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Perceived utility of the psycho-educational report to Foundation Phase teachers.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

In line with the Salamanca Statement (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994) and in accordance with international trends, the policy of inclusive education was instituted in South Africa, as outlined in the White Paper Six (Department of Education, 2001). Inclusion requires that all learners be permitted access to a single school system and not to be segregated according to abilities, race, gender or any other form of segregation (Department of Education, 2001). Accordingly, no longer do learners require fitting into the existing education system, but instead it is now necessary for the education system to adapt to the needs of the learners. In this sense, there is a call for an attitude of acceptance and accommodation of difference in education. As a consequence, teachers are obliged to support the diversity of learners in the mainstream classroom through thoughtful accommodations and adaptations to the classroom, curriculum and assessment (Department of Education, 1997, 2002a). The movement towards an inclusive approach to education has necessitated a review of the psycho-educational assessment practices of educational psychologists.

Traditionally, psycho-educational assessment has functioned according to a medical model framework. According to this framework, assessment is primarily employed for the purpose of identifying the inhibiting 'deficit' within the learner and consequently discerning the possible need for the learner to be placed in a more 'appropriate' setting, such as a remedial or special school (Department of Education, 1997, 2005). However, as inclusion calls for a move away from labelling and classification towards acceptance and accommodation of difference, the continued employment of assessment from a medical model framework is problematic (Department of Education, 2002a, 2005). Given this, the account of the present application of assessment expertise by psychologists as 'inappropriate' seems justified (Department of Education, 1997, 2005).

However, arguments remain for the persisting value of assessment. Bradley-Johnson, Johnson and Jacob-Timm (1995, p. 192) argue that "even if the special education reform movement

results in widespread provision of services without labels, the need to objectively define problems will continue and school psychologists will be the profession in the school most knowledgeable in assessment". Furthermore, Elliot (2000, p. 59) states that "for many teachers, skilled assessment by an educational psychologist offers the promise of a more detailed understanding of the learner's strengths and weaknesses so that they can serve as a basis for subsequent intervention". In accordance with these views, Rosenfield and Nelson (1995, p. 2) suggest that "perhaps the most far-reaching change in the role for school psychologists has been an increased emphasis on linking assessment and intervention, so that information from the assessment process leads directly to intervention strategies rather than just to a diagnostic label and alternate placement for the student".

Furthermore, assessment practices in South Africa persist despite controversy. The Board of Psychology (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2007) include psychological assessment expertise in the current outline of the scope of practice for educational psychologists, and universities throughout South Africa continue to train educational psychology students in assessment. Therefore, in view of the fact that assessment exists within the context of inclusion and that it appears to be here to stay, it follows that psycho-educational assessment practices ought to be accordingly aligned with an inclusive approach.

Hick (2000, p. 1) asserted in a paper delivered at the International Special Education Congress that " if educational psychologists fail to accept the challenge of showing how they can contribute to developing more inclusive ways of working, they run the risk of becoming irrelevant to the children of the country". Additionally, Lindsay (2007) commented in his conclusion to his study on 'Educational psychology and the effectiveness of inclusive education/mainstreaming' that the prominent task today is to consider further mediators and moderators that support the optimal development of learners with special needs. Educational psychologists, through the employment of assessment and the communication of assessment findings, conclusions and recommendations, are arguably able to act as such mediators and moderators. Moreover, in a study by Du Toit (2005) it was found that unless educational psychologists develop a new model for learner support, inclusive education in South Africa is doomed to failure.

Yet it is the report yielded from the psycho-educational assessment that acts as the medium through which the assessment findings, conclusions and recommendations are communicated to teachers. Thus it is the report most specifically that needs to effectively convey useful information and recommendations to teachers.

1.2 Rationale

A number of studies have previously been conducted internationally on perceptions of psychological and psycho-educational reports, including the perceptions of various professionals, parents and teachers. However, there appears to be a lack of recent studies (Baker, 1965, as cited in Ownby, 1990; Cheramie, Goodman, Santos, & Webb, 2007; Cornwall, 1990; Cuardo & Albaugh, 1956; Garfield, Heine & Lavanethall, as cited in Ownby, 1990; Grove, 1980; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, as cited in Farre, 1998; Hartlage, Freeman, Horine & Walton, 1968; Human & Teglasi, 1993; Hull, 2005; Isett & Roszkwoski, 1979, as cited in Ownby, 1990; Lacks, Horton & Owen, 1969; Mar & Sall, 1999-2000; Mussman, 1964; Olfiesh & McAfee, 2000; Ownby, Wallbrown & Brown, 1982, as cited in Farre, 1998; Pryzwansky & Hanania, 1986; Rafoth & Richmond, 2006; Rucker, 1967; Salvagno & Teglasi, 1987; Sudduth, 1979, as cited in Ownby, 1990; Sullivan, 1997; Tallent & Reiss, 1959a, 1959b, 1959c; Weddig, 1982; Wiese, Bush, Newman & Benes, 1986). Moreover, in South Africa only one unpublished study on teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports has been located (Farre, 1998), although a more recent study on remedial therapists' perceptions of psycho-educational reports has been done (Knoetzer & Vermoter, 2007). Farre (1998) similarly commented in her research report that until that point there had been no published studies in South Africa on teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports. Therefore, there appears to be a need for current studies.

For the report to be of value to teachers, it seems necessary that it provides useful insight for acquiring a greater understanding of the learner. Whilst studies have alluded to factors that affect the efficacy of the report for enhancing teachers' understanding of the learner, none has been found to address this issue specifically. Factors noted in previous studies include satisfaction with the content and structure of the report, with the presentation of test results, the comprehensibility of the report and its utility as a means of communication, the acquirement of an understanding of the learner's strengths and needs, the perceived relevance and approach to

the report, its effectiveness in answering the referral questions, as well as the efficacy of the report itself as a means of communication (Baker, 1965, as cited in Ownby, 1990; Cheramie, et al., 2007; Cornwall, 1990; Cuardo & Albaugh, 1956; Farre, 1998; Garfield et al., as cited in Ownby, 1990; Grove, 1980; Hartlage & Merck, 1971; Human & Teglasi, 1993; Hull, 2005; Isett & Roszkwoski, 1979, as cited in Ownby, 1990; Knoetzer & Vermoter, 2007; Lacks et al., 1969; Mar & Sall, 1999-2000; Miller, 2005; Mussman, 1964; Olfiesh & McAfee, 2000; Pryzwansky & Hanania, 1986; Rafoth & Richmond, 2006; Rucker, 1967; Salvagno & Teglasi, 1987; Sudduth, 1979; Sullivan, 1997; Tallent & Reiss, 1959a, 1959b, 1959c; Weddig, 1982; Wiese et al., 1986). Thus an investigation into teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of reports specifically for acquiring a greater understanding of the learner, is warranted.

Additionally, Farre's (1998) South African study found that although overall teachers perceived the report positively, it was noted that the recommendations section was in need of improvement. In line with this, there was also an emphasis on the report lacking utility for determining interventions. Inclusion advocates the linking of assessment to interventions (Department of Education, 2002a; Elliot, 2000; Rosenfield & Nelson, 1995; UNESCO, 2002). Therefore, there appears to be a need to further evaluate teachers' current perceptions of the usefulness of the report for determining supportive interventions.

Furthermore, it was recommended in Farre's (1998) research report that similar studies be conducted on different samples. Foundation Phase teachers are arguably the principal consumers of psycho-educational reports, given that they refer learners for assessments in order to determine early intervention needs. Research has shown that the sooner the learner experiencing difficulties is identified and an intervention is implemented, the greater the chance for the learner to continue to develop to his optimal potential (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2001). Therefore, consumer satisfaction for psycho-educational reports, most especially for Foundation Phase teachers, requires evaluation.

No studies have been located internationally or in South Africa on teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports within the context of an inclusive approach to education. Thus a study on teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports within this approach is required.

In sum, it has evidenced that there is a need for present studies examining teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports. The usefulness of the report for understanding the learner, as well as for determining supportive interventions requires evaluation. Given the importance of assessment to young learners and that no studies on Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of reports has been found, it necessitates investigation. Lastly, no studies have been located on teachers' perceptions of reports within the context of inclusive education, thus a study needs to consider teachers' perceptions of reports within this context.

1.3 Aims

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to investigate Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the psycho-educational report. The study endeavoured to achieve this by evaluating teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of reports for understanding the learner, as well as for providing constructive recommendations for supportive interventions. Following on from this, problems experienced by teachers with reports and how they perceive that reports could be made more useful to them, was explored. This was framed within the current context of inclusive education in South Africa. From this, recommendations for educational psychologists on how reports could be made more useful for Foundation Phase teachers were provided.

The current study was conducted at a single private school in Northern Johannesburg. Consequently, the study findings are specific to this context, although it can be speculated whether other schools would hold similar views.

CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have been conducted on psychological and psycho-educational reports, focusing on the perceptions of a number of different groups, including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, parents and teachers. A discussion follows on the findings from these studies. Integrated into the discussion below is also insight provided from a number of published books and articles, to assist psychologists in report writing. Reference is also made to the implications of inclusive education for assessment and the resultant reports.

2.1 The content of the report

An early study indicated that the test results and recommendations section were perceived as the most useful to teachers (Mussman, 1964), whilst another indicated that it was the recommendations section specifically (Rucker, 1967). Some years later it was correspondingly found that the recommendations section was perceived as valuable to those in a short-term residential facility for individuals experiencing severe cognitive difficulties (Isett & Roszkwoski, 1979, as cited in Ownby, 1990). Information related to social competence was also perceived as useful, whilst projective tests and IQ results held the least value. Yet, these studies are considerably dated, hence not necessarily holding true for today.

More recently, Olfiesh and McAfee (2000) noted from their study on service delivery to college students with learning disabilities, that all sections of the psycho-educational report were used by 80% of the respondents but, in contrast to Mussman's (1964) findings with teachers, the test scores were used least often. Hull (2005) also found that all sections of the report were perceived as at least somewhat useful to teachers. Most teachers reported that they generally read the entire report, and all teachers indicated that they read most of the sections of the report. Farre (1998) similarly found that South African teachers perceive all sections of the report as useful. Therefore it appears that all sections of the report are more recently perceived by teachers as to some extent useful.

Whilst teachers may find some sections of the report more useful than others, it seems likely that the overall utility of the report content would be related to how well it addresses their reasons for referral. Literature has made reference to this.

Report writing resources emphasise the importance of addressing referral questions in reports (Olin & Keatinge, 1998; Tallent, 1998). Tallent (1998, p. 243) states that "a report that consists of seemingly interesting data but that does not respond to the reason for referral is not doing a useful job". Hence this implies that for reports to hold value, the referral questions need to be sufficiently addressed.

Ownby et al. (1982, as cited in Farre, 1998) established that 9% of the teachers find that reports 'occasionally' list the referral questions, whilst 18% indicated that they do 'not usually', and 33% 'never' find this. However, in relating the referral questions to the recommendations, 10% of the teachers indicated that reports 'definitely' reflect this, 23% 'usually', and 19% 'occasionally'. This seems to imply that although reports do not always explicitly state the specific referral questions in the report, they do sometimes address them. In addition, Cornwall (1990) found that reports were perceived favourably by parents and other professionals in this regard. Yet, some years later, Cheramie et al. (2007) established that the answering of the referral question was perceived as inadequate by teachers. This indicates that reports may presently be insufficient in addressing teachers' referral questions.

