CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The history of education for learners with 'special educational needs' and of education support services in South Africa, like much of the history of our country, reflects massive deprivation and lack of educational provision for the majority of people. The inequities evident in the areas of concern addressed by The National Commission of Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET, 1997) can be directly attributed to those social, economic and political factors that have characterised the history of South African society during the years of apartheid.

These factors have not only resulted in a lack of educational opportunities for learners who experience barriers to learning, they have also resulted in inequalities between provision for black and white learners, a highly inefficient and fragmented educational bureaucracy which has separated and marginalised these learners from the mainstream, as well as the provision of highly specialised services to a limited number of learners (NCSNET, 1997:21).

The nature of these inequalities will be addressed in this chapter.

2.2 DEFINING THE TERM 'SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS'

As mentioned in par. 1.3.1 the term 'special educational needs' came into use in the late 1960's as a result of increasing dissatisfaction with the terminology used, which classified handicapped children into ten categories according to their main handicaps. There was an increasing awareness of the prevalence of learning and other difficulties affecting children's progress and adjustment in ordinary schools (Gulliford & Upton, 1994:1).

Webb (1967) found that 16% of the children who passed through school during a certain time period needed, or were given, additional help on account of learning, behaviour or emotional problems. Because researchers had commented that the categorising of children according to their presumed major handicaps had become a restraint in planning special education, it was suggested that special schooling be reconsidered from the point of view of the actual needs of "handicapped" children (Rutter, Tizard & Whitmore, 1970:375).

The idea that was "deeply engrained in educational thinking that there are two types of children, the handicapped and the non-handicapped" was already rejected in the report of the Warnock Committee into Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People (1978:37). This report states that "traditionally the former (handicapped) have generally been thought to require special education, and the latter (non-handicapped) ordinary education. But the complexities of individual needs are far greater than this dichotomy implies. Moreover, to describe someone as handicapped

conveys nothing of the type of educational help and hence of provision that is required."

Theories that explain the development and nature of these needs – not simply in terms of a child's particular disability, but in relation to everything about him, his abilities as well as his disabilities - were therefore required (Gulliford & Upton, 1994:2). This idea comprises a section within the total educational enterprise that is concerned with the education of learners who have handicapping conditions, exceptionalities or special needs.

Gwalla-Ogisi (1990:272) defines a handicapped child as follows:

> *"A child under the age of eighteen years and who, in the eyes of the director-general, deviates to such an extent from the majority of children in body, mind or behaviour that he:*
>
> - *cannot derive sufficient benefit from instruction normally provided in the ordinary course of education,*
> - *requires education of a specialised nature to facilitate his adjustment to the community, and*
> - *should not attend an ordinary class in an ordinary school because such attendance may be harmful to himself or to the other pupils in the class, but is nonetheless educable and will derive sufficient benefit from special education."*

The search for an appropriate definition of special needs, however, continues. A definition given by Brennan (in Donald 1993:140) states: *"A special need exists when any disability (physical, sensory,*

intellectual, emotional, social or any combination of these) affects learning to the extent that special access to curriculum, a special or modified curriculum, or specially adapted conditions of learning, are necessary if the pupil is to be appropriately and effectively educated."

Donald (1993:140) argues that this statement is only appropriate and acceptable in most developed contexts for identifying those with special educational needs. It is also reasonably liberal in the sense that it stresses the obligation of the system to adapt to the needs of the individual learner without removing him from the system. However, this definition is still problematic in a context like South Africa. The reasons for this are as follows:

- It matches the notion that the need is created due to a deficit **intrinsic** to the learner.

In South Africa it is questionable whether the majority of children with special needs have any **intrinsic** disability at all. The most extensive special needs are **extrinsic** to the children concerned and influence their capacity for learning (Kriegler, 1989:165). Where severe social and educational disadvantages occur, special educational needs manifest as the need for special educational support in the acquisition of basic educational skills that have been delayed or denied to learners through lack of access to, or inadequacy of, the existing educational system.

- It assumes that the degree and nature of the special learning need can be matched to curricular or other adaptations that might have to be made.

Where specialised personnel, psycho-educational instruments and physical facilities are lacking or inaccessible - as they are for the majority of South African children - a definition such as that of Brennan's has little practical value (Donald, 1993:140). It is impossible to act on a definition such as this and it does not help to define how many children have special educational needs.

- The definition further assumes that 'special educational need' refers to a relatively small section of the school-going population.

In contexts of widespread poverty and disadvantage as in South Africa, evidence indicates that **intrinsic disability** may be created at a much faster rate than is the case in more privileged contexts (Garmezy, 1991:422).

In the South African context some learners cannot derive sufficient benefit from 'normal instruction' because of handicapping conditions that preceded the instruction, and will need learning support if they are to succeed in the broad community.

The Education White Paper 6 (2001: 7) states: "*a broad range of learning needs exists among the*

learner population at any point in time, and that where these are not met, the learners may fail to learn effectively or be excluded from the learning system. In this regard, different learning needs arise from a range of factors including physical, mental, sensory, neurological, and developmental impairments, psycho-social disturbances, differences in intellectual ability, particular life experiences or socio-economic deprivation."

