

TITLE OF THE PROJECT REPORT

**“Implementing teaching strategies to students with difficulties in learning in a mainstream inner city school- teachers’ experiences”.**

**EDRS6900: Project Report**

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Education (Inclusive and Special Education)  
of  
The University of the West Indies

**Author’s Name: Antoinette Paul- Fitzpatrick**

2014

**Name of Supervisor: DR. BERNICE DYER REGIS**

Department of School of Education  
Faculty of Humanities and Education  
St Augustine

## **Abstract**

In recent years there has been increase demand to cater for students with diverse needs within the general education classroom thus “Implementing teaching strategies for students with difficulties in learning strategies was investigated because of its relevance to the way children learn and how instructions are imparted to them. Additionally the issue of children with difficulties in learning is a major concern of the researcher as well as the administrator and staff of the school.

In this study, finding revealed that teachers used various strategies to teach students with difficulties in learning. Also many ways were articulated to identify students with learning problems and teachers discussed the challenges they encountered on a daily basis to meet the needs of these children. Finally they offered suggestions on ways to be implemented to better able to meet the needs of students.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many persons have supported me in my quest to finish this research. Firstly thanks to my heavenly father for giving me the strength the courage and determination to complete this project. Countless thanks to my entire family for their understanding and support throughout this entire journey. Special thanks to Dr. Regis my supervisor for her guidance, commitment and expert advice. Thanks to my friends and colleagues from special education for their concern and encouragement. Many thanks to the administrator and staff of my school for their unwavering support throughout this research and finally thanks to Dr. Blaides for introducing this special education programme. It is hoped that through this research administration and staff will be made aware of the challenges teachers experience in teaching students with difficulties in learning.

"Every child has a different learning style and pace. Each child is unique, not only capable of learning but also capable of succeeding."

- **Robert John Meehan**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Quote

Table of contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Definition of terms

Background

Statement of the problem

Purpose of the study

Research questions

Expected outcomes

Chapter 2: literature review

Introduction

Characteristics of students with difficulties in learning

Effective teaching strategies and teachers responsibility

The role of parents and motivation

Summary

Chapter 3: Methodology

Design

Sampling procedure

Sample size

Selection of participants

The participants

Data collection strategies

Data collection instrument

The role of the researcher

Researcher's experience

Data analysis

Ethical considerations

Limitations and delimitation of the study

Chapter 4: Data analysis

Presentation of findings

Summary

Chapter 5: Discussion

Recommendations

Conclusion

References

Appendices

Appendix A- Academic performance index

Appendix B- Guiding Questions

Appendix C- Sample of coded data

Appendix D- tables with research questions and findings

Appendix E- Written consent

## **Definition of Terms**

Learning difficulty- applies to students in mainstream schools who do not meet national literacy and numeracy benchmark standards (department of education science and training, cited in Purdie & Ellis 2005). Mainstream refers to inclusion of students with special needs in the general education process (Lewis & Doorlag, 2006)

Special education needs- a child is considered to have special education needs if he/she has learning difficulties which are greater than those encountered by the majority of pupils of the same age (Jones & Charlton, 1992)

Inclusion- this is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education (Ensuring Access to Education for all, 2005)

Learning strategies are techniques, principles, and rules that enable a student to learn to solve problems and complete tasks independently (Lenz, Ellis, & Scanlon, 1996; Schumaker, Deshler, & Denton, 1984)



## **Chapter 1**

### **Background**

This chapter gives statistics about children with difficulties in learning and describes what countries internationally, regionally and locally are doing to address the issue. The chapter then explains the situation at the school that is the subject of this study so as to give insights, understanding and meaning to the study. The chapter also discusses the purpose of the study, the research questions and finally the significance of the study. Learning difficulties and learning problems are often the first term used when a child begins to have trouble in school. In some countries it is also used as a synonym for learning disability (Free Electronic Library nd). As such if schools are to meet the challenge of educating the many students with diverse needs then teachers must embrace instructing and curricula that engage and encourage all students. However Haaland (2011) argues that general education teachers are not being adequately trained to teach students with learning. In the USA 'No child Left Behind' has challenged the nation's schools to ensure that students meet academic standards (Irvin, Buehl & Radcliffe, 2007). This can be achieved if content, instructions, curricula and the strategies employed cater to the diverse needs of each student.

There is sufficient data that any system of teaching will only work to the extent that the teachers responsible for implementing it accept it and are committed to it.

Likewise academic success mandates that educators embrace teaching strategies that will assist these students under their care. Fielding (1999), posits that a deeper understanding of learning difficulties often make possible the creation of classroom strategies that better meet the need of all students.

Globally Studies conducted in Australia found significant minority of children face difficulties in acquiring acceptable minimum literacy and numeracy skills. The department of education science and training (n.d) (DEST) has specified that the term learning difficulties applies to students in mainstream schools who do not meet the national literacy and numeracy benchmark standards.

London et al (2000) claim that prevalence rate for learning difficulties as reported by teachers varies between 6 and 30 percent. Despite some state system and school differences, in Australia the most frequently used term to describe students with educational problems is learning difficulties.

Elkins (2002), London et al (2002) noted that Australian state and tertiary education systems have generally not differentiated between learning difficulties and learning disabilities.

Additionally, an Australia survey have indicated that 10 to 16 percent of students are perceived by their teachers to have learning difficulties and support needs, particularly in literacy that goes beyond those normally addressed by the classroom teachers. These rates are similar to those reported in the UK and US. (Learning difficulties Australia n.d).

In the USA, The 2003 national Assessment of Education Progress showed that 37 percent of fourth grades read below a basic proficiency level and only 31 percent with enough

proficiency to draw inferential and literal meaning from text. Reading difficulties are more common in boys than girls and are significantly more frequent in minority children and those who meet the criteria for free or reduced price lunch programs (Hamilton, Glascoe, 2006)

In the United Kingdom boys' underachievement is a main concern. On a national scale, boys fall behind girls in early literacy skills and this gap in achievement widens with age. The issue of raising achievement directly addresses the learning needs of our students and the specialized growth of our teachers, and enhances the role of the school as an agent of social change. Boys and girls need to be given the best opportunity to become powerful learners (UK Department for Education and Skills, n.d.).

In 2010 23.3% of comprehensive school students in Finland received extra instruction from a special education teacher in school in the subjects in which students needed help. Of this group 12% received aid for speech disorder, 40.5% received help in reading or writing, 23.7% deeming difficulties in mathematics, 9% for learning difficulties in foreign languages, 5.5% for adjustments difficulties or emotional disorders and 8.99% for learning difficulties (Center on International Education, n.d).

Kanwar (2013) also argues that in Chandigarh, India the national average of children with learning difficulties in primary schools is 13-10%. There is no such data for students of secondary classes. The government medical college and hospital -32 (gm ch) has published a study conducted in 10 different schools in the city. It documents the prevalence of learning difficulties from class 7-12 at 1.58% slow learners second the least

in mathematics followed by social studies. There were more boys than girls diagnosed with learning disabilities. A recent New South Wales study to determine the prevalence of learning needs involving 14,500 primary and high school children identified 17.99% (wave 1) and 19.10% (wave 2) children as having a specific learning difficulties.

Regionally the education sector in Guyana faces a number of challenges including the migration of skilled teachers and inability of the education system to respond adequately to the needs of children with disabilities or learning difficulties. Due to this the Ministry of Education in Guyana has joined with regional Education Department and International Education Resource Development National Center for Education among which is to improve the capacity of teachers to deliver relevant and inclusive education and training workshops in literacy, special education needs and early childhood care and education teachers. (Guyana education 2005-2009) In Jamaica, towards the end of the decade of the 1990s, it was found that males are under-participating at the upper cycle of the secondary level and at the tertiary level (Bailey, 2000). This finding was consistent with the results of research in the mid-1990s in Barbados and Dominica, where it was found that over the years of secondary schooling boys participated less. (Rudnick, Jules, & Layne, 1997).

Locally the Pilgrim report of 1990 states “any attempt to give adequate and appropriate education for students with learning difficulties implies the provision of professional studies in special education (Government of Trinidad and Tobago, 1990, p47 cited in Libert 2001). However in 1991 it was estimated that some 67.2% of children with special needs were in main stream primary and secondary schools with no special education provision available to them (Keller et al 1993). The white paper found the

system unable to cater to children with special needs and early childhood care and education and this was due to many school buildings in need of and the absence of a method to continuously assess learning and diagnose problems in the system and of the learner (Libert 2001).

