

INVESTIGATING THE USE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

By

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

MAGISTER ARTIUM
(Community Counselling Psychology)

in the

Faculty of Humanities

School of Human and Community Development

at the

University of the Witwatersrand

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August 2008

DEDICATION

MAHABA

DECLARATION

I hereby sincerely and solemnly declare that this dissertation, entitled: *Investigating the use of psychological assessment in South African schools*, is my own unaided work and all the sources utilized and / or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of MA: (Community-Counselling Psychology) at the university of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree of examination at any other university.

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2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the following people for their assistance and would like to express my sincerest gratitude to them for their contribution to this study:

- My supervisor, Dr. J.F. Strydom, for his invaluable expertise, guidance, dedication, motivation, constructive criticism and advice that made this study possible.
- Matlapane Masupye for his statistical work on this study.
- Ronel Calitz, Moji Sam and Aphane Abram for their information technology and statistical advice on EXEL presentation of graphs in this study.
- Lincoln Sefadi for technical and language edited
- Educators who participated in this study

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JOHANNESBURG

August 2008

ABSTRACT

The field of psychological assessment in South African schools faces many challenges at present. To be able to meaningfully respond to these challenges, it was important to gain an understanding of how psychological assessment is being perceived by educators, whether as being necessary (or not), in their workplace. The study aimed to gather information and generate knowledge in order to provide some pointers about the educators' perceived use of psychological assessment measures. Thereafter, analyse their perceptions in terms of these assessments. It was a mixed study using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The proposed sample was seventy-five ($n = 75$) educators from former model-c and township schools. Data was collected through the use of a self-response questionnaire (quantitative) and then used to identify themes. The identified themes were then used for discussion in focus group interviews (qualitative). Descriptive and thematic content analysis were used for the interpretation of the research data and triangulation thereof.

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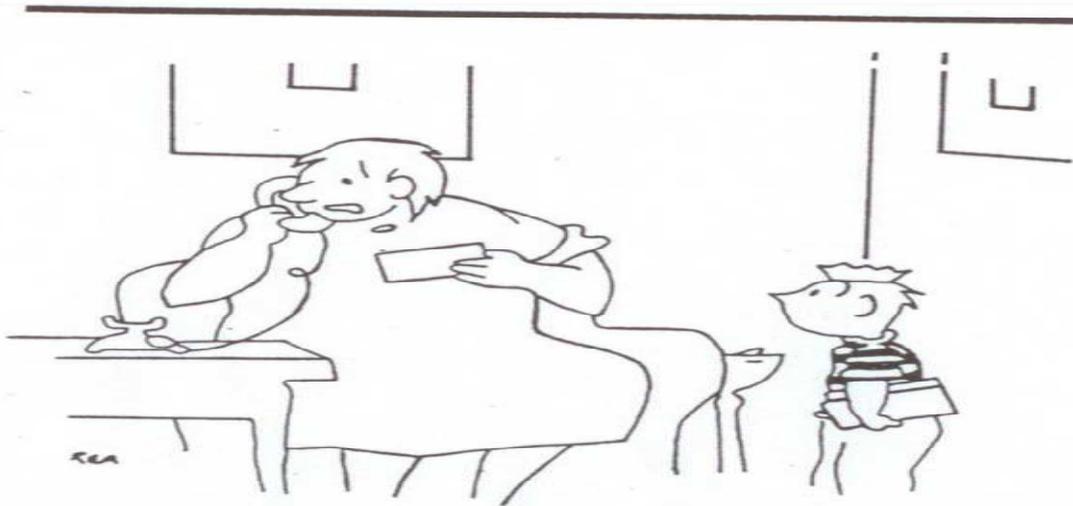
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"It's about Benny, doctor. He's just come from school with an IQ of 104! Should I put him right to bed?"

CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

In developing countries like South Africa, a large number of barriers to learning arise from an interaction of factors within external and internal systems. These barriers in turn directly influence the effectiveness of any education programme or system as a whole. Dawes and Donald (1994) state that the lack of any meaningful support for those who experience difficulties of learning is bound to contribute to the high failure and drop-out rate. This study investigates the current use of psychological assessment in schools in addressing those barriers, and how do educators perceive the use of such measures. The point of departure will be formed by contemplating the purpose of psychological assessment and formulating a principled approach or framework to direct assessment practice. The findings are then used to make recommendations towards the improvement of the psychological service at school level so as to ensure the delivery of quality support service.

1.2 Chapter overview:

This chapter introduces the reader to the motivation for the study as well as outline the aims of the study and the rationale or reason(s) behind carrying out this study. It also gives a detailed explanation of the key concepts and finally, an outline and an overview of the subsequent chapters contained in this research report are provided.

1.3 Motivation:

There is thus a need to generate knowledge and develop insight into the perceived usefulness of psychological assessment in this regard within the current schooling system. Schools often enlist the services of psychologists with the aim of improving the emotional health of learners as well as assessing certain modalities. The ultimate goal of their intervention is to support the learners in such a way that they might progress according to their potential. However, the field of psychological assessment, development of measures, use, and adaptation in South African schools face many

challenges at present. For Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux and Herbst (2004), foremost among the challenges is that culturally appropriate psychological assessment tools are needed for all age groups in our multicultural society (which overlaps to schools) if the process of psychological assessment is to succeed.

According to the Department of Education's (DoE) Policy Documents on Outcomes Based Education (OBE), the process of learning is intended to ensure that all learners are able to develop and achieve to their maximum ability. In line with the (DoE 2003)'s Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and the Education White Paper 6 (EWP 6) of 2001 principles, any act or practice (of psychological assessment) should be in line with the notion that all learners can learn, given the necessary support. But learners must first be identified and assessed before they can be assisted. In order to be able to address any problems associated with psychological assessment in the South African schools, it is firstly important to know how educators view the use thereof. From this information, it should be possible to generate an agenda for schools with regard to psychological assessment as well as provide pointers relating to how to translate such an agenda into action.

1.4 Aim(s) of the study:

The main aim of the study is to reflect on the status of the use of psychological assessment in schools as well as find out if there are any problems associated with these assessments. It also hopes to tap into the educators' perceptions towards the use and understanding of psychological assessment and the contribution if any, done by these assessments in a school setting in general or in a classroom situation in particular.

1.5 Rationale:

The field of psychological assessment, its users and developers of assessment tools in South African schools is under scrutiny at present. Given its practice, which is being viewed as historically flawed, (often abused and misused), it is being watched carefully

by the department of education and that of labour. The usage thereof runs the risk of being discarded. There has grown a need to assess the roles, function and organization of psychological assessment in the current schools' system so as to be able to respond meaningfully to these challenges and risks. It is therefore important to gain an understanding of how psychological assessment is being perceived by educators i.e whether it is viewed as being both relevant and necessary (or not) in their workplace.

There seemed to be a need for studies investigating educators' perceptions of psychological assessment, as assessment remains one of the main activities of educational psychology. It offers a means of communication between teachers and psychologists. From this information, it should be possible to generate knowledge in order to analyse the needs of educators in terms of the usage of psychological assessment measures.

In many provinces, the DoE has put a moratorium on the use of psychological assessment in schools. According to Foxcroft (1997), this was as a result of the biased and discriminatory nature in which these measures were used in the sorry past of the country. Owen (1998) states that the negative aspects of psychological assessing should be carefully weighed against that which is to be gained by assessing. He further claims that assessments have many valid uses and when used correctly, they can provide invaluable information. The DoE's release of (EWP 6) policy on Inclusive Education (IE), suggests that psychological assessment will at times have to be done. This will be done in order to determine the level of intervention that a learner may need. There thus appeared to be an urgent need for studies on how effective psychological assessments are.

Burden in Engelbrecht, Kriegler and Booyen (1996) claims that internationally, assessment is undergoing considerable soul-searching and a radical departure from traditional paradigms. He maintains that the goals of psychological assessment are being examined. In addition, assessment is being viewed in relation to the values and ideological stances that it represents. Burden (1996) further stress that the efficacy of its techniques is being reassessed in respect of special needs and some guidelines are being established for meeting them. This study sought to align itself with these international

trends. Furthermore, echo the sentiments of Mpofu, Zindi, Oakland and Peresuh (1997) survey findings that psychological assessment has room for improvement rather than it being discarded. Thus, hopefully, it will assist decision-makers on the role and use of standardised psychological instrument measures.

1.6 Definition of concepts:

1.6.1 Psychological assessment:

Sheppard and Spalding (2003) define psychological assessment as the use of one or more standardised instruments to gather data that is combined with data from other sources to inform some type of intervention. The process is geared towards identifying, gathering and interpreting information about a learner. In almost all the cases, psychological assessment of children in a school context “include behavioural observations, a test of intellectual abilities and personality functioning” (Groth-Marnat, 2003 p: 44). This may furthermore include such techniques as interviewing, administering, and interpreting traditional psychological tests and neuropsychological assessment. Sheppard and Spalding (2003) posit that psychological assessment is primarily problem oriented, focuses on a description and an analysis of a particular individual learner in a problem situation.

Psychologists are often called upon to assess children who are having a difficulty in the school system, or may need placement in specialised education. Groth-Marnat (2003) states that in the psychological assessment of a learner, “the most important areas are evaluating the nature and extent of a child’s learning difficulties, measuring intellectual strengths and weaknesses, assessing behavioural difficulties, creating an educational plan and recommending changes in a child’s programme” (Groth-Marnat, 2003: p. 44).

Psychological assessment has a number of goals. Haywood, Tzuriel and Vaught (1992) list some of these goals as having to:

- Classify school children according to their aptitude for school learning

- Assist in grouping children by aptitude, the notion being that differential techniques will be used for different groups.
- Identify individual need for educational remediation in specific domains.
- Construct prescriptive programmes of education, either individually or for classified groups.

Landsberg (2001) cautions that in the execution of this psychological assessment, “the professional should not be engaged in the assessment of the learner, not even in the assessment of learning – the focus should at all times be on assessment for learning” (Landsberg, 2001: p. 46). She states further that the purpose of assessment, when learners appear to be faced with barriers to learning, should be to gather information about their learning which will contribute meaningfully to their learning support. Furthermore, to understand the level and the ways in which learner X learns so as to be able to devise appropriate strategies for most effective learning support.

1.6.2 Psychological test:

For Krupenia, Mouton, Beuster and Makwe (2000), a psychological test is an objective, systematic, standardised measure of a sample of behaviour. This means that the administration, scoring and interpretation of a test are independent of the subjective judgement of the individual administering the test. Krupenia *et al* (2000) state further that a test can be termed as being adequately standardised only if a person tested is subjected to precisely the same procedure irrespective of where, when and by whom is the test administered.

Foxcoft *et al* (2004) allege that in South Africa, a test is classified as a psychological test when the purpose of the test results in the performance of a psychological act. According to the Health Professions Act, 56 of 1974, Section 37 (2) (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e), a psychological act with respect to assessment is defined as being “the use of measures to

assess mental, cognitive, or behavioural processes and functioning, intellectual or cognitive ability or functioning, aptitude, interest emotions, personality, psychophysiological functioning, or psychopathology (abnormal functioning)” (Foxcroft, Roodt and Abrahams, 2001: p. 108).

The Health Professions Act, 56 of 1974, furthermore states that only registered psychologists are permitted to perform psychological acts. Tests, psychometric devices, instruments and questionnaires that measure psychological constructs, “must be used, interpreted and controlled by psychologists” (Foxcoft, *et al*: 2004, p. 2). Thus, for Sheppard and Spalding (2003) a psychological test is primarily measurement oriented, concerned with describing and studying groups of people and demands little if any clinical expertise other than that of a psychometrist. On the other hand, Yates and Taub (2003) suggest that testing *inter alia* should serve the following purposes:

- To describe personality.
- To describe intellectual and other functioning.
- To diagnose and classify.
- To suggest a prognosis and make a prediction.
- To select treatment goals.

1.6.3 Barriers to learning:

The notion of barriers to learning (as outlined in the Education WP 6: 2001), refers to the difficulties that arise within the education system as a whole, the school and /or within the learner him / herself, which prevent both the system and the learner’s needs from being met. The DoE’s (2003) report on RNCS alleges that where such needs are not met, learning breakdown may occur. The DoE’s draft paper on Guidelines for Inclusive Education (2002) describes barriers to learning as factors that may hamper the teaching and learning process in an educational setting. Not only do these ‘problems’ hinder

teaching and learning, but they also prevent learners from making progress that is expected of them by their parents and teachers. The draft paper states further that 'barriers to learning and development' are different from those of 'special needs'

According to the Guidelines for Inclusive Education (2002), these barriers could be:

- Systematic- e.g., poor teaching, late enrolment at school, lack of basic and appropriate learning support materials, lack of assistive devices, inadequate facilities at schools, overcrowded classrooms, etc.
- Societal- e.g. severe poverty, lack of access to basic services, urban / rural disparities, discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, etc.
- Rooted in inappropriate pedagogy, insufficient support from educators, inappropriate and unfair assessment procedures, inappropriate languages or language of learning and teaching (LoLT), inappropriate language of communication, inflexible classroom management, attitudes, an inflexible curriculum, etc.
- Conditions that are located within the learner (e.g. disease), i.e. they could also be barriers that emerge from disabilities (neurological, physical, sensory, cognitive).

Added to these are those barriers as identified by the (DoE, 1997) research conducted by both National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training (NCSNET) and National Committee on Educational Support Service (NCESS). These barriers include:

- ◆ Lack of parental recognition and involvement.
- ◆ Negative attitudes to and stereotyping of differences.
- ◆ Inadequate policies and legislation.

The draft on Guidelines for Inclusive Education (2002) also states that in most cases (if not all) the learning and development of a learner are hampered by a combination of two or more of the types of barriers stated above.

1.7 Overview of chapters and layout of the report:

Chapter Two gives the theoretical perspective on psychological assessment. It again covers the literature review of the studies on psychological assessment in schools conducted both nationally as well as internationally. Arguments for and against the use of psychological assessment in modern day schooling system are presented as well as challenges facing the South African education system in this regard.

In Chapter Three the methodology used in relation to the procedure followed and methods that were used in the execution of the research project, is covered. This includes aspects such as the procedure followed, sampling, data collection and capturing, ethical considerations and how the questionnaires as well as the focus group interviews were conducted.

In Chapter Four presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results, quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study are given. A triangulation of the two sets of data (for verification and trustworthiness purposes) and an integrative overview of key themes are presented and discussed. The key themes are also reflected against the findings of other research studies conducted.

Chapter Five provides a tentative discussion as well as a summary of the study. It also covers the limitations that were experienced during the study and implications for further studies. A tentative agenda on psychological assessment in schools is generated through the recommendations. Based on the findings of the study, concluding remarks are made together with suggestions and for further studies with regard to the support for learners.

Having reflected on the chapter layout the focus moves towards the literature review related to this study in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to put the study on the use of psychological assessment in schools into perspective by commenting on a number of aspects. The framework thereof focuses on a number of sub-sections. These include issues such as:

- A theoretical perspective on psychological assessment.
- Why are psychological assessments done in schools?
- Educators' motivation for referring a learner for psychological assessment:
- International perspectives around the use of psychological assessment in schools.
- Historical use of psychological assessment within the education system in South Africa.
- Contemporary developments around these assessments in South Africa.
- Arguments for and against the use of psychological assessment in schools.

The chapter is then concluded by way of looking at challenges that face the practical implementation of psychological assessment strategies in a way that it both corrects the myths and misconceptions of the past, as well as build a positive regard for them.

2.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT:

To add further on the definition of psychological assessment: as already done in 1.6, Burden (1996) defines it as the process of collection of data, usually by a psychologist, with specific purposes in mind. Purposes may include making decisions about placement, diagnosis, referral, planning and empowerment. Owen and Taljaard (1996) state that

psychological assessment has to be done carefully under three basic concepts. This aspect of psychological assessment is being addressed under three headings namely: principles, application and lastly, issues.

2.2.1 Principles:

2.2.1.1 Test construction:

Owen and Taljaard (1996) are of the opinion that the construction of an instrument used to collect data requires careful planning. He argues that attention should be given to a variety of things. These include the purpose of the assessment tool, content, kind of items, procedure and methods of data collection and processing. Owen and Taljaard (1996) further claim that consideration should be borne in mind as to what the assessment tool to be constructed aims to measure. Does it assess aptitude, achievement, personality attitude and or interest? It should also be considered whether it is meant for school children or adults and whether those to be assessed must have a certain educational level.

2.2.1.2 Validity:

For Thorndike, Cunningham, Thorndike and Hagen (1991) validity refers to whether an assessment tool measures accurately what it is supposed to measure. For them, no matter how carefully the assessment tool has been constructed, if it does not measure what it ought to, it does not fulfil its aims and is thus worthless to the user. They stress that validity is the absolute essential component of an assessment tool.

2.2.1.3 Reliability:

Thorndike *et al* (1991) describe reliability of a test as the degree of accuracy and consistency with which the test measures in repeated administrations. In other words, for an assessment tool to be viewed as being reliable, it has to yield the same results consistently if administered repeatedly over the same learner who is assessed.

2.2.2 Applications of psychological assessment

Foxcroft (1997) suggests that tests used in combination with information gathered from other sources, enhance decision making during psychological assessment. She claims that

demographic information and psychological assessment results could assist in the development of fair and unbiased decisions. Foxcroft (1997) further argues that during the application of a test, test users should combine them with interviews for admission and job selection. She states that test results gain in meaning and relevance when they are integrated with information gathered from other sources. She seems to be of an opinion that the application of a psychological assessment and its results become more meaningful if and when they are reflected against the total past and present context of the learner being assessed. Assessment has a potential to create some levels of stress and anxiety in the person being assessed. This should also be observed and considered when applying and interpreting test scores.

2.2.3 Issues related to psychological assessment

The suitability of a psychological test for a group that did not form part of the standardization group, has become a major issue across the country. Attention should be paid to the fair use of tests, otherwise this may lead to what Owen (1992) refers to as test bias. He explains test bias as any one of a number of factors that cause test scores to be consistently higher or lower than they would be if measurement were more accurate. These factors, according to Foxcroft and Roodt (2001), include culture, language, the quality of school education and socio-economic status.

2.3 WHY ARE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS DONE IN SCHOOLS?

2.3.1 To determine a learner's scholastic potential:

Learners do not come to the classroom equal. Socio-economic background, gender, race, disability, ethnicity and HIV and AIDS create inequalities that should be addressed through education if there is to be a delivery of quality education for all. Owen (1998) states that given the very natures of the human being, learners will differ in relevant educational abilities. Psychological assessment therefore makes schools accountable for educating all learners. Bardon (1990), states that the primary goal of the psycho-educational assessment is to determine if a child's scholastic skills are consistent with

what would be expected of that child, considering his or her level of intellectual ability. Some will experience a learning disability, defined as a “condition in which a child’s success in developing specific scholastic skills (i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic) is significantly lower than would be expected of that child based on his or her intellectual ability level” (Bardon, 1990: p. 84).

2.3.2 To determine a child’s pattern of cognitive strengths and weaknesses:

In addition to determining whether a child’s intellectual ability and academic achievement levels are consistent, Bardon (1990) further argues that psycho-educational assessment also helps determine that child’s pattern of cognitive strengths and weaknesses. This is often the most useful aspect of the psychological assessment of the child. Using this pattern of strengths and weaknesses, recommendations for improving the child’s learning can be determined. For example, it might be revealed that he or she is more of an auditory learner than a visual learner, expresses his or her knowledge better verbally than through writing, or understands mathematical concepts only when they are expressed via concrete examples.

American Psychological Association (APA, 1992) posits that although a basic psycho-educational assessment is typically sufficient for diagnosing a learning disability, a more comprehensive assessment (such as a neuro-psychological assessment) often provides additional information regarding a child’s specific pattern of cognitive strengths and weaknesses. Within the school system, this is referred to as the Individualised Education Plan (IEP). Once that pattern is determined, it can be used to help design the child’s learning plan. IEP will only then typically be created once the results of the psycho-educational assessment and recommendations on how to help the learner to cope have been received by the school. In some cases, indirect service delivery has become the norm. Bardon (1990) states that school psychological services have increasingly influenced the entire student body, not just children who are identified as experiencing special educational needs.

