

**EXPLORING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT
OF THEIR CHILD WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN A LOW INCOME
COMMUNITY**

by

Adele Poole

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Supervisor:

Prof. Doria Daniels

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

There is substantial evidence to suggest that parents' involvement in the education of their children can make a significant difference in the educational attainment of those children. Given that parental involvement promises to be advantages to all learners, those with learning difficulties often require a greater degree of parental involvement and support than their peers without learning difficulties. However, studies have also indicated that parental involvement in the education of their children still appears to be limited. This can be attributed to various factors, one of them being the socio-economic status of the parents. The study's focus is on active parent involvement in the education of their children who have learning difficulties in a low socio-economic school. In order to do this, the research made use of a basic qualitative research design that is embedded within the interpretive paradigm. Six sets of parents with children enrolled in the learning support programme at the school were interviewed. The sample was purposively drawn and the interviews were conducted in the learning support classroom of the school. The bio-ecological model of Bronfenbrenner, as well as Bourdieu's model of cultural and social capital, was used as theoretical framework for the study. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data from which four essential themes emerged. The themes were (1) parents' awareness and knowledge of their child's experience of their learning difficulties, (2) the nature of parental involvement in their child's learning, (3) the parent-teacher relationship, and (4) parental resources. These themes suggest that parents have knowledge about and are attentive to their child's learning difficulty. The parents in the study were keen to seek additional professional help despite their financial constraints, and showed a vast amount of compassion and commitment to their child. The data analysis also alluded to the fact that parents experience involvement to have both barriers and advantages, especially when there is access to resources such as the expertise of various therapists. However, the compassion and empathy these parents had for their children's educational challenges was enlightening. In spite of their financial obstacles, the parents were positive and viewed their child's future optimistically. They were actively involved in their child's academic and social education. The parents also worked hard at establishing a relationship with their child's school and encouraged teachers to involve them.

OPSOMMING

Daar is aansienlike bewyse dat ouerbetrokkenheid in die opvoeding van hul kinders 'n betekenisvolle verskil maak in die akademiese vordering van hul kinders. Ouerbetrokkenheid is bewys om voordelig te wees vir alle leerders, maar soveel te meer is dit van groter noodsaaklik vir leerders met leerhindernisse of leerprobleme. Navorsing dui egter dat ouerbetrokkenheid in hul kinders se opvoeding aansienlik beperk is. Verskeie faktore kan hiervoor verantwoordelik wees. Navorsing toon dat 'n moontlike faktor die sosio-ekonomiese status van die ouers is. Die studie fokus op aktiewe ouerbetrokkenheid in die opvoeding van kinders in 'n lae sosio-ekonomiese skool wat leerprobleme ervaar. Ten einde dit te doen, is gebruik gemaak van 'n basiese kwalitatiewe ontwerp wat in die interpretatiewe paradigma ingesluit is. Onderhoude is gevoer met ses ouerpare wie se kinders in die leerondersteuningsprogram van die skool ingeskryf is. Die deelnemers is doelbewus gekies en die onderhoude is in die leerondersteuningslokaal van die skool gevoer. Die bio-ekologiese model van Bronfenbrenner, sowel as Bourdieu se teorie aangaande kulturele en sosiale kapitaal is gebruik as teoretiese raamwerk vir die studie. Kwalitatiewe tema-ontleding is gebruik om die data te ontleed en vier essensiële temas het na vore gekom. Die temas was (1) ouers se bewustheid en kennis van hul kinders se leerprobleme, (2) die aard van die ouerbetrokkenheid in hul kinders se opvoeding, (3) die ouer-onderwyser verhouding, en (4) hulpbronne vir ouers. Hierdie temas voer aan dat ouers wel oor kennis besit aangaande hul kind se leerprobleem en dat hulle aandag daaraan skenk. Die ouers in die studie was ook gewillig om addisionele professionele hulp in te win ten spyte van finansiële beperkings. Hulle toon ook baie deernis vir en toewyding aan hul kind. Die data analise het ook getoon dat daar voordele en nadele is van ouerbetrokkenheid, veral wanneer hulpbronne soos die kundigheid van terapeute beskikbaar is. Die deernis en toewyding wat hierdie ouers vir hulle kinders se opvoedingsuitdagings getoon het, was egter verhelderend. Ten spyte van finansiële beperkings, het die ouers hulle kinders se toekoms in 'n optimistiese lig beskou omdat hulle in hulle kinders se akademiese en sosiale opvoeding betrokke was. Die ouers het ook hard gewerk om verhoudings te smee met onderwysers en onderwysers aangemoedig om hulle te betrek.

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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Engaging parents in their children's education is one of the most effective ways of advancing academic success. In South Africa, one of the strongest trends in education reform has been to give parents, and in some cases community members, an increased responsibility in governing schools (Lemmer, 2007). Parents acquired formal power in education through the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996. This Act created the opportunity for parents to be meaningful partners in school governance and for them to become part of a system in which educators can collaborate with the parents to bring about quality education (Singh, Mbokodi, & Msila, 2004).

Parental involvement is understood differently by various parent communities. So too the race, class and academic history of parents, together with their available resources, influence how parents see their role in the education of their children. Sing et al.'s (2004) research found that parental involvement in educational matters can be influenced by the socio-economic status of the family. However, the focus on socio-economic status, according to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), is not enough to explain the inequality in education of children from different social classes. Bourdieu introduced the concept of cultural capital, which essentially means that, beyond economic factors, cultural habits and characteristics are also fundamentally important to children's school success.

It can be argued that parents from a middle-class background are in a more favourable position to be involved in the education of their children, due to their more favourable economic position and thus availability to the school (Singh et al., 2004). The working class parent's social and financial situation might make it more challenging to attend meetings, be involved, or even just being able to pay school fees. School administrators often ignore such constraints. Thus their efforts to involve parents may be biased in favour of wealthier parents while creating limitations to the involvement of the working class. According to Singh et al. (2004), the imbalance in parental involvement in education is clearly identified in historically disadvantaged schools, where the parents might lack the required literacy level for participation. Many of these parents might be unemployed and thus have reduced financial

power in the school. When the children of poor parents have learning difficulties, the challenges of socio-economic standing become even more pronounced.

Children with learning difficulties generally experience difficulties in acquiring cognitive skills such as attentive listening, reasoning and verbal skills, and in learning areas such as reading, writing and mathematics. Additionally, these learners experience difficulties in regulating their own behaviour with regard to social perception and interaction, and often exhibit challenging behaviour (Landsberg, 2011). Research relating to parent involvement in schooling, especially within a South African context, is limited and is mostly reported on in relation to wealthier social groups (Smit & Liebenberg, 2003). Furthermore, research pertaining to the involvement of parents of learners who experience learning difficulties is particularly limited. Given that parental involvement promises to be an advantage to all learners, those with learning difficulties often require a greater degree of parental involvement and support than their peers without learning difficulties. This study's focus is on active parental involvement in the education of their children who have learning difficulties. Because children with learning difficulties often require a greater degree of parental involvement and support than their peers without learning difficulties, this study could produce new insights into the educational contribution that parents potentially could make to the educational advancement of their children with learning difficulties.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In my capacity as a learning support educator, and as a psychometrist in the Inclusive Education Team in the Metropole South region in the Western Cape, I came across many instances where parents did not fully comprehend the challenges that a child with a learning difficulty has. Many were unaware or uninformed about the services that were available to them regarding their child. Auxiliary services such as psychological support, speech therapy and physiotherapy are very expensive services. Most working-class parents whose children are attending poorly resourced state schools are unable to afford these services and are consequently reliant on the services that the Education Department provides. However, many parents do not make use of the available state services.

The lack of professional assessment and diagnosis of such learners might be contributing to school dropout in such communities. Due to the lack of assessment, children who have

learning difficulties could wrongly be labelled by parents and teachers as naughty, lazy and even unintelligent. Because of this unwarranted label, such children might leave school at an early age, with little self-confidence and low self-esteem. They inevitably become part of the huge unemployment statistics of this country, leaving them with a limited choice for a good future.

Not enough is known about the role that poor parents play to provide support to their child with learning challenges. The purpose of this study was to explore the involvement of parents in the education of their children with a learning difficulty. It sought to understand parents' awareness of their role as the main support structure for the child with learning needs. The research questions that guided this study therefore were:

- What are parents' understanding of parental involvement?
- How are parents involved in their children's education?
- What are parents' knowledge about the structures that are in place to support their child's education?

The study was undertaken within a qualitative research framework. Qualitative research has as view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting in their social worlds. Qualitative researchers are therefore interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, specifically how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 1998).

Methodologies used in qualitative research refer to processes whereby the researcher attempts to understand how research participants make meaning of their environment. This framework is concerned with exploring, describing and understanding human behaviour in its natural setting. In qualitative research the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyses them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language (Creswell, 2007). I worked within the interpretive paradigm as I believed that the reality to be studied consisted of people's subjective experiences of the external world. In this study the reality comprises the parents' experiences of having a child with a learning difficulty within a context where poverty is a prominent reality. Such a positioning compels the researcher to adopt an inter-subjective or interactional epistemological stance towards that reality. The data collection tools were semi-structured interviewing and observation, as these methods rely on the

subjective relationship between the researcher and the participant (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) describe the research design as a plan or protocol that one has for a particular piece of research. The design for this research was the case study. Case studies are usually descriptive in nature and provide rich information about the individuals or particular situations (Lindegger, 2002). The features that mark this particular research project as a case study are the parents who have children with a learning difficulty and their involvement in the children's education. The case is a bounded system, bounded by time, which was the three weeks used for data collection, and place, which was a single school. The sources of information in data collection were the responses of the parents and a member of the school staff, as well as observations by the researcher (myself).

A public school situated in a low socio-economic status area within the Metropole East Education Department was identified to be the context for the study. The school was contacted after permission was granted by the Department of Education in the Western Cape. The parents of children who were enrolled in the learning support programme were identified as potential participants in the study. Eight families with a child with a learning difficulty were selected with the assistance of the school's learning support educator. Six families eventually agreed to participate in the study. The main criterion for participant selection was the ability to articulate the experience of having a child with a learning difficulty.

The methods for data collection were personal interviewing with the parents and one member of the managing staff of the school. A semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the six parents and the senior staff member. This process was facilitated by an interview guide that consisted of a list of themes and questions to be covered (Welman, Kruger, & Mitchell, 2005).

The process of analysis started whilst the data was being collected. A key principle of interpretive analysis is to stay close to the data and to interpret it from the position of empathic understanding (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Data analysis refers to a range of processes and procedures whereby there is a movement from the qualitative data that has been collected to some form of explanation of the people and situations that are being investigated. Qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretative philosophy. The idea is to examine the meaning and symbolic content of the data (Daniels, 2013).

The data was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis emphasises pinpointing, examining and recording patterns (or “themes”) within data. Themes are patterns across datasets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated with a specific research question. The themes become the categories for analysis. Thematic analysis is performed through the process of coding in six phases to create established, meaningful patterns. These phases are: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

1.3 DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study is a study of limited scope, as it is a 50% requirement for a Master’s degree. As such it was delimited to one school. Within this school, six participants were purposively selected based on their socio-economic status and because they were raising a child with a learning difficulty.

1.4 CREDIBILITY AND DEPENDABILITY

Credibility refers to the degree to which the research conclusions are sound, and dependability is the degree to which the results are repeatable. Interpretive researchers do not assume that they are investigating a stable and unchanging reality and therefore do not expect to find the same results repeatedly (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). In qualitative research one expects that participants and populations will behave differently and express different opinions in changing contexts. As such, in place of the criterion of reliability, qualitative findings should be dependable. Dependability refers to the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the finding did indeed occur as the researcher says it did. Dependability is achieved through rich and detailed descriptions that show how certain actions and opinions are rooted in and developed out of contextual interaction (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

1.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues are essential to take into consideration because they are aimed at ensuring the safety of the participants in the study. According to Allan (2011), ethics forms a part of philosophy known as moral philosophy, which studies the idea of morality. To complete ethically correct research it is necessary to receive institutional approval. The first step was to complete the necessary forms and forward a duplicate of my research proposal to the Western Cape Education Department for their approval (see Addendum A). Permission was required from the participants (Addendum D) and the school (Addendum B). All participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage. The Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University provided ethical clearance for the study (see Addendum C).

Each of the participants was given a consent form to sign. This permitted them to choose whether or not they wanted to take part. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly adhered to with regard to the information gathered for the duration of the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants so as to protect their identity.

The participants were assured that the research would not lead to any form of victimisation of them or their children, and that the aim was to benefit them by providing guidelines for support for their involvement in their children's education. All the information was treated with strict confidentiality. I was competent to carry out the procedures necessary for the research project (Allan, 2011).

1.6 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

1.6.1 Parental involvement

Parental involvement comprises a range of activities that take place between the home and the school. It involves parents' insights into their children's progress and parents' participation in decision making regarding their children's schooling.

1.6.2 Low socio-economic schools

South African public schools are categorised from quintile 1 to 5. Quintile 1 represents the poorest school type, while quintile 5 is the best resourced. The poverty rankings are determined nationally according to the poverty of the community around the school, as well as certain infrastructural factors. On the basis on the level of poverty and the income of the parents of the schools, quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools are no-fees schools. Learners attending these schools do not pay school fees.

1.6.3 Learning difficulties

Learning difficulties are defined as difficulties in acquiring knowledge and skills to the normal level expected of those of the same age, especially because of mental disability or cognitive disorder.

1.6.4 Cultural capital

Cultural capital consists of the social assets of a person (education, intellect, style of speech and dress, etc.) that promote social mobility in a stratified society.

1.7 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 served as an introduction to the research study and described its aims and objectives. Chapter 2 will provide a more detailed review of parental involvement, learning difficulties, low socio-economic schools and cultural capital. Chapter 3 details the research procedure, which includes the research design, participants, procedures and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 provides a discussion of the results and the themes that were identified, and ends with a summary of the results. Chapter 5 deals with the discussion of the limitations of the study and concludes with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

It is important, when doing research, to be aware of and review previous work in the field, thus doing a literature review. Babbie (2001) refers to a literature review as a scholarship review, because the process involves studying existing scholarship to see how other scholars have investigated related research problems. The purpose therefore was to locate this study in relation to existing literature (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Hence, in this study, a review of the literature on parental involvement, learning difficulties and parental involvement in schools in low socio-economic areas was undertaken. I framed the discussion within the bio-ecological model of Bronfenbrenner and unpacked the value of the sociological concepts of social and cultural capital.

2.2 FRAMING THE STUDY

2.2.1 Deconstructing the term, learning difficulty

This study is concerned with primary school children who have learning difficulties. My review of the literature shows that the terms learning disability, learning disorder/impairment and learning difficulty are used interchangeably (The Salvesen Mindroom Centre, 2017). It does, however, differ in many ways. A disorder refers to a significant learning problem in an academic area. These problems are not enough to warrant an official diagnosis. Learning disability, on the other hand, is an official clinical diagnosis, whereby the individual meets certain criteria as determined by a professional such as a psychologist or a paediatrician. The difference is in degree, frequency and intensity of reported symptoms and problems, and the terms therefore should not be confused. When the term learning disorder is used, it describes a group of disorders characterised by the inadequate development of specific academic, language and speech skills.

In layman's terms, children with learning difficulties are the 'children who struggle in school'. In this study, children with learning difficulties include children who are enrolled in

the learning support programme at the school and are taken out of their classes once a week to receive remedial education in a smaller group for 30 minutes. When learners have been identified as in need of learning support, an extensively adapted process of co-operation between the parents and the school is implied. It is important for learning support teachers to receive the necessary information about the child's learning difficulty in order to increase his or her learning outcomes. Johnsen and Bele (2013) assert that, through dialogue with parents and effective co-operation between home and school, teachers will gain knowledge about their learners because a positive correlation exists between parental involvement and learner achievement.

It is a normal occurrence in many schools that there are learners who experience learning difficulties. However, there are various degrees of learning difficulties, from learners who are not able to cope with any learning subject at school to learners whose learning difficulties go unnoticed because they usually reach the learning objectives set for them, even though their achievement is not according to their potential. The learning difficulties they experience are mostly due to extrinsic factors, such as poverty, poor home conditions, violence in the family or community, etc. In such cases, the learners' learning difficulties could be alleviated (Dednam, 2011). The following table provides a brief overview of the learning difficulties encountered in schools.