Further insight has been provided regarding the relevance of information provided in reports in general. From Tallent and Reiss's studies (1959a, 1959b & 1959c), it was found that reports often omit essential information, include information of minor relevance and unnecessarily duplicate information in the report. Consequently, the report content does not always depict that which is pertinent to the reader. Accordingly, Tallent (1998) commented on this tendency in his published book on report writing. Thus, it seems necessary for the assessor and report writer to ensure that he is aware of what the teacher wants from the report.

Additionally, in Harvey and Sall's (1999-2000) investigation of parents' perspectives of psycho-educational assessments it was indicated that parents feel that there needs to be a clear

understanding of the child's needs in order to assess the child effectively. This further contends the need for the educational psychologist to be familiar with the reasons for referral.

2.2 The presentation of test data

Literature provides some insight into various professionals' perceptions and preferences for the depiction and discussion of test results in reports. It is essential to evaluate this, given current controversies around the use of standardised tests within an inclusive approach to education (Department of Education, 1997; Department of Education, 2005a).

Garfield et al. (1954, as cited in Ownby, 1990) investigated psychiatrists', psychologists' and social workers' perceptions of psychological reports in a clinic setting. Psychiatrists were critical of excessive speculation in reports and a lack of data from which inferences were drawn. Furthermore, psychologists were critical of the failure to include behavioural data in reports from which inferences could be made. Social workers were least critical of reports. In line with this, another study suggests that reports may exhibit irresponsible interpretations (Tallent & Reiss, 1959c). Consequently, psychiatrists indicated a preference for more in the way of raw data with less speculation. Yet, as these studies concern other professionals, it cannot be assumed that teachers would hold the same opinions. This is especially the case when other professionals may have greater training in the interpretation of test results than teachers. Moreover, again these studies are significantly dated.

Nevertheless, more current resource books on report writing do caution psychologists against problems associated with misinterpretations. Tallent (1998) emphasises that misinterpretation of information, as well as over-speculation, unlabelled speculation and over-generalised interpretations are common pitfall in reports. Furthermore the importance of supporting interpretations with sufficient data, including other sources such as behavioural observations, interviews and records, is emphasised in a number of report writing resources (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2001; Groth-Marnat & Horvath, 2006; Olin & Keatinge, 1998; Tallent, 1998). Therefore, whilst over the years various report readers have experienced problems with the misinterpretation of test data, current resources do guide psychologists in refraining from this tendency.

Further studies relate more specifically to teachers' perceptions. Rucker (1967, as cited in Sattler, 1988) established that although teachers find that reports provide excellent interpretation of test results, they often fail to explain the results or leave results out. More recently, Cheramie et al. (2007) found that the interpretation of test data in reports is unclear to teachers. Perhaps, in this case, similarly to the other case, there is a lack of explanation for the interpretation of test data which consequently inhibits the teacher's comprehension.

However, it was shown in another study that visual aids, such as graphs, aid parents in their recall of information from the report (Miller, 2005). This seems to imply that visual aids may enhance parents' understanding of test data presented in reports. Hence, it can be speculated whether this approach may also facilitate teachers' understanding.

In addition, Selvagno and Teglasi's (1987) study indicated that teachers prefer interpretive data to factual data in reports. Hence it appears that teachers favour information in reports that reflects the psychologist's professional judgement, rather than merely states facts about the assessment findings. This is in accordance with some authors' suggestion that test data should not be included in the report at all (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2001; Olin and Keatinge, 1998). It is also indicated that including test data can lead to misinterpretation (Olin and Keatinge, 1998), and that it is better for the test data to be conveyed in general terms, in a descriptive form, rather than numerically (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2001).

On the other hand, Tallent (1998) maintains that the inclusion of IQ scores in reports is appropriate if it relates to the reason for the assessment, it is displayed within an integrated discussion of functioning rather than in isolation, and provides insight into the individual's strengths and weaknesses. Yet it must be noted that again this suggestion does not pertain specifically to reports to teachers. Tallent (1998) also commented that reports are criticised for at times being test-orientated rather than client-orientated, too theoretical and over-abstract. Accordingly, perhaps Lichtenberg et al.'s (2004) point that test data should provide a comprehensive picture of the person, not merely the test scores, exemplifies the ultimate approach that should be taken in regards to the presentation of test data in reports.

In contrast to some of the other findings, Farre (1998) found that South African teachers did find the test results useful. Whether they were presented numerically or descriptively was not indicated. Similarly Knoetzer and Vermoter (2007) established that South African remedial therapists find the IQ scores particularly helpful, as it provides them with an understanding of the learner's cognitive strengths and weaknesses. It was also specified that the report offers valuable information for determining if the learner's scholastic performance is in line with his cognitive abilities. It could be that remedial therapists find test data useful as, similarly to the instances with the psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, they are likely to have some training in the interpretation of test data.

2.3. Linking assessment to interventions

Foxcroft & Roodt (2001, p. 306) maintain that "decisions made on the basis of the assessment can change the course of someone's life". Thus, determining interventions given assessment findings and conclusions is of great importance.

The 'Open File on Inclusive Education' (UNESCO, 2002) states that the ultimate purpose of assessment, including specialised assessments, is to facilitate teachers and schools in their support of the diversity of learners. The 'Draft Outline for the Implementation of Inclusive Education' (Department of Education, 2002a) in South Africa corresponds with this outlook. It is indicated that assessment is employed to "identify barriers to learning, with the purpose of improving the teaching and learning process" (Department of Education, 2002a, p. 78). Diagnostically-orientated assessments used by specialists within an inclusive framework "consist of a problem-solving processes which, in a cyclic way, attempt to deepen the understanding of the barriers to learning so that more effective programmes to address the barrier can be developed" (Department of Education, 2002a, p. 111). Thus a clear link is evident between assessment and teaching and learning processes.

However, studies over the years have indicated that reports tends to lack decisional utility. One early study found that reports may not always be written with a practical or useful purpose in mind (Tallent & Reiss, 1959). Davidson and Simmons (1991, as cited in Johnson, 2007, p. 6) report from their study that "teachers frequently indicated that the information that they received from psycho-educational assessments is not workable and argued that it must become

more meaningful to teachers". Hartlage and Merck (1971, p. 460) hypothesised in the conclusion to their study on the relevance of psychological reports that "psychologists learn to test and write reports in an academic setting and that in the absence of any external stimulation, they tend to persevere in a somewhat theoretical, non-decision-oriented approach to handling test data". Accordingly it is suggested that psychologists consider the decisional value that their reports hold.

It is most specifically the recommendations section that depicts 'the way forward'. Despite the fact that teachers prefer recommendations that are concrete, specific and realistic (Salvagno and Teglasi's, 1987), studies have shown that recommendations on reports are often too general (Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994, as cited in Farre, 1998; Ownby et al., 1982, as cited in Farre, 1998). In line with this, Cheramie et al. (2007) more recently found that teachers do not find the recommendations on reports adequate. It was exposed that report recommendations are not particularly useful for determining classroom modifications and for the drawing up of individualised education programmes (Cheramie et al., 2007). This also seems to relate to the decisional utility of the report. Therefore, these findings suggest that psychologists should contemplate whether the recommendations that they present on reports are relevant and viable for teachers to implement.

In general, it has evidenced that it is necessary for reports to be written in accordance with the needs of the reader. Rucker (1967) states in the conclusion to his study that, "it is essential that the psychologist constantly bears in mind that his primary audience is the teacher, and that his report must be written accordingly". On a similar line to this, in a later study on the relevance of psychological reports, given the findings, it was asserted that reports could be made more relevant to the users if the psychologist is familiarised with the manner in which the report is to be applied (Hartalge & Merck, 1971). Still, many years later Hagborg and Aiello-Coultier (1994, as cited in Farre, 1998) found that 30% of the teachers find the report 'very relevant' and 51% 'relevant to their classroom work'. Thus, in view of this, it is necessary for psychologists to ascertain the needs of the reader and accordingly address these needs in the report. Consequently, the report will hold greater relevance for the teacher. This relates back to the need for the report to deal with the teacher's referral questions in the report.

South African studies reflect similar sentiments. Remedial therapists in South Africa would prefer reports to provide practical information that they could draw upon in designing appropriate learning support interventions (Knoetzer & Vermoter, 2007). Furthermore, Farre (1998, p. 50) commented in her research discussion that if psychologists wish to improve their reports as a means of service delivery to South African teachers, they should focus on including more concrete and specific recommendations for teachers. This is in line with Salvagno and Teglasi's (1987) findings. Farre (1998) also found that only 57% of teachers were satisfied with the report's understanding of the teacher's role. There was an indication that reports often do not take into account the size constraints of the classroom and consequently are often impractical in their recommendations. Only 38% of the teachers found the reports useful for devising instructional methods or plans. Thus there is deemed to be a "greater need for training educational psychologists in understanding of classroom procedures and generation of specific intervention strategies that can be implemented by teachers and parents" (Farre, 1998, p. 51). These findings correspond with Davidson and Simmons' (1991, as cited in Johnson, 2007) research findings.

Therefore, whilst recommendations are arguably the most important part of the report, given the implications for supportive interventions, teachers have demonstrated criticism of report recommendations. Various report writing resources have also commented on the need for reports to provide recommendations that are useful for determining interventions (Lichtenberg et al., 2004; Ownby, 1990; Tallent, 1998; Zins & Barnett, 1983).

2.4 An inclusive approach to the report

The shifting of assessment from a medical model to an inclusive approach has implications for the approach taken to the report. Thus this requires deliberation.

A radical difference in the approach to assessment within an inclusive perspective is the "move away from assessing intrinsic barriers of the learner without making a thorough investigation of the contextual factors which impact on teaching and learning" (Department of Education, 2005, p. 13). The Department of Education (2002a, p. 79) states that "assessment needs to be multi-dimensional or systemic in nature, located within the framework of barriers at the individual (learner and educator), curriculum, institution, family, community, and social context levels"

and accordingly assessment should be appropriate and relevant to the context and realities of the learner.

However, according to the medical model approach, assessment has traditionally focused primarily on influencing intrinsic factors (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2007). Consequently, it was thought that the learner ought to undergo remediation for these within-person deficits (Landsberg et al., 2007). However, from an inclusive approach it is now recognised that the learner's context often presents as a barrier to development (Department of Education, 1997; Department of Education, 2002a; Landsberg et al., 2007). Therefore, more attention needs to be paid to how extrinsic (contextual) factors influence the learner's development.

Yet, this is not to say that intrinsic factors must be completely disregarded. The Department of Education (2005) suggest that attention must be paid to both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Firstly, learner aspects need to be considered, including communication factors (language proficiency, expressive and receptive language) and cognitive factors (task behaviour, processing skills, language processing and number skills) (Department of Education, 2005). Secondly, behavioural aspects should be taken into account, including social conventions, socio-emotional factors, physical factors, motor ability, sensory factors, self-care factors and medical conditions (Department of Education, 2005). Thirdly, extrinsic aspects that should be addressed include family dynamics, transport needs, socio-economic factors, school readiness for inclusion, school policies, staffing and staff development and physical factors in the environment (Department of Education, 2005). Thus, these elements require contemplation in the utilisation of assessment from an inclusive approach, in order to acquire a greater understanding of the learner and to determine supportive interventions.