2.3.3 Adapting the curriculum:

It is not every child who has or needs an IEP, but it is important for any child experiencing some learning difficulties. Those who experience barriers to learning (as evidenced by their performance in psychological assessment report), “make special demands on their educators as they have to find ways of meeting and addressing their educational needs by providing learning support in order to make it easier for learning to happen” (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker and Engelbrecht, 1999, p: 129). According to Engelbrecht *et al* (1999), this support may take a special form as some learners study at a different level of difficulty and / or a different pace. As some learners may demonstrate what they know in written form, this can be done through the educator adapting the curriculum by providing more written input for a learner with an auditory impairment or even making some arrangements for a specialised equipment like a hearing aid.

2.4 EDUCATORS’ MOTIVATION FOR REFERRING A LEARNER FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT:

2.4.1 Educators’ stress levels:

The study by Abidin and Robinson (2002) examined variables associated with an educator’s behaviour towards the decision to refer a learner for psycho-educational assessment. Issues were whether an educator’s referral decision is driven by the learner’s academic, behaviour, socio-economic relevant variables or the educator’s subjective reaction to a particular student. Specifically, the contribution of the stress an educator experiences in relation to a target learner, results in that learner being referred.

In South Africa, the education department of Gauteng province has set aside a considerable amount of money in order to help educators fight their stress levels. The report in “Sunday Times” dated July 10 2005 highlights the findings of the study conducted by the Vulindlela Consortium. According to the study, about 77% of the total educators in this province suffered some emotional problems. A further 34% called for an

improved counselling service. The report bases these findings of the high stress rate experienced by educators on the fact that they (educators) are overworked and under immense pressure because of concerns for their own safety, bigger classes and problematic learners.

2.4.2 Learner's behaviour and scholastic competence:

Abidin and Robinson (2002) found that both behavioural problems and academic engagement play a major role in shaping an educator's perceptions regarding referral decisions. Previous research by Bay and Bryan (1992) also found that children who demonstrate low achievements as well as behaviour problems were at a greater risk for referral than children with only low achievement. Cooper and Speece (1988) found that in addition to low achievement, non-compliance and distractibility were important variables in differentiating between children who were referred and those who were not.

The study by Abidin and Robinson (2002) indicates that the best likelihood of referring a learner is based on the educators' judgements about the presence of behavioural problems and the learner's scholastic competence. They state that research on the referral-to-placement process suggest that educators' opinions are extremely important in determining eligibility for special education services. McIntyre (1990) maintains that this may unrealistically bias educators' judgement in regard to the referral process for a particular learner.

2.5 INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IN SCHOOLS:

2.5.1 Eastern and Southern African studies:

Mpofu *et al* (1997) did a survey on school psychology practices in East and Southern Africa. They found that the public image of school psychology was reported to be poor in some of the countries included in the study. Reasons given include the limited services

offered by school psychologists. Mpofu *et al* (1997) further claim that the utilisation of school psychological services was described as being generally low. They list the conditions limiting service utilisation in these countries. These include few school psychologists, apathy due to lack of incentives, the use of untrained personnel to provide psychological services, lack of public awareness, traditional and cultural beliefs and low levels of formal education among the general population. Catterall (1990) concluded that professional school psychology in most sub-Saharan African countries was “at best on a very low level or non-existent” (Catterall, 1990: p.104).

In their study Mpofu *et al* (1997) also found that service availability and public awareness were rated low and were biased towards urban centres. They identified a host of reasons for the generally poor public image of school psychologists in most of the countries surveyed. These included shortages of personnel, lack of funding for service awareness programs and chronic political instability. Negative attitudes of some educational policy planners and implementers are cited as reasons which plague education systems of some of the countries. This renders organised school psychology services difficult to achieve.

Mpofu *et al* (1997) conclude their report by stating that school psychology in East and Southern Africa is likely to achieve a higher profile. This information conveys a hopeful sign for those attempting to improve and expand school psychology services. They recommend that concerted efforts should be made to sensitise educational policymakers about the importance of school psychology. This will be in line with promoting the rights of children as declared by the United Nations in the International Year of the child (1979) and endorsed by the International School Psychology Association (IPSA).

2.5.2 American studies on utilisation of school psychology:

Reschly and Wilson (1995) did an observational study of psychological practice, which lasted a decade long in schools in Iowa State. This was an effort to change the ways in which psychologists think about children and the youth who experience learning or

behavioural problems in educational settings. For Reschly (1995) changes in thinking and paradigm shifts are the basis for fundamental changes in the delivery system that affect professional roles and criteria for determining the quality of service. System reform in Iowa is a response to problems in the current system; an effort to implement advances in assessment and interventions that can dramatically change the delivery of services to children with learning and emotional or behavioural problems.

The survey data by Reschly and Wilson (1995) indicate that about two-thirds of school psychologists' time is devoted to various aspects of special education classification and placement. Half of this time is spent in assessment activities. However, Reschly and Wilson (1995) concede that assessment has been and will continue to be a salient activity in the roles of Iowa school psychologists. Vast changes have occurred in assessment purposes, techniques and outcomes. Purposes focus more on interventions; what can be changed in environments to produce improved learning behaviour. Techniques increasingly involve the use of direct and frequent measures of behaviours to gather information in natural environments. These measures help define problems, establish intervention goals, monitor progress and evaluate outcomes. Such measures are also used as the basis for determining whether or not students are eligible for more intensive instructional, social or emotional intervention programs, including special education.

Reschly and Wilson (1995) sum up by stating that the most important goal in Iowa system reform is the improved application of the available knowledge on assessment, instruction, learning and behaviour change. The movement towards non-categorical classification facilitates improvements in applications, and the integration of diverse programs intended to serve children and the youth. Reductions in the amount of time devoted to standardised testing for eligibility determination has provided expanded opportunities for school psychologists to be involved with new roles related to functional assessment, interventions and evaluation of student progress. By implementing these changes, Iowa psychologists who practice in schools are creating a revolution in school psychology. Consequently, it may be argued that psychological assessment leads to improved results.

2.6 HISTORICAL USE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS:

2.6.1 Used inappropriately:

Past segregation policies in South Africa had a detrimental impact on development and the use of psychological assessment tools in this country. The Professional Board of Psychology (1999) states that separate measures were designed for different racial categories. This resulted in a few assessment tools being available that have been designed and standardised for all population groups in South Africa. Given the lack of relevant and appropriate measures, the practice had arisen of using tools developed for a westernised population on other cultural groups and “applying the norms with caution”. Foxcroft (1997) states that this left the psychological assessors with little certainty about the validity, biases and cultural appropriateness of the measures that they used. The use of potentially biased instruments to make important decisions regarding intervention and educational placements, led to incorrect decisions being made.

As a result thereof, there was a widespread dissatisfaction with the traditional forms of psychological assessment in South Africa. Engelbrecht *et al* (1999) state that criticisms levelled at the type of intelligence testing that was performed, usually focussed on the inappropriate test instruments used for the majority of the learners. Engelbrecht *et al* (1999) further allege that this was done “regardless of their different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the likelihood of misdiagnoses and the implications thereof” (Engelbrecht *et al*, 1999: p. 106).

2.6.2 Used for gate-keeping:

The majority of the previously marginalized South Africans then developed a widespread negative perception towards the practice of psychological assessment in schools. Owen (1998) claims that the belief seemed to be that psychologists here were largely responsible for devising a mechanism whereby (through psychological assessment and its

scores), elite former model-C schools could refuse admission to learners from previously marginalised groups. Psychological assessment in this regard served as a means of gate keeping. It resulted in the perpetuation of some myths and misconceptions that learners from certain backgrounds would not cope in certain schools' programmes as such schools were of a high standard and therefore not meant for such learners as they were beyond their reach.

Still on the view of psychological assessment being used for gate-keeping, Bulhan (1985) maintains that through assessment of 'intelligence' the fate of individuals was sealed long before they assumed adult responsibilities. Because psychological assessment is often requested as an aid in making important life decisions, "the potential impact of the information should not be underestimated" (Groth-Marnat, 2003: p. 55). Unfortunately, that was not the case within schools in South Africa. A perception thus developed that psychological assessment in this scenario created self-fulfilling prophecies about certain educators and learners from certain communities and schools.

2.6.3 Used for the promotion of inequality:

In her speech during the opening ceremony of the Mispah School for disabled learners, the education minister hinted that historically, the privileged sector of the South African school population had access to psychological services that compared favourably to those of most First World countries. Theirs was an education system designed for the privileged and supported for success. She stated that on the other hand, the vast educational, psychological and social needs of the non-privileged majority were minimally provided for. The majority of black schools took on the guise of born to fail and unable to pursue success. All these "worsts were intended to bring about the most dismal outcomes in education" (Cape Times: July 12, 2005). According to Kriegler (1993), the issue was not only the overall shortage of psychologists trained to work in schools meant for the former marginalised groups, but also the disproportion of professionals serving different population groups: with blacks having the least qualified personnel, the most inadequate curriculum and the worst infrastructure.

2.6.4 Used to locate pathology within the learner:

Another separate but related source of criticism has been the reliance of psychological assessment on what is referred to as “the medical model with its focus on pathology and factors within the child” (Farre, 1998: p. 3). The sad thing about this practice is that recommendations for ‘special class’ or remedial teaching were being made based on the low scores obtained by a learner in the psychological assessment process. What is equally bad about these ‘special’ classes is that they do not represent the demographics of the schools within which they exist. They did not mirror image the enrolment population of the school. Often there seemed to be an “over-representation (if not total) of learners from the minority groups (this finding applies to the majority in the South African context) in these classes” (Reschley, 1997: p. 437). That reduced learners from the marginalised groups to the level of ‘educable mentally retarded’ classes, with little in the way of improved educational service.

2.6.5 Used to reinforce inequality:

Mechanisms and processes of psychological assessment have not always resulted in indicators of a learner’s educational need. Various departments of education (which were segregated along racial lines) insisted on the administration of various tests merely for categorisation. In the sphere of educational psychology, Burden (1996) lists the most common purposes of traditional psychological assessment as pertaining to the medical model of “Classification...Diagnosis...Intervention” (Burden, 1996: p. 98). Consequently, the public and consumers of psychological assessment information have developed a negative perception regarding the usefulness and relevance of psychological assessment in schools. One of the key concerns was that such tests “disadvantaged some learners and merely served to reinforce the then existing inequalities within the education system” (DoE, 1997: p. 29). Engelbrecht *et al* (1999) claims that “arguments against categorisation and labelling came from a human rights perspective” (Engelbrecht *et al*, 1999: p. 107).

Still on the issue of the incorrect practice of psychological assessment to reinforce inequality, Bulhan (1985) further alleges that with the use of IQ tests, historically advantaged students were elevated to academic heights and promising careers. On the other hand, the rest of the formally marginalized majority were (through low inappropriately assessed IQ scores), relegated to inferior education and doomed for menial jobs. Through this bad practice of psychological assessment, it appears as though the education system was one that was intentionally designed to promote failure for the majority of disadvantaged South Africans and success for a very small number of advantaged people.

2.6.6 Used to toe the line of 'separate development' policy:

On research, test construction and development, Foster, Nicholas and Dawes (1993) mention that the HSRC was widely held to be no more than a pro-apartheid 'think-tank'. They claim that this stems from the fact that many people viewed the psychological assessment instruments produced by this organisation with suspicion. Other than that, psychologists at this institution chose to undertake research projects, which addressed significant national problems. For Nicholas and Cooper (1990), studies that had the potential to produce results and conclusions critical of the government policies, had little chance (if any) of being funded by the HSRC.

Thus, out of fear psychologists have avoided socio-political issues and left the HSRC with 'state supported psychological assessment mechanisms'. In turn, this left South Africa with a legacy of unsuitable, unreliable and usable 'race-based assessment tools'. Foxcroft *et al* (2004) further corroborate this fact in their report on the needs analysis on psychological assessment in South Africa. They argue that practitioners pointed out that most of the HSRC assessment tools were outdated, not culturally appropriate, their norms needed to be updated and the instructions needed to be available in all of the official South African languages.

2.7 THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM AND POLICY IN THE LAST TEN YEARS:

2.7.1 From exclusion to inclusion:

South African education entered a new era from 1994 when a democracy was declared. Associated with this “socio-political shift has been an emphasis on important values such as equity, non-discrimination, liberty, respect and social justice.” (Landsberg, 2001, p. 16). Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001) state that policy documents and subsequent legislation that reflect these values have emerged and relate directly to the development and implementation of an education system informed by liberal, critical and progressive democratic thought.

Based on these guidelines, the DoE thus introduced some key initiatives and policy documents. Amongst them were: White Paper on Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa (DoE, 1995) which was based on an outcomes-based education (OBE) approach and the new Language Policy. The South African Schools Act (1996) which legislated access for all learners to a school of their parents' choice. The National Commission on Special Educational Needs and Training and The National Committee on Education Support Services (DoE, 1997) addressed factors resulting in barriers to learning. Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DoE, 2001) which focuses on the changes that are necessary for accommodating the full range of learning needs.

2.7.2 Discontinuation of the routine administration of group tests of intelligence:

The old practice of psychological assessment in schools has led to questions being raised by the new government officials in the education department. As a result thereof, the Department of Education has currently put a moratorium on the use of psychological assessment in schools in the majority of South Africa's nine provinces. Kriegler (1993) claims that school psychological services have been cut to the bone in Natal, with other

provinces likely to follow suit. According to Foxcroft (1997), this was due to the biased and discriminatory nature in which these measures were used in the past. For Kriegler (1993) it will be no small task to convince the new educational planners that school psychology can mend its old ineffectual ways.

Furthermore, article 5. (2) of the South African Schools Act (SASA 84 of 1996) states that “a public school may not administer any test related to the admission of a learner to a public school, or direct or authorise the principal of the school or any other person to administer such test” (SASA 84 of 1996, p. B-5). Education is not the only department affected by these new laws on psychological testing. In terms of section 8 of the Employment Equity Act (55 of 1998), psychological testing is prohibited unless the test being used has been scientifically shown to be valid and reliable, can be applied fairly to all and is not biased to any group.

2.7.3 ‘All children can learn’

The DoE released a policy on “Building an Inclusive Education and Training System” White Paper 6 (EWP 6). It is based on the notion that “All children can learn” and addresses some basic human rights at school level. This was done as part of the whole school policy, practice and processes that can and should play a role in the delivery of quality education for all and the development of a culture of human rights. The policy suggests that psychological assessment will at times have to be done on some of the learners. This will be to determine the level of intervention that a learner may need. It calls for the overhauling of the process of identifying, assessing and the enrolment of learners in special schools “so that learners experiencing barriers to learning can be identified early and appropriate support provided” (EWP 6, 2001 p. 24). The strife is geared towards enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners. There thus appeared to be an urgent need for studies on how effective these psychological assessments will be in this regard.

Education White Paper 6 therefore sets as an “urgent priority the transformation of practices related to the identification and psychological assessment in general with a view to achieving enabling mechanisms to support learners who experience barriers to learning in the most appropriate way” (EWP 6, 2001 p. 24). This is based on the realisation that there are also other factors that create barriers to learning such as language, poverty, social-class, health, race, etc.

2.8 ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE USAGE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IN SCHOOLS:

2.8.1 It is not uniformly valid:

In as much as psychological assessment might seem to be beneficial, some authors have on the contrary, pointed to dissatisfactory aspects of traditional psychological assessment procedures. Haywood, Tzruel and Vaught (1997) present some of the limitations of standardised psychological assessment tools. They claim that they are not uniformly valid across ability levels, ages and cultural groups. Furthermore, they are not culturally appropriate and can only be applied to an elite group of South African learners. For Owen (1992) the issue of cultural differences is probably the most common criticism expressed against standardised psychological assessment measures. This is especially true when intellectual ability assessed through intelligence tests has always been a fundamental issue in education and psychology. The main argument against these instruments as Owen (1998) states, is that they are viewed as a Western invention, are culturally bound, biased and thus inappropriate to the indigenous groups within South African schools. Many are not as yet available in all the official languages spoken in South Africa.

2.8.2 It labels and marginalizes certain children:

In traditional psychological assessment procedures, the issue of test bias has emerged as being of central importance to general questions about psychological assessment and equal opportunities. Foxcroft (1997) argues that politics have shaped the use of tests

without culturally relevant content and appropriate norms. Past practices in psychological assessment have been culturally biased and created an unnatural division between curriculum delivery and learning. An overemphasis on the notion of ‘special needs’ had the tendency of labelling and marginalizing certain children. It also discouraged ordinary schools to organise support in such a way that it became responsive to the needs of all learners from various cultural, socio-economic and language backgrounds. As such, ordinary class educators did not deem it part of their daily classroom practice to develop an understanding for the different ways in which different pupils learn and need to be supported.

2.8.3 It is not culture free and fair:

Foxcroft *et al* (2004) claim that many international tests are imported and used in South Africa. They argue further that these tests are sometimes unsuitable for use in the South African context and with our culturally diverse groups. There is thus “a need for South African validity, reliability and cross-cultural bias studies to be undertaken and for such tests to be adapted for use here” (Foxcroft *et al*, 2004: p. 107).

The suitability of a psychological assessment measure for a group that did not form part of the standardization group has become a major issue across the country. A number of factors can cause assessment scores to be consistently higher or lower than they would be if measurement were more accurate. Culture and language stand out like a sore thumb within the South African context. Owen (1992) states that psychological assessments are but samples of behaviour which are affected by the cultural environment in which an individual is reared. Given the plural communities with divergent cultural backgrounds in South Africa, the so-called “culture free or culture fair assessments pose some important problems” (Owen, 1992: p. 8).

2.8.4 It is not language free and fair:

Nell (1994) asserts that language is one of the most critical moderator variables impacting on test performance in the multilingual South African society. The issue of

language both in terms of the administration of the test and the language usage in test items is often identified as problematic. Translating a test into various languages so that a learner can be assessed in his / her first language is one option. However, Nell (1994) argues that it is often not easy to decide which language is a learner's first language. Is it their home language or is it the language in which they are educated? For Nell (1994), many South African learners are educated in a language that is different from their home language.

When assessment is taken in a language that is not the dominant language of the assessee (as is often the case in South Africa schools), an instrument, which is supposed to measure intelligence, might also provide some unintended measurements such as language proficiency. This poses a challenge to fair testing practices. Nell (1994), posits that from the results of psychological assessment, it should be possible to judge a learner's scholastic potential and ability to learn and not his / her level of proficiency in English. Problems may even arise when measures that are developed in English speaking countries like America and England, are used in South Africa on speakers of another language other than English. Even if assessment instruments are translated into local languages, concepts used in the original instruments are often culture bound and difficult to translate into other languages. In the psychological assessment situation, people may experience communication difficulties because of their inability to use the specific language used for assessing. Owen (1992) stresses that assessment language should be of such a nature that every assessee could understand what is expected of him or her and can respond freely and with ease.

2.8.5 It focuses on the learners' deficits rather than on their educational needs and abilities

The nature of services provided by psychological assessment of the learners also left too much to be desired. The tendency was for psychological assessment's adherence to a medical model of service delivery. The DoE's (1997) report of the NCESS highlights the reliance of psychological assessment on the medical model for diagnosis and treatment of

learners. According to the report, “this model often contributed to particularly negative stereotyping and marginalisation of learners. Through the administration of intelligence tests to assess intelligence and learning potential of learners, they (learners) were categorised and labelled for placement in ‘special’ education programmes, classes and schools” (DoE, 1997, p. 23). The report further states that this resulted in a lack of attention being paid to how the education system failed to provide for the needs of different learners. In short, the medical model focused attention on what were seen as “deficits in the learners rather than on their educational needs and abilities” (DoE, 1997, p. 23).

2.9 ARGUMENTS FOR THE USAGE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IN SCHOOLS:

2.9.1 Acts as an alternative for the solution of scholastic problems:

The delivery of quality education cuts across a number of issues. Amongst them are what is delivered, how is it delivered, by whom and for what purpose? Engelbrecht *et al* (1996) state that psychological assessment associated with opportunities has great merits. They claim that whether in systematic, group or individual assessment, psychological assessment should be seen as the generation and evaluation of alternatives for the solution of perceived scholastic problems. They posit that individual psychological assessment may still play a crucial role in the educational development of individual learners. The trio further argue that there will always be children who need specialised education services. The task is therefore to devise situations and an assessment idiom, which favours those who are presently under-performing at school level.

2.9.2 It can provide relevant and invaluable information (if used correctly):

Owen (1998) made comments on debates around psychological assessment in schools. He stated that there are conflicting views on it. He maintains that psychological assessment has “ardent supporters and equally fervent opponents” (Owen, 1998, p. 10).

