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School-based support teams' experiences of the support that they provide within their schools

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

The South African education system has undergone a number of vast changes in the last two decades with the creation of a democratic society for all. With these changes taking place, educational principles, strategies and policies have been developed with the aim of making education and training more inclusive and accessible to all members of society. The ultimate aim of these changes is to redress the imbalances and injustices of the past. More than a decade ago, South Africa embarked on a journey towards inclusive education with the introduction of Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). As part of the implementation of this policy, all schools across South Africa were expected to adopt measures towards an inclusive education and training system. This policy document aims to address the ravages of the apartheid education system by building an inclusive system that offers equal opportunity for all learners to gain access to quality education. Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) makes recommendations that have an impact on daily practices within schools. Furthermore, it makes recommendations as to the kind of support that ought to be available to schools, as well as the methods of implementation applicable to support systems within schools. The policy paper is thus premised on the understanding that education needs to take place within a supportive framework.

Within South Africa's unique social and educational context, it is understood that support is required to help those learners who experience barriers to learning. Barriers to learning may include, but are not limited to: poverty; language and cultural differences; difficulties in written and spoken language; difficulties in reading, spelling and writing; as well as physical disabilities. Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) states that enabling mechanisms need to be developed within the education system in order to address the needs of all learners in all these aspects. The enabling mechanisms envisioned in this policy paper include adaptations to curricula and the provision of support to individual learners, as well as the provision of support to the school system as a whole. These mechanisms are seen as essential in providing an inclusive education system as outlined in Education White Paper 6. An inclusive education system requires the collaboration of all role-players in order to meet the needs of learners and to provide a supportive learning environment.

According to Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), three specific levels of support are required for learners who experience barriers to learning. These include:

a) The provincial and national Departments of Education: these departments should develop competencies to understand and act upon the challenges involved in addressing barriers to learning, and promote participation for the purpose of effective teaching and learning.
b) The District Based Support team: the purpose of the District Based Support team is to incorporate all relevant support providers in the school-based support team. Furthermore, the District Based Support team should assess and facilitate the utilisation of community resources in addressing local needs.

c) The school-based support team: The Department of Education has given school-based support teams the responsibility of identifying and initiating support within schools. School-based support teams are made up of a small group of regular members, sometimes including the principal of the school. The school-based support team should primarily be composed of teachers in the school, but the team may also include parents, learners and other community members (Engelbrecht & Green, 2011). This team should provide support through extended consultation on possible classroom strategies. The team may also become a hub for case management, referrals and resource decisions (Department of Education, 2009).

According to Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001), all of the teams listed above should work collaboratively to reduce barriers to learning and development within schools.

Owing to the limited amount of research on the role that school-based support teams play at school level, more understanding in this regard is needed, which this research study aims to provide.

1.2. Research Aims

The primary aim of the current research investigation is to explore school-based support teams' experiences of the support that they provide within their schools. More specifically, the research study aims to:

1) Examine what supportive relationships exist within schools;
2) Examine what support models school-based support teams have in place;
3) Identify what additional support school-based support teams need; and
4) Identify which areas of support within schools may be strengthened.

In addition, the research study aims to fill the gap in research on this topic, as well as provide school-based support teams with further information on support delivery within their schools.

1.3. Research Rationale

One of the fundamental tenets of Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) is that everyone has the right to quality basic education, including adult basic education. However, establishing a system that can achieve this has proven to be extremely challenging, as the policy aims to transform the education and training system in order to create a caring and humane society, as well as accommodate a full range of learning needs. The idea of an inclusive education system places the responsibility of the primary intervention for the learner on the educator. In addition to this, the whole school needs to develop an effective support system in order to assist learners.

The primary function of school-based support teams is to put properly co-ordinated learner and educator support services in place that facilitate the learning and teaching process by identifying and addressing learner, educator and institutional needs (Department of Education, 2001).

Following the release of Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), schools and educators faced the challenge of implementing an inclusive education system. Inclusion embraces the value that reducing barriers to learning

involves a strengthened education support service. At school level, the school-based support teams' primary function is to ensure that learner and teacher support is being adequately provided. District Based Support teams are to provide the full range of education support services to school-based support teams (Department of Education, 2001).

It is evident that education should occur within a supportive framework, yet many schools are facing various barriers themselves. According to Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker and Engelbrecht (1999), many classroom teachers feel that they do not have the sufficient training and support available to them to meet the challenges that are presented by the learners in their classes. Furthermore, they state that classroom teachers feel that they do not have sufficient training and support available to meet the general problems faced by the school as a whole. This highlights the important roles and functions that school-based support teams play in their schools. This research study explores the views and perceptions of a sample of these teams in relation to their roles and functions within their schools.

School-based support teams are implemented to promote the empowerment of educators when dealing with difficulties, but also to put support structures in place to aid the ongoing functioning of schools (Engelbrecht & Green, 2011). This research aims to gain perspective on the various structures that school-based support teams have in place to promote the effective functioning of their schools. By gaining such a perspective, this research may provide information that would assist school-based support teams to function optimally.

The importance of supporting and strengthening school-based support teams is fundamental in the successful implementation of Education White Paper 6. School-based support teams and District Based Support teams are the driving forces of support within the inclusive education system. Therefore, through understanding school-based support teams' experiences, one could gain insight into the functioning of these teams.

1.4. A Synopsis of the Research Report

Chapter 2 highlights relevant literature concerning inclusive education policy in an international and South African context. The movement towards inclusive education in South Africa as articulated in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) is described against the backdrop of educational reform in the last decade. This is done especially in relation to school-based support teams and the provision of support within schools. The function of school-based support teams in this country is given, which has implications for the educational support that is provided within schools. A discussion on previous research that has been conducted on school-based support teams is also given.

In Chapter 3 the aims, context and methodology of the study are discussed, as well as the research design. Data collected in this study is analysed and interpreted in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the results, the implications of the research findings, as well as recommendations emerging from the study. The limitations of the study are also considered, and suggestions for future programmes of research are given.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The literature reviewed is divided into four main themes: inclusive education policy, inclusion in South Africa, the function of school-based support teams and previous research on school-based support teams. First, an overview is given of inclusive education policy, as it is the policy framework within which school-based support teams function.

2.2. Inclusive Education Policy

Over the last decade inclusion has become a worldwide phenomenon, with many countries adopting the principles that are related to inclusion. According to Mittler (2000), inclusion expresses a value system that invites and celebrates diversity arising from gender, nationality, race, language, socio-economic background, cultural origin and level of educational achievement or ability. According to Education White Paper 6 (2001), an inclusive education and training system encompasses the following principles: (a) acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support; (b) enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners; (c) acknowledging and respecting differences in learners, whether arising from age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, infection with HIV or other infectious diseases; (d) focusing on broader rather than formal schooling, and acknowledging that learning also occurs in the home and in the community, and within formal and informal settings and structures; and (e) changing attitudes, behaviour and teaching methods, curricula and environment to meet the needs of all learners.

Inclusion is about including everyone and building a more democratic society with an equal and high-quality education system. Diversity is at the core of inclusive education policy, and it has become the responsibility of the teachers at schools to accommodate the vast needs of the learners they teach.

Booth and Ainscow (2002) comment that defining the concepts of inclusive education is important. They further state that the way inclusion is defined impacts upon the way in which learners' difficulties are perceived, which in turn affects the way interventions for the learner are conceptualised. It is therefore understood that the effectiveness of the intervention is dependent on the manner in which the learner's difficulties are perceived. In addition, the interventions that are put in place are affected by the availability of resources to the school. Idol (2006) postulated that inclusion occurs when learners spend their entire school day within general education classes, as opposed to when learners would spend most of their school day in general education classes and part of their day in special education classes. This would lead to an increase in the number of learners participating in inclusive education settings and fewer learners being excluded from the education setting as a result of their perceived difficulties.

In light of the above it is understood that inclusion is not easily defined, but at its core inclusion holds the primary value of making quality education accessible to all within society. Inclusion is about the commitment to building a more just society and a more equitable education system, and the conviction that the extension of the

responsiveness of mainstream schools to students' diverse barriers to learning can offer a means of translating these commitments into reality (Engelbrecht, Green, Swart & Muthukrishna, 2001). In addition, Mittler (2000) states that inclusion can be seen as an expression of the struggle to achieve universal human rights and that inclusion has its roots in the international human rights movement. Inclusion is viewed worldwide as an educational paradigm that will empower all citizens. Shongwe (2005) states that inclusive education is meant to not only offer individual students educational equality, but also social, economic and political equality, regardless of the student's race, disability, gender, ethnicity and social background.

As societies start to feel empowered, their value systems will change, and this in turn will transform schools. According to Swart and Pettipher (2005), changes in society are frequently coupled with alternative ways of thinking – this is specifically the case in the field of learning and behavioural difficulties. Inclusion aims to empower societies and transform the way that education is practised, so that all individuals in society have access to a quality education system.

2.2.1. International Perspectives on Inclusive Education

According to Engelbrecht et al. (1999), inclusive education emerged as a result of postmodern thinking. It is therefore understood that inclusion is not a new idea, but rather a goal that has emerged over many years within the international community. Fredrickson, Dunsmuir, Lang and Monsen (2003) state that inclusive education has become an important international policy within the past decade. In order to fully understand inclusive education, it is relevant to discuss the history of the concept as found in the literature.

In 1948 the United Nations asserted that education was a basic human right as part of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 1948). According to Ladbrook (2009), education as a basic human right was reaffirmed at the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Fundamental to this convention was the right for every child to have access to primary education. Furthermore, the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) further emphasised the rights of children to receive access to education. At the Jomtiem Conference in 1990, the United Nations Organisation adopted the phrase "education for all" to dictate the growth and movement needed for universal rights in education (Booth, 1999). The Jomtiem conference also stressed the commitment to provide child-centred teaching and learning where individual differences are accepted as a challenge, promoting the idea of holistic learning environments. Of the policies mentioned above, the most fundamental policy is the Salamanca Statement, which will be discussed in more detail.

2.2.1.1. The Salamanca Statement

In 1994, the city of Salamanca, Spain, and UNESCO held a world conference on special needs education. Representatives from 92 governments and 25 international organisations attended the conference, with a view to finding ways of making education accessible to all individuals, regardless of their differences. The Salamanca Statement was the first document to promote the process of educational inclusion worldwide. According to Tebid (2010), the documents used at the Salamanca conference were informed by recognising the need to work towards

“school for all” and to have institutions that include everybody, celebrate individual differences, provide supportive learning and respond to individual needs. With a growing community of individuals opposed to separate special education, the Salamanca Statement’s guiding principle was inclusion as a right of all children in mainstream schools (Engelbrecht & Green, 2011).

The message that the Salamanca Statement conveys is that quality education should be available to all individuals, and that the focus should not be on changing the learner to fit into the education system, but rather changing the system to fit the needs of the learner. According to Gordon (2000), the Salamanca Statement describes inclusion as not only being about reconstructing provisions for students with disabilities, but also extending educational opportunities to marginalised groups who may have historically had little to no access to schooling institutions. However, it is important to note that inclusion is not a single, focused policy that can be applied to all education systems, but is instead culturally determined and essentially depends on the political values and processes of the state for its enaction (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

2.2.2. Inclusion in South Africa

South Africa has a unique past entrenched in negative racial attitudes and practices that allowed for discrimination based on difference. When the nationalist government introduced the system of apartheid to South Africa, they introduced a system to separate different races, but in reality they introduced a system for entrenching massive inequality (Daniels, 2010). As stated by Engelbrecht (2006), the apartheid system had a massive negative impact on the South African education system. During the apartheid period, education and support services for the white population of South Africa were reasonably well developed and resourced, while those serving the coloured, Indian and black population groups were severely under-resourced. There were specific education departments in South Africa, each governed by specific legislation. This legislation was based upon racial and disability lines that reinforced segregation and division among the people of South Africa. In addition, learners who were viewed as disabled were also treated unfairly. According to Swart and Pettipher (2005), these practices led to misperceptions and the stereotyping of learners, and these learners were separated and marginalised from mainstream education provision. Educational support was available to few during this period: those who, in terms of the medical model, were classified as mentally or physically deficient; and those who lived in privileged communities.

