

# **A collaborative approach to facilitating learner support by teachers in a full-service school**

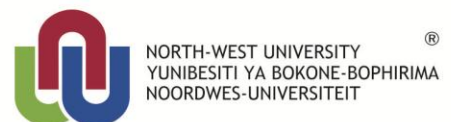
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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Educationis in Educational Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

Supervisor                      Prof P du Toit

May 2016

It all starts here <sup>TM</sup>



## DECLARATION

I, Reinette Koekemoer, hereby declare that this dissertation titled: A collaborative approach to facilitating learner support by teachers in a full-service school, is my own work. I further declare that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted the said dissertation at any other university to obtain a degree.



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R Koekemoer

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all my family members, especially my wonderful husband,  
**Johan Koekemoer.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give all praise, glory, honour and gratitude to God Almighty. I praise Him for giving me the ability and perseverance to complete this study.

This research study would not have been possible without my supervisor, Prof Petrusa du Toit. I want to express my appreciation for her guidance, assistance, time, motivation, support, trust and confidence in me. Her input and positive attitude were essential for the completion of this study and are highly appreciated.

It is an honour for me to express my love and gratitude to my parents, who have supported and encouraged me throughout the duration of my studies. Thank you for your unconditional love, grace and support, I love you very much.

To Johan, my husband, thank you for believing in me, for supporting me and for loving me.

My sister Mariet Eksteen. Thank you for all your advice, help and encouragement. I couldn't have done this without you!!

I want to thank all other family and friends that stood by me throughout this study. I am convinced that some of you feel that you have completed this study along with me. I really appreciate it. You are my joy.

My sincere gratitude goes to Mrs Hettie Sieberhagen for the language editing of this research study. I am so thankful for your positive attitude, enthusiasm and your wisdom.

I would like to especially acknowledge the following people and organisations, for their support and assistance:

The National Research Foundation (NRF) for financial support.

Prof Lesley Wood, for allowing me to be part of her NRF project and for financial support.

North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) for financial support.

Lastly, all my co-participants in Prof Wood's NRF project. Thank you for all your support, empathy, encouragement and help throughout my study. I truly would not have been able to do this without you!

## **ABSTRACT**

Education White Paper 6 sets out the establishment of full-service schools as pilot schools to roll out a policy for inclusive education in South Africa. Teachers in such schools are expected to have skills and knowledge to provide support to learners experiencing barriers to learning, but many are not adequately prepared for the task. This study explores how a collaborative participatory action research and action learning (PALAR) approach can facilitate learner support in a full-service school. The study focuses on a full-service school in the North-West Province.

This qualitative study investigated how teachers pursued an action research and learning process of collaboration with each other to create innovative and effective ways for learner support in their school. Data were generated through action learning set meetings, observation, reflection and interviews, as participants navigated through the cycles of problem identification, action and reflection. The findings suggest that this collaborative PALAR process increased teacher motivation and ability to support learners who experience barriers to learning, as well as managerial and departmental involvement.

**Key concepts:** participatory action learning and action research; teacher training; learner support; barriers to learning; full-service school.

## OPSOMMING

In Education White Paper 6 word bepaal dat voldiensskole as loodsskole gevestig word om 'n beleid vir inklusiewe onderwys in Suid-Afrika te bepaal. Onderwysers in hierdie skole behoort die kennis en vaardighede te hê om ondersteuning te bied aan leerders wat leerhindernisse ervaar, maar talle onderwysers is ontoereikend opgelei om aan hierdie vereistes te voldoen. Hierdie studie ondersoek hoe 'n samewerkende benadering van deelnemende aksienavorsing en aksieleer (participatory action research and action learning: PALAR) leerderondersteuning in 'n voldiensskool kan fasiliteer, en fokus op 'n voldiensskool in die Noordwes-Provinsie.

Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie ondersoek hoe 'n proses van samewerking met aksienavorsing en – leer onderwysers in staat gestel het om oorspronklike en doeltreffende maniere van leerderondersteuning in hul skool te skep. Data is verkry deur aksieleervergaderings, observasie, refleksie en onderhoude soos wat deelnemers aan die studie gevorder het deur die siklusse van probleemidentifisering, aksie en refleksie. Die bevindings dui aan dat hierdie samewerkende PALAR-proses nie slegs die onderwysers se motiveringsvlakke verhoog het nie, maar ook hul vermoë om leerders te ondersteun wat leerhindernisse ervaar. Die betrokkenheid van bestuur en die departement is ook aansienlik verbeter.

**Soekwoorde:** deelnemende aksieleer en aksienavorsing; onderwyser(s)opleiding; leerderondersteuning; leerhindernisse; voldiensskole

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 ORIENTATION AND MOTIVATION

The South African Schools Act (South Africa, 1996b) and the White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education and Training (Department of Education, 2001) were promulgated in South Africa with the purpose of promoting and protecting the rights of people, including learners with barriers to learning. In terms of the Constitution of South Africa (Section 29), Government has the challenge to promote effective learning among all learners, i.e. the inclusion of all learners, regardless of diversity, within the education system. The result has been that an increasing number of learners with barriers to learning are being included in mainstream classrooms (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart & Eloff, 2003).

In October 1996 the Ministry of Education appointed the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services to investigate and make recommendations on all aspects of special needs and support services in education and training in South Africa, which resulted in White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education and Training (Department of Education, 2001). In this White Paper 6 it is recommended that the education and training system should promote education for all and foster the development of inclusive education that would enable all learners to participate actively in the education process so that they can develop and extend their potential and participate as equal members of society. According to Murungi (2015), a fundamental challenge with regard to inclusive education is that it is not consistently or universally defined. The distinctions between inclusion and inclusive education, and between inclusion in the broader and narrow senses in the context of education, are also not clear-cut (UNESCO, as cited in Murungi, 2015). Inclusion in education has been defined by UNESCO as the -

“... process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.” (UNESCO, 2005, par. 13.)

Murungi (2015) reports that in a “broad” sense, "inclusive education" has been defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank as:

“... the understanding that the education of all children including those with disabilities, should be under the responsibility of the education ministries or their equivalent with common rules and procedures. In this model, education may take place in a range of settings such as special schools and centres, special classes, special classes in integrated schools or regular classes in mainstream schools, following the model of the least restrictive environment.” (WHO and World Bank, 2011, p. 209).

The Report on the Implementation of Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education (Department of Basic Education, 2015) states that in South Africa, Inclusive Education as outlined in Education White Paper 6 is about -

- transformation of an education system which has previously been divided into “special education” and “mainstream education” into one integrated system which embraces equity and quality;
- acceptance of equal rights for all learners and social justice; and
- transforming the education system to effectively respond to and support learners, parents and communities by promoting the removal of barriers to learning and participation in that education system in an incremental manner

The Department of Basic Education (2014) states in the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) document that in an inclusive education and training system, a wider spread of educational support services should be created in line with what learners with barriers to learning require. These services encompass low-intensity support for learners with mild barriers, which will be provided in ordinary schools; medium-intensity support for those requiring moderate support, which will be provided in full-service schools; and high-intensity educational support which will be provided in special schools for learners with severe barriers to learning.

Full-service schools are the focus of this study. The Department of Basic Education (2014) describes full-service schools as “ordinary schools that are inclusive and welcoming of all learners in terms of their cultures, policies and practices. Such schools increase participation and reduce exclusion by providing support to all learners to develop their full potential irrespective of their background, culture, abilities or disabilities, their gender or race. These schools will be strengthened and orientated to address a full range of barriers to learning in an inclusive education setting to serve as flagship schools of full inclusivity” (p. ix).

In full-service schools, priorities will include orientation to and training in new teacher roles, focusing on multi-level classroom instruction, co-operative learning, problem solving and the

development of learners' strengths and competencies rather than focusing on their shortcomings only (Department of Education, 2001).

Such full-service schools will be furnished and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs among all learners (Department of Education, 2001). Special attention will be paid to developing flexibility in teaching practices and styles through training, capacity building and the provision of support to learners and educators in these schools (Department of Education, 2001).

Teachers play a key role in the inclusion and support of learners with barriers to learning. According to Roberts (2011), it is argued that the success of inclusion lies with the teachers and therefore their attitudes towards inclusion are crucial to the success of inclusion, and their acceptance thereof is paramount. Yet teachers seem to experience the inclusion of learners with barriers to learning as stressful, since they do not feel equipped for the task (Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff & Pettipher, 2002). This is no surprise, as teaching in any case ranks in the top quartile on complexity for all occupations and this inherent complexity makes it a challenging profession to master (Snowman & Biehler, 2000) – even more so in inclusive education.

According to White Paper 6, the support provided to full-service schools will include physical and material resources, as well as professional development of staff which is to be provided by the District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) (Department of Basic Education, 2014). However, Mahlo and Hugo (2013) argue that there is currently an absence of specific support strategies in the relevant policies and other documents in South Africa to address the needs of learning support teachers in order to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education. Without such support to teachers, the implementation of the inclusion policy in South Africa only means more pressure on the teachers teaching these children, especially in full-service schools which are supposed to provide all services to learners with diverse barriers in those schools.

## **1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

In a study done by Forlin, Keen and Barrett (2008) on the concerns of mainstream teachers on how to cope with inclusivity in the Australian context, one of the concerns that were identified dealt with teachers' perceived competency. The teachers' perceived difficulty in monitoring other learners when attending to the learners with the barriers to learning, was combined with the teachers' high level of concern regarding their reduced ability to teach the other learners in their classes as successfully as they would like (Forlin, Keen & Barrett, 2008).

This is also evident after my own informal discussions with teachers currently teaching in full-service schools and from my own experience as a teacher in a full-service school. In the study by Forlin, Keen and Barrett (2008), the teachers were asked to indicate types of coping strategies they employed in their classrooms and the degree to which they found these useful. It appeared

that the use of humour and maintaining a sense of humour was the most useful strategy in the Australian context. Forlin, Keen and Barrett (2008) also identified two other helpful coping strategies namely the problem-focused strategy and the collaborative strategy. In another study, Hardin and Hardin (2002) highlight other strategies like peer tutoring and cooperative learning. It is possible that these strategies may also be applied in South African full-service schools.

Regarding emotions and attitude towards learners with barriers to learning, Vermeulen, Denessen and Knoors (2012), found that the development of negative beliefs and emotions in response to the inclusion of learners with barriers to learning may lead to low levels of teachers' job satisfaction and enjoyment in their teaching. Yet they found only weak relations between teachers' beliefs and emotions on the one hand and their responsive behaviour to learners on the other hand. In my opinion it seems highly important to assist and facilitate teachers in their support of learners with barriers to learning in their full-service classrooms, to prevent teachers from developing a negative attitude towards their job as a teacher.

In Education White Paper 6, a plan was proposed to convert five hundred (500 primary) schools to full-service schools – schools that can accommodate disabled learners – over a period of twenty (20) years. Dunlop (2011) reports that between 2001 and 2010, of the five hundred schools that were to convert to full-service, only eight (8) achieved this. She further lists the following as some barriers to conversion that were cited (p. 1):

- Lack of funding. Converting a school to be disabled friendly is a resource-heavy undertaking, and most government funded schools are already under-resourced.
- Lack of training for teachers. Training in how to facilitate and teach disabled students must be prioritised if schools are to be truly full-service.
- Teachers argue that the demands of the new curriculum and overcrowded classes prevent them from spending the necessary one-on-one time that teaching a disabled learner requires.

It is because of the above-mentioned that I want to investigate how a particular school, which was converted to a full-service school in 2011, and the teachers who are teaching there, are coping with the conversion from a mainstream school to a full-service school. From this investigation a collaborative approach will be applied to facilitate learner support by the teachers in this full-service school.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Against the above background the main question for the research can be stated as follows:



- How can the process of learner support by teachers in a full-service school be facilitated in a collaborative way?

From this main research question, the following sub-questions can be formulated:

- What is the nature of the current conversion of the school to a full-service school?
- What is the nature of the current learner support practice in the school?
- What are the teachers' views and needs regarding the current learner support practice in their full-service school?
- What kind of collaborative support, in the view of the teachers, will enhance their support of the learners in their school?
- How can this support be facilitated?

## **1.4 RESEARCH AIMS**

### **1.4.1 General Aim**

The purpose and aim of this research is to investigate and establish how the process of learner support by teachers in a full-service school can be facilitated in a collaborative way.

### **1.4.2 Specific Aims**

The specific aims of this research are to establish -

- what the nature of the current conversion of the school to a full-service school is;
- what the nature of the current learner support practice in the school is;
- what the teachers' views and needs regarding the current learner support practice in their full-service school are;
- what kind of collaborative support, in the view of the teachers, will enhance their support of the learners in their school;
- how this support can be facilitated.

## **1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.5.1 Research design**

Against the above background, a qualitative paradigm was indicated for this study, with participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) as research design.

A qualitative approach to research is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e. the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-orientated, collaborative, or change orientated), or both (Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell (2003), it also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenology, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data (Creswell, 2003).

According to Zuber-Skerritt (2002), action research means critical, collaborative research into complex practical problems, involving people at the coalface and being accountable to stakeholders through continuous reflection on action, evaluation and critical self-evaluation. Action research is an alternative paradigm to traditional social science research, since it is practical, participatory and collaborative, equalitarian and emancipatory, interpretative and critical (Zuber-Skerritt, 2012).

PALAR is a combination of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Action Learning (AL).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is defined by Reason (1994) as research with people rather than research on people. It involves inquiry as a means by which people participate together to explore some substantial aspects of their lives, and to understand these better. It is also to transform their action so as to meet their purposes more fully (Reason, 1994).

According to Zuber-Skerritt (2002), the purpose of PAR is to bring about improvement in any given context through action, in terms of enhancing the collective understanding of the context. It can seek to transform existing conditions and break down present boundaries or barriers in society (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). PAR is deemed applicable for this research because the aim of this study, as the facilitation of learner support by teachers, in a collaborative way, may accomplish transforming the current practices and conditions in the schools, which can best be achieved through PAR.

Action Learning (AL) is learning from concrete experience, through group discussion, trial and error, discovery and learning from one another. Zuber-Skerritt explains that "it is a process by

which groups of people (whether managers, academics, teachers, students or 'learners' generally) work on real issues or problems, carrying real responsibility in real conditions." (p. 144)

In the combined PAR and AL in PALAR, the solution is created with and by the participants in the PALAR project, including the researcher/facilitator as a co-researcher who joins to help improve or change the social situation for the better. According to Zuber-Skerritt (2011), PALAR is designed to bring about social change, to expose unjust practices or environmental dangers and recommend actions for change. It often then happens that PALAR is linked into traditions of citizens' direct action and community organising. The practitioner is actively involved in the cause for which the research is conducted. According to Zuber-Skerritt (2011), it is precisely this commitment that is a necessary part of being a practitioner or a member of a community of practice.

Action research has a spiral of cycles which involves the repetition of the cycle more than once, and more if necessary. The cycle involves planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011). Hereafter the whole cycle starts again, and learning takes place through these actions in the cycle.

A critical approach was used in the generation and interpretation of data. Participants will make use of critical reflection to generate data. See further details below in 1.5.2.2.

## **1.5.2 Methodology**

This section is only briefly described, as it will be described in more detail in the chapter on methodology.

### **1.5.2.1 Site or social network selection**

One full-service school in the North-West Province was selected for this research. The school is a primary school which was recently (2011) transformed into a full-service school. This school is a socio-economic lower class suburban school with limited facilities, staff, funding and resources.

### **1.5.2.2 Participants**

All the teachers in the school were invited to participate in the PAR research. In the end the participants consisted of seven (7) participants which included the researcher (= 6 teachers).

### **1.5.2.3 Data generation**

In this study data were generated by means of focus group discussions, observation, reflective journals and interviews.

#### **1.5.2.4 Data analysis and interpretation**

Thematic content analysis was used for data analysis and interpretation in this study. In PALAR, content analysis occurs throughout the whole process, through critical reflection by participants of the ongoing process. Data were analysed for commonly occurring themes and sub-themes from the teachers' reflections and discussions.

#### **1.5.2.5 Trustworthiness**

In this study, triangulation and member checking were used to establish trustworthiness.

Multiple data generation methods were used as indicated above. Triangulation of data results is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence of results among multiple and different sources of information, to create themes or categories in a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Member checking consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the correctness of the information and narrative account (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

#### **1.5.2.6 Ethical aspects of the research**

Since this research involved people as participants, it was incumbent upon the researcher to act according to the ethical standards prescribed by the North West University (NWU) Ethics Committee. Research participants were thus informed about the nature of the study to be conducted, and were given the choice of either participating or withdrawing from participating (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004). The participants' responses would also be anonymous and treated confidentially. All parties involved in the research project would be given feedback.

### **1.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

This study may contribute to the knowledge of the implementation of learner support within full-service schools, as part of the inclusive education strategy, in terms of how teachers can be empowered in a collaborative way to provide learner support in full-service schools. It may give an indication on how facilitation can be applied to enhance the learner support by the teachers in the full-service school.

This study is part of a bigger NRF funded project at the NWU, titled Action Research for Community Engagement by Tertiary Institutions: Beyond Service Learning.

## **1.7 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

### **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive Education refers to an education system which accommodates learners with special learning needs in the mainstream education without discrimination (Dinkebogile, 2005). Van Kraayenoord (2007) refers to inclusive education as “the practice of providing for students with a wide range of abilities, backgrounds and aspirations in regular school settings” (p. 391).

White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education and Training (Department of Education, 2001) provides an elaborate definition on inclusive education, but the most relevant part of the definition, for the purpose of this study, is that inclusive education “...is about enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners” (p. 16).

Inclusive Education in a “broad” sense can be defined as “the understanding that the education of all children including those with disabilities, should be under the responsibility of the education ministries or their equivalent with common rules and procedures. In this model, education may take place in a range of settings such as special schools and centres, special classes, special classes in integrated schools or regular classes in mainstream schools, following the model of the least restrictive environment” (WHO and World Bank, 2011, p. 209).

### **Full-Service Schools**

Full-service schools are ordinary schools that are inclusive and welcome all learners in terms of their cultures, policies and practices. Such schools increase participation and reduce exclusion by providing support to all learners to develop their full potential irrespective of their background, culture, abilities or disabilities, their gender or race. These schools will be strengthened and orientated to address a full range of barriers to learning in an inclusive education setting to serve as flagship schools of full inclusivity (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The full-service school in this study is a full-service school; however it cannot yet be described as such a flagship school.

### **Barriers to Learning**

Barriers to learning refer to difficulties that arise within the education system as a whole, the learning site and/or within the learner him/herself which prevent access to learning and development (Department of Basic Education, 2014). In this study all barriers that are identified by the participants will be applicable.

### **Learner Support**

Learner Support includes all the activities and services in education that have been developed to help learners meet their learning objectives and gain the knowledge and skills that they need in order to be successful in their learning (Brindley, Walti & Zawacki-Richter, 2004). The Department of Education (2001) defines learner support as any form of help, assistance and guidance given to learners who experience barriers to learning – to enable them to overcome their barriers. This support can be of a low intensity, moderate intensity or high-intensity level – depending on the needs of the individual learner.

