

EXPLORING EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES OF IN-CLASS LEARNING FACILITATORS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

by

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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

.....

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*“People are incidentally born or early enculturated into being different.
It is more important to understand how they are put into positions for being
differently ... Not only are cultures occasions for disabilities, but they actively
organize ways for persons to be disabled”*

(McDermott & Varenne, 1996:336-337,
edited by Jessor, Colby & Shweder, 1996).

*When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows,
not the flower*

(Alexander Den Heijer).

ABSTRACT

As a culture of diversity moving towards equality for all, South Africans expect nothing less than progress and change for the betterment of all. Nowhere is this more important than in the education system where equality, in the form of inclusion, is paramount. Recently, there has been renewed interest in learning facilitation as it forms one of the many ways children with barriers to learning can access learning. Making use of learning facilitators can benefit the individual child as well as the educator. As inclusive education is rolled out in the form of policies, learning facilitators could be one of the supporting tools in assisting the child's accommodations and adaptations of the curriculum, ultimately making inclusive education possible for many learners.

Learning facilitation is becoming a more established profession, yet often policies regarding occupational expectations, roles and job-descriptions often take time to catch up with the utilization and deployment of personnel. The purpose of this study was to assimilate the experiences and interactions of educators with facilitators of learners with barriers to learning, in particular, those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The study relied on a fundamental constructivist-interpretivist approach. A basic qualitative study was conducted involving six participants from two private schools in the Helderberg area in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Once ethical clearance was sort and granted, purposive sampling was used to select participants. Data were collected by means of an extensive literature review and semi-structured interviews, and analysed using a synthesis of content and interpretive analysis. Thematic data analysis was applied to analyse and interpret the data. In-depth insights of educators' experiences of collaborating with in-class learning facilitators were gained.

Findings suggest educators had a positive experiences of working with learning facilitators, however participants report that the need for formal training for the learning facilitators is pivotal. Suggestions are made regarding how schools can maximise the benefits of working with learning facilitators.

Key words: Education, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Learning Facilitator, Learning Support, Inclusive Education

OPSOMMING

As 'n kultuur van diversiteit wat na gelykheid vir almal beweeg, verwag Suid-Afrikaners niks minder as vordering en verandering vir die verbetering van almal nie. Nêrens is dit belangriker as in die onderwysstelsel waar gelykheid, in die vorm van inklusiwiteit, uiters belangrik is nie. Onlangs is daar hernieude belangstelling getoon in leerfasilitering as een van die vele maniere om toegang te bied met kinders wat met leerstoornisse presenteer. Die gebruik van leerfasiliteerders kan die individuele kind sowel as die opvoeder bevoordeel. Aangesien inklusiewe onderwys in die vorm van beleid uitgerol word, kan leerfasiliteerders een van die ondersteunende instrumente wees om die kind se verstaan en aanpassings van die kurrikulum te ondersteun en akkommodeer wat inklusiewe onderwys vir baie leerders moontlik maak.

Leerfasilitering word 'n meer gevestigde beroep, maar dikwels verhinder beleid oor beroepverwagtinge, rolle en werksbeskrywings die plasing van personeel en implementering van leerfasilitering. Die doel van die studie was om die ervaring en interaksies tussen onderwysers en fasiliteerders van leerders met spesiale leerbehoefte vas te lê, veral dié met outisme op die spektrum versteuring (ASD).

Die studie was gebaseer op 'n fundamentele konstruktiewe interpretatiewe benadering. 'n Basiese kwalitatiewe studie is uitgevoer met betrekking tot ses deelnamepunte uit twee privaatskole in die Helderberg-gebied in die Wes-Kaapse provinsie van Suid-Afrika. Etiese klaring is verkry en 'n doelgerigte steekproef is gebruik om deelnemers te kies. Data is ingesamel deur middel van 'n uitgebreide literatuuroorsig en semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude, en ontleed aan die hand van 'n sintese van inhoud en interpretasie analise. In-diepte insigte van opvoeders se ervarings van samewerking met in-klas leerfasiliteerders is verkry deur middel van kwalitatiewe data insameling met die gebruik van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude. Tematiese data-analise is toegepas om die data te analiseer en te interpreteer.

Die studiebevindings dui positiewe ervarings aan om met leerfasiliteerders te werk, maar deelnemers rapporteer dat die behoefte aan formele opleiding vir die leerfasiliteerders noodsaaklik is. Voorstelle is gemaak oor hoe skole maksimaal voordeel kan trek met die werk van leerfasiliteerders.

Sluitelwoorde: Onderwys, Outisme, Spektrumversteuring, Leerfasiliteerder, Leerondersteuning, Inklusiewe Onderwys

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants

~ Sir Isaac Newton ~

To Mom and Dad, thank you for teaching me just how to eat an elephant* ... Your unwavering support and love is immeasurable!

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* No elephants were harmed in the writing of this thesis!

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CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

“Great teachers focus not on compliance, but on connections and relationships.”

~ PJ Caposey, ASCD Emerging Leader ~

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is vital to understand the present framework of inclusion so one can be clear regarding the role of each player within education and how relationships between role-players are defined and developed. With constant transformation in South African Education comes the need for adaptation and modification, particularly when implementing inclusive education, and making policy a reality.

“All schools need to support the concept of equal educational opportunities for all learners ensuring access for all learners, including those who experience barriers to learning” (Swart & Pettipher, 2016:4). One can argue that the child before us does not necessarily have vastly different needs to the child from the past, but with the rise of inclusive education, educators find themselves in situations having to face children with unique educational needs within their classrooms, including the need for assistance with children with barriers to learning. “One does not have to yearn for inclusion simply because one has been excluded. It is the right thing to do. We are better for inclusion. We cannot have communities in which ‘others’ do not belong. Schools cannot educate as if our students are homogenous in every aspect of human life. We are about differences. Differences are the source of our strength as our commonalities. We can no longer afford to make differences a site or source that disunites or divides us” (Phasha, 2017:1). This transformation in education creates the opportunity for learning facilitators to collaborate with educators and other educational specialists to best support the child and their contextual, educational needs.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The need for assisted learning by means of individual facilitation is increasing in mainstream schools, as inclusive education is the current framework of education in both the South

African and the international arena. A pivotal element of Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001), is the inclusion of children with barriers to learning, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), in mainstream classrooms. Inclusion is understood broadly as providing education for children who previously may have been taught in a separate special education system (due to barriers to learning) Such inclusive education offers these children the opportunity to now be taught in regular, mainstream schools. These mainstream schools have taken the responsibility of changing and improving the system to provide the support necessary to facilitate access and participation (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009). Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), states that, as far as practically possible, support will be provided in mainstream schools. To ensure that this system will work in practice, it is not simply enough to believe in and support a policy of inclusive education, nor does it ensure that it will necessarily translate into practice at ground level within the classroom (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

As more and more children with barriers to learning such as ASD enter the schooling system, educators are required to adapt to each child's specific learning requirements, often with little training, to the specific needs of each child. Research conducted by Tucker and Schwartz (2013), highlights the gaps in schools' readiness to accommodate children with barriers to learning, reporting that parents reported low levels of perceived disability-specific staff knowledge regarding ASD.

Simpson, de Boer-Ott, and Smith-Myles (2003:116) posit that, "the challenges of including students with ASD are many because of the nature and severity of their disability." Supporting views are posed by Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001:303), "a major paradigm shift in education policy has reflected a move from a dual, special and general education system towards the transformation of general education to recognise and address the diverse learning needs of all learners." With class sizes regularly at their maximum, educators often do not have the capacity to attend to children with ASD. Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001:305) continue to state that, "the demand to meet the 'special needs' of all children with the provision of support services on an equitable basis is great. Many learners have special needs that require learning support beyond that which is traditionally available in the classroom in ordinary (not special) South African schools". As a result, teachers have had to cope with multiple and diverse learning needs, in the majority of cases with no support (Lomofsky,

Thomson, Gouws & Engelbrecht, 1998). In such situations, facilitators are required to assist both the child with ASD and the educator; improving the overall functioning of the class environment.

Currently, in South Africa, learning facilitators are increasingly recruited by parents who have the financial resources to assist their child with the demands of everyday education. Consequently, many schools have had to open their doors to learning facilitators, and this can be problematic, as their role has not yet been formalised in policy structures. A brief review of national educational policies showed no references to the formalisation of learning facilitators and their role within the classroom (South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996; Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, Department of Education, 2001). Furthermore, through gained experiential knowledge, educators often feel threatened by the presence of a facilitator, preferring the traditional model of educator and students within a classroom. Little-to-no research has been collected to support this premise thus far, proving that little is known regarding educators' experiences and perceptions of in-class learning facilitators'. With the lack of empirical data, there is a need to explore and research this further.

Exploring educators' perceptions leads to a deeper understanding of experiences that influence the relationship between educator and learning facilitator. Rosen (2014:276), points out that, "Since teachers are key stakeholders in decision-making processes for students' educational placement, their experiences are important to assess as they may act either as barriers to, or facilitators of, inclusion. These high-stakes decisions inevitably alter students' trajectories regarding developmental outcomes, and therefore warrant further examination".

According to Simpson et al. (2003:116), "independent of the exact nature and severity of their disability, all children and youth with ASD require careful individualised planning to experience educational success." Therefore, all role-players such as parents, educators, learning facilitators, and other educational professionals need to collaborate in the best interests of the learner who is in need of a learning facilitator. In my experience, I have found some schools to be committed to the integration and inclusion of both children with ASD and their learning facilitators, while other schools tend to be reluctant to embrace the idea of paraprofessionals in mainstream classes.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

With the implementation of inclusion and the need to provide learning and education to all South Africans, irrespective of differences or barriers to learning, comes the necessity to provide learning support. One such form of support is to have a facilitator in the classroom to assist the child in reaching his/her full learning potential while addressing their unique learning needs. Children with ASD often need a learning facilitator to assist in the learning process. However, learning facilitators currently lack identity and clarity of their roles within the field of education as there is no official guideline stipulating roles and responsibilities within a classroom setting (Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Bond, Symes, Hebron, Humphrey, Morewood & Woods, 2016). To better understand this role, an exploration of educators experiences of in-class learning facilitators working with children with ASD is needed.

An initial review of the seminal literature revealed that there is little research pertaining to the role of learning facilitators within the classroom. Current research does not explore the perceptions that educators hold through experiential interaction with learning facilitators regarding the presence and benefits (or hindrance) of facilitators working with children with ASD. Consequently, learning facilitators' roles lack formal definition; possibly creating mixed perceptions for educators in the practical setting of mainstream education.

Scholars in this domain have not adequately addressed this topic, thereby creating a void for further research, one that needs to be urgently addressed if we are to provide a collaborative and cohesively structured educational environment for all role players. An extensive review of the literature on inclusive education revealed that empirical research regarding the perceptions educators' hold towards learning facilitators in South Africa is negligible. Previous research has chosen to focus on the views of the learning facilitators (Bergstedt, 2015). When educators experiences were considered in South Africa, the focus of the study was in relation to the social competencies of primary school learners with ASD (van Deventer, 2016) or educator readiness to support children with Asperger's syndrome (Spies, 2013), since which the diagnostics and classification of ASD have changed. This study will assist in gaining a better understanding of the relationships between educators and learning facilitators. It is envisioned that the findings of this study will inform future research on this subject, as well as help to give teachers a voice regarding this change in South Africa. In so doing, there can be a better understanding of how they feel about the reform that is happening and can make use of their skills and expertise in this area.

Gaining a deeper understanding of educators' experiences of in-class learning facilitators for children with ASD requires systematic and information-rich research, of which very little exists. Studies that have been conducted both in South Africa (Bergstedt, 2015) and Sweden (Meynert, 2014) exclusively explore the views of the learning facilitator, leaving the viewpoint of the educator unheard.

As this is a qualitative study, through exploration, the intention was to gain in-depth knowledge of educators' experiences of in-class, learning facilitators for children with ASD and the nature of these relationships and roles that exist. This study focused on the perceptions of educators regarding learning facilitators, that was collated and analysed to form a clearer description of the role learning facilitators play in the implementation of integrated education for children with ASD, as well as the relationship between educators and facilitators within a classroom environment.

1.3.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand educators' experiences of in-class learning facilitators for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

In order to explore educators' experiences of learning facilitators and better understand the relationships formed between educators and learning facilitators, it is useful to clarify a few underpinning goals. The aim of this study was to interpret and describe the perspectives and explore the experiences of educators who interact with learning facilitators to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of facilitators as seen through the eyes of educators. This aim entails exploring and understanding the relationship between educator and learning facilitator and what it means to collaborate with a learning facilitator in supporting children with ASD.

The study provided an opportunity for educators to voice their narratives and perceptions and thus to be heard and acknowledged. Through analysing their responses thoroughly, an attempt has been made to glean as much insight into their perception as possible. In conjunction, the research seeks to identify misconceptions or gaps in the roles and relationships of educators and learning facilitators, thus fostering a more conducive understanding for both role-players.

1.3.2 Research goals

A further long-term research objective, once an in-depth understanding of the relationship was obtained, was to develop a classroom-based guideline for both educators and learning facilitators. This objective will assist both the educator and the learning facilitator in fostering a basis of understanding and collaborative relationship that benefits the child with ASD.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question that guided this study was the following:

- 1) How do South African educators experience the role of in-class learning facilitators supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in their classrooms?

The following sub-questions were explored:

- 1.1) What perceptions are held by educators regarding the role and the necessity of learning facilitators?
- 1.2) What are the expectations, strengths and challenges educators encounter when collaborating with learning facilitators?
- 1.3) In the opinion of educators, what changes need to be implemented in order to improve the working relationship between educators and learning facilitators?

1.5 RESEARCH PROCESS

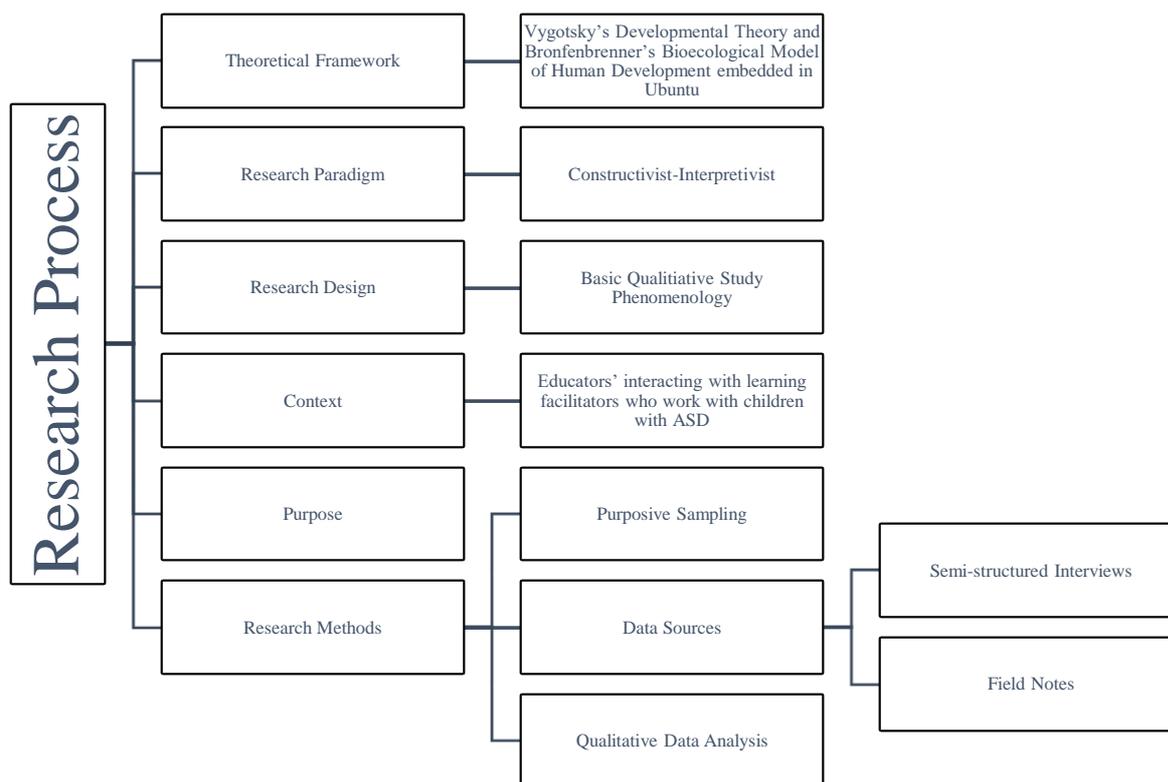


Figure 1.1: *Schematic presentation of the research process*

A comprehensive discussion regarding the research process will be provided in Chapter Three. This research study focused on the experiences of educators who work with in-class learning facilitators in collaboratively supporting children with ASD. The research process is outlined briefly below, describing the theoretical framework, research paradigm, research design and research methodology. A personal interest in interpreting the experiences of educators and the relationships created between educators and facilitators has led me to seek a deeper understanding of the subjective meanings that educators ascribe to their experiences within a classroom. This personal interest of the researcher had a direct influence on the research paradigm and theoretical framework adopted in this study.

1.5.1 Theoretical framework

This study was embedded within a social constructivist paradigm and further guided by the literature review. A key theoretical influence is the premise that, people and their realities are

socially constructed through those they surround themselves with throughout their lives. Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory lends itself to explaining not only how children possibly learn, but more importantly why a learning facilitator would help to bridge the gap for children with barriers to learning. Particularly, children with ASD, who struggle to interpret social cues and communicate efficiently, both key facets of learning.

Children learn through observing the behaviour, attitudes, and outcomes of the behaviours of others'. Vygotsky's social development theory argues that consciousness and cognition are gained through socialisation; this is similar to the work of Bandura who proposed that most human behaviour is learned by observation through modeling by others. Vygotsky refers to this person who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, as the 'More Knowledgeable Other' (MKO). In the case of a child experiencing barriers to learning an MKO can be seen as not only the educator, but also the learning facilitator (Coon & Mitterer, 2016).

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is what Vygotsky (1978:86) explains as the distance between what a child can do independently and what the child cannot do, "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers." According to Vygotsky (1978), a child learns through modeling from others, following by example, and gradually develops the ability to complete the task on their own. In other words, the ZPD is the difference between what the learner knows and the unknown; reaching the unknown through guidance and facilitation from MKO. The role of the educator, according to social developmental theory is to provide children with experiences that occur within their zones of proximal development, thereby encouraging and fostering learning. "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice; first on the social level, between people (interpsychological) and later, on the individual level, within the child (intrapsychological)" (Vygotsky, 1978:35).

When one mentions cultural development, and as this is a South African study, the notion of Ubuntu can be applied. "We are who we are through other people" and as Desmond Tutu says: "A person is a person through other persons, none of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be

human. I am because other people are. A person is entitled to a stable community life, and the first of these communities is the family” (Desmond Tutu, 1995). Freedman and Combs (1992:44), stressed the significant impact connections play between people in order to gain a deeper understanding of their personal experiences; “connecting with people’s experience from their perspective orients us to the specific realities that shape, and are shaped by, their personal narratives.”

“Traditional African epistemology of human relationships has been based on humanness, community and interdependence” (Phasha & Moichela, 2011, as cited in Phasha, Mahlo & Sefa Dei, 2016:26). This epistemology is encapsulated in the framework of Ubuntu, a term meaning “humanity”. Also ascribed as “humanity towards others”, but is often used in a more philosophical sense to denote the belief in a universal bond of sharing and collaboration that connects and binds all humanity.

It is vital that we as South African’s, in this diverse and dynamic population, foster the idea of Ubuntu, the sense of ‘togetherness’ and caring for the well-being of others. As Lemmer and Van Wyk (2010) state, improve life for all, making the world a better place for future generations, another goal and value of education.

Ubuntu can be superimposed on the theoretical model of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory of child development. The Bioecological Model of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) classify five environmental systems in which an individual interacts. This theory provides the framework in which to study the relationships that exist between individuals’ contexts within their communities and their wider society. Together these form the theoretical underpinnings of this research and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.



Figure 1.2: *Theoretical framework of this study*

1.5.2 Research paradigm

In order to maintain focus and direction in this study, careful consideration has been given to the chosen paradigm. As this study took on a qualitative form, it falls within the interpretive-constructivist paradigm. The research is therefore viewed through an interpretivist lens supported by the triangulation of data collection methods. Triangulation will strengthen dependability of the findings.

The interpretivist paradigm is deemed to be appropriate as it emphasises a person’s personal experiences and interpretations thereof (Merriam, 2009). Interpretivist research argues that reality is socially constructed by individuals and that individuals may create and possess multiple realities through social interaction (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, subjective meanings are socially negotiated by the researcher, the research participants and the interactions that stem forth from the semi-structured interviews. Further explanation of the paradigm will be provided in Chapter Three.

1.5.3 Research design

A research design is a strategic framework for action (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2014). This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design as the researcher sought to understand the perspectives and personal, lived experiences of educators as they engage and collaborate with in-class learning facilitators. Merriam (1998:11), defines basic qualitative research as “simply seeking to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process,

or the perspectives of worldviews of the people involved. McMillan and Schumacher (2014:34), support this by expressing that “the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a description of its ‘essence’, allowing for reflection and analysis.” As learning facilitator roles are subjective, this research aimed to gain an understanding from the point of view or ‘life-words’ of the educators which form their world of experiences (Patton, 2002).

1.5.4 Research methodology

The lens through which this qualitative study will be viewed is that of an interpretive constructivist paradigm. According to Adams, Collair, Oswald and Perold (2004:365) during qualitative research, “an effort is made to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions within the context under study.”

1.5.4.1 Selection of participants

Sampling in this study was by way of non-probability purposive sampling. Therefore, participants were selected by convenience, purpose, and volunteering. This study focused on educators’ experiences with regards to interactions with learning facilitators. Participants were purposefully selected based on information-rich cases for an in-depth study. Patton (2002) asserts that purposeful sampling is a form of qualitative sampling whereby information-rich cases are selected for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). It was envisaged that a total of six information-rich participants would be gathered from two selected independent schools in the Western Cape where the school offers Grade One to Grade Twelve and makes use of learning facilitators. As this is a study of limited scope, six participants were sufficient.

Due to the nature of this study, learning facilitators as well as the children with ASD who they serve in the classroom are indirect participants. Learning facilitators in South Africa are usually people with or without qualifications in education, often young adults, who are studying part-time, who are employed by parents to assist their child with barriers to learning and in this study ASD, in mainstream classes. Children with ASD in a mainstream classroom are often children who can benefit from the social and academic aspects of inclusive education.

1.5.4.2 Data collection methods

Data was collected by means of in-depth individual interviews with educators at the schools, as well as observations and field notes. Interpretive research derives data from direct interaction with the phenomenon being studied and aims to reveal the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social interaction (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The primary data sources for this research study were transcripts of the in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews. Secondary to this, observations were noted in field notes.

As this is a study of limited scope, and due to extraneous variables, triangulation was not possible, member checks were carried out to strengthen credibility. Individual interview transcripts were given to the participants so that they could peruse the transcript and verify that their own meaning, intent and that their voice was captured in its true essence.

1.5.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data collection and data analysis research strategies were employed to derive in-depth insights. Verbal accounts and descriptions from educators were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed by means of thematic content analysis and coding, and the perspective taken from both interpretivist and constructivist approaches. In collecting the information-rich data, one is able to explore how categories of observation emerge in context (Terre Blanche et al., 2014).

1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All ethical guidelines were maintained during the study in order to develop the researcher's own ethical consciousness, and conduct the study within the Guidelines of Ethical Aspects of Scholarly and Scientific Research (2013) as set out by the University of Stellenbosch (approval number: SU-HSD-002676, Addendum A) as well as The Health Professions Act of 1974, Annexure 12, Chapter 10 and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Code of Ethics (2011).