Table 1: Most common learning difficulties

| Characteristics | Different areas | Explanation of characteristics | Possible intervention |
|--|--|---|---|
| Cognitive characteristics | Cognition | Learners experience difficulty using cognitive strategies when learning. | Learning support educator |
| | | They experience difficulty during active learning as their metacognitive functions and learning styles are not imprinted. | The learning support educator |
| | | They are unable to solve problems. | - Provides learning support to identified learners by withdrawing small groups of learners and they support the class in general when needed. |
| | Attention | These learners are easily distracted or are not able to pay attention and concentrate as long as their peers do. | - They serve as resource teachers |
| | Memory | Their memory is poor, especially when they have to remember more than one instruction. | - They devise language and mathematics intervention programmes. |
| | Organization | They are disorganised in their approach to learning. They lose their place when they read or when they have to copy information from another book or the blackboard. | - They meet with parents to compile home programmes for learners and guide the parents in such programmes. |
| | | They are disorganised, especially when they have to execute an instruction in a specific order. | Speech and language therapists |
| | Perception | They have difficulties with literacy, their eye-hand preference is not established and they confuse direction. They also experience directional difficulties in reading, writing and mathematics. | - They assess and are involved in auditory perception and emergent literacy. |
| | | They have visual perceptual difficulties and make errors in letters, words and numbers. They also confuse letters, and the order of the letters in the words they write or read is incorrect. | - They engage with learners with speech impairment such as articulation, expressive and receptive language skills, stuttering, hoarseness of the voice. |
| | | They experience auditory perceptual difficulties and find it hard to identify letter sounds in the words they hear. | - Where needed they implement Alternative and Augmentative Communication, an apparatus or device that can supplement or replace communication. |
| Their integration of sensory information is poor and they experience difficulties with letter-sound associations. | | - They teach affected learners to swallow and feed, does hearing screens and assist in second language acquisition. | |
| They avoid activities that expect them to give lengthy visual and auditory attention. They do not like, for instance, to listen to stories and they avoid doing puzzles. | | Occupational therapist | |
| Academic characteristics | Spoken language | They may have a history of late language development. | - Occupational therapists helps children to develop the underlying skills necessary for learning and performing specific tasks such as: |
| | | They find it difficult to remember new words and their vocabulary is limited. | - Gross motor skills development |
| | | They may experience difficulties in pronouncing words and articulating sounds correctly. | - Fine motor skills development |
| | Written language (reading, spelling and writing) | Their word identification and/or comprehension in reading is/are poor. | - Visual Perception |
| | | Their spelling is poor, they make mistakes with letters, words, word syllables and sentence structures. One day they remember a word and syllable when reading and spelling it, but the following day they are unable to do so. | - Visual Motor Integration |
| | | Their poor motor coordination and spatial relation skills cause their paper work and handwriting to be untidy and nearly illegible. | - Work preparation |
| | Mathematics | They experience difficulties in solving mathematical problems. | - Sensory Integration |
| | | They cannot remember their combinations and are overdependent on mathematical aids. | Psychologist |
| | | They work only according to learned solving strategies as they are unable to invent their own creative solving strategies. | - They are involved in: |
| Social and emotional characteristics | | Owing to emotional problems caused by failure and poor social perception, their motivation and attention are poor. This further aggravates their failure in their schoolwork. | - Early identification of learners experiencing barriers to learning |
| | | Their poor use of language and articulation may affect their ability to communicate fluently with other and establish normal interpersonal relationships with them. | - Study skills and exam-writing techniques (individual & group) |
| | | Their social behaviour is unacceptable as they make poor decisions, misinterpret non-verbal cues, cannot predict the consequences of their behaviour and are socially naïve. | - Capacity-building : Educators, Parents & others (IE Guidelines) |
| Behaviour characteristics | | They rush through their written work, the results of which are very poor. | - Psycho-educational assessment (individual & group) |
| | | Their workpace is slow and they find it very hard to complete their work in time as they attend to everything except the work they are busy with. | - Evaluations for assessment accommodations (concessions) |
| | | Both gross- and fine motor coordination are poor. They are clumsy and sometimes seem to be helpless when they have to execute a task. | - Referrals for placement in SS/RC (high-level needs) |
| | | They tend to exhibit hyperactive and impulsive behaviour. | - Psychotherapeutic support (individual & group) |

The literature that I reviewed includes literature situated in psychology that informed me about human development. There I leaned on Bronfenbrenner's research on human development within a bio-ecological system, which I discuss first. This is followed by Bourdieu's and Yosso's research on social and cultural capital. Given the socio-economic status of the parents, I found these useful for my framing of the phenomenon of parental involvement when their child has learning difficulties, and when their context is defined by low socio-economic conditions.

2.2.2 The bio-ecological model

The bio-ecological model is an extended version of the ecological model first introduced by Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s. In general, ecological models describe processes and conditions regarding human development in the actual environments in which people live (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Bronfenbrenner added the prefix bio- to the concept ecological as a means of acknowledging the importance of biological resources and attributes in understanding human development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). He further emphasised that a person's development is a product of a network of cultural, social, economic, political and psychological interactions (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). The bio-ecological model consists of four properties, of which the first is process, which forms the core of the model mainly because it includes specific forms of interaction between organisms and their environment. These interactions are called proximal processes and they function over time. Examples of enduring patterns of proximal processes can be found in parent-child and peer-peer activities (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Bronfenbrenner considers the family as one of the main settings in which proximal processes take place, even though this is but one of many settings in which reciprocal interactions occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). One of the objectives of this study was to explore the parents' understanding of parental involvement, and thus the relationship between parent and child in the home. According to the theory, the proximal processes between child and parents and those with the rest of the family members have an effect on the development and mental well-being of the developing individual from a very early stage. Exposure to and the frequency of the proximal processes would enable parents to detect possible academic struggles that the child may have from an early age on.

The second property is that of the developing person. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) say several features are influential in shaping the course of development of a person, and that these will affect the direction and power of proximal processes through the life course of the individual. The first of these is the 'disposition' of such an individual. Swart and Pettipher (2011) explain this as forces that can activate as well as sustain proximal processes, as well as interfere in, limit or prevent the occurrence thereof. Examples of the 'dispositions' of individuals are distractibility, aggression, feelings of insecurity, unresponsiveness or, by contrast, curiosity, responsiveness and the like in the child. Learners with a learning difficulty often experience these temperaments. A second feature is that of resources of ability and disadvantages. A resource of ability is essential for the effective functioning of these proximal processes and includes experience, knowledge and skills. The resources of

disadvantage, on the other hand, include genetic defects of the individual, such as brain damage or brain functions that inevitably inhibit the domains in which proximal processes can operate effectively (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). If parents are able to detect resources of ability, and especially resources of disadvantage, at an early stage of their child's life, the possibility of this individual receiving intervention from an early stage could influence the quality of life for the parents and the child in a positive way. Another feature is that of demand characteristics, such as a fussy or happy child, or hyperactivity vs. passivity. These features have the ability to invite or discourage reaction from the social environment, which can either foster or disrupt the operation of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

An additional distinctive feature of the bio-ecological model is its highly differentiated reconceptualization of the environment from the perspective of the developing person. The ecological environment is conceived of as a set of nested structures inside of each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These nested structures are referred to as contexts, ecological levels or environmental systems, and include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. These all interact with the chronosystem, which is the time dimension (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Each system depends on the circumstantial nature of the person's life and offers a diversity of options and sources of growth (Swick & Williams, 2006). In this study it was important to look at the availability of resources (or the lack thereof) to the parents to support their child at the various ecological levels. Different dynamics are at play on each level, which influence one another and inevitably the life of the parent and child. Moving from the innermost level (microsystem) to the outside, these structures will be defined and described below.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the microsystem as a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics. Individuals participate actively in this system, such as in the family, the school or the peer group. According to Rogoff (2003), the microsystem consist of the child's most immediate environment (physically, socially and psychologically) and forms the child's setting for initially learning about the world, and therefore offers the child a reference point of the world. The family is the child's early microsystem for learning and how to live.

The mesosystem comprises the interrelationships among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates, such as, for a child, the relationships among home, school and peers; for an adult, these relationships are among family, work and social life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) also notes that the real power of mesosystems is that they help to connect more systems in which the child, parent and family live. This means that what happens in the family or peer group can influence how children respond at school and vice versa. According to Donald, Lazarus, and Lolwana (2010), the mesosystem is very similar to what some refer to as the neighbourhood or the 'local community'.

The exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These refer to places children seldom enter, such as the parents' world of work (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Exosystems are contexts that are experienced by the developing person in a remote manner, and yet they have a direct impact on them (Swick & Williams, 2006). In the current study, the involvement of parents in their child's education and school could often be influenced by the context of the child's exosystem. Parents may not be available promptly due to work circumstances, such as work hours, working conditions and the like.

The macrosystem consists of the all-encompassing pattern of the micro-, meso- and exosystems characteristics of a given culture or subculture. This includes particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity structures, hazards and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). It is argued that the macrosystem in which we live has an impact on the nature of interactions between all the other levels, thereby providing structure and content to the inner systems (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Donald et al. (2010) describes the macrosystem as being the equivalent of what is referred to as the wider community, as well as the whole social system. The population from which the participants are drawn is a low socio-economic community in which circumstances may influence how parents see their role in their child's life on the whole, and thus their involvement in their child's education. The parents' frame of reference regarding their bodies of knowledge, their options that they have due to their socio-economic status, and their belief system may influence how they see their role as parent and the role of the teacher in their child's life. The

influence of socio-economic status on parents' means of thinking and behaviour will be dealt with in more detail in the sections on social and cultural capital.

The outer system, referred to as the chronosystem, encapsulates the dimension of time and how it relates specifically to the interactions between these systems and their influences on individual development (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). It encompasses change and consistency over time, not only in the characteristics of the person but also in the environment in which the person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The chronosystem therefore represents all of the dynamics of families that occur within a historical context within the different systems (Swick & Williams, 2006). In this study, the chronosystem is characterised by the Apartheid system, but more specifically the end of this era and the aftermath thereof. Many changes have taken place in the different ecological systems that affect the developing person in both a direct and an indirect manner. Changes in policies in the schooling system, especially the introduction of an inclusive education system, have had vast effects on the current education system, especially for children and parents whose lives are affected by a learning difficulty.

2.2.3 Social and cultural capital

The concept of social and cultural capital can be best explained by conceptualising it as a person's acquaintances and social networks. According to theorists, if one has more prestigious and well-developed social networks, then one has more social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In its broadest sense, therefore, social capital refers to resources that are obtained through social relationships and connections with other people that include family, community work and school (Saha, 2005). Social capital is generated through social processes between the family and wider communities and is made up of social networks (Reay, 2000). Bourdieu (1986) holds that the more capital one has, the more powerful a position one occupies in social life. He extended the idea of capital beyond the economic and into a more symbolic realm of culture and refers to it as cultural capital, which speaks of non-financial social assets that promote social mobility or success beyond economic means (Saha, 2005). Cultural capital represents symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, etc. that one acquires for being part of a particular social class. It can also be seen in the form of education, intellect, style and speech, dress or physical appearance. In this study, social capital will also refer to knowledge about school systems, referrals to

appropriate professionals, the ability to consult with such professionals, own scholastic achievements and skills, time available, and even the energy and motivation of parents.

In explaining the class differences of people, high socio-economic refers to upper- or middle-class or rich people, whereas low socio-economic refer to the poor or lower class. According to Sullivan (2002), Bourdieu considered the education system of industrialised societies, therefore including South Africa, as functioning in ways to legitimate class inequalities. Success in the education system is facilitated by the possession of cultural capital and habitus. In contrast to this, the possibility of failure of learners from low socio-economic schools is inevitable, because these learners generally do not possess the cultural and social capital that schools value. Class inequalities may play out in this way in educational attainment. In this study it could be explained that poor parents have less cultural, and social capital that is undervalued or not acknowledged. They often do not know about the systems available to them and how the networks operate (social capital), and they probably have not accumulated cultural capital to benefit them and their children.

Yosso (2005), however, challenges Bourdieu's cultural capital theory and introduces an alternative concept called community cultural wealth. Community cultural wealth encourages various forms of capital, which include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resident capital. The view of Bourdieu on cultural capital is thus critiqued by Yosso, who maintains that socially marginalised communities possess their own cultural knowledge, skills and abilities, which usually go unnoticed and unacknowledged. She further contends that parents and learners from low socio-economic backgrounds have their own cultural capital that they bring into the school from their homes and communities. Schools, however, need to recognise the strengths that these communities have to offer, and to acknowledge that, despite their lack of financial resources, parents have their own cultural history and background that can serve as strength and benefit to their involvement in their children's schooling.

James Coleman (1988) as cited in Lee and Bowen, (2006) describes three components of social capital, namely the obligations and expectations of reciprocity in social relationships, norms and social control, and information channels. In his research on parental involvement as social capital, McNeal (1999) describes these components in terms of structural form, which involves the dyadic relationships between the parent and the child, the teacher or another parent. A second component according to McNeal is that of norms of obligation and

reciprocity, which points to the kinship that exists between parent and child. This kinship base makes it easy to discuss relationships between parent-child and parent-school (McNeal, 1999). The third component pointed out by McNeal is that of the existence and degree of resources, which essentially points to the fact that parents have various levels of physical capital, human capital and cultural capital to invest in their children.

Cultural capital is primarily transmitted through the family. It is from the family that children derive modes of thinking, types of dispositions, sets of meaning and qualities of style (Reay, 2000). Braxton (1999) contends that cultural capital is something of a 'tool kit', consisting of certain knowledge, skills and styles, and is transmitted from parents to their children. The family therefore influences the child's engagement with and performance at school.

In schools that are situated in poor communities and where the learner is poor, there is a bigger dependence on state resources such as feeding schemes operating at the school. Families' dependence on social grants could add to such dependencies. According to Lareau (2011), when the habitus of the learner complements the habitus of the broader culture, parents feel comfortable with the school and feel able to tap into the potential of the school's social and material resources.

There are different types of parental involvement in the education of their children. There are parents who are able to visit the school on a regular basis for events and activities, and there are parents who have day jobs and are unable to visit the school, but are involved in their child's education at home. According to De Civita, Pagani, Vitaro, and Tremblay (2004), research has shown that factors associated with low socio-economic status may reduce the effects of home involvement strategies. Financial hardship may limit the family's ability to provide educational materials and opportunities and may even influence parents' educational expectations of their children. When the child has a learning disability, parents' expectations of that child might even be less. The parents' own low educational attainment may limit such parents' ability to help their children with homework. They might also be less likely to access the educational resources available in the community and the support offered by the department of education for children with a learning difficulty. Lee and Bowen (2006) note that, when parents from low socio-economic status school possess less cultural capital, they may need to make more extensive efforts to ensure their child's academic success.

Thus far, I have critiqued two theories that were considered important in providing a theoretical framework for this study. In the following sections, policy documents of the

Department of Basic Education will be reviewed in terms of their expectations of parents as role players in education. Literature on parental involvement in schools and with their children's education, as well as the role of socio-economic status (SES) in such involvement, will also be reviewed.

2.3 PARENTS AND THEIR ROLES WITHIN EDUCATION

The South African School's Act (1996) defines a parent or guardian of a learner as the person legally entitled to custody of a learner, or the person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a parent or guardian towards the learner's education at school. Extended family members, such as aunts, uncles and grandparents, can therefore also be regarded as parent(s).

Additionally, the Children's Act (2012) declares that, in relation to a child, a parent also includes the adoptive parent of a child. The context of parental involvement has been used in this study to describe a situation in which parents are perceived as active partners in the process of educating their children, as well as their personal perceptions and understanding of what parental involvement entails. Dekker and Lemmer (1993) contend that even though parents can differ in many aspects, the one thing that they have in common is the fact that they all have children. For the purpose of this study, the word 'parent' refers to the parent, or the person legally entitled to custody who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of parent towards the education of the child.

2.3.1 Different perspectives of parental involvement

Considerable evidence suggests that parents' involvement in the education of their children can make a significant difference in the educational attainment of those children (Epstein, 1995; Lemmer, 2007). Several definitions of parental involvement exist in the literature, and there has been much debate on this concept. According to Lemmer (2007), definitions of parental involvement vary greatly, and schools and families rarely share the same perspectives on what is wanted or needed. In addition, government rhetoric and education department policies are not always on the same wavelength as far as the effective site-based implementation of parental involvement is concerned. Cotton and Wikelund (1989, as cited in Okeke, 2014) conceive of parental involvement activities as including telephone communication between parents and their child's school officials, written home-school

communication, home assistance or tutoring, home educational enrichment that support the child's educational activities, and attending school functions. Dekker and Lemmer (1993) describe parental involvement as a catch-all term that is used to explain a wide variety of activities that range from occasional attendance at school functions and efforts to become better teachers of their own children, to intensive efforts of serving in school governance and making decisions in the interests of their children's education.

