

https://dspace.org/

Teachers' perceptions of school-based support teams in the Johannesburg East School District

Schneiderman, Farryn

2015

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/35572

Schneiderman, Farryn (2020) Teachers' perceptions of school-based support teams in the Johannesburg East school district, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/35572>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Teachers' Perceptions of School-Based Support Teams in the Johannesburg East School District

Research Report

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education (Educational Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand

Name: Farryn Schneiderman

Supervisor: Dr. Zaytoon Amod

Johannesburg, South Africa, 2015

DECLARATION

I, Farryn Andy Schneiderman, hereby declare that this research is my own independent work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Education (Educational Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other academic institution.

Signature: Date:

_____ _____

Farryn Andy Schneiderman

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisor, Dr Zaytoon Amod, I am truly appreciative of your guidance, support and ongoing patience. Thank you for everything.

Thank you to my family and boyfriend who were my constant source of strength and support. I am grateful for the encouragement and love that you provided me during this time.

To my mother, Brenda, for proof-reading my research report and providing me with support throughout the year.

To Nicky Israel, thank you for your expert advice and assistance.

To all the respondents in this research report, thank you for volunteering to be part of this study.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research study was to explore how teachers in a sample of primary schools in the Johannesburg East school district of Gauteng perceive the school-based support teams (SBST) at their schools. These support teams are supposed to be existing structures within public schools in South Africa according to the policy outlined in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). Teachers in South African government schools often face considerable challenges in the implementation of inclusive education. These include catering to the individual needs of all learners within classrooms that contain a large number of learners. A mixed-method exploratory descriptive design was used to carry out the exploration of this study. Five government primary schools in the Johannesburg East school district participated in this study and there were fifty-four educators that voluntarily completed a questionnaire that consisted of both open- and closed-ended questions. Data from the questionnaires were analysed by using frequency and descriptive analysis, as well as thematic content analysis. Results from this questionnaire indicated that the majority of the respondents have a positive outlook on the school-based support team approach and would like this approach to continue within their school. They do however require additional support from the district support team and would need assistance from both the district and school-based support teams in order to constructively deal with specific barriers to learning. This will improve the collaborative support and emotional well-being of the educators, thereby improving the quality of education provided to the learners.

Keywords: School-Based Support Teams, Barriers to Learning, Collaborative Consultancy, Inclusive Education, Classroom Assistance

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

DECLARATION……ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……iii

ABSTRACT……....iv

LIST OF TABLES ……viii

LIST OF FIGURES ……ix

CHAPTER 1 – OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY……1

1.1. Introduction……...1

1.2. Rationale of the Study……3

1.3. Theoretical Background……..4

1.4. Conclusion……6

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW……7

2.1. Education in South Africa……7

2.2. Inclusive Education……..8

2.3. School-Based Support Teams……..11

CHAPTER 3 – METHODS……18

3.1. Aim and Research Questions……18

3.2. Context of the Study……19

3.3. Research Design……20

3.4. Sampling……...20

3.5. Measures……..23

3.6. Data Analysis……...24

3.7. Procedure……25

3.8. Ethical Considerations……...26

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS……..27

4.1. What do Teachers Think of the Support Structures Recommended in Education White Paper 6, More Specifically School-Based Support Teams? 27

4.1.1. What are the Teachers' Views of the School-Based Support Teams at their Particular School? 32

4.1.2. How do Teachers Perceive the Support they Receive from the School-Based Support Teams? 39

4.2. Are the School-Based Support Teams Functioning as Part of the School System? 40

4.2.1. To What Extent do the Teachers Make Use of These Support Structures within their School? ……42

4.2.2. What are Examples of the Kinds of Issues that they have Consulted or Would Like to Consult their School-Based Support Team on? ……43

4.3. How Beneficial have the Support Teams been to the Teachers? ..45

4.3.1. To What Extent have the Support Teams Provided the Teachers with Adequate Constructive Feedback in order to Assist them in Addressing the Barriers to Learning which the Learners Experience? ……46

4.3.2. Have the Teachers Experienced any Challenges? What are Possible Challenges they have Experienced? …….47

4.4. To What Extent are the Teachers able to Work Collaboratively with these Support Teams at their Schools? ……50

4.5. Respondents' Perspectives Regarding School-Based Support Teams……53

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION OF RESULTS……54

5.1. Description and Analysis of Results……....54

5.1.1. What do Teachers Think of the Support Structures Recommended in Education White Paper 6, More Specifically School-Based Support Teams?.....54

5.1.2. Are the School-Based Support Teams Functioning as Part of the School System? ……56

5.1.3. How Beneficial have the Support Teams been to the Teachers? ……..57

5.1.4. To What Extent are the Teachers Able to Work Collaboratively with these Support Teams at their Schools? …59

5.2. Implications of Research Findings……..59

5.3. Limitations of the Study……62

5.4. Suggestions for Future Research……62

5.5. Summary and Conclusion……63

REFERENCE LIST……65

APPENDICES

A. Principal Information Sheet ……70

B. Principal Consent Form……72

C. Participant Information Sheet……..73

D. Teacher Questionnaire……75

E. Department of Education Approval Letter……84

F. Quantitative Data of the Results ……...85

LIST OF TABLES

PAGE

Table 1. Responses of Participants to Statements from the School-Based Support Team Questionnaire (Appendix D)……36

Table 2. Barriers Faced by the Schools……48

Table 3. Frequencies and Percentages of Results from the School-Based Support Team Questionnaire……85

Table 4. The Educators' Views of the School-Based Support Teams at their Schools……86

LIST OF FIGURES

PAGE

Figure 1. The collaborative consultation model by Idol, Nevin and Paolucci-Whitcomb (1994, p. 2), as cited in Amod (2003, p. 139) …….5

Figure 2. Gender of teachers that completed the questionnaire……21

Figure 3. Years of teaching experience……..22

Figure 4. Qualifications of respondents……..22

Figure 5. Referrals of learners to the school-based support team over the past 12-18 months……42

CHAPTER 1 – OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study focused on the teachers' perceptions of the institutional level support teams (ILST) as outlined in the inclusion policies which are mentioned in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). This chapter will provide the reader with a brief overview of the inclusion policies, specifically focusing on the school-based support teams (SBST), as well as the theoretical background that has formed the basis of this study.

The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) refers to the support teams as institutional level support teams (ILST), however, within the schooling system the term used is school-based support teams (SBST) and this is the term used throughout this study.

1.1. Introduction

As a result of the Apartheid Government which was ruled by the National Party between the years 1948 and 1994, there are large gaps within the education sector still to this day. In order to provide an equal education for all learners, the Department of Education began the implementation of Inclusive Education and Training as outlined in the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) which was published in 2001. In order to strengthen the education support services within an inclusive framework, the Ministry stated that they will establish support teams, namely district support teams, as well as institutional-based support teams so as to assist the teachers and learners (Department of Education, 2001). According to the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), the primary function of institutional or school-based support teams is "to put in place properly coordinated learner and educator support services that will support the learning and teaching process by identifying and addressing learner, educator and institutional needs" (Department of Education, 2001, p. 48-49). There is a strong need for teachers to receive support due to various concerns including the large learner-educator ratios, the lack of training of teachers to deal with the range of barriers to learning, as well as the new curriculum, and a lack of resources in the schools and communities.

There has been a significant change in the education of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities over the last twenty years, resulting in the need for a new way of understanding the requirements of students experiencing these barriers to learning (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). There is a further need for attitudinal change in order to implement an inclusive environment within the education sector in South Africa so as to alter the way in which difficulties are viewed (Riddell, Weeden, & Harris, 2012). Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) has outlined a change in several terms, such as not referring to a barrier to learning as a disability per sé; but many teachers, parents, learners and the wider community may not be fully aware of these domains. Present research looking at a social model of development suggests that children experiencing difficulties in learning may be as a result of contextual factors, and not necessarily difficulties within the learner. These contextual factors may include classroom organisation, teaching processes and teacher attitudes (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). This outlook on education gave rise to the ideas of implementing an inclusive framework where each individual has the opportunity for an equal education and is accepted no matter what difficulties he/she may or may not experience (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). In order for this to occur, there is a need to recognise and respond to the diverse needs of all learners and transform the education system from a separated one to a more integrated structure (Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff, & Pettipher, 2002).

Within an inclusive education framework, teachers need support in identifying and assisting the learner and they need further training to manage various barriers to learning. Moreover, if all teachers received the extra training necessary to carry out the principles of inclusive education, the costs of education that the government has to fund can be lowered due to there being more teachers that are able to teach and assist all learners, no matter what their barrier to learning might be (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007).

The attitude and perceptions of the educators within the schools is imperative so as to achieve the desired goal of inclusive education. Educators are the key force in implementing inclusion and they need support in order to provide quality education to the diverse range of children in South Africa (Swart et al., 2002).Their input as to what works and what is ineffective can assist in changing and improving the policies so that the optimal outcomes can be accomplished. For this reason, this study evaluates the

perceptions of the teachers towards the support they receive by the school-based support teams, as well as the extent to which they make use of these collaborative structures.

1.2. Rationale of the Study

“Practising teachers are the key to the successful implementation of an inclusive system and they will need time, on-going support and in-service training” (Swart et al., 2002, p. 175). School-based support teams are seen as forming an important part of the support structure within the inclusive education system and therefore the rationale of this study was to examine what the views and perceptions of teachers are in relation to these teams. The inclusive framework involves change, both societal and educational, and will have implications for schools and teachers (Swart et al., 2002). Teachers have to deal with complex issues within the classroom and are thus in need of concrete advice and support to cope with the diverse situations. If teachers are overworked and tired, they may not respond well to the changes, thereby negatively impacting the learners (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker, & Engelbrecht, 1999). Teachers often feel that they do not have adequate support to deal with complex issues in the classroom. ”The development of collaborative relationships among teachers so that expertise may be shared is crucial to the success in meeting the diverse needs of all learners in inclusive education settings” (Engelbrecht et al., 1999, p. 157).

Very little research has been done on the teachers’ perceptions of the school-based support teams. There have however been several research studies, both nationally and internationally, on the teachers’ views of and attitudes towards inclusive education. Some of these studies include those by Blackie (2010); Engelbrecht et al. (1999); Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000); Avramidis and Norwich (2002); Burke and Sutherland (2004); Hammond and Ingalls (2003); Hays (2009); and Eloff and Kgwete (2007). Some of these studies found that teachers feel unsupported due to a variety of issues including lack of basic resources, high teacher-learner ratio, managing diversity, inadequate educational support services, and inadequate knowledge and training (Swart et al., 2002). There has also been a study by Engelbrecht, Forlin, Eloff and Swart (2001) in which they look at developing a support programme for teachers involved with inclusion in South Africa. They postulated that

it is important to first identify and understand aspects that cause the most stress to teachers in an inclusive framework in order to implement appropriate support for them (Englebrecht et al., 2001). According to Mahlo (2011, p. 7), there is a lack of support offered to teachers in Gauteng, as well as a "lack of qualified education support staff both at the provincial, district and school level."

There is therefore a need for research to be conducted on a more specific area within the inclusive framework. For this reason, this study is imperative in understanding if the support services, which the inclusive framework has implemented at an institutional level, are providing the necessary sustenance for the teachers and how they perceive these school-based support teams. Teachers need to be further empowered in order for the successful implementation of inclusion and therefore this study explored how school-based support can be built upon and developed as perceived by teachers. The recommendations of the study by Engelbrecht et al. (2001) were considered by attempting to identify how adequately the school-based support teams assist in addressing the stress currently experienced by many teachers.

1.3. Theoretical background

The theoretical background that formed the basis of this study is the collaborative consultancy theory as espoused by Idol, Nevin and Paolucci-Whitcomb (1994). It is significant to first discuss the collaborative consultation approach in order to provide an understanding of an interactive team process that can assist in improving school-based practices. The policy of inclusive education is based on a collaborative approach between educators, learners, the support structures, parents and the community and it is thus important to focus on how this collaboration should be used when supporting teachers. Teachers may be resistant to change and thus the theory of collaboration can facilitate change as it provides the teachers with an opportunity to learn a variety of knowledge from one another and implement new ideas that can assist in addressing the barriers to learning (Briscoe & Peters, 1997).

Idol, Nevin and Paolucci-Whitcomb (1994, p. 1) define collaborative consultation as "an interactive process that enables groups of people with diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems." Amod (2003) suggests that

this model can improve the functioning of school-based support teams, in that individuals can work collaboratively by bringing their unique skills, knowledge and attitudes to the process. The model of collaborative consultation, according to Idol et al. is depicted below in Figure 1.

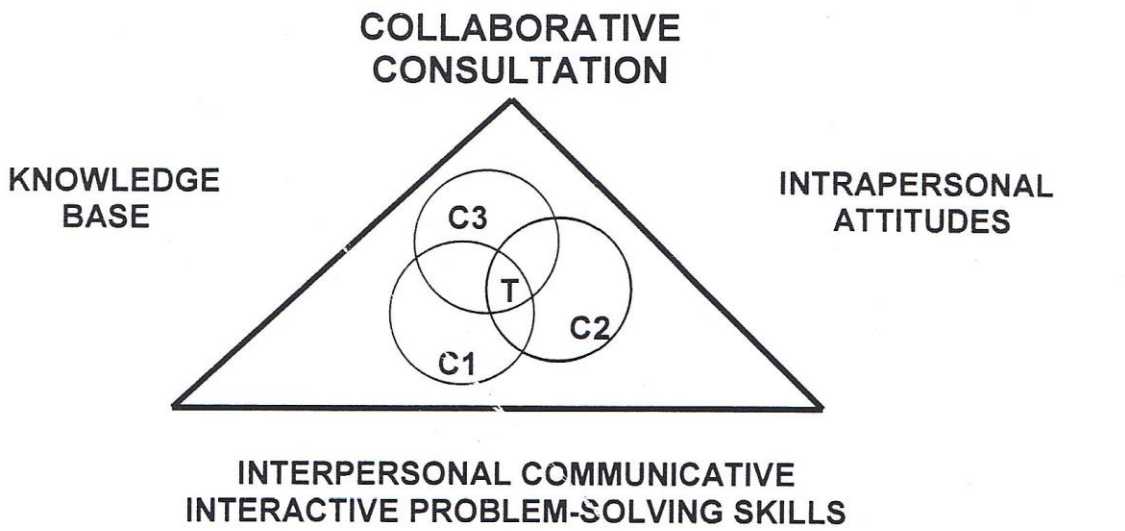


Figure 1. The collaborative consultation model by Idol, Nevin and Paolucci-Whitcomb (1994, p. 2), as cited in Amod (2003, p. 139).

The collaborative consultancy approach can be used as a framework in the school setting when assisting teachers to understand how to work with learners within an inclusive education model. It can assist teachers to work collaboratively in order to reflect on their personal knowledge and theories thereby coping with the barriers to learning and addressing any on-going difficulties in the classroom (Jordan, 1994). Effective collaboration relies on equal contributions from all team members (Amod, 2003). This can be further investigated in the method of research by understanding the components of the team and how often they meet, as well as how the team is selected.