Additionally the Miske-Witt report (2008) argues that about approximately 4% of children in the primary school have been diagnosed with learning challenges. However, teachers and health data have indicated that there may be as many as 20% of students in the government primary schools who have learning, behavior or cognitive challenges. Miske-Witt further argues that there are few opportunities for children to be officially diagnosed with these particular disabilities and because measurement used to diagnose are not normed on Trinidad and Tobago population. Due to this, these un diagnosed children will be referred to as have learning difficulties or challenges rather than having a disability. The exact number of students with learning, behavioral or cognitive challenges in primary and secondary school is unknown. In 2005 the then minister of education of Trinidad and Tobago, Hazel Manning lamented that the national test conducted in 2004 in primary schools revealed that girls are excelling at a faster rate than boys. There are more male students in the below average range although a significant number of female students are also present in the below average range she said that there is the need for attention to be paid to the group of students in each educational distant who are performing under the national mean (express p,25 2005). At the school of education in St Augustine a collaborative research conducted found in the analysis of a one study eleven plus placement data from 1995 to 2005 across communities in the Diego Martin administrative district. The communities were first ranked using the basic needs

index published in the poverty study of April 2007 by kava consultants. It was found that children from affluent communities had more than a 50 percent chance of receiving their first choice. In poorer communities this fell to 10 to 30 percent. Conversely unequal outcomes are also reflected in data from the national assessment of educational achievement in standard 1 to 3. Schools with high numbers of students classified as economically disadvantaged often reported more than 75 percent of students at standard 1 and 3 performing at level 1 at the National Test ( well below standards) in mathematics and language arts. De Lisle argued that the first stage in improving school and the system is greater awareness of the problem (De Lisle, 2009).

Furthermore teachers' training programs are not designed to adequately prepare teachers to manage a highly diversified student body. In addition no program exists for the gifted student (Express, 2005). The ministry of education discussion paper on inclusive education (2004) states a child has special education needs when she/he has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age. A study conducted by George, Quamina-Aijejina, Cain & Mohammed (2009) found that boys in some rural and inner city schools in Trinidad and Tobago have displayed the lowest levels of performance in all aspects of Secondary Entrance Assessment. There appears to be gender differences relation to the educational attainment of boys and girls. For this research study some data were collected from results of the schools National test for the past five (5) years. These results showed that the students had challenges in literacy and numeracy for the past five (5) years.

## **School context**

The area in which the school is located is a designated crime hot spot according to government News release 2011. There exist a few warring gang and from time to time relatives of students are victims of murders. On any given day gun shots can be heard in close proximity of the school. Students complain regularly of being unable to sleep because of the gun shot at night. The school is in the middle of the two 'warring communities' and some students live on both side of the communities. Some students have to cope with financial as well as social problems. About 22 out of the 129 students display symptoms of difficulties in learning.

I have always been concern with the students who displayed problems with learning at my school. This concern has led me to pursue my master in Education inclusive and special education where I was of the view it will better prepare me to assist and identify students with learning problems.

School x is a Roman Catholic elementary school which was established years ago in East Port of Spain. It is located less than 10minutes away from the city of Port of Spain. The school consists of one building which house 7 classes separated by black boards. There is a library on the ground floor and a room designated as computer rooms but there are no computers. There are 8 members of staff with 2 males and 6 females which all have their university degrees and there are reading from their master's degree. The ratio of teachers is to one to eighteen students.

Over the years the school has maintained a low composition of catholic students and 95% of students of African descent 3% mixed and 2% of East Indian descent. Students came mainly from Beetham Gardens, Sealots and East Dry River who enrolled mainly after they were rejected

by other schools or because they are afraid for their children to go into another community because of gang tuff. Many of the pupils were from single parent or extended family households.

Also 74 %of students received free lunches and 62% receive free breakfast.

There is one class per level at this school. The infant one and infant two classes along with the standard one class are on the ground floor. The standard 2 to standard 5 classes is on the upper floor.

The school has a continuous period of more than five years of low academic achievement in 2008.

Literacy had previously been recognized by the past and present administration and staff as one of the main reasons affecting student's achievements. I have observed that some students who perform well in the lower classes display learning problems in the higher classes. In a study I did for my educational research project it was found that students are unable to concentrate in these classrooms because of concerns about their loved ones at home and the violence in their community, gun shots at night that kept them up an unable to sleep and unable to do homework and knowing that very soon gang leaders will try to get to them to join their gang. British gas has shown interest in the school continuous under performance and has sponsored the hopalong learning program. Also recently the ministry of education has sent a literacy coach to assist student from standard one to first years with strategies to assist students with literacy problem. The researcher is a member of staff at this school and is situated in a unique position to observe instructions from teachers as they are presented to the students.



## **Statement of the Problem**

This researcher has observed that many students leave the primary school without mastering some of their basic numeracy and or literacy skills. Additionally over the years most students perform poorly at the national test. There is only one class per level and in each class children with difficulties in learning have been identified.

Teachers have been exposed to various strategies to assist students, yet they continue to have problems with academic performance of students.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the challenges teachers experience in teaching students with difficulties in learning, to gain deeper insights and to determine the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the teaching strategies employed.

## **Expected outcome**

It is expected that the findings of the study will increase the awareness of Administration of the challenges teachers experience in teaching students with difficulties in learning. It is hoped that measures will be put in place to better equip teachers in meeting the needs of students with difficulties in learning

## **Research Questions**

1. What strategies do teachers use to meet the needs of students with difficulties with learning?
2. How do teachers identify children with difficulties in learning?
3. What are the challenges that teachers experience in teaching children with difficulties in learning?
4. What strategies can be adopted for students with difficulties in learning?

**Research questions one, two and three were operationlised in this study.**

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter presents the literature related to the study, Teachers' experiences in the implementation of strategies to teach students with difficulties in learning is vital if these students are to understand concepts and reach their true potential. This is further compounded by the fact that education is seen as the vehicle where by students can become meaning contributors to the society.

The review of the literature is intended to describe and evaluate a specific area of research as it relates to the research questions. It was used to guide the research questions for the study and the questions used for interviewing the participants. The review of the literature will be discussed in the following broad areas, (1) characteristics of students who experience difficulties in learning,(2) effective teaching instruction and teachers responsibility and( 3)The role of the parents and motivation.

#### **Characteristics of students who experience difficulties in learning**

Education is a cornerstone of economic and social development. Primary education is its foundation. Primary education has two main purposes: to produce a literate and numerate population that can deal with problems encountered at home and at work and to serve as a basis on which further education is built (Lockhead et al 1991). As such identifying students with difficulties in learning is crucial so that effective strategies can be implemented to help these students.

According to New South Wales department of education and training (n.d) some general characteristics of students who experience difficulties in learning is that they may experience difficulties with reading, writing, spelling and mathematics, sometimes in all areas and sometimes in just one or two. They may have difficulty following instructions or directions to complete a task and have poor retrieval of information skills perhaps due to troubles with the memory. Additionally they may have reduced or limited vocabulary and word knowledge in comparison to their peers have difficulty copying from the board or overhead projectors and may have poor literacy in their first language. Also Dilshad (2006) argues that research indicates that the children with learning difficulties may have academic difficulties due to basic reading comprehension, written expression, mathematical calculation, language disorder, perception disorders, disruptive behaviors and memory problems. Likewise, the Parenting and Child health (n.d) supports this view they suggested that children with learning difficulties do not perform well in learning to spell, read or write. They found that children may experience challenges in copying or writing things down, have poor handwriting, take longer than other students to finish their work, have had speech and language problems and problems remembering times table.

Conversely in 1988 Jones and Charlton conducted a questionnaire survey to which 35 primary school teachers were asked amongst other things to describe the special education needs of children in their classes. In the completed questionnaire revealed a number of descriptions of special educational needs. Teachers suggested that particular children had a special need for programmes of work to help with usual perception, listening activities, phonic development activities to help with sequencing in written language, peruse objectives in number and structured handwriting programmers.

Most teachers identify the common behaviors of struggling readers. These students wish to appear as readers, they pretend that they do not care about succeeding and they often listen well or depend on friends who can help them. Irvin, Buehl, Radcliffe (2007). Brozo (1990) suggest that struggling readers employ coping strategies. They engage in mock participation, avoiding eye contact with teacher, engage in discipline behavior, become a good listener, rely on classmates or a good reader, seek help from friends, and forget to bring books and so on. Some problem readers resort to aggressive behavior towards parents, teachers and other children. They do so perhaps because they fail to be aware of the situation in which they find themselves.

However, Pumfrey and Elliot (1990) suggest that some children who are otherwise fairly normal or above average in their school achievements in other areas of the curriculum, experience persistent difficulty in any learning with specifically concerns one or more of the followings:

1. Handwriting (motor coordination /clumsiness)
2. Speech, listening, speaking and language (making sense of what is heard, experienced and planning what is to be communicated) and
3. Reading (decoding the words and the writer's message) and spelling (encoding dictating or composed passage)

## **Effective instruction practices and Teachers responsibility**

If schools are to meet the challenges of educating the wide range of students with diverse needs then teachers must embrace instructions and curricula that engage and encourage all

students. In the no child left behind era of accountability teachers are required to meet the needs of students who come from diverse background and ability level (Grafi- Sharabi 2009)

Students experiencing difficulties learning benefit most explicit teaching of new concepts and skills. Effective teaching practices are those which offer all students maximum opportunities to learn. Successful lessons include the following elements, daily review of previous work and how the lesson will build on previous lesson. Also new skills and concepts are presented clearly with much modeling by the teacher and guided student practice with high success rate and with specific feed back to individual students (New South Wales Department of Education and Training n.d).