In this study all learner support activities that are identified by the participants will be applicable.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration is a trusting, working relationship between two or more equal participants involved in shared thinking, shared planning and shared creation of integrated instruction. Collaboration in this study will encompass this kind of working relationship between the participants and the researcher.

### **Facilitation**

Facilitation takes place to make an action or a process possible or easier (Oxford, 2015). In this study the researcher will be the facilitator of the participants' research activities in the whole research process. The participants will also be one another's facilitators in the process whenever the need for collaboration and facilitation among themselves arises.

## **1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION**

- Chapter 1: Introduction and overview of study
- Chapter 2: Literature review on learner support practices and teachers' perceptions on learner support in full-service schools in South Africa and other countries
- Chapter 3: Research design and methodology
- Chapter 4: Results and discussion of findings
- Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

## **1.9 SUMMARY**

Chapter 1 provided an orientation to the research study. It includes a motivation for the study, a rationale of the study, the identification of research questions, the aims of the research, a brief

discussion of the research design and methodology, the possible contribution of the study to the research focus area, the clarification of important concepts and the division of chapters.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **LEARNER SUPPORT PRACTICES AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS IN FULL-SERVICE SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

While the previous chapter focused on the orientation of this study, chapter 2 will review the literature on the current learner support policies and practices in the South African inclusive education system, as well as the challenges which teachers face in providing learner support to learners who experience barriers to learning.

In exploring the challenges teachers face, this chapter will discuss learner support and inclusive education practices in South Africa, followed by a study of the policies and practices in South African education regarding full-service schools. I will also focus on what research indicates as regards teacher's perceptions and attitudes towards inclusive education and learner support, the challenges they face, and their need for development and training to provide effective learner support in full-service schools. Lastly I will indicate what kind of teacher development programmes applicable to learner support there are.

### **2.2 LEARNER SUPPORT IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS**

Learner support is about supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met, with the emphasis on the development of good teaching strategies that will be to the benefit of all learners (Department of Education, 2001).

The Department of Education (2001) defines learner support as any form of help, assistance and guidance given to learners who experience barriers to learning – to enable them to overcome their barriers. This support can be of a low intensity, moderate or high intensity level, depending on the needs of the individual learner. Low-intensity support will be provided for learners at ordinary schools; while moderate support will be provided at full-service schools. High-intensity support will be provided at special schools/special school-resource centres. To determine the level of support required, the needs of the learner, the educator, the school and the system have to be taken into consideration (Department of Education, 2001). The providing of support to learners who experience barriers to learning is an essential key towards providing them with quality education.

Support can also be defined as all the activities which enhance the capacity of a school to cater for diversity and ensure effective learning and teaching for all their learners (Department of



Education, 2005). Individual support generally aims to increase the inclusiveness of the curriculum. Support, in a nutshell, is thus an integral part of all teaching.

Often learners are faced with challenges in the learning process which are a result of a broad range of experiences in the classroom, at school, at home, in the community, and/or as a result of health conditions or disability. These challenges are referred to as 'barriers to learning and development' in the SIAS policy (Department of Basic Education, 2014). According to the SIAS policy of the Department of Basic Education (2014), barriers to learning and development may include: Socio-economic aspects (such as a lack of access to basic services, poverty and under-development); factors that place learners at risk, for example, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, political violence, HIV and AIDS and other chronic health conditions; attitudes; inflexible curriculum implementation at schools; language and communication; inaccessible and unsafe structural environments; inappropriate and inadequate provision of support services; lack of parental recognition and involvement; disability; lack of human resource development strategies; and unavailability of accessible learning and teaching support materials and assistive technology.

Support for learners with barriers to learning can be implemented in terms of support programmes and support packages. Support programmes refer to structured interventions delivered at schools and in the classrooms within specific frames, while a package of support is designed to address the barriers to learning identified for each learner or for each school (Department of Education, 2008a).

In a recent article in the Sunday Times Newspaper, Govender (2015) reports the following about full-service schools:

"The Department of Basic Education projects spending an additional R2.6-billion over five years on the full-service schools project to increase enrolments"

The proposals of the Department of Basic Education also include (Govender, 2015):

- To double funding for special needs children attending a full-service school; and
- For provinces to set up an equipment loan service to provide and manage the distribution of equipment, devices and support material to pupils.

Govender (2015) further reports that a task team was established in June 2015 to investigate the funding and staffing of special and full-service schools that cater for pupils experiencing barriers to learning.

In South Africa, learner support is applied according to the prescriptions of White Paper 6. An education systems approach is followed in which different official departmental systems offer

support to learners with barriers to learning. According to the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support School Pack (Department of Education, 2008b), these education systems include the National and Provincial Departments of Education and the District Based Support Teams (DBSTs) that consist of professionals like therapists, psychologists, learner support teachers, medical personnel and social workers. Support from the community and the parents are also relied on (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2005).

Learner support includes all activities in a school which increase its capacity to respond to diversity. The aim is to design support programmes so that the learner gain access to learning (Department of Basic Education, 2014). Support also takes place when schools review their culture, policies and practices in terms of the extent to which they meet individual teacher, parent and learner needs as well as when teachers plan lessons in such a way that they accommodate all learners (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

The aim of introducing the SIAS (Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support) strategy in the education system is to overhaul the process of identifying, assessing and providing programmes for all learners requiring additional support so as to enhance participation and inclusion (Department of Education, 2008b). According to the Department of Education (2008b), one of the key objectives of the strategy is to provide clear guidelines on enrolling learners in special schools and settings which also acknowledge the central role played by parents and educators. Determining a support package is dependent on the findings of the range of assessments conducted and the outcomes of support plans implemented by several role players in consultation with the parents and the learner whilst following the SIAS process (Department of Basic Education, 2014). According to the Department of Basic Education (2014), support should no longer focus on deficits that have been diagnosed in individual learners, who are assumed to be in need of remediation through individual attention by specialist staff. The SIAS shifts the focus to a holistic approach where a whole range of possible barriers to learning that a learner may experience (such as extrinsic barriers in the home, school or community environment, or barriers related to disabilities) are considered.

According to the Department of Education (2008b), five specific support provision areas are identified:

- The availability of specialist support staff;
- The availability of assistive devices, specialised equipment and teaching and learning support materials;
- The extent to which the curriculum is differentiated to meet the individual needs of learners;

- The delivery of initial and on-going training, orientation, mentorship and guidance; and
- Environmental access (once-off and not necessarily on-going).

This study will focus on the first four learner support provision areas.

The SIAS process is intended to assess the level and extent of support needed to maximise learners' participation in the learning process (Department of Education, 2008b). The National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (Department of Education, 2008b) first outlines a process of identifying individual learner needs in relation to the home and school context, in order to establish the level and extent of additional support that is needed. Secondly, it outlines a process for enabling the accessing and provisioning of such support at different levels (Department of Education, 2008b).

Learner needs stem from a range of possible barriers to learning that learners may experience and which render them dependent on learner support.

According to the Department of Education (2005), the concept 'barriers to learning' refers to all the systemic, societal, intrinsic and pedagogic factors that impede learning and development (Department of Education, 2005, p.10).

Barriers to learning may arise within the education system as a whole, the learning site and/or within the learner him/herself: these prevent access to learning and development for learners (Department of Education, 2008b). The term "barriers to learning" also refers to any obstacle that may hinder the learner from accessing educational provision, and that might contribute to learning breakdown.

The curriculum is one of the most significant barriers to learning. Barriers to learning arise from the different aspects of the curriculum, such as the content, the language, classroom organisation, teaching methodologies, pace of teaching, and the time available to complete the curriculum, teaching and learning support materials and assessment (Department of Education, 2005).

This study will focus on the facilitation of learner support practices regarding inter alia adapting the curriculum in full-service schools for learners who experience any of such barriers to learning.

## **2.3 FULL-SERVICE SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SYSTEM**

### **2.3.1 An overview**

The White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) makes provision for an inclusive education system, in which a range of educational support services must be created in line with what

learners with barriers to learning require. These services encompass low-intensity support for learners with mild barriers, which will be provided in ordinary schools; medium-intensive support for those requiring moderate support, which will be provided in full-service schools; and high-intensity educational support which will be provided in special schools for learners with severe barriers to learning (2001). This study will focus on the learner support as provided in full-service schools only. According to the Department of Basic Education (2014), full-service schools (FSS) are ordinary schools that are specially resourced and orientated to address a full range of barriers to learning in an inclusive education setting.

This differs from special schools because special schools are equipped to deliver education to learners requiring high-intensive educational and other support either on a full-time or part-time basis (Department of Education, 2008b). Some special schools are also resource centres which mean that the school is transformed to accommodate learners who have high intensity support needs, as well as provide a range of support services to ordinary and full-service schools (Department of Education, 2008b).

The Guidelines for Full-Service / Inclusive Schools (Department of Basic Education, 2010) describe a full-service school as a school with the following characteristics (p. 7):

- Full-service/inclusive schools are first and foremost mainstream education institutions that provide quality education to all learners by supplying the full range of learning needs in an equitable manner;
- They should strive to achieve access, equity, quality and social justice in education;
- They promote a sense of belonging so that all learners, staff and families experience a sense of worth in the learning community;
- They have the capacity to respond to diversity by providing appropriate education for individual needs of learners, irrespective of disability or differences in learning style or pace, or social difficulties experienced; and
- They establish methods to assist curriculum and institutional transformation to ensure an awareness of diversity, and that additional support is available to those learners and educators who need it.

According to the Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the implementation of Inclusive Education: Full-service schools (Department of Education, 2005), teachers have to receive support in terms of mastering new skills in curriculum differentiation, assessment and effective teaching methods.

White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) envisages that in full-service schools, priorities will include orientation to and training in new roles focusing on multi-level classroom instruction, co-operative learning, problem solving and the development of learners' strengths and competencies rather than focusing on their shortcomings only, with a variety of support services to meet the full range of educational needs of learners in that school. These support services will include physical and material resources, as well as professional development for staff. They will also receive special attention from the district support teams (Department of Education, 2001).

According to the Department of Basic Education (2010), this approach to minimising exclusion and addressing barriers to learning is consistent with a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning. It recognises that developing learner strengths and enabling and empowering learners to participate actively and critically in the learning process involve identifying and overcoming the causes of learning difficulties. The Guidelines for Full-Service / Inclusive Schools (Department of Basic Education, 2010), continues to state that "this approach is also consistent with a systemic and developmental approach to understanding problems leading to action planning. It is consistent with the latest international approaches that focus on providing quality "education for all" (p. 4).

With the above mentioned goals in mind, the road to implementation of the policy, White Paper 6, has not been easy owing to insufficient funding, lack of implementation capacity, lack of clear national guidelines and funding norms and standards linked to an expanded focus from disabilities to educational practices and institutions which become not just the responsibility of the historical special needs directorates, but the system as a whole (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007).

It seems that difficulties associated with the implementation of inclusive education appear to stem, in part, from the ambiguities within Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). An example of this is evident in the fact that the White Paper suggested the cost effectiveness of inclusion to be one of the benefits of inclusive policy (Department of Education, 2001). It is however difficult to foresee how significant transformations to the educational system in South Africa (e.g. mobilisation of out-of-school children with disabilities; infrastructure changes to schools) can be made without providing provincial departments with substantial increases in their short-term funding to help take these necessary first steps (Stofile, 2008; Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), this ambiguity in financial means and departmental responsibilities may be intentional. Jansen (2001) suggests that some South African policies are enacted for their political symbolism rather than their practicality; consequently, vague policies often get accepted and passed, but no one is held accountable for their implementation. Stofile (2008) actually reports that a chief complaint of education officials in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa was that they got the impression that the national Department of Education was not committed to the implementation of the inclusive policy and had tried to

relegate their responsibilities to others. The very same study by Stofile (2008) found that school principals reported having received no support or funding from the Department of Education to help sustain any progress they had made in the implementation of some of the broad strategies mentioned in the White Paper. It is evident that, without support and recognition, it is difficult for any school to make inclusion a reality.

According to Matland's (1995) ambiguity-conflict model of policy implementation, ambiguity in policy is the result of a lack of clarity in a policy document regarding the goals or the means by which such goals will be reached. When goals are not explicitly stated, there is uncertainty about the purpose of policy, and it is often misunderstood. Donohue and Bornman (2014) reported that, after studying the content of Education White Paper 6, it is clear that the proposed implementation strategies lack specificity and detail, thereby increasing the policy's ambiguity. Research of Stofile (2008) found that education officials in South Africa were unsure regarding the goals of inclusive education, with some officials reporting that they were unclear about how ordinary and special schools would be transformed into schools more suitable for inclusive education. Other officials were confused about the parameters of barriers to learning and exactly how these barriers would be addressed within inclusive schools (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). For example, trying to eliminate learners' intrinsic barriers (e.g. physical or sensory impairment) is more straightforward than trying to address some of their extrinsic barriers to learning (e.g. poverty or orphan-hood). If the goals of inclusion include addressing extrinsic barriers to learning, then schools would need more explicit guidelines from the Department of Education to help them accomplish this rather complicated task of implementing the inclusion policy (Donohue & Bornman 2014).

Even more unclear than the goals of Education White Paper 6, is the fact that the means by which these policies will be realised, are not explicitly stated. Generally, when new policies have been implemented, adequate funding and capacity to deliver these policies are assumed (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). Apart from the lack of funding, schools also currently lack teachers who have the knowledge and skills to teach a diverse group of learners in a single classroom without considerably increasing their workload. Education White Paper 6 states that "new curriculum and assessment initiatives will be required to focus on the inclusion of the full-range of diverse learning needs...since curricula create the most significant barrier to learning and exclusion for many learners." (Department of Education, 2001, 31-32) How the teachers are expected to undertake the task of adapting the curriculum to suit each learner's particular needs and pace of learning is not thoroughly detailed (Donohue & Bornman 2014). The Department of Education envisaged that many teachers would be reoriented to new methods of teaching via comprehensive training programmes that they provided. Training programmes that educate teachers how to accommodate and teach learners with disabilities are generally a week or two long, but teachers report that although these brief training programmes are helpful, they are insufficient (Stofile,

2008). These programmes tend to focus on developing a couple of skills, whereas teachers often need far more comprehensive training programmes (Donohue & Bornman 2014).

From the aspects discussed above, it is clear that ambiguities hinder the implementation of the inclusive education policy. In addition, Matland's (1995) ambiguity conflict model suggests that policy implementation is hindered by conflict stemming from differences in opinion between various stakeholders about how the policy will be executed. According to Matland (1995), "virtually all policy theorists have emphasised the importance of delegating policy to a sympathetic agency." (p. 157) Placing a policy in an agency where it is in conflict with existing policies and goals, leads to few resources, little support, and almost certain failure. This may be a contributing factor to the lack of progress in inclusive policy (Donohue & Bornman 2014). Within the Department of Education, there are various sectors that compete for limited resources. The current educational drives are in the expansion of Grade R (equivalent to kindergarten) and basic adult education programmes, with significantly fewer resources being dedicated to inclusive education (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). It is clear that South Africa's inclusive education policy is therefore characterised by both high conflict and ambiguity. Matland (1995) terms high conflict, high ambiguity policies as "symbolic implementation" policies, which almost always are associated with non-implementation and failure. He further states that symbolic policies tend to garner attention when they are first passed, but ultimately do not come to light; this very pattern is observed in the implementation of inclusive policy. When Education White Paper 6 was first published in 2001, South Africa seemed to be following the international trend toward inclusion, but subsequent policy implementation has made little progress over the past decade.

Santiago, Ferrara and Blank (2008) are, however, of the opinion that full-service schools represent a promising education approach that improves learning by addressing not only learners' academic needs but also their social, emotional, physical, and intellectual needs.

## **2.3.2 The different role-players in a full-service school**

### **2.3.2.1 Teachers**

The teacher's role is certainly one of the most crucial in inclusive education. Educators need a conceptual understanding of inclusion and the diverse needs of learners, including those with disabilities. According to the SIAS Draft Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (Department of Education, 2014), learning programmes and materials as well as assessment procedures have to be made accessible to all learners, and must accommodate the diversity of learning needs in order to facilitate learners' achievement to the fullest. Teachers need to take care not to label learners who are identified for additional support, because this will promote exclusionary practices (SIAS Draft Policy, Department of Basic Education, 2014). The

support that teachers give, according to this policy, will include differentiation of content, adjustment of classroom methodologies and classroom environment and applying the necessary accommodations in assessment and examinations.

In curriculum differentiation, teachers are encouraged to modify the content to some extent to help learners attain the knowledge, skills and competencies (Department of Basic Education, 2011). According to the guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom through curriculum and assessment policy statements (Directorate Inclusive Education, 2011), the key to differentiated teaching methods is the flexible use by teachers of a wide range of:

- Learning materials
- Methods of presentation
- Learning activities
- Lesson organisations

The classroom environment can be differentiated by paying attention to the psychological, social and physical factors that shape the learning environment (Directorate Inclusive Education, 2011). Both psychosocial and physical aspects of the learning environment impact on learners classroom experiences. In a large class, a hearing impaired child or those who struggle to concentrate may experience barriers to learning because of noise levels and seating arrangements (Directorate Inclusive Education, 2011). When it comes to differentiating assessment, the traditional practice of having all learners do the same assessment tasks at the same time has to be reconsidered. In this new way of thinking, teachers need an assessment approach and plan that is flexible enough to accommodate a range of learner needs (Directorate Inclusive Education, 2011). Differentiated assessment will enable learners of various abilities and with varied experience to best demonstrate what they know. According to the Directorate Inclusive Education (2011), as a teacher gets to know her learners, and as learner differences emerge, assessment needs to become more differentiated. The goal is to meet learners where they are and to help them progress to the next step in their learning. Thus, according to the Directorate Inclusive Education (2011), it is a cyclical process: assessment and instruction support and inform each other.

Once the teacher has exhausted all the possible strategies, he/she can consult with the SBST (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

This study will focus on facilitating the differentiation of the curriculum and assessment in the full-service school.



### **2.3.2.2 Parents**

Acknowledging the pivotal role of parents/caregivers in education and training is the key factor in the early identification of barriers (Department of Basic Education, 2014). According to the SIAS Draft Policy (Department of Basic Education, 2014), parents'/caregivers' observations and comments can lead the teacher to find the exact nature of the barriers that a learner experiences. Parents/caregivers should at all times be involved in the identification and assessment processes involving their child, and should be regarded as equal partners in this process (SIAS Draft Policy, Department of Basic Education, 2014). Parents/caregivers should be able to initiate contact with teachers regarding their child's progress. When choices have to be made about the learner's enrolment into a site where additional support is available, parents/caregivers need to have full information about all options so that they can make informed choices (SIAS Draft Policy, Department of Basic Education, 2014). However, it is common knowledge that parents or caregivers are not always available or knowledgeable to be able to make informed choices or to provide such information to teachers about the learner; it is often up to the teacher to decide what kind of support is needed for a learner.