In 1994, South Africa held its first democratic election. These elections changed the face of South Africa, as it became a society that valued democracy. According to Engelbrecht and Green (2011), those responsible for shaping education policy after 1994 wanted to address the disparities and inequalities of the past, and create an education system that could provide access to quality education for all learners.

The first democratic elections led to political changes that resulted in the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) being implemented. The Constitution emphasises the respect of rights for all, with particular emphasis on the recognition of diversity. Furthermore, it emphasises the principles of democracy, equality, non-discrimination and respect for the rights and dignity for all. This implies that all learners in South Africa are entitled to appropriate education in an inclusive and supportive framework (Prinsloo, 2001). According to Lomofsky and Lazarus

(2001), the new democratic South Africa aimed to develop an egalitarian society through the processes of political, economic and educational transformation.

With South Africa having embarked on a new era of democracy, policy documents and legislature have developed to reflect the values of our Constitution and aim to address the challenges faced in education and society as a result of the ravages of our past. The first of the policy documents with a focus on inclusion was the White Paper on Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1995). This White Paper has at its core initiatives aimed to respond to diverse learner needs. The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996) embodies the principles of the Constitution, and asserts the right for all children to have access to basic and quality education without discrimination; it is viewed as a pivotal building block towards developing an equal and democratic education system, as well as society. According to Hays (2009), The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996) emphasised the importance of support services in schools, which became an important element of inclusive education practice. These support services were viewed as imperative to the implementation of an inclusive education system, as they would help to form a unified education system that could accommodate the diverse needs of learners. Swart and Pettipher (2011) postulate that the White Paper on Education and Training and the South African Schools Act created the basis necessary in South African policy and legislation for a paradigm shift towards inclusive education.

In October 1996 the minister of education commissioned the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) to investigate issues relating to special needs and support in education and training in South Africa (Amod, 2003). The report issued by the NCSNET and the NCESS contributed to our understanding of the nature and extent of barriers to learning within South Africa. Furthermore, there was a realisation that there are a range of needs that exist among learners and within the education system that need to be addressed in order for learning and development to be provided and sustained (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

In 2001, South Africa embarked on a journey towards inclusive education, with the publication of the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). One of the core principles of this White Paper is that all children and youth have the ability to learn, but they need support in order to do so. Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) states that its aim is to detach itself from the past, and it further aims to recognise the vital contribution that South Africans with disabilities are making and must continue to make. Furthermore, Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) aims to change the school environment to be responsive to the needs of its learners. In order to achieve this, Education White Paper 6 envisages a school environment that: a) recognises individual differences, b) implements a flexible curriculum, c) adapts to the needs of learners by using flexible teaching and assessment methods, and d) organises resources to support diversity. Education White Paper 6 focuses on building learners' strengths instead of focusing on their weaknesses.

Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) recommends a three-tier support system that includes: a) The school-based support team, b) The District

Based Support team, and c) the provincial and national Departments of Education. The three levels of support envisaged are required to collaborate with one another in order to provide effective support to both teachers and learners within the education system. In light of the above it can be identified that there is a need for the school-based support team, the District Based Support team and the provincial and national Departments of Education to share expertise, knowledge and skills. The three-tier support system that is recommended is multi-faceted and implies that inclusive education cannot be achieved by one team, but rather through the collaboration of all three of the teams listed above. According to Moolla and Lazarus (2014), collaboration within the sector of school development is crucial in order for schools to be effectively supported and empowered to perform their function of delivering quality education.

In order for Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) to be effectively implemented, a paradigm shift is required. According to Frank (1999), the paradigm shift allows for a move away from a "fire-fighting" model towards a long-term approach that is proactive, effective and financially sound. In this paradigm shift, all stakeholders need to collaborate in order for inclusive education to be effectively implemented. According to Calitz (2000, p. 85), "collaboration refers to the challenge of working together as a team; this includes problem-solving, decision-making, planning and intervention strategies". Phillipo and Stone (2006) further state that collaboration alongside teaming are considered crucial to school reform efforts. In view of the above it is thought that effective collaboration will lead to positive learner-related outcomes such as higher levels of motivation among learners.

Idol, Nevin, and Paolucci-Whitcomb (1994, as cited in Amod, 2003, p.139) have outlined the expertise that group members (such as those within schools) could use for a successful collaborative consultation model (Figure 1), namely (a) an appropriate underlying knowledge base; (b) interpersonal, communicative, interactive and problem-solving skills; and (c) interpersonal attitudes (Amod, 2003, p.139).

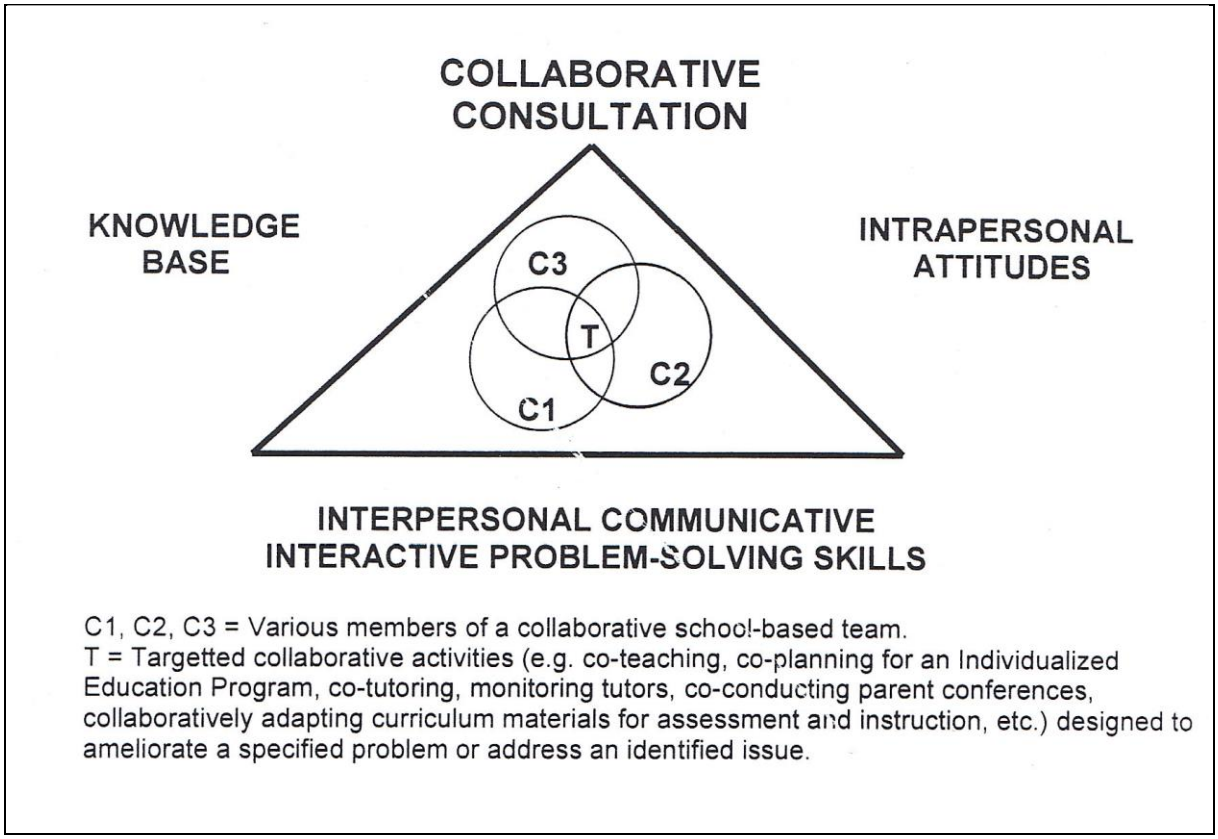


Figure 1. Collaborative Consultation. An Interactive Teaming Process for Improving School-based Practices.

Source: Idol et al. (as cited in Amod, 2003, p. 139).

The most important aspect of the collaboration process is what Idol et al. (1994) define as the scientific base of consultation. Amod (2003) states that included in this knowledge base are technical aspects, techniques on assessment, instructional interventions, curricular and material modifications and adaptations, and classroom learner management.

The second area of expertise according to this model of collaborative consultation is the interpersonal, communicative, interactive and problem-skills area. According to Amod (2003), this area of the collaborative consultation model includes behaviours that collaborators can use to enhance and facilitate the group problem-solving process.

The final area of expertise is intrapersonal attitudes. According to Amod (2003), this area reflects the collaborator's personal values, attitudes, beliefs, experiences and related behaviours. Intrapersonal skills are unique to the individual, but have a significant impact on the collaborative process.

It is suggested that collaborators consider development in all these areas of expertise. Completing self-assessments and implementing needs analyses can be helpful in facilitating the collaborative consultation process (Amod, 2003).

Based on the above kind of approach, Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) focuses on the importance of school-based support services, as well as District Based Support services. This white paper further emphasises that the key to reducing barriers to learning lies in these strengthened support services, emphasising the need for the establishment of strong school-based support teams and District Based Support teams. In other words, Education White Paper 6 (2001) envisions a support system whereby a group of consultees (for example, members of the school-based support team) work collaboratively for the benefit of the child. The advantage of this kind of approach is that participants may experience process gains, where through shared expertise, members are likely to acquire one another's skills (Idol et al., 1994, as cited in Amod, 2003), therefore improving the members' knowledge and ability to address learners' difficulties.

In addition, school-based support teams are required to offer support to both the learner within the school, as well as the teacher. The collaborative consultancy approach offers teachers the opportunity to collaborate with one another, as well as with members of the school-based support team. The benefits of this include the sharing of ideas and expertise, as well as the development of opportunities, which will ultimately benefit the learner, albeit indirectly. This is of utmost importance, as the inclusive education system aims to redress inequalities of the past, address barriers to learning and accommodate a variety of diverse learning needs (Department of Education, 2001). Furthermore, Moolla and Lazarus (2014) highlight the importance of an intersectoral collaboration that is interactive in process and brings together diverse sectors that can execute plans for common goals and generate solutions to challenges faced in schools. This type of approach refers to the idea of working together for a common purpose, as well as consulting with professionals in different sectors to deliver sound education to learners. Moloi (2010) and Oswald and De Villiers (2013, as cited in Moolla & Lazarus, 2014) emphasise the importance of working in a team that builds a sense of belonging and that forms a network of support that can address the many challenges faced in schools.

2.3. The Function of School-based Support Teams

The school-based support team is the structure that provides support for schools at their level. Mackenzie (2003) suggests that schools should provide opportunities for teachers to develop the necessary skills of collaboration in order to enable them to provide effective support to the learners that they teach. Specialist teachers and support teams are required for education systems to become fully inclusive and transform the education programs that are delivered on a daily basis. According to Creese, Norwhich and Daniels (2000), the school-based support team should provide teachers with a forum to share teaching knowledge and skills, and to express and receive collegial knowledge and emotional support. The school-based support team's primary function should be to empower colleagues and promote effective teaching and learning within the school environment.

Mphahlele (2005) suggests that school-based support teams may serve as one way of maximising the participation of all learners and may improve the educational opportunities of learners that experience barriers to learning. School-based support teams are imperative in the process of identifying and implementing interventions for learners that experience barriers to learning, as they form the link between the school and the community; furthermore, they can empower staff by providing the necessary support.

