Edited by
Johnnie Hay, Macalane Malindi
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Reconceptualising Education Support Services in South Africa

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Reconceptualising Education Support Services in South Africa

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Peer review declaration

The publisher (AOSIS) endorses the South African 'National Scholarly Book Publishers Forum Best Practice for Peer Review of Scholarly Books'. The manuscript was subjected to rigorous two-step peer review prior to publication, with the identities of the reviewers not revealed to the author(s). The reviewers were independent of the publisher and/or authors in question. The reviewers commented positively on the scholarly merits of the manuscript and recommended that the manuscript be published. Where the reviewers recommended revision and/or improvements to the manuscript, the authors responded adequately to such recommendations.

Research Justification

This scholarly book represents the culmination of research in four projects since 2015 within the North-West University Faculty of Education, and more specifically, within the substrand of Inclusive Education and Support Services in Communities, of the research focus area Community-Based Educational Research (COMBER). The book generates new knowledge in the field of education support services (ESS). Over the past 20 years, the focus has mostly been on inclusive education without emphasising the structures, functionality and resourcing of ESS. It aims to provide researchers in the field a better understanding of the challenges and solutions envisaged for improved ESS in South Africa within the next 10 years. The book is based on the following research projects:

- Initiating and supporting psychosocial and educational wellness in diverse community contexts: innovation, development and intervention from an educational, psychological and learner support perspective.
- Perspectives on the contribution of NWU BEd Hons Educational Psychology alumni of 2002–2017 to psychosocial and educational wellness in diverse communities.
- An analysis of the psychosocial and educational support rendered by District-based Support Teams to learners and teachers in the North-West and Free State provinces of South Africa.
- Improving psychosocial and educational support, rendered by designated education support structures, to learners and teachers in various schools of the nine provinces of South Africa.

The editors utilise an eclectic theoretical stance, selecting the most appropriate from all the theories discussed in this book. Education Support Service is a critical psychosocial educational support service that has not come to full fruition since the dawn of democracy, despite excellent policy documentation emanating from the NEPI Report on Support Services of 1992. Part 1 of the book deals with theoretical perspectives at work in ESS, where a rather extensive look is taken at theories underpinning and concepts pertinent to ESS. In Part 2, the current status of ESS in its different forms is reviewed by first looking at the connection between ESS and inclusive education, and the origins of ESS are magnified. Thereafter, current support to at-risk learners in South African schools is interrogated, followed by a comparative review of support provided in schools. This section is concluded with an in-depth view of the current psychosocial educational support provided in education districts. Part 3 moves to a reconceptualisation of psychosocial educational services in South Africa: firstly, the importance of sound team dynamics in SBSTs and DBSTs and the skills required of ESS staff are discussed, after which optimal support within rural school contexts is envisioned. The repositioning of special schools as resource centres and full-service schools is then focused on, as well as a discussion of how district support can be reimagined. The book is concluded with an integrated vision of effective ESS in South Africa. The book represents original and new research, and no part of the work has been plagiarised. Ethical clearance for the projects was provided by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University.

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Johnnie Hay

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List of Abbreviations

COMBER	Community-Based Educational Research
CoP	Communities of Practice
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBST	District-Based Support Team
DoE	Department of Education
ESS	Education Support Services
EWP6	Education White Paper 6
FG	Focus Group
FSS	Full-Service School
GRPI	Goals, Roles, Procedures and Interpersonal Relationships
IBL	Inquiry-based Learning
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
ISS	Inclusive Special School
LSA	Learning Support Adviser
LSE	Learning Support Educator
LSEN	Learners with Special Educational Needs
LSF	Learning Support Facilitator
NCESS	National Committee on Education Support Services
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training

NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SAPS	South African Police Service
SASA	*South African Schools Act*
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SES	Senior Education Specialists
SGB	School Governing Body
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SSRC	Special School as Resource Centre
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America

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Theoretical perspectives at work in education support services

Chapter 1

Theoretical perspectives underpinning psychosocial educational support services

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■ Introduction

This book is about education support services (ESS) in the South African school sector and how it could possibly be reconceptualised to elevate it to an improved level of service rendering. 'Education support services' is the collective term for all psychosocial educational support services that are rendered to learners (and teachers) in schools in South Africa by the provincial education departments (inferred from the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training/National Committee on Education Support Services report of 1997). The main vehicles through which these services are rendered within our democratic post-1994 environment are school-based support teams (SBSTs) within all schools, multidisciplinary ESS teams as part of district-based support teams (DBSTs) in districts, full-service schools (FSSs) and special schools resource centres (SSRCs) distributed across provinces, as well as learning support educators (LSEs) at schools or learning support advisers or facilitators (LSAs/LSFs) in area offices of districts (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2014; Department of Education [DoE] 2001).

The post-1994 democratic era ushered in an exciting period of restructuring, transformation and re-envisioning of ESS within an inclusive education system; the previous special education system, with its focus on the correct placement of learners within a range of special education contexts, was seemingly left behind (inferred from Engelbrecht & Green 2018). Education support services now had to work towards serving all learners across the education system and making sure that as many learners as possible were included in inclusive educational contexts (Armstrong 2019; Hay 2003). In fact, with the worldwide advent of inclusive education, the total paradigm within which psychosocial educational support services were operating had to change radically.

Two and a half decades after the dawn of democracy in South Africa, it may be an opportune time to revisit how well the ideals of the transformed ESS have manifested in educational practice.

■ Education support services as the constant within changing educational systems

Support to learners has been documented to be part of formal education systems for more than a century and perhaps even longer. The first school psychologists started to work in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom early in the 20th century, and this might have been preceded by specialist educational support being provided to learners even towards the end of the 19th century (Hughes et al. 2020; Jimerson, Oakland & Farrell 2007).

Over the past century, psychosocial educational support has evolved into a number of support domains or disciplines, but the principle of providing focused support to learners with specific needs has remained constant. School psychologists started supporting learners during the early part of the 20th century, when no or only very few specialised settings were available (Hughes et al. 2020; Jimerson et al. 2007). Support teams with more than one discipline developed with the advent of special education towards the middle of the 20th century, where mostly learners who were referred to specialised settings were supported (cf. Poulsen 1987 regarding the Denmark situation). And since the last decade of the 20th century up to 2021, with the wave of inclusive education probably at its highest, ESS have been alive and supporting learners (and even teachers) as always, though within a different, inclusive education paradigm.

Some years ago, Alan Dyson, a world leader on inclusive education, mentioned that one was not sure what the next phase would be in educating learners experiencing specific needs (i.e. the phase following inclusive education) (Engelbrecht, Green & Naicker 1999). What is sure, however, is that services in the form of psychosocial educational support will be continuing as a constant amongst changing education systems catering for children who are in need of specific care.

■ The rise of the medical model in supporting persons living with exceptionalities

The fact that psychosocial educational support to learners was and is being provided has been a constant for more than a century, but the way in which support was and is being rendered depends on the reigning paradigm or worldview of the time related to the support of people experiencing needs, barriers or disabilities.

The late 18th century saw the first coordinated effort to support persons showing psychiatric or psychological disorders and other disabilities in asylums. Since the Middle Ages, the insane were mostly kept and supervised in lunatic asylums, especially if such persons were violent or uncontrollable at home or whilst under church supervision (Shorter 1997). This period could perhaps be described as operating from the paradigm of *separation and safekeeping* of those showing serious deviations from normality.

Philippe Pinel, a French psychiatrist, is often credited with attempting the first concerted effort to treat asylum patients in a more humane, psychologically appropriate way. At the end of the 1700s, he instituted his 'moral treatment approach' at the famous Bicetre and La Salpetriere mental hospitals by unchaining patients and ensuring good ventilation and lighting in rooms (*Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia* 2020). This marked the start of the paradigm within support to people with deviations that we would like to call *separation and treatment*.

Towards the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, a new paradigm of *separation, diagnosis and treatment* was developing. Medical, psychiatric and psychological advances made it possible for deviant behaviour and emotions to be diagnosed as a specific disorder. Gradually, treatment was developed per disorder, which also included medication. It was within this paradigm that the first school psychologists started to function during the early part of the 20th century (Hughes et al.

2020; Jimerson et al. 2007). For the young discipline of psychology, it was a challenge to apply its knowledge to education. The development of psychometric tests, initially in the form of intellectual measurement, supported the direction in which support to learners in schools would go, namely, to test learners' intellectual functioning and recommend school placement and careers on the grounds thereof (Foxcroft & Roodt 2018). Little happened in terms of the treatment of those learners experiencing specific needs during the first half of the 20th century; correct placement of learners, with appropriate teaching, mostly in smaller groups, was seen as the main thrust, and this led to the gradual burgeoning of special education settings in the form of special schools and special classes. Towards the latter half of the 20th century, remedial education also developed as treatment to those learners in ordinary schools who experienced learning problems, but with their intellectual capacity intact (Department of Education and Culture 1992). This can possibly be seen as the first step where complete separation was done away with – learners were only withdrawn from ordinary classes for short periods of time to receive remedial education. The support paradigm within education now moved to *diagnosis and treatment, and treatment, where possible, in the ordinary classroom.*

It is important to note at this stage that deviation from the normal, and thus the specific psychiatric and disability needs of people, was viewed through a medical lens, even before the days of Pinel. It was medical practitioners who made the first real strides to effectively support such persons after centuries of stigmatisation and inability to normalise their engagement with communities. The church played a huge part in the latter, but unfortunately without real success (apart from safekeeping and caring). The *medical model* of disability and deviation thus dominated all the paradigms described ealier for the better part of two to three centuries (Hughes et al. 2020; inferred from Reindal 2008). The medical model implies that a person with some deviation has been assessed, diagnosed and separated during the earlier years and is treated during the later years.

The latter part of the 20th century saw the rise of the human rights movement, which made a dramatic impact on the medical model perspective of support.

■ The impact of the human rights movement on education (support) via the social and ecosystemic models

The single most influential factor that changed the direction of education for learners who experienced barriers to learning was probably the rise of the human rights movement since the middle of the 20th century. An early foundation of this movement was the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948) shortly after the devastating Second World War, with its atrocious abuses of human rights. Article 1 of the Declaration states that all human beings are *born free and equal in dignity and rights.* Education is addressed in Article 26, stating that (United Nations 1948):

> [*E*]veryone has the right to education […] and that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. (pp. 5–6)

Article 2 also expresses itself on discrimination (United Nations 1948):

> Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. (p. 2)

Through the articles of this Declaration, the seeds were planted for appropriate support, without discrimination, to learners experiencing specific psychosocial educational needs.

Following the above, a seminal court verdict that accelerated this change was the 1954 Brown versus Board of Education pronunciation in the USA (Whitman & Hayes 2014). Although this

verdict was about the freedom of each parent and learner of colour to attend the school closest to home, it opened up the same opportunities for learners experiencing any form of disability or barrier to learning. Parents and learners with barriers could now choose to attend an ordinary or regular school closest to home, and schools had to change to accept such learners. All of a sudden, the centuries-old paradigm of *separation and treatment* was nullified as not attending to the basic rights of human beings who are experiencing barriers to learning. The separation of learners into different educational settings was now viewed as infringing on the basic human rights of choice of school and socialising with peers.

This paved the way for the paradigms of *normalisation, mainstreaming and integration* that took off in the early 1960s, whereby an effort was begun to include learners experiencing moderate to milder barriers in ordinary classrooms and to create opportunities for learners from different educational settings to mix with one another (Engelbrecht & Green 2018; Swart & Pettipher 2019). During this period, the *social model* of disability was developed, which implied that disability was more a social construction than an individual impairment; instead of locating the disability or barrier only within the child or person, huge introspection was done on how society viewed deviation from the norm (Swart & Pettipher 2019). For centuries, society viewed barriers and disability as being the individual's problem and maintained that the community could resolve the problem by isolating the person in a separate setting. Through the social model, it was then argued that society needed to change to accept persons with barriers in its midst and view their challenges as those of the whole society.

Further development followed in the 1970s when Urie Bronfenbrenner developed his *ecosystemic model* of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979). This was later refined into the bio-ecological model (Swart & Pettipher 2019). This model built on the social model by indicating that the individual (and specifically its biology) is only one of many systems that

influence development and learning; all surrounding systems may have an impact on an individual's development, whether it be in the microsystem of the family and friends, the mesosystem where the various microsystems interact, the exosystem that indirectly influences an individual's development or the broader macrosystem of world politics and cultural trends. Add to this the chronosystem of development in time, and it is clear that the point of departure of the medical model that the individual be diagnosed in terms of disability or barriers needs to be extended to include all external influences as well.

The human rights movement, in combination with the development of the social model of disability and the ecosystemic model of human development, laid the foundation of the *paradigm of inclusive education* that was implemented during the last decade of the 20th century. Via the Salamanca Statement of 1994 (UNESCO 1994), governments and schools were requested to change to accommodate learners with disabilities and those experiencing other intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning. In many cases, schools were barriers in themselves because of being dysfunctional in terms of the teaching and learning culture or limited infrastructure. Including learners experiencing specific needs (as far as is reasonably possible) into ordinary schools was viewed as a true reflection of society, where schools should support the education of society to accommodate all differences.

Within the paradigms of normalisation, mainstreaming, integration and inclusion, psychosocial educational support had to add the social and ecosystemic or bio-ecological models to its known repertoire of the medical model. This created serious challenges: some commentators felt that the medical model should be totally disbanded within the new inclusive environment where diagnosis was not foregrounded anymore, whereas others felt that the three models should be merged into a comprehensive whole within which all would still be playing some part (Hay 2012).

This opening chapter provides the theoretical grounding of ESS, and what has been discussed so far will be extended throughout the chapter. But why is it important to provide theoretical foundations of psychosocial educational support services?

■ The value of theory

Theory and practice are inseparable, as the following aphorism states: there is nothing as practical as a good theory. This has always been ascribed to American psychologist Kurt Lewin but has apparently actually originated from Dorpfeld in 1873 already (Bedeian 2016). A good theoretical grounding provides the basis for good and best practice, whereas good and best practice again feeds into theory development.

Professionals such as educators and all those functioning within ESS often think that they are not operating from a theoretical perspective. However, it is not true, as every support service professional views support through one or more theoretical lenses, even though he or she may not be consciously aware of the theories that are applied. An example is the following: Does one view support to learners experiencing specific needs from a medical, charity, lay or human rights perspective (D'Aguiar 2019; Naicker 2005)? In other words, does one execute one's support from the perspective of a doctor–patient relationship, where the patient awaits a diagnosis, a helper–helpee relationship, where the latter is viewed as in need of assistance and pity, lay discourse, where prejudice, ignorance and fear of people experiencing barriers are demonstrated, or a support perspective, where the learner is viewed on equal terms in terms of human dignity and ability to contribute to decision-making?

In this chapter, the aim is to provide a discussion of the theories most relevant to ESS. It is quite exhaustive, yet we do not claim to have paid attention to all theories in the field. However, we believe that the discussion will capacitate theorists and practitioners in

the field with a broad array of theoretical knowledge that will most definitely support the reconceptualisation of ESS within provincial education departments across the country.

■ Theories at work in education support services

Figure 1.1 provides a diagrammatic representation of the theories that are discussed in this section.

FIGURE 1.1: Theories at work in education support services.

■ Systems theory

We deem the systems theory as one of the foundational theories at work in ESS. Ludwig von Bertalanffy is viewed as the father of the systems theory or general systems theory. In his seminal 1967 article, he indicated how this theory could be applied to psychology (Von Bertalanffy 1967). For example, a family can be seen as a system that is made up of different subsystems. Parents are a subsystem, as are the children. However, the subsystems can also take the form of, for example, all the women in the family, all the adolescents in the family or all of those family members currently under duress. Systems and subsystems are in constant interaction with one another, influence one another and are interdependent on one another. An event affecting one family member will thus have an effect on all other family members, even though it may seem as if all members are not directly affected.

Donald et al. (2020) further described a number of processes that are typical of human processes, according to systems theory thinking: apart from the mentioned interdependence and interaction, patterns of functioning can also be discerned in relationships, which are characteristic ways of functioning that develop over time and shape relationships. A person not only shapes others but also is shaped by others. A further characteristic of systems thinking is that the stance of natural science of linear cause and effect is replaced by a cyclical pattern of influencing in human sciences: specific behaviour cannot directly be viewed as the cause of a specific effect in another person but is seen to influence the other person in a particular way. Important, however, is that every individual human being is influenced in a different way, contrary to natural science laws, where a specific stimulus will cause the same effect every time when conditions are similar. The roles that people take on in relationships are crucial in how the system functions. An example of complex roles and possible role confusion is when a single mother in a family needs to be both caregiver and disciplinarian. In this instance, clear and direct

communication becomes even more important and contributes to the functional or dysfunctional communication patterns that are established. Boundaries are another concept of systems thinking that is very helpful when analysing human relationships: a rigid or closed boundary (also described as under-involvement) between two subsystems may contribute to aloof and distant relationships, whereas a too flexible or open boundary (also typified as over-involvement) may have overprotection as its consequence. The ideal in terms of systems theory thinking is to have boundaries between systems and subsystems that are permeable – that is, neither too closed nor too open, but clear (described as balanced or healthy involvement). Healthy emotional functioning may follow where this type of boundary is developed. A last process of systems thinking mentioned here is that all people change with time and development, and these factors influence both the person implied and all other systems and subsystems involved. As time and developmental stages progress, a person changes, and this inevitably influences all other people with whom one is in contact. A father's outlook on disciplining his children during his late twenties may change substantially on becoming a grandfather in his early sixties, and this has an effect on how he will guide his son as a new parent.

Systems theory thinking undergirds much of the practice of ESS. Education support services professionals realise that a referred learner is part of a number of subsystems and systems and is influenced by these to an extensive or lesser extent, even if the specific need of the learner can be described as purely intrinsic. The processes of interaction and interdependence of these subsystems are taken into consideration when support is provided. Patterns of functioning and communication are looked for, and roles and boundaries in systems and subsystems are evaluated. Development over time and how this affects relationships are taken into consideration. Finally, the crucial process of cyclical influencing is used as the lens through which human relationships are assessed, where the keywords are *influence* and *contributing to*, as opposed to the linear causality of cause and effect of the natural sciences.

This short discussion clearly points out the major foundational role that the systems theory should and is playing in ESS practice.

◼ The ecosystemic model that developed into the bio-ecological theory

Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979) used the systems theory to base his ecological systems theory of child development on, whilst also incorporating concepts of the ecological theory into it. Apart from the processes of the systems theory discussed in the 'Systems theory' section, concepts of the ecological theory, stemming from observations from the natural environment (ecology), were applied to human relationships. First and foremost is the issue of the interdependence of segments of the ecological environment that is applied to the human environment. In the same way that a bee needs a flower, the flower also needs the bee (Donald et al. 2020). A learner needs his or her parents for physical and psychological development, but the parents also need the child for emotional fulfilment. Humans are thus interdependent and not islands. This human ecology should be in balance, just as the natural environment should also be in balance; many matters may disturb this ecological balance to contribute to a failed natural or human ecology. Apart from interdependence, balance and disturbance, the ecological theory also focuses on the holistic functioning of an ecology where the sum of a system is always bigger than its parts. Healthy holistic functioning of systems can only be achieved when there are balance and interdependence.

The combined and integrated concepts and processes of the systems and ecological theories were made for a powerful ecosystemic theory, where all the concepts of the natural ecology were merged with the way human systems function. This theory attends, in particular, to a child's development within the context of the systems of relationships that shape his or her environment. Proximal interactions are the most influential in shaping the child, where such interactions occur in face-to-face, long-term relationships (e.g. mother–child or child–friend relationships).

In contrast, distal contexts are contexts that the child is not directly involved with, but which still influence his or her development (e.g. the father's work). To further explain child development, Bronfenbrenner believes that one should understand it in terms of person factors, process factors, contexts and time. For example, person factors (such as the temperament of the child or parent) will partly determine process factors (the forms of interaction that occur in the family). The contexts (such as the family, school or local communities) in which interactive interactions occur will similarly determine how the child develops, all of which will occur over time (changes over time in the child and the environment) (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Ungar 2011).

Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that each nested system has an effect on the child's development. A nested system means that each system level is contained in the next system level (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Donald et al. 2020). For example, every person is part of the microsystem (e.g. the individual, family and school) in which beliefs and values are developed. The child's beliefs and values may influence both the mesosystem (e.g. relationships with peers) and the exosystem (e.g. values demonstrated by parents at work), and vice versa. Moreover, the macrosystem (e.g. educational policy) influences the child's ability to function effectively in the school environment. The various systems can influence one another mutually, thus creating reciprocal interactions amongst the various systems. Children are thus embedded in multi-level, dynamic ecological settings. Bronfenbrenner's conceptualisation of embeddedness includes the multi-level systems that consist of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, which, in turn, are all part of the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Donald et al. 2020).

The ecological systems theory, or the later bio-ecological theory of child development, has laid an appropriate theoretical foundation for attending to specific learner needs within inclusive education. It has managed to breach the century-old medical model by not only looking primarily at the intrinsic, biological factors that contribute to a child's needs but also at all the surrounding systems

that may contribute to learner development and needs. It also filled the gap between disability and special needs and barriers to learning; whereas the first two concepts were strongly based on an intrinsic, developed world concept of need that is located within the child, the latter crossed the bridge to the developing world where learners' needs may often be because of extrinsic factors or a combination of both. Education support services practice has certainly been enriched by this theory.

■ Positive psychology

Another theoretical development towards the end of the 20th century helped to ground ESS within the recent inclusive education developments. Whereas special education was strongly grounded in a deficit perspective of the medical model, inclusive education focuses on the strengths of learners, despite specific needs they may demonstrate. The father of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, underwent his own transformation after being a staunch behaviourist for decades before he realised that psychology was pre-occupied with pathology and deficit. He broke with deterministic behaviourism to establish a psychology that would focus on the positives of human existence.

Positive psychology focuses on the strengths of individuals and their communities and is concerned with interventions that offer buffers against adversity, nurture resilience and limit pathology (Seligman 2005). Social researchers have recognised the importance of understanding strengths and patterns of positive adaptation, and not only understanding risks to eliminate adversity; positive psychology was one of the consequences of this realisation. Thus, as part of this broader conceptual framework (Seligman 2005), there was a change from deficit-focused theories or models of human development to competence-focused theories or models (Masten 2011).

Some of the components of positive psychology include concepts such as positive emotions, flow, flourishing, mindfulness, purpose, meaning and virtues (Seligman 2005). These concepts

also underpin a holistic well-being paradigm within this theory. Holistic well-being encompasses positive mental health on an individual, interpersonal and community level (Kitching 2018; Prilleltensky 2012). It implies that ESS professionals support school communities in aspects such as educational and psychosocial well-being to ensure the mental health of individuals.

Another component of positive psychology relates to the concept of resilience, which is often defined as doing well despite adversity or risk (Masten 2011). It is recognised that a significant threat has to be present in order to conceptualise resilience. For this reason, resilience is not synonymous with concepts such as coping, well-being, competence or good mental health (where a significant threat is not necessarily present) (Rutter 2012). Although all of the aforementioned concepts are positive psychology constructs, they do not require the presence of risk to be identified. Positive psychology aims to help the ESS professional understand the value of constructive, supportive interventions in supporting the community and, in so doing, encourages positive prevention and adaptation for the community at large. From a positive psychology perspective, positive interventions seek to buffer individuals against adversity and to augment individual and community strengths (Joubert & Hay 2020). It is crucial that learners living with barriers to learning or disabilities are viewed as having numerous strengths on which to build an adaptive life with meaning.

◼ The social-ecological model of resilience

The social-ecological model of resilience builds on the concept of resilience from positive psychology (see 'Positive psychology') and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (see 'The ecosystemic model that developed into the bio-ecological theory'). From these two theories, resilience is understood to be a reciprocal process that is influenced by a specific ecological system (Ungar 2011). The ecological systems theory is fundamental in understanding the social-ecological model of resilience,

especially the influence of the macrosystem (e.g. cultural ecology) on the various microsystems (Veeran & Morgan 2009). Despite the progress made in resilience research waves one to four, Ungar (2011) was concerned that the understanding of resilience was still focusing too much on the individual. For this reason, he proposed the concept of the social ecology of resilience to explain the social transactions that transpire between the individual and the multiple systems found within his or her social ecology (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Donald et al. 2020).

All of the systems imply a complex, dynamic setting in which bi-directional transactions take place. The concept of the social ecology of resilience reflects an ecological-transactional understanding of how an individual's resilience processes are influenced by his or her environment (Ungar 2011). Families, communities and culture offer the reciprocal provision of resources that answers Ungar's (2011) concept of navigation and negotiation. All of the systems described by Bronfenbrenner are interdependent and collaborate in negotiations towards achieving resilience (Lau & Van Niekerk 2011). For example, for an individual to negotiate and navigate towards resilience-promoting resources, the individual needs particular qualities (e.g. flexible thinking or determination) to be able to seek out and make the most of resources made available by the ecosystem in which he or she is embedded.

At the same time, the micro- and macro-systems will need to capacitate the individual by offering supportive resources and processes. Conceptualising resilience as a process that needs both individual agency and ecological support takes the focus off the individual (meaning that individuals cannot be blamed for not being resilient) and emphasises that resilience is a complex, multifaceted process that will vary from context to context and be influenced by the culture of a given ecology (Ungar 2011).

How ESS professionals support learners and teachers is often determined by their ability to navigate, negotiate or bargain for resources from the various social systems. Thus, resilience-supporting

transactions that are shared in culturally congruent ways by ESS professionals and their social ecologies (e.g. teachers, parents and learners) potentiate resilience (Rutter 2012).

From the sections 'Positive psychology' and 'The social-ecological model of resilience', it becomes clear that resilience is a key ESS focus currently when supporting learners (and teachers) experiencing barriers to learning and development. All of these learners (and teachers) experience adversity in some way or another and need to be guided to bounce back individually and as part of a broader social community to previous or better levels of functioning.

■ The bio-psychosocial-spiritual model

It was clearly argued in the previous section that resilience is a construct that guides ESS professionals in supporting learners and even teachers. Another guiding construct in ESS is the concept of the holistic development of learners.

George Engel, an American psychiatrist, is credited with the development of the bio-psychosocial model in 1977, when he suggested that the traditional biomedical model in medicine or psychiatry did not view a human being in totality and holistically (Engel 1977). This was a further impetus (and, at the same time, acknowledgement) from the health sciences that the traditional medical model alone could no longer be the single lens through which the human condition could be viewed. This development was strongly premised on the general systems theory with its reorientation towards more holistic approaches in human science. It preceded Bronfenbrenner's seminal work on the ecological systems theory (1979) by two years and was indicative of the change in thinking that developed in the 1970s about human illness and development. This fed into the momentum that the concept of inclusive education would engender towards the last decade of the 20th century.

Engel (1977) motivated his new model as follows in his initial article:

> To provide a basis for understanding the determinants of disease and arriving at rational treatments and patterns of health care, a medical model must also take into account the patient, the social context in which he lives, and the complementary system devised by society to deal with the disruptive effects of illness, that is, the physician role and the health care system. This requires a biopsychosocial model. (p. 324)

As a psychiatrist, it was clear to Engel that all factors that could contribute to illness should be taken into account when evaluating a patient. These would include the social context and a bigger focus on the psychological functioning of the person. Primacy should not be given to biological factors alone, as this boils down to a reductionist approach. A more holistic evaluation of the biological, psychological and social dimensions of a human being will help to determine whether a patient is sick or whether it can merely be seen as a 'problem of living' (Engel 1977:324).

Engel suggested through this model that clinicians should no longer look for single causes of ill health but consider the fact that many contributory factors may be at play. The model now also linked mind and body in a much deeper way than previously by blurring the clear distinction that was often made between the two dimensions. A further important development through the model was that Engel implied that health was just as important as illness (Hughes et al. 2020).

Mark Winiarski took Engel's model a step further when writing about HIV and AIDS by adding the spiritual dimension of a human being and renaming the theory the bio-psychosocial-spiritual model. Winiarski (1997) viewed people as holistic human beings with a spiritual dimension over and above the bio-psychosocial components. Building on systemic thinking, he stated: 'If we think it through […] it seems that every aspect of life has biomedical, psychological, social and spiritual components that affect one another' (Winiarski 1997:10).

By adding the spiritual dimension, Winiarski sent a strong message to all support professionals that not only biology or psychology or social context may affect a client's well-being but

also the spiritual engagement of the person. Psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors now had to also attend to clients' spirituality or refer the person to an appropriate spiritually helping professional for that dimension.

The implications of the bio-psychosocial-spiritual model for ESS are quite clear: a learner should be supported holistically as far as possible. The biological dimension should be kept in mind very well, especially in light of the fact that ESS workers in most cases are not medical personnel. When dealing with psychological issues, the social context, the biological domain and the spiritual domain should also be focused upon, and so forth.

Within ESS, the matter of educational dimension also comes into play, which in many referrals is a primary focus. It may even, therefore, be appropriate to extend the mentioned model to an even more holistic description of the bio-psychosocial-educational-spiritual model within ESS. The extension of the model within ESS to include the educational dimension may be an even more truthful reflection of the total learner that is supported.

■ (Social) constructivism

Constructivism as a theoretical perspective has become a critical foundation of current educational (and psychological) thinking and has had a profound influence on pedagogy, research and support to learners experiencing barriers to learning. Its existence is partially attributed to a reaction to positivism with its tenets that the absolute truth could be detected through objective inquiry and that direct instruction to learners to fill up their *tabula rasa* (blank minds) is the real way of teaching (Donald et al. 2020).

Constructivism is often attributed to psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner who realised that children were not empty vessels who received knowledge passively, but mostly helped to co-construct knowledge with the experience that they brought to classrooms and learning spaces. In terms of pedagogy,

constructivism therefore changed the face of teaching; a much more interactive and iterative process of engaging with learners is now followed in classrooms across the globe instead of a predominant monologue in the form of direct instruction from the teacher's side. Learners are encouraged to actively co-construct and reconstruct knowledge by taking part in what is presented (Donald et al. 2020). This pedagogical point of departure has been facilitated and fast tracked by the advent of the knowledge era, where learners have instant technological access to facts via platforms such as Google.

It is not only pedagogy that has been transformed by constructivism but also the way research is approached. Positivism has a very strong tradition and link to quantitative research, where the researcher tries to unravel the truth via statistical relationships and prediction, in which respondents are merely sources of data that need to be exploited. Constructivism has helped researchers to realise that participants can play a much bigger role in research; a more egalitarian situation has been created between researcher and participant, where the latter's subjective meaning making through words contributes substantially to the eventual research results. Perhaps the strongest change can be seen with the rise of action research, where participants co-construct solutions to real-life problems with the researcher.

Before we attend to how constructivism has influenced education to learners experiencing barriers to learning, a note about the different types of constructivism is necessary. Social constructivism is the most commonly known type and basically indicates that knowledge is predominantly constructed in a social environment amongst people. Radical constructivism is another type and postulates that knowledge is absolutely relative and a social construct: 1 + 1 is not necessarily equal to 2, as it depends on the context. Two other types of constructivism are communal and relational constructivism, with some intricate differences to social and radical constructivism (Fosnot 1996; Lenartowicz 2016).

But what implications does (social) constructivism have for ESS? One important implication is that parents and the learner have much more input to make in terms of the education of the child experiencing barriers to learning, including in which setting education should take place. During the 20th-century special education era, ESS staff evaluated a learner and then recommended appropriate placement in a specialised setting, often far from the learner's home town. With the advent of inclusive education since the last decade of the 20th century, parents and the learner acquired much more say in how and where the child should be educated. Apart from the earlier-described human rights movement, which has substantially contributed to this change in power dynamics, constructivism, with its focus on the learner's contribution, has also facilitated this transformation. A second implication is that learners experiencing barriers can also contribute to education in a meaningful way and can even add value to the education of those without visible barriers. Many teachers have in this regard come to realise that it may be critical to expose learners without barriers to those with barriers, as this prepares all of them for the real world after school and may destigmatise prejudices. A third implication is that educational support by ESS professionals now has a much more interactive, egalitarian and reciprocal character compared to earlier one-sided interventions from the support professional's side under special education. More awareness exists that ESS is a joint venture of two or more minds and, without ownership from all, will not succeed.

Closely related to constructivism and its influence on educational support is the theory of transformative learning.

■ Transformative learning

Learning theories have developed over the past century to explain how general and academic learning takes place. Some of the most important broad categories of learning theories are behavioural, cognitive, gestalt and metacognitive theories.

All of these theories have had an influence on how educational support has been rendered over the century, but space and high relevance do not allow us to delve into this too deeply. We will only touch on transformative learning, which can be described as one of the later theories of learning and probably best located within the category of metacognitive theories.

Metacognition deals with the awareness of how one's own cognition works, in order to improve cognition. In the same way, metacognitive learning focuses on the awareness of how one learns, in order to improve one's learning and make it as deep and effective as possible.

Transformative learning theory is the brainchild of Zack Mezirow. Mezirow (2010) initially focused his theory on adult learners, but today it is also seen as highly applicable to younger learners. Transformative learning is all about the change that happens after learning. This is accomplished via the concept of perspective transformation, implying that psychological, convictional and behavioural change will follow learning. Psychological transformation should happen in the understanding of oneself; convictional transformation happens when one is willing to revise one's belief systems and behavioural transformation transpires when lifestyle adjustments are made. These three transformations converge to ensure that summative perspective transformation happens after learning (Mezirow 2010).

In education, transformative learning takes place where an educator makes learners aware of their assumptions whilst also supporting them to engage critically with these assumptions. Of course, this involves reflecting not only on one's own assumptions but also on those of others. The eventual aim is to support learners to make meaning of their life experience.

How does this link to ESS? It is important for ESS professionals to continue on their way to engage critically with assumptions, especially the assumptions of the current paradigm in education for learners experiencing barriers to learning. An example is that very few professionals questioned the older special education

paradigm when it had big momentum; it was just accepted as the best way of dealing with learners with disabilities and barriers. In the same vein, it should be emphasised that ESS professionals should now also engage in transformative learning within the inclusive education era. Are we, via this paradigm, perhaps simultaneously winning a lot by including learners, but also losing much by neglecting specialised support within inclusive classrooms? A secondary implication of this theory is that the assumptions of educators and learners with and without barriers should be challenged through perspective transformation. This is easier said than done, as prejudices are often hard to transform. It is, nevertheless, important that some ways of thinking are challenged, for example, how 'normal' learners view a classroom where learners with barriers are also represented.

This concludes the overview of theories directly related to ESS. In the 'Culturally appropriate support' section, the views and perspectives regarding psychosocial educational support in different parts of the world are interrogated.

■ Culturally appropriate support

■ Westernised perspective on support

The westernised perspective on support is generally portrayed as a focus on a curative and mostly individual (and family) support service approach stemming from the earlier-described medical-biological model of treatment (Gibson 2006; Hughes et al. 2020). This model mostly consisted of the cure or treatment of sickness or dysfunction of individuals – rather than prevention – when providing support services. Subsequently, a move was made towards an ecosystemic model (Donald et al. 2020), where the systems surrounding the challenges of the community are taken into consideration. In Third World countries, such as South Africa, there has been a shift from individual psychotherapy (as is typically portrayed within westernised societies) to contextually relevant intervention services as advocated by an ecosystemic

approach (Donald et al. 2020; Pillay 2011). This shift has come about because of the changing social, political, economic and psychological issues facing communities and schools.

Interestingly, some non-Western universities are also training ESS professionals from an ecosystemic (mostly westernised) perspective. This may imply that these trained ESS professionals did not receive appropriate training in indigenous knowledge systems and even cultural diversity (Joubert & Hay 2019; Pillay 2011). One way of creating a sense of respect for the community is for ESS support professionals to fully understand the specific cultural background (or indigenous identity) of the community members with whom support services are conducted (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston 2005; Joubert & Hay 2019).

The American Psychological Association Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents (American Psychological Association 2008) has reported on how an Afrocentric worldview plays an essential part in the support provided to African-American youth. The report points to a general lack of acknowledgement in the literature of 'racial, ethnic, and cultural forces, nuances, and competencies, particularly as they relate to the resilience and well-being of African-American youth' (American Psychological Association 2008:1). Many South African studies also acknowledge the need for further culturally relevant studies, especially on how Afrocentric practices can be used by ESS professions to promote resilience and well-being to complement Western theories (Theron, Theron & Malindi 2012).

■ Afrocentric perspective on support

Afrocentric practices presuppose an Afrocentric worldview where people are considered interconnected and inherently valuable. The interconnectedness amongst people is termed 'ubuntu' (which means 'a person is a person through other people') (Dube 2009:188). In societies that are respectful of the

ubuntu philosophy, the youth are taught to respect their elders and their traditional heritage and to be part of a wider community (Mkhize 2006). Everyone in the community is part of socialising the youth with ubuntu values, which include sharing resources and helping others. Afrocentrism also consists of spiritual beliefs (i.e. an attachment to God or the ancestors) that the youth are taught to respect and practise in order to benefit themselves and others. Thus, Afrocentrism is driven by spiritual beliefs, values and cultural practices that encourage intra- and interpersonal harmony that helps individuals to overcome adversity (Levers, May & Vogel 2011; Waghid 2019).

To be socialised in terms of an Afrocentric worldview is potentially a supportive resource because this worldview encourages connection to others as part of a shared cultural belief system that provides support in difficult times. A shared cultural belief system and support from others may act as a buffer against adversity, as has been shown in previous resilience studies. South African studies also confirm that to be socialised into an Afrocentric worldview is a supportive resource because individuals are part of a group they can identify with as their cultural heritage and experience a feeling of belonging, making them aware of enabling cultural traditions and providing access to the resources offered by such traditions (Joubert & Hay 2019; Neblett et al. 2010).

Education support services professionals can learn from studies that suggest that the resilience and well-being of African learners are linked to Afrocentrism when learners are socialised to be respectful of this worldview. Education support services professionals can invite family members to share culturally appropriate customs, traditions and stories to be used within the framework of the learners' counselling sessions (Joubert & Hay 2019; Kagan 2009). For example, an intervention that can enhance learners' cultural association is to invite families to participate in culturally relevant family activities (e.g. dancing or storytelling) at school. However, ESS professionals should caution

against assuming that Afrocentrism is lived uniformly. There are various reasons why the centrality of Afrocentrism may be reduced, such as the acculturation of the youth, and it, therefore, cannot be assumed that all learners embrace Afrocentric practices in similar ways.

■ Eastern perspectives on support

In this section, various school support systems of Asian countries are concisely described in terms of access to psychosocial educational support. Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, India and South Korea face similar contextual challenges as South Africa, such as poverty, teacher training that does not equip teachers well for supporting learners experiencing barriers, superficial implementation of special needs support and inequalities in terms of access to education and psychological services (Clark, Zhou & Du 2019).

The lack of psychosocial and educational support is clearly evident in countries such as China, where there is little government support for learners with various disabilities and, in general, a lack of psychosocial and educational support (Clark et al. 2019). In other Asian countries, culturally appropriate assessment and intervention tools are also not available for the poorer communities in need of intervention (Patwa et al. 2019). In Vietnam, for example, learners with learning barriers such as autism are often viewed and treated in terms of cultural beliefs and not according to the medical or bio-ecological models. Some authors are of the opinion that the focus should rather be on culturally appropriate interventions that can improve the knowledge of parents and school communities in terms of learning disabilities (Ritter, Terjesen & Khuc 2019).

In general, Asian countries seem to be driving learners to high-level academic achievement, thus leading to the exclusion of learners with psychosocial and educational challenges. This is especially true in countries such as South Korea and China, where

high expectations in terms of performance are placed on learners within a rigid societal structure (Phosaly, Olympia & Goldman 2019). These circumstances actually imply the need for high-quality school support on a psychosocial and educational level (Zhou, Xin & Du 2019).

There are, fortunately, signs of progressive views in, for example, India. Here, Patwa et al. (2019) recognised that legislation, such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, has made progress to bring equality and access to the school system. Furthermore, the Indian School Psychology Association is serving as an advocate for psychological support services to be mandated by legislation. In South Korea, teachers are certified as school counsellors but lack the necessary competencies and role clarity to fully support learners' psychosocial well-being (Phosaly et al. 2019).

In more resourceful Asian countries, such as Japan and Malaysia, a reformed framework of late has opened up more supportive psychosocial services to school communities, especially with learning disabilities. The school support system in Japan is an example of how teachers can function as psychological supporters for learners and how access to various professional support services, such as school counsellors, registered psychologists and even nurses, within the school system can work collaboratively to support the school system (Yoshikawa et al. 2019). Malaysia is another example of how culturally specific resources can aid in supporting learners with risk factors associated with academic performance and social stressors (Kok & Low 2019).

In conclusion, many Asian countries face numerous educational and psychosocial challenges similar to African and Western countries. There is a need for support from legislation and for adequately trained teachers and ESS staff to serve school communities. Some progress has been made within these contexts, and some Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Japan,

are exemplars for Asian countries in need of developing culturally appropriate psychosocial educational support services.