Snow et al (1998) concluded that the National Research Council identified the most effective way to prevent reading difficulties from developing was to ensure that every child received appropriate high-quality reading instructions in grades k-. Present reports of the National Reading Panel (2000) reported that critical components of early reading instruction should include explicit teaching to build: phonemic awareness, and phonemic decoding skills, fluency in word recognition text processing, reading comprehension strategies, oral language vocabulary, spelling and writing.

Explicit instructions do not leave anything to chance and does not make assumptions about skills and knowledge that children will acquire on their own (American Education 2004). Evidence for explicit instruction was found in a recent study given to group of highly at risk children during kindergarten, first grade. The most phonemically explicit one produced the strongest growth in word reading ability (Torgesen, Wagner, Rashotte, Rose, et al. /1999). Other studies suggest that schools must be equipped to provide very explicit and systemic instructions

in beginning word reading skills to some of their students if they expect virtually all children to acquire word reading skills at grade level by third grade (Brown and Felton, 1990; Hatcher, Hulme, and Ellis, 1994; Iverson and Tunmer, 1993).

For instance findings of Drecktrah and Chiang (1997 in their survey of 183 Americans primary school teachers of students with learning difficulties discovered that over 70% of teachers surveyed believed that a combination of direct instructions and whole language approaches is effective in teaching reading and writing.

On the other hand constructivist teaching and learning recognize that knowledge is created in the mind of each learner and that effective teaching approaches delve into the learners mind through active learning; learner-generated inquiry; concrete, authentic experiences, collaborative investigations and discussions and reflection; and structuring learning around primary concepts Evangelist (2002), Likewise Briggs (1999) articulates that constructivism suggests that meaning is not imposed or transmitted by direct instruction but is created by the student learning activities. Added to this the teacher facilitates learning rather than teach explicitly or directly. Children share ideas with their peers with minimal corrective intervention (Cambourne,2002;Daniels,2001;et el).

Yam et al (2012) suggest that current teaching preparation does not take into account complexity of factors and there is a strong need to train teachers to adapt instructions to the diverse student's ability learning styles personality traits and needs by using more differentiated teaching strategies. It can be argued that teachers aren't always aware that a student in their class has a learning difficulty but it's their responsibility to be kept abreast of current strategies to

assist students in the classroom. It is important that learning should be meaningful; it must be within the child experience.

Furthermore findings on research on effective teaching suggest that effective teachers adjust their teaching to fit the needs of different students and the demands of different instructional goals, topics and methods (Doyle, 1989). Salisbury, Rees and Conrad (1999) investigated the differential attainment of boys and girls in Britain proposed that gender focus be placed on the language competencies of students particularly boys in effort to balance their educational achievement.

Likewise young and( Warrington 2002), view that successful learning for boys ties closely with such practices as using classroom activities in ways most likely to engage boys to read about drawn on their interest and skills selectively context for learning that incorporate their interest.

In recognition of the importance of teacher education in addressing the problem of male under achievement Clarke (2004 -2005) reviewed the revised teacher preparation curriculum in Jamaica and found that it has incorporate silent issues and approaches to help student teachers content with their roles in the socialization of boys and girls in order to achieve gender equality, it is recognized that curriculum content, instruction process and materials, and students' choices



must be gender fair and that “teachers must be educated towards this end of achieving a gender fair curriculum” (Education Police Paper, 1994 ) .

Additionally it is most importance for teachers of boys to understand and appreciate how boys learn. Daniel, Creese, Hey, Leonard and Smith (2001) found that primary school boys generally prefer individual work as opposed to sharing. Individual activity will thus encourage independent though and work, but group work can benefit the building of learning skills. Kutnuk et al (1997) found, girls frequently maximize learning outcomes though corporative and social bounds and this learn-approach was not generally found among boys.

In a study conducted at St. Thomas University in New Brunswick (Richmond and Miles, 2004, pp. 58–64), a male-mentor reading program was established in a local school. The objective of the program was to push boys’ interest in reading by providing them with material that appealed to them and with male mentors who would develop informal educational relationships with them. The mentors were “regular” men in their 20s who joined the boys weekly over a two-year period. They became positive gender role models for the boys – active young men engaged in purposeful literary activities.

By bringing the external world into the classroom, sharing their world views with students, and modeling satisfaction and success in learning and using literacy skills, male mentors can help boys see a purpose in reading.

It is also vita that teachers understand how student learn so they may be better able to assist them with the learning challenges. Within each of our classrooms, there is a mixture of

students with a mixture of learning preferences. Multiple-intelligence theory suggest that content from any discipline can be taught in more than one way and that teachers should design lessons, projects, and assessments with consideration as to how students learn (Campbell, 1997). Many educators believe boys have a unique learning style which is different from that of the girls and this is cited as one of the cause for their underperformance in an under differentiated classroom (Clark, 2007; Cross, 2003; Figueroa, 2004; Hyndman, 2007). Australian teachers observed that boys have a strong interest in electronic and graphic forms of literate practice; were willing to “do” literacy in active, public ways (such as debating drama, public speaking) and were eager to engage in “real life” literacy contexts and “real life” literacy practices (Rowe & Rowe, 2000).

Choate (2000), recommends that students who learn slowly may require supplementary instruction, varying accommodation for their learning profiles and special assistance as they attempt independent task.

To modify instructions teachers should slow the pace of the

1. Instruction to match students learning rate
2. Reviews and re-teach before each lesson
3. Provide extended readiness and practice activities for each lesson
4. Emphasize relevance and real life skills
5. Provide ample talking and listening activities to expand language, skills and concept
6. Shorten assignments to manageable units
7. Directly teach word meaning for all subjects

Myra Barrs suggests the following classroom situations and instructional approaches as ideal

for encouraging talk as part of reading and writing activities:

- small shared-reading groups that include the teacher
- groups working together with multiple copies of the same text
- students reading in pairs, working with a partner from the class or a partner/buddy from another grade
- groups reading along with taped stories
- students using the computer in pairs, perhaps for redrafting a piece of writing

*(Barrs and Pidgeon, 1993, p. 24)*

Differentiation instructions can be used as a teaching strategy to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. Differentiated instruction is a teaching theory based on the premise that instructional approaches should vary and be adapted in relation to individual and diverse students in classrooms (Tomlinson 2001). The model of differentiated instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and adjust the curriculum and presentation of information to learners rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. (Tracey Hall, Nicole Strangman, and Anne Meyer, 2009).

## **The role of the Parents and Motivation**

One of the biggest challenges schools have today is the increasing diversity among students (Lichter, 1996). Demographic distinctiveness such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity and cultural background and other parental characteristics are systematically linked with parental school involvement. Parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be involved in schooling than parents of low socioeconomic. (Baker & Stevenson, 1986). Family experiences play an integral role in shaping children's attitude towards literacy furthermore many children learn to read by reading with their parents (Walker, 2003). On the other hand parents from low socioeconomic background face many more barriers to involvement including nonflexible work schedules, lack of resources, transportation problems and stress due to residing in disadvantage neighborhood. Also because parents in lower socioeconomic families often have fewer years of education themselves and potentially harbor more negative experiences with school, they often feel ill-equipped to question the teacher or school (Lareau, 1996). Head start, the nation's largest intervention program for at-risk children emphasizes the importance of parental involvement as a critical feature of children's' early academic development because parental involvement promotes positive academic experiences for children and has positive effects on parents-self-development and parenting skills. Cultural models related to reading are generally accepted understandings about readers and reading in a local community. These cultural models play a role in the development of reading identities as people define themselves as readers in reference to shared conceptions of reading and readers. While describing literacy as

a valued skill in American society, Kathleen McCormick (1994) recognizes a cultural suspicion directed at people who enjoy reading. This suspicion may be particularly strong in urban communities where life experiences have demonstrated to residents that reading is identified with people other than themselves.

Parenting and Child Health(n.d) argues that children home environment shapes the initial constellation and attitudes they develop towards learning. When parents nurture their children's natural curiosity about the world by welcoming their questions, encouraging explanations and familiarizing them with resources that can enlarge their world they are giving their children the message that learning is worthwhile and frequently fun and satisfying.

Kelly (1978) argues that the educational level of the home will affect a child's rate of progress at school. The education of the parents themselves and their attitudes to education, the kind of language used in the home, the presence of a surplus of books will have serious implications for the child.

Evidence has shown that home and family influences do affect success in school. There are proportionally many more reading failures among more affluent homes. Studies of culturally different children show that those children do not enter school with the same background of experiences that successful readers possess (Karlin, 1980).

Additionally children who live in homes with parents who don't have a high school diploma and those from economically deprived homes are five to six times more likely to drop out of school later in life (Brizius & Foster, 1993, P, 70). In fact Walker (2003) states that parents who have experienced stressful learning experience themselves often find it difficult to assist struggling readers.