According to the Department of Education (2009), school-based support teams could consist of, *inter alia*, the following members: a learning support teacher, the referring teacher (either a class teacher or learning area teacher), the scribe, an elected teacher, the principal, a school assessment team representative, a learner support material committee representative, a co-opted member from outside of the school depending on the needs of the learner (for example an occupational therapist or an educational psychologist), the parents of the learner and the learner. The size and the composition of the school-based support team will depend on the size and the needs of the school. Each member of the team will perform a specific role, but all team members will work collaboratively towards an identified, common goal.

According to Eloff and Kgwete (2007), support in inclusive education is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon. Support is perceived as something that the whole school community must be involved in: this will foster the idea that everyone is supported and accepted within the school system. In order for this to be effective, collaboration by all stakeholders is required to provide effective support to learners. Cheminais (2002) states that a successful inclusion team (school-based support team) will be flexible and creative, work towards a common purpose and goal, and be committed and involved in working towards an inclusive school.

The school-based support team is the central agent in identifying, assessing and planning for learners with individual needs. The roles and responsibilities of school-based support teams include:

- Mobilising support within schools in order to assist teachers with meeting the needs of the students in their classrooms;
- Managing the facilitation and collection of assessment and historical data, and distributing this to team members;
- Collaboratively participating in decision-making with regard to screening referrals, developing individualised education plans, adjusting programming and/or evaluation, monitoring student progress and referring to district services or outside agencies;
- Encouraging teachers and parents to try alternate strategies in supporting learners and children;
- Making recommendations for referrals or assessment beyond the school level;
- Assessing team functioning; and
- Being the voice for students when others have given up

(Department of Education, 2009).

As stated above, Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) emphasises that the key to reducing learning difficulties lies within strengthened support services. Therefore, school-based support teams are viewed as imperative in addressing barriers to learning. Furthermore, the members of the school-based support team should be capable of working collaboratively among themselves, as well as with other staff members in order to provide support within their schools. Landsberg (2005) postulates that the school-based support team should be visible and flexible within the school system. Part of the duties of the school-based support team include: in-service training of teachers, assessment and support of all learners that experience barriers to learning, discussing and addressing learner development through the organisation of programs and teaching strategies, facilitating the sharing

of human resources, the provision of teaching methods and teaching aids, the placement of the learner in another school should the need arise, ensuring parental consultation and involvement, planning preventative strategies, supporting teachers on site, as well as monitoring and evaluating the work of the team within an action reflection framework (Bouwer, 2005: 67).

Support should be viewed as a team approach, rather than the responsibility of an individual. The intention of instituting a school-based support team is to put a structure in place that is part of the ongoing functioning of the school or institution, rather than it being a group only called into being in response to a crisis (Engelbrecht & Green, 2011). Sethosa (2001) suggests that schools could take the following steps when a learner is identified as experiencing a barrier to learning:

- The first step requires the class teacher to fill out the GDE 450 support form wherein they state what the learner's barrier to learning is, what intervention strategies have been implemented and what the outcome of the intervention strategies are.
- The second step takes place at the learner's grade or phase level. The grade or phase level teachers will convene a meeting in which they will recommend additional and alternative interventions while taking into consideration the intervention strategies put in place by the class teacher. The class teacher is then required to implement the suggested intervention strategies. Should the intervention assist in addressing the learner's barrier to learning, it may not be necessary to refer the learner for further support.
- The third step requires the involvement of the school-based support team. The school-based support team, alongside other relevant stakeholders such as social workers, nurses, psychologists, therapists and parents, should convene a meeting to discuss the intervention put in place to assist the learner and make further recommendations that should be implemented by the learner's class teacher.
- The fourth and final step requires the involvement of the District Based Support team. This step is considered if all other steps towards addressing the barrier to learning are considered unsuccessful. If this is the case, learners are referred to the District Based Support team by the completion of a referral form. From this step onwards, the school-based support team and the District Based Support team should collaborate to work out a plan to assist the learner further.

The above steps highlight the importance of collaborative consultation in addressing learner's barriers to learning, and furthermore, highlight the important role school-based support teams play in addressing barriers to learning.

2.4. Previous Research on School-based Support Teams

Although there has been substantial research on inclusive education in South Africa, there are a limited number of studies that have focused on school-based support teams. The researcher felt that more understanding in this regard is needed, which prompted this research study.

Research conducted by Mphahlele (2005) investigated the support offered by school-based support teams from foundation phase educators' perspectives in the Tshwane North region. She reported that there was little to no collaboration between

foundation phase teachers and the school-based support teams. She also reported that school-based support teams lacked the knowledge to identify barriers to learning, and that they could not design intervention strategies for teachers to support learners in their classrooms. Furthermore, she reported that the foundation phase teachers that participated in her research study collaborated with one another on ideas on how to support the learners in their classrooms, rather than collaborating with members of the school-based support team.

As part of a Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) pilot project, Amod (2003) established and evaluated the functioning of school-based support teams in the North West Province of South Africa. Through the administering of questionnaires to school-based support teams, referring teachers, learners and parents, as well as focus-group interviews with the school-based support teams, it was found that there was a positive response from teachers and principals on the role that school-based support teams were playing in their schools after they had received training. A pre-post intervention study using a control group was conducted, and it was found that teachers were aware of the support available to them both inside and outside of the school. Furthermore, it was reported that the school-based support teams were providing appropriate support to teachers, and that they were linking teachers to external support mechanisms after the training they had received.

In a study conducted by Frank (2003), the needs of educators (specifically the members of school-based support teams) in providing psycho-educational support to learners were investigated. He administered a survey questionnaire, conducted a focus-group interview and individual interviews, and administered a final questionnaire to his participants. He reported that educators acknowledged problems relating to the implementation of policy and ineffective support strategies. Furthermore, the educators highlighted the absence of relevant policy within the education system and they expressed concern over the lack of clarity and understanding when completing the necessary documents for the referral of learners.

In addition, Frank (2003) reported that educators raised concern over the large numbers of learners in classrooms, particularly with reference to addressing barriers to learning. They also emphasised the need for further training and for constructive partnerships with the ministries of health, education, welfare and labour in order to provide support within their school.

In 2004, Thabana investigated the development of the teacher support team (school-based support team) in assisting teachers of learners with special educational needs in a school in Khayelitsha. The main aim of her study was to investigate the perceptions and coping skills of teachers, and to explore the support available to teachers with particular reference to the teacher support team. The entire teaching staff participated in her research, and she made use of a case-study approach to collect her data. She found that 55% of the teachers from the intermediate phase did not find it difficult to accommodate learners who experienced learning difficulties. The remainder of the teachers in the intermediate phase (44%) expressed feelings of inadequacy when working with the same learners. In the foundation phase it was reported that 40% of the teachers felt that they could cope with learners who experienced learning difficulties. However, 60% expressed feelings of helplessness in this regard. In addition, the teachers that partook in this

research expressed the need for further training in order to help them cope better with their daily tasks. They also expressed that they would like the assistance of a remedial or learning support facilitator owing to the high teacher-to-learner ratio at the school.

Thabana (2004) also found that the intermediate phase teachers would only refer their problems with learners to the teacher support team if incentives for motivating the learner or discussing the problem with a colleague had not worked. The teachers stated that the teacher support team is helpful to them, but they suggested that it could provide further assistance by:

- Providing training on barriers to learning;
- Assisting learners in overcoming barriers to learning;
- Assisting in referring learners to specialists (such as psychologists); and
- Sharing specialist knowledge, ideas and experience.

D'Alanzo, Giordano and Van Leeuwen (1997) studied the attitudes of educators towards inclusion in schools in New Mexico. They administered questionnaires to 360 educators, and the findings of their study indicated that educators were concerned about problems with learner socialisation, learners' self-esteem, teacher stress and classroom management. The findings of this study illustrated that members of the school-based support team have an important role in supporting both teachers and learners within the school.

The above studies highlight that the implementation of school-based support teams has potential value within the inclusive education framework, but that school-based support teams' experiences of effectiveness in providing support require further investigation.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, developments in inclusion and inclusive education have been reviewed alongside their impact on the implementation of policy. The role of the school-based support team as proposed in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) has been discussed. This white paper is one aspect of the inclusive education and training system that is vitally important to this research, as it emphasises the need to address barriers to learning through effective support structures such as the school-based support team. This study aims to research school-based support teams' experiences of the support that they provide within their schools with a view towards suggesting possible intervention strategies and procedures that can assist in assisting learners and teachers in South African schools. The following chapter describes the research methodology used in the current study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aims and Research Questions

The primary aim of this research study was to explore school-based support teams' experiences of the support that they provide within their schools. Furthermore, the research aimed to examine what supportive relationships exist within school-based support teams, to examine what support models these teams have in place, to identify what additional support is needed and to identify what support can be strengthened within the schools that participated in this study.

The specific research questions in relation to the above aims of the study were:

1. How does a sample of school-based support teams in the Johannesburg East District view their role and function in providing support to their schools?
2. What are school-based support teams' perceptions and experiences of providing support to their schools?
3. Do the school-based support teams use a specific model or approach in providing support to their schools?
4. What are the school-based support teams' perceptions and experiences of the ideal support system/s they would like to have in place?
5. What are the school-based support teams' experiences of collaborating with parents/caregivers, District Based Support teams and relevant service providers (such as health and welfare professionals, psychologists and learning support professionals), in providing support?
6. What alternative support structures are available at their schools?
7. What do the school-based support teams view as their successes and challenges?

3.2. Context of the Study

Five government primary schools from the Johannesburg East district participated in the research. Government schools were used in this study as they follow the policy of Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). The five schools that were selected to participate in the research are located in urban areas of the Johannesburg East District in Gauteng. Furthermore, the schools cater for learners from varied backgrounds, ranging from low to high socio-economic status.

The ratio of learners to educators within the five schools fluctuated between 25 learners per educator to 45 learners per educator. The average ratio was approximately 30 learners per class.

3.3. Research Design

This was a qualitative-descriptive study. The central aim of qualitative research is to illuminate subjective meanings created by participants, their actions and experiences, as well as their social contexts (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). The study's goal was to provide a rich, interpretative understanding of school-based support teams' experiences of the support that they provide within their schools. It also sheds light on the support available to school-based support teams through parental involvement and the District Based Support team.

Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is a subjectively constructed reality, and that it is widely distributed amongst a community of knowers, each of which has a personal but equally valid interpretation of reality (Gitchel & Mpofu, 2012). The research was a non-experimental, descriptive study, as the researcher attempted to capture the experiences and perceptions of school-based support teams. This took place in the context of focus-group interviews and questionnaires.

3.4. Sample

Non-probability sampling methods of purposive sampling and convenience sampling were used to select the participants. By selecting participants who are knowledgeable about the area in question, it was possible to ensure the validity of the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999; Polit & Beck, 2008). According to Freeman, de Marrais, Preissle, Roulsont and St. Pierre (2007), validity is essentially a measure of the trustworthiness of data, and it increases the confidence in the inferences made. Furthermore, the sample was chosen based on their geographic location and their availability to the researcher.

The five school-based support teams that participated in this study comprise different staff members such as the principal, the deputy principal, heads of departments and teaching staff (see Table 3.1). All of the members of the school-based support teams participated in the focus-group interviews. School 1 had six participants, School 2 had three participants, School 3 had four participants, School 5 had six participants and School 6 had five participants. In total there were 24 participants in the focus-group interviews from the five participating schools. In addition, each of the heads of the school-based support teams completed and returned the questionnaires.