Report writing resources emphasise the importance of considering the learner's context in the assessment of children (Harvey, 2006; Ownby, 1990). Thus educational psychologists should heed this recommendation with regard to their assessment of children and writing of reports.

Even though the focus of an inclusive approach is on supporting and accommodating the learner in the mainstream classroom by addressing hindering contextual factors, there are still occasions when it is appropriate to refer learners for alternate school placement. Vaughn, Bos

& Schum (2003, p. 4) comment that "there are times, however, when students' needs are best met in other settings". Moreover, Karale (as cited in Bradley-Johnson et al., 1995, p. 190) states that "although inclusion may be beneficial for some students, inclusion may not be effective in achieving and enhancing social development in all children". In line with this, the Department of Education (2005) in South Africa point out that assessment practices which prevent learners with severe and multiple disabilities from admittance to special schools are problematic.

Moreover, Palesa Tyobeka, the Deputy Director General of Education in South Africa, stated in a paper delivered at the 10th World Congress of Inclusion in (2006, p. 8):

> "Mindful of the fact that many parents are still preferring the option of special schooling for their children, the Department of Education is simultaneously running a programme for improving the quality of education in special schools."

Thus there evidently remains recognition of the need and acceptability of some learners receiving support in alternate school environments.

However, the need to use assessment for this purpose should be reduced to the minimum (Department of Education, 2005). Learners with mild and moderate support difficulties should not be referred to alternate school settings, as it is thought that their needs can be adequately accommodated in the mainstream classroom (Department of Education, 2005). Moreover, all support mechanisms available at the school and community level ought to be exhausted before looking beyond the school for support (Department of Education, 2005). The resources of the school, additional requirements, and a strong motivation should be provided as reasons why the learner should require support in an alternate setting (Department of Education, 2005). Moreover, the outcome-based curriculum (Department of Education, 2002b), provides flexibility in terms of curriculum in order to accommodate learners in the mainstream classroom.

It is also necessary for the learner's uniqueness to be taken into account in reports. This is supported by inclusion documents and other literature. The White Paper Six (Department of Education, 2001, p. 16) states that "all children and youth can learn" and "all children and youth need support". Thus the need to accept and respect that all learners are unique and consequently have a variety of differing learning needs, is highlighted (Department of

Education, 2001). It is these needs that require being supported and accommodated in the mainstream classroom.

In accordance with this, Tallent (1998, p. 241) indicates that "the teacher's need, then, is to understand the student, specifically with regard to such matters as developmental level and to the proximate features of the student that contribute to some aspects of the learning environment that requires attention". Moreover, Lidz (2003, p. 231) states that "if teachers are to individualise their programs, they need some guidance to inform them of the needs of the individuals within their domains". Reports, given assessment findings and conclusions, are arguably able to provide teachers with insights concerning the nature of the learner's needs and how these can be effectively supported and accommodated in the classroom.

Recognising the uniqueness of the learner also concerns appreciating the learner's strengths (Department of Education, 2001). Accordingly, it is contended that psychologists need to assess learners with a view to establishing their areas of need as well as their strengths (Department of Education, 2002a). Foxcroft and Roodt (2001), and Snyder, Ritschel, Rand and Berg (2006) also emphasise the importance of including the client's strengths in reports. Groth-Marnat and Horvath (2006) suggest that there should be a balance between positive and pathological aspects in reports.

Furthermore, it is important to accommodate each learner's learning style in the classroom, in order to optimise their learning potential (Department of Education, 2001Landsberg et al., 2007; UNESCO, 2002). Multiple intelligences should also be recognised and drawn upon (Vaughn et al., 2003). Therefore, in the endeavour to determine supportive interventions, it appears necessary for assessments, and accordingly reports, to provide teachers with insight into the learner's unique learning style and possibly his strengths in terms of multiple intelligences.

Additionally, accommodation of difference extends to gifted or talented learners (Landsberg et al., 2007; UNESCO, 2002; Vaughn et al., 2003). Hence, perhaps it is also necessary for these learners to be assessed in order to determine how their needs could be adequately supported in the classroom.

Lastly, the report of the National Commission on Sepcial Needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services (Department of Education, 1997) indicate that there is a need to move away from an emphasis on individual assessment towards a more team-based approach. This includes the involvement of parents, teachers and learners (Department of Education, 2005). Bradley-Johnson et al. (1995, p. 193) further contend this point, stating that "the school psychologist will have an increasing role in working with teachers and other professionals in designing interventions for improving learning and classroom behaviour". Moreover, Harvey (2006) indicates that reports can better meet the needs of learners, parents and teachers by involving them as collaborators in the assessment and report writing process. Thus, collaboration extends to the reporting process.

2.5 Technical aspects of the report

It is necessary for reports to be understandable to teachers if they are to appreciate the insights reflected. Without comprehensibility, it could be said that the report holds no value at all.

The problematic use of jargon in reports is a theme frequently demonstrated in previous studies internationally. As early as 1954, Garfield et al. (1954, as cited in Ownby, 1990) found psychologists to be critical of the use of jargon in reports. Still many years later Rucker's (1967, as cited in Cheramie et al., 2007) study revealed that the use of jargon in reports leads to miscommunication. Problematic sentiments of jargon have continued to be demonstrated over the years. In 1986, Wiese et al. (1986) conducted a study on teachers' perceptions of the use of jargon in reports. It was found in their study that teachers were more satisfied with reports with lower levels of jargon and that the use of jargon impacted upon their comprehension of reports. More recently it was correspondingly indicated that reports were rated more negatively in terms of their use of technical language (Cheramie et al., 2007). This is in line with Harvey's (2006) findings. Therefore it is apparent that the problematic use of jargon in reports has continued to evidence in international studies over the years. This is in spite of the fact that published articles and books caution psychologists in this regard (Groth-Marnat & Horvath, 2006; Harvey, 2006; Olin & Keatinge, 1998; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1979).

However, it must be noted that Hagborg and Aiello-Coultier's (1994, as cited in Farre, 1998) finding was disparate to these studies. In their study, 98% of the teachers rated the use of technical language or jargon in reports as 'about right'.

Still other studies have shown that reports often lack general clarity. Garfield et al. (1954, as cited in Ownby, 1990) found that psychiatrists perceive reports as vague and ambiguous in their writing style, and psychologists also criticised reports for their lack of clarity. Another early study demonstrated that there is only a modest agreement in the relation between the intended messages that psychologists communicate in the report with the actual messages the report readers, from various professions, received (Caudra & Albaugh, 1956). Accordingly it was advised that psychologists be more explicit in their report writing. Tallent (1998), in his book, cautions psychologists on being too technically wordy, instead to write with simplicity, and to refrain from being vague, unclear and ambiguous.

Nevertheless, again Hagborg and Aiello-Coultier (1994, as cited in Farre, 1998) were disparate to the other studies. In their study 67 % rated the report as easily understandable and 31% rated it as just understandable.

Additionally, studies have revealed that the professional level and experience of the reader influences understanding. Grove (1980) conducted a study to determine how well psychologists communicate with peers, parents and teachers. A multiple choice vocabulary test was developed and administered to these groups. There was a statistically significant difference between all the groups, with the psychologists scoring highest, then teachers, and finally parents. Soon after this, Weddig's (1982) study demonstrated that reports are often not written according to the appropriate reading level of parents, and understanding was associated with their level of education. Furthermore, in another study, whilst the report was rated overall as understandable to parents and other professionals, parents rated the report less understandable than teachers (Cornwall, 1990). Additionally, it was indicated that teachers with prior experience of psychological reports usually find reports easier to understand (Cornwall, 1990). It has also been shown that special education teachers are more comfortable with terms than students trained to be regular classroom teachers or students in other majors (Rafoth & Richmond, 2006). From all this, it is evident that psychologists ought to consider

the professional level and experience of the reader when writing the report. This is supported by published articles and books on report writing (Groth-Marnat & Horvath, 2006; Ownby, 1990). Ownby (1990) suggests that the psychologist should not assume that the reader understands even terms which he perceives as basic, and ought to give concrete descriptions.

Yet, it must be noted that the findings of one early study did not support the claim that reports are too technical, theoretical or written in a vague manner (Baker, 1965, as cited in Ownby, 1990). Instead teachers found the information portrayed on reports to be fairly coherent. There was also an indication that teachers with less experience find the report most useful. Hence, from this, it appears that the report provides greater utility for supporting inexperienced teachers than more experienced teachers. However, this study too is particularly dated.

Turning to South African studies, Knoetzer and Vermoter (2007) indicated in their research findings that South African remedial teachers often do not understand the language used in reports. If remedial teachers with higher education struggle to comprehend reports, it is questionable whether regular classroom teachers will understand the reports either. However Farre (1998, p. 54) commented in her research findings that "it is encouraging to note that 81.9% of teachers in the current study were satisfied with the language used on the report that they read". Consequently there appears to be a discrepancy in research findings here.

Additionally, the way the report is structured influences the extent to which the teacher understands the report in general, and consequently influences her understanding of the learner. Rucker's study (1967, as cited in Sattler, 1988) indicated that the report content lacks form and organisation. Noting criticisms of the communication of reports, Pryzwanky & Harmania (1986) investigated a problem solving approach to writing reports. The study found that school psychologists, counsellors and teachers all rated the traditional report format more favourably. Thus, although teachers have criticised the organisation of reports, later research has shown that there is a preference for the traditional report, rather than an alternative report structure. Yet, again these studies were conducted a considerable number of years ago.

Previous research has also noted various professionals' satisfaction with different lengths of reports. Tallent and Reiss (1959) found that psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers

experience reports as unclear and excessively long. Accordingly, Tallent (1998, p. 10) states in his published book on report writing that "the longer the report is, the less prominent any given item of content is likely to be, and the less likely it is that the relative significance will be grasped". Therefore it is deemed necessary for psychologists to write more succinct, focused and explicit reports. Carlos and Albaugh (1956), on the basis of their findings on sources of ambiguity in reports, recommended that psychologists emphasise the most salient features in the report and specify degree. In order to achieve this, it is suggested that attaining a clear statement of the focus of interest of the report by the referral source may be required. Another previous study with various professionals, including psychiatrists and social workers, concluded that "an outline form of the psychological report can be valuable in speeding up the writing of reports and also presenting findings in a clearer, more concise fashion than the standard narrative report" (Lacks, Horton & Owen, 1969). These studies correspond with Foxcroft and Roodt's (2001) indication that reports should only contain relevant facts. Thus, according to all this, it seems as if a shorter, more concise report is optimal.

On the other hand, one study contrastingly demonstrated that reports are perceived by teachers as too brief (Rucker, 1967, cited in Sattler, 1988). Moreover, Weiner's (1985, as cited in Cheramie et al., 2007) study suggests that as long as reports provide comprehensible information, teachers are satisfied with longer reports. Perhaps Olin and Keatinge (1998) and Groth-Marnat and Horvath's (2006) indication that the length of the report ought to be determined by the referral source, demonstrates the manner in which psychologists can ascertain the length required for a specific report.