The parents will not be the focus of this study, but it cannot be foreseen if this study may eventually indeed produce results on the role of the parents.

### **2.3.2.3 Institutional Level Support Teams (ILST)**

White Paper 6 states that Institutional Level Support Teams (ILSTs), also referred to as School Based Support Teams (SBSTs), should be pivotally involved in identifying learners that are "at risk" and to address barriers to learning. According to the previous SIAS Strategy School Pack of 2008 (Department of Education, 2008b), the SBSTs need to support educators in the SIAS process by providing opportunities for regular, collaborative problem-solving around areas of concern regarding learner support to barriers in learning. The SBSTs also have to assist in facilitating the provision of such support where needed. The Department of Education (2008b) further states that in each case a cycle of intervention and support by the educator/s facilitated by the SBST needs to be implemented before additional support from outside the site of learning is requested.

According to the Draft Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014) the SBST has the following functions (p. 32-33):

- Study the report provided by the teacher on barriers identified and support provided / implemented up to that point, and the impact of the support
- Assess support needed and develop a programme for teacher and parents

- Provide training / support to be implemented in the classroom if necessary
- Evaluate / monitor after the proposed programme has been implemented for a period agreed upon by the SBST, teacher and parents. The kind of support to be provided will determine the length of a formal report which should be compiled by the SBST
- Identify further School-Based Support assets and mobilise these
- Encourage collegial support / peer support.

According to the SIAS Draft Policy (Department of Basic Education, 2014), the core purpose of these teams is to support the teaching and learning process. This policy further states that the SBST's key functions that relate to teaching and learning include:

- Co-ordinating all learner, teacher, curriculum and school development support in the school. This includes linking the SBST to other school-based management structures and processes, or even integrating them in order to facilitate the co-ordination of activities and avoid duplication
- Collectively identifying school needs and, in particular, barriers to learning at learner, teacher, curriculum and school levels
- Collectively developing strategies to address these needs and barriers to learning. This should include a major focus on teacher development and parent consultation and support
- Drawing in the resources needed, from within and outside the school, to address these challenges
- Monitoring and evaluating the work of the team within an 'action-reflection' framework.

The principal has the responsibility to establish the SBST and to ensure that the team is functional and supported (Department of Basic Education, 2014). It is suggested by the Policy for SIAS (Department of Basic Education, 2014) that the following people make up the core members of this team (p. 33-34):

- Teachers involved with the teaching of the particular learner(s) who experience barriers to learning
- Teachers with specialised skills and knowledge in areas such as learning support, life skills/guidance, or counselling

- Teachers from the school: these could be teachers who volunteer because of their interest, or who represent various levels of the programme, e.g. Foundation Phase, or who represent various learning areas, e.g. language and communication
- Teachers who are involved directly in the management of the school: this could be the principal, the deputy principal or another member of the management team
- Teachers on the staff who have particular expertise to offer around a specific need or challenge
- Non-educators from the school: this includes administrative and care-taking staff
- Learner representatives at senior, further education or higher education levels: this is an important addition to the team if one wishes to encourage peer-support. In addition to the above core team who would meet on a regular basis to 'problem solve' particular concerns and challenges in the school, the following additional people could be brought into some of the SBST's meetings and processes to assist with particular challenges:
  - Parents / caregivers at early childhood centre or school levels: the inclusion of interested and specifically skilled parents would strengthen the team
  - Specific members of the District-based Support Team (DBST), including special/resource schools
  - Members of the local community who have a particular contribution to make to specific challenges
  - Teachers from other schools, particularly from full-service schools and those that may be in a cluster relationship with the school concerned.

The functioning of the ILST/SBST will be investigated in this study.

#### **2.3.2.4 The Principal and School Management Team (SMT)**

Whether a school truly adopts an inclusive approach, relies on the attitudes and actions of the principal and the school management team members (Department of Basic Education, 2010). The Department of Basic Education (2010) states: "adoption of an inclusive approach is established by embracing continuous change and nurturing this understanding among staff members." (p. 13) The administrative roles of the Principal and the SMT in ensuring that schools are established as inclusive centres of learning, care and support are numerous, but they can be grouped into the categories of leadership and management (Department of Education, 2010).

A report by the CSIR on their Inclusive Education Field Test done in 2008 (Department of Education, 2008b), states that most of the SMTs in the provinces included in the field test reported that when it comes to the implementation of White Paper 6, their difficulties arise either from a lack of understanding of their roles regarding inclusive strategies or from an inability or unwillingness to perform them. They further report that many appeared ignorant of the support mechanisms necessary for the effective implementation of inclusive education. Some members of the SMTs were reported to be not only unwilling but actively hostile towards the entire process. SMTs and principals play a crucial role in the leadership of inclusive education and implementation of the SIAS and ILP strategies at schools.

The role of the SMT will also be investigated in this study.

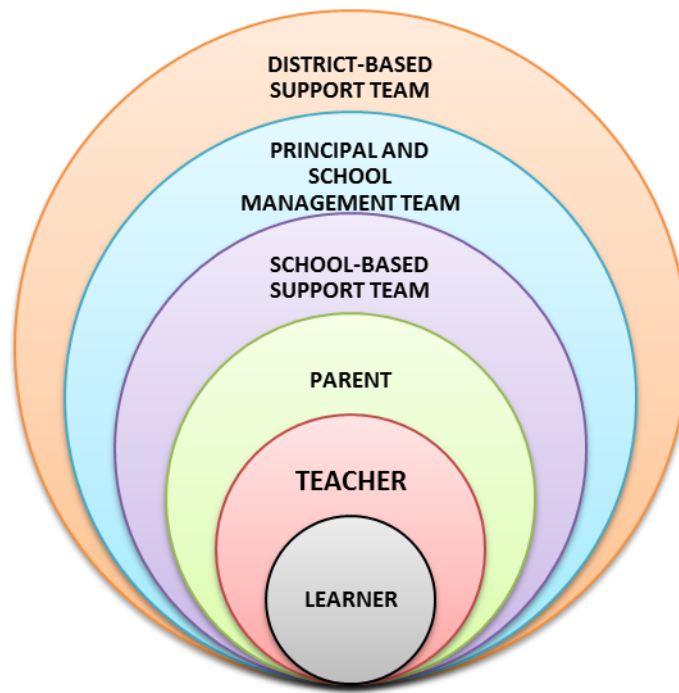
### **2.3.2.5 District-based Support Teams (DBSTs)**

Apart from the role-players indicated above, there is also the District-based Support Team (DBST). The SIAS Draft Policy (Department of Education, 2014) is aimed at all support staff in the District-based Support Team (DBST), including curriculum and school managers, human resource planning and development coordinators, social workers, therapists, psychologists and other health professionals, working within the school system.

According to Department of Education (2008b, p 100) the role of the staff on the DBST is to:

- Discuss and evaluate the request by the school for additional support in consultation with the parents / caregivers, teachers and institution-level support team members
- Plan support provision to schools, teachers and learners
- Monitor support provision in a mentoring and consultative way.

The different role-players in a full-service school and their place of involvement with the learner who experiences barriers to learning, as discussed above, can be illustrated in the following Figure. As indicated in 2.3.2.1, parents or care-givers are not always available or knowledgeable to be able to make informed choices or to provide such information to teachers about the learner; it is often up to the teacher to decide what kind of support is needed for a learner. Therefore the parents will not be the focus of this study. In this light, the parents are not placed in closest proximity to the learner in the Figure, but the teacher instead.



**Figure 2-1: Different role-players in a full-service school.**

Kuyini and Desai (2007) highlight the fact that policies on the constitution of the various teams and their functioning alone will not ensure the success of inclusive education in schools. These authors indicate that teachers and teachers’ attitudes play an essential role in ensuring the success of inclusive education, and that successful inclusion hinges on developing and sustaining positive attitudes. The role of teachers’ attitudes and perceptions in the application of a government’s policy therefore cannot be emphasised too much. These matters are discussed next.

## **2.4 TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

According to Lomofsky, Roberts and Mvambi (2004), teachers are expected to give inclusion their full support, and have to be sensitive, not only to particular needs of learners, but also their own attitudes and feelings. Such attitudes and feelings are usually based on perception.

According to Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana (2001), perception refers to how people see or understand the meaning of things around them. Educators will attach positive meaning to the special needs of learners in the classroom if they have a positive perception of learners. If educators perceive learners in need of additional support negatively, they will probably behave negatively towards such learners, as perception is the basis of behaviour (Purkey & Novak, 1996).

In their South African study of teachers' perceptions of the definition of inclusive education, Smit and Mpya (2011) report that their participants (the teachers) did not have a good understanding of inclusive education, but were clear regarding the meaning of the concepts education for all, disabilities, barriers to learning, etc. All their participants indicated that inclusive education promotes education for all children, irrespective of their disability, so that they can be educated in the same classroom with other learners of their age. Smit and Mpya (2011) further report that participants (educators) in their study who had a little understanding of inclusion, believed that learners who experience barriers to learning need to be placed in separate classes. This was the previous norm in South Africa before the education system was changed to accommodate all. Learners then were separated according to race, colour and various disabilities (Smit and Mpya, 2011). Smit and Mpya (2011), reports the following responses from their group of participants (educators) defining inclusive education:

- "It is simply making space for all children, including those with disabilities and learning barriers and putting them together with those who are physically functional."
- "It is a learning education which includes learners with learning barriers, learners who are physically challenged or impaired in the mainstream school."
- "Inclusive education includes all learners, irrespective of their greater or lesser difficulties, in gaining access to education in the mainstream."
- "Inclusive education is the response to the diverse needs of all learners and it ensures quality education through appropriate curricula."
- "It is the education whereby all learners, irrespective of their disabilities, are included in the mainstream of a school."
- "Inclusive education caters for all learners irrespective of any disability. All the learners can show their potential."
- "Inclusive education is a type of education which allows learners with special education needs to be accommodated in a normal school."

Smit and Mpya (2011) observed an interesting manifestation, namely, that the educators who participated in their study practised what they preached, as their classes were inclusive in terms of content differentiation and classroom environment. When it came to their participants' views on inclusive education, all the participants were positive about inclusion (Smit & Mpya, 2011). They all supported the system because of its non-discriminating nature. Smit and Mpya (2011) report that their participants pointed out that the system gives every learner an opportunity to

participate fully in the process of learning. The participants also indicated that it was a positive step the government had taken, even though they viewed it from different perspectives. Some participants also mentioned the issue of drop-outs at schools, which were caused by things like the inflexible curriculum content which does not respond to the educational needs of all learners (Smit & Mpya, 2011). An inflexible curriculum is one of the main problems, because it does not accommodate all learners, such as those who are moderately physically disabled, or who have minor hearing or visual impairments. These categories of learners tend to leave school, not because they do not have talent or are unintelligent, but because the system does not accommodate them (Smit & Mpya, 2011).

The most stressful aspects for teachers working with inclusion emanate, according to Engelbrecht and Green (2007), from aspects like limited contact with parents, ineffective teaching provision for other learners when including learners with barriers to learning, matters perceived to have an impact on the teachers' competences (for example teacher turnover and transfers, class ratios and heavy workload), absence of support strategies for teachers, and inherent short attention span and poor communication skills of the learners with disabilities which disturb the other learners.

Engelbrecht and Green (2007) warn that any attempt to train teachers for inclusion should consider teachers' attitudes, beliefs and concerns and their stress and coping skills. It will be necessary to allow time for well-planned and adequate training and professional development programmes which will alleviate teachers' doubts and resistance (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman & Earle, 2006).

Villa & Thousand (2003) state that the one important aspect in the discussion around teacher attitude and coping with stressors is the fact that teachers themselves need to realise their legal responsibilities for meeting the needs of all learners in the least restrictive environment. To be able to achieve this obligation, teachers need to develop positive beliefs, values and attitudes about diversity, change, collaboration and learning (Mitchell, 2004; Topping & Maloney, 2005).

Engelbrecht and Green (2007) further posit that the success of the implementation of inclusion policies relies on teachers' acceptance of the policies, their belief in the value of the policies, and their ability to cope with the demands of the changing education system.

According to White Paper 6, classroom teachers will be the primary resource and bear the responsibility for achieving inclusive education (Department of Education, 2001). However, despite a more equitable allocation of resources across schools since 1994, lack of instructional capacity - with specific reference to suitably trained educators and adequate support services - constrain teachers' implementation of inclusive education (Smit, Russo & Engelbrecht, 2010).

Personal issues, including the teachers' perception of their own professional competence and knowledge necessary for the successful inclusion of learners with barriers to learning in their classrooms, have also been cited in a number of studies as being of particular concern to teachers (Forlin, 2001; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002a; Sharma et al., 2006).

From the perceptions reported above, it seems that there are numerous stressors that can influence teachers' perceptions. Some of these stressors will be discussed next.

## **2.5 POSSIBLE STRESSORS FOR TEACHERS IN FULL-SERVICE SCHOOLS**

The most common stressors for teachers in full-service schools appear to be the following, as found in a number of studies.

### **2.5.1 Teachers' competency to teach in an inclusive classroom**

A study on pre-service educators' attitudes towards inclusive education by Mdikana, Nthangase and Mayekiso (2007), done in South Africa, indicated a dire need for special skills for teachers teaching learners with special educational needs. This result confirmed an earlier result from a study conducted by Center and Ward (1987) in which regular teachers indicated that their attitudes to inclusive education reflected lack of confidence in their instructional skills. According to Mdikana, Nthangase and Mayekiso (2007), this result is understandable because teaching an inclusive classroom requires special skills. Most teachers in South Africa are not trained to teach inclusive classes, and according to Mdikana, Nthangase and Mayekiso (2007), this creates a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness. As a result, the concept of inclusive education is provoking anxiety in many teachers. Swart, Pettipher, Engelbrecht, Eloff, Oswald, Ackerman and Prozesky (2000) also found that teachers' perception of their own knowledge, skills and training in inclusive education as inadequate, influenced their implementation of inclusive education.

### **2.5.2 Financial, material and human resources**

From the study of Mdikana, Nthangase and Mayekiso (2007), it is also clear that a vast majority of their participants felt that there is a need for special resources to adequately support learners who experience barriers to learning. In terms of White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), inclusive education will only be introduced to schools when human and material resources have been provided. Some primary schools would be converted into full-service schools, and for these, support services, structures and facilities would be made available. The White Paper 6 further states that special schools will be converted into resource centres where the practitioners will be expected to capacitate those who are in regular and full-service schools because of the expertise they already have (Mdikana, Nthangase and Mayekiso, 2007).



Class size and overcrowded classrooms can also be a possible stressor to teachers who have to teach a large number of learners of whom some need support owing to the barriers to learning they experience. Ntsanwisi (2008) reports a ratio of between 25 and 55 learners to one teacher in the schools that participated in her research in Limpopo. As Khoele (2008) also states, paying individual attention to specific needs of learners with barriers to learning becomes difficult in overcrowded classrooms, and adds to teachers' stress.

### **2.5.3 Lack of support for teachers**

Swart et al. (2000) found in their study that a lack of educational support to teachers as experienced by the teachers in their study, was a stressor in their implementation of inclusive education.

Weeks and Erradu (2013) found in their study that educators teaching at full-service schools were simply being asked to adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of their learners, without proper training to do so. They also found that there was a lack of expertise and qualified personnel among education department officials to give clear directions for learner support. Weeks and Erradu (2013) concluded that the national Department of Education and the various provincial departments could do more to support educators in their provision of support to learners who experience barriers to learning.

For such stressors to be adequately addressed, it seems that teacher professional development and in-service training in learner support are necessary. This matter is discussed next.

## **2.6 TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING IN LEARNER SUPPORT**

According to the Department of Basic Education (2014), all staff members need to be involved in support activities.

In the light of the foregoing, the question can be asked how the teachers in South African full-service schools indeed bear the responsibility to provide support to learners who experience barriers to learning, and what their own experiences of their own abilities and rights as teachers of learner support are. Smit, Russo and Engelbrecht (2010) highlight inter alia the following rights of teachers in providing learner support:

- The right to receive adequate training
- The right to receive adequate resources
- The right to receive adequate support services.

Many teachers in South Africa are ill-prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners, and combined with a lack of teacher support, it is not strange for negative attitudes towards inclusion to develop among these teachers (Nel, Müller, Hugo, Helldin, Bäckmann, Dwyer & Skarlind, 2011). However, teachers' attitudes can be changed if they are provided with well-planned information and the necessary support structures, according to Nel et al. (2011). Smit, Russo and Engelbrecht (2010) posit that it remains essential that educators receive the training, resources and support to which they are entitled, and that the class sizes and workloads are kept within reasonable limits. Mdikana, Nthangase and Mayekiso (2007) highlight the fact that White Paper 6 acknowledges the significance of empowering the teachers. According to the Department of Education (2006), teachers cannot be expected to facilitate learning in inclusive classrooms if they are not empowered to do so. Continued professional development is envisaged (Mdikana, Nthangase & Mayekiso, 2007). Tertiary institutions have been challenged to develop programmes for diversity learning and to start introducing programmes in inclusive education. This implies that inclusive education is likely to succeed if teachers receive pre-service training in educating learners with special educational needs (Mdikana, Nthangase & Mayekiso, 2007).

Pre-service and in-service teacher education efforts in South Africa have in recent years focussed on the development of classroom skills, with specific reference to skills in behaviour management in classrooms with diverse groups of students (Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel & Malinen, 2011).

Training is regarded as essential for the successful implementation of inclusion (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Paul, Rosselli & Evans, 1995; Rouse & Florian, 1996), with teachers needing not only knowledge and understanding of barriers to learning, but also practical training in teaching strategies which facilitate inclusion (Pivik, McComas & Laflamme, 2002).

According to Oswald (2007), in-service teacher education has become the vehicle for bringing about planned change in education systems as witnessed in the worldwide movement towards inclusive education. Currently there is quite a wide range of professional development opportunities in the context of school improvement inform programmes for the implementation of inclusive education in schools and classrooms (Van Kraayenoord, 2003). According to Oswald (2007), many of these in-service development programmes that were intended to promote inclusive education, have proved both inadequate and inappropriate, resulting in negative feelings towards the implementation of inclusive education (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Buell, Hallam & Gamel-McCormick, 1999; McLeskey, Waldrom, So, Swanson & Lovelad, 2001).

The increasing learner diversity in schools, larger class sizes and the intensifying needs of learners all contribute to a demanding work environment for teachers (Sands, Kozleski & French, 2000). According to Voltz, Brazil & Ford (2001) teachers and support personnel need to break through the walls of isolation to form collaborative partnerships with one another, parents, learners

and community members to combat stress and to accept ownership of all learners in order to provide quality education for all learners. Oswald (2007) stresses that teachers have a significant role to play in the development of schools as inclusive school communities. And to this end, pre-service teacher education is indispensable. In addition, the development of schools as inclusive school communities can serve as a powerful incentive for in-service professional development (Stanovich & Jordan, 2002).