Table 3.1. Details Related to the School-based Support Teams Included in the Study

Name of School	Composition of school-based support team (SBST)	Access to specialist/ support staff	Description of socio-economic background of the school
School 1	1. Principal (Head of SBST) 2. Deputy principal 3. Head of Department (HOD): Foundation Phase 4. Head of Department (HOD): Intersen Phase 5. Life Orientation teacher 6. Two classroom teachers	None	Low socio-economic status
School 2	1. Deputy principal (Head of SBST) 2. Head of Department (HOD): Foundation Phase 3. Head of Department (HOD): Intersen phase	Remedial teachers Social workers Educational psychologist (when necessary)	Low socio-economic status
School 3	1. Principal (Head of SBST) 2. Deputy principal 3. Head of Department (HOD): Foundation Phase 4. Head of Department (HOD): Intersen phase	Social worker Remedial teacher	Middle socio-economic status
School 4	1. Head of SBST (classroom teacher) 2. Deputy principal 3. Head of Department (HOD): Foundation Phase 4. Head of Department (HOD): Intersen Phase 5. Remedial teacher 6. Life Orientation Teacher	Remedial teacher Psychologist (part-time) Occupational therapist (part-time) Physiotherapist (part-time)	Middle to high socio-economic status
School 5	1. Principal 2. Deputy principal (Head of SBST) 3. Head of Department (HOD): Foundation Phase 4. Head of Department (HOD): Intersen Phase 5. Remedial teacher	Remedial teacher WITS Speech and audiology students (part-time)	Low socio-economic status

As reflected in Table 3.1 above, School 1 does not have specialised or support staff such as social workers, counsellors, learning support specialists and educational psychologists. School 1 suggested that the reason why they do not have access to specialised or support staff is because they cannot afford to pay for the staff. Furthermore, they added that specialist and support staff are difficult to access due to the surrounding areas socio-economic status. The four remaining schools indicated that they have specialised support staff on their premises on a part-time basis. These four schools also indicated that they have remedial teachers employed on their staff. School-based support team members indicated that they expect the specialised support staff to assist them in identifying and addressing barriers to learning, as well as with the writing up of reports in order for learners to be referred to other schools.

3.5. Instruments

The following instruments were used in this study:

3.5.1. Focus-group interview with School-based Support Teams

Each of the school-based support teams participated in a focus-group interview which consisted of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A). Krueger and Casey (2000, p.4) clarify the purpose of focus groups by saying that they are set up "to understand how people think or feel about an issue, service or idea". On a general level, school-based support teams were asked to provide their views on inclusive education as applied to their schools. More specifically, they were asked to provide information on their functioning as a team as well as on the support they provide within their schools. In addition, they were asked to provide information on the support that they get from other role-players in their school, such as the principal and the parents, as well as the support that they receive from the District Based Support team and the community in which the school is situated.

The focus-group interview was designed to explore and obtain information about the support systems that are available to the school, as well as the perceived successes of and challenges faced by the school-based support teams.

3.5.2. Head of School-based Support Team questionnaire

The head of each of the school-based support teams completed a questionnaire (see Appendix B) after the focus-group interviews had taken place. Each of the respondents was given the questionnaire after the focus-group interview had taken place in order to gain clarity around the profile of the school in general, as well as the school-based support team, and the amount of involvement received by the District Based Support team. It was considered that due to the limited amount of time allocated to the researcher to conduct focus-group interviews, the questionnaires would provide additional information on important aspects of the school-based support teams. Respondents were asked to give background information on the social context of their school and details regarding their school-based support team. For the purpose of this study, it was considered important to get a profile of the participating schools' socio-economic backgrounds, the school-based support teams' composition and function, the resources available to the school, the amount of parental involvement in the school, as well as the amount of involvement from the District Based Support team.

3.6. Triangulation

According to Di Fabio and Maree (2012), the validity of qualitative research can be improved by increasing the sources of validation. This process is referred to as triangulation. They further state that in order to ensure triangulation, different sources of information or methods should be used. In this study, focus-group interviews as well as questionnaires were used in order to ensure triangulation of the data. According to Swanson and Holton (1997), triangulation of data should give similar or consistent results through the use of independent measurements and analysis of the same phenomena.

3.7. Procedure

The procedure for the study was as follows:

i. Written permission to conduct the study was gained from the Gauteng Department of Education research officials (see Appendix C).

ii. Authorisation to conduct this study was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical).
iii. The principals from the schools selected for the sample were approached telephonically to determine whether they were willing to allow their school-based support team to participate in the study.
iv. Once permission was obtained from the principals, they were given the Principal Information Sheet (see Appendix D) and the head of the school-based support team of each school was approached and given the Head of School-based Support Team Information Sheet (see Appendix E). The information sheets contained information regarding the research that was being conducted. In addition, information was given regarding the anonymity of the participating schools and participants, as well as the confidentiality of their responses.
v. Once consent was obtained from the principal of each of the schools and the heads of the school-based support teams had been informed of the research, a meeting with the whole school-based support team was held. In this meeting, an overview of the research study was presented to the school-based support teams by the researcher. Request for participation in the study was voluntary.
vi. School-based support team members who wished to partake in the study were handed the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix F). The information sheet contained information regarding the research that was being conducted, as well as information regarding the anonymity and confidentiality of participant information.
vii. Once the head of the school-based support team and the members of the team had indicated that they would like to take part in the research, they were asked to sign the Participant Consent Form (Appendix G) and the Permission for The Focus Group to Be Audio Recorded Consent Form (Appendix H).
viii. Owing to the nature of the school's timetables, the researcher was allocated 30 minutes with each of the school-based support teams to conduct the focus-group interviews.
ix. After the focus-group interviews had taken place, the heads of the school-based support teams were contacted separately and given the questionnaire which they could complete in their own time. The researcher collected the questionnaires from each of the schools a week later in a sealed envelope.

3.8. Data Analysis

In this study, thematic content analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyse the data collected from the focus-group interviews. This method of data analysis was used as it allows researchers to focus on the presence of meanings, and relationships of words and concepts, in order to make inferences about the messages (Busch et al., 2005). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic content analysis is able to minimally organise and describe the data set in rich detail.

Thematic content analysis was applied to the data collected in the focus-group interviews according to the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2006). It is important to note that these phases are not linear; rather, the researcher alternates between them. In the first phase, the researcher needs to familiarise herself with the data. This was achieved by her immersing herself in the data and

spending many hours transcribing the focus-group interviews, which involves a verbatim account of everything that was discussed. Although this process is very time consuming, it proved to be a valuable exercise, as by listening to the interviews over and over, the researcher thought of ways to code the data. Familiarity with the data was also achieved by reading and re-reading the transcript.

In the second phase, initial codes are generated from the data. These are features in the data that are of interest to the researcher. This was done by identifying and highlighting poignant words and phrases within the data. For example, the researcher identified the phrases “we need support from one another, we have the opportunity to learn a lot from the people who have experience in the field of teaching” and “we are in need of extra support”.

In the third phase, themes were identified from the codes. This was completed by arranging and grouping the codes. The researcher did this by grouping the phrases that were highlighted in the second phase of this process. For example, the following phrases were grouped together under the heading of parental involvement: “parental involvement is limited – parents are not interested in helping their children in this school”; “parents aren’t always aware of what is happening in their child’s school life” and “parents won’t admit that their children have problems”. It should be noted that in some instances a code formed a theme, while in other instances codes were broken down into different themes or formed sub-themes.

In the fourth phase, the themes that emerged from the third phase were reviewed and refined. For example, the researcher revisited the sub-theme of parental involvement that emerged during the third phase of this process and realised that the sample of school-based support teams felt that the parents of the learners that attended their schools were not adequately involved in their child’s or the school’s daily functioning. They felt that the parents of the children that attend their schools could be more involved in their children’s academics as well as in supporting the school.

The fifth phase is concerned with defining and naming themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) encourage simplicity and advise the researcher to try to capture the “essence” of each theme by the “story” it tells (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Having identified themes in the data, the researcher set about finding a descriptive name for each of these.

The sixth phase focuses on reporting the findings of the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the need for vivid data to demonstrate each theme. In addition, they indicate the need to embed these extracts within a narrative that makes an argument in relation to the research question. In this phase, the researcher identified verbatim extracts from the data collected in order to capture the essence of each theme. For example, the following phrase was used to convey the universality of the school-based support teams’ experiences of support from parents: “parents aren’t always aware of what is happening in their child’s school life”. The researcher also used other verbatim extracts within the discussion of each theme to add to this understanding.

Data collected by means of questionnaires completed by the heads of each of the school-based support teams was analysed in depth using the content analysis method. One of the essential features of content analysis is counting the frequencies and sequencing of particular words and phrases (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2006).

In the current study, the constant comparative method of data analysis developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967, as cited in Merriam, 2001) was applied. The researcher began with looking at respondents' remarks on the questionnaires and compared these remarks with other instances in the same set of data. These comparisons lead to tentative themes, which were then compared with each other and with the themes devised from the thematic content analysis of the focus-group interviews. The regularities became the categories or themes into which data was sorted. Descriptive analysis is used to interpret the themes that emerged in the data from the questionnaires given to the heads of the school-based support teams.

By selecting participants who are knowledgeable about the area in question, it was possible to ensure the validity of the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999; Polit & Beck, 2008). Essentially, validity is a measure of the trustworthiness of the data and increases the confidence of the inferences made (Freeman, de Marrais, Preissel, Roulsont & St. Pierre, 2007). The trustworthiness of the interpretations made was ensured by complying with the criteria put forward by Fossey et al. (2002), namely authenticity, coherence, reciprocity, typicality and permeability. To guarantee that the interpretations were authentic, verbatim quotes and statements from the data collected were used. Coherence looks at whether there is a link between the data and the findings. This was achieved by getting the supervisor to check the researcher's findings. Reciprocity is achieved when the researcher involves participants in the study. This was achieved by letting the participants lead the way during the focus-group interviews and facilitating discussions with them along the way. In addition, clarifying questions were posed to confirm interpretations based on what was said. Typicality addresses the generalisations of the findings. As a result of the limited sample size and lack of randomised sample, no generalisations were made. Finally, permeability was addressed by stating the researcher's position.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Before embarking on this research, permission was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education. Furthermore, the researcher adhered to the ethical standards laid down by the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) for research involving human subjects. Approval was obtained from this committee to conduct the research (see Appendix I).

Once permission to conduct the research was granted by the Gauteng Department of Education, written permission was obtained from the principals of the schools to conduct the research. In addition an information letter was handed to all principals (Appendix D). The heads and members of the school-based support teams were also given information letters (Appendix E and Appendix F) and were then invited to participate in the study. Consent was obtained from all of the eligible participants, as they signed the relevant consent forms (Appendix G and Appendix H).

Participation within the study was voluntary, and there was no benefit or disadvantage for participants. The participants could withdraw from the study at any point without negative consequences. Participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any questions that were uncomfortable with, as many questions require participants' personal experiences, which they may find difficult to divulge honestly.

Confidentiality was achieved by encouraging participants not to disclose any personal information that others revealed during the focus-group discussion. In addition, no identifying details were included in the transcription of the data or quotes used to present the findings. Anonymity is ensured, as the names of the participating schools and the participants will not be given in the research report.

Measures were also employed to ensure the safety of the data. During the course of the study, raw data was kept in a locked drawer by the researcher and only reviewed by the researcher and her supervisor. Both the audio recordings and the transcripts are to be kept in a safe place for up to six years, to enable publication, and will then be destroyed. A summary of the research findings will be forwarded to the principals of the schools involved in the study.

3.10. Researcher Reflexivity

In contrast to quantitative research, which strives to be objective and value-free, qualitative research embraces the subjectivity of the researcher. According to Parker (2004), it sets about making the standpoint of the researcher clear and requires the researcher to step back and reflect on their vantage point.