In line with Rucker's study (1967, as cited in Sattler, 1988), Farre (1998) established that South African teachers find reports too short. On the other hand, Knoetzer and Vermoter (2007) found that South African remedial teachers require reports to provide quick and specific reference to the child's difficulties, highlighting that there is often not the time to study long reports.

2.6 The effectiveness of the report as a means of communication

Finally, it is necessary to consider whether the report in itself is an effective means of communication for teachers. If the report is not perceived as an adequate means of

communication, it is necessary for psychologists to reflect on the need to communicate in other ways. Sudduth (1976, as cited in Ownby, 1990) investigated the effects of various means of reporting assessment data to teachers. Teachers were provided with one of four combinations of consultation and report: (a) written report only, (b) face-to-face consultation only, (c) report and consultation, or (d) no report or consultation. The study findings demonstrated that providing both the report and consultation has significant increases in the teacher-psychologist agreement about the nature of the problem, but no other significant treatment effects were observed. Hence, from this study, it is apparent that the report alone is not perceived as a sufficient means of communication. It is optimal for the report to be provided in conjunction with a consultation with the psychologist. Zins & Barnett (1983) further indicate that often teachers do not read the entire report. Hence, although the report is a common means of communication between psychologists and teachers, it cannot be assumed that it is the most optimal form of communication. It is necessary to consider whether these previous insights still hold true for today.

Other studies have demonstrated that parents desire greater communication and collaboration with psychologists. Human and Teglasi (1993) conducted a study on parents' satisfaction and compliance with recommendations. It was found that understanding the parents' perspective was of importance. Whether the parents agree with the recommendations and are able to realise their value, influences their compliance. Consequently, the importance of discussing concerns with the recommendations and possible obstacles to their implementation is proposed. Correspondingly, another study found that positive interaction with parents increased the likelihood of follow-through of the recommendations (Sullivan, 1997).

2.7 A South African study

Given that Farre's (1998) previous study on teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports is most relevant in its content and setting to the current study, it is necessary that further elaboration of the study be provided. Consequently, this will be discussed here.

Farre's (1998) study aimed to evaluate teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports that they received by teachers. The study was descriptive and explorative in nature. Perception sif of the content of reports, the comprehensibility of reports, as well as the lengths of reports, was

assessed. Furthermore, the perceived usefulness of reports in terms of their source was evaluated, as well as how demographic variables of both learners and teachers relate to the perceived usefulness of reports. Additionally, teachers' attitudes to test data and psychologists, in relation to perceptions of report utility, were looked at. Finally, how criticisms of reports in this study, and most specifically the recommendations section, correlated with what previous literature had demonstrated, was evaluated.

The sample of the study was from twelve co-educational, Ex-'Model C', government primary schools in the greater Johannesburg area. The teacher-participants in the study were from both the junior and senior primary school levels, and the schools were from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. A total of twelve schools participated in the study, seven which schools were Afrikaans in their medium of instruction and the other five English. Ninety-three questionnaires completed by teachers were used for the study.

A questionnaire was devised that contained both quantitative and qualitative questions. The qualitative questions were provided as a means to further elaborate on the quantitative answers provided. The questionnaire included demographic details, details of reports, ratings of the various sections of the reports, the overall ratings of reports as well as an attitude measure.

The current study has been devised in consideration of the nature of Farre's (1998) study, as well as her findings. Thus, in this way, the study extends on what was done and discovered from this previous study. This is also in consideration of what previous international literature has shown, as well as the requirements of an inclusive approach to education.

CHAPTER THREE:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

The overarching research question investigated in this study was:

- What are Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the psycho-educational report?

In the attempt to determine the answer to the overarching research question, the following questions were explored:

- What are Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the report for understanding the learner?
- What are Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the report for determining supportive interventions?
- What problems do Foundation Phase teachers experience with reports?
- What are Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of how the report could be made more useful to them?

3.2 Research Design

This study was conducted through a qualitative research design. It is located in the interpretive phenomenological paradigm (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). No variables were manipulated or controlled, as in an experimental research design (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003). Instead the study was descriptive and explorative in nature (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003). Given the dated international studies and lack of South African studies on teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports, it was necessary not to limit the participants' responses. Instead, at this point, it was deemed important to gain a more thorough understanding of their current perceptions of reports in an explorative manner. A quantitative research design would require directive, closed-ended questions whilst a qualitative research design allows for questioning to be less directive and more open-ended. In this way, a qualitative design permits greater flexibility which would facilitate this explorative study. Moreover, in order not to limit the expression of teachers' perceptions, the qualitative strategy is more desirable. Although Farre

(1998) employed both a quantitative and qualitative research design for her study, for the reasons discussed above, it was decided that a qualitative research design would be used here.

The research strategy was both phenomenological and practitioner-based. The phenomenological strategy of inquiry intends to identify the participants' experiences of a phenomenon, topic or concept (Creswell, 2009; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2004). This study investigated teachers' perceptions of reports, given their experiences of receiving reports in their teaching practices. A practitioner-based strategy seeks to describe, explain and change policy or practice. This study explored teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the report with the end resulting aim of providing recommendations for educational psychologists on psycho-educational assessment report practices.

This study was inductive. Inductive reasoning concerns taking findings from a small group and using them as a basis to form possible generalisations across a larger group (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003). The finding from teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports for this school evokes the question of whether teachers from other schools would express similar themes. Thus the findings of this study are tentatively generalised to a larger group.

3.3 Data collection

Semi-structured individual interviews were employed (Appendix B) for data collection. The interview technique is useful when researchers seek to determine the viewpoints of respondents (Strauss & Myburgh, 2005). As this study examined teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the report according to their own experiences, it is fitting to use this technique. Semi-structured interviews were also chosen as it enabled the researcher to set meaningful predetermined questions whilst still allowing flexibility in the direction of the interview (de Vos et al., 2004). The researcher was then able to follow up on aspects that emerged during the interview process. Although the interview technique is employed with fewer participants than other research strategies, the depth of information acquired through interviews is usually greater (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003). Given the explorative form of this study, the rich information acquired from fewer participants was viewed as more valuable than the less rich information acquired from a greater number of participants.

The interview was phenomenological in nature. In phenomenological interviews, data is gathered regarding the lived experiences of the participant (Strauss & Myburgh, 2005, p. 42). This study examined teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports from their own experiences of receiving reports. In this type of interview, the interviewer facilitates the flow of information from the respondent until the interviewee does not provide any more information (Strauss & Myburgh, 2005). Accordingly, this was done.

The interviews were tape recorded. A recording allows for fuller records than note taking (de Vos et al., 2004). However, the disadvantage of tape recording is that it may cause the participant to feel uneasy or withdrawn, accordingly inhibiting the interview process (de Vos et al., 2004). On the other hand, the participant would arguably feel even less comfortable with a video recording. Hence, tape recording was chosen over video recording for this study.

The interview process requires specific techniques. The researcher needs to allow the participant to do the majority of the talking and to employ active listening skills, such as paraphrasing, summarising, clarification, reflection and summarising (de Vos et al., 2004). The researcher guides the interview through open-ended questioning and probing (de Vos et al., 2004). These skills were utilised by the researcher for this study.

A pilot study was conducted prior to implementing the formal research study. Pilot studies are employed to ascertain whether the relevant data can be obtained from the participants (de Vos et al., 2004). It is also useful to do a pilot study for interviews as it allows the researcher to become familiar with the interview process (de Vos et al., 2004). The interview schedule for this study was piloted in order to determine any pitfalls in the interview schedule and to make the necessary alterations, as well as to become more familiar with the interview process. The first two participants interviewed were for the pilot study. Hence the data from these interviews was excluded in the final research report. Instead, this data was used to rectify any problems found in the interview schedule. Once these rectifications had been made, the following participant interviews were employed for the purpose of the formal research study.

3.4 Participants

The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. In purposive sampling, parameters are set regarding the type of participants required for the study (de Vos et al., 2004). Ten Foundation Phase teachers from an independent school in Northern Johannesburg were selected. However, as mentioned previously, the first two participants were interviewed for the pilot study. Hence, a total of eight teachers were interviewed for the formal research study. It was required that the teachers had a minimum of three years' teaching experience in the Foundation Phase and that they had experience with psycho-educational reports. Experience was necessary for teachers to provide credible comments on the usefulness of the psycho-educational report. As independent schools are perceived as privileged, it was thought that they would have greater access to psychological services. Thus it is arguable that teachers in independent schools would have considerable experience with reports. The school was selected according to the non-probability, purposive sampling technique. Non-probability samples are selected on their availability and willingness to participate (Gravetter and Forzano, 2003). It is purposive in that it was required that the school be independent. It was decided that specifically eight teachers (excluding the two additional pilot study participants) would be interviewed for this study, as this is when it was perceived that data saturation would be achieved and sample redundancy would occur; moreover, it was deemed a realistic number of participants to be interviewed within the time framework of this study.

3.5 Data Analysis

Phenomenological interviews are analysed thematically (Strauss & Myburgh). Accordingly, thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data in this study. Thematic content analysis is a method of identifying and reporting patterns or themes located in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It reports the experiences, meanings and reality of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The theme captures important elements in the data, in relation to the proposed research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, in this study, themes regarding the teachers' perceptions of reports, from their experiences, were identified in relation to the given research questions for this study.

3.6 Procedure

The school was contacted via email, informed and invited to participate in the research study. When interest was shown, a letter detailing the purpose and procedure for the study was provided (Appendix C), as well as an informed consent form to be signed by the Principal (Appendix D). According to college requirements, the Rector was also required to provide consent for the study. Once informed consent had been attained from both the Principal and Rector, the Principal informed the staff of the study, and a number of teachers put their names forward as potential participants. Accordingly, these teachers were each contacted and provided with further information on the study. This included a letter detailing the purpose and procedure of the study (Appendix E), the consent forms (Appendix F and G), as well as the biographical information form, including the age range that the teacher fits into, the level of qualification and years experience teaching that the teacher had, and the grades that the teacher had previously taught (Appendix A). The first ten teachers to continue to show interest in participating were the participants for this study.

Following this, an interview date, time and place that suited the teachers was set. Before the interview commenced, the signed forms were given to the researcher. The interviews were conducted according to the semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix B). The interviews were audiotape recorded and were approximately forty-five minutes in length. The first two participants interviewed were for the purpose of the pilot study. Following on from this, when possible amendments have been made to the interview schedule, the remaining eight teachers were interviewed for the formal research study.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The Code of Ethics for Research on Human Subjects at the University of the Witwatersrand was adhered to and the Ethics Committee granted clearance for the proposed study (Protocol Number: MED/09/007 IH). This was followed in the execution of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR:
RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

From a thematic content analysis of the eight transcribed interviews a number of themes were identified. These themes are aligned with the research aims and questions of the current study.

The themes that emerged include:

- The utility of the report for providing a more comprehensive understanding of the learner.
- The utility of the report for determining supportive interventions.
- Perceptions of technical aspects of the report.
- Consideration for the uniqueness of the learner.
- Desire for greater communication and collaboration
- The perceived value of the report within an inclusive approach to education.

4.1. The utility of the report for providing a more comprehensive understanding of the learner

The teachers conveyed their perceptions of the usefulness of the report for providing a more comprehensive understanding of the learner. This relates to the first research question. Certain sections of the report were perceived as more useful than others in this regard.