There are six stages in the collaborative consultation process, namely: “Gaining entry and establishing team goals; problem identification; intervention recommendations;

implementation recommendations; evaluation; and follow up" (Idol et al., 1994, p. 4). This consultation model can provide the teachers with problem-solving strategies in addressing the barriers to learning, thereby increasing their skills in understanding and helping in an effective manner when presented with difficulties (Amod, 2003). Amod (2003) has researched and concluded that this approach can be used to improve the functioning of school-based programmes. The benefits of the collaborative consultation process contribute to the effectiveness of this approach with school-based support teams. These benefits include: "student-centred approach to service delivery, staff development opportunities, and shared responsibility for design and implementation of programmes" (Amod, 2003, p. 140). Furthermore, positive outcomes, such as it providing the opportunity for them to become reflective practitioners to further their professional development, have been reported by teachers that have been involved in peer support (Woods, 1993; Pugach & Johnson, 1995 as cited in Bedward & Daniels, 2005, p. 55). The support teams can adapt these interactive steps and make use of the benefits when providing support to teachers at an institutional level.

1.4. Conclusion

Certain factors, including that of effective planning, diverse forms of support for teachers, a positive working environment, as well as efficient teacher development, have an influence on the implementation of an inclusive environment (Kaikkonen, 2010). Through a collaborative approach, teachers are required to facilitate the learning and development of a diverse range of students and promote an optimal learning environment that meets the needs of each individual learner (Kaikkonen, 2010). This is an enormous responsibility for a teacher, especially if one has not been provided with the necessary training, and therefore the teacher requires the support of others to assist in the classroom, which can further provide an increased morale, leading to a positive attitude on behalf of the teacher. According to Kaikkonen (2010), teachers that express confidence in their competence in the classroom, demonstrate a more positive attitude which results in the teacher feeling better able to guide and assist the learners that are experiencing barriers to learning.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will examine the above theoretical approach that can assist with implementing a collaborative and effective school-based team, how education in South Africa has led to the application of inclusive policies, the role of inclusive education as outlined in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), as well as the role of school-based support teams.

2.1. Education in South Africa

Education in South Africa has transformed greatly over the years and it is thus imperative to look at the history of our education system in order to see how these changes have affected teachers and their support structures.

The inequality between the rich and poor in South Africa is one of the highest in the world. There is thus a vast difference between schools in Johannesburg in terms of resources (Daniels, 2010). “The divide is still mostly racially based” (Daniels, 2010, p. 632). With the implementation of the Apartheid government in 1948, South Africa distinguished between the races, namely ‘Whites’, ‘Blacks’, ‘Coloureds’ and ‘Indians.’ The Apartheid government believed that Blacks should only get a basic education (Daniels, 2010). Inequality was thus rife amongst the races and amongst the schools to which each race was assigned. Inferior teaching as well as the services provided was apparent resulting in the learners receiving a less-than-adequate education when compared to those learners in the more privileged so-called “White” schools. There was minimal support for a learner who required any additional assistance to what the teacher could provide. Resources were inferior in all schools for Blacks, Coloureds and Indians whereas White schools were more privileged in this area. By the mid-1970’s, learners in the non-White schools were beginning to realize how different their education was and wanted to see an integrated education system with equality for all learners no matter their race (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007).

Furthermore, schools that were being forced to learn in the language of the oppressor, Afrikaans, began to protest and this resulted in many riots, including the Soweto Uprising which led to many students being injured and even killed, like in the case of Hector Peterson (Daniels, 2010). All of this also had an effect on the majority of

teachers in that they had to teach in a language that was not necessarily their home language, namely Afrikaans. Since the election of the democratic government in 1994, a large amount of effort has been made towards becoming a non-racial society with equal human rights for all (Daniels, 2010). The education departments are now a unified system (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). “The Bill of Rights in South Africa’s Constitution states that all learners have a right to basic education including adult basic education and further education” (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001, p. 304).

Education has changed over the years in South Africa and the broader social context of education places a large impact on the education system and directly affects teachers implementing inclusive education (Swart et al., 2002). “These multifaceted societal changes have implications for the implementation of inclusive education, including making educational change, faster and more complex change, intensifying teachers’ work and increasing the pressures on them to bring about fundamental changes in learning and teaching in order to accommodate diversity and provide quality education for all” (Swart et al., 2002, p. 185). South African schools have begun implementing these changes in an inclusive framework which adopts a more collaborative approach in understanding barriers to learning. “Inclusive schools and classrooms focus on how to operate classrooms and schools as supportive and caring communities in which a sense of community is fostered” (Landsberg, 2005, p. 19). This implies that each system in the school structure (the learner, the educator, the support teams and parents) address any barriers to learning together in a collaborative manner.

2.2. Inclusive Education

The above changes in our education system in South Africa have led to an inclusive framework. The concept of inclusive education in South Africa began in October 1996 with the appointment of both the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS). These committees were tasked with researching all areas relating to special needs and support services in education (Engelbrecht et al., 1999). In a report completed by the commission and committee, it was stated that there is a need for an integrated system in order to support the diverse needs of learners (Engelbrecht et al.,

1999). They found that there were approximately 288,000 school-aged children with disabilities that were not in school and many more children were not in school because of "race, language, AIDS, socio-economic reasons and an inaccessible curriculum" (Daniels, 2010, p. 634). The Ministry of Education composed a governing document, on the basis of the report from the NCSNET and NCESS, to introduce and plan the process of inclusive education and training in South Africa. This document, Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), defines inclusive education as:

- *"Acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support.*
- *Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners.*
- *Acknowledging and respecting differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infectious diseases.*
- *Broader than formal schooling and acknowledging that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal settings and structures.*
- *Changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula and environment to meet the needs of all learners.*
- *Maximizing the participation of all learners in the culture and the curriculum of educational institutions and uncovering and minimizing barriers to learning"*

(Education White Paper 6, Department of Education, 2001, p. 6).

"The predominant objective of any education system is one of providing quality education for all learners in order to enable them to realise their full potential, thereby enabling them to contribute to and participate in society" (Prinsloo, 2001, p. 344). For this reason the inclusive education and training system is one that would allow for this, no matter what the learner's race, gender, sexual orientation, class, culture, HIV/AIDS status, language, religion and/or disability. The main focus of the policies is to integrate special and mainstream education by altering the curriculum, training of staff, and collaboration of district, schools, parents, learners and communities (Nel, Nel, & Hugo, 2013). The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) has moved away from the term 'special needs' and rather refers to 'barriers to learning' which forms part of the social rights model and seems more appropriate as the barrier is

often not within the learner but within the system (Daniels, 2010). “The Department of National Education (2001) also indicates that the provision of special education is costly because it demands a low learner-educator ratio, highly trained staff, and specialized teaching material and equipment” (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007, p.352).

There are both extrinsic as well as intrinsic factors that cause barriers to learning. The extrinsic barriers include “poverty and the unemployment rate in the area; gangster activities; the drug and alcohol abuse of parents; a high rate of HIV/AIDS; vandalism; the illiteracy of parents; many different home languages; inadequately trained teachers with regard to learning support; and a lack of sufficient support services” (Nel et al., 2013, p. 3). Intrinsic factors that are experienced by a large proportion of learners include learning difficulties, attention and concentration difficulties, visual and hearing impairments, physical disabilities, as well as various other disorders (White Paper 6, Department of Education, 2001). These factors have led to the need for different methods of teaching and various policies so that all youth have the opportunity to obtain an equal education. There are not enough special schools (approximately 486 in the public and private sectors) in South Africa that are able to accommodate the large amount of learners who are experiencing either extrinsic or intrinsic difficulties resulting in barriers to learning and development. Furthermore, many parents are not able to afford the fees of these special schools.

Within an inclusive framework, the teacher is required to adapt to the environment in which he/she caters to the individual needs of each learner. Teachers thus need to consider the pedagogy, curriculum and classroom climate to ensure that every learners’ needs are met (Nel et al., 2013). All learners, even those that do not have a specific disorder or disability, require support in one way or another (White Paper 6, Department of Education, 2001).

One of the strategies that the Department of Education has set out in order to overcome barriers to learning is implementing support structures. These include resource centres, designated full-service schools, district support teams, as well as school-based support teams. The district level support teams consist of staff from provincial districts, regional and head offices and special schools. Their function is to evaluate and build the capability of schools, education and training centres, as well as higher education institutions in order to address barriers to learning (Department of

Education, 2001). On the other hand, the school-based support teams are to assist and reinforce the process of learning and teaching by addressing the needs of the learner, teacher and school (Department of Education, 2001). These support structures need to work collaboratively in order to achieve the goals set out by the Department of Education.

In order to implement inclusion in South Africa, it is necessary for the community to be involved, as well as other relevant stakeholders. It is important for specialised and skilled staff members from special schools to assist and support the teachers in 'ordinary' schools, to further train teachers in understanding barriers to learning, and to receive diversity in a positive light rather than one that is difficult to teach and thus assist and support learning to develop the learners' potentials in a non-discriminatory learning environment (Prinsloo, 2001).

2.3. School-Based Support Teams

According to statistics from a survey conducted in September 2014 (Department of Basic Education, 2014) in South Africa, there are 12 655 436 learners that are attending 25 741 schools (both public and independent) (Department of Basic Education, 2014). There are 425 090 educators that serve at these schools (Department of Basic Education, 2014). This indicates that there would be an average of one teacher to thirty children in a classroom, if each school accepted a certain amount of learners. However, each school varies in size and some teachers have fifty or more learners in one class (Statistics on Children South Africa, 2012). According to Statistics on Children in South Africa (2012), the learner-educator ratio's for 2012 were forty learners per educator in primary schools and thirty-five learners per educator in secondary schools (De Lannoy & Hall, 2012). These ratios differ at each school and the learner-educator ratios are less in independent schools. One questions the support that exists for teachers within an inclusive framework in South Africa, where there are a broad range of barriers to learning, which include large class sizes, limited resources, language and cultural differences, as well as the effects of HIV/AIDS on learners and their families (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) suggests that in order to provide support to the

teachers within inclusive education and training, they need to develop school-based support teams, as well as district support teams (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007).

According to Prinsloo (2001), one of the most integral parts of developing an inclusive framework within South African classrooms is to empower and train the teachers in order to allow them the opportunity to support those learners who are experiencing barriers to learning in an effective and efficient manner (Prinsloo, 2001). Teachers need to feel that they are able to identify and provide the necessary support to the learners so as to assist with their confidence in managing these learners in the classroom. One way to empower and train the teachers is through the use of a collaborative supportive team. Each school-based support team functions in various ways at each school, as a result of the different needs and diversity of the school (Links, 2009).

Previous studies on support for teachers within inclusive education indicate that many teachers felt unprepared and not well equipped when dealing with children with 'special needs'. Furthermore, they tend to have a negative outlook on inclusion which may create a barrier to successful implementation (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). In a study by Eloff and Kgwete (2007) within schools in the Gert Sibande Region, various issues were identified regarding support for teachers. They included "perceived lack of skills and competence, large classes, and insufficient resources" (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007, p. 353). Teachers in the study mentioned a lack of human resources as one of the challenges of inclusive education. They mentioned that there is a small number of support staff and they have limited access to the district support teams as they are also understaffed (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). For this reason, this research study explored the support that the teachers receive from their colleagues in the school-based support teams, as well as how supportive the school has been in implementing inclusive education. From the study, it appears that some teachers do not fully understand the term "inclusive education", due to there being a lack in training and explanation. For example, they refer to children that have physical disabilities as "special education" within the classroom and they think of inclusive education as "the presence of a student with a disability in the classroom" (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007, p.354). Moreover, they refer to diversity in the classroom as the difference between ability and disability rather than acknowledging the broader concept of diversity. Previous studies have

also observed that the attitude of the teachers is a strong predictor of successful implementation of inclusion (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007).

“New educational policies require that teachers work collaboratively to share their diverse knowledge and skills in order to enhance learning and teaching” (Amod, 2003, p. 48). Teachers require support from school teams in order to adapt to the changes in the education system. This involves an interactive process. The writer agrees with Amod (2003) that the educational psychologist, who forms part of the district support team, plays an integral role in ensuring prevention and early intervention. In Amod’s (2003) study, she discussed using a collaborative consultancy approach to provide support to teachers and learners within a school setting. She further concluded that this collaborative approach, whereby all members work together, can be applied to school-based and district support teams in a South African context (Amod, 2003).

According to Bedward and Daniels (2005), in the United Kingdom a “TST (teacher support team) is an organised system of peer support which consists of a small group of teachers who take referrals from individual teachers on a voluntary basis. The referring teacher reports concerns about classes, groups or individuals in order to discuss and problem solve with peers. Follow-up meetings are held, if required. The process is as confidential as the requesting teacher wants it to be” (Bedward & Daniels, 2005, p. 55). This teacher support team is somewhat similar to the school-based support teams in South African government schools. These teams assist in enhancing the working conditions of teachers by involving the expertise and knowledge of all staff members. By supporting the teachers, the teams are indirectly supporting learners (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). Many teachers in the USA and Europe have reported feeling professional isolation. This isolation creates a barrier to learning in that teachers may not participate in professional development and may not share any educational goals (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). In this study, that was conducted over a two-year period and evaluated the professional isolation of teachers and nurses, it was found that “many teachers reported that collaborative problem solving reduced their feelings of isolation. By coming together to discuss issues that would normally have been dealt with in isolation, both referring teachers and members of the TST’s reported that professional development was enhanced through discussion” (Bedward & Daniels, 2005, p. 60).

Teachers work in constantly changing environments in which there is an increased level of stress leading to withdrawal and feelings of isolation. By working in a collaborative problem-solving manner, the school-based support teams can provide support and prove to reduce the isolation and withdrawal, thereby improving practice and quality of service provided by the teacher (Bedwald & Daniels, 2005). By communicating with others, often educators realise that they are not alone and that others experience similar issues within their classroom. Collaborative work involves each member of staff giving their input, either from knowledge or personal experience, and then guiding others on how to deal with the problem effectively. In addition, it has been suggested that these support teams are not of a spontaneous nature and therefore need formal training in the skills of support, empowerment of these individuals and ongoing facilitation from management or district support teams (Bedward & Daniels, 2005).

Many teachers in South Africa take sick leave due to feelings of stress, burnout and being overworked. According to Olivier and Venter (2003), “knowledge about stressors could be valuable in order to avoid and/or manage factors causing stress to teachers” (Olivier & Venter, 2003, p. 186). Factors that contribute to these stressors include the high teacher-learner ratios, lack of discipline in schools, retrenchments, new curriculums and changes in school policies (Olivier & Venter, 2003). Work-related stress often results in negative attitudes towards their work which has a potentially damaging effect on the learners in the classroom. It was recommended by Olivier and Venter (2003) in their study that involved teachers’ stress levels in the George area that principals and the Department of Education should make a considerable effort to manage the stress levels and feelings of isolation of the educators. Training and support groups have been suggested as some ways of limiting the stress of teachers in South African schools (Olivier & Venter, 2003).

Training is an important factor in providing support to teachers as it allows them to feel effectively prepared in the classroom and to deal with various issues relating to children (Bedwald & Daniels, 2005). In the study by Bedwald and Daniels (2005), it was indicated that the teacher support teams worked best in those schools in which the Senior Management Team (SMT) was actively involved and supported the staff. The SMT’s would usually consist of the principal, deputy principal and the head teacher for each year or each phase. There has been a growing development

indicating that teaming may result in positive student achievement and reduced referral rates of learners who require special education (Phillippo & Stone, 2006). However, school politics and underlying issues related to staff conflict can potentially threaten effective team work at schools (Phillippo & Stone, 2006).