Another common condition can be found in homes where children are virtually left to their own devices. In some families, at home when the child is home from school. The reason for this vary for necessary reasons (e.g. parents has to work to keep family housed and fed) to purely personal preferences (e.g. parents travels a lot, goes out a lot) Olender, Elias & Mastroleo (2010). In England, Keith Topping and others have found ways to help parents view literacy in a new light so they can work successfully this was achieved by encouraging parents to sit together with their child so they can read aloud a story together (Walker, 2003).

Early recognition of learning difficulties is important. If your child is not doing as well as expected, or is doing well in some areas but finding other work very hard, ask your child's teacher if an assignment can be done at school. Talk to your child's teacher about what your child needs, and keep persisting until her gets the support he needs – no one cares about him as much as you. Keep a check on your child's progress. If he's not making progress ask questions and ask the teacher to try something different. Ask the teacher what your child will get out of any particular program. Don't encourage your child to opt out of trying or excuse bad behavior because he has a learning problem.

According to Brophy (1987) motivation to learn is a competence acquired through general experience but stimulated most directly through modeling communication of expectation and direct instructions or socialization by significance other (especially parents and teachers).

It has been argued that when pupils are allowed to work at their own pace and level perhaps also in pursuit of their own interest, there are great gains in motivation and incentive to work and learn. This is precisely the kind of gain we are looking for in the education of pupils with learning difficulties. If he can be encourage to take on what he can cope with if we can play

on his strength rather than his weakness then we can reasonably hope to achieve a level of motivation that may give us rather more chance of doing something for such pupil Kelly (1978).

The importance of family support cannot be underestimated in motivating readers. Encouraging literacy in the home supports the total reading process. One powerful way to build the home-school connection is to implement a take-home book program in which students and parents build strong literacy bonds as they read together.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The reason of this research study is to gain knowledge through teachers' experiences of the way in which they implement teaching strategies to teach students with difficulties in learning. It is important to gain deep insight of the teachers' experiences in a reliable manner to give validity and value to their story. This chapter explains in detail the methods and procedures used to explore this phenomenon. It also focuses on the research design, how the participants were selected and profiled, and the way in which the data will be analyzed, ethical issues and the limitations and delimitations of the study.

The research questions operationlized are what are the strategies do teachers use to meet the needs of students with difficulties in learning? How do teachers identify children with difficulties in learning? What are the challenges that teachers experience in teaching children with difficulties in learning?



## **Research Design**

Qualitative methods are used in research that is designed to provide an in depth description of a specific program or setting (Martens 1998). The design of the research project is expected to answer salient questions about the phenomenon under investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This research project is attempting to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon so the qualitative is design will help to describe and clarify the teachers' experiences in relation to children with learning difficulties. Also this design will provide a clearer more accurate understanding and description of the essence of the experiences of the teachers who have taught students with difficulties in learning at the school (Husserl, 1970).

Cuba and Lincoln (1989) state that if researches accept the ontological assumption associated with interpretive/constructions that multiple realities exist that are time and context dependent they will choose to carry out the study using qualitative methods so that they can gain an understanding of the constructions held by people in that context.

Furthermore Peek and Furman, (1990) explored the importance of qualitative research in special education in terms of recent development in the philosophy science the need for more holistic analysis of problems in policy and practice and increased attention to descriptions of the world as experienced by individuals in the analysis of issues in special education. As such this research study utilizes this designed to investigate the experiences of teachers in the implementation of teaching strategies to students with difficulties in learning in a mainstream inner city school.

## **Sampling technique**

Of the five traditions to qualitative inquiry suggested by Creswell (2013) the case study research design is the most suitable design to answer the research question in this study. In case studies the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake; 1995; Yin, 2009, 2012). This case will be an in-depth study of three teachers' experiences of implementing teaching strategies for students with difficulties in learning.

The sampling technique used is purposive sampling; since there is only one class per level at the school. Therefore, three trained teachers who have been teaching at the school for over three years are the subjects of the case study. It was very important to have the classes that are being tested at the National Test to be a part of this study therefore one teacher from second year infants, standard one and standard three were interviewed. Purposeful sampling is a qualitative sampling procedure in which researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008).

## **Sample Size**

There is no fixed number or percentage of subjects that determines the size of an adequate sample. It may depend on the nature of the population of interest or the data to be gathered and analyzed (Best & Khan, 2006). Three out of a staff of seven teachers and one principal will be utilized in this study.

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2011), in-depth information from a small number can be very valuable.

## **The Participants**

The three participants who are in the study will be given pseudonyms. The second year will be called Laura, the standard one teacher Rose and the standard three teacher John.

Laura teaches standard one and has 21 years teaching experiences of which eighteen have been at school x Primary School. She has taught second year infants, standard one, standard two and standard five at the school.

This teacher resides in San Fernando. She lived in Maraval for a number of years to be closer to her place of work but has since returned to San Fernando. It is expected that with her five year experience at the school she will provide depth to the quality of information collected. This teacher has a certificate in reading and dyslexia training from the dyslexia association from Trinidad and Tobago. She is also the holder of a teacher's Diploma from Corinth Teachers College and a Bachelor of Education from the University of the West Indies St Augustine.

Rose teaches standard one. She has fourteen years teaching experience of which eleven years were spent at this school. She has taught the first year infants, standard one and standard two classes at this school. This teacher resides outside of the community but because of the number of years she has been at the school she has become familiar with the children and the families of the community. This teacher is the holder of a Bachelors Degree in language and the holder of a Teacher's Diploma from the Valsayn Teachers College in Trinidad.

John, one of the two male teachers on the staff teaches standard three and has fourteen years teaching experience of which twelve years were spent at this school. He has taught standard five and standard three, with most of his teaching experiences being in the standard five class. This teacher lived in Santa Cruz but recently has moved to Chaguanas. It is expected that

as a male teacher teaching boys, his views may be different to the female teachers and help to bring a male teacher point of view to this research and a different insight to this research. This participant has a Diploma from the Valsayn Teacher's College he also has a Degree in Agriculture Studies and is pursuing his Masters in Agriculture Science.

Although these three teachers live outside the school community they are very familiar with the students and community. These teachers were chosen as participants because they are trained teachers who taught at the school for over three years. Also the standard one and the standard three class are assessed at the national test so that these teachers will provide valuable information and insights to the study.

### **Selection of Participants**

The participants of this study were chosen based on purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select those participants who will provide the richest information for the study (Best & Khan, 2006, 19 cited in Wolland – Mestine 2012). The researcher purposefully selected three teachers and one principal based on the class they taught at the time of the conduction of this study and because they were trained teachers who were at the school for over three years. Additionally the participants represented the three levels of the school, infants, standard one and standard three being the classes which are tested in the national test and contribute to the academic performance Index of the school as put forth by the ministry of education. These three teachers are the important to share how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have into the world (Merriam 1998 p.6) from their interaction of students with difficulties in their classroom and this will in turn deepen the researchers

understanding of the teachers experiences on implementing strategies to students with difficulties in learning.

### **Data Collections and Procedures**

Data collection should be ethical and also respect individuals and sites. Obtaining permission before starting the data is not only part of the informed consent process but is also an ethical practice (Creswell 2008). Choosing the method or methods to collect data based on your research question or questions is an important step in obtaining answers to your question. According to Creswell (2007) data collection can be viewed as the process of gathering data from various sources in a systematic way that enables the researcher to answer related research questions.

Data for this study were collected mainly through semi structured open ended questions through individual interviews in order to gain rich thick data. The intention for the interviews was to find out from three teachers about their experiences of implementing teaching strategies to students with difficulties in learning in an inner city school classroom.

According to Merriam (1998) interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies in education. Conducting interviews was thought to be the most appropriate because interviews are used to gather information regarding an individual's experiences and knowledge; his/her opinion; beliefs and feelings; and demographic data (Best's and Khan' 2006). As such, this researcher felt that the selected teachers would be able to share valuable knowledge based on their experiences and the way that they implement teaching strategies and give insight

though their opinion is to students with difficulties in learning. Also the main purpose of the interview is to obtain a special kind of information. The researcher wants to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 1990, p278). Therefore it can be inferred that interviews permit the researcher to gain an insight into the minds of the participants.

The type of interview conducted was semi-structured in nature. Merriam explained less structured formats allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand to the emerging world view of the responded, and to the new ideas on the topic Merriam 1998 further explains that semi-structured interviews comprises of having a list of guiding questions or issues to explore but not pre-determine the order to exact wording of the questions.

All the interviews were conducted in the natural setting at school. The participants were all willing to share their experiences on the research topic. However, interviews with the standard one and standard three teacher were open and relaxed, and they shared information willingly. . In contrast at first the second year teacher started off being defensive, thinking that I was judging her method of teaching. On further clarification on the topic, she relaxed and was able to share and give me deep insights about her experiences. Lichtman (2010) reiterated that it is important to develop rapport in order to conduct an interview that generates meaningful and useful data.