◼ Towards an integrated perspective of support

South Africa represents a confluence of African, Eastern and Western worldviews, with a strong African foundation represented by at least 10 African languages and cultures, eastern influence via the second largest Indian population outside of India (mostly located in KwaZulu-Natal) and a particular Western perspective via immigrants from European countries, such as England, Scotland, the Netherlands, France and Germany.

It could therefore be stated that ESS in South Africa should also represent these influences in bio-psychosocial-educational-spiritual support. The collective community-orientated spirit of ubuntu should be merged with the scepticism towards psychological support often found in Eastern countries and the individualistic focus on human development lived by Western societies. This is a real challenge within the diverse South African society and learner and teacher populations.

The 'Team dynamics' section concisely focuses on an issue that will be elaborated on in Chapter 6, namely, the crucial matter of how teams operating within the education support environment should take cognisance of their interpersonal dynamics.

◼ Team dynamics

Different chapters of this book focus on SBSTs and DBSTs, giving an indication that multidisciplinary teams are mostly the way forward envisaged for psychosocial educational support services. The team dynamics within these teams may hinder or facilitate the effective rendering of support and is, therefore, seen by the authors as a crucial foundational perspective in ESS.

■ Group dynamics within collaborative partnerships

Research supports the notion that if ESS professionals develop trusting collaborative partnerships, they will be able to intervene more effectively (Heath & Hudnall 2011). There is a growing discussion on incorporating knowledge from multiple disciplines (i.e. biological, social, communication, organisational and large-scale ecosystemic sciences) in support of communities (Thornberg 2012). If ESS professionals learn to collaborate with people from different disciplines in a proactive manner, they are bound to derive benefits that will make their tasks manageable and beneficial to their learners. For example, collaboration amongst psychologists, social workers, special needs educators and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with a mental health focus could have positive consequences for learners, such as improved academic development, reduced aggression, diminished substance abuse and less absenteeism from school (Thornberg 2012).

Some group dynamics may play a role in the efficiency of support given by ESS professionals and should be clarified when collaborating with other professionals. These include issues with role clarification, power struggles and losing sight of a common goal where conflict may arise amongst members of a team (Hay 2013). Education support services professionals will benefit from acquiring multiple skills, such as organising, negotiating, networking, communicating, problem assessment and problem solving, that will enable them to resolve problematic group dynamics in collaborating with professionals from multiple disciplines (Pillay 2012). One particular example of friction may be the strong medical model inclination of paramedical professionals versus the more ecosystemic training that specialist educators and educational psychologists undergo (Hay 2012).

■ Synergy

A critical term used in team dynamics is *synergy*. Synergy alludes to 'the combined power of a group of things when they are working together that is greater than the total power achieved by each working separately' (Cambridge Dictionary of English 2020). The ideal within SBSTs and DBSTs is, therefore, that optimal synergy is achieved when working together to support learners and teachers. This is a real challenge within ESS, as ESS have developed over the years to consist of a number of professional disciplines from primary educational to primary paramedical backgrounds. These colleagues should collaborate in a synergistic way to support learners and teachers at their best. In South Africa, it is mostly the DBSTs that consist of a variety of professionals, although SBSTs also consist of a variety of mostly specialist educators. The way in which they collaborate determines how well learners (and teachers) are assessed and supported. More about this will be interrogated in Chapter 6.

Although multidisciplinary teams may be the ideal within ESS, this type of support is not always possible and realistic. In the 'Support rendered by education support services professionals' section, a concise theoretical background is provided on the ways in which psychosocial educational support can be rendered to learners, teachers and schools.

■ Support rendered by education support services professionals

Three major ways of disciplinary collaboration can be distinguished from the literature and ESS practice.

■ Uni-disciplinary approach

The uni-disciplinary approach implies that one ESS professional or discipline renders services to learners and teachers. In the

current South African situation, the services of the LSF or LSE may be described as uni-disciplinary. The advantages of this approach are that the single person or discipline rendering service builds up a solid relationship with credibility amongst the schools that he or she is serving because of being located at the specific school or being itinerant amongst a few specific schools (Cummings, McLeskey & Huebner 1985). The possibility of influencing the school system also develops because of this good relationship that is established (Befring 1987). He or she also becomes skilled as a generalist who may render basic psychological, school social work or occupational or speech therapy screening, apart from the specialist learning support. The disadvantages of single-discipline service rendering are that such a professional often stays a generalist, as so many varied learner needs have to be addressed and the necessary specialist depth cannot be reached in terms of supporting a learner or teacher. Often, this kind of service rendering is found in deep rural areas where there is an absence of more ESS disciplines – in South African terms, an absence of DBST service rendering or even private specialist services that the poor cannot afford. Despite these disadvantages, we state with certainty that uni-disciplinary service delivery in remote areas of South Africa is way better than no service at all. The onus then just rests on the ESS staff member to capacitate himself or herself with broader multidisciplinary knowledge and skills and to network as well as possible to ensure some consultation and referral possibilities when the learner requires more than generalist support.

■ Trans- or interdisciplinary approach

The trans- or interdisciplinary approach implies that there is a multidisciplinary team available, but because of time and finances, the referred learner is initially allocated to one staff member most likely to appropriately support the learner effectively. The team leader would scrutinise the referral and decide whether it is

primarily an educational-academic, psychological, school social work or occupational or speech therapy problem, and request the specific ESS discipline to assess and support the learner (Engelbrecht & Hay 2018). In the South African context of DBSTs, this is probably the approach that is taken most. Should the first ESS staff member then assess the situation and come to the conclusion that another discipline also needs to be involved, further referral takes place. However, in most cases, the learner may be appropriately supported by the first staff member focusing on the referred problem. This approach may be viewed as the best of both worlds within a developing context: one discipline supports the child, but back-up services are available if required.

■ Multidisciplinary approach

With the multidisciplinary approach, a learner is assessed by all available disciplines of the ESS team and then only a final conclusion is drawn at a team discussion, as well as what the suggested support interventions should look like. This is an expensive and time-consuming way of work and often not sustainable in developing countries (Engelbrecht & Hay 2018). However, it is, of course, the best possible way to assess and support learners, as all aspects of the learner's needs can be addressed. One often finds that presenting the learner problems seems simple and related to one domain of functioning, only to detect that, for example, an educational or academic need links strongly to psychological or social challenges, and so forth.

Apart from the theories underpinning ESS, the views about ESS from different broad cultural groupings in the world, the team dynamics at play in ESS and whether the services are rendered by a single discipline or in teams, two final theoretical constructs within ESS are crucial as the foundation of this book, namely, direct and indirect service rendering within ESS.

■ Direct and indirect service rendering within education support services

Three decades ago, Gutkin and Conoley (1990) already expressed the importance of school psychology moving from direct services (where an individual child is assessed and supported) to indirect services (where school psychologists support and capacitate adults in the life of children to render services). This move is critical within the ESS of the 21st century within a developing South Africa and in the midst of inclusive education.

As will become clearer in this book, South Africa does not have the ESS resources in provincial education departments to service each learner individually, even if they only focus on those experiencing barriers to learning. Direct support to learners may only be possible in circumstances of high-intensity need, but fortunately, indirect services can be developed where ESS members capacitate teachers and parents as thoroughly as possible to support learners experiencing mild to moderate-intensive need. With this type of combination of ESS, it may be possible to bring about change.

■ Conclusion

In this chapter, the authors attempted to provide an overview of the most important theoretical foundations of ESS in terms of theoretical perspectives underpinning the rendering of psychosocial educational support to learners and teachers, how support is viewed in African, eastern and Western contexts, the dynamics at work within ESS teams, how support can be rendered in individual and team contexts and whether direct or indirect services are indicated. It is not an exhaustive effort professing to include all theoretical perspectives at work in ESS, but it should be helpful to ESS practitioners and academics. It also lays the foundation upon which the other chapters of this book are built.

Current status of psychosocial educational support services in South Africa

Inclusive education and education support services: Global and local trends

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■ Introduction

A historical overview of ESS across the world will be given in this chapter. This will include how ESS originated in South Africa as well as the focused trends and developments of ESS during the 20th century. These aspects will be linked to the origin and development of inclusive education globally. Lastly, the structuring of ESS in South Africa will be elaborated on.

■ The history and origin of education support services

Education support services are defined as any source or method of support to provide optimal assistance to learners, teachers and systems (such as the school). In fact, it is a global concept that can include a variety of psychosocial educational support. Many disciplines and specialists are involved, including specialist educators, psychologists, school social workers and paramedical staff, such as occupational, speech and physiotherapists, amongst others. This section will briefly explain the history and origin of the above-mentioned ESS.

■ Historical overview of special education

The history of special education probably started during the 18th century. Blackhurst and Berdine (1993) explained that before that time, persons with disabilities were not taken into consideration and were often mistaken as being possessed by evil powers or cursed or simply seen as stupid. In some instances, individuals with exceptionalities were largely ignored or subjected to inhumane treatment, ridicule, isolation and, at times, even put to death (D'Antonio 2004; Winzer 1998). The literature describes the treatment provided to individuals with disabilities as they are being confined to jails and alms-houses without decent food, clothing, personal hygiene and exercise (Gallagher 1998; Smith 1998). However, at the beginning of the 18th century and the

period known as the Enlightenment, ideas about education for these persons started to arise (Johnston 1999). These steered rational philosophical beliefs about human dignity, which led to changes in the treatment and societal perceptions of persons with disabilities (Smith 1998).

In the early 19th century, exponents of social change worked to eliminate social problems. Mock, Jakubecy and Kauffman (2002) highlighted that physicians and clergy wanted to ameliorate the neglectful, often abusive treatment of individuals with disabilities. During that time, professionals understood individuals living with disabilities received better treatment in residential facilities in rural contexts. Advocates of these institutions argued that environmental conditions such as urban poverty and vices induced behavioural problems (cf. Gallagher 1998:493–502). Those who were interested in reforms forced governments to make funding available for specialised care institutions. These specialised care institutions catered for specific disability, such as intellectual impairment (cf. Gallagher 1998:493–502), mental illness, sensory impairment and behavioural disorders (Bateman & Linden 1998). However, children, who were delinquent or aggressive, but not insane, were housed or sent to reform schools. Those with schizophrenia were sent to psychiatric hospitals. Bateman and Linden (1998) mentioned that moral treatment was the dominant approach of the early 19th century in psychiatric hospitals, the aim being to cure.

Johnston (1999) was of the opinion that during the 19th century, special education became more intense because of people such as Reverend Thomas Gallaudet and Samuel Howe, in the USA, who took action regarding special education. The first school for deaf children was founded by Gallaudet in 1817 in Hartford, Connecticut. The school was called the American Asylum for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and is nowadays known as the American School for the Deaf (Bateman & Linden 1998). The second school was founded by Samuel Gridley Howe in 1829 in the USA and was focused on the education of blind students. Currently, the school is called the Perkins School for the

Blind and is located in Massachusetts (Johnston 1999). Following the example of these two people, more institutions that aimed to educate disabled children were established in other American states. With special education becoming more significant through the years, the Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feebleminded Persons was created (Bateman & Linden 1998).

According to Winzer (1998), the 20th century was characterised by the execution of laws to ensure that people with disabilities would have their right to education assured. In the early 20th century, the New York University incorporated in the courses presented by the school a training programme for special education teachers. At approximately the same time, French researcher Alfred Binet, alongside with Theodore Simon, produced the first intelligence scale – a standardised intelligence test in order to identify children with intellectual impairment (Winzer 1998).

This test was subsequently transformed to suit American standards, and the idea of the intelligence quotient (IQ) was introduced (Winzer 1998). In addition, a council that played an important role in making laws to protect those living with disabilities was founded by Elizabeth Farrell and was called the Council for Exceptional Children. The most important hallmark was when President Eisenhower signed Public Law 85–926, which provided grants to colleges and universities to ensure that teachers are trained and prepared for special education (Bateman & Linden 1998). Thereafter, many laws and acts that protected children with disabilities were promulgated during the remainder of this century. Ideas on how to safeguard children living with disabilities and to guarantee access to education became more prominent (Bateman & Linden 1998).

Based on the above and for the benefit of this chapter, it is important that the developments in special education be clarified. The history of special education can be conceptualised in phases that highlight the different developments that

the field has practised. It has been noted that some of these conceptualisations emphasise changes involving instructional interventions for learners living with disabilities, whilst others emphasise the place of intervention. According to Yell, Rogers and Rogers (1998), the focus on placement reflects that instructional settings had characteristic qualities that alone protected effective intervention. It is worth noting that in the late 19th century, placement inspired for better and bigger care institutions as well as the movement for deinstitutionalisation.

Furthermore, Bateman and Linden (1998) explained that during the late 19th century, social Darwinism replaced environmentalism as the main causal explanation for people living with disabilities, and this led to the start of the eugenics movement of the early 20th century, leading to discrimination against people living with intellectual impairment.[1] These authors further mentioned that at the start of the 20th century, the deliberation suddenly shifted from *whether* the disadvantaged should be assisted to *where* these individuals should be served. In this case, people were given protective treatment, which is in conflict with the mission of special education. Moreover, after many centuries, special education teachers still focused on the need for place. According to Winzer (1998), the civil rights movement saw special education as an opportunity for the minorities to access educational privileges of the majority, and the clause of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* or the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* encouraged exponents for the rights of people living with disabilities to access mainstream education wherever and whenever possible. Yell et al. (1998) and Bateman and Linden (1998) added that in the 1980s, the Regular Education Initiative returned the responsibilities for the education of learners living with disabilities to mainstream schools and regular classroom teachers. By the 1990s, the

1. See Special Education Current Trends, Preparation of Teachers, International Context. Reviewed 19 September 2021, from https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2438/Special-Education.html

exponents of full inclusion advocated for the education for all learners living with disabilities in mainstream schools (Engelbrecht et al. 2016).

■ Brief history of school psychology

During the late 19th and early 20th century, social reform, which involved mandatory schooling, mental health, vocational guidance, child labour laws and juvenile courts, was implemented. According to Skiba et al. (2008), these cultural and social advances were a key factor in the push for the need for school psychologists. In 1918, attending school became mandatory in the USA. Prior to this ruling, it was up to parents whether they wanted their children to be educated in a school (Raid & Barram 2004). As a result, schools were filled with many learners of different backgrounds and skill levels. Some learners really struggled and seemed unable to keep up. This brought about a challenge for teachers and administrators. To address the problem, school officials began testing struggling learners in an effort to get to the root of the problem. Standardised testing became a relatively common method used to screen learners prior to placing them in schools. Zafiris, Thornas-Duckwirz and D'Amato (2007) were of the opinion that it is during this era that schools began using standardised tests to find out where learners were academically in relation to other learners. The belief was that this information would make it easier for the school to help everyone to learn.

As mentioned earlier, by 1910, in many urban and some rural communities, special education services existed. As a result, 'experts' were required to offer assistance in selecting and placing children in these services. It is at this stage that the school psychologist had to be incorporated in many countries to serve as the gatekeeper for special education that evolved. According to Skiba et al. (2008) and Berliner (1993), the early models of school psychology in the USA progressed from Lightner Witmer and G. Stanley Hall, who had different perspectives on the

provision of services to individuals. In this regard, the different perspectives were explained according to their focuses, whereby the first focus was on a more idiographic, clinical model that could offer real services for the individual (Witmer), and the other was more research-orientated by considering to improve normative features for groups (Hall).

Raid and Barram (2004) believed that the binary approaches mentioned were merged to shape the fundamentals of school psychology and the testing movement in particular. At this time, the first applied intelligence test battery was developed, which measured higher-level cognitive skills and formed relationships with measures of school realisation. In this respect, the first person in the USA to obtain the title of 'school psychologist' was Hall's student, Arnold Gesell (Kramer 1987). It is further noted that the psychosocial educational service in schools also began during this time. Hay (1993) asserted that the first school psychologist was probably appointed in the USA and that this development can be considered as the beginning of psychosocial educational services in schools. He concurs that the first school psychologist can be traced back to the year 1915 when Arnold Gesell was appointed by the Connecticut Board of Education. Hannan (2008) mentioned that Gesell, as the school psychologist for the Connecticut State Board of Education, assisted in progressing classes to help children living with disabilities to prosper. According to Hay (1994), this appointment was primarily for the mental evaluation of children throughout the state of Connecticut, with specific emphasis on rural schools.

In Britain, the origin of educational psychological services is traced back to the year 1913 when Cyril Burt started working as a psychologist within education (Hay 1994). Burt was branded for his improvement of factor analysis in psychological testing and for his studies of the influence of heredity on intelligence and behaviour. He was the first person to popularise IQ tests in Britain. His work shaped the foundation of the education policy for half a century – since the 1920s until the 1970s.

Further development in school psychology came about in 1925 when the initial school psychology training programme was established at New York University (undergraduate and graduate). These courses were the immediate forerunners to the courses on educational psychology that are seen today in programmes of teacher training. During that time, an influential network of multidisciplinary clinics was set up in the USA and Europe to address the problems of childhood and adolescence. This is affirmed by Hay (1994) when he states that clinics were established, and by 1928, the Child Guidance Council, which began coordinating child leadership, was established. In the middle of 1930s, state department accreditation for school psychologists was provided in New York and Pennsylvania. This was the first doctoral-level programme in school psychology. Furthermore, associations such as the American Psychological Association and the American Association of Applied Psychologists were formed (Raid & Barram 2004). However, Hay (1994) emphasised that the field of school psychology during those years up to 1930 in the USA was characterised by a lack of distinctiveness in relation to specialised training, core of practice, accreditation and organisational recognition. He alludes that the predominant role of school psychologists in this period developed to that of psychometrists who would specify the type of class where learners should be placed.

In 1969, the National Association of School Psychologists was shaped in the USA. The National Association of School Psychologists instituted practitioners nationwide jointly in a more unwavering and strengthened identity (Fagan & Wise 1994). This association was established as a counter-reaction to the American Psychological Association's insistence on the registration of all school psychologists and as a result of the fast growth that occurred in the field of educational psychology (Hay 1994). By 1975, the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, well known at that period as Public Law 94–142, was promulgated by Congress. Fagan and Wise (1994) were of the opinion that this public law triggered a mammoth growth in the number of school

psychologist practitioners, and the amenities were now obtainable nationwide, regardless of continual variability in delivery systems and practitioner qualifications. According to Raid and Barram (2004), the National Association of School Psychologists started to undertake much more accountability in defining education and professional qualification standards, as well as steering from a 'reactive' model (merely responding to information and recommendations from outside agencies) to a 'proactive' role (working to have an impact on the types of decisions these other agencies might make).

Hay (1994) pointed out that the role and function of school psychologists began to change in the 1980s from 'assessment and placement intensive' to 'preferential assessment, interventions, and at least secondary prevention for at-risk groups'. Fagan and Wise (1994) added that these changes continued to evolve in an effort to make the work of practising school psychologists available to all learners, as well as their parents, teachers and the community.

■ Historical overview of international school social work

The start of obligatory school attendance laws triggered developments in school social work. This development was influential worldwide. Canada implemented compulsory school attendance in the 1870s, the USA passed compulsory laws by 1918 and United Kingdom passed compulsory laws at the end of the 19th century (Huxtable & Blythe 2002).

The initial position of school social work was established during the 1800s in the United Kingdom and was known as the position of 'school attendance officer'. The role of school attendance officers was to track learners' attendance and enforce rules about truancy, which varied according to local laws and the guidelines of each school (Huxtable 2016). This also included the tracking of learners who had a habit of missing school. Kasiram (1993) alluded to the

fact that these officers were usually either police officers, whose duties include ensuring learner attendance in the local school system, or social workers who worked within the school. Kelly (2008) mentioned that later on, this position developed into those of 'education welfare officers' and 'education social workers'. This name change was characterised by the expansion of their job descriptions, which further allowed them to be involved in assisting underprivileged families in getting benefits in terms of school means and uniforms and supporting families that were battling with education through building relations with them and visiting them at home. In the USA, school social work services were established in 1906 in the Boston and New York areas (Kelly 2008). The fundamental emphasis of these school social workers was the triad of teacher, parent and learner. According to Germain (2006), the focus was to work with all aspects of the child's circumstances, but the fundamental skill behind all of this was assessment – a logical way of understanding and communicating what was happening and what was conceivable. In such instances, the social worker had to develop a plan to promote the entire constellation – teacher and learners in the classroom, as well as parents and others – to collaborate on supporting learners to successfully completing the developmental and academic steps that lay ahead (Allen-Meares 2006). Huxtable and Blythe (2002) highlighted that because of an upsurge in the number of learners that needed ESS in the USA, private agencies appointed 'visiting teachers' in other parts in order to ensure interaction between the school and the home, with the end objective of improved school attendance in mind. Visiting teachers were responsible for ensuring that children went to school and collaborated with teachers to help them, for example, understand new immigrants (Harrison & Harrison 2009). According to Vergottini (2019), these visiting teachers began to follow a social work method, and by the 1930s, the title of 'school social worker' had been officially accepted.

From 1930, many countries, including Denmark and Canada, started to introduce school social work services. During the 1930s, Denmark developed many initiatives to relieve the crisis of

economic misery. Jonasen (2004) mentioned that there was an upsurge of voluntary efforts, and municipalities and trade unions also came forth with other initiatives to support their citizens. Some of the undertakings were sustained during the 1940s, somehow with the political determination of keeping the young away from the 'influence from authoritarian ideas' (Flyvbjerg 2001:202). Through the 1950s and 1960s, social work in Denmark was being expanded, especially in the public sector. During that era, highly qualified consultants (psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, etc.) were employed to support the school with decisions in complicated school cases (Jonasen 2004). As a result, school social work experienced expansion both in curriculum and capacity. In children's institutions, a further diagnostic culture became predominant, especially in some lately well-known municipal and county institutions (Payne 2005). In this respect, older institutions were viewed as reduced active and scientific in their approach. Furthermore, teachers in social advising brought some influential ideas from American social work to Denmark (Gamst & Gamst 2008). Casework and active listening became elements in teaching. Between 1964 and 1971, a fourth social reform emerged in Denmark, and a proposal in the field of social work was made. This proposal encouraged a municipal-based, 'one-string' system that largely trained social workers with knowledge of economy, psychology, psychiatry, labour relations, social policy, sociology, institutions for the handicapped, how children's institutions work and rehabilitation (Jonasen 2004). Flyvbjerg (2001:209) further mentioned that the role of the social worker became viewing the client's circumstances as a whole, including economy, family relations and work relations. According to Payne (2005), from 1977 onwards, economists and politicians altered the perspective of the economic catastrophe, and therefore, politicians transformed laws and conditions for social work. Payne furthermore emphasised that throughout the 1980s and onwards, approaches in family work advanced in municipal institutions. This was affirmed by Flyvbjerg (2001:209), alluding to the fact that social

workers with therapeutic postgraduate training attempted, as an alternative to placing children in care, to capacitate parents to advance their relationships with their children – in several cases quite successfully.

Canada started school social work in the 1940s (Barret 2016). Westhues (2005:140) alluded that the history of social work education in Canada can be branded as a discussion about the mission of social work practice between two perspectives: the professional (or function) perspective and the progressive (or cause) perspective. In this issue, professionalism favoured protecting people using social work services, whilst progressive social workers assumed that their role was to work as advocates for greater social justice (Vaillancourt 1996). The literature indicates that the initial schools of social work in the country were established in 1914 at the University of Toronto and in 1918 at McGill University in Montreal. These schools were grounded in a belief that social problems could best be addressed by people with well-developed social work practice skills and knowledge of applied social sciences. Spolander et al. (2011) mentioned that this belief was strongly related to professionalising social work education.

Today, social work education is presented at the postsecondary level in Canada. Currently, there are approximately 50 social service worker programmes across Canada in community colleges and 34 university programmes that provide people with undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications (Stephenson et al. 2001). All these programmes recognise the necessity for stability between the professional and the progressive visions of social work education.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers originated in 1926 (Spolander et al. 2011). Foley (2002:315) pointed out that the mission statement of the Canadian Association of Social Workers mirrors a pledge to both the professional and the progressive perspectives: '[…] to deliver a national leadership role in strengthening and advancing the social work profession in Canada'.

Furthermore, Westhues (2005:132) noted that the Board of Accreditation, created in 1970, was understood to have numerous purposes, namely, the 'safeguard of the public, support and development of standards of social work education, the establishment of a basis for professional associations' acknowledgement of educational programmes and the facilitation of student transfer between programmes.

In this section and the 'Brief history of school psychology' section, the history of the development of two of the core disciplines of ESS was interrogated. Of course, the true multidisciplinary ESS team consists of a number of disciplines, but space does not allow a detailed exploration of, for example, the origin of all the paramedical disciplines within education or of specialist educators.

■ Origin of education support services in South Africa

Education support services in South Africa seem to have a century-old history. South Africa saw the first appointment of a professional psychiatrist in 1923 in the Natal Department of Education. The Cape Department of Education followed with a similar appointment in 1926. Hay (1994) pointed out that the role of these professionals was to assist with the diagnosis of mentally retarded learners. Furthermore, the first special classes were created in 1926 in the Cape (Gerber 1981). These special classes segregated learners by taking them out of mainstream education. Hay also mentioned that the Transvaal Education Department appointed a career counsellor in 1936 and an inspector psychologist in 1937. Hay and Gerber further emphasised that the first career guidance officer in the Orange Free State was appointed in 1937. In 1939 and 1950, respectively, an occupational inspector psychologist and a clinical inspector psychologist were appointed as well. Since then, this service has expanded dramatically amongst all population groups.

It is important to point out that psychology in South Africa started to be practised almost 80 years ago and is viewed by some as stemming from the era of 'scientific racism', shaped by Eurocentric psychology – employed in the best interests of the colonial and later apartheid rulers (Van Ommen & Painter 2008). Scientific racism started to steer or rule educational and social scientific deliberations and debates in South Africa by the end of the 19th century, in a similar way as it did in Europe (Van Ommen & Painter 2008). Social scientists in South Africa, such as psychologists and doctors, vindicated the variance in treatment for the diverse races. Psychologists were anxious about the 'native problem' and the 'poor white problem'. They determined the pathway through the discoveries of social research to 'rationalise the system of institutionalised racism and economic manipulation that was later to be named apartheid' (Van Ommen & Painter 2008:67). Accordingly, the origin of psychology in South Africa unintentionally supported the apartheid ideology through psychological testing. For the benefit of this chapter, the below discussions go deeper into the history of South African ESS prior to 1994 and the early years after 1994.

Prior to 1994, psychological support services in South Africa were incorporating the preventative and the curative approach; yet, it was more associated with an individualistic, clinical approach (Makhalemele 2011). During that time, schools were not entirely provided with support services, and in those schools where delivery was available, it was not equal. In actual fact, the education departments were racially separated, and the operational organisation of support services echoed the same qualities. Engelbrecht, Lazarus and Daniels (2008) stated that dissimilar support services were managed by racially separated education departments, and service delivery was characterised by glaring inequalities and inconsistencies and an absence of coordination, national focus and lucidity on the nature of support services. By then, sufficient delivery of support services was for those education departments serving privileged learners, whereas support services for learners from other population

groups were scarce or non-existent. Some educational services, such as special education, guidance and counselling, and social work fell under psychological or auxiliary services and were involved under each of the racially segregated education departments, whereas other educational services, such as school health, were not part of support services under education (Swart & Pettipher 2009). In the Department of Education and Culture (which was further separated into the House of Assembly, the House of Representatives and the House of Delegates), guidance and counselling services were equally district- or clinic- and school-based. In the services of the African education departments, where they did exist, they were primarily or exclusively school-based, with slight access to specialist referral systems (Swart & Pettipher 2009). Makhalemele asserted that the education support personnel from the Department of Education and Culture were positioned at clinics, and schools referred learners with barriers to learning and development to them, whilst in some Department of Education and Training schools, similar work was done by advisers using the Panel for the Identification, Diagnosis and Assistance system for children with problems. As with all other components of education, special education was also disjointed and relegated as a result of apartheid structures. Lazarus, Daniels and Engelbrecht (2008) pinpointed that the administration and control of special education were positioned as an auxiliary service within the racially and ethnically separated education departments. It is apparent that some links of special education with other ESS existed, but there was very little incorporation of services.

Even the delivery of support services in education was marginal and unevenly provided to different race groups. Swart and Pettipher (2009) were of the view that the ESS were rationally well established in departments serving whites, coloureds and Indians, whereas they were exceptionally underdeveloped in the department serving Africans. Services such as social welfare and school health were underprivileged in terms of establishment, and there were no clear goals for what they had to attain.

Additionally, the non-existence of adequate personnel and training, as well as of any form of applicable referral system, made the existing services enormously problematic (Engelbrecht 2008). School health services across education departments did not have a reliable policy; each department managed this service differently, and departments with more resources had satisfactory school health services (Makhalemele 2011). Swart and Pettipher disclosed that only whites and Indians received any form of actual school health services. They further indicated that coloured learners obtained services, but to a lesser extent. In terms of schools for Africans, only primary schools had access to school health services; however, in the Department of Education and Training schools, the majority of them did not receive these services. The delivery of guidance and counselling services also demonstrates inequality across various education departments (Makhalemele 2011). The National Education Policy Investigation (1992) indicated that although the administration of psychometric assessment transpired in all education systems in South Africa, it was predominantly pronounced in the African education system. In these guidance and counselling services, disparities with respect to specialised and non-specialised personnel were apparent, as the then Department of Education and Training had no specialised personnel to handle the referrals and supervision, whilst the Department of Education and Culture had access to specialised services (Engelbrecht 2008). In the Department of Education and Training, guidance and counselling continued to be nearly non-existing, and these services were primarily presented to secondary schools. The delivery of special education services was done through special schools in all education departments, but this was also done in a different way, according to the specific department. The exponents of these special education services were delivering support on an itinerant basis to evaluate learners, where likely they moved these learners to special schools. The departments serving the advantaged segments had extracurricular support for special education, whereas in the Department of Education and Training schools, where it did exist, it was slight, with apparent disparities (Swart & Pettipher 2009).

In 1996, the then Minister of Education appointed the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) to scrutinise and make recommendations on all aspects of special needs and support services in the South African education system. The DoE (1997) posited that in 1997, these two bodies presented their reports that entailed, amongst other things, the following recommendations:

- The distinct systems of education ('ordinary' and 'special') need to be combined to provide one system, which would be able to recognise and provide in the various needs of the learner population.
- There must be delivery of a range of opportunities for education provision and support services in the integrated system of education.
- Learners must be able to interchange from one learning context to another, such as from early childhood education to general education and training (GET), from a specialised centre of learning to an ordinary centre of learning or from a formal to a non-formal programme.

Furthermore, the inception of outcomes-based education in South African education had significant implications for the delivery of support to learners with special educational needs. Also, from 1996 to 2001, policies and acts were passed that forced the transformation of the education system to accommodate all learners (Makhalemele 2011). Swart and Pettipher (2009) pointed out that these policies were in line with the principles such as non-discrimination, freedom, equity, respect and social justice that provided the background for the Constitution. For the purpose of this chapter, these policies will not be presented but only listed below to make the reader aware of the existence thereof:

- *South African Constitution* (South Africa 1996), specifically the Bill of Rights.
- *White Paper on Education and Training* (DoE 1995).
- *South African Schools Act* (SASA) (84/1996).

- *White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy* (DoE 1997).
- NCSNET or NCESS reports (DoE 1997).
- *Higher Education Act* (101/1997) (South Africa 1997).
- *Further Education and Training Act* (98/1998) (South Africa 1998).
- *Employment of Teachers Act* (76/1998) (South Africa 1998).
- *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (EWP6) (DoE 2001).

■ The focused trends and developments of education support services during the 20th century

Psychometric personality assessment was built on the intellectual psychometric assessment of the early 1900s. It was first introduced in the 1930s by Herman Rorschach and Henry Murray and afterwards extended during the 1950s by David Rapaport and David Shakow (Wetzler 1989). This type of assessment was established during the burgeoning era of scientific expansion, of which psychology was a part. The perspective of psychological assessment was positivistic and scientific. After some time, psychology was also applied in clinical, educational, military and industrial backgrounds. Psychological instruments had to be administered under well-ordered conditions to ensure reliable and valid measurement. During the second half of the 20th century, psychological assessment was used for the treatment of emotional disorders and intellectually challenged and handicapped people with the intention to provide them with educational opportunities (Foxcroft & Roodt 2019). The USA and the United Kingdom further developed a number of psychological tests that were ultimately used in other countries. Claassen (1997), however, argued that since the late 1950s to 1970s, some intellectual tests began to fall into disapproval with psychologists

and the bigger community. This has led to the ban of some intellectual measurements in countries such as the USA, Sweden and Denmark. It is assumed that the ban was initiated by the idea that these tests were biased and that these favoured particular cultures whilst being biased towards others. This was affirmed by Foxcroft and Roodt (2019), stating that in the 1980s and 1990s, the emphasis in the use of psychological tests was on cross-cultural test modification.

South Africa was no exception when it comes to the history of psychological measurement. Claassen (1997) mentioned that psychological testing has emanated to South Africa through Britain, and the advancement of psychological tests in South Africa shadowed an indistinguishable pattern to that of the USA. As determined by apartheid policy, South African tests were established in the context of unsatisfactory distribution of resources. This led to some bias towards people and learners of colour and influenced placement in education. Claassen and Scheepers (1990) were of the opinion that the psychological tests used in South Africa were brought in from foreign countries from the early 1900s and were predisposed against the South African community, especially the black community, as they initially had not been standardised on the South African population. Van de Vijver and Rothmann (2004) added that psychological testing in South Africa was initially established to be used with the Afrikaans- and English-speaking population and left out the African group, which made out the largest population. In the past, two different bodies regulated the development and use of tests in South Africa. The production of psychological tests in South Africa was the responsibility of the National Institute of Personnel Research, whilst the Institute for Psychological and Edumetric Research was tasked to develop measures for education and clinical practice. These two bodies were merged to form the Human Sciences Research Council in 1984. The Human Sciences Research Council then was accountable for the development of psychological tests that suited the South African context. Foxcroft and Roodt (2019) highlighted that the Human

Sciences Research Council has established many tests that may be used for numerous purposes in schools, tertiary institutions and the private sector. However, Owen (1998) suggested that by the end of the 20th century, there was a deficiency of culturally fair tests that could be used in a multicultural society such as South Africa.

As the provision of ESS in South Africa was thinly spread and unequally provided to different race groups, the white provincial departments established teams in the four provinces that seemingly provided effective services to their learners. They were planned to serve white learners and, to a lesser degree, Indian and coloured learners in the education system. According to Hay (1994), in 1991, the Cape Province restructured the provision of the school psychological service that was provided by the 19 school clinics that were well established. The school clinics were lodged in buildings in districts that assisted numerous schools. The professionals that served in these school clinics were all working for the provincial education department and comprised psychologists, psychometrists, remedial and LSEs, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and social workers. The staff from these clinics provided a combination of itinerant and clinic services. Daniels et al. (2007) emphasised that learners who needed comprehensive examinations and treatment were treated at school clinics, and those with less serious challenges were dealt with at the schools involved.

Subsequent to 1994, school psychologists from the former separated education departments who had operated at school clinics were brought collectively into non-racial provincial education departments inside the circuit-based, district-based or provincial teams (De Jong 1996). According to Normand (1993), some school clinics that were accountable for psychological services were already looking at ways in which they could offer ESS to schools through intersectoral collaboration in the run-up to the 1994 elections. In this regard, the highlight was on multidisciplinary consultation as a method to service delivery. Service delivery was

on a continuum: indirect services to the learner via teachers and parents, focusing on prevention, and direct services with a mainly curative approach (Daniels et al. 2007).

The Free State became another province to establish child guidance clinics in the former white provincial education department. There is a lack of literature on child guidance clinics in the Free State; however, it is known that during the apartheid era, there were five child guidance clinics in the Free State Province that were deliberately located to assist mainly white learners in the province (Makhalemele 2011). According to Radebe (2005), these clinics provided an extensive range of assessments and treatment interventions for behavioural problems. They also helped learners who experienced learning and emotional problems such as stress, depression and phobias. The clinics used diverse intervention strategies to support learners and provide in their needs. These approaches included individual and group psychotherapy, family and marital therapy, behavioural or cognitive therapy, play therapy, teaching study skills and social casework. J.F. Hay (pers. comm., March 09, 2021) highlighted that shortly before and then after 1994, these clinics opened up to serve learners of all races and schools but were restructured after the NCESS report of 1997 to become DBSTs. Although these child guidance clinics were highly resourced and comprised true multidisciplinary support teams, they were also characterised by limited professional staff to serve all learners via direct services. Radebe pointed out that whites dominated the staff of the clinics, which generated problems in reverence to the psychological assessment and evaluation of learners. Inconsistent staffing also was a problem: some clinics had about four psychologists, whilst others had only two (Makhalemele 2011). These teams had the luxury of being made up of psychologists, school social workers, occupational therapists, speech therapists or audiologists, special education advisors and remedial education advisors (Makhalemele 2011; Radebe 2005). In the process of (racially) transforming the clinics into DBSTs, many highly specialised staff left the employ of the Free State Department of Education. Two main reasons

could be put forward for this, namely, that the new multidisciplinary teams were often managed poorly and that specialised white staff felt a sense of alienation within the new structure, according to Hay (pers. comm., March 09, 2021).

In 1993, the then Transvaal Education Department had five child guidance clinics and 25 education aid centres that were responsible to supply educational psychological services to the whole of the Transvaal (Hay 1994). The service was known as the Educational Auxiliary Service and provided a specialised psychosocial educational service to learners, parents and staff members. These centres offered different disciplinary support. Hay (1994) asserted that the disciplines at these centres dealt with career issues (career guidance), education matters (orthopedagogy), teaching challenges (orthodidactics), social work issues (sociopedagogy), and speech and occupational therapy. Hay further alluded to the fact that the education advisers linked to the education aid centres worked mainly within the school context and their work activities were aimed at preventing problems, whilst the aid centre-based staff handled serious problem cases on a curative basis.

On the whole, the South African educational psychological services were characterised by the placement of learners in specialised locations since the 1970s. Hay (1994) affirmed that the emergence of educational psychological services early in the 20th century in the earlier mentioned countries was because of education authorities that required the correct placement of learners according to their intellectual abilities. D'Amaro and Dean (1987) clarified that the responsibilities of the school psychologist were centred on individual diagnostic assessment as an antecedent to special class placement. The debate on whether this is the appropriate role for the school psychologist has continued for many decades; however, it seems to remain the primary function of most practising school psychologists. Furthermore, psychologists who were assessment specialists frequently presented resolutions and recommendations related

to change in the child; that is, the child's educational placement was seen as mostly originating from challenges within the child. This is strongly related to psychology following the medical model for the better part of the 20th century.

The mental health intervention movement took issue with this belief, namely, that challenges only originate intrinsically and sought to extend the medical model view (D'Arnaro & Rorhlisberg 1997). The movement advocated fewer special class placements and classification. This concern was also realised in South Africa. Radebe (2005) asserted that the South African history is reflective of the countless black learners who were referred for psychological intervention in contrast to white and coloured learners. As a result, many of them were placed in special education. In addition, Makhalemele (2011) highlighted that some learners were positioned in a particular learning setting as they had been characterised as belonging to a group of learners for which a particular kind of educational placement existed. Thus, the placement might have been unsuitable to a learner's prerequisites and might also have resulted in the learner being marginalised.

To add to the above, for the better part of the 20th century, educational psychological services focused on the identification of intrinsic special needs of learners. Hence, the focus of identification was on conditions within learners that had a negative influence on their learning and participation. This was affirmed by Farre (1998), who mentioned that the rise of psychological assessment was based on what is referred to as the 'medical model', with its emphasis on pathology and factors within the child. Burden (1996:24) identified the most common determinations of traditional psychological assessment as connected to the medical model of 'classification […] diagnosis […] intervention'.

However, the involvement of school social work has changed the landscape regarding psychological assessment somewhat in the sense that more of the extrinsic factors were also considered as contributing factors to barriers to learning and development.

School social workers played a key role in supporting learners and their families throughout the process of a psychological assessment in making sense of reports and ensuring that learners' strengths and needs were understood. Glicken (2005) stated that the school social worker conveys information about a particular client through psychosocial assessment. In this regard, the social worker reflects on a variation of factors, which may comprise the physical or psychiatric illness and the influence thereof, outcomes derived from psychological tests, legal status, explanations of the problem or problems, prevailing assets and resources, the projection or expectation of outcomes and the strategy considered to resolve the problem (Summers 2006). These roles clearly indicate the accommodation of extrinsic perspectives in psychological assessment. According to Reyneke (2020), the social worker in a mainstream school setting plays a significant role in developing learners and connecting them to the external resources and support essential to maximise their abilities in the educational process. One may conclude that a social worker understands the generalist model to mediate on all levels and situations with individuals, groups, the community, parents and school teams.

