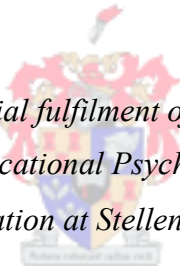


Theoretical approaches underpinning educational psychologists' practice in district- based support teams

by
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*Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Educational Psychology (MEdPsych) in the
faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University*



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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

There has been a paradigm shift occurring in the field of educational psychology over the last few decades from a predominantly medical approach towards a more inclusive and systemic approach. This development has called for a change in the way educational psychologists conceptualise problems, as well as an expansion in their practices in order to provide effective support services. However, the question arose which theoretical approach educational psychologists currently espouse and implement. This study therefore endeavoured to explore the theoretical approaches underpinning educational psychologists' practice, with a focus on those professionals working within District Based Support Teams (DBSTs) in the Western Cape. Within this broad aim, the research aimed to identify which theoretical approach(es) the educational psychologists personally espouse and which theoretical approach(es) is/are espoused within the DBSTs. A further objective was to determine what the practice of their theory-in-use entailed. This information would ascertain whether the educational psychologists' espoused theories and theory-in-use correspond.

Qualitative research within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm was employed for the research design. The participants included eight educational psychologists practising within District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) in the Western Cape. Data was collected by means of an extensive literature review, self-administered questionnaires and individual interviews and analysed using qualitative thematic analysis and interpretation.

The key findings of this research revealed that the educational psychologists in this study personally espouse a systemic approach to their practice of educational psychology. However, it was revealed that this approach is not necessarily adopted by all members of the DBSTs. Furthermore, the educational psychologists themselves experience many challenges in implementing this theory. Their theory-in-use at the Education District Offices incorporates both medical and systemic approaches. Assessment of learners is largely based on a medical model, whilst the interventions and support they provide appeared to be focused on a more systemic level. It was concluded that the theory that the educational psychologists personally espouse; the theory espoused within DBSTs; and the theory-in-use within the DBSTs, do not entirely correspond.

Keywords: Educational psychology, paradigm shift, theoretical approaches, medical approach, systemic approach, practices, District-Based Support Teams, Western Cape.

OPSOMMING

'n Paradigma skuif wat die laaste paar dekades plaasgevind het in die veld van opvoedkundige sielkunde, het meegebring dat die benadering verander het vanaf 'n hoofsaaklik mediese model na 'n meer inklusiewe en sisteem gebaseerde model. Hierdie ontwikkeling vra dat opvoedkundige sielkundiges probleme op nuwe maniere konseptualiseer, asook hul praktyk uitbrei om effektiewe ondersteuningsdienste te kan verskaf. Die vraag watter teoretiese benaderings opvoedkundige sielkundiges tans onderskryf en implementeer, het ontstaan. Hierdie studie poog dus om te ondersoek watter teoretiese raamwerke opvoedkundige sielkundiges se praktyke onderlê, en fokus op die opvoedkundige sielkundiges wat werk binne die Distriksgebaseerde Ondersteuningsspanne (DBSTs) in die Wes-Kaap. Binne hierdie breë doelwit, word deur die navorsing gepoog om die teoretiese benadering(s) wat opvoedkundige sielkundiges binne die DBSTs persoonlik aanhang sowel as die teoretiese benadering(s) wat binne hierdie DBSTs gepropageer word, te identifiseer. 'n Verdere mikpunt was om vas te stel wat die deelnemers se praktyk (teorie-in-gebruik) behels. Hierdie inligting sou dit moontlik maak om vas te stel of die teorie voorgestaan en die teorie-in-gebruik ooreenstem.

Kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodologie vanuit 'n interpretatiewe/konstruktivistiese paradigma is gebruik in die ontwerp van die navorsing. Die deelnemers was ag opvoedkundige sielkundiges wat binne die DBSTs van die Wes-Kaap praktiseer. Data is versamel deur 'n uitgebreide literatuur oorsig, self ingevulde oop vraelyste en individuele onderhoude. Die data is geanaliseer deur van kwalitatiewe tematiese analise en interpretasie gebruik te maak.

Die kernbevindinge van die studie het gedui op 'n sistemiese benadering tot hul praktyk, wat deur die opvoedkundige sielkundiges persoonlik onderskryf word. Die bevindinge het ook gedui daarop dat nie al die lede van die DBSTs dit aangeneem het nie. Verder ervaar die opvoedkundige sielkundiges self verskeie uitdagings ten opsigte van die implementering van sodanige teoretiese benadering. Die teorie-in-gebruik binne die Onderwys Distrikskantore bevat beide mediese model benaderings sowel as meer sistemiese benaderings. Die assessering van leerders is grootliks gebaseer op 'n mediese model, terwyl die intervensies en ondersteuning wat gebied word blyk meer sistemiese onderlê te wees. Dit kom dus vooras of die teorie wat opvoedkundige sielkundiges persoonlik aanhang, die teorie wat binne die

DBSTs onderskryf word, en die teorie-in-gebruik binne die DBSTs nie noodwendig ooreenkom nie.

Sleutelwoorde: Opvoedkundige sielkunde; 'n paradigma skuif; teoretiese raamwerke mediese model; sisteem model; praktyke, Distriksgebaseerde Ondersteuningsspanne; Wes-Kaap.

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Context

The field of educational psychology in South Africa has undergone much rethinking and development over the last three decades. The end of the apartheid era and the start of the 21st century called for a more contextually relevant and systemically sensitive approach to the practice of *educational psychology* (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Swart & Pettipher, 2005). The focus has been on developing a role for systemic psychology versus what is portrayed as a defunct individually-orientated, medical model (Pelligrini, 2009; Sands, Kozleski & French, 2000; Shannon, & Posada, 2007; Stobie, Gemmell, Moran & Randall, 2002b). This re-conceptualisation of the profession has led to a re-definition of roles within a preventative, health promotive and supportive educational system, as well as a new, more comprehensive definition of the scope of practice for educational psychologists (Engelbrecht, 2004; Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), 2011). This includes stressing the importance of systemic values in the practice of *educational psychology*, such as promoting sustainability, co-operation, partnership and collaboration (Department of Education (DOE), 2005a). This movement requires educational psychologists in South Africa to re-examine their theoretical frameworks and re-work their professional practices.

In 1994 South Africa entered a new era and became a democratic country. Since then, there has been a national need to redress the wrongs of the past, and an urgency to reconstruct and develop a society and education and health system that caters for all (Donald *et al.*, 2010; Sayed, 2001). Emphasis is placed on important values such as equity, non-discrimination, liberty, respect and social justice, which provided the framework for the new South African Constitution. In the fields of education and psychology, new policies, legislation, structures and practices have been developed, with an emphasis on equal opportunities for all.

In order to be relevant, fair and just, education in South Africa has been and is being reformulated, changed and developed, within an inclusive learning environment (Naicker, 2005). The philosophy underpinning inclusive education is that every child can learn (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1994). An inclusive education system is one that acknowledges the diversity of its learner population and

recognises that all children are individuals with differences in learning needs, learning styles and objectives. As a result, schools and the curriculum need to be flexible, supportive and co-operative to accommodate the diversity of all learners (Donald *et al.*, 2010; Lazarus & Lomofsky, 2001; Muthukrishna & Sader, 2004; Sands *et al.*, 2000).

The changing nature of the education system has forced educational psychologists to reconsider their roles in order to respond to the needs of their clients. Contextual demands and the reductionist nature of the previous educational-psychology models have required a shift from the traditional child-deficit, medical perspective towards a systems approach, suggesting a wider scope of analysis and action within an inclusive-education approach (Donald *et al.*, 2010; Ebersohn, 2000; Engelbrecht, 2004; Wood, 1998).

For several decades, there has been continued discontent expressed with regards to mainstream psychology in general in South Africa (Dawes, 1986; De Jong & Der Hoorn, 1993; De la Rey & Ipser, 2004; Donald, 1984; Hickson & Kriegler, 1991; Lazurus, 1998; Leach, Akhurst & Basson, 2003; Macleod, 2004; Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004; Rock & Hamber, 1994; Vogelmann, 1987; Watson & Fouche, 2007). Psychology has been criticised at the level of training, practice and function for being irrelevant to the nature and needs of the majority of the South African population. A mental-health investigation was initiated by the Professional Board for Psychology and a national task force appointed in order to reform the profession in all its aspects (Hickson & Kriegler, 1991). The need to place psychology in its wider socio-economic, political and cultural context has been recognised (Louw, 2002). In addition, national finances will not permit individualised therapeutic services to be provided to the whole of the *South* African population and new forms of practice, which are managerial and/or preventative and community based will have to be developed (Sayed 2001; Sharratt, 1995). According to Hickson and Kriegler (1991, p. 792) “...the mission of a psychologist in the South African context should be essentially that of a proactive, educative and preventative change agent. The vision of the future professional psychologist should be that of a mental-health facilitator and consultant rather than primarily or exclusively that of a therapist”.

The South African Professional Board of Psychology has been in consultation with relevant parties for several years in order to re-define the scope of practice for all categories of

psychology. An Educational Psychology Task Team was formed in 2007 to review the scope of practice for educational psychology. An amendment to the scope of practice was recently promulgated by the Minister of Health (HPCSA, 2011). The Educational Psychology Task Team plans to hold a second conference to clarify and gain a deeper understanding of the scope. Educational psychologists are no longer restricted to working only with children and are not bound to the school setting. Educational psychologists are able to work with children and adults within the context of learning and development. This change takes cognisance of the fact that education and learning are lifelong endeavours and they are not restricted to formal schools (HPCSA, 2009). Educational psychologists practice in a variety of settings including: private practice; public and private school systems; special-needs schools; clinics and hospitals; universities; Education District Offices; community, government and non-government organisations; and other institutions.

The recent shift in roles and practices of educational psychologists is not unique to South Africa. Worldwide, the changing nature of educational psychology has been prompted by systemic and inclusive movements (Farrell, 2004). This kind of change has been characteristic of developments in *educational psychology* as practised in many parts of Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in recent years (Cameron, 2006; Jimerson *et al.*, 2004; Jimerson *et al.*, 2006; Jimerson *et al.*, 2008; Norwich, 2005; Shannon & Posada, 2007; Stobie, *et al.* 2002b). It has become increasingly clear that educational psychology “. . . must be reflective of, responsive to, and proactive towards the multiple and changing systems within which we operate (e.g. school, family, societal, legislative systems), including the increasingly diverse populations whom we serve (e.g. children, families, educators, administrators, community leaders) and the settings in which they function” (e.g. homes, schools, education support services (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000, p. 489).

Traditional psycho-educational support is focused solely on learner deficits and the medical model is used to explain educational difficulties for diagnosis and individual therapeutic treatment. This system regards “...some learners as, at best, disadvantaged and in need of individual fixing, or at worst, as deficient and therefore beyond support” (Engelbrecht, 2004, p. 21). In South Africa during the previous political dispensation, direct educational-psychological services were provided only to a few advantaged schools and communities and

excluded environmentally and economically disadvantaged learners who have an equal right to effective support (DOE, 1997; Sharratt, 1995). This a-contextual and individualistic approach ignored systemic factors and the influence of broader socio-economic factors (Louw, 2002). Training programmes focused on an applications-only, individually-focused profession and employers strictly defined a narrow scope of practice for educational psychologists (Donald, 1991; Engelbrecht, 2004; Sharratt, 1995). This removed educational psychologists from a position of potential influence on policy and management in education. However, the systemic approach assumes that the key to successful inclusion lies in addressing the needs of the education system/setting, to ensure that the needs of the learners are met, rather than focusing on the learner needing to fit into the system (DOE, 1997). The primary effort should be on the design and facilitation of the processes involved in schooling, not on the provision of special services (Lazarus & Lomofsky, 2001; Muthukrishna & Sader, 2004; Sharratt, 1995).

Educational psychologists have a major part to play in actively shaping, changing and transforming the quality of education. The consequence of the complexity of adapting to changes that reform demands, is that individuals and groups, in this case educational psychologists and educational support services, are required to make major changes in how professional problems are conceptualised and adopt new ways of solving them (Ebersohn, 2000). Educational psychologists will need to make a paradigmatic shift from perceiving the presenting “problem” as one-dimensional, to being multi-factorial in origin. Educational psychologists must now not only be prepared to intervene on an individual level, but also on a systems level in order to implement and evaluate preventative programmes. In these efforts they should conduct systemically and contextually valid assessments and interventions to promote positive learning environments within which learners and educators from diverse backgrounds have equal access to effective educational-psychological support. New roles include those of organisational facilitators, collaborators, consultants and mental-health specialists who help educators and school administrators to foster competent (i.e. mentally healthy) learners (Engelbrecht, 2004; Mathukrishna & Baez, 2002).

Two of the strategies for developing an inclusive system of support, involve a focus on collaboration and consultation (Engelbrecht, 2007). As a result the Department of National Education (DNE) has established several Education District Offices in each province to

facilitate an integrated approach to service delivery by all levels of government, in line with national policy (DOE, 2005b). Key district services include: advice and co-ordination on curriculum; education for learners with special needs; and institutional management and governance (IMG). District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) have been developed to support, monitor and evaluate schools in each district. DBSTs include advisors responsible for IMG at schools, school administration, general education and training (GET), and special needs, including school psychologists, social workers and learning-support advisors. The task of the DBST is to plan and to advise on the most appropriate support programme to be provided to the school and the respective learners. This will entail new linkages and networks as well as new fields of operation and will have implications for the training of educators, managers and specialised staff.

This research focused specifically on educational psychologists working within the DBSTs in the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). The WCED is divided into eight education districts, namely Metro Central, Metro South, Metro North, Metro East, Cape Winelands, Eden and Central Karoo, Overberg and West Coast.

1.2 Rationale

Educational psychologists have traditionally relied exclusively on a medical-model paradigm for conceptualising and providing professional services (Engelbrecht, 2004; Mathukrishna & Baez, 2002). However, with the proposed theoretical shift towards more inclusive and systemic ways of practicing it is unclear 1) which theoretical approach(es) educational psychologists currently use to understand service users' presenting problems and how to assist them and 2) what this approach entails in practice. The literature (policies, legislation, educational advisers, psychology boards, etc.) offers descriptions of what educational psychologists should be doing with regard to the changing roles within a systemic framework, but there is little offered with regard to what they are actually doing in practice. An examination of the literature revealed a lack of studies containing rich descriptions of the practices of educational psychologists, particularly with regards to theoretical approaches supported and implemented.

Keeping the above theoretical shift in mind, this research aimed to explore which theoretical approach(es) educational psychologists working at the District Offices in the Western Cape,

make use of today. In addition, though the systemic approach is fundamentally sound in theory, are educational psychologists able to apply it in practice?

Change provides a natural and compelling opportunity to examine the field of educational psychology and obliges educational psychologists to engage in a process of professional introspection and self-examination (Engelbrecht, 2004). Educational psychologists need to be aware of how and why their working contexts have changed in order to meet the new challenges in implementing systemic and inclusive practices. In redefining the roles of educational psychologists, there is firstly a need to acknowledge the fact that appropriate educational-psychological support within inclusive education demands the development of a culture, which embodies systemic and inclusive values within a holistic approach to support. According to Ebersohn (2000) the values of a society are considered most important as they influence theoretical change and development. Swart and Pettipher (2005, p. 20) argue that “...real change is about an interaction between individual change and institutional change”. Therefore a paradigm shift requires change at an institutional level; change on a personal level; and interaction, understanding and collaboration between the two. Have educational psychologists adopted a new way of thinking? Do they have the specialised insight, skills and practice required to provide holistic health-promotive, developmental and preventive actions in relation to the learning and development of individuals, schools and communities? Furthermore, has their training equipped them to implement and deal with this new way of practising?

Making a paradigmatic shift from a reductionist and linear way of seeing the world to a systemic worldview poses an exceptional and complex challenge (De Jong, 1996). A shift in paradigms does not necessarily imply an overnight change in practices. The medical model is still frequently used as an explanatory framework for educational-psychological practice (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2005). It will be useful to consider the theoretical approaches currently underpinning educational psychologists’ practice, and what these approaches entail. Further information in this area should help new and established educational-psychological services to plan future developments and more efficacious practices. It may also contribute to new, innovative and relevant training models. Furthermore, the study could offer a new and useful conceptual constellation for guiding the professional work of educational psychologists.

1.3 Broad aims of research

With the development of educational psychology in mind, the overarching aim of this study was to explore the current theoretical approaches underpinning educational psychologists' practice in DBSTs in the Western Cape. Within this broad aim, the study aimed to identify which theoretical approach(es) the educational psychologists personally espouse and which theoretical approach(es) is/are espoused within the DBSTs. A further objective was to determine what the practices of their theory-in-use entailed. This line of questioning is based on Argyris and Schön's (1996) framework, which distinguishes the difference between espoused theory and theory-in-use. They define espoused theory as the theory people say they are following and theory-in-use as the theory that people actually follow in practice. Argyris and Schön (1996) highlight that actual behaviour may or may not be congruent with a person's espoused theory. This research therefore aimed to ascertain whether there is a match between educational psychologists' espoused theory and theory-in-use. Lastly the study aimed to explore the influence of the educational psychologists' university training on their current practice and whether further training was required to fulfil their role at the District Office.

This study concentrated solely on educational psychologists currently working at the Education District Offices in the Western Cape, and therefore excluded educational psychologists working in other contexts exclusively (e.g. private practice, schools, clinics, etc.). The author decided to focus on the DBSTs as the context of formal schooling and the particular demands that emanate from that context, necessitate an important debate about the most appropriate theoretical approach for effective service delivery.

1.4 Research questions

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

- 1.1. What are the theoretical approach(es) underpinning educational psychologists' practice in DBSTs?
 - 1.1.1. Which theoretical approach(es) do they personally espouse?
 - 1.1.2. Which theoretical approach(es) is espoused within the DBSTs?
 - 1.1.3. What does their theory-in-use entail in practice within the DBSTs?
 - 1.1.4. How do a) the theory that they personally espouse, b) the theory espoused within DBSTs and c) the theory-in-use within the DBSTs, correspond?

2. What role does their initial training play in their current practice?

1.5 Definition of key concepts

For the purposes of this study, the following three concepts will briefly be explained to give the reader a sense of context and understanding when reading this research: 1) Theoretical approach(es) 2) Educational psychologist and 3) District-Based Support Teams.

1.5.1 Theoretical approach(es)

Although the term does not have a clear and consistent definition, “theoretical approach” (also termed “theoretical framework” or “conceptual framework”) is defined as any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels (e.g. grand, mid-range and explanatory) that can be applied to the understanding of phenomena (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). A theoretical approach can be viewed as the structure, the scaffolding, or the frame, which guides our thinking, actions and practices. In psychology, a theoretical approach is used to provide a model for understanding human thoughts, emotions and behaviours (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). As mentioned above, the profession of educational psychology has two dominant theoretical approaches (medical and systemic), which guide the practice of it.

1.5.2 Educational psychologist

To date, there continues to be a debate surrounding what constitutes the work of an educational psychologist. This may partly be due to the profession being so diverse – differences between countries, within countries, within services, and lastly at the level of individual educational psychologists (Good & Levin, 2001; Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009).

In addition there are a variety of titles used throughout the world to describe a person who provides psycho-educational services including counsellor, educational psychologist, professional of educational psychology, psychopedagog, psychologist, psychologist in education, psychologist in the schools or school psychologist (Jimerson, Skokut, Cardenas, Malone & Stewart, 2008b).

The International School Psychology Association (ISPA) describes school psychologists as professionals who provide “individual assessment of children who may display cognitive,

emotional, social or behavioural difficulties; develops and implements primary- and secondary-intervention programs; consults with teachers, parents and other relevant professionals; engages in programme development and evaluation; conducts research and helps prepare and supervise others” (Jimerson *et al.*, 2007, p. 1 in Jimerson *et al.*, 2008b). The Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), which represents the psychology profession defines educational psychologists as psychologists who, “assess, diagnose and intervene in order to facilitate the psychological adjustment and development of children and adolescents within the contexts of family, school, social or peer groups and communities” (PsySSA, 2009, p. 2).

In South Africa, the profession of psychology functions within registration categories (registered counsellors, psychometrists, clinical psychologists, counselling psychologists, educational psychologists, industrial psychologists, research psychologists, neuro-psychologists, and forensic psychologists) each with a defined scope of practice (HPCSA, 2011). Although the scopes of practice overlap, they are mostly determined by contexts within which psychologists are supposed to work. The Professional Board for Psychology acknowledges that all practitioners of the profession of psychology are competent to perform psychological acts within the ambit of competencies prescribed by their registration categories. All psychologists have skills unique to their fields that can benefit clients with various psychological problems. It is therefore important for psychology professionals to limit their activities to their particular scope of practice (HPCSA, 2011).

The scope of practice for educational psychologists defined by the HPCSA includes, “assessing, diagnosing, and intervening in order to optimise human functioning in the learning and development” context (HPCSA, 2011). (See Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1 for the complete scope of practice.)

It is important to note that within the South African context, a psychologist working within a school setting can be registered in any category of psychology and is not restricted to educational psychology. A psychologist working for a school is often referred to as a “school psychologist” or “educational psychologist”, as the focus is on learning and development within a school/education setting. However, the focus of this research was on educational psychology in particular and therefore only psychologists registered as educational

psychologists working in the DBSTs were interviewed. Throughout this research the term “educational psychologist” will be used to refer to the work of school and educational psychologists.

1.5.3 District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs)

Each Education District Office throughout the country has DBSTs, which provide support to the schools and learners. The team is multi-disciplinary in nature and therefore provides a multitude of services including: learning support, curriculum advice, counselling, psycho-educational services, training, mentoring, monitoring, consultation, classroom observation, programme development, inter-sectorial collaboration, development of institution-level support teams (ILSTs), etc.

1.6 Research design and methodology

A research paradigm refers to the manner in which one looks at the world (Wellington, 2000). To address the absence of educational psychologists’ voices in the literature, this study required a research paradigm that would facilitate the expression of their own views, practices and experiences to the researcher. An interpretive constructivist paradigm was thus employed, which allows for a deeper understanding of the meanings people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experience they have in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The goal of research within this paradigm is defined as describing and understanding, rather than explaining and predicting human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). An interpretive stance has been taken, which assumes that experiences, words, actions and meanings can only be ascertained in relation to the contexts in which they occur. This requires a certain level of “empathy” from the researcher, whereby it is necessary to try and understand the point of view of the participants involved in the study (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006).

A research design is a plan of how one is to carry out the research process (Mouton, 2001). In keeping with the constructivist, interpretive paradigm, a qualitative research design was used. A qualitative research method is a method that is explorative, descriptive, contextual and inductive in nature. Using this methodology implies that data is in the form of words, as opposed to numbers and is therefore subjective. Qualitative studies enable the researcher to study specific issues in depth, openness and detail as they identify and attempt to understand

the information that emerges from the participants (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). As is often the case with qualitative studies, a small sample was selected, which provided for a more detailed and in-depth analysis (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The knowledge that was gained came from the educational psychologists' personal accounts.

Research methods refer to the various procedures and tools (such as participant selection, data collection and data analysis) to be implemented in the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). I used a non-probability, purposeful sampling technique to obtain the participants. The participants consisted of eight educational psychologists currently practising at one of the Education District Offices in the Western Cape. Data was collected by means of a literature review, a self-administered questionnaire, individual interviews and also my own research journal containing notes on my observations and experiences during the research process. Data was analysed by means of qualitative thematic analysis and interpretation. Thematic analysis involves constant reading and movement across the data to identify, code, and categorise the emergent themes (Silverman, 2004). After refinement, the themes are collated, compared, analysed and interpreted with the intention of explaining why things are as you have found them.

1.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical responsibility is of the utmost importance throughout the research process to guard against any possible harmful effects of the research on the participants. Ethical clearance was granted by the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee, as well as the Western Cape Education Department (see Addendum A). Permission to contact the educational psychologists was obtained from the head of each Education District Office (see Addendum B). Voluntary participation was ensured and written informed consent was obtained from the participants (see Addendum C).

1.8 Personal position

In qualitative research, it is the researcher who is the primary instrument for generating data. It is therefore the researcher who decides what questions to ask, what to observe and what to write down. The researcher brings certain values, assumptions, beliefs and biases to the study (Mertens, 2005). It is therefore essential that as the researcher, I was aware that my own perspective could influence the research process. Therefore it was necessary to acknowledge,

reflect and constantly monitor my personal position, as both a researcher and intern educational psychologist, throughout the research. With that said, it may be useful to briefly mention my own background in relation to educational psychology.

I entered the Master's in Educational Psychology (MEdPsych) Programme without fully knowing what the role of an educational psychologist entailed. I just knew I wanted to work with children, was a teacher, and was interested in psychology (I had an Honours in psychology) so it seemed the best option. My only "encounter" with an educational psychologist was a written report obtained for a learner in my Grade 7 class. The report indicated that the learner had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and was placed on medication. The report was filed and that was the last I "heard" from the educational psychologist.

During my first semester of the MEdPsych programme I followed a module on inclusive education, which focused on the shift from the medical model to the systemic model when dealing with and supporting psychological and educational difficulties. We read and discussed the topic of the changing roles of educational psychologists due to this paradigmatic shift and looked at possible ways of delivering psycho-educational services to all. As was my experience, educational psychologists were often seen in a bad light with the role of assessing and labelling children and offering little advice in terms of what to do to support the child. With this theoretical shift taking place I began to wonder whether educational psychologists had changed their theoretical perspectives and what their current practices involved. During my internship the scope of practice for educational psychologists was revised and a new scope was developed at the end of 2009.

1.9 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been to outline the intentions of the research as well as to familiarise the reader with the topic at hand. The chapters following will proceed with theory relevant to the research question, methods of data collection and analysis and finally findings, discussion and meaning-making. More specifically: Chapter 2 of this paper will focus on giving a theoretical background to the study and literature review; Chapter 3 will encompass research design and methodology; Chapter 4 will entail a report on the results and interpretation of the findings. Chapter 5 will contain conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The main focus of this research was to describe and understand the theoretical approaches underpinning educational psychologists' practice at the District Offices in the Western Cape and to look at how these approaches are practically implemented. A secondary aim was to identify whether these educational psychologists' university training equipped them to deal with their current job descriptions. In order to do this, I will first look closely at the theoretical perspectives/models in the field of educational psychology that are particularly relevant. Secondly, I will examine the history and development of the educational system and educational psychology in South Africa, as well as internationally. This will provide a context for understanding the discipline and its practices more clearly. Lastly, I will examine the current research in the area of educational psychology both nationally and worldwide.