In light of the above it is important to point out that the researcher has previously worked as a teacher within a government school. The researchers own beliefs around the core principles of inclusive education were positive, however her experiences regarding the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa, as well as the her experiences of the support structures that should be available to schools and within schools was slightly tainted. This seemed to be an advantage, as it enabled the researcher to be more receptive to what the participants were saying, having gone through similar experiences in the past. However, it was important for her not to impose this understanding on the participants. She achieved this by becoming aware of her own thoughts and feelings, and expressing these thoughts and feelings in a journal.

It was important for the researcher to make it clear to the participants that she was not affiliated with the participating schools or the Gauteng Department of Education. Only then would they feel comfortable in sharing their positive and negative experiences about providing support within their schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter aims to present the results of the research study based on an analysis of the data collection process.

4.1. Research Findings

Table 4.1. gives a summary of the data collected from the questionnaires given to the heads of the school-based support teams.

Table 4.1. Summary of Data from Head of School-based Support Team Questionnaires

	School 1	**School 2**	**School 3**	**School 4**	**School 5**
Parental involvement	School Governing Body Tuckshop Parent meetings	No commitment from parents to the school	School Governing Body	Fundraising Reading School Governing Body	School Governing Body Parent meetings
Regularity of SBST meetings	Fortnightly	Varies based on necessity	Weekly	Monthly	6–8 meetings per year (unspecified)
Content of SBST meetings	Referrals Problems Correspondence with teachers & parents	Referrals Learner progress Parent meetings Results of learner assessments	Learner support Behavioural problems	Feedback Interventions implemented Referrals Teacher support	Learner problems (academic and social)
Successful in implementing intervention strategies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Feelings about functioning of SBST	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Support from principal	Yes	Yes	Unanswered	Yes	Yes
Support from teachers	Varied	Yes	Yes	Yes	Unsure
Collaboration with DBST	Poor	Poor	Unsure-DBST does not assist timeously	Unanswered	Poor

Table 4.2. gives an overview of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. The main themes involved the functionality of the school-based support team, support, collaboration and the functionality of the District Based Support team. The subthemes involved providing support, the responsibilities and structure of school-based support teams, access to support staff, parental involvement, support offered by the District Based Support team, the benefits of collaboration, school

infrastructure and involvement. Each of the themes and subthemes will be discussed below (see 4.2. to 4.2.4).

Table 4.2. Overview of Themes and Subthemes

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Functionality of the school-based support team	• Providing support • Responsibilities and structure of school-based support teams
Support	• Access to support staff • Parental involvement • Support offered by District Based Support team
Collaboration	• Benefits of collaboration
Functionality of District Based Support Team	• School infrastructure • Involvement

4.1.1. The functionality of the School-based Support Team

Participants were asked to express their experiences of providing support within their schools. The results indicate that the participants' experiences fall under two categories or themes, namely providing support and the responsibilities and structure of school-based support teams.

School-based support team members indicated that they are involved in addressing concerns referred to them by teachers. Each of the participating schools' school-based support team members indicated that when they had a learner referred to the team by a teacher, they had a specific procedure that they followed in order to provide support for both the learner and the teacher. School 2 indicated that they attempt to get the parents involved in supporting the learner as soon as they have been notified of the learner's difficulties. They further expressed: "*we contact the parents of the learner that has been referred to the team. Once we have contacted the parents, we have a meeting as SBST. After meeting with the parents, we try to understand what is happening to the child. We try and make accommodations for the child, and communicate with the parents what we are doing for the child in the school*".

School 4 highlighted the importance of collaborating with teachers and parents. They emphasised that learners' perceived difficulties should be discussed with the teacher concerned and that interventions should be put in place to assist the learner. In addition, School 4 indicated that they attempt to get the parents of the learner involved in supporting the learner. School 4 reported that: "*We have a meeting with the teachers and discuss where we can assist, we then meet with the parents; after having met with the parents and deciding on a way forward, we put them onto our support programme or they go and see the relevant specialists*".

From the above statements given by participants it seems as though the school-based support teams in this sample follow specific procedures in order to address referrals made to the team by teachers within the schools.

Subtheme 1: Providing support

Providing support, as experienced by school-based support team members who participated in this study, can be described as being positive. School-based support teams provide members with the opportunity to learn from other members who are also a part of the team, fostering an informal support system. School-based support teams allow members of the team and other teachers within the school the prospect of collaborating with one another on projects, brainstorming ideas on how to teach subjects and asking for advice on how to deal with learners in their classes. This was further emphasised by the answers given by the heads of the school-based support teams from Schools 2, 3 and 4, which indicated that teachers supported the school-based support teams in implementing support plans. In this regard, school-based support teams experience support as follows: "*We need to support one another – we have the opportunity to learn a lot from the people who have experience in the field of teaching*". The team from School 4 said: "*The SBST adds value in the school system, especially for younger, newer teachers because they can approach the older, more experienced teachers for advice on how to support learners*".

School 2 expressed that: "*We actively try and find solutions to the problems that we face. We have grade meetings with our teachers so we can understand what we are facing".* The above statement highlights the active role school-based support teams need to take in order to provide effective support to the teachers within their schools.

The school-based support teams' answers varied regarding the implementation of specific procedures to address learner difficulties. Each of the school-based support teams indicated that they followed a specific procedure when a learner was referred to the team; however, most of the participating schools did not elaborate on the specific steps that they follow. Schools 3 and 5 indicated that the procedure they followed was dependent on the type of problem that was referred to the team. School 1 indicated that it was the teacher's responsibility to address problems in their classroom, and School 4 expressed that they assist the teacher in addressing the problem before contacting the learner's parents. School 2 indicated that they follow a specific procedure when a learner is referred to the team:

> *A letter informing the parents that their child needs to be assessed is sent home and we make an appointment with the parents. During the meeting we explain that the child is experiencing problems and we explain the role of the educational psychologist. The educational psychologist gets documentation to the parent to fill out regarding background information. The child is assessed in the morning at the school. Once [the] report is ready the deputy principal, the educational psychologist and the parents will meet to discuss the result. The teacher of the child and parents will get a copy of the report. A copy of the report will also go into the child's file*.

Subtheme 2: Responsibilities and structure of school-based support teams

Even though participants' experiences of providing support within their schools were fairly positive, their feelings towards their responsibilities and the structure of the school-based support team were less positive. It was apparent from the focus-group interviews that some of the schools that participated in this research study feel that they are not meeting the needs of all learners because of the structures within

the school and the number of responsibilities that staff members have. School-based support teams often consist of staff members that fulfil other duties within the school (for example they are members of the school-based support team as well as the school management team), and are responsible for more than just their role in the school-based support team. This is evident in the statements such as the following:

> *We are a small school: [the] number of teaching staff is limited. Our SBST tends to be management function, and sometimes the White Paper doesn't take into account the differences in school structures. Sometimes our staff will have to perform extra-mural duties, and it's very difficult to have a team outside of management to attend meetings. Our management teams tends to form part of all teams, for example the SMT [school management team] is part of the SBST, which is part of the assessment team*.

A participant at School 3 indicated that:

> *SBSTs deal with emergencies, and it takes away from their teaching time. For instance, our SBST members are teachers, and they will be teaching their classes, but then will suddenly have to deal with a child that has been hijacked or something, it takes away from their teaching time*.

A participant at School 4 added: "*We are able to see the learners for support as much as we can. Members of our SBST are full-time teachers, the workload is quite hectic*".

The above statements highlight the number of responsibilities school-based support team members have in addition to their everyday teaching responsibilities. With limited teaching staff available to schools, the responsibility of providing support often falls to school-based support team members who are also teachers or heads of departments and cannot focus their attention only on providing support to teachers and learners within the school system.

4.1.2. Support

Support as experienced by participating school-based support teams consisted of three subthemes: firstly, access to support staff; secondly, support provided by parental involvement; and lastly, support offered by the District Based Support team. It is understood that the school-based support team's major role is to provide support to their school community; however, at times the support that is needed by learners and teachers within their schools is beyond what the team can provide.

Subtheme 1: Access to support staff

The access to support staff and support specialists posed a problem to all of the school-based support teams that participated in the research. School 1 responded by saying: "*We are in need of extra support*". School 1 does not have access to any support specialists and clearly expressed that they desired these services. Participants from School 1 further added: "*The class needs to have a specialist teacher to come and teach the class, so that the normal teachers don't have to worry about the child*".

The need for support was further emphasised by participants from School 5. School 5 highlighted that they would like access to a psychologist who could assist in assessing learners at their school, which would help them address learner's barriers to learning as well as assist with the referral process. Participants from School 5 felt that it was the responsibility of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) to provide access to specialist staff such as educational psychologists. School 5 stated the following in this regard:

> *We need help with the referrals and the referral process. It would help if they [the GDE] employed psychologists that could come into schools and assess the children … [we need] access to a psychologist to conduct assessments … We would like a psychologist that could come into the school two days a month and help with the assessments for referrals and all of the emotional problems we deal with – that would make a huge difference*.

In addition, School 5 identified that having access to a social worker would be beneficial, as the social worker could help learners deal with their emotions. A participant from School 5 indicated that: "*We would also like to have access to a social worker*".

School 3 also highlighted the need for support in addition to the social worker and remedial teacher they have access to. Furthermore, they emphasised that although support structures and staff are supposed to be available to them as a government school, they are unsure about how to gain access to these resources. A participant from School 3 remarked: "*Government is supposed to have systems that we can work with or through to get assessments conducted, but we don't know about them, or even if they exist*".

In light of the above statements it is clear that school-based support teams from these three schools want and need access to support staff and support specialists such as psychologists in order to manage the extent of additional support that is required within in their schools. This could enable them to effectively support the school community within which they function.

It is important to note that Schools 2 and 4 did not indicate that they are in need of extra support. However, it is of interest that these two schools do currently have access to support specialists that can assist them in supporting learners effectively.

Subtheme 2: Parental involvement

Participants were generally not positive regarding the support that they receive through parental involvement. All of the participating school-based support teams mentioned that parents are either not involved with the school or that parental involvement is minimal. This was noted in remarks such as:

> *Parental involvement is limited: parents are not interested in helping their children in this school. We have many referrals, an overload of referrals. Because majority of learners in the school are learning in their third or fourth language, and with that there are many problems that come with it. Parents won't admit that their children have problems, but they also don't have the money to pay for private therapy for their children* (School 1).

Parental involvement isn't as good as it could be as some parents are in denial about their children's difficulties. Parents are reluctant to act on their children's difficulties. There is little to no follow-up on the parent's side: for instance if the child is referred to a speech therapist, the parent may not take the child for the assessment, and this is out of the school's hands (School 2).

One of the participants at School 3 added:

Parental involvement is very minimal. Majority of our parents work, and either mom or dad is unable to collect their child after school, and their involvement in school life (even extra-murals) is minimal. Parents aren't always aware of what is happening in their child's school life, which is quite bad.

Another participant from School 4 remarked that: "*Parents aren't always on board. The SBST can try as hard as we can to help and support the child, but if the parents aren't involved, we are fighting a losing battle*".

Furthermore, a participant from School 1 suggested that parental involvement in their school was also low and that parents are not interested in their children. In the focus-group interview, participants from School 1 identified the lack of parental involvement as an issue or difficulty that affects the school's functioning.

Participants from School 5 also identified the lack of parental involvement as a concern. A participant from School 5 indicated that: "*Our parents aren't always supportive. They are hardly involved*".

It is evident from the above remarks that school-based support teams in this sample would like parents to be involved in their children's education. However, it would seem that the amount of parental involvement is minimal, and because of this school-based support teams feel that they are not being appropriately supported by the parents of the children that attend their schools. In addition, the heads of the school-based support teams indicated on the questionnaire the activities parents are involved in (see Table 4.1). From this data we can identify that parents are minimally involved in the functioning of schools, and only School 5 indicated that parents are involved in events such as fundraising for the school.