There are several factors that may have an influence on the teachers' perceptions of the support structures in their schools. These include the changing of teaching approaches so as to adapt to an inclusive framework. Specifically in most primary schools in South Africa, the educators teach the learners in all subjects throughout the day. This raises an issue of them continually adapting for the same children each week (Forlin, 2010). This however could be seen from a more positive perspective as these teachers get to know those children who are experiencing barriers to learning and can learn to cater to the needs for a full year.

In the United States, a model that is increasingly being implemented in schools in order to address the need for more teachers in an inclusive environment is that of co-teaching (Nierengarten, 2013). "Co-teaching has been one of the support strategies used to address the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities for leaners with special needs in the general education classroom" (Nierengarten, 2013, p. 74). "Co-teaching is defined as two or more professional delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space" (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 2 as cited in Nierengarten, 2013, p. 74).

According to Sakellaradis (2012), all teachers are equipped to help youth to learn and should not be concerned regarding their possible inexperience when dealing with certain situations. When he or she is faced with challenging situations in the classroom or at school, the teacher can seek advice on how to better assist those individuals. Each teacher therefore has the potential to develop the skills to help children experiencing difficulties and no teacher should feel that they need to refer the children to an expert specialist to assist with their difficulties, but rather be guided by those "specialised" teachers to deal with the situation within their school (Sakellaradis, 2012). For this reason, the school-based support teams can assist those teachers who feel that they are unable to assist learners with barriers by providing them with practical advice and suggestions. A report issued in the United Kingdom indicated that many teachers feel that they are not well-equipped to teach learners said to have profound

learning difficulties and suggests that this is a result of the gap in teacher's initial training and education (Sakellaradis, 2012). Although this report was based internationally, it can still be transferable to the South African education and training of teachers and their perceptions.

There has been sparse research into teachers' perceptions of school-based support teams in South Africa. In one of a few studies, Amod (2003) established and evaluated the functioning of eighteen school-based support teams in the North-West Province. Data was collected using quantitative and qualitative methods. Teachers, school-based support team and district support team members were included in the sample. The findings of this study reflected that school-based support teams had a positive role to play within the range of schools included in this study. However they needed ongoing training as well as support from other teachers, their school principals, parents and their district support teams (Amod, 2003).

A further study by Mphahlele (2005) investigated the experiences of foundation phase teachers of school-based support teams. After completing an analysis, she concluded that there is little or no collaboration between the teachers in the foundation phase and the school-based support teams. Furthermore, she established that the teachers were collaborating and forming their own network of support in order to assist each other in identifying and understanding the barriers to learning within their classrooms (Mphahlele, 2005).

A study by Eloff and Kgwete (2007) investigated South African teachers' voices on support in inclusive education. They conducted the research within the Gert Sibande region (which falls under the Mpumalanga Education Department) and they concluded that teachers need to be provided with tangible support (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). They did not look specifically at the school-based support teams, rather at support in general, including that provided by the Department of Education, schools and colleagues, as well as support resources.

Limited research in this area provided a justification for conducting this study as school-based support is a key to the successful implementation of inclusive education according to Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) policy. The issues around support for teachers within an inclusive framework needs to be addressed by collaboratively consulting with all relevant systems within the education

structure in order to effectively continue to implement an inclusive framework in South African schools. Teachers' perceptions of the support structures, which they have access to, can assist in undertaking various challenges that they may experience. School-based support teams need to assist in understanding what they can do together with the teachers, learners, parents and community at large in order to address barriers to learning.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODS

3.1. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this research project was to explore how teachers in a sample of primary schools in the Johannesburg East school district of Gauteng perceive the school-based support teams (SBST) at their schools. These school-based support teams are supposed to be existing structures within public schools in South Africa according to the policy outlined in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). This study looked at the efficacy or ineffectiveness of these teams from the view of the teachers at each school.

Based on the aim of the study, the following research questions were explored:

I. What do teachers think of the support structures recommended in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), more specifically school-based support teams?
    i. What are the teachers' views of the school-based support teams at their particular school?
    ii. How do teachers perceive the support they receive from the school-based support teams?
II. Are the school-based support teams functioning as part of the school system?
    i. To what extent do the teachers make use of these support structures within their school?
    ii. What are examples of the kinds of issues that they have consulted or would like to consult their school-based support team on?
III. How beneficial have the support teams been to the teachers?
    i. To what extent have the support teams provided the teachers with adequate constructive feedback in order to assist them in addressing the barriers to learning which the learners' experience?
    ii. Have they experienced any challenges? What are possible challenges they have experienced?
IV. To what extent are the teachers able to work collaboratively with the support teams at their schools?

3.2. Context of the Study

Five government primary schools in the Johannesburg East School District participated in this research study. The reason for government schools being used within this study is that they follow the policy of Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) and therefore have school based support teams based at each school. The five schools have been given codes (School A, School B, School C, School D and School E) so as to ensure the anonymity of the study. A brief description of each school is given hereunder:

School A is a co-ed primary school situated within the North-Eastern urban suburbs of Johannesburg. The majority of the students at this school are from low socio-economic backgrounds and the school is under-resourced when compared to other government schools. School fees are one of the lowest but many are still unable to afford these fees. The school therefore receives very little assistance from parents and guardians of the learners and the school grounds are not well kept. There are approximately seven hundred and fifty learners, eighteen classrooms and twenty-six educators.

School B is also a co-ed primary school situated in the Northern central part of Johannesburg in a more affluent neighbourhood. There are approximately six hundred and forty-six learners enrolled at the school and twenty-four educators making up the thirty staff members at the school. Many of these learners are from outside of the area.

School C is an all boy's school situated in central Johannesburg, comprising seven hundred learners and forty teachers. The learners that attend this school appear to be from higher socio-economic backgrounds. They have a supportive group of parents and other benefactors that assist the school to maintain their standards. The school grounds are very well kept and this school has a team of therapists, consisting of an occupational therapist, a speech therapist, a physiotherapist, as well as an educational psychologist, on the school premises running private practices.

School D is also situated in central Johannesburg and is an all boy's primary school consisting of approximately one thousand and eighty one learners with thirty one staff members. Learners mostly come from disadvantaged middle to lower income groups and some are immigrants from other African countries, such as Zimbabwe and Cameroon.

Lastly, School E is an all girls' primary school situated in central Johannesburg. The support systems at this school consists of a speech therapist, an art therapist and a psychologist. There are twenty-nine staff members of which sixteen are educators, and approximately six hundred and forty five learners at the school.

Some of the schools that participated in this study are former 'model C' schools, while others are 'township schools' as they were previously known. The term 'township' originated during the period of Apartheid to differentiate between the residential areas in terms of racial segregation (Mampane & Bouwer, 2011). There were thus schools that were known as 'township schools' as they were located within these areas and were demarcated for the Black and Coloured youths. This allowed for diversity within the sample.

3.3. Research Design

The proposed research study is a mixed-method exploratory descriptive design, which used a survey approach in order to explore the perceptions of teachers towards school-based support teams. This design assisted in exploring and investigating a relatively unknown area of research and aimed at describing this phenomenon (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006).

3.4. Sampling

The sampling method that was used was one of non-probability sampling, known as convenience sampling, as the schools were chosen according to their geographic location (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The sample for this study included teachers from five primary schools (Grades 1-7) within the Johannesburg East school district. A sample of 80-100 teachers were targeted within the study, however, due to voluntary participation, after collecting the questionnaires from the five schools, only fifty-four teachers completed the Teacher Questionnaire (Appendix D).

The background information that is relevant to the study can be viewed below. Figure 2 indicates the gender of the respondents at each school.

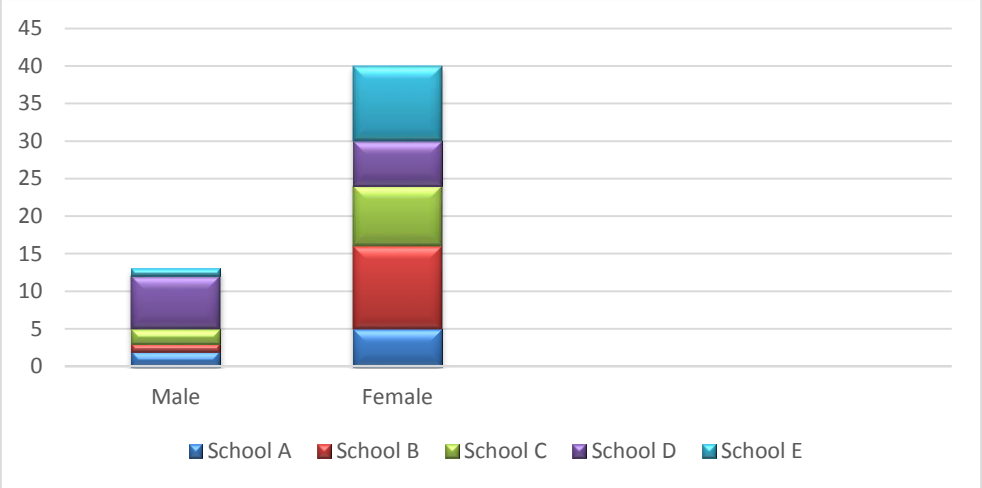


Figure 2. Gender of teachers that completed the questionnaires.

There were fifty-four respondents within this study, thirteen of which were males and forty of which were females. One participant chose not to reveal their gender.

Figure 3 depicts the various years of teaching experience as indicated by the respondents in the study. The majority of the respondents (as per Figure 3 on page 21) had between zero and five years teaching experience, while the minority had over thirty years of teaching experience. Seventeen out of the fifty-four respondents (approximately 31%) stated that they have had experience in the field of special needs education. Three of these teachers are from School A, three are from School B, three are from School C, six are from School D, and two are from School E. Interestingly, the majority of teachers that have experience in the field of special needs education attended the school that is in a lower socio-economic area, with little resources. They can therefore provide additional support to their colleagues in the areas of special education, based on their personal experience.

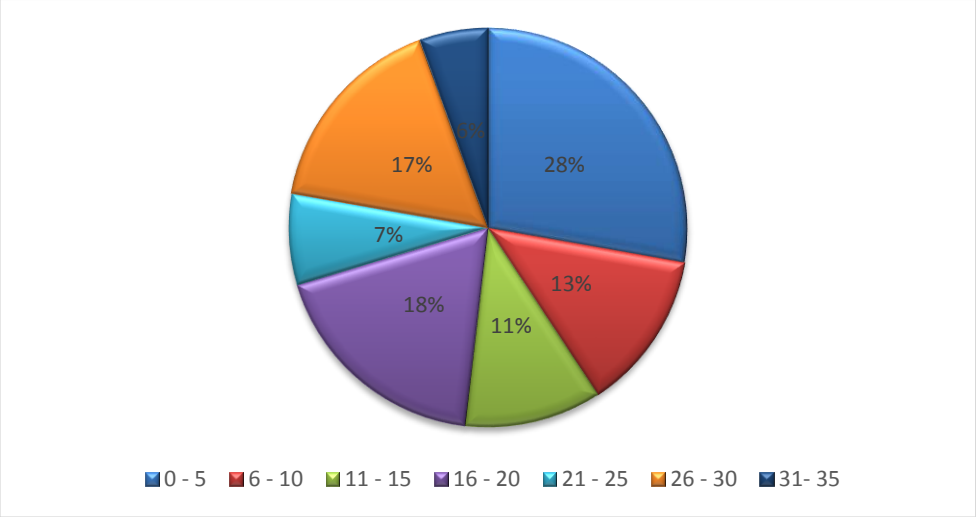


Figure 3. Years of teaching experience.

The following pie chart (Figure 4) provides information about the qualifications of the participating teachers.

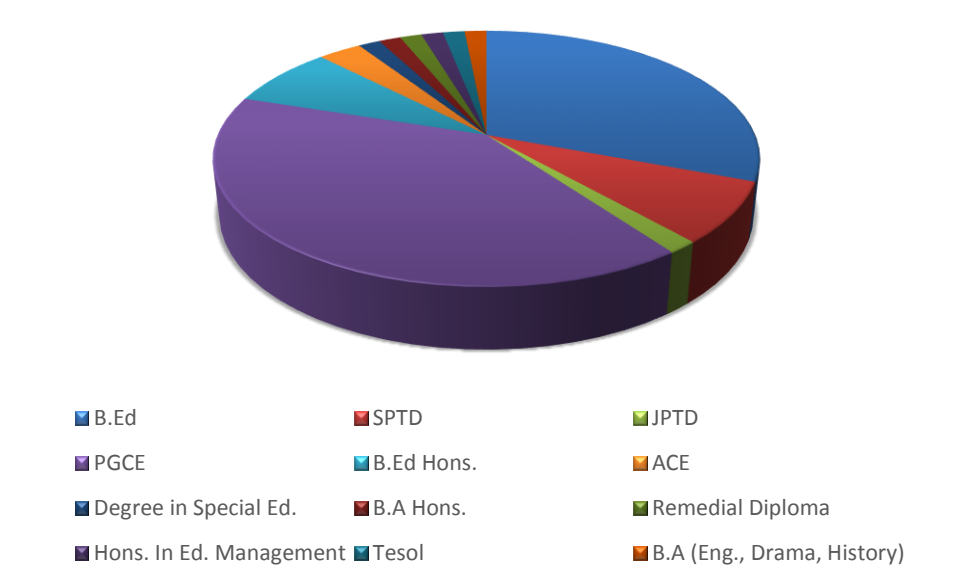


Figure 4. Qualifications of respondents.

As indicated in Figure 4, the majority of the teachers had a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). There are many teachers who reported having a Bachelor's Degree in Education (B.Ed), while five respondents had an honours degree in Education (B.Ed Hons.). Five teachers had a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma and one teacher had a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma. Three percent of the sample had an advanced certificate in education (ACE); one participant a Degree in Special

Education (Degree in Special Ed.); one of the teachers had a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Psychology (B.A Hons.); two percent reported having a Diploma in Remedial Teaching (Remedial Diploma); a further two percent had completed an Honours Degree in Educational Management (Hons. In Ed. Management); one participant had a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English, Drama and History (B.A (English, Drama, History)); and lastly one participant had completed a qualification as a teacher of English to speakers of other languages (Tesol).

It is also imperative to note that within the sample, nine of the respondents had two degree qualifications, and three of the respondents had completed three degree qualifications. The remaining forty-two teachers had one degree qualification.

3.5. Measures

This study used a semi-structured self-completed questionnaire, containing both open and closed ended questions (see Appendix D). The questionnaire required some background information regarding how the school-based support team was selected at each school, as well as how often they meet. In addition, a 5-point Likert Scale was used to explore the views of the teachers regarding the school-based support teams. The teachers were able to elaborate further on each question. The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore the perceptions of teachers towards the school-based support teams. The questionnaire is based on the Teacher Assistance Team approach (TAT), conceptualised by Chalfant and Pysch (1989), and Chalfant, Pysch and Mooltrie (1979) which was used and further developed for the South African context by Amod (2003).