He highlights these conflicting views by stating that “Many people are opposed to measurement and evaluation, yet at the same time favour excellence, which is facilitated by and can be identified only through measurement and evaluation” (Owen, 1998: p. 10). Owen (1998) is of a notion that the negative aspects of psychological assessment should be carefully weighed against that, which is to be gained by its careful practice. It should also be borne in mind that psychological assessment gives no answers, but merely provides relevant information so that sounder conclusions may follow. However, misconceptions regarding its use and interpretation hamper the utility of standardised assessment tools. Nonetheless, it has a significant role to play today and in the future. He further claims that it has many valid uses and when used correctly, can provide invaluable information.

Burden’s (1996) sentiments should also be reiterated when he states that psychological assessment associated with opportunities has great merits. Attributes by Hopkins and Stanley in Owen (1998) hit the nail on the head: “...people are opposed to measurement and evaluation, yet at the same time favour excellence, which is facilitated by and can be identified only through assessment” (Owen, 1998: p. 10). There should therefore, be a strife for the (unbiased and fair) use of psychological assessment.

Burden in Engelbrecht *et al* (1992) claims that internationally, psychological assessment is undergoing considerable soul-searching and a radical departure from traditional paradigms. He maintains that its goals are being examined. In addition, psychological assessment is being viewed in relation to the values and ideological stances that it represents. He further stresses that the efficacy of its techniques is being reassessed in respect of special needs and some guidelines are being established for meeting them.

2.9.3 It can alleviate some social problems:

Psychological assessment can be located in the school of the future. Kriegler (1993) argues that the accessibility, identification of children and families in need of help can be easily facilitated in a school setting. Furthermore, using the school as a locus of delivery

for family counselling will promote parent involvement and community support of education. Psychology within the education system can be a driving force to alleviate some social problems related to poverty, HIV and AIDS and family disintegration. Kriegler (1993) posits that more than half of the South African population is younger than sixteen years, meaning that they fall within the bracket of compulsory school-going age. Therefore, any crisis in education poses the most serious threat to future national well-being. The school is at least an important potential locus of psychological assessment and service delivery.

A report by World Bank (2002) states that schools are also a sustainable community institution that can be mobilised and through which support can be channelled to provide physical, social and emotional care for vast numbers of orphaned and vulnerable children over a long period of time. A basic education is one of the potent weapons against HIV infection and for all other developments. It is critical that children are in school and able to learn effectively while they are there. The report claimed further that often the first sign of emotional or social distress in children is falling grades or academic performance. It is vital that through psychological assessment, schools are able to attend to the social and emotional issues that are affecting learners if the school's primary objective of academic learning is to be achieved.

2.9.4 It reduces the incidence of 'illness' in learners:

Conoley and Gutkin (1995) argue that school psychology does not suffer from a lack of good science. They claim that it rather suffers from a science that is devoted almost exclusively to answering the wrong sets of questions. For them school psychology is a science that is preoccupied with the problem of individuals rather than understanding the ecologies within which people function. They further argue that it is a science with its historical roots in personality theory, psychological assessment, diagnosis and treatment of disorders. Conoley and Gutkin (1995) maintain that the primary purpose of school psychology should not be to 'cure the sick.' The strife should be towards creating healthy environmental systems like schools, families and communities that reduce the incidence

of 'illness' in learners. Unfortunately, "to usher in a new era of school psychology requires the creation and application of the right science to practice" (Conoley and Gutkin, 1995: p. 211).

2.10 CHALLENGES FACING THE USE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT WITHIN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS:

2.10.1 Ethical use of psychological assessment tools:

For Foxcroft *et al* (2004), psychological assessments can be useful if they are used in combination with other methods. Another claim that they highlight is that psychological assessment results provide a wealth of information in a short space of time. They however caution against relying on test data only. An argument put forward is that if practitioners follow good psychological assessment practices, they will not use psychological tests in isolation. But they would utilise them in conjunction with interviewing, reference checking and clinical insight. This would be to ensure that the requirements and objectives of the assessment are met. According to them, results should also never be evaluated in isolation. They further argue that together with other methods, psychological assessments provide a picture of the individual learner. When an instrument is well-designed, well-researched and relevantly applied, "valid predictions can be made and an indication can be obtained of the probability of success" (Foxcroft *et al*, 2004: p. 107).

2.10.2 Provision of quality education for all:

The basic idea of "education for all" is derived from the basic principles of the rights of learners in the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policies and Practice in Education (UNESCO, 1994: p.10). The principles and appeals from UNESCO's (1994) statement to governments stimulated educators to initiate, design and implement education systems that embrace UNESCO's (1994) principles. It pre-empted the retreat of governments to redress the provision of service delivery in education. The purpose of the Salamanca

Conference was to further the objective of education as a fundamental human right aimed at enabling schools to serve all learners.

For many years before the democratic dispensation came about, South Africa was isolated from international society and its “education system was not competitive to international standards” (DoE, 2000: p.11). When South Africa was readmitted into the international education conference, it had to write a report which outlined the state of affairs in education, provide challenges and indicate how the country intends moving on with solving such problems. The South African DoE’s Assessment report to UNESCO in 2000 was written to outline factors that may affect the provision of quality education.

South African education system has since undergone some remarkable reforms and aligned itself with the policies of the Salamanca Statement. The creation of a single national Education Department out of eighteen fragmented systems was one of the most significant milestones of post apartheid education. The passing of the South African Schools Act in 1996 was a watershed for education. One of its most important provisions was compulsory schooling for children aged between seven and fifteen. However, legislating Inclusive Education through (EWP 6) without proper structures in place (such as relevant psychological assessment measures and procedures), dynamic transformation and reorganisation shall remain but just a futile exercise and / or a pipedream.

2.10.3 The need for practitioners to access high quality tools:

The report by Foxcroft *et al* (2004) indicates that psychological assessment in South Africa faces many challenges at present. They did needs analysis on the test-use patterns and needs of psychological assessment practitioners. They found that among the challenges facing assessment is the need for practitioners to access high quality tools. The aim was being able to ensure that psychological assessments that they perform yield valid and reliable results. Foxcroft and her team (2004) state that countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom the Netherlands and Spain have conducted surveys to determine the patterns of the use of psychological assessment tools. This was

done in order to establish which tools were the most frequently used and may thus require constant reviewing and updating. However, Shuttleworth-Jordan and Ann (1996) made an appeal against what they termed an overly hasty attitude of despair in South Africa because psychological tests have not been designed for application amongst a particular population.

2.10.4 Data on the needs of psychological assessment practitioners:

Foxcroft *et al* (2004) point out in their report that a comprehensive survey of test-use patterns and needs of psychological assessment practitioners have never been undertaken in South Africa. They maintain that this has made it difficult to establish an effective agenda regarding the development, adaptation and updating of tests and to develop appropriate continuing professional service. Such a survey would not only document test-use patterns and needs but would also form the basis for generating suggestions regarding the agenda that needs to be established to guide test development. This would in turn greatly enhance psychological assessment practices in South Africa in general and within the education system in particular.

2.10.5 Inadequate and fragmented human resource development:

On the other hand, the DoE's (1997) report of the NCESS states that there is a tremendous shortage of psychologists trained in the education sector to provide support to schools, especially in far outlying rural areas where there is a serious shortage of emotional and psychological support. Like many of the formally marginalized residential sites in South Africa, many schools in such areas still need to recover from the after-effects of segregation. Many are to a large extent mainly impoverished, face high levels of crime, violence, abuse and severely suffer the effects of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Due to the socio-economic situation, depression and anxiety are rife in these places. The report further highlights the fact that there are a number of psychologists whose training has historically been based on a medical model. They are not necessarily trained as educational psychologists but are presently working in the department of education.

There is a serious need for well-trained professional therapists especially those familiar with the social, cultural and economic conditions of those requiring help. Such professionals will help in formulating appropriate responses and interventions.

Conclusion:

After the trends of psychological assessment practices have been put into perspective both locally and internationally, this study seeks to align itself with these trends. Furthermore, echo the sentiments of Mpofu *et al* (1997) survey findings that psychological assessment has room for improvement rather than be discarded. Thus hopefully, assist decision-makers on the role and ethical use of standardised psychological instrument measures. The research methodology used in the execution of this study is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the research design as followed in the execution of the research project. This includes aspects such as: all the procedures followed before the study could commence, research design, sampling, data collection techniques, data capturing and methods for analysis thereof, how the questionnaire and the focus group interviews were conducted as well as some ethical considerations for the participants.

3.2 Research question:

The main question for the research project was:

How do educators perceive the use of psychological assessments in South African schools?

In answering this question, data was collected on the following questions that would then form subsidiary questions for the study:

- When are psychological assessments used in the current schooling system?
- What are the problems associated with these assessments?
- What are the educators' perceptions about the contribution, if any, done by these assessments in a school setting?

3.3 Research design:

The study made use of a mixed-method design that included both quantitative and qualitative methods. The reason for this is that it enhanced the richness of the data gathered and the information could be triangulated, using methodological triangulation,

to establish whether similar findings emerged across the methods. This, according to Foxcroft *et al* (2004), increases the validity and trustworthiness of the findings. It made use of a questionnaire which even though it was largely quantitative in nature, some open-ended questions were included. The data from the questionnaire were used to identify themes that were used to formulate questions, which were used in focus group interviews that were conducted with educators.

3.4 Procedure:

Permission was asked from the Free State Department of Education Head Office in Bloemfontein (Appendix A), as well as from the Northern Free State Education District (Fezile Dabi) in Sasolburg (Appendix C) to conduct a research in their schools. Both offices could only grant permission provided that the researcher would adhere to certain procedural conditions (Appendix B) in the execution of the study. Permission was granted after both the researcher and the supervisor (Appendices D and H) had accepted and declared to conduct the study subject to the adhering as well as observing those conditions. The study commenced only after permission was granted. A letter (Appendix E), asking the educators to participate in the study was sent to the schools concerned. It also briefly outlined the purpose of the study.

3.5 The Sample:

Purposive sampling method was used to make a sample of 75 educators from five public schools in the Northern Free State Education District (Fezile Dabi). This included educators from primary schools, high schools and combined schools. Names of schools from rural communities were drawn from a hat to participate in the study. The same was done for representatives of schools in both urban and semi-urban schools. Two “ex-model C” schools were chosen, as they were likely to have had some access to psychological services, (because of their historical position of advantage within the South African education system). The majority of the sample, (three schools), were educators from the previously marginalised schools. These schools were included in the sample

since the majority of learners in South Africa were in marginalised schools with limited resources resulting in their exclusion from psychological service delivery. An invitation was extended for them to participate in the study where the purpose of the study was to determine (from educators) how useful psychological assessments are at school level in general and in the classroom situation in particular.

3.6 Participants:

3.6.1 Questionnaire participants:

The questionnaires were delivered to the schools to be completed by Post Level one (PL 1) educators at their own flexitime. A covering letter on the front of the questionnaire (Appendix E) provided the educators with the necessary information for completing the questionnaire. The educators who chose to participate in the study were asked to complete the attached questionnaire as carefully and honestly as possible. Once the completion of the questionnaire was done, each participating educator had to put it in the envelope which was provided, seal it and then hand it to the Life Orientation Head of Department from whom it was collected within approximately a fortnights' time. This procedure helped to ensure that no one had access to the completed questionnaires. It also guaranteed their confidentiality. Both the completions of the questionnaire and the return thereof, were considered consent by the educator to participate in the study.

3.6.2 Focus group interview participants:

Two schools (from the five that took part in the study) were nominated to participate in focus group interviews. As such two group interviews were conducted at two different sites. Each group had an average of seven participating members. Educators who chose to participate in the study through being part of the focus group had to give consent by submitting their names to either the Life Orientation Head of Department or the school's secretary. They were then contacted via the Life Orientation Head of Department or the school's secretary in order to discuss their participation in the study.

Post Level 1 educators who participated in the focus group interviews were those from the purposively selected sample who had completed and returned the quantitative questionnaire as stipulated in 3.5.1. In order to be included in the focus group discussion, educators had to adhere to certain conditions as set out in the Subject Information letter (Appendix F), which was attached to the questionnaire. Before the interviews could commence, each educator received this letter with some background information on the study, a consent form (Appendix G), and a list of questions. The participants had to sign this consent form as an indication that they gave permission that the information they provided could be audio-taped so as to be used for the study purposes only. Signing the consent form served as proof that an educator had given consent to participate in the group discussions. They were also reassured that participation was confidential and that neither their names nor their schools' names would be mentioned in the research report. Audio-tapes were used merely for back-up purposes only.

3.7 Data collection:

Two main types of data collection techniques were used to collect data from 16 July 2005 to 22 September 2005.

3.7.1 The questionnaire:

A questionnaire is described as a set of written questions dealing with some topic or related group of topics, given to a selected group of individuals for the purpose of gathering data (Van Rensburg, Landman and Bodenstein (1994), Kanjee (1999)). It usually consists of a number of measurement scales, open-ended items and closed-ended ones. For this study, data collection was done by means of structured questionnaires consisting of both quantitative (closed) questions and qualitative (open-ended) questions.

As already stated in paragraph 3.2 this research was of both quantitative and qualitative nature. The researcher therefore decided to use questionnaire as one of the data gathering instruments as it is probably best suited for this kind of study. For Kanjee (1999) a

questionnaire does not only afford respondents adequate time to complete it, but it can also reach out to people who are far away.

The questionnaire in this study is an adaptation of that used by Farre (1998) and Manala (2001). Though it was divided into three main sections, section 2 was sub-divided into smaller sections so as to tap on a number of aspects (Appendix I).

3.7.2 Focus groups interviews:

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006) describe focus group interviews as settings which bring together a specifically chosen sector of the population to discuss a given theme or topic. They further state that the reliance is on the interaction within the group which leads to data and outcomes, “yielding a collective rather than an individual view” (Cohen *et al*, 2006, p. 376). Krueger (1994) posits that focus groups are designed mainly to obtain peoples’ opinion. The rationale to use focus group situation in this study was as Patton (2002) states, to gain some depth in discussion with the objective of obtaining high quality data in a social context.

Focus group interviews were used in this study in order to enrich the quantitative information obtained from the educators’ questionnaire. They were done so as to obtain rich data that could be integrated with the results of their completed questionnaires. This would in turn “enrich as well as enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the findings of the overall study” (Foxcroft *et al*, 2004, p. 39). Patton (2002) regards focus group interviews as a highly efficient qualitative data collection technique as it provides more opportunities for quality control in data collection.

The questions for discussion in focus groups were formulated based on educators’ responses in the research questionnaire. They were partly prompted by those posed in the questionnaire as well as the patterns of responses thereof. As already stated in 3.2, the data from the questionnaire was used to identify themes that were to be used in focus group interviews. Items for discussion in the focus group interview (Appendix J) tapped

on a number of aspects. Amongst others they included aspects such as support provided for learners at school level, educators' perception, knowledge and understanding of psychological assessment, problems experienced regarding psychological assessment as well as support, if any, received from the district office and what could be done to improve psychological assessment services in general. Although the questions were structured, they were not followed in a rigid and inflexible manner but mainly served to guide the discussions.

3.8 Data analysis:

Three main analysis techniques were used: Descriptive statistics for the quantitative questionnaire. Thematic content analysis was used for the qualitative responses from the focus groups so as to make sense of the data obtained from the questionnaire. Methodological triangulation was then used in this study for the overall analysis. This entailed the consolidation of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Patton (2002) states that data triangulation involves comparing and cross-checking the consistency of data from different sources at different times using different means. As this was a mixed study using both quantitative as well as qualitative methods, data triangulation was used to interpret the findings from the two sets of data in order to determine exactly how psychological assessments are being used currently within the schooling system.

3.8.1 For the questionnaire:

Quantitative data for the closed questions was presented in terms of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (where applicable) and some of the data were rank ordered. The number of responses in each category was counted and assigned to its proper category. Firstly data was to be analysed in terms of frequency of responses and then converted to percentages. Neutral responses were also counted whilst zero or no responses were excluded as they were not assigned or allocated any number or code. A further analysis was done to determine whether the proportion of subjects rating an item positively is significantly more or less than those rating it negatively.

Furthermore, for various ratings such as the usefulness of content items, overall usefulness of reports, ratings of attitude measures, were reported as percentages of educators rating an item either positively or negatively.

3.8.2 For the focus group interviews:

Qualitative data obtained from the focus group interviews and open-ended questions of the questionnaire were analysed using thematic content analysis. An analysis of the content of the responses to the qualitative questions was done. The analysis of data in this regard focussed more on the dominant and common themes of various issues presented by the participants as Weber (1990) states. Responses expressing a particular theme for each question were grouped together. From the groups' responses towards the questions posed, themes and sub-themes that emerged were identified according to answers to each question asked. This process was then followed by summarizing the main contents of data and their messages. Information was grouped per response to each question as educators' responses to these questions often seemed to overlap. The information obtained from each focus group was transcribed and typed up by the researcher.

3.9 Ethical considerations:

The research was carried out according to the standards of ethics set for research by the University of the Witwatersrand. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants including what was being requested from them.

3.9.1 Participants for the questionnaire:

Participation was on voluntary basis and therefore no one was in any way coerced to take part. The educators were informed (Appendix E) that as participation in the research was voluntary, nobody would be advantaged or disadvantaged for participating or choosing not to participate in the study. They remained anonymous and the given information was confidential as completed questionnaires were not be seen by any person except the researcher and his supervisor.

By completing the questionnaire, participants automatically gave informed consent for participation. The demographic details required were for statistical purposes only and were treated as totally confidential. The confidentiality of their responses was protected and there was no way of linking the data to them directly. Thus, they did not write their names anywhere on the questionnaire.

3.9.2 Participants for the focus group:

For the focus group, the same procedure was followed except that they had to give consent. Each participant received a letter explaining the purpose of the study (Appendix F), a consent form (Appendix G) as well as the list of the questions for discussion (Appendix J). They were asked to sign the consent form as proof that they gave permission that the information they provided could be used for the study. They also had to give consent for tape-recording to be used as back-up and could therefore not remain anonymous.

Once the research was completed, a letter was sent to the participating schools thanking them for taking part in the project. A summary of the findings was also sent to all schools that were involved in the study. Feedback was given to the school in the form of group responses and not individual perceptions. Tapes of focus group interviews were transcribed and destroyed thereafter. Results are as reported in the research report (thesis). All collected data were then destroyed after the completion of the study.

CONCLUSION:

A detailed structure of the methodology used for the execution of this study has been given in this chapter. It included aspects such as the research design, procedures followed, sampling method, data collection techniques for both the questionnaire as well as how the focus group interviews were conducted, data capturing and methods for analysis thereof, including some ethical considerations for the participants. A detailed description of this research findings and discussion thereof is given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS:

4.1 Introduction:

This chapter covers the overall results of the study. It is sub-divided into three sections namely: Section A: Quantitative report which covers the findings of the research questionnaire, Section B: Qualitative reports on the information that was obtained from the educators who participated in the focus group interviews and Section C: wherein triangulation of all the data obtained is done. Discussion and report on themes as well as sub-themes that emerged when data were analysed are presented reflecting this against both national and international literature for verification purposes. Concluding remarks are then done and the next chapter is introduced.

4.2 Overview of the sample in context:

Five schools participated in the study: three primary schools, one high school and one combined school. They were all co-educational government schools in the Northern Free State (Fezile Dabi) Education District. All schools sampled were English-medium schools except for the combined school, which was a predominantly Afrikaans-medium school. Two of the primary schools used Southern-Sotho as a medium of instruction in the Foundation phase and the third was a dual language medium school where both English and Afrikaans were used as Languages of Teaching and Learning (LoLT).

Section A:

4.3 Quantitative research results from the questionnaire: (Closed questions)

A total of 75 questionnaires were sent out to the participating schools i.e. 15 questionnaires per school. A total of 49 responses were received. This represents a 65 %

return rate. No questionnaire was received from the high school sampled to participate in the study. Mangione (1998) as cited in Foxcroft *et al* (2004) posits that “... if the response rate is less than 50 % then the results might not be scientifically acceptable” (Foxcroft *et al*: 2004, p. 12). Foxcroft *et al* (2004) further state that if more than 20 % of the respondents did not return the questionnaire, it is likely that the results of the findings could be affected. The response rate in this study (65 %) seems to indicate that the sample reflects the general attitudes of the educators regarding psychological assessment in schools. This suggests that the findings could be generalised to other school to some extent.