Pre-service teacher education can play a significant role in preparing teachers during a process of educational transformation (Oswald, 2007). Booth, Nes and Stromstad (2003) state that pre-service teacher education contributes to the broader educational experience of teachers. Higher education institutions need to develop new structures, new programmes with changed curricula and new names, and new ways of organising teaching and learning, in order to empower teachers to remove barriers to quality education for all learners (Oswald, 2007). Oswald (2007) further states that these institutions can also directly work with teachers and their schools to support inclusive developments. It is self-evident that there will be great variations in content and organisation of pre-service programmes between countries (Oswald, 2007). According to Booth et al. (2003) it is, however, a worrying factor that in many countries student teachers still enter their profession with little understanding of inclusive values and what these mean for teaching and learning in schools.

Haug (2003) contends that how pre-service teachers have been prepared for teaching learners with diverse learning needs in schools is a good indicator of how prepared they will be to meet and teach the complete heterogeneity of learners, and to function professionally within an inclusive school. Renzaglia, Hutchins and Lee (1997) argue that one of the problematic areas for teacher education in higher education institutions seems to be how to impact on the values, beliefs and attitudes of pre-service teachers. They further state that, perhaps for this reason, recent teacher education research has shifted from a focus on changing teacher behaviours to changing teacher beliefs.

The focus of this study will, however, be on how this research can endeavour to contribute to in-service training by firstly establishing what the state of affairs is regarding learner support in a full-service school, and to provide guidelines on how Participatory Action Research and Action Learning could empower teachers in this role.

According to Van Kraayenoord (2003), there is currently a range of professional development initiatives in the context of school improvement programmes for the implementation of inclusive education in South African schools.

In the Strategic Plan 2011 – 2014 of the Department of Basic Education (2011), it is stated that policies are being finalised that will see the National Department developing new training packages, to a large extent through distance education and e-Education, and leveraging the development of relevant training programmes by universities and private training providers. Plans for a monitoring system for the development of teachers, to be run by the South African Council for Educators (SACE), are already at an advanced stage (Van Kraayenoord, 2003). The Department further state that this system will require teachers to report on their professional development activities that they had undertaken on an annual basis (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

As stated above, this study will endeavour to contribute to teachers' professional development/in-service training by hopefully yielding results that can be implemented as guidelines for learner support in full-service schools.

## **2.7 DEVELOPING SUPPORT PROGRAMMES FOR TEACHERS IN FULL-SERVICE SCHOOLS**

In this regard, the role of the school's management team is crucial. Engelbrecht, Oswald and Forlin (2006) emphasise the importance of school principals' leadership roles in effecting change. This view is endorsed by Nel et al (2011), reporting that principals can foster a climate of collegiality and collaboration among teachers.

McLeskey and Waldron (2002b) emphasise that professional development should use coaching and other follow-up procedures, be collaborative, be embedded in the daily lives of teachers and provide opportunities for continuous growth. In this way collaborative professional development can be critical in developing, and also in maintaining, inclusive schools (Oswald, 2007).

When it comes to support in the school setting, the sharing of successes and difficulties in developing inclusive cultures and practices in classrooms reduces isolation, creates opportunities for open discussions and critical feedback, encourages risk taking and provides more and continuous opportunities to learn from trusted colleagues (Ainscow, Howes, Farrell & Frankham, 2003; Carrington & Robinson, 2004; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002b).

Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2004) in Engelbrecht & Green (2007, p. 144) explored ways of learning in schools to promote the successful implementation of inclusive education. They managed to stimulate self-questioning, creativity and action that have proved to be key to powerful learning and support for teachers, using the following approaches:

- Mutual observation of classroom practices, followed by structured discussion of what happened

- Group discussion of a video recording of one colleague teaching
- Discussion of statistical evidence regarding test results, attendance registers or exclusion records
- Data from interviews with learners
- Staff development exercises based on case study material or interview data
- Changes in curriculum
- School-to-school cooperation, including mutual visits to help collect evidence.

## **2.8 SUMMARY**

This study will strive to provide guidelines for such professional development in learner support in full-service schools, through attempting to establish how such development can be facilitated with the teachers, via the PALAR methodology of this study. The methodology for this study is described in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Through this study, I intended to facilitate the learner support practice of teachers in full-service schools by conducting Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR). In this chapter, the research design and methodology used in this study are described and explained. The choice of PALAR as research design, as well as the methods of data generation and analysis chosen, is theoretically justified. Finally, the ethical considerations in this study and the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness of the findings are also discussed.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH AIMS**

##### **3.2.1 General Aim**

The purpose and aim of this research was to investigate and establish how learner support by teachers in a full-service school can be facilitated in a collaborative way.

##### **3.2.2 Specific Aims**

The specific aims of this research were to establish -

- what the nature of the current conversion of the school to a full-service school is
- what the nature of the current learner support practice in the school is
- what the teachers' views and needs regarding the current learner support practice in their full-service school are
- what kind of collaborative support, in the opinion of the teachers, will enhance their support of the learners in their school
- how this support can be facilitated.

#### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

##### **3.3.1 Research design**

A research design is a formal plan for conducting a study, and it specifies exactly how the study will be carried out (Mertler, 2009). It is crucial to conceptualise the design of a study prior to its

commencement, carefully considering all aspects of the study and how they fit with the paradigm of the researcher. The paradigm and the rest of the methodology are described below.

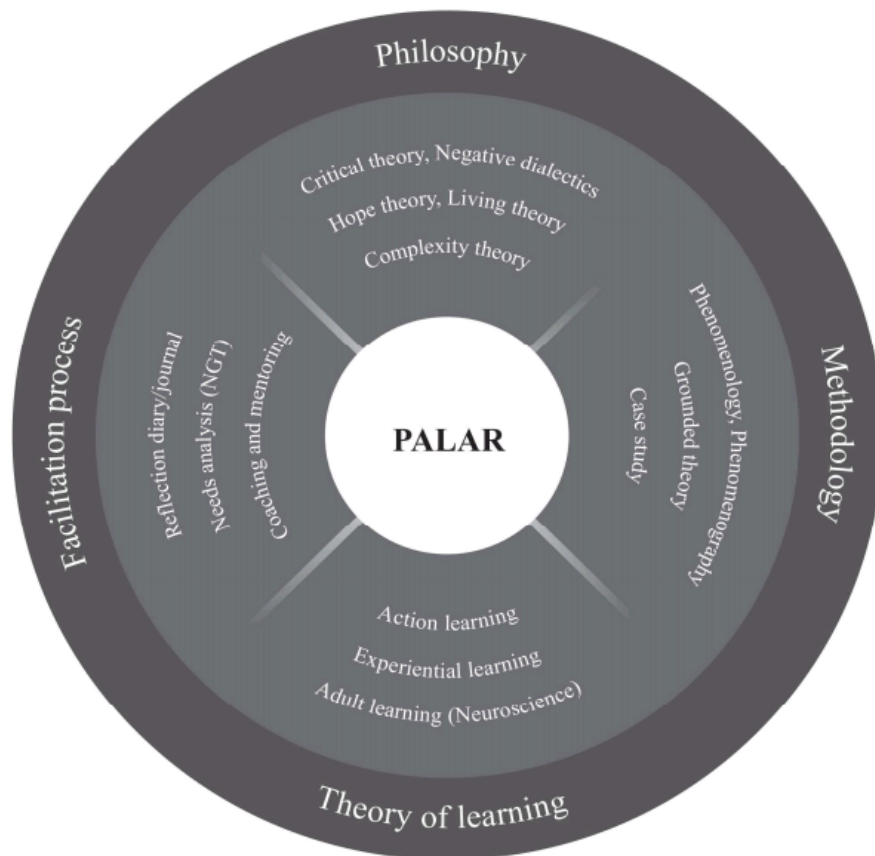
Against the above background, a qualitative approach was indicated for this study, with participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) as research design, as described below.

A qualitative approach to research is one in which the inquirer gains knowledge based on a constructivist paradigm (i.e. the meanings constructed from participants' individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or an advocacy/participatory paradigm (i.e. political, issue-orientated, collaborative, or change orientated), or both (Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell (2003), the qualitative approach uses research designs such as narratives, phenomenology, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, case studies or action research. In this way the researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data (Creswell, 2003). According to Zuber-Skerritt (2002), action research involves critical, collaborative research into complex practical problems, involving people at coalface and being accountable to stakeholders through continuous reflection on action, evaluation and critical self-evaluation. Zuber-Skerritt (2012) further describes Action Research as an alternative design to traditional social science research because it is practical, participatory and collaborative, equalitarian and emancipatory, and critical.

PALAR is an acronym for participatory action learning and action research (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). Zuber-Skerritt (2015) states that it is a holistic, integrative concept that incorporates related concepts and values such as participation, collaboration, communication, community of practice, networking, and synergy. Zuber-Skerritt (2015) further explains that it is also related to ALAR, an integrated concept of action learning (AL, traditionally used in organisation and management development) and action research (AR, traditionally developed in social work, education, and higher education).

Zuber-Skerritt (2015) states that "PALAR is not static; it is an ongoing, emergent genre in the large family of action research, including action learning (AL), lifelong action learning (LAL), action research (AR), action learning and action research (ALAR), educational action research (EAR), collaborative action research (CAR), participatory action research (PAR), critical participatory action research (CPAR), participatory action learning and action research (PALAR), action science (AS), appreciative inquiry (AI), and so forth" (p. 6).

According to Zuber-Skerritt, Kearney and Fletcher (2015), the paradigm of participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) constitutes a philosophy, a methodology, a theory of learning, and a facilitation process, as shown in Figure 3-1.



**Figure 3-1: Theoretical Framework for PALAR (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015, p. 110)**

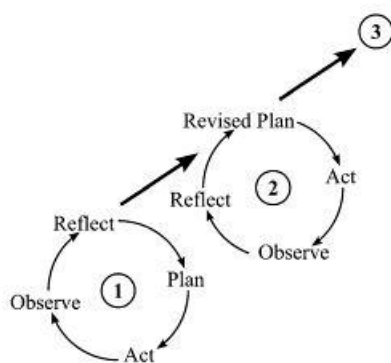
Zuber-Skerritt et al. (2015) further states that PALAR as a philosophy is embedded in the theories outlined above. The four groups of theories indicated in the Figure are therefore all implicit in the methodology of the PALAR process applied in the generation and interpretation of the data in this research.

The main methodologies used in PALAR include case study methodology, grounded theory, phenomenology, and phenomenography — “a qualitative research methodology with a non-dualist viewpoint (i.e., there is only one world, but one that people experience and describe in many different ways)” (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015). According to Zuber-Skerritt et al. (2015) PALAR’s theory of learning includes adult learning theory in general, and action learning and experiential learning in particular. PALAR as a facilitation process has included, among other processes, needs analysis (using the Nominal Group Technique), reflection diary or journal, and mentoring and coaching (Zuber-Skerritt et al. (2015).



PALAR is created by combining PAR and AL, in which a solution is created with and by the participants in the research project, including the researcher/facilitator as a co-researcher who joins to help improve or change the social situation for the better. PALAR is designed to bring about social change, to expose unjust practices or environmental dangers and recommend actions for change. The practitioner is actively involved in the cause for which the research is conducted. It is precisely this commitment that is a necessary part of being a practitioner or a member of a community of practice (Zuber-Skerrit, 2011).

PALAR comprises a spiral of cycles which involves the repetition of the cycle more than once, and more if necessary. The cycle involves planning, acting, observing and reflecting on practices and changes (Zuber-Skerrit, 2011). Hereafter the whole cycle starts again, and learning takes place through these actions in the cycle.



**Figure 3-2: The Spiral of Action Research Cycles (Zuber-Skerrit, 2011).**

PALAR was used as research design for this study because the researcher worked with the participants to bring about change for the better.

My PALAR spiral consisted of two cycles. The main objectives during each part of each cycle are set out in paragraph 3.3.2.4

PAR is deemed appropriate for this research because the aim of this study, as the facilitation of learner support by teachers in a collaborative way, encompasses transforming the current practices and conditions in the school. Through Action Learning (AL), the participants learnt from concrete experience, through group discussion, trial and error, discovery and learning, from one another on how learner support could be facilitated better. In this study a solution was created with and by the participants in the research project, including the researcher/facilitator as a co-researcher who joined to help improve or change the situation in the school for the better.

Action learning involves a group of people (called a set) working together for a concentrated period of time (Zuber-Skerrit, 2011). The focus is essentially on the individual. It is the individual who comes to the set to learn from experience and to move on to more effective action. The set enables this process to take place through concentrated group effort focused on the issues of each individual (McGill & Beaty, 2001). The focus group discussions held by the participants is referred to as Action Learning Set (ALS) Meetings (McGill & Beaty, 2001).

A critical approach was used in the generation and interpretation of data. Participants made use of critical reflection to generate and analyse data.

### **3.3.2 Research methodology**

#### **3.3.2.1 Site or social network selection**

White Paper 6 indicates that thirty (30) schools will be launched as full-service models for implementation in the rest of the country (Department of Education, 2001). One full-service school in the North-West Province was selected for this research. The school is a primary school which was converted into a full-service school in 2011/2012. This school is a suburban school in a lower socio-economic environment with limited facilities, staff, funding and resources. Overall the school employs about 32 teachers of whom some are appointed by the School Governing Body.

Entry into the school for the research was possible and reasonably easy because I was previously a teacher at the school and had established relationships of trust with the teachers who had previously expressed their views on the functioning of their (at that time: our) full-service school to me. Hence entry into the school was easily accomplished. The principal and staff were cognisant of the research I wanted to undertake in the school and they all granted their consent to be participants in the research (see ethical considerations further down). Throughout the research process, I focussed on staying objective and open to every participant's contributions. I did not favour some of the participants because I knew them better than the others and I made it a priority to foster a relationship of trust between me and all of them.

#### **3.3.2.2 Position of the researcher**

I worked closely with the school, in particular with a group of teachers from the school (see 3.3.2.1). Being employed as a teacher previously at the school, I had established relationships of trust with the principal and teachers who had previously expressed their views on the conversion of their (at that time: our) school to a full-service school, to me.

At first, management (the principal) was very open to my entering the school and scheduling Action Learning Set meetings with the participants. After sitting in on the first few meetings, I got

the idea that they were not happy with some of the responses and comments of the participants, and that he felt it was developing a negative image of the school. I assured management that the school and staff's names would not be mentioned in the dissertation, but he was still unhappy with some colleagues' negative attitudes, comments and incorrect understanding of the full-service school system. This resulted in the principal refusing that participants send me reflections without him reading through it first. Of course that would have a direct influence on the credibility of the participants' reflections, and I had to come up with new ideas to get clear and accurate feedback from the participants.

The feedback from the participants was consequently gathered through conversation during ALS meetings, casual conversation before or after meetings, and in some cases, casual interaction where I came across some participants unplanned, in social settings.

### **3.3.2.3 Participants**

I started by inviting all the teachers in the school to form part of the action research set. In the end, only six teachers indicated that they wanted to participate. All six these teachers were willing to participate voluntarily and gave informed consent during the initial discussions and before the research commenced.

Three of the participants were Foundation Phase teachers (Grades 1 – 3), and one of them was also the Head of Department for the Foundation Phase of the school. The other three participants were Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers (Grade 4 to 7) teaching Languages, Mathematics, Life Skills, Economic and Management Sciences and Social Sciences. One of these participants was also the Head of Department for the Intermediate and Senior Phase of the school. One of the other participants was the head of the ILST and was responsible for all the full-service aspects of the school.

### **3.3.2.4 Data generation**

Action researchers mostly use qualitative data generation strategies like document analysis, interviews, focus group discussions, observation, journals and artefacts (Mills, 2007). In this study data were generated by means of action learning set meetings (focus group discussions), observation, reflections, qualitative questionnaires and interviews, each within two cycles as is regular in PALAR. The empirical study (the two cycles) took 10 months to complete. The cycles and the generation strategies are described next.

#### **3.3.2.4.1 Cycle 1**

- a) Action Learning Set Meetings (Focus Group Discussions)

Action learning set meetings or focus group discussions were used to generate data from teachers as co-researchers to address the aspects in the research question and sub-questions. Special emphasis was on what Sagor (2009) refers to as impact questions to generate data before and during evaluation of the action plan and reflection on the whole process. Focus group discussions were implemented because one person's comments can trigger other useful responses from the other participants in the action learning set (ALS). This promoted action learning by repeating the cycle. Such group discussions enabled the individual participants to discuss their own interpretations of how they implement learner support, and to express their individual views on possible changes they might effect in this regard. These ALSs were held regularly with the purpose to elicit teachers' views on the current status of learner support, their views on how a collaborative learner support strategy can be facilitated, and to develop strategies on more effective ways of providing learner support. The focus group discussions were held with all six the participants present. There were three focus group discussions held in cycle 1.

During the first ALSs of the participants, a SWOT analysis was done to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the school when it comes to being a full-service school and supporting the learners in the classroom.

A SWOT analysis involves the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a certain organisation, work area or group (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). According to Zuber-Skerritt (2013) strengths and weaknesses are internal to the organisation, work area or group. Strengths are the things that are done well and are advantageous or beneficial. Weaknesses are inadequacies or things that are not done well. Zuber-Skerritt further explains that these things may affect success adversely. On the other hand, there are opportunities and threats that are internal or external to the organisation, work area or group (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). Opportunities include factors such as current or possible trends, future events or developments which could be used to increase the likelihood of success (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). According to Zuber-Skerritt (2013), they are the factors that may be taken advantage of. Threats include factors such as current or possible trends, future events or developments which may hinder or decrease the likelihood of success. These are the factors that may need preventative action (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013).

Each participant was requested to first make notes by him/herself, identifying what strengths and opportunities exist in the school to provide good support to learners with barriers to learning in the school. They also had to think about what weaknesses and threats within their school can prevent them from supporting learners with barriers to learning effectively. After the participants had been given time to make these notes by themselves, the participants started discussing what they thought were their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, while one of the

participants drew up a final combined SWOT analysis of the individual opinions on the board, containing all the factors identified by all the participants.

After all the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in regard to supporting learners with barriers to learning in the school had been identified by the participants, the participants decided to use the time before the next meeting to think about what they had identified and how this/these could be used or changed for the positive.

The nominal group technique (NGT) was used so that the participants could identify the biggest priorities to address in the school if they want to collaboratively offer quality support to learners in a full-service school.

The NGT is an effective method for collecting feedback from a group of participants, especially for needs analysis (identifying issues, concerns and expectations) and for evaluation purposes, e.g. collecting positive and negative feedback on an activity, such as a workshop, course or a whole programme (Zuber-Skerritt, 1998). NGT is appropriate because it is a very effective way to do a needs analysis.

The next time the participants met, the nominal group technique was used so that the participants could identify the biggest priorities to address in the school if they wanted to collaboratively offer quality support to learners in a full-service school.

The focal question for the NGT needs analysis was: What kind of support, in your view, will enhance your support to learners in your school and/or your classroom?