Taliaferro, DeCuir-Gunby and Allen-Echard (2009) contend that parental involvement is essential to the schooling experience and outcomes of children. They further state that multiple systems, such as parents, home and community, influence the socio-educational experiences of the developing child. This implies that factors such as spending time with children and integrating home with school are also important. Therefore, parental involvement in both the school and home is essential for learners. Epstein (1986) furthermore defines parental involvement in terms of two distinct environments – in school, which she refers to as formal parental involvement, and at home, also known as informal parental involvement. Formal parental involvement is dyadic and refers to parents' physical presence at the school, including general participation, helping in the classroom (e.g. assisting school activities) and involvement in school governance (e.g. serving on the school governing body). Informal parental involvement, on the other hand, may refer to providing adequate and appropriate space for studying, helping with homework, discussing the day's events and engaging in teaching at home.

2.3.2 Dimensions of parental involvement

Definitions of parental involvement represent a wide variety of parental behaviour and practices. Because of this, researchers have supported the use of a multi-dimensional definition rather than a unidimensional understanding of this phenomenon. Epstein (1995) identifies six areas of parental involvement. The first type of involvement refer to schools assisting families with parenting and child-rearing skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each stage and grade level. In the area of communication, schools communicate with families about school programmes and learner progress with school-to-home and home-to-school communication. Volunteering means that schools should improve recruitment, training, work and schedules to involve families, volunteers and audiences at school and in other locations

to support learners and school programmes. Learning at home is when schools should involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curricular-linked activities and decisions. Decision making involves schools including parents as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy activities through parent-teacher association committees, councils and other parent organisations. Collaborating with the community involves schools co-ordinating the work and resources of the community, businesses, colleges and universities or other groups to strengthen school programmes, family practices and the learning and development of learners. Georgiou (2007), on the other hand, claims that parental involvement has five dimensions, which are parenting, helping with homework, communicating with the school, volunteering at school, and participating in school decision making. Similarly, Fan and Williams (2001) empirically identified a seven-component solution for parental involvement: television rules, communication, contact with school, parent-teacher association, volunteering, supervision and education aspiration. According to the abovementioned authors, there are different dimensions to parent involvement that should be considered and taken into account when a school has the need to strengthen parental involvement. Depending on the general frame of reference there seem to be advantages as well as barriers to parental involvement.

2.3.3 Advantages of parental involvement

The literature shows that there are many advantages of parental involvement. Fan and Williams's (2010) study documents that it has been linked positively to learners' maths proficiency and achievement, gains in reading performance, as well as performance on standardised tests and academic assessments. In addition, parental involvement was also found to be related to fewer behavioural problems at school, better attendance and class preparation, better course completion and lower drop-out rates.

Epstein (1986) argues that, due to the two-way communication between home and school, teachers who work with parents understand their learners better. This relationship enables the teacher to generate unique rather than routine solutions to classroom problems, and a shared understanding is reached between parents and learners. Furthermore, parents who are involved develop a greater appreciation of their role in the education of their child. Dekker and Lemmer (1993) note that, if a school is to be improved, parents who are critical and can make sensible judgements are needed. Parents should furthermore not view changes in the

education system as a threat, but rather as a promise to better support both parents and learners.

In a study conducted by Smith (2006) on parental involvement in education among low-income families, it was found that children's self-confidence improved when their parents were engaged in their education. The study also revealed that parents' involvement helped them gain a sense of community and strengthened their belief in the benefit of their personal involvement in their child's education.

The way teachers perceive their learners' parents has a significant impact on the level of involvement by the parents in the long run. Early parental involvement has a positive effect on the child's overall achievement, particularly for the entire duration of their early educational experience. Schools in which parents are effectively involved are better positioned to tackle problems associated with their children's education, especially when the child experiences a learning difficulty.

Despite the fact that parental involvement is associated with multiple advantages for parents, teachers and the learner, low socio-economic schools often struggle to create a strong, successful and lasting relationship with the majority of the parent force of the school. Education reform in South Africa also stresses the importance of collaboration between the parents, community and school for the positive overall development of learners. Lemmer (2007) claims that it appears that relatively few parents are actively involved and that involvement may drop off after the first few years. Furthermore, the preference of most parents is not for involvement through school governing bodies, but for involvement in their own children's learning (Epstein, 1995). However, according to Taliaferro et al. (2009), schools value parental involvement that they can see (formal) versus what they cannot see (informal or at home).

2.3.4 Barriers to parental involvement

Taliaferro et al. (2009) have found that there are many reasons why parents may not engage in formal participation in school activities. Some of these reasons are tied to the practical issues of daily life, including other engagements and responsibilities, such as being at work or unavailability due to taking care of other children. Other factors are more obscure, such as the treatment parents receive when attempting to interact with the school. De Luigi and Martelli

(2015) argue that barriers to parental involvement appear to be complex, as there are individual and family factors, child factors, parent-teacher relationship factors and societal factors.

Taliaferro et al. (2009) point out that some parents, in particular African-American parents, have negative memories of school and this helps create scepticism, ambivalence and disengagement from school involvement. According to Koonce and Harper (2005), African American parents often report negative treatment by school personnel. Parents believe that some school personnel doubt their capacity to provide genuine and meaningful assistance and therefore offer them undesirable tasks.

South African studies, notably those conducted on black parents' participation in former model C schools, found that such parents face many challenges. In Mncube's (2009) study on the perceptions of parents on their role in the democratic governance of schools in South Africa, it was found that the majority of black South African parents in the former model C schools ascribed reluctance to participate in school governing bodies (SGBs) and school activities to a lack of education on involvement in school governance and activities. The language barrier poses an additional problem because of the exclusive use of English as a medium of communication in SGB meetings. It is difficult for these parents to attend SGB meetings because of their education/literacy level, and therefore they fear academic victimisation by educators, especially of their children. Parents are also wary of power relations that exist in the SGB. Matshe (2014) argues that the non-involvement of parents in poor communities in schools is to a great extent not deliberate and is influenced by factors beyond the control of the parents. These factors include illiteracy, socio-economic factors, lack of effective communication and lack of capacity and skills.

Okeke (2014) strengthens this argument by noting that most parents in multi-ethnic communities face even greater barriers, especially in relation to language and other cultural characteristics. Such parents tend to harbour feelings of inferiority to teachers, negative attitudes towards the school and inadequate knowledge and skills. These are some of the reasons why black parents do not want to become involved in schooling matters. It has also been suggested that the schools' ideological positioning within the larger society may equally act as a serious barrier to parental involvement.

2.4 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF FAMILIES

In a study conducted by Singh et al. (2004) on black parental involvement in South Africa, it was found that, although parents attribute their non-involvement to various factors, their involvement with schools was highly influenced by their economic status. The study suggests that parents from disadvantaged backgrounds encounter greater difficulties in their relationship with the educational system, and that the socio-economic status of the parent seems to dictate the level of involvement of parents in the education of their child. Bourdieu's (1986), contention of class differences in the school community and the influence thereof supports this.

In order to explain the influence of socio-economic factors, particularly poverty, on parental involvement, I reviewed literature to inform the study on the role of social support in parental participation. A large proportion of South Africa's parent population is unemployed or earning below the breadline. These parents often receive social grants for their school-going children, which entail a monthly amount of R350 (South African Social Security Agency, 2017). Many South African families are living below the breadline. According to Stats SA (Musgrave, 2015), the proportion of the population who are deemed to be living in poverty increased from 45.5% to 53.8%. A possible reason for this is that the poverty line, which measures the income people need for essential items after meeting their basic food needs, increased from R620 a month to R779. Furthermore, the official unemployment rate for South Africans was 25% in 2014 (Musgrave, 2015)

According to Bourdieu (1986), working-class ways of life remain largely organised around the practical order of simply getting by. Their choice of school for their children entails a financial and practical decision, such as the nearest school in the neighbourhood. School therefore has to fit into expectations related to affordability, work roles, family roles, the sexual division of labour and the demands of household organisation. Schooling in working-class families is seldom tied to long-term planning; rather, it is tied to coping in the present. Research shows that poor parents' desires for their children's education are often vague and are normally limited by the wants and needs of the children themselves (Ball, Bowe & Gerwitz, 1995, as cited in Msila, 2012). However, this could also be perpetuated due to limited ways of engaging with their worlds.

According to Lee and Bowen (2006), parental involvement in education strengthens links between parents and teachers, role players who represent two primary microsystems, namely the home and the school. Central to the home-school bond and the ability of parents to become involved is the social and cultural capital available to the individual parent. Parents who live in a low socio-economic environment seem to lack networks and relationships in their society that enable them to function effectively. Such families generally lack the social assets to promote social success. Therefore Msila (2012) contends that social and cultural capital are both aspects that poor parents (working class) are unlikely to have. This is similar to the viewpoint of Lareau (1987), who stresses the importance of cultural capital and believes that there are various factors that influence parental participation in schools. Lareau contends that working-class parents' educational capabilities, their view of the appropriate division of labour between teachers and parents, and the material resources available in the home, all affect parent involvement in schooling. This means that the parents' cultural capital influences their view of their role in their child's education.

Smith (2006) argues that children of low-income families often experience non-involvement by their parents due to constraints that might be tied to their economic circumstances, and this causes the children to experience less academic benefits than children coming from higher income families.

When a child has a learning difficulty, there is an increased demand for the family resources of time, money and expertise. Nichols (2000) found that poor discipline, family problems, lack of positive role models, lack of parental support for learning, transience, lack of literacy and numeracy preparation prior to schooling, lack of literacy resources (e.g. books) and poor socialisation contribute to a child's learning difficulties. Furthermore, it was also revealed that schools situated in low socio-economic areas had a higher prevalence of learning difficulties than schools in better socio-economic areas. Contributing to this could be a lack of social support for learners. Because schools that are situated in areas characterised by low socio-economic status have a high attendance by such learners, it is suggested that low SES contributes to children's learning difficulties.

2.5 THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

2.5.1 The road to transformation in the South African educational context

To understand the phenomenon of parental involvement in the education of their child with a learning difficulty it is important to explain the changes in education that have taken place on the international front since the start of South Africa's democracy in 1994. These changes had a direct influence on transformation in the education system on a national level, hence influencing the policies of schools. In a bio-ecological framework, these are macrosystem changes that influence the developing learner and his or her parents. Swart and Pettipher (2011) state that the macrosystems we live in have an impact on the nature of the interactions on all the other levels, thus providing the structure and content of the inner systems. The international system influencing education has a more direct influence on the national system of education in South Africa. In turn, the renewed policies in education have an indirect influence on the individual child and parents. For the purpose of this study I reviewed literature that speaks to the changes in support for learners and parents who have special education needs.

The change in philosophy on the segregated education of children according to their difficulties can be traced back to the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Historically segregated special education was supported by the medical model of disability, which views the barriers to learning as being within the child. The medical model was strengthened by advances in psychometrics, and both these models facilitated categorisation and separate educational provision according to a learner's disability. This segregated approach went unopposed for many years (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). The international movement to inclusive education started in 1990, with the first global commitment in Jomtien at the World Conference on Education for All. UNESCO, along with other UN agencies and a number of international and national non-governmental organisations, has since been working towards achieving this goal (UNESCO, 2001).

The principle of inclusive education led to the establishment of a Framework for action on Special Needs Education that was adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain in June 1994. The purpose hereof was to inform policy and guide action by governments, international organisations, national aid agencies, non-governmental organisations and other bodies in implementing the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education. The term 'special needs

education' refers to education for all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties (UNESCO, 1994).

The Salamanca Statement is clear in declaring that inclusion is a right, a right that is universal and views the creation of inclusive schools as part of the creation of an inclusive society (Engelbrecht, 1999). The statement also declares that every person with a disability has the right to express their wishes with regard to their education, as far as these can be ascertained. Parents have an inherent right to be consulted on the form of education best suited to the needs, circumstances and aspirations of their children (UNESCO, 1994).

South Africa's system of education has changed significantly since 1994, when democracy became the new basis of the country's policy imperatives, extending it to include the right to education, free from discrimination and prejudice (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009). According to Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001), this international guideline provided the overall framework for policy documents in inclusive education in South Africa. These include the White Paper on Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa (Department of Education [DoE], 1995), the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Department of Education [DoE], 1997b), the National Commission on Special Educational Needs and Training and The National Committee on Education Support Services (DoE, 1997b) and White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). For this study, policies summarised in White Paper 6 will be discussed in more detail.

2.5.2 White Paper 6

White Paper 6 provided the framework for the implementation of inclusive education in all public schools and aimed to address the diverse needs of all learners in one undivided education system. Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) argue that White Paper 6 provides guiding principles for the new education system it envisages for South Africa and includes the following: protecting the rights of all people and making sure that all learners are treated fairly; ensuring that all learners can participate fully and equally in education and society; providing access to all learners to a single, inclusive education system; and making sure that all learners can understand and participate meaningfully in the teaching and learning process in schools (DoE, 2001).

Education White Paper 6 makes provision for support by means of a systems approach and collaboration between these systems. Support at a national level is to formulate policy; at a provincial level the role of the departments of education of the nine provinces is to implement policy accepted by the National Department of Education; at a district level the district base support team (DBST) provides a co-ordinated professional support service that draws on expertise in higher education and local communities, targeting special schools and other specialised settings, designated full-service and other primary schools and educational institutions (DoE, 2001).

It proposed that schools should establish a support team that is responsible for the provision of learning support and, together with the teachers, be involved in a particular learner's teaching and learning. The naming of the institution-level support team (ILST) has since changed to the school-based support team (SBST). This team is ultimately responsible for liaising with the DBST and other relevant service providers to identify and meet the needs of their specific institution (DoE, 2001). The learning support teacher (LST) has responsibility for the organisation of this team (Landsberg, 2011). Learning support teachers are expected to provide collaborative systemic support in conjunction with the SBST, and they support the general education teacher in addressing the diverse needs in their classroom. In addition, the LST periodically withdraw learners who experience barriers to learning from the general education classroom for individual or small group support (Dreyer, 2013).

Two main policies were introduced in White Paper 6 for the implementation of inclusive education, namely one on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) and one on Curriculum Differentiation. The SIAS policy is used to determine who needs support, what support is required and how it will be delivered. Three levels of support are identified in the SIAS policy: low, moderate and high levels of support. Learners with learning difficulties need different levels of support. Within low levels of support, any specialist intervention is provided by either other teachers or specialists within the school or surrounding schools, school-based support teams (SBST) or district-based support teams (DBST), or from the school's network of stakeholders. The curriculum and assessment should be adjusted to allow learners at multiple levels of functioning to assess the curriculum and assessment tasks best suited for the learner's needs. Within moderate levels of support, transversal teams that are based at the circuit or district level will monitor and support the implementation of inclusive education through support group meetings, feedback reports, telephonic consultations and site visits. Therapeutic and specialists services that are not available in the school or within the

district are to be sourced from outside the Department or from the school's network of stakeholders (e.g. NGOs), according to the need. Adjustments that are needed to the curriculum, assessment tasks and learner and teaching support material (LTSM) will involve additional planning time by teachers, inputs from curriculum and assessment advisors, and resources from and monitoring by the SBST and DBST. Within high levels of support, access to a range of specialist (specialist teachers, occupational therapists, speech therapists, audiologists, physiotherapists, etc.) is required on a daily basis and must be available full time at the institution/school. The regular curriculum programme is to be adjusted on an on-going basis depending on the learner's needs (DoE, 2011).

2.5.3 Parents and South African policy – means of support

Schooling in low socio-economic areas is mostly provided by the government through public schools. Public schools are managed by the school governing body and the school principal. However, while the South African Schools Act (1996) states that school governing bodies are ultimately responsible for managing and controlling schools, it also states that principals, who are members of the school governing body (SGB), are not solely accountable to the SGB but also to the education department. A SGB comprises parents of learners at the school, educators at the school, members of staff at the school who are not educators and learners in the eighth grade or higher at the school. Of the many duties of the SGB, they need to decide on the language medium of the school, as well as the school fees for each learner at the school. Parents are therefore involved in deciding on crucial aspects regarding the education of their children.

In 2007, a new funding policy was implemented nationally, according to which the poorest 40% of schools were granted no-fees status. No-fees schools may not charge fees; instead, funding allocations from government are skewed to ensure that the poorest schools receive the largest per-learner allocations. The no-fee policy is reliant on a national poverty ranking system which divides all schools into quintiles. The poorest schools are included in quintile 1 and the least poor in quintile 5. The poorest schools receive the greatest per-learner allocation on the assumption that schools in wealthier communities are better able to raise funds and require less support from government. The policy requires that 60% of the available resources must be distributed to the poorest 40% of learners (Hall & Giese, 2009).