The informed consent was obtained in writing for all participants, ensuring that they had a thorough understanding of what the research would entail. The number of contact sessions that was required, the types of questions that could be asked, the purpose of the research, the benefits and risks of participating and the method of anonymising the data obtained, as well

as their rights (including, but not limited to the right to withdraw at any time) were all communicated both verbally and in writing. Due to the nature of this research, it was necessary for the researcher to use counselling skills to ensure the participants were at ease and comfortable with the process at all times; contact details of an independent psychologist were provided should the participants had felt the need for counselling.

Confidentiality was of utmost importance. Only the supervisor and the researcher had access to privileged information given by the participants. Information was securely stored in a locked cabinet, and all electronic documents were kept under password control. Any identifying information was anonymised, and participants were numbered to ensure anonymity. The researcher was careful to remain unbiased, in order to maintain validity and reliability (dependability) of the study and the potential outcomes of the research.

1.7 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Swart and Pettipher (2016:9) are of the opinion that, “Language reflects the social context in which a paradigm is developed and can be a powerful tool.” It is important to clarify terms and concepts that were used throughout this study. “Words are received and put through our own interpretive sieve as we construct meanings from the page. This process is shaped by our theoretical or ideological disposition, experience and, of course, our attendant limitations. Consequently, there is a need to think carefully about the language that we use” (Slee, 2001:114). In each domain of study, the discourse and semantics are negotiated by those who utilise the terminology. In the following section, the frequently used terminology is defined to ensure consistent understanding.

1.7.1 Learning facilitator

A plethora of terms are used, both internationally and locally, in order to define learner support personnel (Cologon, 2013), such as instructional assistants (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli & MacFarland, 1997) and paraprofessionals (Doyle, 1995; Pickett, 1999). All terms used are synonymous with the concept of a person, usually an adult, who assists a child or student in meeting the demands of a learning environment. For consistency, uniformity, and clarity, the term ‘learning facilitator’ was used throughout this study referring to an adult, who is not the educator, but who facilitates learning within the classroom.

1.7.2 Inclusive Education

Inclusive education holds different meanings for different role-players. Donald, Lazarus and Moolla (2014:17) define inclusive education as “the South African policy based on providing education that is appropriate to the needs of all children, whether their origin, background, ability or circumstances.” Landsberg, Kruger and Swart (2011) describe inclusion as a “reconceptualisation of values and beliefs that welcomes and celebrates diversity, and not only a set of practices” (Landsberg et al., 2011:8).

1.7.3 Learner

The term ‘learner’ is often used in South Africa to refer to a child of school-going age. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA), defines a learner as, “any person receiving education or obliged to receive education in terms of this Act” (South African Schools Act, 1996:5). Historically South African educators used the word ‘pupil’; and currently, the terminology is synonymous with ‘learner’, ‘scholar’ and ‘child’. For this study, the terms; ‘learner’ and ‘child’ were used interchangeably to refer to a person who attends a school and may be in need of a learning facilitator.

1.7.4 Barrier to learning and development

Landsberg and Swart (2011), define barriers to learning and development as, ‘those factors which lead to the inability of the system to accommodate diversity that leads to learning breakdown or prevent learners from accessing educational provision’ (Department of Education 1997:12 as cited in Landsberg & Swart, 2011:19).

1.7.5 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by impairments in reciprocal social interaction, language development and intentional communication, and restricted interests and stereotyped motor behaviours (American Psychological Association, 2013).

1.7.5.1 Echolalia

The vocalized repetition of words, phrases, intonation, or sounds of the speech of others.

1.7.5.2 Stimming

Self-stimulatory behaviour, the repetition of physical movements, sounds, or repetitive movement of objects.

1.7.5.3 Theory of the mind

“The understanding that you and other people have minds, thoughts, and emotions. Students with ASD have difficulty explaining their own behaviour, appreciating that other people might have different feelings, and predict how behaviours might affect emotions. For example; standing too close, not realizing they make others feel uncomfortable” (Woolfolk, 2010:144). Can also be referred to as ‘*tacting*’; the showing and sharing of minds and the ability to apply perspective.

1.7.5.4 Social Reciprocity

The back-and-forth flow of social engagement and conversation. “Social reciprocity is the dance of social interaction and involves partners working together on a common goal of successful interaction and adjustments are made by both partners until success is achieved” (Autism Society of Baltimore-Chesapeake (ASBC), 2017).

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENTATION

This research study is structured as follows:

Chapter One: **Context and Rationale for the Study**

An introduction, motivation, and contextualisation of the study supported by a brief explanation of the research methodology, research methods and the research process that will be implemented.

Chapter Two: **Literature Review**

A literature review assisted in placing this study in both the international and local contexts. An in-depth review of existing literature highlighted that little research had been conducted pertaining to educators' experiences of in-class learning facilitators for children with ASD.

Chapter Three: **Research Design and Methodology**

This chapter provides outlines the research process in detail. Qualitative research will be the selected approach of inquiry and basis of assumptions for the study. Not only will the research paradigm, design, and methodology be discussed concisely, but ethical considerations are outlined too.

Chapter Four: **Findings and Discussion**

A description of the experiences, perceptions, and relationships of educators and learning facilitators when collaborating with the needs of a child with ASD are the focus. Research findings and an interpretation thereof will be discussed.

Chapter Five: **Recommendations**

Results and interpretations of results will be integrated with the context the relevant literature and theoretical framework. Included in this chapter will be an evaluative discussion on recommendations, possible limitations of the study, indications for future research and concluding remarks.

1.9 CONCLUSION

Chapter One serves as a general introduction aimed to orientate the reader to the research by providing an outline for the present study. This chapter explains the motivation that leads to the problem statement and goals of the study. Furthermore, it stipulates the chosen research paradigm, design, and methodology used to answer the research questions. Finally, it provides clarity to the context and rationale for the study in the form of a framework.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE PHENOMENON OF LEARNING FACILITATION

“The greatest part of a writer’s time is spent in reading, in order to write: a man will turn over half a library to make one book.”

~ Samuel Johnson, The Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D. Vol 2 ~

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The starting point of any research study requires an in-depth look at the existing research and writings surrounding the topic of the study. Gaining a commanding knowledge of previous studies and publications in the area of research creates a reference point from which to work and cultivate further discussion in order to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this area (Merriam, 2009). “The purpose of reviewing literature is to learn first-hand what has been studied on the specific question and thereby increase the researcher’s understanding of the concept under investigation so that he or she will ask more relevant questions” (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:21). Creswell (2008:89), expounds a literature review as, “a written summary of journal articles, books and other documents that describe the past and current state of information; organises the literature into topics; and documents a need for a proposed study.” Hart (1998:1) believes that, “a review of the literature is important because without it you will not acquire an understanding of your topic, of what has already been done on it, how it has been researched, and what the key issues are.”

This chapter serves to provide a summary of the seminal research pertaining to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Inclusive Education and the use of learning facilitators as part of the educational support for educators as well as the learners with ASD. This literature review can be seen as a foundation on which this study was based. A literature review involves, “a search and study of current writings on the problem under investigation. To conceive the research topic in a way that permits a precise formation of the problem and the hypothesis, some background information is necessary (Bless et al., 2013:49). Reviewing literature is an on-going process and aids in identifying the current gaps in the existing research.

This chapter begins by first discussing the term, ‘Autism Spectrum Disorder’ (ASD) and the key diagnostic features of ASD, followed by an exploration of the learning support children with ASD require. Inclusive education and support for barriers to learning are discussed next, one of which is the use of in-class learning facilitators. The reviewed seminal literature was identified by searching (a); peer-reviewed databases such as SAGE and ERIC, (b); table of contents of special education journals, (c); reference lists of identified journal articles and (d); existing published research studies.

2.2 AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

There is a broad range of barriers to learning that may affect the intellectual and physical well-being of children and indicate the need for appropriate interventions. In the field of child development, interventions can be defined as a ‘coming between’ any negative, disabling effects that a developmental delay or barrier to learning might have on the developmental process in general. “This is an attempt to minimise, if not prevent, the impact of the delay/barrier on the child’s development” and progress (Cunningham, 1992).

2.2.1 Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is defined by Koudstaal (2016:383) as, “a complex, variable developmental impairment, which stretches over the lifespan.” ASD, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), is classified under the umbrella term of Neurodevelopmental and Neurocognitive disorders. These disorders begin in childhood and are characterised by intellectual difficulties as well as difficulties in conceptual, social, and practical areas of living (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Best practice dictates that the ASD diagnostic process is informed by experienced professionals from at least two disciplines, for example, psychology and speech pathology, with the diagnosis ultimately provided by a specialist medical practitioner, a child psychiatrist, neurologist or paediatrician (Carrington & Harper-Hill, 2015; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Presently, international classification systems such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-5) and the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Diseases and Disorders (ID 10) are used to identify and classify the essential features, characteristics and diagnostic criterion of ASD

(Landsberg et al., 2011). The diagnostic criteria for ASD are often seen through a lens of impairment (Wing & Gould, 1979), diagnostic information paints a picture of what the learner is unable to do when compared with the development of his or her age cohort. An ASD diagnosis requires the child to present with difficulties in, “reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgement, academic learning, and learning from experience”, including difficulties in adaptive functioning that significantly impedes the individuals independence compared to normative development according to sociocultural standards (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

2.2.2 Core features of Autism Spectrum Disorder

ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects how one perceives and socialises with others. The two primary characteristics of ASD, as stipulated in the DSM-5 (2013), is firstly, a persistent impairment or deficit in social communication and social interaction and secondly, restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities. These impairments need to be present in early childhood and limit a child’s daily functioning, even if symptoms are only recognised later in the child’s life. “Diagnoses also reflect a myriad of factors including the age at which a child’s difficulties become apparent, the length of time certain behaviours may be present, the combination of symptoms and the severity of different symptoms” (Carrington & Harper-Hill, 2015:2). According to Landsberg et al. (2016:402), “the various manifestations of behaviour we observe in learners with ASD are not part of the disorder but rather a response to how they experience and understand the world.”

“ASD is almost universally regarded as a life-long condition, although the severity of cognitive, language, social and adaptive skill impairments varies widely among children and across time within children” (Helt, Kelley, Kinsbourne, Pandey, Boorstein, Herbert & Fein, 2008:339). Previously known as pervasive developmental disorder with various subtypes, including autistic disorder, Rett disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, Asperger disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified, ASD now encompasses all these under one term, known as Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Symptoms of ASD are classified into three clusters; *Social Reciprocity* (the difficulty in engaging in the back-and-forth flow of social interaction); *Social Communication* (difficulty in initiating and maintaining social relationships and engaging in a socially acceptable manner); and lastly, *Restricted, Repetitive Patterns of Behaviour, and Interests/Activities*.

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour may present itself as verbal echolalia (the repetition of words, phrases, intonation, or sounds of the speech of others); stimming (Self-stimulatory behaviour, the repetition of physical movements, sounds, or repetitive movement of objects); or any other behaviour or compulsions that the child may become fixated with as a pattern.

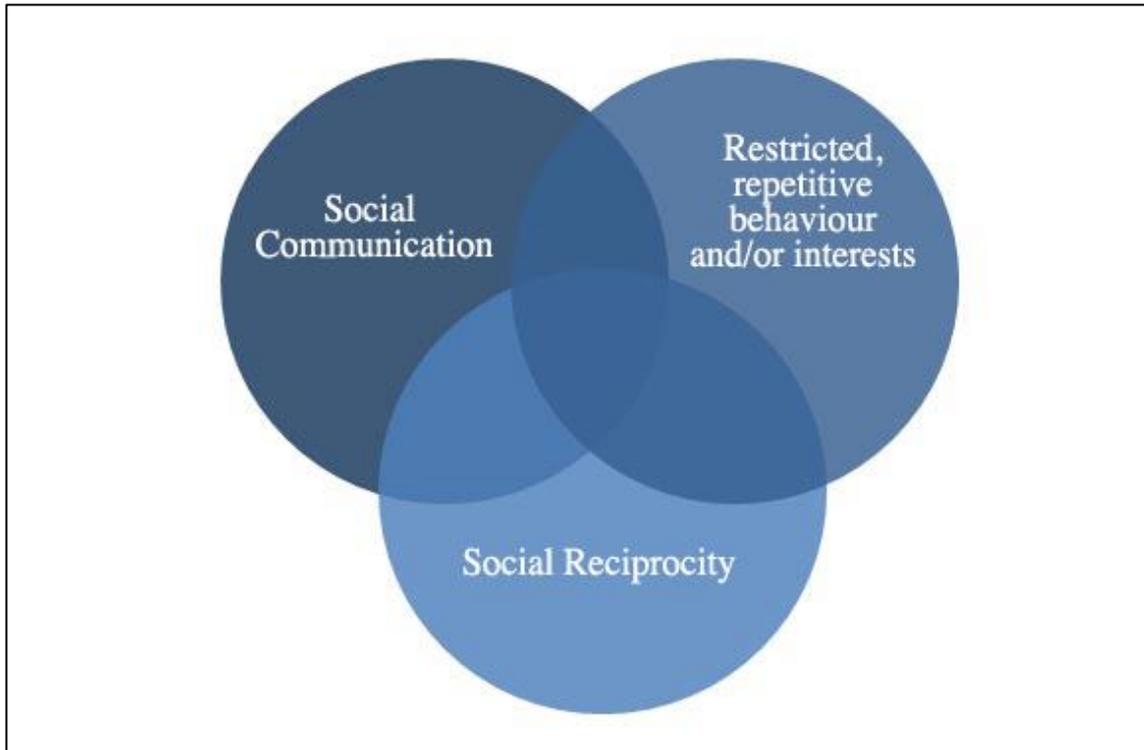


Figure 2.1: *Triad of symptom clusters and impairments of ASD*

2.2.2.1 Social reciprocity and communication

Social interactions can be challenging for learners with ASD. They may find it difficult to understand the body language of others, initiate conversation or adequately respond to social interactions, all of which form the basis of learning and communicating in a classroom. Their inability to reciprocate emotions and maintain eye contact and other facial expressions can lead to a failure in peer relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). One can see how challenging and demanding a school learning environment can be for a child with ASD. Consequently, learners with ASD tend to avoid social interactions as they do not find them enjoyable (Cotugno, 2009; Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson & Scott, 2004; Ashburner, Ziviani & Rodger, 2010; Anderson, Oti, Lord & Welch, 2009). “Children with ASD are predisposed to social isolation by virtue of their disorder and may have difficulty maintaining social

relationships, tracking a sequence of actions, developing conversational topic, empathising, fathoming non-literal meanings and participating in imaginative play” (Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, Solomon & Sirota, 2001:400).

2.2.2.2 Restricted, repetitive behaviours and interests

Learners with ASD often display repetitive behaviours, becoming fixated on a particular object, ritual or interest. Repetitive behaviours can manifest in the learner’s motor-movements, speech or the use of objects. They find it difficult to be flexible either in topics of conversation, routine or forms of play (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Repetitive motor mannerisms are stereotyped or repetitive movements or posturing of the body while restricted patterns of interest are defined as a limited range of interests that are intense in focus (Autism Speaks, 2017). Repetitive movements often occur when a learner is anxious, for example, a change in routine. To self-soothe, they will often use these self-stimulating movements to calm themselves through stimming or echolalia (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Rotherham-Fuller & Mac Mullen, 2011).

Children with ASD invariably find comfort in following the same routine every day and can become quite inflexible regarding routines. If the routine is disrupted, the learner often becomes upset and may resort to self-stimulating behaviour to calm themselves (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Humphrey & Symes, 2011; Duerden, Oatley, Mak-Fan, McGrath, Taylor, Szatmari & Roberts, 2012; Kargas, López, Reddy & Morris, 2014).

Humphrey and Symes (2011) postulate that learners with ASD often prefer an environment that provides them with a low sensory experience. The reason for this is that such learners are frequently sensory sensitive, meaning they can find sound, touch and visual stimuli overwhelming. This sensory sensitivity differs from learner to learner, depending on the level of sensitivity to sensory input and processing, whether hyper- or hypo-sensitive (Humphrey & Symes, 2010; Marco, Hinkley, Hill & Nagarajan, 2011; Lindsay et al., 2014). Schools can present a myriad of continuous stimuli, a cacophony of sounds, leading to a child with ASD becoming overwhelmed. Procuring an in-class learning facilitator can alleviate the stress associated with sensory overload.

Being a spectrum disorder, each child with ASD will present with uniquely different needs and severity of impairments. Additionally, “the educational needs of learners on the autism spectrum can change over time and as children learn to communicate and participate in

school, behaviour, for example, may improve or become more challenging” (Carrington & Harper-Hill, 2015:2). The use of learning facilitators can be a valuable conduit between the learner and the educator by not only modelling socially appropriate behaviour, but also buffering and translating the social cues for the student.

2.2.3 Autism Spectrum Disorder levels of severity

ASD, according to the DSM-5 (2013), is categorised into three levels of severity, which “may vary by context and fluctuate over time” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013:53). Severity levels range from learners requiring support only with their social and behavioural deficits, to learners who are in need of ‘very substantial support’ (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Learners with ASD, Severity One, require very little support to assist them with their poor social and communication skills; without such support, these learners will not develop or improve these skills. Often, these students display a broad vocabulary being able to speak in full sentences when engaging in social situations (Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012; Ghaziuddin & Mountain-Kimchi, 2004; Saulnier & Klin, 2007). Conversations for these learners with ASD usually centre on their precise interests, due to the fact that the learners feel comfortable conversing about a topic that they have a broad knowledge base of when engaging (Slocombe, Alvarez, Branigan, Jellema, Burnett, Fisher & Levita, 2013).

Although learners with level one ASD do not show prominent language deficits and are able to communicate, they may still find it difficult to hold conversations with another person. Particularly where they are expected to reciprocate and respond in dialogue by answering questions (Colle, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright & van der Lely, 2008; Ghaziuddin & Mountain-Kimchi, 2004; Laugeson, Frankel, Gantman, Dillion & Mogil, 2012). The DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013:52) states that these children, “may have decreased interest in social interactions; and without supports in place, deficits in social communication cause noticeable impairments and although they can converse in full sentences their to-and-fro conversations with others fail.” One such support could be a learning facilitator in order to elevate the learner’s social and communication skills, depending on the severity level.

Severity Level for ASD	Social Communication	Restricted interests & repetitive behaviors
Level 3 'Requiring very substantial support'	Severe deficits in verbal & nonverbal social communication causing severe impairments in functioning; very limited initiation of social interactions & minimal response to social overtures.	Preoccupations, fixated rituals and/or repetitive behaviors markedly interfere with functioning in all spheres. Marked distress when rituals or routines are interrupted; very difficult to redirect from fixated interest or returns to it quickly.
Level 2 'Requiring substantial support'	Marked deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication; social impairments apparent even with supports; limited initiation of social interactions & reduced or abnormal response to social overtures from others.	RRBs and/or preoccupations or fixated interests appear frequently enough to be obvious to the casual observer and interfere with functioning in a variety of contexts. Distress or frustration is apparent when RRB's are interrupted; difficult to redirect from fixated interest.
Level 1 'Requiring support'	Without supports in place, deficits in social communication cause noticeable impairments. Difficulty initiating social interactions & demonstrates atypical or unsuccessful responses to social overtures of others. May appear to have decreased interest in social interactions.	Rituals and repetitive behaviors (RRB's) cause significant interference with functioning in one or more contexts. Resists attempts by others to interrupt RRB's or to be redirected from fixated interest.

Figure 2.2: *Diagnostic criteria and levels of severity for ASD (DSM-5, 2013)*

Research conducted by Cotugno (2009), shows that learners with ASD, who are on severity level one, can successfully function in mainstream schools. This is confirmed by the DSM-5 (2013); although they meet certain diagnostic criteria for ASD, their vocabulary and understanding regarding their own specific interests are broad. If given the necessary tools, these children will be able to interact more easily, have ordinary conversations with their peers and be able to develop in an educational environment (Cotugno, 2009; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Children who are diagnosed with level two or three would require more support and assistance, as their impairments fall within all three areas of the triad of symptom clusters. Bearing in mind the premise of Inclusive education is to provide education for all, it is important to always hold cognition that a child with special educational needs is first and foremost a child who has the same needs as any other child. The defining principle of the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 states that each child has a right to equality, and all decisions made regarding the child must be 'in the best interest of the child' (Children's Act No 38 of 2005). Phasha (2017:5) is of the opinion that, "schooling and education must welcome and embrace difference in order to be truly inclusive. Our schools must embrace and address what social differences entails, particularly its connection with the educational and learning processes."

2.3 MANIFESTATION OF ASD IN THE CLASSROOM

As the name suggests, ASD is a spectrum disorder, meaning that severity and symptoms will present on a spectrum. Therefore each child with ASD would present with different combinations and magnitude of manifestations. Research shows that since ASD manifests very differently from one person to the next, it may be difficult to see if a child has ASD or not, especially in the classroom (Rai, 2012). This information is provided for informational purposes only, to illustrate what ASD may look like within an educational setting. It is not meant to be a diagnosis, nor is it intended to be medical advice. Keeping in mind the triad of symptom clusters (figure 2.1) children with ASD will be affected and challenged by these symptoms in their learning environment.

Impairments in social communication and social interaction can be seen in how a child with ASD interacts with their peers. One of the defining characteristics of children with ASD is that they fail to develop normative social relationships (Durand & Barlow, 2016; Wong & Kasari, 2012; Schietecatte, Roeyers, & Warreyn, 2012; Doyle, 2003; Carr, 2006). Initiating and maintaining friendships can be difficult and often these children prefer to limit their contact to adults, using them as tools, a means to achieve a task, or taking them by the hand to make a request (Durand & Barlow, 2016). Within a classroom, children who find social communication and interaction challenging, may be found absorbed in their own world, rarely reaching out to their classmates and educators. They may find it difficult to maintain eye contact and can easily fixate on activities that are unrelated to the task at hand, thus making learning facilitation challenging for all role-players. Ochs et al. (2001:407) explains, “in situations in which a learning facilitator is absent, in which teacher’s attention is directed elsewhere, or in which classmates seated nearby are occupied with their own tasks, children with ASD may be corporeally present, but mentally elsewhere.” A learning facilitator can be one of the many learning aids to assist children with ASD overcome these challenges.

Landsberg et al. (2016), refers to these challenges in social interaction and relating as aloof, passive, social interactions. Children with ASD often lack an understanding of social rules and have difficulty in predicting the behaviour and intentions of others (Landsberg et al., 2016; Ochs et al., 2001). Vermeulen (2014) points out that although reactions of learners with autism are logical most of the time, they are simultaneously socially inappropriate, referring to this as *context blindness*. Rai (2012) concurs by saying that children with ASD usually, “take spoken language literally and have a limited understanding (if at all) of metaphors. If

told ‘would you like to come and sit on the carpet?’ because it is carpet time, students with Autism may respond with ‘No’”. Furthermore, “instead of talking to people, they talk at them, conversations are led by them all the time, and the topics only revolve around the things that they like. They may lose interest (or ignore you) if you speak about something that they do not find interesting” (Rai, 2012:46).

A classroom environment needs learners to possess considerable social skills, both in the ability to read social situations, as well as the ability to respond appropriately, making learning possible. Social reciprocity involves the capacity to engage in joint attention or to participate with the required style of response (Gillespie-Lynch, Septa, Wang, Marshall, Gomez, Sigman & Hutman, 2012; Rai, 2012) that is a limited ability for children with ASD. Among children with severity level 1 or 2, this may present itself as appearing self-focused and not interested in things that are valued by others (Durand & Barlow, 2016).

Deficits in non-verbal communication can manifest in a variety of ways. According to Durand and Barlow (2016), depending on the level of severity, non-verbal behaviour can include a lack of facial expression or tone of voice, also known as *prosody* (Paul, Augustyn, Klin & Volkmar, 2005), an inability to interpret others emotions or non-verbal cues, having a different notion of personal space and boundaries (seen by standing too close to others).