As noted before, the Teacher Assistance Team approach is a collaborative problem-solving approach used by teachers in schools (Amod, 2003). This questionnaire consisted of thirteen background information questions and eleven questions that could be answered both on a Likert Scale and more qualitatively by elaborating on the quantitative question. Due to the Teacher Assistance Team Approach Questionnaire being adapted from the Amod (2003) study, it was necessary to first pilot it in order to test the instrument on a different sample that did not form part of the study. The adaptations from Amod's (2003) questionnaire to the questionnaire that was utilised

in this study included a change from the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) Approach to the school-based support team approach. In addition, the questions relating to the model of family involvement were eliminated due to them not being applicable to this study, and questions relating to the barriers to learning that teachers experience at the school were added. These barriers include availability of resources, curriculum, and class sizes (see Appendix D). An example of the changes include:

"The Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) approach is a sound one," was adapted to say: "I feel positive about the support provided by the school-based support team."

"The Teacher Assistance Team was effective in helping me with my concerns regarding the learner/s I referred to them," was adapted to say: "I think the SBST has assisted me with my concerns regarding learners in my classroom."

Following the pilot study with the six teachers at a primary school within the Johannesburg East District that did not form part of the study, changes were made based on the verbal and written comments of the educators. Language modifications were made to questions 4.7., 4.9. and 7, and the addition of questions 4.10. and 11 were necessary to enhance the precision of the survey.

3.6. Data Analysis

A mixed method data analysis technique was used, which included frequency and descriptive analysis, as well as thematic content analysis. The researcher used descriptive statistics in order to analyse the close-ended questions. This was done by counting the frequencies for each answer on the Likert scale. Thematic content analysis was used when analysing the open-ended questions. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), qualitative content analysis is defined as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1178). More specifically, a conventional content analysis was used as the aim of this study was to describe the perceptions of the sample of teachers towards the school-based support teams. Data was further analysed by reading and re-reading the responses on the questionnaire and identifying the emerging themes, according to the research questions, until there were no new themes that were emerging. This assisted

in increasing the validity and reliability of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The background information from the questionnaire (see Appendix D) was examined in relation to the perceptions of the teachers towards the school-based support team.

3.7. Procedure

The procedure for the study was as follows:

a) The Department of Education was approached and permission was granted, thus allowing the researcher to carry out the study within the sampled public schools (see Appendix E).
b) The University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical) granted permission in order to conduct the research study.
c) Permission was sought from the school principals by approaching them for permission to conduct the study within their schools.
d) The researcher attended each school to conduct the study. Upon arrival at each school, a formal letter (see Appendix A) was given to the principal in order to give written informed consent (see Appendix B), as well as a further explanation of the study. The Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix C) was given to all teachers, which provided them with an explanation of the study and allowed for them to choose whether or not they wanted to participate in this research study.
e) The researcher then provided the educators with an overview of the study, as well as information regarding informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Request for participation in the study was on a volunteer basis and consent was obtained by their agreement to complete the questionnaire.
f) Each volunteer participant was given a questionnaire (see Appendix D) and a time period in which they had in order to complete it. The time period varied depending on school constraints, but it was approximately one week. The questionnaire took each participant approximately twenty minutes to complete.
g) The researcher informed the respondents about the sealed drop-box that was placed in the staff room in order for them to place the completed questionnaires in, thus ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Throughout this research study, all ethical responsibilities were adhered to.

According to the APA Ethical Guidelines Concerning Human Respondents in Research (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009), no harm was imposed on the respondents during this research study as the respondents voluntarily completed the questionnaires, and the respondents remained anonymous. The principal of each school gave written consent (see Appendix B) in order to allow the study to take place at the school. All relevant data from this research study was stored in a secure place. Pseudonyms have been used in place of the school's name in order to ensure that all information remains private and confidential. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, there was a drop-box for the teachers to put their completed questionnaires in. All data from the study will be retained for a period of five years after which it will get destroyed.

Informed consent was given when the participant chose to complete the questionnaire. The researcher informed the respondents, both orally and in writing (see Appendix C) about:

- The area of the research study, that is, the teachers' perceptions of school-based support teams.
- The educators' right to decline to participate or withdraw from the process at any stage of the process.
- The expected duration of the questionnaire.
- The fact that they will not be disadvantaged if they choose not to participate in the study and there will be no benefits or risks for the respondents that do participate in the study.
- The confidentiality and anonymity with regard to the fact that no identifying details were required and the school names were not going to be utilised in the research report. All the data was analysed and kept in a secure place, only to be seen by the researcher and the supervisor, and
- The person to contact regarding any questions about the research.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

Based on a thematic analysis approach used to analyse the data of this study, the results will be examined using themes based on the responses of the respondents. Furthermore, the categories that emerged from the data analysis, which were built on thematic content analysis, are based on the research questions and aim of the study. This section is thus structured according to the themes that emerged under the research questions that were asked in this study and consist of the combined results of the five primary schools that participated in this study.

4.1. What do Teachers Think of the Support Structures Recommended in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), More Specifically School-Based Support Teams?

The majority of the teachers (approximately 76%) feel positive about the support provided by the school-based support teams. The respondents justified this by explaining that the teachers that form part of the school-based support team assist each other and receive support with the learners whom they experience difficulties. Several of the responses from the educators are provided below:

> *"Support is given to educators for learners who have academic problems or social problems."*
>
> *"Because they provide information on how to deal with a learner with learning barriers."*
>
> *"It (the school-based support team) is very involved and providing assistance as to how to go about offering support for learners."*
>
> *"Even though some teachers and members are not all specialised. The group support given helps the teachers to deal with the problems affecting children and as well the children who are affected are given guidance before the problem escalates."*
>
> *"They have always been helpful in giving advice and taking the time to give extra help to students who need it."*

One teacher from School A stated that the deputy principal is very helpful. Furthermore, the school-based support team provides guidance to the teachers which in turns assists and gives those learners who are experiencing barriers to learning the opportunity to receive additional support. At School B, it was reported that the learners who are referred to the school-based support team, receive help within two weeks from the date of referral.

The respondents from School C explained that the school-based support team provides advice to other teachers. The concept of this support is supposed to be a collaborative one and it appears that the school-based support teams at some of the schools are viewed as superior to other teachers. They seem to be providing advice as opposed to working collaboratively and assisting or guiding the teachers. Both the school-based support teams and the teachers that do not form part of the team can gain knowledge from each other. Moreover, other respondents at School C mentioned that they feel positive about the support structures as it provides assistance to teachers, learners and parents. This ensures that the support is efficient on a collaborative level so that all members can be involved in improving the learning provided to the children, as well as providing support to each person involved.

It was reported that the educators at School D have been provided with worksheets and hand-outs that give them suggestions on how to identify and assist those learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. The group support helps the teacher to deal with the issues that are affecting the learners, thereby preventing the problem from becoming worse. Not one teacher at School D had a negative view on or was unsure of the support provided by the school-based support team. They are of the opinion that the team helps the educators who are unsure of how they can assist the learners, as well as helps the learners who are struggling. The majority of the learners at School D that have been referred to the school-based support team, have received appropriate assistance.

The school-based support team at School E attempts to organise meetings that allow for staff input, thereby working collaboratively with all the teachers. There was a trauma event at the school one week prior to the researcher collecting the data there and the school-based support team arranged for social workers and counsellors to counsel the learners and teachers.

Six percent (6%) of the respondents from all five primary schools do not feel positive regarding the support provided by the school-based support team. The reasons that were given for this was that the school-based support teams are not adequately trained and/or they not assisting in the school. One teacher at School E is a new member of staff and she feels that the procedure was not explained to her; it was just expected that she understood how the school-based support team works.

A further sixteen percent (16%) of the educators (combined result from the 5 primary schools) are unsure of their feelings regarding the support provided by the school-based support teams. Many feel that they still require assistance from psychologists and other specialists, as well as the fact that they have a lack of resources at their schools. It was mentioned that it is difficult to assess the learners in order for the teacher to understand what support is necessary for each learner.

> *"Difficult for learners to be assessed so that teachers know exactly how to help (not all teachers are qualified to teach learners that are challenged)."*

According to the respondents, there have not been follow-up meetings or feedback from the school-based support teams and the members do not always provide support with certain aspects within the classroom (for example: discipline). It appears that at School C, the principal and deputy principal have been perceived to be autocratic and thus do not work as collaborative members of staff.

The results further indicate that the majority of the respondents (80%) from all five primary schools perceive group problem-solving to be effective in generating strategies to assist the learner. Therefore, most of the teachers feel that the support structures are effective as the group can work collaboratively to solve problems with learners who have barriers to learning.

Sixty three percent (63%) of the respondents (which is equal to 34 educators) stated that they agree or strongly agree that the school-based support teams have led to an improvement in terms of interpersonal communication skills between teachers. A further fifty-seven percent (57%) of the educators feel that the school-based support teams have had an effect on student performance. In contrast, twenty-five percent (25%) or fourteen respondents feel that the school-based support teams do not have an effect on school performance. Five of the teachers from School D that participated

in this study feel that the school-based support teams have been helpful for the students, while four of the teachers from School D do not feel that the support has had an effect on the students. Moreover, School B's results were also similar, with six educators feeling that the school-based support teams have had an effect on the students' performance, while five teachers disagreed with this view. The school-based support team at School C appears to have the largest effect on the students' performance as nine out of the ten respondents from that school were of the opinion that the team has had an effect on the learners' performance at school.

With regard to referral to a psychologist, twenty-one out of the fifty-four respondents (39%) stated that they are unsure whether the school-based support team has decreased the need for referral to a psychologist. It was mentioned by the different teachers within the questionnaire that they still find the need to refer students to psychologists or other professionals. Furthermore, only twenty-one out of the fifty-four respondents (39%) feel that the school-based support team has helped to decrease the need for placement of the child elsewhere. The purpose of the school-based support team within an inclusive framework is to lessen the need to place a child within a remedial or special school. However, the teachers are not completely sure if the support teams have assisted in this regard. Thirty percent (30%) do not feel that the school-based support team has helped to decrease the need for placement of the child elsewhere, while a further thirty-one percent (31%) are unsure regarding this matter. The Likert Scale yielded evenly distributed results on the statement regarding the placement of a learner in a different environment.

The respondents were asked whether they are aware of the other support structures that were outlined in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), specifically the district support teams. Twenty-six percent of the educators (26%) are aware of the support structures, while thirty-seven percent (37%) of the educators are unaware or have never heard of the district support team assigned to their school. It was further reported that some educators are aware of the district support team but they have not seen them for a long period of time.

"Very much aware with little assistance."

"Not for a long time."

Other teachers stated that it is very difficult to contact the district staff when their assistance is required, as well as for regular follow-up.

One teacher from School D reported that the school receives feedback from the district support teams on a frequent basis. However, a common response from the teachers was that the district support teams provide minimal to no support to the schools or the school-based support teams. After further analysis, it appears that the district support team makes contact with the schools towards the end of the third term as they require the referral and retention forms from the schools. Although a large number of educators are either unaware of the district support teams, or believe that they receive little assistance from them, the majority of teachers (59%) would still desire continued assistance from this team. Some teachers are of the opinion that when they have a discussion with the parents, whose children are experiencing barriers to learning, that their children require additional support or sometimes need to be referred to an external professional for added support, these parents are sometimes in denial and need further input from the district support teams. The teachers would like to receive more resources, support and education, and prompt assistance from the district support teams. The educators do not want to wait a full term for one child to be assessed. One teacher stated the following:

> "*District assistance plays a vital role in ensuring improved performance of both educators and learners.*"

It was mentioned that the district support team always follows up with School E. Previously, there was one representative from the district support teams that was based at School E for a certain period, and the teachers would like that system of having a representative based as the school to continue because it helped in providing the teachers with direction and confidence.

A further thirty percent (30%) of the respondents in the study stated that they were unsure if they would desire continued support from the district support teams. Some educators feel that they do not need external support as they are satisfied with the internal support. Others believe that they only need support from them when a learner is not suitable in his or her current school environment. The district support teams does not seem to be meeting the requirements of the schools in terms of solving certain issues and attending to matters that require urgent attention. A new teacher at School

E stated that she had never heard of the district support teams, which raises issues regarding education in universities on inclusive education and their structures.

Six out of the fifty-four respondents (11%) stated that they do not desire support from the district support teams as they feel that they have never received support before so they are unsure if it is actually desirable or not. According to these educators, the district support team does not provide the schools with the necessary resources and they do not adequately assist in placing the learners who are experiencing barriers to learning in special schools or better suited school environments. At one of the schools, it was reported that the children referred to the district support team have not yet been attended to since the previous year.

A large majority of the teachers (87% or 47 out of the 54 respondents) believe that the school-based support team approach to teacher support should continue within their school. It is believed that this assists in reducing the pressure on the teachers' work. Teachers require assistance, especially in areas where they have not received further training. The educators do want the support to continue but they believe that further improvements are necessary. It has been a success so far as it is helpful to the learners and the staff should work as a team to ensure continued support. It is the only effective approach that deals with the learners' problems immediately and it assists teachers in improving their approaches to teaching, thereby helping the learners. Moreover, the quality of teaching is improved with the assistance of the school-based support teams.

In general, it could be viewed that the majority of teachers feel positive towards the support structures recommended in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), however, there are further improvements to be made, especially with regard to the district support teams.

4.1.1. What are the Teachers' Views of the School-Based Support Teams at their Particular School?

Upon exploring how the teachers view the school-based support teams at their particular schools, it was first questioned as to whether or not the teachers know what the nature and purpose of the school-based support team is.

The general consensus is that its aim is to support learners who are experiencing barriers to learning and make recommended referrals where necessary.

> *"The SBST is committee formed by teaching staff members and the purpose of the SBST is support teachers and learners faced with challenges that form barriers to teaching and learning."*

> *"Identify learners who require support; refer learners to other organisations, eg. hospitals, psychologists."*

In addition, the school-based support team supports the teachers, other members of staff at the school who are not educators (for example, administrative staff), as well as making contact with the parents of the learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. Further responses include that they help identify those learners who are experiencing possible barriers to learning and assists the teacher in dealing with those issues in the classroom.

> *"Identify learners with learning barriers and social problems identified by teachers."*

Some educators mentioned that the school-based support teams assess areas that are affecting learners on a social and academic level, as well as home circumstances. The team arranges for assessments to take place and then provides feedback to the parents of those learners. Educators further stated that the school-based support team counsels learners for personal issues that they may be experiencing. They believe that the team diagnoses learners with behavioural problems and provides interventions to assist those learners. Moreover the respondents are of the opinion that the school-based support team ensures that the governance of the school runs smoothly and serves and protects the school. Lastly, it was mentioned that the school-based support teams are there to discuss a learner or learners who may require additional support.

In order to explore what the teachers' perceptions are of the school-based support teams at their particular school, they were asked to rate whether the team has assisted them with their concerns regarding the learners in their classroom. The majority of respondents in Schools A, B, C, D, and E (63%, 75%, 80%, 69%, and 56%

respectively) felt that the school-based support teams have assisted them with their concerns regarding the learners in their classroom.

The respondents at School A feel that the support team evaluates the learner profiles and provides the teachers with ideas and recommendations on how to assist the learner in the classroom. Two teachers are unsure whether they feel assisted in the classroom as there is not enough time for the assistance to be effective. According to one of the educators, the coordinator of the school-based support team at School A is often absent, resulting in the support being disrupted and not efficient. One teacher stated that he does not feel assisted by the school-based support team regarding the issues in the classroom as he does not think the learners should be doing remedial work from grade one to grade seven.