Six teachers indicated that they find the background information at least somewhat useful, with three teachers expressing that it occasionally provides them with more than they had previously known. Still, two teachers consider it advantageous to gain further insight about the learner from other influential individuals in the child's life, besides the parents. Thus, in this way, greater insight into the learner's broader context is provided. This relates to the importance of understanding the learner contextually, according to an inclusive approach (Department of Education, 2002a, 2005; Landsberg et al., 2007).

In regards to the clinical impressions section, six teachers relayed that they do not find it useful at all. The problem seems to be largely located in the fact that the learner's behaviour in the one-on-one assessment setting may be in vast disparity to the classroom context. Four of the

teachers suggested this. Accordingly, three participants feel that there is a need for psychologists to come into the school and observe the child in the classroom context, and Participant Five highlights the importance of explaining the behaviour discrepancy between settings. This again concerns taking the learner's everyday context into consideration and highlights the need for this to be taken into greater account in reports (Department of Education, 2002a, 2005).

The study revealed that whilst certain test results are more useful than others in providing teachers with information that is deemed helpful for acquiring a greater understanding of the learner, overall they are seemingly perceived as limited in this regard. This is discrepant to Mussman's (1964) erstwhile findings with teachers and more in line with Olfiesh and McAffee's (2000) study outcome with regard to service delivery to college students with disabilities, where the test scores were used least often.

None of the teachers exhibited enthusiasm for the cognitive test results, although two teachers recognise that the discrepancy between the scores can be insightful. Yet, it must be noted that these two teachers have degrees in learning support which suggests that they would likely have some knowledge in the area of assessment. Therefore, it is questionable whether general classroom teachers would also recognise related insights. This is in agreement with Knoetzer and Vermoter's (2007) finding that South African remedial therapists, having greater expertise than general classroom teachers, find IQ scores useful for acquiring insight into the learner's strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the expertise of the teachers ought to be taken into account when writing up reports.

In Farre's (1998) study significantly more teachers found IQ test information useful. Perhaps the discrepancy relates to the fact that inclusion was not well instituted in South Africa at the time of this previous study, and inclusion deemphasises standardised assessments (Department of Education, 1997; Department of Education, 2002a, 2005). In addition, a lack of understanding of the meaning of the information provided by the results for acquiring a greater understanding of the learner may also be a contributing factor.

Three of the teachers find the scholastic test results useful, another three find it only moderately useful, and two others do not find it useful at all. The findings of the current study are not completely aligned with Farre's (1998) study where significance was found for the perceived usefulness of achievement tests. Although Ownby et al.'s (1982, as cited in Farre, 1998) study indicates that achievement tests are frequently reflected in reports, there is no indication of how useful teachers actually find them. Participant Four's remark, in regards to the presentation of scholastic assessment information, stated, *"but I do like to see reversing 'b's' and 'd's' and that type of thing",* seems to suggest value for qualitative insights.

In regards specifically to perceptual test results, six of the teachers indicated that they find these valuable. It provides them with insight into the learner's underlying difficulties, and accordingly facilitates decision making for supportive interventions. Since the large majority of teachers perceive perceptual test results as useful, it implies significance. This is in agreement with Farre's (1998) findings.

Accordingly, on the whole, it appears that the teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of test results in the current study are not as favourable as those demonstrated by Farre's (1998) earlier study. In this study 69% of the teachers found the test results useful. Moreover, it was commented that "the provision of test results may be regarded by teachers as privileged or "expert" knowledge possessed by psychologists, and thus highly valued" (Farre, 1998, p. 52). This suggests that the test results, or perhaps rather how they are currently conveyed on reports, are not currently providing teachers with as great an insight into the learner as they potentially could. It appears that some difficulty with understanding the findings is contributing, as discussed later.

Five of the teachers indicated that they find the emotional assessment findings particularly valuable, with still another describing it as *"interesting"*. According to three teachers, it provides them with a greater understanding of the learner's emotional wellbeing, and how this influences the learner's behaviour and performance at school. For instance, Participant Two commented, *"I have a child in my class who was diagnosed with depression, and I didn't know that he was depressed and hence his almost – I thought it was a bad attitude to school, but in fact the child was depressed and was now being placed on medication for depression, and it's*

made a vast difference in his life. So that was very informative for me". Nevertheless, two teachers demonstrated a desire for more detail on the emotional side, although ethical constraints on the part of the psychologist may prohibit this.

The finding that teachers value emotional assessment insights is in contrast to Isett and Roszkwoski's (1979, as cited in Ownby, 1990) study outcome in a short term residential facility for individuals experiencing severe cognitive difficulties, where projective tests were found to hold the least relevance. Perhaps the inconsistency is due to the fact that this cited study did not focus on teachers' perceptions.

Two teachers also feel that there should be a greater emphasis on emotional intelligence. This correlates with an inclusive approach to education, in that there is an emphasis on consideration for multiple intelligences and holistic education (Department of education, 1997, 2002a, 2002b; Vaughn et al., 2003). Therefore, perhaps more emphasis should be given to this in reports.

The utility of the report for answering the teacher's referral question also provided insight into how useful reports are for enhancing teachers' understanding of the learner. Although one teacher suggested that reports usually do answer her referral questions, another two teachers indicated that this is not always the case. This reiterates Cheramie et al.'s (2007) conclusions, and is aligned with the comment in Farre's (1998) research report indicating that there may be a need to better address the referral questions of teachers. However, it contests Cornwall's (1990) international study findings at a paediatric hospital psychology department. A tendency to inadequately address the referral questions demonstrates a lack of consideration for report writing resources emphasis on the importance of this (Tallent, 1998; Olin & Keatinge, 1998).

On the other hand, Participant Five indicated that she does not have a specific referral question. Rather, she hopes to gain a holistic understanding of the learner from the assessment. This is in line with the impression that Participant Seven gave. Hence, as long as the report provides a holistic understanding of the learner, some teachers may perceive it as adequate. One teacher indicated that some reports are better than others in providing a holistic understanding of the learner. Still, another teacher feels that reports have improved in this regard. Inclusion

supports the acquirement of a holistic understanding of the learner (Department of education, 1997, 2002a).

It also seems that reports frequently provide teachers with confirmation of their previous predictions of the learner's difficulties and support needs. Seven of the teachers indicated this. This corresponds with other previous findings (Farre, 1998; Hagborg and Aiello-Coultier, 1994, as cited in Farre, 1998). Two teachers would like more than this from reports.

In sum, although reports are found to provide the teachers with some useful insights for acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of the learner, there is definite need for improvement. Some sections of the report provide what is deemed more useful information to them than others. There is a need for reports to more fully answer the teachers' specific referral questions. Whilst confirmation of their previous predictions is generally provided in reports, some would like more than this. Yet, overall, what seems to be the underlying message from the teachers' responses is that the relevance of the information presented in reports to them as teachers and whether this is clearly explained appears to contribute to its perceived usefulness for acquiring an understanding of the learner.

The perceived overall usefulness of the report for acquiring an understanding of the learner in the current study is disparate to Farre's (1998) previous findings. In Farre's (1998) study 69.9% of the teachers indicated that they find the report useful for helping them to understand the learner. Moreover, Ownby's (1982, as cited in Farre, 1998) study revealed that 28% of the teachers consider it 'important' for the report to help the them to understand the learner, whilst 16% think that it is 'very important', and 6% 'essential'. Arguably the need for the report to provide an understanding of the learner is particularly important within an inclusive approach to education, as teachers require an understanding of the learner's needs and strengths in order to provide optimal support.

4.2 Utility of the report for determining supportive interventions

The teachers expressed their perceptions of the usefulness of the report for determining supportive interventions. They referred to interventions beyond as well as within the classroom context. This addresses the second research question.

Seven of the teachers in the current study suggested that they find the summary, conclusion and recommendations sections of the report particularly valuable, with particular emphasis on the recommendations. The value held for the recommendations section of the report is aligned with previous findings (Isett & Roszkwoski, 1979, as cited in Ownby, 1990; Mussman, 1964; Rucker, 1967). Hence, there is a consistency in this finding dating back a number of decades.

Yet, in spite of the expressed value for the recommendations section, the teachers indicated that they do not always find the recommendations depicted in reports particularly useful. Although the quantitative results of Farre's (1998) study revealed that teachers perceive the recommendations as very useful, the qualitative comments suggested that there was room for improvement. Hence, this discouragingly seems to somewhat correspond with the current study.

In terms of recommendations for supportive interventions beyond the classroom, it was established that all of the teachers find that reports generally do depict the therapies that the learner may require. This relates to Occupational, Speech and Play Therapies. Hence it seems that the report is effective in this regard. However, three of the teachers feel that, if a number of different therapies are recommended, they ought to be prioritised, as attending all of the therapies simultaneously may not be viable. One teacher feels that if a learner requires several therapies, it ought to be considered, for financial reasons, whether the learner would be better suited to a remedial school setting. A remedial school is perceived as potentially more beneficial as the therapies may be all inclusive. Nevertheless, at the current school, Occupational and Speech Therapies are available on site and the learners are able to attend therapies during school hours. Yet, one teacher feels that it is problematic when learners are pulled out of class to go to several therapies, as it cuts into teaching time. Hence, this needs to be taken into consideration.

Participant Six indicated that she finds recommendations for alternate school placement valuable, as it may be the most advantageous to the learner. Moreover, Participant Four feels that a recommendation for remedial school placement coming from a psychologist is helpful, as it provides a strong backup for what was already suspected. Participant Eight indicated that the

report should be explicit in this recommendation. This is consistent with Tallent's (1998, p. 55) suggestion that readers prefer it when the psychologist does not "straddle the fence".

However, three of the teachers feel that recommendations for alternate school placement are often too quick. This implies that learners are referred for alternate school placement before it has proved essential, and before addressing the extrinsic barriers. This is opposed to the Department of Education's (2005) outline for determining the possible need for alternate school placement. Hence, in this way, reports are deemed to lack inclusivity in nature, and to be more medical model in their approach.

Participant Four feels that if a learner experiencing difficulties is recommended to be accommodated in the mainstream classroom, recommendations should also be provided on how this can successfully be achieved. She makes the following remark:

> *"I think there could be more suggestions because sometimes we might get a report that says 'is a good inclusive child', but we need more – how do we do that? What does this child need? Do they need a tutor? Do they need somebody spending more time with them in the classroom? Do they need more OT or do they need OT? Do they need Speech Therapy? I actually think that the reports could give more in that area because I have read reports that say 'a good inclusive child'. And I don't know what that means".*

All of the teachers suggested that reports do generally provide recommendations for neurological assessments, with regards to the possible need for medication, when deemed necessary. Six of these teachers indicated that they find this useful. Three of the teachers expressed that it adds to what they had previously been thinking and communicating to the parents. One teacher also finds that parents more readily accept the recommendation if it comes from another professional. Participant Six and Eight both indicated that the recommendation should be explicit. This again supports the notion that psychologists should not "straddle the fence" in their recommendations (Tallent, 1998, p. 55).

Participant Three feels more negatively about recommendations for neurological assessments, in regards to the possible need for medication. Moreover, she perceives that this recommendation sometimes tarnishes the parents' perception of the report overall. This

appears to relate to Farre's (1998) finding that parental resistance/non-compliance/inability to implement recommendations are not always addressed.