Another development in educational psychological services was a move to prevention-type strategies that involved more training of adults to support learners. During the 1970s, educational psychological service providers, especially school social workers, put more emphasis on family, the community and the collective approach with teachers and other school personnel. Oakland (1999:120) highlighted that changes in the role and function of staff in educational psychological services also took place in the 1980s when there was a move from 'assessment- and placement-intensive' to 'preferential assessment, interventions, and at least secondary prevention for at risk groups'. These modifications continued to rise with determination to a gradual move to prevention-type strategies where adults were trained to support learners. This was enshrined in the code of practice according to which all service providers are compelled to view

adults as equal partners (Squires et al. 2007). Adults should be consulted frequently to enlighten the interventions adopted for their children. Also, staff in educational psychological services are integral to the process of supporting learners experiencing barriers and should work with teachers and schools through the processes outlined in the code. Educational psychologists and school social workers could, therefore, be seen as main professionals who can support and capacitate adults and support them to make valued contributions in supporting children.

In line with the above, educational psychological services represent a constant within education systems worldwide (cf. ch. 1). This is true even within the latest inclusive education paradigm, the origin and development of which are discussed next.

■ Origin and development of inclusive education

The origin and development of inclusive education have a direct bearing on educational psychological services. To understand this, it is necessary to be briefly exposed to education during the asylum era and the special education era.

■ The era of institutionalisation or asylums

The Renaissance era, with its awakening of many human potentials, is strangely also associated with the start of the asylum era and resulted in advancing the institutionalisation of persons with a disability (Barnes 2013). Today, it is viewed in a negative light, but at that stage, it was seen as a step forward in caring for exceptional persons. The policies regarding institutionalisation were embedded in the upheavals that complemented the coming of industrial capitalism, urbanisation and other ideologies, such as medicalisation (Barnes 2013). The asylum era introduced the charity model and the medical deficit model of disability (Kumar & Subudhi 2015; Tremblay & Tivat 2007). The medical model of disability viewed disability as fixed

and permanent, and therefore, solutions were established by concentrating on the persons with a disability as the only solution to treat the problem (Lim & Chia 2017). The charity model is seen as a branch of the medical model. Thus, the base reasoning is informed by the medical model but extended into an understanding of disability as tragic and pitiable. Retief and Letšosa (2018) mentioned that followers of the charity model believe that an individual has a disability, but this disability is a 'problem' within his or her body; good citizens should tolerate the disabled person's tragedy. Consequently, stimulated by a disabled person's accomplishments, the charity model sees non-disabled people as the 'saviours' of the disabled. Services to the disabled were mostly organised by private organisations, churches and individuals, as there was no state provision (Chitiyo & Chitiyo 2007). For instance, the Catholic Church accepted persons with disabilities as 'honours of state' (Tremblay & Tivat 2007). Quaker philanthropist Samuel Akerly and John Dennison Russ established the New York Institution for the Blind in the USA in 1831 (Eisenstadt & Moss 2005). Furthermore, in 1900, the USA established at least 25 isolated institutions for persons with disabilities (Rimmerman 2013). In South Africa, the Valkenberg Lunatic Asylum was established in Cape Town in 1891 (Chitiyo & Chitiyo 2007).

The asylum era lasted well into the 20th century. Children with disabilities were held in discriminatory and abusive conditions during this era, although institutionalisation was viewed as a step forward in the treatment of exceptional people. This included physical abuse in Russia, sexual violence against girls in India, the use of incarcerated beds in Greece, the incorrect use of psychotropic medicine in Serbia and the chaining of children with disabilities in Ghana and Indonesia (Barriga et al. 2017). In Hawaii, persons with disabilities were placed in mental institutions (Amundson & Ruddle-Miyamoto 2010). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, persons with severe disabilities were confined in institutions and residential homes that were managed by professionals (Barnes 2013). In Romania, persons with disabilities

were ostracised from 1948 to 1989 (Walker et al. 2010). In Finland, persons with intellectual disabilities were placed in the countryside, whilst in Alberta, all learners who were deaf were taken out of the region until the 1950s (Jahnukainen 2011). Furthermore, New Zealand's fifth largest mental institute, which was built in 1912, housed at least 12 000 people who had psychiatric conditions (Hamilton et al. 2017). These institutions were located outside the suburbs to make sure that persons with disabilities did not come too close to the other residents (Walker et al. 2010). In Zimbabwe, children with moderate to severe disabilities conceptualised life in such institutions as life in purgatory (Mutsvangwa 2017).

In line with the above, it is noted that in hindsight, the asylum era contravened the international human rights policies, comprising the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Section 2 Articles 5 and 7. The discriminatory and abusive conditions of the asylum period had an effect on the education of learners with disabilities, as most of them were unable to access education. Most of them lived under harsh, isolated conditions. The medical model of disability, which conceptualised disability as fixed within the individual and which advocated for treatment by specialised professionals, contributed to the labelling, disregarding and stereotyping of persons with disabilities, despite the progress that was made to care for exceptional persons in institutions. The 'Special education and the gradual transition to a more inclusive environment' section presents the transition to the special education era.

■ Special education and the gradual transition to a more inclusive environment

The history of special education overlaps somewhat with that of the asylum era and begins during the 19th century. According to Blackhurst and Berdine (1993), prior to that time, people living with disabilities were not taken into consideration and were frequently mistaken as being controlled by immoral powers,

cursed or simply irresponsible. Special schools were gradually established for learners with disabilities, with children receiving their education in segregated institutions (Barriga et al. 2017). In Europe, the first school for persons with disabilities was founded in 1832 in Bavaria (Braddock & Parish 2001).

However, Gerber (2011) mentioned that the American special education system was unique and could not have existed elsewhere or in another century. Its birth was a unique confluence of time, place and circumstance. It was the year 1900 or the school year of 1899 to 1900, to be precise – the very beginning of the 20th century (Danforth 2009). The origin of special education in the USA is explained as follows by Gerber (2011):

> The special education we see in our schools today, the special education that is part of a remarkable national policy, the special education that remains to emphasize attention on questions about the nature of individual differences, the appropriate role and organisation of public education, the importance of equality – that special education initiates on Henry Street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the classroom of a single teacher, Elizabeth Farrell. (p. 4)

Learners with disabilities predominantly received their education in segregated special classrooms in Zimbabwe (Charema 2010), India (Hodkinson & Devarakonda 2009) and Canada, Australia and Finland (Jahnukainen 2015). In Botswana, like other African countries, persons with disabilities were not allowed to attend ordinary schools (Jonas 2014). Special schools focused on the specific needs of learners with disabilities (Gordon 2013). Learners with disabilities were therefore isolated and discriminated against, both at school and in society (Gordon 2013).

Gradually, several countries started to employ measures to respond better and in less isolation to the demands of children living with disabilities. In the 1960s, new ideas of normalisation and integration were born (Jahnukainen 2015). The principle of normalisation, which was coined by Wolfensberger, was originally applied to institutions with the intention of making the conditions of everyday life of learners with disabilities

closer to those in ordinary settings (Jenkinson 2001; Mann & Van Kraayenoord 2011).

Furthermore, in the USA, the paragraph of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* of 1975, which was retitled the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* in 1990, was meant to afford all learners with disabilities a suitable public education (Hossain 2012). In 1987, the European Community also committed to the full integration of learners with disabilities in the regular classroom (Saloviita 2018).

In South Africa, the apartheid regime promoted separate (and, in many instances, discriminatory) education for different ethnic groups – black, coloured, Indian and white learners (Lomofsky & Lazarus 2001). In addition, the apartheid education system created a twofold system of education that was made up of the mainstream and the special education components (Naicker 2000). Special needs education was disjointed, not only by apartheid laws that imposed educational separation along ethnic lines but also by policies that divided the so-called 'normal' learners from those who were categorised as having special needs (Engelbrecht 2006; Swart & Pettipher 2016). This gave rise to large numbers of learners being excluded from mainstream education (Naicker 2000). In other countries, special schools were indebted to cooperate with the mainstream schools in the catchment area (Spain), or special schools provide ambulant or other services to mainstream schools (Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and the United Kingdom) (Meijer, Soriano & Watkins 2003). Again, in hindsight, this dual system of education in the previous South African dispensation violated the right to inclusive education that is entrenched in human rights policies such as the Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), Article 24.

With the advent of inclusion, many learners with special needs were moved from special classrooms into ordinary classrooms when a choice was provided to learners and parents (Adedoyin & Okere 2017). The 'Philosophical grounding of inclusive education' section deals with inclusive education.

■ Philosophical grounding of inclusive education

This section attempts to conceptualise inclusive education, fundamental legal frameworks and declarations on inclusion, the EWP6 and the *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support* (SIAS).

■ Conceptualising inclusive education

Over the past decades, the inclusion of learners in ordinary schools has been at the centre of education. Waitoller and Artiles (2013) pointed out that as a global movement, inclusive education was developed as a response to the exclusion of learners with diverse learning needs. As a result, a wide body of empirical literature has been written about inclusion in education. However, there is no commonly acknowledged definition of inclusive education, as different researchers often understand inclusion differently. Nonetheless, Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2011) and Tchombe (2017) highlighted that inclusive education is broadly perceived from a diversity perspective and narrowly perceived from a disability perspective.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2005:14) described inclusive education as 'a practise of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and rising marginalisation within and from education'. As a radical shift from integration, the mandate to adjust has now been redirected to schools, where the schools are required to be more welcoming towards learners with diverse capabilities (Jonas 2014; Saloviita 2018). Adewumi et al. (2017) argued that inclusion is an act of educating learners (who were previously educated in special schools as a result of their special needs) in mainstream schools that deliver the necessary support to safeguard access to quality education.

From the above definitions, it is evident that inclusive education emphasises equity and social justice for minority groups. This was supported by Topping (2012), who conceptualised inclusion as a means of celebrating diversity and supporting the achievement and participation of all learners despite their socioeconomic situations, ethnic origins, cultural heritage, gender and sexual preferences. Figure 2.1 summarises the concept of inclusion.

From the above illustration, it can be noted that inclusion has evolved through various stages, from the participation of learners with special educational needs in the mainstream to the equal involvement and achievement of all learners in the ordinary classroom.

1
Children with special educational needs in mainstream school

2
Children with special educational needs accessing mainstream curriculum with social and emotional integration

3
All children achieving and participating despite challenges stemming from poverty, class, religion, language and cultural heritage, gender, etc.

4
All children, parents and community equally achieving and participating in lifelong learning in many forms in and out of school and college

Source: Topping (2012).
FIGURE 2.1: Expanding concepts of inclusion: Four levels.

■ International perspectives on inclusive education: Fundamental legal frameworks and declarations on inclusion

The concept of *inclusion* as a social justice and human rights agenda is entrenched in the diverse range of frameworks and declarations. Du Plessis (2013) summarised these fundamental frameworks and declarations as noted:

- The 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which ensures the right to free and compulsory elementary education for all children.
- The 1989 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which ensures the right to receive education without discrimination on any grounds.
- The 1990 *World Declaration on Education for All* (*Jomtien Declaration*), which sets the goal of education for all.
- The 1993 *United Nations Standard Rule on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, which not only affirms the equal rights of all children, youth and adults with disabilities to education, but also states that education should be provided in 'an integrated school setting' as well as in the 'general school setting'.
- The 1994 *Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education*, which requires schools to accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.
- The 2000 World Education Forum Framework for Action, Dakar, Education for All and Millennium Development Goals, which stipulates that all children should have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education by 2015.
- The 2001 *Education for All Flagship on the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities – Towards Inclusion*.
- The 2005 *United Nations Disability Convention*, which promotes the rights of persons with disabilities and mainstreaming disability in development.

The *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO 1994) is the anchor for inclusion. The Salamanca declaration advocates for 'the progress of inclusive mainstream schools [...] [as] the actual means of contending discriminatory attitudes, crafting welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all' (Clause 5, para. 2) (UNESCO 1994). These legal frameworks were meant to realise the rights of all learners.

■ South African perspectives – White paper 6 on inclusive education

After democracy had dawned in South Africa, the post-apartheid education department adopted numerous policies that were meant to redress the imbalances caused by apartheid and provide education for all children (Ntombela 2011). South Africa thus adopted inclusive education as evidenced by the retraction of the *Bantu Education Act* of 1954 (Du Plessis 2013; Uchem & Ngwa 2014). Like other countries, South Africa is also a signatory to international legislative frameworks on inclusion, acting as the *Salamanca Statement and Framework on Special Needs Education* of 2004 (Engelbrecht et al. 2016; Uchem & Ngwa 2014). Inclusion was thus prioritised in the South African equity agenda to support the goals of transformation and democracy (Engelbrecht et al. 2016; Uchem & Ngwa 2014).

In South Africa, inclusive education is reflected in the South African Constitution (South Africa 1996) and education policies such as the SASA of 1996, the EWP6 (DoE 2001) and the *Revised SIAS Policy* of 2014 (Lomofsky & Lazarus 2001; Nel et al. 2016). The South African Constitution (South Africa 1996) focused on the progression of transition from apartheid to democracy, and embedded in the Bill of Rights are values of human dignity, the attainment of equality, the progression of human rights and freedom, and the right to basic education, including adult and basic education. The Bill of Rights is consistent with the United

Nations Conventions (1989) and the African Charter (2005), which highlights the right to basic education for all children.

Similarly, the SASA (1996) legislated the unification of the South African education system (Walton 2011). The SASA promulgated that the new democratic South Africa required an innovative national system for schools that would amend past inequalities in the delivery of education and make available an education of high quality for all learners. In doing so, it would place a resilient foundation for the development of all citizens' talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, battle racism and sexism and all other forms of biased discrimination and intolerance, 'safeguard and develop our diverse cultures and languages, [and] sustain the rights of all learners' (SASA 1996). In addition, the SASA emphasised the collaboration of stakeholders by acknowledging the importance of parents as equal partners in education (Geldenhuys & Wevers 2013).

In order to further promote an inclusive agenda, the South African government introduced the EWP6 (DoE 2001). The framework for an inclusive education system is laid out in the EWP6 (Hay 2018; Nel et al. 2016). Embedded in the EWP6 are the ethical principles of fairness and social justice, human rights, a healthy environment, participation, social integration and redress, equal and equitable access to education, community responsiveness, cost-effectiveness and a paradigm shift in thinking from special needs to barriers to learning and development (DoE 2001; Engelbrecht et al. 2016; Murungi 2015; Walton 2011). Donohue and Bornman (2014) argued that the key strategies provided by the EWP6 are clearly placed within Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model.

The policies on inclusion are therefore required to advance the inclusion of all. However, Donohue and Bornman (2014) postulated that it is not enough to just outline the six strategies without giving detail and guidance on how the responsible authorities and schools can effectively meet the goals for inclusive education. Machaisa (2014) also argued that despite the policy initiatives

that were put in place, there still is a gap between policy formulation and policy implementation, as some school principals and teachers are still experiencing challenges in implementing inclusive education in their schools. Moreover, for inclusive education to be effectively implemented, teachers should be part of the process of change and their voices are crucial to the transformation of their practices (Makoelle 2014).

■ Policy on screening, identification, assessment and support on inclusive education in South Africa

In addition to the EWP6 (DoE 2001), the DBE announced the strategy on SIAS, which was intended to improve access to quality education for all children, including vulnerable children and other learners who experience learning challenges (DoE 2008). Pillay and Terlizzi (2009) argued that the SIAS strategy aimed to support educators to implement the tenets of inclusive education in a collaborative working relationship with parents and learners. Furthermore, the SIAS strategy is aimed at reducing the unnecessary placement of learners in special schools (Dalton, McKenzie & Kahonde 2012). However, the SIAS strategy saw some challenges during its implementation, and as a result, the recommendation for its review was announced. To safeguard a more rigorous and consistent process of SIAS of learners across the system and thus ascertaining a more equitable practice in terms of admission, support and funding, the Revised SIAS policy was accepted in 2014 (DBE 2014). This policy seeks to provide a 'policy framework for the normalisation of the processes through identifying, assessing and providing programmes for all learners who need additional support to improve their participation and inclusion in schools' (DBE 2014:1). The purpose of the SIAS is to determine who needs support, what kind of support is needed and how the required support will be rendered (DBE 2014). Although it appears as if this policy endorses the placement of learners in special education, it must still be regarded as the main

procedure to safeguard the transformation of the education system towards an inclusive education system in line with the requirements of the EWP6 (DBE 2014; DoE 2001).

The SIAS policy (DBE 2014) is supposed to be read in conjunction with the other education policies, which include Article 24 of the *Convention of the Persons with Disabilities* (2006), Article 23 of the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* (1989), the *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development* (2001), the *Children's Act* (38 of 2005), the *National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, Grade R–12* (2011) and the *Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act* of 2000. These policies and legislation mandate the inclusion of all learners in education. However, Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) proclaimed that the goal of implementing inclusion in education has not been achieved, as teachers who had been trained prior to 1994 only received training in either mainstream education or special education. It can therefore be argued that in-service teachers would require workshops and training so they can understand and acknowledge inclusive education.

■ Adjustments of education support services within inclusive education

'Education support services' as a concept was coined after 1994 as a key support measure that would ensure the success of inclusive education in South Africa (DoE 2001). The EWP6 (DoE 2001) and the *Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (2005b) provided operational guidelines on how these support services should function in an inclusive education system (Makhalemele & Nel 2016). These support structures for schools, teachers and learners were located in the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Donohue & Bornman 2014). Structures of ESS comprise DBSTs, SBSTs, FSSs, SSRCs, LSEs and the community (Donohue & Bornman 2014; Nel et al. 2016). However, Hay (2003) noted that ESS that are

driven by the locomotive of placement contradict the ideal of inclusive education that recommends that learners ought to choose their own classrooms and schools and that all learners should receive adequate support in the chosen classroom. Furthermore, Hay (2003) argued that the implementation of ESS within the South Africa education system requires a paradigm shift, and the six paradigm shifts that the South Africa education system should consider when incorporating ESS into inclusive education are as follows:

- **Paradigm shift 1:** ESS are required to concentrate on the entire education system, which includes all learners and all teachers, and not only on learners experiencing obvious barriers to learning. This represents a huge shift from past psychosocial educational services, which were focused mainly on learners living with special needs.
- **Paradigm shift 2:** Keep and support the learner in the inclusive classroom. This suggests that as an ESS staff member, one ought to focus on supporting the learner (and teacher) in the inclusive classroom and not put him or her in an isolated setting.
- **Paradigm shift 3:** Within inclusive education, psychological services would be replaced by ESS, as psychological services often dominated the support that was rendered to learners. Within inclusive education, specialist educational support is now seen as just as important as psychological support.
- **Paradigm shift 4:** In inclusive education, the focus should also be on adults engaged with learners, where ESS staff work with the learner's immediate systems, involving adults such as teachers, parents and external support professionals.
- **Paradigm shift 5:** Be careful of fixed diagnoses. Within inclusive education, the challenges are often viewed as extrinsic to the learner and are thus able to change.
- **Paradigm shift 6:** Support is provided to individuals and systems. This implies that the individual-curative model of support is complemented by working with larger groups, and even school systems, in a preventative manner.

These six paradigm shifts are to be taken into consideration in order for ESS to be aligned with the inclusive education agenda.

In tandem with the above-mentioned shifts, DBSTs are mandated to evaluate programmes, diagnose their effectiveness, suggest modifications and (DoE 2001):

> [*S*]hape the capability of schools, early childhood and adult basic education and training centres, colleges and higher education institutions to identify and address severe learning difficulties and to accommodate a range of learning needs. (p. 29)

In addition, SBSTs are required to provide properly coordinated learner and educator support services, which would support the learning and teaching process by identifying and addressing the needs of learners, educators and institutions (DoE 2001). According to Hay (2003), it is vital to align ESS with inclusive education, because the success of inclusive education solely depends on adequate and effective support. In addition, Makhalemele and Nel (2016) argued that these formal professional and support services are crucial in safeguarding that learners have the right to support so that they can achieve their best in education. Furthermore, members of ESS are required to receive training in both the medical model and the ecosystemic perspective of special needs, in the ubuntu philosophy and in inclusive education (Hay 2003). The structure of ESS in South Africa is elaborated on in the 'Realities in the structure of education support services in South Africa' section.

■ Realities in the structure of education support services in South Africa

The Ministry of Education in South Africa believed that the key to reducing barriers to learning within all education and training depends on strengthened ESS. As a result, the EWP6 was published in 2001 to make an inclusive, non-racial and integrated

education system (DoE 2001). This policy document further mandated the establishment of support structures to meet all learners' needs. The intention was to offer sufficient support to the different learning needs of all learners, teachers and the school (DoE 2002). The support structures for schools, teachers and learners in South Africa, as framed by the numerous policy documents, are the DBST, the SBST, the FSS and the SSRC (DBE 2014; DoE 2001). However, it should also be noted that ordinary schools provide some kind of basic support as well. Recently, LSEs have been appointed at district offices as another structure that supports teachers (Nel et al. 2016). Moreover, the community-based support system, which comprises of a preventative and developmental approach to support, is of the utmost importance in ESS (DoE 2001). These support structures at all levels of education play a key role in identifying and addressing barriers to learning in their immediate context (Donald et al. 2018). All ESS structures interact with one another to deliver a unified and, if necessary, more specialised services (DoE 2005a).

■ Ordinary schools

According to the DoE (2001), ordinary schools provide basic support to learners who require low-intensity support. Du Toit and Forlin (2009) were of the opinion that creating ordinary schools involves safeguarding that all learners have access to being taught the same curriculum with the same content, standards and achievement within an inclusive class. Although this kind of institution can maintain the existence of support services, research indicates that the delivery of optimal support in South Africa is still unrealistic to attain; below are some of the realities that prevail in many ordinary schools.

The physical environment of many ordinary schools and learning settings is not barrier-free, and even where this is the case, accessibility has not been intended (DoE 2001). This requirement

has long been suggested by the report of the NCESS (DoE 1997),[2] namely, that the physical condition of all centres of learning should be improved, being providing appropriately sized classrooms, water supply, toilets and barrier-free access to the building. It is noticed that schools have to develop barrier-free teaching and learning environments that accommodate the various needs of the learning population, for example, warranting all learners to move around freely (cf. Lazarus et al. 2008).

Furthermore, the literature indicates that ordinary schools are battling to address the challenges of the curriculum. Curricula often generate a substantial barrier to learning and exclusion for many learners in ordinary schools (DoE 2001, 2005b). In ordinary schools, these barriers to learning emanate from within the various interconnecting parts of the curriculum, such as the content of learning programmes, the language and medium of learning and teaching, the management and organisation of classrooms, teaching style and pace, time frames for completion of curricula, the material and equipment that are available, and assessment methods and techniques (DoE 2001). Moreover, Makhalemele and Nel (2016) asserted that the delivery of support services in many ordinary schools is inadequate because of a lack of resources. As a result, most learners are not permitted from accessing the curriculum through adequate delivery of the material or tools they need for learning to take place. This indicates a lower level of support delivery than needed, because of inadequate resources.

The policies that guide the execution of inclusive education in South Africa prioritise the support of ordinary schools by other support structures such as FSSs, SSRCs and DBSTs. These kinds of suggested support structures are apparently ineffective, as many ordinary schools struggle to deliver effective support services. This was affirmed by Landsberg (2009) and Nel et al. (2016) when they pointed out that it is essential to be taken into consideration

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2. Some sections with regard to the NCESS report in this chapter result from the thesis by Dr Thabo Jan Makhalemele. See Makhalemele (2011).

that it is very challenging for teachers in ordinary schools to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning, as they do not receive sufficient support from an organised and functional support service. Furthermore, the DoE (2005b) declared that each ordinary school should be closely associated with an SSRC, which in reality does not occur because many of the SSRCs are operating inwardly without taking support services to the ordinary schools. It seems their modus operandi is to wait for ordinary schools to contact them before they provide support.

Moreover, the literature states that ineffective collaboration in support services is detrimental to reaching the goal of inclusive education. That means effective collaboration amongst professionals at schools and other stakeholders in addressing the various needs of learners and teachers can contribute meaningfully to the effective functionality of ordinary schools. However, although ordinary schools have the privilege of drawing on resources from other stakeholders and support structures, this often does not happen because the structures are not working collaboratively for the conceivable solution to address barriers to learning or are often not in a position to help because of work overload.

A study conducted by Nel et al. (2016) indicated that about 65% of mainstream teachers do not have a recognised initial teacher education qualification that encompassed training in how to respond, within mainstream classrooms, to various learning needs. These teachers have been capacitated only for either mainstream education or so-called specialised education in separate educational settings. The result is that teachers believe they are not able to provide the support needed in classrooms and that the needs of learners with disabilities are best met in separate classrooms.

■ Full-service schools

The aim of establishing FSSs was to strengthen the provision of ESS at mainstream schools. These types of schools represent

conversions of ordinary schools to full service, with the determination to expand the provision of services to and simplifying access by disabled learners from neighbourhood schools (DoE 2001). Full-service schools provide for learners who need moderate-intensity support, and they are tasked to prepare teachers at ordinary schools with adequate skills to provide services at their schools (Makhalemele 2011). Full-service schools should have the competency to deal with diverse learning needs, regardless of the disability, social difficulties, or differences in learning style or pace experienced (Nel et al. 2016). However, what remains troubling is that there is evidence that the functionality of this type of support is not matched by reality.

The conversion of primary schools to FSSs seems to be a challenge that is slowing down the provision of support services in education. The process of converting mainstream schools to FSSs has been extensively delayed and challenging (DoE 2009). It is noted that the DoE relied on other government departments, such as the Department of Public Works, for upgrading infrastructure. Unfortunately, such departments were not able to prioritise the supply of infrastructure to these schools. This implies that existing FSSs and those that are in the process of conversion are unable to expand their provision of services to disabled learners and simplifying their access from schools in their vicinity.

Implementing the policy on inclusion is a mandate from the EWP6, and all schools, including institutions of higher learning, are expected to observe the implementation thereof (DoE 2001). The reality is such that the implementation of inclusive education has never been easy, and schools are experiencing different challenges that lead to the failure of implementing the policy. A study conducted by Motistwe (2014) provides evidence that the implementation of the inclusive education policy in FSSs has become a trial. Also, the DoE (2009) report showed that there was widespread awareness on policies for the implementation of inclusive education, but the application thereof was limited to a small percentage of FSSs.

Moreover, it has been reported that educators in FSSs articulated concerns about the numerous learners who might need individual support plans within overcrowded classrooms. Statistics, however, show that only an insignificant percentage of the population needs such individual support (DoE 2009). Nevertheless, these findings suggest that educators in FSSs will need strong support in the area of curriculum differentiation, starting with SBSTs as a core support mechanism at school level (DoE 2009).

According to Landsberg (2009), one of the major roles of FSSs is to deliver support to learners and teachers by means of proficient and experienced learning support teachers. The essential feature of the FSS is the coordinated and structured provision of support to accommodate a wide range of learning needs (Donald et al. 2018). The implementation of this role is, however, not simple, as learners with barriers to learning are being integrated into FSSs without extra support (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey 2010), and many schools do not have the capacity to cater effectively for learners experiencing barriers to learning (Keen & Ward 2004; Strydom et al. 2012).

Full-service schools have a responsibility to reach out to surrounding schools. Landsberg (2009) expanded that this type of support structure was aimed to support neighbouring schools with knowledge, information and assistive devices concerning barriers to learning. Unfortunately, researchers report many failures of FSSs. Maguvhe (2013) mentioned that FSSs cannot be supportive of ordinary schools unless they themselves function well. Makhalemele and Tlale (2020) added that teachers in these schools are unable to work collaboratively with educators from within their schools and neighbouring mainstream schools to assess the support needs of individual learners and the development of support plans for learners. Furthermore, working in close collaboration with the DBST to coordinate support is also seen as a challenge for FSSs. The literature has also indicated poor collaboration between schools and the DBST (Makhalemele & Nel 2016; Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden 2020; Nel et al. 2016).

■ Special schools as resource centres[3]

Special schools as resource centres are conversions of special schools and have two main responsibilities, namely, to deliver educational support services of better quality to their selected learner populations and to be incorporated into DBSTs so that they can provide specialised professional support in the curriculum, assessment and instruction to designated full-service and other neighbourhood schools (DoE 2001). In this regard, from special schools, the learning support teachers provide support to both learners experiencing barriers to learning and teachers at FSSs and ordinary schools. Moreover, coordinating and organising professional development activities for teachers, school management teams and other staff in ordinary and FSSs can be seen as a priority of SSRCs.

Special schools as resource centres are further to be used as centres of learning for all learners in need of high-intensity support (Makhalemele & Nel 2016). Again, these centres, in collaboration with the DBSTs and FSSs, exchange knowledge with immediate mainstream schools and provide professional development to teachers as well as justifiable support to learners and teachers (Motistwe 2014). Furthermore, Nel et al. (2016) indicated that SSRCs similarly prepare learners living with disabilities for possible inclusion in ordinary schools. Support from the community, being health and welfare, organisations for disabled people and the business segment, is coordinated by SSRCs. In acting together with the community, these centres offer home-based support and further engage in community outreach activities that target awareness of and advocacy for disability (Muthukrishna 2008). Despite the expected roles of this support structure, there are some challenges that may hinder the smooth functioning of these schools.

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3. Some sections resulted from the doctoral thesis by Makhalemele (2011).

According to the DoE (2007), the principals of mainstream schools and SSRCs should be involved in seeing to it that clear arrangements are made and proper procedures are put in place to normalise the collaboration and exchange of staff amongst ordinary, full-service and special or resource schools. The success of this interchange rests on the involvement and effectiveness of the principals from these schools. Apparently, there seems to be no or very little effective collaboration amongst the principals of these schools; therefore, SSRCs are unable to reach the set goals to develop teachers from neighbouring schools. Also, it is notable that a lack of resources in SSRCs is still hindering the functioning of these schools to support neighbouring schools. According to Nel et al. (2016), more resources are required from SSRCs to support other schools. Makhalemele and Nel (2016) also reported that numerous SSRCs do not function proficiently because of under-resourced facilities, which deter them from utilising the resources of these schools outwardly towards other schools.

Currently, SSRCs are dispersed over some of the districts in each province of South Africa. The geographic location of SSRCs becomes a challenge to them that hinders them from performing their role, as many schools are unable to access SSRCs (Makhalemele & Tlale 2020). In some education districts, one SSRC assists many schools, and some of them may be located too far away that they are not capable to access these services (Makhalemele & Nel 2016). In addition, the DoE (2009) has reported that many SSRCs do not have adequate specialist professional support staff to support full-service and neighbouring schools.

It should be noted that in South Africa, not all special schools will be transformed into resource centres. Special schools will remain in existence, and the EWP6 (DoE 2001) emphasised that learners living with severe disabilities will be accommodated in these improved special schools as part of an inclusive education system. The DoE (2007) mentioned that special schools are required to be strengthened to provide quality education in good

conditions to their own learners before they can offer support to other schools. Special schools are expected to teach disabled learners, develop individualised education plans, feed and dress learners who have not developed these skills and also support other teachers (Rulwa-Mnatwana 2014). The DoE (2007) further elaborated on the role of special schools as:

- To promote the full development and human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth of learners, and the reinforcement of human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity.
- To promote the inclusion and participation of all learners in all social, sporting and academic activities in the school.
- To involve the community and parents in the life and services of the school.
- To involve the cost-effective utilisation of material and human resources.
- To emphasise on bringing support to learners in the classroom rather than withdrawing them for individual specialised interventions.
- To assist, where withdrawing for specialised intervention is the best alternative, that this is done for therapeutic purposes to facilitate re-integration.
- To make specialised support available to all schools in a district in an effectively managed programme.

There is still a lack of literature on the realities of special schools. However, recent literature indicates that the support services at special schools in South Africa are ineffective. Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018) indicated that internal support from the SBSTs is very poor. Consequently, teachers from these schools rely mainly on support from subject advisors. Makhalemele and Tlale (2020) reported that teachers in special schools observe their teaching as a challenge, and they suggested that these teachers should receive rigorous training for them to deliver the curriculum and support learners. These authors added that much of the support in special schools is given to learners rather than teachers because teachers believe that their staff comprises knowledgeable teachers in the field of inclusive education and special needs.

■ Learning support educators

Recently, many district offices have appointed LSEs to reinforce the support at schools. These officials are usually members of DBSTs. However, the inclusion of such officials in the DBST has not yet been fully implemented in all provinces. According to Nel et al. (2016), 'these educators are allocated to numerous schools where they deliver support with regard to the identification and support of learners experiencing barriers to learning'. Nel et al. further highlighted the role of LSEs as contributing massively to building partnerships, providing professional development to teachers, supporting the SBST and networking with community role players.

■ School-based support teams

The EWP6 (DoE 2001) imposed the establishment of SBSTs in all institutions to address barriers to learning and development. Nel et al. (2016) recognised this team as the first level of support for teachers and learners in a school. The focus of the SBST is on capacitating teachers to develop preventative and promotional strategies in the health-promoting school framework (Makhalemele 2011). It comprises assisting the school as a whole, which is a significant aspect of the process of support and change. The DoE (2001) highlighted the sole responsibility of this team as putting in place properly coordinated teacher and learner support services with the intention of supporting the learning and teaching process. The DoE (2006a) expanded the role of SBSTs so as to coordinate all teacher, learner, curriculum and institutional development support in the institutions. In this regard, Makhalemele (2011) cited the linkage of this team to other school-based management teams or even incorporating them to facilitate the coordination of undertakings and avoid duplication as examples of operations.

Furthermore, SBSTs are trusted to jointly recognise institutional needs and, in particular, barriers to learning at

learner, teacher, curriculum and institutional levels (DoE 2006b). Motistwe (2014) believed that these teams are responsible to attract the needed resources, from within and outside the institution to address the challenges. The DoE (2006b) pointed out that SBSTs ought to play a role in admitting learners with special needs. In this respect, the team is responsible for ensuring that new admittances being referred to them by the admissions committee are fully screened. Then, in collaboration with the teacher, the team will decide on the class to which the learner will be admitted and outline support measures to be implemented (Makhalemele 2011). Another important point in this role is to orientate teachers in meeting these support needs. The DoE concluded that the team is bound to advise the DBST of additional support needs in terms of training material, equipment and other necessities. Apart from these matters, SBSTs play a vital role in managing the classroom adaptation to suit learners experiencing barriers to learning. In this respect, one of the roles of the SBST is to safeguard that the physical environment is adapted (DoE 2006b). Again, the SBST plays an important role in the adaptation of the curriculum.

However, the reality and dilemma SBSTs face in trying to offer educational support to learners, teachers and schools surpass the ideal, envisaged support services as determined by policies. The structure of the SBST is not adequately defined in policies that are promoting its establishment. In policy documents such as *Consultative Paper Number 1 on Special Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, First Steps* (DoE 1999) and the EWP6 *(Special Needs Education) Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (DoE 2001), the SBST is conceptualised as consisting of mainly teachers at the school itself and, where possible, parents and learners. These policies further mention that the SBST should be coordinated by members of staff who have received extra training in life skills education, counselling or learner support. Nel et al. (2016) stated that this team consists of teachers, volunteers, members of the school management team,

members of the DBST and other stakeholders from the community (e.g. health professionals and members of other government departments and non-governmental organisations [NGOs]).

Another noticeable predicament is that these teams, in some instances, appoint teachers who lack knowledge and skills in support. Motistwe (2014) indicated that in other schools, these teams are not efficient, and those members who are chosen do not have knowledge or skills on guidance and learner support, even though they may have attended workshops. This implies that there is also an absence of knowledge and skills amongst teachers to support learners who experience barriers to learning. According to Masango (2013), the lack of knowledge of SBST members to take care of learners with special needs may have resulted from the lack of training and motivation to carry out their responsibilities. Moreover, Tsotetsi and Omodan (2020) asserted that the successes of the SBST that are expected to be recorded are on the decline and quite dramatically in schools located in rural areas. They further mentioned that it is practically in line with their observations that most members of these teams in rural schools have only received teacher training that is considered inadequate to deal with learners' needs in this context. In the study conducted by Tsotetsi and Omodan, it was noted that a lack of resources is accountable for the deficiencies in the implementation of the SBST policy in many schools. This means that teachers are too busy with their statutory responsibilities because of inadequate human resources, such as teachers and other support staff, and as a result, the SBST will not live up to its responsibility to provide the necessary support. It was discovered by Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2020) that although SBSTs recognise their role, they lack the skills and knowledge to support teachers in classroom activities, including the adaptation of the curriculum. This indicates that SBSTs often do not have the necessary knowledge for curriculum adaptation and are, therefore, unable to provide adequate support to teachers.

■ District-based support teams

District-based support teams are central to service delivery, as they have to evaluate and shape the capacity of all education institutions to recognise and address severe learning difficulties and to accommodate a range of learning needs (DoE 2001, 2006a; Makhalemele 2011). The EWP6 (DoE 2001) recommended the creation of DBSTs and pinpointed its primary function as evaluating programmes, diagnosing the efficiency thereof and suggesting adaptations. In addition, with supporting teaching and learning, DBSTs are anticipated to create and develop structures such as SBSTs, assess the level of support that is needed by a learner, monitor and make the support needed available in terms of curriculum and institutional development, identify resources and facilitate the admission of all learners to schools (DoE 2006b). Nel et al. (2016) saw the broader accountability of the DBST as:

> [*T*]o offer a coordinated professional support service that draws on expertise in further and higher education and local communities, targeting special schools and specialised settings, designated full-service and other primary schools and educational institutions. (p. 3)

Makhalemele and Nel (2016) and the DoE (2005b) pointed out that the key function of the DBST is to help education institutions to identify and address barriers to learning and promote effective teaching and learning. They elaborated that this consists of both classroom and organisational support and providing specialised learner and teacher support, as well as curricular and institutional development (including management and governance) and administrative support.

A DBST is a multidisciplinary team of experts with varied knowledge, skills and experience (Makhalemele 2011). Donohue and Bornman (2014) and Mashau et al. (2008) highlighted that these teams consist of support staff from provincial and regional education departments and special schools. The purpose of having such teams is to pool limited available resources in order to make optimum use thereof (Muthukrishna 2008). The DoE (2005a)

indicated that the support service providers within DBSTs are curriculum specialists, support personnel, administrative experts, management specialists, government professionals and community role players. Makhalemele and Nel (2016) unpacked the members of these teams as:

> [S]pecialised and general counsellors, psychologists, therapists and other health and welfare workers employed by the DoE, community-based organisation or NGOs members, as well as various learning support personnel, special needs teachers, officials of the education department providing curricular, administrative and institutional development support at district level and specialist support providers and teachers and other specialists from SSRCs. (p. 169)

Although this support structure exists in all districts in all of the provinces to maintain the provision of support as determined by the EWP6, research indicates that the effective delivery of ESS at the DBST level across South Africa is still unrealistic. In a study conducted by Nel, Muller and Rheeders (2011), it was reported that the DBST members in Gauteng Province did not have a supportive relationship with the school. This is not acceptable if there is to be effective support because the main function of this support structure is to build the capacity of schools. Another reality is that DBSTs do not have sufficient human resources to reach all of the schools. This was validated by Makhalemele and Nel (2016), namely, that human resources in DBSTs were believed to be insufficient by over 61% of the respondents in their study. The inability to deliver appropriate support services is the outcome of the lack of human resources. In some districts, the situation is such that there are two psychologists, two social workers and a limited number of learning support facilitators (LSFs). Consequently, it becomes challenging for the DBST to reach all learners from its designated schools.

Poor leadership from DBST leaders and members seems to prevail in many districts. Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations and actions of others (DoE 2008). Hence, leadership is essential for keeping up the inspiration of teachers and other stakeholders. In this regard, the role of the DBST is to encourage

teachers to find solutions and meet challenges encountered. However, Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2018) found that members of the DBST did not always recognise their leadership role when supporting teachers to ensure that decisions were made, challenges met and processes supported. It was reported that poor leadership was facilitated by some school principals who violated the trust of DBST members, disempowered the district officials and reasserted authority when DBST members were in conflict with teachers. Moreover, in some instances, the leaders of the district were not managing the team effectively. In a study conducted by Makhalemele (2011), it was found that in other districts, the management and organisation of most DBSTs by Deputy Chief Education Specialists in the directorate of inclusive education were poor. This focused the responsiveness on the fact that the leadership in this directorate was not functioning optimally and that there was a need for more commitment from people in leadership positions.

Currently, the staff of SSRCs are incorporated into DBSTs to serve neighbouring schools and utilise resources from community to attain their goals (DoE 2001). According to Maguvhe (2013), these SSRCs seem not to be fully strengthened with expertise, resources and being part of the district support services where they can become resources for all of the schools in the district. It is clear that these SSRCs cannot be supportive to neighbouring schools unless they themselves function well. Again, the collaboration of SSRCs with DBSTs seems to exist only for a few members of the DBST who have placed learners experiencing barriers to learning directly into these centres. This is problematic, as the other DBST members are unable to provide the necessary support to the SSRCs. For instance, the LSFs or psychologist is unable to visit SSRCs and assess the progress of the learners who have been admitted.

Although DBSTs exist in all of the provinces, there is a challenge with regard to who should serve in these teams. In many districts, only members from the Directorate of Inclusive Education are

considered as official members of the DBST, whilst the policy indicates that the DBST should include members from all the directorates. In this instance, some officials from other directorates do not participate actively in the programmes of the DBST. The DoE (2009) reported that a concern has been raised during the training of DBSTs that other directorates, including the Curriculum and Institutional Development Units, showed limited participation and that the capacitation did not translate to school-level support. The DoE (2009) further mentioned that it has been announced that officials outside of the Inclusive Education Units in districts did not see the work of the DBST as their primary function but viewed the work as an add-on that could only be carried out if other duties allowed space for it.