Kriegler (1989) has also argued against the appropriateness of a model for 'specific learning disability' in South Africa where it excludes services to the majority of those who have special learning needs in the mainstream of education. It was believed that special educational need has little to do with the effectiveness of mainstream education. This was because of the assumption that children with special educational need are relatively few in number and special educational support has been seen as dispensable within the broader educational initiative. In order to challenge this sort of conceptualisation, educators in South Africa should rather describe special needs in terms of the origins thereof and rather also describe the different contexts in which 'special educational needs' seem to appear, so that the true nature and extent of special needs can be identified (Donald, 1993:140).

2.3 THE CONTEXT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Warnock (1978:6) makes the following statement: "*We have been concerned, not only with the severely handicapped but with all those children who require special education in any form.*

The help may range from continuous support from specialist services, including an intensive educational programme in a special school for a child with severe and multiple difficulties, to part-time assistance from a specially trained teacher for a child with mild learning difficulties. It is perhaps useful to regard the range of special educational need as a continuum, where traditional definitions of special needs as well as more contextually relevant approaches are taken."

Traditional identification of special needs focused on the individual alone and emphasised pathology and the intra-personal deficits that resulted in problem focussed practices. Attempts to identify the cognitive, motivational or behavioural factors causing underachievement, in order to correct the problem in these terms, do, however not constitute an adequate or sufficient model of intervention (Donald 1991:39).

Donald (1991), who has studied the nature of learning disabilities in the South African context, argues that identification and assessment should focus on a systematic analysis of a particular context, whether at the level of classroom, school or wider systemic context.

There is therefore a need to be generous in terms of providing for the special educational needs of a very significant numbers of learners, on the basis of the assumption that extrinsic disability is a widespread legacy of apartheid in South Africa that will take a generation and more to eradicate (Van den Berg & Naicker, 1996:30).

It is, however, important to identify these learners as they are mostly accommodated in ordinary schools and need special educational support and intervention. Reynolds (1989:130) suggests that children with special needs can easily be identified in an ordinary school setting because:

- They are not responding positively to the instruction offered in basic skills, e.g. reading
- Their social behaviour is unacceptable
- They are falling behind in learning academic subjects
- They may have significant physical limitations or major health problems
- English is often not their first language
- They are extremely limited in experiences that provide the background for formal education.

Where traditional views of special needs focussed basically on two categories of special need, namely individual learning disabilities and behavioural problems, there is also a need for understanding difficulties which are related to the educational and socio-economic environment in which the child functions.

It is therefore relevant to categorise barriers to learning in three main categories, namely: Individual barriers to learning; social, interpersonal and behavioural barriers to learning; and barriers to learning that are related to educational deprivation. These barriers will be described briefly:

2.3.1 Individual disabilities and difficulties as barriers to learning

Children with mild learning difficulties were traditionally seen as forming the largest group of children requiring some form of additional educational support in ordinary schools. Moderate learning difficulties were described as stemming from a variety and combination of causes which included mild and multiple physical sensory disabilities, an impoverished or adverse social or educational background, specific learning difficulties and limited general ability. They were seen as constituting "the largest group of children with special needs" (Gulliford, 1994:43).

Learners were identified as having specific learning difficulties if there was an unusual and unexpected discrepancy between some measure of general intellectual ability and their levels of attainment (Hammil, 1990:75). Most children learn to read, spell and write; some take longer than others do. Typically, the more intellectually able a child, the more rapidly will he/she will become literate. This is a well-validated prediction. However, a number of learners who would be expected to learn to read, fail to do so. Their failure is unexpected and unusual. As such, it is a cause of concern to parents, learners and professionals. This concern is also a reflection of tolerance or intolerance regarding individual differences between learners and their rates of progress, and standards of literacy. Although there is no universally accepted definition of specific learning difficulties, a child who fails to reach a level of achievement in, for example, reading that is predicted on the basis of measured intelligence, chronological age or grade placement in the absence of adverse exogenous factors, is often labelled as specific learning disabled or dyslexic, and is therefore regarded as having special educational needs.

2.3.2 Social, interpersonal and behavioural barriers to learning

Hammil (1990:83) mentions that the main limitation of the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities definition described in par 1.3.1 is that it does not specify the inclusion of social skills in the listing of primary learning disabilities.

When trying to understand the occurrence of emotional and behavioural problems in children, there is a tendency to assume that it is the learners who are at fault. The clear indication of the term 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' is that it is the learners who have the emotional and behavioural difficulties (Upton, 1994:96). From 1944 to 1981 the official term used in Britain to refer to these children was 'maladjusted', which together with other terms such as 'disturbed', 'disruptive' and 'psychiatrically ill' suggested that the child had the problem. These terms are understandable when adopted by teachers whose primary concern is to establish an effective teaching and learning environment in the classroom.

Reid (1985) and Cronk (1987) both explored the perceptions held by disruptive learners, and found that these learners often view their acts of disruption as rational and justifiable responses to poor teaching.

