs. Teachers indicated that they did not have the necessary time needed to repeat and reteach concepts covered in class.
This often resulted in teachers feeling guilty because they were not giving the children in their classrooms the time they required to learn successfully.

**Issues influencing teachers’ perceptions of why children with special needs are continuously failing in the school, leading to role conflict**

This study found that two major factors had an influence on teachers’ perceptions of the reasons why children with special needs were failing in the school throughout their primary education. The first involved institutional factors that included administrative support, perceptions of teacher roles, the number of children with special needs teachers had to contend with and testing. The second factor consisted of teacher’ attitudes towards children with special needs.

*Institutional Factors*

Administrative support, how teachers saw their roles, the number of children with special needs in their classes and whether or not teachers viewed tests favourably had an impact on the way teachers viewed the school and their roles as educators of children with special needs. Teachers who had a positive relationship with the owner of the school, the principal and the heads of primary tended to have a more favourable view of the manner in which the school was catering for children identified with special needs. These teachers usually consisted of those who had spent more than three years at the school. They were generally comfortable with their roles as teachers and indicated that they got frequent praise and support from the administration. Support and praise were usually presented in the form of public monetary awards in the weekly religious meetings. The teachers who did not have a good relationship with the administrative staff of the school found that they had little support and felt that these monetary awards were little more than bribes.

Another factor that had an impact on the way teachers viewed their roles as educators of children with special needs was the number of children identified as
having special needs. Teachers who had more than five children identified as having special needs in their classrooms felt that they were overwhelmed by their responsibilities to firstly, teach and secondly, enable those children to pass the fortnightly tests. This proved a daunting task that many teachers indicated turned into a choice between actually teaching children with special needs so that they could acquire knowledge or training them to perform in tests. The teachers who resorted to training children to pass tests experienced high levels of role conflict.

Teachers who had a negative view of testing experienced greater role conflict than those who believed testing was indicative of student knowledge. The majority of teachers felt that frequent standardised testing caused greater stress to themselves and children with special needs. Testing was seen to contribute to low self-esteem of children with special needs because it promoted their continual failure. Constant failure was the reason most teachers gave as to why children with special needs were not improving academically across their primary school education.

**Attitudes of teachers towards children with special needs**

Teachers who had positive attitudes towards inclusion and believed that their roles included teaching children with special needs in an inclusive classroom had an impact on the amount of role conflict they experienced. The teachers who were supportive of the inclusion of children with special needs into the classroom felt constrained by the restrictions that were imposed upon them by the school because they could not employ instruction techniques that would enable children to effectively master skills. These teachers also displayed greater frustration toward testing, as they believed that it was wasting valuable teaching time. They expressed their dissatisfaction of the school system and their belief that the school had no interest in improving the skill and knowledge acquisition of children with special needs. The relationship that these teachers had with the school administration affected their overall view of the school system, the religious culture (as opposed to actual religious beliefs) and the effectiveness of the instruction and assessment
strategies they used. Consequently, these teachers experienced a greater level of role conflict than those who did not view inclusion of children with special needs positively.

Conversely, the minority of teachers who did not view the inclusion of children with special needs positively experienced less role conflict. They believed that it was not their role to cater for the educational requirements of children with special needs, so they did not alter their instruction or assessment strategies to make them more accessible. These teachers generally ignored children with special needs and special instruction was left to the remedial teacher. These teachers were comfortable with the school system and their teaching roles in the school.

Implications

The lack of consideration by the school for children with special needs has led teachers to experience role conflict. Role conflict has emerged because teachers are faced with a reality that involves high numbers of children identified with special needs in their classrooms. Most teachers indicated that they did not find having children with special needs in their classes stressful. They found that the lack of administrative support was the most stressful factor in relation to teaching children with special needs in an inclusive environment.

The theory of role conflict that has emerged from this study could serve as a basis to increase the communication structures between the school administration and teachers in relation to what instruction and assessment strategies were perceived as being most beneficial to children with special needs. The school administration needs to listen to teachers' experiences of children in their classrooms to reduce their feelings of disempowerment and frustration. It also needs to have support structures in place so that teachers are able to access them. In addition, the administration needs to provide teachers with resources and support when they request it.
Therefore, ways of fostering greater cooperation between the administration of the school and teachers needs to be addressed.