Amongst the members of the DBST, there is usually one or more LSFs who play an important role in the support process. These officials normally connect the schools with district support. Once the referrals are made to the district, the leader of the DBST assigns the case to the LSF, who will then contact the school to ensure that the necessary support is available to the particular school. Makhalemele (2011) highlighted the essential role of LSFs as evaluating the problem and the primary intervention strategies and deciding whether to provide further suggestions for classroom intervention or, on the basis of the nature of the problem, consult with other members of the DBST.

■ The community

According to the EWP6 (DoE 2001), one of the key strategies required to achieve inclusion in schools is to develop a community-based support system that comprises a preventative and developmental approach to support. The ideal is to mobilise the community so that all social partners and role players can become part of the support processes in schools. Donald et al. (2018) were of the opinion that members of the community, including parents or caregivers, NGOs, faith-based organisations, specific community leaders and healers, can also provide support at school.

Engelbrecht (2008) argued that it is anticipated that community members should be involved to attract local and indigenous resources in order to offer support. In this regard, the community-based approach remains essential to the support system in schools. Thus, support to schools as well as other sites of learning is anticipated to be provided by volunteers, parents and NGOs. The EWP6 (DoE 2001) encouraged the involvement of the community stakeholders (e.g. health professionals, other government departments and NGOs) to be part of SBSTs. Also, in a study conducted by Nel et al. (2016), it was reported that community collaboration was essential in the support process. The participants in that study reported that teachers did refer learners to other support structures within the community, such as social workers, police, nurses and religious leaders. This indicates the significance of community engagement at school level. Furthermore, members of the community enjoy the privilege of being able to serve in DBSTs. According to Muthukrishna (2008), role players in the community, such as grandparents, parents and other caregivers, NGOs, organisations for disabled people, learners, teachers, members of the school governing body, and so forth, will improve a holistic, community-based approach to support services at district level. In this regard, DBSTs will be able to coordinate the informal and formal support within the community with all education institutions and any other government departments (Landsberg 2009).

■ The functionality of the formal support structures in South Africa

The literature indicates that the formal support structures in South Africa are not as effective as suggested by policy and that the policy requires serious reconsideration. This was affirmed by both Walton and Rusznyak (2014) and Nel et al. (2016), stating that teachers reported their experiences with regard to the execution of inclusive practices in their classrooms as demanding and indicated that contextual predicaments, such as the lack of

formal support structures, played a significant role. Moreover, unclear policies on the constituency of support structures in schools exacerbate the poor provision of support at schools. Makhalemele and Tlale (2020) further highlighted that schools do not have systems in place for implementing support services in terms of the policy set out in the guidelines of EWP6. Mostly, the support structure at the school level is given the power of overseeing the provision of support, but it, too, does not have the relevant skills.

In studies conducted by Makhalemele and Nel (2016) and Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2018), participants reported that professional support staff who directly provided these services reported the inappropriate and insufficient provision of support services to schools as their main concern. This appeals to schools and teachers to understand the needs in terms of support of all learners and enhance the delivery of support services. Moreover, the personnel from the district ought to accelerate the programme of professional development to promote support in schools. Again, it is the opinion of the authors that the formal support structures remain to struggle to function within an inclusive education environment. The inadequate allocation of resources is considered as the main reason for support structures struggling with the provision of support. Makhalemele and Nel give an example that limited resources inhibit DBSTs to execute their role to provide support at district level and to reach all schools. In addition, Maguvhe (2013) expressed the opinion of professionals from SSRCs that there is a need for more resources to be allocated to special schools, instead of more resources to be allocated to FSSs.

In an investigation on the inclusive education field test done by the DoE (2009), it was found that most SSRCs were not ready to serve at resource centres, as they did not meet the set criteria. However, many special schools are continuing to be converted to resource centres despite the readiness of the existing ones. Another challenge that the formal support structures encounter

involves principals who interfere with the work of these teams. For instance, in a study conducted by Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2018), DBST members reported that it was challenging for them to demonstrate leadership because some principals demoralise them and reasserted authority when the DBST members were in conflict with teachers. Also, Motistwe (2014) reported that principals indicated having a lot of work and being unable to play a significant role in ensuring that effective support services existed.

The literature further exposes the ineffectiveness of SBSTs to identify and address barriers to learning. However, there are many reasons involved, such as a lack of direction and guidance regarding the manner in which SBSTs should be set up (these still differ from one school to the other) and how these teams should function (Motistwe 2014). Again, many teachers are still uncertain about the specific roles within SBSTs (Makhalemele & Nel 2016; Makoelle 2014). In a study conducted by Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2020) on FSSs, it was found that poor leadership was one of the key factors that diminished the capabilities of SBST members in performing their key roles for supporting teachers and learners. Furthermore, Nel et al. (2016) found that FSSs lack resources, and as a result, they are incompetent to provide various levels of support to neighbouring schools.

For the benefit of the reader, it is of importance to present the major gaps with reference to the various levels of support. The gaps listed below may be valuable to the improvement of support services at both school and district levels.

The objective that ordinary schools in South Africa can maintain the existence of support services through the delivery of ideal support is still unrealistic to attain because of numerous factors. The DoE (2001) has indicated that the physical environment of many of these institutions is not barrier-free. Another setback experienced in ordinary schools is that the delivery of support services in the curriculum remains a challenge. Furthermore, it has been noted that the other suggested support

structures (e.g. FSSs, SSRCs and DBSTs) that are supposed to prioritise the support of ordinary schools are ineffective and mostly do not have a linkage with these institutions. Last but not least, poor collaboration exists amongst the professionals at ordinary schools and other stakeholders to address the needs of learners and teachers. On the other hand, the availability of support services in FSSs is unfavourable because of an expected higher number of learners experiencing barriers to learning because the conversion of schools to these institutions is moving at a slower pace. Another concern is that these institutions are battling with the implementation of policy on inclusion and only a limited percentage of them succeed. Moreover, Strydom et al. (2012) expressed that many FSSs do not have the ability to cater effectively for teachers and learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Special schools as resource centres seem not to be capable to develop teachers from neighbouring schools because there is very little effective partnership amongst the principals of these schools. Also, it is noted that the functions of SSRCs are still hindered by a dearth of resources, and as a result, these schools become unsuccessful in supporting the neighbouring schools. With regard to the LSEs, their inclusion in the ESS at district level has not yet been fully implemented in South Africa. However, it is our opinion that fast-tracking their involvement may enhance the provision of support at both district and school level.

The main challenge facing SBSTs is the appointment of teachers who lack knowledge and skills in support. The implication is that such teachers will struggle to identify and provide support to teachers and learners who experience barriers to learning. Furthermore, these teams seem not live up to their responsibilities to provide the necessary support, as teachers are too busy with their statutory responsibilities. Whilst DBSTs suffer from insufficient human resources, in some instances, members of these teams do not have a supportive relationship with the school. Moreover, Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2018)

reported that DBST members did not always recognise their leadership role when supporting teachers to ensure that decisions were made, challenges met and processes supported. Another gap is that there is a challenge with regard to who should serve in SBSTs. In this regard, it is expected that all the directorates should have the representatives in the DBST, but it has been discovered that some officials from other directorates do not participate actively in the programmes of the DBST. Regarding the community engagement in the support process, it is notable that both schools and DBSTs did refer learners to other support structures within the community.

■ Conclusion

This chapter has explored the history of ESS, both internationally and nationally. The significance of the changes in support services was put into perspective, whilst the development of ESS in the middle and latter part of the 20th century was discussed. The goals and approach of support services were highlighted. The chapter also contextualised the origin and development of inclusive education. It concluded by highlighting the structures and functionality of ESS structures in South Africa. In this chapter, it was reiterated that despite serious challenges throughout the past century and more, ESS will still be around, irrespective of the education system it serves.

Support for at-risk learners in South African schools

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■ Introduction

A child is regarded as a person of 18 years old or younger, and there is a general agreement that all children in South African schools are entitled to education (South African Human Rights

Commission 2018). Since 1994, various initiatives have been devised to explore factors that may be barriers that are depriving South African learners of this fundamental human right. For Phasha (2016), quality education includes teaching learners respect for differences whilst creating a supportive classroom environment for all. This idea involves, therefore, more than the mere dumping ground for facts and, instead, denotes fundamental support that contributes to the holistic development of personal, social, spiritual political and economic aspects (South African Human Rights Commission 2018).

Despite the widespread adoption of the sustainable development goals for 2030, including access to quality education and holistic support, it seems as if the overwhelming majority of learners in South Africa are being deprived of access thereto (Phasha 2016). In addition, many South African children are unable to take advantage of education because they are confronted with extrinsic and intrinsic factors that affect, in one way or the other, their development, learning and academic performance (Nel, Nel & Hugo 2016). Materechera (2020) added that South Africa faces many unique challenges at school level in aiming to accommodate all learners. Research has found that only 64% of the 16- to 17-year-old learners amongst the poorest 20% of the households had passed Grade 9 (Hall 2018). Pillay and Barron (2014) further added that South Africa has some of the highest estimated incidence and prevalence of tuberculosis- and HIV-infected patients in the world, which may increase the number of orphans and vulnerable children. As a result, South African schools are filled with at-risk learners (Bialobrezka et al. 2012).

The concept 'at-risk learners' is being used in many conversations. According to Ungar (2004:38–39), the 'personal and environmental factors that have been studied as barriers to health and well-being have come to be known as risk factors'. Risks are those factors that impair optimal development and render a child vulnerable to poor developmental and

academic outcomes. On a personal level, risk factors may be temperament, sensory-motor deficits, unusual sensitivities, low frustration tolerance, the inability to maintain healthy relationships, a lack of self-esteem and feelings of incompetence (Ungar 2004). Environmental risk factors may include psychiatric problems in the family, chronic and profound stressors, low socioeconomic status, low academic achievement amongst parents and poorly functioning families (Ungar 2004). Although the list is not exhaustive, it reminds one of South Africa – a country that is battling poverty and underdevelopment. The apartheid settlement patterns are persisting in South Africa. The phenomenon of urbanisation that followed the repeal of the apartheid legislation has led to the development of several informal settlements around towns and cities, where poverty, unemployment and poor infrastructure are prevalent. Many under-resourced schools admit learners from these areas.

Ungar (2005) argued that a child's ability to cope with developmental challenges is a product of what is built inside and around the child. Ungar (2011) made another important observation that coping ability can be understood through the social ecology of resilience theory (cf. ch. 1 and ch. 4). This theory involves culture as a dimension of coping ability. This implies that helping learners cope requires that one considers their individual strengths as well as what their environment, which includes the family, school, culture and community, can offer. Working together is key to providing at-risk learners with safe havens in environments that serve as microsystemic strongholds in environments beset with risk and adversity (Theron & Engelbrecht 2012). Of course, the term 'at risk' is contested, and perhaps it requires more exploration.

'At risk' has a strong in-built meaning, but researchers argue that, to date, the term is not clearly defined and there is not a generally agreed-upon definition (Edmunds & Edmunds 2018). The literature further asserts that the concept 'at risk' is often used interchangeably with the term 'vulnerability' (Mohlakwana 2013).

The root of the English word 'vulnerable' derives from the Latin expression for 'to wound', with the original wording 'vulnerare' (Mynarska et al. 2015:9). It is reasoned that whilst vulnerability refers to the capacity to be wounded, the term 'at risk' implies that there is a chance or a probability of being wounded (Arora et al. 2015). In agreement with Novosel et al. (2012), the term 'at risk' will be used in this chapter in reference to learners or groups of learners who are facing barriers that may contribute to challenges with learning.

Risk factors are seen as a relative state, which means that it is not only highly contextual, but it appears that there is an array of interrelated factors placing learners at risk (Arora et al. 2015). Psychologists argue that the presence of protective factors can shield learners from helplessness and raise the chance of a positive outcome (Arora et al. 2015). Where protective factors are absent, learners could be affected negatively by risk factors and the challenges associated with these, which could jeopardise the learners' holistic development and learning-related performance (DoE KwaZulu-Natal 2014). Policy documents provide a policy framework for the identification, assessment and provision of support for at-risk learners requiring additional support to participate and benefit from inclusion in South African schools (DoE 2014). The aim of holistic psychosocial support is to address the socio-emotional, physical and spiritual needs that arise from interrelated risk factors, such as barriers to learning, a lack of parenting, child-headed families, poverty, homelessness, inequitable access to resources, incarceration, rape and sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy, chronic health issues, abuse, neglect, violence, deprivation, social exclusion, injustice, substance abuse or other conditions (Arora et al. 2015; Hlalele 2012; Hoosen 2015; Mohlakwana 2013; Mynarska et al. 2015; Phasha & Myaka 2014; Setlhare, Wood & Meyer 2017). Robbins, Stagman and Smith (2012) added that learners who are exposed to three or more risk factors will most likely be unable to cope with the influences that have a negative impact on their lives. This situation is especially critical for learners in South Africa, with its postcolonial and

post-apartheid inequality, where the majority of learners carry heavy psychosocial-emotional loads (Hlalele 2012). Supporting at-risk learners in South Africa should therefore be seen against a broader political, social and cultural background (Engelbrecht 2020). Nel and Grosser (2016) maintained that the support of at-risk learners includes involving SBSTs and DBSTs to ensure including a variety of professionals, such as teachers, curriculum specialists and health professionals to support at-risk learners on different levels.

Research emphasises that in order for learners to reach their full potential, they need fostering care at all developmental stages to optimise positive consequences for life (Silbert & Mzozoyana 2019). Support for at-risk learners does not only imply the identification of emotional, behaviour or physical challenges affecting learning, but also include addressing disparities of the past and providing equitable access to quality education for all learners (Dreyer 2013). Ndinisa (2016) clarified that in 2001, the South African DoE acknowledged these challenges by adopting inclusive education policies. The aim of the EWP6 (DoE 2001), for instance, was to identify and minimise factors that prevent equity and belonging, causing barriers to learning and development. Policies on inclusive education, for example the EWP6, further aim to assist teachers and support teams to understand terms and concepts that relate to the implementation of inclusive education practices (Engelbrecht 2020).

The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to explore psychosocial support for at-risk learners in South African schools. First, the concepts 'learning disabilities', 'special needs' and 'barriers to learning' will be investigated by reflecting on intrinsic and extrinsic models. Then will follow a discussion on how holistic support efforts aim to address intrinsic, pedagogical, systemic and socioeconomic barriers to learning. After that, we will explain how the ubuntu philosophy is in line with the focus of inclusive education, and in the empirical study, we will look deeper into the psychosocial support available to at-risk learners in South Africa.

■ Learning disabilities, special needs and barriers to learning

In order to support learners to overcome barriers to learning, it is imperative to identify the above-mentioned challenges of at-risk learners. Acknowledging the challenges of at-risk learners will allow support teams to take the appropriate action within the learning situation. For the purposes of this chapter, the concept 'special needs' refers to the identification of barriers or negative influences, for instance personal, environmental or medical difficulties that have an impact on a learner's ability to perform and meet the requirements of learning (Insurance Sector Education Training Authority 2015).

Special needs contribute to learning difficulties where individual learners require additional or specialised services or accommodation (Ndinisa 2016). Unidentified needs can lead to neglect, defencelessness and unassertiveness whilst also exposing learners to possible emotional, psychological and physical abuse (Mohlakwana 2013). As a result, a feeling of hopelessness may develop, where learners become more isolated, feel powerless and often protect abusers to avoid further harm (Bialobrezka et al. 2012). It is evident that there is an interrelatedness of individual, relational, community and societal influences that makes it difficult to identify or address the exact risk factor that may be the direct cause of negative psychosocial well-being (Novosel et al. 2012).

The DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association 2013) provides some diagnostic criteria for specific learning disorders to diagnose difficulties in learning. The terms 'learning disability', 'learning disorders', 'learning difficulties', 'learning impairments' and 'barriers to learning' are often used interchangeably, although they vary widely across contexts (Nel & Nel 2016). Whilst developed countries have based their perceptions of learning disabilities on scientific clarifications defined in the international classification of functioning, disability and health, the

interpretation of this term is a more complicated issue in developing countries (Atkinsola & Chireshe 2016). 'Learning disabilities' can be seen as an umbrella term that refers to challenges to learning manifesting in different ways and causing problems in a variety of learning areas. Various factors in South Africa have an impact on the interpretation of the term 'learning disabilities'. Nel and Grosser (2016), for example, identified contextual factors as a major influence in the understanding of learning disabilities in the South African context. Other factors include policies, attitudes, spiritual and cultural philosophies about disabilities, social factors, a lack of understanding and respect for individual human rights (Atkinsola & Chireshe 2016).

Barriers to learning are seen as obstacles that prevent learners from learning and can influence the development of the whole learner, including environmental, physical, socio-emotional or cognitive development (Vlok 2016). Nel and Grosser (2016) summarised the classification of barriers to learning as intrinsic (including various disabilities) and extrinsic (environmental, pedagogic and systemic). Intrinsic barriers relate to conditions within the learner, including barriers such as medical conditions, medical disabilities and sensory impairments (Nel et al. 2016). In addition, epilepsy, Down Syndrome, autism, attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder also relate to intrinsic barriers (Nel et al. 2016). According to Vlok (2016), intrinsic barriers further include emotional and behavioural barriers, physical impairment and chronic illnesses and diseases. Extrinsic barriers refer to those barriers outside of the learner, including societal, environmental or contextual barriers, such as barriers to the learner's personal support system (Bornman & Rose 2017). Bornman and Rose (2017) labelled opportunity barriers as environmental factors that can influence development and learning caused by a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic barriers, for instance the environment in which a learner lives, or by the school itself, including socioeconomic barriers, poverty, family abuse, crime, gang violence, poor housing, gender and language matters.

In the 'Medical, social and bio-ecological models' section, it will be argued that the medical deficit model mainly focused on intrinsic disability or special needs. In an attempt to move away from the categorisation of learners as a result of intrinsic impairments (medical deficit model), attention has been paid to the social and bio-ecological factors (bio-ecological model) that acknowledge both the person and environmental factors that influence the performance and development of learners (Nel & Grosser 2016).

■ Medical, social and bio-ecological models

As Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 have demonstrated, there are various theories exploring the inclusion of learners. It is also emphasised that whilst the focus in the previous South African education system was on the categorising of disability or impairment and the physical placement of learners, the focus has moved in recent years from categorising learning difficulties in terms of medical conditions or problems within the child to respecting the diversity, needs, abilities, characteristics and expectations of learners (Mukwambo & Phasha 2016).

In the medical model, disability was (and still is) viewed as a form of biological pathology located in the body of the person (Berghs et al. 2016). The focus of the medical model is on the individual, mainly in isolation; in other words, the diagnosis of the problem exists in a person's body, the required treatment and placement (Nel et al. 2016). Because this model does not acknowledge the importance of social and environmental factors, culture and context well enough, it often results in negative perceptions, labelling and discrimination (Haegele & Hodge 2016). As a result, learners with disabilities may feel excluded, belittled or stigmatised and experience frustration when they are met with an attitude of pitying (Goering 2015).

In response to the traditional medical model, the social model of disability was developed. This model interpreted the deficit,

illness or biological limitation in the context of social inequality, oppression, marginalisation and social structures (Da Silva, Dirce & Dornelles 2010). The basic idea of the social model is that disability should not be understood as an individual factor but should rather be viewed as a matter of life in society (Da Silva et al. 2010; Haegele & Hodge 2016). Within the social model, learners have a voice to explain their desires (Goering 2015). It is argued that if support teams do not understand the vital role of social context in the development of learners, they will fail many learners (Lebohla & Hlalele 2012).

With the move to inclusive education, the focus shifted away from the 'specialness' of learners to the dynamic interplay amongst forces of the different reciprocal layers of systems involved in learners' lives (Smit, Preston & Hay 2020). It is believed that in order to understand a learner's development and performance, support teams have to consider the complex interactions and interrelationships with the learner within the surrounding environmental systems associated with the learner (Nel et al. 2016). This idea is portrayed by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory, where it is explained how different nested and interrelated systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems) affect one another and also the learner's development (Swart & Pettipher 2019). Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the microsystem as bi-directional and referred to the immediate environment and relationships (family, homecare, peer, group and school) with which the learner interacts and which influence the learner. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further asserted that different parts of the microsystem, for instance the interaction between the school and home or home and peer groups, could influence the development and performance of a learner (mesosystem). Although the exosystem does not involve the learner as an active participant, events in the parents' workplace (exosystem) could have an impact on the immediate environment of the learner and interact with the learner's development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The influence of society, cultural values and the economic conditions under which the

learner lives is described as the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The chronosystem includes transitions or shifts in a learner's lifespan that can influence a learner, for example starting school, a divorce, changing schools or death in the family (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) seems appealing as a conceptual tool for supporting at-risk learners because it emphasises the collaborative efforts from the interacting dimensions amongst learners, schools, families, larger communities or government. Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) focuses the attention on the need for a holistic approach, where support teams could work collaboratively with at-risk learners.

■ Holistic support to at-risk learners

Psychosocial well-being is seen as the social and emotional aspects of holistic well-being that influence learners positively or negatively to fulfil their potential as human beings (DoE 2017). Swart and Phasha (2019) clarified that well-being is created by access to social resources such as nurture, care, security and nutrition. The most powerful and important form of psychosocial support is the everyday assistance provided by families, caregivers, households, friends, teachers, community members and significant others (DoE 2017). In addition, educational programmes have the potential to promote learners' well-being by providing psychosocial support through school initiatives (Silbert & Mzozoyana 2019). Instead of merely identifying at-risk learners, it is the duty of support teams to equip learners with coping skills to mitigate challenges. There is growing evidence that attests to the importance of learner well-being in schools, emphasising the idea that learners have the 'right not only to survive but to thrive' (Silbert & Mzozoyana 2019:1).

Shung-King, Lake, Sanders and Hendricks (2019) emphasised that there are different layers of psychosocial support in the

holistic approach to learners' development. The layers include the provision of regular and predictable adult guidance and emotional availability to learners, as well as physical support, as learners need the comfort and stability that a caringly provided daily routine of physical containment and nurturance brings (Shung-King et al. 2019). Hlalele (2012) added that these layers are dependent on a well-coordinated school community partnership that focuses on the interaction of well-being factors in and outside of the learner, as well as beyond the walls of the classroom.

■ Complexities of barriers placing learners at risk

As argued in the 'Holistic support to at-risk learners' section, a combination of complex person-environment factors can contribute to barriers that place learners' development and performance at risk. The complexities of the above-mentioned factors and the lack of proper and functional support structures intensify the extent of at-risk learners' challenges in ways that lower their coping ability and holistic well-being. This, in turn, may then affect learners' ability to comply with requirements in school. An opportunity for a descending spiral is generated where each unsupported risk element leads to a new level of susceptibility and, consequently, opens a host of new risks (SOS Children Village Society International 2016). At the bottom of this spiral, are those learners who have to face new threats, new obstacles, increased difficulties and negative expectancies and who are more susceptible to other risk factors (Silva, Maftum & Mazza 2014).

The purpose of this chapter is not to explore intrinsic or extrinsic barriers in detail, but rather to follow Maguvhe's argument (2016) that instead of focusing on extrinsic or intrinsic barriers, one should move beyond the barriers by focusing on factors that include or exclude learners in learning. This idea

echoes the words of Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, that 'one child excluded is one child too many' (Get SACE 2017:1). In the 'Intrinsic factors' section, ways to support at-risk learners when the interaction between intrinsic and environmental factors prevents learning and holistic development will be discussed.

■ Intrinsic factors

Development is a unique, diverse and dynamic process during which personalities, potential, aptitudes and skills within individual learners mutually interact (Ferenczi, Csákvári & Tánczos 2015). Learning difficulties may be more or less apparent because of the uniqueness of learners and the interplay amongst environmental and intrinsic barriers to learning. It is, however, impossible to separate intrinsic factors from other factors such as family, the environment or societal factors because there is constant interaction amongst the individual factors and adversity factors such as health issues, disability, socio-emotional factors, gender, religion or sexual orientation that can, in turn, affect the development and academic performance of learners (Bornman & Rose 2017).

Gracy et al. (2014) added that chronic illness and long periods of hospitalisation are intrinsic barriers that could influence learners' abilities to perform academically. A lack of academic performance may lead to social and emotional developmental problems (Emerson, Distelberg & Montgomery 2016), which, in turn, may lead to social exclusion, stigmatisation and discrimination (Bialobrezka et al. 2012; Motsa & Morojele 2016). If learners mask their needs and do not have well-developed socio-emotional coping skills, these needs may manifest as a barrier to learning and limit the learners' holistic well-being (Nel et al. 2016). In addition, social barriers may surface when there is discrimination against learners based on race, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture or religion (Maguvhe 2016). However, the

impact of intrinsic factors on well-being varies, and some learners have more support and are more resilient than others in overcoming hardship without experiencing lasting harm (UNESCO 2019). Adelman and Taylor (2001) suggested that the first step to supporting learners facing intrinsic barriers to learning should be preparing beginner teachers to accommodate all learners in teaching and learning activities by acknowledging the physical limitations of individual learners. Acknowledging physical limitations can lead to emotional battles; therefore, teachers should focus on ways to increase motivation that will affect thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Mapepa and Magano (2018) added that supporting at-risk learners requires a multidisciplinary approach where the different needs of learners can be addressed by experts in a specific field, such as psychologists, occupational therapists, health workers, audiologists and speech therapists.

In the 'Systemic factors' section, the way systemic factors could play a supportive role in the well-being of at-risk learners will be explored.

■ Systemic factors

A supportive school environment with caring and affectionate family interaction is fundamental to ensuring well-being (Silva et al. 2014). UNESCO (2019) stressed that the more families, communities and the environment reduce risk factors and increase protective factors, the more likely it will strengthen a learner's resilience and the more likely it is that the well-being of the at-risk learner will be strengthened. It is, however, not only the loss of parental or community care that determines risk or vulnerability, but risk often results from a combination of dynamic factors within the family. Families differ in terms of structure, ethnicity, language and cultural beliefs, which could add to placing stress on a learner (Swart & Phasha 2019). SOS Children Village Society International (2016) identified other dynamic

factors within families that may cause risk for learners, for instance the context, children on the street, child-headed households, parental attitudes towards education, divorce and remarriage, the presence of many children in the household, early or unplanned parenthood, low education levels of parents, a lack of parenting skills and a lack of support from the extended family. Another dynamic factor that may put learners at risk is being stigmatised, discriminated against or excluded for any number of reasons, such as being part of a minority group, for example the young, the old, the educated, the disabled and those experiencing illness (SOS Children Village Society International 2016).

In order to understand how family factors could influence a learner's development, the living arrangement of learners should be acknowledged (Mhaka-Mutepfa 2016). Learners may, for instance, not be able to reach school because of transportation issues or as a result of parents' demanding jobs or family responsibilities – which, in turn, may lead to corporal punishment or, in extreme cases, expulsion from school (Ameyaw-Akumfi 2013; Swart & Phasha 2019). Moreover, some learners are deprived of family or extended family support, which may imply a lack of care and emotional support (Mhaka-Mutepfa 2016). It is, therefore, not always the parent factor that causes risk *per se*, but the way it contributes to other risk factors; for example, parental substance abuse can interfere with a parent's protective capacity and lead to neglect or involvement in criminal activities, which may jeopardise the learner's well-being (Ameyaw-Akumfi 2013). Substance abuse and neglect can co-occur with other risk factors, including HIV and AIDS, domestic violence, child abuse and poverty (Ameyaw-Akumfi 2013). A parent's lack of knowledge, age and stress level and the family structure are examples of more risk factors contributing to negative patterns of family functioning (Ameyaw-Akumfi 2013). These factors differ from one community setting to another and can change over time (Novosel et al. 2012). Elish-Piper (2019) explained that the more a learner's family is involved in the learner's education, the better the family will understand the expectations, challenges, learning,

teaching, assessment and behaviour of learners who are at risk. In addition, the family will have an understanding of what programmes are available or how support is offered by the school. It is vital that support teams serve learners with disabilities by minimising systemic barriers to learning and maximising learner participation and involvement in learning and assessment activities (Hove & Grobbelaar 2020).

The discussion above confirms that there are many benefits to systemic involvement in education. Family factors, however, are in a complex interplay with other environmental factors that can lead to other challenges, and the type of home involvement is closely related to the social context and socioeconomic status of parents. These factors will be discussed in the 'Socioeconomic factors' section.

■ Socioeconomic factors

The interaction between health, poverty and development can set the stage for either future success or a lifetime of stumbling blocks. Saeed (2017) wrote that concentrating and learning are difficult tasks when a learner is experiencing food insecurity. Research highlights that poverty will have adverse effects on learners' cognitive development, especially in the early childhood years (Hanover Research 2015). In addition, children who live in homes below the poverty line have to face other overwhelming daily challenges (Hanover Research 2015). A malnourished child often has the added burden of walking long distances to school, sometimes without shoes. When learners lack basic needs, they may be unable to acquire particular academic skills and social competencies (Mohlakwana 2013). These barriers to learning are not always easy for teachers or support teams to identify because learners often deliberately mask or hide their needs, which makes it difficult to provide support (Arora et al. 2015).

Whilst low socioeconomic status creates risk factors such as isolation, exposure to danger, displacement and health or

well-being problems, it also gives rise to marginalisation and deprivation (Venter & Venter 2019). Klasen (n.d.) asserted that although challenges with regard to poverty deepen the gap between rich and poor, such challenges make learners the victims of social exclusion, which is a far worse obstacle. Learners may become powerless in their struggle to cope with poverty, which can manifest in helplessness, expressed as truancy, dropping out of school, substance, sexual or emotional abuse, engagement in crime, self-harm or even suicide (McInerney & McInerney 2010; Mohlakwana 2013). In addition, orphans and abandoned children may end up in child-headed households or living on the street, where they may resort to prostitution, drugs or being exploited in other ways (Mhaka-Mutepfa 2016). Societal problems create the situation where learners are often emotionally and psychologically traumatised by their experiences (Mhaka-Mutepfa 2016).

Poverty and unemployment have challenged schools to provide psychosocial support to at-risk learners (Silva et al. 2014). As in the case of parenting, poverty is not always a reliable indicator of whether a learner is at risk, but it is likely that it can contribute to other complex risk factors. Mohlakwana (2013) argued that the social context in which learners find themselves constructs their identity and defines who they are. The environment can play a fundamental role in vulnerability and risk, but considering the amount of time a learner spends in the school environment, the influence of schools on the psychosocial development of the learner should not be underestimated (Howard & Walton 2015). Although it is not always possible to change the socioeconomic status of learners, the provision of an empathic context that values and respects all learners is essential in support endeavours (Devlin et al. 2012).

■ Pedagogical factors

Pedagogical factors can be linked to teaching, learning and assessment approaches that do not accommodate the diverse needs of learners (Nel & Grosser 2016). The educational

environment is the most obvious place that will influence support, teaching and learning (Bole 2010). Any means of education, support action and other constructive influences and benefits that the school can offer should create an opportunity for learners to benefit from education; however, in order to benefit from these, learners should first attend and be enabled to stay at school (SOS Children Village Society International 2016).

Silbert and Mzozoyana (2019) maintained that learners in the South African education system do not compare well with their counterparts in other countries. The *Mail and Guardian* (08 April 2011) confirmed that the fact that almost 80% of Grade 5 learners cannot read fluently bears testimony to the fact that South African education is in a crisis. Inadequate language proficiency and inappropriate language are important factors that place learners at risk (Machaba 2016). In addition, overcrowded classrooms (with 50 learners or more), insufficient training of teachers, a lack of resources, poor teaching, learning and assessment practices, inflexible curricula, a lack of human resources development, long delays in the assessment of learners and centres with inadequate facilities or physical access for learners with disabilities are some of the major educational factors that contribute to learners being at risk (Materechera 2020; Nel & Grosser 2016; Right to Education for Children with Disabilities n.d.).

The discussion above highlights that teachers and support teams in the school environment perform an important role, in which they should focus not only on the cognitive development of learners but also on addressing the psychosocial development of all learners (Angelkovski 2016). Dreyer (2013) supported this view in arguing that there is a need for collaboration between learning support teams and teachers to coordinate learning support in schools and address challenges in classrooms. Professional development is necessary to equip educational professionals with skills and knowledge to accommodate at-risk learners (Potgieter-Groot, Visser & Lubbe-de Beer 2012). Although the EWP6 (DoE 2001) aimed to create a space for

supporting learners who are at risk, Mapepa and Magano (2018) found that the current state of curriculum adaptation for at-risk learners still is limited. Nel and Grosser (2016) added that adequate teacher training and support to cater for at-risk learners, a flexible curriculum, good communication strategies and flexible teaching and assessment practices are important pedagogical strategies to overcome challenges in order to meet the diverse needs of at-risk learners.

It can be concluded that support teams cannot guarantee employment or financial support. However, supporting and educating learners to build resilience and teaching at-risk learners to apply positive life skills to deal with life's challenges can contribute to developing constructive and responsible citizens.

■ Theoretical framework

Psychosocial support to at-risk learners requires that all South African learners should benefit from education. Ubuntu is deemed suitable as a theoretical framework because it expresses sharing, caring, empathy, compassion, equity, harmony, dignity, humanity and hope, which are all essential characteristics of empowering at-risk learners (Masondo 2017; Metz 2014). Phasha (2016) explained that the ideas of ubuntu are in line with the focus of inclusive education, namely that it is vital to allow all learners to benefit from education to be able to grow into capable and responsible citizens.

Not only does ubuntu form part of the knowledge and wisdom of Afrocentric policies, but it also holds the idea of caring for others (Lefa 2015). This idea implies that meaningful interaction between the learner, family members and those outside the family circle is necessary to realise human excellence (Mugumbate & Chereni 2019). Ubuntu is based on the Nguni principle *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,* which means a person is a person through other people (Lefa 2015). In other words, one is not considered a human being unless one is concerned about the well-being of

other people. Crucial ingredients of human excellence are relationships, communality or communal well-being (Mugumbate & Chereni 2019). In the ubuntu philosophy, the focus is on the 'we', and not the 'I', because ubuntu is seen as comprising actions that honour the 'humanness' amongst people and the fundamental virtues of collective compassion and humanity; in other words, 'it takes a village to raise a child' (Mugumbate & Cherini 2019:28). Etieyibo (2017:663) elaborated that ubuntu fosters collaboration, as the 'journey of life is a shared one'.

Adopting the ubuntu philosophy can be valuable to support at-risk learners because an integrative social network amongst the teacher, support team, learners and parents or caregivers could be formed. Integrative interaction is part of the African way of living (Mahlo 2017) and should be foregrounded in promoting support in African contexts (Walton 2018). It could be argued that when psychosocial support staff embrace ubuntu, uncaring expressions such as 'it is not my problem', 'you need specialised education' or 'we cannot accommodate you', as outlined by Masondo (2017:29), will not be used. This idea is in line with the definition of inclusive education, as outlined in policy documents of the DoE, such as the EWP6 (DoE 2001), that schools should embrace equity and social justice and that all learners have the right to quality education, based on the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (Masondo 2017).

◼ Methodology and research design

In order to reconceptualise the psychosocial support rendered to learners who are at risk, we elected to conduct qualitative research involving schools challenged by psychosocial risk and examine how ubuntu finds expression in teachers' efforts to support at-risk learners. We regarded qualitative research as a suitable research approach for this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research is a field of inquiry on its own that cuts across study fields and subject matter. In our study, we adopted qualitative

research as the strategy of inquiry within our field – educational psychology. We were interested in the lived experiences of teachers who served within SBSTs in both full-service and ordinary schools. This idea is in line with the argument of Nieuwenhuis (2020) that qualitative research relies on words rather than numerical data to employ a meaning-based approach.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) pointed out that qualitative research occurs within naturalistic environments, and it thus puts the researcher into the world that can be represented through, amongst other methods, interviews, photographs, field notes and recordings. In order to situate ourselves in the world, we chose phenomenological research as our qualitative research design. The participants were studied within their natural contexts. We sampled a FSS, which is typically an ordinary mainstream school that has been equipped to provide quality education to learners with a wide range of learning needs (DoE 2010). It does so by facilitating access to equitable quality education to achieve social justice in education. An ordinary primary school and a secondary school were included in the sample. Table 3.1 illustrates the sampled schools.

TABLE 3.1: Demographic details of the school-based support teams' participants.

School	Participants	Gender	Language group	Age	Experience in years
FSS	FSS 1	F	IsiZulu	54	29
	FSS 2	F	IsiZulu	52	27
	FSS 3	F	IsiXhosa	46	21
PRI	PRI 1	F	Sesotho	41	16
	PRI 2	F	IsiZulu	44	19
SEC	SEC 1	M	Sepedi	49	25
	SEC 2	M	IsiXhosa	34	9
	SEC 3	F	IsiZulu	47	22
	SEC 4	M	Sesotho	45	20
	SEC 5	F	Setswana	43	19
	SEC 6	F	Sesotho	40	15
	SEC 7	M	Sepedi	59	35
Total	**12**	**-**	**-**	**- -**	

FSS, full-service school; PRI, primary school; SEC, secondary school.

Table 3.1 shows that the participants who took part in this study were all South Africans aged 34 to 55 years. Their work experience ranged from 9 to 30 years. They spoke isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Setswana or Sepedi. The participants totalled 12, and of the 12, three participants were men and nine participants were women.

We generated data through a qualitative questionnaire. We were limited to this way of generating data by restrictions because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which did not allow for proximal interaction between researchers and participants. The questionnaire was sent via email to the schools, which, in turn, returned the completed questionnaires to us via email too. The open-ended questions in the questionnaire were formulated in English, and the participants responded in English. These responses were not edited to keep them original. We repeatedly read the responses to immerse ourselves in the data. We processed the data through inductive content analysis. Sections of the data were labelled, and two broad themes were developed. Below, we present the findings of the study and use excerpts from the data to strengthen our assertions.

■ Findings and discussion

The findings of the study are based on two major themes, namely, schools admit and support learners from immiserated households, and schools serve as nodes of support for learners at risk.

■ Schools admit and support learners from immiserated households

All the schools that took part in the study were located in poor socioeconomic areas where risks such as poverty, unemployment, single parenthood and child-headed households abound. Mhaka-Mutepfa (2016) highlighted that the development of learners should always be understood in terms of the context in which it occurs, which includes the biological, intellectual, social, cultural,

historical and economic context. Given that the holistic development of learners is deeply influenced by context, it is argued that school lifestyle opportunities and choices can either develop learners into responsible citizens or it can influence their future lives negatively (Taylor, Quinn & Eames 2015). All the participants understood that poor socioeconomic challenges influence choices to preserve learners' future, in line with what one participant said:

> 'Our learners come from a socioeconomically depressed area. Many parents are unemployed and thus depend on different social grants. Many learners live with either grandparents, single parents or in [a] child-headed household.' (SEC 7, 59-year-old male secondary school teacher, date unspecified)

The above comment underlines that in many African cultures, families include extended families that are composed of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and brothers and sisters (Mhaka-Mutepfa 2016). It is argued that these extended relationships could be valuable in efforts to provide learner support if schools acknowledge and develop the different relationship layers according to the ubuntu philosophy.

Another participant added that the learners being admitted at her school were from the township and farms around the small rural town in which the school was located. Learners from these rural areas often had backlogs in their learning and development. For example, one of the participants admitted that learners had backlogs in fine and gross motor development, auditory perception, visual perception and eye-hand coordination. One participant said:

> 'For us, the main problem is that we admit learners from poor families from nearby farms. This is because some of these farm schools were closed and the learners were referred to us. These learners have not attended preschool and we have to start with things they should have learned there. Like they do not know how to handle a pencil, you have to teach them left and right. They can't write their names when they come. They can't differentiate between different letters and sounds or copy from the board.' (PRI 2, 44-year-old female primary school teacher, date unspecified)

It is true that ubuntu could not solve all the above-mentioned learning problems, but it is argued that if schools recognise characteristics such as sharing, caring and social responsibility, it could help learners to discover possibilities, instead of only focusing on challenges (Ngwaru 2014). For example, the findings show that the participants taught learners who were malnourished. Some learners did not have access to adequate healthcare. Learners often fell ill, as the following excerpt shows:

> 'I have a few learners who show signs of malnutrition in my class. I saw one with chicken pox and I had to send him to a nearby clinic and send him home. Unfortunately, he had to wait all day for the taxi to come in the afternoon because he comes from the farm. The parents do not have resources.' (PRI 2, 44-year-old female primary school teacher, date unspecified)

Moreover, the findings of the study confirm that learners in South African schools are exposed to complex combinations of personal and systemic risks of poor developmental outcomes. Whilst there are many health, socioeconomic and other contextual challenges, Shumba (2011:90) reminded us that if we care for others according to the ubuntu philosophy of *'ümuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'*, we should acknowledge human worth in communal connections whilst we support at-risk learners.