**Instrument:**

The interview that was prepared, contained lead and probe questions related to:

- number of years at this school
  - size of class
  - classroom challenges
- } what strategies do teachers use to meet the needs of students with difficulties in learning?

- teaching strategies used
  - Identification of students with difficulties in learning
  - what do you think contribute to these boys having difficulties in learning
  - parental involvement
  - any school arrangements in place for students with difficulties in learning
  - suggestions for administration
- } RQ 2
- } RQ 3

Merriam (1998) highlights that in all forms of qualitative research the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection. All information is filtered through the researcher's eyes and ears and is influenced by his or her experience (Lichtman, 2010).

I moderated, listened, observed and recorded the interview. The role of the qualitative researcher is one that embraces subjectivity. Subjectivity is something to be acknowledged and understood. The researcher has to understand where they are situated in order to understand and interpret the data of teachers' experiences fully.



## **Ethical Issues**

These were the ethical considerations that were observed from the start of the research study. Data collection should be ethical and it should respect individual and sites. Obtaining permission before starting the data it is not only part of the informed consent process but is also an ethical practice (Creswell, 2008). Firstly written permission was sought from the schools principals as well as the teachers. The principal was informed about the nature and purpose of the study and the assurance that the school's name would be replaced by a pseudonym as to avoid identification.

The three teachers who were chosen as participants were spoken to individually and informed about the nature of the study. Additionally the teachers were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time. Teachers were assured that anonymity and confidentiality of their identities and information will be persevered.

Also ethical considerations were adhere too by replacing teachers and students names with pseudonyms.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of making decision about interpreting the data, this involves consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and heard (Merriam 1998). Creswell (2013) added to this by emphasizing that data analysis in qualitative research consists of preplanning and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes

through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or discussions.

For this study, after completing the interview I started the process of analyzing the data. The interviews were transcribed and printed. I read the transcript several times to get a sense of the interviews.

Participants were asked to examine rough draft of their transcripts to ensure accuracy of their expression.

Firstly, a friend and I transcribed the digital data and all efforts were made to get the exact words of the participants. To ensure this, the researcher listened to data and read to a typist the exact words heard. While translating certain words of expression were noted on a separate section of the field notes book

I then created a 2 inch margin on each side of the text document so that I could jot down notes in the margin. I scrutinized the data line by line trying to find leads, ideas and issues in the data themselves to gain the deeper meaning. I proceeded with the process of coding the document by identifying text segments and placing a bracket around them and accurately described the meaning of the text segment.

After coding the entire text I made a list of all code words. I grouped similar codes and looked for redundant codes. I then listed the codes in numerical order, placing a number for each code as they appear in the transcript. Themes were then selected based on the codes, I then colour coded in relation to the theme and visually represent this on a chart. I looked at the list and the data and circled specific quotes from participants that support the codes.

The researcher then engaged in peer review to ensure the researcher's bias had not clouded the generation of the categories and the identification of the themes. According to Gibbs and Taylor (2010) coding is the process of combing the data from themes, ideas and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code label so that stage for further comparison and analysis.

### **The Researcher Experiences**

After teachers college I was assigned to the school where the research is being conducted. The interest in children with difficulties in learning started there and when a master's in education inclusive of special education was advertised I grabbed at the opportunity so as to find ways to better address children in my care.

The conceptualization of this study started in the last special education class of the Masters programme. The title of the study changed twice before I settled on the present study. Firstly it was "A phenomenological study of teachers' experiences of students with learning difficulties in a primary school in East Port of Spain". Then "what are the challenges for teachers in implementing strategies to assist students with difficulties in learning". Now my study is Implementation of teaching strategies to teach students with difficulties in learning in a mainstream inner city Primary school.

The journey conducting this research had some problems. The major problem for me was the literature review. My interaction with the participants was very interesting for we were able to discuss issues and topics that were important to both of us. Time and time again I returned to the participant for clarification on what was said and to further ask questions.

**Delimitations and limitations** are those conditions the research has no control over and as such this may place restrictions on the conclusion of the study and their application to other situations (Best and Khan 2006)

### **Delimitations**

The study cannot be generalized. It is delimited to the experiences of teachers in one school. Information can only be used within the context of the school.

### **Limitation**

There is only one class per level so I was unable to compare same levels. Also time constraint in scheduling interviews. This researcher has been a teacher at this school for over fourteen years and as such has an inbuilt bias.

In conclusion this chapter gave a detailed view of how this research was conducted and the following chapter will focus on the data analysis and presentation of findings.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

The analysis focused on answering the following three research questions that were operationalized in this study.

1. What strategies do teachers use to meet the needs of students with difficulties in learning?
2. How do teachers identify children with difficulties in learning?
3. What are the challenges that teachers experience in teaching children with difficulty?

The process ensured that all three research questions were answered although what strategies do teachers use to meet the needs of students with difficulties in learning was the main research question.

Themes

Research question 1.

1. What strategies do teachers use to meet the needs of students with difficulties in learning?

Themes generated from these question are: individual work with students, peer tutoring among students, exposure to literacy programme, positive reinforcement.

Individual work with students

Firstly all the three teachers that were interviewed expressed the view that individual work is a necessary strategy in teaching students who have difficulties in learning. The teachers believe

that individual work may address instances where students may have to review work done at a lower level before any new work can be done. These teachers are of the view that if individual work is not done students will leave the institution without grasping the necessary numeracy and literacy concepts.

Laura argued that although she has to give the students with learning problems the individualized attention it is sometimes challenging because all the other students want to get her attention as well.

She stated that:

“I try but.. its hard on me but I do try and I have to be conscious of it because it has some boys who may be faster in completing task, who when you give them a task to do they will finish on time and finish it quickly and still want that attention”

Rose revealed that :

“I teach whole class then give the children who need individual attention so I can help them. She further stated that “some kind of always fall by the wayside because we are unable to give them the one on one attention that they need”

However John pondered also the boys who have learning difficulties;;

“I try to devote more extra time with them although I know my time is limited any extra time I have I try to devote to them”.

He further highlighted the fact that:

“There is a certain amount of sight words that the boys in my class are supposed to know but the boys who have reading difficulties, “I wouldn’t start at that level I would start at the first level.

Yea.. Start with work below their level”.

## **Peer tutoring among children**

Peer tutoring is a strategy used by all three teachers in meeting the needs of students with difficulties in learning. They view it as motivational for students to encourage them to learn because the stronger students can help the weaker ones, especially in subject areas such as reading and mathematics.

Laura divulged;

“I try peer tutoring to let the stronger help the weaker because so to help them not to feel that miss breathing down their necks”

She further stated that;

“I do peer tutoring where they feel more relaxed with their classmates.

Rose disclosed that:

She “putting that child with one who is able to read is also put them with one just as slow or I put those with same ability together”

John shared that:

“I would sometimes put a fast one to help a slow one read”



## **Exposure to literacy programmers**

The teacher of the lower levels recognizes the existence of the Hopalong programme in the school to improve literacy. However their views differ in terms of the level of effectiveness. The teacher at the standard three level found the use of the dolch sight words was helpful however quite often he needs to revert to levels lower than that suitable for their age group .Rose believed that the Hopalong reader seems to fit with their reading ability where they go at their own pace and they are able to work at their own pace some seem to be improving with that,

She explained:

“There are differences in some of them not all. Those with learning difficulties tend to gravitate towards where they are able to do activities and because of the activities they are able to read the words there in work”

However she explained further;

“But the reading book itself but they have problems with the same words in the reading text.

John divulged:

“Also the boys who have these learning problems I find myself having to go back to work that is at much lower level than their own for example the dolch sight words”.

## **Positive reinforcements**

Teachers use positive reinforcement as a strategy to help students with difficulties in learning.

Positive reinforcements such as praises, mini breaks, free movement as key strategies to improving students' basic skills. They believe that even starting task at lower levels can achieve success is also a motivational strategy that can used to assist these students.

Laura highlighted the fact that she always:

“Praise task that is attainable... I always have positive words for the students and give them mini breaks and free movement in the classroom.”

Rose disclosed that:

“I give them games and thing to playing with when they get tired of the work so they will not get too tired and they will do more work.”

## **Research Question 2**

### **Identification of students with difficulties in learning**

The following themes that emerged on how teachers identify students with difficulties in learning; were learning problems, behavior problems, inattentiveness and sensory impairments and under develop motor skills

### **Learning Problems**

All teachers confirm that students with difficulties in learning often have literacy problems. They do not understand what they read so they obviously have comprehension and spelling problems. Students are believed to have problems in all areas because the reading problem transcends all other areas. They also feel that students are not responding to strategies used by teachers to address their problems.

Laura lamented:

“They cannot match letters to sound; they sometimes have problems in basic things like directionality. Some even have problems with recognizing the back and front of a book”

“all that shows because even if the child is now learning to read you’ll find that child have interest in print and they can tell their own stories. I don’t think that they have much exposure in literacy and reading...I not seeing that in terms of talking to the boys.”