According to the teachers at School B, the school-based support team has assisted them with their concerns regarding learners in their classroom, which correlates with their positive perception of the school-based support team at their school. There were two teachers, out of the twelve respondents, who are of the opinion that the school-based support team does not assist the teachers with issues regarding discipline within their classroom.

"SBST hasn't helped with discipline problems in our school!"

Furthermore, they felt that the concerns are addressed depending on the need of the learner and whether or not the learner can afford the necessary interventions that are recommended by the school-based support team. One of the teachers did not think the team has assisted him in the classroom as he stated that he feels lonely and unsupported.

The school-based support team at School C provides the educators with good advice and assists the learners using support workbooks. One of the teachers involved in the school-based support team at this school has reportedly been especially helpful with regard to assisting the teachers. The referrals of the learners who have difficulties are sent to the remedial teacher and the teachers and parents meet on a regular basis to assist with the learners. One teacher does not feel assisted in the classroom as there have been no positive outcomes with the issues that she has raised. In addition, one out of the ten respondents feels that she does not have contact with the school-based

support team as she is a subject teacher and therefore stated that she is unsure if the team has assisted her with concerns in the classroom.

The educators from School D also agree that the school-based support team has assisted them with their concerns in the classroom. They are of the opinion that input from others helps to identify and remediate learners with barriers and the advice has brought about a positive change in the learners' performance and behaviour.

> *"By meeting and discussing a learner with problems, the group (SBST) can tell from their experience."*

> *"I agree because I have applied some of the solutions and advice they gave me and have seen a positive change in children's performance and behaviour."*

Twenty-three percent (23%) of the teachers feel that the advice can be redundant and the suggestions from the support team may not necessarily address the issues specifically and are therefore too vague at times. One teacher at School D does not feel assisted by the school-based support team in the classroom.

> *"I do not see any function done by the SBST in my classroom."*

The respondents from School E reported that they have received a range of ideas on how to deal with different learners in diverse situations, as well as ways of identifying problems and strategies to assist those learners in the classroom. Three teachers stated that they have not completely been assisted in the classroom but some issues have been supported. Two out of the eleven educators at School E believe that the school-based support team is not working effectively within their school and therefore they do not receive assistance with their concerns in the classroom.

Table 1 (on page 37) indicates whether the majority of teachers at each school agrees, disagrees or are unsure of the statements from the questionnaire:

Table 1

Responses of Participants to Statements from the School-Based Support Team Questionnaire (Appendix D)

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Team members provide moral support for you.	School A School B School C School D School E		
The SBST has failed to generate useful intervention strategies.		School A School B School C School D School E	
The SBST has led to an improvement of interpersonal communication skills between teachers.	School B School C School D School E		School A
The SBST has not had an effect on student performance.		School A School B School C School D School E	
The SBST has assisted me in improving my skill in understanding classroom problems.	School A School B School C School D School E	School A	
The SBST/SMT has generated practicable strategies to assist in the classroom.	School C School D School E	School A School B	

The results in Table 1 above provide descriptions about how teachers perceive the school-based support teams at their particular schools. It can be seen that the majority of teachers at all the schools feel that the team members of the school-based support teams provide moral support to the teachers and the team generates useful intervention strategies to assist the educators. According to the responses from the respondents at School A, the most common response from the teachers was that they are unsure as to whether or not the school-based support team approach has led to an improvement of interpersonal communication skills between the teachers. The remaining four schools, School B, School C, School D, and School E, are of the opinion that this approach has led to an improvement in interpersonal communication skills between the teachers. The majority of the teachers' at all five schools clearly state that the school-based support team has had an effect on student performance.

With regard to whether or not the school-based support teams have assisted the teachers in improving their skills in understanding classroom problems, most of the teachers at School B, School C, School D and School E feel that the team has assisted them with this aspect. At School A, however, half the teachers are in agreement that they have improved their skills in understanding classroom problems, while the remaining half do not agree that they have had assistance from the school-based support team in understanding the classroom problems. School C, School D and School E believe that the school-based support team or school management team has generated practicable strategies to assist them in the classroom. The majority of teachers at School A and School B however do not feel that the school-based support team or the school management team has generated strategies to assist them in the classroom.

Sixty-three percent (63%) of the teachers from all of the schools said that they have been able to implement the suggestions that emerged from the school-based support team. Most of the teachers from School A however are unsure if they have been able to implement the suggestions as they find the barriers which the learners experience to be more social than academic and they believe that there is a limited number of places where they can refer these learners in order for them to obtain the necessary support at an affordable rate. One of the teachers at School A stated that she is in partial agreement with regard to being able to implement the suggestions that emerged from the school-based support team as she has been able to carry out the

suggestions that relate to classroom issues and contacting of the learners' parents, but she has not been able to put into action the recommendations from the school-based support team to refer learners to psychologists and/or social workers. Other educators feel that the team members do not provide any suggestions that have assisted them in supporting learners who experience barriers in the classroom.

The respondents from School B believe they have been able to carry out the suggestions from the school-based support team as the teachers have been given positive ways to deal with issues and they are supported with their decisions. The majority of educators from School C indicated that they have been able to implement the suggestions but the levels of difficulty regarding the suggestions vary. Similarly, most of the educators at School D feel that they have been able to implement the suggestions, especially when parents or guardians are involved. Slight changes have been observed in the learners' performance after implementation of some of the suggestions that emerged from the school-based support team. Moreover, some of the ideas have enabled the teachers to approach the learners in an alternative manner. According to the majority of the teachers at School E, the suggestions that have emerged from the school-based support team have been easy to implement. They specifically mentioned that the school-based support team coordinator has been very helpful and useful recommendations have been made.

All of the teachers at School A mentioned that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support team. They feel that the team is organised, supportive, knowledgeable and beneficial. Nine out of the twelve respondents at School B feel that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support team. The one drawback is that the team members are too busy with work from the Department of Education so they not always available for the other staff members. The common response from the teachers at School C is that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support team as they are approachable and understanding. Moreover, the school management team works well with the school-based support team. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the educators at School D are in agreement that the team and teachers work in a collaborative manner. They feel that communication between all stakeholders is important and enhances the performance of the learners. The majority of the teachers at School E feel that the team members come up with effective ideas

on how to improve the school and teaching methods and therefore they feel that they can work collaboratively with the members of the support team.

The majority of teachers from School A, School C, School D and School E all feel that the school-based support team has provided them with constructive feedback in order to assist them in addressing the barriers to learning that they have encountered. The school-based support team, according to these teachers, provide concrete feedback and assist the educators to the best of their ability. Five out of the twelve educators that participated in this study at School B are unsure as to whether or not the school-based support team has provided them with constructive feedback to assist with the barriers. The reasons that were given for this uncertainty was that the school-based support team often refers the cases to psychologists and they only provide feedback with some cases but not all. The staff members that feel that the support team has not provided them with constructive feedback mentioned that no suggestions are made from the school-based support team. One teacher stated that she has never been faced with problems or challenges that she is unable to handle on her own. Another teacher from School E feels that the school-based support team does not provide her with constructive feedback in order to assist in addressing the barriers to learning as there is only one member of the school-based support team and therefore feedback is not effective.

4.1.2. How do Teachers Perceive the Support they Receive from the School-Based Support Teams?

As previously reported, the majority of teachers (76%) from all five of the primary schools that participated in the research feel positive about the support provided by the school-based support teams. Although there is a lack of resources at the schools, the teachers feel that the school-based support team is helpful and assists learners with their difficulties.

In addition to feeling positive about the school-based support teams, sixty-nine percent of the respondents think that the school-based support teams have assisted them with their concerns regarding learners in the classroom. The school-based support team members want the teachers to excel and assist the learners adequately in the

classroom. They will refer children who they are unsure of how to assist in the classroom. Some teachers have noticed positive changes in the performance of several learners as a result of the assistance they have received from the school-based support teams.

Only eleven percent of the teachers feel that the team members do not provide moral support to them as educators. Thirty-three of the fifty-four respondents (61%) stated that the school-based support teams have assisted them in improving their skills in understanding classroom problems.

4.2. Are the School-Based Support Teams Functioning as Part of the School System?

It appears that all respondents are in agreement that there are functioning school-based support teams at Schools A, B, C and D. At School E, however, the majority reported having a functioning school-based support team but two of the respondents were not in agreement with the remaining eleven educators.

All of the teachers from School A that participated in this study are in agreement that there is an existing school-based support team functioning at their school. According to them, the vice principal of School A is in charge of the support structures and various other teachers, including the principal and heads of departments, form part of the committee. Teachers that wanted to be a part of the team volunteered to be a part of it. This committee meets once a week and provides support to the teachers with regard to learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. One teacher from each phase also forms part of the school-based support team and assists one another.

Similarly, all the educators from School B stated that there is an existing school-based support team at their school. The deputy principal and head of departments form part of the team. The head of the foundation phase in particular assists with the support structures. One teacher did mention that the school has educational psychologists and school counsellors that come to their school. It was not made clear as to whether or not these specialists assist with the school-based support team. It seems that the teachers refer the children to the school-based support team and then the team refers the learner to the school counsellor or educational psychologist when necessary.

According to the ten respondents from School C, their existing and functioning support team operates in relation to a learner support teacher and other therapists. It comprises the head of departments and school management team.

Every participant from School D stated that there is an existing school-based support team at their school. According to these teachers, they, as educators, identify learners who have difficulties and refer them to this team, then the team discusses the issues that teachers and learners face and they suggest possible solutions to the problems. The principal, head of department and some teachers form part of the school-based support team.

With regard to School E, there are two out of the eleven respondents who have indicated that they do not have an existing school-based support team that functions at their school. These two teachers stated that there is one teacher that assists but not a support team. The remaining nine respondents mentioned that the school-based support team consists of the school management team (SMT) members and they strategize on possible support that could be put in place to assist the weak learners, as well as how they could provide support to the stronger learners (terms used by the teacher). One teacher further mentioned that their support team functions by having teachers assist with extra English and Mathematics after school twice a week. In addition, the team deals with retention of students and provides support to learners who experience difficulties.

The following are quotes from the respondents in this study that were written on the questionnaire when asked what the nature and purpose of the school-based support team is.

> *"To bring any learner/s who we (as teachers) are worried about, I've needed to refer learners who we think have a problem like social, psychological or educational."*
>
> *"Helps sometimes to refer the child to LSEN."*
>
> *"Identify learners who require support; refer learners to other organisations, e.g. hospitals, psychologists."*

"To organise assessments for learners who need and give feedback to those parents."

"Support children."

"Its sole aim is to support learners on areas of need and recommend referral where necessary."

"To collect any information on learners that need to be retained or referred."

4.2.1. To What Extent do the Teachers Make Use of these Support Structures within their School?

It was necessary to explore whether the teachers make use of the school-based support teams by obtaining an estimate of the amount of learners that they refer to the support teams. The following pie graph (Figure 5) illustrates the number of learners that were referred to the school-based support teams at each of the five schools over the past twelve to eighteen months:

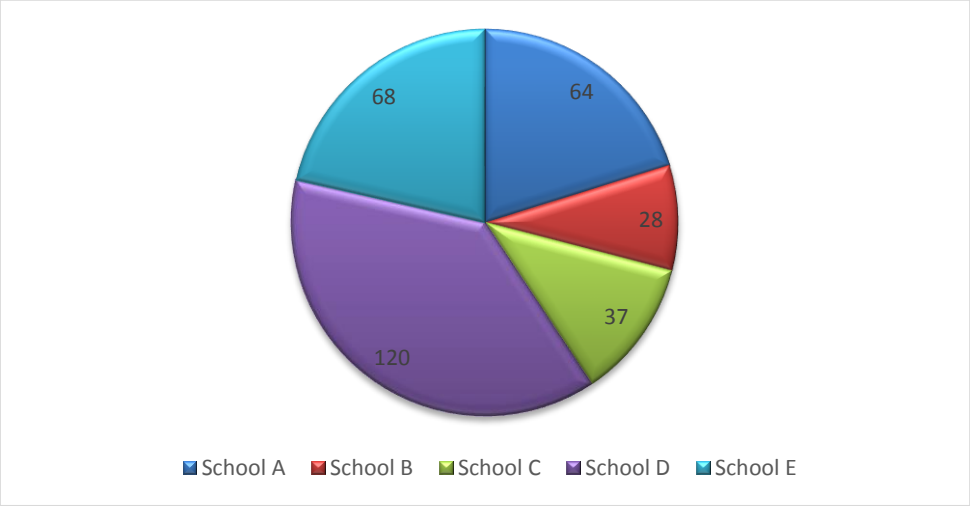


Figure 5. Referrals of learners to the school-based support team over the past 12-18 months.

It is important to note that several respondents did not disclose the amount of learners that they had referred and others were unsure of the exact amount of learners that were referred, therefore the above figure indicates the estimated amount of learners that were referred. Out of the eight respondents at School A, they have referred a total

of sixty-four learners to the school-based support team, while School B has referred twenty-eight learners, School C has referred thirty-seven learners, School D has referred one hundred and twenty learners, and School E has referred sixty-eight learners to the school-based support team over a period of 12-18 months. The teachers refer those children who they view as experiencing barriers to learning and require additional assistance and support. Furthermore, one of the teachers from School D stated that he does not have the exact amount but he refers a large amount of learners to the school-based support team at his school. This is due to the fact that many of the learners in his class experience barriers to learning as they were not born in South Africa.

The educators attempt to implement the suggestions provided to them by the school-based support team and many of the teachers consult with the team for support and assistance with learners who are experiencing difficulties in the classroom.

4.2.2. What are Examples of the Kinds of Issues that the Educators have Consulted or Would like to Consult their School-Based Support Team on?

The teachers have consulted their school-based support teams on issues regarding the structure of how to support the learners in the classroom, as well as how to communicate with the parents of the learners who are having difficulties in the classroom. They have been approached for assistance with discipline and specific areas. These include reading, the handwriting of learners, as well as mathematics. In one case, the school-based support team organised additional reading lessons for those learners who were struggling. One teacher reported that although she had a learner in her class that was retained, the school-based support team could identify his needs and make necessary implementations and suggestions for him for the following year. The team has further been approached to assist with referrals of children for psycho-educational assessments, however many of them have struggled with the costs of the assessments and are unsure of affordable places for them to go. They provide support to educators with learners who have academic and social problems. Educators find it difficult to assess the child, or get them assessed, so that they know exactly how to assist him or her in the classroom. At one of the schools, a

learner passed away so the school-based support team arranged for social workers and counsellors to counsel the teachers and learners. Many educators from all five of the primary schools would like to approach the school-based support team at their school to assist with behavioural difficulties in the classroom.