The procedure of the NGT comprised the following five steps:

Step 1: Participants brainstormed individually, and wrote their responses to the general, focal question (about five minutes).

Step 2: The individual participants' lists were then compiled into a public list (on the board) by a round robin collection of ideas without any discussions at this stage. The rule was that criticism and judgement of any items were forbidden.

Step 3: The facilitator led the subsequent discussion and clarification of the public statements, collating any overlapping statements on the board and numbering all collated statements.

Step 4: This discussion was followed by ranking. Each participant was asked to select from the list of public statement five items that he/she considered most important, to write these on three separate small paper slips (provided by the researcher) and then to rank them from 1: Most important to 5: Least important.

Step 5: Finally, the participants were requested to go place their slips next to the statement showing their first, second and third priorities.

The three ranking slips provided (a) instant feedback of results to the group, and (b) the basis for a final prioritised list presented in table form. The facilitator calculated the scores by writing each item/statement in the first column, the number of mentions as 1 under the second column, mentions as 2 under the third column and number of mentions as 3 under the fourth column, as 4 under the sixth column and as 5 under the last column. The weight given to the second column was 5 points, third column 4 points, fourth column 3 points, fifth column 2 points and last column 1 point – multiplied by the number of mentions for each item.

#### b) Observations

Observation was also implemented. According to Cohen, Manion and Morisson (2007) the distinctive feature of observation as a research process is that it offers an investigator the opportunity to gather “live” data from naturally occurring social situations. The use of immediate awareness, or direct cognition, as a principal mode of research thus has the potential to yield valid or authentic data (Cohen, Manion & Morisson, 2007), which is observation’s unique strength. Robson (2002) states that there are other attractions in its favour: what people do may differ from what they say they do, and observation provides a reality check.

I, as the participant researcher, first observed how the participants initially supported the learners. After that, in the focus group discussions, the participants themselves suggested alternative ways of learner support, which they then implemented, and I again observed how they did that. The participants also observed their own and their colleagues’ practices and the implementation of the suggested strategies in their classes. They were then requested to reflect on their implementation of the strategies.

#### c) Reflections

Reflective journals are often called learning journals, research journals, or log books. Zuber-Skerrit (2013) describes journals as “strong heuristic tools for reflection as well as for formulating the essence of this reflection in written form. The research journal is a legitimate source of data and a qualitative research method (p. 2).” It constitutes the researcher’s subjective perspective that needs to be triangulated with the perspectives of the participants (Zuber-Skerrit, 2013). Whitehead and McNiff (2006) encourage researchers to invite their research participants to maintain their reflective journals, or learning portfolios, recording instances where they learnt something new, showing their reflection on their learning, and commenting on its possible significance. Zuber-Skerrit (2013) states that participants learn to reflect on significant, critical events on a daily basis, reflecting on these events and personal learning, and planning for

subsequent action as a result of the process. Whitehead and McNiff (2006) also state that reflective journals can be done by using a range of strategies, which include written, oral and perceived data (p. 69).

The participants were requested to write reflective journals about their thoughts, learning and experiences in their classrooms on the implementation of these support strategies. The principal, however, was not keen on the participants making their reflective journals available to me without him seeing it first. Hence in this cycle, he allowed them only one collaborative reflection which he wanted to see first before letting me have it.

#### 3.3.2.4.2 Cycle 2

##### a) Action Learning Set Meetings (Focus Group Discussions)

The purpose of the Action Learning Set Meetings during cycle two was to reflect on cycle one and the participants' implementation of the alternative strategies to determine which parts of the original action plan had to be amended in order to be successful. There were two focus group discussions held in cycle 2.

##### b) Qualitative questionnaire

Because the principal did not want to allow reflections by the participants, he agreed that they could fill in a questionnaire about their perceptions of being employed in a full-service school as well as how they felt about their own skills to identify and support learners with barriers to learning. Hence a questionnaire had to be compiled.

Since a standardised instrument was not available to obtain the data required for this purpose, I as researcher developed a set of open-ended questions for the questionnaires. (See ANNEXURE H) The questions in the questionnaire were compiled from the focus group discussions, which had exposed the above-mentioned issues among the participants that were deemed relevant to obtain more information about.

##### c) Interviews

An interview was used in this study to embark on what Holstein and Gubrium (1997) describe as a reality-constructing and meaning-making occasion. Nieuwenhuis (2008) explains that semi-structured interviews are commonly used in research projects to corroborate data emerging from other data sources. It usually requires the participant to answer a set of predetermined questions, and it does allow for probing and clarification of answers. The researcher needs to be attentive to the responses of the participant so that so that he/she can identify new emerging lines of inquiry

that are directly related to the phenomenon being studied, and then explore and probe these (Nieuwenhuis, 2008).

A semi-structured individual interview was conducted with the principal of the school, to allow the principal an opportunity to give his viewpoint on being the manager of a full-service school and the learner support procedures in the school. Once he had granted his permission, an appointment was made for the interview. Telephonic (sms) reminders were sent a day prior to the interview.

The main objectives of each data generation strategy in the two cycles as described above, are set out in the Table below:

<b>Cycle</b>	<b>Data Generation</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Data Documentation</b>
Cycle 1	Action learning set meetings (Focus group discussions)	SWOT analysis was done to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the school when it comes to being a full-service school and supporting the learners in the classroom.  Nominal group technique was used so that the participants can identify the biggest priorities to address in the school if they want to collaboratively offer quality support to learners in a full-service school.	SWOT analysis  Outcome of NGT as recorded on the blackboard.  Discussions in meetings recorded and transcribed.
	Observations	To determine how the teachers initially supported the learners as well as how they implemented the strategies suggested in the group discussions.	Observational notes
	Reflections	To determine the teachers' overall feelings toward being employed at a full-service school and how they feel about their own skills to accommodate learners with	Typed reflection of participants.



		barriers to learning in the classroom.  To get feedback on the ideas and actions decided on during ALS meetings, if these were implemented and what the outcomes were.	
Cycle 2	Action learning set meetings (Focus group meetings)	To discuss ways to improve on the ideas and actions as decided on during cycle 1, to get better outcomes.	Discussions in meetings recorded and transcribed.
	Qualitative questionnaire	To allow the participants an opportunity to give their viewpoints on certain aspects.	Written questionnaires
	Interview	To allow the principal an opportunity to give his viewpoint on being the manager of a full-service school and the learner support procedures in the school.	Interview recorded and transcribed.

**Table 3-1: Main objectives of each data generation strategy.**

### 3.3.2.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretative philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data (Nieuwenhuis, 2008). Nieuwenhuis (2008) says that, phrased differently, it tries to establish how participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences in an attempt to approximate their construction of the phenomenon.

Qualitative data analysis tends to be an on-going and iterative process, implying that data collection, processing, analysis and reporting are intertwined, and not merely a number of successive steps (Nieuwenhuis, 2008). In qualitative studies, researchers often find it advisable and necessary to go back to the original field notes and verify conclusions, or to go back to the

participants to collect additional data and to verify these, or to solicit feedback from participants consulted in the research (Nieuwenhuis, 2008). Mouton (2008) agrees by stating that data analysis involves the “breaking up” of data into manageable themes, patterns, or trends. He states that the aim of analysis is to understand the various constitutive elements of the data through an inspection of the possible relationships between concepts, and to see whether there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated, or to establish themes from the data.

Nieuwenhuis (2008) concludes by stating that when analysing qualitative data, your goal is to summarise what you have seen or heard in terms of common words, phrases, themes or patterns that would aid your understanding and interpretation of that which is emerging. The aim is never to measure, but to interpret and make sense of what is in the data, and this requires creativity, discipline and a systematic approach (Nieuwenhuis, 2008). The above-mentioned guidelines were followed to ensure that what was found was trustworthy and credible.

One way to analyse qualitative data is through content analysis. The analysis of data gathered in action research studies is accomplished with the participation of the subjects who are seen by the researcher as stakeholders in the situation in need of change or action (Berg & Lune, 2012). Berg and Lune (2012) list a fairly standard set of analytic activities in content analysis, arranged in a general order of sequence (p. 240):

- Data are collected and transformed into text (e.g., field notes, transcripts, etc.)
- Codes are analytically developed or inductively identified in the data and affixed to sets of notes or transcript pages.
- Codes are transformed into categorical labels or themes.
- All the data are sorted by these categories, identifying similar phrases, patterns, relationships, and commonalties or disparities.
- Sorted data are examined to identify meaningful patterns and processes.
- Identified patterns are considered in light of previous research and theories, and a small set of generalisations are established.

During the PALAR cycle of evaluation, data analysis occurs continuously. In this study, content analysis was used for data analysis and interpretation. In PALAR, content analysis occurs throughout the whole process, through critical reflection by participants of the on-going process and the emerging data. Analysis is performed by all participants and is on-going, with one analysis of the participants during one cycle, informing their next step, and so it continues. Data were analysed for commonly occurring themes from the teachers’ reflections and discussions.

### **3.3.2.6 Trustworthiness of the data**

In this study, triangulation and member checking were used to establish trustworthiness.

Because multiple data generation methods were used, triangulation was used as a strategy to establish trustworthiness. Triangulation of data results is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence of results among multiple and different sources of information, to form themes or categories in a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Member checking consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the correctness of the information and narrative account (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

### **3.3.2.7 Ethical considerations**

Since this research involved people as participants, it was incumbent upon the researcher to act according to the ethical standards prescribed by the North West University (NWU) Ethics Committee.

#### **3.3.2.7.1 Permission**

Permission was sought from the North-West University Ethics committee and from the District Director of Education, the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of the North-West Provincial Department of Education, as well as the principal of the full-service school.

#### **3.3.2.7.2 Informed consent**

Research participants were informed regarding the aims of the research and its methodology. They were informed about the nature of the study and were given the choice of either participating or withdrawing from participating (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004). Participants must agree voluntarily to participate without any form of coercion, and their agreement must be based on full and open information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The participant's responses were anonymous and each participant was given a consent form to sign. The consent form further outlined their rights in terms of the participation in the research.

#### **3.3.2.7.3 Privacy and confidentiality**

In consideration of participant's vulnerability, confidentiality was assured as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) warn researchers that all personal data ought to be secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity. Participants' identities were concealed to avoid any harm.

### **3.4 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented a description of the research process followed in this study. It included the qualitative methodology and research design, the selection of participants, data generation, data analysis and ethical considerations.

In the next chapter the results generated and analysed through this methodology are presented.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, I described the methodology I had selected as based on the PALAR paradigm, and explained how it informed the generation of data for this study. I discussed my research design and how the data were generated throughout my PALAR cycles.

In this chapter, the findings of the research are first presented. In the discussion thereafter, I provide my interpretation of the data, as integrated with the literature.

#### **4.2 RESULTS**

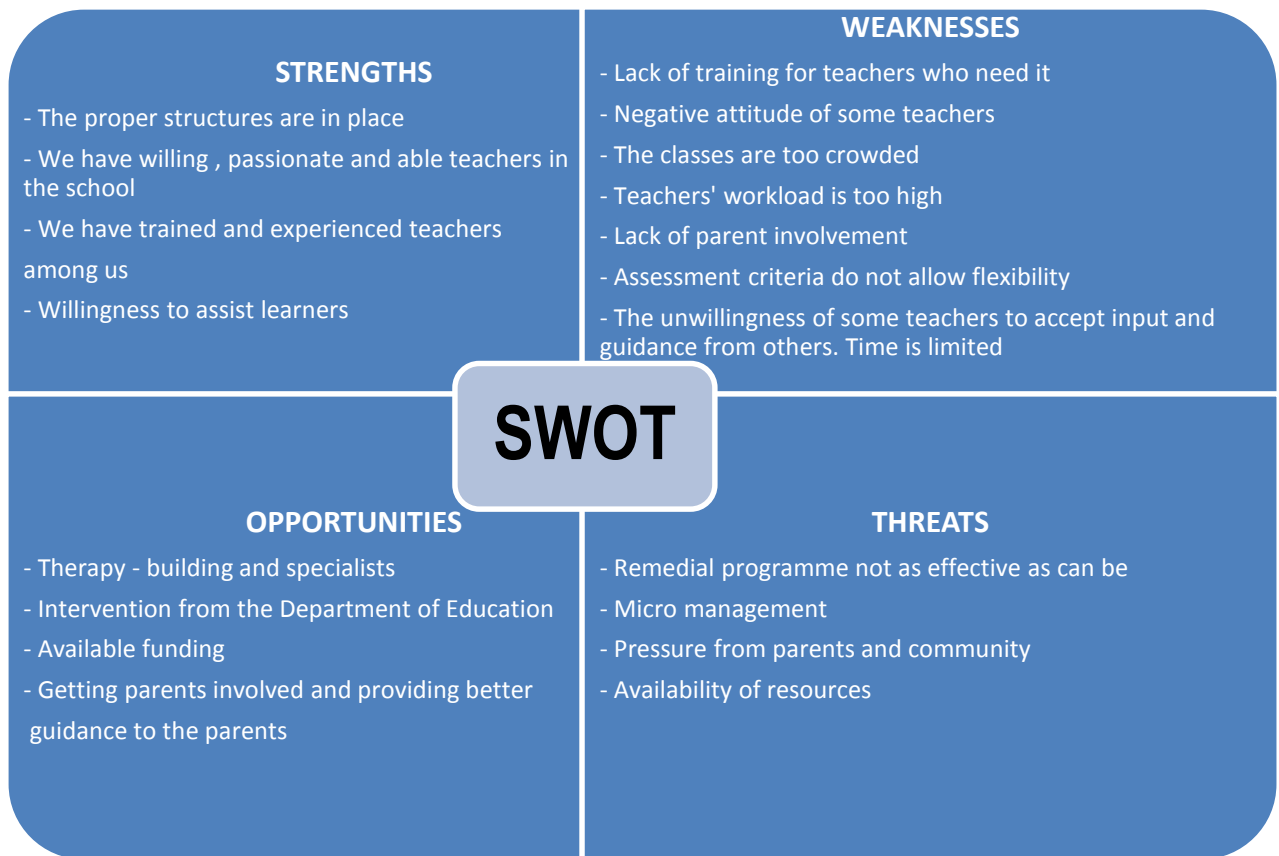
The results will be presented as obtained from the various data generation methods in each of the two cycles (see chapter 3 for a description of the cycles within PALAR).

##### **4.2.1 Cycle 1**

(a) Action learning set (focus group meetings)

During the first Action Learning Set (ALS) meetings, the focus was to investigate the teachers' perceptions regarding the provision of learner support in the full-service school. The two main techniques used to help identify and explore such perceptions were a SWOT analysis and Nominal Group Technique (NGT) (see chapter 3).

Each of the teachers first did his/her own individual analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) without discussion; after this all SWOT analyses were combined on the board until all contributions were written down. Figure 1 below indicates the combined SWOT analysis of the teachers:



**Figure 4-1: SWOT analysis of the school’s provision of learner support**

A discussion of this analysis then followed.

It was evident that the teachers’ knowledge and skills regarding learner support was a big issue among the participants:

*“Teachers are not equipped to identify all these problems...not able to handle it...”*

*“...we must get training from the department, because we are a full-service school...”*

*“...we have teachers teaching Mathematics, who cannot teach Mathematics...who is not trained to teach Mathematics...”*

*“...teachers must be trained to work with these learners (learners with barriers to learning)...”*

It was stated as a strong point that there are trained and experienced teachers among them. These teachers were trained in learner support in their undergraduate studies, and have an idea on how to support learners with barriers to learning, but they are the minority of the teachers in the school.

The participants discussed the issue of the lack of training of teachers, and teachers who are not equipped to support learners with barriers to learning. The participants made the following statements:

*“...I did not study to be a LSEN teacher, but when I was put in that position at my previous school, I had to put in effort, I investigated, asked for help from other teachers, asked them to teach me and give me pointers, what to do and what not to do, went on the internet and did some research....I had to equip myself to do the job to the best of my abilities...” (FG)*

Not all of the teachers in the full-service school were exactly sure what an inclusive education system meant and what was expected of them pertaining to supporting learners with barriers to learning. Apart from the teachers not being exactly clear on what an inclusive education system involves, some participants seemed to think that there are teachers in the school who have already given up before even completely implementing inclusive practices in their classroom.

*“In all schools there is teachers who is only there to receive their pay checks and don't really worry about the learners”...“I understand that sometimes you just want to give up”....“I am putting in so much effort and sometimes the learner's marks just stay the same”....“I can imagine that later on you just feel like, you know what, what is the use....”*

The teachers then mentioned that the large number of learners in the classroom adds a lot of pressure to their workload:

*“...and the Department pressure us to fill our classes. We have learners in need of individual support but we still have 38 to 40 learners in a class...”*

*“For example when we get a new learner in the school from another school, and they cannot write in cursive. In our school, the policy is that the learners must write in cursive. You struggle until the end of the year to teach that child how to write in cursive, and at the end of the year, they still can't write in cursive.”*

The participants indicated that the CAPS curriculum expects of teachers to work at a steady pace which does not allow much flexibility. Participants also discussed the workbook prescribed by the Department. The workbook in their opinion is very basic and teachers still have to do additional work to adhere to the CAPS prescriptions. This results in additional marking work:

*“Now you have to mark this work, the ‘blue book’ and their homework.”*

When it comes to management of the school, participants expressed their frustration regarding micromanagement practices within the school:

*“The negative attitude from management... you can’t talk to them and there is certain decisions being made without the ILST’s input and no one is in the position to change it.”*

*“It was once said to me by a member of the SMT: “Mam, I am a manager of this school, do what I tell you”...”*

According to the participants, parents have a choice whether their children can be failed or not. This adds pressure, because parents do not want their children to fail and instruct the teachers to let them pass to the next grade. Hence learners advance to the next grade while their work is not on standard, and this leads to a bigger problem at the end of the next year. The teachers consider this additional pressure caused by the parents, because they as teachers try their best for the learners’ sake, but the parents are ignorant about the problem caused by their refusal to let their child fail a grade.

*“And then there is the pressure from the parents that the children cannot fail...during parents’ evenings you explain to the parents that the learner’s progress is not good, but at the end of the year, the parent just insists that the child goes on to the next grade...”*

The teachers also feel the parents add pressure in the cases where some parents do not want to give consent that their child be tested to identify barriers to learning and what support is needed:

*“It is also a threat is when a parent refuses to sign the letter of consent to let the child be tested (for the identification of barriers to learning)...”*

The teachers indicated the necessity to keep learners’ profiles up to date and make notes of all communication to parents about the learners’ problems:

*“...to the times when we had one class for all these learners... like a ‘hulpklas’...”*

It was evident that management (who was not part of the focus group discussions) was not totally clear on what it meant to be a full-service school:

*“This is why Mr X (the principal) suggests that we organise the learners in classes 1, 2, 3, 4, from better to weakest, so that all the teachers know class 4 has the weakest learners, and when it is their time to come to you for class, you will know that you have to absolutely slow down and put in much more effort as with class 1, to get these learners on track....”*



The discussion pointed out that the teachers are very negative about training sessions, especially after school hours, and it was clear that the teachers' attitudes needed to change before any training initiatives could be successful.