Many children with ASD engage in echolalia, often echoing or repeating words or phrases possibly at a high volume. This can be disconcerting for educators as well as the rest of the learners in the classroom. Approximately 25% of children with ASD struggle to develop sufficient speech proficiency to be able to effectively communicate their needs (Anderson, Farrar, Golden-Kreutz, Emery, Glaser, Crespín & Carson III, 2007; Carr, 2006).

With regards to restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities many children with ASD appear to find comfort in routine and things remaining consistent. In a classroom one can imagine an environment of constant flux, this can be extremely upsetting for a child on the spectrum who finds comfort in familiarity and routine. “This intense preference for the status quo is known as *maintenance of sameness*, and often people with ASD are consumed in stereotyped and ritualistic behaviours for hours” (Durand & Barlow, 2017:495; Durand, 2014; Rai, 2012; Sattler & Hoge, 2006; Carr, 2006). All of the behaviours mentioned above could have an adverse effect on both the social development of the child with ASD as well as the ability for them to learn. Ochs et al. (2001:416), stress that although

children with ASD, “sometimes appear impervious to rejection and scorn, they can be hurt by these experiences and/or become anxious to revise their public self-image.” This could lead to higher chances of bullying within the educational setting.

2.4 SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH ASD

Support for children with ASD needs to encompass the full range of diverse needs of the child. One such way to address the development of the child is through education. “Education plays a pivotal role in meeting the diverse needs of learners with ASD” (Koudstaal as cited in Landsberg et al., 2016:394). Supporting a child with ASD means developing and modelling better communication, improving their social interaction and development (see figure 2.1) as well as providing positive behaviour plans, organisational skills encouragement and accommodating and supporting their sensory needs. As one can see, a range of provisions is necessary to be able to address the child’s barriers to learning. A barrier to learning is anything that hinders the child from being able to learn (Law, 2017). According to Koudstaal (as cited in Landsberg et al., 2016:394), “if possible, children with ASD need to receive education in close proximity to non-autistic learners or peers as related to the reasonable accommodation principle in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UNESCO, 2007)” (McDonnell, 1998; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001). A study conducted by Ochs et al. (2001) points out that when the diagnosis of ASD is fully disclosed, subsequent social support in the classroom and playground is more consistently provided by the education system. Furthermore, according to their research, “children who are institutionally identified as having ‘special needs’ are particularly vulnerable to social distancing” (Ochs et al., 2001:400).

2.4.1 Placement of learners with ASD

A central issue in the treatment of children with ASD, highlighted by Carr (2006:346) is, “whether they should be placed in special schools exclusively for children with ASD or should they be placed in mainstream schools attended by children without barriers to learning and provided with additional support”. This decision should be made in collaboration and in consultation with all role-players, including educators, facilitators, learning support specialists, educational psychologists and parents/guardians. “Teachers are well placed to spot possible ASD in school-age children. They have experience with the range of skills children present at a given age and can watch children interacting together. Many school-age

children are referred for specialist assessment when teachers become concerned” (Hudry, 2015:198). Phasha (2017:30) that, “from an inclusive perspective, teacher education and training would need to shift from a rather mechanistic to an organic approach that is more constructive and qualitative. An approach that makes teachers capable of matching their teaching to learner diversities, making them accountable for their pupils’ learning and the extent to which they fully engage all scholars in class participation.” This leads to the argument that teacher education and training is in need of shifting from, “providing student teachers with survival skills to handle and cope with classroom routines and rituals to more transformative practices. Teachers need to be able to grasp the broader issues of knowledge and professional skills for inclusion, create and re-create knowledge, understand their learners and effectively deal and interact with them” (Phasha, Mahlo, & Dei, 2017:30).

Each child with a barrier to learning would present with unique and individual needs, as is the case with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The mere fact that it is a spectrum disorder shows that needs and the specific support for those needs exist across a spectrum. Special needs education involves providing support on a continuum, as should placement of learners with barriers to learning and the support that each child would need. Thus a continuum of placement exists in South Africa. Engelbrecht, Kriegler and Booysen, as cited in Du Plessis (1996:41), explain that, “at one end of the continuum are those with clear intrinsic deficits of a physical or neurological nature whose educational needs are usually for highly specialised educational resources and assistance. At the other end of the continuum are those with clear extrinsically created socio-economic disadvantages.”

UNESCO (2005:13) defines inclusion as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education”. Inclusive education, according to Mampane (2016:116) is a process signified by a continuum of support provided within inclusive school systems (mainstream and special schools).

Inclusive Education aims to promote the “continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school” (UNESCO, 1994:11) where placement into special schools is not the preferred model. Similarly, Peters (2004) highlights the significance of context in the construct of inclusive education, with a continuum of service provision and support within a mainstream school context. Mampane, however, is of the opinion that the above definition by UNESCO (1994), “clearly introduces the binary

oppositional relationships between mainstream inclusive schools and special education schools based on context and the continuum of support. These continuums of support are context-specific, with the ‘continuum of service’ (within the inclusive mainstream schools) versus a ‘continuum of placement’ (found within the special schools) (Mampane, 2016:117). Furthermore, Mampane (2016:117) states that the definition provided by UNESCO’s (1994), “fails to acknowledge the significant role the continuum of placement plays in providing access to quality education for learners with severe learning disabilities”.

South Africa’s reality is that total inclusion is yet to reach fruition. “The history of education for learners with ‘special educational needs’ and of education support services in South Africa, like much of the history of our country, reflects massive deprivation and lack of educational provision for the majority of people” (Du Plessis, 2006:28). The reality of inclusive education is a continuum of placement and support exists based on the specific needs and support required, the resources available and parental/guardian choice. “. These continuums of support are context-specific, with the ‘continuum of service’ (within the inclusive mainstream schools) versus a ‘continuum of placement’ (found within the special schools)” (Mampane, 2016:117).

A study on inclusive education in South African schools, conducted by Walton et al. (2009), found that private schools in South Africa have implemented inclusive education through a continuum of support within the mainstream system. This study shows that specialist services and educational resources available in private schools easily enable implementation of inclusive education through the continuum of support in mainstream schools (Mampane, 2016). The study points out that, “specialist professionals and not teachers provide the continuum of support given to learners with learning and behavioural disabilities in those private schools, as the ‘pull-out’ pedagogy of learning is used. However, the public education system (especially in poorly resourced township and rural schools) does not employ the services of specialist personnel and does not practise the continuum of support” (Mampane, 2016:126). This data highlights the stark reality of disparity within the South African education system and how the support and resources on offer differ from school to school.

Research shows that children with ASD can benefit from participation in inclusive educational environments, provided that they receive the essential support to be able to achieve success in these contexts (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001). Research by Friedlander (2010:141) suggests that, “inclusion in the general education classroom is becoming the

placement of choice for many students with autism.” Specialist personal, such as learning facilitators, could provide children with ASD with a continuum of support, however, this, according to Mampane is conditional and dependent on where the child receives their education either rural-public schools or private schools where there is a much higher chance of the child receiving specialist professionals and support.

Carr (2006:346) raises the need to balance an ethical decision versus a pragmatic one. Ethically, inclusion encapsulates the premise that children with ASD, “should be provided with every opportunity to live as normal a life as possible and, for this reason, should be educated in mainstream schools with additional support provided.” However, pragmatically, resources are not often available. Not only can it be difficult to source the appropriate support within mainstream schools, but it can be costly for parents/guardians too. “National policy, the views of advocacy groups, and the way in which funding from statutory and voluntary sources are allocated, all determine the availability of mainstream or centralised special educational placements” (Carr, 2006:346).

Barriers can emerge from different levels in the system; teachers need to identify the barrier so as to impart content in such a way that all learners can access it, no matter their abilities and styles of learning. The earlier barriers are identified, the better for all. South African education makes use of the national strategy for Screening Identifying Assessing and Support (SIAS) (2014) document in determining the child’s educational barriers as well as the possible support that may be needed. The SIAS document provides educators and educational professionals with a framework for not only providing intervention strategies and proof of intervention provided on a school level, but also determines the placement of the child with barriers to learning. This national document stipulates the role that educators play in the screening and identification process and provides an organogram for intervention, referral and placement of a learner experiencing barriers to learning. Often children are faced with challenges in the learning process, which are a result of a broad range of experiences in the classroom, at school, at home, in the community, and/or as a result of health conditions or disability. These challenges are referred to as ‘barriers to learning and development’ (SIAS, DoE, 2014:12).

Education White Paper 6 makes it “imperative that the education and training system must change to accommodate the full range of learning needs, with particular attention to strategies for instructional and curriculum transformation” (Department of Education, 2001:11). These

principles also underlie the South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The focus of assessment in South African schools is no longer only achievement-orientated. The SIAS (DoE, 2014) reflects this change towards a focus on effective support for learning. Instead of assessing the learner, we are now assessing the learning. Previously the special educators or psychologists were responsible for assessing and providing support for learners with barriers to learning. Now, assessment is curriculum-based and teacher-driven.

The SIAS is based on the premise that the support is brought to the learner, not the learner to the support. Initial screening is guided by the learner profile in which the teacher becomes the case manager and refers to other professionals when necessary. The national screening policy is designed to guide educators and assist in identifying recognising the child's strengths and needs on which to establish an action plan for support. When teacher intervention is not successful, the School Based Support Team (SBST) becomes involved, and possible placement is then considered at District level based on the child's support needs. It is then that the District Based Support Team (DBST) is involved with providing support and possible placement of the learner. Provision should be given based on the severity of support needed to address barriers to learning.

The extent or severity of the barrier to learning is the determining factor in the choice of educational settings and placement. In South Africa there are special schools that cater for children who experience physical barriers to learning such as hearing impairments (HI) and visual impairments (VI), and then there are other Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) schools, such as School of Skills, Specific Learning Disability (SLD) schools, and Severe Intellectual Disability (SID) schools. Some children with barriers to learning such as ASD, can attend mainstream schools depending on the severity level and degree of assistance needed. Some mainstream schools, often in the more rural areas of South Africa where access to LSEN schools is limited, offer resource classes that provide a more intimate learning environment with fewer learners in the class. It is important to note that the 'ideal' placement of a learner with ASD may change over time (Landsberg et al., 2016).

Table 2.1: Placement criteria according to the Western Cape Education Department (WCED, 2017)

School of Skills	<p>A learner referred to a School of skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● should experience mild to moderate cognitive barriers (MMID) to learning which result in poor scholastic progress; ● should demonstrate an aptitude for skills training; ● scholastic functioning should be at least two years below grade level/age cohort; ● learner may have repeated a grade.
SLD Schools	<p>A learner referred to a SLD school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● should present with specific learning difficulties (significant difference between verbal- and non-verbal cognitive functions); ● may also experience emotional and or social challenges related to specific learning difficulties; ● intellectual functioning level: average to high average; ● medical conditions: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Diabetes, Epilepsy and other medical conditions.
SID Schools	<p>A learner referred to a SID school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● should present with special educational needs regarding severe intellectual disability (SID); ● the learner may present with learning disabilities: Fetal alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Down Syndrome, or other learning disabilities.

2.4.2 Multi-dimensions of support for children with ASD

Children with ASD require specialised support to experience success in inclusive classroom environments. This requires educators to be proficient in identifying and recognising individual needs, level of severity of ASD, emerging skills, areas of strength and special interests. Modification of the learning programme will need to take place to ensure that learners with ASD have access to the curriculum (Landsberg et al., 2016; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001).

Currently, an array of intervention strategies exists, ranging from technological assisted learning; medical, diet and supplement interventions, behaviour modification approaches, to sensory approaches such as aromatherapy and reflexology (Landsberg et al., 2016). Smaller class sizes, assisted learning, curriculum modification and differentiation can all promote the

learning of a child with ASD. Curriculum adaptations can be done through the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework that, “conceptualises the need for a more flexible curriculum designed to lower the barriers and to enable learners with widely varying needs, to be included in the learning process. It is an instructional design approach that addresses a broad range of learning needs in a single classroom” (Dalton, McKenzie & Kahonde, 2012:1). This instructional design requires a multi-disciplinary team consisting not only of the educator and parents/guardians, but may also include a learning facilitator. A learning facilitator is one of the many interventions and supports that can be utilised to give the child with ASD the best possible chance to reach their full potential within an inclusive setting, by modelling the correct behaviour and social communications as seen in the triad of symptom clusters and impairments in figure 2.1. Ochs et al. (2001) maintains that the use of learning facilitators enhances positive inclusion and thus, strives towards achieving inclusive education.

2.5 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is defined as a process of addressing the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to, and within, the learning environment (UNESCO, 2005). Inclusive education is underpinned by the broad principles of, “dedication to building a more democratic society, a more equitable and quality education system, and the belief that extends the responsibility of regular schools to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all learners” (Dyson 2001; Ainscow, 2009, as cited in Swart & Pettipher, 2014:4). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2005) views inclusive education as, ‘the dynamic process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners and of seeing individual differences not as problems but as opportunities for enriching learning’. Slee (2001) believes inclusive education demands a reconstruction of educational thinking and practice in mainstream schools for the benefit of all children (Slee, 2001).

According to Ferguson (2008:2) “inclusion began in the United States and Europe as a special education initiative on behalf of students with disabilities as early as the 1980s.” The idea of learning and education continues to change over time. “At this time the focus of special education reform was essentially structural, the debate being where students with disabilities should receive education” (Ferguson, 2008:2). Different educational institutes

were on offer according to the needs or disabilities children displayed. Segregation of education was offered, as it was believed that specialist educators were needed to educate what was then termed ‘disabled children’.

The notion of inclusion is not isolated to schools and education, but should rather be considered a community ethos. Inclusion cannot take place without support from the whole community namely; government, parents, teachers, and children. One can understand the importance of system collaboration by examining the Bio-ecological Model of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994). According to Ferguson (2008:3), “fundamental and continuous improvement and renewal are therefore essential for implementing inclusion.”

The aim of inclusive education is described by Rose (2010:221) as, “the quest to create the conditions for inclusion wherein inclusion shifts the emphasis from ‘the difficulties presented by the child with special educational needs’ to ‘the development of strategies and classroom practices that enable inclusion to be achieved.’” The nature of impairment has shifted in its essence, from the deep epistemological attachment view that barriers to learning and other deficits are produced by the impaired pathology of the child (Brantlinger, 1997), to a more systemic approach. This approach is grounded in the belief that such barriers to learning can be attributed to many facets of nested systems; “complex relationships rather than those that are organic within the child” (Slee, 2001:117) and the interaction between the child and the systems. These nested interactions can be illustrated by as the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2004) which will be discussed in further detail in 2.5.1.

Many policies were formed to support inclusive education, both on a national as well as a global scale. One of the most influential global manifests was that of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), stemming from the World Conference on Special Needs Education 1994, highlighting “the need to include students with special educational needs as the core agenda of broad-based educational innovation” (Ferguson, 2008:3). The World Conference on Special Needs Education 1994 was crucial in directing inclusive education aiming all focus on “education as a fundamental human right by paying attention to the fundamental policy shifts necessary for the development of inclusive education” (Swart & Pettipher, 2014:8). According to Lipsky and Gartner (1997), “the Salamanca Statement provides a vision, creates a standard and is a benchmark for measuring progress in schools” (Lipsky & Gartner, in Swart & Pettipher, 2014).

In 2001, America began emphasising the democratic right of every child to public education. Moving from mainstreaming (children with disabilities are afforded the opportunity to attend school alongside those without disabilities) towards integration. The ‘No Child Left Behind Act’ (NCLB, 2002) aimed at ensuring that learners with disabilities are assigned equal membership in the community and maximise the social interaction between those with disabilities and those without (Swart & Pettipher, 2014). The NCLB act “required teaching and learning standards to be established for all students”. The NCLB act details that all students be “included in state-wide assessments; meet assessment standards; and be supported by appropriate technology, which includes assistive technology, to achieve this” (Dalton, 2012:3). This move by the government was based on a more social approach to learning, development and education. It must be noted that integration, although more socio-ecological, meant children were accommodated rather than included.

Based on this premise, inclusion can be seen as “an extension of the comprehensive ideal in education” and “changes in thinking about inclusion in education have been possible because of changes in society” (Swart & Pettipher, 2014:8). Inclusion is the embodiment of collaboration of multi-disciplinary teams and involves optimising active engagement from all learners. The shift here is that classmates, the school and the education system fit the needs of the individual child who may be experiencing a barrier to learning.

Inclusion is often associated with education of children who have disabilities but inclusion, according to Carrington and Harper-Hill (2015) is much broader than that. The premise of inclusive education begins at the heart of education. Slee (2001) firmly believes that preparation of inclusive teachers should be woven right across the fabric of the teacher-training curriculum. “Educators need to become more critically literate about the politics of disability and disablement as a prelude to their attempts to practice inclusion (Hooks, 1994, as cited in Slee, 2001:117). Inclusion provides a theoretical framework for education reform that is both political and cultural (Carrington & Harper-Hill, 2015). It requires challenging the status quo of our traditional education system so that all students are welcome and taught in their local school, it does not concern special educational needs, but more encapsulating, it is about all students (Slee, 2001). The formation and implementation of legal acts, “extends the range of heterogeneity among children in a classroom” (Ochs et al., 2001:400). Consequently, learners may interact, for the first time, with a variety of classmates who have significant physical, cognitive, and/or emotional impairments (Ochs et al., 2001).

As with any paradigm, such as inclusive education, there exists a significant discrepancy between theory and implementation. Many dilemmas may occur on every level of the education system, from entry-level educator training to policy formation; “dissembled consideration of inclusive schooling policies and practices” (Slee, 2001:113). Additional issues may include: “professional preparation of teachers in regular schools to equip them for the challenge of inclusion, the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion, the prevalence of children with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms, and the nature and extent of support for children with learning barriers” (Slee, 2001:114). South Africa is no exception with regards to the impasses that practical implementation, and the roll-out, of inclusive education, involves.

2.5.1 Inclusive education within South Africa

Inclusive education has become the buzzword in many educational settings; however, it carries different meanings for different role-players. Donald et al. (2014) define inclusive education as the South African policy, based on providing education that is appropriate to the needs of all children, regardless of their origin, background, ability or circumstances” (Donald et al., 2014:17). Dalton et al. (2012:2) mention that, “since 1994, when democracy was established in South Africa, there has been a radical overhaul of government policy from an apartheid framework to providing services to all South Africans on an equitable basis.”

The underpinning argument for inclusion in South Africa is that all children should have access to equal education and be educated together. The South African Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001:16), a framework for inclusive education practice, describes inclusive education as a system that “acknowledges all children can learn and that all children need support; accepts and respects that all children are different in some way and have different learning needs.”

The development of an inclusive education system can be traced back to the nation’s founding document, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Dalton et al., 2012). It is stated in Section 29 of the Bill of Rights that, “everyone has the right to a basic education” (Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa, 1996). Dalton et al. (2012:2) asserts that, “the scope of the policy is broad as it attempts to address the diverse needs of all learners who experience barriers to learning.”

The education system in South Africa has undergone many changes in recent years. One of the cornerstone documents regarding educational transformation is Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001). The underpinning argument for inclusion is that all children should have access to equal education and be educated together. The South African Education White Paper 6 (2001:16), describes inclusive education as a system that “acknowledges all children can learn and that all children need support and accepts and respects that all children are different in some way and have different learning needs.” The policy highlights the conceptual shifts needed, based on the following premises:

- all children, youth and adults have the potential to learn, given the necessary support,
- the system’s inability to recognise and accommodate the diverse range of learning needs results in a breakdown of learning (Donald et al., 2012).

Our current approach to teaching, according to Carrington and Harper-Hill, (2015), draws on social constructivist perspectives; requiring children to work in groups, converse about what they have learnt, and complete a range of academic activities. These activities requires focus, critical thinking and other executive functioning skills that children with ASD find challenging. “Inclusive education must be well thought out, planned and executed. Southern Africa can learn from international contexts while not necessarily seeking a wholesale transplant for ideas and practice” (Phasha, 2017:7). Not only should inclusive schools consider local contexts and histories as significant, but approaches should simultaneously incorporate multiple learning methods and experiences (Phasha, 2017).

Swart and Pettipher (2014:4) note that due to the global transformation of information and technology, “classrooms are rapidly becoming outdated as the educational, social and political needs of our society continually change.” Inclusive education addresses the ever-changing requirements of the communities. “It is to create schools that are grounded in democratic principles and constructs of social justice. All schools need to support the concept of equal educational opportunities for all learners ensuring access for all learners, including those who experience barriers to learning” (Swart & Pettipher, 2014:4).

Furthermore, a paradigm shift can be noted as Education White Paper 6 (2001) states that inclusive education “enables education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners” (Potterton, Utley & Potterton, 2004:2). One can see the

transformation from the medical model of ‘diagnosing and fixing’, to one that allows the system to adapt to the individual child’s needs (Phasha, 2017). The inclusion of children with diverse needs implies a shift from a medical deficit model of disability to a social systems model. With the latter these learners are not viewed as a problem; instead, the barrier to learning is seen as the environment or society’s response to these individuals (Krüger & Yorke, 2012; Phasha, 2017). In the past, the child was the one having to accommodate and adapt to the schooling systems on offer. With clear reference to children with ASD; “children’s specific needs make mainstream inclusion challenging, but inclusion could be significantly enhanced if the individual needs of students with ASD could be more adequately met” (Carrington & Harper-Hill, 2015:5).

→ *Social Model of Disability*

Contrary to the medical model, the social model of disability theorises that the discrimination against disabled people (including those in need of inclusive education) is socially created and has little to do with the nature of the person’s disability or barrier to learning. This rationale makes a distinction between disability and impairment. “Disability is primarily understood as a result of oppressive social arrangements” (Connor, Gable, Gallagher & Morton, 2008:442) and is the, “loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers (Disabled People’s International, 1981). Impairment is the, “loss or limitation of physical, mental or sensory functioning on a long term, or permanent basis” (Disabled People’s International, 1981) and can be caused by society’s inclusion.

The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS, 1975) subscribe to the notion that, “disability is something that is imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. This can be seen within the realm of praxis, as education either promotes segregation in the form of special schools and placement or in the form of inclusive schools. “Through fear, ignorance and prejudice, barriers and discriminatory practices develop which disable us. The approach of the social model suggests that people with disability’s individual and collective disadvantage is due a complex form of institutional discrimination as fundamental to our society as sexism or racism” (Riser, 2014).

Table 2.2: Comparison of medical and social model of disability (Riser, 2014)

Medical model thinking	Social model thinking
Child is faulty	Child is valued
Diagnosis	Strengths and needs defined by self and others
Labeling	Identify barriers and develop solutions
Impairment becomes focus of attention	Outcome based programme designed
Assessment, monitoring, programmes of therapy imposed	Resources are made available to ordinary services
Segregation and alternative services	Training for parents and professionals
Ordinary needs put on hold	Relationships nurtures
Re-entry if normal enough OR permanent exclusion	Diversity welcomes, child is included
Society remains unchanged	Society evolves

The social model directly challenges the medical model “the obsession with finding medically based cures, distracts from looking at causes of wither impairment or disablement (Riser, 2014). The medical model view creates a cycle of dependency and exclusion, that is difficult to break, “If people were to start from the point of view of all children’s right to belong and be valued in their local school we would start by looking at ‘what is wrong’ with the school and looking at the strengths of the child” (Riser, 2014).

Broderick and Ne’eman (2008) apply the social model to offer an understanding of ASD, “[ASD] is nothing more than (or less than) an example of our abundant human neurodiversity”, assuming competencies in individuals rather than diagnosis of disease as portrayed in medical (and educational) discourse as well as reframing deficit-based assumptions of disability (Connor et al., 2008:449). Billington (2000:13) argues that, “it is difficult to accept that, in our supposedly ‘advanced’ society, children continue to be removed from their local community in order to attend institutions outside of their social sphere, especially when this is justified on the basis of a partial and overly simplistic view of their abilities and intelligences.” Billington’s point is a significant one regarding the cultural narrative of ASD, the distribution of power within education, as well as the educational placement of learners in South Africa. It can be argued that having a learning facilitator assist

a child with ASD rather than placing such a child in a special school will eliminate social exclusion in action of that child, and help develop the symptoms of ASD according to the medical model. If inclusion is not practiced then Billington (2000:18) argues that such children may risk being, “denied access to those very qualities of which, it could be argued, they seemed to be most in need ... social integration”.