The following is a list of some of the barriers to learning and issues that the teachers identified that they would like assistance with from the school-based support team:

- Designing appropriate activities for learners with difficulties
- “Gifted” learners
- Weak learners
- Conflict in the working environment
- Well-being of all stakeholders
- Learners who are disruptive
- Learners with behavioural difficulties (aggressive, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), concentration difficulties)
- Learners with emotional and social difficulties (including problems at home)
- Learners with reading, spelling and language difficulties
- Teaching a group
- Learners with speech impairments
- Learners with physical disabilities
- The team should have a standard test that needs to be administered to the learners before retaining them.
- Need more support material
- How to ensure that them, as educators, are performing and assisting in the correct way.
- Referral forms
- To organise specialist attention, for example counselling
- Diagnosis of serious learning disorders
- Useful and constructive advice
- Learners who have perceptual difficulties
- Discipline
- Learners who have been retained but still require support
- Assist not only classroom teachers, but also subject teachers
- Removal of camera in the classroom

- Regular feedback and follow-ups regarding the referrals that have been made.
- Constructive assistance with parents that come across as difficult.
- Additional options for those learners who have special needs.
- Potential for a small remedial class by getting a remedial teacher on sight to assist the learners on a one-to-one basis.
- Early identification of learners that require an LSEN (Learner with Special Education Needs) number.
- Referral of learners to relevant specialists for a period of time.
- Displaying what to do as opposed to stating what is to be done by the educators.
- Parental involvement in the learners' education
- Department involvement or support, who to contact and their role in supporting the school.

4.3. How Beneficial have the Support Teams been to the Teachers?

It can be concluded that the majority of the educators feel that the school-based support teams have been beneficial to them as the majority of respondents are of the opinion that the school-based support teams have assisted the educators with their concerns regarding learners in the classroom (69%), provided moral support to them (76%), improved the interpersonal communication skills between the teachers (63%) had an effect on student performance (57%). The referrals of those children who are having difficulties have been beneficial for both the teachers and learners.

Furthermore, the results indicate that most of the teachers feel that the school-based support teams have been beneficial to the teachers with regard to suggestions (67%), assistance in the classroom (61%) and making the necessary placement of learners in suitable environments (39%). Forty-seven out of the fifty-four respondents (87%) would like the school-based support team approach to teacher support to continue within their school.

Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the respondents would like to continue receiving assistance from the district support team which therefore suggests that, to a certain degree, the support is beneficial to the teachers.

4.3.1. To What Extent have the Support Teams Provided the Teachers with Adequate Constructive Feedback in order to Assist them in Addressing the Barriers to Learning which the Learners Experience?

Few respondents at Schools A and B (3 at School A and 4 at school B) feel that the school-based support teams or school management teams have generated practicable strategies to assist in the classroom. Alternatively, the majority of respondents at Schools C, D, and E (70%, 46% and 55% respectively) feel that the support teams have generated practicable strategies that assist them in the classroom.

A large number of the respondents (63%) from the five primary schools mentioned that they are able to implement the suggestions that emerged from the school-based support teams. One teacher from School A mentioned that she half agrees and half disagrees with her ability to implement the suggestions that emerged. The reason for this was:

> *"Yes, as practical. Yes, as phoning parents who often assist. Yes in the classroom. But with psychological help no or referring or testing learners."*

Responses from the educators at School B were that they are given positive ways to deal with the barriers to learning and are supported with their decisions. No specific ways were however reported. The educators at School C and D feel that they have been helped in becoming aware of the different needs of each learner and can thus approach the learner in a different manner. One of the suggestions that the educators at School E believe to have been beneficial in addressing the learners' needs is by taking one learner a week and providing them with additional classes in which they require further support. The respondents from all five primary schools tend to agree that parent involvement has an effect on the implementation of the suggestions in order to assist the learners who experience barriers to learning.

The eight out of the fifty-four respondents (15%) that do not feel that they have been able to implement the suggestions that emerged from the school-based support team, and thus does not feel they are being provided with constructive feedback to assist the learners, reported that no suggestions emerged from the school-based support teams.

It was reported by fifty-nine percent (59%) of the participants from the five primary schools that they believe that the school-based support team has provided them with constructive feedback in order to assist them in addressing the barriers to learning that they have encountered.

> *"Sometimes I feel 'helpless' with a learner and the SBST always assists to the best of their ability."*

> *"I have been told about certain activities which help children with barriers to learning."*

There were twelve respondents (out of fifty-four) that are neutral with regard to whether the school-based support team has provided them with constructive feedback to address the learners' needs, resulting in a further nineteen percent (19%) that do not feel that the school-based support team has provided the educators with constructive feedback to assist with the barriers that they have faced.

One teacher who felt unsure stated that:

> *"The SBST does not give much feedback. They record which children need referral and why."*

It seems to be that the school-based support team refers the learners who are experiencing barriers to learning to psychologists or other specialists in order to receive feedback from them.

One teacher expressed that she received constructive feedback from the school-based support team but not from the Department of Education.

4.3.2. Have Teachers Experienced Any Challenges? What are Possible Challenges they have Experienced?

According to the responses of the respondents from all five of the primary schools, the barriers to learning at the schools, which may be challenging for both the educators and learners, were rated as follows (see Table 2):

Table 2

Barriers Faced by the Schools

Barrier	Very Poor	Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent
Resources (books, stationery, etc.)	1.9	7.4	35.2	31.4	24.1
Relationships between principals, teachers, learners and parents	0	13	27.8	44.4	14.8
Functioning of administration and management	0	9.3	29.6	42.6	18.5
Socio-economic context	9.3	20.4	37	33.3	0
Language and communication between all parties involved	5.5	14.8	42.6	31.6	5.5
Provision of support services	5.5	27.8	27.8	35.2	3.7
Parental involvement	9.3	25.9	40.7	20.4	3.7
Training	5.5	16.7	39	33.3	5.5
Human resource development	5.5	18.5	50	24.1	1.9
Classroom size	13	31.5	33.3	18.5	3.7
Curriculum	1.9	11.1	35.2	38.8	13
Parent intervention	14.8	35.2	29.6	16.7	3.7

Note. The above results are reported as percentages.

The teachers further mentioned that teachers are unable to attend to all the learners in one lesson and there is limited time to complete administrative work. The curriculum does not allow for the necessary attention that is required for those experiencing barriers to learning and therefore individual attention is needed to assist each problem.

There is a lack of training for teachers in learner support and there is poor support from the district support team. Many educators reported that the classroom size varies depending on the grades.

According to the results in Table 2, the majority of the respondents feel that the relationships between the principals, teachers, learners and parents (44%), the functioning of the administration and management (42%), the provision of support services (35%), and the curriculum (39%) are good and thus working well within the schools.

The majority of respondents reported that the following barriers are adequately developed at the schools: resources (35%), socio-economic context of the school (37%), language and communication between all parties involved (43%), parental involvement (41%), training (39%), human resource development (50%), and class size (33%).

Parent intervention was reported by thirty-five percent (35%) of the respondents as being poorly developed within the five primary schools.

A further challenge that was communicated by the respondents with regard to the support teams is the lack of assistance from the district support team.

> *"There has been insufficient support from the district."*

In addition to this, the educators would like the assessments that are referred to the Department of Education to be more prompt.

It was stated by one teacher at School C that the headmaster and deputy principal of the school do not work collaboratively with the school-based support team and other teachers which proves to be challenging for the teachers as, according to this teacher, the educators are not encouraged to participate with the school-based support team, which results in them feeling isolated.

It was expressed that there are time-limits with regard to meetings with the school-based support teams so the educators may have difficulty in receiving the necessary support and assistance when they need it. Furthermore, the educators feel that some members of the school-based support team have not had sufficient training in order to provide support to the teachers.

The educators are concerned that many of the learners have social and emotional problems that may be having an additional effect on their academic performance. They feel they are unable to assist with this and are unsure of where to refer them to. This becomes more challenging for the teachers when the parents of the learners who are experiencing barriers to learning are not supportive.

> *"Classroom sizes are too big. A teacher is unable to attend to all learners in one lesson. Smaller class sizes=better performance."*

From the above quote from one of the respondents, it can be seen that the teachers find it demanding and complex to provide assistance and meet the needs of each individual learners when the classroom sizes are too big. Moreover, the teachers feel that the school-based support teams assist with the learners whom they refer to them but they do not provide assistance and support within the classroom. Practicable suggestions do not seem to be provided to the teachers to assist them in the classroom.

Some teachers, according to one of the members of the school-based support team at her school, do not refer learners to the school-based support team or to the district support team due to the large amount of paperwork that are required. This results in the learners being given a condoned pass to the next grade, which will continue until one teacher refers the learner.

An issue that arose from all of the five primary schools was that the schools and teachers do not know where to refer learners for assessments and therapies that are required at a reduced rate. They would like a list of specialist that they are able to refer the learners to when external assistance and support is required.

4.4. To What Extent are the Teachers Able to Work Collaboratively with these Teams?

Forty-three out of the fifty-four respondents (80%) are in agreement that group-problem solving is effective in generating strategies to assist the learner. Although they agree with this statement, this may not be how each school particularly runs. It was therefore explored with the respondents if the team members at their school provide

moral support to the teachers. A large majority of seventy-six percent (76%) of the respondents from all five schools feel that the members of the school-based support team provide moral support to them.

Communication is a necessary element in order to work in a collaborative manner as a team. Sixty-three percent (34 out of 54 respondents) of the educators believe that the school-based support team approach has led to an improvement in interpersonal skills between the teachers.

The overall results from the five schools indicate that eighty-three percent (83%) of the teachers feel that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support team. Seven of the fifty-four respondents (13%) neither agree nor disagree with regard to the collaborative work with the school-based support team and the remaining two respondents (4%) feel that they cannot work collaboratively with the school-based support team. These are the teachers that feel like an outcast and isolated from the other staff members at their school.

According to the results at School A, seven out of the eight respondents feel that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support team at their school. Only one teacher indicated that she is unsure if she can work collaboratively with them, but she did not give an explanation as to the reason for this. No teachers at School A mentioned that they cannot work collaboratively with the team members. The teachers feel that the deputy principal and head of departments are helpful to them. They indicated that although there are time constraints and problems with absenteeism, the school-based support team are organised, supportive and beneficial, which assists with a collaborative working environment.

One teacher at School B does not feel that he could work collaboratively with the school-based support team. This teacher in particular made it clear that he feels like all the teachers are against him and the members of the team are viewed as managers like in a business setting. Nine out of the twelve respondents feel that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support team as the team members are always available and helpful when they ask for their assistance. Two teachers feel unsure regarding this as they mentioned that the members of the school-based support team are often too busy with work for the Department and are thus unavailable when they need assistance from them.

The majority of the teachers at School C (90%) feel that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support team at their school. These teachers feel that the team members are approachable and are willing to help and listen to any problems. They feel it is also important for the school management team to be able to work collaboratively with the school-based support team. The one teacher who is unsure if she is able to work collaboratively with the support team is of the opinion that teachers are not invited to contribute in the meetings and the issues they bring up are often overlooked.

According to one teacher at School D, he is unsure of the teamwork at the school. The remaining twelve educators (out of the 13 respondents) feel that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support team. They pointed out that each and every members' ideas and solutions are put together in order to decide what is best for the learner/s. One teacher stated:

"Communication to better the performance of a struggling learner is enhanced."

This school believes that in order for the school-based support team to be effective, teachers need to be actively collaborating with the team to come up with adequate solutions to the rising issues.

With regard to the results from School E, there is one teacher who strongly believes that she cannot work collaboratively with the school-based support team at her school because the team is not functioning within the school. In addition, two members of the staff believe that the team is never available for one-on-one consultation resulting in the work not being completely collaborative. The majority of teachers at School E (8 out of 11 respondents), however do believe that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support team. They further elaborated on this by stating that the school-based support team always assists with ideas and suggestions on how to improve the school and teaching methods. Furthermore, they can sit together and discuss the problems and how they can help the learners who are experiencing difficulties. One of the members of the school-based support team at School E mentioned that she has worked with all the staff members at the school.

It can be concluded that most of the teachers feel that they can work collaboratively with the school-based support teams at their school, however, there are two teachers

that do not feel they can work with the team, resulting in them feeling isolated from the staff. One of the reasons the team is unable to work collaboratively with staff members is due to time constraints as the team members have additional paperwork from the Department of Education that need to be completed.

4.5. Respondents' Perspectives Regarding School-Based Support Teams

Further information that was provided to the researcher with regard to the school-based support teams is that this approach functions well and supports the educators. Many teachers would like a list of places where they can get learners assessed by a multi-disciplinary team. They would like an explanation of the requirements of the school-based support team according to the Department of Education. Moreover, the educators desire more training or workshops on how to deal with specific problems. Some would like a psychologist to be based at each school in order to assist with the performance and well-being of the learners. It was reported that the teachers do not like that the school is run like a business, where the school-based support team members are viewed as the managers. There are a lot of environmental factors that influence the progress of the support structures. They would like the maximum support that is possible from the district support teams and they feel that they should be involved from the beginning of the year so as to identify and support those learners experiencing difficulties. One suggestion from the teachers is to involve more stakeholders in the school-based support team committee. When teachers have to take additional time after school to work, it destroys the morale of the teachers in those lessons. The training at a tertiary level should include ways to assist those learners who experience barriers to learning so that the teachers feel that they can assist them adequately. Overall, most teachers consider the support from the school-based support teams to be well-established and necessary in their schools.

Tables 3 and 4 in Appendix H display the quantitative data as per the results from the five primary schools from the school-based support team questionnaire (Appendix D). These results indicate the frequencies and percentages with the sample of fifty-four participants and provide a summary of the results discussed throughout chapter four of this research report.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter of the research report will evaluate and analyse the results by making use of the themes that emerged from the research questions. The theoretical and practical implications of the research findings will be explored. Lastly, the limitations of this study and recommendations for future studies will be discussed.

5.1. Description and Analysis of Results

5.1.1. What do Teachers Think of the Support Structures Recommended in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), More Specifically School-Based Support Teams?

As can be seen from the results, the overall perceptions of school-based support teams that form part of the inclusive education policies as outlined by Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), is a positive one. The teachers feel that the school-based support teams provide assistance and guidance to them, the learners and the parents of those learners who experience barriers to learning. This indicates that the support is a collaborative one as it encompasses all parties involved. “No one teacher can or ought to be expected to have all the expertise required to meet the educational needs of all students in the classroom” (Lipsky, 1994, p. 5 as cited in Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2005, p. 40). All teachers need support and assistance from other teachers, and sometimes from parents, in order to cater to the individual needs of the learners and assist them in the classroom.

The school-based support teams appear to function differently at each of the primary schools, depending on the needs of the teachers and the schools. Some school-based support teams provide worksheets to the teachers to assist them in the classroom, while others provide guidance when the need arises. Although, the team members are chosen in a diverse manner at each school and they do not all meet after exact periods, the teams are functioning at each of the five primary schools and are providing support to the teachers, which in turn supports the learners.

Very few of the respondents feel that the school-based support teams are not functioning within their school. Educators from School A and C believe that their principal needs to be more involved, in a collaborative manner, in the support team. The principal at School A seems to not be involved at all with the school-based support team, while the principal at School C seems to be involved, but in an autocratic manner as opposed to a collaborative one. Some of these teachers that view the support to be a negative one appear to have feelings of isolation. If all the teachers, including the principals, do not work collaboratively when problem-solving, the teacher that either chooses to not work with the school-based support team or feels excluded by other team or staff members, begins to feel isolated and lonely. This decreased the quality of work produced by that teacher, which could have an effect on the learners and their parents (Bedward & Daniels, 2005).