Another means of support from the Department of Education is the National School Nutrition Programme, which provides one meal per school day to all learners in quintiles 1, 2 and 3 public primary schools, and to all learners in quintile 1 secondary schools. The nutritional support is intended to address barriers to learning associated with hunger and malnutrition. The Department of Agriculture also assists schools with seedlings, equipment and expertise to establish food gardens that help supplement the feeding programme (DoE, 2011).

2.6 THE SCHOOL AS A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THE LEARNER EXPERIENCING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

For inclusivity to enjoy preference, one of the main tasks of the principal is to help create specific conditions and practices within schools that address the needs of diverse learners. This task centres on forms of teaching and learning that enable diverse learners to succeed, and it implies the advancing of school cultures that embrace and support diversity (Riehl, 2000). Partnerships between staff, families and community members are considered vital for the success and full participation of all learners. Extending partnerships among these groups contributes to learner success and ultimately creates a thriving and democratic community (Haines, Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis, & Turnbull, 2015).

A particular means of accommodating learners who experience learning difficulties is the provision of learning support at schools. The basis of learning support provision is shifting from a problem-focused approach to one that determines the levels of support a child needs to fully participate in a diverse classroom. The Western Cape Education Department has adopted a systemic approach to providing learning support to primary schools. This model is based on a continuum of support provision. The model is based on the notion that, while the first level of support should be provided within the general education class, small groups of learners can be withdrawn for additional support. It allows those learners who otherwise would not be able to afford highly specialised or individual support services to gain access to such services (Dreyer, 2013). In recent years, South Africa introduced the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Strategy (SIAS) as a tool to assess and provide learning support collaboratively and systematically (Dreyer, 2013). The SIAS policy guides teachers in their determination of which learners need support, the type of support that is required and how it will be delivered. The SIAS process is implemented at different levels, with each level having a different level of intervention. The initial screening is done by the

class teacher, who screens all learners at admission, as well as in the beginning of each phase, and records his or her findings in the Learner Profile (LP). When a learner has been identified through the initial screening as being vulnerable or at risk, the teacher manages the case and co-ordinates the support process. The parent/caregiver and the learner (from age 12) are expected to be involved throughout the decision-making process of the SIAS. The teacher completes a support needs assessment form (SNA 1), in which she captures the areas of concern and compiles an inventory of the strengths and needs of the learner. Based on this information, an individual support plan (ISP) is formulated to support the learner. If the support given by the teacher proves to be ineffective, the teacher will involve the SBST by making an appointment to discuss the learner's progress. A second form, the SNA 2, guides the SBST when the learner is referred to them. A plan of action is formulated by which the teacher and school could strengthen the support. The SBST then decides whether a higher level of support is needed, in which case the DBST is asked to assist. At stage three, the SNA 3 form guides the DBST in their intervention strategy to review the plan of action of the teacher and the SBST. The DBST then compiles a further plan into action for the learner and school, based on the information available. The intervention at this level involves planning and budgeting for additional support programmes determined by SNA 3 (DoE, 2011). Throughout the process, the involvement of the parent is vital. Parents need to give consent for whether their child may be assessed by a specialist, as well as permission for alternate placement should that be found to be at the best interest of the learner.

The SIAS policy assigns a fundamental role to the parents in the early identification of learning difficulties. Parent's observations and comments can assist the teacher in addressing other learning difficulties that a learner might be experiencing. It therefore is important that parents be involved at all times in the identification and assessment processes. Parents are encouraged by the Department of Education to initiate contact with teachers regarding their child's progress. In cases where decisions need to be taken about enrolling the learner at an alternative site where additional support is available, parents need to be fully informed about all options available to them so that they can make an informed decision. Parents are expected to be proactive when they suspect that their child has additional support needs. So, for example, the policy states that, should the child not have had access to early intervention programmes by age three years, it is the parents' responsibility to report their child's case to the local mainstream school in the area by the age of five years (DoE, 2011).

The role and involvement of learners in assessing their progress is also introduced as a SIAS strategy. Learners' own perceptions of themselves and their learning are essential when identifying the need for support. When decisions are made about the site where learners are to receive additional support, their learning needs, social relationships and emotional growth are taken into consideration. It is advised that decision making happens in consultation with the learners themselves. Furthermore, the sharing of information about the support needs of learners is only done with the informed consent of the parent or the learner.

2.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter I reviewed the literature that informed me about the issue under investigation. The literature also allowed me to develop the theoretical framework for the study. What the literature underlines is that the role of South African parents in the education of their children has changed markedly since 1994, with the introduction of new education policies. However, children function in various systems, and all of these come together in how learning needs can be understood and attended to. In the next chapter I introduce the research design and methodology that I considered most suited to the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the involvement of parents in the schooling of their child with learning difficulties. To be able to understand, describe and interpret parents' involvement and hence their experience, this study is located within a qualitative research framework. This specific means of enquiry involves studying the phenomenon in its natural setting, and attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). According to Merriam (1998), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, specifically how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.

The previous chapter presented a comprehensive review of the literature. This chapter presents the methodology that guided this study and describes the chosen research design. This chapter also introduces and discusses the data collection methods that were used to collect the data, and describes the analysis procedures that were followed to process the data. Within this chapter I point out the study's limitations and delimitations. I also present the ethical considerations taken into consideration whilst conducting the study with vulnerable parents.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question is what the researcher believes could be the problem, or the case that the researcher intends investigating by means of the research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). These questions also enable the researcher to determine and put forward a tradition of enquiry. The research questions that I posed for the study were:

- What are parents' understanding of 'parental involvement'?
- How are parents involved in their children's education?
- What knowledge do parents have about the structures that are in place to support their child's education?

Furthermore, Durrheim (2006) suggests that the type of research questions that are formulated, as well as the way in which the research questions are addressed, is influenced by the research paradigm of the study. A detailed discussion of the research process and design implemented to answer these questions will now follow.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Reber (1985) describes a paradigm as an orientation to or a plan for research using a particular focus. Creswell (1998) describes a paradigm, also known as a worldview, as a set of basic beliefs or assumptions that guide the researcher's enquiry. Within educational research, three research paradigms can be identified. These are the positivist, interpretivist and critical paradigms (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). In the positivist stance, education is considered the object to be studied. This is a stance not suited for qualitative research, as only one reality is assumed. Knowledge gained through scientific and experimental research is objective and quantifiable. In the interpretivist form of research, education is considered to be a process and school is a lived experience (Merriam, 1998). As such, knowledge is gained through an inductive mode of enquiry. In critical research, education is considered to be a social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation. Knowledge generated from this mode of inquiry typically requires an ideological critique of power, privilege and oppression in areas of educational practice (Merriam, 1998). In this study the interpretivist stance was chosen, for it deals with parents' subjective experiences of being involved in the education of their child who is enrolled in the learning support programme in a low socio-economic school.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002) describe paradigms as comprehensive systems of interconnected practice and thinking that define the nature of enquiry along three dimensions. These dimensions are ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Ontology addresses the form and nature of reality, and therefore what there is that can be known about reality (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The nature of reality is constructed by individuals involved in the research situation. Multiple realities therefore exist, such as the reality of the researcher, those of the individuals being investigated, and those of the reader or the audience interpreting the study (Creswell, 1998). The implication is that realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions based socially and experientially, as well as local and specific, and dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them (Guba,

1990). This means that we construct knowledge through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The ontological assumption of researchers who adopt an interpretive paradigm is therefore that participation by the individual will ensure that the knowledge that is produced is reflective of the individual's reality.

Epistemology looks at the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known; this means that the relationship between the researcher and that reality (Punch & Oancea, 2014) is a necessary part of the research. Within the interpretive paradigm, the epistemological assumption is that the researcher interacts with that which is being researched. This interaction, according to Creswell (1998), can assume the form of living with or observing individuals over a period of time, or an actual relationship between the researcher and the individual(s). There is therefore a close link between the researcher and those being researched. The researcher and the researched are fused into a single entity, and the findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two (Guba, 1990). This means that we are shaped by our lived experiences and these will always come out in the knowledge that we generate as researchers and the data gathered by our subjects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this study I built a relationship between myself and the parents and interacted with them and key informants from their worlds in order to understand their realities through the knowledge generated in this research.

Methodology refers to the methods that can be used to study the reality (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The qualitative researcher works inductively, meaning categories are developed from informants' data and not in advance by the researcher (Creswell, 1998). It is the process of how we seek out new knowledge. Interpretive approaches rely heavily on naturalistic methods such as interviewing and observation to ensure adequate dialogue between the researchers and those with whom they interact in order to collaboratively construct a meaningful reality (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Interpretive researchers appreciate that individuals' behaviour can be understood by sharing the frame of reference of those being researched. An understanding of individuals' interpretations of the world around them has to come from the inside, not the outside (Cohen et al., 2000). Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world, where things are studied in their natural settings by attempting to make sense of or interpret

phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Researchers in this paradigm therefore seek to understand rather than explain.

This study was guided by the interpretive paradigm because it sought to understand and explain the meanings of parent support as understood by them (Merriam, 1998).

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a plan or blueprint for how the researcher intends to conduct the research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Durrheim (2002) defines a research design as a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research. For the research design, the researcher must make a series of choices in relation to four aspects, namely the purpose of the research; the theoretical paradigm informing the research; the context or situation in which the research is carried out; and the research techniques employed to collect and analyse the data (Durrheim, 2002).

The purpose of the study was to investigate the involvement of parents in the schooling of their child with a learning difficulty. The research was conducted with parents whose children were being schooled in the learning support programme in a low socio-economic school in the Metropole East region of the Western Cape Education Department. From this programme, seven parents were purposively selected to participate in the study. The research was located in a holistic case study design (Yin, 1984). A detailed description of methods employed in the case study will be described next.

3.4.1 The case study

Case studies investigate ongoing experience within its real-life context when the boundaries between experience and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984). The case study is a descriptive methodology within a qualitative framework that relies on several sources of evidence, and has an actual everyday context within boundaries that are not clearly evident. Case studies can be quantitative in nature and test theory, but in education, as in my study, the case studies are being used within the qualitative paradigm (Merriam, 1998). The basic idea is that one case (or a small number of cases) will be studied in detail, using whatever methods and data are deemed appropriate

for the case. While there will be specific purposes and research questions, the general objective is to generate as full an understanding of the case as possible (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Case studies are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit (case) or bounded system such as, in this case, the bounded system consisting of six sets of parents whose children were schooled in a specific class group due to their learning difficulties (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

A holistic case study design involves one unit of analysis (Yin, 1984). People can be a unit of analysis. This means that the primary focus of data collection is what is happening to the individuals in a setting and how individuals are affected by the setting (Patton, 2002). However, a unit of analysis can likewise be seen as an object of investigation (Durrheim, 2002). In this study the subject of investigation was the parents whose involvement in the schooling of their child with a learning difficulty was being investigated. Although their experiences are unique, they were studied as a bounded system of parents whose children participate in the same programme at the school. A holistic analysis in this instance refers to the entire case (Creswell, 1998).

The context of the study was the primary school attended by the children requiring learning support. The case is the parental involvement and the decisions taken for their children to be involved in the learning support programme offered by the school. The bounded system thus is defined by the learning support programme at the school that these six parents' children participate in.

3.4.2 The role of the researcher

The researcher forms an integral part of the research process, in particular the data collection. Yin (2009) identifies the following skills required for researchers doing case studies. They should be able to ask good questions and interpret the answers, should be good listeners and not be trapped by their own ideologies and preconceptions. Furthermore, researchers should have a firm grasp on the issues being studied and should be unbiased by preconceived notions. The case study strives to portray what it is like to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and a thick description of the participants' lived experiences and feelings about a situation. It therefore is important for events and situations to be allowed to speak for

themselves, rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2000).

3.4.3 The research setting

Within the qualitative approach, individuals are studied in their natural setting. This involves the researcher going out to the setting or field of study, gaining access and gathering material (Creswell, 1998). The setting was a primary school in the Metropole East region of the Western Cape Education Department. The school is set within a community that can be labelled a low socio-economic area. This school is classified as a no-fees school, which means that the children at the children are not obligated to pay any school fees. The school has a feeding scheme system that serves the learners two nutritious meals a day. Many of the learners live in informal settlements or in a dwelling set up in the backyard of someone else's plot. The parents of most of the learners' at this school receive social grants. Those who are in employment are waged workers. The learning support programme at the school serves children in the foundation and intermediary phase.

3.4.4 Participant selection

Sampling is as important in qualitative studies as it is in quantitative studies. Non-probability or purposeful sampling was appropriate for this particular study, because it is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality (Cohen et al., 1998). In this way they build up a sample that is satisfactory for the specific needs as outlined in the research objectives. I first determined the selection criteria that were essential for choosing the participants. As the criteria that were established directly influence the purpose of the study and guide the identification of information-rich cases (Merriam, 1998), this was important to determine, as the participants in the study had to meet the following criteria:

- They had to be parents or guardians of a child at the primary school.
- The child or children had to be enrolled in the learning support programme at the school.
- These child(ren) had to be assessed and diagnosed with having a learning difficulty.

I built rapport with the participants by introducing myself and the purpose of the study informally and as broadly as possible. According to Cohen et al. (2000), it is important for the interviewer to establish an appropriate atmosphere so that the participant can feel secure to talk freely. When parents are uneducated and poor, they might be insecure and feel intimidated by a researcher who is unknown to them. Ethical considerations such as gaining informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity formed part of establishing an open and trusting rapport, hence I decided to work through an individual whom they are familiar with. I approached the learning support educator of the school for the names of possible parents. Access to the school was gained through the learning support educator of the school, as well as the departmental head of the foundation phase. The learning support educator assisted in identifying potential parents as participants, while the departmental head helped facilitate my access to the parents by initially approaching them on my behalf. Once the consent was obtained from the participants, the data collection process commenced. I was given permission by the school principal to conduct the interviews in the learning support classroom at the school.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

In qualitative research there are three major methods of collecting research data, namely asking questions (and listening intently to the answers), observing events and noting carefully what happens, and reading documents (Bassegy, 1999). A case study involves the widest selection of data to be collected, as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case (Creswell, 1998). Yin (2009) refers to six forms of data collection in case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artefacts. For this study, semi-structured interviewing was the primary method conducted with the parents and key informants. I observed informally at the school by visiting the school on an occasion prior to the formal interviewing process.

3.5.1 The researcher as instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for both collecting and analysing the data. This requires of the researcher not simply to follow instructions, but to become an interpretive researcher (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). The qualitative researcher attempts to become more than just a participant observer in the natural setting that is being investigated, and has to make a deliberate effort to put her/himself in the shoes of the people being observed and studied and understanding their actions, decisions, behaviour, practices and so on from their perspective (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The researcher's role is that of an active learner who can tell the story from the participant's point of view, rather than an expert who passes judgement on participants (Creswell, 1998). Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach and Richardson (2005) state that, as a prerequisite for successful qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument who has experience related to the research focus. In addition, the researcher must be well read, knowledgeable, analytical, reflective and introspective.

3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are essential sources of case study information and are usually guided conversations, rather than structured queries. Even though the enquiry is consistent, the actual stream of questions in case study interviews is likely to be fluid rather than rigid (Yin, 2009). This type of interview is an interaction between the interviewer and the respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order (Mouton & Babbie, 2001). This method gives the researcher an opportunity to get to know the participants quite intimately, so that the researcher can really understand how the subject thinks and feels (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). The interview is largely guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, which allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1998).

An interview guide (Addendum D) was drawn up, informed by the themes identified through the literature review process. Merriam (1998) states that interview guides are common in qualitative research and contain several specific questions and open-ended questions that enable the researcher to follow up with probes.

3.5.3 Observation

Observations were the second method for data collection. Non-participant observations were used in this study (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Observations took place prior to doing the fieldwork during visits to the learning support teacher, the grade head as well as a member of the senior staff. I wrote down observations after the visits to the school and used them during the process of data analysis.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation (Merriam, 1998). A key principle of interpretive analysis, according to Terre Blanche and Kelly (2002), is to stay close to the data and to interpret it from a position of empathetic understanding. For this study, content analysis was used, which is usually divided into two types – conceptual analysis and relational analysis. Content analysis, also known as thematic analysis, was used to analyse the data of this study.

According to Creswell (1998), the data analysis for a case study consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting. The following steps suggested by Terre Blanche and Kelly (2002) were followed for the analysis of my research data. This is not a fixed recipe, but it endeavours to unpack some of the processes involved in immersing oneself in and reflecting on the data.

Step 1: Familiarisation and immersion

In qualitative research, data analysis typically starts during the data collection process in order to reduce possible data overload (Cohen et al., 2000). In this stage of data analysis, all the material that has been collected should be read through many times over (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). Silverman (2011) adds to this by stating that the researcher should start by engaging in some kind of close, detailed reading of bits of data. This entails close, detailed reading looking for key, essential, striking, odd, interesting things that people do or the texts say. This was done during my visits to the school, the family homes when negotiating access and during interviewing.

I personally transcribed the interviews in order to stay close to the data. This process enabled me to become familiar with the interview material and, in this way, immerse myself in the data. When the transcripts were completed, I carefully read the transcripts several times, making side notes and linking the literature and research questions to the data.

Step 2: Introducing themes

This step involves inferring general rules or classes for specific instances. According to Terre Blanche and Kelly (2002), the language of the interviewees should be used to form categories. The researcher should abstain from simply summarising the content by thinking in terms of process, functions, tensions and contradictions.

I aimed to label the themes that emerged through the descriptive words used by the participants. I paid particular attention to the primary research questions through which information on parental involvement developed in this case study. Similarities as well as contradictions between the six cases were noted in order to be able to give as rich a description of the experiences of the participants as possible.

I was able to identify themes that emerged after immersing myself in the research data, and clear patterns developed and became evident across the six cases. I categorised the themes that emerged. These themes were frequently reconsidered throughout the process and hence the themes were refined continuously.

Step 3: Coding

Coding is the starting activity in qualitative data analysis and the foundation for what comes later (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Terre Blanche and Kelly (2002) suggest that, during the activity of developing themes, the researcher should also be coding the data. This entails marking different sections of the data as being instances of, or relevant to, one or more of the themes. Punch and Oancea (2014) recommend that the researcher should read and systematically code data. These codes can be drawn from ideas emerging from immersing oneself in the data, as well as from prior reading during the literature review. With each new application of a code, prior coding practices should be reviewed to see if what the researcher wants to code fits what has been done before.

Therefore, in coding, the body of data is being broken down into labelled, meaningful pieces with a view to later ‘cluster’ the bits of coded material under a code heading and further analysing them both as a cluster and in relation to other clusters. Thematizing and coding blend into each other, because the themes that are used tend to change in the process of coding as a better understanding is developed of how they relate to other themes (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002).

Step 4: Elaboration

This step involves exploring themes more closely, with the purpose being to capture the finer nuances of meaning not captured by the initial coding system. Terre Blanche and Kelly (2000) advise that it is worthwhile to keep on coding, elaborating and recording until no further significant new insights appear to emerge.

Step 5: Interpretation and checking

The final step is when the researcher puts together the interpretation. This is a written account of the experience that was studied. The final written account of the findings and interpretation is given in Chapters 4 and 5. At this stage it is of the essence that the researcher reflects on her role during the research process, her personal involvement during the research as well as the way this might have impacted on the way the data was collected and analysed (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002).

3.7 DATA VERIFICATION

The research results must be able to be deemed trustworthy, and this is especially important when practitioner-researchers intervene in people’s lives (Merriam, 1998). Research results are trustworthy to the extent that there has been some accounting for their validity and reliability. Ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner. Because the nature of qualitative research is different to that of quantitative research, different methods of data verification are needed. The trustworthiness of qualitative studies can be evaluated and addressed by looking at the

credibility, generalisability, dependability, confirmability and transferability of the research (Creswell, 1998).

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility taps into the question of whether there are compatibilities between the research results and the interpretations of what exists in the minds of the participants. The procedure of gaining credibility involves prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing and member checks. The aim is to assess the intentionality of the respondents, to correct for obvious errors and, if necessary, to provide additional information (Mouton & Babbie, 2001).

3.7.2 Generalisability and transferability

A common criticism of the case study concerns its generalisability (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Generalisability relates to the extent to which the interpretive account can be applied to other contexts than the one being researched. Because of the contextual nature of interpretive research, there are usually strong limits on the generalisability of findings (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). To create a foundation for transferability and to allow other researchers to use the findings and make comparisons with their own work, the research report must contain an accurate description of the research process, an explanation of the arguments for the different choices of methods, and a detailed description of the research situation and context (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002).

3.7.3 Dependability (reliability) and confirmability

According to Merriam (1998), reliability is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield similar results. Qualitative researchers refer to dependability rather than reliability. Babbie and Mouton (2001) refer to dependability as a process in which the researcher must provide his or her readers with evidence, or a paper trail of the research process. The notion of an audit trail involves the researcher providing opportunities for outsiders to examine the interview transcripts and notes. This allows them to

examine the data, findings, interpretations and recommendations and attest that that are supported by the data and are internally coherent so that the end product may be accepted. This establishes the confirmability of the research process.

3.8 DELIMITATIONS AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS

As this is a study of limited scope, I delimited the research to one learning support programme in one school in the Metropole East region of the Western Cape Education Department. The key assumption that guides the study is that parents who are informed about the options available to them will act upon them.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Merriam (2002) defines a good qualitative study as one that has been conducted in an ethical manner. It is argued that the validity and reliability of the study are largely dependent upon the ethical decisions that the researcher makes. For this study, various decisions were made to ensure ethical conduct. Ethical clearance was granted to perform this study by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University. The research participants were thoroughly informed of the nature of the research and the steps in the research process (Allan, 2011). They were also reminded of their rights. They participated voluntarily in the research and were aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. The research process and expectations were explained to the potential participants in detail in order for them to make an informed decision about participation. After acceptance into the study, the participants were asked to review and sign a consent form prior to participating in the data collection process. Anonymity was guaranteed in that no individual response was linked to a specific participant. The identities of the participants were protected through the assignment of pseudonyms to them.

3.10 SUMMARY

In this chapter I presented the case study as research design, I unpacked the methodology for this type of design and presented the research questions that guided the study. I reported on my decisions on data collection methods and described the processes of data analysis and data verification. The chapter concluded with the study's delimitations, the key assumptions and the ethical considerations. In the chapter that follows, the data is presented and the themes that emerged are discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I start off by describing the school and the participants. I present the themes and subthemes that were identified during the process of thematic analysis of the data. Then I engage in a discussion of the findings. These findings are then interpreted using the reviewed literature as the framework for my sense-making of the data.

4.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

4.2.1 Access to the research population

I contacted three schools to identify potential participants for the study. At the first two schools the learning support teachers issued me with a list containing the names of at least six parents who could potentially have been participants in the study. As an outsider, I found it difficult to recruit parents for the study. At two of the schools only one parent was willing to participate. At the third school the learning support teacher also provided me with a list of parents' names. However, at this school, the Foundation Phase grade head instead of the learning support teacher contacted the parents to ask them to participate in the study. Six parents on the list agreed to become participants in the study. I met with the potential participants and explained the aims of the study and what would be required of them. I explained to the parents that their participation would be voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. They also knew that they had the right not to answer certain questions should they choose to do so. They were assured of anonymity and that all the information would be dealt with in a confidential way.

4.2.2 The research school

The research school is a public primary school in the Western Cape province. The school is classified by the Department of Education as a quintile 4 school, which means that the learners at this school are exempted from paying school fees. Although the school is situated in a region where a large segment of the population can be regarded as middle- to upper class,

the parents of learners at the research school are mainly employed in blue- or pink collar jobs.¹ The majority of the parents of the school receive a social grant from the government due to the high incidence of unemployment. Most of the fathers of the families in the study were employed in jobs that pay on a weekly or two-weekly basis. Most of the mothers were employed as domestic workers who are also paid on a weekly or daily basis.

The school's learner population comes mainly from the two neighbourhood townships. Children from outside the area are transported to school by private taxi companies and these are costs that the parents carry. The school follows the government-mandated CAPS curriculum (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements) and caters for learners from Grade R to Grade 7. There are approximately 990 learners enrolled in the school, including the Grade R learners. The school is organised into the foundation phase and a combination of the intermediary and senior phase called the inter-sen phase. Each grade has a grade head that manages the grade and reports to the educational specialists, who in turn report to the principal.

4.2.3 Participants in the study

In my interview with the parents I asked them about their marital status, where they were employed and their sources of income. I furthermore enquired after their housing type and the number of adults and children residing in the house. The interview also covered the parents' experience of their own education and the highest grade they passed. This information is summarised in Table 2.

¹ Pink collar workers perform work in the service industry, and blue collar workers are working-class workers who perform skilled or unskilled manual labour.

Table 2: Demographic information on participants

| Learner(s) (Pseudo- names) | Participants/ parents | Marital status | Employment/ occupation | Highest grade passed (parents) | Source of income/state grant | Type of housing | Number in family residing in house |
|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| Nicci and Teddie | Family Oliver Tessa and Nick (Participant 1) | Married | Mother – employed Father – employed | Mother: gr 12 Father: gr 9 | Salaries | Rent a house | Adults – 2 Children – 2 |
| Ronnie and Iliza | Family Skippers Ella and Frank (Participant 2) | Married | Mother – employed Father – employed | Mother: gr 9 Father: gr 12 | Wages | Own home | Adults – 3 Children – 3 |
| Tammy and Jake | Family Van Wyk Viola and Anton (Participant 3) | Married | Mother – unemployed Father – employed | Mother: gr 9 Father: gr 9 | Wages | Rent | Adults – 2 Children – 2 |
| Solly | Family Van Rooy Liza and Sam (Participant 4) | Married | Mother – unemployed Father – employed | Mother: gr 12 Father: N5, Diploma in Building (BIFSA) | Salary | Own home | Adults – 2 Children – 2 |
| Danny | Family Spies Maggie (Participant 5) | Not married | Mother – employed Father – employed | Mother: gr 9 Father: gr 7 | Salary and receive a state grant | Live with maternal grandfather | Adults – 3 Children – 2 |
| Lolly | Family Bekker Sandy and Dave (Participant 6) | Not married | Mother – employed Father – employed | Mother: gr 10 Father: gr 8 | Salary and receive a state grant | Rent | Adults – 2 Children – 2 |

As the table shows, two of the six families owned their own homes. The rest rented a house or lived with a grandparent. Most of the participants in the study had partners. Where possible, both parents participated in the interviews. In most of the families, both parents were employed. In terms of education, the highest grade passed by both the mothers and fathers was Grade 12.

As part of my orientation to the school context, I set out to determine what types of support children and parents have access to. Through informal interviewing and observation I found

that the school and its learners have access to various types of support. These include learning, nutritional and financial support provided by the state as well as by private organisations and individuals. Learners who experience barriers to learning are identified by their performance in what is known as lit-num assessments, which are assessments for literacy and numeracy. The school, however, only concentrates on the literacy component and therefore learning support is offered only for children who perform poorly with regard to their literacy development in their home language, or mother tongue, which is Afrikaans. Consequently, learning support offered at this school is aimed at supporting learners whose achievements are below standard for their grade level in spelling, reading and/or writing. Learners in Grade 1 to 3 receive formalised learning support. The focus of the learning support services changes yearly, depending on the school's needs and recommendations from the staff regarding need. The Department of Education provides a learning support teacher to the school for two days a week, and three days a week every alternate week.

The SBST consists of the principal, grade heads and the learning support teacher. The role of the SBST is to, in the first term, identify learners who need learning support opportunities and, in the third term, to identify those who have to be referred to special schools or schools of skills. When there is a need for specialists such as occupational, speech, psychological or physiotherapy, the learning support teacher contacts the DBST (district-based support team) for their expertise and consultation.

In addition to learning support, the Department of Education also offers nutritional support for 200 learners at the school on a daily basis. They receive two nutritious meals during the course of the school day. Parents and local community members are responsible for cooking the food, for which they receive a stipend from the Department of Education.

The school community is being sponsored by various retailers and non-governmental organisations in the surrounding areas. The school elicits sponsorships for sport clothing and equipment, school uniforms for needy learners, books and money. Collaboration with outside organisations has led to the conversion of one of the classrooms into a school library. A community member is responsible for running the library on a daily basis.

To get a sense of how the school perceives parental involvement in the school, I spoke to one of the members of the senior management team at the school. The opinion of this teacher was that parents seemed to be involved in their child's school work but not necessarily in the running and management of the school. Hence, parental involvement in the school is reported

to be minimal. Parents of learners in the foundation phase tend to be more involved in their child's education than the parents of learners in the intermediary and senior phases.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF THE THEMES

My analysis of the transcriptions and field notes was guided by the research problem, which was to investigate the knowledges that parents have about the support available to their child and their involvement in the educational support of their child with a learning difficulty. I sought to gain insight into the experiences that each participant had in their engagement with the school. All the interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, the mother tongue of all the participants. In the thesis, all quotes are provided verbatim and translated into English. The analysis of the data yielded the following themes and subthemes, which I present in Table 3.

Table 3: Themes and subthemes identified in the data

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|---|--|
| 1. Parents' awareness and knowledge of their children's experience of their learning difficulties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents' attentiveness to their child's learning difficulty • Parents' knowledge of their child's learning difficulty |
| 2. The nature of parental involvement in their child's learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents seeking additional professional support for their children • Showing compassion for and commitment to their child |
| 3. Parent-teacher relationship | |
| 4. Parental resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constraints to parental involvement. • Advantage of access to resources |

4.3.1 Parents' awareness and knowledge of their child's experience of their learning difficulties

4.3.1.1 Parents' attentiveness to their child's learning difficulty

The procedure teachers need to follow when they become aware of possible barriers to learning that a child may be experiencing is to discuss it at the SBST meetings, which are meetings that are held on regular intervals. Once a child has been identified, the learning support teacher, who forms part of the SBST, contacts the parents for a meeting to discuss the way forward for the child. This usually involves that the child should be allocated to a learning support programme at the school. This would mean that the child is withdrawn from the classroom for interaction in a smaller group.

My past experience as a learning support educator is that parents do not like hearing that their child is struggling at school or that the child needs to be removed from the mainstream school to be placed in a specialised education setting. I started off by exploring when the parents became aware of the learning difficulties that their children had, and the knowledge they have of the problem. I found that all the interviewed parents had been aware of their child's academic struggles before the school brought it to their attention. In some cases the parents picked it up as early as during Grade R, as the following parent, Liza, claimed:

In graad R, Ja. In graad R het ek dit opgetel...en vra vir Sam ek sit baie met hom en hy probeer rêrig, maar hy sukkel verskriklik. Want hy... hy sukkel verskriklik. 'n Mens kan vir hom iets vertel en hy is baie... hy snap gou, hy snap gou. Maar dit is net as dit by die skryf kom, of by lees kom, foei tog, dan het hy rêrig 'n probleem. [In grade R, yes. In Grade R I picked it up and, just ask Sam (her husband), I sit with him a lot and he really tries, but he really struggles a lot. Because he... he struggles a lot ... one can tell him something now, and he'll understand it very quick. But it's just when it comes to reading or writing it down, shame, then he really has a problem.] (Interview, Participant 1)

Sandy and Dave, for example, knew even before the Grade R teacher called them in to discuss their child, that Lolly was struggling academically. However, when parents like Viola and Anton discovered that their child was struggling at school they put it down to their child being lazy.

Ek weet van al lankal af want kyk Tammy is baie lui ook. [I have known for a while (that Tammy is struggling with her schoolwork) because, look, Tammy is also very lazy.] (Interview, Participant 3)

Similarly, Sandy and Dave attributed the challenges that their daughter experienced to her being lazy or disinterested in school.

Lolly is baie lyf wegsteek dan sê sy sy kan nie dit doen nie. Dan sommige kere sê sy “Mammie ek is vaak ek wil nou slaap, ek is nou moeg ek kan nie meer nie”, lyf wegsteek. [Lolly shied away and then she’ll say that she can’t do it. Sometimes she would say “Mommy I am sleepy, I want to go sleep, I am tired, I can’t anymore”, shying away.] (Interview, Participant 6)

In the case of children displaying characteristics of hyperactivity, parents attributed their child’s learning difficulty to being too playful and being in a hurry to finish their work as expected of them.

Uhm dat ek vir Juffrou sê ek het nou al agtergekom hy is baie spelerig, Juffrou het mos al vir my laat inroep omtrent hom né. [I noticed at home that he is very impatient. Uhm, let me tell you, I noticed that he was very playful, his teacher called me regarding him.] (Interview, Participant 5)

It thus seemed as though the parents did notice certain behavioural patterns, but did not fully understand the potential impact of these behaviours on scholastic achievement, as they attributed it to playfulness or laziness.

4.3.1.2 Parents’ knowledge of their child’s learning difficulty

As parents became aware of their child’s learning difficulty, they became concerned and assisted their child to the best of their ability from the start. During the interviews it became evident that the parents had knowledge about their child’s learning difficulty, mainly due to them having another child who had also been struggling academically at school. The parents were eager to explain to the interviewer what the learning difficulty involved, especially when they had more than one child who had been struggling with a learning difficulty. Three of the couples who participated in the study had more than one child experiencing learning difficulties. According to Liza and Sam, speaking about Solly:

...dis net hy kan dit nie skryf nie. Op papier sit nie... die letters is weer omgedraai. Soos sy p, sal hy 'n strepie maak en dan gaan hy daai kant toe. Want kyk, met sy Wiskunde en dit het hy nie 'n probleem nie, dan doen hy nou ander goedjies. Maar dis net met die skryfwerk en wat ek voel die leeswerk. [It's just that he cannot write, to put it on paper. The letters are turned around. For instance his p (the letter p), he'll make a stroke but then he goes that way. Because look, with his Mathematics he does not have a problem and then he does other stuff. But it's just with the writing and what I feel the reading work.] (Interview, Participant 4)

Tessa and Nick described the learning problem of their son, Teddie, as follows:

...jy nou vir hom iets sê byvoorbeeld soos daai, dan gaan jy oor na iets anders toe dan vra jy weer vir hom daai wat jy eerste gevra het, dan het hy vergeet. [You tell him something for example like that, and then you go on to something else, and if you ask again what you told him at first, then he would've forgotten that.] (Interview, Participant 1)

Sandy and Dave's child, Lolly, had never struggled academically, but after a traumatic event in the family she started having difficulty concentrating on her schoolwork. It reached the point that the school intervened and suggested learning support classes. The teacher observed that her performance deteriorated. The teacher was concerned and showed Sandy how Lolly's marks had dropped since her last exam. Sandy felt helpless and realised that her child needs extra support.

4.3.2 The nature of parental involvement in their child's learning

In this section I report on the data that speaks to the nature of the parents' involvement in their child's education. Some of the parents acknowledged that the school offered learning support to their children and were pleased with this support. From the data it became clear that the parents were proactive in dealing with the challenges that their children had with learning. However, due to working responsibilities, not all parents were freely available to assist their children. For example, Sandy asked a friend who is a stay-at-home mother to help her daughter Lolly with her homework after school. There were also parents, like Tessa and Nick, who had the financial resources to act on the suggestions by the school that they seek

out professional support from a psychologist, an occupational therapist and a speech therapist.

What my data shows is that, in the family home, one parent is singled out as the parent who is responsible for the child's learning. This involves liaising with the school and helping with homework. It also involves seeking extra help if needed. I found that that parent was usually the mother. Some of the fathers explained that the mother was with the children during the day and she needed to take responsibility for helping with the homework. It is the opinion of Anton that men work long hours and this makes it difficult for them to assist with homework and school-related issues.

Kyk, sy sal dit meer agterkom want sy is deur die dag met die kinders, ek kom 9 uur, 10 uur by die huis, 11 uur, 12 uur. [Look, she will notice it because she is with the children during the day, I get home 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock.]
(Interview, Participant 3)

Generally, the fathers in the study indicated that they supported their children by working and providing financially. I found this to be a gendered response, as most of the mothers also were employed. The perception is that mothers are at home, and that they are the ones who should be spending time with their children. Nick explained that his wife struggled with juggling both her work and assisting with homework, and that it sometimes caused a lot of stress for her, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

Maar sodra ek weg is, soos as ek in die werk is of so, en sy's alleen by die huis, dan lyk dit my vrou kan huil. [But as soon as I am gone, when I am at work or the like, and she is alone at home then it would seem that my wife could cry.] (Interview, Participant 1)

The fathers stated that they did get involved in their children's informal education by helping them to acquire life skills and take on responsibilities around the house. They would assist with homework over the weekend or when they were home. So, for example, Nick encouraged his children in the mornings while preparing for school by supervising small jobs, such as ensuring that their shoes are shined for the day. Anton indicated that he tried to make learning fun for his children and would make up games with sums and words. He believed the children can have fun and learn at the same time.

Tessa and Ella were mothers who were working part time. They decided to quit their jobs in order to spend more time with their children and support their education. Their decision was motivated by a need to be there for the children on a more regular basis. Even though they knew that it could mean financial hardship, they were still prepared to take the risk. Ella described how she decided to quit her work as a domestic worker to invest more time in her daughter.

Ek is moeg en geïrriteerd as ek by die huis kom, ek wil nie meer dit doen nie. Ek moet daar dan wees vir my kinders. En soms gaan dit moeilik. [I am tired and irritated when I get home, I don't want to do it anymore. I need to be there for my children. And sometimes it's very difficult (financially).] (Interview, Participant 2)

Tessa's decision to resign from her job to become a stay-at-home mother was also influenced by the limited time she had with her children. As her husband had found a permanent job, she became able to do so. She summarised it as follows:

Maar ek maak nou my werk klaar. My man het nou met 'n vaste werk begin. Wat ek nou besluit ek gaan klaar maak dat ek liever dan by die huis is. [But I am leaving my job, my husband started with a permanent job now. What I decided now is that I am going to leave my job so that I can rather be at home (to be there for the children).] (Interview, Participant 1)

4.3.2.1 Parents seeking additional professional support for their children

The data shows that, when parents have the means to do so, they do seek out additional support. While Tessa was still employed, she had access to medical aid. She was in a position to take her children for educational/psychological assessments and therapy at a psychologist, occupational therapist and speech therapist. However, once she resigned her job she no longer had access to private medical and psychological services and became dependent upon the state for psychological and health support.

Dit was 'n tydperk wat ek en my man uitmekaar was en toe het ek deur die werk sielkundige geloop en toe het hulle, uhm, toe het ek vir Teddie, ook uhm, Nicci en toe het ek mos nou vir hulle twee (by die sielkundige gehad) wat hulle op Ritalin gesit het. Dit was mos privaat gewees. Maar by die kliniek, ek het nog nie die moed gehad om

in daai lyne te staan nie. [It was a time when my husband and I were separated and I went to the psychologist via work. Then I took Teddie, and also Nicci, and then I took the two of them (to the psychologist) who put both of them on Ritalin. Because it was private. But at the clinic, I haven't had the courage to stand in those long lines.]

(Interview, Participant 1)

Some of the parents in the study buy multivitamins and other supplements that they administer to their children to help enhance their educational capacities. Maggie, Viola and Sandy give their children multivitamins or medication that enhances their ability to concentrate.

4.3.2.2 Showing compassion for and commitment to their child

Parents reported and showed great compassion for their children's struggles with learning difficulties. They encouraged their children to always try their best and assured them of their commitment to help them. According to Ella, she pacified her daughter with the following words:

En ek nou vir Iliza gesê, 'Mamma gaan kyk die kwartaal dat Mamma kan voluit agter jou staan, ek sal moet hulp soek vir jou my kind.' [And then I told Iliza, 'Mommy is going to see this term that I can support you fully, I shall have to seek for help for you, my child'.](Interview, Participant 2)

From their narratives it became clear that the parents motivated their children to participate in the extramural activities offered by the school, such as netball, rugby and athletics. Viola, for example, encourage Tammy to play netball. She told her to "ask if she may play netball, because I played netball at school". Nick was proud to share with me that Teddie was good at sport, and that he participated in cross-country racing at school. He also excelled in rugby.

4.3.3 Parent-teacher relationship

The participants seemed to have a good relationship with teachers at the school. When the teachers call them to come to the school to discuss an issue they will attend meetings and interviews. They recalled the initial call from the school to discuss with them their child's

problem. In all their cases an interview was set up by the school to inform them about their child's learning difficulty and the learning support they would receive. All the parents said they attended these meetings. The parents reported staying in contact with the relevant teachers regarding further developments or support that could be provided to the parent by the school.

For stay-at-home mothers it was easier to go to school and assist where help was needed. Liza said that she communicates with the school on a regular basis. Both the class teacher and the learning support teacher have her telephone number and are encouraged to call her at any time should they experience a problem where her assistance is required.

Ek het vir hulle gevra as daar enige probleem is, as hulle enige iets optel met Solly, laat my weet asseblief tog en as daar probleme is dat ek kan kom dat ons probeer dit uitsorteer. Ja, so ek probeer altyd hier wees. [I asked them that if there is any problem, if they pick up anything with Solly, they must please let me know whether there are any problems so that we can try and sort it out. Yes, I always try to be here.]

(Interview, Participant 4)

Maggie also said that the teacher knew that she would come to school whenever she was needed. She was available and would come when called.

Some of the parents knew that their children might not be ready to be promoted to the next grade, and thus preferred that they be kept back for the year. They seemed to have total trust in the teachers' decisions. Anton detected that the teacher wanted to keep his child back for the year but did not know how to initiate the issue. He then told the teacher that he gave permission for his child to repeat the grade if the teacher was of the opinion that the child may benefit from it. This indicates that there was collaboration between the parents and teachers. Tessa could afford private intervention and kept the teachers up to date with the findings of assessments and the recommendations of therapists. She knew all the learning support teachers that her child had been to in the past.

It is clear that the parents communicated with the teachers and that the relationship between them was beneficial to all parties involved. However, the relationship between the parents and the district team was not that beneficial. The participants in the study knew of the support services the Department of Education offered parents of children with learning difficulties. They seemed not to clearly understand their role and their rights as parents to call upon the

services offered by the Education Department. Their understanding appeared to be basic, which could explain their lack of keenness to make use of the support provided by the district office of the Education Department. The parents acknowledged that they knew that the Department of Education had different therapists available at no cost. However, they had not gained or requested their services for their children. Educational specialists and therapists form part of the district-based support team that renders support, such as psychological therapy and assessments, speech therapy, occupational therapy, learning support and physiotherapy, to schools. All the parents seemed to be informed about these services and the support available to them. They seem to have internalised the view that therapists in a DBST have many schools to visit and that they have limited time to visit schools. They are thus regarded as very busy and the parents view such services as scarce resources to which not everyone is entitled.

As far as the parents' involvement in the management of the school is concerned, only one of the parents that I interviewed served on the school governing body (SGB). Although she had served on it in the past, she did not wish to continue with it. The main reason given for this was work obligations. Parents were evasive when the question on serving on the governing board was posed and did not provide any explanation for their decisions not to serve on the SGB.

4.3.4 Parental resources

The parents experienced both barriers to and advantages of their involvement in their child's education. However, in spite of their children struggling in school, the parents still seemed to have a positive outlook on their children's future.

4.3.4.1 Constraints to parental involvement

My analysis of the data showed that the barriers these parents experience to their involvement in their children who experience academic difficulties were tied to work responsibilities and financial constraints. According to Georgiou (2007), reasons such as difficulties in getting permission from work, cultural differences with teachers, socio-economic status and the educational level of the particular parent can be viewed as barriers to parental involvement.

One of the mothers came alone to the interview because her husband could not get leave to come to school. This particular mother reported that her husband usually had difficulty getting time off from work and, as a result, they as parents had decided that she would be the one responsible for being involved in school matters where their children's education was concerned. Their situation resonates with the issue raised by Okeke (2014), namely that despite the numerous benefits associated with effective parental involvement in the schooling of their children, parents' lack of time or their fear of having nothing to contribute, academic victimisation and language barriers become challenges that stop them from effective participation. Singh et al. (2004) contend that the low socio-economic status of parents is the main reason for their non-involvement in their children's schooling. Even though parents are of the opinion that they would seek more help for their children, the issue of available funds is something that cannot be ignored.

Extra help and private therapists cost too much, a fact that cannot be overlooked, especially when parents already struggle to make ends meet. The high cost involved in privately sourced support services, from psychologists, occupational therapists and speech therapists, for instance, prevented parents who did not have medical insurance from seeking additional support. They therefore were dependent on support services provided by the school and the Education Department. Anton, who works seven days a week, is thus not able to invest optimally in his child. So too was Liza, who spoke about how their limited wages stopped them seeking additional and professional help for their child.

4.3.4.2 Advantages of access to resources

The advantages of access to resources were referred to by the parents. These included their children benefitting from learning support classes, and the parents having established good relationships with the teachers and the school. The parents who had access to medical aid could afford outside help from private practitioners, who were a great source of help to them. They saw it as an advantage that their children were diagnosed and that their children would benefit from alternative education.

Sy het vir my gesê Nicci gaan aan die einde van die dag sal Nicci moet gaan na wat 'n mens noem tegniese skole. Maar Teddie, het hulle verduidelik, Teddie moet na 'n skool gaan soos Rustof LSEN skool. Hy is nie vir die midstroom nie, hy is eintlik 'n

kind wat tussen die twee skole val. [She (the psychologist) told me that Nicci will, at the end of the day, Nicci will have to go to what one calls uh, a Technical School. But Teddie, they explained, Teddie need to go to a school like Rusthof LSEN School. He is not for midstream schools, he is actually a child that is between the two schools.] (Interview, Participant 1)

The Oliver family was in the fortunate position that they did not have to wait for the therapists of the Education Department to guide their decisions, as their financial circumstances allowed them to make use of private services. Tessa believed that her child benefitted a great deal because of the medical aid.

Sy (haar dogter) het vir 'n oogtoets gegaan. Maar die Departement se sielkundige het nog nooit my kind getoets nie, hierdie is toetse wat ons self laat doen het. Christelle het die toetse gedoen en Renate het die medikasie voorgeskryf. Ons het self hulle gehoor ook laat toets, alles, het baie geld gekos. [She (her daughter) went for an eye tests as well. But the Education Department's psychologist has never tested my child; these are tests that we did ourselves. Christelle did the tests and Renate was the one who prescribed the medication. We even had their ears tested and everything costs a lot of money.] (Interview, Participant 1)

The others accepted that such services were scarce, and that they could not fight for their children's right to them.

4.4 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.4.1 Introduction

This study was grounded in Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological framework, as well as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital. The interpretation and the discussion of the research findings were therefore informed by these theoretical perspectives. This section of Chapter 4 links the research findings to the literature and theory.

The study explored parental involvement in the education of their child with a learning difficulty in a low socio-economic school. Six families participated in the study. The analysis of the data yielded important themes pertaining to parents' experiences of having a child with

a learning difficulty in an environment where resources are limited. What follows is a discussion of the research findings on parents' awareness and knowledge of their child's experience of their learning difficulty.

4.4.2 Discussion of the themes and subthemes

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1986), the family, especially parents, is the primary source of influence in the child's development. Proximal processes between parent and child are enduring and happen on a continual basis within the family. It would seem that frequent interaction enabled the parents in this study to detect the academic struggles of their child from an early age. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory also postulates that relationships within the family are reciprocal; therefore not only is the child influenced by his/her parents, but the parents are influenced by the child. Therefore the family as microsystem seemed to be reciprocally influenced by the learning barriers that the child(ren), as a member(s) of that family, experience(s).

The data suggests that the parents are well aware of their child's learning difficulty. All the parents reported some knowledge or awareness that their child had a learning difficulty before the school informed them about it. Some parents could have been in denial about their children's condition and attributed the characteristics displayed by the children to laziness or playfulness. As parents are not professionally trained to diagnose learning challenges, it is to be expected that their classification of the problem would be what Nichols (2000) describes as casual, and attributed to as normal and expected in the early years when children make the home-school transition. It therefore may seem that, when the child is in the foundation phase, parents are most likely to attribute possible signs of a learning difficulty to the child being naughty or even idle. The question that arises is whether the cultural capital, as espoused by Bourdieu (1986), of adults who mostly have limited personal scholastic backgrounds will allow them sufficient insight into the behaviour of their children. Their accounts challenge this view, as the data shows that these parents accumulated capital that benefitted their children. They were investing in their children in various ways.

The participants in the study showed insight into their child's learning difficulty. All of them knew that their child was not keeping up and either had difficulty in reading and writing or mathematics, or both. They explained to me with great care the nature of the problem. Their

awareness of the learning difficulty did not mean, however, that they understood the learning difficulty of their child or how to address it. It therefore seems the parents may have had only have partial or a shallow understanding of their child's learning difficulty. According to Nichols (2000), parents' understanding of their child's learning difficulty is likely to influence the kinds of involvement they adopt. Information gathered from the data showed their understanding of parental involvement entailed helping their children with their homework, having a relationship with their child's teacher and searching for extra help despite possible financial constraints. This is an understanding that might be due to how schools expect parents to be involved (Epstein, 1995). What is missing is the need to support the child with a learning problem beyond what is needed for their other school-going children. This does not happen, as the parents do not think they have a right to demand these support services.

The parents' understanding of parental involvement may have also been shaded by their experience of their own parents' involvement in their education. When the parents reflected on their own experience as learners and their parents' involvement, the majority reported on their own parents' unavailability due to work obligations. However, their parents supported them in ways that were known to them as parents, for example encouraging them to do their best and being a support emotionally rather than financially, or serving on the school committee at the time. It seemed unclear whether more concrete support in terms of explaining work, or teaching concepts, happens in appropriate pedagogical ways. In other words, it seemed as though the participants encouraged and supported their children on more emotional levels, rather than on scholastic levels. Cultural capital as being primarily transmitted through the family is confirmed when the participants said that all they knew was how their own parents supported them.

Braxton (1999) equates cultural capital with a 'tool kit' consisting of certain knowledge, skills and styles and are transmitted from parents to their children. In the case of the participants in this study, the cycle of support seemed to be perpetuated. This confirms the notion that cultural capital influences the way parents can and do support their children experiencing learning difficulties. They do what is known to them and how they experienced it when they were children. The participants in this study all had access to and completed their basic education. Most of them completed at least 10 years of formal schooling, although the majority of the mothers reported leaving school before completing grade 12. Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski and Apostoleris (1997) found a family's socio-economic situation to be a

strong predictor of parental involvement. Parents' own education is related to their parental involvement. Furthermore, research also suggests that the amount of schooling that parents receive has an effect on how they structure their home environment and how they interact with their children to promote academic achievement (Georgiou, 2007). In this study, all the parents came across as involved parents, despite many not having completed high school. They were involved in their child's schooling at home and at school. These parents deemed it important to support their children on all levels, and to the best of their abilities. Their working-class backgrounds did not determine their support for their children and their involvement in their education. It did, however, influence the nature of their involvement with their children, as I will next explain.

When recruiting parent participants for this study, the majority of parents showed interest in participating in the interviews. However, it was the mothers who reported being the person actively involved in day-to-day participation in their child's schoolwork. Data collection and analysis also revealed that the mothers were the primary source of support and encouragement regarding their child's learning difficulty. This is supported by Grolnick and Slowiaczek's (1994) study, which found that mothers were more involved than fathers in each of three aspects of parental involvement in children's schooling: behaviour, cognitive/intellectual, and on a personal level.

The parents reported feeling compassion for their children's struggles, as well as concern for the children's emotional well-being. They encouraged them to take part in extramural activities at school. Some of the parents recalled being active in sport themselves while at school. One of the fathers displayed a visible sense of pride when he spoke about his child excelling in rugby and athletics. They acknowledged that their children also had strengths, and not just the perceived weakness of a learning difficulty. The parent participants reported on their interactions with the environment, which included the school and other role players, as presented below.

The focus of the discussion on parental environment interaction will be mainly on the relationship parents have with their child's teacher, the school and the Western Cape Education Department. As discussed previously, several factors influence the relationships between parents and the school and education institutions. Parental involvement practices represent two central aspects of the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1986) bio-ecological model of a child's development: relationships amongst adults in the child's microsystem, and

corresponding behaviours, values and attitudes across settings. This means that parent involvement at school promotes connections between adults in two of the child's primary microsystems, the home and the school, while parental involvement at home conveys congruence in the attitudes and behaviours governing these two microsystems (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Låftman (2008) explains that the way teachers perceive their learners' parents has a significant impact on the level of involvement by the parents in the long run. Early parental involvement, as well as continuous involvement, has a significant positive effect on the child's achievement, particularly for the entire duration of early educational experience. In this study it appeared that, after their child's scholastic difficulties were identified and learning support was being provided, the relationship between parents and teachers became more relaxed and informal. Proximal relations on the mesosystemic level became more significant and beneficial for all parties involved. In the case of this study, parents' relationships with teachers directly involved with their children's support became stronger after the initial notification of difficulties. However, although parents were capacitated with knowledge about their child's learning condition, the teachers seldom involved them as collaborators in the educational support of the child. Therefore, although they took on the responsibility of supervising homework, it was without guidelines from teachers that could have enhanced the learning experience.

Applying the concepts of social and cultural capital to the home-school mesosystem may provide greater understanding of how schools can address effective parental involvement. Coleman (1988) views social capital as a means to an end, for example a means by which parents can promote their children's school achievement and education attainment. Social capital obtained through visits to the school may take the form of information (e.g. about upcoming events or available enrichment activities), skills (e.g. how to help with homework and home reading, parenting tips), access to resources (e.g. books, study aids, sources of assistance) and sources of social control (e.g. school-home agreement on behaviour expectations and educational values), all of which can help parents to be effectively involved in their child's education. An additional aspect of social capital discussed by Coleman (1988) is the attention that parents pay to their children. He holds that education-related social capital possessed by parents or obtained through their involvement at school promotes academic achievement only if parents are able to devote time to supporting their children's education at home. The aspect of time was a huge point of contention for the parents

participating in this study. Fathers blamed their lack of time spent with their children on their work hours and their socio-economic status.

According to Bourdieu (1986), parents from non-dominant groups tend to exhibit less parental involvement at school. Parents with low levels of education, for example, may be less involved at school because they feel less confident about communicating with school staff owing to a lack of knowledge of the school system, a lack of familiarity with educational jargon, or their own negative educational experience. In this study, however, parental involvement was more significant than expected, mainly due to the parents' interest in and commitment towards their children's education in spite of their socio-economic status. Parents reported that they envisioned a good future for their children because, as Nick pointed out, with parents' co-operation and encouragement, their children are able to "come far in life". Yosso (2005) describes this occurrence as aspirational capital, which refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived barriers. This resilience is clear in the view of the Nick, who allows himself to dream of possibilities for his child beyond their circumstances. It therefore seems as though, in the case of these parents, they try their best to support their children how they know best, which is to encourage their child emotionally. The proximal relations between parents and school staff play a role in this phenomenon. More in-depth, closer relations and clearer and more concrete communication between parents and teachers can lead to more insight and knowledge about supporting their children more efficiently.

With regard to advantages, the following perspectives are relevant: According to the participants in the study, parental involvement poses advantages as well as disadvantages. Matshe (2014) claims that parental involvement in education has many advantages that can benefit other stakeholders, such as teachers and learners. Griffith (1998, cited in Drummond & Stipek, 2004), states that the involvement of parents in their children's education has long been advocated as integral to positive childhood development and school success. The beneficial effects are mostly visible in children's academic learning and performance. All the parents, except for one, had children in the learning support programme for the first time. They were positive about the extra help offered by the school and the Education Department, and viewed these initiatives in a favourable light. This support encouraged them as parents and inspired them to be more involved and to foster closer relationships with their child's teachers.

The parent who had access to medical aid reported various advantages. She claimed that the recommendations made by the various therapists were of great help to her children, as well as for them as parents. The guidance and advice they received regarding their children's academic future allowed them to prepare their children as well as themselves to make the best possible choices for their education. These parents were informed by private therapists that their children would be better accommodated in alternative education settings such as special schools and schools of skills. This knowledge put them in a position of knowing their children's barriers and how to deal with them best.

4.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter I presented the data and provided an interpretation of the findings under the following four themes: parents' awareness and knowledge of their children's experience of their learning difficulties, the nature of parental involvement in their child's learning, parent-environment interaction, and parental resources. These themes presented themselves during the analysis of the data. Direct quotes from the participants' accounts were incorporated to provide qualitative descriptions of the themes. The themes were interpreted and informed by the available scientific research on the issue of parental support. In the final chapter of the study, Chapter 5, I summarise the key findings of the study. I also address the limitations of the research and make recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe parental involvement in the schooling of their child with learning difficulties in a low socio-economic school. To be able to understand, describe and interpret parents' experiences, I embarked on a qualitative study and worked within an interpretive research paradigm. The theoretical framing of the study was informed by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory of human development. It was also informed by Bourdieu's (1986) work on cultural and social capital, as well as Yosso's (2005) explication of community cultural wealth. The participants in the study were six parents who were purposively selected for the study. These parents were interviewed, with their partners where possible. I was interested in their understanding of parental involvement, their involvement in their children's education, and the knowledge of the support structures available to them. Data gathered from these interviews was then analysed using thematic analysis. In Chapter 4 I presented my study's data and described the themes that emerged. In this chapter the implications of the findings of this study will be discussed and recommendations will be put forth. The limitations and strengths of the study will furthermore be discussed, and possible future research will be suggested.

5.2 INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

The analysis of the data on the involvement of parents in the education of their children with a learning difficulty produced four essential themes. What emerged from the participants' accounts were that they were very involved parents in their children's schooling.

The data shows that the parents had become aware of their children's learning difficulties at an early stage of their development. The early awareness of their child's scholastic struggle happens on the microsystemic level of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological framework. The extent of their knowledge was that their child was struggling with reading and writing or with mathematics. The parents all stated that, when teachers called them to discuss their children's learning difficulties, they already knew about it. According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), these

are the proximal processes that exist between parent and child within the family unit. However, the parents only acted on the learning difficulties once the problem was diagnosed by the school. Their delayed response could be the result of various factors, such as a lack of expertise or insecurity about their capabilities. The limited agency that the parents showed with regard to their children's learning problems could possibly also be attributed to the limited social capital in economically poor communities. The networks to which access is gained through financial resources was clear from Tessa, who could have her child evaluated privately. There were no existing community networks that the parents could make use of. Bourdieu (1986) argues that a person's way of understanding or insight into a matter is influenced by the person's education or intellect, and this promotes or hampers social mobility in a society where people's socio-economic status differs. This means that the parents' own scholastic backgrounds may have influenced their views and understandings of their children's learning difficulties. However, their inability to act on their knowledge could also reflect their fear to acknowledge that their child has a learning problem. As such, they waited for official confirmation from the school.

In the parent structure, the mothers emerged as the major role players who physically involved themselves in their children's education. Although most of the parents worked outside of the home, the fathers were more likely to be employed in fulltime jobs that made it difficult for them to be available during the day. Fathers usually had difficulty getting time off from work to attend meetings or functions held at the school. The exosystemic level of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model explains the effect that the parents' work responsibilities may have on the developing child, even when it does not directly impact on the child.

However, there also were mothers who reported struggling to cope with stressful jobs and attending to their children's education. Despite their employed status, mothers continue to be relegated the responsibility of childcare by society. This led to two mothers in the study, Tessa and Ella, making the decision to resign from their jobs to be more available to their children. This decision was taken in spite of the family's financial difficulties. The analysis of the data shows that the parents had compassion and empathy for their children's learning difficulties.

The data shows that, after the child's scholastic difficulties were identified, the parents worked hard at establishing relationships with strategic role players at the school. Where learning support was being provided, the parents reported that they were liaising with

teachers more frequently. They often relayed their feelings and opinions about their child as they became more comfortable with the teachers. It would seem that these parents were accumulating social capital through liaising with the school. It served to strengthen their parental involvement from being a superficial engagement with the problem to becoming more meaningful practices that benefited their children's educational development. These findings are supported by Johnsen and Bele (2013), who observed that parents whose children with learning difficulties receive the necessary help at school have better relationships with teachers than do parents with children with learning difficulties who do not receive the help they need. Parents who receive support from the school developed a stronger perception that they could contribute to their child's education. This is supported by the study's data. The parents informed teachers about their availability to come to the school to discuss their children's progress.

However, parents of children with learning difficulties must be willing to assess the situation critically and comprehensively, to ask more intelligent questions, to evaluate the answers carefully and, at the same time, to pursue solutions that are likely to help their children. Even though the parents were keen to be involved in their children's education, they were not so keen on a closer managerial role at the school. The participants showed little interest in serving on the school's governing body and being involved in other duties at school, other than being involved directly in their child's schooling. The constraints to their participation were lack of time, limited financial resources, as well a lack of effective communication, capacity and skills.

On a macrosystemic level, the parents were aware of the services that the Education Department could provide to their children. What was surprising was that, although they had knowledge about the available support, none of the participants acted on this knowledge. All the participants said they were informed by the school of the services available to them. However, it would seem that the information and usefulness of these services were not conveyed to the parents in a clear manner, for example how beneficial the services of these therapists could be to the children with learning difficulties. It would seem that the parents left important decisions like the initiation of contact with outside support services to the teacher and other professionals. With the exception of the Oliver family, none of the parents had experience in seeking outside support such as therapy for their children, which speaks to their lack of social capital. This restricted them from acting on the knowledge they had and making important decisions, such as on accessing the support services that were available

through the education department. The nature of their parental involvement could thus be open to improvement.

In this study, the data shows that these poor parents do not access and use the valuable support services that are available to them free of charge. The one set of parents who did have the financial capabilities consulted with professionals on a private basis. The other parents might have internalised the view that their low socio-economic status hampered them from accessing optimal support for their children, even when they did have the knowledge about public professional support. However, although they did not seek out professional support for their children, they were invested in them, and had hope for and a positive outlook on the future for their children regardless of their learning difficulties. Reio and Forines (2011) claim that parents of children with learning difficulties experience a high degree of stress with regard to their children's future. But if parents are deeply involved in the education of their children with learning difficulties, the parents' stress levels can be reduced and their sense of fulfilment and self-confidence seem to be simultaneously increased.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the qualitative study's findings are unique to this particular research population, the knowledge gained from this study could help guide teachers and other stakeholders in their endeavour to enhance and advocate parental involvement in low socio-economic schools. It is my view that teachers played a valued role in the support of parents whose children have learning challenges. The relationship between the teacher and the parent therefore seems to be a determiner of active parental involvement in the school. The parents in the study reacted positively to the teachers' reaching out to them. This is supported by Epstein's research, which suggests that teachers need to be educated on how to educate parents on their involvement in their children's schooling. Epstein's (1995) framework of the six types of involvement would be a practical starting point for the school to improve parental involvement. The framework includes helping families establish a home environment to support their children, designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programmes, recruiting and organising parents' help and support, providing information to help families know how to help learners at home with homework, and teaching the parents specifically what to do for their child by handing them specific exercises to address the learning difficulty in a direct manner. Schools should also

educate parents in uncomplicated ways on how to be part of school decisions and the management matters that affect their children. Schools can integrate resources and services in the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and the development of learners (Epstein, 1995). This could be useful to strengthen parents' agency to seek outside support for their children. Parents place the responsibility for and initiation of outside professional help on the school, or are accepting of the fact that poor people's children do not have the right to professional learning support. A recommendation is that parents need to be workshopped on how to access free public support services. Although they are aware of these services, they might not have the knowledge on how to access them.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study was determined by it being a 50% research thesis. This placed constraints on the width and depth of the study. This being a study of limited scope, I made the decision that I would focus on the parents' role only. My recommendation for further research is that the population include teachers and strategic role players, such as learning support teachers and therapists. I selected a culturally and linguistically homogenous sample, thus the participants were from the coloured racial group. Further studies could include parents from other racial and cultural groups that are also present in the school. The study was conducted at one school and had a sample of six families. Although qualitative studies do not seek to generalise their findings, a bigger study involving more schools in the district might generate findings that could inform the education department of the challenges that low socio-economic parents have in accessing educational support, as well as the type of advocacy that could capacitate them.

The study was undertaken within a qualitative research methodology. A suggestion would be that parental involvement as it plays out in low socio-economic schools can be explored using different research methodologies, such as in a mixed-methods research design. I believe that, if both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed, a bigger sample can be used and hopefully more information on the phenomenon could become known from a culturally more diverse school community.

5.5 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

Due to the nature and structure of the research design, the study gained in-depth insight into the experience of six parents with children with learning difficulties in a low socio-economic school. The advantage of conducting qualitative research is that it allowed me to gather rich descriptions from the participants. The richness of the data enhanced my understanding of parents' involvement in their children's education. This insight is important, as research can provide valuable information for teachers and the school management team, and hopefully lead to ways to improve parental support for their children. Participating in the research study could have been beneficial for the parents, as it provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences raising a child with learning difficulties, and capacitated them with knowledge on how to best be involved in their child's education.

5.6 REFLECTIVE CONCLUSION

I have experience of teaching in a low socio-economic school as a learning support educator. My own experience led me to believe that parental involvement in the lives of children with a learning difficulty was poor, and that the schools were implicated through their lack of involvement. When I struggled to find participants at the first two schools, and when parents showed minimal interest in participating in the study, it was as if my personal experience of the lack of parental involvement in such conditions was validated. The interest of the parents of the third school that I approached, and their willingness to participate in the research, were therefore unexpected and challenged my biased views about parents' lack of involvement in their children's education. What was enlightening was the compassion and empathy these parents had for their children's educational challenges. In spite of their financial obstacles, the parents were positive and viewed their children's future optimistically. They were actively involved in their children's academic and social education. The parents also worked hard at establishing a relationship with their children's school and encouraged teachers to involve them. The data that I collected and the findings that I arrived at challenged my personal experience of parents from low socio-economic communities being uninvolved in their children's schooling. Confronted with the evidence, it forced me to revise my views on parents in their role in their children's success with schooling.

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ADDENDUM A



UNIVERSITEIT-STELLENBOSCH-UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

Approve with Stipulations Notice
Stipulated documents/requirements

14-Oct-2014

Poole, Adele A

Protocol #: HS1046/2014

Title: Exploring parental involvement in the educational support of their child with learning difficulties in a low income community.

Dear Mrs Adele Poole,

Your **Stipulated documents/requirements** received on , was reviewed by Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) via Expedited procedures on 14-Oct-2014 and has been **Approved with Stipulations**.

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: **24-Apr-2014 - 23-Apr-2015**

The following stipulations are relevant to the approval of your project and must be adhered to: **The researcher is reminded to submit to the REC a copy of the permission letter obtained from the participating school to conduct the research study on their premises.**

Please provide a letter of response to all the points raised IN ADDITION to HIGHLIGHTING or using the TRACK CHANGES function to indicate ALL the corrections/amendments of ALL DOCUMENTS clearly in order to allow rapid scrutiny and appraisal.

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number HS1046/2014** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 0218089183

Included Documents:

REVISED_Research proposal~REVISED_DESC application~REVISED_interview schedule_ENG~REVISED_interview schedule_AFR~REVISED_REC application form~REVISED_informed consent form~Response to stipulations~

Sincerely

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator

Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Investigator Responsibilities

Protection of Human Research Participants

Some of the general responsibilities investigators have when conducting research involving human participants are listed below:

- 1. Conducting the Research.** You are responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC approved research protocol. You are also responsible for the actions of all your co-investigators and research staff involved with this research. You must also ensure that the research is conducted within the standards of your field of research.
- 2. Participant Enrolment.** You may not recruit or enrol participants prior to the REC approval date or after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials for any form of media must be approved by the REC prior to their use. If you need to recruit more participants than was noted in your REC approval letter, you must submit an amendment requesting an increase in the number of participants.
- 3. Informed Consent.** You are responsible for obtaining and documenting effective informed consent using only the REC-approved consent documents, and for ensuring that no human participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their informed consent. Please give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents. Keep the originals in your secured research files for at least five (5) years.
- 4. Continuing Review.** The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is your responsibility to submit the continuing review report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. If REC approval of your research lapses, you must stop new participant enrolment, and contact the REC office immediately.
- 5. Amendments and Changes.** If you wish to amend or change any aspect of your research (such as research design, interventions or procedures, number of participants, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material), you must submit the amendment to the REC for review using the current Amendment Form. You may not initiate any amendments or changes to your research without first obtaining written REC review and approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.
- 6. Adverse or Unanticipated Events.** Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to Malene Fouche within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. You must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants. The only exception to this policy is that the death of a research participant must be reported in accordance with the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures. All reportable events should be submitted to the REC using the Serious Adverse Event Report Form.
- 7. Research Record Keeping.** You must keep the following research related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence from the REC
- 8. Provision of Counselling or emergency support.** When a dedicated counsellor or psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.
- 9. Final reports.** When you have completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions, interventions or data analysis) or stopped work on your research, you must submit a Final Report to the REC.
- 10. On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits.** If you are notified that your research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, you must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

ADDENDUM B



Western Cape
Government

Education

Directorate: Research

Audrey.wyngaard2@ecw.gov.za

tel: +27 021 467 9272

Fax: 0865902282

Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000

wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20140304-25821

ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mrs Adele Poole
PO Box 1064
Strand
7139

Dear Mrs Adele Poole

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: EXPLORING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLING OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCHOOLS

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **01 April 2014 till 30 June 2014**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard

Directorate: Research

DATE: 05 March 2014

Lower Parliament Street, Cape Town, 8001
tel: +27 21 467 9272 fax: 0865902282
Safe Schools: 0800 45 46 47

Private Bag X9114, Cape Town, 8000
Employment and salary enquiries: 0861 92 33 22
www.westerncape.gov.za

ADDENDUM C



GORDONSBAAI
7150
021 856 1548
Faks 021 856 1680
Email: [REDACTED]

GORDONSBAAI
7150
021 856 1548
Fax: 021 856 1680

22 Julie 2015

Geagte Ouer

Graag wil ek u toestemming vra vir 'n onderhoud. Dit handel hoofsaaklik oor u kennis en betrokkenheid in die leerondersteuningsprogram by die skool. Dit is slegs 'n bewusmaking van u kind se leeragterstand en wat in plek is by die skool en die Wes-Kaapse Onderwysdepartement om u en u kind te ondersteun.

Indien u instem, kan u asseblief aandui watter tyd vir u die beste sal pas om my by die skool te kom sien.

Datums en tye

Vrydag, 24 Julie 2015, enige tyd tussen 8:30-15h30, [REDACTED]

Dag, tyd, Plek: 08h30 Vrydag

Ouer se handtekening:

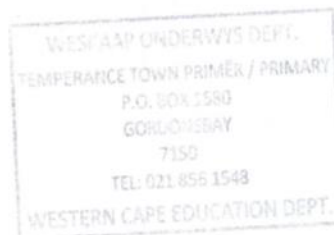
Ek waardeer u samewerking en tyd.

Vriendelike groete

Adele Poole
Intern opvoedkundige Sielkundige

Copyright [REDACTED]

Edith Irene Opperman
Prinsipaal



Ingeligte toestemming

Hiermee verklaar ek dat die navorser, Adele Poole aan my die volgende verduidelik het alvorens ons met die onderhoud begin het.

- ↓ Ek vrywilliglik deelneem en nie gedwing word om aan die studie deel te neem nie.
- ↓ My naam nie in die studie gebruik sal word nie, indien nodig sal skuilname gebruik word.
- ↓ Die doel van die studie
- ↓ Die beraamde tydsduur van die onderhoud
- ↓ Die feit dat ek ter enige tyd van die onderhoud kan weier om verder deel te neem aan die studie/onderhoud en kan onttrek.
- ↓ Dat ek die keuse het om sekere vrae nie te beantwoord nie.
- ↓ Ek die vrymoedigheid moet hê om vir duidelikheid te vra indien ek nie 'n vraag verstaan nie.
- ↓ Die inligting wat verkry sal word uit die studie tot 'n hulp en voordeel van leerders en die skool as 'n geheel sal wees.

Hiermee verklaar ek, dat Adele Poole, bogenoemde aan my verduidelik het en dat ek dit verstaan. Ek gee my toestemming om vrywilliglik deel te neem aan die studie.

Naam en van:

Handtekening:

Datum:.....

Handtekening van navorser:.....

ADDENDUM D

Interview guide

Title: Exploring parental involvement in the schooling of a child with learning difficulties in a low socio-economic school.

The interview guide will be directed at the following research questions that will guide the study.

Research questions

1. What is the participants' understanding of 'parental involvement'?
2. What is the current extent of parents' involvement in their child's education?
3. What knowledge do parents have about the structures that are in place to support their child's education?

Interview guide:

a) Background information

The background information will give an indication of the living conditions including income level, number of people in the house, number of people who have formal schooling in the house; overall an indication of the socio-economic status of the family.

- (i) Name, address (residential area), age, marital status.
- (ii) Occupation, qualifications
- (iii) Sources of income (government grant, etc.)
- (iv) Housing: house-owner, municipal home or informal housing.
- (v) Family composition in the house: parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family, etc.
- (vi) How many school-going children in the house.

b) What is their understanding of parental involvement

In this section I explore the roles that the parents play in their child's schooling as well as knowledge that they have regarding policies that are in place to support learners with learning difficulties.

- (i) How do the parents see their role as parents of a child with a learning difficulty? Does it (the role) differ from having a child with no learning difficulty?
- (ii) Explore parents' knowledge about the WCED policies regarding children with learning difficulties.
- (iii) Parents will be asked to describe their involvement in their child's education in different settings (e.g. at school, at home, elsewhere?)
- (iv) Do parents serve on any committee or organisation at the school; are they involved in assisting with any extra-mural activities offered at the school.

c) What is the extent of parents' involvement in their child's education?

In this section the aim is to look at the parents' commitment to their child's education and to what extent they are able to go to assist the child in obtaining an education that would be beneficial to them in the future.

- (i) When did the parents become aware that their child has a learning difficulty?
- (ii) Who informed the parents that their child has a learning difficulty?
- (iii) How often do parents liaise with their child's teacher regarding their child's education and general behaviour in class?
- (iv) Do parents volunteer their services and availability to the school when needed? (e.g. assisting in the school's tuck shop, substituting for an absent teacher, etc.)
- (v) Who helps the child with his/her homework?
- (vi) When the school hosts functions for funding, do parents volunteer their services to the school?

d) What is parents' knowledge about the structures that are in place to support their child's education?

In this section questions are aimed at investigating whether parents are aware that there are certain structure is place at the school and District Offices to assist to optimise teaching of learners with learning difficulties.

- (i) What services outside of the school, can the parent provide to his/her child to support him/her in his/her learning difficulty?
- (ii) Are parents aware of any structures that are in place at the school to support their child to address their learning difficulty (e.g. extra classes after school, learning support offered at the school, occupational therapy, speech therapy and psychological services offered by the WCED, ect.)
- (iii) What is the parents knowledge regarding the learning support programme at the school.
- (iv) What is the parents' opinion of their child's education in the future?
- (v) In their opinion, do they think that their child will be able to function as a independent individual in the future?

Onderhoudsvrae

A) Agtergrond inligting

1. Naam en van
2. Adres
3. Ouderdom
4. (i) Biologiese ouers (ii) Pleegouers
5. Huwelikstatus: (i) Enkelouer (ii) Getroud (iii) Ongetroud (iv) Geskei
(v) Ander
6. Werk/Beroep: (i) Werkloos (ii) Werk wel; plek van werk
7. Hoogste graad op skool geslaag
8. Bronne van inkomste: (i) Staatstoelae, spesifiseer
(ii) Ander
9. Tipe behuising (i) Huiseienaar (ii) Huur (iii) Agter in agterplaas -
bangelou
(iv) Munisiplae behuising (v) Informele behuising, beskryf indien nodig
10. (i) Aantal grootmense in die huis (ii) Aantal skoolgaande kinders in die huis (iii)
Ander

B) Kennis/begrip van ouerbetrokkenheid

1. Het u self agtergekom dat die kind moeilik leer op skool/ Hoe/ Wanneer?
2. Wie het u ingelig dat die kind wel 'n leeragterstand het/moeilik leer op skool?
3. Hoe gereeld in die skool in kontak met u oor die kind se leeragterstand? (i) Een
keer 'n kwartaal? (ii) Minder as een keer 'n kwartaal.
4. Verduidelik kortliks wat u verstaan oor die kind se leeragterstand.
5. Ouers/pleegouers kan help dat die kind nie so swaar kry op skool nie met hulle
skoolwerk nie, Hoe help u die kind bv. (i) met huiswerk, (ii) vra vir onderwyser
hoe die kind gehelp kan word, (iii) as ouer nie self kan help nie, kry hulle iemand
wat wel kan help.
6. Die Onderwysdepartement het spesiale maniere om kinders met leeragterstande
te help. Weet u dalk daarvan?
7. Wanneer die skool ouers benodig om te help by die skool met bv.
fondsinsameling, help u en in watter hoedanigheid. Is u beskikbaar indien die
skool ouers nodig het om te help?
8. Dien u op die skool beheerraad?
9. (i) Neem u kind aan sport deel by die skool? Wanneer daar sport by die skool is,
kom kyk u na die kinders?

C) Kennis van bestaande ondersteuningstrukture

1. (i) Word ekstra klasse na skool vir die leerders aangebied? (ii) Doen u kind ekstra klasse by die skool.
2. Sou u kan bekostig om ekstra hulp in te kry vir u kind?
3. Is u bewus dat die volgende dienste deur die WKOD aan die ouers beskikbaar gestel word:
(i) Leerondersteuning (ii) Arbeidsterapie (iii) Sielkundige ondersteuning
(iv) spraakterapie (v) Mediese hulp
4. Wat was aan u verduidelik rondom die leersondersteuningsprogram by die skool?

D) Persoonlike inligting rondom eie opvoeding/leeragterstande

1. Het u 'n leeragterstand op skool gehad?
2. Hoe was jou ouers betrokke by jou opvoeding op skool?
3. Hoe sien u die kind setoekoms (i) in skool, (ii) eendag na skool?

ADDENDUM E

P (pa) Uhm, ek was by Athlone College en ek het tot by N5 gedoen. Dan het ook Bisfa College toe gegaan waar ek 'n ambagssertifikaat gekry het

AP OK!! Bisfa ne? Hoe nu weer. Hoe is daai college se naam nou weer?

P(pa) Bifsa

AP B I F S A (spel); hulle is mos daar in Bellville....

P(Pa) Actually Belhar

AP In Belhar ja... naby UWK

P(Pa) ...yes, net langsaan UWK

AP ...net langsaan UWK: uhm en Liezel jy? Tot watter grad?

P Matriek

Oprvoeding.

AP Matriek, oh, ok. Het julle hierso skool gegaan?

P Ja, hier by Temperance Town en Strand Sekonder.

AP Oh. Ok. Alright. Umh, Bronne van inkomste. Daar is ... eintlik wil ek net weet julle ontvang nie 'n staatsstoelae nie?

P Nee

*Inkomste
Nie staatsstoelae.*

AP Nee, ok. En uhm... bly julle in julle eie woning of... huur julle

P(pa) Eie woning

Behuising - eie woning.

AP Eie woning...onthou dis anonymous hoor daar word nie name genome nie... uhm.. en dan wil graag weet hoeveel mense... hoeveel grootmense woon in die huis en hoeveel kinders ...

P Net ek en hy en dan die twee kinders

Hoeweenoid afhanklik

AP Man julle is nie die mense wat ek soek nie (lag) - julle is regte mense. Ek soek die mense wat klomp mense bly in een huis...

P Ai jinne....

AP Eintlik het ek... want dit is die tipe kind wat ek mee werk. Hoe het julle agter gekom dat Schean n leersprobleem het. Het julle dit self agtergekome of het die skool vir julle laat weet; hoe het dit gebeur.

P (Pa) Ons het dit self agter gekom.

vooraf geweet van LP.

P Ja, ons het dit self opgetel; al van kleins; van graag R; toe hy graag R toe gaan ne, hy het nou voor skool so bietjie begin skryf en so dan vat ek hom dat hy bietjie skryf; maar wat hy wel doen, nou nog, hy draai sy letters om. En in graad R het hy begin skryf van regs na links. Hy sal beginne skryf...so daai...sy 1, 2 omdraai, 3, 4... dis hoe hy skryf.

*Self opgetel
baieer help
kind*

LP- leersprobleem.

*Bevestig
draai letters om
- Skryf verkeerde rigting
- draai letters/nommers om*

- AP Oh, ok. En wanneer het jy dit opgelet Liezel?
- P In graad R, ja. In graad R het ek dit opgetel en...vra vir Shaun ek sit baie met hom en hy probeer regtig maar hy sukkel verskriklik. Want hy umh. Hy sukkel verskriklik..n mens kan vir hom iets vertel en hy is baie... hy snap gou, hy snap gou. Maar dit is net dat as dit by die skryf kom, of by lees kom, foei tog, dan het hy regtg 'n probleem. over het kind - kind Sukkel baie. met skryf en lees
- AP OK, so skryf en lees. En toe hy nou graad 1 kom, ne, toe het hulle vir julle laat weet of watter tyd; wanneer het die skool vir julle laat weet. Jy se mos nou jy het eerste opgetel ne, julle as ouers, maar uh...
- P Juffrou Meyer het vir ons in graad 2 Over word ingelig deur skool.
- AP Nou eers..die eerste keer het die skool vir julle
- P ...vir ons genader om te laat weet skool nader oer oor kind se LP.
- AP ..in graad 2. Ok alright. En uhm, want ek dink nie hulle kry leerondersteuning in graad 1 nie; dit begin eers van graad 2 af; dis seker nou waarom hulle gevra het julle moet inkom want hy moet ekstra lesse kry.
- P Ja...
- AP Ja, ok. Uhm, was hy al getoets? IK en so aan? leerder. was nog nie vir IK geassesseer nie.
- P (pa) nog nie
- P HY was nie getoets nie. Green assesseering.
- AP ok, uhm
- P(pa) ..maar sy IK is baie hoog... over se mening oor kind se leer vermoed
- AP Is dit, ...
- P (pa) Verskriklik hoog
- AP Rerig
- P Hulle het gister huiswerk gekry; tuiswerkies gekry; hy het 'n baie ryk verbeelding daai kind; ek ...en hy praat baie mooi; sy sinne ; wat hy wil se.. is net hy kan dit nie over se mening
- P(pa) ...skryf nie.. oor kind se vermoed
- P ...skryf nie. Op papier sit nie.
- AP So die problem is eintlik die skryf.
- P ..die skryf en die lees.
- AP en lees..ok Itzhak. Pentman.