Taking measures to abolish the standardised programs and tests that the school uses could diminish role conflict. Testing could be restructured to include more summative evaluation procedures such as homework, oral presentations and quiz results in addition to test results. Teachers need to have a greater role in constructing tests after they have measured individual student needs (which is especially relevant to children with special needs). Also, children should not be labelled as having special needs or sent to remedial classes solely on the basis of achieving results less than 50% in their tests. In addition, the quality of remedial staff must be improved. All staff employed to teach children with special needs should be required to have the appropriate qualifications. The placement of children in remedial classes should be at the discretion of the classroom teacher based on a number of formal and informal assessment criteria involving not only formal assessment and summative assessment but also observation. Consequently, teachers would feel that they had more control over the testing measures that they used.

From the interviews and focus group discussion, there was evidence that there needs to be further research conducted into how teachers might be able to reconcile their beliefs of what constituted effective instruction and assessment strategies within the culture of the school. This needed to be considered very carefully so that teachers’ roles were not as compromised as they seemed to be at the time of the study, while not conflicting or offending the religious and cultural beliefs of the school.

An important recommendation from the study is that teachers believed that the school needed to have structured educational support units in place organised by qualified educators of children with special needs (remedial teachers). Arguably, teachers in the school need more time for reflection on the manner in which
Educational support is used in the school, as another implication of the study is that the school needed to have structured educational support offered in the regular classroom. Children with special needs must be regarded as having legitimate requirements that are different from other children. The appointment of remedial teachers needed to be taken seriously by the school and these teachers should not be used for any other purpose other than teaching children with special needs (for example, many remedial teachers were used as “stand-by” or relief teachers).

Relationships between teachers were central to the amount of role conflict teachers experienced in relation to teaching children with special needs. Teachers who indicated that they had more than five children who had been identified with special needs found it virtually impossible to interact with other staff members because they spent most of their non-teaching time attempting to cater for the specific educational requirements of children with special needs. This increased teachers’ stress levels as they were continuously trying to keep up with the demand of teaching in the general classroom and meeting the needs of children with special needs. Being unable to discuss their concerns with other teachers proved to be concerning for most teachers because they felt that they were not benefiting from different experiences or being able to talk to different people about the difficulties that they experienced with such large numbers of children with special needs in their classrooms.

The use of team-teaching or the encouraged collaboration among teaching staff by the school would give teachers a greater feeling of support and being part of the school culture, instead of being opposed to it. Collaborative teaching would enable teachers to discuss problems they were having with teaching children with special needs, pool their resources together and to develop effective instruction and assessment strategies that have been used by others.
The study also identified the need for more inservice courses and workshops for teachers so that they feel competent to meet the educational requirements of children with special needs. At the time of the study, teachers felt that they had little competence, translated into a lack of confidence, to effectively teach children with special needs. If children with special needs in the school are to improve their academic achievement, teacher will need to be trained in teaching children with special needs.

Other factors that might have affected the academic achievement of children with special needs and need further research include the religious restrictions placed on females in the school, funding, socio-economic levels, attitudes to the school and whether students were from a non-English speaking background.

In conclusion, the enforced use of testing, and restrictions to instruction and assessment strategies caused teachers to question their role as educators working in the best interest of children and consequently, led to role conflict. More research is needed to determine ways in which the role conflict experienced by teachers in relation to children with special needs can be reduced without affecting the religious doctrine and cultural expectations of the school.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. How many children have you got in your class who can be classified as having special needs. That is, children who consistently receive marks less than 50% in tests.

2. At what year level would you say many of these children are working at?

3. Do you think the standardized programs that each year level use caters for individual needs of students who consistently achieve low marks?

4. What are some of the things you do to cater for individual needs of low achieving students?

5. Why do you think that the improvement of these students has been marginal or negligible?

6. What are some of the behaviour patterns of the low achieving students in your class?

7. What are some of the attitudes of low achieving students toward school?

8. Do you feel that withdrawing individual students and putting them into remedial classes is an effective way of improving their academic performance?