Likewise Rose stated :

“They seem to have difficulties in sounding out words. They take longer to comprehend the sentences they have read. When you read to them is just words.”

She further explained

“In their writing they may not be able to spell words as they sound. Some of them they spell it close to the sound but if they see the words they may not know what it is”

John added to this by explaining that:

“The subject area for me the boys have the most difficulty in reading and because of that difficulty in reading they kind of stem off to the other subjects. So you know you realize that they have problems in mathematics, problems in social studies, and problems in science but for me the most of it stems from reading”.

## **Behavior problems**

Students are described by teachers as having behavior problems such as hitting, kicking, , continuously out of seat and not responding to punishment. These problems teachers voiced as being an indication that these children have difficulties in learning.

Laura disclosed that sometimes:

“I identify these boys according to how disruptive they are , they kick hit and walkabout the classroom or go under the table fidgeting doing something while work is going on”

Rose revealed:

“Well... Some of them.. The children with learning difficulties you will more find they are disruptive in the class at times”. They tend to run around they are disrupting the class at time.

She further added;

“They can’t sit still they will look for a fight somebody who doing work they will go and interfere with them. If you punish they doesn’t seem to make any sense”

Although John agreed that the behavior problems indicates that students may have difficulties in learning,

He stated;

“Miss I know that boys with learning problems do misbehave and thing but miss they can’t do that in my class”

## **Inattentiveness**

Teachers that were interviewed stated that students who have difficulties in learning displayed short attention spans focus and concentration. This is also an indication, according to these teachers that the students are having difficulties learning. They also made reference to lack of attention being seen in the inability to complete task given.

Laura commented:

“They always on the move they cannot focus for long, you understand they are easily distracted. Those are some of the signs that are seen in the classroom.

She also commented that;

“Even when the teacher is in the class they do not focus. They have a problem with focusing and concentrating”

Rose made mention that:

“You will just teach something and when you ask them a question they don’t know the answer. Sometimes they ask to go to the toilet or drink some water in the middle of a lesson”.

John disclosed:

“How I always have to keep track of them by calling their name otherwise they dream away”

## **Sensory impairments and under developed motor skills**

Teachers observed that some of these boys hold the pencil awkwardly take long to copy from the board, they do not like to write, have a lot of in completed task and home work is rarely done or completed by someone else. They also highlighted the fact that they appear to have hearing and seeing problems.

Laura observed that:

“I am not seeing that there s much interaction with books at home. They hold their pencils awkwardly; they are usually not task and do not complete assignments or talk about things not related to the topic”.

Rose teacher explained:

“These are the boys who I have to put in front of the class so they could see better from the blackboard. When I call Tim name he takes long to hear. Their hand writing is scrappy.”

Research question 3

## **What are the challenges that teachers experience in teaching children with difficulties in learning?.**

The following themes indicated the challenges that teachers experience in teaching students with difficulty in learning stress of the job lack of motivation to learn, impact on community and home environment and absence of school policy

### **Stress of the job**

One of the key areas mentioned was that teachers lack training which place stress on them to meet the needs of these students because they do not think that they are adequately trained to deal with them. Another issue raised was a lack of time to individual work and the fact that all students are competing for your attention.

Laura sounded frustrated and was twisting her hair when she explained:

“Sometimes in even trying things to their level you still encounter difficulties because as well I am not a technician so I don’t know what are the major hindrance or difficulties so it’s just like a trial and error kind of thing”

She further revealed in her statement:

“You are the only person in the classroom so with everybody seeking your attention it hardly gives you time to focus on the need for that individual because everybody needs individualized attention. By the grace of God I cope, am...it makes life frustrating...for me...for me it is difficult in planning because it takes a lot of planning.



Rose divulged that:

“No one strategy help with these five boys, in order to find to find strategies you have to find out about the issues that bothering that child and you does not reach that child”

She further divulged:

“I don’t think that a teacher like me will be adequately prepared because. I try my best to somehow reach them but yet I don’t think best is the best for them likewise.

John with a humor-less laugh explained:

“How do I cope with them... hmm not very... well laugh...

He added;

“I was not trained to deal with all of this when I was in teaching college. Good... you know the ADHD and all Down Syndrome but in terms of the exact techniques of how to deal with these children and how to make them more sociable. How to make them more academically relived I don’t think I was ever trained in that area”.

### **Lack of motivation to learn**

Students who have difficulties in learning often lack motivation coming to class and this sometimes stems from the home environment. Also students experiencing learning problems are

unable to adequately apply themselves to the demands of school work and due to this may lack self esteem and motivation to do school work.

Laura explained that one of her major challenge:

“Is the boys’ lack of motivation on any given day so sometimes you may have all the strategies and all the good intentions if they are not comfortable, if they are not focused in class that day you may not get anything done.”

Likewise Rose voiced similar challenges:

“If you punish them they don’t seem to make sense punishment is like a waste of time.”

She explained further:

“You always have to find some kind of activities like games something to get them involved and occupied where you know they will not be able to affect anyone else in a negative way”.

John felt that due to a lack of motivation these students give up quite easily and not persistent in completing task, assignment given to them.

He revealed:

“If they continue to just do it once and don’t keep up with it they would just keep on and not continuing to read”.

### **Impact of community and home environments**

Teachers highlighted three main issues related to the home environment. Firstly believe that these students do not get the support they need at home. Secondly parents are not aware of ways that they could help their children and finally, they do not motivate their children, which they believe cause them to resign themselves to believing that they are slow.

Laura disclosed:

“We don’t know what they coming from home with.. In terms of the home environment”

She highlighted further: and then we have the famous surrounding with tatattata.. Gun shooting so you don’t know what state of mind the child is coming with”

“So they expect the teachers to do everything so am cannot take up the parents’ role and responsibility in seeking help for their children.

Rose suggests that students come to school with issues from home:

“Amm....their home environment .Issues of whatever they have to deal with at home. Ha... well one is the parental involvement. You don’t get them helping enough. Come in to sit down and find out what it is we doing. What they can expect at home to help the child.”

John commented:

“The home environment is the major challenge for him”.

He disclosed that”

“Parents who work late at night by the time these boys come home and they play and so on their parents ready to leave so nobody knows who really with them at home”

He revealed further;

“I want parents at home to try.. spend time with them... stop telling children they slow”  
he also commented “being told at home that they slow they lack self esteem... resign themselves... not pushing, accept laziness”

### **Absence of school policy to assist students with learning problems**

All teachers confirm that presently there is a no school policy in place to assist children with difficulties in learning.

Laura commented:

“Do we have a school policy...? I don't think we have a school policy. I can't remember, I not sure”.

Rose divulged:

“No policy in place for students with difficulties with learning. At one time we had two children that I can think of who were referred and they were able to place them in schools where they will better function.”

John stated:

“Am... hem... I really don't know nah, I really don't know how to answer that one. Laughs... but these boys need a constant somebody to be constant with them while they do their work”.

In summary, this chapter looked at the findings in relation to the research questions. In terms of the strategies teachers used to teach children with difficulties in learning teachers mainly used individual work with students, peer tutoring among students, positive reinforcement and exposure to the literacy program. Teachers identified students with difficulties in learning by recognizing the children with learning problems, behavior problems, inattentiveness and sensory impairments and under developed Motor skills. Teachers experienced challenges such as stress on the job lack of motivation of children, the impact of the community and home environment and no school policy in place to assist these children. The upcoming chapter looks at a discussion on the finding.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

Research question: what strategies do teachers use to meet the needs of students with difficulties in learning?

Research conducted by Choate (2000) suggests that students who learn slowly, at times requires additional instruction, a variety of accommodations for their learning style and special assistance as they attempt independent tasks. Teachers have all voiced their opinion that in teaching children with difficulties in learning, individualized instruction is an important component in the learning process. Teachers are concerned that because of the high demand for attention that they are unable to provide this special attention for all students. As such some may up falling by the wayside. This means that they will leave the institution lacking the basic numeracy and literacy skills. Individual work is quite important based on teacher's comments because it can help students review work that was done at a lower level. Providing these children with the individual attention that they need is a strategy that these teachers use to assist students with learning but it has been recognize by all three teacher that it has been inadequate because of time and as such is not benefiting students with difficulties in learning. Motague (1993) highlights the importance of tailoring instructions to individual student attributes. Teachers need to know how to select instructional approaches that will enhance learning for particular students.

Based on studies done by Fin (1993) an approach to providing additional support for students to meet higher academic achievement is typically accomplished through the use of peer tutors. Similarly, Friend & Bursuck (2012) argue that peer tutoring is a student's centered

instructional approach in which peers of students help one another and learn by teaching. This is a strategy employed by all the teachers interviewed to cater for the needs of students who have difficulties in learning. It is a documented fact that children can learn from each other thus, teachers believe that it is also a motivational strategy as well because the stronger students can help the weaker ones, especially in areas such as reading and mathematics. This makes them feel comfortable with their own peers. Based on experiences of the researcher there is also the issue of language barriers where the teachers and the students have differences in the way they speak hence posing a challenge for students. If students are placed with their peers this challenge can be reduced. Doug & Lynn et al ( 1997) reported success in using peer assisted learning strategies to improve reading skills in mid –elementary schools and Mathes, Torgesen & Allor (2001) have reported similar success with students in early elementary schools However, Woods (2006) argues that when teachers group students, students become labeled. This can present a problem for no matter what the group is called all children know which ones are bright, average or slow.

