Children with disabilities in South Africa, and their right to a participating life.

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ABSTRACT

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The aim with this study was to examine in what amount disabled children in South Africa can live a participating life in society, with focus on special needs schools and their capability to empower the children. The data material has been collected through eight qualitative interviews, and observations at seven special needs schools in the country. Through my result I have distinguished three main roads to empower the children: First, to analyze social structures, secondly, to gain knowledge and awareness, and thirdly, to strengthen the children's self-esteem. I have also analyzed the structural barriers that are hindering disabled children to participate, and illustrated this by describing social policies and their effect on special needs schools in South Africa.

Key words: Children with disabilities, school, south Africa, participation, empowerment.

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa has a population of 51 million people, whom are divided into four groups. 80 % are Black, and the other groups are Europeans, Colored and Asian. There are eleven different languages spoken in South Africa, the biggest being Zulu. Today South Africa has a democratic system, with free elections. ANC (African National Congress) received the political power in 1994, at South Africa's first democratic election (Länder i fickformat 2011). South Africa is a country marked by the Apartheid regime, and the division between Black and White is still big. Many White live with a high standard, while poverty is the reality for numerous of Black people. Today, South Africa is a democracy, but nevertheless it is regarded as one of the most unequal countries in the world (SIDA 2009).

I have worked as a personal assistant in Sweden, and this led me to become interested in disabled people's situation in other countries, especially concerning children. What kind of assistance is available for children with disabilities in South Africa, and how is this assistance practiced? South Africa is a country I find interesting in many ways. It is called the rainbow nation for its cultural diversity, and the country has a both dark and intriguing history. My interest lies in children with disabilities and their position in school and society. What are their chances to live a full-worthy and participating life, and what obstacles might they struggle with in this area?

The United Nation's Convention on the Children's Rights proclaim in article 23 that: "… a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community" (UN 1989). In the children's act 38 of 2005, there are several principles that relate to the care and protection of children. Concerning children with disability or chronic illness, there is a principle saying that consideration must be made in "making it possible for the child to participate in social, cultural, religious and educational activities, recognising the special needs that the child may have" (Children's act 38 of 2005, pg. 22) Both regulations consider the children's right to participate in the community and in several activities. My question is how this is practiced in reality, and especially what role special needs schools have regarding this area.

According to statistics from the Department of Basic Education, there were 108 240 learners in special needs schools in South Africa in 2011. The number of schools was 442 (Department of Basic Education 2013, pg. 28). Brahm Fleisch et al. (2012) mention disability

as one of several factors to why some children do not attend school in South Africa. They announce that about 1.9 % of the children in the compulsory school age (7-15 years) have some form of disability. 22.1 % of them are not attending school at all (Brahm et al. 2012).

Under the Apartheid policies, the special schools were mainly directed to White and Indian learners, even though approximately 80 % of the population was Black learners. The new inclusive education policy was introduced in South Africa in 2001, and was supposed to guarantee support, access and quality education to all learners, including those with special needs and disabilities. It was also a result of the new government's attempt to reduce the discrimination and inequalities that had flourished during the Apartheid time. The inclusive education strategy was supposed to increase the participation of all learners, and prevent them from being excluded from communities and neighborhoods et cetera. But although this is the objectives, the implementation of the policy has been thorny, due to things like insufficient funding, lack of capacity and lack of clear, national guidelines (Sulochini Pather 2011, pgs. 1103-1104). Petra Engelbrecht et al. (2006, pg. 121) mention various factors that create barriers to participation and learning in schools in South Africa, amongst them lack of good support and communication, negative attitudes, deficient legislation and inappropriately trained teachers.

My question of interest is how staff at special needs schools work to assist children with disabilities under the circumstances mentioned above. The inclusive education strategy seems to want to integrate disabled children into mainstream as far as possible, but what happens to the children that are still in need of special education? It seems like the intention to integrate and perhaps normalize, stand in contrast with the fact that some children are left behind in the normalization process. What are the chances of inclusion and participation for those children that mainstream schools cannot cater for? Are special schools in South Africa equipped to provide adequate assistance for them?

There is much research about inclusive education in South Africa, that have questioned if the inclusive education policy has been successful or not. To study special needs school's role for disabled children is important for research because it brings light to the situation of those children who cannot cope in mainstream schools. I believe there is much to learn from how the teachers and other staff at school work to empower these children in a society where poverty and structural issues are a reality. The difficulties that these children might meet can also be similar to the difficulties that children with disabilities in other countries meet. By

gaining more knowledge about how disabled children can be empowered, and able to participate, could be an important source of information regarding how to help disabled children in general.

This thesis will discuss the political aspects that special needs schools work under, as well as how the schools provide assistance that can help to empower the children. I will discuss and analyze this with regard to the children's chances of participation.

1.1.1 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The aim of my study is to analyze how special needs schools in South Africa work to empower children with disabilities and prepare them for a participating life in society.

1.1.2 QUESTIONS OF ISSUE

- What assistance is available for children in special needs schools in South Africa?
- How do teachers at special need schools in South Africa work to empower children with disabilities?

1.2 DEFINITIONS

1.2.1 DISABILITY

The World Health Organization (WHO) refers to the notion disability with the Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). ICF is regarding disability as an interaction between body functions and social structures. Disability is therefore something that should be seen in its context.

1.2.2 SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOLS

When I discuss "special needs schools" in South Africa, I refer to those schools that are directed to children with chronic disabilities/impairments. These schools can also be mentioned as "special schools."

1.2.3 ASSISTANCE

A lot of my thesis will circle around what assistance is available for children with disabilities in South Africa. The word assistance can contain several aspects, but in this thesis I will mainly refer to the word when I discuss how children are helped to live a participating life in society. The practical assistance, such as allocations and materials, will be discussed in some amount, but the main focus will lay on the empowerment of the children.

1.3 RESTRICITONS

Disability is a notion that has several dimensions. There are physical, mental and intellectual disabilities, and disability at different levels. This thesis will concern children in special needs schools, which mean that the children have a more severe disability than, for example, just a learning disability. Another aspect I have reflected on is the age of the children. I reckoned that it would be most relevant for my study to focus on children between 6 and 15 years old, which can be considered as the "school age" for most of the children.

1.4 EARLIER RESEARCH

In the journal: *Psychodynamic Counseling,* Kerry Gibson and Leslie Swartz (2000) discuss the emotional demands child care workers are experiencing in South Africa, especially concerning disadvantaged children. They argue that non-governmental organizations receive very little support from the state. Many of the organizations that work with children strive to do as much as they can with the limited resources they have. They need to find a balance between their lacking resources and the high demands that they are meeting. Gibson and Swartz' study emerged during a clinic for organizations that work with the care for disadvantaged children. Their intention was to have training programs and workshops that could help to create practical solutions to the issues that these workers experienced, but they found this to be difficult due to both emotional and political barriers. The writers highlight the fact that organizations are reflecting both the political and the historical context of which they are situated in. They emphasize the importance to reflect over emotional and political dynamics, so that these can be understood and worked through. Only then can the needs of the children they're caring for effectively be met (Gibson & Swartz 2000, pgs. 136-139, 152).