Galloway and Goodwin (1987:15) argue strongly in favour of the term 'disturbing': *"By definition,*

children who are called maladjusted or disturbed attract these labels because they have disturbed adults. The adult's disturbance may be at the level of frustration or anxiety at not 'getting through to' the child, or it may be sheer physical fear of violence. The term 'disturbing' implies recognition of the children's effects on adults while the terms maladjusted and disturbed are too often taken to imply psychological or social characteristics in the child".

This kind of thinking opens up the possibility of a behavioural problem being caused by participants other than the learner and, in particular, forces us to look at the role that poor teaching may play in the creation of such problems.

" Emotional and behavioural difficulties are manifest in many different forms and severity of behaviour. Children with these difficulties exhibit unusual problems of adaptation to a range of physical, social and personal situations. They may set up barriers between themselves and their learning environment through inappropriate, aggressive, bizarre or withdrawn behaviour. Some children will have difficulty making sense of their environment..." (Quotation in Upton, 1994:98).

Following this quotation, it is also stated that learners with emotional behaviour disorders are likely, by the time they enter a school or special school, to have developed a range of strategies dealing with day-to-day experiences that are inappropriate and impede normal personal and social development,

that make it difficult for them to learn.

2.3.3 Educational deprivation as a barrier to learning

Kriegler (1996:112) states that the predictors of a child's ability to benefit from formal education are primarily dependent on the quality and quantity of informal education at home, rather than on global and intractable factors such as 'cultural differences' and 'socio-economic status'. Negating the importance of pre-school informal mediated learning experiences has helped maintain the myth that the discrepancy in educational outcome between black and white children is the result of racially determined and genetically transmitted inferiority.

The Inner London Educational Authority (1986), according to Kriegler (1996), carried out a four year longitudinal study of nearly 2000 children attending fifty junior schools. This study, however, indicated marked differences in attainments between social groups, and substantially lower reading achievements for learners from ethnic groups. Whilst the children may be moved to special settings as a result of low achievement, this feature persists across the contexts in which they may be placed.

In this study there was little evidence to support a need for qualitatively different forms of instruction. It appeared that such learners needed more teaching and accelerated exposure, not a different kind of teaching, than other learners. Accelerated exposure at an age younger, and at a rate faster than what is usually considered the norm is therefore the notion that will form the basis of intervention in

this research.

Related to the above mentioned contexts in which special needs appear, one can also divide the origins of special needs into three categories, namely: special needs caused by intrinsic factors, special needs caused by extrinsic factors, and special needs caused by a reciprocal interaction between intrinsically and extrinsically generated special needs.

2.4 THE ORIGINS OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

One of the reasons for studying the origins of special needs is that the identification of causal factors may open up the way for preventive measures (Molteno & Lachman, 1996:141).

There are some difficulties that arise in the building up of a profile of special educational needs within the field of communication, where there is an overlap of possible causes that are more likely to illustrate general area of difficulty rather than a specific one. It should be noted that some of the following characteristics might influence the way in which a child has difficulty in acquiring one or a combination of the skills of reading, spelling, handwriting and mathematics:

- visual, hearing or motor handicaps
- low intelligence
- emotional problems or maladjustment
- poor home/environmental circumstances

- lack of schooling, especially in the early years
- inappropriate teaching
- poor self-image with negative attitudes to learning to read
- parental pressures (Pumfrey & Reason, 1991:234).

The most frequent sources of special educational needs are difficulties in learning that hinder the development of literacy and numeracy skills needed in other areas in the curriculum. The sources of such difficulties may include slow cognitive development and slow language development. However, some children of average or even superior abilities may have marked difficulties in acquiring reading and writing skills. Emotional and adjustment difficulties may contribute to learning difficulties, sometimes as a result of unsettled home circumstances, sometimes as a consequence of feelings of failure (Gulliford, 1994:41). Mild sensory disabilities, speech and language difficulties, health problems resulting in absences and irregular scholastic attendance for other reasons are frequently additional factors.

Engelbrecht, Kriegler and Booysen (1996:25) mention that at one end of the continuum are those with clear intrinsic deficits of a physical or neurological nature whose educational needs are usually for highly specialised educational resources and assistance. At the other end of the continuum are those with clear extrinsically created socio-economic disadvantages.

The three causes of special needs will be discussed next:

2.4.1 Intrinsically generated special educational needs :

Intrinsically generated special needs imply a deficit within the learner and relate to needs caused by:

- Hearing Impairment
- Visual Impairment
- Intellectual Impairment
- Neurological disability
- Physical disability

In the Education White Paper 6 (2001:9) it is stated that the World Health Organisation has calculated that between 2.2 percent and 2.6 percent of learners in any school system could be identified as disabled or impaired. This estimation applies specifically to learners who form part of this group experiencing intrinsically originated special needs. An application of these percentages to the South African school population would project an upper limit of about 400,000 disabled or impaired learners.

Intrinsically generated special needs will not form part of this study since provision has already been addressed. In the EducationWhite Paper 6 (2001:53) it is acknowledged that the Consultative Paper No 1 on Special Education (August 1999) proposes "...an implementation strategy that prioritises the upgrading and conversion of all 378 special schools and specialised settings and their inclusion

within new district-based support teams…"

2.4.2 Extrinsically generated special educational needs :

An extrinsically generated special educational need does not imply a deficit within the learner. The need is structurally and systemically created and results in the learners not acquiring basic educational skills.