4.3.1 Demographic details

Demographic information on the sample is supplied in tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1

Demographic information on the sample:					
Gender:	%	Age:	Frequency	Grades taught:	Frequency
Male: 6	12.2	21– 30 years	4	Foundation: 1-3	18
Female: 43	87.8	31– 40 years	17	Intermediate: 4-6	16
		41 – 50 years	19	Senior Phase: 7-9	10
		51 – 60 years	9	FET: 10-12	5

The data as summarised in table 1 above and table 2 below reflect personal information of educators who participated in the study. The above table is intended to provide the key findings on a descriptive level and to include information about the educators’ personnel profiles. It should also be mentioned that the location of the sampled school did not indicate to have any bearing on the responses from educators. Educators’ responses appeared to be uniform whether the school was in a rural, semi-urban or urban area as they seemed to both understand and experience the process of psychological assessment in similar ways.

Table 1 shows that more than 87 % of the sampled educators were females. This supports the statistics as supplied by a report on Education Statistics and the Education Management Information System (DoE's 2005 during a period when the study was conducted), which indicates that there are more female educators than males employed in the education system.

The majority of the participants fall within the 31 to 50 years age group, with a combined total percentage of more than 73 %. Another area worth mentioning is that of the grades taught by the sampled educators. A substantial number of the participants in the study were educators in the lower grades with a combined total of 69 % (both foundation and intermediate grades). DoE's 2005 report indicates that the majority of the female educators are found in primary schools with the majority of males in secondary schools.

Further information about the demographic details is given in table 2 below:

Table 2

Demographic Data						
Items	Mean	SD	Frequency	%	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
Teaching experience:	3.3	1.3				
0 – 5 years			5	10.2	5	10.2
6 – 10 years			10	20.4	15	30.6
11 – 15 years			13	26.5	28	57.1
16 – 20 years			8	16.4	36	73.5
21 + years			13	26.5	49	100
Learners referred	1.4	0.9				
None			6	12.2		
1			32	74.4	32	74.4
2			7	16.2	39	90.7
3			1	2.3	40	93.6
4			2	4.6	42	97.8
5			1	2.3	43	100

Table 2 shows that a majority of the sampled educators have more than ten years teaching experience (a combined total of 69 %). This implies that the participants in the study were seasoned professionals and it could be expected that somehow they might have come into contact with the process of psychological assessment at school during their teaching careers.

Table 2 again shows that the rate at which learners are being referred by the sampled educators for assistance can best be described as being very low. Most educators in the sample (74 %) managed to refer an average of only one learner in the year prior to the execution of this study. This low rate of referral is especially concerning and perhaps reasons need to be established. This is in light of the World Bank's (2002) report on the situation of children in South Africa. It highlights the prevalence of potential systemic barriers to learning such as HIV and AIDS epidemics, poverty abuse, neglect and substance abuse as factors that contribute to the vulnerability of children and a possible scholastic under-performance. Maybe just a few learners at the schools which participated in this study are affected by these factors and hence the low rate of referral for intervention.

4.3.2 Trends on service availability and utilisation of psychological assessment:

Educators' responses to items assessing their utilisation of psychological assessment services are shown in figure 1 below:

Figure 1

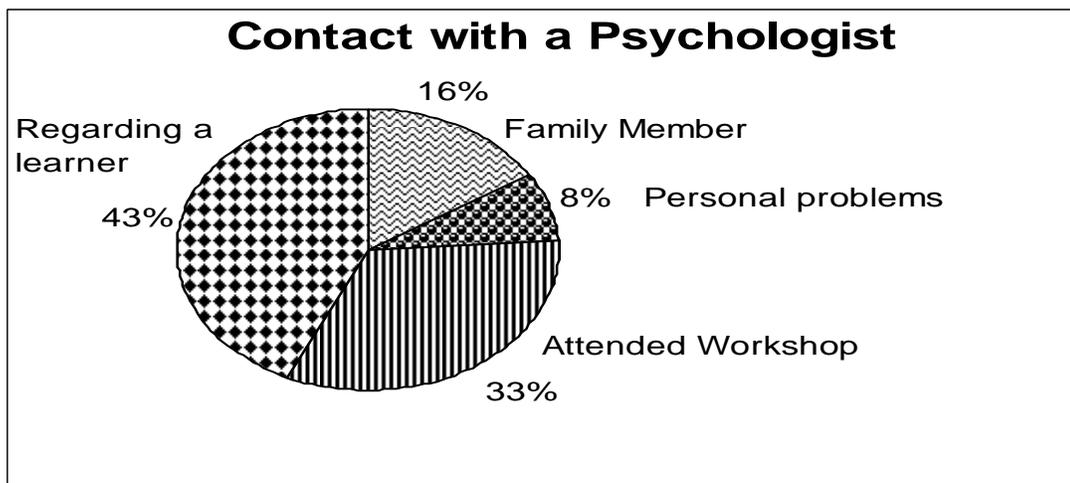


Figure 1 shows that the sampled participants are most likely to come into contact with a psychologist (43% of the time) if there is a ‘problem’ involving a learner. The second most likelihood for educators to come into contact with a psychologist appears to be when they attend a workshop conducted by a psychologist (33 %). Other instances whereby educators used the services of a psychologist were through a family member (16 %) as well as meeting one for a personal problem (8 %). These responses show that educators had contact with a psychologist mainly through their school.

Since the most likelihood for educators to come into contact with a psychologist seems to be if there is a ‘problem’ involving a learner, it would be best to find out what are the issues that prompt them to refer learners.

4.3.3 Purposes for which learners are referred for psychological assessment:

Educators’ responses to items assessing their reasons for referring learners for psychological assessment are supplied in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Reasons for referral		
Item	Frequency	Percentage
Reading	30	61
Alcohol and / or Drugs	1	2
Writing	27	55
Mathematics	19	39
Failing at school	16	33
AIDS related matters	1	2
Sexual abuse	14	29
Bullying	12	25
Attention Difficulties	19	39
Death in a family	3	6
Behaviour	24	49
Learning difficulties	1	2

Table 3 above shows the learners that are referred for assessment are mostly those experiencing learning difficulties in both reading (61 %) and writing (55 %). These results could suggest that learners are struggling in these areas most or that educators are finding it difficult to teach these skills.

These indications and findings are supported by other studies done on some of the common problem areas experienced about learners by their educators. A national Systematic Evaluation (SE) process did a survey to monitor and evaluate education provision, delivery and achievement. The SE Report (DoE 2005) for intermediate phase found learner achievement in the Free State province to be lagging behind learners of other provinces in South Africa in terms of reading and writing languages of teaching. According to the report from the study conducted by SE, learners generally registered a provincial paltry mean of 31 % for reading and writing. The findings of SE, together with the reasons why educators refer learners for psychological assessment from the table above, suggest some serious challenges for educators, learners and their parents.

It was worth noting that learner behaviour (49 %) rated amongst the top three reasons why educators referred learners for a psychological assessment. This corroborates claims made in paragraph 2.3.2 that the best likelihood of referring a learner is based on the educators' judgements about the presence of behavioural problems (Abidin and Robinson 2002, Bay and Brian 1992, Cooper and Speece 1998). Furthermore, Govender (2006) states that according to recent submissions made to the Human Rights Commission (on school-violence), schools have been reduced to 'war zones' and some also labelled as 'sites of war. A poor grasp of anger management, (a behavioural problem), is cited by psychologists in the report, as one of the problems affecting most pupils. A report on the study in America by Leff, Power, Manz and Costigan (2001) states that as much as 71 % of educators claim that they almost always intervene in incidents in class and on the playground. This indicates an increase in the number of learners who need help through psychological intervention.

Govender’s report (2006) cites learners’ engagement in drugs as the reason that may be leading to the psychotic kind of conduct seen in schools recently. Interestingly, alcohol and / or drug use was not amongst the highly rated reasons for referral in this study. Table 3 also shows a paltry figure of only less than 10 % of the referred learners were for interventions for their alcohol and / or drug use. Perhaps there are other factors other than alcohol and / or drug use which result in learners having behavioural problems. Bullying, (25 %), was also not amongst the highly rated reasons for referral in this study. This contrasts with the study in American schools by Leff *et al* (2001) which found that a typical learner has a high likelihood of being bullied or being involved in bullying. As a result thereof, many learners in America miss school everyday because they are afraid of being bullied there.

4.3.4 Overall Usefulness of the Report Content:

Educators’ responses to items assessing their general perception about overall usefulness of the report on assessed learners are tabled below:

Table 4

Ratings of usefulness of the report overall			
Items	Percentage rating this item		
	1 & 2 Useful	3 Neutral	4 & 5 Not Useful
What I found out about the report was that it:			
Addressed my concerns about the learner	21.1	10.8	68.1
Contained suggestions for parents and educators	16.2	12.3	71.5
Was easy to understand	17.4	15.3	67.3
Gave sufficient information	24.7	28.5	46.8
Was presented in a clear manner	16.2	23.3	60.5
Specified the educator’s role clearly	21.1	26.3	52.6

Interpretations can be made about the sampled educators on reports that were received as Table 4 above seems to suggest. 68 % felt that the report did not adequately address their

concerns about the learner. 72 % said that the report contained few or no suggestions for them and parents. 67 % indicated that the report was generally not easy to understand and it did not give sufficient information. Furthermore, educators seem to have a feeling that the reports were not presented in a clear manner and did not specify their (educator's) role clearly.

Educators who referred learners for assessment and received some written feedback report seem to have experienced some problems with it. Many rated the report as 'Not Useful' on almost all issues. From table 4 above it can be depicted that the sampled educators have an overall negative ratings of the reports received and that they were not entirely happy or satisfied about them. On average, only less than 25 % of them found each item in the report to be 'Useful'.

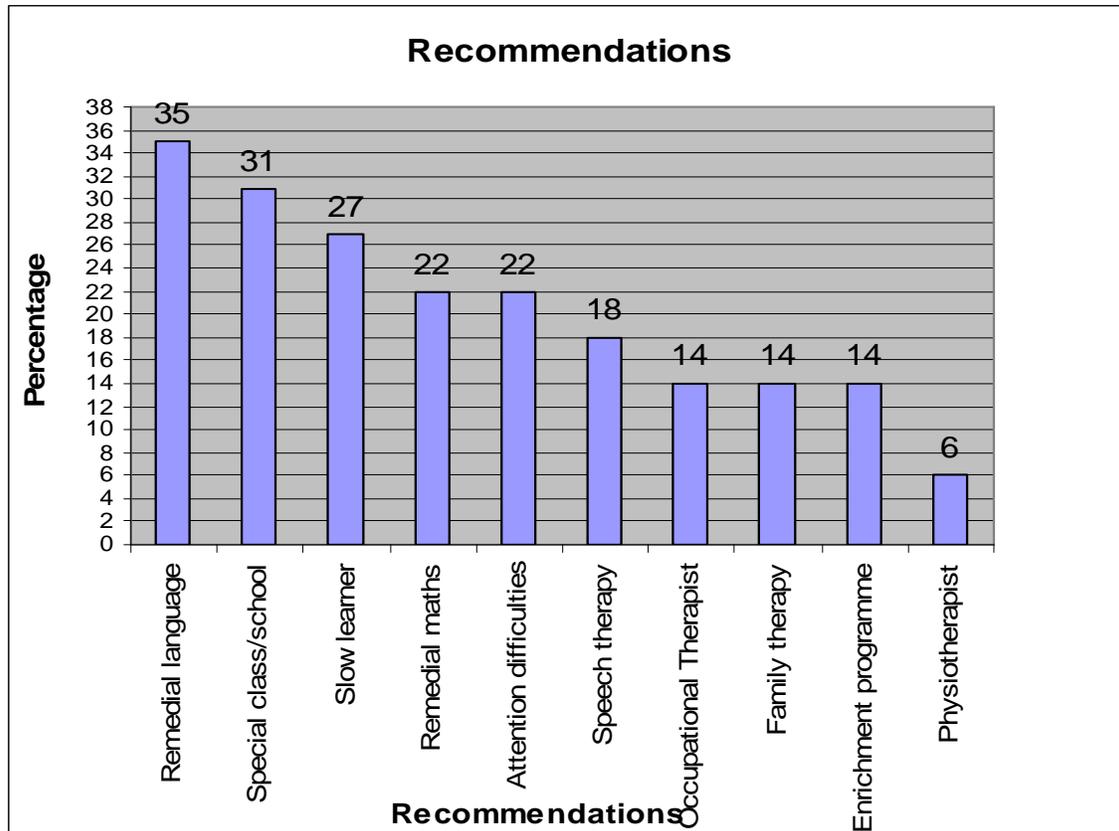
It is important to mention that a significant number of educators did not indicate their responses in this section. Such missing information constituted about 23 % of the sampled educators. This could be as a result of the fact that a lot of the sampled educators referred few learners for assessment or did not refer learners at all (as evidenced in table 2), and therefore received few or no form of feedback at all. This might have had an influence on the sampled educators' overall perceptions about feedback received in the form of written reports.

The overall negative rating of the usefulness of the report indicates that there could be some miscommunication with regards to psychological reports. This could be a result of lack of understanding of what is required of the educator from the part of the psychologist. This misunderstanding could be regarded as a possible reason behind the low (or non-) utilisation of psychological services by a low (or non-) referral of learners for that service. This negative perception towards reports can best be summed up by quoting the comments of one participant in the open-ended questions regarding the usefulness of the report. The participant viewed the report as being "a totally useless piece of document in my opinion and didn't help or mean anything at all."

4.3.5 Recommendations:

Sampled educators' responses to items assessing their general attitude towards recommendations in the reports of assessed learners are tabulated in figure 2 below:

Figure 2



The information supplied by Figure 2 above raises some important issues. Of note are the three most common recommendations for the learners who were referred for psychological assessment. The first one is that a learner should receive remedial language (35 %). The second highest recommendation is that a learner should be placed in a special class / school (31 %), and that he / she is classified as a slow learner / mentally retarded (27 %). These results could suggest that only children with the most severe problems get referred and that they really need specialised help.

The implication of these recommendations is two-fold. Firstly, it suggests that the practice of psychological assessment still operates from the mode of both blaming the learner and finding pathology within the child as pointed out in paragraph 2.5.4 of the literature review. This seems to imply that it is the assessed learners who are not performing up to the required standard of the system of education and not the system that could be failing the learner as highlighted in paragraphs 2.7.2 and 2.7.5. It was stated in these paragraphs that it would appear as if psychological assessment still focuses on the learners' deficits rather than on their educational needs and abilities. It is therefore being used to label and marginalise certain learners. This contradicts with the DoE (2001) Policy on Inclusive Education. EWP 6 advocates a move away from exclusion to inclusion and that a psychological assessment process should be in line with policy's belief that all learners can learn if given the necessary support.

Secondly, this could imply that there are some learners who experience difficulty to learn and who are not receiving proper support. But they are instead being subjected to a learning system that is incompatible with or incomprehensible to them. There could be some external social factors that result in a diverse group of learners with diverse learning needs in the schooling system. Macfarlane (2005) states that at present, the education system seems to be out of step with the needs of these learners. This may result in a scenario which Macfarlane (2005) refers to as "the disappearing school children", whereby many learners drop out of the schooling system as it does not cater for their specific needs. He further argues that there is no point insisting that learners should go to school but not make it worth-while for them to be there.

4.3.6 Attitudes towards Psychologists:

Educators' responses to items assessing their general attitude towards psychologists are illustrated in Table 5 below:

Table 5

Attitudes toward psychologists			
Items:	Percentage of sample rating Agreement or Disagreement		
	1 & 2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 & 5 Disagree
If a pupil is experiencing difficulties, a psychological assessment should be recommended	81.6	10.3	8.1
Psychologists can provide a lot of information that could be helpful to educators	89.8	4	6.2
When it comes down to actually dealing with pupils in the classroom, psychological information is useless #	14.3	10.2	75.5
I think the services of psychologists should be made more available to learners and educators	87.7	8.2	4.1
I would never approach a psychologist for help #	5.1	9.2	85.7
Sending a learner to a psychologist is generally a waste of time #	0	4.1	95.9
I don't have much faith in psychologists #	5.1	16.3	78.6
I have a great respect for psychologists	83.7	10.3	6.1
Assessed learners improve in their problem areas	65.3	24.5	10.2

NB: # Reversed items: disagreement indicates positive attitude towards psychologists.

Table 5 above suggests that educators generally have a positive attitude towards psychologists. From Table 5, it is indicated that around 82 % of educators feel that if a learner experiences some difficulties, a psychological assessment should be recommended. Nearly 79 % of them have faith in the services rendered. Almost 96 % of the sampled educators regard the intervention of a psychologist as useful and not a waste

of time. Nearly 90 % of the sampled educators are of an opinion that psychologists can provide a lot of information that could be helpful to them. Regarding reversed items, 75 % are of an opinion that when dealing with pupils in the classroom, psychological information is useful. 85 % indicated that they would approach a psychologist for help whilst 78 % said they had faith in psychologists.

4.3.7 Attitudes toward assessment data:

Educators’ responses to items assessing their general attitude towards assessment data are supplied in Table 6 below:

Table 6

Attitudes toward assessment data			
	Percentage of sample rating		
	Agreement or Disagreement		
Items relating to assessment data in general:	1 & 2	3	4 & 5
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Psychological assessment data are not really relevant to educational decision-making #	20.4	8.2	71.4
Information obtained from assessment conducted by psychologists provides an objective way of confirming impressions about learners	81.6	10.3	8.1
Psychological assessment often relies too much on assessment data #	20.5	28.6	49.9
I believe the information yielded by psychological assessing to be very valuable	75.6	17.3	8.1
The use of jargon in reports of assessment data is not really a problem for educators	63.5	20.6	15.9

NB: # Reversed items: disagreement indicates positive attitude towards assessment data.

From Table 6 above, it appears as though the sampled educators hold assessment data in a higher esteem. It could be concluded that 71 % of the educators were of an opinion that

assessment data are relevant to educational decision-making. 76 % of them valued the information as yielded by psychological assessment. 82 % of the respondents felt that they also provide an objective way of confirming their own impressions about referred learners. These resonate well with the sampled educators who indicated an overwhelming positive attitude towards psychologists as table 4 suggests.

It should however be mentioned that the educators' high positive regard of assessment data in Table 6 above starkly contradicts their overall low negative rating of the assessment reports as shown in Table 4. This could mean that although educators value the interventions of psychological assessment services highly, they might find it difficult to either understand / interpret programmes in their reports or to implement them. This could imply that whilst educators have a high positive regard of the intervention of psychologists in 'dealing' with learners, they have serious reservations of the feedback aspect thereof. This, as Farre (1998) suggests, may indicate that even though most educators find psychological intervention useful, assessment reports fare less well in fulfilling educators' broader aims of helping learners improve in their problem areas.

Another possible interpretation could be that despite the educators' high regard for assessment data, they maybe lack the specialised skills to effect specialised tasks (which might be laid out in the report), to deal with learners experiencing some difficulties in learning. Another possibility could be that some schools simply do not have the necessary facilities to help such learners, like classes and personnel for either remedial and / or special education. This could mean that the educators' positive regard of assessment data is being threatened by their perceived inability to interact with the assessment reports and put them to profitable use. This seems to bode well with the sampled educators overall low number of referred learners, (table 2) and their general negative attitude towards feedback in psychological assessment reports (table 4).

4.4 Qualitative research results from the questionnaire (open-ended questions):

As already stated in paragraph 3.7.2, qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire were analysed using thematic content analysis. Analysis of

results in this regard focused more on the dominant and common responses of various issues supplied by the participants. Only the main common themes found in each question, are reported for each question. From the sample's responses towards the questions posed, responses were identified according to answers to each question asked. Information was coded and grouped per response to each question. Responses expressing a particular theme for each question were grouped together. A group of responses that had more similar answers than the others was regarded as a sample of the educators' views in that specific question. The same process was followed for each question. Both Sotho and Afrikaans written responses were translated verbatim by the researcher into English.

4.4.1 Definition of a psychological assessment:

From the different responses, educators seem to have an idea of what psychological assessment is about. The ones that seems to the most common definition supplied was that:

“it is a way of evaluating a learner's behaviour, example: emotional / social etc. that is the way psychologists assess learners to address their cognitive or behavioural problems”.

Another common response given as a definition of a psychological assessment was:

“to determine whether a learner is really flexible, equipped and can cope with his / her daily emotional, social and physical life”.