The participants expressed that there is a willingness among them as teachers to assist the learners with barriers to learning, but there is no acknowledgement of their efforts, which they admitted then leads to a lack of motivation among themselves.

*"...we need acknowledgement...I gave just as much input and no one even said thank you..."*

Frustration from some of the participants came to the fore about the lack of support from the colleagues in their department in the school:

*"During the planning for the week we all sit together to make sure that we do the same work in all the classes in our specific grade. Then some of them just take the work, write it on the board and tell the learners to copy it without discussion and explaining the work to the learners. Thus, all the learners' books look alike but our learners...my learners know what to do and understand the work but the learners of the other teacher doesn't (sic) know what to do..."*

*"I have discussed this numerous times in our meetings but nothing is done about it and in the end, we are blamed for picking on them and mistreating them.....", "I am really unhappy in my department".*

*"...and the Department pressure (sic) us to fill our classes. We have learners in need of individual support but we still have 38 to 40 learners in a class..."*

*"...that's why we say that we need to get training from the Department..."*

Training of teachers to be able to identify and support learners with barriers to learning was rated as very important. Their comments regarding training were the following:

*"...it is not possible for equipped and skilled teachers in the school to train the others because they are just not interested...the ILST organised for a therapist to visit the school and talk to the teachers about learner support but they were totally negative..."*

*"...the teachers don't want to know what being a full-service school is about and why we are a full-service school, they want to gain practical skills on how to support the learners with barriers within the classroom..."*

One participant suggested that the teachers should be asked to make a list of their training needs so that the ILST can discuss it with management so that proper, applicable training can be arranged. The training should not be seen as information sessions, but as skills development opportunities.

The participants indicated there are also teachers in the full-service school who are in permanent positions but who seemingly “do not care for supporting learners in an inclusive learning environment and who are not interested in developing their skills to provide learner support”.

Some teachers in the school seem to think that the full-service support centre (the term used in the school for the centre where learners with barriers to learning are supported via extra classes in Maths and English), is there to sort out discipline problems of learners they do not want to deal with themselves in their classes:

*“Thorough and regular feedback to teachers is a must to enable them to understand the importance of the Full-Service Department. Unfortunately some teachers still see my work as that of a teacher who must look after discipline of learners who they can’t seem to manage themselves.”*

Upon completion of this discussion, we then had to decide which of these issues were the most important that we would like to address first. We prioritised the issues as follows:

1. Training of teachers to be able to identify and support learners with barriers to learning.
2. Intervention programme to address barriers to learning with interventions and theory.
3. Proper planning in terms of training opportunities, class sizes, allocation of teachers to classes.
4. Parental and community involvement.
5. Learner interaction and involvement.
6. The curriculum and assessment procedures.
7. Regular support meetings between teachers.

These issues were then scored with the use of the NGT (see chapter 3). Table 4.2 indicates how the scores were calculated:

<b>Statement / Item</b>	<b>1: Most important (x5)</b>	<b>2: Moderately important (x4)</b>	<b>3: Important (x3)</b>	<b>4: Less Important (x2)</b>	<b>5: Least Important (x1)</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Training of teachers to be able to identify and support learners with barriers to learning.	3	2	0	1	1	<b>26</b>
Intervention programme to provide learner support with interventions and theory.	0	4	2	0	0	<b>22</b>
Proper planning in terms of training opportunities, class sizes, allocation of teachers to classes, etc.	2	1	0	2	0	<b>18</b>
Parental and community involvement.	0	0	3	2	2	<b>15</b>
Learner interaction and involvement.	1	0	0	2	0	<b>9</b>
The curriculum and assessment procedures.	1	0	1	0	0	<b>8</b>
Regular support meetings between teachers.	0	0	1	1	2	<b>7</b>

**Table 4-1: Calculation of scores for the different issues**

An action plan on how to address these priorities in a collaborative way then had to be compiled to address all the priorities. The action plan encompassed the following:

- (i) All participants are to encourage colleagues and one another to be open to training opportunities, whether these be formal or informal.
- (ii) The head of the full-service support centre, who is a participant, is to request from management to schedule training by the Department for all the teachers in the school on how to identify and support learners with barriers to learning.
- (iii) The ILST is to initiate a full-service class, where learners who experience barriers to learning can be properly assessed by way of the SIAS.
- (iv) The ILST is to plan properly in terms of training opportunities, class sizes, allocation of teachers to classes, etc.
- (v) All participants will help to get parents involved in terms of information sessions and individual meetings with parents of learners who experience barriers to learning.

A specific timeframe was not set for the action plan, but we decided that every action had to be initiated as soon as possible.

#### (b) Observation

I, as the participant researcher, observed how the participants supported the learners with barriers to learning in their classrooms, as well as how the support of learners with barriers to learning was managed within the school in general. From my observation(s), I made the following notes:

- Teachers are uncertain about how to support learners with barriers to learning.
- Teachers have limited knowledge of different types of barriers and how these should be addressed.
- Limited time and the high number of learners in the classroom put a lot of pressure on the teachers to provide efficient additional support to learners.
- There are not yet proper structures and procedures in place as prescribed in the SIAS policy, which results in teachers not knowing what steps to follow to make sure that learners with barriers to learning are supported.

#### (c) Reflections

The participants were requested to reflect on their own and their colleagues' practices and the implementation of the suggested strategies in their classes. Participants were, however, influenced negatively in the writing of reflections. The principal did not like the fact that he would

not know what the participants would say about the learner support practices in the school; he wanted to see their reflections first. This would mean that if the participants knew the principal would see what they wrote, their reflections might not be open and genuine. The principal stated that he would only allow one collaborative reflection written by one participant in collaboration with the others. Subsequently I received one collaborative written reflection at the end of Cycle 1. This reflection was more like a report on the functioning of the school as a full-service school (it was indeed written by the head of the full-service class) and did not contain any reflections of participants' perceptions and feelings about the functioning of the school as a full-service school or of the PALAR process up to here.

This 'reflection' indicated the following:

- The ILST mainly focussed on a “remedial programme for learners allocated to the full-service support centre” in the school.
- A representative from the Department of Education advised that the school must “work and focus on each child according to its needs and weaknesses”.
- Learners are “allocated” to the full-service support centre and are “selected” in co-operation with the class-teachers, ILST committee and the head of the full-service support centre, focussing on mainly Mathematics and English.
- Learners who are selected attend the full-service support centre on a rotation basis where they get additional support in Mathematics and English.
- Thorough and regular feedback by the head of the full-service support centre is given to the class teachers to enable them to understand the importance of the full-service support centre.
- Some teachers still regard the head of the full-service support centre only as the teacher who must discipline the learners in the full-service class, because the teachers themselves do not want to deal with discipline in their own classes.
- If the head of the full-service support centre and ILST consider it necessary, the services of speech and language therapists, psychologists and the state hospital are arranged.
- Information regarding different special needs or barriers to learning is available at the full-service support centre.

#### **4.2.2 Cycle 2**

- (a) Action learning set (focus group meetings)

During the ALS meetings of cycle 2, the action plan decided on during the ALS meetings of cycle 1 was discussed again. This discussion indicated the following of each of the original statements in the original action plan (see Cycle 1):

- (i) All participants are to encourage one another and other colleagues to be open to training opportunities, irrespective whether these opportunities are formal or informal.

Feedback from the participants on this issue was very positive. They argued that the reason for this was the fact that they themselves now had a better understanding of what being a teacher in a full-service school entails. They were able to connect and share with colleagues, which helped to change their attitudes. Originally some teachers may have appeared as if they did not care about equipping themselves, and when colleagues tried to help them, it was seen as critique and was personalised. However, that did not seem to be the case anymore.

- (ii) The head of the full-service support centre is to request from management to ensure training from the department for all the teachers in the school on how to identify and support learners with barriers to learning.

This action was no longer necessary. Management was already busy to schedule training, and therefore this action was already in process. The principal had visited the ALS meetings from time to time during Cycle 1, where he had heard what the teachers said and thus perhaps realised the need to initiate such training for the teachers.

- (iii) The ILST is to realise the initiation of a full-service class, where learners with possible barriers to learning, can be sent for proper SIAS.
- (iv) The ILST is to plan properly in terms of training opportunities, class sizes, allocation of teachers to classes, etc.

These two actions had been put in place by the establishment of a resource centre for all the teachers in the school where they would be able to get information on different types of barriers to learning, and on how to support these learners, as well as physical resources to use in their classrooms. The ILST was also in the process to attempt to get input from all the teachers about their training needs, with the purpose to arrange for skills development opportunities. Teachers would also be invited to join support meetings where they can engage in discussions with one another on how they support the learners in their classrooms, help one another other with dilemmas and give pointers on what works for them.

This issue was also addressed by the principal in the interview with him (see below).

- (v) All participants must help to get parents involved in terms of information sessions and individual meetings with parents of learners who experience barriers to learning.

The participants reported that parents had been invited for opportunities like the above, but there was little interest and attendance was very low. There was a definite need for a new strategy to get parents involved. The participants asked the head of the full-service support centre to discuss this issue with the principal, and together come up with an alternative strategy.

(b) Observation

After my first observation in Cycle 1, the participants themselves had suggested alternative ways of learner support, which they then implemented and I again observed. These alternative ways included:

- Activities like physical activities, extra classes and reading periods.
- Patience with learners and involving more learners on different levels.
- Development of lesson plans and files.
- Identification of learners who have to receive additional support.
- Development of support materials.
- Development of learners' fine motor skills.

From my observation of the implementation of these alternative learner support strategies, I observed the following about the teachers:

- Some teachers were motivated and positive in terms of trying to support all learners with barriers to learning in their classes, while others still had negative attitudes.
- Teachers who planned according to the learners with barriers to learning in the specific class during lesson planning, were able to better support these learners taking into account limited time and the number of learners in the class.
- Although not all teachers had the opportunity to go for training yet, one teacher went and did research on barriers to learning and how to provide learner support.
- There seemed to have been a positive change in management's motivation to get structures and procedures in place and to provide more support to the teachers.

(c) Questionnaires

The next stage of Cycle 2 involved the participants completing a questionnaire regarding their opinion and feelings about the process (see Addendum). The questions and answers included the following:

**Q1: How did you feel about the meetings we had as a group?**

“It reinforced our awareness” (P1)

“Was helpful to hear other teachers’ concerns and inputs” (P2)

“We focussed on problems and solutions for full-service although we did not have the correct information in some cases” (P3)

“It was a good start but I feel that we did not proceed on all the problems that we had” (P4)

“It led to progress and for us to start working together as a group”, “we were able to identify problems although we did not find all the answers” (P5)

“Informative, problems were identified, it made sense to work as a group and it made us starting to think about problem solving” (P6)

**Q2: Did you learn anything from your colleagues in the group? If yes, what? How did you apply it in your own classroom and / or teaching?**

“I tried to involve more teachers to be open-minded” (P1)

“Learned how to use different strategies for the same problem” (P2)

“Some of the ideas for activities like physical activities, extra classes and read periods is (sic) proving to be successful” (P3)

“Implementation at this stage is not yet successful” (P4)

“We swapped a lot of ideas; where possible and applicable, they were applied” (P5)

“Being more patient with learners and involving more learners on different levels” (P6)

**Q3: Were any of the strategies we as a group discussed during cycle 1 applied? If yes, were these successful?**

“Group discussions were introduced more regularly” (P1)

“Learners is (sic) now more involved in lessons” (P2)



"We now have SBST meetings once a month, parent involvement is better, more workshops are being scheduled and we are using services from the Department" (P3)

"We met more frequently" (P4)

"More SBST group discussions", "working closer together as a group" (P5)

"The SBST works much closer together now and we share information and activities" (P6)

**Q4: Were there any strategies we as a group identified and discussed that you were not able to apply? If yes, why?**

"Time management" (P1)

"I found it difficult in our big classes (40 learners) and our limited time to always use different strategies" (P2)

"Not enough time to use different strategies" (P3)

"Not enough time" (P4)

"Not enough time to implement all we want" (P5)

"Not enough time to implement strategies" (P6)

**Q5: Have you discussed the supporting of learners with barriers to learning with any members of the group since we last met? If yes, what was the discussion about?**

"Our general approach to support overall progress" (P1)

"A teacher was assigned per grade so that the other teachers could report the learners that struggle, to that specific teacher. The teachers can then work together to help the learner or refer the learner to the full-service support centre" (P2)

"We discuss different support needs, lesson plans and files, how to identify learners who must receive additional support and the rotation of learners" (P3)

"There is a definite need for support material which is in progress", "we could identify how to handle learners with special needs" (P4)

"What the different needs are and how to handle learners with special needs" (P5)

"The need for the support centre, how to develop fine motor skills and how to support learners with barriers to learning" (P6)

“This process was informative, it identified problems, it made sense to work as a group, it made us start to think about problem solving” (P6)

**Q6: Are there any issues regarding learner support that you would like to discuss further as a group?**

“The supporting of needs within the classroom setup” (P1)

“Following the curriculum within the full-service framework” (P1)

“There are always emerging new issues and problems to overcome”, “the monthly meetings is (sic) very helpful” (P2)

“No, the system is not in our favour and time is limited” (P3)

“No, we must just start and build on it” (P4)

“Not enough time to work concrete with learners and to re-teach” (P5)

“No, we are now in full control of our support centre (full-service support centre)” (P6)

**Q7: What is your overall feeling / attitude towards learner support, inclusive education and the establishment of full-service schools in South Africa?**

“Full-service schools are the ideal, the question is, however, if there will be funds available to keep it going.” (P1)

“I think the need for full-service schools is very high. Each child is different and needs support. Even gifted learners need new challenges to keep their minds stimulated. Children with barriers need a loving teacher to support them the best they know how.” (P2)

“Positive. We must accommodate all learners in our schools. I am excited to see the progress of each learner.” (P3)

“There is a very big demand for inclusive education and with the knowledge we have we can build on it. We are all lifelong learners and educators, for all levels in education.” (P4)

“It is time that we give these learners a decent place. It is very important that a mind change is done by many role players. This learner don’t (sic) adjust to fit in your class – you as the teacher have to accommodate the learner.” (P5)

“Wonderful idea. No child is left out. Lots of pressure on teachers but those who are willing to walk the extra mile to help and support learners will make the difference. Education for our nation is a necessity. All schools need to be inclusive!” (P6)

(d) Interview

The final stage of this cycle was an interview with the principal of the school, which took part towards the end of the research. The following is my report on the unstructured interview with the principal. The only question posed to him was to describe his perception of the functioning of the full-service school.

After the first discussions you held with the teachers, the ILST started investigating and learning more about what being a full-service school means. It took a while to get all the teachers to understand the concept of inclusive education. We as a school are still in our growing stages but the school is now much different from what it was in the beginning of the research you started here.

The full-service support centre was established as the place where the learners with barriers to learning can be assisted. In this school, learners visit the full-service support centre for additional support in groups of three or four. We focus on only Mathematics and English due to time constraints. In the other subjects, the teachers have to pull their weight in terms of inclusion in the classroom. We reached out to an educational psychologist who advised us to only involve learners up to Grade 4 level. We also exclude children with a very low average performance in school because what is the use? We will never get him or her to suddenly pass. Only the learners who will benefit from the full-service support centre are included in the support offered there. A social worker and psychologist from the Department visit the school regularly. There are no learners here with only physical barriers to learning.

Most of the most learners involved in the full-service support programme have language barriers. Language barriers are our biggest issue right now because the learners start Grade 1 in a language other than their mother tongue. Because we only focus on Mathematics and English at the full-service support centre, the teachers of the other subjects are being supported with additional information during the morning meetings to be able to support the learners in the bigger classroom setup as well.

When it comes to the day-to-day functioning of the full-service support centre, learners are being pulled out of the mainstream class by the head of the full-service support centre according to the time allocated for them. All teachers are aware of this timetable and must therefore plan accordingly. When a teacher identifies a learner with a barrier or barriers to

learning in his/her classroom, intervention forms for the SIAS process are filled out by the teacher as well as the head of full-service support centre.

Each member of the ILST was allocated to a Grade, and when teachers need support, they first go to the ILST member for their grade for support. If this member cannot help the teachers, they are referred to the head of the full-service support centre.

Support from the Department is available. In the beginning we did not hear or see a lot from the Department, but the moment the school reached out, the Department came on board; that is, speech therapists, psychologists, social workers and so on.

It is also important that teachers put together a question paper according to cognitive levels. The “weak” questions (sic) should be enough to let a child pass. That is why the full-service support centre focuses on the skills and knowledge necessary to be able to succeed in the “weak” questions.

We drafted a full-service support centre policy and communicated it to all the teachers so that they are familiar with all the procedures and rules. The most important thing they should understand is that the full-service support centre is not there to address discipline problems. When it comes to managing discipline, the learners involved in the full-service programmes are excluded from detention and kept busy by doing something practical on the school grounds with the permission of their parents.

We have a head for the full-service support centre who runs everything pertaining to inclusive education in the school. She deals with all the enquiries, visits from parents, and so forth. In terms of skills and resources, the head of the full-service support centre went for additional training in order to be able to identify learners with barriers to learning, and to know how to support them.

Only one member of the ILST did not have learner support training during the initial teacher education studies. The ILST went for additional training and workshops and will be able to support the other teachers. In the full-service building, we have good computer programmes for the learners on which they work.

The ILST had a meeting with all the parents whose children are being supported in the full-service support centre (currently 51 learners). There was much interest and almost all the parents attended. During this meeting the concept of inclusive education and the function of the full-service support centre were explained to them. They were also reminded of their role as parents in supporting the learners. Parents were invited to visit the full-service support centre to get information and resources to be able to support their

children better at home. Parents have to give permission for their child to be involved in the full-service support centre. The reason for this is that, for that period of time, the learner is withdrawn from the mainstream classroom and parents are paying school fees. They are informed about the activities of the full-service support centre. Parents also give informed consent for visits from psychologists, speech therapists, social workers and what may be required. The parents were also invited to be involved in reading periods which they attend, if possible.

In general, the initial attitude of the teachers when they heard we were going to be a full-service school was very negative because they thought we were going to be a special school. That is, until they realised that we now cater for learners who experience barriers to learning in the classroom, and we take them to the full-service support centre for additional support to work on their learning barriers (sic). Teachers are now expected to adjust their own teaching to make sure they include all learners and support all learners. Class management has been identified as the biggest issue, and that is the responsibility of the teacher. It was difficult to get all the teachers to do a mind-shift, but it is going much better now. The misinterpretations of some teachers have definitely changed now. The teachers are on board. They don't have a choice. They must be on board. I would say there was a definite change in the perceptions and motivation of the teachers regarding supporting learners with barriers to learning.

We visited a special school in the district and were very happy to see that what we are doing is in line with what is being done by others as well. We are quite confident that our current strategy will be successful for a long time. We do not make use of a resource centre. We buy our own resources with the funding received from the Department. We are way ahead of other full-service schools.