Despite intact ability, the need for learning support is very real. These learners have for some reason or another not acquired adequate basic educational skills – especially related to literacy and numeracy - at a time in their development when this should normally have occurred (Donald, 1993:145).

"It is the fundamental relationship of these skills to all other dimensions of the curriculum and the inability of these learners to progress, or to be motivated to progress without these skills that creates the need for special educational support" (Adelman & Taylor, 1983 in Donald 1993:145).

It is possible for this support to be provided within the normal mainstream classroom. It is, however, **not** possible for these children to acquire these skills at a late stage of development in the same way as younger children might. This can also not occur in an overcrowded and under-resourced classroom with an under-qualified teacher who has no access to special educational support services or access to the required special methods and materials for presenting the learning skills. There is thus a need

for interdependence between improved general educational conditions and special educational support.

Causes of these needs are complex and various but basically comprise of the following:

- Structural causes : Shortage of schools and classrooms, high learner-teacher ratios, teacher under-qualification and lack of essential teaching materials and resources (Cooper, McCaul, Hamilton, Delvare, Moonsamy and Mueler, 1990:838)

- Systemic factors : Language of instruction and its relationship to early acquisition of reading skill; curricular content and a rigidly instrumental process of teaching (Thembala, 1986:75)

Statistical data, for example the Education White Paper 6 (2001), focus more on intrinsically generated special needs as described in par. 2.4.1. It is therefore difficult to establish the precise number of children who experience externally generated special needs, although there are a few indicators that suggest that the need is substantial.

The first indicator is the school **drop-out rate**. It was reported by the Research Institute for Educational Planning in 1991 that the major drop-out occurs in the first year of schooling - the critical

period for the acquisition of basic educational skills. If it is assumed that those who have dropped out in the first year of education are the least likely to have acquired basic educational skills, then we can assume that these are the children who will be requiring special educational support (Donald, 1993:146).

A second indicator in the range of special needs is school **failure rate.** Children who fail and have to repeat grades frequently represent those who have special needs that have not been met. Some of these may be children with intrinsic disabilities where there is a reciprocal interaction with extrinsic educational disadvantage. Given the high proportion of repeaters, particularly in the lower grades, it is likely that more children who have no intrinsic disability have a need that is generated by extrinsic educational inadequacies. The wide range of socio-economic factors have also contributed to the extent and severity of the problem.

2.4.3 Special educational need as a reciprocal interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic factors:

Donald (1993:149) states that it is particularly difficult to determine the incidence rates for mild mental handicap, speech and language impairment, specific learning disability and emotional and behavioural disorders. In disadvantaged social and educational contexts the reciprocal interactive effects of extrinsic factors complicate the matter.

Central to appreciating the need that is generated in this area is the notion of **'risk'**. Children who

have even mild intrinsic disabilities are at risk of developing needs for special educational support. It is those with the **least** supportive and facilitative social and educational environments who are most likely **not** to cope and to need special help if they are to be effectively educated. Children with mild intrinsic impairment, who also suffer extrinsic social and educational disadvantages, are more likely to manifest with special educational need (Donald, 1993:149).

The development of special educational needs is increased, not only by the interaction between extrinsic socio-educational disadvantages and children's existing intrinsic disabilities, but also by those factors that have been shown to increase the risk of developing intrinsic disabilities (refer par. 2.5.1. and 2.5.2).

Donald (1993:141) mentions the fact that factors related to poverty as well as health and health-care access interact to produce disproportionately high incidence rates of disability and special educational need. In this regard it is stated in Summary Report on Poverty and Inequality in South Africa (May, 1998) that in measures of human development such as life expectancy, infant mortality and adult illiteracy, South Africa compares unfavourably with several other middle-income countries and therefore the number of children with intrinsic physical, cognitive or emotional disabilities can be a significant portion of the South-African school-age population.

The extrinsically generated special educational needs that were created under the system of apartheid are also reflected in the high drop-out rates, failure rates, and evidence of underachievement in

relation to potential in African education particularly.

The existence of this group together with the high incidence of intrinsic disability and the reciprocal interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic factors make up a total group of children with special educational need who are far from a small minority in the South African school-age population.

The marginalisation of special educational need as it has occurred in the past and as it may yet occur in the process of educational reconstruction in South Africa has to be challenged. (It is, however, not the aim of this study to challenge and redefine current practices, but to determine whether these needs can possibly be limited by educational involvement before formal school entry).

It is important to conceptualise the need as **context dependent** - generated as much through extrinsic socio-educational factors as through intrinsic disability; and as perpetuated and exacerbated through the reciprocal synergistic effects of poverty and socio-educational disadvantage. It is important to realise that the **extent** of special educational need in South Africa is considerably greater than in more advantaged socio-educational contexts, and, given the nature of this need, it cannot be marginalised from the concerns of general educational reconstruction (Donald, 1993:150).