Turning to recommendations for how the child could be supported in the classroom, although all of the teachers expressed a strong desire for this, none of them have actually found reports to provide this. For instance, Participant Two stated, "*What, giving you advice on how to do it in the classroom? No, I've never read a report that actually tells me how to do it".* Participant One commented that she has been given reports in the past with articles attached, but she has found this to be too *"generic"*.

Participant One stated that she would like reports to provide more on how she could support the child in the classroom, given the occupational or speech related difficulties. This is consistent with Knoetzer and Vermoter's (2007) finding that remedial therapists would like more practical information that can be drawn upon in designing interventions. However, whilst this desire is recognised, it may be beyond the educational psychologist's field of expertise to make recommendations related to other therapies.

Participant Eight expressed concern for the failure of reports to provide teachers with constructive ideas to utilise specifically in the classroom context to effectively support the learner emotionally, although appropriate recommendations for Play Therapy may have been given. This corresponds with Participant One's feelings. Recommendations for this are within the educational psychologist's field of expertise.

However, when Participant Seven has contacted psychologists in the past, she has found them to be fairly forthcoming on how to support the child. Moreover, Participant Six believes that, as a Learning Support teacher, it is her responsibility to translate the report into practical ideas for the classroom. Yet, it is not in accordance with what Knoetzer and Vermoter (2007) have found regarding remedial therapists' perceptions.

Participant Five suggests that reports do not always reflect that the psychologist has an understanding of the classroom context, and what can realistically be implemented in this setting. This supports previous study findings that recommendations are not always perceived

as practical to the classroom context, and that teachers would like them to become more so (Davidson & Simmons, 1991, as cited in Johnson, 2007; Farre, 1998; Selvagno & Teglasi, 1987).

Moreover, three teachers consider it necessary for psychologists to acquire greater insight into the school as a unique system, as each school may function in a different way and have varying expectations. This is in line with Harvey's (2006) indication that the psychologist should know the school well enough in order to ascertain that the recommendations are appropriate. Moreover, Ownby (1990), emphasises that the environment in which the report is to be sent needs to be considered, in order for all influencing variables to be addressed. It also relates back to the need for reports to take greater account of contextual factors, according to an inclusive approach (Department of Education, 2002a, 2005; Landsberg et al., 2007).

The finding that reports lack utility for determining supportive interventions within the classroom is disturbingly compatible with both international and South African previous study findings (Cheramie et al.'s, 2007; Farre, 1998; Knoetzer & Vermoter's, 2007). Moreover, this tendency is opposed to resource books' recommendation for reports to assist in the determining of interventions (Lichtenberg et al., 2004; Ownby, 1990; Tallent, 1998; Zins & Barnett, 1983). Although Hagborg and Aiello-Courtier's (1994, as cited in Farre, 1998) study reflected that teachers find reports to be relevant to the classroom, this may be a due to the fact that the psychologists in this study partook in classroom observations.

In essence, the following comment in Farre's (1998) discussion also applies to the current study, over ten years later. Farre (1998, p. 50) stated, "The implication is that if psychologists wish to improve their reports as a means of service delivery to teachers, they should focus on including more concrete and specific recommendations to the teacher". Disturbingly, this also corresponds with Salvagno and Teglasi's (1987) findings over twenty years ago. Moreover, in Hagmier, Bischoff, Jacobs and Osmon's (1998) study on 'Role perceptions of the school psychologist by school personnel', 90% of the teachers conveyed that they would like the school psychologist to be more involved in the implementation of classroom interventions.

This finding also appears to support previous findings dating up to fifty years ago, demonstrating that reports are often not written with a practical or useful purpose in mind (Hartlage & Merck, 1971; Tallent & Reiss, 1959) and are not particularly useful for determining interventions (Cheramie et al., 2007). This is disappointing, given the importance, from an inclusive approach, of yielding interventions from assessments (Department of Education, 2002a).

It could be argued that it is the teacher's responsibility to translate the findings into classroom interventions, and perhaps many psychologists take this stance when providing teachers with reports. However, given the clear appeal for more classroom specific recommendations, psychologists could assist them more by providing more. Moreover, if teachers struggle to understand the findings, as portrayed on the report, it will be difficult to translate them into interventions.

4.3 Perceptions of technical aspects of the report

A number of criticisms of and preferences for technical aspects of the report were given. This includes the use of technical language, the preferred length and organisation of the report, experiences of waiting for reports, and preferences for the presentation of test data. These findings concern the third and fourth research questions, regarding problems experienced with reports and perceptions of how the report could be made more useful to them.

Five of the teachers strongly indicated that they find reports often contain too much technical language. For instance, Participant Three remarked *"...sometimes I'll read the report and think, oh my goodness, what on earth do they mean? And even sometimes you need to take out a dictionary".* Moreover, one teacher indicated that she struggles to understand the scholastic test results, which consequently inhibits their potential usefulness to her. This finding discouragingly demonstrates the persistence of the problem with excessive jargon in reports, which has evidenced repeatedly over the past five decades (Garfield et al., as cited in Ownby, 1990; Harvey, 2006; Rucker, 1967, as cited in Cheramie et al., 2007; Wiese et al., 1986). Moreover, psychologists are evidently not heeding report writing resources' cautioning in this regard (Groth-Marnat & Horvath, 2006; Harvey, 2006; Olin & Keatinge, 1998; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1979). This finding is disparate to Farre's (1998) finding that teachers do not have

a significant problem with the use of language in reports. This supports the notion that reports should be written with the reader in mind (Tallent, 1967; Hartlage & Merck, 1971).

Contrastingly, one teacher suggested that she does not have a problem with the terminology, given her experience. This implies that greater experience will allow for greater understanding. This corresponds with Cornwall's (1990) finding. However, this does not seem to be the case, as other teachers who expressed difficulties with understanding the technical language in reports have also had considerable experience in teaching and with reports.

Two other teachers with higher education than some of the others expressed that they find report terminology relatively understandable. Hence, this is aligned with Rafoth and Richmond's (2006) international study's conclusion that special education teachers are more comfortable with report terminology. Additionally, it somewhat corresponds with Grove's (1998) finding on a study of report vocabulary comprehension, where teachers scored higher than parents, with less education in this regard, but lower than psychologists, with greater education.

Nonetheless, Participant Four, who is remedially trained, still finds a lot of the technical language difficult to understand. Participant Four also commented *"I think for teachers that's hard, for myself as learning support I think it's difficult".* Moreover, Participant Eight, who has a background in psychology, remarked that she still finds it difficult to understand the terminology. Hence the findings are more aligned with Knoetzer and Vermoter's (2007) South African study results, where remedial teachers indicated that they often do not understand the language used in reports either.

Turning to the preferred length of the report, one teacher indicated that she prefers longer reports as it is believed to be *"value for money"* and she gets *"more out of it"*. Another teacher expressed that she prefers *"a more detailed"* and *"thorough"* report, which seems to also imply a preference for longer reports.

Contrastingly, six teachers feel that they would prefer a more concise report. However, two teachers emphasised that all pertinent information should be included. Still, Participant Eight

feels that it is alright for her if the report is lengthy, but what is pertinent to her should be highlighted in a concise way. Therefore, overall it can be concluded that the majority of teachers prefer a more concise report that highlights important information that it is relevant to them. This relates back to the value held for the summary and conclusion sections of the report.

The finding that reports are generally too long is supported by literature (Tallent et al, 1959; Tallent, 1998). In addition, it backs up Carlos and Albaugh's (1959), as well as Foxcroft and Roodt's (2001) recommendation that reports ought to only emphasise the salient points. Furthermore, it appears to be in some agreement with a previous study's conclusion, including various professionals, that an outline form of report, which is presented in a clear and concise way, is most desirable (Lacks et al., 1969). Yet, the current study is disparate to Farre's (1998) study, where it was found that teachers perceived reports as too short. On the other hand, it is aligned with Knoetzer and Vermoter's (2007) finding that remedial therapists prefer reports to provide quick and specific reference to the learner's difficulties.

Waiting for reports appears to be a problem for many of the teachers. Six teachers suggested this. Nonetheless, three teachers demonstrated recognition for practical considerations in this regard. Moreover, Participant Eight pointed out that it is often not the psychologist's fault that reports take a long time to be handed over, as sometimes the parent *"sits on it"*.

Overall, the teachers appear satisfied with the organisation of reports. Five teachers explicitly stated that they find the organisation adequate. Another two teachers conveyed that reports do vary in this regard, although no criticism was expressed for different forms of organisation that they received on reports. It was also mentioned by two teachers that they are so used to reading reports that they find it easy, and one other teacher commented that she tends to read the report in her own way in any case. Two teachers more specifically emphasised that they like heading on reports.

Finally, the teachers expressed their preferences for the presentation of test data. Three teachers prefer professional interpretation of data over factual data depicted in reports. Four other teachers indicated that they like both factual and interpretive information. For two of the

teachers, this is so that they can also draw their own conclusions. Yet it must be noted again that these two teachers have both got honours degrees, which perhaps explains why they are able to draw their own inferences from the data.

These findings are inconsistent with Selvagno & Teglasi's (1987) study, where teachers suggested that they prefer interpretive data over factual data. In addition, it does not support the notion that factual data should be omitted altogether from the report (Foxcroft & Roodt; Olin & Keatinge, 1998). However, there remains a need to consider the professional expertise of the teacher in order for them to understand what is presented on the report (Cornwall, 1990; Groth-Marnat & Horvath, 2006; Grove, 1980; Ownby, 1990; Rafoth & Richmond, 2006), as well as consideration for the possible misinterpretation of test data (Olin and Keatinge, 1998). Moreover, if the test scores are depicted as ranges, thus in accordance with the descriptive rather than numerical form advocated by Foxcroft and Roodt (2001), and discussed in an integrated discussion, as suggested by Tallent (1998), it could be most understandable and useful to the general classroom teacher. In this way, the report would be providing a comprehensive picture of the person rather than merely the test scores, as emphasised by Lichtenberg et al. (2004).

Two teachers also indicated that they quite like the use of a table to present test results. One would also prefer a written explanation of the test results depicted in the table. One other teacher finds that the written explanation is more useful to her than graphs and tables. Two other teachers prefer the graph, whilst another teacher indicated that the graph means nothing to her. Hence, unlike parents, teachers have varied preferences for how test data is presented (Miller, 2005). Consequently, it appears necessary for several forms of presenting test results to be depicted on reports. In consideration of what has just been discussed, the test data, in whatever form, ought to be depicted in ranges.

In sum, that the overuse of technical language is a considerable problem for teachers. With general classroom teachers lacking comprehension of the report, it is rendered useless. In addition, it is considered more favourable if reports are presented in a shorter more concise way, depicting information that is of pertinence to the teacher, or at least for the salient points to be highlighted. Furthermore, teachers appeal for reports to be made available to them as

soon as possible. The organisation of reports is deemed satisfactory, and teachers express value for the interpretation of test data to be given, and for the test data to be displayed in a number of forms.

4.4 Consideration for the uniqueness of the learner

It evidenced from the study that teachers would like reports to take the uniqueness of the learner into greater consideration. Problems and preferences for reports in this regard relate to the third and fourth research questions.

