

## **Research Journal Extracts**

### **Familiarisation: Meta Notes**

**January 2023**

#### Prerequisite for best practises

- Teacher knowledge and motivation - knowledge of caps, braille and passion for what they are doing (lose correlation to PCK) (complementary challenge)

#### Best practises

- Communicate with other teachers
- Adapt teaching strategies for the individual learner's needs.
- Work slowly and break it down into steps
- One-on-one work
- Using concrete activities and resources before moving on to abstract
- Topic specific strategies
- When designing or adapting worksheets, the simpler the presentation is the easier it is for the learners.

#### Resources

- With the exception of a few (hundred board and "Woody") self-made resources were preferred.
- Braille machines and a school embosser
- Common household resources: glue, prestick and bottle caps.
- Can vary depending on the needs of the learner.

#### Challenges

- Standardised size of braille: cannot always fit everything. Adaptions need to be made.
- No standardised criteria for braille worksheets
- The time and the money required to make resources that are individualised.
- Advanced planning and organisational skills required.
- Overcoming the learners' challenges with reversals and making worksheets that are not confusing for them.

## **Situating myself in relation to the data: (after familiarisation)**

**January 2023**

Connection to the research topic:

Prior to the research study, I had no contact with teachers who taught blind learners. Furthermore, I have not received training in how to teach blind learners despite being both a teacher and having done an honours in educational psychology. The advantage of this is that I do not have my own established opinions on best practises for teaching braille learners. However, it does mean that member checking is very important to ensure that I have not misunderstood the use of a strategy or the context.

Positivism Creep:

I know that there is a desire in me to generate findings that “make a difference” and therefore I need to be aware of a positivism creep that might imply that I have found some sort of gold standard approach that can be applied to other contexts. I need to remain aware that the data is based on the teachers’ perceptions, it is contextual and it changes. As the teachers explain, what works one year, does not always work the following year and what works for one learner may not work for another. Therefore, I need to be open to the nuance and the contextual nature of the data.

Experiences and values

My experience as a teacher has, however, shaped some of my perspectives about teaching. I believe that the teaching profession is undervalued despite the hard work and skill that is required to teach well. I have a knee-jerk reaction when I read, what feels like, the tired mantra of literature on teaching in South Africa. It often goes something to the effect of: “teachers are not equipped to meet the diverse needs of learners” / “teachers lack training” or some other statement that implies that teachers are in some way insufficient. It reminds me of a day when I burst into tears when a teaching colleague asked me how I was doing. I said, I just don’t feel like “I am not enough” or can’t do enough. I had been a diligent student and was now pouring my heart and energy out for my learners but somehow there was always more need than I had capacity to fulfil. This has perhaps influenced my belief that perhaps it is not always the teachers who are not good enough or did not get good training but perhaps the expectations on teachers, especially with the move towards inclusive teaching, is a lot to ask.

It is for this reason that I approach the participant teachers' perceptions of best practices with great respect. I see teachers who have shown great resilience and creativity and genius in the approaches and the strategies and practices they have had to develop, on the ground, through experience, with little help and little recognition for the magnitude of the task which they willingly embrace. In many careers, you may be able to provide best practices while being extrinsically motivated but teaching is one of those professions that seems to require intrinsic motivation, a desire to go the extra mile although you will not be monetarily rewarded for it, in order to embrace best practices.

### **Reflective Journaling after Data Generation**

**December 2022**

Every single second of the workshop was maximised because the participants had so much to share. They were so generous with their time and enthusiastic about their involvement. I felt as though the participants were able to share with us what they felt was most important and provide examples of their strategies. The participants preferred to prioritise demonstrations of resources and seemed to view the mind maps as secondary importance. The primary form of data generation was through demonstrations and explanations through discussion. The details of their resources and strategies felt new, I had not seen it before in the literature. I was surprised that they did not voluntarily mention the abacus at all. Because it was mentioned so often in the literature, I asked the participants towards the end of the workshop what their opinion on it was. They did not view the abacus as necessary for best practices, however, it could be incorporated if a learner was interested in it.

There were things that the teachers emphasised as essential that I had not thought of before. For example, the importance of a thorough understanding of the curriculum and how to achieve the essential objectives so that they can focus on the most essential parts of the curriculum.

Overall, there was a naturalness and ease in building rapport with the teachers. The teachers demonstrated respectful, colleague friendships and wholesome work partnerships between themselves. The teachers appeared to be motivated by a desire for learners with blindness to be taught well.