The importance to look at the context will be emphasized in this thesis, as special needs schools also can be seen as organizations that are affected by the political structures around them. I assume there is some difference between disadvantaged children and children with disabilities, however, the challenges that Gibson and Swartz are describing, could be similar to what the staff at special need schools is experiencing.

In a study made by Peter Rule and Taadi Ruth Modipa (2012), adults with disabilities describe how their disability has affected their lives. For example, the disability had contributed that they dropped out of school by various reasons, or that they did not attend school at all. In this study, the adults with disability were participating in a program called

Enable, where they got the opportunity to participate in adult education. Twelve semi-structured interviews were made, as well as four focus group discussions. This gathered material about these people's experiences of disability in both education and society. The result showed that some of the participants never attended school as children, because of their disability. This was possibly due to poor health in the family, the shame of having a disabled child or that the schools could not cater for them. Another learner had felt isolated by both teachers and other learners, and chose therefore to drop out of school. The experiences of these adults points to the fact that their disability led to social discrimination. But through their study, Rule and Modipa could see that:

> "Data from other adult learners in the study confirm that they experienced a boost in their levels of skills and knowledge, as well as in their self-esteem and sense of capability, through participating in adult education" (Rule & Modipa 2012, pg 152).

This study gives examples of various difficulties that people with disabilities can meet in their daily lives. It also shows how adult education can help learners to gain more confidence in themselves and their own abilities. However, I want to be careful with drawing to clear parallels with this and the children enrolled in the special needs schools. There are many differences between a child and an adult. Nevertheless, it is possible that the challenges that these adults met as children are similar to the challenges that children with disabilities in South Africa meet today.

From 2004, both adults and children with disabilities in South Africa have the right to free health care. Also, children up to 18 years old that are in need of fulltime care are entitled for a care dependency grant (Saloojee et al. 2006). However, many children in poor areas in South Africa don't receive the services that they are in need of. Saloojee et al. investigated the services available to children with disabilities in a South African township. Their results showed that only 40 of 92 children between seven and fifteen years attended some form of school. Still, the writers refer to a Jamaican study of disabled children that suggests that the biggest need that the children had was to receive special education. Saloojee et al. discuss the fact that when children with disabilities are not receiving the services they are in need of, such as health care, grants and schooling, it diminishes their chances to participate in daily activities (Saloojee et al. 2006, pg. 233). Philippa Russel (2003) argues that even though it can be seen as a general opinion that children with disabilities should have the same chances of participation in society as their non-disabled parents, the reality looks different. Much

research points to the fact that many disabled children and their families still face discrimination and other social barriers that are diminishing their chances of participation (Russel 2003, pg. 216). Russel also speaks of the importance of schools that can provide a safe and supporting environment for the children. Yet, she points out that:

> "Disabled people are currently only half as likely to attend further or higher education as non-disabled people and are twice as likely to leave school with no formal qualifications. In many cases, the lack of opportunity relates to uncertainty about a range of issues including risk management, communication strategies and in some cases a lack of awareness of the potential of disabled students (Russel 2003, pg. 220).

Later in this thesis I will discuss more about the challenges and structural barriers that special needs school meet as they work to assist children with disabilities.

2. METHOD

2.1.1 A QUALITATIVE STUDY

I have used a qualitative method in my study, of the reason that I wanted to capture various dimensions regarding children with disabilities' chances of participation. I intended to both describe and analyze special needs school's ability to prepare the children for a participating life in society, therefore I found a qualitative method most suitable. This enabled me to take more time for interviews and observations, yet in fewer organizations, so that this type of analyze was possible. Bryman (2011) points out that a qualitative research is interested in analyzing the *meaning* that people give to things happening around them. Another important aspect for qualitative research is the context in which people are situated in. Every subject of investigation must be seen in its context. Otherwise we might miss getting a broader understanding of the phenomenon, or people's actions (Bryman 2011, pg. 364).

Katarina Jacobsson and Anna Meeuwisse (2008) explain that the "case study" can be used as a method in, for example, social work studies. This type of method enables you to gather lots of knowledge about a certain phenomenon (Jacobsson & Meeuwisse 2008, pg. 42). Jacobsson and Meeuwisse point out several characteristics for a case study. They argue that the aim is to investigate the context, as it has a great importance for the understanding of the case (Jacobsson & Meeuwisse 2008, pg. 49). The case in my thesis is children with disabilities. My focus lies on the children's positions in the South African society, and especially in relation to in what amount they are able to participate.

2.1.2 SAMPLING

I visited altogether seven schools in my study. Six of them were located in KwaZulu-Natal, and one in Western Cape. My choice of schools depended firstly on the accessibility factor, and secondly on which schools that agreed on letting me visit them for my study. It also had a practical relevance for me, since I was mainly situated in KwaZulu-Natal.

When choosing schools for my study I have used a purposive sampling, meaning that I have chosen schools that are relevant for my study (Bryman 2011, pg. 392). Bryman refers purposive sampling to when scientists don't randomly choose participants for their research. Instead they have a strategic approach from the basis of their research questions. Eriksson-Zetterlund & Ahrne (2012) describe something similar when they explain what they call a "two-step sampling", where you often look at organizations and choose those that are relevant for your research. Since I wanted to do a study about children with disabilities in South Africa, I considered several possible environments, and got to the conclusion that special needs schools were the most suitable. Mainly because I assumed a lot of the assistance given to children with disabilities were practiced there.

Two of the schools I found through the Internet, and the rest of them I found through contacts in the field. Therefore, I have, besides the purposive sampling, also made a so called "snow-ball sampling". This kind of sampling means that your first interview person gives you other contacts that are relevant for your research (Eriksson-Zetterlund & Ahrne 2012, pg. 42). In my case, I got in contact with staff at an organization for orphaned and vulnerable children. These people helped me to get in contact with several special needs schools in the area. In some cases, the staff at those schools referred me to other schools or organizations. However, I realized it could be a risk with this, if the schools chosen by the staff were quite similar to each other and therefore would give a certain direction in the material (Eriksson-Zetterlund & Ahrne 2012, pg. 43). By choosing two schools on my own I believe I have reduced that risk in some amount.

The schools I chose were mainly directed to children with physical disabilities, in preschool and elementary school. My intention was to interview teachers at these schools, but in some cases I have also interviewed nurses, physio-therapists and occupational therapists, whom are involved with the children's physical and mental care. I concluded that it would give me a broader perspective by interviewing people from various professions. Altogether I found eight

participants, of whom there were three teachers, two principals, one nurse, one physio-therapist and one occupational therapist.