According to Pumfrey & Elliott (1993) states that a structured program is one which has a specific organization; the different parts cohere and contribute to a planned whole. The “hopalong” reading program is one program that is used to raise the reading level of the children and encourage the children to want to learn, It focuses on a blend of phonics and sight words utilizing flash cards and work books. It also encourages the reading and creative writing connection. This programme is geared towards the first year to standards one and suggestions and handouts are offered up to standard three.

However, based on what was said by the interviewees, this programme although there are strategies, it relies on memory and because the boys have problems with remembering they do not read but guess. They see it as following words and not reading for comprehension. Although

it works with some boys where it fits with their reading ability and they can go at their own pace, they are therefore able to improve with the use of this programme. It must be mentioned however although some of the boys are working well with it, boys with learning problems are struggling.

Additionally, the use of a multi-sensory approach in helping alleviate reading /spelling problems has long been advocated ( Hornsby,1984; Hulme,1981; Peters,1967 sighted in Pumfrey & Elliott ,1990). Aural-Read-Respond-Oral-Written (ARROW) is a multi-sensory teaching /learning approach which uses and strengthen elements from physiology, environmental and psychological roots (Pumfrey & Elliott, 1990). Recently ARROW was introduced into the school to assist boys who were at risk for reading failure. All boys tested were reading below their chronological age. These boys will be given eight contact hours in strategies to assist them to help them be better able to Although it's too early to comment on the effectiveness of this program at the school it must be mention one of the teacher mention that boys learn differently to girls and they needed less oral and more hands on multi sensory teaching that also focuses on multiple intelligences. It has been my observation that participants in this study hardly ever use manipulates or teachers aid when implementing strategies to their students teach more in an abstract way that may not benefit these boys with learning problem. It can also be argued that there are too many reading programs being implemented at once which can confuse instead of assist students. For instance reading interventions that vary the content of phonics instructions have different outcomes depending on the way in which phonics is taught (Necheochea & Swanson, 2003).



Motivation is essential if children are to become successful readers, and it is the easiest component to implement in the early elementary grades (Tyner, 2003). Likewise Stipek (1993) states that students have an achievement need that forces that drive an individual needs to improve, succeed or excel in things considered both difficult and important. Teachers recognize this and hence use classroom strategies such as praise and assigning tasks that are attainable, mini breaks and free movement as a means of motivating their students to perform. The need of at risk students for more positive emotional support in the form of encouragement, feedback and positive reinforcement are widely understood( Swanson,1999) Teachers also saw the need to refrain from using negative words such as “slow” to describe students. This they believe will also help to increase student’s level of motivation.

In this study one teacher explained that maybe she is teaching in the way she was taught and that may that’s the reason why these boys are not responding to the strategies that she uses. Now, this is very important because many studies done suggest that boys learn differently to girls and that strategies used must cater to gender differences. Similarly Alloway, Freebody.Gilbert & Muspratt,2002;Hyndman,2007;Lingarg,Martino.Mills,Bahr.(2002) who link the need to provide real life situations in teaching and make pedagogy more connected to students lives and world beyond the classroom thereby helping to motivate boys to learn.

## **Research question: How do teachers identify children with difficulties in learning?**

Dilshad (2006) argues that research indicates that the children with learning difficulties may have academic difficulties due to basic reading comprehension, written expression, mathematical calculation, language disorder, perception disorders, disruptive behaviors and memory problems. They may also exhibit disruptive behaviors as well. The teachers interviewed all confirmed that the students with learning difficulties often have literacy problems. This they believe transcends all other subject areas. It is quite real to the teachers that the students are not responding to whatever strategies they are employing to improve their literacy level.

The teachers sighted this issue of disruptive behaviors as an indicator that the child is also having difficulties with learning. According to an article by the Women's and Children Health Network (n.d), if a child is having difficulty learning, it might be due to a specific learning difficulty, but there are other causes of learning problems as well, including; behavior problems where a child does not want to do school work and does not listen in class. These teachers also made mention of this as an issue, however the one male teacher interviewed stressed on his belief that although they might have behavioral problems they are aware that they cannot behave like that in his class. Choate (2000) Low academic motivation is related to several factors. First, the student may have a history of academic failure; academic work may have brought more punishment than success. Second, teachers, parents and others may not know the motivators or rewards that work best with the student, or may use them ineptly. These students in the study

might be displaying disruptive behaviors because of inadequate motivators. Also teaching instructions may not be catering to the way boys learn and as such lack motivation to learn.

Choate (2000), make the point that students designated as general education and remedial learners who are considered at risk for school failures contains groups of at risk students with attention deficits. All teachers interviewed believed that these students who have difficulties in learning also lack attention and cannot focus on task for a long period of time. This will most likely affect their performance. In order for children to grasp concepts given they must be able to focus on the work presented to them. Students' inability to focus and lack of attention will hinder students from being able to complete tasks as mentioned by teachers interviewed. in the same way Woods( 2006) recommend that teachers should first assess tasks according to the type of attention span necessary to complete them. Then they should match their methods of instruction and task according to the variations of attention span in their classroom.

As mentioned in the findings, teachers listed a set of observable characteristics that they have noticed in children with difficulties in learning. New South Whales Department of Education and Training (n.d), highlighted some general characteristics of students who experiences difficulties in learning is that they experience difficulties in reading, writing, spelling and mathematics, sometimes in all areas and sometimes in just one or two. In this study the major difficulty in this school is reading and writing. The teachers believe that they are even able to recognize the learners with difficulty by their writing. Although the teachers stated that reading is the major problem at the school. They recognize that the problem in reading

transcends all other subject areas. Other areas of observation are that some of these students have problems seeing on the blackboard or hearing instructions or directions that are given unless they can see the teachers lips .Also it has been my observation that children with difficulties in learning enjoys doing work on the computer and enjoys art and craft and painting. Hodges (1988) posits compare to achievers, at-risk youngsters tend to be significantly less visual and auditory and have a higher preferences for tactile/kinesthetic stimuli and greater need for mobility and intake (food or drink).

**Research question: what are the challenges that teachers experience in teaching children with difficulties in learning?**

One of the key areas mentioned were teachers feeling a lot of stress on the job. Yam et al (2012) argues that current teaching preparation does not take into account complexity of factors. Although all teachers attended Teachers' college and two of them have their bachelors in education they all strongly agree that they are not trained to deal with children with these learning problems and have suggested that additional specialized help is needed to assist theses children with learning problems. Likewise studies have shown there is a strong need to train teachers to adapt instruction to the diverse students' ability, learning styles, personality traits and needs by using more differentiated teaching strategies (Yam et al, 2012).

Mental or physical health problems, substance abuse, and other personal problems can interfere with individual students' motivation to exert effort in a course; this is according to an

article from Carnegie Mellon University (n.d). Teachers stated that they believed that some of the children in their classes with difficulties in learning are as a result of bad pregnancy habits which affected them mentally because of excessive drinking, smoking or taking of drugs. One teacher even mentioned the home environment, where children have parents who work late at night and they are not supervised at home. This he believes will affect children in that they are not motivated at home, they do not get the assistance to do homework and they are just not given the support that is required at home.

Another major challenge is the communities these boys come from. In a research study I did at this school for my Education 11 course titled "why boys' are not motivated to do work in standard five (5)". It was discovered that with all the shooting in the communities at night the boys are unable to concentrate and do their homework. Compounding this is that when these boys are at school they are unable to concentrate because they are studying if their family members are safe at home and if they can safely reach home after school. Many a time gunshot can be heard in close proximity of the school, this causes the interruption of teaching sometimes for the entire day. With these interruptions in teaching and learning boys are at a disadvantage in the instruction and learning process.

Researcher Lee et al (2007) write that students from single parents do not do as well in school academically as those from intact families as cited in Appelbaum (2009). From my study done as mentioned previously, these children come from mainly single parent low economic households. As a result they may not have the desire home environment that is conducive to learning. . Therefore it is understandable why these children have mental and social issues that

affects their level of motivation and hence performance in school. Kelly( 1978 ) argues that the educational level of the home will affect a child rate of learning. Then educational level of the home can determine the value parents have of education and their attitudes towards learning. Kelly further states that evidence has shown that home and family influence do affect accomplishment in school: there are proportionally many more reading failures in the midst of poor homes than there are among more affluent homes.

All teachers agree that there is no school policy in place to address challenges teachers are faced with daily. Although there are cases where students were referred for help and was assisted, there is still not policy to deal with students with difficulties in learning. However, recently the Ministry of Education has established a literacy coach, who is supposed to be dealing with students from first year to standard one with reading problems read.