“Legislations around inclusive education form another piece of the puzzle to ensure the democratisation of education in South Africa” (Potterton et al., 2004:1). The South African Bill of Rights came into effect in 1996, coupled with the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996, that is influenced strongly by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). Here one can see the evidence of global trends and paradigms shaping national policies and rationale. The South African Bill of Rights is based on the values of humanity and outlines a person’s rights and responsibilities as a citizen, one of which being the right to education.

Implementation of inclusive education in South Africa is further guided and driven by the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS); (Department of Education, 2008). The SIAS strategy, according to Dalton et al. (2012:39), “provides guidelines for early identification and support, the determination of nature and level of support required for the learner, and identification of the best learning sites and placement for support.”

Following on from the SIAS document is the Guidelines for responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom through Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (Department of Education, 2011). This policy provides practical guidance to school management and educators on planning and teaching in order to cater to the needs and diversity of all learners (Dalton et al., 2012). By doing this, it allows educational stakeholders to shift from an in-child model to a more systemic approach, rather adapting the environment to the learner and not the learner to the environment, as was the previous paradigm of the medical model.

Special Education in South Africa has its origins in the theories of the medical deficit model (Swart & Pettipher, 2014; Phasha, 2017). “Inclusion is about managing diversity, thus a whole school philosophy. With a clear epistemology of inclusive education, pedagogic practices should be derived from an understanding that disability emerges from a different developmental path and should not be based on a deficit hypothesis” (Phasha, 2017:20). Swart and Pettipher (2014:5) concur stating that, “professionals used these medical models

not only as explanatory frameworks, but also to direct their ideas and beliefs which they demonstrate in their methods, behaviour and conversations.”

Taking a critical look at the medical model, one can view this model as focusing on the deficits that exist innately within the child seen as a *within-child* model. The medical approach, dominant in the 1900s, concerned itself with diagnosis and treatment, “focusing predominately on pathology, sickness and the nature of aetiology of presenting problem, and on dealing with the specific pathology in a centred way” (Swart & Pettipher, 2014:5). The emphasis was on ‘*fixing*’ the child, requiring specially trained professionals, for the child to fit into the education system.

Through the medical deficit model, children were tested, diagnosed and labelled in order to separate their differences and therefore place such children in separate learning institutes according to their label and disability. The issue with this approach is raised by Swart and Pettipher (2014:5) as they suggest, “the location of risk factors and barriers is frequently not only with the person, but can also be situated in the community.” This led to the formation of a more socially influenced model and slowly the paradigm shift towards the bio-ecological model influenced by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994).

2.5.1.1 Bronfenbrenner’s Theory and Inclusive Education Policy

The Bio-ecological Model provides a framework for inclusion. This multi-dimensional model of human behaviour is a socially based model derived from the notion that all people with barriers to learning should be given equal opportunity to enjoy everyday living as do those who have no barriers or challenges (Swart & Pettipher, 2014). The theory, according to Paquette and Ryan (2001:1), “looks at a child’s development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment.” In practice, people with barriers to learning should be provided with every opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential and development. The emphasis is placed on the interactions between “individual’s development and the systems within their social context” (Swart & Pettipher, 2014:10) emphasising that a child’s own biology is a primary environment fuelling their development (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The Bio-ecological Model, a systems and developmental theory, inspects the direct and indirect influences on a child’s life referring to many levels of contexts, all nested within one another. These ecological systems include the microsystem,

mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystems; being successive levels, each contained in the preceding system (Donald et al., 2014).

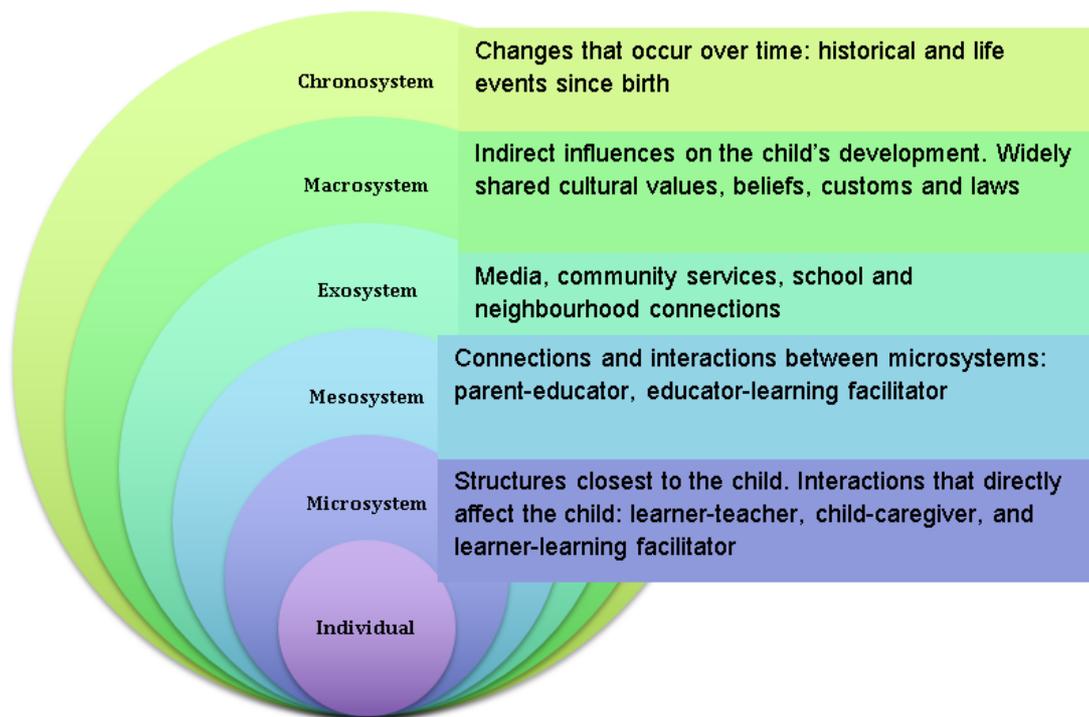


Figure 2.3: *Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, adapted from Bergstedt, 2016)*

The Bio-ecological Model is the theoretical framework that one can implement inclusive education within, as it engages all systems at all levels and becomes the tool for every role player to be an active participant in developing and formulating a whole school in accordance with inclusive cognitions. “An affirmation of who our students are, their relative identities and histories, the cultures and experiences that they bring to the school system, and the interplay of culture, history and location in shaping educational outcomes is paramount. These sites of learning should be tapped into as part of the learning process for the benefit of all” (Phasha, 2017:2).

In summary, the Bio-ecological Model of human development is a systems theory based on the following assumptions; every child needs to be seen within the context of their broader environment; external factors outside of an individual influence the way they perform academically, behave socially, and perceive themselves internally; and barriers to learning can be located within various environments within which the individual interacts. Often adaptation within the child's environment is necessary in order to assist the individual to

overcome the learning barriers and thus take learning forward (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Donald et al., 2014). “In order to optimally support the effective development of the learner, consideration must be shown to the individual needs of the learner and the processes within the environment that foster or hinder learning potential” (Bergstedt, 2015:iii).

Phasha (2017:4) encapsulates the Bioecological model when she says, “the question of re-visioning schooling and education from a critical inclusionary perspective must seek a structural transformation of school/education systems in ways that pay particular attention to the macro-social processes, economic, political and psycho-cultural realms of domination and colonisation.” She argues that there needs to be less divide between the community and the school, more amalgamation of the Exo- and Microsystems, “traditional African communities are about inclusion. If one analyses aspects of African Indigenous education, for example, one can infer that we need to create spaces in African schools for parents, elders, families and cultural custodians to come in as teachers to work on a daily basis to complement the work of professionally trained educators. Community teachings emphasise togetherness, sharing and reciprocity” (Phasha, 2017:5).

Inclusive education is based on bridging the divide of inequalities and inaccessibility to education, resources and basic human rights. The three principles of inclusive education are: *support*, *diversity* and *equality*. Support within the microsystem of the individual learner and teacher as well as the Meso- and Macrosystems in terms of decision makers all existing under the continuum of the chronosystem of policy (such as Education White Paper 6, 2001), access to curriculum and readdressing barriers and inequalities.

Diversity is the underpinnings of South Africa and is backed by the Constitution of South Africa (1996). The Constitution promotes the rights, dignity and diversity of each citizen and holds all citizens equal in the law. It promotes respect for all differences, be it gender, race, disability, ethnicity, language or religion. Equality, the third principle of inclusive education, is about providing appropriate support based on the unique needs of the individual. Treating every person with respect and dignity is the fundamentals of the Bill of Rights (1996) and the UN Convention for persons with disability (1992) and is the foundation for creating inclusive educational environments in South Africa. More specifically, an inclusive learning environment, according to Potterton et al. (2004), is one that:

- respects the rights of all learners and models the characteristics of a fully democratic society
- is free from discrimination, segregation and harassment and tries to facilitate an atmosphere of equality, acceptance and respect
- promotes the full personal and academic development of learners irrespective of age, race, class, gender, culture, religion, disability or HIV status
- is child-centred and values learners as partners in teaching and learning and accommodates a broad range of learning needs (Potterton et al., 2004:3).

Despite the enabling policies of SIAS and the Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classrooms through Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (Department of Education, 2008, 2011), Wildeman and Nomdo (2007:109) argue that, “the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa is slow and only partial.” One can argue that this may be due to the fact that many people, including education specialists and decision makers, still equate inclusive education to disability and Special Education, causing it to be slow to develop and progress in South Africa (Phasha, 2017). In addition, “Despite the development of an inclusive education policy to address exclusion, one of the issues that hampers progress, is the lack of teacher skills in adapting the curriculum to meet a range of learning needs” (Dalton et al. 2012:1).

Mampane’s (2016:115) findings suggest firstly, “that the inclusive education system is made of binary oppositional relationships between inclusive mainstream and special education school systems; secondly that both school systems provide a continuum of education support and contribute towards achieving Education For All (EFA); thirdly that the presumed binary oppositional relationship between the two education systems is contrary to an inclusive education policy, and finally that progress with the implementation of an inclusive education system in South Africa is slow in strengthening inclusive mainstream schools and less focused on strengthening the well-established and flourishing special education system.”

One may ask, ‘how does inclusive education in South Africa differ from other parts of the world, such as the USA and Europe?’ Inclusive education in the USA and the UK have focused predominately on the physical disabilities of children known as Special Education or Special Needs Education (Hossain, 2012; Muskens, 2007) whereas in South Africa, due to

historical, socio-political injustices, the approach to inclusive education has had to be with an African philosophy in mind (Phasha, 2017:4). Phasha (2017) writes,

“If identities are relational then difference can only enrich the cause of education. We must bring a reading to inclusion that values us all as part of a single humanity. To do so, however, we must challenge our refusal to engage in critical questions of power and privilege. We must be prepared to think laterally and widen our perspectives. We may be utopian but we have to work hard to make our ideals a reality” (Phasha, 2017:2).

Across the globe, no matter whether the approach is from a disability frame of reference or a diversity and inequality standpoint, the implementation of inclusive education is not without challenges. “Comparative international studies, especially between the developing (South) and developed (North) countries, present contrasting contextual issues as barriers to the implementation of inclusive education” (Mampane, 2016:130).

2.5.1.2 Ubuntu: Implications for understanding disability

According to Phasha, (2017), a much broader understanding of inclusive education needs to be embodied in Africa as until recently the conceptual understanding was viewed as *Special Education* or the *Education of Learners with Physical Disabilities* which did not fit the reality of South Africa, “to see education as a totality encompassing the varied ways, options, and strategies through which learners come to know their world, and to effect social and personal change” (Phasha, 2017:2). The idea of inclusion, from a South African perspective, addresses the fundamental questions of power and equity, promoting a link between students’ myriad of identities and embracing diversity, thus mobilising inclusive education. Inclusive education in South Africa is strongly intertwined with Ubuntu, as discussed in Chapter One and is not synonymous with Special education, it is simply, “good education for all” (Collair, 2017).

In the *isiZulu* culture, the expression is ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ which translates as, ‘a person is a person through (or because of) other people’ (Shutte, 1993:46). Van der Merwe (1996), as cited in Berghs (2017:3), defines the concept as “not just descriptive but also a normative ethical claim about how we should behave towards others and how to become human”.

South Africa is a crucible of cultures and with each culture comes different value systems. The education system of the nation can be used as a tool to unite the diverse backgrounds and foster a climate of tolerance, respect, unity and Ubuntu. Education systems are also renowned for political agendas, often pawn pieces in the chess game of the political arena, for education reaches the nation. In South Africa, education has been fraught with inequalities, and it is up to the current stakeholders (teachers, policymakers and other political and non-political figures) to encompass the past in such a way that our future generations learn from our mistakes and try correct the wrongs of the past.

We create our perceptions of ourselves, of others and others perceptions of us through those with whom we surround ourselves. According to Freedman and Combs (1992:16), “societies construct the lenses through which their members interpret the world.” Understanding of our world is formed through language and storytelling. We make sense of the world around us by organising our experience and memories in the form of narrative (Bruner, as cited in Freedman & Combs, 1996:30). This understanding is in congruence with the postmodern view of reality; realities are socially constructed, constituted through language, and are organized and maintained through narrative (Freedman & Combs, 1996:22). Essentially, this means no single truths exist, but rather an explanation of someone’s experiences, as told from the person’s viewpoint in order to make sense of the world in relation to others and the self within this world.

Weingarten (1991:289) supports this in saying, “the experience of self exists in the on-going interchange with others. The self continually creates itself through narratives that include other people who are reciprocally woven into these narratives.” Similarly, Stratton (2014) describes this as the overlap of self and other which can be summarised in the notion of Ubuntu; ‘I am, because you are’.

Education White Paper 6 on special needs education (DoE, 2001:3) “confirmed and clarified the distinctive and significant role of special schools within the South African inclusive education system while committing to strengthening them and improving their quality. Special schools will be strengthened, and incrementally primary schools will be converted into resource centres to support mainstream schools.” Special schools form a significant part of the inclusive education system and “through their specialised personnel have a specific supportive role to play in improving the quality of education for learners with severe learning disabilities” (DoE, 2001:3) and achieving education for all. “In essence, the implementation

of inclusive education does not mean the abolition of special schools; inclusive education is about a mutual collaborative relationship on the continuum of educational support within the education system without binary oppositions. A special school system is significant to the success of inclusive education in South Africa” (Mampane, 2016:117).

Mahlo (2013:76) connotes that, “the implementation of Inclusive Education in schools will require not only accepting learners with different learning needs in mainstream classrooms, but also determining whether those learners are being provided with appropriate support.”

2.6 SUPPORT FOR BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Professionals in the field of special education have acknowledged the challenges that inclusive education brings concerning the practical implementation and implications. In response to these challenges, employment of paraprofessionals such as learning facilitators has grown tremendously (Riggs & Mueller, 2001; French & Pickett, 1997). Despite the proliferation of learner facilitators in supporting students with barriers to learning, it continues to remain one of the least researched and potentially a significant aspect of special education in the last decade (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer & Doyle, 2001). As the inclusion paradigm begins to take shape in classrooms across the country, the context and scope of learning facilitators have expanded beyond the special education classroom, and learning facilitators can now be seen assisting children with any barrier to learning, including the barrier of ASD.

Robertson, Chamberlain and Kasari (2003) support this by saying that children who face barriers to learning are being increasingly educated within the general classroom resulting in general education teachers becoming more involved as well as more responsible for the education of children with diverse educational needs. Furthermore, they deduce that, “of children with barriers to learning, children with ASD may pose particular challenges to the general education educator” (Robertson et al., 2003:123). Appropriate interventions to lessen the challenges for the child experiencing barriers to learning include services and programmes, as well as assistive devices, support strategies and modified structured environments that enable the child with special educational needs to participate as much as possible by removing barriers and catering for the child’s specific needs. All of these support strategies play a significant role in addressing the challenges of barriers to learning (Law, 2017).

Numerous children require additional support within the classroom to enable them to gain access to, and mastery of, the curriculum and stipulated tasks, including children with ASD. Additional resources may be “resources to assist mobility or to provide access to the language of learning” in order for the individual child to reach their full learning potential, however, the “calculus of equity is far more complex than this simple addition. It is a cultural calculus wherein we evaluate and question the relative values afforded to different people and groups of people through the culture of schools and classrooms” (Slee, 2001:116).

As educators in schools, it is important to focus on the strengths that children have, as well as acknowledge where the child needs support in their academic and social learning. Frequently a diagnosis can be critical in ensuring that the learner not only has access to appropriate services, but more importantly, receives the necessary support (Carrington & Harper-Hill, 2015).

“The reality is that it is the combination of an individual’s strengths, interests and motivation coupled with access to great educational opportunities which shape educational outcomes for all learners” (Carrington & Harper-Hill, 2015:3). Great educational opportunities, as highlighted here, may be expanded to an increasing number of children with barriers to learning if the education system, and all paraprofessionals involved, are committed to providing academic support to those in need; one such kind of support can take the form of trained learning facilitators. Giangreco et al. (2001:59) stresses the importance of training and supervision for learning facilitators; “it is paramount because employing learning facilitators to assist in the provision of special education and related services is an indirect service delivered under the close direct supervision of qualified personnel who are present in the classroom for all or most of the time (Giangreco et al., 2001; Smith & Littlejohn, 1991).

A learning facilitator may be utilised to support all learners, as well as the educator. “Inclusive educational opportunities have expanded steadily as school-aged students with increasingly severe disabilities are being provided with access to general education classes. Having learning facilitators accompany these students in general education classes is considered by many teachers to be an essential support” (Giangreco et al., 2001:58).

Through the transformation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 in America (IDEA, 1997), the role of the learning facilitator was formalised, “paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised can assist in

the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities” (IDEA, 2004:109; Dybvik, 2004). If provided with the necessary support of trained individuals such as learning facilitators, then children with barriers to learning such as ASD can have access to the curriculum and social learning that takes place within schools. “Learners who are recognised for their strengths and interests, who are motivated by teachers and whose challenges are appropriately accommodated, can be successful at school (Carrington & Harper-Hill, 2015:3). Learning facilitators can assist the child with barriers to learning with individual instruction, one-on-one instruction and social modelling.

“Children who have a diagnosis of ASD are often challenged by the school due to the difficulties they have with social and communication skills that are required to participate in classrooms today” (Carrington & Harper-Hill, 2015:3). In situations where the learner can have a learning facilitator these challenges can be managed, perhaps even decreased as the learning facilitator models the social and communication skills to the child.

2.7 LEARNING FACILITATORS

Learning facilitators can be seen as a cadre of personnel who serves as a bridge between learning content, learner and educator. A simplified definition of a learning facilitator is an adult who supports the education of a learner who is experiencing barriers to learning, within a general educational setting such as a classroom. Learning facilitators are considered by Giangreco et al. (1997) as the people in the most subordinate position in the school hierarchy. Such adults tend to work one-on-one with the child in order to make learning content accessible, as well as assist the educator in meeting the needs of the individual learner (Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Robertson et al., 2003).

According to Gouws and Mfazwe (1998) the role of the learning facilitator is an important one for it provides assistance in the lives of the learner with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. Furthermore, Gouws and Mfazwe (1998) believe learning facilitators should work alongside the teacher, parents and other learning specialists to create a multi-disciplinary team in order to best support the learner with barriers to learning.

In South Africa, according to professional experience and knowledge, the use of learning facilitators is yet to be formalised, and the employment of a learning facilitator is often initiated by parents, and the responsibility to source, train and manage the learning facilitator

falls on the parents. Often it is through parents advocating the need of the learning facilitator and negotiating with the school regarding implementation, that the child benefits from a paraprofessional such as a learning facilitator. The sad reality of this is that implications of this can be costly, resulting in many South African families not being in a financial position to be able to provide such a support for their children's education and development.

With the rise of utilisation of learning facilitators as one of the many tools for implementing inclusive education, a debate arose regarding the nature of learning facilitators and the core function that they would serve. Some stakeholders challenged the educability of children with more severe disabilities, reasoning that such children only needed someone to provide custodial care that did not require skilled special educators. Paradoxically, others argued that given appropriate instruction and support, children who experience more severe barriers to learning were able to be educated and that the required assistant should be a skilled special educator that can design individualised curriculum and instruction (Sontag & Haring, 1999). This argument may arise as a result of the scale of severity of children with barriers to learning, such as ASD. One might deduce that, 'once size does not fit all'. Exploring the type of recommended interventions for children with ASD is an "eclectic approach to provision, enabling interventions to be tailored to individual needs and preferences" (Bond et al., 2016:306). An effective, individually tailored intervention would be to use a learning facilitator to assist children with ASD reach their full learning potential.

According to Giangreco et al. (1997), as the number of students with disabilities rise in general education schools and classes, so too does the need for, and use of, instructional assistants, such as learning facilitators. However, although current research acknowledges the increase and importance of in-class learning facilitators in mainstream classes, research emphasises the need for more training for learning facilitators and the importance of relationships within the educational community (Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

2.7.1 Roles and responsibilities of learning facilitators

Learning facilitators have been employed in international public schools for more than 50 years, and their roles and responsibilities have changed over time (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Although the use of learning facilitators is a relatively new concept in South Africa, the roles they face are similar to that in the international arena. Research shows that learner facilitators remain responsible for many of the clerical and student supervision aspects of school,

however, their responsibilities also include assisting the professional educator known as the class or subject teacher, with instruction, working with parent groups, facilitating the inclusion of children with disabilities or cultural and language differences, and providing support for related services (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). A simplified job description would be a one-on-one paraprofessional aid that provides support and accommodations to the included student facing a barrier to learning; one such barrier may be ASD or may be other barriers to learning (Robertson et al., 2003).

Giangreco et al. (1997) surmises that the proliferation of learning facilitators has often outpaced conceptualisation of team roles and responsibilities, as well as training and supervision needs of in-class learning facilitators. This lack of role clarification can frequently cause possible frustrations or misunderstandings between educator and learning facilitator as each may hold a very different perception of their own roles and responsibilities. The role and responsibility of the learning facilitator are described by Robertson et al. (2003), as helping to provide assistance with the included student. Specifically to help keep the student focused on the task at hand, provide accommodations and modifications where necessary, to help increase the child's understanding while minimising any social and/or academic frustration and challenges, reduce behavioural problems and help the learner work in small groups with other learners. All these responsibilities are assumed to provide support to the classroom educator.

In South African practice, one may notice learning facilitators playing increasingly prominent roles in the education of students with barriers to learning. "With pressure from parents, who want to ensure that their children are adequately supported, and general educators, who want to make sure they and their students are properly supported, the use of learning facilitators has become a primary mechanism to implement more inclusive school practices" (Giangreco et al., 1997:56). Due to the fact that, in many cases, the learning facilitator is funded by the parents, parents feel they are in charge and responsible for the learning facilitator and furthermore, the learning facilitator is purely responsible for the child being facilitated and should not work with other children in need within the classroom.

As increasing numbers of learning facilitators have taken on expanded and often unclear roles in assisting children with barriers to learning, many questions arise. Are the roles and duties they are requested to perform appropriate? Are learning facilitators adequately trained for their roles and responsibilities? Do they receive suitable supervision? Are they truly assisting

qualified personnel, or are they functioning as the primary instructors and decision makers for the learner in need of facilitation? (Giangreco et al., 1997).