A general response from the teachers with regard to the support teams is that they feel supported by the team members but they still require additional support from specialists. There are not enough specialists working at government primary schools in South Africa. Out of the five primary schools that participated in this study, only one has a psychologist based at the school (School C). This Educational Psychologist, however, consults privately but is based on the premises of the school so she assists where possible. According to the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), as provided by Yvette Daffue (personal communication, October 2013), the number of registered Educational Psychologists as of October 2013 was 1 464. While the number of registered Intern Educational Psychologists was 145. This number is considerably low due to the fact that there are approximately 25 000 public and independent schools in South Africa. There is no possibility for each school to have an Educational Psychologist placed at their school and for this reason the district- support teams are there to assist with assessments and referrals to other organisations or institutions when necessary. By viewing the responses of the teachers, it can be seen that there is a large need to have learners assessed and supported by specialists. The teachers and schools are not aware of institutions to which they can refer learners, particularly affordable settings. In addition there is a long wait for assessments by the Department of Education which means that if a learner cannot afford a private assessment, there are not sufficient resources.

A main finding from the results indicated that there is little support from the district support team. According to the Department of Education (2005), the district support is limited in rural or previously disadvantaged areas. The reason for this is unknown. However, the support that is provided by the district-based support team includes classroom-based support, organisational support, administrative support, and support for addressing social and contextual factors. The support is not provided through one cohesive structure which results in support and assistance on a district level being fragmented (Department of Education, 2005). There is a lot of changes that still need to occur on a district level with regard to educational support, which could be an area for further research. Many of the respondents would like the support that is provided on an institutional, as well as a district level, to continue as it reduces pressure on teachers, improves quality of teaching and assists teachers and learners in the classroom.

5.1.2. Are the School-Based Support Teams Functioning as Part of the School System?

The results indicated that there are school-based support teams functioning at each of the five primary schools. This aligns with the policies of inclusive education, as outlined in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). All members of the team were chosen differently at each school. Some volunteered to be a part of the school-based support team, others were chosen based on their previous experience with special education, while other teachers were chosen due to them being the heads of departments at their school.

Many of the teachers view the nature and purpose of the school-based support team to be a support structure for the learners. Although they do support the learners, the school-based support teams are supposed to assist the teachers in dealing with the individual needs of each learner in the classroom, thereby assisting both the teachers and the learners. It is important to note that teachers play a vital role in child development and the way in which they teach has an effect on the learners' performance (Timperley, 2008). Teachers therefore require a great deal of support in order to assist with the learners' development and functioning. If they do not receive

the required support, they may feel isolated, stressed and burnt-out, which will have a negative effect on the quality of education.

The teachers make use of these support teams by referring learners who are experiencing difficulties to these teams. Moreover, they have consulted the school-based support teams on areas where they need assistance. They also consult the teams when wanting to refer learners to specialists. However, there is a large number of issues that the teachers would still like assistance with from the school-based support team. Research indicates that class teachers are supposed to first deal with the problem in the classroom and then, if they are having difficulties or are unable to do it alone, they can consult the school-based support teams. If the problem is still unresolved the support works in an hierarchical manner in that they can then consult the district support teams and then the learner support teachers if necessary (Mahlo, 2011). However, the issue arises in that the teachers are overwhelmed by the barriers to learning in large class sizes and are unable to deal with each problem on their own. From this study, it seems that they deal with the immediate barrier first but there are time constraints when wanting further development and assistance with other difficulties that they experience in the classroom, including discipline and learners with specific difficulties.

5.1.3. How Beneficial have the Support Teams been to the Teachers?

The results from this study indicated that the teachers find the support provided by the school-based support team to be beneficial and would thus like the school-based support team approach to continue within their school. There has been a lot of programmes designed in South Africa over the past fifteen years that have aimed at empowering teachers and supporting them during the transformation of policies and the new curriculum (Prinsloo, 2001). This school-based support approach has been one that is providing the teachers with a way of problem-solving in a group, thereby improving interpersonal communication skills and decreasing feelings of isolation. This collaborative consultation can only work if all members are involved in improving the learners' performance. One challenge that was reported by the teachers is that there is a lack of parental involvement and intervention. This prevents learners' development

and places sole responsibility of education on the teachers. “Family involvement, with strong partnerships between home and school educators, is an essential part of helping students become strong, ethical leaders for the future” (Dettmer et al., 2005, p. 46).

In the study by Dettmer et al, (2005), two integral elements that contribute to the successful implementation of inclusive education with regard to support for educators were raised. These include systematic staff development and planning of time for all staff members to work together to assist those learners with special needs (Dettmer et al., 2005). The time constraints of teachers was a challenge that was put forward by the respondents in this research report. They feel that there is limited time to meet with the school-based support team and the members of the team have limited time to discuss various issues in detail so as to assist the teacher adequately. There needs to thus be specific time set aside for teachers to meet and work collaboratively with the school-based support team in an efficient manner.

A further challenge that teachers and the members of the school-based support team experience is that many of the learners at schools in South Africa have social and emotional difficulties that prevent optimal learning from taking place. Learners who are more socially deprived appear to have higher percentages of barriers to learning which could be seen in a study in England and Scotland (Peer & Reid, 2012). The deprivation rates are higher in SA and therefore the barriers to learning are higher. The schools that are less resourced and in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods seem to have more children that are deprived and thus have an increased number of learners who have barriers to learning. It is difficult for the teachers to assist with the emotional and social barriers to learning and they thus want to refer these children to psychologists or social workers to assist. The problem that then arises is the cost of these services, as many of the families who require this support cannot afford them. This links to the schools and families not knowing where to refer the families. Community involvement is thus extremely important.

Teachers are approaching the learners who experience barriers in a different manner (Riddell et al., 2012). They are realising how social and contextual factors have an impact on the students’ performance (Avramidis & Norwich, 2012). Teachers,

however, can only assist to some extent with these matters and therefore they require external support.

5.1.4. To What Extent are the Teachers Able to Work Collaboratively with these Teams?

“The processes of consultation, collaboration, and co-teaching are recognized as essential for effective inclusion programs” (Dettmer et al., 2005, p. 40). The overall consensus was that the teachers are able to work collaboratively with the school-based support team at their school. In terms of collaboration, they believe the school-based support team provides moral support to the teachers and communication has been improved since this approach has been functioning in the school.

An interesting finding was that there seems to be more use of the school-based support team and more additional collaborative work at School D, which is not as well-resourced as some of the other schools. These teachers appear to assist each other and the school-based support team functions to the best of their ability with the resources and involvement that they have. School C appears to have more parent involvement which assists the children in receiving additional support with their difficulties.

It was also found that two teachers out of the fifty-four respondents, feel as if they are outcasts at their schools and do not work collaboratively with the other teachers and the team members.

5.2. Implications of Research Findings

In previous studies, such as that by Swart et al. (2002), teachers mentioned that they have inadequate support services in place. The results from this study however indicate that, twelve years later, the internal support has improved but the external and district support requires further development and changes.

While the majority of teachers say that they feel supported by the school-based support teams at their school and they would like this form of support to continue,

however it is not clear if these teachers feel personally supported on an emotional level. It may be a suggestion for the teachers to have group counselling to assist with their emotional well-being, and not only the practical support to assist them with the learners in the classroom. According to a study done by Jackson, Rothmann and van de Vijver (2006), “primary and secondary educational institutions should attend to the work-related well-being of their staff” (Jackson, Rothmann, & van de Vijver, 2006, p. 272). Their emotional well-being will affect the teachers’ attitudes and behaviour to the learners which will in turn affect the learners’ performance in the classroom. The educators may feel that their internal world has no area to be understood and dealt with and they do not realise these feelings affect their behaviour and attitude towards the learner. Research indicates that teachers with high levels of stress, like those in South African government schools, are less effective in the classroom (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Kokkinos, 2007 as cited in Jackson et al., 2006) and have greater absenteeism rates (Jackson et al., 2006). The high stress levels are likely to arise from the challenges that teachers’ face, which include lack of resources, large class sizes and a change in curriculum, which lead to job dissatisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

At each school that participated in this study, there are at least one or two teachers who feel or view themselves as an outcast and therefore do not work collaboratively with other staff members or the school-based support team. Additionally, there is a minority of teachers who do not feel supported at all by the school-based support team at their school. As with all organisations, institutions and schools, there are a variety of dynamics that can cause conflict if they are not understood or handled appropriately. This can be viewed in a study by Achinstein (2002), in which she explored the underlying tensions, conflicts and challenges that arise in professional teaching environments where a practice of collaboration is fostered (Achinstein, 2002). The findings indicated that a collaborative environment, where teachers are encouraged to give their opinions and share their values, generates new conflicts (Achinstein, 2002). Teachers bring their own values, thoughts and preferred individual working methods to the working environment. Other teachers may not agree with or have different values, thoughts and ways in which the teachers work, resulting in alignments of groups that have common beliefs and values. Teachers that do not agree of have diverse methods, begin to feel like an outcast and therefore cannot work

collaboratively with other teachers. The school thus needs to form a collaborative environment that is inclusive of all teachers and staff, as well as all learners.

Parents and teachers may rely on psychologists, social workers and remedial teachers as the professionals who have specialised expertise, however they themselves have a vital role in a child's development and education. The parents and teachers know the child the best and need to understand the effect they have on these children each day. They are teaching them new material and providing them with a basic need of education. It is overwhelming for a teacher who has a large class size and wants to assist each child but is unable to do so due to time constraints. Parents and teachers therefore should be empowered to assist those learners experiencing barriers to learning and therefore the power battle between parents and teachers needs to be addressed (Peer & Reid, 2012). The school-based support team can work and identify the needs of the learners and then refer them to the necessary specialist if the need arises. It is unrealistic in South Africa to have specialists based at each school due to the ratio between qualified specialists and schools. For this reason the specialists can come in once the teachers and parents have identified the needs.

From the results that indicated what the teachers would like to or have consulted the school-based support teams on, it can be seen that the educators need support within specific areas and would like to approach the school-based support teams at their schools to assist with these areas. However many questions arise as a result of this: Is there enough time for these teams to provide support in all these areas? Do they have the adequate knowledge and training to assist the other teachers constructively in these areas? These questions, along with others, need to be reviewed by the Department of Education when developing and enhancing the support structures within government schools in South Africa.

Some ways in which the school-based support can be improved is by making team building activities a compulsory task for all staff members. This will assist the teachers and members of the support team in working collaboratively and resolving any conflicts that may exist between the teachers. In addition to building a collaborative team at the school, it may be beneficial for the Department of Education to provide time for teachers to attend group counselling sessions which allow for their personal growth and development. Teachers and parents could be afforded the opportunity to attend

workshops on identifying and managing barriers to learning and developmental disorders so they can identify what barriers to learning their children are experiencing.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

The following are some of the limitations of this study:

The size of the sample may not be adequate in order to reflect the larger population, however it does depict a diverse range of schools within Johannesburg. Due to the fact that this study was conducted within only one School District in Johannesburg, the findings cannot be generalised to other areas in South Africa or other countries.

Due to this study consisting of self-reported data, the respondents may have not answered the questions on the survey honestly. People tend to supply answers that they think others would expect and, for this reason, the study may not be an accurate reflection of how all teachers' perceive the school-based support teams at their particular school.

Furthermore, the responses from the educators were not always adequately elaborated on. For example: "they improve the support." If this study were to have been conducted in an interview structure, the researcher could have asked the respondents to elaborate further with specific details and ask them specific questions relating to their responses. Due to time constraints in relation to the completion of this research study, follow-up interviews, in which the researcher could obtain further information on responses that were not fully detailed by some of the respondents, were not executed.

5.4. Suggestions for Future Research

Further research can be conducted in several areas. There are many learners who do experience barriers to learning, as can be seen by the large number of children that are being referred to the school-based support teams at their schools. A further understanding of these various barriers to learning that are experienced by these five

primary schools could assist in the training of teachers to better support the learners in the classroom.

A further area of research could explore ways in which the district support teams could assist the school-based support teams and other educators so that the teachers do not have to refer as many learners for externally-based assistance.

Moreover, the use of individual interviews with the teachers may assist in gaining further understanding of how and in what ways the school-based support teams are impacting on and improving the teachers' well-being and quality of education. This would investigate how exactly the school-based support teams are working to improve the support for the teachers at government primary schools.

5.5. Summary and Conclusion

This research report focused on teachers' perceptions of school-based support teams as outlined by Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). The Department of Education has been working on improving the education system in South Africa so as to provide the opportunity for every child to receive their right to quality education (South African Human Rights Commission, 2012). Teachers need to provide this basic education, but due to the challenges they continuously face, they require support and assistance in order to provide the necessary education to all learners, no matter their barrier to learning. This support needs to come from the Department of Education, the schools, parents, learners and the wider community. Programmes and approaches, such as the school-based support team approach, have been put in place to support teachers, who are the key role players in the development of inclusive education. These support teams are assisting in improving the quality of education through collaborative support for teachers.

As a result of South African education moving towards a social model in which there is a change in the view of the difficulties faced by learners, the teachers are approaching learners in a different manner, realising that the barrier faced by the learner is often within the system and not within the learner (Daniels, 2010). Results from this study indicate that teachers feel positive about the support provided by the school-based support team, but they would like further assistance from the district

support teams. The school-based support teams are functioning and are being utilised within the school systems in South African government schools. Although the respondents indicated that they face many challenges at their schools, they feel that the support teams have been beneficial to them and the majority can work collaboratively with the school-based support teams at their schools.

“All educators share responsibility for student achievement and behaviour” (Dettmer et al., 2005, p. 41). All educators thus need to work together to ensure the implementation of an inclusive environment in which all learners, no matter their barrier to learning, receive basic quality education.

REFERENCE LIST

Achinstein, B. (2002). Conflict amid community: The micropolitics of teacher collaboration. *Teachers College Record, 104*(3), 421-455.

Amod, Z. O. (2003). *A problem-solving psychoeducational assessment model for implementation by educators in South African schools.* Ph.D Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P., & Burden, R. (2000). A survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in one local education authority. *Educational Psychology, 20*(2), 191-211.

Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 17*(2), 129-147.

Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2012). The state of the research – compromise, consensus or disarray? In L. Peer & G. Reid (Eds.), *Special educational needs: A guide for inclusive practice* (pp. 24-34). Sage Publications Ltd., United Kingdom: London.

Bedward, J., & Daniels, H. R. (2005). Collaborative solutions – Clinical supervision and teacher support teams: Reducing professional isolation through effective peer support. *Learning in Health and Social Care, 4*, 53-66.

Blackie, C. (2010). *The perceptions of educators towards inclusive education in a sample of government primary schools.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Briscoe, C., & Peters, J. (1997). Teacher collaboration across and within schools: Supporting individual change in elementary science teaching. *Science Education, 81*(1), 51-65.

Burke, K., & Sutherland, C. (2004). Attitudes toward inclusion: Knowledge vs. experience. *Education, 125*(2), 163-172.

Chalfant, J.C., & Pysch, M.V.D. (1989). Teacher assistance teams: Five descriptive studies on 96 teams. *Remedial and Special Education, 10*(6), 49-59.

Chalfant, J.C., Pysch, M.V., & Mooltrie, R. (1979). Teacher assistance teams: A model for within building problem-solving. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 2*, 85-95.

Daniels, B. (2010). Developing inclusive policy and practice in diverse contexts: A South African experience. *School Psychology International, 31*(6), 631-643.

De Lannoy, A., & Hall, K. (2012). Education – Learner-to-educator ratio. *Statistics on children in South Africa.* Retrieved from

http://www.childrencount.ci.org.za/indicator.php?id=6&indicator=44

Department of Basic Education. (2014). *Education Statistics in South Africa.* Retrieved from

http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=UdGRjcHLNik%3d&tabid=462&mid=1327

Department of Education. (2001). *Education white paper 6, special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system*. Department of Education: South Africa.