In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, the coronavirus pandemic has added additional pressures. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools had little time to support learners, which put them at risk of poor developmental outcomes, as the following excerpt shows:

> 'The barriers are a combination from school and home. Cases of abuse or malnourishment from home impact learner performance in class and their conduct in general since COVID-19. The school now has little time to support learners and address their problems.' (SEC 1, 49-year-old male secondary school teacher, date unspecified)

Teachers, driven by care associated with the ubuntu philosophy, would like to present extra classes for learners with backlogs. However, they are unable to do so, as learners have to be transported home immediately. Teachers do not want to risk

learners missing their transport homeward, as was stated by one participant:

> 'These poor learners with problems, we cannot hold extra classes for them because the taxis come immediately when the bell rings. They take them back home to the farms where they come from daily. We cannot risk them missing the taxi, many things may happen to them.' (PRIM 1, 41-year-old female primary school teacher, date unspecified)

Other teachers, especially in the full-service and primary schools, reported that their schools were affected by criminal activities, especially during recess. This makes the need for the adoption of the ubuntu philosophy even more pronounced. The following excerpts bear evidence of the challenges with regard to crime experienced by schools:

> 'Our school was vandalised during recess. Computers were stolen and the food meant for the feeding scheme was also stolen.' (PRIM 2, 44-year-old female primary school teacher, date unspecified)

Participant FSS 3 added:

> 'During the lockdown, our school was vandalised. The people were looking for food. So, we have a crime problem from the shack dwelling people around the school. The police never get to arrest them.' (FSS 3, 46-year-old female full-service school teacher, date unspecifed)

The above excerpts show that schools were targeted by people in the community, which defies the principles of ubuntu.

Participant FSS 1, listed the barriers that the school was beset with as follows:

> '[*L*]iteracy and numeracy, societal problems, financial problems, reluctance of parents to engage with the school to assist and support the learners, and needy learners (food stationery, clothes, etc.).' (FSS 1, 54-year-old female full-service school teacher, date unspecified)

Despite the risks listed by Participant FSS 1, Participant FSS 2 later added:

> '[…] SMT of the school arranges for specialists to visit the school and deal with the needs of learners. The school reaches out to NGOs to provide food, clothes, shelter and social services. We are constantly in contact with the department, […] they rely on the [*sic*] help from

outside since our learners are from poor backgrounds.' (FSS 2, 52-year-old female full-service school teacher, date unspecified)

It is therefore evident that the school management team of the FSS seems to recognise the importance of community-based organisations in the education and support of learners who are at risk.

Whilst it is evident that learners have a constellation of needs because of their immiserated social ecologies, learning and development also take place at home within a formal or informal context. The quality of education, whether it is at home or at school, needs to support learners and prepare them to be active members of society. Therefore, the impact of individual development, living arrangements, barriers and opportunities and how these influence learning and development should be acknowledged (Mhaka-Mutepfa 2016).

If the principles of ubuntu are recognised in a collective effort, where adults with and without formal qualifications take responsibility to develop each learner cognitively, socially and emotionally (Phasha 2016), the school could operate as an essential partner alongside the community, transforming curricula, classrooms and policies to cater for the diverse needs of learners. In this regard, the school can become a node of support for learners who are at risk of poor learning and developmental outcomes. The role of at-risk learners' social ecologies in enhancing adaptive coping is recognised (Ungar 2005, 2011).

◼ Schools serve as nodes of support for learners at risk

Whilst it is widely recognised that the school plays a crucial role in supporting at-risk learners, the findings demonstrate that pedagogical and systemic barriers within a school system influence quality support for at-risk learners. Nel et al. (2016) explained that barriers within the school system, including a lack of basic support materials, inadequate facilities and resources, ill-trained teachers

and an inflexible curriculum, may lead to a lack of understanding in supporting at-risk learners. In addition, some schools add that it is challenging to draw resources from their communities. Despite these challenges, it was encouraging to note that many of the schools served as nodes of support for at-risk learners, which reflected ubuntu. Some of the schools connect at-risk learners to social services, as the following excerpt shows:

> 'No, the community itself lacks relevant resources and expertise to address the problems of learners at risk of development. They rely more on the school for help. On our part, the school ensures there is help from the department of social development since our learners are needy. They are from households where there are conflicts, alcohol abuse and many problems.' (SEC 5, 43-year-old female secondary school teacher, date unspecified)

Research demonstrates that the holistic development of learners is rooted in the learning and developmental opportunities afforded to them (Peckham 2017). The excerpt above shows that some of the schools recognise the important role of offering responsive support in developing the whole learner.

Some caring teachers, such as Participant SEC 7, a 59-year-old male secondary school teacher, took extraordinary steps to support holistic development, in accordance with the idea of Bondai and Kaputa (2016) that holistic education is enshrined in the ubuntu philosophy. Guided by ubuntu, Participant SEC 7 visits the families of learners from poor families – something that social workers should do because of their scope of practice. In this regard, he said:

> 'I continuously give learners emotional support by motivating them to focus on their studies and future career choices. I do home visits for those learners with socioeconomic needs.' (SEC 7, 59-year-old male secondary school teacher, date unspecified)

Chikunda and Ngcoza (2017:84) reiterated that 'it takes a village to raise a child', a saying that is in line with ubuntu. The visits by Participant SEC 7 reflect his belief in shared responsibility to raise a child. Emotional support includes a range of skills such as teaching learners to get along with others, caring, showing

empathy, having resilience or showing commitment. It is, however, vital to work as a team.

Some of the participants reported how they involved families and the community in the case of learners who appeared to be at risk:

> 'Some of these learners have epilepsy and parents are not educated to know what it is and what to do. We make [*sic*] a letter and send the child to a nearby clinic for examination and medication. At least we do something as the school.' (PRI 1, 41-year-old female primary school teacher, date unspecified)

Aligned with the ubuntu principle of shared responsibilities, one participant explained how parents or communities are involved to support learners at risk:

> '[...] some learners fall pregnant. We are always scared that the learner may deliver her baby at school in class. But we keep in touch with the parents and monitor and advise the child since I am a mother [*sic*]. It affects our performance, but we must continue.' (SEC 6, 40-year-old female secondary school teacher, date unspecified)

Sufficient awareness of the emotional, social and behavioural aspects that could influence a learner's health in vulnerable communities is vital (Venter & Venter 2019). If a school health programme includes health screening and health education, it will contribute to holistic well-being.

Keeping in touch with family members and the community underlines what Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) called the 'relationship circle'. In this circle, the different relationship layers are dependent on one another to promote the holistic well-being of learners. A school management team and SBST are valuable members of this relationship circle. In one school, it was evident that the school management team was represented within the SBST. The team could easily relay messages to the managing staff with regard to the support needed by learners, as the following excerpt shows:

> 'The SMT has representation in the SBST to act as a link between the two teams and to help solve problems in support of the

concerned learner. They help in accessing whatever help is necessary for the SBST to succeed.' (SEC 7, 59-year-old male secondary school teacher, date unspecified)

The excerpt shows that the school had adopted a whole-school approach to rendering psychosocial support to learners. This included attempts to gain support from external sources of help. Maintaining the whole-school approach denotes acknowledging input from all the different facets of holistic development. Asked about the procedures followed when learners have needs in terms of support, the FSS teachers provided a more elaborate procedure. For example, Participant FSS 1, a 54-year-old female full-service school teacher, said:

'I am head of the SBST. Teachers identify learners who need support. Learners identified are referred to the SBST. The team guides the educator on what to do. If there is no progress the coordinator is involved. Every attempt is recorded and the people who got [*sic*] involved. Learners who need further referral are referred accordingly to external sources of support. But parents are involved all the way.' (FSS 1, 54-year-old female full-service school teacher, date unspecified)

Six teachers reported that they visited the families of learners who appeared to be at risk. These were learners from child-headed households, especially girls because of their special vulnerabilities. Others reported that they visited the families of learners with behavioural problems to find out why they broke the rules at school. It is evident that, driven by the ubuntu philosophy, some teachers go beyond their scope of practice to ensure the well-being of their learners.

It is, however, challenging to collaborate with parents and communities. For example, two teachers reported that parental support and involvement were especially unsatisfactory. Parents who had not have opportunities to acquire tertiary education were implicated in not being available. This creates problems for teachers, as the following excerpt shows:

'We work with parents when a child needs support. The law says we must not exclude parents. However, those parents who are illiterate do not want to come to school when they are needed, except when

they are upset about something. This gives us problems because some of them threaten teachers.' (FSS 2, 52-year-old female full-service school teacher, date unspecified)

Participant SEC7, a 59-year-old male secondary school teacher, also pointed out though that some of the parents were 'often in denial about their children's problems and they hope that this [problem] will disappear as the child grows [older]'. This shows that some parents should be educated about barriers to learning to ensure that schools and parents worked together more harmoniously to support learners. Harmony and cooperation amongst different but related microsystems can go a long way towards lessening the burden on the school. It is important to note that schools should be able to draw from communities that should, in turn, make the necessary resources available.

■ Conclusion

The aim of this study was to highlight the risks that beset schools as social units in immiserated communities where an assortment of personal and socioecological risks abounds, and then demonstrate how the philosophy of ubuntu plays itself out in teachers' efforts aimed at providing psychosocial support to learners who are at risk. As pointed out, the participating schools were battling complex combinations of risks affecting learners. The risks ranged from perceptual backlogs that impaired reading, writing and mathematical ability to psychosocial problems that involved poverty, single parenthood, child-headed households, orphanhood, unemployment, crime and insufficient resources.

It is important to note that notwithstanding the aforementioned risks, the ubuntu philosophy shone through in the efforts of teachers and schools to support at-risk learners. In this regard, caring teachers, who were often inadequately trained to render the psychoeducational and psychosocial support learners need, nevertheless made themselves available to support them. Moreover, schools made efforts to work with parents, NGOs and state departments to support learners at risk. This shows that

although the schools that participated in the study were situated in economically depressed communities, they did not abandon their supportive duties but used the limited resources they had at their disposal. This is reminiscent and indicative of the ubuntu philosophy that permeates many African communities.

The findings of this study show that the teachers recognised the role of other stakeholders in enabling them to support learners at risk of poor developmental and academic outcomes. Their schools were under-resourced; nevertheless, they epitomised ubuntu in working under these less than favourable conditions. Some parents were either unavailable or ill-prepared to work with schools in supporting learners at risk; however, the teachers continued to perform their inclusive pedagogical duties.

The study opened our eyes to the heroic efforts of teachers under conditions that could typically predict poor outcomes. However, it was not without limitations; for example, the study involved only three schools. It would be interesting to know what the picture would have looked like had the sample been bigger. This requires replication of this study and the involvement of more schools in areas where risks similarly abound.

The COVID-19 pandemic limited us to a qualitative survey, and the response rate was relatively low. Conditions permitting, it would be advisable for this study to be replicated using a plethora of methodologies that could include interviews and participant observation to generate data. Furthermore, action-orientated research could be done to transform participating schools into health-promoting schools. Learners may be sampled and their voices thus privileged in future studies of this kind. Perhaps the concept of ubuntu could find more expression in such a study. This would require child-friendly methodologies to circumvent the shortcomings of traditional methods that have proved to be less effective with children who are not used to having discussions with adults, let alone strangers.

As ubuntu is anchored in culture, it would be interesting to fully understand the culture of the communities studied.

As researchers, our cultures were diverse. The first author speaks isiZulu and the second author Afrikaans. Whilst the phenomenon of ubuntu does run across our diverse cultures and it is expressed in culturally unique ways, we are not experts of the ways in which ubuntu is understood and practised in all contexts. Furthermore, we could not interact with the participants and thus observe how ubuntu manifested in their daily activities. Therefore, our own understanding of the ways in which ubuntu is understood and how it finds expression in the unique cultures of the participants may be limited.

Another limitation could be the fact that no school has a homogeneous culture, and South African schools, especially, are characterised by much diversity. Compounding this is the fact that South African schools admit children of foreign nationals and children who are unaccompanied and reside in children's homes. We also did not study the policies of the schools to find evidence of the ubuntu philosophy. Therefore, it is not clear whether the acts of ubuntu we witnessed were laid out in the policies and ethos of the schools or the result of the benevolence of the teachers who participated in the study.

What could be an eye-opener is how the concept of ubuntu relates to other dominant socially constructed phenomena such as religion. The findings of this study are silent on religion; however, the benevolence of kind and caring individuals and groups that characterises religiosity is prominent in the findings. Some of the NGOs are run by churches, though.

In conclusion, we argue that despite the limitations elaborated on above, there is merit in the findings of our limited, small-scale study. The participants have opened our eyes to how ubuntu could become a rallying point in supporting learners at risk. The efforts aimed at reconceptualising psychosocial support would be strengthened by the recognition of support nuanced by ubuntu and the urge to go the extra mile without expecting any personal benefits.

A comparative study of school-based support in South Africa: A social ecology of resilience perspective

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■ Introduction

South Africa is yet to overcome the inequalities that are part of the legacy of apartheid policies that pervaded all aspects of life.

The COVID-19 epidemic has made these inequalities even more glaring in South Africa. Whilst it may be argued that South Africa has entered an era of democratisation, decolonisation, equality of opportunity, and political and social reform, many learners are still at risk of poor developmental outcomes because of personal, socioecological and complex combinations of the former and the latter (Malindi 2018).

There is a realisation that learners at risk require support that will enable them to cope resiliently in school despite the risks or barriers that they experience. For example, the EWP6 (DoE 2001) suggests that all learners can learn and that all learners may require support at some stage of their lives. This implies that psychoeducational support should be equitably extended to all learners without unfairly discriminating against them as in the past. The mooted support is pivotal to the growth and development of learners with diverse learning and developmental needs.

In rendering support to learners, care should be taken not to focus attention solely on the individual child, because the risks of poor developmental outcomes emanate from not only within the child but also within the home, school and wider community as the child's social ecology (Prinsloo 2001; Ungar 2011, 2013). Furthermore, research shows that at-risk children require active support systems to cope with risk and adversity (Theron, Theron & Malindi 2013b).

Ample research demonstrates that the capacity to cope with risk and adversity, which is referred to as resilience, is a product of bi-directional interactions between individuals and their sociocultural contexts (Theron et al. 2013b; Ungar 2011). In other words, for children to cope resiliently in the context of risk or barriers to optimal learning and development, they require their own personal strengths and the strengths that they can source from active support systems that include caring families, caring teachers, supportive peers and communities that are capable of making resources available to them in culturally meaningful ways (Ungar 2006, 2008).

At-risk learners should receive psychoeducational and psychosocial support that involves the supportive role of the family, school and community. This envisaged support should be facilitated by school-based support services and be based on the principle of meaningful collaboration (DoE 2001). Questions that can be asked are how different schools as social units in South Africa dispense support to at-risk learners and which institutions can be relied upon by schools in providing support to these learners.

In this chapter, I compare three schools, focusing on the nature and quality of school-based support with the view to reconceptualise school-based support so that it benefits learners in ways that reflect equity and unhindered access. I argue that the social ecology of resilience theory (Ungar 2011) is a suitable framework for learner support because it recognises not only children's personal strengths but also the role that the components of a child's social ecology, such as a family, peer group, school, and community resources and services can play in enabling learners at risk of poor developmental outcomes to cope.

∎ Background on the status quo

The EWP6 (DoE 2001) suggested that all children can learn and that they may require support at some stage. This necessitates the establishment of structures referred to as SBSTs in schools to ensure that support is closer to learners at risk of poor developmental outcomes. These teams should be staffed by teachers with various but relevant and appropriate knowledge and skills to provide the support needed by learners in a local school, wherever possible. The team should facilitate support to learners, teachers and the whole school alike. Support should be preceded by the process of identifying learners in need of support, and SBSTs should open channels for learners and teachers to access support that communities may provide.

The EWP6 (DoE 2001) identified school-based support as the first level of support; however, these teams should work hand in

hand with DBSTs. With the support of DBSTs, SBSTs should facilitate the development of support programmes for learners at risk of poor developmental outcomes and in-service training for teachers (Nel et al. 2016). In other words, the team should liaise with stakeholders such as the DBST in matters pertaining to support. Teachers (and the SBST) should be able to differentiate the curriculum to support learners (Hlalele, Jiyane & Radebe 2020). It is important to note that SBSTs, supported by DBSTs, should aim to diversify the support they render to learners to include psychosocial, socioeconomic and sociocultural barriers, with a focus on the optimal development of learners.

It is equally important to note that accommodating a wide range of learner needs is an important tenet of inclusive education (Donald et al. 2020). School-based support should therefore be as comprehensive as possible. The notion that the concept *inclusive education* refers to the education of learners previously labelled as learners with special needs, is misleading. Instead, *inclusive education* refers to the whole system of education in the country that should be inclusive in nature, accommodating learners with diverse learning and developmental needs, without unfairly discriminating against anyone. Therefore, school-based support, accompanied by an inclusive pedagogical approach should be holistic and facilitated in ways that enhance academic and psychological resilience.

◼ What is an inclusive pedagogy about?

Inclusive pedagogy is a distinctive approach of which the aim is not only to reduce educational inequalities but also to enhance learning opportunities for all (Florian 2015). According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), an inclusive pedagogical approach is based on three basic tenets, namely:

- Shifting focus away from only those people who have additional needs, to the approach that is oriented towards learning for all learners.

- Rejecting the deterministic belief about ability that supports the idea that learners at risk might delay others' progress if they learn in inclusive classrooms.
- Promoting ways of working alongside other competent adults who respect the dignity of learners as full members of the school and community.

In other words, an inclusive pedagogy is about shifting attention from labelling and separating learners at risk of poor developmental outcomes from their peers, rejecting the belief that at-risk learners will delay others and promoting ways of ensuring respect for the dignity of at-risk learners in school and communities that are socially inclusive.

Accommodating diversity encompasses three dimensions, namely flexibility regarding the curriculum, contextual relevance and respect for diversity (Donald et al. 2020). The tenets and dimensions advanced by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) and Donald et al. (2020) show that support should be all-encompassing and focus on all learners. Supportive teaching should be equitably accessible to at-risk learners in schools and classrooms that recognise and respect diversity.

It should be noted that inclusive education is based on ideologies that include social justice, democracy, human rights and access to education for all (cf. ch. 1 and ch. 2), whilst the concept *inclusive pedagogy* refers to how teachers should teach in inclusive educational contexts where diversity is celebrated (Guðjónsdóttir & Óskarsdóttir 2016). Therefore, an inclusive pedagogy presents a critique of the deficit approach that focuses on labelling and 'differentness' and offers an alternative that supports learners within the classroom and in the curriculum (Sanger 2020). An inclusive pedagogical approach fosters social inclusion. Social inclusion refers to an assortment of practices and teaching methods implemented to foster equity and social 'belongingness' in the classroom despite gender, race, social class, ethnic group, culture and any other aspect of diversity (Cleovoulou 2008):

According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), an inclusive pedagogical approach is determined by:

> [...] how teachers address the issue of inclusion in their daily practice – reflected in their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about learners and learning, as well as in the things that they do and the responses that they make when the students they teach encounter barriers to learning. (p. 826)

Inclusive pedagogy is, therefore, not deterministic; instead, it presents an opportunity for teachers to foster social inclusion and social justice whilst accommodating, recognising and celebrating diversity. They intentionally create learning environments that enable learners to flourish.

■ The role of learner or learning support teachers

Learning support teachers play a crucial role in rendering and facilitating support to learners at risk in inclusive schools. These educators, together with staff members, parents and different outside agencies, need to ensure that learners have access to the comprehensive support they require. This necessitates that the learning support teacher facilitates support in collaboration with other stakeholders to enhance the professional development of teachers. Collaboration is important, as support can be provided by other role players who are not necessarily teachers.

In a study that looked at the roles of learner support teachers in a private school, it became clear that learner support teachers play multiple roles in their schools (Buys 2017). The findings of this study showed that these teachers rely on collaboration with stakeholders within and around the school. Support teachers are usually faced with contextual risk factors such as insufficient district support, sociocultural problems, classroom and school management factors, scarce resources, a lack of skills and competencies, large classes and inadequate collaboration amongst stakeholders, especially in less affluent schools that are still grappling with the

legacy of apartheid segregation and exclusion (Eloff & Kgwete 2007; Mahlo & Hugo 2013).

Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018) explored the realities of teacher support and found that whilst they did receive support from their schools and the district, support teachers felt that better planning and coordination of activities between schools and districts could benefit schools more. The participants in this study lamented the disruption of school activities when district officials plan and conduct offsite workshops for support educators.

Considering inclusive education, support teachers' roles have become more comprehensive and they see the need for sustained retraining because most of them have had training that was based on the exclusionary, individualised medical model (Dreyer 2013). Many support educators had training in remedial and special education. Inclusive education requires that they make a paradigm shift and render and coordinate comprehensive support for learners with complex constellations of psychoeducational and psychosocial barriers to learning and development.

In South Africa, support is streamlined according to the National Strategy on SIAS policy (DoE 2008). The objective of the SIAS policy is to (DoE 2008):

> [O]verhaul the process of identifying, assessing and providing programmes for all learners requiring additional support so as to enhance participation and inclusion. One of the key objectives of the strategy is to provide clear guidelines on enrolling learners in special schools and settings which also acknowledge the central role played by parents and educators. (p. 1)

The strategy aims to provide support to teachers in schools with the means to determine the support needs of learners before placement in alternative learning contexts occurs. It sets out protocols for the identification of learners who require support and provides details on the responsibilities of teachers, managers, DBSTs and parents or caregivers who are involved in the process of rendering and facilitating support required by learners.

It is important to note that more affluent schools, namely former Model C schools, and independent schools in South Africa can employ professionals such as educational psychologists and registered counsellors. However, schools in poorer communities are unable to employ such professionals and they thus rely on districts. Again, some districts do not have enough professionals (cf. ch. 5). Notwithstanding financial constraints, some schools have fully functioning support teams.

■ Psycho-educational support

Often, it is forgotten that psychoeducational support services should be located within the system of inclusive education that recognises, celebrates and accommodates diversity (DoE 2001). Clearly, the paradigm has shifted from the predominant medical model that was deficit-focused, towards the socioecological model that recognises the role of the social context in relation to supporting learners at risk of experiencing poor developmental outcomes (Nel, Nel & Hugo 2012).

The limitations of school-based support in rendering psychological and some educational support services should be acknowledged. In other words, psychoeducational assessment aimed at identifying the learning needs of learners, counselling, therapy, medical and social services fall outside the scope of teachers in SBSTs. This is where the DBST should come in. The role of DBSTs is to ensure that psychological, medical and social services are timely and equitably accessible to learners because some of the learners who subsist in immiserated contexts where these services are inaccessible drop out of school (Donald et al. 2020). Several studies show that these children adopt *streetism*, which refers to life on the streets, where they fend for themselves in contexts that typically defy normative development in children (Malindi 2009, 2014a, 2014b; Malindi & Theron 2010; Theron & Malindi 2010).

Worldwide, schools face the challenge of adolescent pregnancy that is prevalent in low-, middle- and high-income groups (Ghose

& John 2017; Jones et al. 2019; World Health Organisation [WHO] 2020). As teenage mothers, young girls suffer resource constraints and depletion in some contexts; however, some of them cope resiliently if social support from home and school, and community resources and services are accessible to them (Malindi 2018). Other schools are battling risks such as violence, substance abuse, suicide, gangsterism, homophobia, bullying, poverty, HIV and streetism (Donald et al. 2020; Machenjedze & Malindi 2018; Machenjedze, Malindi & Mbengo 2019; Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya 2014; Singer, Erbacher & Rosen 2018).

Whilst the list of social problems above is less than exhaustive, it is important to note that interventions aimed at ameliorating the plight of children experiencing psychosocial problems involve the medical, psychological and charity approaches (Malindi 2009; Van Ijzendoorn et al. 2011). Frequently, a combination of the aforementioned intervention approaches is considered. It is, however, important to note that the strengths of individual learners, as well as those sourced from their social and physical ecologies, should be considered in line with positive psychology (Donald et al. 2020; Ungar 2011).

According to the guidelines on the functions of SBSTs (DoE 2010), working as a team, teachers, school management and parents should find suitable ways of addressing barriers to learning. Support should be sought within and outside the school. This includes ways in which medical emergencies are handled in schools.

■ Overview of challenges besetting school-based support in South Africa

In South Africa, school-based support faces an assortment of challenges in rendering support to learners at risk. For example, in a study aimed at exploring the challenges faced by SBSTs, Makhalemele and Tlale (2020) found that SBSTs were hamstrung by the inability of the team coordinator to convene meetings,

poor communication amongst team members and other teachers, a lack of interest on the side of other teachers to serve on the team and inadequate support from school management. Some of the members of the team did not freely share knowledge and transfer the skills they had to others, whilst other members of the team lacked the skills needed to perform their assigned functions. School-based support team members were not fully and equally utilised in and by the team. The study found that SBSTs were struggling to accommodate diversity amongst themselves. They were thus unable to profit from diversity posed by gender, age differentiation, work experience and qualifications amongst teachers. Because of cultural considerations, younger team members were not free to teach their more experienced colleagues new knowledge. Furthermore, SBST members did not enjoy being reprimanded and made to be committed to the cause of support in the team and school. School-based support team members did not have enough time to perform support functions and teach regular classes; therefore, SBSTs experienced less than adequate commitment to the SBST activities. The team members felt that the paperwork was burdensome and thus had an impact on the efficiency of the team.

Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018) noted that the Foundation Phase teachers in the school they studied did not obtain sufficient support from the district, especially on various curriculum issues, and that district officials appeared to be confused. This had the potential to imperil the goals of making quality education accessible to learners. It is important to note that the quality of learner support is negatively affected by the fact that teachers often lack requisite knowledge and skills in differentiating the curriculum in order to cater for a wide range of learning needs (Dalton, McKenzie & Kahonde 2012).

Donohue and Bornman (2014) referred to an inflexible curriculum, the ensuing practice of separating learners at risk of experiencing poor developmental outcomes from the rest, the legacy of inequitable education funding in South Africa and the difficulty that

schools have in helping learners affected by socioeconomic risks. Furthermore, problems such as lack of parental participation in school matters, heavy teacher workloads, inadequate teacher training, multigrade problems and a lack of resources to support the education of learners at risk were noted (Adewumi & Mosito 2019; Heeralal & Jama 2014; Jama & Buka 2020).

Some SBSTs receive limited support from DBSTs (Hlalele et al. 2020). It is important to note that support to SBSTs may be limited by a dire shortage of specialists who could serve in DBSTs (Hay 2018). Makoelle (2014) found that school-based support was limited by the fact that SBST members did not collaborate as they had to but they tried to implement support practices taken from somewhere without evaluating them critically to determine their effectiveness within their contexts and cultures. The SBST members did not engage in critical reflection regarding prevalent practices within their school contexts. He also found that some members did not regard inclusion as part of their scope of practice. Their attitudes served to impair the provision of support to learners in need.

In another study by Mphahlele (2005), the issue of a lack of collaboration was mentioned, and at this time, it was between the SBST and Foundation Phase teachers. This study also found that the team did not hold meetings, and after the members had attended workshops organised by the DBST, the knowledge was not shared with other colleagues. Moreover, Foundation Phase teachers did not have confidence in the SBST. The team seemed to lack knowledge of their roles and responsibilities.

Another study found that members of SBSTs felt that they were inadequately trained to implement inclusive education, the language of teaching and learning served as a barrier, they lacked adequate psychosocial support and had unrealistic workloads and lacked resources (Rulwa-Mnatwana 2014). In a study aimed at exploring the viability of school-based support for vulnerable children in Johannesburg (Williams 2010), overcrowding and a lack of resources were documented, as well as overwhelming

cases of child abuse and violence in the community, underfunded feeding schemes and a shortage of social workers in the community. All of these are factors that hamper the functioning of SBSTs.

■ Full-service schools as centres of care and support

Several learners in ordinary schools develop and attend school in contexts that do not promote normal and ideal development in South Africa. In these environments, the risk of poor developmental outcomes and risks abound, and the resilience and well-being of learners are imperilled. Risk and adversity occur on personal and ecological levels, which include the family, school, community and cultural context. This means that risk and adversity render children psychosocially vulnerable. The term *vulnerability* is context-specific and contested worldwide.

Notwithstanding the contestations referred to above, Eloff, Ebersöhn and Viljoen (2007) cited Kelly who broadly defines vulnerable children as:

> [C]hildren who have been exposed to trauma (such as violence, abuse, and death), children living in compromising and adverse socioeconomic circumstances, girls, children from rural areas, street children, children with disabilities, children from urban slums or high-density areas, abandoned children, children in high-risk homes (especially those run by single parents), and social offenders. (p. 79)

The above definition is comprehensive and encompasses a wide range of risk and adversity. It should be noted that learners do not become at risk of poor developmental outcomes in the midst or aftermath of the risk and adversity. Instead, they are at risk even before they are exposed to risk and adversity. This necessitates that children should be seen to be at risk before, in the midst and during the aftermath of risk.

For many children, ordinary schools remain the only hope for meaningful growth and development, especially if families fail to

make social capital accessible to them. In this regard, Malindi and Machenjedze (2012) found that ordinary schools where there were caring teachers served as an active support system for at-risk learners and enabled children who had lived on the streets to cope resiliently. These children grew up in care, away from ideal family systems.

Theron (2016) argued that schools have the responsibility of supporting children's resilience, as teachers in ordinary classrooms can champion resilience. Caring teachers in ordinary schools can champion resilience as individuals and as members of SBSTs. Teachers can connect learners to various sources of support within and outside the school. This is even more important for learners in rural schools where resources are often inaccessible. Some of the learners in ordinary schools located within immiserated communities lack the socio-emotional, cognitive and behavioural skills required for successful early school adjustment (Tatlow-Golden et al. 2016). Learners who subsist in poor socioeconomic backgrounds where health-promoting resources are lacking, experience poorer health and sometimes drop out of school (Sznitman, Reisel & Khurana 2017). Such learners depend on teachers for support because these teachers serve as competent adults in their lives (Malindi & Machenjedze 2012; Silyvier & Nyandusi 2015).

Research showed that schools that enhanced self-efficacy in mathematics and cognitive activation amongst learners in Italy enabled them to be resilient (Alivernini, Manganelli & Lucidi 2016). Another study in Greece, which was aimed at identifying promotive resources that improved academic resilience amongst learners, showed that personal resources within learners, which include locus of control and self-efficacy beliefs, and resources within the family such as parental school involvement, support from family members and the father's and the mother's education, boosted academic resilience in learners (Anagnostaki et al. 2016).

From the discussion above, it is apparent that ordinary schools staffed by caring teachers who form part of active support

systems can enhance learners' abilities to cope with and overcome the risk of poor developmental outcomes. The idea of transforming ordinary schools into FSSs and special schools into resource centres (DoE 2001, 2010) has also taken root in South Africa. The question that may be asked is: What are FSSs and SSRCs?

Full-service schools are ordinary schools that have been equipped to provide for a wide range of learning needs amongst learners (DoE 2001:21) (cf. ch. 8). Full-service schools should be able to provide quality education to all learners (DoE 2010). Furthermore, these schools should accommodate and celebrate diversity by adopting the ethos and principles such as embracing a vision of a society for all, adopting a holistic, flexible and accommodative approach to development, engendering the spirit of collaboration amongst role players and adopting the principles of inclusivity and a strong culture of respect for all (DoE 2010).

Full-service schools are offshoots of inclusive education. They should be capable of responding to a wide range of learner needs through SBSTs and the support they receive from SSRCs and DBSTs. Collaboration with available and willing stakeholders within and outside the education department is key to the supportive role of ordinary and FSSs. However, in South Africa, there are constellations of challenges confronting ordinary and FSSs.

During the apartheid era, there were special schools in South Africa that catered for learners with specific categories of disability (DoE 2005). According to the EWP6 (DoE 2001), there were 380 special schools in South Africa and the majority of these were in the Transvaal and Cape provinces of the time. This meant that many learners who could have benefitted from these schools were not accommodated.

With the advent of the EWP6 (DoE 2001), special schools assumed a different role. For example, these schools would continue to cater for the needs of learners who require intense levels of support. The education department will raise the quality of education in special schools and ensure that learners who

require intense levels of support that mainstream schools cannot provide, are catered for in special schools. Special schools will be strengthened and play a key role in providing expertise and support, regarding the curriculum, assessment and instruction to full-service and ordinary schools. They will be part of the DBST and support neighbouring schools, including FSSs. Special schools will accommodate learners who are already enrolled in them and those who require secure accommodation and special programmes with high levels of support. Lastly, special schools will offer life skills training programme-to-work linkages to learners.

Essentially, special schools will move away from using segregation based on categories of disability, and learners will be permitted to return to ordinary schools if they show evidence that they will cope (DoE 2005). Specifically, according to the guidelines (DoE 2005), the following will be done (cf. ch. 8):

- Making existing special schools part of an integrated education system.
- Encouraging schools to operate within a disability rights framework.
- Upgrading capacity to provide quality services to learners with high-intensity needs.
- Upgrading physical facilities at schools in previously disadvantaged areas.
- Training and re-orientating all teachers to inclusive education.
- Training staff for new roles as part of DBST in skills such as networking, community development, developing SBSTs, teamwork, mentoring, counselling and transferring knowledge and skills to educators who, for example, teach large classes.
- Increasing the capacity to assist the process of de-institutionalisation and promoting the placement of learners in neighbourhood schools.

It is evident that FSSs and special schools should play an important role within an inclusive system of education in South Africa.

■ Methodology

The aim of this chapter was to explore the nature and quality of school-based support in three selected schools in South Africa. I adopted the qualitative research approach as my strategy of inquiry. Choosing qualitative research as my approach would situate me in the naturalistic context of the participants (cf. Denzin & Lincoln 2011). I needed to collect rich data based on the lived experiences of teachers who are confronted with learners facing risks of poor developmental outcomes in resource-constrained contexts (cf. Malindi 2018). I was mindful of the fact that schools that are respectful of children's rights typically provide pathways towards coping with barriers to optimal functioning (cf. Theron, Liebenberg & Malindi 2014). Such schools serve as nodes of care for at-risk learners.

■ Research design

I conducted a comparative study of three schools to examine the ways in which they provided psychosocial and psychoeducational support in South Africa, in the context of an inclusive system of education. To achieve depth in my data, I adopted multiple case study research involving a FSSs, an ordinary rural school and a special school as my research design. Case study research is a systematic inquiry into an event or a constellation of similar events that are related to a particular phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis 2007). In this regard, the school-based learner support process as a development-focused process in learner contexts beset with risk and adversity was the focus of the study. I needed to study school-based support and thus explore and document the similarities, dissimilarities and challenges faced by schools as social entities in providing the support needed by learners. A study of this nature occurs in a systematic way in naturalistic contexts (Rule & John 2011). Schools serve as naturalistic contexts for teachers.

◼ Theoretical framework

I premised this study against the social ecology of resilience theory (Ungar 2011, 2012, 2013) (cf. ch. 1). According to the social ecology of resilience theory, children's social and physical environments are pivotal to adaptive coping in the context of an assortment of the risks that may imperil their learning and development. This represents a move away from the medical model that located barriers to learning and development within the learner, excluding the system.

The social ecology of resilience theory is based on four principles, namely decentrality, complexity, atypicality and cultural relativity. The principle of decentrality requires that one should not focus solely on the individual child's strengths for evidence of resilience (Ungar 2011, 2013). Instead, we should focus on the strengths that the child's social and physical ecologies can provide. This suggests that the child should be decentred or cease to be the centre when intervention is planned, because the social and physical ecologies are important sources of coping resources.

Theron and Engelbrecht (2012) added that adults (teachers and parents) are part of a child's social ecology, and they serve as microsystemic strongholds for learners and provide the social capital that enables their well-being. The importance of the social and physical ecologies in enhancing development and learning in learners was noted in other studies that focused on youth at risk (Machenjedze et al. 2019; Malindi 2018) and the role of teachers (Malindi 2018; Malindi & Machenjedze 2012; Sharma & Sen 2012; Theron 2016; Theron, Liebenberg & Malindi 2013a).

Regarding the principle of complexity, Ungar (2011, 2013) argued that positive growth and development in the context of risk and the resources that enable adaptive coping are too complex for us to easily predict singular developmental trajectories in all contexts beset by risk and adversity. This complexity explains why young people have demonstrated buoyancy in contexts that would

typically predict poor developmental outcomes (Malindi 2014; Malindi & Theron 2010; Theron & Malindi 2010).

The principle of atypicality opens one's eyes to the possibility of learners coping with risk and adversity in ways that are not regarded as conventional or typical – a phenomenon called 'hidden resilience' (Malindi & Theron 2010; Ungar 2004, 2007, 2011). Often, in the absence of active and accessible social and physical support systems, children drop out of school and fend for themselves outside of their families. Some engage in substance abuse or even gang behaviour. These are atypical ways of adaptive coping in the midst of adversity that are reminiscent of hidden resilience (Malindi & Theron 2010; Ungar 2004, 2007, 2011).

The last and final principle of the social ecology of resilience theory is cultural relativity. This principle presupposes that the resources or processes that enable resilient coping in at-risk youth are both culturally and temporally (and, therefore, historically) nuanced (Ungar 2011, 2013). Research shows that a child's capacity to cope with psychosocial difficulties mirrors the influence of culture (Malindi & Theron 2010; Ungar 2011). One's religion and philosophy of life are dominant social influences that may or may not enable the resilience of a learner. Earlier, Ungar (2006) defined resilience as a product of the navigation and negotiation process towards resources that enable well-being and stated that communities should make these resources available in culturally meaningful ways. The design and implementation of interventions should take the child's cultural context into account, focusing on issues that will forward the child's development.

■ Sampling strategy

I needed a mix of schools in rural and urban contexts, as I desired a more complete picture of school-based support. I therefore sought schools in rural contexts where some resources are scarce as well as in urban contexts where resources abound. I sampled

three schools (one urban FSS, one rural school and one urban special school) in two provinces of South Africa. In the excerpts, the three schools are identified as 'UFSS', which is an urban FSS, 'RUOS', which is a rural ordinary school and 'SSRC', which is a special school and a resource centre.

I invited members of the SBSTs to take part in the research, because they were the ones who received referrals in their schools and coordinated external referrals if need be. This implies that I sampled purposively (cf. Barrat, Ferris & Lenton 2015). From the urban FSS, two members of the SBST volunteered to take part in the study. From the rural ordinary school, three members of the SBST volunteered to participate in the study and two members of the SBST from the special school volunteered to participate in the study. The total number of participants was seven.

It is important to note that the participants were all women. Their ages ranged from 39 to 58, with their work experience ranging from 13 to 33 years. Not all the participants had pre-service qualifications in counselling and special and remedial education. In fact, only Teacher 3 had furthered her qualifications and obtained a Further Diploma in Education (Remedial Education). The remaining four participants had received in-service training in either basic counselling or special or remedial education. All the participants had attended additional in-service training workshops

TABLE 4.1: The demographic details of the participants.

Schools	Participants	Age	Gender	Specialisation	Experience
UFSS	Teacher 1	54	Female	Special education	31
	Teacher 2	43	Female	Counsellor	20
RUOS	Teacher 1	39	Female	Remedial education	13
	Teacher 2	45	Female	Counsellor	21
	Teacher 3	58	Female	Remedial education	33
SSRC	Teacher 1	49	Female	Life Skills	26
	Teacher 2	44	Female	Educational psychologist	20

UFSS, urban full-service school; RUOS, rural ordinary school; SSRC, special school and a resource centre.

organised by provincial education departments on inclusive education and support services.

■ Data collection strategy

The COVID-19 pandemic placed specific requirements and responsibilities upon researchers to ethically ensure that the safety of the participants in their studies was ensured. I therefore chose to use a qualitative survey as my data collection strategy. The qualitative survey was sent to the participants by email. They were invited to answer the questions in it and return the survey via email to eliminate contact between the participants and me. I prepared broad questions focusing on the nature and quality of school-based support in South African schools.

■ Data analysis

In this qualitative research study, data were gathered in the form of text and required content analysis (cf. De Vos 2007). Although the questions had been formulated in English, the participants were free to write in any South African language of their choice, as I am proficient in nine official languages. The participants wrote their answers in English. I read the answers from the participants several times and labelled sections thereof, a process Nieuwenhuis (2007) calls 'open coding'. I examined the codes closely and thereafter merged some of them and developed themes.

■ Data presentation and discussion

The data that had been collected through a qualitative survey were processed through inductive content analysis. Four themes were developed, and they are discussed separately below. I use original, unedited excerpts from the data to support my assertions.

☐ The variable nature and quality of psychosocial support

The systematic analysis of data shows that there were stark differences in the nature and quality of school-based support in South African schools. For example, the urban FSS accommodated learners with different barriers to learning and had a separate remedial education class and a separate special education class for learners with intellectual impairments and those with more serious developmental needs such as intellectual impairments and autism spectrum disorder. There was an internal referral procedure when teachers in mainstream classes encountered learners who required more intense support. The following excerpt bears evidence of the assertions above:

> 'My school is a full-service school that accommodates learners who experience a variety of barriers to learning. Our grades range from Grade R to Grade 7. We, however, have a section we call an inclusive section, which is a separate class for these learners. We have been a full-service school since the [*sic*] 2013, if I remember correctly. We have learners who are intellectually challenged. Those who are mildly intellectually challenged are supported within their classrooms. When teachers have difficulties, they refer them to a remedial teacher through the SBST. The remedial teacher has her own classroom, in which she does her remedial work. We have a few autistic learners.' (Teacher 1, UFSS, 54-year-old female)

The above excerpt shows that Teacher 1, UFSS believed that inclusive education was some kind of education meant for learners with barriers to learning, whereas it is an education that includes everyone without discriminating against them.