9. What benefits do you associate with remedial classes?

10. What problems do you associate with remedial classes?

11. Do you think that the computer lessons that students attend weekly are effective?

12. How can the use of remedial and computer teachers be improved?

13. What do you think of the frequency of formal testing in the school?

14. Do you think these standardized tests enable students with special needs to improve their academic achievement?

15. What would you like to see happen in relation to the frequency and standardization of testing in the school?

16. What are some of the resources and support that you would like to see put in place for students with special needs?
17. What changes do you think the school needs to make to cater for children with special needs?
Example of the Probe Questions used in the Interviews

Each probe question number corresponds to the semi-structured interview question number.

1. Do you consider all children who get grades below 50% in the fortnightly tests as children with special needs?

2. Why do you think that these children have managed to go through school at this year level?

3. What can the school do to modify these standardized programs to cater for students with special needs? Can they modify them?

4. Do you always follow the standardized programs? How do you deviate from the program?

5. Do you believe that the school is not doing enough to help improve the academic achievement of children with special needs?

6. Do you categorize low achieving students’ behaviour as either withdrawn or disruptive?

7. Why do you think the attitudes of low achieving students toward school are so negative?

8. a) How do you think remedial classes could be improved so that they are more benefit to students?

   b) Why do you think they should be “scrapped”?

   c) In what ways would children with special needs be better off in remedial classes?

9. Do you believe that concepts can be repeated more easily for low achieving students in remedial classes rather than the general classroom?

10. Why do you think these problems are occurring in remedial classes? Why don’t you think they are helping students?

11. & 12. What can be done to improve computer lessons to make them more effective for children with special needs?
15. Why do you think standardized testing should be stopped or the frequency lowered? How would this benefit children with special needs?

16. Why do you think that the school has not provided you with these resources?

17. Do you think that the school will make the changes that you suggested? Why?
Dear Colleague,

I am conducting a study investigating how to improve the achievement of low achieving students in the school. These children will be referred to as students with special needs.

The study will investigate the strategies that you use to instruct and evaluate children who consistently achieve low results. I am also interested in your perceptions of the school that you work in and what sort of impact it has on teaching and learning.

Your viewpoint is very important and will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Please answer the questions as honestly and accurately as possible. There will be no connection between individuals and the results. At no time are you asked to give your name.

You have been provided with an envelope in which you can place your completed questionnaire. I would appreciate your completing the attached questionnaire and putting it in the principal’s pigeon hole by next ____________.

The principal of the school has endorsed the study and an abstract of the findings will be provided once the study is completed.

Thank you in anticipation of your valuable assistance.

Ivanka Saric
STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete this section by ticking the appropriate boxes or write the required information. Information given will be treated with the strictest confidence and is required to allow the questionnaire to be classified.

Gender: Female
Male

Country of Birth: ______________

Religion:  
Muslim  
Christian  
Jewish  
Other (please specify) ______________

Classification:  
Classroom Teacher  
Remedial/Special Education Teacher  
Religious Staff  
Other (please specify) ______________

Degree(s) Held: ______________________________

Years of Teacher Experience: ____________

Years at Current School: ______________

Current Year level taught:  
Kindergarten – Year 3  
Year 4 – Year 5  
Year 6 – Year 7
Listed below are a number of statements that could be used to describe what happens in schools. Please indicate to what extent you think the statements apply to your school by circling the appropriate number.

The scale is coded as follows:
- Never circle 1
- Sometimes circle 2
- Usually circle 3
- Always circle 4

**Item 1:** Teachers perceptions of the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>Item wording</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subscale:</strong> Support provided by the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for children with special needs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Provides remedial programs for children with special needs when I request them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Provides me with correct advice on how to access psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and other specialists.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Provides me with necessary resources and support in the form of inservice courses to implement various programs constructed by psychologists and other specialists when I request them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration by staff, parents and administration</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in educating children with special needs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My colleagues work together to improve the academic achievement of children with special needs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Uses information from parents, other staff members and specialists (eg, psychologists) to help construct Individualized Education Programs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Addressing student underachievement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The principal addresses student underachievement.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The principal puts appropriate strategies in place to help teachers address student underachievement.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item no.</td>
<td>Item wording</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>Always</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I have time to prepare students for tests</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I have the time and support to provide opportunities for students to sit practice tests covering the concepts that will be formally tested.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Students are taught learning and testing strategies to enable them to study more effectively.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tests are used to develop and modify instruction.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Formal testing is used as the main tool in evaluating and assessing students' acquisition of knowledge.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Test results are used to plot and follow student progress throughout the year.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The test results students with special needs achieve adequately reflect what they can or cannot do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Teachers have an input into the construction of tests.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Teachers have a say in how often tests should be administered.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Students repeat the same tests throughout the year.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Frequent formal testing helps improve the grades of children with special needs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Testing in this school requires students to repeat material presented in textbooks.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>This school uses formal testing as the main method of evaluation and assessment.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item no.</td>
<td>Item wording</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>Always</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subscale: Models of Instruction and Assessment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Catering for the individual needs of low achieving children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Teachers decide what strategies to plan and teach when considering students with special needs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Teachers cater for the individual needs of low achieving students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Teachers are encouraged to measure the effectiveness of their instruction and assessment methods after each lesson.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Establishing goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Teachers are expected to provide clear Goals in each lesson.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Teachers are encouraged to identify more attainable goals for students with special needs that may be different from other students in the school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Setting attainable goals for students with special needs help them to achieve better results.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Models of Instruction and assessment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Teachers are given the opportunity to use drama and theatre arts to teach new concepts.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Teachers are provided with computer packages and given information on how to use them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Teachers have the opportunity to integrate art, physical education, information technology, technology and enterprise, and music with the subject areas to promote and provide children with different ways of learning.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Classes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Computer classes help students with special needs improve academically.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Remedial classes are effective in improving the results of children with special needs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Religious and associated language lessons take up time that could be used more efficiently in giving children with special needs extra tuition.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In your opinion, what are the steps the school needs to take in order to improve the academic achievement of students with special needs?

Any other comments:

Thank you for spending the time to complete the survey.

Regards,

Ivanka Saric
APPENDIX C

Focus Group Questions

1. Are the issues identified the main problems faced by teachers and children with special needs in the school?

_Probe:_ What are the main problems?

2. Do the themes identified adequately reflect the teachers’ perceptions and attitudes of instruction and assessment strategies they are being encouraged to use by the school?

_Probe:_ Why are the teachers’ attitudes negative towards these instruction and assessment strategies?

3. Do the themes identified express teachers’ perceptions of why children with special needs are consistently failing?

_Probe:_ What are the reasons children with special needs are failing?
APPENDIX D

Principal’s Consent Form

Dear Principal,

I am conducting a study investigating how to improve the achievement of low achieving students in the school. These children will be referred to as students with special needs or low achieving students.

The study will investigate the strategies that teachers use to instruct and evaluate children who consistently achieve low results. I am also interested in teachers’ perceptions of the school that they work in and what sort of impact it has on teaching and learning. The study will involve semi-structured interviews of sixteen upper primary teachers. Field notes of interviews will be taped on site. In addition, fifty primary teachers will be surveyed.

The teachers’ viewpoints will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. At no time will the name of your the school appear anywhere in the study. If, at any time teachers wish to withdraw from the study, they are free to do so. If they wish to withdraw any information that they have given from the study, it will be removed immediately and destroyed.

Your cooperation in allowing the study to proceed would be appreciated. If you consent to the study being carried out in your school, please fill in the consent form below.

Yours Sincerely,

Ivanka Saric

______________________________________

I agree to allow the study to take place in my school. I understand that at no time will my name or that of the school appear anywhere in the study and that I may withdraw at any time.

Name of Principal: ______________________

Signature: ______________________

Date: ______________________
Dear Colleague,

I am conducting a study investigating how to improve the achievement of low achieving students in the school. These children will be referred to as students with special needs or low achieving students.

The study will investigate the strategies that you use to instruct and evaluate children who consistently achieve low results. I am also interested in your perceptions of the school that you work in and what sort of impact it has on teaching and learning. The study will involve semi-structured interviews of sixteen upper primary teachers. Interviews will be taped and field notes taken on site. In addition, fifty primary teachers will be surveyed.

Your viewpoint is very important and will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. At no time will your name or the school's name appear anywhere in the study. If, at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so. If you wish to withdraw any information that you have given from the study, it will be removed immediately and destroyed.

Your cooperation in the study would be appreciated. If you agree to participate, please fill in the consent form below.

Yours Sincerely,

Ivanka Saric

I agree to participate in the study. I understand that at no time will my name or that of the school appear anywhere in the study and that I may withdraw at any time.

Name: __________________

Signature: __________________

Date: __________________