Two teachers indicated that they do not feel that reports always take the uniqueness of the learner into full account. Participant Three criticised reports for being *"a little bit too generalised"*, and expressed a desire for reports to *"show that they've cared"* and *"be a bit more personalised"*. Participant Four stated, *"I mean I've had one report with the wrong name, and the psychologist obviously had it on her computer and didn't – you know. And the name wasn't changed. It was the wrong child's name or the wrong gender".* This again suggests that reports may be too generalised in their depiction. Harvey (2006) recommends that reports refrain from making global predictions. Moreover, inclusion emphasises the importance of accommodating the unique needs of the learner (Department of Education, 1997, 2001).

Five of the teachers indicated that attaining an understanding of both the learner's needs and strengths is important. Three of the teachers suggest that by knowing the learner's strengths, they can be drawn upon to assist with areas of weaknesses. However, five teachers, hence the majority, commented that reports do not always emphasise both. Inclusion and report writing resources highlight the importance of appreciating the learner's strengths (Department of Education, 2002a; Groth-Marnat & Horvath, 2006; Snyder et al., 2006).

All of the teachers expressed that they would value insight into learning style so that they can more effectively accommodate the learner in the classroom. For instance, Participant Two commented *"Because if you have a kinaesthetic learner and it's mentioned in the report and they've done some kind of testing to figure out that that child is kinaesthetic, your whole activities are going to change for that particular child"*. However, although one teacher has reported a single experience of a report reflecting this, none of the other teachers have found

this. Consequently reports appears to be failing to adequately assist teachers in accommodating learning styles, as is required for an inclusive approach to education (Department of Education, 2001; Landsberg et al., 2007; UNESCO, 2002).

Farre's (1998) research report conveyed that 60.7% of the teachers found information regarding how the learner learns best useful, whilst 19.7 % were neutral and the other 19.7% did not find it useful in this regard. Therefore, despite the evident majority finding the report useful for acquiring an understanding of how the learner learns best, there is still room for improvement.

Finally, in terms of the utility of the report for understanding the unique needs of the diversity of learners in the classroom, all but one of the teachers stated that it is usually the learner demonstrating learning difficulties that is sent for an assessment. One teacher that has previously sent children identified as 'gifted' for assessments has not found them particularly useful. Hence the report could provide teachers with more on how to accommodate advanced children in the classroom, as advocated by an inclusive approach to education (Landsberg et al., 2007; UNESCO, 2002; Vaughn et al., 2003). However, it must be noted that the teachers did not demonstrate a significant desire to send learners, other than those experiencing learning difficulties, for assessments.

In sum, it appears that teachers would like reports to reflect an understanding of the learner as a unique individual. This includes consideration for the learner's strengths and weaknesses, and learning style. Additionally, consideration of individual differences may extend to the needs of 'gifted' learners.

4.5 Desire for greater communication and collaboration

Again in answer to the fourth research question, the teachers in the current study expressed a desire for greater communication and collaboration with the psychologist.

All of the teachers would appreciate it if the psychologist came into the school and provided verbal feedback, in addition to the report. Two of the teachers who have had an experience of a psychologist coming into the school to meet with them have found this to be greatly beneficial. Five of the teachers indicated that verbal feedback would be useful to clarify the content of the

report, as well as to ask further questions. Moreover, two teachers feel that a whole team approach to feedback would be valuable.

Nevertheless, three teachers did point out that there were practical implications to consider, as it may not be viable for the psychologist to give in-person feedback for each case. Yet, two teachers maintained that a telephone call would be sufficient.

Furthermore, four of the teachers expressed that follow-up later from the psychologist would be valuable. Two of the participants were particularly critical of the fact that there is little follow-up. This point of view is consistent with Hagmier, Bischoff, Jacobs and Osmon's (1998) study, whereby over one-half of the elementary school staff members regarded follow-up sessions with teachers as an important role of school psychologists.

On the other hand, two teachers recognise that follow-up may also not be practically viable for psychologists. Moreover, one teacher suggested that it is the parents' responsibility to follow up. Nevertheless, she remarked, *"I mean the psychologist might phone maybe in a month even and just say how did it go, much like a doctor takes out stitches and he doesn't charge for that"*. Contrastingly, Participant Three does not feel that follow-up should be expected commenting, *"Does your doctor phone you and check that you are taking the antibiotics that he prescribed?"* Furthermore, Participant Five indicated she would like to be able to call on the psychologist any time, but ultimately the communication would then be between her and the therapists, unless the psychologist was seeing the child for Play Therapy.

Some teachers feel that they, as teachers, also hold valuable insight about the learner that could be provided during the assessment process. For instance, two teachers expressed that they often have insight into the family background and dynamics that may not be revealed by the parents and could assist the psychologist.

In consideration of the teachers' comments, it is apparent that the findings are fairly consistent with Suddoth's (1976, as cited in Ownby, 1990) study. Suddoth (1976, as cited in Ownby, 1990) established that teachers would prefer both a written report and consultation. Moreover,

it supports Farre's (1998) suggestion from her study that satisfaction with reports could be improved by consultation

Additionally, greater collaboration in the assessment process is advocated by the Department of education (1997; 2005), in accordance with an inclusive approach to education. The Department of Education, in association with the National Commission on Special Needs Education (NCSNET) and the National Commission on Education Support Services (NCESS) (1997, p. 84), make the following recommendation:

> "Education support personnel should focus increasingly on involving and supporting educators and parents in assessment, building their capacity and, where appropriate, should participate in developing appropriate interventions as well as preventative and promotive programmes".

Therefore, there is seemingly a need for teachers to become a greater part of the psycho-educational assessment process. This is in support of Harvey's (2006) comment that the learner's needs will be better met if the teacher is involved as a collaborator, as well as Lidz's (2003) suggestion that teachers will be more likely to carry out interventions if they are involved in their selection and design. Accordingly, this marries with previous studies demonstrating that parents are more compliant if they are included in the process (Sullivan, 1997; Human & Teglasi, 1993).

4.6 The perceived value of the report within an inclusive approach to education

The teachers in the current study conveyed their overall impression of the usefulness of the psycho-educational report. Participant Two referred to the report as *"very successful"*, Participant Five, "*very valuable"*, and Participant Six, *"immensely"* valuable. Still another three teachers indicated that they find the report fairly useful, with Participant Three suggesting that the report is *"overall, useful"*, Participant Four commented that she puts the report's usefulness *"in the middle"*, and Participant Seven stated that she does *"take it seriously"*. More negatively, Participant Eight commented, *"I don't read it all"* and *"there are some that aren't"*, and Participant Three's overall impression of the report was clearly negative.

Despite the way teachers currently view psycho-educational reports that they receive, all of them consider reports to be potentially valuable within an inclusive approach to education. Six of the teachers allude to its importance for understanding the learner, as well as for discerning what supportive interventions are required.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, despite the extensive criticisms of reports, and their seeming tendency to disregard for inclusive education, they are still deemed valuable, or at least potentially valuable. However, there is a need for psychologists to reflect on their present utilising of assessments and consequent depictions of reports, and consider how they can become more relevant to teachers who function in the context of inclusive education.

CHAPTER FIVE:
CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

The study set out to investigate Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the psycho-educational report. Teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of reports for providing an understanding of the learner, as well as for determining supportive interventions were looked at. In addition, problems experienced by teachers with reports, and how they could be made more useful to them were explored. All of this was addressed in consideration of the current context of inclusive education in South Africa.

The study revealed that whilst reports do provide the teachers with some useful insights for acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of the learner, there is definite need for improvement. In particular, the relevance of the information presented in reports to them as teachers and if this is clearly explained appears to contribute to the perceived usefulness of the information. Reports are generally deemed useful for assisting the teachers in determining supportive interventions beyond the classroom context, but are thought to considerably lack utility for determining supportive interventions within the classroom. This is particularly problematic, given the emphasis on accommodating the learner in the classroom context from an inclusive approach to education (Department of Education, 2001).

A number of other areas were highlighted that could be improved to better meet the teachers' needs. Criticisms of and preferences for technical aspects of reports were expressed. The overuse of technical language in particular was found to negatively impact on the effectiveness of reports as a medium of communication. Also, having a tendency to find reports too generalised and problem-focused, a desire for more emphasis and consideration for the uniqueness of the learner was indicated. Additionally, the teachers conveyed a desire for greater communication and collaboration with the psychologist in the assessment process, which is aligned with an inclusive approach to education (Department of Education, 2005, 1997). Yet, overall, probably the most fervent appeal is for more in the way of recommendations for classroom specific interventions.

Despite the extensive criticisms of reports communicated by the teachers, it is unanimously felt that the report has the potential to hold great value for teachers within an inclusive approach to education. The recommendations yielded from this study should be heeded for this to be fully realised.

The current study demonstrated both correspondence and disparities with previous studies. Of particular pertinence is the continued tendency for reports to lack utility for determining interventions, as well as to make excessive use of technical language. Furthermore, it is thought that differences between the current study findings and Farre's (1998), the most recent South African study, may predominantly relate to the fact that this study was conducted over a decade ago, and that inclusive education was not well instituted in South Africa at that point.

5.2 Recommendations to educational psychologists for psycho-educational reports provided to teachers

The following recommendations for educational psychologists on the psycho-educational report for Foundation Phase teachers, within an inclusive approach to education, are proposed in consideration of the findings of this study:

1. Include only pertinent information in the background section.
2. When stating the clinical impressions, also acknowledge and explain behaviour discrepancies between the assessment and classroom settings.
3. Observe the learner in the classroom context.
4. If possible, acquire further insight on the learner from informants other than the parents.
5. Provide a comprehensive picture of the person, not merely the test scores.
6. Present test information in several forms, such as in both written and visual forms.
7. Rather than emphasising the IQ in itself, explain what the cognitive test results have revealed regarding the learner's difficulties and strengths.
8. Take other forms of intelligence, such as emotional intelligence, into consideration.
9. Provide plenty of qualitative information.
10. Pay considerable attention to the perceptual test findings.
11. Provide as much insight as possible on the emotional wellbeing of the learner, also relating this to the learner's behaviour, most specifically within the school context.

12. Fully address the teacher's referral questions in the report.
13. Provide information that may further the teachers' understanding of the learner.
14. Pay particular attention to the summary, conclusion and recommendations, given that teachers find these the most valuable sections.
15. List in order of priority the recommended therapies.
16. Consider the practical implications of therapies, such as pulling the learner out of class or the possibility of going to a remedial school, where the therapies may be all inclusive.
17. Alternate school placement should only be considered when other interventions within the school context have first been tried.
18. If the learner is recommended to be included in the mainstream classroom, practical ideas on how the learner can be effectively supported in this context, should be suggested.
19. In general, provide extensive recommendations on practical ideas that teachers can implement in the classroom, in support of the learner.
20. If alternate school placement is deemed the most advantageous, state this explicitly in the report.
21. Consider the unique make up of the school and classroom context when discussing the learner and making recommendations.
22. Demonstrate an understanding of the learner as a unique individual.
23. Account for both the learner's strengths and weaknesses.
24. Provide insight into the learner's specific learning styles.
25. Refrain from the use of technical language, instead addressing the teacher in more simple language.
26. Refrain from lengthy reports. Rather provide shorter reports that depict all pertinent information in a concise way, or at least highlight important information in the summary and conclusion section.
27. Present the report to teachers as soon as possible.
28. Communicate and collaborate with teachers in the assessment and report writing process. In this regard, it is useful for the psychologist to participate in the school multidisciplinary team.
29. As far as possible, provide both written and verbal feedback to teachers.