Questioned about the nature and quality of support rendered to learners, the teachers from the rural ordinary school reported that they did not receive sufficient support. They added that the older members of staff did not embrace inclusion and did not attend in-service training workshops, as the following excerpt shows:

> 'We are a rural school with grades ranging from one to seven. Since we are not far from the township, we admit learners who come

from the township. We do have a SBST that finds it hard to do its work because we do not receive enough support. We have ageing members of staff who are not willing to learn new ways of teaching that involve teaching an inclusive classroom. Some do not wish to attend refresher workshops because they are about to retire.' (Teacher 2, RUOS, 45-year-old female)

The special school that took part in the study is a former Model C institution, named a remedial school that admitted learners from all major ethnic groups and children of foreign nationals. The school had created a nurturing environment for learners in smaller classes that enables individualised attention. The teachers in that school were adequately qualified, and the school had psychologists, an occupational therapist, a social worker and a nurse. The medium of instruction had been changed to English to accommodate all learners. The excerpt below provides the relevant information:

'It is a public remedial school for learners from Grade R to Grade 12 who experience barriers to learning which prevent them from coping adequately in a mainstream environment. Teaching and learning takes [*sic*] place in a nurturing environment with smaller classes (18 maximum), individual attention, specialised teaching by qualified experienced teachers as well as therapeutic intervention. We admit all four ethnic groupings in South Africa and foreign nationals from African and Asian countries. The medium of instruction is English, and the universal CAPS Curriculum is followed.' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

The teachers in the special school maintained positive relationships with learners and accommodated and celebrated diversity. They intentionally taught about diversity and instilled values in learners to ensure that they are internally motivated to learn and interact freely. Healthy communication and referral channels had been opened in the school as the excerpt below shows:

'I believe a positive teacher-pupil relationship is a crucial factor for effective teaching and learning, as it enables the child to learn in an environment where they feel welcomed and at ease. I speak openly about my broad views on diversity. I have learners from different

races, genders, and different religious beliefs. I always instil on [*sic*] them values of respect, dignity, tolerance, and acceptance. That helps a lot for me, as I have observed they engage more in lessons, show better behaviour and progress more academically. Good communication with my learners, I can describe it as an opportunity for exchange of feelings, information, and thoughts. That opens a door to give guidance, motivation, encouragement. I also do a lot of referral for support.' (Teacher 2, SSRC, 44-year-old female)

The teachers in the special school taught important intrapersonal life skills that included critical thinking, decision-making and problem solving. To foster the development of interpersonal life skills and self-care, programmes that covered career development, healthy living, leadership and citizenship had been put in place, as shown below:

'As a life skills educator, I cover a range of content that encourages them to become critical thinkers, decision-makers and problem solvers. The following programmes are in place: Peer mentoring, Career guidance (Career Expo Rocking Future yearly event), personal development (EQ skills), Citizenship and leadership skills, Sexual health, Mental health. The importance of a healthy lifestyle (the importance of nutrition, exercise, spiritual and psychological well-being. Physical education is compulsory. Pink Drive for breast cancer awareness and girl hygiene issues.' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

Another teacher at the special school added that she used life skills camps effectively to enable her to learn more about learners and to empower those who were reserved to reach out to others and develop social competence:

'I have always organised Life skills camps when learners are in Grade 10, pre-COVID-19 [...] I had an opportunity to have a different experience with learners in a different setting. Even the most reserved ones, used to come alive and show personal qualities they would not project in class.' (Teacher 2, SSRC, 44-year-old female)

The management of the special school was supportive to teachers in the execution of their daily duties. The management of the school organised workshops for professional development,

encouraged teachers to care for themselves and fostered healthy communication and collaboration, as shown below:

> 'SMT – they provide professional management and give guidance. They advocate for awareness about learning barriers that can affect learners differently and broaden our understanding of learner needs. They provide continuous in-service training for all staff including educators, from such services I am glad to say I am empowered and developed. I am forever grateful for that. I do share this sentiment with them. They go out of the[*ir*] way to bring in or send us to where we can collaborate with a pool of expertise, when a need arises. They do encourage us as staff to look after our well-being, so that we are able to attend to the learners. They show understanding of team dynamics to encourage good working relations. They help with planning, organisation, and communication to reach our target goals as staff, for effective teaching and learning. They have an open-door policy, to talk about anything that could hinder us to be effective at work.' (Teacher 2, SSRC, 44-year-old female)

The findings of the study showed that the nature and quality of support rendered to learners in various schools was different. It was influenced by the availability of capital and qualified human resources, positive staff attitude and a supportive management style.

☐ The variable outlook and composition of school-based support teams

The findings show that the composition of SBSTs across the schools that took part in the study was not uniform. However, the formula used to form the core team was similar in that the teams comprised teachers representing each grade. In the FSS, the principal and administrators formed part of the team, as the following excerpt shows:

> 'I am a member of the SBST. This team has in it a representative from each grade. It has the principal as a member and two administrators, and the deputy principal. In total, we are 13.' (Teacher 2, UFSS, 43-year-old female)

In the ordinary rural school, only one member of the team was qualified as a remedial teacher and one was a lay counsellor. However, the rest of the team members were not qualified as support teachers, and this made it difficult for the SBST to support learners at risk:

'I am the leader of the team. I think we do not function the way we should because we seldom have time to meet as a team. Again, when we meet, we often find it hard to say what we are going to do to support learners since we are a rural school. Our team consists of seven teachers representing each grade and one head of department. Only I have a qualification in remedial education. Others have in-service training that we feel was inadequate. One of us is also a counsellor.' (Teacher 3, RUOS, 58-year-old female)

In addition to grade representatives, the team at the special school had therapists that included psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, school counsellors, a social worker and a nurse, as indicated below:

'The team consists of the SBST co-ordinator, representatives from each phase from primary school, high school, therapy, psychology and remedial departments or sections in the school. In fact, there are primary and high school educators with training in learning difficulties. We have remedial educators, Educational Psychologists, Speech Therapists, Occupational Therapists, School Counsellors, a Social Worker, and a School Nurse.' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

Furthermore, the special school had a health and safety committee that formed part of the active support system at the school:

'Health and safety committee – is responsible to initiate, promote and maintain safety and review measures of ensuring the health and safety of learners and staff (teaching and non-teaching staff.) They disseminate and explain information from health and safety policies. Members meet whenever its necessary to do risk assessments, provide guidance and training where necessary. They display safety posters in and around the school. The[y] do safety drills to keep everyone informed for emergency preparedness. They organise training for First Aiders to make sure we have valid certificates.' (Teacher 2, SSRC, 44-year-old female)

The support team of the special school functioned well. The members learned from one another, as they exchanged knowledge and skills, as indicated below:

> 'We work as a team, with one goal in mind to develop learners holistically. A supportive environment makes for a better working atmosphere. When the pressure at work becomes too much, we re-affirm one another. That becomes a confidence/morale booster. We draw and learn from each other, as we have different skills, experience, and expertise. I am afforded an opportunity to be a mentor as one of experienced educators for student teachers and they end up working in the school. That is more humbling knowing you building a legacy that will be there even if I leave the institution.' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

It can be concluded that the findings of this study show that the SBSTs in the schools that took part in the study did not function in the same way.

☐ Variable facilities and infrastructure

The findings of the study show that the schools that took part in the study did not have similar facilities. The FSS had data projectors that were used in classrooms to facilitate teaching. However, the school did not have Wi-Fi facilities for teachers to teach remotely. During the lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, teachers were unable to use technology to teach remotely:

> 'In our school we have a lot of teaching aids. In our classes, our teachers have data projectors. In my special education class, we have mini laptops for learners. We also have a big library, that is fully equipped. We have a Maths lab. I think we need more technology and training because we need to use it more now that we are facing a COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, we are not able to do online teaching since our learners do not have devices. And some of the teachers do not know how to teach through Zoom. In 2020, we could not do anything, we waited for schools to reopen so we could te[a]ch.' (Teacher 1, UFSS, 54-year-old female)

The FSS did not have sufficient staff. The classes were bigger and there were only two support teachers – a remedial teacher and a

support teacher. They both had separate classes for remedial education and special education:

> 'In our school, we need more manpower. We have many children, but we have one remedial teacher. And half of the 900 learners in the school need intensive support. It would be best if each grade had a remedial teacher. I am a support educator in our school. I have my class for learners who need intensive support, who cannot benefit from remedial education. Such learners are referred to my class through the district since we do not have enough special schools in our town.' (Teacher 2, UFSS, 43-year-old female)

The ordinary rural school had temporary structures for classrooms and poor road infrastructure leading to the school. Also, the school had neither a library nor a computer centre, and crime was a problem for the school:

> 'We do not have permanent structures since our classes are mobile classes. We do not have a library, or computer centre. In fact, even the road leading to our school is bad. We have a problem of burglary since our classes are temporary structures.' (Teacher 2, RUOS, 45-year-old female)

The special school had a library that, according to the teachers, should be reimagined in line with the technological era. The buildings at the school were not accessible, as there were no ramps for wheelchair users and learners who used crutches. The rails were unstable and thus dangerous for learners. In general, the buildings did not allow for learners with physical impairments who had learning difficulties too. However, the teachers had a positive attitude to diversity, and they demonstrated empathy towards learners:

> 'The traditional model of a school library is a challenge, needs to be reimagined to include experts in education technology and experts in information management. The school started as a small school, there is an increasing demand for admissions, which leads to overcrowding. Most parents do not attend parent feedback meetings even pre-COVID times. There are no ramps for wheelchairs yet and the rails are not stable. There are wide entrances for wheelchair users and those who use crutches. Unfortunately, the buildings do not allow for learners with severe physical handicaps. Teachers have positive attitudes towards learners. They empathise with learners.' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

Although the special school had capital resources, it did not keep up with the changing need of developing the school infrastructure:

'Yes, there is support but when it comes to infrastructure development that is done under the public works programme. It takes a bit longer for infrastructure to be developed. Work in progress. LTSM is provided, Print- Textbooks, pamphlets, handouts, study guides, Visual-Charts, Audi-visual [*sic*] (Few TV sets), Electronic Interactive [*sic*] (Computers, calculators).' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

Although the special school had a media laboratory, the teachers expressed a wish for reading and relaxation areas and a functional computer laboratory. There was a need for more resources to accommodate the needs of more teachers and learners:

'We have a fully functional media centre that is open till late afternoon where both teachers and learners are afforded the opportunity to use educational resources for all subjects. Books, Laptops, data projectors, stimulating toys. There is a need for separate reading and relaxation areas within the centre for all learners. [*A*] Digital research area would be beneficial for all learners. The few computer labs we have do not have sufficient devices to be used by all learners. The CAT lab is mainly used for learners taking the subject. The province accommodates only Grade 8 and 9 learners. TV sets and tablets are either for use by educators or learners.' (Teacher 2, SSRC, 44-year-old female)

The findings show that the special school had better resources compared to the full-service and rural schools. The special school was smaller compared to the full-service and rural school, and although it had a shortage of some resources, it still was in a better position compared to the FSS and rural school.

☐ Challenges besetting school-based support

The findings show that the schools that took part in the study faced challenges. The FSS accommodated learners from poor socioeconomic backgrounds and learners with physical impairments:

'Our learners are mainly from poor families. Some of them are children from neighbouring schools. They are referred to us when teachers

there feel that the learners are not making satisfactory progress. Now most of our learners are those who have learning barriers. We have a few learners who use crutches, but they are in mainstream classes.' (Teacher 1, UFSS, 54-year-old female)

The DBST had fewer professionals to be able to support schools in the area. For example, learners who needed psychosocial support did not receive such support, as there was one psychologist in the district. It, therefore, took a long time for learners with psychosocial needs to be assisted. The district did not have sufficient curriculum specialists and social workers:

'I would say we have limited support from the DBST because there is a shortage of professionals in the district. In our school and in the district, we have lots of kids who need a psychologist but now we have only one psychologist in the district. I can say in our country and our schools, we need psychologists in our schools. Since we rely on the only one in the district, she cannot do all the work in the district alone. So, we refer learners who require psychological intervention, and wait for up to six months without any intervention. We have a shortage of other specialists like social workers, remedial specialists, and curriculum specialists. So, we wait long for children to get support.' (Teacher 2, UFSS, 43-year-old female)

Another challenge the FSS experienced was that parents were reluctant to grant the school permission to transfer learners to either mainstream or special schools, preferring that those learners remain in the special class at the school:

'We have a challenge with parents wanting to have their children admitted to the school despite capacity problems. And those whose children are in my support class for those with disabilities always complain when a child must exit my class and join a mainstream class or a special school that serves as a resource centre. They want them to stay in the class so the department would do well to increase the number of classes and support teachers.' (Teacher 1, UFSS, 54-year-old female)

The ordinary rural school too accommodated learners from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of those learners were from single-parent families with young parents. The DBST had fewer members of staff and was not fully capable to support the school

as expected. The COVID-19 pandemic had worsened the unavailability of the DBST, as the school did not have consistent access to Wi-Fi:

> 'Our kids are from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. I noticed that some are from single-parent households where the mother is actually very young. The parents are unemployed mostly, and some are in low-wage employment. We struggle to get the DBST members to visit the school. Last year was worse because of COVID-19 because those few officials did not have a way to connect to us since our Wi-Fi is weak and often it does not work. We struggle to enable children to benefit from the district support team since they are few and come to us after a long time.' (Teacher 1, RUOS, 39-year-old female)

The special school experienced challenges such as criminal activity in the form of muggings and burglaries, failing power and infrastructure and water supply interruptions:

> 'We had [*a*] few cases of learners mugged on their way to school. Crime – car theft on the school premises, whilst there was a fundraising event. School burglaries. Power failure and the school has a back-up generator for the CAT Lab. Bursting sewage pipes around the school. Water interruptions. [*A*] Lack of involvement of the local government officials.' (Teacher 2, SSRC, 44-year-old female)

The teachers of the special school reported that parental involvement declined as learners advanced to high school. Some parents saw language as a barrier:

> 'I have noticed parental involvement declines as learners progress to high school. I think parents believe their involvement is no longer a great need as many teens have a desire for independence even if they have learning difficulties. They tend to push parents away by not sharing valuable information with them, even if the school has sent important information. However, some learners still believe they need their [*sic*] parental support. Some parents normally voice language barrier[*s*], [*and a*] lack of knowledge once subjects are specialised. The educators do go an extra mile to offer intervention programmes, extra classes. We have a translation committee, which I am a member of, to help facilitate communication in vernacular languages.' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

The teachers of the special school reported that learners' emotional well-being affected their ability to do well academically.

Some of the learners had problems emanating from their home or community environments:

> 'The learners' emotional well-being majorly affects their ability to do well. Learners in our school have Specific Learning Difficulties [*sic*]. (Autism, Asperger's syndrome, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, attention deficit, anxiety disorders.) Emotional barriers emanating from the learning difficulties lead to [*a*] lack of self-esteem and confidence, fear of embarrassment, doubt, and feelings of adequacy. Some learners are affected by challenging home and community environments.' (Teacher 2, SSRC, 44-year-old female)

The findings show that the schools experience problems ranging from personal and familial issues to community risks and that they do not receive enough support from the districts.

☐ Multi-stakeholder collaboration

The EWP6 (DoE 2001) recommends that support to learners experiencing learning barriers should be rendered through multi-stakeholder collaboration. The findings of this study show that school were making efforts to reach out to stakeholders who could strengthen school-based support. The teachers from the urban FSS reported that the school benefitted from NGOs to support learners who needed social services. For example, the school benefitted from the business sector or community members who made donations to learners from poor socioeconomic backgrounds:

> 'Up to so far, I do not see much collaboration. But yes, sometimes we involve NGOs that have funding to assist when we need their support. Sometimes we refer learners who require social services to NGOs that have social workers. NGOs have programmes on gender-based violence and they help families where parents fight. There are NGOs that deal with disabilities, so we involve them because they have disability programmes. They also do awareness campaigns. The business sector does not provide much support, but community members do donate shoes for learners.' (Teacher 2, UFSS, 43-year-old female)

The urban FSS was in the vicinity of a healthcare clinic, which enabled collaboration on health matters affecting learners

at the school. The Department of Social Development assisted the school when the need for a social worker arose. The teachers mentioned the supportive role of local government that had a section on disability as part of the mayoral committee:

> 'Our school is near a clinic, so they help us a lot when we need them. They either come to the school or we take the child to them. They also come to the school to immunise the kids. When we have children, who require a social worker, such as those who have serious family problems, we phone the department of social development through our coordinator. Our local government supports the school a lot. They sponsor our kids [...] they buy them food and sponsor their transportation when the kids have to go and play sports outside town. Since we have children with disabilities, local government has a section that deals with disabilities. So, they are very supportive of us as a full-service school.' (Teacher 1, UFSS, 54-year-old female)

The teachers of the urban FSS mentioned that the school had implemented an adopt-a-cop programme, with a policeman who supported the school regarding matters such as crime prevention and substance abuse:

> 'We have an adopt a cop programme at our school. The adopted policeman works closely with the safety committee on substance abuse matters. The police help us whenever we need their services for example when kids experiment with drugs. They come and search their bags to see what they have. We luckily, do not have kids in rehab.' (Teacher 2, UFSS, 43-year-old female)

Likewise, teachers from the rural ordinary school reported that the school had adopted a policeman who assisted them regarding crime affecting the school. The school benefitted from the benevolence of NGOs and received support from the Department of Social Development in the form of social workers. The Department of Health supported the school by extending its programmes to include deworming and dental health:

> 'The people we work with are the police especially when it comes to crime. Then some NGOs help us when we need social workers and when some of our children are hungry. They donate food to the families and here at school, the kids eat from the feeding scheme programme. Some NGOs organise that the kids be given school uniform[s].

Social workers from the department of social development come after [*sic*] many months after we have reported the case. The department of health helps us when kids are ill or must be checked for worms. Oh, they teach kids about dental hygiene, but they check them first […] Those are the people who help us.' (Teacher 2, RUOS, 45-year-old female)

The special school benefitted from private companies and newspapers:

'There are different companies that are friends of the school, and they give continuous support, through donations and fundraising initiatives. Local newspapers do collaborate with the school to broadcast sport events, student achievements and other co-curricular activities.' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

In addition, the special school was assisted by the education district office and other departments, such as the Departments of Social Development, Health, Public Works, the South African Police Services and Correctional Services:

'Education district office. Workshops on curriculum since the kids write national matric exams. Amanuensis. Department of social development. Foster grants. Department of health. Health screening for all and dental screening. Awareness campaigns on wellness. Refer other learners to other specialists. Department of Public Works. Infrastructure development. Safety and security (SAPS). Adopt a cop. Awareness campaigns about crime and substance abuse. Correctional Services – Pillar to post project. Meet an offender programme about prison life and advise them to not get involved in crime in the juvenile section.' (Teacher 2, SSRC, 44-year-old female)

The findings show that the schools collaborate with and are assisted by NGOs, private companies and government departments to support learners at risk.

■ Availability of opportunities for further development

The findings show that the schools that took part in my study had opportunities for professional development. The FSS was assisted by the neighbouring special school on matters relating

to the curriculum, didactic approaches and assessment procedures. Furthermore, the special school involved the FSS with regard to workshops:

> 'Since we became a full-service school, we admit learners who would otherwise have been sent to special schools. And the support we receive from the department of education is much more than the support we received when we were a normal school. We have a special school that serves as our resource centre. The school helps us a lot when we must plan and when we need advice on the curriculum, teaching methods and assessment. They let us know when there are workshops for special schools.' (Teacher 2, UFSS, 43-year-old female)

The teachers of the rural ordinary school bemoaned the short, less effective workshops they attended:

> 'Ja [*Yes*] we sometimes go to workshops, but we benefit less from them because everything is abstract. Sometimes I think we should be able to observe an expert doing what we need to do in our classes. These workshops are few and very short. They happen in the afternoon when there is really no time.' (Teacher 1, RUOS, 39-year-old female)

On the other hand, teachers from the special school attended and benefitted from workshops on neurodevelopmental learning needs, career development, teen suicide, literacy, dyslexia, health, and safety and first aid:

> 'Yes, to mention a few symposia on neurodevelopmental learning needs. Other workshops focus on career transition for people with disabilities, ADHD, teen suicide, literacy and dyslexia, health and safety, and first aid. I believe they are informative and empowering workshops. Good teachers become great by going beyond the [*sic*] textbook knowledge. They improve my skills and abilities. One gets an opportunity to collaborate with different teams to share experiences and knowledge.' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

Furthermore, the special school benefitted from a Bible society that routinely donated Bibles to learners and teachers alike, and a myriad of civil society organisations that ran campaigns on sexuality, education, teenage suicide, depression, martial arts, fitness and dental hygiene:

> 'The school has [*a*] scripture union for daily prayers and devotionals. [*A*] Bible society they bring Bibles [*sic*]. Sexuality education

programmes provided sexuality education to learners. Teen suicide workshops and depression. Drug awareness campaigns. Warriors of faith – Martial Arts & Kickboxing: physical fitness, martial arts, and kickboxing. Active Education: fitness programmes. Health-screening for wellness for both learners and educators. Dental hygiene campaign.' (Teacher 1, SSRC, 49-year-old female)

The findings show that all the schools benefitted from workshops presented by the DoE and several programmes run by NGOs. However, the special school has access to more programmes than the other schools.

■ Discussion

The findings of this comparative study provide an interesting picture of the variable nature and quality of school-based support in South African schools. In summary, the findings show that the nature and quality of school-based support for at-risk learners vary according to the learning context and the resources in it. The findings partially reflect the legacy of apartheid education provision, as the full-service and ordinary school lacked the resources that the special school, which is a former Model C school, had. It also reflected negatively on the democratic government, which had not adequately addressed these matters. A similar finding was made by Makhalemele and Tlale (2020).

A study by Hay (2018) has found that districts do not have sufficient numbers of staff with requisite skills. The findings of that study indicate that the SBST is hamstrung by a lack of support from the district in supporting learners to show resilience in the context of risk. Districts are also crippled by staff shortages. The findings of my study show that despite challenges, SBSTs try their best to collaborate in providing support; however, the three participating schools did not have similar networks of support to collaborate successfully. A lack of collaboration was found to be a challenge in a study by Mphahlele (2005) as well.

The findings show that despite all the changes in initial teacher training at South African universities, the teachers in the schools

that took part in the study lacked adequate qualifications to render support to learners. For example, the FSS and ordinary school had very few support teachers compared to the special school. The ordinary rural school had ageing staff members who had been trained long before the advent of inclusive education. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the special school was in a better position to render a higher quality of support compared to the full-service and ordinary rural school. A study by Rulwa-Mnatwana (2014) found this to be the case in a different context as well.

What seemed to be missing was evidence that the special school served as a resource centre to a FSS and ordinary schools in its neighbourhood. The FSS that took part in the study did collaborate with the resource centre in its vicinity; however, it was not evident that the FSS worked with other neighbouring schools to support learners. Neighbouring schools only referred learners to the FSS, without showing a need to learn from it.

None of the teachers of these schools mentioned how their provinces supported their efforts to enable learning and development amongst learners at risk. They did, however, mention how other state departments offered various kinds of support to them as individual schools. It was not evident that DBSTs facilitated any form of networking for the schools to perform their supportive roles. The schools went out of their way to find NGOs and departments to partner with.

There was evidence of in-service training for teachers on matters relating to support. However, the teachers at the ordinary rural school bemoaned the shortness and inadequacy of these workshops.

On the positive side, the findings of this study demonstrated that the schools were willing to serve as nodes of care and support for learners at risk despite lack of training and resources (Heeralal & Jama 2014; Jama & Buka 2020). Theron (2016) and Malindi and Machenjedze (2012) recommended that schools

serve as microsystemic strongholds for learners at risk. This recommendation was made after it had been made clear that learners who functioned resiliently were those whose schools did what they could to support their learning and development. As studies by Alivernini et al. (2016) and Anagnostaki et al. (2016) also show, schools can provide protective resources for learners to become resilient despite the barriers or risks they are facing.

The findings of my study reflect the usefulness of the social ecology of resilience theory (cf. section 'Theoretical framework') in learner support endeavours. For example, the findings highlight the reliance of schools on external services and community resources in enabling learners to cope with risk or barriers to learning. Unfortunately, the findings also show that some of the schools are not in locations where the required services are available and accessible to at-risk learners. Ungar (2005) recognises that coping ability depends on what is built within the child and on what is built around the child. In other words, collaboration amongst microsystemic strongholds, such as families and schools (Theron & Engelbrecht 2012), and the wider community is key in enabling learners who are psychosocially vulnerable to overcome barriers on personal and socioecological levels.

Whilst it is important to consider the child as an individual both in assessment and subsequent support provision, it is equally important for role players to consider a child's social ecology and the resources it can provide. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argued that an inclusive pedagogy discourages the labelling and separation of learners at risk from their peers, rejects the belief that at-risk learners will delay others and promotes ways of ensuring respect for the dignity of at-risk learners in schools and communities that recognise social justice and cohesion. In other words, this has implications for assessment and intervention approaches that focus on the individual child to the exclusion of the contribution of the child's social ecology are limiting.

■ Conclusion

The findings of this study show that psychosocial support requires reconceptualisation and reconfiguration in line with the Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (Ungar 2011). Furthermore, psychosocial support should increase in quality and be extended to learners at risk. This will require adequate staffing in schools and districts, rapid school infrastructure development, strong networks of support and adequate methods of risk identification and adequate support.

The study was not without limitations, though. For example, the study involved two schools in one province and one special school in another. It would be interesting to replicate the study with more FSSs, ordinary rural schools, urban ordinary schools and special schools. The COVID-19 pandemic served as another limitation. The methods that could be used to generate data were limited to the qualitative survey that was used. The teachers in the FSS and the ordinary rural school did not have access to Wi-Fi for online discussions to be initiated. It would be interesting to know what the picture would be like had these teachers been interviewed online.

As this was a qualitative study, the generalisation of the findings to other contexts was not desired; however, the transferability of findings to similar contexts is possible within limits. It has become clear that FSSs and ordinary schools in South Africa should have resident psychologists, counsellors and social workers to ensure access to psychosocial services. Universities should train more mental healthcare workers, and districts should attract psychologists, counsellors, social workers and occupational and speech therapists to strengthen DBSTs. Schools and districts should recognise their roles as change agents who are relied upon for social justice to be extended to learners with diverse needs. Diversity should be normalised and celebrated for social cohesion to be achieved.

The functioning of psychosocial educational support in the education districts of South Africa

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■ Introduction

In this chapter, a close look is taken at the functioning of psychosocial educational support in the education districts of the nine South African provinces. The focus here is on the

current structures of ESS or psychosocial educational support and how support services are rendered throughout the country. One of the key features of the post-apartheid dispensation was the establishment of nine provinces, whereas the pre-1994 South Africa had only four provinces and a number of homelands. The nine provinces afforded the provincial education departments the opportunity to manage education closer to educators and learners, with some flexibility in terms of structuring the head offices and district offices (Bantwini & Diko 2011). Along the same line, the provinces had some leeway to structure how psychosocial educational support or ESS would be delivered.

The EWP6 of 2001 represents the broad outline of how ESS should be structured, but no fixed or rigid guidelines exist regarding a number of issues. However, what was clear regarding ESS operations on district level was that each district should have at least one DBST, each school should have an SBST, FSSs were to be established per district and some special schools would initially be identified to become resource centres (DoE 2001). The medical model was to give way to the social or ecological model within inclusive education (D'Aguiar 2019), with an emphasis on specialist support educators driving the service instead of psychologists as in the past (Hay 2003).

In this chapter, an overview is initially provided of the nine provinces of South Africa and their education districts. Thereafter, policy is analysed in terms of how psychosocial educational support was to be rendered across South Africa, followed by a concise description of the more common ESS structures in the districts. Each province is then assessed in terms of its structuring of and services rendered within ESS. Lastly, the ESS services across the provinces are compared, the challenges encountered are highlighted and the question of whether more alignment is necessary or possible in the country is discussed.

■ An overview of the nine provinces and their education districts in South Africa

The democratic dispensation in South Africa ushered in a change of provinces – from the previous four, the Cape Province, the Orange Free State, Natal and Transvaal, to nine provinces, namely Gauteng, Limpopo (earlier called Northern Province), Mpumalanga, North-West, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape and Western Cape (South African Government 2020). Figure 5.1 below provides an overview of the current nine provinces.

These nine provinces are each divided into education districts, but not all of them use the term 'district', and all of them are not
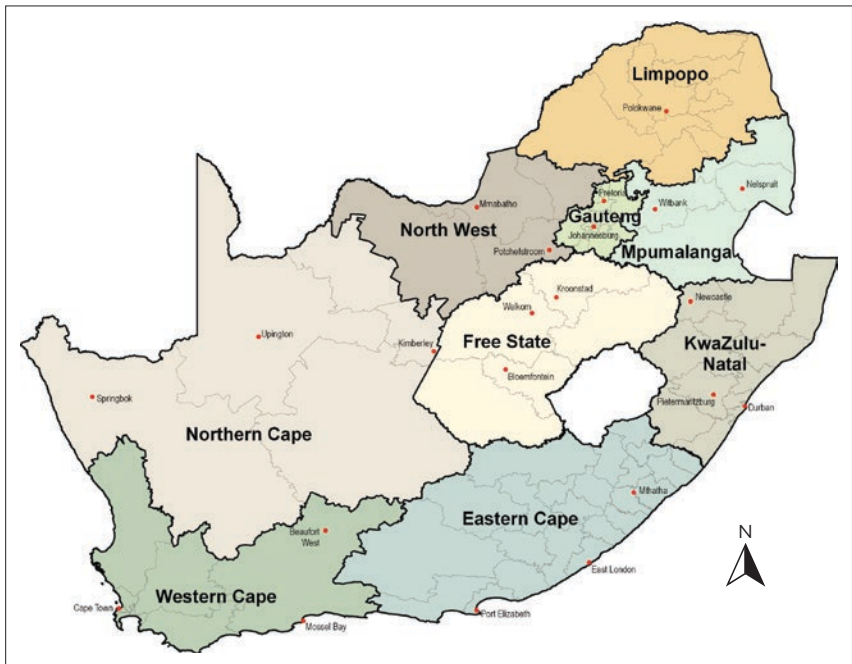
Source: DBE and UNICEF (2013).
FIGURE 5.1: The nine provinces of South Africa.

based on the same demarcation principles. Mpumalanga and North-West use the term 'region' to indicate a district. Most provincial education departments utilised the boundaries of district municipalities to demarcate education districts, but exceptions occur. The Eastern Cape used local municipalities to demarcate education districts (therefore the large number of 23 districts); North-West adjusted the boundaries of its education districts somewhat from the district municipalities, and provinces with metropolitan areas divided their metropoles into districts (DBE & UNICEF 2013).

Initially, the country had 52 education districts, but this number has now increased to 86. One of the latest changes was Limpopo splitting its original 5 districts into 10, but despite that, the province still has three of the larger geographical districts in the country (DBE & UNICEF 2013).

Figure 5.2 presents the current education districts of all provinces.
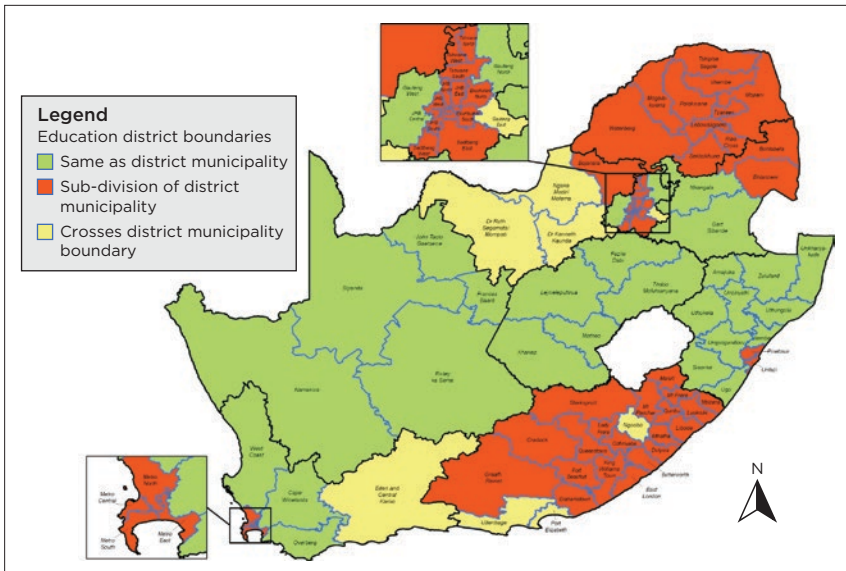
Source: DBE and UNICEF (2013).
FIGURE 5.2: The 86 education districts of South Africa.

TABLE 5.1: Number of education districts per province.

Province	Number of districts
North-West	4
Mpumalanga	4
Northern Cape	5
Free State	5
Western Cape	8
Limpopo	10
KwaZulu-Natal	12
Gauteng	15
Eastern Cape	23
Total	**86**
Average	**10**

Source: DBE and UNICEF (2013).

The education districts per province are indicated in Table 5.1. From this, it is clear that inconsistencies exist at the geographic demarcation level, with the geographically largest province, the Northern Cape, having only five districts, and a large but smaller province, such as the Eastern Cape, having 23 districts.

The next table provides an overview of the geographical area of each of the education districts, as well as the number of schools. The rank order in terms of geographical size and number of schools per district is also provided. Interesting to note is that the largest three districts are located in the Northern Cape (Namakwa [126 836 km^2], Pixley ka Seme and Siyanda), with Eden and Central Karoo of the Western Cape in the fourth place and Dr Ruth Sogomotsi Mompati of North West in the fifth place. The picture changes somewhat when the ranking in terms of the number of schools is viewed: Vhembe in Limpopo has the largest number of schools (792), followed by Zululand in KwaZulu-Natal (767), Polokwane (692) and Sekhukune (676) in Limpopo and Uthungulu in KwaZulu-Natal (674) (DBE & UNICEF 2013; see Table 5.2).

More interesting deductions can be made from this table when the smallest geographical areas and smallest number of schools are viewed. The smallest districts are Johannesburg Central (153 km^2) in

TABLE 5.2: Geographical area and number of schools per district.

Province	Education district	Area in km²	Area rank (1 = largest area)	Schools	School rank (1 = most schools)
EC	Butterworth	3323	58	400	24
EC	Cofimvaba	3615	56	282	33
EC	Cradock	17 752	20	85	82†
EC	Dutywa	3030	61	349	29
EC	East London	3606	57	316	31
EC	Fort Beaufort	6460	44	253	42
EC	Graaff-Reinet	39 870	6	83	83†
EC	Grahamstown	6223	45	87	81†
EC	King Williams Town	7159	42	439	19
EC	Lady Frere	3238	60	162	70
EC	Libode	3898	54	424	22
EC	Lusikisiki	3913	53	355	28
EC	Maluti	4370	50	231	49
EC	Mbizana	2412	68	217	55
EC	Mt Fletcher	5359	46	187	59
EC	Mt Frere	2480	67	251	44
EC	Mthatha	3020	62	364	27
EC	Ngcobo	4515	49	221	54
EC	Port Elizabeth	2648	66	263	36
EC	Queenstown	7844	41	182	61
EC	Qumbu	2705	63	255	40
EC	Sterkspruit	20 043	18	170	65
EC	Uitenhage	11 407	32	168	68
FS	Fezile Dabi	21 301	17	252	43
FS	Lejweleputswa	31 930	9	276	35
FS	Motheo	13 999	24	325	30
FS	Thabo Mofutsanyana	28 346	12	490	15
FS	Xhariep	34 250	8	75	85†
GT	Ekurhuleni North	792	73	222	53
GT	Ekurhuleni South	491	79†	198	58
GT	Gauteng East	1385	70	170	65
GT	Gauteng North	4170	51	71	86†
GT	Gauteng West	4087	52	167	69
GT	Johannesburg Central	153	86†	224	51

Source: DBE and UNICEF (2013).
†*Smallest 10*.
EC, Eastern Cape; FS, Free State; GT, Gauteng; KZN, KwaZulu-Natal; LP, Limpopo; MP, Mpumalanga; NC, Northern Cape; NW, North-West; WC, Western Cape.

TABLE 5.2 (Continues...): Geographical area and number of schools per district.

Province	Education district	Area in km²	Area rank (1 = largest area)	Schools	School rank (1 = most schools)
GT	Johannesburg East	441	81[†]	224	51
GT	Johannesburg North	339	83[†]	200	57
GT	Johannesburg South	417	82[†]	177	63
GT	Johannesburg West	295	84[†]	158	71
GT	Sedibeng East	2657	65	90	80[†]
GT	Sedibeng West	776	75	144	74
GT	Tshwane North	688	76	155	73
GT	Tshwane South	840	72	259	37
GT	Tshwane West	646	77[†]	158	71
KZN	Amajuba	6911	43	250	45
KZN	Ilembe	3269	59	431	20
KZN	Pinetown	1504	69	541	9
KZN	Sisonke	11 127	35	451	18
KZN	Ugu	5047	47	507	14
KZN	Umgungundlovu	8934	37	541	9
KZN	Umkhanyakude	12 824	29	540	11
KZN	Umlazi	788	74	511	13
KZN	Umzinyathi	8589	38	485	16
KZN	Uthukela	11 326	34	457	17
KZN	Uthungulu	8213	40	674	5
KZN	Zululand	14 799	22	767	2
LP	Lebowakgomo	4683	48	249	46
LP	Mogalakwena	12 770	30	280	34
LP	Mopani	21 782	16	537	12
LP	Polokwane	12 306	31	692	3
LP	Riba Cross	3896	55	258	38
LP	Sekhukhune	9531	36	678	4
LP	Tshipise Sagole	13 086	28	225	50
LP	Tzaneen	2703	64	181	62
LP	Vhembe	8263	39	792	1
LP	Waterberg	36 734	7	183	60
MP	Bohlabela	13 597	25	387	26
MP	Ehlanzeni	14 014	23	430	21
MP	Gert Sibande	31 841	10	553	7
MP	Nkangala	17 043	21	549	8

Source: DBE and UNICEF (2013).
[†]*Smallest 10*.
EC, Eastern Cape; FS, Free State; GT, Gauteng; KZN, KwaZulu-Natal; LP, Limpopo; MP, Mpumalanga; NC, Northern Cape; NW, North-West; WC, Western Cape.

TABLE 5.2 (Continues...): Geographical area and number of schools per district.

Province	Education district	Area in km²	Area rank (1 = largest area)	Schools	School rank (1 = most schools)
NC	Frances Baard	13 518	26	124	76
NC	John Taolo Gaetsewe	27 283	13	170	65
NC	Namakwa	126 836	1	81	84†
NC	Pixley ka Seme	102 727	2	99	78†
NC	Siyanda	102 524	3	106	77†
NW	Bojanala	13 443	27	581	6
NW	Dr Kenneth Kaunda	18 084	19	255	40
NW	Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati	49 491	5	391	25
NW	Ngaka Modiri Molema	23 864	14	415	23
WC	Cape Winelands	22 309	15	293	32
WC	Eden and Central Karoo	62 185	4	241	47
WC	Metro Central	251	85†	257	39
WC	Metro East	504	78†	171	64
WC	Metro North	1253	71	237	48
WC	Metro South	452	80†	207	56
WC	Overberg	11 405	33	97	79†
WC	West Coast	31 104	11	139	75

Source: DBE and UNICEF (2013).
†*Smallest 10.*
EC, Eastern Cape; FS, Free State; GT, Gauteng; KZN, KwaZulu-Natal; LP, Limpopo; MP, Mpumalanga; NC, Northern Cape; NW, North-West; WC, Western Cape.

Gauteng, Metro Central (Cape Town) in the Western Cape and Johannesburg North, West and South in Gauteng – all in big metros. In terms of the smallest number of schools, however, the picture changes somewhat: Gauteng North is the smallest (71), then Xhariep (75) in the Free State, Namakwa (81) in the Northern Cape and Graaff-Reinet (83) and Cradock (85) in the Eastern Cape.

This brief analysis provides an idea of how complex it is to provide psychosocial educational services of a similar standard to all learners dispersed across the vast South African landscape. How does one equalise ESS between the largest Namakwa district (126 836 km²) and the smallest Johannesburg Central district (153 km²)? Namakwa district is 829 times the size of

Johannesburg Central. And how does one render equitable ESS between the district with the largest number of schools (Vhembe with 792) and the smallest number (Gauteng North with 71)? Vhembe has 11 times the number of schools in Gauteng North.