After discussion with the Department and management, it was clear that some of the participants had a misconception of what inclusive education meant. The ILST determined that it is not possible to have just one specific full-service class, but that learners are supposed to be supported and included within their existing class, together with all the other learners. The ILST did, however, establish a full-service support centre with one teacher – the head of the full-service support centre – whom the learners with barriers to learning (sic) visit on a rotation basis in order to receive additional support in Maths and English. It is important to understand that English is not the learners' mother tongue and therefore the learners struggle a lot because they take it as first language in this school.

All the data as presented above are discussed in the next section.

### 4.3 DISCUSSION

The data presented above were analysed by way of open coding and thematic inductive data analysis (see chapter 3). From this analysis, the following main and sub-themes emerged:

Themes		Sub-themes	
1	Participants' perceptions regarding the provision of learner support in the full-service school	1	Feelings of lack of knowledge, skills and training
		2	Feelings of lack of support for themselves
		3	Teachers' attitudes
2	Teachers' support needs in the full-service school	1	Training
		2	Resources
		3	Support from colleagues, the principal and the Department
3	Participants' experience of the PALAR process	1	Teachers' attitudes
		2	Teachers' knowledge and skills

**Table 4-2: Main themes and sub-themes**

Each of these themes and sub-themes are now discussed.

#### 4.3.1 Theme 1: Participants' perceptions regarding the provision of learner support in the full-service school

##### 4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Feelings of lack of knowledge, skills and training

According to White Paper 6, classroom teachers will be the primary resource and bear the responsibility for achieving inclusive education (Department of Education, 2001). However, despite a more equitable allocation of resources across schools since 1994, lack of instructional capacity with specific reference to suitably trained educators and adequate support services, constrain teachers' implementation of inclusive education (Smit, Russo and Engelbrecht, 2001), exactly as indicated by the participants in this study.

The teachers also indicated that they lack the knowledge and skill to teach a diverse group of learners in a single classroom without considerably increasing their workload, as also indicated by Wildeman and Nomdo (2007). Education White Paper 6 envisages that new curriculum and assessment initiatives will be required to focus on inclusion of the full range of diverse learning needs, and that teachers will be orientated to new methods of teaching via comprehensive training programmes that they provided (Department of Education, 2001). This has not happened yet in this full-service school. The duration of training programmes that educate teachers how to accommodate and teach learners with disabilities is generally a week or two, but teachers from the study of Stofile (2008) report that, although these brief training programmes are helpful, they are insufficient. These programmes tend to focus on developing a couple of skills, whereas teachers often need far more comprehensive training programmes (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

This corresponds with the perceptions of the teachers in this study about the training provided by the Department.

#### **4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Feelings of lack of support for themselves**

The CAPS curriculum prescribes the curriculum to be covered during each year. On top of this CAPS prescriptive, aspects like crowded classrooms, an inflexible curriculum, micromanagement, the limited availability of resources, and dealing with discipline in their classes, as indicated by the teachers in this study, were ascribed by the teachers to a lack of support for them from their colleagues, school management and the Department.

#### **4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Teachers' attitudes**

The apparent lack of interest of some teachers in learner support within the full-service school, was due to the unfamiliarity thereof and their not knowing exactly what is expected of them. This theme has also been identified in other studies (Smit & Mpya, 2011, p. 28): "Teachers do not have a good understanding of inclusive education...", "teachers who have a little understanding of inclusion believe that learners who experience barriers to learning need to be placed in separate classes..." Other studies (Forlin, 2001; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002a; Sharma et al., 2006) cite that personal issues, including the teachers' perception of their own professional competence and knowledge necessary for the successful inclusion of learners with barriers to learning in their classroom, are of particular concern to teachers.

### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Teachers' support needs in the full-service school**

#### **4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Training**

The data indicated that there is a need for guidance on how learners with barriers to learning can be supported according to their specific needs. The principal, with the help of the ILST, has indeed reached out to the Department who now provides for a psychologist, social worker and occupational therapist to visit the school regularly.

This finding is supported by the research of Mdikana, Nthangase and Mayekiso (2007) as well as Center and Ward (1987) who indicate that the need for special skills for teachers teaching learners with special educational needs is one of the highest factors influencing teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education.

#### **4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Resources**

It is evident in literature that, despite a more equitable allocation of resources across schools since 1994, lack of instructional capacity with specific reference to suitably trained educators and

adequate support services constrain teachers' implementation of inclusive education (Smit, Russo & Engelbrecht, 2010). In the study of Mdikana, Nthangase and Mayekiso (2007) a vast majority of their participants felt that there is a need for special resources to adequately support learners who experience barriers to learning. In terms of White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), inclusive education would only be introduced to schools when human and material resources had been provided. Some primary schools would be converted into full-service schools and for these, support services, structures and facilities would be made available. The White Paper 6 further states that special schools would be converted into resource centres where the practitioners would be expected to capacitate those in regular and full-service schools because of the expertise they already have (Mdikana, Nthangase & Mayekiso, 2007).

The principal of the school in this study, however, indicated that they do not make use of a resource centre but rather buy the necessary resources themselves. He indicated that the reason for this is that the effort and time it takes to get hold of specific resources is not worthwhile, and therefore they rather take action themselves.

The findings also indicated that the number of learners in the classroom add a lot of pressure to the teachers' workload. Apart from that, the CAPS curriculum expects of teachers to work at a steady pace, which does not allow much flexibility. There is a workbook prescribed by the Department which in their opinion is very basic, and teachers still have to do additional work to adhere to the CAPS prescriptions. This results in additional marking work. If the teachers had fewer learners in the class, or had a teacher assistant who could help with administrative tasks, the pressure could be much less.

In the literature, class size and overcrowded classrooms were also identified as stressors to teachers who have to teach a large number of learners of whom some need support owing to the barriers to learning they experience. Paying individual attention to specific needs of learners with barriers to learning becomes difficult in overcrowded classrooms, and adds to teachers' stress (Khoele, 2008).

#### **4.3.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Support from colleagues, the principal and the Department**

The first findings indicated that some of the teachers in the study had negative attitudes. This was due to the fact that the teachers did not have a clear understanding of what being a teacher at an inclusive school entails. Moreover, they felt there was a lack of support from colleagues and management. This attitude, however, changed during the course of the research, due to a new support structure for all the teachers and ILST that was phased in by the principal. The teachers are on now board and know what is expected of them.



They indicated that there was still a lack of support from the Department, and that the workshops the Department scheduled were more like information sessions and not the skills development that they need. This is supported by the finding of Weeks and Erradu (2013), that the national Department of Education and the various provincial departments could do more to support educators in their provision of support to learners who experience barriers to learning.

### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Participants' experience of the PAR process**

#### **4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Teacher's attitudes**

At the beginning of the research the participants had mixed feelings about the fact that their school was being converted to a full-service school. Some were uncertain of what being a full-service school meant for them as teachers and how it would affect their everyday teaching environment. Others were negative because of the fact that they have not been not trained to teach learners with barriers to learning. Some also expressed their frustrations with lack of support from colleagues, school management and the Department.

The PALAR process we embarked upon had a positive impact on the attitudes of some teachers. They were able to relate to one another and discuss their perceptions and feelings.

The principal also stated that it had taken some time to get all the teachers to do a mind-shift. He now felt that, with the proper structures and policies in place, the teachers are more sure of their responsibilities and they are on board to let the full-service school function properly.

#### **4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Teachers' knowledge and skills**

The number one priority for the participants was the development of their knowledge and skills to be able to identify and support learners with barriers to learning. Opportunities in this regard were then created by the ILST and management. More informative material is now available to the teachers and the ILST members have been sent on additional workshops and courses. The participants now have better knowledge on what being a teacher in a full-service school is all about and what they can do to support learners with barriers to learning.

## **4.4 CONCLUSION**

Even though the teachers do not yet have all the skills to support learners with barriers to learning, it is evident that this PALAR process has brought about changes within each participant and within the school.

In chapter 5 these findings are discussed in terms of the original research questions.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore how a participatory action learning and action research approach can be used collaboratively to facilitate learner support in a full-service school.

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of the research and its findings, and then continue to provide conclusions and recommendations flowing from this research. I also reflect on my own learning in the process, provide the limitations of the research, and indicate the potential contribution of the research.

#### **5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH**

Chapter 1 provided an orientation to the research study. It included a motivation and rationale of the study, the identification of the research questions and aims, a brief discussion of the research design and methodology, the possible contribution of the study to the research focus area, the clarification of important concepts and the division of chapters.

Chapter 2 contained the literature overview in terms of the challenges teachers face, learner support and inclusive education practices in South Africa, and the policies and practices in South African education regarding full-service schools. Lastly I indicated what kind of in-service training can be relevant for learner support.

In chapter 3 the research design and methodology used in this study were described and explained. The choice of PALAR as research design, as well as the methods of data generation and analysis chosen were theoretically justified.

Chapter 4 reported on the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data, followed by a discussion thereof as related to literature.

#### **5.3 CONCLUSIONS**

In the following discussion I deconstruct and interpret the findings to answer the research questions and to draw my final conclusions from that.

The main question **“How can learner support by teachers in a full-service school be facilitated in a collaborative way?”** will be answered after the four sub-questions have been addressed.

### **5.3.1 Sub-question 1: What is the nature of the current conversion of the school to a full-service school?**

This school was informed that it was going to be converted to a full-service school in 2012. The Department of Education visited the school and explained the changes that the school was going to undergo. Although all this information was communicated, the teachers were very vague on what being a full-service school entailed and what their responsibilities as teachers in a full-service school are. During that time and 2013, which was when I entered the school to engage in the PALAR study, the school did not have proper structures and policies in place, and this caused teachers to be sceptical as to whether they could succeed. From the first ALS meeting with the participants in this study, change started to happen in the school. It was as if for the first time, someone started talking about the elephant in the room: How do we succeed as a full-service school?

The conversations and discussions in the ALS meetings initiated other conversations and discussions to happen outside of the ALS meeting with teachers and management staff who were not participants. This also resulted in the principal taking action to establish proper structures and policies to guide and help teachers in their task as being full-service teachers.

The school cannot yet be described as a flagship full-service school but it is definitely moving and progressing in the right direction.

### **5.3.2 Sub-question 2: What is the nature of the current learner support practice in the school?**

In the beginning of the PALAR process, some participants were under the impression that there needs to be a separate class for learners who experience barriers to learning, and that not all teachers have to implement learner support in their classrooms. There was a perception that not all teachers are involved in the full-service department of the school and that only some teachers needed training and skills development to make a success of being a full-service school. I would think that this was also the reason for not many structures to be in place, because most of the teachers were simply looking the other way.

During the process the participants became more curious about their own responsibilities, and this initiated investigation from the participants' side. They started talking to colleagues about this and also enquired from the principal if he was aware of all the changes that needed to happen in the school.

The principal then reached out to professionals in the community and the Department of Education, and the ILST drew up a full-service policy for the school in which all information

regarding supporting learners with barriers was included. This helped the teachers to understand what their responsibility was when identifying a learner with barriers to learning, and what the learner support process entailed.

The ILST also scheduled training for the teachers to equip them with knowledge and skills on supporting learners with barriers to learning. The ILST members went for further training and each ILST member was allocated a Grade teacher to support when needed.

The school also built a new building – the full-service support centre – where the identified learners who experience barriers to learning are taken on a rotation basis to receive learner support.

### **5.3.3 Sub-question 3: What are the teachers' views and needs regarding the current learner support practice in their full-service school?**

The participants initially did not know how to support learners who experience barriers to learning. They indicated that they were not trained and did not have the skills to support learners with barriers to learning. The biggest priorities for them to be addressed in the school were:

1. Training of teachers to enable them to identify and support learners with barriers to learning.
2. Establishing an intervention programme to address barriers to learning.
3. Proper planning in terms of training opportunities, class sizes, and allocation of teachers to classes.
4. Parental and community involvement.
5. Learner interaction and involvement.
6. The curriculum and assessment procedures.
7. Regular support meetings between teachers.

From these priorities an action plan was drawn up to address the following:

- (i) The participants to all encourage colleagues and one another to be open to training opportunities, whether these are formal or informal, from one another.
- (ii) The head of the full-service support centre, who is also a participant, to request from management to ensure that proper training from the department is scheduled for all the teachers in the school on how to identify and support learners with barriers to learning.

- (iii) The ILST to realise the initiation of a full-service class where learners with possible barriers to learning can be sent for screening. .
- (iv) The ILST to plan properly in terms of training opportunities, class sizes, allocation of teachers to classes, etc.
- (v) All participants to help to get parents involved in terms of information sessions and individual meetings with parents of learners who experience barriers to learning.

At the end of the data generation, the feedback from participants was positive, including feedback that the other teachers are now being open to training opportunities and skills development. Although limited time was a big issue, I think the teachers realised that skills development would only make their work as full-service teachers easier. Teachers now had a better understanding of what being a teacher in a full-service school entailed. They were able to connect and share with colleagues, which helped to change their attitudes.

The principal indicated that the full-service support centre was fully functional. The learners visited the full-service support centre on a rotation basis. Class sizes and allocation of teachers to classes were still an issue to address due to the high number of learners and limited staff allocated to the school.

Regarding parent participation, the principal scheduled a meeting one evening for all the parents whose children were involved in the full-service support centre. There was much interest and almost all the parents attended. During this meeting the concept of inclusive education and the function of the full-service support centre were explained to them. They were also reminded of their role as parents in supporting the learners. Parents were invited to visit the full-service support centre to get information and resources to be able to support their children better at home.

#### **5.3.4 Sub-question 4: What kind of collaborative support, in the view of the teachers, will enhance their support of the learners in their school?**

The teachers indicated that they would interact more with one another in mutual support. At the end of the PALAR collaborative research process, the participants were indeed a much closer group of colleagues than at the start. There is now a sense of belonging and compassion. The participants do not feel alone any more with their insecurities, frustrations and problems because they can now openly talk about these and exchange advice.

The participants indicated that having meetings more regularly would enhance their ability to support learners better.

The principal also indicated that the idea of allocating an ILST member to each grade, to support the specific teachers in that Grade, was also enhancing the support of learners in the school. All the teachers in the school now had someone to give them guidance when they were unsure of their own learner support practices in their classroom.

### **5.3.5 Main question: How can learner support by teachers in a full-service school be facilitated in a collaborative way?**

From the discussion of these sub-questions, it can be concluded that learner support in a full-service school can be facilitated in a collaborative way, by way of answering the sub-questions as follows:

#### **5.3.6 Sub-question 1: What is the nature of the current conversion of the school to a full-service school?**

The school is progressing in the conversion of the school to a full-service school.

#### **5.3.7 Sub-question 2: What is the nature of the current learner support practice in the school?**

The ILST has drawn up a full-service policy for the school and the ILST is functioning according to the policy. The ILST also scheduled training for the teachers to equip them with knowledge and skills on supporting learners with barriers to learning. The school also built a full-service centre where all support can be provided.

#### **5.3.8 Sub-question 3: What are the teachers' views and needs regarding the current learner support practice in their full-service school?**

After the PALAR process the teachers now have a better understanding of what being a teacher in a full-service school entails and feel better equipped to support learners with diverse needs.

#### **5.3.9 Sub-question 4: What kind of collaborative support, in the view of the teachers, will enhance their support of the learners in their school?**

During the PALAR process the teachers realised they need each other to strengthen their own knowledge and skills. There is now a sense of belonging and compassion among them and for each other. They realise they will have to continue supporting each other in order to support learners better.

## **5.4 REFLECTION ON MY LEARNING**

This study was my first introduction to PALAR methodology. I was very unsure at first, but what I did not realise initially is that even after the first meetings, change started to happen among the participants, their colleagues and ultimately the school. I then knew that the PALAR process can be instrumental in facilitating the changes participants view as necessary, and that we had actually already been addressing the problem for these teachers right from the start, by giving them a safe space to discuss their problems and to initiate and explore their own strategies, which empowered them to make changes happen.

I enjoyed the process overall and I am very happy with the outcome of this study.

## **5.5 POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

### **5.5.1 Methodology**

The PALAR methodology has not been implemented in schools before, and proved to be an innovative way for these teachers to plan and implement their own changes regarding learner support, specifically in the context of their full-service school.

### **5.5.2 Theory**

This study corroborated theory on the impact of PALAR in collaboration among members of a community, in this instance the full-service school. It also highlighted aspects of PALAR theory in terms of the effect of the process on members' perceptions and attitudes.

## **5.6 LIMITATIONS**

Firstly, the fact that this study focussed on only one school and included only six participants, limits the findings to this school only. It does, however, provide a background for similar research in similar conditions.

Secondly, the reflections by the participants were prohibited by the principal, hence the data from the reflections may not be fully valid as a true reflection of the participants' views. However, enough data were generated from the other data sources to be able to answer the research questions, as in 5.3 above.

## **5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the fact that this research study's scope was limited to one full-service school only, the following recommendations can be posed:

### **5.7.1 Further research**

Similar studies can be done in other full-service schools in other provinces and in different social environments. Such research can also focus more on the provision of teacher training for learner support.

### **5.7.2 Teacher training**

Learner support can be included in the pre-service training so that teacher qualifications can reflect teachers' training in learner support, and to ensure that all qualified teachers have knowledge of learner support to learners who experience barriers to learning.

### **5.7.3 The Department of Education**

It is clear from this study that it is necessary for the national and provincial departments of Education to support ILSTs in each school, not only in full-service schools, with further training in learning support, specifically for the conversion of a school into a full-service school, as promised by White Paper 6.

## **5.8 CONCLUSION**

The aim of this research was to investigate and establish how learner support by teachers in a full-service school can be facilitated in a collaborative way. It is evident that there are teachers who want to support learners with barriers to learning but do not know how to go about it. Having colleagues to collaborate with, resulted in the teachers in this research being more positive and confident in their learner support practices. The findings from this research may contribute to a similar collaborative approach to be employed in other schools, not only in full-service schools but in all schools who take to heart White Paper 6's vision of learner support for all learners who experience barriers to learning.



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## **ANNEXURES**

ANNEXURE A	Letter to NWDoE requesting permission to conduct research
ANNEXURE B	Permission letter: NWDoE
ANNEXURE C	Letter to School requesting permission to conduct research
ANNEXURE D	Permission letter: School
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ANNEXURE H	Questionnaire
ANNEXURE I	Example: Completed questionnaire
ANNEXURE J	Language Editing Certificate

# ANNEXURE A - LETTER TO NWDOE REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY  
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA  
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT  
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

Private Bag X8001, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Mr H Motara  
District Director  
Dr Kenneth Kaunda District  
Department of Education, North-West Province

Tel: 018 299 1911  
Email: [reINETTE.koekemoer@nwu.ac.za](mailto:reINETTE.koekemoer@nwu.ac.za)

14 May 2014

Dear mr H Motara

## Permission to conduct research at a school in the KKD

My name is ReINETTE Koekemoer, I am an MEd student in Educational Psychology at the North West University (NWU). I am conducting my research under the supervision of professor Petrusa du Toit. The title of my dissertation is: *A collaborative approach to facilitating learner support by teachers in full-service schools.*

My research proposal has already been approved by the MEd and PhD Committee of the Faculty of Education Sciences and my research project falls under the auspices of Prof Lesley Wood's larger NRF research project at the NWU, titled: *Action Research For Community Engagement By Tertiary Institutions: Beyond Service Learning.*

Ethical clearance has been granted for Prof Wood's project by the Research Ethics Committee of the NWU (Ethics Number: NWU-000 22-13-S2). I hereby request your permission to conduct the research at Western Reefs Primary School. The research aims to investigate and establish how learner support by teachers in a full-service school can be facilitated in a collaborative way.