2.5 RETHINKING SPECIAL NEEDS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In recent years there has been a major shift in thinking about the nature of special educational needs. This re-conceptualisation has taken place over a number of years and has involved a gradually evolving awareness of the limitations of the categorical system of special education. The socio-economic and educational disparities and structural inequalities generated by apartheid in South Africa have had a particularly devastating impact on the creation and reproduction of special educational need (Donald & Csapo, 1989; Donald 1992; Skuy & Partington 1990; Gwala-Ogisi, 1990).

According to Donald (1994:136) this is not merely a problem of individual pathology in South Africa - it is a reflection of the distortion of the social formation that has at its core the creation and reproduction of disadvantage. This aspect will be discussed in depth in chapter 3 when the specific nature and culture of the South African community is addressed.

The very notion of special educational need is therefore in itself relative and not absolute (Donald, 1994:137). It depends on how 'disability' is perceived and interpreted in a particular social context and on how 'need' is defined in relation to this. South Africa lacks the diagnostic services and reliable epidemiological data for the group for whom the reproduction of disadvantage is likely to create the highest rates of disability and special educational need. It also disregards the large group of children who have no intrinsic deficit as assumed under the disability definition but who are in fact structurally

'handicapped'. As a result of both structural and systemic inadequacies in the South African education system, these children have become educationally disadvantaged to the extent that they also have real special educational needs (Donald, 1994:138). Donald further mentions that this manifests as the need for special educational support in the acquisition of basic skills - especially numeracy and literacy - that have been delayed or denied to learners through lack of access to, or inadequacy of the existing educational system – whether at home or at pre-school centres.

It is difficult to establish the precise extent of this group, but it is undoubtedly reflected in indicators such as the high drop-out rate and failure rates in the early grades of African learners as well as in the numbers of socially and educationally neglected children generated in this society.

The following factors regarding special needs and disadvantage are especially prominent in the South African context:

2.5.1 Poverty, Health and Disability

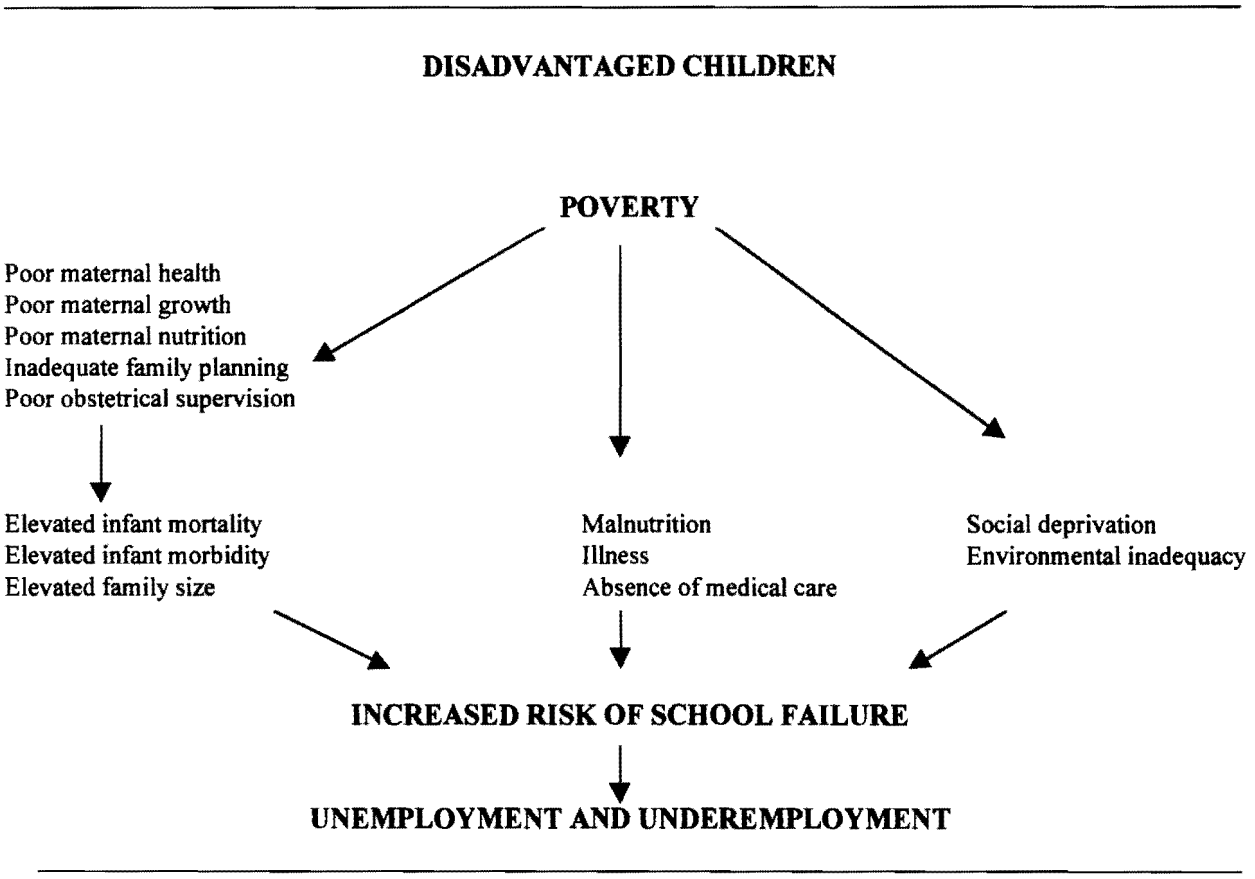
In the Summary Report for the office of the Executive Deputy President and the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Poverty and Inequality (1998:5) it is stated: " *Poverty can be defined as the inability to attain a minimal standard of living, measured in terms of basic consumption needs or the income required to satisfy them.*"