2.1.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

To gather the material needed for my thesis I have used qualitative interviews and observations. The shape of my interviews was semi-structured, meaning I used a consistent amount of questions through what is called an interview guide (see appendix). Alan Bryman (2011) explains that an interview guide has questions that follow certain themes, although, they can be adjustable if needed (Bryman 2011, pg. 415). With a semi-structured interview, I have followed the specific themes that can be distinguished in my thesis. I have used pretty much the same questions in all my interviews, even though the place and form of them have varied depending on how the interview proceeded. One question has often been followed by the supplementary questions that I have found suitable. The time of the interviews was approximately 30 minutes. I recorded six of the interviews, and took notes during two of them. Every participant was ensured anonymity and the interview participants were offered to receive the thesis as it was finished.

Considering my questions of issue, I distinguished three themes from which I proceeded. These were: 1: What assistance is available for the children in school, 2: how the teachers work to empower the children and 3: in what amount the children are able to participate. These themes also contain other aspects that I have discussed in this study, such as the children's rights, self-esteem and difficulties they meet in their daily lives. By visiting special needs school in South Africa, where children with disabilities were enrolled, I collected data through both interviews and observations. That gave me a deeper insight in disabled children's situation in South Africa, and showed ulterior reasons to why things are a certain way. Qualitative interviews can capture shades and dimensions that you can miss by using standardized questions (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Ahrne 2012, pg. 40). How teachers work to assist children and prepare them for a participating life in the society is a question that must be problematized and seen in the light of reasons, consequences and solutions, and that is why I chose to do a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews.

2.1.4 OBSERVATIONS

The observations I made were meant to serve as a complement to the interviews. Philip Lalander (2011) discusses the advantages with doing observations in a study, as it can work as an advantage to the research to put yourself in the same place as the participants in the study.

Observations can then give you a deeper understanding of what you want to study (Lalander 2011, pg. 83). By doing observations, I did not have to rely merely on the information I got through the interviews, but I could also get insight in how the assistance was practiced in school. My main intention was not to look for contradictions between interviews and observations, but to get a wider insight in how the assistance is practiced in schools.

I did my observations at six of the seven schools I visited. The reason that I didn't observe one of the schools was the time factor and that the school was located far out in a rural area. Five of the schools were located in KwaZulu-Natal and the last one was located in the Western Cape Province. The time of the observations varied. The most common was that the observations lasted around two to three hours. In some schools I made further visits for one or two days.

My main purpose was to observe how the assistance given to the children was practiced in special needs schools. I decided in beforehand what to look for when I observed. Therefore, I used themes as guidelines in my observations. These themes were: the assistance available for the children and concrete ways to assist them.

2.1.5 PROCEDURE
The material I have analyzed is containing of the transcriptions I got from my interviews, and my notes from the observations. Håkan Jönson (2010) declares that coding is a part of the analysis, to interpret and distinguish certain patterns in the material. A common way to code is to use letters or colored pens, and to divide the material into categories (Jönson 2010 pg. 56-57). To structure this material, I have used four different color codes. These are: 1. Problems, difficulties (red), 2. Assistance available for the children (yellow), 3. Empowerment (green) and 4. Participation (blue).

2.2 CREDIBILITY, TRANSFERABILITY, DEPENDABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY
It can be difficult to argue that a qualitative research demonstrates an absolute truth, as it often focuses on one description of the social world. Nevertheless, to create credibility in the results, it is important to let the participants of the study confirm that the researcher has described their reality correctly (Bryman 2011 pg. 354-355). Therefore, I have given some of the participants in my study the opportunity to read my final result, to give feedback and confirm whether or not it reflects their reality. This involves the interview participants or

other people I have met in the field, not any of the children that participated through my observations. It is important to illuminate the fact that this study very much relies on the interview material I have gathered. Therefore it is shaped by second-hand information, instead of first hand as it would be if I interviewed the children themselves (which however is not appropriate due to the ethical factor). What the school staff says regarding the assistance the children get and how it can increase their participation may contradict to what the children themselves experience. This is important to be aware of when looking to the results from this study.

Concerning transferability, Bryman argues that qualitative research is about finding the uniqueness and meaning of what is studied. Instead of searching to illustrate results that can be generalized to other areas or situations, the researcher should make thick descriptions of the details of whatever he or she studies. This will create a database of information that each person can conclude whether or not it is transferable to another environment. Therefore, I have searched to let the interviews contain a lot of details, to not make too much room for my own assumptions or conclusions. I also believe that the observations I made helped me gather details that an interview might have missed.

To make my study dependable, I made sure to follow the directions given for the research procedure. That includes affirming that things as sampling, interviewing, transcriptions and observations were correctly made, and described clearly in my thesis (Bryman 2011, pg. 355). This will also contribute to more transparency in my investigation. Showing how the participants in my study have been chosen and clearly demonstrate my procedure is important for the transparency criterion (Bryman 2011, pg. 370).

2.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Bryman (2011) presents the ethical principles that need to be considered in any research. For example, everyone involved in the study are to be *informed* of its purpose and have a chance to decide whether or not they want to participate in it. This has naturally been clarified in relation to my requests for the interviews. It has been a little more difficult with the observations. Even if my purpose was to gather knowledge about how teachers, or other staff at school, give assistance to the children, I found it important to make sure that the children will get information about my role as a researcher, and the purpose with my study as well. In many cases the teacher also did introduce me to the class and informed them that I was there to learn more about disabled children in special needs schools in South Africa. And in all

cases, I have made sure the children's identities are protected, by choosing not to mention any names of individuals or places.

Besides the information principle, there are three other demands that need to be considered in research. The second principle is to receive *consent* from every person that actively participates in the study (Vetenskapsrådet). I received consent before every interview, in relation to my request if the person wanted to participate in my study. As far as the observations go, it is difficult to receive consent from every single learner. In some situations it is enough to get consent from a teacher, considering that the nature of the situation would not be of a sensitive one (Vetenskapsrådet). Seeing that my observations were made during a normal school day, I find that this case suits in that category.

The third principle is about *confidentiality*. Every participant in the study should be anonymous, so that it is impossible to tell out their identity from the material used in the thesis (Vetenskapsrådet). I have made sure that no personal data, other than the participant's profession and gender, have been exposed in my thesis. All the participants in this study have been given pseudonyms to assure anonymity. The transcriptions and notes from my observations will be destroyed as soon as my thesis have been approved and published.
The forth principle informs that the material and data that have been gathered only are to be *used* in research purposes. It is not permitted to let the material be used for commercial or other non-scientific purposes (Vetenskapsrådet). I will not use my thesis with another purpose than research.