30. Follow up may be valued by some teachers.

It must be noted that the findings of this study, and accordingly the recommendations given, are specific to the school with which this study was conducted. Therefore the findings cannot be assumed to apply to all teachers and schools.

5.3 Concluding comments

Fundamentally, the study has revealed that for the psycho-educational report to hold utility in today's context, it is essential that it becomes increasingly relevant and user-friendly to teachers. Therefore, it is imperative that educational psychologists reflect on their current utilisation of psycho-educational assessments and consequent depiction of reports, and consider whether they are providing a valuable service to teachers. This is with particular consideration for the present requirements of an inclusive approach to education.

5.4 Limitations of the current study

Many of the studies discussed were particularly dated, as few recent studies appear to have been done. In addition, most of the previous studies were not conducted in South Africa. Hence there were limited current studies specific to the South African context to compare the study findings with.

Furthermore, the current study is limited in its generalisation to other school contexts, given that the participants were from one specific private school. In addition, the area in which the study was conducted may impact on the teachers' perceptions of the relevance of reports, as each context may have different needs. The sample also only consisted of Foundation Phase teachers, and teachers in other phases of the school system may have differing views of reports. Moreover, the sample was small in size, which means that the validity of the findings is questionable.

Additionally, no distinction was made between the differences between reports done by educational, counselling or clinical psychologists. It is also possible that the reports of private psychologists may differ somewhat from those done at other settings such as clinics, but no

distinction was made in this regard. Furthermore, the report is seen as a homogenous whole, whilst in reality the type and style of reports may vary considerably.

5.5 Recommendations for future studies

It is recommended that similar studies be conducted with Foundation Phase teachers in other private schools in the area. The findings can be compared to this study. It may also be advantageous to use a larger sample of teachers.

Further studies could be conducted in other areas of Gauteng or South Africa. It may also be interesting to discern how useful government schools find psycho-educational reports, perhaps comparing this to private schools.

Similar studies could be done with different participants. For instance parents' perceptions of psycho-educational reports could be investigated. Additionally, teachers' perceptions of psycho-educational reports in other phases of the school system could be addressed.

In consideration of the persisting problem with the utility of the report for determining supportive interventions, as well as the problematic use of jargon in reports, future studies could investigate this more closely. Studies looking at collaborating and communicating with teachers in the assessment and reporting process could also be done.

The effectiveness of different models of assessment on the perceived usefulness of reports could be investigated. This was also recommended in Farre (1998) research report. Given the emphasis on dynamic assessment in an inclusive approach to education, an examination of how useful teachers find reports that make use of this assessment form could be conducted.

It is thought that studies on perceptions of the utility of psycho-educational reports hold tremendous value, generating practical implications for practice. Moreover, given current controversies surrounding assessment, it is crucial that if assessment is to persist, it is in accordance with the requirements of the present inclusive approach to education. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers extend on the findings of this study.

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APPENDIX ONE

Biographical Information:

Name: _____

Age:

20 – 29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 +

Gender:

Male	Female

Level of qualification:

Diploma	Undergraduate	Honours	Masters	Doctorate

Number of years teaching experience:

3-6 years	7-10 years	11-14 years	15-18 years	19-20 + years

Grades taught:

Grade R	Grade One	Grade Two	Grade Three

APPENDIX TWO

Interview Questions

1. What are your perceptions of the usefulness of the report for understanding the child?

Probing questions:

1.1 What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the various sections of the report for understanding the child? (background information, clinical impressions, IQ test results, scholastic test results, perceptual test results, emotional assessment findings, summary and conclusions; recommendations)

1.2 What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the report for understanding the nature of the difficulties that the child is experiencing?

1.3 What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the report for understanding the diversity of children present in the classroom? (lower functioning children, gifted children, children from different cultures)

1.4 What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the report for understanding the child contextually? (the home, school and community environment that influences the child's life)

1.5 Do you find that the report give you an understanding of both the child's strengths and weaknesses?

1.6 What are your thoughts on information given in reports on the child's temperament? (Is the child's temperament reflected in the report? What is its perceived usefulness?)

1.7 What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the report for gaining an understanding of the child's learning style?

1.8 What are your thoughts on the effectiveness of the report for answering the referral question?

1.9 Do you prefer reports that provide more factual data or professional interpretation of the data?

2. What are your perceptions of the usefulness of the report for determining supportive interventions?

Probing questions:

2.1 What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the report for determining how the child could be supported through therapy interventions? (Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Play Therapy)

2.2 What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the report for determining the possible need for medication?

2.3 What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the report for determining the possible need for alternate school placement?

2.4 What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the information provided on the report for determining how the child could be supported in the classroom?

2.5 What are your experiences of teacher-specific recommendations provided on reports?

2.6 Do you think that psychologists ought to follow up on the success of recommendations given on the report? What is your experience of this?

3. What problems, if any, do you experience with reports?

Probing questions:

3.1 How do you find the use of technical language in reports?
(jargon, definitions of psychological terms, teachers educated enough to understand)

3.2 What are your thoughts on the organisation of the report?
(organisation of the report, clarity of the report)

3.3 What are your thoughts on the length of reports?

3.4 What are your thoughts on the presentation of test data in reports?

3.5 What are your thoughts on waiting for reports from psychologists?

3.6 -What are your thoughts on the usefulness of the report within an inclusive approach to education?

4. What are your perceptions of how the report could be made more useful to you?

Probing questions

4.1 How could the report be made more useful to you for understanding the child?

4.2 How could the report be made more useful to you for determining learning support interventions?

4.3 Do you think that the report is a sufficient means of feedback in itself?

5. Closing questions

5.1 What are your thoughts on the overall usefulness of the report?

5.2 Is there anything else that you would like to comment on regarding reports?

APPENDIX THREE

Letter to the Principal

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Telephone: +27 11-717-4500/2/3/4. Fax: +27-11-717-4559

Date:_____

Dear _____

My name is Laura Cook. As part of completing my Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, I am conducting a research project on the **'Perceived utility of the psycho-educational report to Foundation Phase teachers'**. The study aims to investigate Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the psycho-educational report. This relates to the usefulness of the report for understanding the learner, as well as for providing constructive recommendations for supportive interventions. Following on from this, problems experienced by teachers with reports and how they perceive they could be made more useful to them will be explored.

I would like to invite your school to participate in this study. Participation in this study will entail allowing me to individually interview ten different Foundation Phase teachers in your school. The first two interviews will be part of a pilot study. Therefore, I will use my findings from these interviews as a way of determining whether I have included the right questions in the interview schedule. They will not be included in the final research report. The interview will be for approximately an hour with each teacher, and it will be conducted at a time and place that suits them. The teachers will need to have at least three years teaching experience in the Foundation Phase and experience with psycho-educational reports. Participation is voluntary and neither your school nor the teachers will be disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not to participate in the study. With permission from the teacher, each interview will be audiotape recorded in order to ensure accuracy. All of the responses will be kept strictly confidential, and no information that could identify your school or the teachers will be included in the research report. The participants may refuse to answer any questions

that they would prefer not to answer, without any negative consequences. Your school and/or the teacher-participants may also choose to withdraw from the study at any point, without any negative consequences.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. Should you consent to allow your school to participate in this study, I will then approach the teachers at your school and, should they fit into the participant requirements, invite them to participate in the study. Results from the study may be made available to you should you request them from myself at the end of the year.

Kind regards,

Laura Cook
082 788 1361
lcmwatson@yahoo.com

Supervisor: Sue Thompson
011 717 8330
sue.thompson@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX FOUR

Consent form to conduct research in school

I _____ the headmaster/headmistress of _____ consent to the staff of _____ to be interviewed by Laura Cook for her study on the 'Perceived utility of the psycho-educational report to Foundation Phase teachers'.

I understand that:

- Participation is voluntary.
- As a school we may withdraw at anytime without any negative consequences.
- No information that may identify the school will be included in the research report.
- With the consent of the teachers, the interviews will be audiotape recorded.
- The information obtained from the interview will remain strictly confidential.
- The teachers may refuse to answer any of the questions that they do not wish to answer, without any negative consequences.
- There are no risks or benefits to your school or to the teachers participating in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX FIVE

Letter to the teachers

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Telephone: +27 11-717-4500/2/3/4. Fax: +27-11-717-4559

Date: _____

Dear _____

My name is Laura Cook. As part of completing my Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, I am conducting a research project on the **'Perceived utility of the psycho-educational report to Foundation Phase teachers'**. The study aims to investigate Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the psycho-educational report. This relates to the usefulness of the report for understanding the learner, as well as for providing constructive recommendations for supportive interventions. Following from this, problems experienced by teachers with reports and how they perceive they could be made more useful to them will be explored.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. It is necessary that you have at least three years teaching experience in the Foundation Phase and experience with psycho-educational reports in order to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary and you will not be disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not. It will entail an interview that, with your permission, will be audiotape recorded to ensure accuracy. The interview will be approximately an hour in length. The interview material (tapes and transcriptions) will be kept strictly confidential and will only be processed by myself. No information that could identify you will be included in the research report. You may refuse to answer any questions that you would prefer not to answer, without any negative consequence. You may also withdraw from the study at any point, without any negative consequence. Additionally, it is required that you fill in a biographical information form. It will include the age range that you fit into, the level of qualification and the number of years teaching experience that you have, as well as the grades that you have taught.

A total of ten participants will be interviewed. The first two interviews will be part of a pilot study. Therefore, I will use my findings from these interviews as a way of determining whether I have included the right questions in the interview schedule, and make the necessary amendments. They will not be included in the final research report.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. Consent has been granted by the Rector and Head of the Junior Preparatory School, as long as the College's 'Educational Survey's and Research Policy' is complied with. Should you consent to allow me to interview you, please fill in the attached consent form. The first ten teachers to complete the consent forms will be the participants for this study. I will then contact you to make arrangements to interview you at a time and place that suits you. Results from the study may be made available to you should you request them from myself at the end of the year.

Kind regards,

Laura Cook
082 788 1361
lcmwatson@yahoo.com

Supervisor: Sue Thompson
011 717 8330
sue.thompson@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX SIX

Consent form for interviews with teachers

I _____ consent to be interviewed by Laura Cook for her study on the 'Perceived utility of the psycho-educational report to Foundation Phase teachers'.

I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.
- I may refuse to answer any of the questions that I do not wish to answer, without any negative consequences.
- No information that will identify me will be included in the research report.
- The information obtained from the interview will remain strictly confidential.
- The audiotapes will be kept locked away in a cupboard by the researcher, and later destroyed once the research report has been examined.
- The interview will be approximately one hour in length.
- There are no risks or benefits to you in participating in this study.

I **do / do not** consent to the researcher using verbatim quotes in the research report.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX SEVEN

Consent form for audiotape recording

- I _____ consent for the interview to be audiotape recorded.
- I understand that the audiotapes will not be heard by any other person other than Laura Cook, and that they will be processed by her.
- I understand that the audiotapes will be kept locked away in a cupboard by the researcher, and later destroyed once the research report has been examined.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX EIGHT