This research will involve teachers at Western Reefs Primary School who will be invited to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. All sessions will take place after school hours, as negotiated with the teachers, so teachers' participation in the research project will not impinge on their teaching responsibilities in any way.

To start off, I will invite all teachers at Western Reefs Primary School to an information session where I will inform them about my research project. After the information session, I will extend an invitation to the attendees to participate on a voluntary basis in the research project. Thereafter the voluntary participants and I will meet to explore the challenges they experience working with learners with barriers to learning. Subsequent sessions will involve the exploration and development of support strategies which teachers can use to provide learner support in the full-service school classroom.

The sessions will be audio-recorded for the purposes of transcription and analysis. The research will however adhere to the ethical prescriptions of the Research Ethics Committee of the NWU and the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), which means that all information collected will be treated in the strictest confidence – the name of the school nor the names of individual teachers will be made public and will not be identifiable in any publications stemming from the research. The role of the participating teachers is voluntary and the participants may decide to withdraw at any time without any fear or penalty.

Should permission be granted from your office, permission will thereafter also be sought from the school principal as well as the teachers.

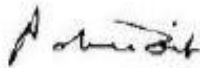
Should you need more information about the research you are very welcome to contact me at 018 299 1911, or my supervisor prof Petrusa du Toit at 018 3892498.

Thank you for considering my request.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reinette Koekemoer'.

Reinette Koekemoer

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Petrusa du Toit'.

Prof Petrusa du Toit  
Supervisor

## ANNEXURE B - PERMISSION LETTER: NWDOE



### **education**

Lefapha la Thuto la Bokone Bophirima  
Noord-Wes Departement van Onderwys  
North West Department of Education  
**NORTH WEST PROVINCE**

Temane Building  
5 O.R. Tambo Street, Potchefstroom  
Private Bag X1258,  
Potchefstroom 2520  
Tel.: (018) 290-8216  
Fax: (018) 294-8234  
Enquiries: Mr H. Motara  
e-mail: hmotara@nwpe.gov.za

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### **DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT**

#### **SENIOR PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT MANAGER**

---

16 May 2014

Ms R Koekamoer  
North West University – Potchefstroom Campus

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON "A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO FACILITATING LEARNER SUPPORT BY TEACHERS IN FULL-SERVICE SCHOOLS" AT WESTERN REERS PRIMARY SCHOOL IN MATLOSANA AREA OFFICE - DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT**

The above matter refers.

Permission is hereby granted to you to conduct your research at Western Reefs Primary School in Matlosana Area Office (Klerksdorp) - Dr Kenneth Kaunda District under the following provisions:

- The activity you undertake at the school should not tamper with the normal process of learning and teaching; and will take place after school hours.
- You inform the principal of your identified school of your impending visit and activity;
- You provide my office with a report in respect of your findings from the research; and
- You obtain prior permission from this office before availing your findings for public or media consumption.

Wishing you well in your endeavour.

Thanking you

**MR H MOTARA**  
DISTRICT DIRECTOR  
DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT

cc Mr S S Mogoisi- Area Manager: Matlosana



# ANNEXURE C - LETTER TO SCHOOL REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



Private Bag X8001, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222

Mr. Smit  
Principal: Western Reefs Primary School  
Marlowe Road  
Orkney, 2620

Tel: 018 299 1911  
Email: reinette.koekemoer@nwu.ac.za

16 September 2014

Dear Mr. Smit

## Permission to conduct research at your school

My name is Reinette Koekemoer, I am an MEd student in Educational Psychology at the North West University (NWU). I am conducting my research under the supervision of Professor Petrusa du Toit. The title of my dissertation is: *A collaborative approach to facilitating learner support by teachers in full-service schools.*

My research proposal has already been approved by the MEd and PhD Committee of the Faculty of Education Sciences and my research project falls under the auspices of Prof Lesley Wood's larger NRF research project at the NWU, titled: *Action Research For Community Engagement By Tertiary Institutions: Beyond Service Learning.*

Ethical clearance has been granted to Prof Wood's project by the Research Ethics Committee of the NWU (Ethics Number: NWU-000 22-13-S2). I hereby request your permission to conduct the research at your school. The North-West Department of Education by way of Mr Motara at the District Office has already granted me permission to conduct the research in a school in the KKD (please consult the approval granted as attached).

The research aims to investigate and establish how learner support by teachers in a full-service school can be facilitated in a collaborative way. This research will involve teachers at your school who will be invited to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. All sessions will take place after school hours, so teachers' participation in the research project will not impinge on their teaching responsibilities in any way.

To start off, I will invite all teachers at your school to an information session where I will inform them about my research project. After the information session, I will extend an invitation to the attendees to participate on a voluntary basis in the research project. Thereafter the voluntary participants and I will meet to explore the challenges they experience working with learners with barriers to learning. Subsequent sessions will involve the exploration and development of support strategies which teachers can use to provide learner support in the full-service school classroom.

Sessions will be audio-recorded for the purposes of transcription and analysis. The research will adhere to the ethical prescriptions of the Research Ethics Committee of the NWU and the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) – all information collected will be treated in the strictest confidence, which means that neither the school nor individual teachers will be named or be identifiable in any publications stemming from the research. The role of the participating



teachers is voluntary and the participants may decide to withdraw at any time without any fear or penalty.

Should you need more information about the research you are very welcome to contact me at 018 299 1911, or my supervisor Prof Petrusa du Toit at 018 3892498.

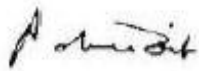
Should your permission be granted, I will thereafter also consult the teachers if they want to participate and get their consent as well.

Thank you for considering my request.

Yours sincerely



Reinette Koekemoer

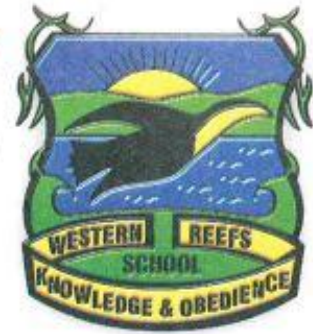


Prof Petrusa du Toit  
Supervisor

## ANNEXURE D - PERMISSION LETTER: SCHOOL

# Western Reefs PRIMARY SCHOOL

P.O. Box 86 ORKNEY 2620 Marlowe Road, Orkney  
Telefax: 018 473-4122 e-mail: wrps@lantic.net



4 November 2014

Attention: Reinette Koekemoer

PER EMAIL

Madam

### COLLECTING DATA INFORMATION

Your request received regarding the above, refers.

You are hereby given permission to interview the Grade 6/7 Teachers from Monday, 17 – Thursday, 20 November 2014 from 14:00 – 14:30.

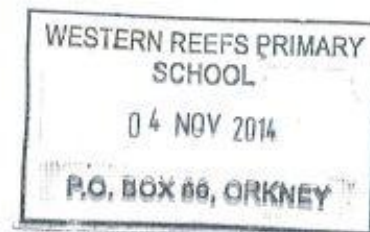
Unfortunately due to severe time constraints and examinations taking place from the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2014 – 10 December 2014, it would not be suitable to interview the teachers during this time.

You are however requested to please contact the school again for dates and times during January 2015.

Hope you find the above in order.

Regards

  
MR JCH SMIT  
ACTING PRINCIPAL



*Where learners are being equipped for life in the real South Africa*

## ANNEXURE E - LETTER OF CONSENT: PARTICIPANTS



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Teacher  
Western Reefs Primary School  
Marlowe Road  
Orkney, 2620

Tel: 018 299 1911  
Email: [reINETTE.eksteen@nwu.ac.za](mailto:reINETTE.eksteen@nwu.ac.za)

17 November 2014

Dear Teacher

### Consent to participate in research at your school

My name is Reinette Koekemoer. I am a MEd student in Educational Psychology at the North West University (NWU) (Potchefstroom campus). I am conducting my research under the supervision of Professor Petrusa du Toit. The title of my dissertation is: *A collaborative approach to facilitating learner support by teachers in full-service schools.*

I would appreciate your collaboration with this research project. I am seeking your consent to participate in the study. Permission has been granted by the principal Mr Smit as well as the Kenneth Kaunda District (kindly see the attached permission grant).

Only teachers who agree will participate collaboratively as a group in this research project. The study will entail collaboration between you and me on constructive ways to provide learner support in the full-service school classroom. All information obtained during this research process will be treated in the strictest confidence – no names of teachers or of the school will be made public or revealed to anyone. The teachers' names will not be used and individual teachers will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study. A summary report of the findings will be made available to you as the stakeholders.

The research process will require regular meetings with you as decided on by you as the teacher participants, after school hours as convenient to you. Participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty.

If you consent to participate, kindly supply your permission by please completing the attached form, which I will collect from you.

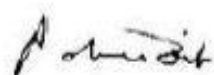
Should you need more information about the research you are very welcome to contact me at 018 299 1911, or my supervisor Prof Petrusa du Toit at 018 3892498.

Thank you for considering my request.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reinette Koekemoer'.

Reinette Koekemoer

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Petrusa du Toit'.

Prof Petrusa du Toit

Supervisor



## ANNEXURE F - EXAMPLE: TRANSCRIBED ALS MEETING

Reinette Koekemoer

Transkripsie: 4 Desember 2014, Deel 1

	barriers in that school. Stem julle saam met dit?
Fokusgroep	'n Kollega van buite kom ook hier na toe vir sessies, maar dit bly nog steeds... die hele personeel sit daar. Ons praat almal saam vir 'n uur of twee of drie ure. Sy vertel vir ons hoe werk dit in die praktyk van dinge en goed..., maar van hierdie kind in jou klas het hierdie probleem en so hanteer jy dit... By DIT kom ons nie uit nie.
Fokusgroep	Teachers are not equipped to identify all these problems.
Fokusgroep	Uhhh.. Nie so erg "not equipped" ne' not able to handle it. Want om die kind te identifiseer, ne', is een ding. Daar is genoeg mense op die staff om te help om hom te identifiseer, maar om terug te gaan in die klas om daai kind te help, veral in die senior fase, waar jy 'n klomp kinders tussen in het... Dis waar die krisis in kom. In die foundation phase is hulle, kom ons sê, "meer lenient", omdat hulle 'n vaste groep kinders heeldag het.
Fokusgroep	... Dis onstellend.... Maar dit is wat ons nou-nou gesê het. Ons klasse IS klein. En sê maar ons het 38 kinders volgende jaar, so daar is nie plek meer nie. Jy het nie 'n reading boarder nie... Jy kan nie sit groter of fyn motories, fyn motories kan jy seker hê, maar dan is daar die kind langs aan. Daar is nie plek dat hy sy eie tafel kan hê nie, want daar is nie tafels en stoele nie. En dan... het jy nog ander 38 kinders, en jy moet hierdie enetjie help. Maar nou het jy twee kinders in jou klas wat jou nodig het, jy is een persoon... jy kan ook nie vir hierdie ander kinders sê, "hoor hier gaan aan met die werk op die bord" nie, want hulle is nog te klein. So jy moet fisies... of veronderstel om die heelyd te verduidelik met voorbeelde en almal te kan help, want jy moet leiding gee. So jy kan nie daai intense hulp vir die een gee nie. 'n Kind wat by my was, het elke ekstra klas, byna nooit gemis nie. Hy het van 20% in sy language opgegaan na 39% toe. Nou vir my is dit... Ek kan sien hy werk, hy het nooit gemis nie. Die ander ene het dan nie transport nie, dan nie dit nie, so daai tye wat hulle netbal het, het ek ekstra Engels gehad en dan het

	<p>ek met hulle gewerk. Dit is dan nou fine, maar dan het die ander juffrouens ander buitemuurse aktiwiteite gehad. Ek het met my en die ander Engelse juffrou se kinders gewerk. Sy het ook vir my gesê sy kan nie glo dat hulle punte soveel verbeter het nie... maar die ander kinders werk net niks. Dit is baie moeiliker om in die skool, wanneer jy moet skool gee en teach om dan daai kinders wat nie mal is nie en wat regtig sukkel, om hulle regtig voldoende te help, voel ek..</p>
Fokusgroep	<p>... En alle onderwysers is ook nie regtig commit. Hulle is baie negatief. Soos ek nou gesê het. Hierdie kind het nou deurgeglim hierdie jaar en ons het nie agtergekom daar is 'n probleem nie. Uhm... Ek het 'n paar keer vir haar ('n kollega) gevra, hoe doen hierdie enetjie met doen oor gehoorstukkies en sy't gesê OK. En nou hier teen die einde van die jaar, hoor ek "o, dit is sy wat volgende jaar na jou klas toe kom volgende jaar". Toe ons nou na haar goed kyk, toe sien ons maar sy het nooit hierdie jaar gekyk nie.</p>
Fokusgroep	<p>... En dit is sy (die kollega) wat nie goed in gevul het nie...</p>
Fokusgroep	<p>... Dit is sy (die kollega) wat by die intervensies.... sy sien nie dat daar 'n probleem is nie.. Ja daar staan nie eers watter kind 'n gehoorapparaat dra nie.</p>
Fokusgroep	<p>Dit sê vir my die' onderwyserres is nie ge-equipped of commit om so iets te identifiseer nie...</p>
Fokusgroep	<p>... En ook nie commit nie</p>
Fokusgroep	<p>Ja, daar is geen commitment nie... Maar ek dink as sy opgelei is in so iets, sal sy beter hierdie dinge raaksien...</p>
Fokusgroep	<p>... En soos ek gesê het, 38 in 'n klas, met hierdie probleme saam... En die departement druk ons om ons klasse vol te maak. Ons is full service, ons het al hierdie probleme in ons klasse, maar ons moet 38 in 'n klas hê. En prakties is 40 in 'n klas..</p>

## ANNEXURE G - EXAMPLE: REFLECTION

### Full Services School

We are a Full Service School. This means we must accommodate and assist learners with Barriers to Learning.

During the sessions with Reinet Koekemoer, the ILST committee **mainly focused** on a Remedial Programme for learners allocated to the Full Service Department but according to the Department of Education there is **NO** Remedial Program in place for Full Services Schools. Dr \*\*\*\*\* from the Department said that we must work and focus on each child according to their needs and weaknesses.

The learners allocated to the Full Service Department are selected in co-operation with the class teachers, ILST committee and myself – Emphasis on Maths and English.

Attendance takes place on a rotation basis – meaning improvement in marks give opportunity for other learners to attend. The big number of learners with barriers make it impossible for only one teacher to accommodate all the learners and therefore the rotation system.

Each class teacher is responsible for intervention per learner send to the Full Service Department. Attendance to the Full Service Department includes the following: 1. Intervention form per learner by class teacher, 2. Maths or English classwork book.

Thorough and regular feedback to teachers is a must to enable them to understand the importance of the Full Service Department. Unfortunately some teachers still see my work as that of a teacher who must look after discipline of learners who can't be manage by themselves.

Services offered to the learners are taking place if the need is identified by both me and the ILST committee. Support include the following: Speech and Language Therapist, Psychologist and appointments at State Hospitals.

There's no time for monthly meetings, the Staff form part of the meetings and if there's a serious problem then the ILST can discuss the matter/problem.

We've arranged workshops for both teachers and the ILST committee to expand their knowledge and to help them in classes. Available at the Full Service is a file with information regarding different conditions / special needs (Physical Abuse, Sexual abuse, Substance abuse, Vision Impairment, ADHD, Hearing Impairment...) that the teachers can use to help them.

Parent involvement plays an important role to provide the school with important information regarding their child.

Xxx



# ANNEXURE H - QUESTIONNAIRE

REINETTE KOEKEMOER  
MEd Study

Questionnaire

Dear participant.

I really PLEASE need the following questions answered as conclusion to my study.

- 1. How did you feel about the meetings we had as a group?  
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- 2. Did you learn anything from your colleagues in the group? Of yes, what? How did you apply it in your own classroom and / or teaching?  
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- 3. Were any of the strategies we as a group discussed applied? If yes, was / is it successful?  
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- 4. Were there any strategies we as a group identified and discussed that you were not able to apply?  
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5. Have you discussed the supporting of learners with barriers to learning with any members of the group since we last met? If yes, what was the discussion about?

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6. Are there any issues regarding learner support that you would like discuss further as a group?

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7. What is your overall feeling / attitude towards learner support, inclusive education and the establishment of full-service schools in South Africa?

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NAME OF PARTICIPANT

## ANNEXURE I - EXAMPLE: COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE

REINETTE KOEKEMOER  
MEd Study

Conclusion questionnaire

Dear participant,

I really PLEASE need the following questions answered as conclusion to my study.

1. How did you feel about the meetings we had as a group?

Informative  
Shows problems  
Makes sense to work as a group.  
Started to think about problem solving.

2. Did you learn anything from your colleagues in the group? Of yes, what? How did you apply it in your own classroom and / or teaching?

Yes. Patient with learners. Involve more learners  
on different levels.

3. Was any of the strategies we as a group discussed applied? If yes, was / is it successful?

Yes. Group discussions. SBST works closer  
store information and activities.

4. Was there any strategies we as a group identified and discussed that you were not able to apply?

Not enough time to implement strategies.

5. Have you discussed the supporting of learners with barriers to learning with any members of the group since we last met? If yes, what was the discussion about?

Yes Handwriting  
Needs for Support Centre  
Fine motor skills development  
How to handle all learners with needs - extra Eng/Math classes

6. Is there any issues regarding learner support that you would like discuss further as a group?

No at this stage we are in full control of our support Centre

7. What is your overall feeling / attitude towards learner support, inclusive education and the establishment of full-service schools in South Africa?

Wonderful idea No child is left out. Lots of pressure on educators but those who are willing to walk the extra mile to help and support learners will make the difference. Education for our nation is a necessity!  
All schools needs to be inclusive!

Sentie

NAME OF PARTICIPANT

## ANNEXURE J - LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

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### CERTIFICATE

Issued on 09 December 2015

I hereby declare that I have edited the language of the dissertation

**A collaborative approach to  
facilitating learner support by teachers  
in a full-service school**

submitted for the degree

*Magister Educationis* in Educational Psychology

in the Faculty of Education Sciences at the

Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

by

Reinette Koekemoer

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*The responsibility to effect the recommendations and changes remains with  
the candidate*



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