Statistics for 1994 suggest that between 35% and 55% of the South African population live in poverty. There is a high correlation between the level of education and standard of living. According to the White Paper for the Transformation of Health Systems in South Africa, Department of Health (1997) the poverty rate among people with no education is 69%, compared to 54% among people with primary education, 24% among those with secondary education, and 3% among those with tertiary education. There is also a high correlation between poverty and ill-health (Summary Report on Poverty and Inequality in South Africa, 1998). Poor people are more prone to health risks associated with malnutrition, disease and infection. Many health risks associated with poverty result in cognitive or sensory impairments that are likely to create special educational need. There is therefore a relationship between malnutrition and cognitive development that is of pervasive concern. This involves a synergistic interaction in which a variety of factors related to child nurturing and stimulation under conditions of poverty interact with and reinforce one another to create increased levels of risk for cognitive development (Richter & Griesel, 1994:80). Where cognitive development is affected, special educational need is likely to be created. Thus, given the extent of poverty and malnutrition in disadvantaged communities such as those in South Africa, higher rates of special educational need are created than in more developed contexts.

Garmezy (1991:419) in this regard presents a transgenerational model of poverty that was

documented by Birch and Gussow (1970):

DIAGRAM 1: A Transgenerational Model of Poverty: Its Consequences and Correlates



The model (diagram) illustrates the consequences and correlates of disadvantage and poverty.

These aspects are also related to the contextual setting of a particular community.

2.5.2 Contextual disadvantage and Educational deprivation

There is a long, and fairly depressing, history concerning the nature of environmental effect on the educational opportunities of children and the relationship of these to those students whose behaviour in school interferes with their learning and results in them being categorised as having special educational needs (Garner, 1994:105 ; Rutter & Madge, 1976; Essen & Wedge, 1982). This incidence was mainly caused by neglect of which the following can be said:

Many aspects of neglect are unintentional and closely related to social and economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, housing conditions, physical and mental health, family functioning and knowledge of child-care and control. Unlike other forms of child maltreatment, the identification of neglect is singularly focussed upon the **circumstances of the child's parents or caregivers**. Many children 'fail to thrive' as a consequence of neglect and/or abuse. These children often exhibit developmental delays which cause special educational needs (Hall, 1994:175).

In South Africa the theory of a 'learning disability' paradigm is partly derived from the value attached to intelligence and the belief in the magic of the IQ. Especially in South Africa the theory of specific learning disability, minimal brain dysfunction or dyslexia leads to doubtful identification criteria, ineffective intervention strategies, and, moreover, the exclusion of millions of children who have an equal right to special assistance. To exclude environmentally, culturally and economically disadvantaged children is to limit the type of special education service that these children may hope

to receive (Kriegler & Skuy, 1996:111).

It is estimated that as many as 50 percent of black and coloured South African learners are academically retarded, most of them suffering from the effects of environmental, socio-economic, cultural and/or educational deprivation (refer par. 2.5.1.). The special needs are therefore defined in terms of the presence of a barrier to learning rather than the existence of a handicapping intrinsic condition as has been the case previously. The principal benefit of this change has been awareness of **educational** needs and a focus on improving the quality of educational provision.

2.6 PROVISION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The pattern of racial inequality has applied with particular severity to the current inadequacy of provision for all coloured children with special educational needs. The NEPI report (1992:8) estimated that 40 percent of South Africa's school population fell into the category of having special educational needs at that time. Van den Berg and Naicker (1996:30) do not argue that special schools be set up for half the school population, but rather that the school has to be transformed into an institution that takes seriously the real disadvantages which so many pupils face. They are therefore arguing for the mainstreaming of special educational efforts within the basic school, with special schools being created for those with clearly observable conditions requiring special attention. There is a growing call to provide for special needs in regular classrooms. It is, however, important to consider the history of provision for special educational needs in the South African context.

2.6.1 The history of provision for special educational needs in South Africa

Previously the formalisation of special education in South Africa was instituted by the following acts that legislate special educational services: The Children's Act No. 23 1960; the Education Services Act No. 41 of 1967 as amended; the Coloured Persons Education Act No 47 of 1968 as amended; the Mentally Handicapped Act No. 18 of 1973; the Mentally Retarded Children's Training Act No 63 of 1974; and Education and Training Act No 90 of 1979 for Africans (Czapo, 1986:77;Gwalla-Ogisi, 1990:271, Nkabinde, 1997:5).

Both historically, and in terms of current educational initiatives emanating from the state, the issue of special educational need in South Africa has been relegated to the periphery of educational concern (Donald, 1993:139). In all departments of education the provision of specialised educational services has lagged behind the estimated need, and recent cut-backs and retrenchments have followed and exacerbated this pattern.

According to Du Toit (1996:5) the initial interest in special education was mainly in the education of blind, deaf and mentally handicapped children. The beginnings of special education in South Africa date as far back as 1863 when the first schools for visually and hearing impaired learners were established (Nkabinde, 1997:77). Dramatic developments in the field of medicine and clinical psychology during the twentieth century have, however, led to more and more categories of handicap

being identified, and separate schools were established for these groups. The main aim during this era was to remove the particular deficiencies of these children.

One aspect distinguishes the development of, and provision for special education in South Africa from that in other countries, namely the **extent of philosophical and political influences**. The white-black dichotomy has resulted in extreme disparities in the services rendered to the various population groups (Nkabinde, 1997; Du Toit, 1996).

During the first three centuries of colonialism, the foundation was laid for compulsory specialised education for white disabled children in separate schools with a clinical approach to education. Historically, special education programmes for non-white South African children with disabilities have been neglected (Nkabinde, 1997:76) Schools for disabled children of these racial groups were mainly established and controlled by churches. These children were also not expected to attend school and most of them stayed at home.

Before the seventeenth century South Africa was inhabited by nomads as well as several tribes and sub-tribes. In these early years extermination of the disabled was also practised in South Africa (Du Toit, 1996:8). Children who were unusual at birth were regarded as a bad omen and killed at birth.

The first schools were established during the period of Dutch colonisation (1652-1795). During this time it was practice to have separate schools for white and slave children. During British occupation

after 1806 a formal system of secular education was introduced and after the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 state schools with free and compulsory education were provided for whites, but not for coloured children.

As elsewhere in the world, disabled children were not initially included in formal education, but from 1900 onwards the Department of Education became involved in special education and took on the responsibility when Act 29 of 1928 - the Vocational Education and Special Education Act- was promulgated.

In 1948 the National Party with its 'apartheid' policy came to power. Everyone was classified into four racial groups: whites, Indians, blacks and coloureds. Separate development was promoted by separate homelands assigned to Africans of the various tribal groupings. Special education for white children was quantitatively and qualitatively expanded. Initially, separate schools were established for children who were deaf, hard of hearing, blind, partially sighted, epileptic, cerebral palsied and physically disabled. Further investigations as to children with specific disabilities followed, such as committees of inquiry into the education of children with minimal brain dysfunction, autistic children and severely mentally handicapped children. Special schools for children with these disabilities followed (Du Toit, 1996:10).

While remarkable strides were being made in the field of special education for whites, educational provision for disabled children from other population groups developed much more slowly, leading

to severe discrepancies in both the quality and the quantity of such provision (Du Toit, 1996; Nkabinde, 1997).

Nkabinde (1997) refers to the HSRC (1987) report, **Education for the black disabled**, that documents on the exceptionally high incidence of disabilities in black population groups. This was attributed to detrimental factors typically operating in Third World countries and associated with poverty, lack of access to medical and health care facilities, ignorance, traditional birth customs, and so on.

Du Toit (1996:12) summarises the situation with regard to special education in South Africa towards the end of apartheid as follows:

- A fragmented specialised education system based on ethnic separation and discrimination on the basis of race and colour.
- Duplication and disproportionate allocation and utilisation, of facilities, professionals and services
- For whites there were also separate education departments for special and regular education, each with its own system of management, control and educational support.
- Separate schools for children with different categories of disabilities. Children with disabilities were channelled out of the mainstream into schools catering for such disabilities.

and welfare.

- Limited education support services that were disproportionately distributed across the different education departments. The more privileged sectors of society received the best services, while the most disadvantaged sectors had little or no access to support.
- A lack of trained professionals to fill posts in the field of special education and educational support services, especially in black education. Kriegler (1993) explains that the overall ratio of educational psychologists to pupils would remain at the ridiculous level of 1:12000, even after reorganising the skewed distribution.
- Disparities in per capita expenditure across different education departments, which were even more exaggerated in the case of special education. In 1987 African children constituted approximately 20 percent of the special school population, yet only received 12 per cent of the total school expenditure (NEPI, 1992).
- Unequal access to special education. Free and compulsory education was mandatory for all but Africans.
- Varying criteria for the admission and discharge of pupils.
- The use of varying terminology and categories of special education in different departments.
- A strong medical focus with clinically described admission criteria and a multidisciplinary approach.
- Severe discrepancies in the provision of special education for the different race groups, **with provision at pre-school level being almost non-existent for black and coloured**

disabled children.

- Extreme disparities between special education provision in urban and rural areas.
- Inadequately trained teachers, especially in black special education.
- A lack of equipment in special schools.