2.2 Theoretical approaches

There has been a theoretical shift (related to disability, educational and psychological support) occurring in the 21st century from a primarily medical perspective, which focuses on the individual; to a more contemporary perspective, which focuses on the interaction between the individual and the environment (Green 2001; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). Several terms are often used interchangeably to refer to this more holistic approach, such as a systemic or systems approach; an ecological, bio-ecological, ecosystemic or ecological systems approach. This is the first major paradigmatic change in Western thought since the 1500s (Poplin, 1988). This shift has taken place as a result of traditional practice being demonstrated to be insufficient. As society's needs and values change, a new way of thinking about human nature evolves. This change is reflected in a number of disciplines. This has been the case in the field of education and psychology. Inclusive ideas, theories and research agendas have been largely informed by systemic and human rights perspectives. This has led to a proposed change of roles and practices for educational psychologists from traditional child-focused assessments and interventions to systemically-orientated problems or solution-focused consultations with school staff and parents. The presenting "problem" should be viewed as multi-factorial in origin, and interventions aimed at different levels (i.e., the classroom, school, teachers, family, child, curriculum, policy, etc.) (Stobie *et al.*, 2002b).

In order to fully understand a systemic approach to educational psychology it is helpful to firstly examine its historical precedent – the medical model. The following section aims to explore this traditional approach in more detail.

2.2.1 A medical approach

The medical approach or within-child model is ultimately a model of diagnosis and treatment. The medical model claims that any illness, problem, or deficit is inherent. This model views that the impairment is the problem, and they seek to change or “cure” the impairment in order to make the person “normal”. When applying the medical approach to education, the origin of any type of learning difficulty, difference or disability is looked for within the learner (Lewis, 1999). The child with the disability/deficit is assessed and diagnosed with a particular intrinsic deficit and labelled and categorised accordingly (e.g. Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), deaf, blind, dyslexic, cognitively impaired, physically or mentally disabled). Children are often treated differently as a result of such labels. Thus children that do not “fit into” the existing education programmes would have to attend special schools and remedial classes in order to “fix” them and alleviate their differences. Such education aims to provide the learner with a special curriculum and interventions provided by professionals who have specialised skills and expert knowledge. Specialised educators and other professionals such as educational psychologists are viewed as the only knowledgeable experts that can assess, identify and treat the learner with the disability. “Key concepts associated with the medical model include: ‘special educational needs’, ‘handicap’, ‘disability’, ‘defect’, ‘deficiency’, ‘remedial’, ‘diagnostic’, ‘cases’ ‘prognosis’, ‘prescriptive’, ‘segregation’ and ‘exclusion’ ” (Landsberg *et al.*, 2005, p. 5).

There has been much criticism of the medical model and many view it as problematic in understanding education today. Pelligrini (2009) argues that “within-child” models of conceptualising difficulties can lead to individual assessment and fail to provide educational psychologists with a broad investigative focus that includes attention to the systems of which children are a part. Sheridan and Gutkin (2000) point out that although assessing, diagnosing and treating pathologies of learners are relevant for much clinical work, it is too restrictive in scope for educational support services. They continue to point out that neither education support professionals, nor learners, function in isolation. A systemic approach emphasises that we are all influenced by the multiple systems that surround us and the many systems of

which we are a part. “... we cannot serve children effectively by de-contextualising their problems as internal pathologies, as the medical model would have us do. We must understand how 'dysfunction' relates to the larger systems that encompass our clients, and find ways to intervene effectively with these systems” (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000, p. 489).

It is important to highlight that a systemic approach does not disregard the medical perspective, but instead expands on the theory and fosters a more integrative, holistic understanding of an individual within his/her environment and context.

The following section will look at the systemic approach in more detail.

2.2.2 A systemic approach

Criticism of the medical model has led to a more social-systems theoretical perspective, whereby the process of learning and development is seen as occurring within a social context. The social-systems perspective arose out of a combination of family therapy, ecological and systems theory approaches (Donald *et al.*, 2010; Kaser, 1993). Family therapy grew out of the need to explain complex patterns of interaction between family members, which intra-psychic psychodynamic approaches might not address successfully (Pellegrini, 2009). “Ecological theory is based on the interdependence between different organisms and their physical environment. These relationships ... are seen holistically. Every part is as important as another in sustaining the cycles of birth and death ... which together ensure the survival of the whole system” (Donald *et al.*, 2010, p. 36). Systems theory sees different levels and groups of people as interacting systems – where functioning of the “whole is dependent on the interaction between all parts” (Donald *et al.*, 2010, p. 36).

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of the 1970s and more recently, the revised bio-ecological model, has had significant influence on the shaping and creation of our understanding of how different levels of systems, in the social context, interact in the process of an individual’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992). This theoretical approach has great relevance for emphasising the importance of the interaction between the development of an individual and the systems within the individual’s social context. Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological theory looks at an individual’s development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992). This theoretical

approach claims that in order to bring about change within an individual, it is necessary to work with the different levels of the system. Bio-ecological theory opposes the idea of change being seen as a linear cause and effect. Instead the concept of circular causality states that change (or activity) in any part of a system or individual affects other systems and individuals and at a later time could be seen as a cause for change. The bio-ecological theory strives to understand possible intrinsic factors (the “bio”), contextual/environmental factors (the ecology), as well as social changes contributing to an individual’s learning and development. The interdependence and relationships between people, groups, organisations and the physical environment are explored. The context of a learner is considered very important, as each learner’s context, history and personal characteristics are different. Whereas the medical perspective fails to consider an individual’s context and the individual is evaluated as though separate to his/her environment, the bio-ecological approach claims that the learner and his/her environment cannot be separated and is concerned with the real-life situations in which children exist.

Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological theory defines complex “layers” of the environment, each having an effect on an individual’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992). This theory emphasises the interaction between factors in the child’s maturing biology, his/her immediate family/community environment, and the societal landscape fuelling and steering his/her development. Changes or conflict in any one layer will ripple through to other layers. To study a child’s development then, we must look not only at the child and his/her immediate environment, but also at the interaction of the larger environment. Bronfenbrenner's model includes five systems, which interact with an individual: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The interaction of structures within a layer and interactions of structures between layers is key to the bio-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

The microsystem – this is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. The microsystem encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with his/her immediate surroundings. These types of interaction refers to face-to-face, usually continuous social interactions (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). Structures in the microsystem include family, school, neighbourhood, or childcare environments (Landsberg *et al.*, 2005). At this level, relationships can impact in two directions – both away from and

toward the child. For example, a child's parents may affect his beliefs and behaviour; however, the child also affects the behaviour and beliefs of the parent. Bronfenbrenner calls these bi-directional influences, and he shows how they occur among all levels of environment (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). At the microsystem level, bi-directional influences are strongest and have the greatest impact on the child. However, interactions at outer levels can still impact the inner structures.

The mesosystem – this layer refers to the relationships that develop and exist between the microsystems. In short, a mesosystem can be viewed as a system of microsystems (Landsberg *et al.*, 2005). These microsystems continuously interact with one another, modifying and influencing each other (Donald *et al.*, 2010). For example, a learner from an unstable family environment may not receive the support he requires at home, which may place him/her at risk of developing barriers to learning. However, the learner may have an understanding and attentive teacher at school who is able to provide a positive and nurturing environment. This may, over time, counteract the possible negative influence his/her home environment has on his/her learning and development. In turn, this may even impact the interactions the learner has at home (Landsberg *et al.*, 2005; Donald *et al.*, 2010).

The exosystem – this layer defines the larger social system in which the child does not function directly. The structures in this layer impact the child's development by interacting with some structure in his/her microsystem. The child may not be directly involved at this level, but he/she does feel the positive or negative force involved with the interaction with his own system (Donald *et al.*, 2010). Examples could include the education system (e.g. the curriculum, inclusive education policies), a parent's place of work, the media or a sibling's peer group.

The macrosystem – this layer may be considered the outermost layer in the child's environment. While not being a specific framework, this layer is comprised of social/cultural values, beliefs, practices and customs, as well as economic structures and laws, etc. (Landsberg *et al.*, 2005). The effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all other layers. For example, if it is the belief of the culture that parents should be solely responsible for raising their children, that culture is less likely to provide resources to help parents. This, in turn, affects the structures

in which the parents function. The parents' ability or inability to carry out that responsibility toward their child within the context of the child's microsystem is likewise affected.

The chronosystem – this system encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child's environments. Elements within this system can be either external, such as the timing of a parent's death, or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur with the aging of a child (Landsberg *et al.*, 2005).

Four further key components of this theory can be looked at to further understand the relevance of this framework. Firstly, an important component of this theory is that children are also active participants in their own development and the environment is therefore not simply impacting on the child. Children's perceptions and views of their context are central to understanding how they interact with their environments (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). Secondly, Bronfenbrenner refers to the fact that in adapting to internal and external change, systems attempt to maintain a "dynamic balance" (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). Within a system there are always experiences that cause a sense of disequilibrium, yet according to this framework, a system will always work towards achieving that sense of balance that is valued. A third key component (mentioned previously) is that which is referred to as "circular causality". This idea is quite opposite to that of linear cause and effect commonly associated with the medical model. Circular causality refers to the fact that "change (or activity) in any part of a system or individual affects other systems and individuals and at a later time could be seen as a cause for change" (Swart & Pettipher, 2005, p. 12). A final concept that is relevant is the notion that the whole system is greater than the sum of its parts. To understand the whole, the relationships between the different parts of the system need to be looked at. In terms of education, a school that encourages reciprocal relationships within the school environment is more effective than one that does not interact with different systems (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). All of these concepts that, although briefly, have been discussed are central to understanding the bio-ecological perspective.

Drawing on the bio-ecological theoretical framework one looks at how you might support a learner at the level of the individual, home, school and community and how you could strengthen partnerships and facilitate relationships between the various levels. A bio-ecological perspective is helpful in terms of planning interventions on multiple levels.

Systemic practice is concerned with change. Change also describes the outcome of the work that systemic practitioners do to facilitate problem resolution within systems. It could take the form of modified behaviour and structural re-organisation, and/or altered communication patterns and different understanding of problems (Pelligrini, 2009).

An important theoretical perspective that is aligned with a systemic approach and is therefore worth mentioning is that of constructivism. Constructivist perspectives on learning and teaching have become increasingly influential today. These views are grounded in the research of Piaget, Vygotsky, the Gestalt psychologists, Bartlett and Bruner, as well as the progressive educational philosophy of Dewey. There are different types of constructivist perspectives, with subtly different meanings. Constructivism is an alternative to positivism, structuralism and individualism, which maintain that knowledge is fixed and unchangeable and that behavioural and learning practices dwell in the heads of individuals (Dudley-Marling, 2004). Constructivists argue that knowledge is a social construction that is developed and learned through social interaction (Donald *et al.*, 2010). In other words, knowledge resides not only inside the person, but in the relationships, actions, artefacts, and objects surrounding him/her.

In summary, factors that can create barriers to learning and development can be located within the learner, within the family unit, within the school, within the education system and/or the broader social, cultural, economic and political context, and especially in the interactions among all these systems. In order to bring about change, it is necessary to examine and work with all these various systems, and not just at an individual level, as the medical model suggests.

While knowledge and understanding of the theoretical frameworks of this research are important, it would also be valuable to look practically at the historical and contextual development of education, and educationally psychology in South Africa, as well as internationally.

2.3. Overview of education and educational support in South Africa

It is important to know the context of South Africa and its relation to education and educational support. South Africa differs from the rest of the world as a result of its unique

history. Before 1994 South Africa was governed by a group subscribing to the principles of apartheid, a system whereby people were segregated based on race. This resulted in gross inequalities across all aspects of life, among which was the education system. Different state departments were responsible for the education of children from different race or ethnic groups, which inevitably led to differences in the quality of the education (Naicker, 1999). As a hierarchy of values attached to different race groups prevailed, the education services differed accordingly, which culminated in the majority of children in South Africa receiving sub-standard services, and thus being seriously disadvantaged. White English and Afrikaans people were privileged and had access to the best education and support services; whilst black and coloured people were excluded (DOE, 1997). There were 17 separate education departments with different policies for each of the various ethnic groups. Additionally, there was a vast disparity in funding and support provided by the government for each department (Engelbrecht, Kriegler & Booysen, 1996). Free and compulsory education was mandatory for whites, coloureds and Indians, but not for black people (DONE, 1997).

During the apartheid era, there was a focus on improving and expanding specialised education for white learners with disabilities. Separate schools were established to cater for their specific needs and more sophisticated support services and specialised teaching was provided. However, educational provision for disabled children from other population groups was scarce (DONE, 1997). The education system adopted the medical perspective and assessed and labelled learners according to their innate ability. Such labels determined whether the child could go to a mainstream school, a special school, or considered fundamentally deficient and therefore beyond support (Naicker, 1999). There was no move towards integrating special and regular education, as had been the general trend in other countries (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 1996).

In summary, education during the apartheid years in South Africa involved segregation and exclusion on the basis of race, as well as disability.

However, in 1994, South Africa entered a new era and became a democratic country. The South African Constitution was established with a focus on building a new nation, emphasising core values such as human dignity, equality, justice and freedom. Discrimination and prejudice were no longer to be tolerated and instead an inclusive philosophy was adopted

(Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996). Inclusion is essentially an international trend with the ultimate goal of promoting a more just and inclusive society, one which enables all children and adults, whatever their gender, age, race, ability, impairment or HIV status, to participate in and contribute to that society (Donald *et al.*, 2010). The new government placed improving education as a high priority, as it was viewed as a means of instilling the knowledge and values of democracy.

Reform since 1994 has made significant attempts to address the imbalances of the past and to bring education in South Africa in line with international standards. The 17 separate education departments were unified into a single Ministry of Education with a focus and commitment to inclusive education (South African Federal Council on Disability (SAFCD, 1995). The philosophy underpinning inclusive education is that every child can learn. Inclusive education ensures that all children are treated equally, are actively involved in all learning areas where possible, and aim to develop the full potential of all learners (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1994).

In order to further understand why there has been a shift in education from segregation to inclusion, it is important to examine the processes and goals of education both within South Africa and the wider international context. The following sections aim to do so by providing a closer look at the development of inclusive education internationally and nationally.

2.3.1 Inclusive education: international context

Before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 many children and adults were excluded from formal education altogether, as a result of schools not being sensitive to individual learning styles and backgrounds (Knowlton, 2004). Learners with a disability or any specific need that could not be catered for by the dominant education system were assessed, labelled with a deficit and placed in separate “special” schools, away from their peers, where they were taught by specialised support staff (Sands *et al.*, 2000). This led to the development of two separate systems of education within countries – regular and special education (Kisanji, 1999).

The realisation that these exclusionary education practices were unacceptable was solidified when, in 1948, the international human rights movement exposed educational practices in

many countries as questionable. The beginnings of a change in paradigm became evident when “normalisation” was introduced. The concept of normalisation originated in Scandinavia but came to the fore in America in the late 1960s. “Normalisation” can be defined as making available to all handicapped people patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life of society” (Swart & Pettipher, 2005, p. 6). In education, normalisation involved making maximum use of the regular school system with a minimum resort to separate facilities. This process placed children with special needs into “normal” schools and expected them to adjust and fit in like the other “normal” children.

However, normalisation did not recognise the existence of a wide range of individual differences in society and people's individuality seemed to be overlooked. It may, therefore, be argued that normalisation gave rise to the concept of integration, which is essentially the equivalent of mainstreaming (Kinsella & Senior, 2008). To respond to these apparent weaknesses, integration was seen as a reasonable arrangement. Integration recognised the existence of a continuum of services, from the special school, special class to the regular class with or without support. When entering a mainstream class, the child with a disability had to prove his/her readiness to “fit in”. The idea was that children with disabilities could only receive education if they could interact appropriately with other children; they had special equipment; they had one-on-one support with a specialised teacher and they could follow the curriculum. The schools, classrooms or teachers never adjusted to fit the needs of the incoming learners, but expected them to change and adapt (Landsberg *et al.*, 2005; Rieser, 2002). Although integration involved “more extensive participation of learners with special needs in age-appropriate activities with non-disabled peers, significant instruction time in separate settings still prevailed” (Engelbrecht, 2004, p. 4). It can be argued that integration actually reinforced the medical paradigm by focusing on the problem within the individual and the individual's need to be “fixed” or cured (Sands *et al.*, 2000). Integration was about getting learners to “fit” into a particular kind of system.

A new understanding took shape around the mid 1990s, focusing on the need for an “inclusive society” and closely focusing on an education system's role in doing so. The differences became apparent between integration and inclusion: inclusion was seen as a re-conceptualisation of beliefs and values (Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn, & Christensen, 2006). These

values celebrated diversity and were to become a way of “being”, not simply a set of practices or policies.

This inclusive approach to education received its first major boost at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. The purpose of the conference was to extend the objective of education to being a fundamental human right. The Salamanca Statement asserted that “inclusion is a right, a right which is universal, seeing the creation of inclusive schools as part of the creation of an inclusive society” (Engelbrecht, 2004, p. 4). This conference paved the way for fundamental policy shifts to occur internationally and nationally. The statement proclaimed that regular schools with an inclusive orientation were... “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all, moreover they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system” (Engelbrecht, 2004, p. 4). The Salamanca Statement described specifically what the ideal was that all countries and education systems should be aiming for – inclusive schools that recognises and respond to the diverse needs of their learners, accommodating all learners, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have and that the state should offer a continuum of educational support services to support the development of inclusive schools (Fuchs & Fuchs; 1994).

Inclusive education is about more than disability and there are many other target groups who have a right to access. Inclusive education recognises that special learning needs can arise from social, psychological, economic, linguistic, cultural as well as physical (or disability) factors (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Swart 2004). Barriers to learning can therefore be caused by intrinsic difficulties such as disabilities, learning disorders, chronic health problems or emotional issues; or by external circumstances such as poverty, hunger, abuse, cultural and language differences; or by systemic factors such as an inappropriate curriculum or assessment tools (UNESCO, 1994).

Both internationally and in South Africa, a move toward inclusion is in motion, policies are continuously being revised and there is constant effort to make practices more inclusive. It is important to note though, that institutional access alone does not necessarily create the grounds for inclusive education. Wiebe Berry (2006) argues that it is what goes on in a place

(not the location itself) that can potentially make the difference. While access and presence in “mainstream” classrooms is a necessary step towards inclusive education, it is not entirely enough. It is what happens in the classrooms and schools that is equally critical to achieving true inclusive education. Active participation and support is necessary on all levels and requires working systemically – government, NGOs, parents, teachers, school and learners should be involved and interact with one another. Inclusive education is therefore an all-out drive, which needs to be action orientated and involvecombine everyone for success. The key to successful inclusion lies in addressing the needs of the education system/setting, to ensure that the needs of the learner are met, rather than focusing on the learner needing to fit into the system (Donald *et al.*, 2010). Schools should be seen as inclusive sites of learning which foster a sense of belonging and welcome diversity. Schools and the curriculum need to be flexible, supportive and co-operative to accommodate the diversity of all learners (Donald *et al.*, 2010; McLeskey & Waldron, 2007). This involves recognising and responding to the fact that learners all have strengths and weaknesses. Engelbrecht and Green (2001) argue that *educators should not think in terms of two kinds of learners, the “normal” and the “special”, but about one diverse and changeable population of learners who learn in a variety of ways and have the right to appropriate education.*

The following section will examine inclusive education and systemic thinking within the South Africa context, with a focus on the reconstruction and development of education and educational support.

2.3.2 Inclusive education: South African context

Both international and national trends regarding disability have undergone major shifts which have influenced the movement towards inclusive education in South Africa to a large extent. These shifts centred mainly on the move from a medical perspective to a systemic and rights perspective (equal opportunity for all) (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht, 1999).

Since 1994, education legislation and policy have reflected the commitment of the South African government to address the diversity in the learner population and provide a continuum of educational support within a democratic South Africa. Individual rights and social change are considered a central component in decision-making (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001). Both the SAFCD and the South African Constitution advocated a non-discriminatory

type of education. The SAFCD called for a “...a single inclusive education system that is responsive to the diverse needs of all learners, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning, as well as different language needs in the case of deaf learners where their first language is sign language, and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organisational arrangements, technical strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities” (SAFCD, 1995, p. 1). The South African Constitution declared the fundamental rights of post-apartheid, South African citizens, one of which is “the right to basic education and to equal access to educational institutions (RSA, 1996, p. 16).

At the beginning of 1997, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS), were appointed to investigate and make recommendations on all aspects of special needs and support services in South Africa (DNE, 1997). Historically there was a division between Education Support Services (ESS) and Special Needs Education, which resulted in the promotion of ESS as services that were provided separately to ordinary education provision, used only when needed. This isolated learners with special educational needs. The nature of these services tended to reflect highly specialised interventions directed at a limited number of individuals in predominantly urban areas, and problems in the education system itself were seldom addressed by these services (DNE, 1997).

The NCESS and NCSNET adopted an integrated and systemic approach to education and educational support. They declared that “special needs” should not only refer to the learner’s needs, but include the system’s needs as well. The role of educational support services is therefore to address both these needs. Acknowledging that “special needs” often arise as a result of barriers in the system, it was suggested that instead of referring to “learners with special needs”, we should refer to “learners who experience barriers to learning”. The NCSNET (1998) defined ESS to include all human and other resources that help to develop and support the education system so that it is responsive to the different needs of all learners and the system. The fundamental role of the ESS was to ensure that all learners had equal access to the education system and were able to participate optimally in the learning process.

White Paper 6 entitled, “Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System”, (DOE, 2001) built on previous documents and legislation by placing

inclusive education at the core of education transformation in South Africa. White Paper 6 emphasises a systems approach (based on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model) to educational reform and recognises that barriers to education can be located within the learner, within the site of learning or school, within the education system and within the broader social, economic and political context. It puts forward a role for schools in addressing the full range of learning needs created by these different barriers. White Paper 6 recognises that, developing learners' strengths and empowering and enabling them to participate actively and critically in the learning process involves identifying and overcoming the causes of learning difficulties.

White Paper 6 reinforced the NCSNET's notion that the key to reducing barriers to learning within all education and training was in strengthening education support services. In the previous system, education support services were separate, fragmented and specialised with little co-ordination or collaboration between disciplines. However, the Department of Education has committed to "developing the capacity of all support service providers to provide a holistic and comprehensive service, including the ability to 'work together' in coordinated and collaborative ways" (DOE, 2001).

The Department of Education (2005a) declared that, "support must no longer be seen as focusing on 'deficits' that have been 'diagnosed' in individual learners who are assumed to be in need of 'remediation' through individual attention by specialist staff". Instead support is defined as all activities, which increase the capacity of a school to respond to diversity. Providing support to individuals is only one way of attempting to make learning contexts and lessons accessible to all learners. Support is also provided, for example, when schools review their cultures, policies and practices to determine how supportive these are of individual educator, parent and learner needs. Support is provided when educators plan lessons in such a way that they accommodate all learners. As such, support must then focus on the learning and teaching process by identifying and addressing learner, educator and institutional needs.

One of the main strategies for developing an inclusive system of support involves the formation of support teams at every level of the system: institutional, district, provincial and national. The aim of these support teams is to address all possible barriers to learning, with a focus on providing support, as well as developing and implementing preventative strategies.

These interventions should aim to strengthen positive influences and to reduce or mitigate the negative ones (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2010a).

At institutional level, all schools and higher education institutions are required to establish Institutional-Level Support Teams (ILSTs)/School Support Teams (SSTs). The ILST should be made up of school management, educators, parents/caregivers, community members and learners (where applicable). These services should support the learning and teaching process by identifying and addressing learner, educator and institutional needs (DBE, 2010a) At district level, DBSTs are responsible for supporting schools, parents and the community to organise appropriate support for all learners. The functions of the DBSTs include: training, mentoring, monitoring and consultation. The DBSTs analyse and verify the content and procedures followed at institutional level in order to plan and advise on the most appropriate support programme to be provided to the school and the respective learner. A further role is to train teachers and support staff about inclusive education, as well as equip them with the necessary skills to be able to deal with all barriers to learning. The DBST is trans-disciplinary in nature and has representation from several domains such as, Early Childhood Development (ECD), curriculum advisors, institutional development/education management, teacher development, inclusive education, learning-support facilitators, special needs specialists (e.g. relating to specific disabilities), therapists, psychologists and other health- and welfare professionals (Department of Education, 2005b). Further support structures exist at provincial (Provincial Task Team (PTT)) and national (National Task Team (NTT)) level. The PTTs and NTTs should work together with the DBSTs in addition to various other support systems, which have a large influence on the education system. These include: the Departments of Health, Social Development, Justice, Correctional Services, Safety and Security, Transport, Sport and Recreation, Labour, Public Works and Agriculture, as well as local government structures such as community members, members of NGOs and CBOs, faith-based organisations (FBOs), traditional leaders, traditional/indigenous healers, academic institutions and research organisations, such as the Children's Institute, etc (DBE, 2010a).

Another strategy supporting inclusive education adopted by the Department of Education is the conversion of special schools to resource centres and the development of full-service schools/colleges. Special schools are schools that provide education to learners who need high-level individualised and specialised support on a high-frequency basis. These schools

are to be used as resource centres so that they can provide advice, guidelines, training and mentoring on a consultative and part-time basis to both teachers and learners in ordinary schools with regard to curriculum, assessment and instruction matters (DBE, 2010b). Full-service schools are schools that will be equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs to learners.

Whereas the implementation of White Paper 6 (2001) to date has focused primarily on disability-related barriers (intrinsic), its intention is to address the multiple levels of barriers to learning (including systemic and societal barriers) (DBE, 2010c). In order to realise this intent, the DBE has recently implemented the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) Programme to address all barriers to learning (DBE, 2010c). The vision of the CSTL Programme is that the educational rights of vulnerable children are realised through schools becoming inclusive centres of learning, care and support. The DBE (2010b) has adopted the Department of Social Development's definition of a vulnerable child as, "a child whose survival, care, protection or development may be compromised due to a particular condition, situation or circumstance that prevents the fulfilment of his or her rights" (Department of Social Development, 2005 in DBE, 2010b, p.19). Implicit in this definition is that vulnerability is not a constant state. It will change as a child's circumstances change and no child is immune from potential vulnerability. An ecological systems approach is emphasised in applying CSTL, which recognises that barriers to education include: intrinsic barriers (located largely within the individual child, such as physical, mental and health-related problems), systemic barriers (such as inadequate infrastructure, inappropriate teaching methods or materials, poorly trained teachers, insufficient support for teachers, and policy and curriculum issues) and societal barriers (including severe poverty, unemployment, inadequate care-giving arrangements, child labour, violence against children, crime, etc.). The CSTL Programme outlines the process of mainstreaming care and support for teaching and learning into policies, programmes and processes within the education sector. To guide this vision and ensure the mainstreaming of care and support, the National Support Pack (NSP) was developed. It contains implementation guidelines and tools that provide a step-by-step guide to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate programmes within the CSTL framework. Provinces, district, school-based officials, as well as all non-governmental organisations currently providing care and support in schools are strongly encouraged to apply the principles of the NSP in their work.

However, despite coming a long way, South African society currently faces many challenges of development (Du Toit & Forlin, 2009). One of the most urgent of those challenges is reconstructing education from what it has been to a system that brings equal opportunities for all children. Apartheid policies have left a legacy of severe disparities with the result that learners of all ages find themselves in a society struggling to meet the most fundamental needs of all its citizens – nutrition, shelter and basic education (DBE, 2010b).

Within the educational context, socio-economic-related factors contribute to high teacher-learner ratios, textbook and other resource shortages, and inadequate and inappropriate provision of educational support services (DBE, 2010b). The incidence and prevalence of disabilities among school-going children are compelling, which is made worse by a shortage and lack of expertise among teachers. The facilities for children with special educational needs are lacking, limited or non-existent in schools and particularly in rural areas (Ebersohn, 2000). South African learners are also faced with personal and environmental stressors that put them at risk for emotional, behavioural and academic difficulties. Risks that are common for South African children include violence, abuse, undernourishment, HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, ineffective developmental transitions and commercial exploitation (Engelbrecht, 2004). Furthermore, prevailing difficulties in schools, including ineffectively trained educators, a lack of a positive teaching and learning culture, and poor or no collaboration with parents of learners, contribute to the stressors with which learners and educators have to cope (Ebersohn, 2000).

The establishment of DBSTs is not yet a reality in all provinces, yet there are some teams that are functioning effectively at present (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). All provinces still have a long way to go – either in terms of getting infrastructure and resources in place or creating understanding and attitudes among teachers and other professionals towards inclusion and diversity that will promote the inclusive ideals that Education White paper 6 outlines. The real challenge facing the South African education system will be in the implementation of these recommendations (Lazarus & Lomofsky, 2001).

Making sure that every young South African receives quality schooling is an urgent need. “Action Plan 2014”, and a long-term vision called “Schooling 2025”, is to be implemented in 2012 (DBE, 2011a). Schooling 2025 will allow for the monitoring of progress against a set of

measurable indicators is for in the basic education sector. It will cover all aspects of basic education including among others, the enrolments of learners, and retention of teachers, infrastructure, school funding, learner well-being and school safety, mass literacy and educational quality.

There has been a large focus on creating a curriculum suitable to the needs of the South African learners. Outcomes-Based- Education (OBE) was initially introduced as the answer as how to best educate learners. However, in November 2009 the Minister of Basic Education announced that OBE was inaccessible to teachers and was to be phased out. A new educational policy was approved in January 2011 known as, “Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement” (CAPS). Every subject in each grade now has a single, comprehensive and concise Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement that provides details on what teachers ought to teach and assess on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis. Provision has also been made in the CAPS documents for learners who experience barriers to learning. The reworked “National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12”, is to be implemented during the period 2012–2014. The National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12, adopts a flexible learner-based and learner-paced approach to the curriculum, whereby all learners should be enabled to achieve their full potential.

“The National Protocol for Assessment Grades R–12” states that every learner should have access to the standard of assessment that is suited to his or her needs. No learner should be disadvantaged by the system in as far as that there will be a lowering of expectations or he or she is not assessed at all. The main objective of assessing learners is to provide support in order to enhance individual growth and development and to facilitate their learning. The emphasis is not placed on labelling and categorising an individual. The Department of Education (2005a) states that assessment of children’s learning should make use of a multi-dimensional information-gathering approach. Information should be gathered from multiple measures, domains, sources, settings and occasions.

When compiling the assessment profiles of learners and determining their support needs, there are numerous factors that need to be closely considered (DOE, 2005a). Such factors include: learning (including communication and cognitive issues, etc.), behaviour (social conventions, socio-emotional factors, etc.), physical (motor, mobility, sensory, self-care,

medical conditions, etc.) environmental and contextual factors (nutritional needs, transport considerations, family dynamics and support, etc.) and socio-economic. The “National Protocol for Assessment Grade R–12” outlines three types of alternate assessments for learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities, and for other learners who experience barriers to learning and who may need alternate ways in which to demonstrate whether or not they have attained the knowledge, concepts and skills. It also provides a mechanism that ensures that these learners are included in an educational accountability system (DBE, 2011b).

The following learners are regarded as learners with special needs for whom measures should be taken in ordinary as well as special schools to assist with the barriers to learning that they face: learners who have neurological barriers to learning; learners who have hearing impairments (deaf and hard-of-hearing learners); learners who have severe visual barriers to learning; learners who have physical barriers to learning; learners who experience mild-to-severe intellectual barriers to learning; learners with severe behavioural and emotional barriers to learning; learners with any medically assessed special need; and learners with multiple barriers to learning.

In summary, in order for inclusive education to be successful, every level of the system must be developed to accommodate diversity and to provide a supportive teaching and learning environment for all. There is a need for effective interventions at intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, institutional and societal levels.

As a result of major changes within the education system and the provision of educational support, the discipline of educational psychology has had to review its approaches and practices. The following sections aim to examine educational psychology, both internationally and in South Africa.

2.4 Reconstruction and development of educational psychology

Worldwide (in countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, South Africa, Estonia and Hong Kong) there has been a reconstruction of educational-psychological services within the movement towards inclusive and systemic thinking. A major theme has been an increased emphasis on

indirect service delivery and prevention, rather than direct work with individual children. However, this shift in thinking is not new to the profession and has been a hot topic for many decades. A famous text entitled, *Reconstructing Educational Psychology (REP)* (Gillham, 1978) has been very influential in spurring the ongoing debate about the need to redefine the roles and practices of educational psychology. In 1978, Gillham declared aspects of educational-psychological practice to be outdated and ill-judged. He called for new ideals in the profession, those based on the application of psychology, rather than the employment of intelligence quotient (IQ) tests which constituted the work of many educational psychologists at that time. A key point was that in order to help children, it was necessary to change what happened to them. A literature analysis conducted a year later indicated much agreement with Gillham's sentiments. Several authors noted that in order to resolve educational problems educational psychologists should direct their attention toward the classroom and the instructional processes that take place there (Clinefelter, 1979). However, this reconstruction process has never fully taken place. It is over three decades later and there continues to be uncertainty surrounding what constitutes the discipline of educational psychology. This may partly be due to the profession being so diverse – differences between countries, within countries, within services, and lastly at the level of individual educational psychologists (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Good, & Levin, 2001). As a result, the profession has been referred to as having an identity crisis and some authors have cautioned that it may even be in danger of becoming obsolete (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009).

Gillham suggested in 1978 that the profession of educational psychology needed to move away from individual case work and do more systemic work. In South Africa the same shift was recommended around the mid 1980s (Donald, 1984; Kriegler, 1989; Sharratt, 1995). It is over 30 years on, and there is evidence that the same discussions still exist. Articles continue to be written and research conducted on the many questions that still prevail: What exactly do educational psychologists do (Cameron, 2006)? Have they made the theoretical shift to systemic practice (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000)? What are their current practices and roles (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010; Kennedy, 2006; Love, 2009)? What are the challenges experienced (Stobie *et al.*, 2002b)? What are the training needs (Kenedy, Cameron & Monsen, 2009; Parkinson, 2004)? What does the future hold for educational psychology (Alexander, 2004; Baxter & Frederickson, 2005; Gersch, 2009; Hatzichristou, 2002; MacKay, 2002; Parkinson, 2004; Sheridan & D'Amato, 2004; Stobie, 2002a)? Many of the

papers delivered at the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) annual conference included topics such as contemporary society's expectations of educational psychology, and a role for educational psychologists within these expectations (Love, 2009). In addition, recent issues in the journal entitled, *Educational Psychology in Practice* examined the distinctive contribution of educational psychology and a perceived "identity crisis" of its practitioner. In South Africa a task team was appointed to examine the field of educational psychology and define the profession and scope of practice more clearly.

A large dilemma surrounding the profession remains about the level at which the work of an educational psychologist should be aimed. The levels can include the individual child, parents, family, peers, teachers, school, organisations, government (policy and planning), etc. Whilst there has been much emphasis placed on moving away from individual child-focused work, there remains a strong argument for the need for this type of work within the education sphere. It can be argued that the re-constructionist movement ignores what can be done usefully at the level of the child in his/her immediate context (Norwich, 2005). Furthermore, the more one takes a systemic psychology perspective, the less one is working in distinctive ways from other allied professional groups (Norwich, 2005). Those psychologists interested in systemic levels, it might be argued, could move onto other roles – "such as administration, consultancies and so on – a lapsed psychology or going beyond psychology" (Stobie *et al.*, 2002b, p. 392). It has also been said that the educational psychologist is not wholly necessary for a systemic intervention to be successful, and these services are increasingly being delivered by professional groups other than educational psychologists (Farrell *et al.*, 2006).

Often educational-psychology professionals have been trained in the medical model, and prefer viewing themselves as professionals focusing on a specific field, without having to extend themselves by getting involved in broader issues (Eloff, Maree & Ebersöhn, 2006). In addition many schools, teachers, parents, and in some cases, local authorities, expect educational psychologists to do individual work. Furthermore, a strength of the child-focused approach is that few people in the education sphere are qualified, equipped or willing to tackle this type of work.

Boyle and Lauchlan (2009, p. 79) believe that the shift from individual casework to systemic work has led to an "underachieving and under-confident profession in danger of becoming

obsolete”. They suggest that as the profession has moved away from the child-deficit model it may have also left behind psychological theory, therefore losing a psychological basis to its approach.

The use of psychometric tests is regularly disputed within the profession. MacKay (1999, p. 822) argued: “...it [psychometric testing] has been the subject of theoretical and practical debate at a level which has challenged its entire foundations”. Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) explain that the reason that individual casework and assessment is continually discredited is the traditional link of this kind of work to psychometric testing. The use of psychometric tests is not, nor should it be, solely about obtaining IQ scores, but should be used in conjunction with other assessments to provide a greater understanding of an individual child’s strengths and areas of weakness. This in turn can influence subsequent interventions as well as providing a greater knowledge for other professionals, as well as the parents of the child. Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) emphasise that there is far more to individual casework than psychometric assessment. There is a need to communicate both within and without the profession that individual casework does not automatically infer the use of psychometric testing. This may be particularly necessary to change public perceptions of the use of psychometric testing, since there remains an attitude among teachers, parents, and educational and governmental administrators that “there can be standardised solutions to real-world problems” (Lunt & Majors, 2000, p. 242). A role for the educational psychologist may be in communicating the limitations of psychometric testing, and in promoting alternative approaches to assessment and individual work, which may be just as informative as psychometric tests (Lauchlan, 2001). Furthermore, Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) suggest one should celebrate casework and communicate that sometimes it is acceptable to be involved in such individual work.

Due to the promotion of systemic thinking and the view expressed that individual casework by educational psychologists did not constitute a positive approach to working with children and schools, there is currently almost a feeling of shame induced in educational psychologist’s if they express to other professionals their affinity towards working with the individual child (Leadbetter, 2000). Leadbetter (2000, p. 458) pointed out that the “move towards systemic work has produced a frustrated profession, where the unspoken dictum is ‘project work – good, casework – bad’. This ‘unspoken dictum’ may have the consequence of undermining educational psychologists’ confidence when undertaking individual casework

(since it is considered ‘bad’ to do so), which in turn can affect negatively one’s quality of practice as an educational psychologist”.

Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) suggest that individual casework should be an integral and essential part of the work of most applied psychologists and in educational psychology even more so. Moreover, it is argued that this kind of work should be valued as distinctive and unique within the realm of educational-psychology practice. Furthermore, it could be argued that educational psychologists and services that promote models of working that do not allow for individual work with children are potentially doing a massive disservice to the children and young people who are being denied this valuable support.

However, the alternative argument is the more you take an individual child-focused perspective, the less you can intervene in wider systemic factors that have a significant impact on children (Norwich, 2005). It is argued that no matter how good the educational psychologist may be at interacting with the child, and since there are many extraneous variables (e.g. peers, teachers, environment, home life, etc.) affecting a child at the individual level, the overall effect is minimal and limited (Dessent, 1992). Dessent (1992, p. 39) argued that “working at the level of organisations, at the level of policy and working essentially through others to affect change at the individual level – is where educational psychology can be most effective”. Bozic (1999) suggested that educational psychology should go beyond only working with school systems and focus on family systems, as well as working with adjacent services (e.g. social services departments).

Systemically-orientated work has brought with it a diversification of knowledge and skills for educational psychologists. These are expressed in work activities such as: training and coaching others; contributing to research and policy development and planning; consultancy; practitioner-research evaluation of interventions; working with families; dealing with multi-faceted problems of education. For example, these could include school improvement, inclusion, pupil participation, teacher training, school organisation, teaching and learning, human resources, the effects of poverty on educational achievement and progress (Stobie, 2002a).

It would be opportune to make note now of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model and his emphasis on working with all the various systems (micro, meso, exo, macro, chrono), as well as focusing on the interaction between the systems to bring about change. There are many other authors who suggest that educational psychologists should attend to both problem-oriented individual work and preventive and context-related issues. The challenge then facing professional educational psychology is one of being innovative in service terms, with one eye on theoretical-linked and evidence-informed developments, and the other on trends in policy, service and inter-professional work (Norwich, 2005). Bozic (1999, p. 240) described his role as an educational psychologist as: "a mixture of consultative, indirect modes of working and individual casework".

It is interesting to note that even those advocates of working solely at an individual level or at a systems level recognise the value of working at both levels. Boyle and Lauchlan, (2009) emphasise the importance of casework-based interventions for influencing systemic work and linking it to policy. They argue that if the educational psychologist is able to use his/her individual casework to inform the policy-makers then the profession becomes valuable. Dessent (1992) pointed out two decades ago already that there will always be children who will require intensive one-to-one support no matter how good the systemic operation is. He claimed that "being able to use the information gained at an individual level to influence future policy and provision, places the educational psychologist in a unique, privileged and enormously powerful position" (Dessent, 1992, p. 43).

Fallon *et al.* (2010) suggest that whilst the core educational-psychology functions remain constant, it is the range and derivation of the work, which is being, and will continue to be, transformed. They emphasise the importance of the educational psychologist's ability to respond flexibly to the changing socio-political context. Kaser (1993) argued that educational psychologist's should see themselves as "successive generalists", who understand professional learning is a life-long process, which necessitates changing the focus of their activities during the course of their professional development. Ashton and Roberts (2006), however, highlight the breadth of educational-psychology work across different contexts and functions as a potential source of confusion for educational psychologists. Fallon *et al.* (2010) question whether it is unreasonable to assume that individual educational psychologists could

become effective “scientist-practitioners” across the whole range of functions and contexts available for them to work in.

Alternatively, Stobie (2002a, p. 233) recommends that in order to effect change in the profession and in consumers of educational-psychological services, educational psychologists should be “highly trained and skilled specialists rather than generalists matching their particular expertise to the nature of the presenting problems”. Stobie (2002a, p. 233) argues that “while there are underlying transferable competencies required for every educational psychologist, there is enormous room for the acquisition of expertise in specifiable areas of the job”.

Fallon *et al.* (2010) concluded after studying the numerous reviews of the educational-psychology profession and frameworks for practice that, “EPs are fundamentally scientist-practitioners who utilise, for the benefit of children and young people, psychological skills, knowledge and understanding through the functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training, at organisational, group or individual level across educational, community and care settings, with a variety of role partners” (Fallon *et al.*, 2010, p. 4). The authors proposed that the “recurrent question about the role of the educational psychologist, then, has not been about *what* EPs do, or can do, but *how* they can, or should, operationalise the identified core functions within their particular employment context ” (Fallon *et al.*, 2010, p. 4).

Educational psychology operates in a rapidly evolving environment and faces several challenges. Gersch (2009, p. 18) argues that “educational psychologists have to understand the nature of these challenges and embrace change. At all times the profession must be seen to be relevant and capable of providing real solutions for people. With a strong foundation, it is up to each and every professional to ensure that educational psychology emerges with the successful and vibrant future that is within its grasp”.

2.5 Research on educational psychology

Research conducted over the past decade reveals conflicting results over which theoretical approaches are implemented by educational psychologists. Findings suggest that there is considerable variation both within and between countries around the world. On the one side,

educational psychologists' engagement with systemic thinking and practice is shown to be limited (Leyden, 1999; Martin, 2001; Pelligrini, 2009; Shannon & Posada, 2007). Whilst on the other side, the shift towards systemic practice is revealed to be marked (Farrell *et al.*, 2006; Kennedy, 2006). However, many studies have shown that systemic approaches co-exist with traditional child-focused practices (Norwich, 2005; Stobie, 2002a). The following section aims to examine some of the research conducted in South Africa and internationally.

A review of the South African journals revealed few studies conducted recently on the theoretical approaches currently used by educational psychologists. According to Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) the medical model is still frequently used in South Africa as an explanatory framework for scholastic or academic difficulties. Research by Eloff *et al.* (2006) examined the thoughts and perceptions of the role of educational psychologists in early childhood intervention (ECI). Focus groups were conducted involving educational psychologists and trans-disciplinary representatives who work in the field of ECI. Findings indicated a number of trends, including the perception that ECI educational psychologists are making increasing use of an asset-based approach. This approach involves empowering the community by identifying their strengths and assets to form the basis of an effective intervention. It was found that ECI educational psychologists should make use of group assessments and therapy rather than individual work. In addition they should offer support groups for parents and caregivers. Multi-disciplinary collaboration was highlighted as essential for effective work. Eloff *et al.* (2006, p. 24) discussed that educational psychologists need "enhanced input on systems theory, organisational analysis and development (i.e. whole-school development) and constructivist perspectives on teaching, learning and assessment". They suggest that training of future educational psychologists could focus on prevention, group work, parental guidance/support and community work.

A study in Hong Kong (Lam & Mak, 1998) indicated that educational psychologists have gone beyond the traditional role of psychometricians or gatekeepers of special education. Their services ranged from remediation to prevention, casework to systems work, and direct services to indirect services. However, they were still faced with many difficulties in their work including lack of government planning, a poor ratio between educational psychologists and students, and poor promotion prospects in their careers.

The results of a study conducted in Scotland (Kennedy, 2006) showed a marked shift in theoretical frameworks during the period from 1997 to 2002 from a cognitive/developmental, social-learning theory base towards a stronger social-interactionist and ecological/systemic framework. The study concluded that educational-psychology services are moving towards more solution-focused, systemic, naturalistic and collaborative assessments. However, there had been very little change in the use of norm-referenced assessments.

Recognising the diversity of school psychology around the world, the International School Psychology Survey (ISPS) was developed through the collaborative efforts of international colleagues involved in the International School Psychology Association (ISPA) Research Committee. The ISPA Research Committee explores the diversity of the profession of school psychology and promotes the exchange of information and resources around the world. The ISPS has been conducted in several countries around the world in order to obtain knowledge of the characteristics, training, roles and responsibilities, challenges and research interests of school/educational psychologists. Countries involved in this survey have included: Albania, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece and Northern England in 2004 (Jimerson *et al.*, 2004); Australia, China (Hong Kong), Germany, Italy, Russia in 2006 (Jimerson *et al.*, 2006); New Zealand in 2006 (Jimerson *et al.*, 2009); and Georgia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates in 2008 (Jimerson *et al.*, 2009). The results from all of the countries surveyed revealed psycho-educational evaluations or counselling students individually among the highest reported activities. A third important activity was consultation. Providing primary prevention programmes and conducting staff training and in-service programmes were among the least reported activities. The percentages of reported participation in the ideal activities revealed that very few respondents engaged in their ideal activities all of the time. Respondents from the various studies were fairly consistent in their endorsement of the importance of psychological research. Commonly cited challenges reported by school psychologists in these countries included: lack of leadership within the profession; lack of research and evaluation; professional burnout; lack of money to fund services properly; and low salaries. School psychologists reported enjoying working with and helping children, families and teachers, and a common distaste for administrative work. One point of difference between results of the New Zealand survey and previous ISPS studies was the predominance of contextual information over standardised measures in assessment.

A small-scale study conducted by Shannon and Posada (2007) in the UK revealed that individual-based casework was the primary area of educational-psychology work, with little involvement in strategic planning and policy initiatives. The authors surmised that, “this continuing high percentage of individual work suggests that services may still be grappling with the “medical model” of “referral on” of young children, rather than being able to work in a more consultative way” (Shannon & Posada, 2007, p. 67).

There have been a number of studies conducted on teachers’ and principals’ views of school psychologists in different countries with varied findings.

Farrell *et al.* (2005) conducted a survey of teachers’ views of school psychologists in eight countries (Cyprus, Denmark, England, Estonia, Greece, South Africa, Turkey and the USA). Overall, it was found that teachers appreciated the quality of the service they received from school psychologists although they would like to see more of them. In general, seeing individual children for special-education assessment or for therapy, advising teachers on children with behavioural problems and working with staff inside the school are all rated as activities that are performed regularly by school psychologists. Similarly, working with teachers on whole-school development, on the curriculum, teacher training, vocational guidance and working with parents are seen as tasks that are performed less frequently. It appears that teachers, on the whole, would like school psychologists to undertake work that, at present, they do less frequently. Many teachers stated that they would like the school psychologists to spend time on other tasks, in addition to their work with individual children. There were also concerns in the UK and the USA about the large amount of time school psychologists spend on testing and assessments for special education. Farrell *et al.* (2005) concluded that, among the numerous and diverse roles and responsibilities that school psychologists may perform, teachers and psychologists may not be placing priority on the same functions, nor may they be interpreting the actual daily activities of the school psychologist in the same way.

Second, and perhaps more significantly, many of the tasks the teachers would like school psychologists to undertake involve working with teachers in the schools on consultation-related activities, for example, providing training for teachers, advising them on the development of curriculum materials and working with teachers on whole-school

development. This suggests that teachers would welcome a move from school psychologists to increase their school-based consultation work. This survey suggests that school psychologists should feel confident in moving forward in consultation and that this would be appreciated by teachers. Third, and contrary to some previous studies (such as MacKay & Boyle, 1994) where teachers stressed the importance of school psychologists carrying out individual assessments, teachers in this study implied that this work was not so important (ranked last as the task that teachers would like school psychologists to do more of). Both the qualitative and quantitative data in this study suggest that teachers would like school psychologists to move away from routine assessments of individual children who might require special-educational provision.

Research by Boyle and MacKay (2007, p. 13) found similar results to Farrell *et al.* (2005) and concluded that the “highest levels of user satisfaction by schools are associated with service delivery which marries work at the levels of individuals, class, school, and family as emphasised in systemic problem analysis models”. The study indicated that casework is still very important, according to the service users, but has altered somewhat in that there is a view of individual casework that is firmly part of a more systemic approach but nevertheless still crucial in some situations. Moreover, casework has evolved to be part of a wider intervention that may just as easily be at the level of the family as the school or even the authority.

In a survey of school-psychology practice in England, carried out by the British Government (2002, in Farrell *et al.*, 2005), extensive qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from a wide group of representatives who use educational-psychology services (e.g. parents, teachers, other agency professionals). One of the key findings was the notable mismatch between what educational psychologists think they should be doing and what users perceive their role to be, for instance, among teachers there was often an overemphasis on individual assessment, in contrast to a broader role. This problem might be overcome if school psychologists explained their role more carefully to teachers and other stakeholders. This was one of the key recommendations emanating from the survey, which concluded that, for educational-psychology services to provide an enhanced role, it is important to establish a clear statement regarding roles and function.

2.5.1 Challenges facing the profession of educational psychology

Research over the years has noted a number of obstacles preventing educational psychologists from applying systemic psychology to their daily practice. Some of these issues include: time constraints (Farouk, 1999; Pelligrini, 2009); lack of training and supervision (Engelbrecht, 2004; Kenedy *et al.*, 2009; Pelligrini, 2009); issues regarding ownership of areas of expertise (Wood, 1998); too much statutory work (Leyden, 1999; Webster, Hingley & Franey, 2000); expectations of teachers and schools that educational psychologists do other things (MacKay & Boyle, 1994); and reluctance to change from the security of traditional practice (Lyons, 1999; Stringer, Elliott, & Lauchlan, 1997).

Evidence suggests that educational psychologists are unable to respond to the multitudes of issues emerging from education and so there is a tendency to stick with what has always been done (Stobie, 2002a). Studies have shown that a great deal of time is spent on individual assessment/intervention, writing formal reports and administrative tasks (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Leyden, 1999), which leaves little time for organisational and multi-agency work (Shannon & Posada, 2007). A systemic approach often requires ongoing contact with clients over time, and usually with more than one member of the system, which may be difficult for educational psychologists to organise, in light of their time availability (Farouk, 1999; Pelligrini, 2009).

Many educational psychologists have received limited training in systemic theories and practice in their initial training (Kenedy *et al.*, 2009; Pelligrini, 2009). As a result there is often a misunderstanding of what a “systems approach” involves and the term can be interpreted in at least half-a-dozen different ways (Burden, 1999). It is therefore necessary to develop or enhance their knowledge and skills of applied systemic theory. However, further training is lengthy and can be expensive, and opportunities for systemic supervision may be rare (Pelligrini, 2009).

Traditional practice views the educational psychologist as an “expert” with specialised skills. The challenge then for the systemically-orientated educational psychologist is working collaboratively with other professionals (Engelbrecht, 2004). The notion of shared responsibility often leads to conflict over ownership of areas of expertise (Wood, 1998). Annan, Bowler, Mentis, and Philipson (2008) found differing views regarding the

relationship between the learner and the environment as a common cause of difference encountered by educational psychologists working in teams. They suggest that educational psychologists can support effective interventions by understanding “the perspective from which each member is viewing a particular problem, to understand this perspective in relation to the context in which each team participant interacts with the learner or a problem. Such understanding requires sensitivity and respect for a wide range of views” (Annan *et al.*, 2008, p. 397).

How educational psychologists and other professionals in mental health and education view the role of educational psychologists may be a major barrier that prevents educational psychologists from applying systemic theory in their work. Research by MacKay and Boyle (1994) revealed that teachers wanted educational psychologists to continue with traditional practice (i.e. individual casework, usually revolving around the use of cognitive tests and counselling). Similar findings were reported by Farrell *et al.* (2006), as well as Ashton and Roberts (2006) who showed that schools and teachers often do not see the unique role and value that educational psychologists have apart from statutory work, advice giving and individual assessment. Ashton and Roberts (2006) surmised that it could be difficult for educational psychologists to promote a systemic approach, which may not be valued by those seeking individual child assessments. Further to this Stobie, (2002a, p. 231) argued that education authorities themselves “have nurtured the traditional role of educational psychologists (for example, being gatekeepers to special provisions and fulfilling many of the administrative duties), thereby negating the profession the much wider applied psychology role that could address the expanse of problems in education”. Magi and Kikas (2000) concluded that a major reason why schools do not desire systemic practice is because they are not yet aware of its possibilities. MacKay (2002) suggested that the range of unique skills they can offer to schools should be explained clearly to school principals, teachers and other stakeholders.

Lastly, acknowledgement of the inherent difficulties in paradigmatic change is important. The new paradigm has its own set of values, beliefs, theories, methods and assumptions. The systemic approach therefore requires different ways of thinking, seeing, and learning about phenomena, and new ways of practising. Often the unknown is faced with criticism and resistance as change involves re-thought, transformation, re-culturing and re-structuring

(Swart & Pettipher, 2005). It is important to highlight that a shift in paradigms does not necessarily imply an overnight change in practices. Changing the system involves new learning for everyone, new responsibilities and is an ongoing process.

The following section aims to examine the field of educational psychology within the South African context.

2.6 Educational psychology in South Africa

In South Africa, psychology in general has been described as being in a “crisis” as a result of the discipline being irrelevant to the nature and needs of the majority population (De Jong, 1996; Hickson & Kriegler, 2001). In addition its a-contextual and individualistic approach has ignored systemic factors and the influence of broader socio-economic issues (Engelbrecht, 2004; Sharratt, 1995). Educational psychology in South Africa has been known in the past to concentrate exclusively on assessing and diagnosing children as potential candidates for special education (De La Ray, 1999). Educational psychologists have had little to do with the general processes of learning and schooling, nor have they been concerned with curriculum design; educational policy, planning and management; mental-health promotion; or work at the community level (De Jong, 1996; De Jong & Der Hoorn, 1993; De Jong, 2000; Engelbrecht, Kriegler, & Booysen, 1996; Sharratt, 1995).

The challenging social and education conditions in South Africa have resulted in the need for the re-structuring of educational psychology as a profession (Mackay, 2002; Sharratt, 1995). Providing first-world services in a third-world context is limiting and exclusionary. The demand for educational psychologists is extensive, however the ratio between the school-going population and available professionals is alarming (Ebersohn, 2000). The educational psychologist is therefore not in a favourable position to assist each and every school in South Africa. Thus a shift in focus to a more broad-based practice centered on the enhancement of the various systems (parents, teachers, school, policy, etc.) is necessary (Sharratt, 1995). Such a shift requires educational psychologists to *consider their theoretical approach(es) and practices; change and expand their roles; and further their skills and knowledge through additional training.*

2.6.1. Change in theoretical approach(es) and practices for educational psychologists

In 1998, the NCESS emphasised the role of the educational psychologist in ESS within the community as vital in reaching the goals of inclusive education. The role of psychologists working within the South African education system should be in line with Education White Paper 6, with an emphasis on mentoring, collaboration, consultation, monitoring, programme development, and whole-school development.

Educational psychologists are now required to form part of collaborative teams working within schools and communities and at district level. This will provide the full range of educational support services by pooling limited available professional and other resources in order to make optimum use of them (Engelbrecht, 2004). Collaboration offers the opportunity to capitalise on the diverse and specialised knowledge of educators and educational-support professionals who have had different training and experience. The collaboration itself should be inclusive, encompassing educators, principals, administrators, parents, learners and professional support personnel and should focus on shared decision making in governance, planning, delivery and assessment in education (Wood, 1998).

Educational psychologists should be prepared not only to assume roles as members in collaborative teams but also to serve as consultants (Engelbrecht, 2004). Educational psychologists possess expert knowledge and can assist others in supporting learners who are experiencing barriers to learning and development. Consultancy is something of a paradox to the traditional role of the educational psychologist, whereby one works directly and exclusively with the individual child. Educational psychologists are now required to address educational-psychological difficulties experienced by children, by working through the key adults around them. Gutkin and Curtis (1999) argue that to deliver meaningful assistance to children and young people hinge(s) directly on the ability of the educational psychologist to consult effectively with teachers and other key role players. The shift to consulting psychology would allow for a greater number and broader spectrum of people to be reached for a reduced per capita cost. In addition, consulting may see a reduction in the purported marginalisation of the majority of South Africans, which emanates from an over reliance on the individual psychotherapy modality (Lazarus, 1998; Seedat, Duncan & Lazarus, 2001).

Whole-school development is a comprehensive approach to developing effective schools, involving all stakeholders and all elements of the school as an organisation. Educational psychologists can play important roles as organisational consultants and facilitators within an inclusive school approach. Organisational consultation assumes that individuals in a work setting can be assisted by examining the entire environment in which they work. Thus the role of educational psychologists is to assess the entire school system and to assist educators to resolve a broad range of identified concerns that may affect their job functioning as well as learner outcomes in order to facilitate change (Engelbrecht, 2004). Educational psychologists should also be willing to work in the broader context of communities. Community psychology “aims at mass intervention, trains and uses large numbers of people for interventions, and purports to prevent psychological problems before they arise” (Pretorius-Heubert & Ahmed, 2001, in Pillay, 2003). According to Eloff *et al.* (2006, p. 3), “educational psychologists should no longer act as the (sole) experts, providing solutions to the community, but rather act as a facilitator and agents of change who facilitate the identification and establishment of assets; mobilising these within the communities, for example identifying leaders within the community who will become facilitators. To be able to do this, educational psychologists need to be flexible, creative, and culture-sensitive”.

Redefining their roles will enable educational psychologists in South Africa to “provide their services in a broad array of contexts, including providing support in classroom, school and community environments; facilitating change within organizations, schools and agencies; applying principles of learning and development both within and outside schools and consulting and collaborating with educators and other professionals” (Engelbrecht, 2004, p. 26). This will furthermore enable educational psychologists to develop educational environments that meet diverse learning needs as well as work at the interface of educational, psychological and behavioural systems in order to intervene to improve organisations and to develop effective collaborative partnerships between parents, educators and communities. Educational psychologists should go beyond within-child factors and consider how contextual characteristics affect the learning of children.

Educational psychologists need to be aware of how and why their working contexts have changed in order to meet the challenges in implementing these new roles. Transformation of educational psychologists’ approaches to problems and adopting new ways of solving

problems will contribute greatly to the effective support of all learners in South Africa. By doing so, they should be able to affirm the position and status of the profession on a national and international level as a confident profession, which has not only adapted successfully to change, but has been the facilitator of considerable change and development within the education system as a whole (MacKay, 1999).

Educational psychologists are required to make a paradigm shift from working on a one-to-one basis (the medical model) to a systemic model where they reach out to schools in the community empowering teachers and parents, to become the key agents of the process of change (Ebersohn, 2000). An emphasis has been placed upon developmental and prevention actions, support, empowerment, and health promotion (Department of Education, 2005a; Donald *et al.*, 2006). This includes “primary, secondary and tertiary prevention efforts, specific direct and indirect interventions, facilitating change, individual and group counselling, crisis intervention and lifespan development. In these efforts they should conduct ecologically and systemically valid assessments and interventions to promote positive learning environments within which learners and educators from diverse backgrounds have equal access to effective educational psychological support” (Engelbrecht, 2004, p. 23).

A new, more comprehensive definition of the scope of practice for educational psychologists (as well as other categories of psychology) has recently been formulated and promulgated (HPCSA, 2011). This is a culmination of many years of consultation by the Professional Board for Psychology with a wide range of stakeholders, inside and outside the profession. The practice framework for psychology was formulated by the Professional Board for Psychology as the Standards Generating Body and revised after consultation with all relevant stakeholders such as the Psychological Society of South Africa (PSSYSA), Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa (SIOPSA) and Heads of Departments of Psychology (HOD) and all registered psychology professionals on various occasions in meetings and other forms of communication. This new scope of practice was also informed by the Human Resources Plan of the Department of Health for the country formulated by the National Department of Health. This amendment to the scope of practice was necessitated by a number of critical factors, which among others include: a) new developments in the profession of psychology; b) the psychological needs of our country;

and, c) the practice categories in the profession that were recently introduced (i.e. the register for psychometrists, registered counsellors, neuropsychologists and forensic psychologists). The HPCSA (2011, p. 8) describes the following acts to fall within the scope of practice of educational psychologists:

- (a) assessing, diagnosing, and intervening in order to optimise human functioning in the learning and development; assessing cognitive, personality, emotional, and neuropsychological functions of people in relation to the learning and development in which they have been trained;
- (b) identifying, and diagnosing psychopathology in relation to the learning and development; identifying and diagnosing barriers to learning and development; applying psychological interventions to enhance, promote and facilitate optimal learning and development; performing therapeutic interventions in relation to learning and development; referring clients to appropriate professionals for further assessment or intervention;
- (c) designing, managing, conducting, reporting on, and supervising psychological research, in the learning and development; conducting psychological practice, and research in accordance with the Ethical Rules of Conduct for Practitioners registered under the Health Professions Act, 1974; adhering to the scope of practice of Educational psychologists;
- (d) advising on the development of policies, based on various aspects of psychological theory, and research; designing, managing, and evaluating educationally-based programmes;
- (e) training and supervising other registered psychological practitioners in educational psychology; and
- (f) providing expert evidence and/or opinions.

The new scope of practice defines the work of an educational psychologist to focus on “learning and development”. I would like to suggest that this is perhaps too broad a description, and could be fleshed out. There is still a focus on assessment and diagnosis, which is associated largely with a medical model. It does not specify a focus on systemic practice, such as conducting systemic assessments to evaluate the functioning of the environment that may impact on the individual. Furthermore, there is mention of “psychological interventions” and “therapeutic interventions”, but nothing about systemic interventions. The scope does not incorporate certain practices outlined in education policies, such as implementing prevention programmes or an involvement in community development.

Whilst it describes “referring clients to appropriate professionals for further assessment or intervention”, it does not take this further to include multi-disciplinary collaboration (i.e. working together to assist the client). In addition, it does not mention consultation with parents, teachers and other various professionals. I would argue that the practices delineated by the present scope of practice, do not reflect a paradigmatic shift from a medical approach to a systems-orientated perspective. The Educational Psychology Task Team plans to hold a second conference to clarify and gain a deeper understanding of the scope. It is hoped that these issues that I have discussed will be addressed.

A psychologist working for the Department of Education has a specific job description that may differ from those psychologists working in other contexts. The Department of Education (2005b, p.17) states that the job of a psychologist working for the Education Department is “to render psycho-educational and psycho-therapeutic/counselling support within a district-based consultative model to learners, educators and parents, so that learners can make optimum use of their learning and curriculum opportunities within an inclusive education framework”. More specifically, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED, 2006) describes the services offered by a school psychologist working for the Education District to include the following: provision of support to educators and parents; promotion of capacity-building programmes; provision of psychological and educational assessments and therapeutic intervention strategies; multi-disciplinary and multi-functional collaboration; advocacy and promotion of inclusive education; provision of HIV/AIDS support; promotion of community involvement; provision for Continuous Professional Development (CPD); as well as administrative functions.

As is evident from the above-mentioned job descriptions, educational psychologists still perform the traditional practices of assessment and therapeutic interventions. However, their scope of practice has been expanded to include significant others who have a direct (such as parents, teachers, etc.) and indirect (such as community leaders, curriculum and policy advisors, etc.) impact on the child. In addition they do not work in isolation, but collaborate with other relevant professionals. There is also an emphasis on providing support; building programmes to equip others with skills; promoting community involvement; and a focus on inclusive education.

A focus on systemic practice necessitates an alternative approach to assessment. There has been a move away from assessing intrinsic barriers without investigating the contextual factors, which impact on the teaching and learning (DOE, 2005a). Traditionally educational psychologists have tended to use standardised IQ tests exclusively when assessing learners (Foxcroft & Davies, 2008). This approach is concerned with accurately identifying and assessing an individual learner's problem and prescribing specific individualised strategies for resolving it, the first consideration being that the source of the problem is within the learner. Based on the result of such a psychometric assessment, the educational psychologist determines whether the learner needs to attend a special school or not.

Nowadays educational psychologists should use a variety of assessment tools in order to gain a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the learner. The emphasis of an educational-psychological assessment is not only placed on discovering the learner's IQ score and the grade or age level on which they function, but also to question "why" the specific learner is not making progress, "what" the learner can or can't do, as well as to understand the learner's areas of personal strength and assets (Foxcroft & Davies, 2008). In addition, the educational psychologist should assess the learner's environment to determine whether there are any external factors impacting on the learner. The main aim of the assessment is to gather sufficient information from a variety of sources in order to support the learner in the best way possible. The focus of the assessment is on what support is needed in order for the learner to function optimally. The educational psychologist should put support strategies in place with the goal of keeping the learner in the mainstream school. In addition, a transversal approach should be used whereby parents, teachers and other key role players are all consulted in order to identify the needs of the learner and to support plans put in place. Educational psychologists have a vital role in helping to gain information about an individual's holisticwhole development and helping to make all the systems that impinge on the school system function together in a co-ordinated and positive way.

The changing nature of both the South African and the international educational contexts necessitates a change and expansion in roles for educational psychologists in order to provide effective support services (Department of Education, 1997; Donald *et al.*, 2006; Engelbrecht, 2004).

2.6.2 Change in training for educational psychologists

Parkinson (2004) noted that the most pertinent issues in relation to educational psychology in South Africa at present is the need for common agreement in relation to the knowledge and competence required to be an educational psychologist, the training requirements for educational psychologists and the role and function of educational psychologists. A shared vision within the profession is imperative. A change in the way educational psychology is practised warrants a corresponding shift in training. Do training programmes in South Africa adequately prepare graduates for the full range of practice modalities they enter?

Training programmes used to reflect a focus on an applications-only, individually-focused profession, thus defining a narrow scope of practice for educational psychologists (Sharratt, 1995). Training and upgrading of qualifications of psychologists is key (at Initial Professional Development Level as well as Continued Professional Development) in order to work effectively within the new framework. Training that will prepare professionals to deal effectively with the complexity of issues confronting them in the workplace, is sorely needed (Eloff *et al.*, 2006).

Community psychology is often viewed as the means of effective intervention for many of the social and psychological problems in South Africa. However, Pillay (2003) noted that there appears to be a gap in terms of how it should be integrated into the training of psychologists. He conducted research on the training of educational psychologists in community psychology. The study involved focus-group interviews with qualified and trainee educational psychologists at the University of Gauteng. He found that there was very little exposure to community psychology during the training and most of the participants were self-taught in community psychology. His research concluded that training must be open to black trainees in order to bring a “richness of experience into the programmes that should add value... (Pillay, 2003, p. 267). In addition, trainees should not just be exposed to theory, but must put it into practice through fieldwork, projects and case studies. Trainees should also receive cross-cultural training and be exposed to diverse communities. Furthermore, training should prepare trainees to work with groups of people and not just individuals, and should focus on prevention of psychological stressors, and not just curing those with problems. Lastly, training should be of a generic nature to enable the future psychologist to work with a variety of community needs.

Pillay (2003) believes that all psychologists should be trained in community psychology and the training should involve all disciplines within psychology. He notes that at this stage community psychology should not be a discipline on its own in the South African context. Research conducted on clinical and counselling psychology training revealed that these “programmes are still constructed around a fundamental drive towards producing competent psychotherapists. Despite efforts to include more group and context focused elements, training remains largely focused on the individual, neglecting the individual’s context (Ngonyama, 2004).

My training as a student of the Master’s in Educational Psychology Programme at Stellenbosch University in 2008 reflected a shift towards systemic and inclusive training, including modules such as, community psychology and inclusive education, as well as a practical component at a school in an impoverished farm community. However, not much of the theory learnt in these modules was practically implemented, but rather understood through assignments. This might have been due to lack of time and resources.

2.7 Conclusion

Based on this literature review it may be too safe to conclude with Stobie’s (2002a, p. 231) sentiments that, “change in educational psychology has been, and is, a long-term ‘reconstruction’ process that is far from complete”.

The following chapter will expand on the research design and methodology implemented during this research project.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and discusses the various aspects regarding the design and methodology which were employed in this study. This includes an outline of the research aims; the research paradigm; the research design and methodology; and the research methods, which include participant selection; methods of data collection; data analysis; as well as the assurance of validity and reliability. Lastly, ethical issues that were taken into consideration will also be reviewed.

3.2 Research aims

The predominant aim of this study was to explore the theoretical approaches underpinning educational psychologists' service delivery, as well as their current practices. The focus was specifically on educational psychologists working in the Education District Offices in the Western Cape. A secondary aim was to explore whether these educational psychologists' previous training equipped them to deal with their current job description and whether further training was required.

3.3 Research paradigm

According to Mertens (2005) and Wellington (2000), a research paradigm refers to the manner in which one looks at the world. This then guides and directs the researcher's thinking and action. Researchers must be conscious of their beliefs and working paradigm, and of the way these might impact on the research process and outcomes (Mertens, 2005).

To address the absence of educational psychologists' voices in the literature, this study required a research paradigm that would facilitate the expression of their own theoretical approaches, practices and experiences to the researcher. Thus, this study employed the interpretive/constructivist paradigm. In order to fully understand this paradigm, three interrelating premises described by Lincoln and Guba (2002, in Mertens, 2005) will be used to assist in the definition, namely: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Each of these premises will be described further below.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality. The ontology of an interpretive paradigm claims that

reality can be understood and interpreted, but not predicted or controlled (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). The goal of this research was to understand and describe the educational psychologists' approaches to their practice, rather than prove a theory or predict or explain their thoughts and actions. A constructivist paradigm holds that, reality can only be known by those who personally experience it (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Further to this, constructivists believe that there are multiple realities, as each individual views and understands reality differently (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). For this reason, the existence of one single truth is questioned. A further point is that people continuously construct, develop, and change their everyday interpretations of their "reality". The findings of an interpretive/constructivist study therefore reflect a moment in time and should be taken into account in any conception of social science research.

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge. An interpretive paradigm would see knowledge arises from observation and interpretation (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). A constructivist views knowledge as constructed through a process of self-conscious action by those who are personally experiencing such action (Henning *et al.*, 2004). Knowledge was obtained through the researcher interacting personally with the participants and seeking to understand and interpret their subjective experiences. It is important to note that the research findings are influenced by both the researcher and the participants, as they interact with and shape each other and co-create understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Methodology refers to the approach the researcher adopts to attain the desired understanding of reality and knowledge. An interpretive inquiry generally makes use of participant observation and interviewing. Constructivists are largely concerned with participants' personal lived experiences. In order to obtain the desired information, this research made use of a qualitative methodology, which will be discussed in the following section.

3.4 Research design and methodology

A research design is a plan or blueprint that, along with the research paradigm, informs how you intend conducting the research (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). The focus is on the end product: What kind of study is being planned and what kind of results are aimed at? There are two major aspects of research design (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Firstly, you must specify as

clearly as possible what you want to find out. Secondly, you must determine the best way to do it.

A qualitative research approach was employed in this study, which was explorative, descriptive, subjective, interpretive and contextual in design. Qualitative research is conducted because a problem or issue needs to be explored and because we need a detailed description and understanding of the issue (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). This description can be obtained by interacting directly with the participants and allowing them to relay their stories, irrespective of what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature (Creswell, 2007). The researcher then attempts to understand and interpret the subjective experiences of the participants in their specific context or setting.

Research methodology refers to the “coherent group of methods that complement one another and have the ‘goodness of fit’ to deliver data and findings that will reflect the research question and suit the research purpose” (Henning *et al.*, 2004). Each paradigm is associated with its own research methods. As this study was designed within an interpretive/constructivist paradigm, qualitative methods were used. Qualitative research involves selecting a small number of participants, which allows for a detailed encounter and an in-depth understanding of thoughts, actions and behaviour. Data is gathered in the form of spoken words providing “thick” narrative descriptions and direct quotations to be used in data analysis (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The insider’s perspective is emphasised where understanding and describing the participants’ point of view is fundamental (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). In qualitative studies it is the researcher who is the “primary instrument” of gathering and analysing data. The researcher’s goal is to try to capture what is happening without being judgemental. However, pure objectivity is never really possible within an interpretive/constructivist paradigm. Therefore it is important that the researcher declares his/her own personal viewpoint (see section 3.7 for the researcher’s personal position on the topic).

This study was exploratory in the sense that, as a result of the proposed theoretical shift towards a systemic approach to the practice of educational psychology, the research aimed to explore the theoretical approaches and practices currently espoused and employed by the educational psychologists working in the Education Department District Offices. The study was descriptive in nature, as it provided rich descriptions of the educational psychologists’

theoretical understandings, experiences and practices. These descriptions were obtained by allowing the educational psychologists to discuss verbally and openly their subjective points of view with the researcher. This was achieved through the use of individual interviews with each of the participants, resulting in personal narratives in the form of words. The researcher then attempted to uncover and interpret these meanings. The research was contextual, as it focused on understanding the educational psychologists' experiences in their own work setting at the District Offices.

3.5 Research Methods

The following section aims to describe the different qualitative research methods used in this study. These methods include: participant selection; data collection (involving a literature review, a participant questionnaire, individual semi-structured interviews and a research journal); and data analysis.

3.5.1 Participant selection

As this research was embedded in the interpretive/constructivist paradigm and the aim was to obtain an in-depth understanding of educational psychologists' theoretical approaches and practices at the District Offices, a non-random, purposeful sampling method was used. The purposive selection of data sources involves choosing people from whom the researcher can substantially learn about the topic under study (Merriam, 2002). The concern is not how much data is gathered or from how many sources, but whether the data that is collected is sufficiently rich to bring refinement and clarity to understanding the research questions (Wellington, 2000). Since the research is not for the purpose of making claims about the distribution of the experience across a population, the sample size is generally small. It is therefore important to purposefully select information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 1990). The reason for the use of multiple participants is to provide accounts from different perspectives about an experience. By comparing and contrasting these perspectives, researchers are able to notice the essential aspects that appear across the sources and to recognise variations in how the experience appears (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Purposive sampling has a number of different strategies to purposefully select "information-rich cases" in order to answer the research questions. Criterion sampling is one such strategy, which involves selecting certain important, predetermined criteria for the inclusion and

exclusion of participants (Mertens, 2005). This narrows down the research, which results in a much smaller and relatively focused number of participants. For the purpose of this study, the researcher stipulated that the participants should include: 1) educational psychologists, 2) who were at the time working at one of five education districts offices in the Western Cape, and 3) who were registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) as educational psychologists.

Permission to recruit participants for this study was requested from both the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) (See Addendum A) and the heads of each of the five Education District Offices (See Addendum B for an example of the consent form). After permission was granted, a list of all the registered educational psychologists was obtained from the heads. Each possible participant was then contacted telephonically by the researcher and invited to participate in the research on a voluntary basis. Fourteen educational psychologists were approached and eight participants agreed to form part of the research group. The main reasons for declining to be involved in the study were lack of time and involvement in other studies. Once the participants agreed to be involved in the study, they were required to sign a consent form (See Addendum C for an example of the consent form). Eight participants formed the research group.

According to Mertens (2005), a researcher employing an interpretive/constructivist view should include information concerning certain particulars pertaining to the research participants. Thus a brief outline of the demographics of the participants is provided below in Table 3.1. The participants were coded as follows: P (Participant) (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8); and the interviewer as R (Researcher). A further description of the participants can be found in Chapter 4.

Table 3.1 Participant demographics

Participants	Gender	Age	Language Proficiency	Setting/context previously work at
P1	Female	54	English Afrikaans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private practice • School • Hospital
P2	Male	57	English Afrikaans Dutch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special-needs school • Clinic
P3	Female	44	English Afrikaans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private practice • Special-needs school
P4	Female	51	English Afrikaans Xhosa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate company • Special-needs school
P5	Male	49	English Afrikaans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private practice • School
P6	Male	55	English Afrikaans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private practice • School
P7	Female	42	English Afrikaans Xhosa Zulu Sotho Tswana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of technology
P8	Male	42	English Afrikaans Xhosa Zulu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private practice • School

3.5.2 Methods of data collection

3.5.2.1 Literature review

All research studies should be placed in the context of the general body of scientific knowledge, so it is necessary to indicate where your study fits into the picture (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). The research questions generally arise out of a gap in information in the literature. Few studies in South Africa have explored the theoretical approaches and practices currently employed by educational psychologists. After presenting the general purpose of the study, the researcher should then bring the reader up to date with the previous research in the area, pointing to general agreements and disagreements among the previous researchers. This

study made use of a literature review to explore three main areas: 1) theoretical approaches of educational psychologists (with a focus on the paradigm shift); 2) practices of educational psychologists; and 3) training of educational psychologists.

3.5.2.2 Participant questionnaire

A questionnaire is defined as a group of written questions used to gather information from respondents, and is regarded as one of the most common tools for gathering data in the social sciences (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The participants were each requested to complete a self-administered questionnaire sent to them via email (See Addendum D). This approach is considered to be appropriate as the participants were sufficiently literate (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Of the eight participants, only two completed the self-administered questionnaires by hand. The other six participants requested that they answer the questionnaire orally in the face-to-face interview with the researcher, as they did not have the time to complete the form themselves.

The questionnaire was divided into two main sections, namely demographics and content items. The demographic items gave an overview of the participants in this study, which included their gender, age, language proficiency, qualifications, university where professional training was completed, period of registration with the HPCSA, and settings/contexts previously worked in. The second section of the questionnaire contained several open-ended questions which needed to be answered in as much depth as possible. The responses to these questions were used mainly to inform the researcher on the content for the individual interview.

3.5.2.3 Individual semi-structured interviews

The basic individual interview is one of the most frequently used methods of data gathering within the qualitative approach (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The interpretive/constructivist paradigm maintains that in order to capture the richness and fullness of an experience, the data gathered needs to consist of first-person or self-reports of participants' own experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Individual interviews are a more natural form of collecting data and provide for a more intimate and trusting relationship with participants (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). A qualitative interview is essentially a simple conversation between a researcher and a participant, but with a specific purpose – to gather information with the research aims

in mind (Berg, 2009). Qualitative data in oral form is the product of this encounter. The main aim of the interviews was to converse with the participants to elicit their knowledge and understanding of their espoused theoretical approaches, as well as their day-to-day experience and practice of educational psychology. Through the interviews, the researcher gained access to and sought to understand “the private interpretations and reality that individuals hold” (Merriam, 2002, p. 272).

The individual interviews were conducted at the participants’ place of work in a private and quiet location. The interviews were semi-structured so as to allow the participants the freedom to convey their experiences in their own way. A semi-structured interview guide (interview schedule) was used to direct the interviews (see Addendum E). The questions were open questions to allow participants to express their views and experiences in a rich and comprehensive manner, without leading their response in any particular way. Many of the questions were developed from themes that emerged during the process of developing the literature review. The questions were not necessarily asked in the exact phrasing or order or as they appeared on the interview schedule, but were used to steer the process. The participant’s response determined the question order and format.

Eight individual interviews were conducted at five Education District Offices in the Western Cape, namely: Metro South, Metro East, Metro North, Metro Central and Cape Winelands. The interviews took between forty and ninety minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher for the purpose of data analysis (see Addendum F for an excerpt from a transcript).

3.5.2.4 Research journal

Silverman and Marvasti (2007, p. 302) give five reasons why a researcher should keep a research journal. These include: “1) to show the development of your thinking; 2) as an aid for reflection; 3) to help improve your time management; 4) to provide ideas for the future direction of your work; and 5) to use in the methodology chapter of your research”.

A research journal was kept throughout the research process and contained the researcher’s thoughts, reflections and questions. The research journal proved to be a very valuable tool.

3.5.3 Data analysis

This study employed a process of qualitative data analysis, which involves studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In qualitative analysis, it is the researcher who is the main interpretive tool. It is important to note that the interpretation is based on a specific context and as reality is dynamic and constantly changing, the meanings associated with that particular setting and population may change over time.

The data-analysis process in this study involved two interrelated phases. The first phase involved thematic content analysis, which is a descriptive presentation of the qualitative data. In the second phase, interpretive analysis was employed, whereby the researcher attempted to explain the data in further detail. Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006, p. 321) describe interpretive analysis as “a back and forth movement between what one knows and what one wishes to know, description and interpretation, foreground and background, part and whole, to achieve a compelling account of the phenomenon being studied”.

The process of data analysis “involves reading through the data repeatedly and engaging in activities of breaking the data down (preliminary analysis: thematising and categorising) and building it up again in novel ways (synthesis, elaborating and interpreting)” (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006, p. 322). This method involved the following five steps:

Step 1: Familiarisation and immersion

This step involved the researcher immersing herself in the interview transcripts by reading through the content several times, attempting to make sense of the patterns and themes that emerge from the data. Once this is complete, the researcher should be thoroughly familiar with the data in a manner that she knows which themes are arising, as well as what kind of interpretations are likely to be drawn and supported by the data.

Step 2: Inducing themes

An inductive analysis was undertaken whereby the patterns, themes and categories of analysis “emerge(d) out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (Patton, 1990, p. 390). This inductive process involves the researcher working back and forth between the themes and the database until he or she establishes a

comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 2007). It is important for the researcher to go beyond summarising the data and to pay attention to the “processes, functions, tensions, and contradictions” of the responses (Terre Blanche *et al.* 2006, p. 323).

Step 3: Coding into themes

Coding involves a process of reducing the data into meaningful segments by identifying passages of the text and applying codes to them to indicate that they are examples of a specific theme or idea (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Coding makes it easier to search the data, make comparisons and identify patterns (Creswell, 2007). Codes can be based on: themes, topics, ideas, concepts, terms, phrases or keywords found in the data.

Step 4: Elaboration

This involves exploring the themes in more detail in order to “capture the finer nuances of meaning” (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006, p. 326). The findings are confirmed by means of re-reading the original narratives and modifying the analysed data accordingly. The researcher is open to the possibility that new ideas or insights may become visible after much interaction with the data.

Step 5: Interpretation and checking

The interpretation of the results is the final written account of the research. In this step, the phenomenon that was studied is reported using categories, themes, and sub-themes. These categories and themes will be presented in detail in Chapter 4, whereafter they will also be discussed in light of the literature.

An example of the data analysis process can be found in Addendum G.

3.5.4 Validity and reliability

Merriam (2009, p. 209) advocates the importance of “producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” when conducting qualitative research. Without rigour, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility (Morse *et al.*, 2002). Hence, a great deal of attention should be applied to validity and reliability in all research methods.

However, it is worth mentioning that there are a number of leading qualitative researchers who argue that reliability and validity are terms pertaining to the quantitative paradigm and are not pertinent to qualitative inquiry (Morse *et al.*, 2002). However, the researcher concurs with those advocates who believe that the concepts of reliability and validity can be applied to all research because the goal of finding plausible and credible outcome explanations is central to all research (Hammersley, 1992; Kuzel & Engel, 2001; & Yin, 1994; in Morse *et al.*, 2002).

“Although we should strive for everything in our power to do truly objective, valid and reliable studies, the reality is that we are never able to attain this completely. Rather it remains a goal, something to be striven towards, although never to be fully attained” (Babbie & Mouton, 2005, p. 276).

There are a number of strategies that qualitative researchers can employ to promote the reliability and validity of a study. The following strategies were used in this study: triangulation, member checking: rich, thick descriptions; avoidance of bias through reflexivity; prolonged engagement; peer review; and an audit trail. These will be explained further below.

3.5.4.1 Triangulation

Triangulation involves generating data in multiple ways and from different sources. According to Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006), triangulation allows the researcher to inspect the phenomenon from different angles thereby providing a clearer understanding. To a certain extent, methodological triangulation was used in this study. I made use of multiple methods, including: a participant questionnaire, interviews and educational policy documents to add supplementary information regarding the functioning of the District Offices. It was my intention to conduct two focus groups with the participants for a further discussion of the research questions. However, due to the participant's lack of time, this was not possible. The credibility of the research findings was improved by using multiple data sources.

3.5.4.2 Member checking

For a description or interpretation of human experience to be credible, it needs to be immediately recognisable by the people involved in the study to be their own (Babbie &

Mouton, 2005). To ensure the credibility of this research, member checking was employed, which involved giving the transcripts back to the participants to check for plausibility. This gave the participants an opportunity to change what they had said, or explain it in more detail.

3.5.4.3 Rich, thick description

It is most important in qualitative research to provide enough rich description to contextualise the study, “such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches to research context, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). Such description and interpretation of data and findings will be found in Chapter 4.

3.5.4.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important strategy that can be used to avoid research bias in qualitative research. This form of inquiry requires the researcher to make interpretations of what he or she sees, hears and understands. The researchers’ interpretation cannot be separated from their own background, history, context, and prior understandings. Reflexivity therefore involves reflecting upon the ways the researcher’s values, assumptions, biases, attitudes and experiences have shaped the research. Reflexivity thus demonstrates an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the research process and the impossibility of remaining ‘outside of’ one’s subject matter while conducting the research (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, throughout this research, the researcher made it a priority to be constantly aware of her own thoughts, feelings and assumptions when dealing with participants, interview transcripts or documents (see Section 3.7 for a reflection on the researcher’s own position as researcher).

3.5.4.5 Prolonged engagement

This strategy ensures that adequate time is spent on collecting and analysing data. It is important that adequate time is spent generating data, such that the data becomes “saturated”. In other words, the data and emerging findings begin to repeat and no new information surfaces as you collect more (Merriam, 2002). In this research, interviews were continued until the researcher found the same information was being repeated. Analysis was also done until the writer found no new themes, ideas or insights to the initial themes or ideas discovered.

3.5.4.6 Peer review

This strategy involved discussions with the researcher's colleagues and her supervisor on the research process, from beginning to end.

3.5.4.7 Audit trail

An audit trail involves a detailed account of the methods, processes and reflections during the research process. An adequate trail should be left to enable the auditor to determine if the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations can be traced to their sources and if they are supported by the inquiry. I made use of a research journal (as mentioned above) to capture the details of this study.

3.6 Ethical considerations

To do the best research and to give the best service to the community and to the profession, researchers need to behave ethically. Before the research participants were contacted, ethical clearance was obtained from the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee. Once the participants had agreed to partake in the study, they were required to sign an informed consent form. This consent form provided an outline of the purpose of the research, as well as the specific procedures (i.e. completion of participant questionnaire and an individual interview) in which they would be involved. It was stated no risks, discomforts or inconveniences were foreseeable. However, in the unlikely event of any negative emotional reaction, a registered psychologist would provide psychological support. Participants were ensured of confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality was maintained by means of assigning code names to the participants in order to maintain anonymity. In addition, it was not disclosed at which District Office each participant worked, or at which universities they studied. The participants were granted the right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage during the research process.

3.7 Personal position

In qualitative research, it is the researcher who is the primary instrument for generating data. It is therefore essential that as the researcher, I acknowledge my own position and perspective, which may have an influence on the research process and findings. It is important that I declare my status as a student and intern educational psychologist, as this

closely links me to the participants, as well as the topic under study. The following section will explore this further.

I began the Master's in educational psychology (MEdPsych) Programme in 2008 at a University in the Western Cape. In the first semester we completed a module on inclusive education, which focused on the paradigm shift from the medical model to a more inclusive systemic model, also named the bio-ecological/ecosystemic approach. This module was allocated a large portion of the timetable and a great deal of time was spent on reading the theory and discussing the concepts. I found this module to be extremely thorough and informative. On a theoretical level, I could see the enormous potential and value of the systemic model. However, I wondered how this would translate in practice in South African schools. I feel that whilst this module provided a sound theoretical knowledge, we could have benefited further from discussions on the implementation of systemic theory. Furthermore, there could be more focus on equipping the student educational psychologist with the skills required to practise from a systemic theoretical framework. In addition, the module could consider the challenges one could encounter practising systemically and how to deal with such occurrences.

In 2009, I completed my internship year at a private school in Cape Town and had the opportunity to put into practice some of the theory I had learnt at university. The school as a whole was committed to ensuring that learners experiencing barriers to learning received the necessary support in order to function to the best of their ability. I formed part of a multi-disciplinary support team, which assisted learners experiencing a variety of issues. It appeared that a systemic theoretical approach was used to guide the practice of this support team.

I personally espouse the bio-ecological model as my theoretical framework. It was therefore essential that I was constantly aware of my own biases and assumptions relating to this theory. I had to stay mindful of the fact that I might be judgmental when coming across findings, which indicated opposite or alternative theoretical and practical understandings.

As a student and intern educational psychologist I was able to learn a great deal from the participants who have been working in the field for some time. Their practices and challenges

provided me with a more nuanced understanding of the practice of an educational psychologist within an education system.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the interpretive constructivist paradigm in which this research was situated and its influence on the research design and methodology were discussed. Chapter 4 will provide the findings and interpretations of this study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

The overarching aim of this study was to explore the current theoretical approaches underpinning educational psychologists' practice in DBSTs in the Western Cape. Within this broad aim, the study aimed to identify which theoretical approach(es) the educational psychologists personally espouse and which theoretical approach(es) is (are) espoused within the DBSTs. A further objective was to determine what the practice of their theory-in-use entailed. This research therefore aimed to ascertain whether educational psychologists' espoused theories and theory-in-use correspond. Lastly, the study aimed to explore the influence of the educational psychologists' university training on their current practice and whether further training was required to fulfil their role at the Education District Office.

This chapter will present the findings of this study. It will begin by describing the eight participants in some detail, followed by the qualitative findings consisting of the categories and themes that emerged from the research.

4.2 Characteristics of research participants

The following section aims to provide an outline of the main characteristics of the research group.

All eight of the school psychologists that participated in this study are registered with the HPCSA under the category of educational psychology. The number of years the participants have been registered range from 4 years to 27 years. They are all currently employed by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) in school psychologist positions and. They work at one of the various District Offices in the Western Cape. However, they are appointed to different posts within the District Office and therefore their job descriptions, roles and practices vary among them. For example, one of the participants is a member of the inclusive education team and works specifically with the Specialised Learner and Educational Support (SLES) sector. Another participant holds a managerial position and oversees other psychologists. It is important to highlight that the participants' varying positions may contribute towards them drawing on and applying different theoretical frameworks.

Many of the participants have previously worked in other settings including hospitals, schools (mainstream and/or special-needs schools), universities, private practices or private companies.

The research sample included 4 females and four males ranging between the ages of 42 years and 57 years. All of the participants were fluent in English and Afrikaans and three of them could speak one or more of the African languages, such as Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho and Tswana.

4.3 Findings and Discussion

Results from the data analysis will first be presented in table form to indicate the main categories, themes and sub-themes that were identified during this study. This will be followed by an exposition in which each of the categories that were identified will be summarised, supported by references to the raw data (transcripts) and interpreted and discussed with reference to the literature review of Chapter 2. As noted in Chapter 3, these findings represent my own understanding of the participants' responses.

The five main categories uncovered in this study are: 1) educational psychology; 2) theoretical approaches espoused; 3) practices (theory-in-use); 4) challenges; and 5) training. Within each category, themes and sub-themes exist. The categories, themes and sub-themes of this study have been presented in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Illustration of categories, themes and sub-themes

CATEGORIES	THEMES AND SUB-THEMES
Category 1: educational psychology	Theme 1: participants' definitions of educational psychology Theme 2: generalists versus specialists Theme 3: participants' understanding of the population they serve
Category 2: theoretical approaches espoused	Theme 1: theoretical approach(es) personally espoused Theme 2: theoretical approach(es) espoused by the District Office Theme 3: understanding of a systemic approach
Category 3: practices (theory-in-use)	Theme 1: assessments Theme 2: meetings and interviews Theme 3: report writing and recommendations Theme 4: learning support Theme 5: therapy/counselling Theme 6: training Theme 7: collaboration Theme 8: consultation Theme 9: circuit work Theme 10: administrative tasks Theme 11: curriculum development Theme 12: research Theme 13: policy planning Theme 14: prevention Theme 15: community work
Category 4: challenges	Theme 1: challenges of working as an educational psychologist in a district-based support team Sub-theme 1: working as a team Sub-theme 2: working environment Theme 2: challenges of working systemically Sub-theme 1: insufficient time Sub-theme 2: high demands Sub-theme 3: shortage of psychologists Sub-theme 4: poor socio-economic conditions Sub-theme 5: non-espousal and implementation of new paradigm Theme 3: intrapersonal experiences of participants
Category 5: training	Theme 1: university training Theme 2: continuous training Theme 3: training of the student psychologist

4.3.1 Category 1: educational psychology

Three themes under the category of educational psychology will be examined. Theme 1 will discuss the participants' definitions of educational psychology. Theme 2 will explore whether the participants view their practice of educational psychology as specialised or general. Theme 3 will focus on the participants' understanding of the population they serve.

4.3.1.1 Participants' definitions of educational psychology

The participants were all asked to describe the discipline of educational psychology. Overall, the researcher found their definitions to be more or less consistent with the scope of practice for educational psychologists as defined by the HPCSA (see Chapter 2.6.1 for the scope of practice). Their descriptions included assisting persons to adjust or deal with difficulties to improve their well being and functioning. They described dealing with a variety of issues including: learning, intellectual, emotional, psychological, social or behavioural difficulties or disabilities. Further to this, the participants discussed providing support and interventions to address these issues in some way. The most common practices described by the participants included conducting assessments, diagnosing and providing therapeutic interventions.

In addition, several of the participants included some instances of systemic practice in their definitions. For example, Participant 1 mentioned, *“liais[ing] with and refer[ring] to other health professionals”*; Participant 4 and Participant 8 noted assisting and/or training educators and empowering them to deal with difficulties; Participant 5 referred to *“consultation”*; Participant 1 and Participant 6 commented on considering other *“contexts such as the school, family, social or peer groups and the community”*; and Participant 7 discussed working preventatively, as well as curatively. These examples suggest that there is movement away from defining the work of an educational psychologist to focus solely on the individual and so-called curative work.

Some of the participants' definitions of educational psychology are provided below:

We assess, diagnose, do therapeutic interventions, draw up intervention plans, liaise with and refer to other health professionals, in order to facilitate the psychological adjustment of persons within the context of school, social or peer groups and communities. (P1)

Educational psychologists assess, diagnose and intervene in cases where functioning of children, adolescents and families are affected by learning, emotional, social or behavioural difficulties or disabilities in order to appropriately address these difficulties to facilitate their optimal development, growth and well-being. (P3)

...it is about assisting learners, dealing with learning disabilities, learning problems, assisting educators in being able to identify problems, for example by empowering them with the knowledge of problem areas or what could be the problems with the children, what children come with, what are the background that cause problems with children. (P4)

It's first of all to support learners with a variety of barriers, not just to learning, but coping in life. And it takes from various modalities of support: emotional, cognitive support, learning difficulties, relationships, family structure, suppose it could be part of emotional as well, and various other factors. And then obviously the assessment is part of that, therapy is part of it, the consultation is part of it. (P5)

4.3.1.2 Generalists versus specialists

Several of the participants play specific roles within the DBST, which demand particular approaches and practices. For example, Participant 5 and Participant 6 hold managerial roles, which includes co-ordinating and managing the other school psychologists working at the District Office; Participant 3 works specifically with the Specialised Learner and Educational Support (SLES) sector, with a focus on ensuring the appropriate placement of learners according to the inclusive policy framework; and Participant 7 works specifically with behaviour and teaches the necessary skills (e.g. parenting skills, anger management, stress management, etc.) to parents, teachers and learners.

In addition to these specialist positions, some of the participants discussed that their current job descriptions require them to provide a wide variety of services. For example, Participant 8 stated that *“the list [of practices that they are required to perform] is endless – there are a number of things”* and Participant 5 commented that they are viewed as *“a jack of all trades”*. Participant 7 noted that, *“psychologists see themselves as generalists now, cause they have to do everything”*. However, despite a call for more widespread practice, many of the participants indicated that their work is mainly focused on individual cases and “circuit” responsibilities (to be discussed further in Section 4.3.3.1 and 4.3.3.11 respectively). Participant 1 noted that there are *“huge demands on [their] individual direct services with the*

learner”, Participant 6 said that “*the individual demands for assessment, counselling and so on*” and “*the circuit work limits the other kind of work that they do*”.

Furthermore, it appeared that many of the participants might prefer a more specialised practice. For example, Participant 7 discussed how they are “*fighting*” against being viewed as “*generalists*” at the district, as “*it is too much work*”. Participant 6 recalled how “*less now than before*” psychologists working for the district could focus on providing specific services “*that they enjoyed and were good at*”, whilst “*still providing the main core services*”.

The literature revealed conflicting opinions on whether educational psychologists should see themselves as “*successive generalists*” (Kaser, 1993) or “*highly trained and skilled specialists*” (Stobie, 2002). Eloff *et al.* (2006) discussed that often educational psychologists have been trained in the medical model, and prefer viewing themselves as professionals focusing on a specific field, without having to extend themselves by getting involved in broader issues. It may be that the psychologists working at the District Offices agree with Stobie (2002, p. 233) who argues that, “*while there are underlying transferable competencies required for every educational psychologist, there is enormous room for the acquisition of expertise in specifiable areas of the job*”. This topic seems to be a point of contention, which may require some clarity and direction from the board of psychology and Education Department.

4.3.1.3 Participants’ understanding of the population whom they serve

The majority of the participants defined their scope of practice to include working with children, adolescents, families and adults including parents and educators. However, most of the participants emphasised that the learner is their main client. Some of the participants included the community as well, when defining their scope of practice.

Many of the participants discussed working with adults to be an area of contention and viewed their opinions. Participant 1 commented that “*although the HPCSA limits [them] to working with children and adolescents, [she] [feels] this is too restricting, as [she] [has] the skills to work with persons of all ages*”. Participant 8 stated that although they were not supposed to work with learners older than 18 years, this was unrealistic as, “*you need to work with a parent in order to support the child*”. Participant 2 described “*the commission of education,*” as being “*life-long learning*”. Therefore he felt that it is acceptable to work with

“any adult, as long as it’s got to do with some respect of furthering your learning or your education in some or other way”. Both Participant 6 and Participant 7 were of the opinion that working with adults was acceptable as long as you had the necessary training, as is evident in the following quotations:

...provided you as an educational psychologist have the training and experience, if necessary with supervision. So if you are working just with adults just in psychotherapy or in-depth therapy, provided that you have the requisite training. It is only problematic, I think, when people don’t have the background that get involved with it. (P6)

And if you are trained – I actually highlight that fact – If you are trained to work on a particular challenge and a particular problem you can work with adults, as well, if you have trained and you can prove that you have trained for it. (P7).

At the time of these interviews the new scope of practice had not yet been promulgated, which highlights that educational psychologists are no longer restricted to working only with children and are not bound to the school setting. This change takes cognisance of the fact that education and learning are lifelong endeavours and they are not restricted to the context of formal schooling. However, the new scope mentions that educational psychologists are able to work with children and adults within the context of “learning and development”. As the author discussed in Chapter 2, she argues that the scope would benefit from a more clearly articulated definition of what the Board considers the context of “learning and development” to encompass.

4.3.2 Category 2: theoretical approaches espoused

Anfara and Mertz (2006) define a theoretical approach as “the structure, the scaffolding, or the frame, which guides our thinking, actions and practices.” Argyris and Schön’s (1996) break down the concept of a theoretical approach into two distinct components. They distinguish the difference between espoused theory and theory-in-use. They define espoused theory as the theory people *say* they are following and theory-in-use as the theory that people actually *do* in practice. Argyris and Schön (1996) highlight that actual behaviour may, or may not, be congruent with a person’s espoused theory.

Category 2 provides the findings related to the espoused theoretical approaches underpinning the participants’ practice of educational psychology (i.e. what they say their theoretical

approach to be). Category 3 will provide the findings related to the participants' theory-in-use (i.e. what they do in their practice of educational psychology at the District Office).

Category 2 is divided into three themes: 1) theoretical approach(es) personally espoused; 2) theoretical approach(es) espoused by the District Office; and 3) understanding of a systemic theoretical approach. The results of the first two themes are presented in Table 4.2 to give the reader a broad overview.

Table 4.2 Theoretical approach(es) espoused

Participant	Theoretical approaches personally espoused	Theoretical approaches promoted by the District Office
Participant 1	Ecosystemic approach Bio-psycho-social model Medical model (but not exclusively) Constructivism Multiple Intelligences Existentialism Person-centred therapy Gestalt therapy Narrative therapy Reality therapy Cognitive-behavioural therapy Brief-solution-focused therapy Family-systems therapy	WCED policies such as White Paper 6
Participant 2	An ecosystemic approach Narrative therapy Cognitive-behavioural therapy Person-centred therapy Play therapy	An ecosystemic approach
Participant 3	Ecosystemic model Family therapy Play therapy	Ecosystemic approach Inclusive education framework as per the policy guidelines in White Paper 6
Participant 4	Ecosystemic approach Client-centred therapy Gestalt therapy Narrative therapy	No specific theory
Participant 5	Ecosystemic model Bio-psychosocial model Cognitive-behavioural therapy Psychoanalytic therapy Humanistic therapy	Depends on training, but mostly ecosystemic or bio-psycho-social model
Participant 6	Ecosystemic Eco-psychology Rational-emotive Narrative therapy Client-centred therapy	No specific theory Depends on training and backgrounds, but mostly the ecosystemic model informs the psychological services Inclusive education
Participant 7	Ecosystemic approach Medical model (used as a “backdrop”) Brief-solution-focused therapy Narrative therapy Cognitive-behavioural therapy	Ecosystemic approach Inclusive education
Participant 8	Ecosystemic Narrative therapy Behavioural therapy	No specific theory, but ecosystemic theory seems to be the general theory used

4.3.2.1 Theoretical approach(es) personally espoused

The participants were asked to discuss the theoretical approach(es) that underpins their practice of educational psychology. Several of the participants mentioned that they found this question to be a useful one, as they hadn't given much thought to their theoretical framework before. This is illustrated in the following quotations:

Now listen here, I would like to thank you for the questions hey, because it actually made me think, because when you are doing this for so long a lot of things become automatic and you don't always examine your practice. ... I realised how I just go on from day to day to day and we don't have the theoretical and intellectual discussions that we should have... to keep us sharp. So thank you very much. (P1)

It was a useful exercise for me, because it made me think. It becomes commonplace and as you do things you don't really think about what you are doing and why. But it really gave me an opportunity to think about what I am doing. (P3)

The literature noted that a paradigmatic change provides an opportunity for educational psychologists to engage in a process of professional introspection and self-examination. It was emphasised that they need to be aware of how and why their working contexts have changed in order to meet the new challenges in implementing systemic and inclusive practices (Engelbrecht, 2004). The previously mentioned quotations highlight the appreciation of opportunities for reflective and collaborative engagement with the theoretical underpinnings of the work of an educational psychologist.

After giving the participants an opportunity to reflect on their theoretical approach(es), it was revealed that all of the participants claim to espouse personally an ecosystemic model as the dominant theoretical approach to their practice of educational psychology. This suggests that on an intellectual level, the participants seem to have made the theoretical shift advocated by South African education policies and legislation. It could also be that the participants make use of this theoretical language, with different understandings of the principles underpinning the theory.

The analysis indicated that some of the participants' understanding of the eco-systemic approach may differ individually and may even be somewhat misunderstood to some degree. For example, a few of the participants still consider the medical model to have a place as a theoretical approach that they personally espouse to some degree. Participant 1 noted that,

“there is still a place for it, but not for one-on-one exclusively”. Participant 7 discussed using the medical model as a “backdrop”. In other words, he does not depend solely on the medical model when working on cases, but also considers *“the whole system”*. He mentioned that, *“as a psychologist you need to have”* the medical model, *“because that’s what makes you a psychologist”*. These responses indicate that they view the medical model as a separate approach to the ecosystemic model. However, as mentioned in the literature, the ecosystemic approach is an extension of the medical model and still considers individuals and their biological make-up, but looks at the influence that the environment plays. Another theoretical approach discussed by the participants included the bio-psychosocial model. Participant 5 viewed the ecosystemic approach and the bio-psychosocial model to be *“pretty much similar”*. Participant 1 explained the bio-psycho-social model to include looking at biological factors (such as *“physical aspects”*), psychological factors such as (*“perception”, “thinking”, “attention”, “intelligence”, etc.*) and social factors (such as *“self-esteem”, “self awareness”, etc.*) that have an influence on a person’s development. However, her definition of this approach includes intrinsic concepts only, and fails to consider the ecological interactions.

The bio-psychosocial model only reflects the environment as a social context. Whereas, the ecosystemic approach takes this model further and considers the total ecological environment that has an influence on a person’s functioning. Furthermore, the ecosystemic approach emphasises the interactions within and between systems. The previously mentioned responses suggest that the participants may benefit from a review of the ecosystemic approach in order to gain a complete understanding of this theory in its entirety.

In addition to the ecosystemic model, the participants mentioned several therapeutic approaches that they personally espouse. The most common therapies discussed included: person/client-centred, narrative and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). Some of the participants discussed various other theoretical approaches that they also adhere to as illustrated in Table 4.2 Participant 6 discussed “eco-psychology” as a personal approach that he considers in his own life. He described this as referring to the influence of nature on oneself, as is illustrated in the following quotation:

...just in my own life reading more and more lately around eco-psychology and showing how people become more and more alienated if they are alienated from nature and that strong

link you know...With the environment, before ecosystemic it meant more around the ecology in terms of social ecology, but I am more and more seeing the links just from my own personal experience with wilderness and nature and how essential that is to teaching oneself... (P6)

This illustrates another interpretation and understanding of the interplay between individuals and the environment.

4.3.2.2 Theoretical approaches espoused by the District Office

Overall, the ecosystemic model is claimed to be the main approach informing the participants' practice of educational psychology at the District Office. The participants' understanding of this theory will be discussed further in Section 4.3.2.3. Several of the participants noted that although the general trend seemed to be an ecosystemic approach, there was no specific theory advocated by the District Office. The majority of the participants mentioned that one's personal background and training has an influence on how one works. Participant 1 recalled how *"when [she] started [at the District Office] [they] looked mainly at learning barriers as intrinsic and so [they] would say, 'the child has got a spatial-perception difficulty and so we need to work with the individual'..."* She discussed how she now considers *"systemic factors that could influence learning and could be a barrier"*. Participant 8 felt that the ecosystemic approach *"works very well for this situation" [at the District Office]*. On the other hand, some of the participants mentioned that working according to an ecosystemic model is not always possible. A few of the participants make use of an eclectic approach to their practice of educational psychology at times, due to insufficient time. Participant 5 explained that his reason for working this way was because he doesn't *"have the luxury of time very often and then [he] uses whatever [he] can"*. Further to this, a few of the participants discussed that not all of their colleagues work from a systemic perspective. Participant 6 noted that although the ecosystemic approach *"informs psych [psychological] services, it doesn't always inform other sections within the District"*. He mentioned that this is often *"...a source of conflict, or if not conflict, there is kind of a misunderstanding"* among colleagues. As stated in the literature review, White Paper 6 declared that the Department of Education was committed to *"developing the capacity of all support service providers to provide a holistic and comprehensive service, including the ability to 'work together' in coordinated and collaborative ways"* (DOE, 2001). However, from the participants' responses

it appears that this is not necessarily always the case within the District Offices. There seems to be a lack of cohesion and understanding among the disciplines, where one common theoretical approach guiding them all as a team, could be beneficial.

Several of the participants discussed inclusive education as a philosophy prioritised by the District Office. Participant 6 noted that, *“one of [the] underlying principles of [their] work is that [their] interventions and [their] assessment of the situation should be with a view to inclusive practice”*. Participant 3 mentioned that, *“in the past there was a lot of emphasis on differentness and disabilities”*, but now the focus has shifted to *“giving the child an opportunity to be educated in a school environment that caters for his or her unique needs”*. She expressed that, *“inclusive education gives us the opportunity to learn about the different disabilities, but also to become a more inclusive, not only school, but also society, by accepting one another for our differences”*. Participant 7 described working inclusively as, *“taking note of children’s barriers, and not wanting to change the child to fit into the system, but changing the system so that the child can fit into it”*.

Although the philosophy of inclusive education is claimed to be a priority at the District Office, it may not be fully realised. Participant 7 expressed the opinion that inclusive education is difficult to implement, as they have insufficient resources. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

I can’t fault them [theoretical models] on the philosophical level, but the problem is that they are not often resourced enough to really make them effective. They are First-World models that need First World resourcing, which we don’t have. (P7)

Participant 6 discussed that whilst the District Office adopts an inclusive philosophy, the placement of learners in special schools continues to be a service that they provide. Furthermore, he was of the opinion that this practice is acceptable. This is evident in the following quotation:

...We still have sort of parallel systems, but parallel in the sense that I don’t think they conflict. We still have, there are a lot of specialised support structures for special schools. So we use those and learners do get referred to them... somebody said recently, I think it is L... W..., I’m not sure. She said her intention wasn’t an either/or and so I think that’s the way it works. (P6)

I interpreted the participants' responses to indicate that the District Offices in the Western Cape may not have fully embraced the systemic and inclusive culture and values to the extent envisioned in education policies, such as White Paper 6. However, these findings only capture the perceptions of the research group and other staff members within the districts may hold varying opinions. A more comprehensive study may therefore elicit a different picture.

4.3.2.3 Understanding of a systemic approach

A review of the literature revealed that there are several basic factors that are key to understanding an ecosystemic approach. These factors include the following: 1) the individual does not function in isolation 2) the presenting "problem" is viewed as multi-factorial in origin; 3) interventions are aimed at different levels/systems (i.e., classroom, school, teachers, family, child, curriculum, policy, etc.); and 4) different levels and groups of people are seen as interacting systems – where functioning of the "whole is dependent on the interaction between all parts" (Donald *et al.*, 2010, p. 36).

The participants each had their own unique way of explaining how they understood an ecosystemic approach. Most of them discussed factors 1, 2 and 3 mentioned above. However, factor 4 was only mentioned by Participant 8. All of the participants understood that an individual does not function in isolation (Factor 1 mentioned above). The following quotations are examples of this point:

The onus is not only that the child is the one, you know, intrinsically with the barrier (P1)

You don't look at the child as an island, you see, you consider quite a number of factors. (P8)

In addition, all of the participants discussed that the cause of a learning difficulty or developmental issue should not be viewed solely as a problem within the learner, but rather as being multi-faceted in nature (Factor 2 mentioned above). Below are quotations that illustrate this point:

...presenting problem with various presenting problems. It can be multi-faceted...This may relate to a barrier within the child or within the environment. (P5)

The learning difficulty could range from, as I said you know, what the child brings to the situation, but it could just as well be the systemic factors. (P6)

A learning difficulty could be, it could emanate from a child himself, it could be that it is inside, intrinsic, from within, or it could be from outside, but also the learning difficulty could

emanate from the environment where the child is not exposed to a conducive environment where the child can learn and develop in a proper way, as expected. So you cannot only look at children and say they have a learning difficulty – we also need to look at the environment. (P7)

Furthermore, it was emphasised that there are many “barriers” that can affect a person’s functioning, including both “intrinsic” and “systemic” factors. Such barriers that were mentioned by the participants included: “genetics”, “biological”, “intelligence”, “neurological”, “cognitive”, “physiological”, “physical”, “sensory”, “developmental”, “behavioural”, “attitudes”, “thinking”, “perceptions”, “attention”, “emotions”, “interests”, “levels of stimulation”, “family circumstances”, “home”, “domestic situation”, “child rearing”, “nurture”, “scholastic”, “curriculum”, “career and work”, “church”, “social”, “relationships”, “friends”, “school”, “educator issues”, “poor teaching”, “teaching styles”, “community”, “socio-economic”, “political conditions”, “poverty”, “abuse”, “unemployment” and “drugs”.

Some of the participants discussed the need to implement interventions on multiple levels/systems to bring about change (Factor 3). The following quotations discuss this point:

What we are supposed to do is draw up a holistic and systems intervention plan and this plan should be on many levels... (P1)

Look at the system. Look and see what you as a school can do to improve the system, not just focus on the learner. (P6)

...Taking note of children’s barriers, and not wanting to change the child to fit into the system, but changing the system so that the child can fit into it. (P7)

It is of no use to conduct an intervention on one particular area of a problem – you must conduct all of them. (P8)

None of the participants mentioned the point that the interaction within and among systems is key to an ecosystemic approach (Factor 4 as mentioned above). Participant 8 discussed the need for herself to interact with others in various systems to bring about change (Factor 4). Below is a quotation from this participant:

You consider the family, hence we are working with social workers, we consider the community, hence we are working with NGOs in the community, and social services, you consider even the school, lots of things you are considering. (P8)

In addition, the analysis displayed evidence of “medical model language” being utilised to conceptualise a problem, which is a reflection of the participants’ personal theory and theory-in-use. The discourse used by some of the participants implied that it is the child that is the problem, rather than the child experiencing barriers. Examples of this included descriptions such as: *“the child’s inability to cope”; “it’s about this learner with all these barriers”; “problems with the children”; and “learners with a variety of barriers”*. Furthermore, the participants diagnose learners and label them according to their intellectual level. E.g. *“severely or moderately cognitively handicapped”*.

It is my understanding that whilst the participants appear to have a general grasp of the eco-systemic approach, their practice may benefit from a more thorough understanding. Furthermore, I interpreted the language they use as a reflection of their personal theory and theory in use.

4.3.3 Category 3: practices (theory-in-use)

The participants were asked to discuss what their work at the District Office entailed in practice on a daily basis. This line of questioning is based on what Argyris and Schön (1996) refer to as “theory-in-use”, as it concerns what the participants actually do in practice.

As there were many practices discussed by the participants I have arranged them into the following themes: 1) assessment; 2) meetings and interviews; 3) report writing and recommendations; 4) learning support; 5) therapeutic interventions; 6) training; 7) consultation; 8) collaboration; 9) preventative work; 10) community work; 11) circuit work; 12) curriculum development; 13) policy planning 14) research; and 15) administrative tasks.

Overall, psychometric assessment of learners; “circuit” work; and administrative tasks, were found to be the most common practices for the majority of the participants, forming a large part of their work. Practices that the participants were not currently involved in included: research, curriculum development and policy planning.

Each theme identified will now be discussed in further detail.

4.3.3.1 Assessment

I found there to be an effort made by the participants to obtain information from a number of sources in order to gain a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the learner. They described the assessment process to involve a meeting with the teacher(s)/principal; an interview with the parents and the learner; a psychometric assessment; a follow-up meeting with the teacher and parents to provide feedback and recommendations; and a report. Furthermore, many of the participants mentioned that they obtain additional information from school reports and previous interventions that have taken place at school level, in order to gain a clearer picture of the learner's functioning.

Many of the participants mentioned that they consider the individual case before they conduct a psychometric assessment. Participant 5 stated that “[they] have to clearly find out whether it's going to be effective to assess a child, spend the time assessing and what to do with the information”. Participant 6 described that the psychologist meets with the “teacher support teams around any cases that they perhaps want to refer or want to discuss with a view to assessment”, as well as ensure “that there has been sufficient school-based intervention”. In addition, some of the participants discussed that the focus of the assessment should be on what support is needed in order for the learner to function optimally. Participant 4 emphasised that they “don't just assess for no reason”. She remarked that, “assessment is not their prime thing, but that [they] need to ensure that learners learn effectively”. Participant 7 emphasised the need to “assess for support”. She noted that, “special schools are supposed to be there for intensive barriers”.

However, despite these efforts mentioned above, the researcher understood the practical component of the assessment procedure to be largely based on identifying the deficits contributing to problems experienced. Most of the participants indicated that conducting psychometric assessments forms the majority of their work at the District Office. Furthermore, these assessments are largely concerned with the placement of learners in special schools or school of skills. The following quotations support these points:

A large part of my work is just this – assessing learners and filling in forms for learners to go to special schools. (P1)

So what I do is I assess the children for placement. We get the referrals from the school or from the hospital and then I just do the psychometric assessment for placement... (P3)

Some of the participants mentioned that they make recommendations to support the learner in specific areas that were identified during the assessment (to be discussed further in Theme 3).

The researcher found there to be evidence of integration practices still occurring, as some of the participants discussed the placement of learners in a Learner Support Education (LSEN) unit class, within the mainstream school. A LSEN unit class was defined by Participant 8 as *“a special school, but in the mainstream school. LSEN educators teach those learners with barriers, instead of referring them to a special school, because [they] don’t have many available special schools”*. It can be argued that this practice reinforces a deficit approach, as it focuses on the problem within the individual and the individual’s need to be taught by specialised learning-support educators. On the other hand, the participants mentioned that the teachers in mainstream schools are not willing to accommodate learners’ different learning styles and needs. Participant 7 remarked that the teachers *“want those children with difficulties out of the mainstream school”*. It is therefore often a decision between having no support provided, or specialised support provided.

Many of the participants discussed that the large number of assessments were the result of the many referrals made from the teachers. However, as discussed in the literature review, in order for inclusive education to be fully realised, it is necessary for all parties involved to embrace inclusive values and adopt inclusive practices.

All of the participants spoke of the huge demand for individual assessments, and the lack of time available to complete full psycho-educational assessments. Participant 3 noted that, *“in private practice [she] can really have an in-depth interview with the parent, with the teacher and [she does] a full psycho-education assessment and feedback. But here [at the District] there isn’t really scope or time for that...”* As a result, a shortened version of an intelligence test is used to establish a learner’s IQ score, which determines where he/she will be placed, and/or the necessary support required. The placement of learners, determined by their IQ score, is described by Participant 3 in the following quotation:

...severely or moderately cognitively handicapped, then they would go to a special school. Cognitively mild – if they fall into that category, they may go to a LSEN unit, and if they test borderline then they have to stay in the mainstream, and then once they reach the age of 14 they can then go to a School of Skills. (P3).

However, as mentioned in the literature, the use of psychometric tests should not be solely about obtaining IQ scores, but should be used in conjunction with other assessments to provide a greater understanding of an individual child's strengths and areas of weakness.

The main assessment tool used by all of the participants to determine a learner's intellectual ability is the Senior South African Intelligence Scale-Revised (SSAIS-R). However, a shortened version of the SSAIS-R, consisting of four sub-tests, is used. The Junior South African Intelligence Scale (JSAIS) or Draw-A-Person (DAP) is sometimes used as well. The Beery or Bender is often used to assess visual-motor integration and projective tests such as the Draw-A-Person (DAP) or Kinetic-Family-Drawing (KFD) are used to identify emotional/familial issues. The scholastic tests are generally done by a learning-support teacher at the school. Other assessment tools that were mentioned by the participants, but were seldom used included: scholastic assessments (Standard Assessment Test (SAT); Schonell Arithmetic and Ballard Arithmetic), interest scales (e.g. Nineteen Field Interest Questionnaire), emotional assessments (Vineland Social Maturity Scale, Beck Depression Inventory, Burns Inventory) and personality tests (e.g. 16 Personality Factors (16PF)). The participants were questioned as to whether they felt conducting a shortened version of the intelligence test (e.g. SSAIS-R) was sufficient in order to obtain the learner's level of functioning. Most of the participants responded that this was not ideal, but it was all they could manage with such huge demands and insufficient time. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

Man, I don't have time...Time is a factor. I would have loved to do the full assessment, but I have got to do the short version... the short version doesn't give the full picture... you can see where the child you know falls within, but you don't see the other sub-tests, which would supplement and that would give you the full global, aerial view and then you can say for sure. (P4)

It appears that, despite the participants' will to work systemically and inclusively, the medical model continues to be applied to their assessment practice. Although efforts are being made to obtain information from a number of sources, they still continue to assess, diagnose and label learners according to their innate ability, and place them in special schools away from their peers.

4.3.3.2 Meetings and interviews

As mentioned above, the participants described the assessment process to include meetings or interviews with the persons involved in the learner's learning and development. The participants all spoke about an initial meeting with the teacher or Institution Level Support Team (ILST)/Teacher Support Team (TST) to discuss their concerns and what interventions had already been put in place. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

You don't just go and interfere with the schools – you get invited and they tell you who needs to be seen by you – especially the ILST, is the one that will sift, or even the LSEN educator will tell you, “I would like you to see these children, I have worked with these children so long and I see there's no progress.” (P4)

The next step involves an interview with the parents to discuss relevant information about the learner's context, as well as to obtain written consent to assess the learner. Most of the participants emphasised that ideally they should meet with the parents before conducting the assessment. However, it was revealed that this is not always possible, due to time constraints and availability/willingness of the parents to attend the interview. Participant 1 mentioned that there are times when “[she doesn't] even see the child. [She relies] a hundred percent on what the teachers give [her]”. Many of the participants noted that it is often the case that the parents don't attend the meeting, but give consent to conduct the psychometric assessment via a signed consent form sent home from the school. Participant 3 mentioned that if “there are issues that need to be discussed with the parent then [she] will phone or [she] will ask them to come to the school”. Participants 5 and Participant 8 emphasised that it is ethical practice to meet with the parents where possible. Participant 5 remarked that “even though [he] has lots of cases it must always be ethically guided and to [him] it's very important that there must be communication with whoever referred the child, being the parents or the school”. Participant 5 also highlighted that it is necessary for a psychologist to conduct a

psychometric assessment before a placement in a special school is made. Participant 8 stressed the ethical and legal importance of informing the parents about the purpose and nature of the assessment. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

Remember before I do anything, ethically – it's ethical you see and remember it has legal implications. I must talk to the parents – first talk to the parents and explain to the parents in the language that she is going to understand, what I'm going to do his/her child, what is the best way, how is the child going to benefit. I cannot just assess and take the child to a special school – must know what a special school is... (P8).

The participants mentioned meeting with the parents and teachers after the assessment to provide feedback and recommendations. However, again this is not always possible due to insufficient time. Participant 3 noted that, “*sometimes it's just the report that goes through with the recommendation for placement and the recommendations for other interventions*”. Participant 4 commented that she writes reports and gives them to the school and only communicates with the parents if there is something important that needs to be discussed.

These findings revealed that despite the psychologists' efforts to obtain information from a number of sources and provide feedback to them, this is often not possible. This suggests that they are not always able to gain a complete understanding of the learner in his/her context.

4.3.3.3 Report writing and recommendations

All of the participants discussed recording the results of the assessment in the form of a report, which is given to the parents and the school. Most of the participants noted that their reports are brief, as there are so many cases, as is illustrated in the following quotation:

...a hand-written, brief psychometric report, of which I always leave a copy at the school, and a copy goes with me to go on file, but sometimes if it's a referral for another professional agency, then I will come to the office and type out the report. But I do it because I have so many children it's mostly hand-written (P5)

The report also states the recommendation for placement, if that is the case, as well as general recommendations for other interventions. Some of the participants then meet with the teachers or ILST to devise a support plan for the learner, as illustrated in the following quotation:

...I would give general recommendations and then I would recommend that the teacher, class teacher and the ILST team and all the role players get together and just work on the support plan for the individual child depending on what the needs are of the child... P3)

The meeting of all the relevant role players presents an example of systemic practice, which encompasses multi-disciplinary collaboration. However, as mentioned previously, the psychologists do not always get the opportunity to meet with the relevant persons to discuss a suitable support plan.

4.3.3.4 Learning Support

None of the participants participate in providing direct learning support to the learners, but provide recommendations to be implemented by others such as the class teacher or learning-support teacher. Some of the participants discussed devising an individualised plan to support the learner in specific areas that were identified during the assessment. This support plan is known as an individual educational plan (IEP) and is devised together with the other key role players, such as the class teacher, Institutional Level Support Team (ILST) and learning-support teacher. Most of the participants spoke about equipping the ILST with the knowledge and skills to deal with a variety of barriers to learning. Participant 6 described that their “*focus is on building systems at school like the ILST, to help the schools to have capacity to include all learners*”. Participant 4 discussed using the ILST “*as a vehicle to help [them]*” and to be “*the first port of call when there are problems*”.

These responses suggest that an effort is being made to support the learner, as well as the educators. These practices are in line with an ecosystemic approach, as the focus is not solely on providing direct support to the learner, but supporting the system to support the learner.

4.3.3.5 Therapeutic interventions

Most of the participants stated that they do not conduct many therapeutic interventions due to insufficient time and the requirements of the District Office. Participant 4 stated that providing therapy is “*not [their] core function*”. It was noted that when they are involved in therapy with a learner, then it is for a brief period of time, usually only one session. A few of the participants mentioned conducting therapeutic interventions with groups of learners to deal with specific issues such as divorce, anger management or social skills. Many of the

participants spoke about “*debriefing*” or “*crisis management*” as a means of immediate counselling when a tragic event occurs, such as a shack fire, a bus accident, death, murder, rape, etc. Where further therapy is needed, referrals are made to other professionals, such as social workers, or non-government organisations (NGOs).

Some of the participants discussed that the focus has shifted to training the teachers to deal with emotional and behavioural issues themselves instead of the psychologist intervening with the learners directly. This practice is in keeping with the Department of Education’s vision, whereby mental health care providers are seen as facilitators and consultants rather than primarily or exclusively as therapists.

However, most of the participants discussed the large demand for therapeutic interventions and their desire to do more direct therapy with individual learners. Participant 1 emphasised that “*there is still a big need for individual work because our children are severely stressed and traumatised*”, and Participant 8 remarked that one therapeutic consultation is “*not effective*”. Participant 2 commented that he doesn’t “*have the pleasure and the privilege to work one-on-one*” or the “*luxury of seeing clients, even two times.*”

It would appear that attempts are being made to provide interventions on different systemic levels. Personal preferences may not always be met, but the lack of time and the dire needs that exist within schools necessitate such interventions.

4.3.3.6 Training

Most of the participants discussed conducting training, in the form of workshops to provide educators and parents with knowledge, skills, as well as support. Participant 3 described providing training and workshops to be “*part of the job description*”. Many of the participants specifically mentioned training the ILSTs to assist educators to be able to identify problem areas, and empower them to deal with such issues. Examples of workshop topics mentioned by the participants included: “*parenting skills*”, “*anger management skills*”, “*stress management*”, “*how to deal with a learner with attention-deficit disorder*”, “*behavioural problems*”, “*how to work with difficult learners*”, and “*classroom management*”.

Some of the participants were of the opinion that the workshops provided to educators, are ineffective. Participant 1 commented that the workshops are usually only one hour long, and as a result there is insufficient time to fully equip them with the necessary skills. She concluded that it *“is not a meaningful workshop it’s just a hello and goodbye”*. She discussed how she recently negotiated with the district to run *“a twelve-week parenting skills programme”*, which would allow for in-depth training. Participant 5 mentioned that *“in terms of [his] personal experience, teachers have so many workshops, and they don’t apply anything of what they learn”*. He resolved to *“do workshops for schools or groups of teachers or individual teachers who have specific needs of their own, that they want support with, because then they are motivated to use what they get”*.

I found that although psychologists are providing some form of training to educators, this is met with many challenges. The value of workshop training for educators seemed to be questioned by some of the participants in this study. In order for systemic interventions such as training to be successful there needs to be a willingness to learn and a desire to further one’s knowledge and skills from the educators’ perspectives and fresh ways of approaching it from the department and the psychologists’ sides.

4.3.3.7 Consultation

Many of the participants discussed that consultation forms a large part of their practice. As mentioned in the literature, consultation is a practice largely associated with a systemic approach. The participants mentioned that they consult with principals, educators, ILSTs, parents, as well as other professionals. Consultation was described by the participants to involve providing information and support, as well as equipping others with the necessary skills. Participant 7 described consulting to be about *“empowering [others] so that when [the professionals] are not there, then they are able to do whatever it is that they have to do”*.

Participant 6 felt that there should be more consultation occurring and he remarked that this is *“an area where a psychologist could be more effective”*. However, he noted that, *“in order to consult and work preventively and focus on the system, you also need time to go and become part of that system.”* He emphasised that this type of work is time consuming, even more so than individual work. He mentioned that consultation is not about the psychologist being an expert with all the answers, but rather about collaborating with others and sharing knowledge

and skills to come up with strategies to address the situation. The following quotation provides Participant 6's understanding of consultation:

...when I say consulting also not meaning consulting as a specialist coming in, having all of the answers, but where you sit down with the system and say okay let's look as a group and I bring what I bring to the situation and you bringing what you do. Let's look and try and analyse what is going on and then together jointly work out strategies to address whatever the difficulty is. And it means you know the psychologist may have a role, but lots of other people will also have a role. So it's not coming in knowing everything, but just bringing a different perspective to the school.

It is my understanding that although the psychologists are engaging in consultative practice, this is an area that they would further want to develop.

4.3.3.8 Collaboration

The participants mentioned that collaboration with others is an important element of their practice. Firstly, they are involved in collaboration within the District Office, as they work as part of a DBST. Secondly, they collaborate with the teachers, parents and principals at the school. Participant 1 discussed working together with volunteer parents who offer their service to the school where needed. She gave an example of parents who assist learners by helping them learn to read. Thirdly, they collaborate with other professionals such as the school nurse, doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers, and private psychologists, etc. Lastly, some of the participants collaborate with members of the community, such as church ministers. Participant 6 discussed the importance of “*providing broader-based intervention at community level and not just the school in isolation*”. He emphasised that “*real collaboration*” is about getting community members, as well as other agencies, such as health and social services, involved to support the school. He spoke about how people across sectors need to get together and discuss the needs of the school and how they can assist. He noted that this sort of broad-based collaboration is not taking place at present.

Despite efforts to work collaboratively, many of the participants discussed that they are often met with challenges. These will be discussed further in Category 4.

4.3.3.9 Curriculum development

The participants noted that they were not involved directly with the development of the curriculum, as it was the job of the curriculum advisors. Participant 1 noted that in the past she used to assist with the Life Orientation curriculum, but now she does not have the time to be involved in such work.

4.3.3.10 Policy planning

None of the participants work directly with the devising of educational policies. However, some of the participants mentioned that they have an indirect influence on policy as they express their views to the District management, who in turn inform the policy advisors. This is illustrated in the following quotations:

I think we do influence policy in terms of what our experience is, because you express your needs and concerns in policy. Policy will more go through District management and I think our role is to inform District management of general needs and traits we pick up in schools and then it's their role to pass on the information. (P5)

Our work does influence policy in a way. Although, not at a level where you write up policies, things like that, but we can do, at the ground level you can do things and think this is not working well, and if this can be implemented or it can be done this way, then things can change, then you inform policy in that way. (P7)

However, some of the participants expressed frustration when it comes to the implementation of the policy at ground level, as well as feelings of not being valued. These feelings are evident in the following quotations:

So it's more about implementing policy than development and that's also a frustration because you are just expected to implement policy that doesn't always work or that are not always feasible or manageable. (P6)

...and often we see that things don't work, but they still don't change. And sometimes they come up with policies where, for instance with the redesign that has happened, they cut psychologists, the number of psychologists, and you actually saying to them we need more psychologists, but they not seeing it, so sometimes it's useless – for you to even get involved. (P7)

And then another thing in the problems, we are always being reminded time and again that they don't really see our roles as psychologists, they don't really see why are we supposed to

be here, what are we doing.. We have to write a report and motivate why you supposed to be here. So in other words they don't value us. They don't value us, you see. So, it demotivates and discourages, such things, because to take into consideration you have put in a lot of weight behind this work and if you look back that, the learners out there they cannot function without a psychologist and the support. (P8)

Although the scope of practice for educational psychologists includes advising on the development of policies, this does not appear to be occurring in practice. Collaborative discussions between the Board for Psychology and the Education Department on this issue could have useful results.

4.3.3.11 Preventative work

Many of the participants provide training and workshops to parents, teachers and learners with the aim of preventing problems. However, Participant 5 spoke about his “*personal experience*” of providing teachers with workshops. He commented that “*teachers have so many workshops, they just sit there and they don't apply anything of what they learn in these workshops. They just go back to what they know.*”

Participant 8 mentioned that they also encourage the teachers to have “awareness days”, to educate learners about issues such as drug abuse, HIV/AIDS or child abuse.

Many of the participants discussed wanting to be more involved in preventative work, but not having enough time to do so, due to the many schools and large demands of individual cases. Participant 6 commented that he didn't believe, due to the “*limited resources*”, that an educational psychologist working at the District Office “*can effectively*” do both individual and preventative work. He remarked that you “*almost need two different people – one doing direct work and another indirect*”. These challenges will be examined further in Category 4.

4.3.3.12 Community work

Most of the participants are not involved in large-scale community work, but do collaborate with community members, where possible. Many of the participants discussed liaising with non-government organisations that work directly with the schools. Participant 7 commented

that the schools that have NGOs working with them “*run smoothly, because there is understanding in the community, and the community wants to give back to the school*”. He remarked that if “*the school is willing and the community is helping*”, then “*you find that there is a lot of cohesion and working together, and therefore less challenges*”.

Participant 6 commented that, this type of work should be done by “community psychologists”, as he felt there is insufficient time to work effectively on an individual and school level, as well as community level.

4.3.3.13 Circuit work

The participants discussed the work they conduct as members of a DBST, which they refer to as “circuit work”. The support team comprises professionals such as psychologists, social workers, curriculum advisors and learning-support teachers who work together as a team to provide support to schools. The participants described this work mainly to include school readiness and progression and promotion of learners. However, I got the sense that they view this work as separate to their job as a psychologist. Participant 1 commented that when she began working at the District Office in 1996 it was her “*dream job*”, as she was a “*psychologist five days a week*”. Nowadays, she remarked that, “*twenty five percent of [her] time is spent in meetings, and fifty percent of [her] time is circuit work [school readiness, progression and promotion]*”.

School readiness involves an evaluation of the readiness of the school to function effectively. The schools are required to devise a School Improvement Plan (SIP), with the aim of developing areas of the school that are not functioning optimally. The DBST is responsible for evaluating this plan, as well as providing recommendations for effective implementation. In addition, the support team should monitor the progress made throughout the year. This type of practice is an example of systemic work, as it involves assessing the functioning of the system to support the learners.

Progression and promotion involve discussing the learners at risk with the teachers or ILSTs. They ensure that the learners with difficulties have received the necessary additional support. They examine the interventions that have been put in place and provide further recommendations.

Many of the participants mentioned having to perform functions as part of the support team that does not involve educational-psychological work. An example given by several of the participants involved monitoring school examinations. The participants expressed their dissatisfaction with having to perform such tasks that they felt were not part of the profession of educational psychology. The following quotation illustrates this point:

But that does not mean you are not going to do the unskilled work, like what the District is doing. For instance I'm going to monitor examinations like anyone. I'm going to be there for two solid hours, walking up and down doing nothing as a psychologist. If they say they want the number of teachers during opening, how many teachers who are present, who are not present, people who are sick, who are not sick, how many toilets that are working, how many broken desks, how many books are needed, you have to go and look at all the toilets and see if they are still working, all the schools – we are also doing that. Things that are supposed to be done by people who are doing curricular, but we also do that, there is no exception. Because we are doing teamwork. But I don't understand this teamwork, how does it work? Because to my professional job, they can't come and help me, because they are not skilled. (P8)

However, it may be argued that this kind of monitoring of schools' effective functioning could be viewed by the participants as a component of their systemic practice. This line of thinking follows the notion that in order to be able to support the system, it is important to know how the system functions. Although, this does not imply that the psychologist must do all the work. Systemic work suggests that all parties involved collaborate and perform varying tasks and take on differing roles in order for the system to function effectively.

4.3.3.14 Research

None of the participants were involved in research. However, three of the participants spoke about the possibility of being involved in research projects in the future.

4.3.4.15 Administrative tasks

Most of the participants discussed the large amount of administrative work that has to be done on a daily basis. This includes tasks such as checking and responding to emails and letters; making and returning telephone calls; report writing; processing application forms; planning; and preparation for training and workshops.

The discussion in the preceding three categories has shed light on the educational psychologists' espoused theoretical approaches, as well as the theory-in-use at the Education District Offices in the Western Cape. These essentially provide an understanding of the first research question, which aimed to explore the theoretical approach/es underpinning the participating educational psychologists' practice in DBSTs.

The findings revealed that all of the participants claim to personally espouse an ecosystemic approach to the practice of educational psychology. In addition, the ecosystemic model is claimed to be the main approach informing the participants' practice of educational psychology at the District Office. However, many of the participants stated that although the general trend seemed to be an ecosystemic approach, there was no specific theory advocated by the District Office per se. Furthermore, they often do not get to practice in this way due to the many challenges faced.

Overall, I found that in practice, the participants seem to implement both systemic and traditional child-focused practices. There seems to be a move towards providing more systemic services, such as collaboration, consultation, training and school-readiness evaluations. However, traditional child-focused practice, such as conducting psychometric assessments and placing learners in special schools, appears to be their core service. Involvement in research initiatives, curriculum development and policy planning were among the least reported practices.

The participants discussed the many challenges that they experience working at the Education District Office, as well as implementing the systemic approach in practice. The following category aims to examine the challenges experienced by the participants.

4.3.4 Category 4: Challenges

Throughout the interviews with the participants it became very apparent that there are many challenges facing the educational psychologists. These challenges include working at the Education District Office; challenges that prevent them from working systemically; as well as intrapersonal challenges. This section aims to examine these many challenges.

4.3.4.1 Challenges working at the District Office

Two sub-themes make up this theme of challenges in working at a District Office. These include: “*working as a team*” and “*working environment*”.

Working as a team

The participants spoke of the many challenges they experience as being members of a DBST. Many of the participants discussed their frustration in having to do non-psychological work, which takes away from their already-limited time. In addition, some of the participants felt that their identity as a psychologist “*gets lost*” doing this work. Participant 7 mentioned that many of the psychologists are protesting being involved with “*things that don’t have anything to do with psychology*”. She remarked that she makes “*sure that she keeps her identity*” when working in a team, by bringing her “*psychological point of view*” and “*expertise*”.

A further challenge discussed by most of the participants is their lack of autonomy and being managed by others who are not psychologists, and do not fully understand the work of a psychologist. The following quotations illustrate this point:

...and I had autonomy, but now I am a circuit team member and I must follow instructions...As a member of the circuit team you must do what the circuit team is doing. (P1)

I think a negative would be the biggest is working in a District Office where you report to non-psychologists. (P5)

...having too many bosses and too many people making demands of them and not actually allowing them and giving them credit for managing the service themselves, because they actually cope and do it themselves quite adequately but everybody seems to think they can manager it better. (P6)

We are supervised or managed by people who are not psychologists, know nothing about psychology, they are not registered as psychologists, but they are giving us a go ahead, what must you do and what not to do. (P8)

These findings revealed to me that the DBST’s in the Western Cape are not functioning optimally, as envisioned in education policies. There seems to be a lack of a multi-disciplinary collaboration, and issues around expertise, identity and status. It appears that

some of the participants are not willing to share their “expert” knowledge and view themselves as superior to other members in their team. This is an indication of their theory-in-use, which suggests that the participants’ have not fully embraced inclusive and systemic approaches, as their own team does not appear to function within these frameworks.

Working environment

Many of the participants spoke about their working environment being less than ideal. Their office space is cramped and there are minimum of eight people working in one small office. Participant 8 described the seating arrangements as being “packed like sardines”. He noted that *“there is no privacy if you are speaking to a parent”*, and this shows a *lack of professionalism – especially when it comes to psychology*”.

Another challenge faced by some of the participants is the shortage of transport to get to the schools. Participant 7 commented that *“sometimes you need to go out to the school, you can’t because there’s no car at the Education Department, therefore you cannot do follow up in a proper way”*.

4.3.4.2 Challenges working systemically

Five sub-themes were identified as challenges preventing the participants from working systemically. These include: *“insufficient time”*; *“high demands”*; *“shortage of psychologists”*; *“poor socio-economic conditions”*; and *“non-espousal and implementation of new paradigm”*.

Insufficient Time

One of the biggest challenges mentioned several times by all of the participants was the lack of time they have to work effectively. This is mainly due to the large demands placed on them and the shortage of psychologists. The participants are responsible for managing a huge number of schools (between 21 and 45 schools were noted), and therefore have to divide their time up accordingly. Often this results in visiting a school only once or twice a year. Participant 5 commented that he offers *“a same-day service – in other words whatever we deal with that morning, [we] must finalise that afternoon, because tomorrow has the same number of needs”*. He noted that he has *“to have clear boundaries and limit the number of*

consultations, otherwise it can become endless". A limited amount of time often results in limited services that can be provided. The following quotations illustrate this point:

Here at the District Office you are limited in terms of the time you can spend with a learner. In my particular post, there are limitations with regard to the consultations that I can do, and the assessments, that I can do. In private practice I can really have an in-depth interview with the parent, with the teacher and I do a full psycho-education assessment and feedback. And here there isn't really scope or time for that in my current position. (P3)

...the problem is when there is huge demands on your services, on your individual direct services with the learner, and that swamps you, there is not a lot of time left for the preventative systemic work, which is actually just as time consuming". (P6)

High demands

All of the participants mentioned that there is a large demand for their services, particularly direct work with individual learners. They get many referrals from schools, particularly for assessments and placements in special schools. Participant 1 remarked that she was "overwhelmed" with the number of applications. She noted that when she last counted she had one hundred and twenty applications for placement in special schools. Participant 6 discussed the "stress of constantly working in an environment where the needs far outweigh what you are able to provide". He commented that many of the psychologists feel despondent as they have studied to be in the helping profession, but they can't help everyone. He remarked that "you have to come to terms with that, otherwise you would go insane".

Shortage of psychologists

Many of the participants mentioned that there are not enough psychologists available to cater for the many schools that need support. Participant 6 commented that "psychologists are under-supplied and there is an over-demand for their services". Each psychologist is responsible for providing support to a minimum of 20 schools, which Participant 8 referred to as being "a drop in the ocean" and "impractical". In addition, Participant 4 highlighted the shortage of "African, Xhosa-speaking psychologists in the Western Cape", as many of the learners first language, and sometimes only language, is Xhosa.

Participant 7 discussed the lack of support shown for psychological services. She noted that the number of psychologists employed by the Education Department was recently cut. She

remarked that they have informed policy advisors and management that they require more psychologists, but their requests have not been met.

Poor socio-economic conditions

Many of the participants discussed being disheartened by the poor socio-economic conditions of the schools to which they provide their services. Some of the poor conditions mentioned by the participants include poverty, lack of resources, large classes, burnt-out teachers, rape and murder. Participant 6 commented that, *“the socio-economic situation is so huge that you wonder if anything you do is actually going to make a difference”*. Further to this, Participant 7 noted that they *“need First-World resourcing, which [they] don’t have.”*

In addition, some of the participants noted that the teachers find it difficult to implement the recommended interventions, due to the large number of learners in their classes. The following quotation illustrates this point:

If the classes were smaller I am sure teachers would be more creative, but if you’ve got forty-seven children in a class it’s difficult. So they are and we are struggling and we are fighting with teachers to do interventions and many of them are doing the best that they can. It’s not always very effective. (P1)

Non-espousal and implementation of new paradigm

The participants noted that many of the teachers still adhere to a medical approach when dealing with learners with difficulties. Participant 1 commented that, *“teachers are still stuck in the medical model”*. Participant 3 noted that *“there is a lot of misconception about inclusivity and the teachers’ understanding and their implementation of inclusive practices are not always what is envisioned in White Paper 6”*. Participant 6 remarked that teachers *“still locate the problem purely within the child”* and want the psychologist to *“fix the child”*. Participant 7 discussed that the teachers see the children *“as the ones with problems”* and are not willing to change themselves or the way they teach.

Participant 6 noted that one of the greatest challenges is to get teachers to espouse and implement a systemic model. He discussed that whilst the psychologists are looking at working systemically, the teachers *“want a quick fix”*. Participant 7 remarked that, *“teachers just want those children with difficulties out of the mainstream school and gone to a special*

school". She commented that the reason the psychologists are "*doing so many assessments, is that they are assessing for placement for special schools*", as a result of the many referrals from teachers. Teachers are not willing to implement alternative recommendations and interventions. Both Participant 1 and Participant 5 discussed some teachers' inability to acknowledge and accommodate learners' different learning styles and needs. Participant 1 stated that "*teachers want a one-size-fits-all*" approach. Participant 5 emphasised that "*they need to differentiate and create opportunities*". Participant 7 concluded that, "*although the department is really trying, it's not working well*".

As the literature revealed, in order to manage these mentioned challenges, educational psychologists are required to shift their focus to a more broad-based practice centered on the enhancement of the various systems (parents, teachers, school, policy, etc.). However, it appears that all parties involved (such as education management structures, DBSTs, educators, parents, etc.) including the educational psychologists themselves, have not made this shift entirely and as a result these challenges continue to exist.

These findings concur with research conducted by MacKay and Boyle (1994), Farrell *et al.* (2006) and Ashton and Roberts (2006), whose research revealed that teachers wanted educational psychologists to continue with traditional practice (i.e. individual casework, usually revolving around the use of cognitive tests and counselling). As suggested in the literature, it may be that educators and other professionals do not see the unique role and value that educational psychologists have apart from individual assessment. It is possible that a major reason why schools do not want systemic practice is that they are not yet aware of its possibilities. I agree with MacKay's (2002) recommendation that the range of services that educational psychologists can provide to schools should be explained clearly to school principals, educators and other stakeholders. Further to this, as argued by Stobie (2002a), it appears that the Education Department and Education District Offices themselves have nurtured the traditional role of educational psychologists (for example, by providing individual psychometric assessments and placements in special schools), thereby negating the profession the much wider applied psychology role that could address the expanse of problems in education.

However, it is important to acknowledge that a shift in paradigms does not necessarily imply an overnight change in practices. Changing the system involves new learning for everyone, new responsibilities and is an on-going process.

4.3.4.3 Intrapersonal experiences of participants

Overall, I found many of the participants to be experiencing feelings of being overwhelmed, overworked, frustrated, demotivated, undervalued and discouraged at times. In fact, when I asked Participant 8 to describe a highlight of his job he remarked, *“I don’t have a positive to be honest.”* He discussed that some of his colleagues at the District Office *“don’t really see [their] role as psychologists...”* He mentioned having to *“write a report to motivate why [he] is supposed to be [at the District]”*. He concluded that, *“they don’t value us... so it demotivates and discourages us.”*

The following category will examine the participants training in educational psychology.

4.3.5 Category 5: Training

Category 5 consists of three themes. Theme 1 will explore the influence of the educational psychologists’ university training on their current practice. Theme 2 will look at the role of continuous training. Lastly, Theme 3 will describe the participants’ opinions on the training of the student educational psychologist.

4.3.5.1 University training

All of the participants felt that their university training in educational psychology had given them a solid foundation to be able practice at the District Office. The following quotations illustrate this point:

I was very fortunate to do my degree at XXXXX. The training that they gave us was very thorough...I am eternally grateful to my lecturers that I had at XXXXX. I can’t say it enough...The training that I got from XXXXX was a very solid foundation for me to put all the other things on. If I never had that, then these things wouldn’t be easy to attach to my existing framework. (P1)

It definitely played a role. (P2)

I think the training that I received equipped me to do that. I think I was fortunate to be trained at YYYYYY at the time when inclusive education was coming to the fore. (P3)

I think it was great. The role on my current practice was really good, especially the internship. (P4)

I think very much influential. Most of what I received in my training, I still use on a day-to-day basis. However, obviously one does pick up through experience, and primary training was just a core base on which you lean, and then from then onwards you have to learn how to do the job. But without your primary training you can't do it at all. Definitely, so it's a strong guideline. (P5)

Oh definitely, yes, yes there's a relevancy, there's a correlation to the training and the work that I'm doing – there is a relationship. (P8)

4.3.5.2 Continuous training

The participants mentioned continuous training, as being very influential in their current practice. Some of the participants noted that their teaching experience had equipped them well to be able to understand and deal with learners. Many of the participants discussed Continuous Professional Development (CPD), which is a requirement of the HPCSA for all registered professionals. This involves attending a number of workshops, courses, etc., in order to gain further knowledge and skills and be kept abreast of current trends and new research findings. Participant 5 discussed the importance of “*being aware of the changes in the field, as there's always change*” and “*amending your practice according to the newest information and tendencies*”. Some of the participants noted the importance of reading and Participant 2 referred to himself as a “*scholar*”, “*reader*” and “*life-long learner*”.

4.3.5.3 Training of student educational psychologists

Most of the participants discussed community work and the ecosystemic approach as important to include in the training of the student educational psychologist. Below are some of the participants' thoughts:

I think a module on community psychology ... Just because of the vast numbers. (P1)

I think to understand the environment/the community where the child comes from. So they need to have community development skills when they do their practice because issues are not just straight cut you need to be brought up and understand maybe of even politics. (P4)

...look at the whole system – at community psychology and for me that probably was the most useful, because to come into a system like this just with your individual focus it wouldn't have been helpful. So that whole thing of community and looking at it and saying if I am going to,

if I have got limited time and limited resources, how can I best use that to impact on the system for the greater benefit of as many learners as possible. (P6)

Systems for me is very important because you know other universities they just focus on the medical model, individual therapy, psychodynamic, yes the psychodynamic model is there for one to understand. Understanding systems for me is very important (P7).

Participant 1 mentioned the importance of being trained to work with groups of people, and not just one-on-one. She discussed the need “*for psychologists who come into work in a district setup to need facilitation skills*”.

4.4 Conclusion

As part of my discussion and in conclusion, I would like to apply the bio-ecological model, discussed in Chapter 2 and which I personally espouse, in attempting to gain an understanding of the approaches adopted by the educational psychologists that participated in this study. The bio-ecological model can provide a framework for understanding the way in which the educational psychologists function within their current work context. By exploring the nature of their context, we can begin to gain a deeper understanding of their practices, as well as the challenges they face within their context.

It is important to recognize that the context within which the educational psychologists function is made up of multiple layers or systems (i.e. micro-, meso-, exo-, macrosystem). If we look at the different systems of which they form part, as well as the relationships and interactions between and within these various systems, we begin to gain a better picture of the complex nature of their work. Examples of the systems and subsystems of which the educational psychologists form part and the interactions which contribute to the psychologists’ experiences as related in the findings, include the National Department of Basic Education, the Western Cape Education Department, the Education District Offices, the DBST, management systems, the different schools, the principals, the staff of each school, individual classroom systems, teachers, parents, as well as the learners, collectively as well as individually. In addition to the systems mentioned, macro systemic factors such as socio-economical and historical factors also influence the experiences and practices of the educational psychologists.

The findings of this study revealed many challenges that the educational psychologists experience within the different systems, which have an influence on the way they perform their current job description. The microsystem, which encompasses the relationships and interactions the educational psychologists have with their immediate surroundings, includes challenges like the poor working environment at the Education District Offices; the lack of collaboration among the DBSTs within which they operate; and insufficient time to meet with teachers and parents. The mesosystem involves the relationships that develop and exist between these various systems. For example, the interaction between learners and teachers could influence the work of the educational psychologist in a positive or negative manner. The exosystem incorporates the larger system in which the educational psychologists do not function directly, but which have an impact on their functioning (such as an inflexible curriculum or possible inadequate teacher training). The macrosystem comprises of social/cultural values, beliefs, practices, attitudes and customs (e.g. Discrimination against learners who are seen as ‘different’; or non-espousal of an ecosystemic approach by teachers), as well as socio-economic issues, (such as poverty, crime, abuse, violence, laws, politics, poverty, etc.) and politics (such as apartheid system). The effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have cascading influences throughout the interactions of all other systems.

As Bronfenbrenner’s approach states, the functioning of the “whole is dependent on the interaction between all parts”. This means that an action or change on one level cannot be seen as the cause for an action on another level. Each system possesses critical, contributing factors. Efforts should be directed at synergizing the system as a whole. The emphasis is on changes to the systems within their context (i.e. teachers, schools, parents, the education system). Linear solutions do not exist, and are also not only dependent on the practices of educational psychologists.

An awareness of the complexity of the systems within which educational psychologists practice, brings about a deeper understanding of some of the discrepancies between espoused theory and theory-in-use which were found in this study.

This chapter presented and discussed the findings of this study. From the analysis of the interviews, five categories emerged. Category 1 explored the participants’ definitions and understanding of educational psychology. Category 2 examined the theoretical approaches

personally espoused by the participants, as well as those espoused at the district office. In addition, this category looked at the participants' understanding of an eco-systemic approach to the practice of educational psychology. Category 3 revealed what the participants do in practice on a daily basis – their “theory-in-use”. Category 4 discussed the numerous challenges experienced by the participants. Lastly, Category 5 explored the influence of the educational psychologists' university training, as well as continuous training and training of the student educational psychologist.

Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the research process, as well as draw final conclusions, make recommendations for theory and practice and give suggestions for further research. In addition, the strengths and limitations related to the study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: OVERVIEW, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the research findings and address the research questions. Recommendations for theory and practice will be discussed, as well as for further research. Thereafter, the limitations and the strengths of the study will be presented.

5.2 Overview of the research

Chapter 1 placed this study in context and provided the rationale and aims for conducting such research, as well as presented the research questions. This chapter revealed that there has been a paradigmatic shift in the field of educational psychology, from a predominantly medical perspective to a systemic approach. This has resulted in the need for educational psychologists to redefine how they conceptualise problems, as well as consider new ways of practising. An examination of the literature revealed a lack of studies in South Africa examining the theoretical approaches supported and implemented by educational psychologists. The current study therefore endeavoured to research this topic further and chose to focus on educational psychologists working at the Education District Offices in the Western Cape. The following questions were explored:

1. What are the theoretical approach(es) underpinning educational psychologists' practice in DBSTs?
 - 1.1 Which theoretical approach(es) do they personally espouse?
 - 1.2. Which theoretical approach(es) is espoused within the DBSTs?
 - 1.3. What does their theory-in-use entail in practice within the DBSTs?
 - 1.4. How do a) the theory that they personally espouse, b) the theory espoused within DBSTs and c) the theory-in-use within the DBSTs, correspond?
2. What role does their initial training play in their current practice?

The rest of Chapter 1 provided the definitions of key concepts, a brief description of the research design and methodology, assurance of validity and reliability, ethical considerations pertaining to the inquiry, and my position as researcher.

Chapter 2 provided a literature review of the topic under study. A description of the two dominant theoretical approaches informing educational psychology practice were presented. This was followed by an overview of education, educational support and educational psychology in South Africa, as well as internationally. Research on educational psychology was also explored.

Chapter 3 described the research design and methodology that was followed to gather, record and analyse the data in this study, in order to answer the research questions. The research was guided by the interpretive/constructivist paradigm and qualitative methods were employed. Eight educational psychologists working at various Education District Offices in the Western Cape participated in the study. Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted with each participant. The data was then analysed and interpreted by the researcher.

In Chapter 4, the findings derived from the qualitative data analysis of the interviews with the participants were presented and discussed. Five categories, along with themes and sub-themes, related to the theoretical approaches underpinning the educational psychologists' practice were derived from the data.

The current chapter has provided a brief overview of the inquiry. Conclusions on the findings, recommendations, and the limitations and strengths of the study will be presented below.

5.3 Conclusions on the findings

There were five main categories uncovered in this study: Category 1: Educational psychology; Category 2: Theoretical approaches espoused; Category 3: Practices (theory-in-use); Category 4: Challenges; and Category 5: Training. A brief summary of each category, as well as concluding comments, will now be discussed.

5.3.1 Category 1: Educational psychology

Theme 1 examined the participants' definitions of educational psychology. The most common practices included in their definitions were conducting assessments, diagnosing and providing therapeutic interventions. In addition, there were instances of systemic practice

described, such as consultation; liaising with other health professionals; considering other contexts; training; and preventative work.

Theme 2 explored the participants' work as an educational psychologist and whether it is general and widespread, or specialised. The participants discussed their job description at the Education District Office to include a wide range of services. However, despite this, most of their work currently seems to focus on "*individual direct services with the learner*". The reason for this is that there is a great demand for these services. Furthermore, it appeared that the participants would prefer a more specialised practice, which would allow for more time to be involved in areas that they enjoy and in which they are skilled.

Theme 3 looked at the participants' understanding of the population they serve as educational psychologists. They described their work to include working with children, adolescents and adults. However, there was debate concerning whether it was appropriate for an educational psychologist to work with adults. One participant noted that this was acceptable provided the work concerned "*learning*" or "*education*". Other participants, discussed that an educational psychologist could work with adults, as long as they had the necessary training.

5.3.2 Category 2: Theoretical approaches espoused

Within Theme 1, it was revealed that a few of the participants had not reflected on their theoretical framework for some time and appreciated the opportunity to do so. Overall, the dominant theoretical approach personally espoused by the participants is the ecosystemic model.

Theme 2 discussed the theoretical approach espoused at the Education District Office. The participants indicated that they make use of the ecosystemic framework to inform their practice. A further philosophy discussed by the participants included inclusive education. However, it was mentioned by several of the participants that the District Office does not necessarily advocate a specific theoretical approach and one's personal background and training influences how one works. It was noted that whilst the psychologists working within the District Office mainly support an eco-systemic approach, some of their colleagues do not, which causes conflict or misunderstanding amongst team members. Furthermore, although

the participants espouse an ecosystemic perspective, they do not always have the time to implement the associated practices.

Within Theme 3 it was found that the participants seem to have a general grasp of the ecosystemic approach.

5.3.3 Category 3: Practices (theory-in-use)

Overall, the findings revealed that the participants' theory-in-use currently incorporates practices associated with both the medical and the ecosystemic theoretical perspectives.

Psychometric assessment of learners; circuit work; and administrative tasks, were found to be the most common practices for the majority of the participants, forming a large part of their work. Practices that the participants were not currently involved in included: research, curriculum development and policy planning.

The assessment procedure for learners experiencing barriers to learning appears to be largely based on a medical approach. Although efforts are being made to obtain information from a number of sources to assess the learner's context, this is often not possible. Psychometric tests are predominantly used to score the learner's IQ, which determines the placement in a special school. Many of the participants noted that the reason for the large demands for psychometric assessments lies with the numerous referrals from teachers.

The interventions and support provided to schools seems to stem from an ecosystemic theoretical approach. There is a move away from providing direct interventions to individual learners. Emphasis is being placed on practices such as consulting, collaboration, prevention and training. The intention is to equip educators and parents with the necessary skills to empower them to be able to assist the learner themselves. Furthermore, the participants described working with the teachers and ILSTs to put support structures in place for learners experiencing barriers. In addition, the DBSTs conduct school readiness evaluations with the aim of devising a School Improvement Plan (SIP) to develop areas of the school to better support the learners. However, the participants all mentioned that they experience many challenges in implementing these practices effectively. In addition, they discussed their desire to do more direct and long-term therapy with individual learners. The participants are not currently involved in curriculum development, research initiatives and policy planning.

5.3.4 Category 4: Challenges

Theme 1 discussed the challenges the participants' experience working at the Education District Office. There appeared to be a lack of a multi-disciplinary collaboration within the DBSTs. In addition, the participants discussed that their working environment is not conducive to the nature of their work.

Within Theme 2, five challenges of working systemically were identified. The participants all discussed the lack of time available to them to carry out their work effectively. This is compounded by the large demands placed on them and the shortage of psychologists available to provide services to the many schools. Many of the participants noted that the poor socio-economic conditions at the schools hinder their work. A further barrier preventing them from practicing systemically involves the teachers' non-espousal and implementation of the new paradigm.

Theme 3 revealed that many of the participants experience feelings of being overwhelmed, overworked, frustrated, demotivated, undervalued and discouraged at times.

5.3.5 Category 5: Training

Theme 1 explored the influence of the participant's university training on their current practice of educational psychology. Overall, it was found that this training had given the participants a solid foundation to be able practise at the District Office.

Within Theme 2, the participants discussed the value of on-going training, such as Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and its strong influence on their current practice.

In Theme 3, it was noted that the participants would include community work and the ecosystemic approach in the training of the student educational psychologist.

5.3.6 Research questions addressed

The data generated and the categories, themes and sub-themes created all formed part of a process that essentially allowed me to answer the original research questions. I found the dominant theoretical approach underpinning educational psychologists' practice in DBSTs to

be the ecosystemic approach. However, it was revealed that this approach is not necessarily espoused by all the members of the DBSTs. Furthermore, the educational psychologists themselves experience many challenges in implementing this theory at the District Offices.

In practice, I found their theory-in-use to incorporate both medical and ecosystemic approaches. Assessment of learners is largely based on a deficits approach, whilst the interventions and support they provide appeared to be focused on a more systemic level. These findings lead me to conclude that the theory that the educational psychologists in this study personally espouse; the theory espoused within DBSTs; and the theory-in-use within the DBSTs; do not entirely correspond. In answer to the second research question, it was found that, according to the participants, their initial university training played a large role in their current practice. However, continuous training was considered essential to keep them informed and skilled.

The following section will discuss the recommendations for theory and practice.

5.4. Recommendations for theory and practice

Based on the findings of this research and with regards to the Education District Offices in the Western Cape, the following recommendations are made:

- The Education District Offices could provide opportunities for all members of the DBSTs to reflect on the theoretical underpinnings of their practice on a regular basis. All employees, including managers, could engage in collaborative discussions to ensure a common theoretical approach guides them all as a team. Furthermore, there is a need to develop the working relationships amongst colleagues for collaborative practice to be effective.
- If the systemic model were to be fully utilised within DBSTs, it would be beneficial for all members to review this approach to gain a clearer understanding of the theory and practices involved.
- If the potential of systemic practice is to be realised, it is imperative that all parties involved understand and embrace the principles and values of working this way. It is essential that schools and teachers be educated about the benefits of implementing systemic practices and the range of services that educational psychologists can provide.

- New and improved ways of implementing systemic practice need to be devised in order to prevent the many challenges experienced at present. It may be that this theoretical approach needs to be adapted so that it is relevant to the South African context.
- A further review of the scope of practice for educational psychologists would be beneficial. The focus could be on defining more clearly what the board considers the context of “learning and development” to encompass. Furthermore, emphasis could be placed on the provision of systemic practice.
- Inter-disciplinary collaboration between the South African Board of Psychology and the National Education Department may be useful in order to ensure a common understanding of what the work of an educational psychologist entails.
- Curriculum advisors/co-ordinators and educators of ecosystemic theory should collaborate to revise current training programmes to ensure that students not only have a thorough theoretical foundation, but they also receive the necessary exposure and practical experience to be able to use it effectively once they are working in the field.
- CPD courses could focus on equipping educational psychologists with the necessary knowledge and skills to implement systemic practices effectively.

5.5 Limitations

This study has certain limitations that need addressing in future research.

This research represents only a small-scale study (8 participants) and cannot be generalised to the rest of the Education District Offices in the Western Cape or other provinces in South Africa. As this study focused specifically on educational psychologists, it does not reflect the thinking and actions of psychologists registered in other categories. In addition, these findings are not an indication of the theoretical approaches underpinning the practices of educational psychologists working in other settings/contexts.

As this study was employed within an interpretive/constructivist paradigm, these findings represent my interpretation of the participants’ point of view, and are therefore not free of my own biases and assumptions. However, this research makes no claims other than to have

provided a deeper understanding of the topic, which may lend itself to further investigation. Further research may seek to be empirical, quantifiable, generalisable and statistically significant. This study did not seek these outcomes.

Insufficient time available to meet with the participants proved to be a considerable limiting factor in this study. As the researcher, I would have valued spending more time with the participants, which could have provided for a deeper and richer understanding of the topic being researched.

This study did not make use of triangulation to the full extent, which would have increased the validity and reliability of the findings. The intention was to collect data using a variety of methods, including demographic questionnaires and focus groups. However, only three of the eight participants were able to complete the questionnaires by hand before the interview and all of the participants were not able to partake in a focus group, due to lack of time available to them. These methods would have allowed for a wider range of information to be gathered. In addition, there was not another person involved in the coding and analysis of the data, which would have added to the reliability of the study.

Although this research gave insight into the participants' theory-in-use, it would have improved and enhanced the findings if I had observed the participants in action. This would have provided first-hand information, as well as detailed descriptions of their practices.

I acknowledge my position as a novice researcher and the impact this may have had on my interviewing skills and the analysis of the data obtained. During the interviews, I could have inquired more deeply into some of the participants' responses in order to gain a more thorough understanding.

5.6 Strengths

The design and methodology of this study afforded the participants the chance to reflect on and discuss the theoretical approach(es) underpinning their practice with the researcher. Many of the participants appreciated this opportunity and noted that they benefited from this interaction. Furthermore, it is hoped that this may generate further reflection and discussions among colleagues.

The participants in the study provided valuable, first-hand information and insight into the theoretical approaches, practices and training of educational psychologists working at the DBST. The findings revealed a number of challenges and areas where improvements can be made. This information may assist Education District Offices, education departments and the Board of Psychology to address these issues and develop more efficacious practices. It may also contribute to the development of current training programmes at university level.

5.7 Recommendations for further research

A review of the literature revealed that research on the theoretical approach(es) underpinning educational psychologists practice in South Africa is currently limited. Therefore, further research on this topic is important.

As the sample size of this study was small, a larger or more comprehensive study or similar studies done concurrently across all District Offices, in all provinces in South Africa, is necessary. This will allow for a thorough understanding of the nature of the theoretical underpinnings of educational psychologists in this country.

An ethnographic study whereby the researcher observes first-hand the practices employed by the educational psychologists working at the Education District Offices would be valuable. This type of study would provide a clearer understanding of their theory-in-use.

A further study can be done at the Education District Offices in a few years time, looking at the growth and development of the current theoretical approaches and practices and also focusing on what changes have been made and what the consequences of this are.

This study revealed that all members of the DBSTs do not necessarily espouse the ecosystemic theory. Therefore, it would be useful to conduct focus groups with all members of a DBST, including the heads of departments, to allow for further discussion and debate on this topic. This could provide useful insight into the theoretical approaches personally espoused by members; the practices they employ; the challenges they face; as well the functioning of the team as a whole.

As this study focused solely on educational psychologists working at the District Offices, it may be beneficial to interview psychologists practising in other categories, such as counselling psychology. Furthermore, another study could explore the theoretical approaches of educational psychologists working in other contexts, such as private practice.

An in-depth study focusing specifically on psychologists' knowledge, understanding and practice of systemic theory may provide valuable information.

This study uncovered several challenges in implementing systemic practice. Further research could focus on exploring the challenges that affect the extent to which systemic theory is translated and incorporated into practice, as well as possible solutions to deal with these issues.

Another study could review the current Master's in educational psychology programmes provided at tertiary institutions. In addition, further research could investigate the extent to which training provided at tertiary institutions in South Africa equips trainee educational psychologists with the knowledge and skills to apply systemic theory in practice.

As the scope of practice for educational psychologists has only recently been promulgated, it may be useful to explore educational psychologists' understanding and thoughts on the new definition.

Research into teacher's perceptions of what the work of an educational psychologist entails, as well as the services they would like educational psychologists to provide, may also be beneficial.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a broad overview of the current study and provided answers to the initial research questions. It revealed the limitations and strengths of the study and discussed recommendations and further research possibilities. I have found this research process to be incredibly useful on a personal level. It has afforded me the opportunity to thoroughly examine the theory I espouse, as well as gain a deeper understanding of the systemic theoretical approach to the practice of educational psychology.

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ADDENDA

ADDENDUM A: Ethical clearance from the Western Cape Education Department

Name:
Enquiries: **Dr A.T. Wyngaard**
Reference:
Telephone:
Telephone: **021 467 0272**
Fax:
Fax: **(021) 425 7445**
E-mail:
E-mail:
Voorvraag:
Reference: **2010HR12-0025**
Betreffende:



Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement
Western Cape Education Department
ISebe leMfundo leNtshona Koloni

Mrs Lisa Venter
25 Portland Road
Rondebosch
7700

Dear Mrs Lisa Venter

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: THEORETICAL APPROACHES UNDERPINNING EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' PRACTICE IN DISTRICT-BASED SUPPORT TEAMS

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

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **01 August 2010 till 30 September 2010**.
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T. Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

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

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards,

Signed: Audrey T. Wyngaard

for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**

DATE: 12 August 2010

MIETD ANSKRIJF VERWYSINGSNUMMERS IN ALLE KORRESPONDENSIE / P/LANK QUOTE REFERENCE NUMBERS IN ALL CORRESPONDENCE /
NCTDA TITHALE UNOMBULO ZESMATHISG KUYO YONKE DIBALELWANI

GRAND CENTRAL TOWERS, LAKE PARLIAMENT STRAAT, PRIVAATSAK X9114, KAAPSTAD 8000
GRAND CENTRAL TOWERS, LOWER PARLIAMENT STREET, PRIVATE BAG X9114, CAPE TOWN 8000

WEB: <http://wced.wcape.gov.za>

INBELSENTRUM / CALL CENTRE

INDIENSNEMING- EN SALARISAVRAAL/EMPLOYMENT AND SALARY QUERIES ☎0861 92 33 22
VERLIGE SKOOLSAAL SCHOOLS ☎0800 45 46 47

ADDENDUM B: Informed consent form for heads of Education District Offices



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**STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO APPROACH EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN DISTRICT OFFICES OF THE
WCED TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**THEORETICAL APPROACHES UNDERPINNING EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' PRACTICE
IN DISTRICT-BASED SUPPORT TEAMS**

You are asked for permission to approach the educational psychologists in your District office to participate in a research study conducted by Lisa Venter, who is currently completing a Master's Degree in Education (Educational psychology) at the Educational Psychology Department at Stellenbosch University. In the event of you granting the permission, the contact details of the potential participants in your District office are requested. The results of the study will contribute towards a thesis. Your office was selected as a possible source of participants as the study explores educational psychologists' (in the greater Cape Town area) theoretical approaches underpinning their practices.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the theoretical approaches, practices and training of educational psychologists working in District-Based Support Teams in the Western Cape.

Information in this area should help new and established educational-psychological services to plan future developments and more efficacious practices. It may also contribute to new, innovative and relevant training models. The study may offer a new and useful conceptual constellation for guiding the professional work of educational psychologists.

2. PROCEDURES

If educational psychologists volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask them to do the following things:

i) Complete a questionnaire

- To complete a self-administered questionnaire consisting of demographics and open questions. The questionnaire will be formulated in both English and Afrikaans so that they will have the choice to answer in the language with which they are most comfortable.
- The demographic items include: gender, race, age, language proficiency, university where professional training was completed, qualifications, period of registration with the HPCSA, settings/contexts worked. The questionnaire also contains several open-ended items which need to be answered in as much depth as possible.

ii) Semi-structured interview

In addition they will be asked to volunteer to take part in an individual interview to be conducted by the researcher. The interview will consist of semi-structured questions and should take no longer than 1 hour. The interview will take place at the interviewee's place of work in a private location during a suitable time. The interview will be audio-recorded for transcription.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts or inconveniences. In the unlikely event of any negative emotional reaction psychological support will be provided by a registered psychologist.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

As the participants they will not benefit directly from participation in the research. Their involvement may contribute towards a deeper understanding of the professional practices of educational psychologists and provide valuable information for future training and practices.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

They will not receive any payment for their participation.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with the participants will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with their permission or as required by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning code names in order to maintain anonymity. The individual interview will be audio-taped and they will be able to view the transcript at will. The recorded data and transcripts will be stored in a safe, which only the researcher will have access to. The audio recordings will be destroyed after the research has been completed.

A final research paper containing the results will be provided to the Research Department of the Western Cape Education Department, as well as the University of Stellenbosch to inform the public of the findings.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

They can choose whether to be in this study or not. If they volunteer to be in this study, they may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. They may also refuse to answer any questions they don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw them 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 the researcher, Lisa Venter, at 083 4628209 (lisaventerpsych@gmail.com) and/or Supervisor, Mariechen Perold, at Stellenbosch University, Educational Psychology Department, at 021 8082307 (mdperold@sun.ac.za).

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Participants may withdraw their consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché at the Unit for Research Development, University of Stellenbosch (mfouche@sun.ac.za).

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to *[me/the subject/the participant]* by *[name of relevant person]* in *[Afrikaans/English/Xhosa/other]* and *[I am/the subject is/the participant is]* in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to *[me/him/her]*. *[I/the participant/the subject]* was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to *[my/his/her]* satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily that the researcher may contact the educational psychologists in my District office./I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ *[name of the subject/participant]* and/or *[his/her]* representative _____ *[name of the representative]*. *[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 Investigator

Date

ADDENDUM C: Informed consent form for participants



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**STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**THEORETICAL APPROACHES UNDERPINNING EDUCATIONAL
PSYCHOLOGISTS' PRACTICE IN DISTRICT-BASED SUPPORT TEAMS**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Lisa Venter, who is currently completing a Master's Degree in Education (Educational Psychology) at the Educational Psychology Department at Stellenbosch University. The results of the study will contribute towards a thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are registered as an educational psychologist with the HPCSA, and are currently working at one of the District Offices in the Western Cape area.

10. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the theoretical approaches, practices and training of educational psychologists working in District-Based Support Teams in the Western Cape.

Information in this area should help new and established educational-psychological services to plan future developments and more efficacious practices. It may also contribute to new, innovative and relevant training models. The study may offer a new and useful conceptual constellation for guiding the professional work of educational psychologists.

11. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

i) Complete a questionnaire

You will be required to complete a self-administered questionnaire consisting of demographics and open questions. The questionnaire will be formulated in both English and Afrikaans so that you will have the choice to answer in the language with which you are most comfortable.

The demographic items include: gender, race, age, language proficiency, university where professional training was completed, qualifications, period of registration with the HPCSA, settings/contexts worked. The questionnaire also contains several open-ended items which need to be answered in as much depth as possible.

ii) Semi-structured interview

In addition you will be asked to volunteer to take part in an individual interview to be conducted by the researcher. The interview will consist of semi-structured questions and should take no longer than 1 hour. The interview will take place at the interviewee's place of work in a private location during a suitable time. The interview will be audio-recorded for transcription.

12. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts or inconveniences. In the unlikely event of any negative emotional reaction psychological support will be provided by a registered psychologist.

13. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

As the participant you will not benefit directly from participation in the research. Your involvement may contribute towards a deeper understanding of the professional practices of educational psychologists and provide valuable information for future training and practices.

14. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not receive any payment for your participation.

15. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning code names in order to maintain anonymity. The individual interview will be audio-taped and you will be able to view the transcript at will. The recorded audio data and transcripts will be stored in a safe, which only the researcher will have access to. The audio recordings will be destroyed after the research has been completed.

A final research paper containing the results will be provided to the Research Department of the Western Cape Education Department, as well as the University of Stellenbosch to inform the public of the findings.

16. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. 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.

17. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Lisa Venter, at 083 4628209 (lisaventerpsych@gmail.com) and/or Supervisor, Mariechen Perold, at Stellenbosch University, Educational Psychology Department, at 021 8082307 (mdperold@sun.ac.za).

18. 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 Maléne Fouché at the Unit for Research Development, University of Stellenbosch, at 021 8084622 (mfouche@sun.ac.za).

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to *[me/the subject/the participant]* by *[name of relevant person]* in *[Afrikaans/English/Xhosa/other]* and *[I am/the subject is/the participant is]* in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to *[me/him/her]*. *[I/the participant/the subject]* was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to *[my/his/her]* satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____
[name of the subject/participant] and/or *[his/her]* representative _____.
[name of the representative]. *[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 Investigator

Date

ADDENDUM D: Self-administered questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESEARCH PROJECT
Department of Educational Psychology
STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
THEORETICAL APPROACHES UNDERPINNING EDUCATIONAL-
PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICE IN THE DISTRICT- BASED SUPPORT TEAMS
LISA VENTER
MEdPsych Student

This questionnaire forms the first part of a research study towards a Master's in Education (Educational Psychology) degree at Stellenbosch University. This study aims to explore the current theoretical approaches supported by educational psychologists (EPs) in the District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) in the Western Cape. Please note that the information provided will be treated with confidentiality.

Please answer the following questions as extensively as possible. Use an X in the appropriate box where relevant:

Please type your answers if possible.

1) Demographic Information:

a) Gender

M	F

b) Age

c) Race

White	Coloured	Black	Indian	Other: Specify

d) Languages

	Speak	Read	Write	Work
English				
Afrikaans				
Xhosa				
Other - Specify:				

e.1) Qualifications

Degree(s)/ Diploma(s)/ Certificates/ Honours/Master's/Doctorate	University/College	Year obtained

e.2) CV of skills acquired [Workshops attended, service training, conferences, further studies, etc.] Please provide a copy if possible.

f) How long have you been registered as an educational psychologist (in years including 2010)?

g) Indicate in which setting/s you work currently and have worked previously.

SETTING	CURRENTLY	PREVIOUSLY
Private Practice		
School – Mainstream		
School – Special Needs		
School – Consulting		
Education District		
Public Sector (Hospital or Clinic)		
Non-Governmental Organisation		
Government		
Academia		
Research		
Other (Please Specify)		

2. How would you describe the discipline of educational psychology?

3. How do you define your scope of practice as an EP?

4. What is your personal view/understanding/theory about the nature of learning and development? How do you explain how a child acquires knowledge? How do you understand the cognitive, emotional, behavioural, social and other aspects of a person's development?

5) How do you understand a i) learning difficulty or ii) developmental issue/delay?

6) How do you understand a presenting problem and how to intervene and bring about change?

7) Which theory(ies) inform(s) your practice of educational psychology at the District Office?
What is your practice modality/framework for your service delivery there?

8) Which theoretical approach(es) underlie(s) the expectations of the district management?

9) To which theoretical model(s) about human behaviour do you personally subscribe?

10) In which theoretical model(s) were you initially trained?

11) What does the practice of educational psychology entail for you? (What do you do during the course of your day or week?)

12) What influences the nature of your practice?

13) Indicate at which level(s) your work focuses – i) individual child ii) family iii) whole-school or iv) governmental/policy/managerial.

14) Describe the influence of your initial training on your current practices.

15) Describe the influences of any further training that you might have received on your current practices.

16) Have you changed your EP practices over the years, if so, why?

17) What makes your practice as an educational psychologist differ from other members in your District-Based Support Team?

ADDENDUM E: Interview guide

Individual Interview Guide

How would you describe the discipline of Educational Psychology? What do EP's do?

How do you perceive your roles and responsibilities as an educational psychologist working in the South African context?

What would you see as important to include in the training of the student educational psychologist to be able to fulfil the role (s)?

How do you define your scope of practice as an EP?

Which theoretical frameworks inform your practice of educational psychology?

What is your understanding of a systemic/contextual approach to educational psychology?

To what extent does systemic/contextual thinking influence your practice as an educational psychologist?

To what extent are you involved in consultation and facilitation work?

To what extent do you work in collaboration with others?

To what extent are you involved in the ordinary processes of teaching/schooling?

To what extent are you involved in preventative and health promotive work?

Have you changed your practices over the years, if so, why?

What are the challenges you experience as an EP?

What are the highlights you experience as an EP?

What type of assessment tools do you use in your practice?

Which diagnostic tools do you make use of?

What type of therapies and other interventions do you use in practice?

What type of research do you do?

What is your involvement with policy planning; curriculum development, and programme design?

What makes an educational psychologist's practice differ from other psychologists?

ADDENDUM F: Excerpt from a transcript

PARTICIPANT 6

R: How would you describe the discipline of the educational psychology?

P6: In South Africa or just generally

R: In South Africa - in the context in which you work

P6: How would I describe the discipline of psychology?

R: What is educational psychology?

P6: I suppose as the name implies it's an interface between psychology and education with particular focus on learners and children. You know from right through their sort of lifespan while they are at school kind of focusing on the adjustment - I suppose psycho-educationally - the issues that result from that kind of mismatch between the demands of the educational system where they are psychologically, emotionally, intellectually and looking at kind of assessing what and where there are mismatches and what needs to be happen to kind of bridge those gaps and support the learner. And the sort of main areas as I said would be assessment, but also the counselling - therapeutic intervention and obviously with that is also the interface between the school, child and family systems and ideally also the community and broader. But I see kind of less and less that that happens because of the fact that psychologists are under-supplied and there is an over demand for their needs. So ideally they should be moving and doing more community-type, broader preventative, but in reality there is not enough of them

R: Okay, great. How do you define your scope of practice as an educational psychologist?

P6: I suppose, as I have said it's kind of across the lifespan from right from pre-school to and because it is around education it really encompasses then when I talk about the school setting then it is our setup that it's educational psychologists that can work right across university and then you have students who are no longer children who are actually young adults and so I

see, I work. In our scope of practice would be what I have said before in terms of that interface, but it could encroach if I could use that word into other areas provided you as an educational psychologist have the training and experience if necessary with supervision. So if you are working just with adults just in psychotherapy or sort of in-depth therapy, provided that you have the requisite training. It is only problematic I think when people don't have the background that get involved with it

R: What is your personal view or theory about the nature of learning and development? So in other words how do you explain how a child acquires knowledge?

P6: Well I suppose I have very much an ecosystemic view that the child, it's not just what the child brings to the situation in terms of genetics or natural ability, but just as much the environment that the child is brought up in. Starting right from, I suppose pre-naturally all of you know with the mother the child brings to the situation right to the when the child is born to the kind of child rearing and the levels of stimulation to you know the type of schools that they go to So I believe that the learning is absolutely as I said also about the match between what the child needs and what the environment provides or doesn't provide and I suppose with it goes that any child in the right environment could learn

R: Okay Great and how would you understand the learning difficulties Sort of I suppose it's kind of linked to this

P6: Yes I sound a bit like a stuck record because again it's about that mismatch In some instances it can be what the child brings to that situation so there could be a neurological physiological sensory difficulty that the child has as a result of developmental history but it could also be that the child has had the necessary tools but the situation that the child has been in and we have a lot of that Really poor teaching and compounded maybe by a really shocking domestic situation so that the child is in an unsafe uncaring threatening environment...

ADDENDUM G: Example of data analysis

EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW	CODES	THEMES	CATEGORIES
<p>If you give proper support to learners it takes a lot of time and I, there isn't time in what the circuit team managers want you to do. There isn't time to do justice to this</p> <p>So for the past two years since I have been in a circuit team - if I have done five percent of my time with counselling then it is a lot.</p> <p>So then provision of psychological educational assessment and therapeutic intervention: A large part of my work is just this - assessing learners and filling in forms for learners to go to special schools.</p> <p>like from one school I will easily get twenty six applications.now, how do you assess twenty six children in one day?</p> <p>Yes you are the person that does the assessment</p> <p>So then if you look at the provision of support to educators and parents; they mainly see this as workshops so we run a one hour workshop - not very effective. But what I have <u>managed to negotiate</u> for, is to run a twelve week parenting skills programme. So each session is two hours so parents of any of the thirty three schools they are welcome to attend. But that took like, I think <u>two hours of negotiation to get that concession</u></p> <p>As a member of the circuit team you must do what the circuit team is doing. So at the beginning of the year, we are nine in the team - and thirty three schools, so you must go and do school readiness visits. The whole team is involved in that. Then we do pre- progression and promotion visits, so that can take you a month every</p>	<p>Support</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Counselling/Therapeutic intervention</p> <p>Assessment</p> <p>Admin/filling in forms</p> <p>Special school applications</p> <p>twenty six applications</p> <p>Workshops</p> <p>Circuit team</p> <p>School readiness visits pre-progression and promotion visits</p> <p>Discuss learners at risk</p>	<p>Insufficient time</p> <p>Therapy/Counselling</p> <p>Assessments</p> <p>Administrative tasks</p> <p>High demands</p> <p>Training</p> <p>Circuit work</p>	<p>PRACTICES: THEORY-IN-USE</p> <p>CHALLENGES</p>