Subtheme 3: Support offered by District Based Support team

A factor that was expressed by participants as being a limitation was the support offered by the District Based Support team. District Based Support teams are delegated by Education White Paper 6 to support schools in the implementation of inclusion. The main function of the District Based Support team is to work with school-based support teams in addressing barriers to learning within South African schools.

It is apparent from subtheme 1: access to support staff that the school-based support teams that participated in this research felt that they did not have adequate access to specialist support staff. Furthermore, support from the District Based Support team was considered negligible. In addition, analyses of the school-based support teams' responses indicate that they feel that they have little to no support from the District Based Support team and that they would like the District Based

Support team to be more involved in assisting them. In addition, three of the five participating heads of the school-based support teams indicated in their questionnaires that the support that was available to the team from the District Based Support team was poor.

In the words of one of the participants from School 1:

As an SBST we wish we could have a structure where we could identify the learners that need the extra help, before it is too late and they move into a higher phase. The structure needs to be supportive both at school level, but work hand-in-hand with District whereby we can help the learners".

A participant from School 5 remarked:

[We need] continuous support from District. We hardly ever see them, and if they do come to the school it is once a year. They are removed from the classroom, they do not understand what is going on in schools, and they only come in to collect the paperwork.

Furthermore, the time it takes to get support from the District Based Support team was also presented as a problem. This was expressed by a participant from School 3:

District takes long to get things done, documents have gone missing at District, they never get back to you, and staff turnover is high. It is difficult working with District, and parents get frustrated because they want to move their child to another school, but they can't move the child until we get the LSEN number from the district. We are powerless in the situation. Parents expect us to get their child a place in the new school, and that is not our function, that is a function of the district … We see somebody from District once every six months. We never saw them last year; we had no support last year"

The concept of inclusive education calls for a network of support that involves the District Based Support team working hand-in-hand with the school-based support team. In light of the above responses it can be agreed that the District Based Support teams' provision of support to school-based support teams in this sample is considered to be inadequate and unsystematic. This is highlighted in the following comment by School 4:

Our district official [IDSO] has changed, we don't even know who they are now … There is apparently a centre for inclusive education at the district, but we are unsure about what their function is or if they really exist. The reason we don't approach them is because they put you on a waiting list and it takes far too long to solve the problem – often it takes more than two years to solve the problem.

4.1.3. Collaboration

Analysis of the participants' responses indicates that the participating school-based support teams are collaborating with teachers effectively. Participants from each of the schools indicated that there is a working relationship between the school-based support teams and the teachers, especially with regard to the implementation of interventions and the referral of learners experiencing academic and social

problems. This is highlighted in the following statement from a participant at School 1:

> *We [the SBST] try and make accommodations for the child … the teacher needs to find ways [to accommodate] the child within the classroom. The teacher has to play an active role and make accommodations and recommendations for the child, because at the next SBST meeting, the teacher will be asked what they have done to help the child*.

Taking the above statement into account, it is evident that school-based support teams rely on teamwork in order to support learners within their schools.

Subtheme 1: Benefits of collaboration

From the responses given by participants on the effectiveness of their team, it is evident that Schools 1, 2, 4 and 5 value collaboration between the school-based support team and the teachers within their schools in order to work towards a common purpose. Although this is the case, it seemed to be more of a trend in Schools 1 and 4. Furthermore, school-based support teams from these schools seemed to view themselves as a collaborative mechanism for problem-solving with teachers. A participant from School 1 said:

> *[We are] working well as a team. Most of the teachers are part of the SBST. When it is necessary, management invites teachers who are having problems with children to be a part of the meeting or session that is taking place, and they talk about the problems they are having with their children*.

When remarking on the effectiveness of the school-based support team's collaboration with the teachers, another participant from School 1 mentioned:

> *Our team is effective because when we try and find out children who have barriers we sit down and discuss and find ways that we can intervene with the problem. A discussion would take place between lots of the teachers so that an intervention can be put in place. We rely on teamwork*.

Participants from School 4 emphasised the advisory role they have within their school. They further emphasised importance of collaborating with teachers and this was put in the following words:

> *The SBST adds value in the school system, especially for younger, newer teachers, because they can approach the older, more experienced teachers for advice on how to support learners.*

They also said that "*it is vital for the teachers of the child that needs extra support to work as team"*.

When participants were asked about their experiences of collaborating with community members, their responses were varied. Two of the participating school-based support teams (Schools 1 and 3) indicated that: "*[we have] nothing in the immediate community*", and "*We have nothing*". However, the other participating schools indicated that they do have community members that they collaborate with. Schools 2, 4 and 5 indicated that they have a reading group at their schools: "*We have a remedial team that comes in called the reading grannies [second innings] which we view as part of our support team. They mainly work in the foundation phase, they work with the children to improve their reading*". They also indicated:

"*We have reading moms*". A participant from School 4 indicated that they have formed a collaboration with the Wits Speech and Audiology Department, who assess learners at their school: "*We get some help from Wits with language therapy*".

4.1.4. Functionality of the District Based Support team

The functionality of the District Based Support team can be divided into two subthemes, namely school infrastructure and the involvement of the District Based Support team with the school-based support teams.

Subtheme 1: School infrastructure

One participating school-based support team (School 3) identified that the District Based Support team were dictatorial and did not take into account the infrastructure of the school and its staff before implementing policies:

> *We are a small school, number of teaching staff is limited … sometimes the White Paper doesn't take into account the differences in school structures … Our SBST tends to be management function … Our management team tends to form part of all teams, for example the SMT is part of the SBST, which is part of the assessment team*.

It is evident from this comment that the participant found the Department of Education's policy and the requirement of the implementation of school-based support teams frustrating, as there are not enough staff at this school to perform all of the different roles required for the school to function optimally.

Subtheme 2: Involvement

Regarding the amount of support school-based support teams receive from district personnel, each participating school expressed that they received no support from the district. This was apparent in comments such as: "*[we receive] absolutely nothing*" (School 1). "*We see somebody from District once every six months. We never saw them last year; we had no support last year*" [School 3]. "*We never see the district personnel, we don't know who they are*" (School 4). *"[We receive] nothing, support is non-existent*" (School 5).

School-based support teams continually mentioned that the district-based support team was not involved in supporting them. One of the participants from School 5 mentioned:

> *We hardly ever see them, and if they do come to the school it is once a year. They are removed from the classroom, they do not understand what is going on in schools, and they only come in to collect the paperwork*.

Another participant from School 4 added:

> *You are only allowed to retain a certain percentage of learners, which is mind-boggling. They just want the learners to be pushed through based on their age and not their ability. They will only allow us to retain a child once in a phase, whether that child is able to cope or not is irrelevant. They district needs to be more visible, and they need to change their legislature*.

The concept of inclusive education calls for collaboration between school-based support teams and the District Based Support team. District Based Support teams' involvement was considered inadequate, as described by this comment from a

participant from School 3: "*… they don't support schools enough. They only support you when it's a crisis. Their spin doctor will come to the school so that she can get the right story out into the public. But District does not support schools*".

All of the participating school-based support teams indicated that they had little to no experience of collaboration with district personnel or the District Based Support team. In addition, one of the participating school-based support teams indicated that they did not know who their allocated district personnel were and that their district official had changed within the last year and they had not met the new district official. A participant from School 2 remarked that:

> *At one of the meetings at District they told us that there are not enough people to help [from the GDE] so if there are problems try and deal with them in the school and with the parents. There are only three people on the DBST. One is totally involved with the running of district, so she is not really involved; there are two other ladies that service 80 schools. It is not possible for them to see all of us. Often when we have done referrals for learners, they will sit there for years before they get addressed.*

4.2. Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to determine how a sample of school-based support teams in the Johannesburg East District experiences the support that they provide within their schools. In this chapter, the researcher presented the results of research done through focus-group interviews with school-based support teams and questionnaires that were completed by the heads of each school-based support team. Through analysis of the data collected it is evident that all of the school-based support teams that participated in the research were generally confident and positive about their roles within their schools and that they perceive themselves as providing adequate support within their schools. However, they indicated a desire for more involvement and support from both the parents of children attending their schools as well as the District Based Support team in order to support learners in a holistic manner.

In the following chapter, the research findings are analysed in relation to relevant literature. Recommendations for further research are considered. The implications of the research study are discussed, as well as the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Within this chapter, the research findings will be discussed in relation to the aims of the study.

5.1. Research Question 1: How does a sample of school-based support teams in the Johannesburg East District view their role and function in providing support to their schools?

Different school-based support team participants viewed their role and function in providing support in different ways; however, there were some commonalities. School-based support teams saw their role and function within schools as supporting and addressing the needs of learners who experience barriers to learning, and to serve as a collaborative mechanism for problem-solving with teachers. In addition, they viewed themselves as advisory in role and function, and many participants suggested that they work together with teachers in order to find solutions in addressing barriers to learning within their schools. The findings of this study corroborate the results of Amod's (2003) study, where school-based support teams worked collaboratively with teachers to address learners needs. Calitz (2000) states that collaboration includes all aspects of the school-based support team process, whereby teachers share certain ideas with the team and in the end both the team and the teachers agree on the shared ideas. Campher (1997) postulates that the school-based support team can accomplish more than the individual through collaborative consultation that is problem-solving-orientated, thereby creating a positive and caring educational environment.

Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) states that the key function of support teams is to support all learners and educators by identifying the support needed and designing support programs to address the challenges that are experienced by educators. This was reiterated in participants' views that their role and function is to foster an environment of teamwork in which teachers and school-based support team members can solve problems, make decisions, plan and implement intervention strategies.

In this research study, school-based support teams expressed the need to address barriers to learning within their schools in order to provide the best possible educational opportunities to the learners that attend their schools. This need to address barriers to learning compliments the notion of inclusion, which at its core is meant not only to offer individual learners educational equality, but also social, economic and political equality, regardless of their intelligence, disability, gender, race, ethnicity and social background (Shongwe, 2005).

School-based support teams expressed the view that they are the link between the school and the District Based Support team. According to Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), the school-based support team and the District Based Support team are required to collaborate with one another in order to provide effective support to both teachers and learners within the education system alongside the national and provincial Departments of Education. Participants in this research study indicated that they felt that they did not receive the required support from their District Based Support teams. School-based support teams suggested that this lack of collaboration influenced their role and function within the school, as they

are not able to provide for all of the learners' and teachers' needs without adequate access to resources such as the support services of social workers, counsellors and psychologists.

Three out of the five school-based support teams that participated in the research study indicated that they had access to support specialists such as social workers, counsellors and psychologists. However, they indicated that it would be beneficial for the district and the provincial and national Departments of Education to provide these types of support specialists on site in their schools. They further expressed that they found the support specialists beneficial, as they could assist in helping the school-based support team perform their role and function of supporting learners and teachers more effectively. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2012), in order for the school-based support team to be effective, regular and adequate consultation with support service personnel (such as social workers and psychologists) is essential. Furthermore, they state that regular and adequate consultation with support service personnel would develop the expertise within the school-based support teams and this would allow for referral where necessary.

5.2. Research Question 2: What are school-based support teams' perceptions and experiences of providing support to their schools?

Participating school-based support teams perceive and experience themselves as vital in providing support to their schools. These teams are viewed as imperative in school functioning, as they form the link between the school and the community, and are able to empower staff by providing necessary aid.

One of the participating school-based support teams suggested that the school-based support team is functioning very well at their school because they hold regular meetings with teachers in the different phases of the school, as well as with the school management team. They further added that the teachers within their school made full use of their school-based support team for advice and for consultation on addressing barriers to learning. Another of the participating school-based support teams suggested that having a support structure within schools is important because learners need the additional support in order to function and perform optimally.