The Ministry of Basic Education must have been under the same impression when it published Notice 300 of 2013, *Policy on the Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities of Education Districts* (DBE 2013). The subheading of the document reads 'effective districts, better quality'. Herein it is acknowledged that inequalities amongst education districts are a cause for concern. Section 12 under the rationale for the policy (DBE 2013) reads as follows:

> The Constitution protects the citizens' rights to education and equal access to government services. The reality is that educational opportunity and educational success are unequally distributed, and the intensity and quality of service delivery varies [*sic*] considerably from one education district to another across the provinces. The disparities between high and low achieving districts are gross and unacceptable in democratic South Africa. The disparities are particularly severe in rural districts, especially those that for generations were part of rural homelands that lacked a secure economic resource basis. Such districts probably constitute the majority of education districts in South Africa. (p. 6)

Some of the challenges that education district offices experience are that they serve too many schools, the roles and responsibilities between provincial offices and district offices are not clarified and the provisioning of posts is not even amongst districts, with posts often not filled by skilled staff or not filled at all.

The policy (DBE 2013:15–22) sets forth a number of norms to try to improve the inequalities that are experienced, namely:

- There should be between 5 and 10 circuits within an education district (circuits are the smaller segments that make up an education district and are headed by a circuit manager).
- Districts should serve no fewer than 75 schools and no more than 300.
- District directors should be highly trained and competent professionals to be able to manage large multidisciplinary groups of professionals.

- Effective administrative support to district offices is critical to support their functioning.
- Flat, problem-orientated working groups are preferred over hierarchical structures, with a focus on effective project management.
- Collaboration amongst district, provincial and school staff is highly recommended to ensure the most effective support to learning.
- Five teams at district level are strongly recommended, namely the district curriculum support team, the district management and governance support team, the district learner support team, the district examination and assessment team and the district operations team.

Two of the above-mentioned teams relate strongly to ESS, namely the district learner support team and the district curriculum support team. The core functions of the district learner support team are described as follows (DBE 2013:21–22):

- facilitating psychological, social work, career guidance, remedial and therapeutic services for learners
- improving learner wellness and health
- managing the school nutrition programme
- facilitate school safety and security
- overseeing learner transport.

One of the main functions of the district curriculum support team relating to ESS is the facilitation of inclusive education, apart from support in respect of curriculum issues.

A final note from the 2013 *Policy on the Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities of Education Districts* (DBE 2013) regarding district offices deals with staffing. Two issues are factored into staff provisioning, namely the distance that district officials have to travel and areas where poverty predominates. For distance, a maximum of 10% additional posts are allowed, and for poverty, a maximum of 5% extra positions.

Unfortunately, it was found by 2016 that education districts were not optimally organised and that most provinces had not

implemented the required circuit numbers and numbers of schools for which circuits should be responsible (Auditor General 2016). One district, for example, had to contend with 33 circuits, which represented 23 circuits more than the national norm. Another example is the number of schools per circuit, where the Johannesburg East district circuits were each responsible for 94 schools, 277% more than the average the national norms suggested.

From the above exposition, it becomes clear that education districts in South Africa are under serious pressure to effectively support schools and that in 2021, huge discrepancies still exist amongst districts. A concerning issue that further complicates matters at district level is that government documentation does not seem to be aligned. This will become clearer as the mentioned 2013 policy (DBE 2013) regarding districts is compared to documentation about ESS, which will be discussed next.

■ Policy guidelines about psychosocial educational support in districts

With the advent of the democratic era in South Africa, a number of exploratory and preparatory documents since the early 1990s preceded the publication of the EWP6 in 2001. The National Education Policy Initiative's (1992) separate report on support services represented a ground-breaking effort to guide policy in terms of socially just psychosocial educational support to all learners. The Department of National Education of the previous government also added suggestions for, *inter alia*, psychosocial educational support services via their Education Renewal Strategy of 1991, though very brief. By 1996, the new democratic government set up two committees to develop policy guidelines for Special Needs Education and ESSs, and in 1997, the joint document of the NCSNET and NCESS committees was published – *Quality Education for All, Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development* (DoE 1997). These groundwork documents laid a solid foundation for the eventual development of the EWP6.

■ Education white paper 6

The EWP6 of 2001 ushered in a new era in schooling in South Africa. Inclusive education was forefronted as the new paradigm and system to educate all learners in; it represented a break from the separate ordinary and special education systems of the past. Inclusive education now dealt with all learners and not only those experiencing barriers to learning. This implied that ESS should now also focus on supporting all learners as well as possible.

Apart from the big focus placed on inclusive education in the EWP6 (DoE 2001), ESS in districts also received emphasis. In Section 2.2.2, ESS are addressed specifically by first stating that the 'Ministry believes that the key to reducing barriers to learning within all education and training lies in a strengthened education support service' (DoE 2001:28). And then, in Section 2.2.2.2, the following is said about services in districts (DoE 2001:28):

> This strengthened education support service will have, at its centre, new district-based support teams (DBSTs) that will comprise staff from provincial district, regional and head offices and from special schools. The primary function of these district support teams will be to evaluate programmes, diagnose their effectiveness and suggest modifications.
>
> Through supporting teaching, learning and management, they will build the capacity of schools, early childhood and adult basic education and training centres, colleges and higher education institutions to recognise and address severe learning difficulties and to accommodate a range of learning needs. (p. 29)

In the section 'Medical, social and bio-ecological models', the establishment of DBSTs is described. It would first be established in the 30 districts that were part of the District Development Programme, and later possibly rolled out to every district. Special schools would also gradually be converted to resource centres and FSSs established across districts.

■ Conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education: Full-service schools, special schools as resource centres and district-based support teams

In 2005, the DoE published three guideline documents to strengthen the implementation of the EWP6 at district level. One dealt with FSSs, the other with special schools being transformed into SSRCs and the last with DBSTs (DoE 2005).

In terms of schooling, three levels of support for learners experiencing barriers were envisaged to be implemented. Ordinary schools had to be as inclusive as possible to support learners experiencing mild barriers. FSSs were established across education districts to support learners experiencing moderate barriers, and SSRCs were established across districts to support learners experiencing severe barriers to learning, whilst also supporting surrounding schools via consultation services.

The DBST at district level also was seen as a crucial link in the support chain of districts. The composition of core staff was clearly spelt out in Section 4.2 of the DBST document (DoE 2005:17–18), functioning under the leadership of the district director, as including:

- Specialist learner and educator support personnel currently employed in the DoE at district, regional or provincial level, including psychologists, therapists, remedial or learning support teachers, special needs specialists (e.g. relating to specific disabilities) and other health and welfare professionals employed by the DoE.
- Curriculum specialists who provide general and specific curriculum support to educators and education institutions.
- Institutional or management development specialists who provide support to education institutions.

- Administrative experts who provide administrative and financial management support.
- Specialist support personnel and teachers from existing special schools.

From these documents, it is clear that psychosocial educational support would be provided to learners based on the intensity of their needs, and that DBSTs would be made up of a large proportion of ESS staff.

Another policy bringing clarity on how support to learners should be arranged between the school and the district was the *Policy on* SIAS of 2014 (DBE 2014).

▋ Policy on screening, identification, assessment and support

The SIAS policy (DBE 2014) aimed to clarify the roles of the class teacher, the SBST and the DBST in terms of support to a child. First, the class teacher has to support the child as well as possible over and above the usual teaching, and only when no progress seems to be forthcoming, the learner can be referred to the SBST. The SBST now has to assess the situation and recommend alternative support measures, preferably at the school. These alternative measures should now be implemented over the short to medium term. Only when these measures are not bearing any fruit, the learner can be referred to the DBST for more specialist intervention and support.

The SIAS policy was a welcome step forward to regulate learner support arrangements within the broader ESS. It brought clarity on the precise steps to be followed to support learners at the school and in the district and includes a number of support needs assessment forms (1, 2 and 3) that need to be completed when support needs are escalated to the next level. Unfortunately, most teachers view these processes and forms as cumbersome and time-consuming, without necessarily having a positive outcome for the referred learner (Jansen 2020).

From this discussion (and the previous one on district functioning), an important observation can be made – government policy documents neither seem to resonate with one another nor is alignment clear. The DBST referred to in some DoE or DBE documentation is apparently not seen in the same light as, for example, how the *Policy on the Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities of Education Districts* (DBE 2013) regards district structures; five teams are envisaged at the district level, of which two, namely the district learner support team and the district curriculum support team, relate directly to ESS. This discrepancy unfortunately has led to significant confusion on how ESS should be structured, how posts should be provisioned and the way services should be rendered and managed at district level.

In the 'Structures of education support services in the education districts' section, an overview is provided of all the ESS structures envisaged (and partially being in place) in districts. Most of these have already been touched upon in previous chapters and this one, but some interesting, recent perspectives from the past five years are provided.

■ Structures of education support services in the education districts

Here an effort is made to describe the current situation and reality of ESS structures in districts, linking to Part 2 of the book where the current status of psychosocial educational services in South Africa is dissected. This will be followed by a detailed discussion of the ESS in the different provinces.

■ District-based support teams

District-based support teams can be viewed as the backbone of ESS at the education district level but have seemingly not reached their potential as envisaged in policy documentation (Tsotetsi & Omodan 2020). In most instances, it seems as if the full multidisciplinary team envisaged by the DoE (2005) has not

been operational and functional (Hay 2018). In most districts, the multidisciplinary ESS team is functioning as a DBST, without regular input from the curriculum and management section. Often the team leader of the ESS (often also called 'inclusive team') is seen as the DBST leader, whereas the policy guidelines specifically mention that the district director should be the DBST leader. Education support services staff members are often used for non-specialist tasks such as delivering examination papers to schools (Hay 2018) but are regularly stuck without adequate transport to visit schools for specialist support (Makhalemele & Nel 2016). In most instances, the ESS team at district level serves many schools and can only attend to a percentage of the referred learners on an individual basis. Referred learners are mostly seen months after referral on the Special Needs Assessment 2 form, and in the majority of cases, it is a once-off evaluation, with very limited options for regular follow-up (Hay 2016).

■ Education support services or inclusive education teams

The implied ideal of the inclusive education or ESS policy documentation was that each district should have at least one DBST in which the ESS team was incorporated (DoE 2005). This multidisciplinary team should consist of psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, learning support or remedial teaching specialists, special needs specialists, school social workers and nurses or medical staff. The team should support learners holistically by addressing their total bio-psychosocial domains in line with Engel's (1977) model. Unfortunately, the reality is that many districts do not even have an ESS team, and in many others across the provinces, the absence of specialist psychologists, therapists, school social workers and nurses or medical staff is concerning. Huge disparities exist amongst the provinces in this regard (Joubert & Hay 2020), with Limpopo not having one registered psychologist in service in 2015 (Schoeman 2015), whereas the Western Cape apparently

has a psychologist or psychometrist post for each circuit in all eight districts in the province (Western Cape Education Department 2020).

Holistic support provided to a learner is supposed to take place as follows via the different disciplines of a multidisciplinary ESS team (as envisaged in the DoE documents on inclusive education 2001, 2005, 2014):

- **Specialist educators** form the backbone of support services within the new inclusive education system, as the emphasis has now shifted from the medical model to the bio-ecological model of support. In most provinces, they are called 'learning support advisers or facilitators' (Hay 2018), who deal with referrals or support regarding academic or educational matters. These staff members have usually studied at the postgraduate level in Learner Support, Special Education, Remedial Education or any of the specific disability categories.
- **Psychologists or mid-level psychological practitioners** are registered educational or clinical or counselling psychologists who would primarily support learners on an emotional level to improve psychological functioning and learning. This is specialist work and requires knowledge and skills at the master's degree level in South Africa, with registration as a psychologist with the Health Professions Council of South Africa. Some provinces also employ registered psychometrists to focus on psychometry or the psychological testing of learners or registered counsellors to counsel learners with mild to moderate psychological issues. These mid-level psychological practitioners are qualified at the BPsych or honours degree level and are also registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa. In some instances, provinces would employ mid-level psychological practitioners if the positions of registered psychologists cannot be filled.
- **Therapists** include speech, occupational and physiotherapists registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa. Post provisioning for therapists differs quite dramatically across provinces and even districts. In many districts, the core

ESS team does not include the services of these therapists, but some of these are located at special schools with seemingly no or only a little time to spend on district-based work. Speech therapists or audiologists focus the on speech and hearing challenges of learners with concomitant auditory perceptual problems, and they are usually registered for both of these focuses. In some instances, provinces employ audiologists, who only focus on hearing and auditory perceptual issues (Hay 2018). Occupational therapists focus mainly on gross and fine visual-motor integration and visual-perceptual challenges and help to restore functioning to an optimal level in the home, school or work (for adults) environment. Attention is also given to basic life skills. Physiotherapists focus on the restoration and rehabilitation of muscle functioning in the case of injury or disability to ensure optimal mobility and learning possibilities.

- **School social workers** ensure that learners are functioning well at home in their family of origin or when they live with guardians. Although these professionals do not possess statutory powers as field social workers do, they can intervene in cases of maltreatment of learners and refer the situation for statutory intervention if needed. The home and environmental circumstances have an impact on a child's learning, and therefore the school social worker aims to optimise these circumstances.

- **School nurses or medical staff** are professionals who are seldom found at core ESS teams in districts but rather at special schools where learners experiencing specific types of disability may require their care. School nurses are registered with the Nursing Council of South Africa and render specialist preventative and curative care to learners who need basic medical care. Other medical staff are also not found in the core ESS team at district level, but may be part of the staff at special schools on a part-time basis. Examples are a neurologist who has sessions at a school for neurologically impaired learners or an orthopaedist who supports a school for the physically impaired on a part-time basis.

From the above exposition, two deductions can be made: a true, well-functioning and extended multidisciplinary ESS team probably represents the most powerful tool in the support environment to ensure optimal psychosocial educational support, and secondly, managing the core and extended (those functioning within special schools) ESS team can be a real challenge, especially if particular care is not taken to involve the special school ESS members in a realistic and manageable way in the activities of the core district ESS grouping. Furthermore, it has already been mentioned that most DBSTs are not functioning optimally because of, firstly, not including curriculum and management experts in a formal way in the broader team and, secondly, what is currently viewed as the DBST is actually the ESS team (Makhalemele & Nel 2016).

☐ Full-service schools

Full-service schools can be viewed as truly inclusive schools, as learners experiencing mild to moderate needs or barriers to learning are accommodated here. Learners who cannot be fully supported in ordinary schools are to be located in FSSs where the necessary accommodative measures and staff support should be available. The EWP6 (DoE 2001:22) describes FSSs as 'schools that will be equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs among all our learners'. The initial planning was that 30 schools in the country would be converted to FSSs, with this number being extended to 500 schools over the course of 20 years (DoE on FSSs 2005).

In 2015, a significant DBE report was published with the title *Report on the Implementation of Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education*. Table 12 of August 2014 in this report indicates some interesting statistics, namely that 793 FSSs existed across the nine provinces, with 24 724 learners in these schools. The initial goal of 500 FSSs has thus been surpassed by 293 FSSs only 13 years after the EWP6 was launched. What is seriously concerning about the statistics in the table, though, is that some provinces have large numbers of FSSs (North-West = 150;

Western Cape = 147; Mpumalanga = 140; Free State = 132), whilst others only have only a hand-full (Northern Cape = 4; Limpopo = 17; Eastern Cape = 26). Gauteng with 74 and KwaZulu-Natal with 101 seem to be in the middle region of these extremes. This again is indicative of large-scale disparities across the South African provinces in terms of the implementation of equitable support to schools and learners. North-West, for example, has 37 FSSs per district, whereas the Northern Cape and Limpopo both have two districts entirely without FSSs. Another interesting observation about these data (mentioned in the report) is the concern that some FSSs are flooded by learners experiencing barriers to learning (more than 150 such learners in the school), whereas the preferred scenario is somewhere between 5% and 30% in order to not change the composition of the FSS to being similar to a special school.

What is also not clear is how the provinces with huge numbers of FSSs have equipped and staffed these schools? An example is the Free State, which has, on average, 26 FSSs per the five education districts. This against the background that the members of DBSTs or ESS most often do not have ink for printers, Internet connection to send email correspondence or regular transport to visit schools and often even have to bring their own toilet paper to work (Hay 2016). The DBE report (2015) also confirms that only 137 of the 793 FSSs have been structurally upgraded to comply with the norms of universal design.

Some measures are recommended in the DBE report (2015) to improve the functioning and eradication of inconsistencies of FSSs, of which the development of funding, post provisioning and infrastructure norms are the most important.

■ Special schools

Within the excitement of the new inclusive education system, where SSRCs are foregrounded, the existence of special schools is often forgotten. The long-term ideal of the EWP6 was that all special schools (at that stage 380) should be converted to SSRCs,

but this would take a long time. In the meantime, special schools have remained the mainstay of psychosocial educational support to learners experiencing severe or high-intensity barriers to learning. Since 2001, the number of special schools has grown to 453 (DBE 2015), which is interesting against the background of an earlier recommendation from the NCSNET and the NCESS (DoE 1997) that a moratorium should be placed on the building of special schools within the envisaged inclusive education system.

The provisioning and location of special schools across provinces and districts have always been a bone of contention, even in the previous dispensation. This has not really changed since 1994, as Gauteng (136), the Western Cape (83) and KwaZulu-Natal (74) have, by far, the densest concentration of special schools compared to the Northern Cape (11), Mpumalanga (20) and the Free State (21) (DBE 2015). This is probably a reality that will not significantly change over time, as the densest concentration is linked to the three big metropolitan hubs of Pretoria or Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, with a thinner spread in the more rural provinces.

■ Special schools as resource centres

The ideal is that all special schools should become SSRCs over time (DoE 2005). The main characteristics of SSRCs are that an inclusive education paradigm should be embraced, categories of disability should not be foregrounded anymore but rather the intensity of support needed, SSRC staff should become part of DBSTs and services should be extended to surrounding schools (DoE 2005).

According to the DBE report (2015), by February 2015, 80 special schools have been converted to SSRCs across six provinces. Three provinces – the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga – did not provide any information. From these statistics, it is clear that the road to the conversion of special schools to SSRCs is still quite long and fraught with challenges.

One of the biggest challenges seems to be how ESS staff should divide their time between caring for the learners in the school and supporting surrounding schools or the DBST (Hay 2016). The clear message from the staff of special schools is that this is unrealistic if the provisioning of posts is not adjusted upwards.

■ Learning support educators and advisers or facilitators

An indispensable component of ESS in districts involves LSEs at some schools and learning support advisers or facilitators (LSAs/ LSFs) in some circuit offices, over and above those who are directly part of DBSTs at district offices. Learning support educators are called by different names in different provinces, such as school-based LSEs, itinerant LSEs, remedial teachers or special needs teachers. Table 5.3 has been sourced from the 2015 DBE report in the implementation of the EWP6 and includes the number of teacher assistants or aides.

From Table 5.3, it is clear that some provinces have much-needed, dedicated learning support in some schools (e.g. KwaZulu-Natal with 2115 extra support teachers and assistants), whereas others do not provide information or have only little support (e.g. the Northern Cape with only 15 support teachers). It is also clear that there are huge discrepancies in terms of the provision of this type of support, which can be seen as frontline staff in ESS. There are discrepancies not only across the provinces but also within provinces, as it is not clear whether some schools (or circuits) have been allocated these positions in a structured, well-planned manner.

As stated earlier, LSEs, LSAs or LSFs are usually specialist educators who have engaged in further (mostly postgraduate) studies to qualify themselves better in learner support, special needs education, specific disability studies, remedial education and so forth. Provincial education departments try to attract experienced senior staff for these positions.

TABLE 5.3: Number of learning support, remedial and special needs teachers and teacher assistants or aides.

Province	Number of schools	Remedial teachers	Special needs teachers	LSEs (school-based)	LSEs (itinerant)	Teacher assistants/ aides
EC	35	0	0	0	82	54
FS	251	421	268	-	-	-
GT	325	0	258	372	0	0
KZN	66	106	1255	344	43	367
LP	-	-	-	-	-	-
MP	-	-	-	-	-	-
NC	2	0	1	1	13	
NW	0	0	518	62	0	109
WC	1630	0	0	119	480	131
National Total	2309	527	2300	898	254	661

Source: DBE (2015).
LSE, learning support educators; EC, Eastern Cape; FS, Free State; GT, Gauteng; KZN, KwaZulu-Natal; LP, Limpopo; MP, Mpumalanga; NC, Northern Cape; NW, North-West; WC, Western Cape.

◼ District-based education support services in the different provinces

In this section, an overview of ESS in the different provinces is provided.

◼ Eastern Cape

The Eastern Cape is the province with the most education districts, namely 23, which were demarcated based on local municipality boundaries (DBE & UNICEF 2013). From Table 5.2, the following can be deduced in respect of the districts:

- Graaff-Reinet in the west is by far the largest district in the province (39 870 km^2) and the sixth largest in the country. It is followed by Sterkspruit (20 043 km^2) in the north and Cradock (17 752 km^2) in the northwest part of the province. On the other

hand, Mbizana is the smallest (2412 km^2), with Mt Frere the second smallest (2480 km^2) and Port Elizabeth in the far south the third smallest (2648 km^2).

- In terms of the number of schools, King William's Town is first with 439 (and 19th on the national list), Libode second with 424 and Butterworth third with 400. The smallest number of schools per district is found in Graaff-Reinet (83), Cradock (85) and Grahamstown (87).
- Graaff-Reinet is an interesting case study, as it is the largest geographical district in the province but, at the same time, has the lowest number of schools. Travelling for ESS staff is thus a matter of critical planning.

The following can be stated about ESS functioning in the province, according to the *Report on the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (DBE 2015):

The province reported that in terms of functional DBSTs, 23 districts with 460 members were operational, consisting of the following members of sections: Inclusive Education, HIV and AIDS, Curriculum, IDS&G, Early Childhood Development, Further Education and Training, AYET, SNP, Infrastructure, IQMS, Department of Health, DSD, Department of Agriculture, SAPS, REHAB, DPSA and Department of Transport.

The Eastern Cape indicated that 26 FSSs had been designated by 2014, with most of the districts having one FSS, but East London with two and Lusikisiki with three FSSs (DBE 2015). Altogether 2272 learners were accommodated in these 26 FSSs.

The province had 42 special schools with a learner enrolment of 9165 during 2013 (DBE 2015). Unfortunately, no information was provided about the conversion of special schools to SSRCs or the building of new special schools.

In terms of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs and teaching aides, it was indicated that the province had 82 itinerant LSEs in service and 54 teacher assistants.

■ Free State

The Free State only has five education districts, and these are based on district municipalities (DBE & UNICEF 2013). The boundaries of three of these districts have changed significantly in 2011. From Table 5.2, the following can be interpreted:

• Xhariep in the Southern Free State is the largest geographical district (34 250 km^2), followed by Lejweleputswa (31 930 km^2) in the Central-Western Free State around the Goldfields (see Figure 5.2). Motheo around Bloemfontein is by far the smallest (13 999 km^2), with Fezile Dabi in the north the second smallest (21 301 km^2).

• Thabo Mofutsanyane in the east, with QwaQwa as heartland, has the highest number of schools (490), followed by the more metropolitan Bloemfontein-Botshabelo corridor and surrounds with 325 schools. The largest district, namely the vast Xhariep in the South-Western Free State, has only 75 schools in a sparsely populated area of the province, which represents the second lowest number of schools in a district in the country.

• As with Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape, the largest district in the Free State (Xhariep) also has the fewest schools and represents a real challenge for ESS in terms of accessing these schools over vast distances.

The following can be stated about ESS functioning in the province, according to the *Report on the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (DBE 2015):

The province reported that in terms of functional DBSTs, the five districts were operational with 50 staff members from the following sections: Inclusive Education, Curriculum, SMGD, SYRAC, Examination and Assessment, EMIS and Human Resources. (n.p.)

In research done by Hay (2018) in the Free State about the ESS component of the DBSTs, the following picture emerged about the number and disciplines of staff.

TABLE 5.4: Composition of the nine education support services components of district-based support teams in the five Free State education districts.

Free State	Motheo (2 DBSTs)		Xhariep	Lejwele-putswa (2 DBSTs)		Fezile Dabi (2 DBSTs)		Thabo Mofutsa-nyana (2 DBSTs)		Total
	Team 1	Team 2		Team 1	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2	
Team leader	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Socio-pedagogues		4		3		2	1	1		11
Speech therapist/audiologist	1		1	1		1			1	5
Occupatio-nal therapist	1	1				1				3
Psycholo-gist	1	1	1	1		1	1	1		6
Total	**8**	**12**	**10**	**5**	**6**	**8**	**9**	**11**	**10**	**79**

Source: Hay (2018).

ESS, education support services; DBST, district-based support teams.

From this, it is clear that four of the five districts had two ESS teams, whilst Xhariep only had one team. The number of staff per ESS team varied between 5 and 12. The bulk of the staff consisted of LSAs, with 45 out of the total of 79 ESS staff members in the teams being LSAs. The team leaders were mainly specialist educators, with two psychologists as leaders in two of the districts. Of the total of nine ESS teams, five teams had at least one school social worker or socio-pedagogue. In total, four speech therapists operated in the nine teams, with one audiologist. Three of the teams had an occupational therapist, whilst six of the teams had the services of a registered psychologist.

The province reported that by the end of 2014, 132 schools had been converted to FSSs, with between 14 and 36 FSSs in the respective districts. Altogether, 8110 learners were enrolled in these FSSs.

By early 2015, the Free State had 21 special schools, with 6036 learners being accommodated in these. Four special schools had by then also been converted to SSRCs. One new special school was being built in the Fezile Dabi district.

In terms of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs and teacher assistants, the Free State indicated that 421 remedial teachers and 268 special needs teachers were in service at 251 schools.

■ Gauteng

Gauteng has 15 education districts, representing the second most provincial education districts in the country. It is the smallest geographical province in South Africa, whilst at the same time being the most densely populated (15.5 million, according to Statistics South Africa 2020). The districts are based on subdivisions of the three metropolitan areas, namely Tshwane, Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni. From Table 5.2, the following can be deducted:

- The largest district is Gauteng North, which 4170 km², followed by Gauteng West, which is 4087 km². Eleven of the 15 districts have a geographical area of under 1000 km² – quite different to the largest districts in the Eastern Cape and Free State. Johannesburg Central is the smallest district in the country at 153 km², with Johannesburg West at 158 km².
- Tshwane South has the most schools as a district (259), with Johannesburg Central and Johannesburg East second with 224 schools each. Gauteng North has the fewest schools in the country (71), with Sedibeng East having the second fewest in the province with 90.
- Interesting to note is that whilst Johannesburg Central is the smallest district in the country, it has the second most schools in the province; so, it is quite densely populated.

The following can be stated about ESS functioning in the province, according to the *Report on the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (DBE 2015).

The province reported that in terms of functional DBSTs, the 15 districts were operational with 225 staff members from the following sections: all directorates from the districts, NGO, FBO, other government departments, FSS and resource centres.

Gauteng reported to having had converted 74 schools to FSSs by the end of 2014. All districts except Sedibeng East (with four) had five FSSs. Altogether 4310 learners were enrolled in these schools.

The province had 136 special schools by the end of 2014, with approximately 44 500 learners enrolled. By early 2015, 28 special schools had been transformed into SSRCs. The building of one special school was supposed to commence by 2015.

In terms of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs and teacher assistants, Gauteng indicated that the province had 258 special needs teachers and 368 school-based LSEs in service at 325 schools.

■ KwaZulu-Natal

KwaZulu-Natal boasts 12 education districts based on district municipalities, except the eThekwini Metro, which has been split into the districts of Pinetown and Umlazi (DBE & UNICEF 2013). It is a densely populated province (11.5 million people according to Statistics South Africa 2020), second to Gauteng. From Table 5.2, the following can be stated:

- Zululand in the central north is the largest district at 14 799 km^2. The second largest is uMkhanyakude in the far north-east at 12 824 km^2 and then uThukela in the west at 11 326 km^2. Umlazi is by far the smallest at 788 km^2, with Pinetown the second smallest at 1504 km^2 – the real metro districts of eThekwini or Durban.
- Zululand is not only the biggest district geographically but also boasts the most schools in the province (767) and the second highest number of schools per district in the country. uThungulu on the coast around Richards Bay has the second most schools (674).
- KwaZulu-Natal has the highest average number of schools per district-based on the dense population, namely 513. Compared to the average number of schools in the Northern Cape (116), Gauteng (174) and the Western Cape (205), one is struck by the level of ESS that is actually needed to support these schools and learners, often across rather large districts.

The following can be stated about ESS functioning in the province, according to the *Report on the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (DBE 2015):

The province reported that in terms of functional DBSTs, the 12 districts were operational with 156 staff members from the following sections: Circuit Management, Curriculum, General Education and Training & Further Education and Training, District Planning, Special Needs Education Services, Early Childhood

Development, Governance and Management, Co-curricular, National School Nutrition Programme, Curriculum Support, Examinations and Teacher Development.

KwaZulu-Natal had 101 schools converted to FSSs by the end of 2014, with the number of schools ranging between 6 and 10 per district. In these schools, 4295 learners were accommodated.

The province had 74 special schools by 2014, with approximately 17 500 learners in total. By early 2015, 16 special schools had been converted to SSRCs. Four new special schools had been completed by 2014, with one still being built.

In terms of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs and teacher assistants, the province indicated that it had 106 remedial teachers, 1255 special needs teachers, 344 school-based LSEs, 43 itinerant LSEs and 367 teacher assistants in service at 66 schools.

■ Limpopo

Limpopo currently has 10 education districts after dividing each of its original five districts based on district municipalities into two in 2012 (DBE & UNICEF 2013). Three of the five mega districts in terms of school numbers are found in Limpopo. From Table 5.2, the following can be deduced:

- Waterberg is the largest district (36 734 km^2) in the province and in the top 10 in South Africa, with Mopani a distant second at 21 782 km^2 and an even more distant third place to Tshipise Sagole at 13 086 km^2.
- Vhembe has the most schools in a district in South Africa (and Limpopo) with 792. In terms of most schools in a district, Polokwane is third in the country with 692 and Sekhukhune fourth in the country with 678 schools. These mega districts in terms of school numbers place a huge burden on ESS based on the number of sites that has to be serviced.

The following can be stated about ESS functioning in the province, according to the *Report on the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (DBE 2015):

The province reported that in terms of functional DBSTs, the five districts were operational with 75 staff members from the following sections: Health Professionals, Curriculum Advisors, Finance and Human Resource Managers, Deputy Managers Governance, Local NGOs and the SAPS.

In Limpopo, 17 schools had been transformed to FSSs by 2014, but unfortunately, some statistics from some districts were missing, and no learner numbers were indicated.

The province had 34 special schools by 2014, with 8598 learners. No information was provided about the conversion of special schools to SSRCs by early 2015, nor any information about the building of special schools.

In terms of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs and teacher assistants, no information was received from the province.

◼ Mpumalanga

Mpumalanga (together with North-West) has the fewest number of education districts of all of the provinces, namely four. Two of the districts are based on district municipal boundaries, whereas the other two came about because of a split in the Ehlanzeni district municipality (DBE & UNICEF 2013). It is, therefore, understandable that these districts have the second largest average number of schools per district after KwaZulu-Natal, namely 480. From Table 5.2, the following can be stated:

- Gert Sibande in the South-East is by far the largest district ($31\,841\,km^2$), with the other three between $17\,000\,km^2$ and $13\,000\,km^2$.
- Gert Sibande district also has the most schools in the province (553), with Nkangala at a close second with 549. These two districts also are part of the top 10 mega districts in the country in terms of school numbers.
- The biggest challenge for ESS in Mpumalanga is probably the large average number of schools per district that has to be supported.

The following can be stated about ESS functioning in the province, according to the *Report on the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (DBE 2015):

The province reported that in terms of functional DBSTs, the four districts were operational with 176 staff members from the following sections: Early Childhood Development, Department of Health, Disability Desk, Inclusive Education, Social Development, Curriculum, Further Education and Training, General Education and Training, ABET, Human Resources, Pastor, Municipality & Infrastructure, Inclusive (Social Worker), Teacher Development and Governance, Information and Communication Technology, Inclusive (Nutrition), Communication, Inclusive (Life Skills) and PGSS.

Mpumalanga indicated that the province had converted 140 schools to FSSs by the end of 2014, and in each district between 30 and 40. At that stage, 1471 learners were already enrolled in these schools.

By 2014, the province had 20 special schools with 3818 learners. No indication was given by 2015 on how many special schools had been converted to SSRCs. One new special school was completed by 2015, and six more existing special school structures had been upgraded.

In terms of LSEs, LSAs and LSFs and teacher assistants, no information was received from the province.

■ Northern Cape

The Northern Cape is the biggest province in South Africa, with vast distances from especially east to west. It is divided into only five education districts based on district municipalities (DBE & UNICEF 2013). From Table 5.2, the following can be stated:

- The largest district in the province and the country is Namakwa at 126 836 km², with the second in the province and the country Pixley ka Seme at 102 727 km² and Siyanda a close third at

102 524 km². The fourth biggest district is Eden and Central Karoo, which is not even half the size of Namakwa and 40 000 km² smaller than Pixley ka Seme and Siyanda. Only one district in KwaZulu-Natal is larger than the smallest Northern Cape district of Frances Baard at 13 518 km².

- The Northern Cape is sparsely populated with only 1.29 million people (Statistics South Africa 2020), and this is foregrounded in the number of schools per district. John Taolo Gaetsewe district has the most schools in the province with 170, but lies 65th on the number of schools list (out of 86). The rest of the schools lie up to number 84 on this list, with the last mentioned, Namakwa, only having 84 schools.

- Vast distances are, therefore, a major challenge in the largest province of South Africa, with very few concentrated populations apart from the city of Kimberley and, to a lesser extent, Upington.

The following can be stated about ESS functioning in the province, according to the *Report on the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (DBE 2015):

The province reported that in terms of functional DBSTs, the five districts were operational with 76 staff members in the following sections: Curriculum/Inclusive Education, CM, Administration, IMGD, Transport and Health or Social Development.

The province had managed to convert four schools to FSSs, with two of the districts not yet having FSSs by the end of 2014. Altogether 489 learners were enrolled in the four schools at that stage.

By 2014, the Northern Cape had 11 special schools with approximately 1800 learners. Three special schools had been converted to SSRCs by 2015. One new special school was completed in the Namakwa district, sponsored by donor funding.

In terms of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs and teacher assistants, the province reported having one special needs teacher, one remedial teacher at two schools and 13 itinerant LSEs.

■ North West

North-West only has four education districts that are roughly based on district municipalities; however, two of the education districts encroached significantly on Ngaka Modiri Molema district, namely Dr Kenneth Kaunda and Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati education districts. From Table 5.2, the following can be deduced:

- Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati district in the west is part of the top five mega districts in the country in terms of size, at 49 491 km^2. The other three districts are between 23 000 km^2 and 13 000 km^2, comparable to the majority of the Mpumalanga districts.
- The geographically smallest district around Rustenburg, Bojanala, has the most schools (581), which makes it part of the top six mega districts in the country in terms of the number of schools. The other three districts range between 415 and 255 schools, which make the average for the four districts 411, which is the third highest average number of schools per district in a province.

The following can be stated about ESS functioning in the province, according to the *Report on the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (DBE 2015):

The province reported that in terms of functional DBSTs, the four districts were operational with 80 staff members from the following sections: Physical Resource Planning, Human Resources Management and Development, Budget Planning and Development, Area Office Institutional Support Coordinator, EMD, APO Subdivision, EMG, APO Institutional Curriculum Support, SSRCs and FSSs.

In research done by Hay (2018), the composition of two of the ESS components of DBSTs was found. The composition is set out in Table 5.5.

Each of the four districts had one ESS team as part of the DBST, with the division of disciplines as indicated in the table.

TABLE 5.5: Composition of two of the four education support services components of district-based support teams in two of the North-West education districts.

North-West	Dr Kenneth Kaunda	Dr Ruth Segomotso Mompati
Team leader	1	1
Therapeutic section: Speech therapist	1	-
Therapeutic section: Physiotherapist	-	1
Therapeutic section: Occupational therapist	-	2
Social section	2	1
Psychological section	2	2
Special and full-service schools	1	-
Learning support section based in area offices	6	8
Total	**13**	**15**

ESS, education support services; DBSTs, district-based support teams.

Again, as in the Free State, in North-West, LSAs dominated in terms of numbers, with six out of 13 staff members in the Kenneth Kaunda district and eight out of 15 staff members in Dr Ruth Segomotso Mompati district. Apart from the team leaders, who were specialist educators, each team had a therapeutic section (with one or more of the paramedical disciplines), a social section with a school social worker, a psychological section with a psychologist or mid-level psychological discipline and in one of the two districts an educator responsible for special schools and FSSs.

The province indicated that 140 schools had already been converted to FSSs by 2014, with between 34 and 44 per district. Altogether 2546 learners were accommodated in these schools (DBE 2015).

North-West had 32 special schools in 2014, with 6764 learners. By early 2015, four of these schools had been converted to SSRCs. Four new special schools were completed by 2015, according to feedback of the province (DBE 2015).

In terms of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs and teacher assistants, the province reported having 518 special needs teachers, 62 school-based LSEs and 109 teacher assistants (DBE 2015).

■ Western Cape

The Western Cape has eight education districts, of which four are part of the Cape Town metro. The boundaries of the four rural districts are similar to the district municipalities, whereas the Cape Town metro was divided into Metro Central, Metro North, Metro East and Metro South. From Table 5.2, the following can be stated:

• Eden and Central Karoo is the largest district in the province (62 185 km^2) and the fourth biggest in the country. West Coast lies second with half of the surface (31 104 km^2) and Cape Winelands third with 21 309 km^2. The Metro districts are between 251 km^2 and 1253 km^2. Metro Central, at 251 km^2, is the second smallest district in the country.
• Cape Winelands has the largest number of schools (293) and Overberg the smallest number (97). With an average number of 205 schools per district, the Western Cape has the third lowest average of all provinces.

The following can be stated about ESS functioning in the province, according to the *Report on the Implementation of Inclusive Education* (DBE 2015):

The province reported that in terms of functional DBSTs, the eight districts were operational with 392 staff members from the following sections: per circuit-based support team: circuit team manager, two IMG managers, one curriculum advisor, social worker, a psychologist, an LSA and a school corporate officer.

From the website of the Western Cape Education Department (2020), it is stated that each of the 49 circuits in the province has a psychology or psychologist post, a social worker and an LSA. At district level, the following staff are included: a manager for specialised support services, a senior therapist, a senior psychologist, a senior social worker, a learning support coordinator, and an HIV care and support coordinator (Western Cape Education Department 2020).

Western Cape reported having a total of 147 FSSs by 2014 and between nine and 27 FSSs per district. In total, 1720 learners were enrolled in these schools (DBE 2015).

In 2014, the province had 83 special schools with approximately 21 500 learners. By February 2015, approximately 28 special schools had been converted to SSRCs (DBE 2015). Two new special schools were opened in the 2017–2018 year (Western Cape Education Department 2018).

In terms of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs and teacher assistants, the province reported having 119 school-based LSEs, 480 itinerant LSEs and 131 teacher assistants (DBE 2015).

■ Comparing the district-based education support services of the different provinces

From the above exposition, it is clear that some similarities in terms of ESS at district level exist amongst the provinces, but also glaring disparities. Education support services teams as part of DBSTs do exist across provinces but are structured differently and on seemingly different norms of the provisioning of posts. In the Western Cape, the main thrust of ESS services at district level seems to be devolved to the circuit level, where a social worker, a psychologist and an LSA work as a team in the circuit to provide ESS. This is backed up at district level by a team of ESS managers of the different ESS disciplines. In the Free State, nine ESS teams are operational across the five districts, with relatively stable provisioning of disciplines, but where some posts requiring scarce skills are not filled. Smaller (but significant) discrepancies amongst the ESS teams exist, such as teams that do not have speech therapists or audiologists, only three teams that have an occupational therapist, four teams without a socio-pedagogue and three teams without a psychologist. In the North-West, a relatively stable structure seems to be in place for the four ESS

teams in the four districts; however, the therapy section seems to be discrepant across the districts with, for example, a speech therapist in one district but not in the others, or physio- and occupational therapists in one district but not in the others.

One of the most important deductions from the exposition about the provinces is that ESS at the DBST level are equated to specialised school settings in a number of provinces, with very little specialised ESS support in districts. This is probably true of Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. In the Western Cape and Gauteng, a huge effort is made to provide specialist support to districts via specialist ESS staff, whereas provinces such as the Free State and North-West have sound (though thinly spread) ESS district structures in place, but with varied occupancy.

The conversion to and operations of FSSs show huge discrepancies amongst the various provinces. By the end of 2015, the Western Cape indicated that 147 schools had been designated to become FSSs, and in the Free State 128 schools. Comparing this to 12 in the Northern Cape and 13 in Limpopo and further comparing this to 74 FSSs that have been physically upgraded by early 2015 in Gauteng and only three in the Western Cape, the discrepancies do not make sense.