In a study conducted in 1997, interference with ownership of, and responsibility by, general educators are cited as causes of unclear guidelines for roles and responsibilities of learning facilitators. Results indicated that most of the classroom teachers in the sample did not describe their roles as including responsibility for educating the learner with barriers to learning who were placed in their class. Furthermore, the presence of learning facilitators created a readily accessible opportunity for professional staff to avoid assuming responsibility and ownership for the education of such learners (Giangreco et al., 1997; Robertson et al., 2003). The study concluded that different expectations regarding the role of the classroom educator and the role of the learning facilitator were a point of conflict. This study raises the question of, ‘has the role of both the educator and the learning facilitator been clearly defined and differentiated since this study?’ The study also highlighted the fact that learning facilitators demonstrated unfettering autonomy in their role, including entering, leaving and altering educator-directed whole class activities whenever they chose, without consultation with the educator. This motivates the question of, ‘who is ultimately responsible for the education of the learner who is in need of a learner facilitator?’

Even though learning facilitators are there to assist and facilitate learners, research indicates that, at times, learning facilitators are placed in positions where they are to assume sole responsibility for the learner’s education and progress. Constantly having to make decisions and adapt the curriculum to suit the individual needs of the learner. With such massive responsibility resting on their shoulders, the question begs, ‘have learning facilitators received the opportunity for specific training?’ Giangreco et al. (1997:14) established that “making such on-the-spot decisions requires a depth of instructional knowledge and skill that many learning facilitators do not possess.” A brief look at occupational vacancies for learning facilitators reveals that the job descriptions often target a young person who may or may not be a student in the field of education. The job descriptions often do not go into detail on the necessary skills required and generally do not offer high remuneration.

2.7.2 Training of learning facilitators

Learning facilitators continue to be assigned to assist learners who have the most challenging behavioural and learning barriers often with little to no training (Giangreco et al., 2001;

Blalock, 1991; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 1999). Although learning facilitators continue to engage in a broad array of roles and responsibilities, many of them remain untrained or insufficiently trained to perform their expected duties (Blalock, 1991; Fletcher-Campbell, 1992; French & Pickett, 1997).

If training for learning facilitators occurs, it is often limited to training models that focus primarily on specific intervention techniques, prompts, reinforcement or error correction (Parsons & Reid, 1999). Pre-service training for learning facilitators, according to the literature, is virtually non-existent and in-service tuition continues to be severely lacking or insufficient (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005). This may result in a chasm within the education environment where many challenges may arise between educator and learning facilitator as a result. French (1998) found that teachers were generally reluctant, unprepared and untrained to supervise learning facilitators.

In South Africa, one of the few organisations recruiting and training therapists from a holistic approach is KidStart Early Intervention Centre using KidStart Global/AIMS (Awareness, Interests, Movement, Sensory). AIMS is a support system that focuses on providing support for children with ASD as well as their families in their everyday life. Depending on the level of support needed, facilitators are trained either as live-in therapists or as learning facilitators that integrate with the child in the classroom, known as 'consulting support' (KidStart Early Learning Centre, 2017). According to the research, KidStart caters for children from the ages of 18 months to 5 years.

The research concludes that learning facilitators, both locally and internationally, lack training in two crucial facets of responsibility. Namely, managing challenging behaviour and making curriculum modifications and adaptations by employing the framework of Universal Design for Learning (Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Dalton et al., 2012; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Engelbrecht, 2007). Referring to a learning facilitator's membership within the educational community Riggs and Mueller (2001) establish, within their study, that relationships between staff and learning facilitators were not characterised by mutual respect and that the learning facilitators were seldom consulted nor were their opinions requested regarding student issues. One reason cited for this was the fact that being a learning facilitator is currently not an established profession (Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

2.8 CONCLUSION

“The concern over increasing instructional integrity is appropriately an important issue that can and should be addressed within the context of general education classrooms. We suggest that the classroom involvement of learning facilitators must be compatible within the context of the broader plan for the classroom that is developed and implemented by the team for the benefit of all learners” (Giangreco et al., 1997:16).

A concern raised as a result of the literature review is the lack of a strong conceptual foundation or framework that is clear to all education paraprofessionals and professionals (Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Phasha, 2017). “Once appropriate roles have been agreed upon, plans should be established to ensure that learning facilitators are adequately trained and supervised to carry out their roles” (Giangreco et al., 2001:60). It is the hope of the researcher that this literature review will spur reflection, in addition to adding depth and clarity to the experiences of educators when interacting with in-class learning facilitators in supporting children with ASD.

The literature has indicated that training is a crucial element in the effective employment, deployment and retention of learning facilitators (Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Pickett, 1999). Both educators and learning facilitators would benefit from clearly defined roles and responsibilities for both parties as well as a comprehensive job description for learning facilitators that includes relevant and required qualifications, duties, responsibilities, orientation and training requirements, supervision, and evaluation (Pickett, 1999; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). “Acknowledging the importance of these relationships provides a context for examining the procedures for assigning learning facilitators to specific classrooms, learners, educators and tasks” (Riggs & Mueller, 2001:61). This would solidify all roles of members of the school community as well as their understanding of learning facilitators and their supporting function within the education system. This is echoed in the local research conducted by Mampane (2016:130), who is of the opinion that inclusive education will be achieved in South Africa when, “all education systems are made accessible to all diverse learners (including those with severe intellectual and behavioural disabilities) and when the education curriculum prepares pre-service teachers with pedagogy and methodology to teach diverse learners in all school system.”

In the wise words of Lao Tzu, “the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”, conferring with this, Mittler (2000:113), believes inclusion to be “a journey with no end” this may be a result of their understanding of the complexities therewith. One can see how complex and multi-dimensional inclusion is; how challenging the process of transforming policy into practice is, how such a process requires a deep understanding of elements of inclusion, and the motivating factors for change and transformation. This is a journey, not taken by one, but by many. Making use of learning facilitators may provide the support to both the learner with ASD and the teacher whose responsibility it is to assist that child gain access to the curriculum and overall learning and socialising.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“What we find changes who we become.”

~ Peter Morville ~

3.1 INTRODUCTION

For the process of any scientific investigation to be successful, be it social or natural sciences, it must begin with a structure or plan - “the problem is the axial center around which the whole research efforts turns” (Leedy, 2016:59). An in-depth description of the implementation of the research methodology is needed in order to ensure the credibility of the qualitative data in terms of applicability and consistency (Shurink, Fouché & de Vos, 2011:419). Chapter One presented the blueprint of this research design, and this chapter discusses the blueprint in more detail, unpacking the philosophical underpinnings of this study’s design strategies.

Before engaging in the theoretical foundation of this study, it is necessary to restate its aim and rationale as identified in Chapter One (1.5). The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of educators who work with in-class learning facilitators who facilitate and support children with ASD.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Before one can delve into the research design and methodology, it is important to review first the research questions as outlined in Chapter One (1.4), which in this way, will assist in addressing the research problem.

The central research question that will guide this study is the following:

- 1) How do South African educators experience the role of in-class learning facilitators for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in their classrooms?

The sub-questions that will be explored are:

- 1.1) What perceptions are held by each educator regarding the role and the necessity of learning facilitators?
- 1.2) In the opinion of educators, what changes need to be implemented in order to improve the working relationship between educators and learning facilitators?
- 1.3) What are the expectations, strengths and challenges educators encounter when collaborating with learning facilitators?

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm's function, as posited by Nieuwenhuis (2010), is to provide a structure in which to place different realities to interpret and better understand these realities. Creswell (2009) defines a paradigm as a representation of the way people think about things and how those thoughts are acted upon. A research paradigm provides a framework in which the researcher and the intended audience can position themselves. Babbie (2010) refers to this framework as a frame of reference in which interpretations and observations can be organised (Babbie, 2010). Terre Blanche et al. (2014), further surmise that a research paradigm is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice and thinking that defines the nature and enquires along three categorical dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (See Table 3.3) (Terre Blanche et al., 2014).

This study is qualitative in terms of its paradigm, and more specifically shall be viewed through an interpretivist lens within that broader paradigm. The basis of qualitative research, according to Bless et al. (2013), is the philosophical belief that, "truth is relative and that knowledge is constructed by human beings" (Bless et al., 2013:15). Complementing the qualitative approach is the paradigm of interpretivism as this is the lens through which people interpret their world, relationships and experiences, deriving their own personal, unique understanding of their reality. Our knowledge of the world around us is a product of our own assumptions, biases and prejudices.

This research is conducted within the interpretive constructivist paradigm, offering the researcher the scope to investigate and develop an in-depth understanding of the personal experiences of the educators who work with in-class learning facilitators when working with children with ASD. According to Merriam (2009), the interpretivist paradigm emphasises a person's own experiences and interpretations thereof. The interpretivist paradigm argues that

individuals socially construct their reality, and that individuals may hold multiple realities through social interaction (Merriam, 1998). Interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed as the researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the views and phenomena involving the individual educators and the in-class learning facilitators, as they both interact to assist the child with ASD. The interpretivist paradigm is suitable as this study is concerned with the personal experiences of the educator while interacting with in-class learning facilitators. In this study, the interpretive paradigm is used to theoretically frame the research (Mertens, 2010) to better understand the experiences of educator's interactions of in-class learning facilitators for children with ASD. It is an appropriate paradigm for this particular study as this study is concerned with the views and experiences of different educators and how the individual teacher attaches meaning to the phenomenon involving the learning facilitator (Nieuwenhuis, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Carcary (2009) suggests that the interpretivist paradigm provides an opportunity for the researcher to gain contextual depth and detailed, nuanced descriptions (Carcary, 2009).

Cobern and Aikenhead (1997) as cited in Thomas (2010:105), posit that the, "interpretive paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation, thus to observe is to collect information about events, while to interpret is to make meaning of that information by drawing inferences or by judging the match between the information and some abstract pattern." During the study the experiences of the educators were paramount. The researcher sought to explore their realities and interpretations of their lived experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between teachers and learning facilitators. Through conversations in the form of interviews, the researcher was able to gather the participants' interpretations of their own experiences and understanding of their daily interactions with in-class learning facilitators.

3.3.1 Ontology

The term '*ontology*', refers to, "a branch of philosophy concerned with articulating the nature and structure of the world" (Wand & Weber, 1993:220). It specifies the form and nature of reality and what can be known about it. The unique realities and experiences held by the educators working with learning facilitators in facilitating the learning process of the child with ASD, formed the focus of this study.

Ontology is a person's unique, individual belief system and reflects an interpretation of reality. Everyone holds their own ontology based on their personal experiences, shaping their belief system. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe ontology as a way of constructing reality, "how things really are" and "how things really work" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:201). Within the interpretivist paradigm, the ontology is that the world, and knowledge, are created by social and contextual understanding. Participants were afforded the opportunity to express their ontology based upon their everyday realities, giving a view from a practical, ground-level perspective, shaped by the educators own belief system. Each teacher holds their own, personal belief system regarding inclusive education, the implementation thereof, how to assist a child with a barrier to learning, the role of learning facilitators and if facilitators are beneficial or not; this study looked at how these beliefs may shape the relationship and interactions between educator and learning facilitator.

3.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology can be seen as the theory of knowledge, which Lincoln and Guba (2005) summarise by asking the question, "what is the nature of knowledge and relationship between the knower and the would-be-known?" Epistemology identifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher as the 'knower' and what can be known. Both the researcher and participating educators were involved in an interactive process of interpreting socially constructed knowledge within the natural setting of the mainstream classroom that includes a child, or children, with ASD. The interpretive paradigm, as specified by Terre Blanche et al. (2014) imply that the process must take place within the context or setting where the multiple realities under study exist and become accessible. Furthermore, they believe that since the interpretive researcher subscribes to the notion that reality consists of the subjective experiences of the external world, an interactional, epistemological stance towards the research should be adopted.

3.3.3 Methodology

It is of particular importance to acknowledge the fact that data and methodology are inextricably interdependent. For that reason, the research methodology to be adopted for a particular problem must always recognise the nature of the data that will be amassed in the resolution of that problem. The methodology is merely an operational framework within which the facts are placed so that their meaning may be seen more clearly (Leedy, 2016:121).

This study's primary concern was to explore how participants make meaning from their experiences and what they think and feel about working with in-class learning facilitators. The participants lived reality was important as it provides context and a frame of reference to the phenomenon under scrutiny. "The focus of a qualitative study is to determine what respondents think and feel about a particular phenomenon or issue; reality is interpreted from the respondent's frame of reference" (Bless et al., 2013:16).

Using inductive reasoning, qualitative research studies seek to understand the phenomenon under study from the sample. Methodologies such as interviewing, (as used in this study), document analysis and observations, which rely on the subjective relationship through interaction between the researcher and participants, lend themselves to be utilised in the interpretive constructivist paradigm (Martens, 2005; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Table 3.1: Characteristics of interpretivism (Cantrell, 2001 as cited in Thomas, 2010)

Feature	Description
Purpose of the research study	Explore educators' experiences of in-class learning facilitators for children with ASD
Ontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Multiple realities exist due to the unique experiences, beliefs, perceptions, interpretations and knowledge people hold. ● These realities can be explored and made meaningful through human interaction and discussion in order to discover how people make sense of their social worlds.
Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Events are understood through the process of interaction with social contexts. ● Those active in the research process socially construct meaning and knowledge by experience in the natural setting. ● Researcher and participants form a symbiotic relationship based on conversation and listening in order to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Process of data collection. ● Research is a product of the values of the researcher. ● Semi-structured interviews and a focus group.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design, according to Leedy (2016), is simply the planning and visualisation of the data and the problems associated with the employment of the data in the entire research project. Kweit and Kweit (1981:35) hold the belief that “research design is the strategy, the plan, and the structure of conducting a research project.” Bless et al. (2013:130), posit that the research design relates directly to the answering of a research question.

The choice of research design is dependent upon what the researcher seeks to know and understand - “it is the clear thinking necessary for the management of the entire research endeavour, the complete strategy of attack upon the central research problem” (Leedy, 2016:125). Furthermore, the choice of design should permit the researcher to make decisions regarding methods and techniques that are best suited to answer the specific research question.

In an effort to choose the best suited qualitative research design to respond to the research question adequately, the researcher focused on the research aim. The research aim highlights the following: to interpret, describe and explore the experiences of educators who interact with in-class learning facilitators, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of facilitators as seen from the perspective of the educator.

As the study sought to understand the perspectives and lived experiences of educators as they engage and collaborate with in-class learning facilitators, the phenomenological design was most suitable as it has a sharp focus on the essence of the experience of educators.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods were discussed in Chapter One, illustrating the coherence between the chosen methods and the research questions and design. “Data is like ore - it contains desirable aspects of the truth, but to extract from the facts their meaning, we employ certain approaches” (Leedy, 2016:121). The desire to extract meaning from the ore of data collected can be done depending on the approaches to data collection and analysis, which are outlined below.

3.5.1 Context

Defining context according to Merriam (2009), is important and providing enough description to contextualise the study determines the extent to which the findings can be transferred (Merriam, 2009). The context, in which this study was conducted in, regarding the experiences of the educator's when working together to assist a child with ASD, was two primary schools in the Helderberg basin in Somerset West, in the Western Cape of South Africa. The one school is a private preparatory school with approximately 540 learners. A maximum of 25 learners can be accommodated in each classroom. Specialists who are available at the school include a part-time, remedial therapist, a speech therapist, an occupational therapist and an educational psychologist. The second school comprised of 174 learners, with class sizes of between 11 and 18 students following the Cambridge curriculum. Specialists enlisted at this school are a part-time speech therapist, and a language support specialist, employed by the school, to work with the development of children who the language of teaching is not their primary home language. "Although research in schools presents challenges, relevance is important to address in continuing to develop a robust evidence-based practice (Dingfelder & Mandell, 2011). "Research in educational settings also has the potential to address under-researched areas" (Bond et al., 2016:316).

3.5.2 Participants and sampling

In order for research to take place, the researcher must first identify the population and sample to be included in the study. The rationale for this is as follows:

"Sampling theory is the scientific foundation of this everyday practice. It is a technical accounting device to rationalise the collection of information, to choose an appropriate way in which to restrict the set of objectives, persons, or events from which the actual information will be drawn" (Bless et al., 2013:161).

The entire set of people that is the focus of a research project and about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics is called the 'population' (Terre Blanche et al., 2014). In the case of this study, the total population will be all educators who work with a facilitator in educating children with ASD. Working with such a large number of people is both logistically challenging and is unrealistic. For this reason, a sample is selected that is representative of the general population from which inferences can be made. It is important

the sample be carefully selected, as from the sample the researcher should be able to generalise to the greater population.

With regards to this study, a purposive sampling technique was used. Participants were approached on the basis of certain criteria. Purposive sampling;

“rests on the assumption that the researcher knows what type of participant is needed. In qualitative research, the element that is the most complex and rich in information will be the most valuable. The researcher will thus purposefully choose participants on the basis of some specific criteria that are judged to be essential” (Bless et al., 2013:177).

The pillars of quality research are strong validity and high reliability otherwise known as credibility and dependability. “The quality of research is directly related to the sampling procedures, the adequacy of the technique chosen, as well as the professionalism of implementation and appropriacy of the sample size” (Bless et al., 2013:179). The participants’ qualifications, years of experience and current positions are presented in Table 4.1 in Chapter 4.

3.5.2.1 Criterion for participant selection

Participants were selected based on the fact that they had working experience and knowledge of learning facilitators who assisted a child with ASD within the classroom. Educators could be currently collaborating with a learning facilitator, or they could have gained previous experience and exposure to forming a working relationship with a learning facilitator. Locational factors were also taken into consideration as educators resided in the Western Cape district and are employed at one of the two schools that were contracted for the research study. Knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorder was not mandatory. However, this theme was explored in the interviews that were conducted.

3.5.3 The researcher

The researcher’s role in a qualitative study is to be the instrument through which the world is studied. It is paramount that the researcher is self-critical, thoughtful, curious and trustworthy (Bless et al., 2013:236). “The depth and quality of the research depend on the skills and sensitivity of the researcher. Detachment and objectivity are neither possible nor desirable.”

3.5.4 Methods of data collection

3.5.4.1 Interviews

The semi-structured interview concentrated on allowing the educators to use their own words in an open-ended format and to describe any aspects that they felt were essential for the researcher to understand their experiences, perspectives, attitudes and thoughts regarding their relationship between the learning facilitator.

Semi-structured interviews are very helpful in, “clarifying concepts and problems, allowing for the establishment of a list of possible answers to solutions. They facilitate the elimination of superfluous questions and the reformation of ambiguous ones. They also enable the discovery of new aspects of the problem by exploring in detail the explanations supplied by respondents. The wealth and quality of the gathered data are strongly dependent on the skill of the interviewer and the confidence he or she inspires in respondents” (Bless et al., 2013:197).

Furthermore, “it is important to note that quantitative researchers do not accept that, which respondents say, in interviews, is necessarily ‘true’ in the absolute sense of the word. Instead, qualitative researchers argue that human beings construct meaning about their lives and the worlds in which they live and qualitative researchers are interested in the stories that people tell to themselves. Whether the story is ‘true’ or not is less important than whether it captures a person’s experience of their life and world. So, to qualitative researchers, ‘truth’ is always understood in relative or personal terms. Each person has their own unique perspective of the world” (Bless et al., 2013:339).

Educators were interviewed individually and privately within their own classrooms, a space that they may feel more comfortable in as the ownership of the space is theirs. Before formal interviews began the researcher made every effort to make the participants feel relaxed and comfortable with the process. The purpose of the interviews was to determine what educators perceived as the important aspects of their experiences, without providing multiple-choice responses. Self-reports, as defined by Bless et al. (2013), involve the research participant reporting on his or her own experiences, and are based on the assumption that the story is not only honest and accurate, but reflects a genuine nature of the experience. Individual interviews were used to form the methods of data collection in this study. A general interview guide, derived from the literature review and the research questions, framed the discussion

(Addendum D). A guided interview format was followed to allow the individual educators in this study to construct their own priorities (Seidman, 2006), to describe their experiences in their own words, and to elaborate on their own experiences (Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

As with any data collection method, there are advantages and disadvantages. Bless et al. (2013), list one advantage, in that self-reports being that they, “give a sense of how things bother the person in terms of their experience” (Bless et al., 2013:193). Not only is a person given the opportunity to express the negatives of their experiences, but so too can they communicate the positive aspects of their reality. Looking at the aim of this study, the researcher was interested in the participant’s unique experiences of interacting with in-class learning facilitators in collaborating to meet the needs of learners with ASD.

It is important to be cognisant of any pitfalls of such a method of data collection, as each collection technique will have its own disadvantages. Bless et al. (2013) raise the following disadvantages of self-reporting - participants may feel the need to inflate the truth in order for themselves to be seen in a more positive light; participants can anticipate the desired response from the researcher (sometimes called the socially acceptable response) and answer with that instead of their reality truth - all of which fall under the classification of response bias.

There are many ways of obtaining data directly from participants if such information cannot be gathered from observations. The self-report technique that was utilised by the researcher for this study was semi-structured interviews (non-scheduled structured interviews) and a focus group. An interview, “involves direct personal contact with the participant who is asked to answer questions relating to the research problem” (Bless et al., 2013:193).

In particular, “a non-scheduled structured interview is structured in the sense that a list of issues for investigation is drawn up prior to the interview, containing some precise questions and their alternatives or sub-questions, depending on the answers to the central questions. But it is a non-scheduled interview in the sense that the interviewer is free to formulate other questions as judged appropriate for a given situation” (Bless et al., 2013:194). It is important for the researcher to remain as unbiased and non-influential as possible, avoiding leading or prompting the participant whilst being alert to any cues for further questioning. Bless et al. (2013), stress the importance that, “one refrains from influencing the respondent by the way one asks questions” (Bless et al., 2013:194).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual educators in an effort to more fully understand their unique experiences of working with in-class learning facilitators while working with children with ASD. Interviews typically lasted between 45 and 60 minutes; they were audio-recorded and later transcribed for coding purposes. The semi-structured interview comprised of open-ended questions in the hope of eliciting stories from the participants. The belief is held that each participant is information-rich, a master of their own lived experiences and ultimately the best source of information regarding experiences of educators when working with in-class learning facilitators in facilitating and educating children with ASD. In order to assess the relevance of the chosen interview questions, a pilot interview was conducted with a person who met the criterion for the selected participants, but was not a participant in the study. The interview guide was refined thereafter.

Table 3.2: Data collection techniques advantages and disadvantages (Bless et al., 2013:216)

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages
Semi-Structured Interview (Exploratory interview)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides themes to be discussed such as learning facilitator training, challenges and advantages of working with learning facilitators, to name a few • Can access what respondents feel is important • Useful for generating hypotheses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very time consuming and expensive • May be difficult to standardise and analyse • Bias due to social desirability

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the phase in which the results of the study are interpreted. In this study, the first step in analysing the data was to transcribe the raw data from electronic recordings. Next, data analysis consisted of a close reading for recurring themes, sub-themes through thematic coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) of oral expressions of opinions, feelings and experiences (Addendum E). The researcher studies the results of the data analysis in order to gain an overview and understanding relating to the initial research problem (Terre Blanche et al., 2014). The emphasis of this study was on gathering stories and experiences to illustrate or describe common themes in the educators' perceptions and understandings of their experiences, rather than draw conclusions about that experience (Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

Data was categorised into large chunks to avoid fragmenting the responses and losing the essence of the data (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Further data analysis involved breaking down the data into themes and sub-themes (thematic coding), in order to encapsulate all responses as well as to be able to gain a thorough understanding of the lived experiences through the perspective of the participants.



Figure 3.1: *Process of data analysis*

One needs to be cognizant that data collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research. The process of data analysis can be illustrated in Figure 3.2, as stipulated by Creswell (2008). Firstly, through what Merriam (2009) refers to as *horizontalization*, all the data should be laid out for examination. Furthermore, all data should be treated as having equal weight, that is, “all pieces of data have equal value at the initial data analysis stage” (Merriam, 2009:26). Data analysis requires the ability to think inductively, moving from specific raw data to abstract categories and concepts. The data was then analysed using the *constant comparative method* involving segmenting the data with another to determine similarities and differences, thus being able to group similar dimensions through categorising.