4.4.2 Why are psychological assessments used in schools?

It appears as though most educators are of an opinion that psychological assessments are done mainly for diagnostic purposes. Common responses given were:

“to help define a child's particular problem or set of problems”, “to determine which learners struggle with their daily-life school-situated problems so as to

stand by and support them to cope”, “For the identification of special needs children or that with learning barriers”.

4.4.3 Problems associated with psychological assessment at schools:

A number of common responses were identified. Amongst others was that:

“Psychologists in their private practice give a full report and those in the education department do not give reports which cover the child’s concerns and problems enough. But most parents don’t always have funds and medical aid to have children assessed by a private person.

“The education department’s services are overloaded and not able to give the schools needed guidance because they are not easily available and thus have to wait months for learners to be assessed. As such, children do not receive enough attention.”

“Because of difference in language, Sotho speaking learners in an English class are always tested in Sotho at the Child Guidance Clinic. This always gives some incorrect and misleading results. Educators are not always able to deal with specialised problems and therefore learners do not get the correct help early enough to prevent problems later in their school careers.

4.4.4 Role played by psychological assessment in a classroom situation:

Some common responses in this regard almost overlapped with those in paragraph 4.5.2. They included responses such as:

“It helps to pin-point a child’s particular problems so that specific assistance can sometimes be given to that learner.” It gives “more insight on how to handle a specific learner”. “It gives the educator a better understanding of a learner and

how to cope with him / her,” “Actually it only confirms more or less what you already suspect about a learner”.

4.4.5 On whether there are other methods that can be used:

It seems like the majority of the educators were of an opinion that there is a need for resources in the form of

“Experienced teachers and remedial experts who can be of assistance”.

There was a noted concern that: “When problems are too complicated, there can be no substitute for professional psychological assessment.”

4.4.6 On practical implementation of the recommendations of the psychological assessment reports:

There seems to be a serious problem when it comes to the practical implementation of the psychological assessment reports. Some of the concerns raised include the fact that:

“educators deal with a whole lot of children and not just a single individual”.

“Didn’t help at all or mean anything.” “Totally useless document in my opinion because even if things are suggested, how can non-medical aid learners afford these as they are no longer available at the former Child Guidance Clinic.”

4.4.7 Recommended improvement of psychological assessment services in general:

Educators indicated that:

“they need more training provided by experts and specialists in the psychological field.”

“Instead of just giving a written report, there should be ‘a sit-down’ visit between a psychologist, parents and educators in which a plan of action can be worked out. Greater parental involvement should be found as many of these learners usually have ‘problem’ parents”.

An even ‘stronger’ suggestion was also put forward to:

“Make psychological assessments readily available to schools as was the practice more than ten years ago.”

Section B:

4.5 Qualitative results from focus group interviews:

The participants in the focus groups interviews produced some qualitative data on the aims of the study. The information obtained from them was transcribed and analysed in order to gain insight into educators’ opinions, as well as their perceptions on psychological assessment in schools. The following main themes and sub-themes were extracted from the information that the focus groups supplied using thematic content analysis. Both Sotho and Afrikaans written responses were translated verbatim by the researcher into English so as to try and eliminate the possible but unintended distortion of responses.

4.5.1 Scholastic support resources / measures provided by the school:

From the schools represented by both groups, there seemed to be a clear structure in place to assist learners who might be struggling.

Participant, focus group A: “We start immediately at the lower grades, with grade R. where we identify the children because there are more possibilities of helping them and remedy the situation. The first step will be for the teacher to work with the child and then call the parents to see if they can assist. After that we call in the experts like you people from the psychological services of the department of education.”

Participant, focus group B: “you look at what you as a class teacher or as a subject teacher observe a kid in class. We do not use anything special except the learners’ support portfolios”.

“We would like to keep it with younger children because there are more possibilities. Helping them and rectify the situation at the lower grades. And we will start immediately with grade R and grade 1 where we will start to identify the learners. Some of these things are carried up into higher grades.”

4.5.2 How do educators perceive the use of psychological assessments at your school?

There seemed to be a positive regard for this service at surveyed schools.

“I found that it was really positive and useful to me. We would like to keep it with younger children especially at the lower grades where we will start to identify them because there are more possibilities of helping them and rectify the situation”. “They play a great role because they are going to make you to cope with anything you are having and to make you better and your job easier or lighter. Here in class we do not have much time to deal with those who need help because there are so many. “If we work with that child, we know already we are working with what kind of child.”

Members of both groups did however voice their frustrations about the service. Some of the problems associated with these assessments were: quote:

“shortage of personnel within the system that is supplied by the department of education. They are over-worked. You wait for them, sometimes three months, so that they can help. We fill the forms in and then they test them”.

“There is a big willingness from Inclusive Education section, but in as far as giving children the attention needed, they can’t cope ... they are stretched to the limit.”

So the workload is very high and you must in all the languages can work. You must teach children who go to school in their second or third language and I talk not only of black learners, but also of our white children who English is their second language.”

4.5.3 Other methods to be used in the place of psychological assessment:

Educators in focus group discussions seemed to have faith in what role could be played by psychological assessment process and the positive results it may yield in aiding learners who are struggling. They seemed to view it as the relevant method that can be utilised to intervene when learners experience some barriers. They however highlighted the fact that they lack the expertise to interact effectively with the process of psychological assessment.

“Many teachers are willing to be supportive but they complain that they do not know how to deal with children who are angry, withdrawn, whose grades are falling and who burst into tears for no apparent reason”

4.5.4 On the practical of implementation of the recommendations of the reports:

What came out clearly from the focus group interviews was that it was difficult for educators to implement the recommendations of the reports. As ordinary educators, they are not schooled in the operational art of adapting the curriculum for all learners in their classes. That, according to them, needs a specialist who is trained to deal with that, but unfortunately, schools do not have such personnel.

“If you do not have a specialist teacher, how then is it going to be practical for you to implement those recommendations? If you have qualified remedial teachers, they could sit down with you and they would help you to interpret the report. Some schools had specialised staff but the education department went

through a process of withdrawing all those people from the staff allocation” participant, focus group A.

4.5.5 Comments on the support received from psychological service at the District-Based Support Team

All groups decried and lamented the low level of support they received from psychological service at the DBST. They however understood this perceived lack of support to be as a result of the shortage of personnel and this appears to frustrate the educators.

“There is an element of willingness on their part to help. The general feeling is that it appears as though there are not enough people to handle the load. There is a change in reaction if you are so willing as an educator to do something, and you play your part to do the best that you can for learners and expecting someone else to play his / part and that is not forth-coming”.

4.5.6 Empowering educators on how to help learners experiencing some barriers to learning?

Educators in both groups expressed their lack of knowledge or inadequacy in interacting with learners experiencing some barriers to learning. There was a general call for the deployment of experts at school level so as to deal with this problem adequately.

“We need somebody that has special knowledge to overcome those barriers to come into the team School-Based Support Team (SBST). If we can get more information and some workshops on how we can handle some of these things”.

Section C:

4.6 Triangulation of results:

In this section the information gathered from both the questionnaire and focus group interviews was integrated to form a holistic overview of psychological assessment in schools. For this study, methodological triangulation of results was used for “checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data-collection methods” (Patton, 2002: p. 464). This was done in terms of integrating information obtained from each data-gathering method in order to enhance the quality and credibility of the study. It entailed analysing the data from the quantitative questionnaires and then comparing the results thereof with the data from the focus group interviews for verification and validation.

Patton (2002) maintains that the rationale for the specific use of methodological triangulation can be found in the limitations of using single research methodology. He further argues that the aim of reconciling data through triangulation is to provide the researcher with corroboration of results using different methods. By combining multiple methods and data sources, “a researcher can hope to overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-methods studies” (Patton, 2002: p. 464).

4.6.1 An integrative overview of the findings:

Information gathered through the research questionnaire as well as the focus group interviews thus needed to be both consolidated and integrated using qualitative data triangulation. This was done for the reconciling of quantitative and qualitative data. From the information already presented (data results from closed questions, open-ended questions and focus group interviews), overarching key themes emerged. An overview of the overarching key themes identified is presented in Table 7 below. Where possible, statements were given in direct quotations so as to highlight the actual expressions as given by the different respondents and highlighted in the reported and recorded of data.

Table 7

Triangulation of results highlighting themes and findings

Overarching Themes	Quantitative support for themes (4.3)	Qualitative Data		Minor Issues	Findings
		Open-ended (4.5)	Focus groups (4.7)		
Inadequate availability of psychological service	Make psychological service readily available to schools as was the case more than ten years ago	Services are over-loaded, we wait for months for learners to be assessed	They can't cope, they are stretched to the limit, over-worked and service is not forth-coming	Only learners with extreme 'cases' get referred for intervention in the form of psychological assessment	Psychological service is still a scarce resource in schools and does not reach the desired broader spectrum of learners
Reservations regarding written feedback / report content	It did not address their concerns about the learner and did not hint on the educator's role.	A total useless piece of document which did not help or mean anything	Here in class we do not have much time to deal with those who need help as they are many	Psychologists in their private practice give a full report whilst those in education do not do so.	Written psychological assessment reports are not useful to educators as it is difficult to interpret them
Difficult to implement recommendations	Schools lack remedial /special classes for such learners	They are written in a jargon that isn't clear to educators	No specialist means one cannot implement those recommendations	Educators deal with lots of learners and not just single individuals	It is difficult for educators to implement recommendations
Positive attitude towards psychologists	Their intervention is regarded as being useful and not a waste of time as they provide helpful information	There can be no substitute for professional psychological assessment	They play a great role as they make you cope, make you better and your job easier or lighter	Non-medical aid learners cannot afford these services as they are no longer available at the Child Guidance Clinic	Educators have a healthy attitude towards the service of psychologists and psychological assessment
Healthy perception for assessment data	It provides an objective way of confirming impressions about learners	It helps to pinpoint a child's problem so that assistance can be given	Actually, it confirms more or less what you suspect about a referred learner	Sotho learners in an English class are tested in Sotho. This gives some misleading results	Educators have a high regard for assessment data and value its worth for decision-making
Concerns around the shortage of specialist personnel	Educators do not have specialised skills to effect specialised tasks	Educators are not able to deal with learners needing specialised focus	Specialist / remedial teacher at school level could help to interpret reports	We do not use anything special except the support portfolios of the learners	Educators need specialist personnel at school level who could help them with effective intervention

Table 7 above indicates that an overarching theme was identified by a particular data gathering method in order to see what common results or themes are across data sets to indicate the main findings of this study.

4.6.2 Summary on the triangulation of results:

It emerged from the results of both the questionnaire and the focus group interviews that even though there were some points of concern regarding psychological service, the educators felt that the service should nonetheless be strengthened and maintained. The educators need specialist people (at school level if possible) to help them with the interpretation of the report data as they found it difficult to implement the recommendations contained in the report. This runs the risk of creating some despondency from the educators and this in turn results in the non-utilisation of the school psychological service. It appears like educators want to see the results of the whole process, from identifying the learner who experiences some barriers to learning, to seeing him / her performance improving after some intervention, as opposed to just referring and not being able to implement the process of helping the learner.

4.7 Researcher as a source of reference:

Experience gathered and observed on the utilisation of psychological assessment services was mainly through interactions with educators and learners within educational settings as a member of a District Based Support Team, (DBST), formerly known as Support Services as well as my tenure at an internship site. One of the main tasks was to administer psychometric assessment to learners who were referred to the DBST and give feedback to educators and parents of the learners who were referred for psycho-educational assessment.

Psychological assessment within this context seems to operate on two different scenarios. On the one hand its service and utilisation in township schools is all but non-existent. On the other, former model-C schools appear to utilise this service to the fullest. The

utilisation thereof seems to be for some other way-ward reasons other than what psychological assessment is intended for.

◆ **It is used as a ‘legal route’ to retain learners:**

Often, towards the end of the year, there would be an influx of referrals asking for scholastic assessment of some learners. The suspicion was that educators would suddenly realise that certain learners would have to be retained in a grade and not be promoted on to the next one. Lawfully, a learner may not repeat a grade without proof of external intervention by the DBST (evidenced by a low scoring in a psychological assessment). It thus seems that psychological assessment (and reports thereof) is used as an authoritative tool to both confirm and support the educators’ decisions to hold back some learners.

The sole aim of referring a learner for scholastic assessment should be to assess the learner (early in the year preferably), so as to determine his / her potential and ability to learn. By way of identifying strengths and weaknesses, proper intervention strategies can be done in order to assist a learner to cope.

◆ **Used as a means of creating and or maintaining posts:**

Upon being assessed, learners acquire a ‘clinical number’. Depending on the number of learners assessed, (and recommendations for special class or remedial teaching being made), the school then qualifies for an additional post or the retention of the existing one. Thus it would seem as though learners are being referred *en masse* for scholastic assessment, not with the intention of intervening, but with the hope that sufficient learners would be ‘found’ to keep the existing special and / or remedial classes or even create new ones.

The sad thing about these ‘special’ classes especially in most of the former Model C schools is that they do not reflect the demographics of the schools within which they

exist. Many of them do not mirror-image the enrolment population of the school. Often there seems to be an overrepresentation (if not total) of black learners in these classes. A perception is thus created that assessment in this scenario creates self-fulfilling prophecies about certain educators and certain schools.

The same myth applies to school beginners. Some schools would recommend that a learner should be assessed for school readiness (even though they are of a school going age), before being enrolled. Most of these learners are often those whose home language is different from the school's language of learning and teaching (LOLT). Thus on the basis of the low scores from the assessment data, the school would then have a 'license' to enrol the learner in grade 0 instead of grade 1 as his / her age rightfully dictates. Some early learning centres would refer learners whose progress they have doubts about, for assessment. This is usually based on their good reputation of preparing learners well for school upon graduating from their centres. They would therefore seek some 'legal' ways (in the form of psychological assessment) of withholding those who might be at risk of tarnishing their good image if released to schools.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has put the whole study into perspective. It gave a holistic picture of the research results of the quantitative questionnaire as well as the qualitative focus group interviews. Information obtained was integrated through the triangulation thereof so as to form a holistic state of affairs of psychological assessment in schools. Having given the interpretation of the results and analysis thereof, further discussions on the findings, limitations of the study as well as the recommendations for further research are discussed in the next chapter. This also includes suggestions for establishing a programme of action so as to guide the process of psychological assessment in schools.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, results were presented, analysed and interpreted. It was done by giving both the quantitative and qualitative results as well as the triangulation of the findings. This chapter covers the limitations that were experienced during the study. A tentative agenda on psychological assessment in schools is generated. Based on the findings of the study, concluding remarks are made as well as suggestions and recommendations for further studies with regard to support for learners.

5.2 DISCUSSION

5.2.1 Quantitative questionnaire:

The demographic characteristics of the sampled educators as reflected in tables 1, 2 were not significantly related to their positive attitudes towards psychological assessment shown in table 5. Hagborg and Aiello-Coultier (1994) claim that one of the more consistent findings in the literature has been that more experienced educators tend to hold a less favourable view of psychological services. It seems like this claim did not hold true for this study. The majority of the sampled educators in this study (73 %) were older (in the age group 41 – 50 years) and had a significant number of years in service (paragraph 4.3.1 and table 1). They seem to hold a more positive attitude towards psychological intervention even though they showed some noticeable reservations about assessment data.

It should be noted that even though the sampled educators' attitude towards psychologists can be regarded as a positive one, educators did not seem to utilise the services of psychological assessment quiet fully. This is evidenced in the low number of

learners that each of the sampled educators referred or recommended for psychological assessment. It could imply that only learners with extreme 'cases' get referred for intervention. What needs to be determined is how are other learners who experience some barriers to learning (including those with social as well as emotional instabilities), being assisted and supported at school level.

There seems to be three main problem areas that prompt educators to refer learners for psychological assessment. They are reading, writing and behavioural problems. In most of the cases, referred learners get recommended for remedial in the form of enrichment programmes, special classes and / or specialised education.

Feedback to educators in the form of written reports on the assessed learners were regarded by the sampled educators as being meaningless and of no value if there are no resources at school level. It is generally impossible for the educators to practically implement the recommendations of the psychologist as that requires the skills of a Remedial specialist or a Special education specialist. It could be concluded that educators are perhaps not equipped to interact with the jargon in the written report and are therefore not eager to refer learners if they (educators) cannot put the recommendations into practice.

5.2.2 Open-ended questions:

Educators in this study appear to have an idea of what more or less a psychological assessment entails. It seems as though many believe that it can play a significant role in helping identify learners experiencing barriers to learning as well as how to engage with them. They however have some serious reservations around the reports written on psychological assessments done and the practicality of implementing the recommendations thereof. The educators also expressed their frustrations around the non-availability and / or shortage of the personnel to render both an effective and meaningful intervention through psychological service at school level. Educators seem to be of an

opinion that personnel at the district office are overwhelmed by their workload and cannot engage meaningfully with all the learners in schools.

This appeared to be in line with the findings in this study's literature review of the research conducted by Mpofu *et al* (1997). It found that service availability of psychological assessment and public awareness were rated low. One of the identified reasons as highlighted in paragraph 2.5.1 was the generally poor public image of school psychologists. Coupled with that was the shortage of personnel as well as negative attitudes towards some educational policies and systems.

5.2.3 Focus group interviews:

There was a general positive regard of psychological service by the sampled educators. They applauded the services rendered but decried the serious shortage of personnel from the DBST. The shortage results in educators having to wait for longer periods (up to three months), for intervention. This has a negative impact on their work. They were willing to play their role as educators in class with regard to assisting learners who need extra attention. They however seemed to feel inadequately empowered to interact meaningfully with those kinds of learners and would rather have them being attended to by a specialist. There seemed to be a general outcry for the employment of remedial specialists at school level who could help them to interpret some of the reports as supplied by the psychologists as well as implement some of the suggested programmes for those learners. The sampled educators also voiced their desire to be empowered through some workshops on how to interact with learners who experienced some barriers to learning.

5.3 Limitations of the study

A number of aspects created obstacles to the expected smooth running of the research process. Amongst others, (but not limited to), were the following:

- Conducting a research study on known people proved to have a negative effect. Almost all of the sampled participants in the focus group interviews knew the researcher to be a member of their District Based Support Team, even though the initial questionnaire was delivered by another colleague. The subject information letter (Appendix E), which stated that the research was for the completion of study purposes, did not appear to convince them. Despite these measures, the data might have been influenced by participants' familiarity with the researcher.
- Lack of available time on the part of educators prevented some of them from being able to attend a focus group discussion. Following the conditions under which permission to conduct this research were granted (Appendix A), it was impossible to get as many educators as one would have liked after working hours, or enough educators having a common flexitime to participate in the discussions.
- Some educators were neither willing to deviate from their scheduled programmes after school nor were they able to arrange an additional date for a focus group discussion. The only time they were prepared to participate in the study was during the school's tea or lunch break. Unfortunately, these breaks were too short for the standard one hour envisaged for an efficient focus group interview.
- Participants for the focus group interviews needed to be re-assured that the discussions were solely part of a study for the fulfilment of a master's degree purpose. A suspicion on their part was that this appeared like a fact-finding expedition that could be used against them later, if they spoke their true minds. They therefore, seemed unwilling to just give the information especially on a tape recorder, as well as having to attach their signatures. This was despite the covering letter or subject information letter (Appendix F) detailing the aims of the study.
- The referral process at schools that participated in this study seems to be handled by a selected team of educators. As such, the entire process is entrusted in the

hands of very few educators or it is solely at the discretion of the information as supplied to the Life Orientation / Guidance educator. It would therefore, seem that a considerable number of the sampled group felt that certain parts of the questionnaire were not applicable to them as they were not directly involved in the referral process and thus, did not answer such parts in the questionnaire.

5.4 Implications for further research:

This study yielded a number of areas that warranted a further research:

- Since not all educators are involved in the referral system within the schools, but only designated members of the School Based Support Teams, a similar descriptive study could be conducted mainly for educators who are not directly involved with the referral process of learners.
- Similar research could be done focussing on the parents of children who have been evaluated using psychological assessment. This would be to establish their own perceptions towards assessment and to determine the impact, if any, psychological assessment had on their children. That is, whether there was any significant improvement in their scholastic performance or change on their children's behaviour after having been exposed to a psychological assessment process.
- While this study provided a general positive feedback on educators' perceptions of psychological assessment, another study could be done mainly for areas that were rated negatively around psychological assessment. This could include areas such as service availability and the utilisation thereof, recommendations made in reports, as well as the report's structure and content.
- Given the problem areas highlighted by the participants in this study regarding support services to learners, indications were that educational support services are

generally lacking within the current South African school system. A study could be done to determine whether there is room within the current education system for these services or not.

- Another study could be conducted and include a larger sample size, which would increase the power of multiple analysis and the generalisation of findings as results representing opinions of a larger educators' population in the province.

5.5 Recommendations:

Having noted the concerns as raised by the sampled educators around the problem areas regarding psychological assessment, the following recommendations are suggested in order to try and address the highlighted areas of concern as noted in the overarching key themes in the triangulation of results in paragraph 4.6 and Table 7:

5.5.1 Ensure adequate human resource provision:

Educators in this study made a call for psychological services to be readily available to schools because there are no services forthcoming. In order to address the inadequate availability of psychological services and the delivery thereof at school level, as well as ensuring that they reach the desired broader spectrum of learners, it is recommended that the education department should make sure that there is adequate human resource provisioning.

Educators furthermore stated that after identifying learners and referring them for psychological assessment, they often had to wait long periods for personnel from the district office to come and assess the learners. Responses from the questionnaire as well as inputs from the focus groups interviews indicated that there is a dire shortage of specialist personnel within the education system. Those employed presently within the education system are stretched to the limit and cannot interact meaningfully with all the schools. According to the DoE (2005)'s report on Education Statistics and Education

Management Information System, there were 355 schools, with 115 845 learners registered at these schools, and 4 064 educators within Fezile Dabi Education District where the study was conducted. There were only 18 officials from the Inclusive Education section (during the execution of the study) who were supposed to attend to all the learners who might experience some barriers to learning and if needs be, also offer emotional and social support to the educators, too.

5.5.2 Have remedial educators at school level:

Sampled educators voiced their frustrations around the written reports. They claimed that these reports did not address their concerns about the referred learner(s) and did not hint on the educator's role. As such, they regarded them as totally useless pieces of documents which did not help or mean anything at all to them. In order to address the serious reservations by educators regarding written psychological assessment feedback / report content (which is not useful to them as it is difficult to interpret), it is recommended that schools should have qualified remedial educators who could help others to interpret the reports. Instead of just giving written reports to schools, there should be a meeting which involves a remedial specialist, psychologist, referred and assessed learner's parents and the class educator wherein a plan of action will be worked out. It must be emphasised that the full reports should contain sufficient information on suggestions for parents and educators and specify each one's role clearly. It should also be presented in a clear manner which would be easy for everyone to understand as the use of jargon in reports of assessment creates problems for other stake-holders.

5.5.3 Establish functional District Based Support Teams (DBST):

Educators pointed out that their schools lacked remedial specialists as well as special education specialists for learners in need of such resources. It was therefore, practically impossible for them to carry-out the recommendations because they were often written in a jargon that was not clear to educators. In order to address the educators' difficulty in implementing the recommendations as laid out in the assessed learners' written reports, it is recommended that the education department should establish functional District Based Support Teams (DBST)

To address and attend meaningfully to the inadequate availability of psychological services as already stated in paragraph 5.4.1 above, mechanisms (which must support educators in respect of support to learners who experience barriers to learning and development), should be put in place. This should include what Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold (2003) term as having clear job descriptions and lines of accountability for education officials based at the district. This would be in order to both defuse and allay confusion concerning their roles and responsibilities. Taylor *et al* (2003) state that the officials based at the district are best placed to grasp and act on the local conditions under which educators operate at school level.

This study seeks to recommend and align itself with the policy of EWP 6 which puts emphasis on the establishment of operational District Based Support Teams (DBST) to provide co-ordinated professional support services to schools. The support team should comprise of personnel with specialised knowledge and skills, which will incorporate psychologists, socio-pedagogues, speech therapists, physiotherapists / occupational therapists, and learning support facilitators. Their task would then be to evaluate programmes, diagnose their effectiveness and suggest modifications for educators to implement at school level as well as in their classrooms in order to support those learners who experience barriers.

The main role and function of the DBST would then be to monitor and support the educators at school level. They would assist educators in creating greater flexibility in their teaching methods and in assessment of learning through the provision of some illustrative learning programmes, learning support materials and assessment instruments. This would also include offering empowerment through training of and work-shops to educators on how to attend meaningfully to the needs of learners, especially those experiencing some barriers to learning. Educators will therefore, receive support in the form of staff development, in-service education and training and the opportunity to collaborate with other education support personnel at district support services.

Another important task of the DBST to be coupled with the main role stated above would then be to ensure that proper provincial as well as national guidelines for supporting and

referring learners experiencing barriers to learning are followed to the letter by the educators at school.

The DBST should furthermore attend to the low levels of essential resources such as standardised measures. Farre (1998) states that given the lack of standardised measures in many children's home languages and the fact that many psychologists are not proficient in these languages, any assessment would then represent a particular challenge for psychological assessment for these learners. It should therefore, be another task of the DBST to ensure that recommendations for appointments are done according to such needs and relevant personnel as well as making material resources available.

5.5.4 Allow enough time for psychological assessment:

Sampled educators indicated that they have a positive attitude towards the services of psychologists and psychological assessment process. Their intervention was regarded as being useful and not a waste of time as they provided helpful information. It is therefore, recommended that in order to both sustain and maintain the educators' positive regard for psychologists, more time should be given to psychologists employed by the education department for psychological assessment. When proper referral procedures are followed to the letter, good standardised tests can be useful in identifying learners who might benefit from specialised learning contexts. Proper referral procedures refer to the intervention system whereby there are case conferences in which all stake-holders (identified learner, his / her parents, educators, DBST member) meet to confer, share information and make a decision to refer a learner for psychological assessment. The information that has been collected on the failure of different interventions will assist in decision making and guiding the selection of assessment strategies. Assessment techniques that should be selected on the basis of what decision needs to be made and what data need to be collected to arrive at that decision.

This (standardised tests can be useful in identifying learners who might benefit from specialised learning contexts) neither disputes nor does it negate the recommendations of the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS, 1997) report. The

report calls for the discontinuation of the routine use of standardised tests for placement of learners in specialised learning contexts. Another call from the report is for the freeing of psychologists employed by the education department from ‘testing’ or performing specialist assessment functions. The ‘freeing from testing’ will enable them to use their expertise to address other needs such as those relating to social and emotional issues in ways which will impact positively on the learning experiences of many more learners.

Contrary to that, ‘testing’ is only one of the many steps in the psychological assessment process. Good and proper psychological assessment procedures can help all stake-holders benefit before learners get therapy. As long as the majority of learners remain deeply affected by poverty, disease, their parents’ illiteracy and unemployment, a definitive spectrum of psychological assessment intervention in assisting such vulnerable children remains essential in overcoming their adversity. In such instances, psychological assessment (if used correctly), can provide information which is both relevant and invaluable and might even help alleviate some social problems as alluded to in paragraphs 2.9.2 and 2.9.3.

5.5.5 Allow educators to also access high quality tools:

Educators indicated their positive attitude towards assessment data and had a high regard for its value in educational decision-making. For them, it did not only provide an objective way of confirming impressions about learners, but they claimed that it also helped to pinpoint a child’s problem so that assistance could be given. In order to sustain as well as maintain this positive perception, it is recommended that educators should also be allowed to access high quality tools.

Sampled educators expressed their need for empowerment in order to be self-reliant and not being entirely dependent on psychologists (given their critical shortage) for psychological assessment. This study seeks to align itself with the sentiments echoed by Foxcroft *et al* (2004) in allowing other people access to certain instruments. They are of

an opinion that new tests need to be developed to cater for gaps in the existing array of tests. An argument brought forward was that new tests to be developed should be those:

- that educators can administer as too few psychologists are being employed in the educational system to carry out the psychological function (as per the Health professions Act, 56 of 1974 mentioned in 1.6.2 which states that only registered psychologists are allowed to perform psychological tests),
- that the educators can use to identify learning potential in children,
- for assessment of language proficiency,
- with standardised national scholastic performance (not only for diagnosis of learning problems, but also for remediation purposes) and lastly
- those that tap potential cross-culturally.

5.5.6 Strengthen support structure at school level:

Sampled educators expressed the need for specialists in areas such as remedial education as well as special education at school level. In order to address their concerns around the shortage of specialist personnel at school level who could help them with effective intervention strategies, it is recommended that support structure at school level be strengthened.

Each educational institution should have a strong internal support structure in a school, called a Site-Based Support Team (SBST). The establishment of the SBST would then be to cater for learners experiencing learning barriers as well as sensitising schools to diversity. EWP 6 describes SBST as a committee of staff members, comprising of educators at school level whose purpose is to consult with individual educators who request assistance regarding learners experiencing barriers to learning. The rationale is

based on the notion that regular classroom educators need support to assist those learners who experience some barriers to learning. The SBST will then be supported and strengthened by the DBST so that they are fully functional and operational. The team would in turn be able to attend efficiently to the needs of the identified learners (given the critical shortage of specialist personnel).

Every school should (through the SBST and occasionally through the help of a specialist), strive to establish a learning environment that makes the curriculum accessible to all learners and provide every learner with the opportunity to realise his / her full potential. It should also therefore, be the aim of every school to prevent, compensate for, and / or remove the development of learning or developmental barriers as soon as possible. Besides being involved centrally in identifying 'at risk' learners, the broad functions of the SBST would then also be to:

- ensure that the school's education programmes prevent the development of barriers to learning and development,
- ascertain that the teaching and learning environment at school in general and the classroom in particular, is responsive to the full range of learning needs,
- ensure the early identification of the learning and developmental barriers experienced by the learners,
- analyse the learning and developmental barriers and tailor the curriculum, assessment and instruction for learners who may require support,
- assist the class educator to develop Individual Education and Development Plan (IEDP) for the learners as highlighted in paragraph 2.3.2. of the literature review of this study,
- monitor the implementation of the Individual Education and Development Plan (IEDP) and

- Refer the learners to the DBST for psychological assessment only if they do not progress according to their IEDP providing there is clear evidence that extra work was done at school level to assist the learner but bore no fruit.

Following the inputs from the respondents in this study, this report wishes to reiterate and recommend the implementation of the DoE's (1997) report of the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS). The report made some recommendations on the use of Standardised Tests. Among them were calls for the:

- Early identification and assessment of learners who are likely to experience barriers to learning and development, as well as early intervention to be a national priority and not just that of the Department of Education.
- Urgent re-evaluation of all standardised tests whereby only those which have proven usefulness in identifying barriers to learning, development and intervention as part of the assessment process should be used.

Conclusion:

Problem areas encountered and those that threatened the success of the study during the execution thereof, were highlighted in this chapter. Suggestions for future studies were put in perspective. Recommendations to counter problems experienced at schools were also made. Psychologists and other therapists within the education set-up have the responsibility of knitting psychological assessment into the curriculum and use it to construct an enabling environment in the inclusive classroom situation. The rapidly changing social and political situation in South Africa necessitates an instance where assessment does justice to people from different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, continuous research and improvement of tests should be undertaken for tests developed in South Africa as well as for international ones so as to counter the assessment of learners using some technically inadequate instruments.

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APPENDIX A:

FREE STATE PROVINCE



Ref no: 16/4/1/.....-.....

FS460C

APPLICATION FORM TO REGISTER RESEARCH PROJECTS IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- ❖ Please complete all the sections of this form that are applicable to you. If any section is not applicable please indicate this by writing N/A.
- ❖ If there are too few lines in any of the sections please attach the additional information as an addendum.
- ❖ Attach all the required documentation so that your application can be processed.

Send the application to:

Chief Education Specialist: IRRISS (Institution and Research Registration and Independent Schools Subsidies)

Room 1213

C R Swart building
Free State Department of Education

Private Bag X20565
Bloemfontein
9300.

Tel: 4048077/4048075
Fax: 4048074

1 Title (e.g. Mr, Ms, Dr, Prof):

M	r		
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2 Initials and surname:

M	J		S	E	T	S	H	E	D	I					
---	---	--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--	--	--	--	--

3 Telephone: Home:

N	/	A	-											
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Work:

0	1	6	-	9	7	3	9	0	7	8		
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Cell:

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Fax:

0	1	6	-	9	7	6	0	5	5	4	
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e-mail: setshedim@edu.fs.gov.za

			-								
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4

Home Address:

1	1	7	9	2		B	L	O	C	K		X			
M	A	B	O	P	A	N	E								
												0	1	9	6

5

Postal Address:

P	O		B	O	X		3	7	6						
M	O	R	U	L	A										
												0	1	9	6

6.1

Name of tertiary institution/research institute

University of the Witwatersrand

6.2

Occupation: Senior Education Specialist

6.3

Place of employment: Fezile Dabi Education District (Sasolburg)

7

Name of course: MA –Counselling Psychology

8

Name of supervisor/promoter: Dr F. Strydom

Please attach a letter from your supervisor confirming that you have registered for the course you are following.

9

Title of research project:

Investigating the use of psychological assessment in South African schools.

10

Concise explanation of the research topic:

To determine how are psychological assessments used currently at school level in general and how useful are they in the classroom situation in particular

11

Application value that the research may have for the Free State Education Department:

The feedback from the educators will help in attempting to improve the services of the DBST based on the educators' attitude towards psychological assessment

- 12.1 The full particulars of the group with whom the research is to be undertaken:**
Educators from five selected schools in Fezile Dabi district
- 12.2 List of schools/Directorates in the Department/Officials:**
- 12.3 Grades:**
All grades
- 12.4 Age and gender groups:**
25 years and above both males and females
- 12.5 Language groups:**
English, Afrikaans & Southern-Sotho
- 12.6 Numbers to be involved in the research project:**
Approximately 120
- 13 Full particulars of how information will be obtained e.g. questionnaires, interviews, standardized tests. **Please include copies of questionnaires, questions that will be asked during interviews, tests that will be completed or any other relevant documents regarding the acquisition of information.**

Questionnaires and focus group interviews
- 14 The starting and completion dates** of the research project: (Please bear in mind that research is usually not allowed to be conducted in the schools during the fourth term.)
From 16 July 2005 TO 22 September 2005
- 15 Will the research be conducted during or after school hours?**
At the educators' own flexi-time
- 16 If it is necessary to use school hours for the research project, how much time will be needed?**
N/A
- 17 How much time will be spent on the research project** by individual educators and/or learners?

Approximately one (1) hour

18

Have you included:

- 18.1 A letter from **your supervisor** confirming your registration for the course you are following? Yes/No
- 18.2 A draft of the letter that will be sent **to the principals** requesting permission to conduct research In their schools? Yes/No
- 18.3 A draft of the letter that will be sent **to parents** requesting permission for their children to participate in the research project? (If applicable) Yes/No
- 18.4 Copies of **questionnaires** that you wish to distribute? Yes/No
- 18.5 A list of **questions** that will be asked during the interviews? Yes/No

I confirm that all the information given on this form is correct.

SIGNATURE

DATE 20/05/2005

FREE STATE PROVINCE



Enquiries : Mr W B van Rooyen
Reference no. : 16/4/1/30-2005

Tel : (051) 404 807
Fax : (051) 404807

2005-05-25

Mr. M. J. Setshedi
P.O. Box 376
Morula
0196

Dear Mr. Setshedi

REGISTRATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

1. This letter is in reply to your application for the registration of your research project.
2. **Research topic: Investigating the use of psychological assessment in South African schools.**
3. Your research project has been registered with the Free State Education Department and may conduct research in the Free State Department of Education under the following conditions:
 - 3.1 Educators and learners, participate voluntarily in the project.
 - 3.2 The names of all schools, educators, and learners involved remain confidential.
 - 3.3 The questionnaires are completed and the interviews are conducted outside normal tuition time.
 - 3.4 This letter is shown to all participating persons.
4. You are requested to donate a report on this study to the Free State Department of Education. It will be placed in the Education Library, Bloemfontein. It will be appreciated if you would bring a summary of the report on a computer disc, so that it may be placed on the website of the Department.
5. Once your project is complete, you may be invited to present your findings to the relevant persons in the FS Department of Education. This will increase the possibility of implementing your findings wherever possible.
6. You are requested to confirm acceptance of the above conditions in writing to:

The Head: Education, for attention: CES: IRRISS
Room 1204, Provincial Government Building
Private Bag X20565, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9301

We wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

WB van Rooyen
CES: IRRISS

APPENDIX C:



School of Human and Community Development
Researcher: Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050
Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: (012) 7010-372, Cell: (072) 1897-069
24 November 2004

The District Director
Fezile Dabi Education District
Private Bag X 2018
SASOLBURG

Sir

RE: Permission to conduct research at schools in your district:

I am an MA (Counselling Psychology) student at the University of the Witwatersrand and would like to conduct a research for the purposes of obtaining the said degree. Permission is thus, hereby sought to carry out a research project at some schools in your district.

My research topic is: **Investigating the use of psychological assessment in South African schools.** This study seeks to assess how useful these measurements are to educators in classroom settings. It also aims to tap into the educators' understanding of psychological assessment as well as to identify their perceptions about the role of this service. Find enclosed, a copy of the questionnaire that will be given to educators to complete.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully

M. J. Setshedi (Mr)

Dr F. Strydom (Supervisor)

APPENDIX D



School of Human and Community Development

Researcher: Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050

Johannesburg, South Africa

06 June 2005

The Head: Education: Att: CES:IRRIS
Room 1204, Provincial Government Building
Private Bag X 20565
BLOEMFONTEIN
9301

Sir / Madam

Re: Confirming acceptance of conditions of the research project:

Your letter dated 2005-05-25 has reference:

This serves to confirm that I accept the conditions for the registration and conducting of my research project with the Free State Education Department. I also declare to always abide by the stipulated conditions during the execution of the study.

Thanking you for the permission and registration of my research project.

Yours sincerely

M.J. Setshedi

APPENDIX E: Subject Information Letter (Questionnaire Based Research)



School of Human and Community Development
Researcher: Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050
Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: (012) 842 3523, Cell: (072) 1897-069

My name is John Setshedi. I am conducting a research for the purpose of obtaining a Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is the role played by psychological services in South African schools. The main aim being to determine how useful are psychological assessments at school level in general and in the classroom situation in particular. Part of the research aims to explore how your experience of psychological assessment has affected your perceptions of its significance and relevance to your workplace. I am also exploring the ways in which service availability and utilization thereof might lead to a better understanding of the section. I would therefore like to invite you to participate in this research.

Participation in this research will entail completing the attached questionnaire. It will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to complete or not to complete the questionnaire. While questions are asked about your demographic details, no identifying information, such as your name or Persal / Identity Number, is asked for, and as such, you will remain anonymous. Your completed questionnaire will not be seen by any person in this department or section at any time, (except by my research supervisor), and will only be processed by myself. Your responses will only be looked at in relation to all other responses. This means that the feedback that will be given to the school will be in the form of group responses and not individual perceptions.

If you choose to participate in the study, please complete the attached questionnaire as carefully and as honestly as possible, put it in the provided envelope and seal it. Then hand it to the Life Orientation HoD. This will ensure that no one has access to the completed questionnaires, and will guarantee your confidentiality. I will collect them from him/her within a week's time. If you do return your questionnaire, this will be considered as consent to participate in the study. You will then be invited to participate in a focus group discussion of issues around psychological assessment at a later date.

This research will contribute to exploring your perceptions associated with psychological assessment, as well as your understanding of what contribution, if any, do these measures make in a school setting. This can help to inform the school support service in exploring methods of improving service delivery.

Thanking you in anticipation.

M.J. Setshedi

APPENDIX F: Subject Information Letter (Interview)



School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050
Johannesburg, South Africa
e-mail: itsoseng.clinic@up.ac.za

My name is John Setshedi, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is the role played by psychological services in South African schools. The main aim is to determine how useful are psychological assessments at school level in general and in the classroom situation in particular. Part of the research aims to explore how your experience of psychological assessment has affected your perceptions of its significance and relevance to your workplace. In addition to this, I am exploring the ways in which service availability and utilization thereof might lead to and understanding of the section. I would therefore, like to invite you to participate in this research.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by myself, at school, at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will last for approximately one hour. With your permission this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not to participate in the study. All of your responses will be kept confidential, and no information that could identify you would be included in the research report. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation, and will only be processed by myself. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

If you choose to participate in the study please submit your name to the Life Orientation Head of Department or the school secretary. I will then contact you in order to discuss your participation. Alternatively I can be contacted telephonically at 072 1897 069 or at 012 842 3523.

This research will contribute to exploring what are the problems associated with perceptions of psychological assessments, as well as your understanding of what contribution, if any, do these tests make in a school setting. This can help to inform the school support service in exploring methods of improving service delivery.

Kind Regards

M.J. Setshedi

APPENDIX G: Consent Form (Interview & Recording)



School of Human and Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand



I _____, consent to being interviewed by John Setshedi for his study on “Investigating the use of psychological assessment in South African schools”. I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed _____

I _____ consent to my interview with John Setshedi for his study on “Investigating the use of psychological assessment in South African schools” being tape-recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

Signed _____

APPENDIX H:



School of Human and Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand



10 May 2005

FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

C R Swart building

Free State Department of Education

Private Bag X20565

Bloemfontein

9300

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

As the research supervisor of **Mr. John Setshedi (student number 9710279Y)** I would like to confirm that he is registered for M.A. in Community-Based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. He is currently in the process of completing his master's research report entitled:

**INVESTIGATING THE USE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS**

If there are any queries in this regard please contact me for further information

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Strydom'.

Dr. Francois Strydom

Email: strydomf@umthombo.wits.ac.za

Tel: (011) 717-4547

APPENDIX I: Questionnaire

SECTION 1: This section concerns your demographic details:

Please fill in the answer in the space provided:

1.1 Please specify your gender _____

1.2 Please specify your age _____

1.3 How many years of teaching experience do you have? _____

1.4 Which grade or speciality do you teach (e.g. grade 1, remedial etc)? _____

1.5 Is your school situated in a rural or urban area? _____

SECTION 2: This section focuses on how and when are psychological assessments used currently at your school?

2.1.1 Please specify the extent of your contact with psychologists: (Tick the appropriate circle):

- ① I consulted them regarding a personal problem.
- ② I consulted them regarding a learner.
- ③ I have attended a workshop conducted by a psychologist.
- ④ Members of my family have made use of a psychologist.

2.1.2 How many psychological assessment referrals do you send out per term? _____

2.1.3 What has been the main reason(s) for referring or recommending learners for psychological assessment?

Learner(s) experiencing problem(s) with: [tick the relevant block(s)]:

Reading	1	Sexual abuse	7
Alcohol	2	Bullying	8
Writing	3	Attention difficulties	9
Mathematics	4	Death in a family	10
Failing at school	5	Behaviour	11
AIDS related matters	6	Learning difficulties	12

SECTION 2.2: This section concerns the details around feedback or report based on referrals sent out:

2.2.1 Please rate the feedback / report as follows (tick the appropriate box)

Indicate how useful the report was, by ticking one of the numbers from 1 – 5 alongside each item with:

1 = no extent, 2 = a lesser extent, 3 = neutral, 4 = some extent, 5 = a great extent.

What I found out about the report was that it:	1= no extent	2 = a lesser extent	3 = neutral	4 = some extent	5 = a great extent
2.2.1.1 Addressed my concerns about the learner					
2.2.1.2 Contained suggestions for parents and educators					
2.2.1.3 Was easy to understand					
2.2.1.4 Gave sufficient information					
2.2.1.5 Was presented in a clear manner					
2.2.1.6 Specified the educator's role clearly					

Any further comments about the feedback:

SECTION 2.3: This section concerns the recommendations made by the assessors:

Concerning the recommendations, please indicate what were the suggestions that were made about the learner (s) who was / were assessed: (tick the appropriate answer)

2.3.1 Learner classified as a Slow learner / mentally retarded	
2.3.2 Learner referred for speech therapy assessment	
2.3.3 Learner's family to receive Family therapy	
2.3.4 Learner to attend an enrichment programme	
2.3.5 Learner to undergo medical evaluation for attention difficulties	
2.3.6 Learner to be placed in special class / school	
2.3.7 Learner to receive remedial language	
2.3.8 Learner to receive remedial mathematics	
2.3.9 Learner referred for occupational therapy assessment	
2.3.10 Learner referred for physiotherapy assessment	

Any other comment about the recommendations:

SECTION 3: This section pertains to your overall perception about psychological assessment:

Please, read through the following statements and then indicate the extent to which you agree with each one of them by ticking the relevant block alongside each statement:

	1 strongly agree	2 agree	3 neutral	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree
3.1 If a pupil is experiencing difficulties, a psychological assessment should be recommended					
3.2 Psychologists can provide a lot of information that could be helpful to educators					
3.3 When it comes down to actually dealing with pupils in the classroom, psychological information is useless					
3.4 I think the services of psychologists should be made more available to learners and educators					
3.5 Psychological assessment data are not really relevant to educational decision-making					
3.6 Information obtained from assessment conducted by psychologists provides an objective way of confirming impressions about learners					
3.7 I would never approach a psychologist for help					
3.8 Psychological assessment often relies too much on assessment data					
3.9 Sending a learner to a psychologist is generally a waste of time					
3.10 I don't have much faith in psychologists					
3.11 I believe the information yielded by psychological assessing to be very valuable					
3.12 I have a great respect for psychologists					
3.13 The use of jargon in reports of assessment data is not really a problem for educators					
3.14 Assessed learners improve in their problem areas					

Further comments on your perceptions about psychological assessment:

SECTION 4: Qualitative questions:

Please answer each of the following questions:

4.1 How would you define or describe a psychological assessment?

4.2 Why are psychological assessments used in schools?

4.3 What are the problems associated with psychological assessment in your school?

4.4 In your opinion, what is the role played by psychological assessment in a classroom situation?

4.5 Which other method(s) can be used in the place of psychological assessment?

4.6 What are your opinions on the practicality of implementing the recommendations of the psychological assessment reports?

4.7 Which improvements would you like to see implemented with regards to psychological assessment services in general?

APPENDIX J: Focus Group Questions

Research questions for the focus group:

- Please comment on the scholastic support resources / measures provided by the school.

- How do you as educators perceive the use of psychological assessments at your school?
 1. When are psychological assessments used in the current schooling system?
 2. What are the problems associated with these assessments?
 3. What are the educators' perceptions about contribution, if any, done by these assessments in a school setting?

- Are there any other method(s) that can be used in the place of psychological assessment?

- What are your opinions on the practicality of implementing the recommendations of the psychological assessment reports?

- Please comment on the support you receive from psychological service at the DBST.

- Which improvements would you like to see implemented with regards to psychological assessment services in general?

APPENDIX K: Transcripts

NB: CODES: RE: = RESEARCHER, SU: = RESPONDENT

Focus group A

- **RE:** Er, my name is John.
- I'm doing a follow-up on my research based on the questionnaire I dropped at the school some weeks ago. And then, some of the things that I need... is some clarity on issues that were raised on the questionnaire that was delivered at your school
- Let me say that the response form your school was very, ...very quick... within days ... from the school ... neglected the question was ...
- And then let me highlight the fact that whatever thing that is going to be discussed in this section, will not in anyway be used against you. It can rather be used to assist you in a certain manner... not necessarily against you.
- Please feel free to express your own views and feelings about the topic. You can speak in Afrikaans or English... that is okay with me.
- The reason why I'm using the tape recorder is just that so I could be able to transcribe what was being said, unlike ...having to sit down and record word for word in writing what you are saying...
- If I may go back to the questions that the,... I want us... because the questions seems to be so interrelated, in somehow seem to be interlinked, one could ...always summarize... or in answering the questions, one could use whatever information at one's disposal.
- Its all about how Psychological assessment as being used at school, what are the problems related to them, what improvements you would like to see...
- **SU:** In terms of Psychological assessment or...
- **RE:** Just interrelated ...
- Before we start, just at school at the moment in connection with Psychological assessment...Or how does this school go about helping learners experiencing barriers? Right from identifying them up to when you get the report back from the Psychologist.
- **SU:** I think the first step is actually the teacher in the class situation that has to identify ...the children that have difficulties or barriers.
- And we will start immediately with grade R.

- And they must important be the younger children in Grade R and Grade 1 where we will start to identify the children.
- And the first step will be for the teacher to work with the child and then for the teacher to call on the parents.
- And to see if the parents can assist can help with references as well.
- After that we would call in aexperts and ...that also helps and assists.
- We would call the Psychologist services at education department.
- We would like to keep it with younger children obviously some of these things are carried up into higher grades as well.
- Sometimes children arrive from other school in higher grades ...
- and then can pick up the problem that you tried to...
- ...into pieces on the younger children.
- Because there are more possibilities of helping them and rectify the situation...
- ...at the lower grade, starting with Grade R.
- Ja
- **RE:** So you would say that there is enough support system or support base or support structures at your school at the moment.
- **SU:** Basic structure
- Basic structures...functioning quite well...
- ...that interaction with the police.
- As soon as you have the basic support, you er...
- **RE:** How do you as educators view Psychological assessment used at your school.
- **SU:** I think it is ...or, I found that really positive and really useful to me.
- Because I will The children and the problems they have...
- There are, those children who come in lately into our school.
- If they come in Grade R or Grade 1 into our school, they will pick up soon.
- But if you have children transferred and they have severe problems, these often ...
...to help the child. Overcome in lately into our school.
- I find it very useful to get input from other people on the staff, ...

- the ... trained remedial teachers and then also when the child has been referred...
...to help interpret the report.
- **RE:** ...By children coming late you mean in terms of...
- **SU:** Late in the school, the school career, in the primary school career.
- If they come into the school, say in Grade 5 from another school, where they have not been helped properly and have not seen assessed by a Psychologist...
- so that you know exactly where is the barrier to them.
- Then its often very lately you know..., the child is already Ten, Eleven, Twelve, then is very late to help the child.
- **RE:** So the system works a bit better for you if you have kids who attend Grade R at your school?
- **SU:** That's right, ja...
- Then you can identify whatever learning ...
- The only problem comes in when you have those who are being referred ...
- ...Or admitted from other schools... yes, ... from other schools
- The necessary identification and problems ... Not done
- **RE:** Yes
- Because in a senior primary we do...
- if there is a child with severe reading problems in Grade 4 the teacher in Grade 5 will immediately know when that child comes into Grade 5.
- This is supposed to ... Special attention,
- This is supposed...remedial reading lessons.
- So we know..., it makes it easier
- **RE:** If I may go a little further, are there any problems associated or related to Psychologist assessment per se?
- **SU:** Its got... experience ... In such experience...generally or ...
- **RE:** Just generally...
- **SU:** Generally the system right is now...either the system is ...or...
- **RE:** Specifically to your school...Lets start with the system first
- **SU:** The system that education department supplies?

- **RE:** That's right
- **SU:** They are over worked
- Ja...jy wag vir hulle...dat hulle kan help
- There's an enormous willingness from...
- ...particular ... In the District
- Inclusive education section from particular deals with that ...
- They are very active, they have regular meetings with schools
- If you call on them ... a month for the assessment
- They are willing to help
- But at is far as, as is in children as far as giving children the attention, they are stretched to the limit... it appears...
- And then, there isn't as much help ... could possibly be available if they were the greatest staff or if the system was ...
- **RE:** But then from what you are saying it seems like educators at this school have strong believe in support through psychological assessment hence the referrals?
- **SU:** Mmmm... Yes...
- **RE:** You have a strong believe in it...that it is something that should be functional... .. It should not be discarded..., not be thrown out of the window
- **SU:** No, no it is a very effective tool
- **RE:** But are there some... any problems related to that?
- **SU:** Wat is 'n..., wat is 'n...
- Occupation...occupation...
- **RE:** I think that's ok ... Translated
- **SU:** As 'n measure ... intensier by 'n skool of by skool kan kry ...
- Die kinders by die skool sien wat ..., en ook spraak terapie
- Daar is een spraak terapie... en by die Distreek kantoor vir die hele...
- As ons sukkel ... Lang wees
- **RE:** So, ...you see, ...any of those individuals... as part of a team,...because where specialist and teaching and conveying information and developing skills and so on...

- **SU:** But we are not sure of that child has some sort of barrier, ...
- We need somebody to come into team that has special knowledge, to overcome those barriers ... or work around them ...and then
- **RE:** So but the system as it is at the moment, are there some problems associated with the system at the moment
- **SU:** One of them is er, shortage of personnel, shortage of staff
- **RE:** That's what appears to me...
- **SU:** But then,...there's an element of willing on their part to help
- **RE:** Always?
- Always..ja
- **RE:** So,... they do respond to your calls?
- **SU:** They want to help... they want to help
- And you know, also if there's a crisis, and you have a serious problem, they are there immediately
- Even after hours some of the ladies have help does a problem ...
- **RE:** Extreme willingness...
- **SU:** It seems like first clarity is crisis
- No, I think it is because when you are overstretched.. you simply can't get down to all the days, ...of cause the crisis are handled
- **RE:** What I meant was that if you have a serious problem they are willing to leave other things and help you with a child in extreme need? If I can get back to you mam,... like that long waiting period, ...you refer a learner... you send the referral and then you wait for quite a long, time, in what time frame are we speaking about?...A week, a month, two months?
- **SU:** Two months
- Sometimes three months
- **RE:** With no intervention or feedback?
- **SU:** No, because we're waitingdat hulle ... word..., ons vul die vorms in, ...
- en dan toets hulle ... die tyd om dit te doen.
- **RE:** Because there are ...other things?

- **SU:** And I also think because the district is quick,... you know...
- ...and there are not many of them
- The workload becomes...the case load becomes... too heavy...
- **RE:** And that somehow impacts on your functioning as a team
- **SU:** Yes, yes
- Because we only have the children in the class with us while is great
- We don't have problem with that
- If we don't know how specifically to help that child... which direction to take and so if a child sits for 3 months, its not ideal
- If there could have been helped soon it would be good
- **RE:** What would you like to say in...from that system...
- **SU:** No more
- **RE:** Ok let me help... more personnel from District?
- **SU:** Yes, definitely
- Well, and specialized staff as well
- But also more.....school, no (people) specialized staff
- They are actually on the staff because, because education department went through a process of withdrawing all those people from schools because they were ... it seems...staff... when the staff allocations came, it seems those were taken out of the staff allocation...so that a school can first and fore-most have a look at themselves and help themselves with that specialized knowledge and learning
- And thereafter can move...because that schemevery, very strong in the responses, I think there was one or two, if not three responses whereby...
- That thing should be done like they were done before,... like ten years ago
- **RE:** I am just wondering what was happening some ten years back which is different from now.
- **SU:** When we had a full time remedial teachers,...you see... that was all they did,...they did remedial teaching...all the time... they did not have ordinary classes. Now they have to take ordinary classes and if you're lucky enough, you will have a specialist remedial person

- They need to have a little bit of time here, a little bit of time there, while at the same time carrying workload as the normal teacher...So that's not ideal
- ...hulle laat ons praat ... hier is 'n dubbel medium
- Dis Engels en Afrikaans
- So, die werk nader is baie hoog en jy moet in al die tale kan werk...en dan moet jy kinders wat skool gaan in hulle tweede of derde taal,...en ek praat nie met van swart kinders, ...ek praat ook van ons se wit kinders wat...
- **RE:** Ja
- **SU:** Engels is hulle tweede taal...hulle help...die skool wat so...taale
- ...kan gesels, twee van....onderwysers... kan help,...Daar is kinders wat...skool...
- It makes the whole staff situation so much more complicated
- If all the children speak the same language
- **RE:** Same language?
- **SU:** It makes these far less complicated for the staff...and then they do the calculations which...They don't take into account,... There were complications that...because of the culture diversity....mix
- If you ...are if you make use of a language...you are teaching, two different languages... teaching for the staff... they present a lesson of both languages...
- Quite complicated
- **RE:** One of the things that was also raised in the questionnaire was that the classes are a bit too big, so as educators, it is difficult to attend to individual learners, unlike individual learners, hence sometimes you end up referring the learner to a specialist. Are classes too big,...normal...?
- **SU:** No, not here
- **RE:** Not here?
- **SU:** The school makes...so that...
- We have taken a conscious decision especially in the foundation phase to keep these, the classes a lot smaller
- For that very reason so the children can see the lot more personal attention
- **RE:** That's an internal arrangement...

- **SU:** If we had to go according to the, the ratio: 1:25 or 1:40 that the department will suggest to be acceptable...
- In the senior part of the school, there are classes that are lot larger than in junior section of the other school...And those children, they need, don't you see the extra help that they could possibly...
- In terms of small classes, a teacher then referring a child to remedial expert just for the sake ofFrom that we actually need the expertise of...
- **RE:** If I may move a little bit further, I think the answer, I mean, the questions have already been covered in terms of a shortage of personnel and shortage of a specialized or skilled teachers
- If I may refer to the practicality of implementing the recommendation that are done by Psychologist in the report,...How practically possible is that because one of the reasons given was that the child should receive remedial maths or remedial reading or remedial... whatever the case might be... so...
- **SU:** If you do not have specialized teacher, like you....how then is it going to be practically for you to implement those recommendations?
- **RE:** Like I said earlier on the questions is almost are interrelated
- But what I wanted to find out was... is it possible for you at this school to implement the recommendations that are always done in the reports? For instance if it says the kid should receive remedial maths or remedial reading, remedial whatever...
- **SU:** I think from the point of view, skill of teachers, there are some teachers that in an original training received some remedial background....
- And there are some that are outdated, demolish some ongoing interest for them as well... That I think it's a matter of time, because those teachers are already in a classroom almost the quarter of the time... then can only leave a class a quarter of the time
- They are aren't ...getting the time that they need, It might actually also be quite useful to, for those teachers that never have remedial background to seek some sort of training as well...

- **RE:** But if you were going to put your neck on the block and say if it is possible to implement these recommendations...
- **SU:** I could say in the senior primary
- **RE:** In the senior primary?
- Not always, no, no. I would definitely say not always
- **RE:** Is it because of a shortage of personnel... or...?
- Yes and also because you only see the children for a limited period of time. So any remedial that you do,... must be done after hours. So you have to fit in with child's times, sport or whatever else a child is doing and with own afternoon activities.
- You know what,...at the school, so it might... and that you have half an hour fitting time slot for you and the child can be together...And you know,... that is not enough for remedial.
- You need to see to... for the remedial say for instance... in reading to work properly,...That child needs attention everyday. And if you see them once a week, it helps a little bit of cause if a little bit helps, it is not sufficient
- I would say if is difficult for us in the senior primary phase to...with the little ones it is almost impossible to do the afternoons because then they are tired.
- **RE:** This is just ideal
- **SU:** So if...class teacher's situation...
- **RE:** If I may just reflect and capture on what was raised today, it seems like or, sometime back things were running in a certain way which was ideal for educators
- **SU:** It was better because..... much better
- **RE:** But then, because of the new policies and new methods or new instructions, new policies etc, it is actually making life difficult for you as educators around Psychological assessment,... if I may put it that way...
- **SU:** Yes...
- Yes, you don't because if you have qualified remedial teacher there, they could sit down with you and they would help you to interpret the report.

- Because not anybody can do that, you know, so then they have to help you to interpret the report and show you what you ... can do in a class as well as what they are going to do with a child
- You have that double support coming through there which you don't always have now...
- Because of ja...posts...because we don't have all those remedial teachers that we used to have
- **RE:** Would you then as, maybe its an obvious question, ..say that as educators you want to have workshops so that you could be empowered, so that you could learn more about how to handle or tackle a learner who is having a problem in class or would you rather leave that to a specialist.
- **SU:** No, I think if we are able to do things ourselves by means of getting information through a workshop, I think it can only be useful.
- But there could be something that we could do, would still...if its necessary... do something else...
- I think to learn to try to handle things ourselves first of all is very important...because I ...on the lines,... people would prefer to do what... their specialities,... if I am an educator who likes to teach in class,... then having to do remedial work as well, is something else.
- **RE:** Yes but you know, if you have skills, if you have attended workshops where they give you more skills, you could incorporate that into your lessons.
- **SU:** That would be beneficial ...because in every class structure you have yours
- **RE:** The need for the workshop?
- **SU:** I'll just base it on the fact that the..., some people take up remedial work as a special section,...Something that one specializes in...a full time class teacher or educator in class so maybe other people might not be comfortable working with another educator
- Yes, the information... the knowledge thereof is quite, is quite useful
- Then....the teacher knows what is...what to do

- **RE:** From the feedback in the questionnaire...I was just wondering because,...I don't,... some way or the other, I could sense that there was a lot of frustration, a lot of disappointment with the service...
- **SU:** But that is not..., is not because we feel the quality is poor. It is because we feel that the ability to function as well as ...it could be...is limited by ...just don't appear to be enough people to handle the load.
- **RE:** That's a challenge if you are so willing as an educator to do something and you play your part to ...can do your best that you can for your learners, and expecting someone else to play his or her part and that's not forth coming...
- Obviously that thing affects you as an educator in a negative way.
- **SU:** Ja, I think ...it affects us...
- Well it doesn't. It affects us... yes, but it affects the children far more than it affects us...
- **RE:** Where does it leave you as an educator in that situation
- **SU:** We quiet often ask... or go to a private Psychologist...if they are able to do that...so that as well,... we don't only look towards the education department because the parents can do it themselves by all means, I think it is also...
- **RE:** Which still emphasizes your believe in the services of a Psychologist
- **SU:** Yes...
- **RE:** Otherwise you wouldn't refer learners to them?
- **SU:** That's right, yes...
- **RE:** These continuous changes that are taking place, like... there was section where I asked you what are the most other common, not necessarily common, but other aspects that may make you to recommend a learner for assessment and behavioural...According to you, what could be contributing towards the behavioural problems?
- **SU:** To the behaviours... to the behavioural problems....?
- **RE:** Or teachers end up sending learners for assessment in connection with behavioural problems
- **SU:** I think the type of, of behavioural problems that are seen in the section where I teach its mostly,... it is mostly home... it comes from the home..

- We have so many broken homes, we have homes with single parents... that kind of thing, for instance, I know about that little boy in Grade 4 now ...know about him...He's not in our school, he's left our school now...
- But he's seen it through in Grade 4, he goes in the afternoon, and he waits at home alone for his mother until she comes back from Johannesburg at half past 6
- And he's alone for all that time at home, there's nobody there,.. ok?
- So you know we have a lot of those problems with home related problems and the behavioural problem comes, I think they all come from that,... from home based problems
- The children are left alone for very long periods of time in the afternoon, they have to ...be by...themselves,... the parents eventually they don't want to discipline the children overly
- There is not enough support for the children. That's the type of things that I see.
- **RE:** Because of your own workload as an educator that's difficult for you to...
- **SU:** Sometimes I find its difficult to handle those children,
- **RE:** Yes
- **SU:** Or give them....that attention, or sometimes, ja...or give them extra attention
- Sometimes I find it very useful to have interviews with my children individually
- If I have the time at the end of a... of a term and we have little bit of time, we don't have to work in such a hurried manner, I have private interviews with them. We will just chat generally about things that is going on in their lives... and that has been a very big eye-opener to me, sometimes that type of things that... children must cooperate
- It also helps you to understand them better.
- **RE:** Which is quite incidentally, part of Psychological assessment...as well... having to sit down with a learner and getting something from...an interview...just very relaxed, one on one,...check...
- **SU:** ...often helps a lot to cope with...
- **RE:** If you were to make some recommendations to this section, to the Inclusive Education section, that is in connection with Psychological services, ...this is

what we want to see happening based,... on what goes on at your school level,... apart from...personnel, apart from having psychologists visiting your schools more often and attending to your referrals timeously,...Which other comments can you make in relation to improving this?

- **SU:** I think we start about possibly workshops that I think should be done on a voluntary basis which would ...that everybody must attend.
- And those that are really interested, possibly....a single workshop...how serious a workshop.. they build towards something, ...can be useful
- **RE:** In terms of inclusive Education, in terms of having more learners in your... within your disposal... in one class... even though that's national policy... What are your comments on that? Because it also impacts on your assessment, your general duty as a teacher
- **SU:** It depends on what the barrier that the child has to deal with. We have a child in Grade 1 at the moment,...who has visual impairment. We are not able to help that child, the child is not progressing as it should be because of that.
- Because we don't have facilities of...He needs to....or he needs to learn in a slightly different form.
- Apart from the visual impairment he has a variety... the health related problems as well, so that is very challenging.
- But it just depends, in certain children that got a hearing impairment. That is they have a hearing aid and make sure you look at them so... Learn...basics...
- There are some of those children that do develop a kind of progress... one other children except impairment that would be part of a general.
- **RE:** It seems like at some stages....as an educator,... you do end up with a child you don't know how to deal with.
- **SU:** Yes
- **RE:** Is that quite common?
- **SU:** Yes, ja, ja
- **RE:** It is not a once off scenario?
- **SU:** No, ja...I think actually, I think its increasing the number of problem that we see in the classes

- Yes but we still try to... Yes we do try.
- We try to manage them but I think it is increasing.
- **RE:** If we may speak off the record a little bit, but even though it is recording, some Provinces have done away with Psychologists...assessment in the school
- It says lately... categorizing,... diagnosing the kid as a slow learner, someone who needs to receives special attention, this one is deaf therefore, cannot benefit from this...,what we call... normal academic stream...
- But from what has been said here, it seems that you do have a very strong opinion and feeling about Psychological assessment unlike it is being done at the moment.
- **SU:** Because it can only assist and the assistance should be seen for the child
- Yes it help us as teachers because its our job and you get paid for it
- For the child's well-being...first step so..., ja ...
- **RE:** Well, thank you for your time.

Focus Group B

SU: A go ye wena pele, re utlwe gore...

RE: ... this is a follow-up ya questionnaire e ke seleng ke e dropa mo sekolong....Ka kopa gore le ntlaetse yona...I'm here just to have some clarity on the issues tse le di dirisitseng from the questions that were submitted...

...and let me stress again that the is strictly private and confidential, No one else has access to this information except me and my supervisor. You are under no obligation whatsoever gore o tshabe gore go nna le some repercussions by continuing or by participating in this study...

Now, if I refer you back to the letter last send to you, you are neither going to be advantaged or disadvantaged by being a member or participant within this research studies.

Let me say, thank you once more for the high percentage ya di questionnaire returns tse re di kereileng from mo pele...they total something like 95%...

Ke gore maybe there is only one or or maybe two teachers who didn't return the questionnaire ...but overall of the school...Out of the number schools that the

questionnaire that were sent,...you came out tops in terms of the returned questionnaires... Let me say, thank you towards that please... You can use your better language that you are ...It is not binding...

Going through your responses in the questionnaire,...it seems like you never get feedback concerning referrals...

Can you please comment on the scholastic support measures provided by the school at present,...what do you have as support measure or structure at your school?

SU: Re na le support committee, ke yona e ntseng e supporta mathichere... and then le Mrs Lombard wa district office, le ena o re fa support, but yena o supporta rona as a committee and then rona re supporta mathichere ka support yeo.

RE: Do you have what you call a learning support team at your school?

SU: Yes

RE: What is its function,...basically?

SU: To support learners and the educators

RE: In terms of?

SU: Scholastic and emotional problems, destructive behaviour. Again, we have this IQMS process that develops the educators. Assessment is a great problem in our school. We don't have that knowledge and the tools and the strategies tsa assessment. Educators cannot, well they do assess, but in a different way. They don't have that knowledge ya gore whiche jwang, wa bona,.. they have never received feedback for the children that were referred...

RE: Assessment in terms of promoting a learner from one grade to the next... or assessment in terms of identifying a learner who need some kind of intervention?

SU: Exactly...exactly..., in the classroom.

RE: Within the classroom itself?

SU: Yes

RE: And then, as educators, how do you perceive Psychological assessment at school? What's your opinion about Psychological assessment? Are they useful, productive, a waste of time...?

SU: Ga o ka refa definition gape ya psychological ntho e go...go ya ka wena, maybe re ka araba. Maybe ke gona re ka araba, ka this way, athe wena o e batla in this way.

RE: No, don't want a specific manner e ke e batlang ka yona...just your own understanding about psychological assessment. I'm referring... in terms of, after identifying...when you say that this learner needs some kind of intervention.

SU: You have tried your level best,...is not working and then you cannot do anything more than this...therefore, let me refer this kind to someone else.

RE: That is identification for the referral of a learner...

SU: No, it is ... assessment is always like this... psychological assessment is always this...you look at, what you as a class teacher... or as you a subject teacher,... say... as you observe a kid ka mo claseng...

RE: How can you assess,... how do you,... using the assessment tools and strategies?

SU: yes we have done that,...as support, as a school to support the educators.

RE: Ke gore,ka mantswe a mang, ga go na any scholastic support resources?

SU: Ya IQMS key a the whole school, run by the management of the school

RE: It does not include the learner support?

SU: Yes it is there,... they have to be there in the classroom. Our main problem is the assessment...and then, there is the interview, you have the report from the parent or legal guardian...

This is how the child is or was before anything...from conception up until delivery and even now...It forms part of the assessment, what goes on at home...

What are the socio-economic factors at home? Does this kid have enough food... socio-economic status...Even parents they argue a lot... does this kid get support...

RE: And of course these tests that we do...normally the clinic testing... psychological testing?

SU: We argued this...But we no longer rely that much on this thing...They all form part, medical reports included we sit down with this kid...

They all form part of the assessment; so that this kid thing, like you said earlier, behavioral problems...What is it that makes this kid to behave in this particular manner?

It is because of (1)... It is because of what's going on at home? Is it because the kid is being abused in class or the teacher does not like this kid?...Whatever the case may be

RE: After giving that general description, how far is psychological assessment...What are your perceptions about psychological assessment?

SU: They are...they are very... because if a learner is having a problem there at school...then he or she is given guidance or support in a way...

Then, thereafter if we find that there is nothing that we can do...we have tried this and that to support the learner,... all in being ... He has being referred to the professional

RE: Do you think that there is a certain role that they play? How are they helping you as an educator in class?

SU: Ja, they play a great role because they are going to make you to cope with anything that you are having and to make you better and easier or lighter... even to know the history of the child through consultation of parents... we consult parents or guardian... it is really working...

... ga re sebetsa ka ngwana oo, se re tseba gore re sebetsa ka ngwana wa mofuta ofeng...

The environment, especially at our school, it is situated in an environment that has so many things that can affect the child, whereas the child can cope...

But under certain circumstances you'll find that this child has been disturbed by this and that... neighbours around can influence that child.

RE: The environment that you are in now, does it contribute a lot towards children's behaviour?

SU: Yes..., behaviour and then...

RE: ...anything that causes some learning difficulties?

SU: Yes...

RE: As educators, do you feel that you can't deal with that..., you need someone else to come and help you... specifically in those situations?

SU: Yes...If we can get more assistance from public servants lets say the police being there...We have those people... but if they can support us closely to overcome this problem that we are having.

RE: According to you, from what I gather, you have a very strong feeling and support towards psychological assessment.

SU: Especially nowadays if you can get into the house, children are missing their mothers...

Their mothers are very ill and then there is poverty...Parents are unemployed...So you can assist us to make those learners to cope.

The thing is to cope and to accept the situation and to deal with that.

As educators you are not only concerned about what a child thinks of parents in class

RE: You spoke about mothers being very ill...what is it?... AIDS, HIV...or...?

SU: That forms poverty...Even others don't live with their parents...they are just on their own. That thing, you know, if a child arrives at home, nobody helps in our (thing) that is where, you see, because when a learner is disturbed...

When is at home, his mother and father sees what today what are we going to eat,

What are we going to wear, you see, because the parents are working somewhere else? They come at month end or sometimes they take six months to come at home.

That's the whole problem...It means that if we have no service, the learners are not going to get more time for support. Because here in classes... we don't have that much of a time to deal with those who are emotionally...They are so many, they are so many, I think, they do not get any support. That is going to get a lot of problem in the future because...

RE: I have noted that, that section where I asked you what are some of the problems that you normally have...reflected kids having problems with reading, maths, behaviour...

SU: ...and there is something that makes the child to behave differently.

RE: Psychological assessment,... can it give you...

SU: Yes, they do,... it is good...

RE: What are the problems that are associated with psychological assessment or services at your school at this moment?

SU: Problems related to that,... related to psychological assessment?

RE: Skgalo sa gago,... about psychological assessment... how is everything... smooth? Everything running in order? Happy about assistance or intervention in terms of whatever problem that kids might be having in class?

SU: We don't have time, learners are many. So you need someone else to offer assistance.

RE: Is that the only problem associated with psychological assessment / intervention?

SU: That seems to be the only problem, time and overcrowded.

Time factor, overcrowded is not so... but time and knowledge.

Information about how you should go about...

RE: From your colleagues or other members of your staff...what are their perceptions about psychological assessment?

SU: You don't know. You only know about yourself not educators

I think they're also on the same part with us really, we need that service

RE: You need that service...?

SU: Even us as educators really we need that service

RE: Are there any other methods that can be used in the place of psychological assessment?

SU: According to...psychological assessment is always done by someone from somewhere,... by professional someone.

And if you go to private practice, they charge money for that

RE: According to you, what can be used in the place of psychological assessment?

Something that can give almost the same, if not better, results than psychological assessment

SU: ...Unless you help to answer that...it seems it is a little bit difficult question.

RE: You believe so much in psychological assessment... you cannot think of another way ...

SU: Can you give us clue that you ...other than psychological?

RE: You just ignore problems that kids have?

SU: You can't ignore the kind of problems that kids have...Maybe just...

RE: At the moment it seems like there's no other method that you can think of in terms of intervening with a child's problem except for the specialist ?

SU: but the very same specialist will still be coming and... something on the lines of psychological assessment.

RE: In your opinion, is it possible, is it practical to implement the recommendations that are written in the reports,... like if it is recommended that the child should receive remedial maths, or receive remedial class, or should be placed in a special class? Do you have a class for learners with special needs?

SU: No, it is impossible.

RE: It is not possible to do that at your school as we speak now?

SU: Because of ... the venue. The great thing is if you give a child time and space for caring...Then that person's going to change...We need special attention...we as educators are not trained

RE: Some educators... like what you have said that.....

SU: ..affects us because we do identify the needs...Because we know that learners are learning...they are not going at the same pace...some are going on the concept we are dealing with...but the other one will take time.

Time that may be given, it is not really suitable... sufficient to do extra...

RE: Extra work?

SU: That is why sometimes in our planning... we plan to categorize our work so that those who are very fast can follow-up...And we move on and we stay with those who are very slow...But really sometimes, time really beat us. We do try our best, but really time is against you. Because there are many activities that should be done, you have to do this and move to that classroom.

RE: According to inclusive...,

SU: ...they say if you take them out, its discrimination...

RE: Does the law or the policy somehow make life difficult to you?

SU: Yes...it is very difficult for us

RE: Again on that, on the support you get from District-Based Support Team...as well as improvement that you will like to be implemented...but firstly...Can you just comment a little bit on the support that you get from Sub-Regional service department at the District support team, anything that comes to your mind?

SU: The person who is supporting us is really supportive. She is always there when you need her,... on emergency cases,... she also assists us to refer learners to the relevant people.

RE: In terms of psychological assessment per se... how would you like to comment on the support of a psychologist from the District Based Support Team?... in terms of identifying a learner, referring a learner or the learner being assessed... do you get any feedback,... implementing those recommendations,... support-wise,... the whole process...

SU: We had those learners who had eye problems... the District Based Support Team really helped us a lot, because they sent those children to an optometrist.

RE: Are there any other improvements that you want to say to them..., or want to see them being implemented or changed,... that you want to see being done?

SU: If we get more workshops, like us as a School-Based Support Team. If we get more information and some workshops...on how can we handle some of the things...Like the one of eye test we have it is...

Yes, we have that and those who have...hearing...

Yes, we have a little bit information about that

RE: For other things like emotionally...?

SU:if we can get that support from the District

RE: You mean if you could be work shopped... you can be empowered?

SU: Exactly

RE: You don't want to rely too much on an expert coming in... you want to be self-sufficient?

SU: Yes, because it is us who are dealing with those things...If we can get more information on how to support these learners on this and that...If we can be well equipped

RE: At the moment, is that lacking?

SU: I think it is not enough.

RE: Not so much?

SU: Not necessary lacking, it is there but it is not enough

RE: Yes

SU: Because this learner support is not on the committee...Each and every educator must be work shopped and empowered... So that whatever problem that they come across in class, they should be able to deal with them.

RE: The only improvements that you want, as you say, is more workshops on how to deal with those problems

SU: Exactly, and fro specialist to come to render service.

RE: Any other comment that you want to make about psychological assessment, that section, or are you as educators from this school satisfied with the service from that section of the district?

SU: We are satisfied really. Since we have started with this support at our school, it really works a lot...e seng ka mokgwa o question e neng e batlega...

RE: Le ka Sesotho go siame.

SU: They can't cope in the situation

RE: Le ka Sesotho o ka nna wa bolela

SU: Ga ba 'cope' total, total, total...niks

They come, go na le mo e leng gore ba tswa from grade 1, grade mang then they go outside...Then at the end bana se ba tsamaya ko strateng...We have one, go na jwale ga gona ntho e o ka e etsang.

RE: O etsa, eng?

SU: .. ka ba ba feng kana?

RE: Bana ba ba over-age

SU: Bana ba over-age?

RE: And the question is, is there anything that can be done about those kids?

So, your suggestion e le gore can't a specialist come in...

SU: In what way?

RE: In terms of whether being assessed, whether, whether are they fit for, for (normal stream)

SU: Ja... we call it normal stream but in invented commas

RE: What is your opinion on that, on kids who're not coping at all in class an over-aged learners What do you think should, should ...

SU: Learners should be assisted ... skills...They can do research of the skills whether they cope with... what skills they can cope with...Maybe er...for doing a work for welding...all these things. Ke hore,... mesebetsi ya matsogo... jwalo...because some of them are from families... ga go na guidance

RE: How will you as an educator be able to tell whether a kid is not fit for academic stream, but for certain skills?

SU: School work

RE: Over the years,... or...?

SU: Re entseng mo skolong? We spoke to people who have skills... to assist us with learners who are over-aged,...to provide them with certain skills like welding, carpentry...

RE: The thing is, how do you know if a child who,... cannot do maths in class... is only good for carpentry or welding?

SU: We just ask them what their interests are, and by observing them, but the choice will rely with them as well.

RE: The report thereof, how the kid performs, an indication that he needs to be placed?

SU: So you say you can't look at someone and say they have to be...

RE: To answer your question; these kids need to be assessed. Psychological assessment has to be done on them just to determine their level of potential, So that they can be referred to relevant or correct skills centre...or institution or whatever the case might be. As you said earlier on, at the moment there is not much done at school. Any other questions?

SU: Because there's this, we had one learner...Thabo. Thabo has been assessed...everything ...But the skill se a nang le sona... o ne a le motivated mo architecture... you see. So, when he passed grades, he went to secondary school. In secondary school they placed that child..., because he was not performing well.

You find that this child is stupid child, you know, they didn't even assess this child, you see...

That is why we say that we have a problem of these learners who are like that...And we were so worried when we see that child... he was sitting at the shop verandas ...there is a shopping centre there and this child, when he is supposed to get in to the school... he knows very well that, I'm not wanted here.

He just stays for the whole day there at the shops and he is so quite, sad and unhappy

RE: What can those people do, why didn't they assist this child?

SU: And we know that he loves running.

RE: But what kinds of assistance do you think that the school can offer for such a learner?

SU: It is awkward you know. He is in secondary school but, but not in the present moment

RE: What could have been done to prevent that from happening?

SU: If that would er... they should have come here at school at least...Even the grade 7 educators, they were to write a full report about this learner...Then lets say the portfolio...wanted written there in secondary school, ...must get the information, you see...about the learner.

RE: So that wasn't done?

SU: Yes, I think the people in secondary school, are being given the lesser jobs. They've got nothing...I was so worried about that child...

What has been done when they received the portfolio of the child, because that child was standing there for the whole day, wanted to get inside the school to get in the classroom, but the educators didn't allow that, you see?

RE: So, but then that the child was assessed before...

SU: At our school, ...yes...We did everything that we can to assist this learner..

RE: Maybe if further assessment could have been done to determine these interest and...

SU: But the problem ...The age...

Sometimes o refera ngwana, and then meet parents...ngwana a be to a special school, whatever ... so ke problem ya rona...So, if ntho tse kao fela di ka, etswa, tsa shebiwa hantle re fa ngwana problem e tshwanang le yona because...If a referelwa to the school, then a special,...E seng a no nkiwa, like, a tsena...

RE: What you're saying is that once you identify the problem here at school, you must make sure that the problem is fully addressed? Whatever problem that kid might be having should be remediated...before the child could be passed on to another school or grade?

SU: Yes

RE: Any other comment around psychological assessment

(Silence)

RE:If that is the case, I would just like to thank you for your participation in this interview session and then, I'm looking forward to meeting you again so that the, we can see how can we help each other in carrying this task forward. Thank you very much.

SU: Thank you, NTATE SETSHEDI.