These suggestions are in line with school-based support teams' primary purpose and function. Donald et al. (2012) postulate that the school-based support teams' primary purpose and function is to discuss the specific needs and problems that are referred by teachers in the school. The school-based support team must then decide on appropriate individual interventions for learners, as well as general and preventative action strategies.

5.3. Research Question 3: Do the school-based support teams use a specific model or approach in providing support to their schools?

All of the participating school-based support teams suggested that they use a specific approach once a learner has been referred to the team for support. However, some of the participants indicated that the approach differs depending on the type of problem the child has been referred to the team for.

The majority of the participants indicated that for both behavioural and social problems, a member of the school-based support team would approach either the head of department for the learning phase the child is in or the deputy principal or

principal of the school in order to understand the difficulty the child is facing. Once this step has been undertaken, the school would contact the parents in an attempt to have a meeting with them to discuss the problem further. After the meeting with the parents, the school-based support team would meet and discuss planned interventions and strategies to support both the child and the teacher. Some of the participants indicated that they would involve a social worker or counsellor in the meeting with the school-based support team. However, two of the schools do not have social workers or counsellors available to them and mentioned that they would refer the parents to an external support specialist where this was necessary.

5.4. Research Question 4: What are the school-based support teams' perceptions and experiences of the ideal support system/s they would like to have in place?

All the school-based support teams identified that they would like the District Based Support team to be more involved with the daily functioning of the school. Furthermore, they suggested that they would like to have access to support specialists in order to have learners assessed for academic and emotional problems.

In a study conducted by Moolla and Lazarus (2014) they identify that the ratio between school psychologists and learners has a significant impact on the amount of support available to teachers, learners and schools. In light of this they state that it is unlikely that more support staff such as school psychologists and district personnel will become available, owing to the financial realities of South Africa. It is probable that school-based support teams will not get the support they would ideally like, and it is therefore suggested that they need to find other ways of working together with the support staff that is accessible to them as well as their District Based Support teams.

5.5. Research Question 5: What are the school-based support teams' experiences of collaborating with parents/caregivers, District Based Support teams and relevant service providers (such as health and welfare professionals, psychologists and learning support professionals) in providing support?

With regard to parental and caregiver collaboration, participants' responses were varied. The majority of participants' responses were negative and they indicated that parents and caregivers were either not involved in the learner's school life, or if they wanted to collaborate with the parents and caregivers, they had to constantly phone or email the parents and caregivers in order to get their attention. However, one of the participating school-based support teams indicated that parents and caregivers were generally willing to collaborate with the team in supporting the child, if they had been notified by the school of the child's difficulties.

The majority of the school-based support teams indicated that they felt frustrated by the insufficient involvement and support provided by the District Based Support teams. Three of the participating schools indicated that they only see the District Based Support team at the end of the year when retention schedules need to be filled in. They further expressed the concern that learners were being promoted to the next grade or phase by the district personnel without these learners having adequate skills to perform optimally in the next grade or learning phase. Moolla and Lazarus (2014) postulate that collaboration within the school development sector is of utmost importance if schools are to be effectively supported and empowered to

provide quality education to their learners. This calls for parents, district personnel, school-based support teams and other role-players to collaborate in order to provide learners with the support they require. Taking the above into consideration, Moolla and Lazarus (2014) further emphasise the importance of intersectoral collaboration, whereby partnerships are developed between all role-players in order to work towards a common purpose. Moloi (2010) and Oswald and De Villiers (2013) add that working in this kind of team will build a sense of belonging, and will assist in building a crucial network of support that aims to address the challenges faced within schools.

One of the participating schools suggested that the District Based Support team needs to be involved with the schools in their district from day one of the school year, with regular visits to the schools in their district and regular meetings with the school-based support teams in order to get a better understanding of the challenges learners and teachers are facing on a daily basis, with a view towards offering appropriate support to schools.

Experiences of collaborating with relevant service providers were varied, and the participants highlighted the need for community members to be involved in schools. School 1 highlighted that they receive some support from a church in their community, as well as sponsorship from a bank. However, they identified that they needed more support from their community. School 2 indicated that they do not get support from people in their direct community, but they did mention that they pay a fee to the Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre, which will assist them when they have a crisis at the school. Schools 3 and 5 identified that they receive no support from their community. School 4 identified that they receive support from the Wits Speech and Audiology Department, as well as support from parents in the area that run reading groups with the learners.

5.6. Research Question 6: What alternative support structures are available at their schools?

All of the schools that participated in the research study did not directly identify alternative support structures that are available to their schools. School 4 mentioned that they have access to optometrists and therapists who are willing to do pro bono work should the learners at the school require this. School 1 highlighted that the Transvaal Memorial Institute (TMI) used to assist them with assessments, but this is no longer available to the school, as TMI has a limited number of assessment spaces per year. They added that they do get support from the police service should there be any major behaviour problems within the school.

5.7. Research Question 7: What do the school-based support teams view as their successes and challenges?

In this research study, school-based support teams identified their successes as:

- Identifying learners who experience barriers to learning;
- Planning intervention strategies to support the learner and implementing these strategies;
- Teamwork among the school-based support team and the teaching staff;
- Early intervention in supporting learners who experience barriers to learning and referral to and collaboration with support specialists; and
- Regular meetings and discussions as school-based support teams.

Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart and Eloff (2003) state that teaching as a profession is one of the most difficult and complex occupations to master. In light of the above and with reference to the successes that participants identified, it is apparent that the number of roles that teachers and school-based support teams need to take on is extensive.

School-based support teams' identified their challenges as:

- Time constraints;
- Availability of time required to help learners;
- Difficulty in getting learners assessed for potential barriers to learning;
- Getting LSEN numbers from the district office in order to refer learners to schools that can better cater for their needs;
- The amount of administration and paperwork required by the Gauteng Department of Education;
- The structure of school staff;
- The expense of assessing learners;
- Lack of access to support specialists;
- Lack of parental involvement;
- Lack of support from the District Based Support team; and
- Lack of understanding by the Gauteng Department of Education of the school, its functions and the type of learners in schools.

A study conducted by Engelbrecht et al. (2003) mentions that in the past inadequate resources provided to educators and school-based support teams fostered educational stress. In this study, the participants did not overtly express the need for more resources, but it is a possibility that the availability of more resources (such as access to support specialists) could minimise the challenges that participants identified.

5.8. Practical Implications of the Study

In South Africa, inclusive education promotes a structure for addressing barriers to learning and development. School-based support teams play an important role in this structure. In this research study it was apparent the participating school-based support teams felt positive about their role and function within their schools. Factors that contribute to this positive perception include:

- Collaboration with staff members;
- Their implementation of specific procedures and intervention strategies in situations where learners had been referred to them;
- Good communication between school-based support team members and other staff members;
- Working timeously in addressing barriers to learning; and
- Continuous feedback from school-based support teams to relevant role-players.

On the other hand, it was evident that participating school-based support team members felt overwhelmed by the number of responsibilities they had in their daily job commitments. In view of this, it would be important for the Department of Education or the district personnel to explore ways in which teachers, especially school-based support team members, could be supported more effectively. This

needs to be addressed in order for school-based support teams to function to their optimal potential.

From the focus-group interviews it was apparent that school-based support teams had little to no collaborative relationships with parents and other community members. It is suggested that the District Based Support team should look at strategies that school-based support teams can use in order to establish collaborative partnerships with parents and other community members or organisations. Furthermore, it is suggested that if District Based Support teams do not have the capacity to provide ongoing support to schools, they could play an important role in making school-based support teams aware of the resources in their community that could be of assistance. School-based support teams can also find ways in which to form collaborative relationships between parents and other community members by inviting guests to parents' evenings to give lectures on areas of interest. In addition, schools could possibly start parent and community involvement projects whereby parents and community members go to the school in the mornings and assist with reading. It is suggested that schools conduct a needs analysis with parents and community members to understand where parents and community members could assist the schools and how they think a relationship between the role-players can be fostered.

It was also evident that this sample of school-based support teams felt frustrated about the lack of support available to them from their District Based Support team. In addition, their lack of involvement in the school's daily functioning was also posed as a concern. It would seem that perhaps the national and provincial Departments of Education need to consider ways of facilitating closer collaboration between school-based support teams and District Based Support teams. Furthermore, it may be useful to research the District Based Support team's experience of the support that they provide to the schools in their district. In addition, the national and provincial Departments of Education could offer more training to school-based support teams and teachers through workshops. These workshops could address topics such as dealing with emotional and social problems within schools. This could possibly assist school-based support teams in addressing learners' needs in these areas, as well as lessen the schools' need for assistance from support specialists.

Finally, the data highlighted that participating school-based support teams need the assistance of support staff or specialist staff such as social workers and psychologists to assist in addressing barriers to learning within their schools. The Department of Education needs to review and explore ways in which these services can be implemented in order for the needs of our education system to be addressed.

5.9. Limitations of the Study

As a result of the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher cannot generalise the findings to a broader context, as qualitative data cannot assure external validity (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005). This research is only applicable to a specific population of school-based support teams in the Johannesburg East District in Gauteng. Therefore, the research findings cannot be generalised to other parts of South Africa or other countries.

According to Kambrelis and Dimitrisdis (2005) and Mertens (2005), focus-group interviews are designed to elicit responses from participants that cannot be obtained by individual interviews, because they rely on the interaction between participants to

elicit opinions and perceptions. A limitation of this study was that during a number of the focus-group discussions some of the school-based support team members were very vocal about their experiences, while others hesitated to express their experiences or the ideas that they may have had. This may be attributed to the interactive nature of focus-group interviews and some of the participants' reluctance to express their experiences and ideas within this context.

The amount of time allocated to the researcher to conduct the focus-group interviews can also be viewed as a possible limitation of the study. Participants may not have always had the ability to express their views in a great deal of depth.

The heads of the school-based support teams had time between the focus-group interview with the whole team and returning the questionnaire to the researcher. This may have influenced their responses to the questionnaire, as they may have, as a result, reported similar perceptions and topics to those discussed in the focus-group interviews.

Furthermore, as the researcher experienced a time constraint from the demands placed on her to complete the research report within the academic year, she was unable to arrange follow-up interviews with the participants. Follow-up interviews may have presented the researcher and participants the opportunity for further clarification and elaboration.

Finally, in an attempt to ensure triangulation, different sources of information or methods were used, namely focus-group interviews as well as questionnaires. In addition, to guarantee that the interpretations of the respondents were authentic, verbatim quotes and statements from the data collected were used. This was completed in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Coherence in the data was achieved by getting the supervisor to check the researcher's findings. Reciprocity was achieved by letting the participants lead the way during the focus-group interviews and facilitating discussions with them along the way. In addition, clarifying questions were posed to confirm interpretations based on what was said

5.10. Suggestions for Further Research

The sample of this study was drawn from urban government primary schools from varied socio-economic backgrounds in the Gauteng East school district. Further research could include respondents from township areas or from other provinces within South Africa. Studies of the experiences of school-based support teams from different regions of the South Africa regarding the support that they provide within their schools are necessary. This would provide data with which the current study can be compared. Furthermore, such data could be used by the Department of Education to facilitate the development of support mechanisms within schools.

Research into the experiences of the support that school-based support teams provide within their schools at mainstream, inclusive schools and special schools as resource centres could be a further area of research. This data would provide information for the further training and support of school-based support teams.

In addition, research concerning the necessary support skills and knowledge required by both school-based support teams and teachers in general needs to be identified. This could provide insight into possible intervention strategies to support learners that experience barriers to learning.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to conduct research into the experiences of parents and caregivers as role-players within schools, as well as the experiences of District Based Support teams in providing support to schools. This may also determine the challenges that parents and District Based Support teams experience in establishing collaborative relationships with school-based support teams.