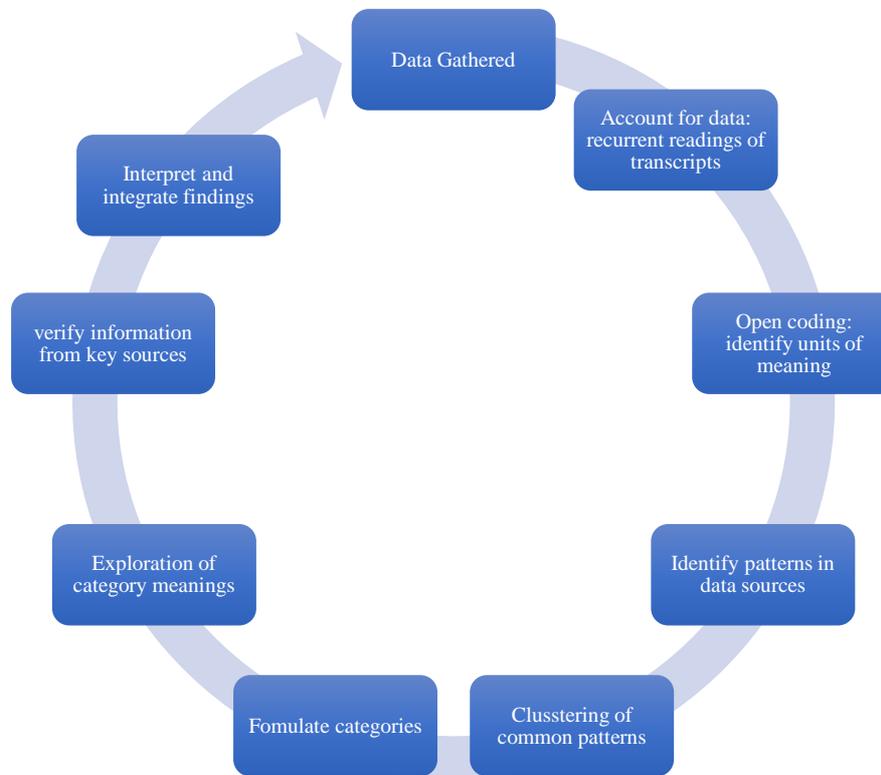


Figure 3.2: *The process of data analysis (Adapted from Creswell, 2008)*

In this phase of the study, the researcher asked, ‘to what extent have the research questions been addressed and answered?’ and ‘to what degree can these answers be trusted?’ In other words, the reliability and validity of the study’s data results were questioned.

3.7 DATA VERIFICATION

The aim of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon within the complexity of its natural context. The phenomenon in question was the experiences of educators when working with in-class learning facilitators assisting children with ASD. Riggs and Mueller (2001) point out that, “qualitative research seldom begins with a priori operational definition, as such the concepts of reliability and validity, as used in quantitative research, lose their meaning when applied to qualitative research” (Riggs & Mueller, 2001:236).

Not only should the researcher be trustworthy, but one needs to evaluate how much trust can be given to the research process and findings, and according to Bless et al. (2013), this is known as trustworthiness. Trustworthiness, as defined by Bless et al. “evaluates the quality of

research on the basis of four concepts: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability” (Bless et al., 2013:236).

Qualitative research strategies designed to promote trustworthiness, and used in this study, are described by Merriam (2009), as cited in Bergstedt (2015), include:

- Peer review, or consultation with experts
- Audit trail; the detailed record of data collection, methodology and rationale for this study
- Thick description: thereby providing rich detail of the context of this study.

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility, referred to as internal validity in quantitative studies, is concerned with whether the researcher’s method of data collection and analysis adequately addressed the research question (Terre Blanche, 2014). The question posed by Bless et al. (2013) is, “will the researcher be able to develop a convincing argument in answer to the research question from this study design? Credibility seeks to convince that the findings depict the truth of the reality under study” (Bless et al., 2013:131, 236). If the researcher has convincingly demonstrated an overall internal logic of the research question, the study design, the data collection method and the approach to data analysis used, then it can be said that the study holds high credibility (Nieswiadomy, 2011).

In pursuance of credibility enhancement, the researcher approached the study continually being cognisant of the research question throughout every step of the research process. During the research process, three distinct inquiry concerns were employed to strengthen credibility. Firstly, rigorous techniques and methods for gathering and analysing the data were planned and implemented, including attention to validity, reliability and triangulation. Secondly, the credibility, competence and perceived trustworthiness of the researcher were interwoven throughout the study. Thirdly, evaluator effects were considered; “philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry, methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling and holistic thinking” (Patton, 1990:1190).

The following provisions, as outlined by Shenton (2004), were employed throughout the research study in order to strengthen and promote the accuracy of recording of the

phenomenon under scrutiny, that is educators' experience of collaborating with in-class learning facilitators when working with children with ASD.

3.7.1.1 The adaption of well-established research methods

Yin (1994), recognises the importance of including, “correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (Yin, 2004:119). In reference to this study, the specific procedures and data methods were carefully considered, before the choice of interviewing was finalised. The line of questioning used in the interview guide, during the data-gathering phase of the research study, was derived from the review of the seminal literature, looking at previous comparable studies that have shown successful utilisation of similar questioning.

3.7.1.2 Site triangulation

More than one school was contracted into this study to see if similar patterns emerge from both sites as well as to provide diversity amongst participants. “Where similar results emerge at different locations, findings may have greater credibility in the eyes of the reader” (Shenton, 2004:66). Diversity is a vital thread woven throughout the South Africa socio-political tapestry, Dervin (1983:7) refers to this as the concept of ‘circling reality’, “the necessity of obtaining a variety of perspectives in order to get a better, more stable view of ‘reality’ based on a broad spectrum of observations from a wide base of points in time-space.”

3.7.1.3 Tactics to ensure honesty in informants

According to Shenton (2004), “each person who is approached should be given opportunities to refuse to participate in the project and to ensure that the data collection sessions involve only those who are willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely” (Shenton, 2004:66). All participants were informed numerous times, both verbally and in writing that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were encouraged to be frank from the very first session, and the researcher aimed at establishing a rapport from the initial contact and reassured the participants that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions posed. The researcher conveyed to the participants that the researcher was an independent agent; participants could, therefore, contribute ideas and discuss their experiences freely and without fear of losing credibility in the eyes of the managers of the organisation (Shenton, 2004).

3.7.1.4 Peer scrutiny of the research project

This research study was conducted under the supervision of Lynette Collair, an active member of the Educational Psychology Department of Stellenbosch University. Frequent meetings gave rise to opportunities for the study to be scrutinised and feedback was welcomed. Through the process of supervision, and engagement with fellow academics and professionals within the scope of this research, fresh perspectives were shared, assumptions challenged and methods refined.

3.7.1.5 Member checks

Lincoln (1995), “consider member checks to be the single most important provision that can be made to bolster a study’s credibility” (Lincoln, 1995, as cited in Shenton, 2004:68). With member checks the participants in the study form part of the credibility process. Data is taken back to the participants to verify and ensure that what has been recorded is what the participants envisioned in meaning. By participants confirming the validity of the narrative account the validity process shifts from the researcher to the participants in the study. “With the lens focused on participants, the researcher systematically checks the data and narrative account” (Creswell & Miller, 2000:127). Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher met with participants to verify if the content of the transcriptions reflected their experiences. Educators were given the opportunity to elaborate on or clarify their answers with the researcher before coding commenced.

3.7.1.6 Examination of previous research findings

Looking at previous studies is done to evaluate the degree to which the study’s results and findings are congruent with those of studies conducted in the past. The ability of the researcher to relate their findings to an existing body of knowledge is considered by Silverman (2013) to be a key criterion for evaluating studies of enquiry. Previous research results were assessed during the literature review and continually updated throughout the study to ensure the research’s knowledge was at the forefront of the current market.

3.7.2 Dependability

Dependability is referred to by Shenton (2004:71) as the technique to show reliability, that is, “if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same

participants, similar results would be obtained”. Lincoln and Gruba (1985) maintain that there is a close tie between credibility and dependability, a demonstration of the former may ensure the latter. Dependability is maintained and achieved through meticulous planning on the part of the researcher. Having a well-structured and concise approach to the research in the form of stipulated research design and methodology helps to strengthen dependability. “Dependability demands that the researcher thoroughly describes and precisely follows a clear and thoughtful research strategy” (Nieswiadomy, 2011:237).

The researcher was careful to provide sufficient detail so as to provide readers of this study opportunity to develop a thorough understanding of the methods implemented and the effectiveness of these methods. The research design and its implementation are outlined in both Chapters One and Three, describing what was planned and executed on a strategic level. The operational detail data gathering was addressed by stipulating the time frames, interview structures to be used as a conversation-frame to guide the participant in terms of themes the researcher wished to explore, as well as following research guidelines as set out in the various codes consulted (see Chapter One).

3.7.3 Transferability

Transferability is symbiotic to context. It is, “the extent to which results apply to other, similar situations requiring the researcher to provide detailed descriptions of the context in which the data was collected” (Nieswiadomy, 2011:237).

Once one is grounded in the context of the study from which the findings emerge, one can then begin to imagine several other contexts where such findings might be meaningful. In such cases, transferability exists. The more one is able to link a study to other similar contexts in time and place, the higher the transferability” (Bless et al., 2013:237). Through the continuous review of the seminal literature, one is able to draw links to other comparable contexts. Sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork is provided throughout this study, to provide the reader with the opportunity to make such transferability inferences. “It is also important that sufficient thick description of the phenomenon under investigation is provided to allow readers to have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those they have seen emerge in their situations” (Shenton, 2004:70). This has been accounted for, in detail, in Chapter Two, which explains the nature of the phenomenon being explored

(educator experiences of working with in-class learning facilitators in the aim of educating a child with ASD), and the context of the study, participants' demographic information as well as the possible limitations of the study in Chapter 4.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the researcher remained objective. "Here steps must be taken to help ensure, as far as possible, that the study's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004:72). To address the concern of confirmability the researcher first conducted a pilot interview, keeping the research question in mind, so as to prevent her own perceptions from interfering and possibly clouding the perceptions and responses of the participants. An audit trail can be seen from the theoretical perspective and should be understood in terms of the entire duration of the research study.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

"Ultimately it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that every study meets the highest ethical standards" (Patton, 1990:36) - ethical practice is strongly intertwined with respect: respect for research, the profession and all those involved in the research process. According to Bless et al. (2013:32), "participants have the right to know what the research is about, how it will affect them, the risks and benefits of participation, and the fact that they have the right to decline to participate or to discontinue their participation at any time during the process if they choose to do so." The nature of the study was explained to participants, both in writing and verbally, to ensure informed consent. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify their understanding of participation and their rights were explained in detail. Once this process was followed, and before the research could commence, the participants were asked to sign an informed consent form that had been approved during the ethical screening of this study.

It is equally important and respectful for the researcher to ensure confidentiality, as it is an ethical requirement in research. Confidentiality forms part of the premise of respect towards participants and is an ethical requirement in most research. Information provided by participants, including information of a sensitive and personal nature, is protected under secure conditions accessed only by the researcher and supervisor involved. Accompanying

confidentiality is the principle of anonymity. Patton (1990) suggests that anonymity is handled, by researchers, by assigning numbers to the participants. In so doing a participant's data will never be associated immediately with his or her name or any other identifiable indicator.

Ethical responsibility should be ingrained in every research study and is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure it is an ever-present thread woven throughout the research. Not only is this study bound by ethical clearance received from the Humanities Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University (HREC) (approval number: SU-HSD-002676), but it is conducted within keeping to the Ethical Code of Professional Conduct of South African Psychologist Board (2002), as well as the Guidelines of Ethical Aspects of Scholarly and Scientific Research (2013), as set out by Stellenbosch University.

As part of the ethical duty of the researcher, the following professional codes of ethics and guidelines were consulted: The Health Professions Act 1974, Act of 1924, Annexure 12, Chapter 10 and Area Code of Ethics (2011). Once the data had been collected, to analyse and report on said data in a principled manner. It is vital that the researcher refrained from fitting the data to the original research question, but instead was guided by the data to form conclusions and recommendations. Lastly, the researcher has the duty to report the study's findings to participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.

~ Zora Neale Hurston ~

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the intricacies of the principal outcomes of the research study. It is a summary of the themes, subthemes, and categories that surfaced during the research process.

Participants' background information, as well as the data that emerged from the study, are discussed in this chapter. The findings are presented, grounded in the methodological chapter and intertwined with the literature review. The gathered data from the individual interviews were analysed in order to address the research questions. The primary research question that guided this study, as set out in Chapter One, was:

- 1) How do South African educators experience the role of in-class learning facilitators supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in their classrooms?

The following sub-questions were explored:

- 1.1) What perceptions are held by each educator regarding the role and the necessity of learning facilitators?
- 1.2) In the opinion of educators, what changes need to be implemented in order to improve the working relationship between educators and learning facilitators?
- 1.3) What are the expectations, strengths and challenges educators encounter when collaborating with learning facilitators?

4.2 PARTICIPANTS, SETTING AND PROCEDURE

The demographic details of the participants are provided in table 4.1. All participants were female and had received formal training in the education faculty either at a university or a teaching college level. Although some educators were in their 3rd, 5th and 6th year of teaching, they all reflected on their experience within their first two years of their career, as newly qualified teachers. All data collection took place on-site at the school where the participant worked. As discussed in Chapter Three, during the process of transcribing each interview, participants were numbered to ensure their anonymity.

Table 4.1: Background information of research participants

Participant	Age category	Qualification(s)	Current teaching grade	Years of experience
P-1	25-30	BEd	Grade 3	6
P-2	25-30	BEd	Grade 2	3
P-3	25-30	BEd	Grade 4	3
P-4	50-55	BSoc Sci & PGCE	Grade R	25
P-5	25-30	BEd	Grade 4	5
P-6	65-70	Diploma	Grade R	40

Once the data was obtained, member checks were carried out, and data analysed, the researcher conducted a literature control in order to verify the findings and strengthen the credibility of the results of the study.

4.3 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

As discussed in Chapter Three (3.5.5), data were analysed by means of thematic coding. Themes and categories were constructed by the researcher examining and identifying the emerging themes, supplying the researcher with rich information to possibly answer the initial research question.

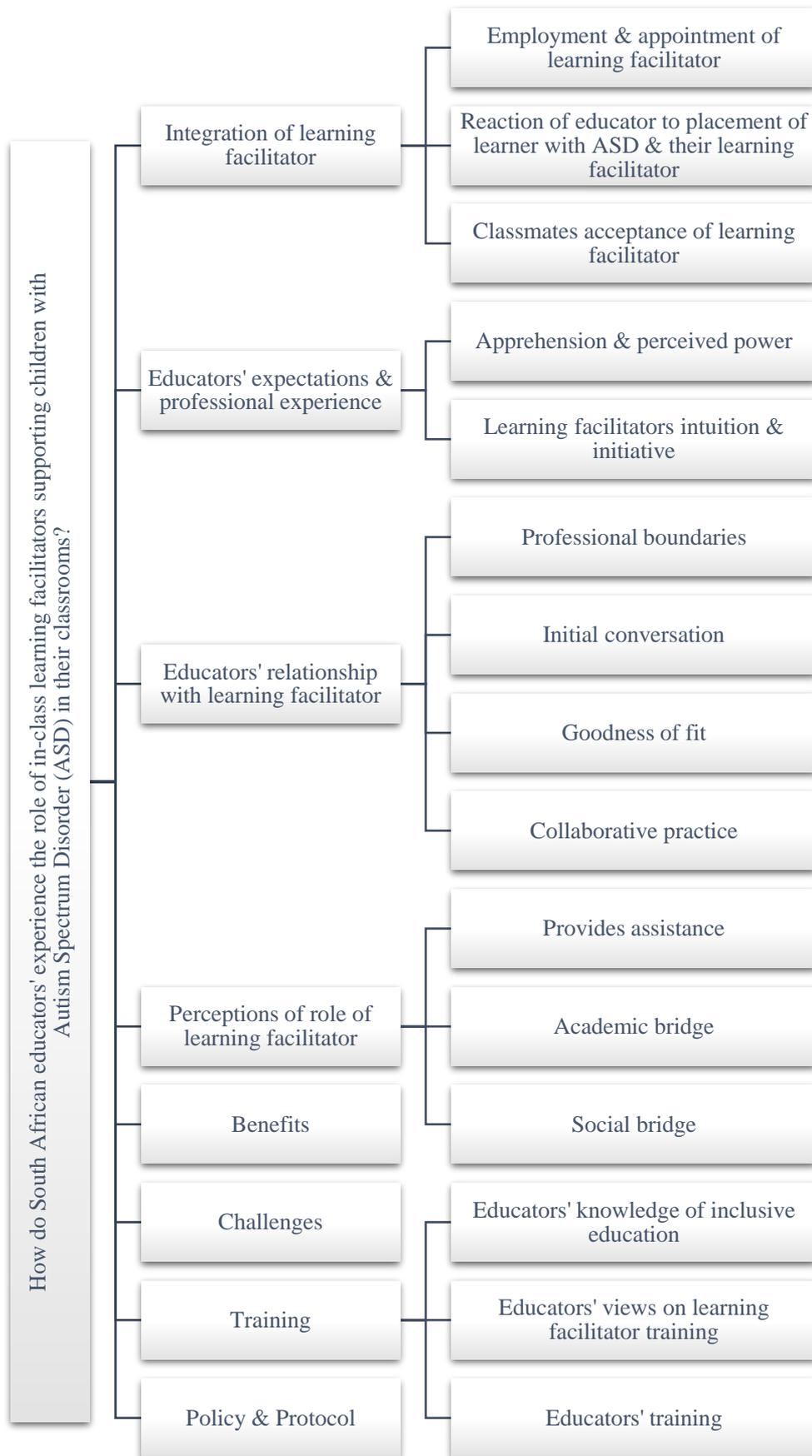


Figure 4.4: *Thematic content of research findings according to research question*

4.4 THEMES AND CATEGORY

When interpreting the interview data, the researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of what it is like to work with a learning facilitator, from the perspective of the educators. To the researcher, it was essential to retain the authenticity of the original data, therefore reporting candid phrases as these were seen as saturated in rich detail as seen through the eyes of the participants.

In response to the research questions, the experiences and perspectives of the educators can be summarised into the following themes:

Table 4.2: Findings of educators' experiences

Educator's perceptions of role of learning facilitator	Changes in need of implementation to improve relationship	Expectations, strengths & challenges of collaborating with learning facilitators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs Clarity • Assistant to the child • Facilitates behaviour & social skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities need formalising • Training for both educator and facilitator • Development of Policy and Protocol 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra pair of hands • Social behaviour modelling • lightens the educator's workload <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility of instruction • Unease of initially working with facilitator • Blurred lines of roles • Lack of policy and procedure

4.4.1 Integration of learning facilitator

4.4.1.1 *Employment and appointment of learning facilitator*

The data distinguishes between the employment and the sourcing of learning facilitators. Employment is the responsibility of the parents of the child with ASD, while the school provided support in sourcing the learning facilitator and assisting the integration of the learning facilitator.

→ ***Parent's Employ Learning Facilitators***

In keeping with the statement in Chapter Two, learning facilitators in this study were employed by the parents of the child in need of support in the classroom. This can be a costly exercise and only an option for families that can afford it. The data collected in this study supports the fact that parents employ learning facilitators.

"She was employed solely by the family." (P-3).

"[Parents] sourced her based on their own criteria, yet in compliance with the school's recommendation to employ a learning facilitator. [The parents] sourced her, and fund it completely." (P-3)

Appointment of the learning facilitator seemed to have little to do with the educator that would be working with the child and their learning facilitator. When the parents were informed of the need for a learning facilitator, one educator recalls that this was the time when the support of her management team came into play, highlighting the need for a supportive management team.

"That is when the support from our principal was incredible." (P-1)

→ ***School support and sourcing of learning facilitator***

Discussion regarding appointing a learning facilitator revealed that the school, in some cases, makes the final decision. One educator voiced that she was part of this decision-making process, and felt her opinion was valued in this respect while others felt they could have had more input in the process. Sourcing of a learning facilitator was either up to the parents or more of a collaborative approach involving the expertise of the school personnel.

"It is very much up to [the needs of] the individual child, then interviews take place with the school psychologist, the parents and the facilitators that the parents need to provide."(P-1)

"Our school psychologist sources the learning facilitators." (P-1, P-5)

"I would like to have some input with [the appointment of the learning facilitator], but often [the learner] come with the facilitator." (P-4)

→ ***Placement of child and their learning facilitator***

Interestingly, according to the data, the newly qualified and appointed educators, are the ones who will often be assigned the learner with special educational needs and with that comes working with a facilitator. This data in this research study is in alignment with the opinion of Giangreco et al. (2001), “assigning the least powerful staff to the least powerful students may be perpetuating the de-valued status of both groups” (Giangreco et al., 2001:59).

At the start of an educators’ career educators have not had the opportunity to grow in confidence and experience and are still finding their feet. The existence of a hierarchical structure can be seen here, made more complex due to lack of training in Inclusive education for both parties and clear guidelines and descriptions of roles and responsibilities.

“It’s a difficult to have somebody else in your class if you’re not comfortable with your own teaching. If you are still learning the skill, it can be very difficult having somebody there. You feel as if you are on teaching practicum.” (P-2, P-4)

4.4.1.2 Reaction of educator to placement of learner with ASD accompanied by a learning facilitator

Some participants expressed that they were merely informed that they would be the child’s educator, only meeting the child and their learning facilitator on the first day of school. Others shared that receiving a child with ASD, who needs a learning facilitator, is no different to welcoming any other child.

“I am very open to children with special needs ... you will change and adapt according to any children who are in your class.” (P-4)

“[I felt] very nervous, very anxious, it was just a big unknown.” (P-3)

“It was challenging as I have never worked with someone like that before. Every day was a learning curve.” (P-1, P-5)

“During studying you are told that you are going to experience kids with difficulties, but you don’t actually expect to deal with some of these severe disabilities because you would assume those kids will go to special needs schools. That’s a huge learning curve for all those involved.” (P-2)

→ *Learning curve for educators*

Not only did the educators see the opportunity as a learning curve, but many participants also anticipated the challenges that may arise when working with such a learner as well as the acceptance of another adult in their domain, a very intimate space for an educator to share. This reveals that the educators may feel threatened and exposed or vulnerable when having to teach in front of another adult, who may judge them and their teaching abilities. The question of power and authority comes into play, as an educator may feel they have to perform for the learning facilitator. This is linked to the importance of the initial conversation that sets the tone for the year, so although educators were apprehensive at first, once they set clear boundaries of authority they felt more comfortable in claiming their space and collaborating with a learning facilitator.

Overall, the response by educators upon hearing the news that a child with a barrier to learning (ASD) would be a member of their class, and would require a learning facilitator, was a positive one, albeit perhaps apprehensive at first.

4.4.1.3 Classmates acceptance of learning facilitator

The notion of how the class responded to the learning facilitator was explored to see if. Mutual understanding, acceptance and respect, as well as feelings of insecurity from the educators emerged as themes. This confirms the impact that a learning facilitator has on an educator in terms of power balance within the classroom.

“It’s obviously beneficial if everybody likes the facilitator who is there. If they are not particularly sociable, the facilitators need to have social skills as well.”

(P-4)

“They respect her and recognise her as someone who has authority. Sometimes the kids become too familiar with the learning facilitator, and they go to her before they go to me.” (P-2, P-3)

Although educators sometimes felt excluded in the process of placement of a child with ASD and the selection of their learning facilitator, through working with the learning facilitator on a ‘trial and error’ basis and gaining more experience in the intricacies of such a dynamic, the

educators showed the positive integration of the learning facilitator within their classroom environment.

4.4.2 Educator expectations and professional experience

→ *Feelings of apprehension and perceived power*

Further challenges were noted in that the unease the educators felt was primarily due to the fact that they did not know who would be entering into their personal-professional space and may have had preconceived notions of what precisely a learning facilitator is.

“I didn’t know the person who was coming to my class ... you feel your authority it undermined slightly. I was very apprehensive about having a facilitator ... you have to kind of not be intimidated.” (P-2)

“It’s intimidating having someone in your space all the time.” (P-2, P-3)

Expectations of what a learning facilitator should know, as well as how one should act, was also discussed. Bearing in mind that learning facilitators are frequently from the student or young adult demographic that means that, developmentally, they may still be in need of their own guidance. Of course, this may be a generalisation. However, Participant 4 did state that as a teacher, you have a lot on your plate already, and very often one needs to monitor the learning facilitator closely.

“There can be frustrations to seeing the facilitator sitting and having a lovely relaxing time, and their charge is heading off, climbing trees. Not paying any attention to any activity that’s going. You expect that in place, a professional facilitator.” (P-4).

A teacher does not necessarily envision sharing her professional space with another adult; her perceived professional duties is to be the sole authority in her domain, adding another adult to the mix may make the educator feel threatened, under scrutiny and feel the need to perform.

→ *Learning Facilitators Intuition and Initiative*

The importance of facilitator agency was also discussed, referring to the facilitators’ level of intuition and initiative. One participant would like the learning facilitator to be able to read the situation, and if the child does not understand the concept, then it is up to the learning

facilitator to create learning apparatus to assist the specific child. Interestingly, educators had high expectations of learning facilitators being able to identify and address every need of the child in their care even though they simultaneously admitted that they thought learning facilitators were insufficiently trained. Educators felt that once a child with ASD was provided with a learning facilitator, then they could mitigate the responsibility of ensuring that specific child grasps the concepts covered in class.

“Facilitators must look at what the teachers are expecting of the other children and actually assist and come up with ideas as to how their child would learn better ... the facilitator should have more information about how their particular child learns.” (P-4)

→ ***Supporting the learner with ASD***

One educator mentioned that having a child with ASD and their learning facilitator in her class simply meant another way to differentiate the work (Participant 3). She continued by saying that at her school they are lucky to have small classes, but even so, within those small classes there is a wide variety of learning needs. For her, it was about addressing the child’s *individual needs*, and it helped if she was aware of the particular needs to be addressed.

The situation in South Africa of parents having to procure and fund learning facilitators is in contrast to the study conducted by Farrell, Balshaw and Polat (2000), in England, who indicate that Learning Support Assistants are employed by the state. Furthermore, recruiting agencies request Bachelor Degree’s, teaching qualification (PGCE, SACE, or a teaching license) as well as a minimum of 3 years of full-time teaching for placement in Malaysia (Seek Teachers, 2017). As parents fund the learning facilitators’ services, it can become problematic if the learning facilitator becomes involved with other children in the class who are not paying for her individual attention. Parents, therefore, feel because they are paying for the learner facilitator they have a monopoly on the learning facilitator and get to dictate the services of that facilitator, for example, the facilitator may only assist their child.

Reasons as to why it becomes complex if parents are made to pay for learning facilitators are two-fold. Firstly, this ultimately excludes a significant portion of the population who may be in need of, and benefit from a learning facilitator, secondly, if learning facilitators are sourced by the school but the school or state does not pay the salary of the learning facilitator then the parents may feel cornered or even bullied into a decision they have little choice over.

Particularly problematic if the parent's decision to hire a learning facilitator is a pre-requisite for their child to be accepted at the school.

4.4.3 Educators' relationship with learning facilitator

→ Professional Boundaries

First and foremost, the educators in the study all stressed the need for a structured relationship with professional boundaries. Secondary was the need for setting boundaries with the learning facilitator from the inception of the relationship and having clearly defined roles. Evidentially, respect was crucial for a good working relationship between educator and learning facilitator.

“To welcome a person into your space is easy, yet to keep that professional boundary, not to become too accommodating.” (P-1, P-3)

“As long as you have boundaries, you both understand what you want to achieve. If you have all those things in place ... it works well and benefits the class not just the individual child that they are working with. (P-2).

“If you don't have a good facilitator and you don't have a good relationship. I can see how that becomes uncomfortable for the teacher.” (P-2)

→ Initial Conversation

Secondly, participants shared the importance of having an initial conversation between themselves and the learning facilitator. In so doing, an opportunity was created for both parties to state their expectations and establish the roles each would be responsible for. Fitting to the needs of the learner became clear.

“She wanted to know what I expected from her and what she is required to do. It would have been nice to have the forewarning and be introduced to the facilitator before the year starts ... have the conversation.” (P-2)

“It's all about communication.” (P-5)

→ **Communication**

Communication between all parties involved seemed to strengthen the working relationships between the educator and learning facilitators as one participant shared her feelings of being “*thrown in the deep end*” as there was no consultation with her or an initial process that was followed.

“You are given obviously those tips and goals for him from the previous teacher, but in terms of the teacher who was going to teach him, there was no preparation for us.” (P-2)

→ **Goodness of fit**

“Having two strong personalities in a classroom is challenging. You have your set ways in your classroom; it is your classroom.” (P-1)

“I had to explain that I was not testing her. I just explained to her it’s not about what she knows. I struggled when she adjusted sentences and assisted other kids.” (P-2)

“You might have one facilitator who is very quiet, may not have that much experience and they almost need teaching.” (P-4)

“If there’s no connection between the facilitator and that child ... it becomes problematic in the classroom ... she didn’t have the warmth.” (P-5)

The *goodness of fit* between educator and learning facilitator is dependent on many factors and is paramount in a good working relationship. Personality and experience are two of these factors. Through discussion, it was noted that for the educator, it’s almost like they have another child to take care of in the classroom. An aloof and disengaged learning facilitator could have an adverse effect on the overall success of collaboration and support for the learner with ASD. Not only can such personality clashes be challenging, but also it can further add to the frustrations and workload of the educator. The ideal situation would be that all three personalities complement each other, that of the educator, learning facilitator and child in need of a learning facilitator.

→ *Collaborative practice*

In summary, the educators stressed the importance of keeping the individual child as the focus of the relationship. Through collaborative practice, the educators remained child-centred in their approach to teaching and learning.

“In the end, it is about the children.” (P-1)

*“In the beginning, it was quite a struggle workwise, socially and emotionally.”
(P-3)*

“Having a learning facilitator really does make your life easier as a teacher. I am just grateful for [learning] facilitators.” (P-5)

Many educators already feel overwhelmed by their workload. It can be a lot of pressure for educators to be able to work with an array of people, the learner, the learners’ parents, co-workers and other educational specialists while maintaining the child as the centre of the system. Keeping the child central and as the focus is achieved easier when all role-players buy into the concept of utilising a learning facilitator.

When the educator and the learning facilitator had a common goal in mind (that of the child in need of the learning facilitator) a more positive relationship was evident. Collaborative practice helped to foster a positive relationship between educator and learning facilitator. When both parties remained focused on optimising the learning for the child with ASD, modelling appropriate social behaviour and collaborating with each other, they shared a common goal and were able to work professionally and harmoniously.

According to this study, facilitators are seen as the interface between the educator and the child experiencing the barrier to learning. Through the complex dynamic of collaboration, the learning goals of the individual child can be achieved. The need for active collaboration is explained by Robertson et al. (2003:126), “active collaboration with the learning facilitator on determining the appropriate and necessary steps to best educate each student”.

The narrative of the majority of the participants showed a positive relationship between them and the learning facilitator, once the initial boundaries were set and roles clarified during the first conversation between educator and learning facilitator. Feelings of apprehension and the

unknown soon dissipated once the educator had experience of working with a learning facilitator.

“I have not found it challenging at all. In my experience, it’s working out really well, and she hasn’t been overbearing.” (P-2)

“In general I have had a positive experience. They really do make your life easier as a teacher, they [learning facilitators] don’t get enough recognition I think.” (P-5)

Educators reported a healthy professional relationship with the accompanying learning facilitators, stating that they felt that by collaborating with the learning facilitator during the inception of their relationship, the relationship between them and the child with ASD strengthened. When both the educator and learning facilitator engaged in collaboration at the early stages of the process, a stronger, relationship was fostered.

The data in this research study is in line with that of Robertson et al. (2003:126), Teachers noted that they had a good working relationship with the learning facilitators in their class, they, “worked well as a team, learning facilitators helped them develop better relationship with the student with ASD.” The majority of the participants had a positive experience, all of whom would be open to collaborating with a learning facilitator in the future.

In particular, this study found that most relationships between the educator and the learning facilitator were successful when a common goal was formed, and the child remained their central focus. Despite the data showing that they both shared the responsibility for the education and behavioural management of the included child with ASD, educators still felt the final responsibility rested upon their shoulders. If clear roles are defined in the inception of the relationship, then educators feel more comfortable in making use of a learning facilitator, feel less intimidated by sharing their space and more open to collaborative practice.

4.4.4 Perceived roles of learning facilitator

→ *Provides assistance: An extra pair of hands*

To determine how the educators saw the learning facilitators’ involvement, the discussion of perceived roles and responsibilities was explored. The educators in this sample described the

roles and responsibilities of the learning facilitator as providing assistance to the student with ASD. A critical aspect highlighted in this study was the need for role classification and clarification.

“Your facilitator is there to facilitate, to assist the one child, or two children, with specified goals ... either attention or finishing a task or understanding an issue or concept or socialising. There are sets tasks for the facilitator.” (P-4)

Specifically, the role of the learning facilitator, according to the data, was to help keep the student focused and on task, to provide any accommodations, modifications or prompts for the activity at hand, and to increase the child’s understanding; all while minimising any social and/or academic frustration. Overall, the learning facilitator was seen as the person who helps to bridge the gaps for the learner with a barrier to learning; gaps which, due to her extensive duties and responsibilities, the teacher could not address with the learner herself. This was carried out through one-to-one assistance within close proximity of the child in need of support.

“For the child definitely beneficial. Making my load lighter... [the child] wouldn’t be able to manage and make that progress, that was done with a learning facilitator.” (P-1)

“It’s just an extra pair of hands, not security, but just to know that there’s somebody there to help you with the situation that you don’t feel like you’re on your own.” (P-1, P-2)

“[The role of a facilitator within the classroom] is to give that one-on-one assistance to the child.” (P-1)

“She is there to get him to focus ... and to participate ... at break, it’s all the socialising, so it’s trying to get him to interact with other children in a positive way.” (P-2)

→ **Academic Bridge**

The issue of the responsibility of the child’s academic learning was explored. All participants saw themselves as the primary authority, and the child’s learning rested upon them. This links to the need for the initial conversation between educator and learning facilitator where

roles are negotiated between the two parties and boundaries are set. If these roles are not established, then the teacher may feel her power and authority is usurped, and her very identity as a teacher becomes blurred.

“Me firstly, she is a support so if I need him to get more attention ... then she is that extra, it is my responsibility to address any behavioural issues, any learning ... she will ensure that he’s okay and he’s taken care of.” (P-2)

“I make the decisions; I am the ultimate authority figure because children naturally take chances and push boundaries.” (P-5)

“Definitely the teacher. The facilitator is just there to be a backup to the teacher ... an interface between you and the child.” (P-3)

One participant viewed her responsibility is to the class as a whole, while the learning facilitator is there for the individual child. Interestingly she did not view her responsibility as to each child, but to the class as a whole. Although it has been made clear that the educator is responsible for the child’s learning, regardless if they have learning facilitator or not, this line can become blurred. This data highlights the need for not only clear roles, but also formalised job descriptions.

*“You have a lesson, and you can only give as much attention to every child so you cannot be there for him the whole time so that is where the facilitator would take over. She would have to observe and get to know how you as a teacher work.”
(P-1)*

Another participant believes it is a mutual responsibility; both parties are working towards a common goal.

“They may want to step in and help other children, but I do not like that. They’re there for that child and must stick to that. I still feel solely responsible for the child’s education and teaching them. The facilitator just takes from what I have taught and consolidates again.” (P-5)

The findings of this study are contrary to those of Marks, Schrader and Levine (1999) who found that learning facilitators assume primary responsibility for the student with barriers to

learning. This, in turn, reduces the role and interaction of the class educator with the child with ASD. “Paraprofessionals perceived they had primary instructional responsibility for the student’s behavioural challenges to whom they were assigned. They reported perceiving that they bore the ‘primary burden of success’ for those students” (Marks et al., 1999:323; Giangreco et al., 2001).

The South African context is unique in that there is yet to be a formal system for the employment, integration and use of learning facilitators. If the state were to invest in this procedure of formalisation more children would gain access to the resource of a learning facilitator, parents would not be out of pocket, and perhaps the one-on-one facilitation could be offered to more than one learner within a class, lessening the expense of a learning facilitator.

Although educators stated that the responsibility of the child’s learning was theirs, it seems that they are inferring that they are responsible for conveying the curriculum to the whole class while the learning facilitator must act as a bridge between their individual learner and the learning content.

“[If the child is unable to grasp a concept, the learning facilitator should] make apparatus to assist the child. A lot of autistic children like particular things ... you make it very personal and use their interests to do that. To use your initiative and your knowledge as to how that child learns [would be helpful].” (P-4)

→ **Social bridge**

“I would say the learning facilitator is there as a tool for him to express himself. Also to express where he’s at.” (P-3)

Often there are social needs, then the facilitator themselves has to become a friend of all the other children because most autistic children don’t make friends easily, so they become the social bridge.” (P-4)

In addition, the modelling of social behaviour assists the child to develop more appropriate means of communication. This is echoed by the research of Vygotsky (1978) and Carrington and Harper-Hill (2015) discussed in Chapter Two. This shows that through a learning facilitator, behavioural and social issues can be corrected. The roles outlined in this study are

supported by Robertson et al. (2003:126), “learning facilitators are employed to help the student work in small groups, to reduce behavioural problems and to provide support to the classroom teacher.”

A study conducted by Koegel, Kim and Koegel (2014) revealed that once learning facilitators were trained to improve socialisation in children with ASD, the children with ASD increased their levels of engagement and rates of initiation of communication with their peers. Dugan, Kamps, Leonard, Watkins and Stackhaus (1995), as well as, Bauminger and Kasari (2000) stress the importance of implementing interventions in the social setting to improve socialisation and positive peer interactions for learners with ASD. Research shows a positive correlation between the learning facilitators’ proximity to the child with ASD and their influence on the child’s social relationships (Feldman & Matos, 2012).

Educators reported working closely with the learning facilitator to develop strategies to increase the child’s social skills development. Having a learning facilitator dedicated to imitating socially acceptable behaviour can be extremely beneficial to children with ASD, who as we know are in need of social support, often struggle to interpret social cues and efficiently communicate (Koegel et al., 2014).

→ *The need for role clarity*

Clear roles are important and can be established by setting professional boundaries during the initial conversation. Having defined roles helps establish who is responsible for what, determines a structure or hierarchy and limits conflict.

“I think that [role clarification] is something that we both had to develop along the way.” (P-2)

“It’s important for her to know those roles.” (P-3, P-6)

The participants all agreed that the sole responsibility of the child’s learning and academics rested with themselves as educators. The learning facilitators were there to assist in the dissemination of the curriculum as well as a support for the child emotional, social and behavioural needs.

4.4.5 Benefits of working with a learning facilitator

Through mutual learning, the collaborative relationship between educator and learning facilitator helped the child with ASD being and feeling included in the classroom activities.

Benefits of having a learning facilitator to assist with a child with ASD, according to this study, are closely linked to the perceived roles and how the educators' experiences influenced their outlook on collaborative practice. These include the learner facilitator lessening the educators' load, having an extra pair of eyes and hands for the teacher, keeping the child with ASD on task as well as assisting in maintaining discipline in the classroom. Allowing the teacher to focus on the majority of the learners while the learning facilitator provided undivided one-on-one attention to the child with ASD meant that the teacher felt less overwhelmed with her own responsibilities. For the participants in this study, all these aspects of learner facilitator collaboration were seen as rewarding.

Discipline and *'crowd control'* was a subsequent advantage. It became evident that having a learning facilitator allowed the teacher to direct her energy to the rest of the class, knowing that the child with the most severe barriers to learning was being taken care of.

4.4.6 Challenges of working with a learning facilitator

→ *Sanctity of professional space*

Having an unknown adult enter an educator's sacred professional space lead the educators to renegotiate their idea of authority. Feelings of anxiety may be elicited in the educator due to feeling like the ultimate authority. Change is hardly seen as positive, as it is the unknown, but once educators became more familiar with the process and relationship of having a learning facilitator present in their class, the feelings of anxiety decreased. Once homeostasis was re-established through dialogue and time, and the educator could put aside her own possible insecurities a common goal could be formed which forged a positive relationship between educator and learning facilitator.

→ *Difference in teaching style*

Firstly, some participants found it challenging to share the responsibility of instruction in; difficulties arose when educators observed a learning facilitator giving instructions to a child

in a style that differed to her own. Secondly, challenges were related to the classroom environment and the learning facilitator being a distraction to other children in the class.

“When my children are asking me a question, and she helps them work it out, that was challenging... there were times when my teaching style would differ.” (P-1)

“If we had a quiet space for them to go to during tests it would have helped. Not only him but for us as a class, because it is distracting when you hear him counting out loud all the time.” (P-1)

This data related to the challenges of ASD and the nature of the barrier to learning, which would present itself in different ways in each learner. Auxiliary challenges were noted in the level of severity of ASD, as well as the level of social impairments and the effect on fellow learners.

“At the beginning, it was very traumatic for people around him because he didn’t know how to verbalise himself properly.” (P-1)

Many participants initially felt intimidated by the process, even though they reported that through their experiences and interactions with learning facilitators they would happily promote and agree to work with one in assisting a child with ASD to reach their full learning and social potential. This could be seen as educators feeling threatened by having an additional adult in their domain, or possibly it is the fear of the unknown that creates the apprehension.

Role confusion still exists regarding the roles of learning facilitators compared to the roles of educators, and other support personnel such as learning support educators (French & Pickett, 1997). Whether the learning facilitator is an assistant to the teacher or an assistant to the learner, “such distinctions of allegiance likely have a significant impact on collaboration and supervision” (Giangreco et al., 2001:55). Clarification of the roles is pivotal from the onset to assist in a smooth working relationship between educator and learning facilitator.

One needs to be reminded of the intent of using learning facilitators, “The intent of using paraprofessionals is to supplement, not supplant, the work of the teacher” (The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1999:37). This is supported by Giangreco et al. (1997:15). “Learning facilitators may be inadvertently strengthening the learner’s cue and

prompt dependence”. In some instances, learners may initially be dependent on cues and prompt from learning facilitators, however, learning facilitators and educators need to be increasingly aware of fading out their support where possible and thus strengthening the autonomy of the child with ASD.

All participants acknowledged that learning facilitators could, and do, play a pivotal role in educating children with ASD, and the interviews conducted highlighted a series of concerns regarding the formalisation of the learning facilitators’ role as well as their training. Giangreco et al. (2001:58) would agree with these sentiments, “if we merely did a better job with roles classification, training, supervision, and compensation, the field’s identified problems would be solved.”

Numerous studies conducted, both locally and abroad, all conclude, regardless of the educational entry-level requirements of the profession of learning facilitator, that current training is lacking and does not provide the level of skills and knowledge essential for the position (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Phasha, 2017; Slee, 2001; Giangreco et al., 2001; Smith & Littlejohn, 1991).

Although the factor of formalising training and clarifying roles remained a common thread between participants many benefits and challenges were discussed; the evidence in this study’s data suggests that the benefits outweigh the challenges of working alongside a learning facilitator. As delineated by Giangreco et al. (1997:15), “learning facilitators can play a valuable educational role in assisting the teaching faculty, provided they are not placed to serve in the capacity of the class teacher”.

4.4.7 Training

→ *Educators’ Training and knowledge of Inclusive Education*

All participants received formal tertiary training and qualifications; however, it became apparent that training in special needs education varied according to learning institute. Five of the six participants felt they were not sufficiently prepared for educating a child with special needs such as ASD.

“We did an inclusive education module in my degree, but it touched on it very lightly. It didn’t give me enough. It didn’t prepare me for it. Not at all. It is only

through experience you gain that knowledge. Textbooks can say one thing, but on ground level, it's totally different.” (P-5)

The majority of the participants invested their time in engaging in further reading regarding ASD in preparation of receiving a child with ASD who requires a facilitator. Educators stated that they read up on ASD to be more informed and to have a more extensive repertoire of strategies to support the child's individual needs. Strategies ranged from the practical class arrangement to learning support material such as larger font for a child who also experiences Dyslexia.

Educators all said that they engaged in research once they knew that they would be the educator of the child with specific barriers to learning. The Internet and books provided the primary source of information for the educators to expand their knowledge and understanding of ASD. The majority of the participants expressed a need for in-service training.

“Not having formal training with autism ... your first go would be the Internet and books and going to your support you have at the school.” (P-1)

→ ***Educators' views on learner facilitator training***

According to the data, the majority of the learning facilitators discussed in this study did not receive formal or specific training to work with children with barriers to learning. Yet some had a history of interacting with the children they accompanied, having either worked with them the previous year or knew them outside of the school environment. This shows that in some incidences, the educator has to educate the learning facilitator as well as the child with barriers to learning; highlighting the need for learning facilitators to be well educated.

“She is not a qualified teacher; she is a facilitator.” (P-1)

“No, she doesn't have qualifications ... she's got that drive and that passion, but it is very different to being trained in something.” (P-3, P-6)

“With one facilitator who wasn't particularly well educated herself.” (P-4)

For another participant, the learning facilitators she engaged with had been trained and, according to her, were efficient. When probed about the nature of the training the learning facilitators received she informed the researcher that the school's educational psychologist

sources the learning facilitators and ensures the training process. All of the research participants, however, indicated that they felt that learning facilitators needed to have more training for the specific responsibilities of their jobs.

“The [current facilitator is] studying teaching at the moment, I don’t know if there’s any formal training in being a facilitator, but I do know that she’s worked with kids.” (P-2)

“I think she has been a facilitator for a long time and she is almost a qualified teacher.” (P-3)

“They have been trained and very much efficient.” (P-5)

“You might have one facilitator who may not have that much experience, and they almost need teaching to facilitate this child because they are not always qualified. They don’t always have the experience or the expertise.” (P-4)

“There will also be some very qualified facilitators who have had the training may be through ASAP (Autism Spectrum Adaptive Programme South Africa) or other organisations or be studying as teachers.” (P-4)

“It tends to be people who are doing a teaching course, and they love children and want experience, but they’re still training... you’ve got to have a natural ability.” (P-4)

Educators reported that in-service, special education training is lacking for both the learning facilitator and themselves; expressing the need for an induction programme that would be designed to assist both themselves and the learning facilitator. Realistically speaking, it is not plausible to expect a learning facilitator to have a teaching qualification, but perhaps the solution to this is to provide training and qualification as a learning facilitator for those who are studying to be a teacher or have an interest in childcare and inclusive education. All participants reported that they received no training regarding working with a learning facilitator. For both the educator and the learning facilitator, training is a critical element in the effective use of learning facilitators.

→ ***Educator training in working with a facilitator***

All participants voiced how they felt ill-equipped to teach a child with severe barriers to learning. If the participant had received training in inclusive education, they felt this was not sufficient. There seemed to be a gap between theory of inclusive education and the implementation of it on ground level.

“I had no training. I had to just go with it and, you know, learn as I went along.”
(P-5)

“I would have liked to have gone on a course or something ... to know about Autism and I guess I can just self-study, but I think it would be useful to go to a workshop to learn how to work with either the specific autistic child or just a child with special needs.” (P-2)

“Tertiary education, in general, is lacking special needs training.” (P-2)

“I do think a learning facilitator should be trained.” (P-6)

“Neither of us had ever been in the situation. It is important for a facilitator to be trained. I would love to go on a course, and I would like [the facilitators] to be trained.” (P-3)

“Even if it exists on a school level where the school develops a sort of introductory programme, or a bank of qualified facilitators and the training would be there.” (P-4)

Research shows a lack of knowledge and support for teaching learners with barriers to learning, particularly children with ASD. As well as a limited knowledge of inclusive education in theory and practice. This is echoed in Mampane’s (2016:124) research, “more resources need to be invested in the training of special education teachers to ensure that learners with severe learning disabilities receive quality education support in the continuum of placement”.

4.4.8 Policy and protocol

→ *Protocol for working with a learning facilitator*

All of the participants in this study indicated that there was no protocol regarding working with learning facilitators, except one who took the initiative to create one. When questioned as to whether there is policy or protocol in place to follow as a guideline for educators who will be working with a child with ASD and their learning facilitator, participants voiced unanimously that no such protocol existed.

“No I don’t think so, but I think it is very unfortunate. When I got the facilitator, I asked them to have documents in place. Eventually, we had a document in place that would say her role in the classroom, the parent’s role, and my role.” (P-3)

The document, compiled by staff members and headmaster, was created to try to address the dynamic complexities of having another adult in the classroom and a protocol to follow in times of confrontation between the two adults. The document was developed reactively from the need to have clear expectations and roles for all those involved. The document provided a sense of structure for the educator to be able to deal with role clarity. Such action indicates that it is possible to create structure and formalise the role of a learning facilitator at a school level through the development of written policy and protocol. Further data provided by Participant 4 and Participant 5 indicates a lack of policy and protocol.

“I’m not sure about policies.” (P-4)

“I know the educational psychologist is head of remedial and she should have something in place.” (P-5)

It is clear that there seems to be a need for the roles and responsibilities of learning facilitators to be formalised. As were the results of a study conducted by Slee (2001:121), “the rich description of educators’ experiences of their interactions with learning facilitators gives further opportunity for policy architects to reconsider the roles and opportunities they provide for members of the school community to play in development and implementation of school reform.” Since then, it seems, the same issue continues to exist.

4.5 PERSONAL REFLECTION

The researcher was an active agent throughout this study, continually engaging in a process of reflective practice as is encouraged by Merriam (2009:229), “critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” helps strengthen validity and reliability. Reflective practice offers the opportunity to challenge possible assumptions or biases regarding the study and gives the researcher as well as the reader better understanding of how data was interpreted and inferences made (Merriam, 2009).

In analysing the data, the value of open-ended questions became apparent as well as the importance of the researcher maintaining an external frame of reference. Siedman (1991), as cited in Merriam (2009:108) suggests, “interviewing requires interviewers to have enough distance to enable them to ask real questions and to explore, not to share, assumptions.” The notion of being able not to let one’s own assumptions and experiences overpower the interviewing is referred to as *Epoche* (Merriam, 2009).

Epoche is the process “the researcher engages in to remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. This suspension of judgment is critical in a phenomenological investigation and requires the setting aside of the researcher’s personal viewpoint in order to see the experience for itself” (Katz, 1987:37). Upon reflection, *epoche* was challenging to employ consistently when conducting the interviews.

For the researcher it was refreshing to hear educators, despite their professional challenges, remain child-centred. “It is all for the children, whatever is going to help them and assist them, then that is what we need to do, but I think it is just as important to know how to help them” (Participant 3). “If you can do it [teach] with a special needs child; you can do it with a normal child” (Participant 4).

4.6 CONCLUSION

The value of relationships is clearly highlighted in this study. Although some of the participants indicated that differences in teaching style and personality did occur, they acknowledged that they felt that professional relationships and clear communication were essential to creating a successful team. This is supported by a study by Riggs and Mueller

(2001:59), “having good communication between educators and learning facilitators paves the road to a successful working relationship.” It was unanimously agreed upon by all participants that they would work with a learning facilitator again; “... until the day I retire, it’s a positive experience”, concludes Participant 5.

The nature of these findings holds significant implications for evaluating how we use, train, and supervise learning facilitators so that their work can be in line with educational outcomes for learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, this study shows the vital role which learning facilitators hold. Formalised training will promote this supportive role which learning facilitators play within the educational environment.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter is a culmination of the research process for without recommendations the data could be seen as futile. In this chapter concluding remarks, as well as the strengths and possible limitations of this study, are stipulated.

5.2 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of this research project was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of educators who collaborate with learning facilitators when working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A basic qualitative study grounded in the interpretive-constructivist paradigm was used to approach the question. Through individual interviews with participants, the researcher was able to glean insight into the lived reality of the educators and how they make meaning of their interactions with learning facilitators, thereby giving the opportunity to understand better the relationship between educator and learning facilitator. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) and the premise of nested systems was utilised in order to provide a theoretical framework in which the findings could be presented.

5.3 STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

5.3.1 Offering educators a voice

Through conducting the interviews, teachers were given the opportunity to share their experiences and how they perceive the relationship between learning facilitators and themselves as well as the benefits and challenges they may experience. The data revealed that the majority of educators were not consulted regarding the employment of learning facilitators even though they are the ones to work closest to the learning facilitators. Holding the conversation about learning facilitators' roles and responsibilities allowed educators' to

have their voices heard. They are often faced with demands from all angles of the educational sector, be it parents, principals, superior's or other colleagues' and as Riggs and Mueller connote, "teachers have not slipped easily into the supervisory role; they are typically prepared to work with children, not adults" (Riggs & Mueller, 2001:60).

5.3.2 Adding to the field of knowledge

Past studies have focused their attention as seen through the eyes of the learning facilitators (Meynert, 2014). Exploring educators' experiences provides an opportunity for growth in the field of study regarding learning facilitation. Subsequent studies can use this research as a foundation on which to build their own understanding. Future research should seek to address practical matters that can have an immediate impact on the education provided for children with barriers to learning.

5.3.3 Offering guidance to educators, schools and policymakers

As raised in the discourse of Participant 4, the school can develop an introductory programme for facilitators to cater to the specific needs of the school, "you can have a bank of qualified facilitators, and the training would be there ... you could have it on your CV, you've done this course and also then that would assist parents in finding facilitators".

Building on from this, a document on guidelines for educators could be created to help support educators. The guidelines could provide a framework for schools to help solidify the roles of learning facilitators as well as other practical tips and possible policy templates for the school to use. "The effectiveness of learning facilitators is underwritten by the culture and work practices of the school" (Slee, 2001:120). By providing a guideline for educators making use of a learning facilitator can be amalgamated into the school's culture and work practices of the school.

5.4 POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This study, like all research, is limited by constraints of time and place. The study consisted of a limited number of participating educators, and their stories must be understood from an individual viewpoint rather than a generalised representation of an entire population. However, despite the limitations of the research, the information gained offers valuable

insights into the relationship between educators and learning facilitators when striving towards the education of children with ASD in mainstream learning environments.

Due to the small number of participants in this study, implications for practice should be tentatively drawn. Although qualitative research may rely on a small sample size, the results of this study should be interpreted within the context of the sample size. A further limitation of this study is its reliance on obtaining only the educators' perspective on their relationship with the learning facilitator. It may be argued that some of the recorded responses that form the basis of the findings, may be partly a result of response bias between educator-facilitator relationship and the nature and severity of the learner who is being facilitated. In other words, children with less severity ASD may be perceived to be easier to teach and facilitate than those who experience a more severe form of ASD. Another consideration is the type of sample under study and the impact of this samples' bias on generalizability and interpretation of findings. Future studies should examine larger and more varied samples of educators who work with larger class sizes, government schools, and other variables. Future studies should also take into consideration the time of year that the study was conducted and data was collected. Examining relationships throughout the year could be a focus of future studies.

A focus group would have added further depth to the study, however; due to extraneous variables, this was not possible. An advantage of a focus group is that all participants are able to converse with one another regarding the issue in question. Similarly, participants may disagree with a posed question or remark creating a catalyst for the whole group to explore the disagreement in greater detail, thereby creating a much deeper understanding of the research problem (Bless et al., 2013). Furthermore, this technique provides an opportunity for participants to learn from one another, and "perhaps even resolve pressing dilemmas with which they are confronted" (Bless et al., 2013:201).

Furthermore, having a conversation with more than one person regarding a shared or similar lived experience can help participants to feel understood and broaden their perspective of the problem, perhaps even fuelling the discussion towards solution-based actions and motivating the participants to be agents of change if needs be.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The information provided in this study raises questions for educational teams to consider and offers suggestions to assist in providing a more formal structure for learning facilitators to work in. The findings listed herein can be used as a starting point for teams or schools to access their own status, prioritise their needs, and take active and constructive steps to improve learning facilitators as a support option for children experiencing barriers to learning.

5.5.1 Formal training of learning facilitators

It should, in the opinion of the researcher, be mandatory that learning facilitators be provided with competency-based training.

Participants indicated that not only are learning facilitators in need of training, but they themselves would like to engage in further professional development. This may coincide with the reason given in the study by Riggs and Mueller (2001) that varying behavioural and academic needs of the children with whom the learning facilitators worked with make it challenging to address all the specific needs of each individual child. The educators in this study expressed the need for an induction programme that would be designed to assist both the learning facilitator and themselves in addressing the needs of the child with ASD. Although one can see the complexity of inclusive education and the employment of a learning facilitator, an induction programme will not be an elixir, rather, together with state buy in, would begin to as a catalyst to fostering a better working experience for all.

This study reveals that both educators and learning facilitators would benefit if the roles and responsibilities of learning facilitators were clearly defined and reflected in a job description that includes qualifications, duties and responsibilities, supervision, and evaluation (Pickett, 1999). “This would assist all members of the school community in understanding the appropriate roles for learning facilitators. Although there are many times when educators and learning facilitators will assume similar roles, it is necessary to articulate clearly the differences between each portfolio” (French & Pickett, 1997:685).

5.5.2 Up-skilling and pre-service training in inclusive education

In summary, the findings described in this study indicate the need to better equip teachers with inclusive pedagogy. Both educators and learning facilitators receive continuous professional development and training in basic instructional procedures that facilitate learning for children with special educational needs, including the learning barrier of ASD, in the context of a mainstream learning environment.

Although educators' perceived this informal training to be valuable, they felt they needed more systematic, structured training to perform their jobs more effectively. Many participants questioned the relevance of their training in inclusive education and educating children with special educational needs. The results of this study corroborate previous findings that both educators and learning facilitators with whom they work need professional development for the successful implementation of inclusive programs (Marks et al., 1999).

“In Australia it has been mandated that student teachers undertake compulsory modules in special education in order to be equipped for teaching in inclusive schools.” Slee argues this to be retrograde as it reinforces the popular conception that inclusive education is about special children and special educators who will prove problematic as they are resettled in the mainstream. Inclusive education demands reconstructed educational thinking and practice in regular schools for the benefit of all children” (Croll, 2000, and Rose, 2010 in Slee, 2001:120). Many tertiary institutes in South African have followed suit, offering a compulsory component on Inclusive Education as part of an education degree. Although the majority of participants indicated that they had received such training, they still felt poorly equipped to implement inclusive education and initially collaborate with a learning facilitator.

5.5.3 Clarification of roles

“While role classification continues to be debated in the literature, the role of learning facilitators can explicitly and individually be clarified within teams.” teams must, however, ensure that all identified roles are educationally relevant and support the learning goals of the child in need of support. “This requires congruence between the skills of the learning facilitator, the needs of the students, and the roles of other educational professionals” (Giangreco et al., 2001:60). Additionally, critical scrutinising of proposed roles should take

place to ensure that learning facilitators are not asked to assume responsibilities that are appropriately those of educators, or related educational specialists.

The results of this study indicate continuing lack of clarity in defining appropriate roles for learning facilitators, a dearth of formalised, continuous training for learning facilitators; as well as inadequate guidelines regarding supervision and evaluation for educators. This is substantiated by Riggs and Mueller (2001), “given that these are current conditions, the educational community must come to realise that students may suffer when services are provided by a workforce that frequently is undertrained, overworked, and underappreciated. Positive, decisive action is needed to ensure a quality education for all students” (Riggs & Mueller, 2001:61).

“Once learning facilitators are seen as a formal occupation, requiring formal training, professional development activities should be provided to enhance the development of learning facilitators at various stages of their careers” (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Clarity regarding the role of the educator as the primary instructional leader in the classroom, as well as the role and expectations of the learning facilitator, will help solidify a stronger working relationship between educator and learning facilitator.

5.5.4 Rethinking of policies and formalisation of job description

Educators reported that they were unclear about the parameters of the learning facilitators’ job responsibilities and role explaining that they learnt as they went along. A few indicated that as they gained experience, they were more confident in formulating their own documents and initiating the relationship based on a conversation on expectations, roles, responsibilities, routines and procedures. Furthermore, the participants eluded to the complexity of learning facilitator employment. As stated in Chapter 4, if government were to formalise the role of learning facilitators, then parents would no longer need to procure and fund such assistance for their children, ultimately resulting in more children gaining access to the support of learning facilitators. Given the constraints of the South African context, this may be a utopian idealism.

It is important to assess the efficacy of the policies and practices of government for a number of reasons, including:

- to determine whether the primary policy goals of government have been put into

practice;

- to identify the causes of any failure or weakness in the process of achieving those goals;
- to inform an analysis of the limits and constraints on the government in the application of policies;
- to encourage a more informed and higher level of debate about such policies and their accompanying practices (Motala & Pampallis, 2001:15).

The lack of consensus pertaining to a learning facilitators job description seems to have made it consistently difficult for educators and learning facilitators to know exactly where their individual responsibilities lie and to generate meaningful occupational role descriptions that reflect the learning facilitators required competencies and skills as reiterated in the study conducted by Picket (1999). The development of policies and procedures must involve a variety of stakeholders (Riggs & Mueller, 2001:60).

This study elucidates the need for active collaboration of all educational role-players and coincides with the sentiments of Giangreco et al. (1997), “therefore, the concern over increasing instructional integrity is appropriately an important issue that can and should be addressed within the context of general education classrooms. We suggest that the classroom involvement of learning facilitators must be compatible within the context of the broader plan for the classroom team for the benefit of all the students” (Giangreco et al., 1997:16).

“Creating state-wide standards for learning facilitators will help school districts to attract and retain qualified learning facilitators. Local school districts can devise their own policies concerning job descriptions and other district procedures. Districts must ensure that their policies are implemented consistently and communicated to teachers, supervisors, administrators, and learning facilitators (Riggs & Mueller, 2001:60).

This study suggests that South Africa’s future policy development, training and research focus on different forms of service delivery that provide the appropriate and necessary support for children with special educational needs, simultaneously avoiding repeating the inherent problems associated with the current practices and policies. The formalised transformation will need to be individualised and flexible enough to consider and

accommodate the diverse variations in learners, educators, schools and communities across South Africa.

The findings of this study are in agreement with Riggs and Mueller (2001), “It is recommended that future investigations continue to address the scope of roles and responsibilities of all educational professionals and the role of learning facilitators as providers of direct instructional services to students” (Riggs & Mueller, 2001:61).

5.5.5 Classroom-based guideline for educators and learning facilitators

As mentioned in 1.3.2 a further long-term research objective, once an in-depth understanding of the relationship is obtained, was to develop a classroom-based guideline for both educators and learning facilitators. Not only will this assist both the educator and the learning facilitator in fostering a basis of understanding and collaborative relationship that benefits the child with ASD, but it could help to provide structure to the working relationship, professional boundaries, policy summaries and protocol frameworks for all educational professionals.

According to Phasha (2017:29), “all practices are driven by principles derived from theories. If learning is a dialectical mediated process, then teachers’ actions in classrooms would need to be based on sound continuous critical reflections, where mastery of subject matter, managing and responding to the dynamics of the learning environment are guided by sound principles”. Such a guide can be seen as a practical roadmap to encapsulate the essence of Ubuntu and assist education professionals, particularly educators to navigate the dynamics of learning and inclusive education guided by sound principles.

5.6 CONCLUSION

It is hoped that results from this study can be used to address related issues and practices in other situations where children with ASD are supported using learning facilitators. Implementation and use of learning facilitators in mainstream classrooms must increasingly be done in ways that consider the unique educational needs of all students, not simply those of the child with special educational needs. Research on the aforementioned items should be on-going in order to explore efficacious ways of supporting and opening access to learning for all learners in our schools.

Reflective practice is key to positive transformation and implementation of inclusive education. “We need to continue to be reflective about both the theory and practice, which are invisible, of inclusive schooling. The reflection, however, must continue to extend our thinking about inclusion and exclusion beyond the theoretical straight-jacket of Special Educational Needs” (Slee, 2001:121).

In conclusion, It is hoped that in raising the issues presented in this study, the national discussion on practices to support learners with special educational needs can be extended and corresponding actions can be taken that will be educationally credible, financially responsible and benefit all stakeholders. Particularly the child with special needs, who should be placed at the centre of all future discussions. It is hoped that this study will spur reflection, encourage discussion, and lead to actions that will benefit all learners. The needs of the individual child with the barrier(s) to learning remain paramount; one should assess each situation within the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) as inclusion may not be the best solution to their needs.

The complexities of formalising the utilisation of learning facilitators’ to assist in inclusive education should encompass all educational role-players; “successful inclusion depends upon recipiently designed procedures for maximising participation and understanding, which address Higher Functioning Autistic (HFA) children’s social deficits” (Ochs et al., 2001:400). For this to be achieved, all stakeholders need to consider the intricate balance between pedagogy, policy and practice.

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ADDENDA

ADDENDUM A

Letter of Ethical Clearance by the Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University



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Approval Notice New Application

22-Aug-2016

Kempthorne, Debby

Proposal #: SU-HSD-002676

Title: Exploring educators' experiences of in-class learning facilitators for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Dear Ms Debby Kempthorne,

Your **New Application** received on **04-Aug-2016**, was reviewed

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: **18-Aug-2016 -17-Aug-2019**

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** (SU-HSD-002676) 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 218089183.

Included Documents:

DESC Report
REC: Humanities New Application
Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham
REC Coordinator
Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

ADDENDUM B

Letter to School Principal's



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Dear

I am in my second year of Masters in Educational Psychology, as part of the course a research component is required. I have chosen to explore educator's experiences of in-class learning facilitators for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The aim of this study is to interpret and describe the perspectives and explore the experiences of educators who interact with learning facilitators in order to gain an indepth understanding of the role of facilitators as seen from the eyes of educators. This entails exploring and understanding the relationship between educator and learning facilitator and what it means to collaborate with a learning facilitator in supporting children with ASD.

I would love to work with the educators of Helderberg International if possible. I request your assistance in identifying educators who would be willing to participate in a study of this nature. All information you provide will be treated in the strictest of confidence, and you and your learning institution will remain anonymous. Participation by the identified participants is completely voluntary and they will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me directly, and will not be penalized for it. There is no potential risk or hazard in participating in this study.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Debby Kempthorne, the principal investigator, or the supervisor assigned to this study, Lynnette Collaire.

Principal Investigator:

Debby Kempthorne

Email:

Tel: Supervisor:

Lynette Collair

Email:

Tel:

Kind Regards,
Debby Kempthorne

ADDENDUM C

Consent to Participate in Research



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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Educators' experiences of in-class, learning facilitators for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

REFERENCE NUMBER: SU-HSD-002676: **9254792-2015**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Ms Debby Kempthorne** (B.Prim Ed. (Wits), HBEd (UNISA)) from the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. As a partial requirement of a Masters degree in Educational Psychology, a research project needs to be completed in the form of a thesis. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled 'Educators' experiences of in-class, learning facilitators for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)'. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you have in-class experience working with a learning facilitator supporting children with ASD.

Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project and contact the researcher if you require further explanation or clarification of any aspect of the study.

This study has been approved by the **Humanities Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at Stellenbosch University** and will be conducted according to accepted and applicable national and international ethical guidelines and principles.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore educators' experiences of in-class learning facilitators for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the following will be asked of you:

- You will be asked to complete and sign this consent form.
- During the study you will be requested to complete a short background information questionnaire. This will take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time.
- During the study you shall participate in an individual interview with the researcher which will take approximately 45 minutes.

- Subsequently, you will be given the opportunity to meet with other participants within a small focus group, participating in a focus group interview of approximately 60 minutes.
- Interviews will be conducted at times and locations convenient for you during July/August 2016. If necessary, I will follow up telephonically or via email.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There are no personal or professional risks anticipated for you if you choose to participate. However, your time is requested which may inconvenience you. Every effort to minimize inconvenience to you will be made regarding the timing and location of the interviews in order to accommodate your schedule. You have the right to withdraw from the study by contacting me directly at any stage during the research process without incurring any prejudice, discrimination or penalty.

If any discomfort should arise during or after the study you may contact:

Counselling psychologist: [REDACTED]

Tel: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

In choosing to participate in this study it is envisioned that there will be no immediate personal benefit, but by sharing your experiences, expertise and knowledge regarding your role and the relationship with a learning facilitator you will be contributing to the body of knowledge regarding in-class facilitators and possible future improvements in this area. This research aims at providing an opportunity for educators to voice their narratives and perceptions; to be heard and acknowledged, that may result in insights to the benefit of policy makers, schools, educators, learning facilitators, parents, children with ASD as well as the community and other educational stakeholders.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

This study is a non-profitable study; therefore the participants will not receive any payment or remuneration.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Every endeavour will be made to ensure your personal information and data is kept in strict confidence during and after the study. To ensure anonymity, an information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. All information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence. Anonymity will be maintained by means of ascribing pseudonyms to each participant as well as coding techniques to generalize and depersonalize information. Please note that your name, the name of your school and other participant's names will be withheld in the reporting of the data. Any identifying data pertaining to you will not be given to any other researcher or agency. Only the supervisor and principal investigator will have access to

this information and shall treat this data with respect, abiding by the ethical codes set out for researchers.

There is a possibility that interviews may be recorded to assist data collection and coding. In the event of recording interviews, you maintain the right to review the recordings. Such recordings will be stored securely as to safeguard your identity. After voice recordings have been transcribed to electronic format they will be erased and the electronic transcripts saved under password control.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Ms. Debby Kempthorne, the principal investigator, or Ms. Lynette Collair, the supervisor assigned to the study.

Principal investigator:

Debby Kempthorne

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Tel: [REDACTED]

Supervisor:

Lynette Collair

E-mail: [REDACTED]

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms [REDACTED] [REDACTED] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to the participant by Debby Kempthorne in English and the participant is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to him/her. The participant was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his/her satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____
[*name of the participant*]. [*He/she*] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any
questions. This conversation was conducted in [*Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*Other*] and [*no
translator was used/this conversation was translated into _____ by
_____*].

Signature of Participant

Date

ADDENDUM D

Interview Guide - Individual Interview

Themes to explore:

A. Background information

B. Current experience while working with a learning facilitator

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. I appreciate you taking the time to share your knowledge and experiences with me.

A. Background information

Let us begin by talking about you, who you are and the work you do.

1. Biographical/Personal information

- 1.1 Age
- 1.2 Number of years teaching
- 1.3 Qualifications
- 1.4 Occupation (current post)

B. Current experiences

I would like to know more about how you experience learning facilitators in your classroom.

2. Classroom experience

- 2.1 Reaction towards placement of learner with ASD in your classroom.
- 2.2 Knowledge of ASD or reading done beforehand in preparation of child entering the classroom.
- 2.3 Protocol and training for working with a learning facilitator (Roles).
- 2.4 Views on how learning facilitators are trained.
- 2.5 Description of educator's relationship with the learning facilitator.
- 2.6 Who is responsible for the child's learning?
- 2.7 If the facilitator is unable to attend school, what happens?
- 2.8 Did it make a difference if the facilitator was well liked by the rest of the learners?
- 2.9 Describe the level of involvement of the learning facilitator (within classroom and with individual child).
- 2.10 Tell me about the rewarding aspects (benefits) of working with a learning facilitator.
- 2.11 What challenges do you experience in your relationship with a learning facilitator in relation to:
 - The classroom setting/ learning environment
 - The curriculum requirements
 - Your support role (to the child and to the facilitator)
 - Inclusive Education