I also considered how I, as a Swedish, young woman, could expect to receive confidence from the people I interviewed. I realized that there could be cultural, linguistic and other forms of ruptures between us. This was something I was aware of, even though I did not experience it during my study.

2.4 MY PRESUMTIONS BEFORE THE STUDY

What were my own presumptions regarding investigation, and how might they have affected my result? I think this is an important question to think about. Since I had never been in South Africa before, my picture of the country depended on what I had learned from media, other's experiences, research, internet et cetera. That probably colored my hypothesis concerning the result I expected to get. From what I have read, there is a significant bridge between rich and poor people in South Africa. I assumed this would have some kind of impact on children with disabilities as well. For example, I had an idea that children in poor areas would receive less

assistance. I also thought there would be a lack of resources in some schools, which might affect how the assistance was provided. I also assumed that the teachers' knowledge and engagement, as well as the schools' resources, were some of the factors that decided how much assistance the children would get that would enabling them to participate.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1.1 WHO'S DEFINITION

I have used WHO's definition of disability and look at its interaction between body factors and environmental factors. In what amount the children can live a participating life in society depends therefore on themselves and their impairment, as well as environmental factors, such as society structures, norms and how the teachers work to empower them.

3.2 SOCIAL POLICIES

To understand and discern the factors that influence the work at the schools and the chances of participation for the children, I will refer to Walkers (2005) definition of a social policy system, and the aims and objectives it is consisted of. Walker describes the national government as responsible for the social security policy and benefits in the country. He also implies that sub-national governments have responsibility for policy design and implementations in certain jurisdictions, as well as they have a main concern for the provision of social assistance. Walker explains that the national government regulates and stimulates the activities of the sub-national government. The national government should ensure an adequate pattern of provision, but that is seldom the case, partly because of political conflicts. This often results in poor targeting of policies (Walker 2005, pgs. 93-94). I believe it is possible to regard special needs schools in South Africa as sub-national governments, which have to adjust to the Aims and regulations of the national government.

Walker declare that:

> "System aims are the embodiment of political intent and provide the ongoing rationale for social security provision" (Walker 2005, pg. 23).

The aims are mostly revealed in official statements, and contain both values and ideas, and conflicts between various power groups. Beside aims we have objectives. Policy objectives are often specified in legislation and included in official materials. They can be looked at as political aspirations, and are depending on the current ideology.

I find a policy analysis relevant to describe how the social structures may affect the assistance provided in the special needs schools, as well as the children's chances of participation.

3.3 THE EMPOWERMENT APPROACH

In this thesis I have focused on ways to assist children with disabilities in special needs schools and prepare them for a participating life in society. The dominating method I have seen through my interviews and observations is the Life Skills-project that are included in the schools education plan. This subject consists of several categories, such as Personal and Social Wellbeing, Physical Education and Creative Arts. The dynamic of Life Skills that I have seen through my study shows on many similarities with the empowerment approach. In this thesis, the Life Skills project will be discussed as one way to practice an empowerment approach for disabled children. The empowerment approach consists of various theories and concepts. Malcolm Payne mentions the critical, feminist and anti-discrimination theories that empowerment relates to. He speaks of Empowerment as a way of helping people to

> "…gain power of decision and action over their own lives by reducing the effect of social or personal blocks to exercising existing power, increasing capacity and self-confidence to use power and transferring power from the groups and individuals" (Payne 2005, pg. 295).

Ole Petter Askheim describes empowerment as a way for people to gain the power needed to change their powerless situation. It is about increasing people's knowledge, strengthen their capacities, and improve their self-image and self-confidence. Another important aspect of empowerment is to make people aware that their situation is due to historical processes, and at the same time social structures (Askheim 2007, pgs. 18, 20). Anna Tengqvist describes empowerment from the basis of various organizations where empowerment is an important factor. One of the things she discern as central regarding empowerment is to see every person as capable, if the right conditions are given to him or her. She mentions projects in several organizations that aim to help people to take responsibility, and be their own actors, instead of regard themselves as "helpless" individuals. By letting people do practical, meaningful and developing things, it strengthens their ability to take action (Tengqvist 2007, pgs. 82-83).

3.3.1 A POLITICAL AWARENESS

Askheim and Starrin (2007) are discussing the word *political awareness* as they speak of various challenges in social work. The context is that social workers are situated in between

the clients and the social structures in society. Political awareness involves empowering the clients as much as possible inside these structures, but at the same time aim to expand the structural frames so that individual needs can be met. It also implies the need to reflect over how political changes, regulations and decisions are affecting the work (Askheim & Starrin 2007, pg. 213).

I will use the empowerment approach in my thesis to analyze how special needs schools in South Africa provide assistance for the children, and in what amount the children get empowered and helped to live participating lives. This by using some of the central concepts that I have mentioned above:

- Help the children to gain action over their lives by working through social and personal blocks.
- Increase knowledge and strengthen capacities.
- Let the children do practical, meaningful and developing things.

I will also involve the concept of political awareness to my study, to bring light to how the social structures decide in what amount the school staff can assist the children, and the children's possibilities of participation.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Three of the schools I visited were private/non-profit schools, and four of them were public/governmental. The public schools were all bigger and more equipped than the private/non-profit schools. The public schools had 100 learners or more, one school had over 400 learners. They did get funding from the government, although many of the interview participants spoke for the need of more funding. Therefore, they also did some fundraising to finance the school fees. Most of the schools charged a school fee for the learners to attend the school. The private schools had 9, 15 and 40 learners. The two schools with fewer learners had only one teacher, while the school with 40 learners had six teachers. All of the classes I observed in were elementary school, grade 1-5, except one class that was more of a high school. In one occasion I observed in two pre-school classes (grade R) as well. As I have studied the work at these schools in relation to my purpose, I have distinguished three main themes that I will discuss in this section. These are:

- Access to school

- Assistance available in school, and

- Ways to empowerment.

The first theme was established with regard to my result, as I found that the access to school had a lot to do with the children's chances of participation. The other two are recognized in my questions of issue, as well as my interview questions, and therefore also visible in my result. With regard to the purpose of this study, I found these three themes as the most relevant to discuss. As my main focus lies on the children's chances to live a participating life, it will be discussed through all the themes.

4.1 ACCESS TO SCHOOL

When looking at people with disability in general, there are some issues regarding their access to things like education, social welfare and employment. Through my result and previous research I have found that the possibility for children with disabilities to attend school can affect in what amount they can live a participating life in society. It is stated in the United Nation's Convention on the Children's Rights, article 23, paragraph 3, that a child with disability should be ensured to have:

> "… effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development" (UN 1989).

According to this convention, there is a connection between receiving education and achieving social integration. If a child doesn't go to school, his or her chances of taking part of the community should therefore be limited. One example from my own study is the deaf children. A nurse in a school that enrolls deaf children explains:

> "But obviously when they come to school they know no sign language... they just point or use their own ideas and sing… so they start learning in the classroom" (Celia).

If the children don't know sign language, one can assume that their abilities to communicate with their surroundings are restricted, as well as their possibilities to participation. For deaf children, the chances to communicate with others might therefore be limited if the child does not go to school.

A teacher talks about the major changes some of the children in her class have made. She speaks about one of the boys when she says:

> "… he was in his bedroom for seven years. His aunt adopted him. He's never ever been to school… And I say, in a turn he has learned to control his... He has stopped spitting at you, he'll now try to hold a pencil to coloring. He's trying to talk with the children..." (Carol).

One thing you can read from this is that school seems to have been the main way for the boy to learn how to behave and interact with the other children. And from her saying that the boy is now *trying to talk with the children,* the interaction and participation part is also discernible.

Most of the schools were available to children with both physical and mental disabilities. However, they could only enroll a certain amount of children. Some of the interview participants mentioned that they sometimes have to say no to parents with a disabled child, due to the fact that the school cannot cater for the child for different reasons. This suggests that even though every child has the right to education, there can be obstacles that make it difficult for them to attend school. A teacher that works on a non-profit organization school also discusses the fact that it is not easy for children to come to school, because they have no money. Most of the children at her school come from "shacks", and from very poor families. This was probably the only opportunity these children had to attend school at all. If they wouldn't be there, they would just be at home.

In relation to aims and objectives, Walker discusses the word *functions.* Functions are the outcomes, or the change that comes from a certain policy. Walker highlight that functions can be both positive and negative (Walker 2005, pg. 27). He continues by pointing out that sometimes there is no outcome that's indicating that the policy aims are becoming real. Walker describes constrains as something that can be hindering the aims to be reached.

We can see that the aims to provide education and assistance to the disabled children, according to the statements mentioned above, are being reached to some extent. There are schools for disabled children. Not just for White and Indian children, as before, but also for the Black and Colored population. During my observations I saw a range of children from all groups. Also, today disabled children are entitled to a disability grant (Saloojee et. al 2006, pg. 230), that could maybe make it possible for a child from a poor family to attend school, despite the school fee. The reason to why many disabled children are still not attending school

could be due to certain constrains. From the basis of Walker I consider that it could involve the capability of schools, or structural problems, like disability not being prioritized enough in the society (Walker 2005, pg. 42-44). The special needs schools are placed in a context where there is both possibilities and constrains, and Askheim and Starrin 2007 argue for the awareness of these things to be able to meet individual needs. I will continue in this thesis with discussions about the assistance available in special needs schools and how the school-staff work to empower the children and meet their needs.

4.2 ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE IN SCHOOL

The facilities I saw in the various schools I visited differed a lot from each other. One school had 343 children enrolled. There were several buildings with classrooms, a big dining hall and a computer room. Beyond that, they also had a swimming pool. Another school had less than 20 learners and only consisted of one room. The female teacher there had arranged for the older children to sit amongst the walls, while the younger ones sat on lower benches in the middle. This school was an alternative to boarding schools, which she didn't believe was a good choice. But she needed more funding to be able to take more children into her school. Two of the schools offered hostel accommodations. These schools also provided what was called an FM system, a kind of hearing aid for the deaf learners, even though they were rarely used in one of the schools. One of the schools had two blind learners enrolled, and offered special blind boards for them. During my observation at this school, I saw one of the blind learners receive a blind stick from the teacher. The child immediately started to practice with it, with a lot of guidance from the teacher. One school had an occupational therapist, a gym and a swimming pool. Most of the classes I observed had one teacher for the whole class. In one class for children with multiple disabilities, they also had one assistant for each child. In this class, a lot of effort was put on creating an individual plan for each child.

It became clear from my interviews that disabled children have the opportunity to get more or less assistance through special needs schools in South Africa. But we've already seen that many children are not attending school. The interview participants also expressed a need for more funding to be able to provide better buildings and more school staff. Lebusa A. Monyooe (2005) points to the fact that:

> "Apart from inadequate physical facilities, the majority of schools in South Africa are poorly equipped and under-resourced" (Monyooe 2005, pg. 14).

She argues that this complicates the implementation of inclusive education in the schools. During my interviews and observations, this is something that I recognized as a problem. Many times, the facilities were insufficient and the teachers too few to cater for the amount of children enrolled in the schools. However, several of the school *did* have quite big buildings in good shapes, as well as adequate equipment for the children. As mentioned above, the schools differed a lot from each other, and reflected both wealth and poverty. It is of course difficult to generalize a small, qualitative study like this on the whole country. Nonetheless, from my interviews I have understood that the schools that had good facilities and much equipment to provide often had been supported with a lot of funding, whereas the non-governmental schools struggled more with the funding part. Carol has expressed her need for a new building as she asks the question:

> "… where would these children go? …Where would they be?" (Carol).

I have recognized through my interviews that the assistance available for the children is dependent on several things, but money was perhaps the most noticeable. If the parents can afford it, they can send their children to a school with good facilities and a great number of qualified teachers. However, from my interviews it has been clear that many families do not have enough money to pay for school fees, and especially not the private schools.

> "…the majority, they have to pay something. You know, if they can't pay the full amount. And with hostels, hostel is private, it's not subsidized. So they have to pay the hostel fees… But there are cases that, they never seem to have money. Kids come to school with nothing. Sometimes with no shoes even" (Celia).

Even if children with disabilities are entitled for a grant, the money from the grant is sometimes not used for the child only, but for the whole family. Celia continues at another time:

> "… the family wants the grant, for them to live. I mean, I've got one case where there's about 14 children at home with Gogo. So they need the grants, to survive… some of them struggle to pay school fees… because a lot of the family members… the brother or sister will also be at home and not working and… they will be drinking, and the grant money will be collected by one of them, and they will drink it out and use it on drugs or… so it's… and the kid gets nothing" (Celia).

Carol talks about a girl that used to go to her school, but had to quit because the family was unable to pay the school fees.

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"Kids come and go, but the little girl, (name), who came with me for three years... She couldn't talk. She was schizophrenic. She would sit in a corner. Eventually she actually left last year because the boyfriend of the mother wouldn't pay the school fees anymore. But it got to the stage where she would actually communicate with you, talk with you and mix with the children. She was a lovely child. But now, where's she now, today? If I had a building and the funding that I needed I could take more children" (Carol).

Carol saw an improvement regarding this girl that began to communicate and interact with the other children before she had to leave school. There are two barriers that can be distinguished here for receiving education, and so also be able to participate in school and practice social skills. First it is the family's lack of money, and then it is the school's lack of funding to get an appropriate school building. Poverty is a problem that was mentioned through all of my interviews, and can supposedly be regarded as a structural barrier. Rule and Modipa's (2012) study about adults with disability gives example of barriers to education that the adults had faced as young learners, such as poverty and gender discrimination. This led to that some of them left school at an early age. Another barricade to education was the lack of understanding from family, teachers and community in general (Rule & Modipa 2012, pgs. 148, 151).

Walker suggests that struggles in the government can lead to poor targeting of policies. The provisions are often not distributed as they should according to the social security policy (Walker 2005, pg. 93). Could this be one reason to why many schools in South Africa are under-resourced and poorly equipped? Walker implies that:

"Without clear objectives, performance cannot be properly assessed nor political accountability excercised" (Walker 2005, pg. 40).

There are supposedly some issues regarding the implementation of political aims and objectives, which contribute to inadequate provision to the special needs schools in South Africa.

4.3 WAYS TO EMPOWERMENT

4.3.1 OVERCOME SOCIAL BARRIERS

An important aspect of what help the children can receive is due to structural barricades. Payne (2005) speaks about social barriers that are hindering people from gaining access to certain services. A common theme in my interviews has been that there is not enough funding.

Some schools get contributions from the government, but it does not seem to be enough for what the schools express need for.

> "… it's difficult because… there's not really enough funding to get staff employed by the government body… we need more teacher aids that can, you know, assist the teachers in the classrooms. Cause our teachers… as we go round you will also see the seize of the classrooms, and there's one teacher" (Celia).

Several of my interview participants have indicated that disability is not prioritized by the government. None, or at least very few, of the schools seem to get enough funding to fulfill the needs of the learners. A physio-therapist mentions this issue:

> "The government doesn't have the money to support us. We got what we've got because of overseas funding, not because of our government" (Mary).

The structural issues also become clear when I ask the interview participants about the children's futures and lives after school. The recurrent dilemma is that there are not enough facilities for the children to go to after school. This impacts their chances to participate in various activities in life, which also the following quotes seem to confirm:

> "Some of these children will never live in the real world. Some will go to care facilities… But the government is mainly good at primary care and is unable to fund as much as needed. There are possibilities to get a shelter employment or some kind of contract work. It can be for example packing, needle work or different work centers. But they then need to pay to get transported to these places. If you're going to stay there you also have to pay because it's private" (Charmaine).

> "And there isn't a lot of support from government, and there isn't a lot of support from Department of Education…We've had some children leave this class, and literally just go home" (Emily).

Payne explains that:

> "Empowerment practice helps individuals and groups to overcome social barriers to self-fulfillment within existing social structures…" (Payne 2005, pg. 297).

Empowerment seeks to help people gain power over their own lives. One way to do that is to help people focus on their strengths and capabilities, instead of personal or social obstacles (Payne 2005, pg. 295). One aspect of empowerment that belongs to Judith A. B Lee's approach is to;

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"Create a sense of community with clients so that they may jointly challenge contradictions that arise from vulnerability and oppression within a society of the affluent and powerful" (Payne 2005, pg. 307).

This indicates that the chances of participation for the children have two sides: An empowerment of the individual by for example strengthen the person's capabilities, and then also challenge the social structures that contain oppressions by vulnerable people, such as children with disabilities. Monyooe (2005) argues that:

"The attitude that a disabled child is not worth the effort required to advance his/her personal and/or social development leads to emotional abuse and feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and worthlessness for the disabled child" (Monyooe 2005, pg. 9).

A study made in Zambia points out that these people are often made invisible, and their rights are being ignored. Regarding children, there is no interest in investing education or social welfare in them, as they are seen as a burden, with no promising future (Monyooe 2005, pgs. 8-9).

Walker (2005) gives examples of several types of constrains, such as political, economic, social and administrative. To have a political awareness could supposedly involve being aware of these constrains and figure out how to work in between them. Walker discusses the social constrains when he suggests that:

"…"policies need to be consistent with people's values and attitudes in order to function as planned" (Walker 2005, pg. 57).

This suggests that it is not only political and structural constrains that need to be illuminated, but also the values and attitudes expressed by the people. The importance of being aware of these constraints or barriers will be discussed further in the next section.

4.3.2 KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS

Another social barrier can be the *lack of knowledge* that is preventing a child from getting the assistance he or she needs.

"Before I started here I was working at a hospital just outside (place). And we used to go on clinics…. And then from the clinics we would then do a further home visit so we would be far out into locations. Far from any sort of town. And there are an amount of disabled children out there that, they cannot get out of their house because they're

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living on the side of the hill and things like that, and there are no roads and, you know if they've got a wheelchair they're lucky, but… there's one child in grade one, he'll be eleven in June, and he's just going to grade one where he should be in grade six. Six turning seven. He has been living with granny cause mum and dad have passed away. So granny has been looking after him, but granny must be late 80:s. she can barely take care of herself, and she's sick as well. So, you know, I mean, he has got a lot of problems like contractions in his feet and legs and things like that. Because he has spent his time on the floor… cause granny doesn't know she has to move him around, she has to change his position and things like that" (Mary).

In this example, the granny's lack of knowledge could have contributed to this child spending all his time on the floor, with, what it seems, poor opportunities to participate in some kind of community. Also, some people might not understand what it means to have a disabled child, which Celia gives example of:

> "And the understanding with a lot of the parents with the mentally challenged children, some are still in the mind that that child can become a doctor. They don't understand, and then I've got some others that see the child as being cursed. And they will tell you straight out, this child is cursed, it's demons, and they will go for all sorts of ritual… so there's a lot of misunderstanding…" (Celia).

Payne refers to Lee when he points out that:

> "Having a critical consciousness, in the Freirean sense, and a knowledge of structural inequalities and oppression gives people power" (Payne 2005, pg. 307). The awareness that what ones situation is due to various reasons can diminish self-blame and instead encourage to take action for change (Payne 2005, pg. 307).

To empower people, *consciousness, knowledge* and *awareness* are regarded as important factors. From the examples above it is likely to believe that the lack of knowledge could be a hindrance to participation for children with disabilities in South Africa. If parents or other relatives had more knowledge of how they could help their child, more children with disabilities might be able to go to school, interact with others and learn how to live with their disability through some form of empowerment. However, Salojee et al. argues that:

> "…despite increasing public awareness of disability issues and rights, and a strong political commitment on the part of the new South African government to address inequities and discrimination encountered by children with disabilities, a large hiatus still exists between policies and their implementation" (Saloojee et al. 2006, pg. 231).

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They point out that even with the new, democratic government, many of the needs of children with disabilities continues to be unmet and ignored. There is therefore reason to believe that many of the problems regarding the children's futures and their chances to live a participating life are of a structural kind. As Walker explains, the aims and objectives that have been established in I policy does not necessarily have to result in the wanted outcomes (Walker 2005, pg. 27).

Dalrymple and Burke are highlighting both the individual's personal social surrounding and the wider social system as contributing factors to their powerlessness. They argue for the importance of *feelings*, *ideas* and *action*. With feelings, they want to reduce the effect of when personal experiences have led to feelings of powerlessness. With Ideas, they focus on the person's sense of self-worth, and to help people to take power over their lives. The action part seeks for change, in an agency, in social welfare or in other systems that in some way affect the person (Payne 2005, pgs. 286-287).

Awareness that the social structures contribute to feelings of powerlessness could be one step to empowerment, as well as building the strength and confident needed to take action over your own life. However, the fact remains that the special needs schools are placed in a political structure, often with only a limited amount of resources. The staff at the schools has to assist the children despite the structural and social barriers they are facing.

5.3.3. SELF-ESTEEM

In the schools I visited, the children got to practice their capabilities by doing creative and practical things, which many times also intended to strengthen the children's self-confidence or self-esteem. Emily explains how they work with this in her class:

> Emily: "… by just being really calm, really positive with them… Really encourage them when they do achieve… a lot of love, and lots of praise and total acceptance of them. And by positive reinforcement. We really try not to use the word punishment or to shout or to just… and if one of them is having a complete tantrum, just let them calm down… and just really appreciating them for who they are, and that they are each one unique and special and lovely. And just helping them to recognize that in themselves as well."

Jayne Bowen (2010) is highlighting the important role that self-esteem plays regarding mental and emotional health, life chances and academic success. She continues by explaining the concept:

> "The commodity termed as self-esteem can be described as the procedure by which individuals set a value on themselves, appreciate their own worth and recognize their attributes as a person, so that they can achieve a quiet sense of self-respect in the process" (Bowen 2010, pg. 47).

Bowen is linking the feeling of self-worth with recognizing one's attributes, what you can accomplish. This shows similarities with the empowerment concept, as explained above. She also discusses that the grade of self-esteem can vary between different situations. The important thing is that the child learns to cope with both its strengths and weaknesses. The pressure on the child should not be too high, as well as the challenges should not be too small and easy to accomplish. But to nurture the children's self-esteem is important so that they can be aware of their limitations and set realistic and achievable goals in their lives. Bowen also points out that a high self-esteem is connected with social inclusion (Bowen 2013, pg. 48). Looking at the study of Rule and Modipa (2012), education can play an important role in strengthening the learners' confidence. But as we see from the stories of the participants, school doesn't necessary has to contribute to feelings of inclusion, but could also implicate to experiences of bullying and isolation.

A principal at a special school suggests that children with disabilities often have a low self-esteem because of their learning problems. An occupational therapist relates to this issue by saying:

> "… they feel segregated from 'normal', what you call normal people, so they feel that normal people look down at them…" (Lucy).

In the discussions above we have seen several examples on how disability has been regarded as a curse, punishment, and something not worth putting effort or money in. There also seems to be a fear of being regarded as "abnormal" by others in the community. A part of the empowerment of the children is therefore supposedly to strengthen their self-esteems. To do that, Lucy is for example letting them interact with so called 'normal' children, to let them see that they actually don't look down at them. She's running a psychosocial group with the children so that they get the chance to interact and share things with each other. This interaction is something that the children might not have much chance to experience otherwise.

> "So the children basically have to interact, so the first activity that I would do with the children in that case would be... I pare them up and they have to tell the person about

them, find the stuff about them, and vice versa, and they need to present the person that they're sitting next to. So it encourages listening skill, it encourages communication… and stuff like that, and it's also boosting the children's confidence, with everybody needs to stand up and present, so you're not isolating the child. That is just some of the things that we do. And lots of laughter, that comes from the kids, and really enjoyed it, and… I suppose it changes their outlook, because I mean if this is the confined environment, they don't get to see or interact with many normal kids outside… unless they go home, and within a South African context where the children are severely disabled, they don't really get to go outside as often, where the parents try to protect them so much that they don't really get to interact with many people" (Lucy).

This interaction groups could be a way to, as Monyooe declares, let these children be heard.

"The voices of disabled people must be encouraged, listened to and taken seriously. Only then will the brokenness, poverty, sadness and self-hatred give way to the vast array of resources, gifts, skills and visions of disabled people. Only when the abilities of those with disabilities are acknowledged and incorporated into our churches, schools, and home will our community be whole" (Monyooe 2005, pg. 9).

With the empowerment approach comes automatically thoughts regarding the future and the children's chances to actually live a worthy, participating life in society. When I ask Celia if the school she works in has a special goal, she answers:

"Basically it's to get them… give them enough information and try and get them to achieve something so they can go out and be… have a sense of belonging in the world" (Celia).

On the same question, Carol answers:

"Get them into mainstream. My aim is to, those children that can go back into mainstream, or have them self-sufficient… To be able to get basic employment…" (Carol).

According to Carol, it seems to be problematic for children with disabilities to participate, and interact with others outside school.

Carol: "You see, what you want for them is to be accepted in the society."
Amanda: "Why do you think they're not accepted in the society?"
Carol: "Cause there not exposed in this country… They're shunned away. Which is sad... the biggest thing… there's not enough facilities in this country for those

children… and what is also very sad… they are never accepted to go and play at a normal person's house. Or a normal friendship… None of these children… very few of these children…(?) a normal childhood, a party or a sleepover or anything like that."

Amanda: "Because the parents don't allow…?"

Carol: "No. Because they're not mixed enough. It's really sad.

These stories indicate that there are still a lot to do when it comes to inclusion and participation for children with disabilities. Carol has a goal to get the children in her school into mainstream and talks about the need to get them to be accepted in the society. She emphasizes the fact that they are not mixed enough as a hindrance to the acceptance. Could this be a reason to why she is eager to get her learners into mainstream school? Is it possibly the only way she sees that they can be accepted and included? In that case, it relates to the issue mentioned earlier, that the inclusive education policy might not be adequate enough to include also the children with more severe disabilities.

Amy C. Watson and Jonathon E. Larson (2006) have a discussion about the stigma and discrimination experienced by people with disabilities. They suggest that:

> "Disability stigma causes harm to people through social rejection and discrimination within housing, employment, and health care settings…" (Watson & Larson 2006, pg. 235).

This can lead to things like social isolation and decreased employment opportunities, which then can cause a lower self-esteem. Watson and Larson continue by discussing the cultural conceptions that people with disabilities internalize and that often contribute to withdrawal, lower self-esteem and limited social interactions (Watson & Larson 2006, pg. 236).

Russel (2003) could be referring to the school staff as she mentions that the lack of awareness of the student's potential could be one of the reasons to the educational barriers disabled people meet, but one can also presume that the students themselves are not fully aware of their potentials. The childrens' lack of self-esteem was a recurring issue discussed during my interviews. A low self-esteem can have various explanations, for example, the attitudes toward disability in society. In Africa, disability is often associated with curses and witchcrafts (Lebusa & Monyoee 2005, pg. 9). This is something that a principal in a special school in KwaZulu-Natal mentions:

> "Zulu culture as such, in terms of old culture, were very much, if you have a disabled child you have some sort of witchcraft or some sort of curse put on your family. So you tend to put away and hide your child away" (David).

However, David also mentions the fact that the grant system has led to the children being more visible in society.

> "… as a result, the parents have to bring the children to town, they have to have them registered…" (David).

As I observed in the schools, I saw many occasions where the children got praise and encouragement from the teachers. The children were listened to and often rewarded when they did well. Regarding the concepts of empowerment and self-esteem, that seems to be a good way to help the children acknowledge themselves, their strengths and capabilities, as well as break the negative feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness.

5.3.4. LIFE SKILLS

All the schools had various ways to empower the children and prepare them for a participating life in the community. One thing they all had in common was that they had what is called "Life skills" in their education program. One teacher explains that the life skills are divided into three groups: Personal and Social Wellbeing, Physical Education and Creative Arts. The groups themselves are then divided into other categories. For example, Creative Arts is divided into Visual Art and Performance art. For some it meant pottery, baking or to practice various situations in the everyday life. In one class, the children got to learn how to handle money, and in another class it involved things like how to live a healthy lifestyle, how to be a good friend, how to protect yourself from the sun et cetera.

> "… it's pottery… making basic pots and that… reading, doing all sorts of like these (?) as well, that the kids also assist with. And paintings… We've got drama… we've starting to put more effort into choir... Even with the deaf learners where some will sing, others will sign, and that type of thing… Some of the things that we try give them basic skills in, at least they can feel… you know get a sense of self-worth, and try generate an income" (Celia).

> "We've got three levels, it's one introduction to learning, a consolidation of learning, and then the skill based program, which is mean to equip them for, either the a little more independent at home, or possible doing some kind of… employment one day when they leave our school" (Emily).

At another school, all the learners had duties at the end of the day on their schedule. These duties could regard vacuum cleaning the classroom floor, sweep leaves from the ground or clean the windows. One day in the week they did some planting or work in the garden, and at times they did some baking together.

Askheim and Starrin emphasize that it is not possible to empower another person, but a social worker's duty is to create the prerequisites needed for the person's to empower themselves (Askheim & Starrin 2007, pg. 215). Could the teaching of Life Skills be a way to create these prerequisites? The Life Skills project has several dimensions, and it seems to create many opportunities for children to learn, grow and explore their unique interests and talents. Tengqvist (2007) mentions various agencies that have empowered people by letting them do practical, meaningful and developing activities (Tengqvist 2007, pg. 83). Life Skills could possibly create similar opportunities for children with disabilities.

6. DISCUSSION

In this section I will discuss and conclude the main subjects that I have distinguished through my results. However, it is again important to remember that this is a small study that cannot represent the conditions in the whole country.

According to both facts and statistics, there seems to be a big amount of disabled children in South Africa that are not able to participate in community and daily activities, as they, according to the Convention of the Children's Rights and Children's Act, have the right to do. That is probably due to various reasons, of which some of them I have discussed in this thesis. The main factors that I have discerned through my study are:

- The special needs schools are often working under high demands, with limited resources.
- Many disabled children do not attend school at all.
- The knowledge how to help the children is sometimes limited.
- There is a lack of facilities and general support from the government.

When looking at the children's chances of participation, it is also relevant to look at things like social structures and policies. Problems regarding the implementation of a policy can for example result in poor targeting of provision (Walker 2005). This could perhaps contribute to the issues of inadequate facilities and shortage of staff in the schools. However, through my study I have seen how the school-staff work to assist disabled children even with these

constrains. Regarding the assistance available for children with disabilities in South Africa, I noticed that it varied a lot, depending on if the school was private or governmental. South African legislation proclaims that every child has the right to go to school. To provide education through special needs schools and the implementation of inclusive education may be a result of this policy. I have visited seven special needs schools that could provide various types of assistance. The Life Skills subject was practiced in all of the schools. This project is giving the children basic skills that they are in need of in their daily lives. For example it could involve baking, pottery, learning how to handle money, or how to live healthy. Some of the schools could also offer various types of training equipment to improve the children's physical health. Several of them had a physio- and occupational therapist and/or a nurse, but the majority of the schools seemed to be in need of more staff.

Even though every child has the right to go to school, the reality for disabled children seems to be that many of them are not able to attend school. Money has been mentioned many times as a big problem for the families, as many of them struggles to pay school fees. Another barrier that has been discussed is the lack of funding that can result in inadequate facilities for children with disabilities.

The assistance given to children with disabilities has been discussed with the empowerment approach. From my discussions above, one can distinguish two different dimensions of empowerment. Firstly, the empowerment that belongs to recognizing discrimination and oppression in the social structures around you and be aware of their impact on your situation. And secondly, empowerment can be when you recognize your strength and capabilities, and believe in your ability to accomplish things. To empower the children, several things have been mentioned in my interviews, the Life Skills-program being one of them. By learning the children basic skills in life, they get more equipped to live independently. Another way to empower the children could be to strengthen the children's self-esteem, by for example helping them see their capabilities and give them praise and encouragement.

But despite all the effort that the school staff is putting in these children, many of them are not very positive regarding the children's futures. After school, the children's chances of participation may be limited. If they are lucky, they get some kind of shelter employment, but many of them will probably just go home. Nevertheless, I have met many committed teachers and other school staff during my study that helps these children to be more independent and self-sufficient. There are schools with good facilities and equipment, and schools with very

limited resources. The interview participants all showed an indication of political awareness that Askheim and Starrin talk about. They know what the schools need and express a great will to help the children. They also presented many creative ways to do this with the resources they had. And a lot indicate that the situation for children with disabilities actually *has* improved, even if there are a lot of issues remaining. As one of the biggest problems, I recognized the big amount of children that are not attending school at all. They are probably the most invisible. But in school, the children get to meet other children and learn various types of skills that can be useful in their lives. Regarding the children's chances to participate in society in general, school seems to be a good starting point.

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8. APPENDIX

Interviewing guide

- How long have you worked here? What are you teaching?

- What is the aim/purpose with your school?

- Are your school directed to a special group of children with disabilities?

- Do all disabled children in this region have the opportunity to attend this school?

- Which kind of assistance do you provide for the children?

- Do you believe these children get the assistance they need in their daily lives?

- Do you know if the children get any assistance outside school?

- Do you see any difficulties that these children meet in their daily lives?

- Do you in some way work with the children's self-esteem?

- Do you help the children in some way when they've finished school?

- Are there places where the children can receive help after school?

- What are your thoughts regarding the children's futures?