5.11. Summary and Conclusion

This study was conducted with the aim of exploring school-based support teams' experiences of providing support to their schools. Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) identified that the main functions of the school-based support team are to support the learning process by identifying and addressing barriers to learning, and to promote effective teaching. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on the collaborative role that school-based support teams and teachers need to adopt in order to support learners in schools effectively. The collaborative model allows school-based support team members the opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise with other staff members, which would assist in supporting learners holistically.

The results of this study indicated that school-based support teams' experiences of providing support within their schools were positive. However, they would like more parental involvement and support from their District Based Support teams. School-based support teams highlighted that parental involvement would improve learner motivation with regard to learning, as well as provide learners who experience barriers to learning further support.

Participants in the study indicated that involvement from the District Based Support team would make the learner referral process easier and better, as District Based Support teams could make decisions regarding learners based on knowledge about the learner and their current situation. In addition, participants indicated that involvement by the District Based Support team would potentially assist in accessing professionals who could assess learners. School-based support teams suggested that access to support specialists that could assess learners would be beneficial and would help the school-based support teams and teachers to further support the learners.

In conclusion, Mwamwenda (2008, p. 7–8) states that "educational psychology has a unique and important contribution to make in the progress of African children, whose success in life is partly dependent on how well we prepare them to take their rightful place in their respective countries and beyond". School-based support teams working in collaboration with teachers, learners, other professionals, parents, and significant community members can help to achieve this goal. They play a pivotal role in empowering individuals to take their rightful place within society.

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Appendices

Appendix A: School Based Support Team Focus Group Interview Questions

Inclusive Education

1. What are you views on an inclusive education system as applied to your school?

School Based Support Team functioning

2. Education White Paper 6 emphasises the importance of the establishment of School Based Support Teams. What are your views on this?
3. In what ways has your team been effective?
   What are some of the challenges faced by your team?
4. What are some of the concerns that teachers refer to the School Based Support Team?
5. Once a learner has been referred to the School Based Support Team, what is the approach that you use?
6. Describe some of the issues/difficulties faced by the school which affect your functioning (for example lack of resources).

Support systems

7. How are you working as a team? (explore group dynamics)
8. Describe the support you get from:
   - The governing body
   - Principal
   - Teachers
   - Parents
   - District personnel
   - Community members
9. Is assistance needed by learners at your school beyond what the School Based Support Team can provide?
10. In your view, are the resources of all role-players in the school (including parents and community resources) being optimally utilised for the purposes of providing an effective and inclusive environment?
11. At this stage, what would you describe as your needs from your District Based Support Team?

Policy

12. Does the school have policies on the structures and procedures to aim for inclusion? Please elaborate.
13. What policy does the school have on the role of the School Based Support team in addressing barriers to learning?

Other

14. Please feel free to add any further comments you might have which you have not had the chance to express regarding School Based Support Teams.

Thank you for your time and the feedback which you have provided.

Appendix B: Head of School Based Support Team Questionnaire

Name:……

School:…….

Date:…….

- **Where is the school situated? (suburb/ town, near a bus stop/taxi rank, near a children's home?)**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **Describe the socio-economic background of the majority of learners that attend this school.**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **What facilities are available to learners at this school? (computer centre, library, textbooks, electricity, photocopier, playing fields)**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **What extra murals are available to learners at this school? (extra lessons, sports, culture, aftercare)**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **How are parents involved in the daily functioning of the school? (tuck-shop, administrative assistance, decision-making process)**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **What specialist staff are available to learners at this school? (occupational therapist, psychologist, remedial teachers)**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **Who are the members of the School Based Support Team?**
  a) **Principal** ……
  b) **Head of Department**…….
  c) **Other Teacher(s)**……

d) Life Orientation Teacher ……
e) Other specialists..……
f) Other……
Specify:……

- **How was the School Based Support Team selected?**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **How often does the School Based Support Team meet?**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **Describe the general content discussed in your meetings.**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **Do you think that the School Based Support Team has helped the school deal with learners' difficulties and concerns? Please elaborate.**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **Has the School Based Support team been successful in generating useful intervention strategies within the school? Please elaborate.**
  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……
- **I feel positive about the functioning of the School Based Support Team:**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

Please elaborate:
……
……
……
……

- **Our team has sufficient support from our school principal in implementing our support plans:**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

Please elaborate:

……
……
……
……

- **Our team has sufficient support from our classroom teachers in implementing our support plans:**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

Please elaborate:

……
……
……
……

- **My experiences with collaborating with the District Based Support Team with regards to support have been positive:**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

Please elaborate:

……
……
……
……

- **If applicable, what support would you like from the District Based Support Team?**

……
……
……
……

- **What improvements do you feel the School Based Support Team could put in place at this school?**

……
……
……
……

- **Please feel free to add any further comments that you may have regarding the School Based Support Team.**

……
……

……
……

Thank you for your time and the feedback which you have provided.

…….……

Appendix C: Gauteng Department of Education Certificate

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:
Reference no: D2015 / 019

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**11 April 2014**
Validity of Research Approval:	**11 April to 3 October 2014**
Name of Researcher:	**Gaffney T.J.**
Address of Researcher:	**P.O. Box 6349**
	Ansfrere
	1711
Telephone Number:	**011 679 2980; 084 580 1304**
Email address:	**theonagaffney@yahoo.co.uk**
Research Topic:	**School Based Support Teams' experiences of the support that they provide within their schools**
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:

Making education a societal priority

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

1. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
4. *A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
5. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
6. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
7. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
8. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
9. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
10. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
11. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
12. *On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
13. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
14. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

.....

Dr David Makhado
Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 2014/04/14

Making education a societal priority

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 D: 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 Theona Gaffney and I am conducting research as part of the requirements for my Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My research study aims to investigate School Based Support Teams' experiences in providing support in their schools. This research can make a contribution to the field of Educational Psychology in terms of understanding the experiences that School Based Support Teams have had in implementing support to their schools within the policy framework of Inclusive Education.

I would like to formally ask for permission to conduct my research study with your schools' School Based Support Team as my sample. I would like to conduct a focus group interview with the School Based Support Team and have a questionnaire completed by the chair of your School Based Support Team. The focus group interview will not last longer than an hour. Confidentiality and privacy of staff members' responses is guaranteed. If consent is given from all of the School Based Support Team members, the focus group interview will be audio recorded; neither the schools name nor staff members' names will be used in recordings. My supervisor and I are the only persons that will listen to the recordings, and the recordings will be destroyed once I have completed my research report. Anonymity will be guaranteed in this research study, as I will not use identifying details of your school or your staff members' names in the research; pseudonyms will be used. There are no risks involved in participating in this research study and the participants' involvement in the study is entirely voluntary. The participants can choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

A summary of the results of my research study will be forwarded to you at the end of the year. The research results may be published in the form of a journal article.

If you have any further queries about the research you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor on the numbers provided at the end of the letter. I can also be

contacted on this number to notify me whether permission has been granted to conduct this study at your school.

Thank you in advance.

Kind regards,

Ms. Theona Gaffney

Tel: 084 580 1304

Supervisor:

Dr. Zaytoon Amod

Tel: 011 717 8326

Appendix E: Head of School-based Support Team 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 Theona Gaffney and I am conducting research as part of the requirements for my Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My research study aims to investigate School Based Support Teams' experiences in providing support in their schools. This research can make a contribution to the field of Educational Psychology in terms of understanding the experiences that School Based Support Teams have had in implementing support to their schools within the policy framework of Inclusive Education.

As the head of a School Based Support Team, you are invited to participate in the research study. Should you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a focus group interview which will be about an hour long and will be conducted at the school where you work. You will also be asked to fill out a questionnaire. Should it be deemed necessary, individual interviews may be held with two or three focus group participants. There are no risks involved and your participation is entirely voluntary. You will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way by choosing to participate in this study, you will not be directly benefited in any way due to your participation in the study. You are free to withdraw for the study at any time that you wish, and you do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Due to the nature of focus group interviews, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Should you agree to take part in the focus group interview, I strongly advise not repeating what is said in the focus group interview in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality and privacy of your responses on the questionnaire is guaranteed. If consent is given from all members of the School Based Support Team, the focus group interview will be audio recorded, and your name will not be used in recordings. My supervisor and I are the only persons that will listen to the recordings, and the recordings will be destroyed once I have completed my research report. Anonymity will be guaranteed in this research study, as I will not use your

name or identifying details of your school in the research; pseudonyms will be used. A summary of the findings of my research study will be provided to the school via the principal of the school. You may also contact me directly to obtain a summary of the results of the research study. The research results may be published in the form of a journal article.

If you have any further enquiries about the research you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor.

Thank you in advance.

Kind regards,

Ms. Theona Gaffney

Tel: 084 580 1304

Supervisor:

Dr. Zaytoon Amod

Tel: 011 717 8326

Appendix F: 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 Theona Gaffney and I am conducting research as part of the requirements for my Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My research study aims to investigate School Based Support Teams' experiences in providing support in their schools. This research can make a contribution to the field of Educational Psychology in terms of understanding the experiences that School Based Support Teams have had in implementing support to their schools within the policy framework of Inclusive Education.

As part of a School Based Support Team, you are invited to participate in the research study. Should you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a focus group interview which will be about an hour long and will be conducted at the school where you work. Should it be deemed necessary, individual interviews may be held with two or three focus group participants. There are no risks involved and your participation is entirely voluntary. You will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way by choosing to participate in this study, you will not be directly benefited in any way due to your participation in the study. You are free to withdraw for the study at any time that you wish, and you do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Due to the nature of focus group interviews, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Should you agree to take part in the focus group interview, I strongly advise not repeating what is said in the focus group interview in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. If consent is given from all members of the School Based Support Team, the focus group interview will be audio recorded, and your name will not be used in recordings. My supervisor and I are the only persons that will listen to the recordings, and the recordings will be destroyed once I have completed my research report. Anonymity will be guaranteed in this research study, as I will not use your name or identifying details of your school in the research; pseudonyms will be used. A summary of the findings of my research study will be provided to the school via the

principal of the school. You may also contact me directly to obtain a summary of the results of the research study. The research results may be published in the form of a journal article.

By participating in this study, you will not be benefited in any way and there are no foreseeable risks due to participation. If you have any further enquiries about the research you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor.

Kind regards,

Ms. Theona Gaffney

Tel: 084 580 1304

Supervisor:

Dr. Zaytoon Amod

Tel: 011 717 8326

Appendix G: Participant Consent Form

I …… have read the attached letter and understand the nature, purpose and procedure of this study, and recognise that participation in the study will not advantage or disadvantage me in any way. I understand that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the focus group interview and I have a right not to answer any questions that I feel uncomfortable with, and to withdraw from the study at any time. I also understand the researcher can make use of direct quotes. I would like to participate in this study.

Signed:……..

Date:……..

Appendix H: Permission for the Focus-group to Be Audio Recorded Consent Form





I …… grant permission for this interview to be audio recorded. I understand that the content of the tapes will be transcribed for the purpose of further analysis and that my, and my teams, identity will be protected; access to tapes will be restricted and the tapes will be stored in a secure location. I understand that the tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the research study.

Signed: ……..

Date: ……

Appendix I: Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical) Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MEDP/14/003IH**
PROJECT TITLE:	School based support teams' experiences of the support that they provide within their schools.
INVESTIGATORS **DEPARTMENT**	Theona Joy Gaffney Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	28/05/14
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 28 May 2014

CHAIRPERSON
(Professor M. Nduna)

cc Supervisor: Dr. Z Amod
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2015

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES