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SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TEAMS' EXPERIENCES OF THE SUPPORT THAT THEY PROVIDE WITHIN THEIR SCHOOLS

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A research report submitted to the Discipline of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Education (Educational Psychology)

Johannesburg, South Africa February 2015

Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of my degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Abstract

This study set out to investigate school-based support teams' experiences of the support that they provide within their schools. School-based support teams have a key role in providing support to teachers and learners through consultation on classroom strategies, case management, referrals and decisions regarding resources within the school with the aim of identifying and addressing barriers to learning. This research specifically explores School-based support teams' experiences of providing support in order to gain an understanding of the role that these teams play in schools. Data for this study was collected by conducting focus group interviews with 25 school-based support team members from 5 government primary schools in the Johannesburg East District. In addition, the head of each participating school-based support team completed a questionnaire. The data collected resulted in the generation of four main themes relating to school-based support teams' experiences of providing support within their schools. These were: the functionality of school-based support teams specifically with regards to providing support within their schools, as well as the responsibilities and structure of school-based support teams; access to specialist support, and the District Based Support Team as well as parental involvement; collaboration and the benefits of collaboration; and finally the functionality of the District Based Support Team focussing on school infrastructure, and the involvement of District Based Support Teams.

Key words: School-based support team, District Based Support Teams, collaborative consultation, inclusive education, education support, learning support, schools, institution-level support teams (ILSTs)

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following is a list of terms and definitions used for the purposes of this research study:

Barriers to learning: these refer to intrinsic and extrinsic factors that prevent optimal learning or that lessen the extent to which learners can benefit from education.

District-based support team: this refers to an integrated professional team provided at a district level. Participants in this team include education support providers employed by the Department of Education and other relevant experts from various community structures and other government departments in the area. The key function of the district-based support team is to assist educational institutions, which include early childhood learning centres, schools, adult learning centres, colleges and higher institutions of learning, to identify barriers to learning and support learners in accessing the curriculum.

Inclusive education system: this is an education system adopted by the South African government that promotes the full development of all learners, irrespective of race, class, disability, religion, culture, sexual preference, learning style and language. It is a system that intentionally strives to facilitate a learning atmosphere of mutual acceptance and respect.

School-based support team (SBST): previously referred to as institutional-level support teams in Education White Paper 6, this is a team based at the school and composed of selected teachers/educators whose main function is to identify and address barriers to learning. To be effective in its role, the school-based support team needs ongoing support from the district-based support team.

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