## **Conclusion**

This case study exposed significant insightful findings for the teachers' experiences of implementing teaching strategies to students with difficulties in learning. These findings unearthed the strategies that teachers used to cater to their students, the different ways in which they identified students with difficulties in learning and the challenges they faced on a daily bases to meet these students. The findings suggest that these teachers need to utilize additional strategies to assist their students, and assistance to overcome the challenges that they experience to meet the need of the diverse learner in their classroom.

## Recommendations

These recommendations arise out of the findings from the research questions in learning?

School based team should be formed:

- To assist teachers on ways of assisting students with learning problems so that teachers will be given the additional support that is needed.
- To monitor when students need to be referred to student support services. Regular use of early screening, and testing to monitor students who are at risk for academic failure.
- Utilize teachers who are qualified to assist these students: teachers with special education background can suggest ways in which these children can be assisted. Team teaching.
- Workshop for teachers to understand how to identify children with problems
- Each term provide professional development training on various strategies to cater to students diverse needs to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- Teachers need to incorporate strategies that cater to the different ways that boys learn, so they will obtain confidence in their own abilities to address the needs of diverse learners.
- The school must foster effective ways of collaborating with parents

Program for Parents

- Educate parents on ways of identifying learning challenges in their children and strategies to assist students at home,
- Make school more parent and community friendly .



# References

- Best, W.J & Khan, V.J (2006). Research in education; Pearson Education Inc
- Blackman A.B, Tangel M.D, Ball W.E, Black R. and Mc craw K.C (1999). Developing phonological awareness and word recognition skills. A two year intervention with low income inner city children. Reading and writing. An interdisciplinary journal 11:239 -273, 1999. Kluwer academic publishers. Printed in the Netherlands
- Block, C. C. (2003), Literacy difficulties: diagnosis and instruction for reading specialists and classroom teachers. A Pearson Education Company
- Campton, C. – Lily Comber, B. (2003). Forward, reading families, literate lives of urban children. Published by Teachers college Press.
- Center on International Education (n.d). Benchmarking / education for all. Retrieved from [www.ncee.org/programs.affiliates/centeroninternational-educationbenchmarking](http://www.ncee.org/programs.affiliates/centeroninternational-educationbenchmarking)
- Choate, S.J (200) Successful inclusive teaching
- Creswell, J.W (2013). Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design choosing among five approaches. Sage publications, inc
- Creswell, J.F (2008). Educational research, planning, conducting, and evaluating, qualitative and quantitative research. Third edition Pearson Educational, Inc
- DeLisle, J (2009). Schooling and poverty. Express Newspapers, School of Education, UWI. ST Augustine
- Department of Education and Training New South Wales (2004). Teaching students, experiencing difficulties in learning, information for teachers of languages. Retrieved from: <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au>
- Dilshad, M. A. H. (2006). Prevalence of learning difficulties and disability among primary school children: effects on emotional problems and academic achievement. Retrieved from <http://etd.uasd.edu/ft/th8654.pdf>
- Evangelist, T (2002). (Ewing, NJ, USA) Constructivist Approaches to teaching and learning. The college of New Jersey Retrieved ([www.tcnj.edu/evangelist/constructivism.htm](http://www.tcnj.edu/evangelist/constructivism.htm))
- Ensuing Access to education for all (2005). Published by United Nations Educational Scientific and cultural Organisation. Retrieved from [www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001402/140224e.pdf](http://www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001402/140224e.pdf)
- Evaluating of children with reading difficulties ([www.aafp.org/2006/1215p2079.html](http://www.aafp.org/2006/1215p2079.html))
- Fielding N.E (1999). Learning differences in the classroom. International reading association

- Friend, M. Bursuck, D.W (2012). Including students with special needs, A practical guide for classroom teachers. Sixth edition. Pearson Education, Inc
- George, J. , Quamina-Aijejina L. ,Cain, M. (2009), Gender issues in education and intervention strategies to increase participation of boys. Retrieved from ([www.moe.gov.tt](http://www.moe.gov.tt))
- Gibbs. R. G & Taylor. C. (2010). How and what to code . Retrieved from: Government Information Agency Guyana 2003 ([www.gina.gov.gy/archive/releases/pr030003.1.htm](http://www.gina.gov.gy/archive/releases/pr030003.1.htm))
- Guyana Programme area Summary education (2005-2009). Retrieved from ([www.guyana-education-summary-mar07-tcm77-20548.pdf](http://www.guyana-education-summary-mar07-tcm77-20548.pdf))
- Hall, D. (2014). How to write a literature review and other guidelines for doing sociological Research.
- Hamilton S. Sutton & Glascoe P. Francis, 2006
- Hill, E.N and Taylor C.L (2004). Parental school involvement and children's academic achievement, programmatic and issues. Published by sage (<http://www.sagepublications.com>)
- Husserl,E. (1990). The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology. Northwestern university press.
- Jones K. & Charlton T (1992). Learning difficulties in primary classrooms, delivering the whole curriculum, a diversion of Rutledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc
- Learning Difficulties coalition (2010). inquiry into pronoun of education to students with a disability or special needs. Retrieved from
- Learning Difficulties Future Challenges ([www.bis.gov.uk/assestsforsight/docs/mental-capitallearning-difficulties.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assestsforsight/docs/mental-capitallearning-difficulties.pdf))
- Lewis, B.R. & Doorlay H.D (2006). Teaching special students in general education classrooms by Pearson Education Inc.
- Libert. A.R (2007). Practice of education in Trinidad and Tobago. Publish by Libert Education
- Lockhead, E. M, Verspoor, M. A and associates (1999). Improving Primary Education in developing countries, A world Bank publication, Manufactured in the United States
- Lumsden. L.S (1994). Students motivation to learn Eric Digest number 92. Eric clearinghouse on educational management Eugene or. Retrieved from: [retrievedfiles.eric.gov/fulltext/ed370200.pdf](http://retrievedfiles.eric.gov/fulltext/ed370200.pdf)
- Martin. A. & Tracey. D. Motivating students to learn (2006). Retrieved from: <http://www.learninglinks.au/wp-content/uploads>
- Merriam, S.B. (1998). Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from case study research in education. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition ). California: Sage Publications.

Parenting and child health (2013). Specific learning difficulties. Retrieved from;  
[www.cyh.com/healthtopics/healthtopicdetails.aspx](http://www.cyh.com/healthtopics/healthtopicdetails.aspx)

Purdie N & Ellis L. (2005). A review of the empirical evidence of identify effective interventions and teaching practices for students with learning difficulties in year 4, 5 and 6 RFT PRN 3538b. Retrieved from (www.

Rains. R.J., Kelly. A.C & Durham (2008). The evolution of the importance of multisensory teaching techniques in elementary mathematics. Theory and practice. Retrieved from:

Rowe. K. (2006). Effective teaching practices for students with learning difficulties. Constructivism as a legitimate theory of learning and teaching. Retrieved from  
[www.research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article](http://www.research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article)

Savic, V. (n.d). Inclusion and excellence in education. The finnish experience. Retrieved from  
[www.britishcounsel.org/december.newsl-07-feature.article](http://www.britishcounsel.org/december.newsl-07-feature.article)

Stake, R.E.(2010), *Qualitative research. Studying how things work*. The Guilford press.

Sutton.S. Hamilton. M.D & Glascoe F. P. (2006). Evaluating of children with learning difficulties. Retrieved from: [www.aafp.org/afp/2006/1215p2070.htm](http://www.aafp.org/afp/2006/1215p2070.htm)

Torgesen, K. J. (2004). Preventing early reading failures. Retrieved from  
[http://archieive.aft.org/pbs-reports/American\\_educator/issues/fall04/reading.htm](http://archieive.aft.org/pbs-reports/American_educator/issues/fall04/reading.htm)

Transforming the Education System of Trinidad and Tobago (Miske Witt final report, 2008)

Trinidad and Tobago Caribbean symposium on Inclusive Education Kingston Jamaica (2007). Retrieved from: [www.ibe-unesco.org](http://www.ibe-unesco.org)

Waxman C.H Padroln N.Y. and Arnold M.K. University of Houston, centre for research on education diversity and excellence ( CREDE) Retrieved from  
([www.books.google.tt/books?hl=en&lr=did](http://www.books.google.tt/books?hl=en&lr=did))

Wheldall, K and Madelanne (2013). Learning difficulties Austrilian Volume 45. No. 3 Retrieved from ([www.ldaustralia.org](http://www.ldaustralia.org))

Wiersma, (1995). *Qualitative research designs*. Retrieved from:  
[http://charlesdennishale.com/books/eets\\_ap/9\\_Qualitative\\_Research\\_Designs.pdf](http://charlesdennishale.com/books/eets_ap/9_Qualitative_Research_Designs.pdf)

Wood, W.J (2006), *Teaching students in inclusive settings, adapting, and accommodating instructions*. Fifth edition Pearsons Educations, Inc