Department of Education. (2005). *Conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education: District-based support teams.* Department of Education: South Africa.

Dettmer, P., Thurston, L. P., & Dyck, N. J. (2005). *Consultation, collaboration, and teamwork for students with special needs* (5th ed.). London, United Kingdom: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Eloff, I., & Kgwete, L. K. (2007). South African teachers' voices on support in inclusive education. *Childhood Education, 83*(6), 351-355.

Engelbrecht, P., Forlin, C., Eloff, I., & Swart, E. (2001). Developing a support programme for teachers involved with inclusion in South Africa. *International Journal of Special Education, 16*(1), 80-29.

Engelbrecht, P., & Green, L. (Eds.). (2007). *Responding to the challenges of inclusive education in southern Africa.* Pretoria, South Africa: van Schaik.

Engelbrecht, P., Green, L., Naicker, S., & Engelbrecht, L. (1999). *Inclusive education in action in South Africa.* Pretoria, South Africa: J.L. van Schaik.

Forlin, C. (2010). *Teacher education for inclusion: Changing paradigms and innovative approaches.* Abingdon, United States: Routledge.

Gravetter, F. J., & Forzano, L. B. (2009). *Research methods for the behavioural sciences* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Hammond, H., & Ingalls, L. (2003). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion: Survey results from Elementary school teachers in three south western rural School Districts. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 22*(2), 24-30.

Hays, R. (2009). *Inclusive education: educators' perceptions of teaching learners with emotional, cognitive and physical barriers to learning.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

Hsieh, H.F., & Shannon, S.E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277-1288.

Idol, L., Nevin, A., & Paolucci-Whitcomb, P. (1994). *Collaborative consultation* (2nd ed.). Austin, Texas: Pro Ed.

Jackson, L. T. B., Rothmann, S., & van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2006). A model of work related well-being for educators in South Africa. *Stress and Health, 22,* 263 -274.

Jordan, A. (1994). *Skills in collaborative classroom consultation.* London, England: Routledge.

Kaikkonen, L. (2010). Promoting teacher development for diversity. In R. Rose (Ed.), *Confronting obstacles to inclusion* (pp. 171-183), New York, New York: Routledge.

Klassen, R. M., & Chiu, M. M. (2010). Effects on teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction: Teacher gender, years of experience, and job stress. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102*(3), 741-756.

Landsberg, E. (Ed.). (2005). *Addressing barriers to learning: A South African perspective.* Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Links, M. (2009). *The inclusive educator.* Gauteng, South Africa: Macmillan.

Lomofsky, L., & Lazarus, S. (2001). South Africa: First steps in the development of an inclusive education system. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 31*(3), 303-317.

Mahlo, F. D. (2011). *Experiences of learning support teachers in the foundation phase, with reference to the implementation of inclusive education in Gauteng* (Unpublished Doctorate Thesis). University of South Africa.

Mampane, R., & Bouwer, C. (2011). The influence of township schools on the resilience of their learners. *South African Journal of Education, 31*(1), 114-126.

Mphahlele, M. (2005). *Support Offered by School Based Support Teams: Experiences of Foundation Phase Teachers in Tshwane North* (Unpublished Master's Thesis). University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Nel, N., Nel, M., & Hugo, A. J. (Eds.). (2013). *Learner support in a diverse classroom: A guide for foundation, intermediate and senior phase teachers of language and mathematics.* Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Nierengarten, G. (2013). Supporting co-teaching teams in high schools: Twenty research-based practices. *American Secondary Education, 42*(1), 73-83.

Olivier, M. A. J., & Venter, D. J. L. (2003). The extent and causes of stress in teachers in the George region. *South African Journal of Education, 23*(3), 186-192.

Peer, L., & Reid, G. (Eds.). (2012). *Special educational needs: A guide for inclusive practice.* London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications Ltd.

Phillippo, K., & Stone, S. (2006). School-based collaborative teams: An exploratory case study of tasks and activities. *Children & Schools, 28*(4), 229-235.

Prinsloo, E. (2001). Working towards inclusive education in South African classrooms. *South African Journal of Education, 21*(4), 344-348.

Riddell, S., Weedon, E., & Harris, N. (2012). Special and additional support needs in England and Scotland – Current dilemmas and solutions. In L. Peer & G. Reid (Eds.), *Special educational needs: A guide for inclusive practice* (pp. 9-23). Sage Publications Ltd., United Kingdom: London.

Sakellaradis, A. (2012). Inclusion and special educational needs – a dialogic inquiry into controversial issues. In L. Peer & G. Reid (Eds.), *Special educational needs: A guide for inclusive practice* (pp. 35-50). Sage Publications Ltd., United Kingdom: London.

South African Human Rights Commission. (2012). *Charter of children's basic education rights.* Retrieved from

http://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/SAHRC%20Education%20Rights%20Charter_Part1.pdf

Statistics on Children South Africa. (2012). *Education: Learner-to-educator ratio.* Retrieved from

http://www.childrencount.ci.org.za/indicator.php?id=6&indicator=44

Swart, E., Engelbrecht, P., Eloff, I., & Pettipher, R. (2002). Implementing inclusive education in South Africa: Teachers' attitudes and experiences. *Acta Academia, 34*(1), 175-189.

Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K., & Painter, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences* (2nd ed.). Cape Town, South Africa: University of Cape Town Press.

Timperley, H. (2008). *Teacher professional learning and development.* [Brochure]. Brussels, Belgium: International Academy of Education (IAE).

APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL INFORMATION SHEET

School of Human and Community Development

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa

Tel: (011) 717-4500

Fax: (011) 717-4599

Good day,

My name is Farryn Schneiderman and I am conducting research as part of a Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. The area of research of this study is teachers' perceptions of school based support teams.

I request permission to conduct my research within your school. I would require the teachers to complete a questionnaire that looks at their views of the school-based support teams. This questionnaire should take approximately twenty minutes for them to complete. Participation of the teachers is entirely voluntary and there are no benefits or foreseeable risks for respondents that take part in this study. There will also be no negative consequences for the school should any teacher withdraw or choose not to participate. These questionnaires will remain anonymous and confidentiality and privacy will be maintained throughout the study. A coding system will be used to keep track of the completed questionnaires from your school. Furthermore, the results of

this study will only be analysed by myself and my supervisor. All data from this study will be secured in a locked cupboard for safe-keeping and will be destroyed after a period of five years.

If you grant me permission to conduct this study at your school, please complete the attached consent form and send it to me. Once the research study is completed, you will be able to obtain general feedback of the findings which will be presented in a summary form.

If you have any further questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Farryn Schneiderman

Tel: 082 536 4630

Email: faschneiderman@gmail.com

Supervisor:

Dr. Zaytoon Amod

Tel: 011 717 8326

Email: Zaytoon.Amod@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM:

I, _____ hereby consent to this study being conducted by Farryn Schneiderman to explore the perceptions of the teachers at this school towards the school-based support teams (SBST).

Signed: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET





School of Human and Community Development

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

Tel: (011) 717-4500

Fax: (011) 717-4599

Good day,

My name is Farryn Schneiderman and I am conducting research as part of a Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. The area of research of this study is teachers' perceptions of school based support teams. I would like to invite you to take part in this study, which will examine what teachers' views and perceptions of school-based support teams at their schools; which are advocated by the Department of Education in their policy of inclusive education.

Should you choose to participate in this study, you will be required to complete the attached questionnaire about the school-based support team at your school. This should take approximately twenty minutes of your time. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you will not be disadvantaged if you choose not to participate. There are no benefits or foreseeable risks for respondents that take part in this study. In addition, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time you wish. Responses

will remain anonymous and confidentiality and privacy will be maintained throughout the study. A coding system will be used to keep track of the completed questionnaires from each school. Furthermore, the results of this study will only be analysed by myself and my supervisor. All data from this study will be secured in a locked cupboard for safe-keeping and will be destroyed after a period of five years.

If you choose to do so, please complete the questionnaire attached and once completed, place it in the sealed drop-box that will be placed in the staff room. Once the research study is completed, you will be able to obtain general feedback of the findings which will be presented in a summary and will be given to the principal of your school.

Your participation is much appreciated.

If you have any further questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Farryn Schneiderman

Tel: 082 536 4630

Email: faschneiderman@gmail.com

Supervisor:

Dr. Zaytoon Amod

Tel: 011 717 8326

Email: Zaytoon.Amod@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX D: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Please fill in the following information:

1. Number of years of teaching experience: _____

2. Qualifications: _____

3. Gender:

Male	**Female**

4. Have you had any previous experience in the field of Special Needs Education?

Yes	**No**

If yes, please elaborate: _____

_____

5. Is there an existing school-based support team (SBST) functioning at your school?

Yes	**No**

Please elaborate: _____

_____

6. Who are the members (team) of your SBST? Please tick the relevant responses.

a. Principal _____
b. Head of Departments _____
c. Other Teacher(s) _____
d. Other Specialists (e.g. Educational Psychologist, Learner support, etc.)
   _____
e. Yourself _____
f. Other _____
   Please Specify _____

7. How was the SBST Team selected?

_____

8. How often does the SBST meet?

_____

9. What is the nature and purpose of a SBST?

_____

_____

10. How many learners have you referred to the SBST over the past 12-18 months?

_____

THE SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TEAM

Please mark your answers to each of the following statements with a cross (X) on the appropriate box:

1. I feel positive about the support provided by the SBST.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. I think the SBST has assisted me with my concerns regarding learners in my classroom.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Please list the problems you would like assistance with from the SBST:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. The following is a list of statements which may reflect some of your views regarding the SBST. Next to each statement, please place a tick in the box corresponding to the extent of your agreement/disagreement with the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Unsure**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
4.1 Group problem-solving is effective in generating strategies to assist the learner					
4.2 Team members provide moral support for you					
4.3 The SBST has failed to generate useful intervention strategies					
4.4 The SBST has led to an improvement of interpersonal communication skills between teachers					
4.5 The SBST has not had an effect on student performance					
4.6 The SBST has assisted me in improving my skill in understanding classroom problems					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
4.7 Too much paperwork is required from the teacher in relation to the SBST					
4.8 The SBST has helped to decrease the need for referral to the psychologist					
4.9 The SBST/SMT has generated practicable strategies to assist in the classroom					
4.10 If applicable, the School Management Team (SMT) has generated practicable strategies to assist in the classroom					
4.11 The SBST has helped to decrease the need for placement of the child elsewhere					

5. I have been able to implement the suggestions that emerged from the SBST.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. I feel that I can work collaboratively with the SBST.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Please rate each of the following barriers according to the scale below - this should be relevant to you and/or your school: *Place a cross in the appropriate box*

   1= Very Poor; 2=Poor; 3=Adequate; 4=Good; 5=Excellent

	1	2	3	4	5
Resources (books, stationery, etc.)					
Relationships between principals, teachers, learners and parents					
Functioning of administration and management					
Socio-economic context					
Language and communication between all parties involved					
Provision of support services					
Parental involvement					
Training					
Human resource development					
Classroom size					
Curriculum					
Parent intervention					
Other (Please elaborate below)					

_____

_____

_____

8. The SBST has provided me with constructive feedback in order to assist me in addressing the barriers to learning that I have encountered.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Our school has had sufficient support from our principal in implementing the school-based support team approach.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. Our school has had sufficient support from the teachers in implementing the school-based support team approach.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. Are you aware of or in contact with the District Support Team for you school?

_____

_____

12. I consider continued assistance from our District Support Team as being desirable.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. I think that the SBST's approach to teacher support should continue within our school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Please feel free to add any further comments that you may have regarding school-based support teams:

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION

APPENDIX E: Department of Education Approval Letter

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:
Reference no. D2015/034

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**25 April 2014**
Validity of Research Approval:	**25 April 2014 to 03 October 2014**
Name of Researcher:	**Schneiderman F.A**
Address of Researcher:	**8 Tibidabo Village**
	Link Road
	Corlett Gardens
	2090
Telephone Number:	**011 882 8470/ 082 536 4630**
Email address:	**faschneiderman@gmail.com**
Research Topic:	**Teachers perceptions of school based support teams in the Johannesburg East School District**
Number and type of schools:	**Five Primary Schools**
District/s/HO	**Johannesburg East**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research
9th Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

APPENDIX F: Quantitative Data of the Results

Table 3

Frequencies (n=54) and Percentages of Results from the School-Based Support Team Questionnaire

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Teachers feel positive about the support provide by the SBST at their school:			
Frequency	41	3	10
Percentage	75.9	5.6	18.5
Teachers think the SBST has assisted them with their concerns regarding learners in the classroom:			
Frequency	37	6	11
Percentage	68.5	11.1	20.4
The teacher has been able to implement the suggestions that emerged from the SBST:			
Frequency	34	8	12
Percentage	63	14.8	22.2
The teacher feels that he/she can work collaboratively with the SBST:			
Frequency	45	2	7
Percentage	83.3	3.7	13
The SBST has provided the teacher with constructive feedback in order to assist in addressing the barriers to learning that he/she has encountered:			
Frequency	32	10	12
Percentage	59.3	18.5	22.2
The school has had sufficient support from the principal in implementing the SBST approach:			
Frequency	34	7	13
Percentage	63	13	24
The school has had sufficient support from the teachers in implementing the SBST approach:			
Frequency	36	4	14
Percentage	66.7	7.4	25.9
The teachers considered continued assistance from the District support teams as being desirable:			
Frequency	32	6	16
Percentage	59.3	11.1	29.6
The teachers think that the SBST approach to teacher support should continue within their schools:			
Frequency	47	2	5
Percentage	87	3.7	9.3

Table 4

The Educators' Views of the SBST's at their Schools

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Group problem-solving is effective in generating strategies to assist the learner:			
Frequency:	43	8	3
Percentage:	79.6	14.8	5.6
Team members provide moral support for the teacher:			
Frequency:	41	6	7
Percentage:	75.9	11.1	13
The SBST has failed to generate useful intervention strategies:			
Frequency:	8	36	10
Percentage:	14.8	66.7	18.5
The SBST has led to an improvement of interpersonal communication skills between teachers:			
Frequency:	34	9	11
Percentage:	63	16.7	20.3
The SBST has not had an effect on student performance:			
Frequency:	14	31	9
Percentage:	25.9	57.4	16.7
The SBST has assisted the teacher in improving his/her skills in understanding classroom problems:			
Frequency:	33	14	7
Percentage:	61.1	25.9	13
Too much paperwork is required from the teacher in relation to the SBST:			
Frequency:	30	16	8
Percentage:	55.6	29.6	14.8
The SBST has helped decrease the need for referral to the psychologist:			
Frequency:	14	19	21
Percentage:	25.9	35.2	38.9
The SBST has generated practicable strategies to assist in the classroom:			
Frequency:	26	15	13
Percentage:	48.1	27.8	24.1
The SMT has generated practicable strategies to assist in the classroom:			
Frequency:	25	14	15
Percentage:	46.3	25.9	27.8
The SBST has helped to decrease the need for placement of the child elsewhere:			
Frequency:	21	16	17
Percentage:	38.9	29.6	31.5

Note. This table provides the frequencies according to a sample size of 54 participants and percentages.