Supporting above-mentioned descriptions, the Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education (2001:5) publishes findings by the Department of Education in February 1998. The central findings of the investigations revealed that "*specialised education and support have predominantly been provided for a small percentage of learners with disabilities within 'special' schools and classes; where provided, specialised education and support were provided on a racial basis, with the best human, physical and material resources reserved for whites; most learners with disability have either fallen outside of the system or been 'mainstreamed by default'; the curriculum and education system as a whole have generally failed to respond to the diverse needs of the learner population, resulting in massive numbers of drop-outs, push-outs, and failures; and while some attention has been given to the schooling phase with regard to 'special needs and support' the other levels or bands of education have been seriously neglected.*"

Towards the middle of the twentieth century the clinical and individual approach to special education, however, gave way to a social and ecological perspective with the realisation that disabled children should be prepared to live within a social context. This perspective originated in Sweden and can be

defined as "making available to all handicapped people patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life in society" (Nirje, 1979:231).

> "*We had a clear picture of all children tramping along a common educational road, towards a common destination of enhanced enjoyment, independence and responsibility, but encountering along the way obstacles of different degrees of severity. Our aim was to show that there was a continuum of difficulty in those obstacles but that children could be helped over them one by one and their progress measured by how far along the common road they could get*" (Aubrey, 1994:32).

Engelbrecht (1994) indicates the need for a more contextually relevant and systemically sensitive approach to the practice of educational psychology. Van der Hoon (1994) also argues for locating educational psychology firmly within an eco-systemic worldview (De Jong, 1996:114). Beliefs such as these led to new trends regarding the provision for special educational needs in a South African context. This issue will be discussed briefly.

2.6.2 New perspectives on the provision for special educational needs

Today, a new way of thinking about special education has led to the policy of inclusion. Educating children who have "disabilities" together with their non-disabled peers is now

becoming practice (Du Toit, 1996:7). The influence of the early years is also widely acknowledged:

In the Department of Education's Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996:24) it is stated that *"the early years determine whether or not a child becomes a successful learner in and out of school. Therefore a more learner-centered approach will be adopted in the Junior Primary years"*.

Policy proposals for the reconstruction of education support services in a new education dispensation for South Africa also strongly advocate a principle of holistic development which is health promotional, developmental and preventive by nature and is underpinned by contemporary eco-cultural, systems and constructivist theoretical positions (Lazarus & Donald, 1994). As Beeby (1986:41) argues: " ... a new education programme does best when it rides the crest of a wave of social and political change".

The quality of education during the apartheid era was obviously unacceptable. Efforts during the eighties to upgrade the quality of black and coloured education and to bridge existing gaps were not accepted. After the first democratic elections for all South Africans in April 1994 a general feeling of optimism and commitment to improve life equality of all South Africans swept through the country (Du Toit, 1996:13). With regard to special education the following trends had already been recognised in the 1995 White Paper:

- The term 'learners with special educational needs' refer to all learners in need of educational support, it is learners whose special needs arise from intrinsic factors as well as learners whose needs arise from extrinsic (social, structural and systemic) factors.
- There will be a predominantly systemic-preventive approach to special education.
- Total mainstreaming of learners with special educational needs is the desirable long-term option. Progressive mainstreaming is the current viable option. The curricula will be designed as such that it gives scope to learners with greater and lesser abilities.
- Teachers should be adequately trained to "teach effectively in order to facilitate learning" (Committee for Teacher education Policy (COTEP) 1994:5).
- All school-going children should have access to educational support services.
- A national commission on special needs in education and training will be established to undertake a thorough needs-analysis and to make recommendations to ensure that adequate services are planned.

The Education White Paper 6 (2001:6) in this regard suggests that the key strategies required to achieve the vision of human rights and social justice for all learners; participation and social integration; equal access to a single, inclusive education system; access to the curriculum, equity and redress; community responsiveness; and cost-effectiveness are:

- Transforming all aspects of the education system,

- Developing an integrated system of education,
- Infusing of 'special needs and support services' throughout the system,
- Pursuing the holistic development of centres of learning to ensure a barrier-free physical environment and a supportive and inclusive psycho-social learning environment, developing a flexible curriculum to ensure access to all learners
- Promoting the rights and responsibilities of parents, educators and learners
- Providing effective development programmes for educators, support personnel, and other relevant human resources
- Fostering holistic and integrated support provision through intersectional collaboration
- Developing a community based support system that includes a preventive and developmental approach to support, and
- Developing funding strategies that ensure redress for historically disadvantaged communities and institutions, sustainability, and ultimately access to education for all learners.

2.7 SUMMARY

The Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996:25) states: *"Children's need for care, safety and protection, stimulation, education, nutrition and health are inter-dependent. An effective, good quality early childhood development program based on sound educational principles, requires an integrated societal approach to meet these needs."*

The question of a service delivery model that is most appropriate for meeting special educational needs in South Africa is complex and requires much research and debate. The needs of those who are the most disadvantaged were not being met in mainstream or through special educational facilities. The children identified as educationally disadvantaged and in need of special educational support for structural reasons also fall into this group (Donald, 1992:148). The result is therefore a very large group of children with special educational needs whose disadvantages are reproduced in a system characterised by a lack of appropriate facilities where they are needed most.

Provision, however, does not regard only the individual whose need is special, but also the context, society and culture in which he lives. In order to facilitate preventive strategies in this context, the nature of the culture needs to be understood. This cultural context will therefore be addressed in chapter three.