Special schools (and the later SSRCs) have always been unequally spread across provinces, with some better and weaker motivations. Gauteng with 126, Western Cape with 83 and KwaZulu-Natal with 74 special schools have always been the provinces with the highest concentration. Although one could reason that Gauteng has the highest population in the country and should therefore have the most special schools, the proportions do not always make sense. Western Cape is third in terms of population (7.5 million) and KwaZulu-Natal second with 11.5 million people (Statistics South Africa 2020), whilst the latter has nine fewer special schools. The Free State, with close to 3 million people, has one more special school (21) than Mpumalanga (20) (DBE 2015) with 4.6 million people (Statistics

South Africa 2020). In terms of the conversion of special schools to SSRCs, the discrepancies continue; by early 2015, 28 schools have been converted in Gauteng and 24 in the Western Cape, with only four in the Free State and North-West each. No information on this matter was received from Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape.

The spread of LSEs, LSAs, LSFs, remedial teachers and teacher assistants is also a cause for concern, as there is little consistency amongst the provinces (refer to Table 5.3 in this regard). Two provinces did not report at all, whereas huge discrepancies seem to exist between, for example, KwaZulu-Natal (2115) and the Northern Cape (15), from the one end of the spectrum to the extreme other.

■ Challenges of education support services at district level

Five main challenges are discussed here subsequent to the overview and research reported on: an amorphous DBST where ESS was supposed to be an integral part of, that is not functioning according to planning, discrepant structures of ESS in different provinces, discrepant structures of ESS within provinces, lack of operational funding to do their work and the near-impossible ratios that ESS team members are dealing with.

Education support services members were supposed to form part of a larger DBST in every district, according to the EWP6 (DoE 2001). It appears as if very little formal DBST functioning has come of this in many education districts across the country (Hay 2017) and that district officials tend to work in a restrictive, overly bureaucratic and highly centralised environment with an alienating and coercive climate (Plowright & Plowright 2011). In most instances, ESS teams function on their own in terms of team dynamics, without regular, formal DBST meetings. Some evidence in this regard is that the Motheo and Lejweleputswa ESS teams in Bloemfontein and Welkom are located far away from

the district offices. In research done in two provinces in 2015 and 2016 (Hay 2017), ESS members complained about the lack of formal collaboration within the DBST. Cases were reported in the Free State where ESS members were instructed to deliver examination papers to schools, with the complaint that district directors often used ESS staff for tasks that were not within their ambit (Hay 2017). It is suspected that whilst the EWP6 was written to establish inclusive education and transformed ESS, this message of DBSTs functioning as teams where ESS members are integrally included never reached district directors in the way it should have. A disjuncture exists between the ideals of the EWP6 and the way district directors or officials have bought into the vision of this document.

From the discussion in this chapter, it is also quite clear that ESS structures in districts have not been consistently planned and staffed across the provinces. Huge discrepancies exist in the way multidisciplinary teams are structured to serve districts and the way in which staff members from SSRCs are involved in the district ESS team. The establishment of FSSs has also exposed serious discrepancies amongst the provinces, with anecdotal feedback indicating that in many of the FSSs, very little has changed in terms of infrastructure and the extension of staff. Examples are the following: in the North West province, only four ESS or inclusive education teams are operating – one in each district. Compare this to the Western Cape where each circuit has an ESS team consisting of a psychologist, a social worker and an LSA. The Northern Cape reported having 15 LSAs and special needs teachers, whereas the Western Cape reported 599. Limpopo indicated that by the end of 2015, 13 schools had been converted to FSSs, whilst 147 had been transformed in the Western Cape. Unfortunately, these figures tell a story of the inconsistent implementation of ESS throughout the nine provinces, often depending on the preference funding allocated to ESS and the management capacity in ESS and the broader provincial governments.

Unfortunately, the discrepancies in terms of ESS provisioning do not stop at the interprovincial level; it is perpetuated even amongst districts in the same province. Some districts are well cared for in terms of special schools and SSRCs, whereas others are neglected. Post provisioning and occupancy differ amongst ESS teams in districts; an example is the nine ESS teams in the Free State, with one common denominator, namely that each has at least a team leader. All teams do not have a psychologist, one team does not have LSFs, and all the other disciplines are present in only some of the teams. An occupational therapist is only found in three of the nine teams (Hay 2017).

What was very clear from the research done in the Free State during 2015 and 2016 on the nine ESS teams (Hay 2017), was that a lack of operational funds dramatically deterred the rendering of service. Complaints abounded about a lack of transport to schools, no money for basic stationery, computers or printers, a nearly absent email system, no toilet paper for most of the bathrooms and ESS members using their private cellular phones to make calls because there was nearly no budget for official calls, and so forth (Hay 2017). At that stage, it was already clear that provinces might be spending far too much on salaries and was left with very little to allocate to operational costs. The result is that ESS teams may have highly qualified ESS staff members who cannot render quality service because of more than substantial limitations in terms of operational funding.

Research done in the North-West and Free State provinces during 2015 and 2016 indicated a very serious concern regarding ratios of ESS member to learners (Hay 2016). One psychologist in the North West province had to support 193 210 learners, and one social service worker had to support 128 833 learners; this is if the total number of North-West learners was divided into, for example, the four psychologists in the province, and so forth. When the total number of staff of the four ESS teams is calculated, the ratio of ESS members to learners comes down to a better 11 368 (with 68 team members in the four ESS teams). In the Free

State, the ratios looked as follows: one psychologist to 108 333 learners; one social worker to 59 090 learners; one speech therapist to 130 000 learners; one occupational therapist to 216 667 learners; and a better number of one LSA to 17 105 learners.

The above-mentioned ratios are frightening when compared to international benchmarks. Back in 1956, UNESCO recommended a ratio of one school psychologist to 6000 learners, whilst the National Association of School Psychologists, in 2015, recommended a ratio of one school psychologist to 1000 learners, although in effect, the reality was 1653 learners (DeNisco 2015). In stark contrast, at the ratios of North-West and the Free State, the notion of individual support to learners is nearly impossible; at most, crises of individual learners could be addressed (Joubert & Hay 2020). The rest of the time spent by ESS members should be in the form of rendering indirect service, where adults working with learners should be empowered. Unfortunately, it was found that the time of ESS members was spent rather evenly between direct and indirect services, which might indicate that only a small percentage of learners in need was reached and that planning for covering all schools and prioritising services to the neediest was lacking (Hay 2018).

With these challenges in mind, the question can be asked whether the alignment of ESS structures and services across the nine provinces is possible.

■ Is alignment across the provinces possible?

In management and political science terminology, the issue of centralisation versus decentralisation always comes to the fore. How strongly should central government in Pretoria lay down ESS regulations that the provinces should adhere to? And how important, to the contrary, is it for provinces to have some freedom to manage their own particular ESS contexts?

From the overview in this chapter, it becomes rather clear that the discrepancies amongst the provinces are substantial and probably too large to argue a reasonable case for. The 2015 DBE report demonstrates three important issues: first, huge discrepancies exist amongst the different ESS structures; second, serious management challenges are experienced in some provincial education departments, as in many cases, data were not received from provinces; and third, no clear distinction was made in most provinces (when reporting) between staff who should roll out inclusive education and those who should primarily work in ESS (inferred from the DBE 2015 report).

When assessing all of these issues and the data from districts in the provinces, it can be rationally argued that the DBE has been too lenient in allowing provinces to determine their own district ESS structures and service rendering models. Huge discrepancies exist amongst provincial ESS structures, the least of which is perhaps how special schools and SSRCs are provisioned and managed. Full-service schools are highly discrepant amongst the provinces in terms of numbers, staffing and the development of infrastructure. Education Support Service teams in districts (and circuits) and LSEs, LSAs and LSFs are probably the most discrepant of all ESS structures in districts and provinces, with huge disparities. It seems as if the Western Cape and Gauteng are placing particular emphasis on specialist ESS staff members in districts, whereas some provinces, such as Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, are opting for specialist educators in ESS teams instead of multidisciplinary personnel.

■ Conclusion

Psychosocial educational support in the districts of the nine South African provinces seems to function in a highly discrepant way, with some provinces placing a huge emphasis on a multidisciplinary ESS team effort, whilst others are struggling to conceptualise the difference between inclusive education staff and ESS staff. This matter will be explored further in Chapter 10 when a reconceptualised ESS will be described.

Reconceptualising psychosocial educational support services in South Africa

Team dynamics in school-based support teams and district-based support teams and skills required of personnel

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◼ Introduction

The EWP6 (DoE 2001), the policy on building an inclusive education and training system, provides key strategies with regard to the development of support structures. In contrast with past practices (as discussed in earlier chapters), support structures for schools, teachers and learners in South Africa, as formulated in the various policy documents, are located on various system levels. As discussed in the preceding chapters, these include the establishment of DBSTs and SBSTs.

It is a shared assumption in education that membership in these support teams implies the need for collaboration within and beyond the school and amongst support teams as co-equal partners on various system levels as well as amongst support teams and support service users within schools and school districts (Hay 2013; Lawson 2004; Strogilos & Avramidis 2017). Operationalising highly functioning teams is, however, dependent on the interaction amongst members of the groups and the extent to which participating individuals and organisations contribute to and strengthen their sustained success in collaborative support interventions (Bennett & Gadlin 2012; Engelbrecht & Hay 2018; Green & Moodley 2018; Hay 2013; Lasker, Weiss & Miller 2001; Lawson 2004).

Knowledge and understanding of group and team dynamics and the role interpersonal skills play in the development of collaborative multi-, inter-, intra- and transdisciplinary support teams are, therefore, regarded as essential in the development of both pre-service and in-service professional development programmes for ESS team members. However, research in South Africa indicates that in many instances there is a lack of collaborative skills development amongst members of support teams in general. Teachers, for example, report little or no knowledge of collaboration amongst these support teams, both within schools and with members of the wider community, as well as a lack of skills in collaboration, which lead to negative

perceptions of the support these teams should and could provide (Hay 2013; Makhalemele 2011; Nel et al. 2013; Nel et al. 2016).

The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to:

• Reconceptualise ESS in South Africa against the background of the preceding chapters with, first of all, an emphasis on a theoretical picture of all basic principles at work in collaborative group and team dynamics.
• As a result, develop a dynamic framework for collaborative teams and the necessary capabilities that can be used in the training of higher-level collaborative teamwork, thereby overcoming existing divides and challenges in support services at present.
• Briefly discuss strategic planning for the training of ESS staff.

■ Terminological framework

■ Motivation for a terminological framework

Meanings of words can vary from one user to the next and from one context to another (Hernandez 2013). This is also the case with terms used in the literature to describe teams and the role of collaboration in the effective functioning of these teams, leading to confusion and incoherence amongst researchers and student teachers alike. It is, therefore, important to clarify at the outset what the meaning of 'collaboration', 'teams' and 'collaborative teams' within the context of this chapter is to prevent conceptual confusion.

■ Collaboration

'Collaboration' as a concept is derived from the Latin word *collaborare,* which means to 'co-labour' or 'to labour together' to complete a task (Hay 2013:223). It is characterised by voluntary participation, shared responsibility, shared accountability, joint decision-making, trusting and respectful relationships, mutual

support and converging values as co-equal parties in the task-completion process (Hernandez 2013; Sands, Kozleski & French 2000; Vangrieken et al. 2015).

For the purpose of this chapter, collaboration can be defined as a style of joint interaction by individuals with diverse expertise working together as co-equal partners to achieve mutually agreed-upon objectives, sharing a sense of responsibility in order to complete a specific task (De Jong, Meirink & Admiraal 2019; Hernandez 2013; Vangrieken et al. 2015).

■ Teams

What is a team? Forsyth (2014:3) defines a team as a group of people who can function together and consists of 'two or more individuals who are connected by social relationships'. Ravi and Sumathi (2016) add that individuals who form a team share an agreed-upon activity or task to achieve a goal; teamwork combines the individual efforts of team members to achieve this goal.

■ Collaborative teams

In today's multidisciplinary, inter- as well as intra-disciplinary and transdisciplinary educational support contexts on various systems levels (see ch. 1), teamwork characterised by collaboration is not optional in the development of support for both teachers and learners but regarded as a necessity (Engelbrecht & Hay 2018; Mfuthwana & Dreyer 2018; Strogilos & Avramidis 2017). There are various categories of collaborative teams, including intra-professional collaborative teams that involve two or more persons from the same field, for example teachers from the same school, and interprofessional collaborative teams that involve professionals from two or more specialised professions, such as psychology and education. These collaborative teams can be based in schools or wider

school districts and can function virtually or face-to-face. With specific reference to virtual teams, team members rely only on electronically mediated communication to collaborate virtually.

In both face-to-face and virtual teams, the following enabling conditions are essential for effective collaboration to take place (Engelbrecht & Hay 2018; Gibson & Cohen 2003; Hernandez 2013; Kitching 2019; Lawson 2004; Stindt et al. 2014):

- Team members are interdependent, with a *shared understanding* of their goals. The effectiveness of achieving the goal lies in harmonising and synchronising the individual and complementary assets each member brings to the team.
- The greater the degree of differentiation, the greater the need for *integration and the fostering of interdependence* that refers to multi-level processes to facilitate shared understanding.
- *Mutual trust, transparency and cultural sensitivity* create a safe environment in which members forge a collective identity and are not ashamed to show vulnerability. In this environment, a willingness to take risks and collective responsibility for outcomes is created. As electronic communication lacks interpersonal cues, which are important for the development of trust, special steps need to be taken to build trust amongst virtual teams.
- The success of both virtual and face-to-face teams lies in the interaction amongst members, the development of a shared language, knowledge and values and the reciprocal influence the members may have on one another.

For the purpose of this chapter, collaborative (support) teams are characterised by a unity of purpose, the fostering of co-equal relationships and the promotion of trust and mutual responsibility as well as cultural sensitivity towards collectively achieving a common goal (Engelbrecht & Hay 2018; Kitching 2019; Nel et al. 2013; Strogilos & Avramidis 2017).

■ Basic principles in collaborative teamwork dynamics: Theoretical approaches and models of collaborative group dynamics

■ Theoretical perspective on collaborative support teams

As discussed extensively in the literature and in other chapters in this book, the traditional view of learning needs as being primarily confined to learners with medically identifiable disabilities (medical approach) has changed to a much broader view and understanding of possible sources of learning needs as not only located within the learner but often located in wider educational, sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts as well (Engelbrecht & Artiles 2016; Green & Moodley 2018; Hay 2014). It has also become clear that in many instances, a learning need is the 'cumulative result of the interaction of extrinsic (e.g. economic) and intrinsic (e.g. a hearing impairment) conditions' (Green & Moodley 2018:196). As discussed in Chapter 1 and pointed out elsewhere (e.g. Green & Moodley 2018), the complex and dynamic ways in which diverse learning needs interact with one another can be integrated by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of human development, which can be used both as a map of possible sources of learning needs as well as possible sources of support. Within the broader framework of the bio-ecological theoretical perspective, education support teams in South Africa that are systemically positioned can generate Afrocentric and community-based support interventions that are contextually and culturally relevant for the development of inclusive school communities (Green & Moodley 2018; Mfuthwana & Dreyer 2018).

As each one of us is part of a bio-ecological framework within complex cultural-historical contexts informed by the chronological (time) and ecological (both biological and social) context in which we grow up and live, we are contextualised in multiple ecosystems

(Conyne & Cook 2004). These ecosystems include culture, school, social relationships, family and the wider social space in which we live and mature. All of these factors shape us to develop in the 'ecological self-sphere' (Lewis & Winkelman 2017; Naess 1988) that encompasses the ecosystem and the environment.

It is, therefore, imperative that schools, as part of the ecosystem, cannot function on an island. Different role players who are concerned with the well-being of the learning environment need to collaborate as teams where opportunities for dialogue in diverse cultural and systemic contexts can be established in a participatory way. Often teachers in individual schools may not have the necessary knowledge or skills to address, coordinate or solve challenges or promote inclusion not causally related to education. For that reason, awareness of the value of networking amongst different systems in order to be able to collaborate with professionals as co-equal partners in a team in unique contexts is important. Effective collaboration can further support teachers to understand their own professional identity and gain an understanding of the value of other professionals as role players. When collaborating on various system levels, role players as co-equal partners can discuss and plan opportunities for in-service training for teachers, identify the needs of ESS and underline the importance of the school and teachers' positive attitude towards both ESS and inclusive education, along with the influence of teachers on learners. The team can further focus on factors concerning teachers' resources, workload and desires, emphasise the importance of parental involvement in the school and coordinate, develop and evaluate interventions and measures based on the learners' individual needs (Hesjedal et al. 2015; Nel et al. 2016). This can include, for example, the implementation of the SIAS document on the SBST or DBST level, as discussed in previous chapters.

As the different team members see themselves as part of an ecosystem (Bender 2003; Lewis & Winkelman 2017), a circular approach amongst collaborative team members, rather than a top-down linear approach, needs to be followed (Fullan 2001).

Lewis and Borunda (2006) referred to a collaborative team as characterised by participatory leadership, and Hesjedal et al. (2015) referred to its interprofessional collaboration characteristics. Both approaches focus on a group of diverse professionals. Why professionals? Because all role players have individual assets and competencies to invest in the team, it must be stressed that this marks a departure from the dominant traditional premise of a medically orientated approach (the trained professional knows best what parents and learners should do) to a bio-ecological approach in which all partners are viewed as co-equal team members with invaluable expertise (Lawson 2004). These professionals can be from different ecosystems that comprise schools consisting of teachers and the SBST, parents or guardians and learners as community members, and support providers, including health professionals such as welfare professionals, community-based support organisations or support professionals such as psychologists, LSEs or experts on disabilities on the DBST level. The professionals liaise with and can be members of the SBST or DBST, where all have a mutual realistic aim, specific roles and responsibilities underpinning holistic measures concerning what is best in including all learners in inclusive school communities (Engelbrecht 2007; Nel et al. 2013; Silverman, Hong & Trepanier-Street 2010).

It is thus evident that for an inclusive education support system to function effectively, collaboration on all system levels, including teachers and parents, is a powerful strategy to support and achieve objectives they are unable to accomplish on their own (Lasker et al. 2001; Nel et al. 2016).

■ Collaborative group and team functioning models

Collaboration involves collective action and the development of new relationships amongst individuals on multiple system levels. The way in which team members interact, connect, communicate and relate with one another to generate joint decisions and

shared responsibility and accountability for outcomes will affect the way in which they will provide effective and sustainable support (Harvey 2013, 2014; Hoever, Zhou & Van Knippenberg 2018; Lasker et al. 2001; Li et al. 2015). Knowledge and understanding of group dynamics and what it entails are, therefore, important in the development of the skills needed for effective and sustainable collaborative partnerships. In the 'Tuckman's stages of group dynamics' section, different models of group dynamics are discussed.

◾ Tuckman's stages of group dynamics

Tuckman's stages of group dynamics in addressing a specific problem (or task) progress through five nonlinear stages of forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Depending on the events and communication strategies, the stages may move backwards. The stages can be summarised as follows (Abudi 2010; Hurt 2012; Ravi & Sumathi 2016; Tuckman & Jensen 1977):

- The *forming stage* is an orientation stage on both the interpersonal and professional levels, where preliminary boundaries and expectations are established.
- In the *brainstorming stage*, members contribute ideas that could potentially become the focus of the task.
- During the *norming stage,* members know their role and work in their part of the task.
- After the members have worked well on finding solutions to identified problems in the task, the *performing stage* follows, where members address the task at hand efficiently.
- The *adjourning stage* is the final stage, which can be somewhat emotional when members part ways.

◾ Marston's DISC profile model

The DISC profile model predicts member behaviour based on four key personality traits that can offer insight when selecting and grouping members for a task (see Rohm 2013).

☐ Dominance

Characteristics: direct, decisive, ego-driven problem solver and risk taker; like new challenges and freedom from routine; driven to overcome obstacles.

Strengths: coordinator and time manager; challenges the status quo; innovation.

Weaknesses: argumentative, ruthless, stubborn and aggressive.

☐ Inspiring or influential

Characteristics: enthusiastic, influential, hopeful, trusting, impulsive, charismatic and demonstrative.

Strengths: problem solver, negotiator and peacemaker.

Weaknesses: more concerned with popularity than tangible results; lacks attention to detail.

☐ Steady or supportive

Characteristics: reliable, predictable, friendly, good listener, team player, empathetic, easy-going and altruistic.

Strengths: dependable, loyal; have patience and empathy; skilled in conflict resolution; prepared to compromise.

Weaknesses: resistant to change, sensitive to criticism and has difficulty prioritising.

☐ Cautious/conscientious/compliant

Characteristics: has high standards; values precision and accuracy; analytical, systematic, even-tempered, realistic, logical and methodical; has respect for authority.

Strengths: excellent information gatherer or researcher; able to define situations precisely and accurately; offers a realistic perspective.

Weaknesses: can get tied down to detail, needs clear boundaries, struggles with procedures and methods, has difficulty accepting criticism, may be overly timid and avoid conflict.

The following profiles work well together (Davis & Klassen 2012; Forsyth et al. 2016; Hogg, Abrams & Brewer 2017):

- Dominance – Conscientious
- Influence – Dominance
- Conscientious – Steady
- Steady – Influence
- Steady – Dominance.

■ Beckhardt's GRPI model

The GRPI (Goals, Roles, Procedures and Interpersonal Relationships) model outlines four interrelated elements of teamwork (Agile Leadership Network 2013; Raue et al. 2013):

- Collaborative team members need to understand what the *goals* of their collaboration are and be committed to achieving these. The goals need to be aligned to establish trust, make progress and accomplish the planned outcome.
- All team members must know their *role* and what is expected from them.
- *Interpersonal* trust, communication and collaboration are expected of each team member to make progress.
- *Processes* need to be in place on how to make decisions, to address conflict to solve problems and to define workflow and procedures to be followed in completing the project.

■ Thomas and Kilmann's conflict model

Thomas and Kilmann's (2015) conflict model addresses team conflict according to the following five approaches, each with a positive and a negative impact:

- Healthy *competition* amongst team members can be highly effective in reaching interesting and innovative goals, if well managed. On the other side, uncooperative behaviour, characterised by the urge to win at all cost, can result in power struggles.
- When team members do not *accommodate* one another, the less assertive members tend to be silent, even when they have good ideas, which can result in a feeling of resentment.
- Team members *compromising* can lead to dissatisfaction and mediocre progress or results. Sometimes compromise is necessary, but often the best solution comes from a single inspirational source.
- *Avoiding* a problem and neglecting the need for a solution are the least effective ways of dealing with conflict.
- For team members to *collaborate,* the best way to find solutions that benefit the whole team and build respect should be found.

■ Lencioni's five dysfunctions of a team

Lencioni's (2002) model outlines common problems that have an impact on effectiveness:

- *Absence of trust* has an impact on communication and performance, and then team members are unlikely to take risks or ask for help.
- *Fear of conflict* can lead to a false form of peace amongst team members that negatively affects progress and innovation. Conflict is part of teamwork and can be very productive if managed effectively.
- A *lack of commitment and accountability*, where team members are not committed to following through on tasks or meeting deadlines, ultimately affects the success of the entire project.
- When team members do not *attend to results* and effective achievements are not planned, members often position their own individual goals above those of the task at hand. The result is that the team loses sight of the estimated results.

■ Summary of group dynamics within a bio-ecological framework

As noted by Hernandez (2013), collaborative relationships within a bio-ecological approach benefit from the continual exchange of ideas and actions of individual professionals who interact with one another. It is clear that cohesion in groups, which can vary in size and include members from diverse cultural backgrounds, professional experience and work contexts, is essential for the group or team to function effectively as a dynamic, interactive, collaborative team. It is critical to build effective relationships to trust, share and support one another to address a problem of mutual interest in a supportive atmosphere where members can listen, emphasise, motivate and learn from one another. Also, it is essential that there is an understanding that conflict can occur, causing teams not to function optimally. Managing conflict should, therefore, be regarded as an essential skill in the development of collaborative teams and is an important catalyst for learning, development and innovation within the group itself (Lawson 2004).

It should be noted that effective cohesion between team members is determined by notions of collaboration as not an end in itself but rather a catalytic process used in interactive and interpersonal relationships amongst individuals working together within, for example, systemically placed education support teams (Winkelman 2017).

■ Determinants of effective collaboration within support teams in South Africa

As discussed in the previous sections, reconceptualising education support teams as collaborative support teams includes varied but interrelated factors and determinants that have been identified in the literature as important in the development of collaborative skills within individual team members (Engelbrecht & Hay 2018; Hernandez 2013; Lasker et al. 2001; Lawson 2004;

Sands et al. 2000). It is important to note that the power to effectively combine the perspectives and interpersonal skills of team members, available resources and characteristics of the partnership itself (which then influence the effectiveness of support team interventions) can be identified as the synergy a team achieves (Lasker et al. 2001). This synergy provides a foundation for the longer-term sustainability of education support practices that includes the gradual development of communities of practice (CoPs) in which an education support team continues over a period of time to engage in a process of collective collaborative learning about the effects of collaborative practice (Patton & Parker 2017; Wenger 2000). As noted by Wenger (2000), developing a CoP takes time, sustainable peer-to-peer professional development activities and individual and group reflection.

These factors of achieving synergy are discussed in finer detail below.

■ Perspectives, attitudes and professional efficacy

As mentioned earlier, the lack of adequate training of team members to work collaboratively with one another influences prospective support team members' perspectives and attitudes towards working collaboratively. In many instances, especially teachers do not feel prepared to work with others in a professional way (Nel et al. 2013). Possessing a sense of professional efficacy and a sense of competence is, according to Hernandez (2013), critical in overcoming any hesitancy to work collaboratively. Furthermore, team members' perceptions of the possible benefits and challenges involved also need to be considered. Possible benefits include an enhanced ability to address an issue that is important to them and the acquisition of new competencies, including the ability to engage in critical reflective learning as practitioners in, as stated earlier, the longer-term development of CoPs, whilst challenges may include the diversion of their time

and other duties, as well as reduced credit for their involvement in collaborative activities (Lasker et al. 2001; Probst & Borzillo 2008; Wenger 2000). Minimising these challenges and maximising the benefits are, therefore, important and should be addressed on all system levels.

■ Interpersonal skill capacity and relationships amongst partners

It has been pointed out in previous sections that to develop effective collaborative support teams, successful interpersonal relationships are invaluable. Understanding the interpersonal dynamics of the collaborative relationship could be challenging. The following individual interpersonal skills play a major role in successful relationships amongst partners (De Jong et al. 2019; Forsyth 2014; Lasker et al. 2001; Vangrieken et al. 2015; Wenger 2000):

- Effective communication skills need to be inclusive, democratic and cyclical. They should be based on reflection and feedback amongst team members, where everyone collaboratively reviews previous performance, sets and evaluates short term and longer-term goals and continuously monitors progress in reaching planned goals.
- The ability to initiate effective collaboration through the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the team members is critical. Team members need to understand the value of team cohesion within a participatory leadership approach as well as their individual responsibility for effective entrustment and growth to reach success.
- The ability to gain trust and respect needs to be established during the collaborative planning phase, when the roles and responsibilities of the team members are shaped. The style of leadership within the group is especially relevant to the development of trust and mutual respect. A participatory leadership approach implies that team members are transparently involved, both formally and informally, in the provision of leadership.

- Cultural sensitivity needs to be stressed as, generally, teams consist of diverse members who need to understand the complexities of working with people who have different perceptions and contextual and cultural backgrounds and experiences.
- Handling emotions in a team is important for effective collaboration. Team members need to understand the self in order to understand others, which enables them to make sense of emotionally complicated situations.
- The ability to manage conflict requires continual involvement by all team members. It is imperative to understand that conflict is not a single argument or an isolated problem but rather an accumulation of either miscommunication or missed opportunities. It is, therefore, significant that teams should have collaboratively developed conflict management documents and methods in place not to be caught unprepared.

◼ **Partnership characteristics**

Lasker et al. (2001) pointed out that collegial and supportive characteristics of the collaborative partnership are important determinants in the development of collaborative support teams. With specific reference to leadership, the following aspects, according to Lasker et al. (2001) and Wehmeyer (2014), play a major role in determining whether a collaborative partnership is efficient:

- Leadership involves open and participatory communication with team members regarding goals, expectations and feedback. It furthermore implies that the leader of the collaborative team understands and appreciates the team members' different perspectives, is able to bridge their diverse cultures and actively encourages the sharing of ideas, resources and power within the group, thereby facilitating the development of partnership synergy and, ideally, an emerging community of practice. Leaders in collaborative teams should also be able to recognise administrative and management

barriers to collaborative practices and be able to assess and meet needs with regard to resources.

- Governance and power differentials within the team that focus on transcending disciplinary boundaries through a process of the transference of skills and the sharing of roles and mutual respect play an important role (Wehmeyer 2014). As pointed out by Lasker et al. (2001), the team's form of governance may be reflected in team members' comfort levels with the team leader's leadership style, the decision-making process in the team and the degree to which they support decisions.

■ Role of contextual setting in which collaboration is taking place

The following contextual setting and organisational factors need to be considered:

- Wider community contextual characteristics that can influence team functioning, including negative perceptions of colla-boration and the support team's relationship with the wider community to address issues in this regard.
- The implementation of education policies on wider societal levels and the way in which implementation is accepted on the macro-, meso- and micro-levels.

■ Strategic planning for the training of education support services staff

As clearly indicated in the literature, collaborative skills development in educational support teams that have an identity defined by a commitment to a shared area of interest is lacking in professional development programmes (e.g. Hay 2013; Nel et al. 2013, 2016; Patton & Parker 2017). Various solutions are available to address this important challenge, of which the following can serve as an example.

■ Example of an online training programme for education support services staff

■ Background

In a 4-week inclusive education skills development training programme for 140 ESS staff members, the training with an emphasis on collaboration skills was grounded in the inquiry-based learning (IBL) interactive teaching model (Robinson & Sadao 2005). Ethics clearance for this endeavour was obtained from the university and the participants gave informed consent to participate in the training programmes. They also consented to the use of relevant comments that would be anonymised if used in any discussion of the programme.

The principle of the IBL model is to study an authentic problem scenario related to the field or problem at hand, which makes the training practical and narrows the theory–practice gap so that trainees can acquire, clarify and apply specific theoretical concepts (Lee & So 2015). In this sense, as trainers, we have striven to explain theoretical concepts with practical examples and scenarios, as this was a pre-request and expectation of the trainees to gain from the training. The following quotations support the trend of their request: 'I want to learn how to identify learners with barriers to learning' and 'assist me on how to deal with learners' and 'how to teach'.

The IBL model also encourages direct or internal interaction between trainers and trainees from different ecologies of knowledge. For example, before the training programme had started, we sent out general questionnaires to the trainees on their position in schools and their subjects of teaching. This allowed for knowledge blending that encourages critical reflection, conceptual learning and problem-solving skills (Schon 1983). Two additional goals, namely the principles of collaborative teamwork and understanding the impact of diverse cultures,

both at the support service provider's and support users' level in education, had also been embedded in the programme. The reason for adding these was to enhance a professional mindset of reflection on action and critical reflection in action and develop culturally sensitive collaboration skills. The trainees agreed that as South Africa was a diverse country, it was imperative that we 'understand that we are a rainbow nation and that each of our cultures are [*sic*] important because they represent who and what we are'. Schon (1983) indicated that when reflective skills become entrenched in daily activities, a person can analyse and respond to various issues and solve problems collaboratively and more effectively.

The skills development training programme took place on an e-learning platform because of the COVID-19 lockdown period. As trainers, we used the learning process to promote our own critical reflection and thinking skills to investigate, explore, discover and evaluate (cf. Kuhlthau, Maniotes & Caspari 2007) this new teaching strategy under previously unknown circumstances. As we could not meet the trainees face-to-face, we had to develop new and innovative strategies to develop not only the interpersonal skills of the participants but also our own, which included the following aspects that were discussed in some detail earlier:

• effective communication skills
• the ability to initiate partnerships
• the ability to gain trust and respect
• cultural sensitivity
• handling of emotions
• the ability to manage conflict amongst the members.

We further ensured that we provided a supportive learning context and that the planned activities and assessment strategies were suitable for remote learning and teamwork (Levi 2011). The day before the programme commenced, all involved participated in a Zoom session, where the trainees were introduced to the

trainers and the online support administrator. We discussed the outline of the programme and individual and group assessments, and the trainees received instructions on how to use the e-learning platform to engage with one another and the trainers and how to upload their assessment activities. The support administrator formed 20 groups of 7 trainees each, 'according to same districts that they come from […] [so] that it would be easier for them'.

As trainers, we placed much emphasis on collaboration in the teams, because it is a core principle of the implementation of inclusive education and effective support strategies. We argued that by exposing the trainees to effective teamwork and its dynamics, along with the strengths and weaknesses thereof, they could become mindful of the typical pitfalls in collaborative support teamwork and gain an understanding of working around it to, in future, participate effectively in culturally sensitive collaborative teamwork. Examples of the collaboration pitfalls in this training included logging into the e-platform and submitting the assessment activities on time. The following are extracts from typical emails received at the beginning of the training:

> 'I humbly request you and your colleagues to assist students who did not manage to write the first test that was due yesterday by giving them a second chance to do it as they were not familiar with online assessment […] the challenge had been most are not technologically inclined.' (unspecified participant, email, date unspecified)

A further challenge that came to the fore when group assignments had to be uploaded on the e-platform read as follows:

> '[*M*]embers do not even have a smartphone or any device that we can use for a chat like WhatsApp or even zoom. We live in scattered places, so face-to-face meeting is out of the question. I was therefore, appealing to your good conscience to reconsider this thing of group work, especially, if we cannot work face-to-face.' (unspecified participant, email, date unspecified)

A few trainees experienced challenges with regard to keeping to the time frame of submitting assignments:

> 'And finally, the issue of due dates also put[*s*] an enormous pressure on us, because we are given a limited time to work on the assignments

and not forgetting that we still have so much work to do at our respective schools.' (unspecified participant, email, date unspecified)

Overall, we experienced a positive attitude amongst most of the trainees, who found solutions to the challenges they experienced. The following are comments from the programme administrator:

'There are a few students who had difficulties with interacting with other students in order to complete the group assignments. Some have did [*sic*] it individually. Also quite a few of them have submitted their assignments in my email because they were experiencing challenges in submitting their assignments on eFundi [*the e-platform*].' (unspecified participant, email, date unspecified)

Although technological devices, the use thereof and sufficient data for the trainees were prerequisites from the side of the higher education institution in presenting the programme online, it appeared that some trainees received last-minute support from the DoE to be able to do so. As a result, the trainers, the programme administrator and the DoE agreed to adjust some of the submission dates of the assessment. We argued that 'we would rather focus on learning and developing of support knowledge and skills to address barriers to learning than to stick to submission dates'.

■ Outline of the online programme
□ Group dynamics

For the planning and action phases of the training (cf. Marks, Mathieu & Zaccaro 2001), we used Tuckman's stages of group dynamics to post an online survey gaining information on the trainees' *expectations* of the training programme ahead. The following were collective answers: 'be assisted with various strategies to implement that will be attainable by a disadvantaged school and the society at large'; *preferences*: 'To gain more knowledge and skills to fully implement inclusive education at my school'; and *deprecatory* remarks: 'To waste my time' or 'Learning things that will only get myself a certificate but not adequate skill that can be applied in a practical context' and 'to

be given a lot of information that does not show practical scenarios [*sic*] in class activities to apply inclusive[ly]'.

On a personal level, following the DISC profile model, the trainees stated their characteristics, leadership abilities, strengths and weaknesses. The questionnaires indicated that many of the trainees were in management positions in their schools and therefore viewed themselves as leaders who solved problems. They further valued their positions and described these as to 'Empower, motivate and inspire them [colleagues] to make our roles or duties effective'. The following quotation summarises most of the answers: 'I am an innovative person, I believe in working as a group such as working with other teachers and building much relationship with the parents and as well my learners'.

Based on these findings, we grouped the different teams and presented these teams as collaborative partnerships on the e-platform. We encouraged the trainees to appoint a team leader and an assistant team leader democratically. These leaders were responsible for, amongst other things, administrative tasks, such as posting group activities online and laying down the fundamentals of the GRPI model (cf. section 'Beckhardt's GRPI model'). We also stressed the importance of leadership as boundary spanning as well as participatory in understanding and appreciating different perspectives and sharing ideas, resources and power within each collaborative team (cf. Lasker et al. 2001).

During the planning phases, we made use of the SMART goals to focus on *specific* aspects of inclusive education in our training. Therefore, the training did not only refer to knowledge on inclusive education but included attitude and behaviour competencies regarding the role, position and responsibilities of ESS in leadership and collaborative team membership to overcome barriers in collaboration. It further focused on planning, reflecting and providing feedback on learning activities and individual responsibilities, so that they could thrive in their roles. In our own planning, we continually verified whether the training was *attainable* for remote learning, whether it was *relevant* to the

trainees' current authentic teaching context and whether it adhered to what the trainees had formulated as professional needs, as stated in the questionnaires. We also explored how we could *measure* and *monitor* their learning progress through different online means of assessment, such as individual and group tasks, reflections, feedback, chatroom discussions and looping emails. In addition, we ascertained whether it was *time-bound*, meaning, would they be able to manage to master the learning material and attain the goals within the four week period alongside their daily teaching tasks. As trainers, we planned to post the assignments after the presentation; however, in the chatrooms, the trainees asked for assignments in advance – 'Can we please have the assignment for the third group assessment and the portfolio's activities?' Another trainee confirmed this request with the following comment: 'Yes please. We are all full-time teachers so we need to start early because our time is limited. The sooner the assignments are available the sooner we can start and work a few hours per day on it'.

As we progressed with the online training, it was apparent that the trainees gained self-confidence on the e-platform and started to answer one another's questions in the chatroom. As trainers, we took one step back to joyfully observe their growth, as shown in the following chat amongst three trainees: 'Good day I cannot find the […] documents IEP, SIAS and the lesson plan template', to which another trainee responded, 'Good day […] click tests & quizzes then click History of inclusive Education in SAS [SIAS] the[n] go to assessment and announcement o tla bona di questions tsa multiple choice'. Another trainee responded, 't[h]anx dear, you answer[e]d for me too, I also struggled'.

It is thus essential that in the planning phase, inadequacies in planning need to be highlighted and addressed for the action phase to be successful. For this reason, the first week of training moved cyclically between planning and action. We realised that as remote learning was new to both the trainers and the trainees, we needed to set clear goals for success and give reflective and

feedback activities after each set of work. By doing so, we could ensure that the trainees develop e-learning skills and become acquainted with the mental discipline of reflective practices to develop reflective thinking skills, individually as well as in a team because that formed part of their assessment throughout the training. The questions posed were specific to the process of reflective thinking. For example, 'How would learners from different cultural backgrounds be affected with […]?' 'What are the moral implications of […]?' 'What evidence supports and contradicts […]?' By reading the trainees' reflections and feedback, we as trainers could evaluate our teaching content and monitor our adherence to the expectations of the trainees. We realised that some of our actions might change after the first week, as the trainees did struggle with reflections and application questions. It was clear that the roles of trainer and trainee were not fixed during the first week but were rather that of co-producers, as all of the members participated inclusively to become better equipped for the training. Aligned with the aforementioned, McGrath (1962) indicated that leadership and followership are complementary and participatory.

We used Thomas and Kilmann's conflict model as a set of guidelines for the team to function effectively. Every week, the team leaders and the assistant team leaders reflected on the progress, problems and functioning of the team. The following are some comments made, in line with Lencioni's five dysfunctions of a team, to assistant team leaders to report on problems that had an impact on team effectiveness: 'we make a[n] effort in the group to answer each other with respect and not to undermined [*sic*] people's idea'; 'we first find the problem, listen and try to make them understand the cause [when there is any ineffectiveness] for the whole team'. Another team leader said she had set ground rules in collaboration with other team members as 'we all have different views over different things. It's important that we understand working as a team we have an objective to achieve. So we don't involve our emotions[;] we are all entitled to have [*sic*] an opinion'.

As trainers, we encouraged healthy team competition (cf. section 'Marston's DISC profile model') by posting score charts of participation, along with efforts to achieve synergy, goals, creativity and team spirit. As stated earlier, as time went by, the trainees, based on the statistics, visited the e-platform more often and left inspiring and supportive comments for team members. Based on the increasing standard of the assessment tasks, we could identify an improvement in collaboration in the teams. The answers and practical examples of how to address different learning barriers by means of adjusted activities and lesson plans, parental involvement, considering different teaching styles, and taking the learner and learning context into account, served as evidence.

☐ Development of problem-solving skills

As the training proceeded, we encouraged the trainees to identify the problems they experienced during the training and to explain how they went about it to solve those in the following way:

- **Problematise:** During team activities, the trainees were confronted with their own individual boundaries or gaps of knowledge when measured against the understanding of other team members. Trainees saw this as motivation to learn from one another or to introduce different skills to one another – 'Wow, this is a good idea, I like it, I can for sure use it for Gr 7 Maths and science'.
- **Demand:** When completing activities, some trainees experienced knowledge gaps and realised they needed new knowledge to enable them to complete the tasks successfully. As this training took place on an e-platform, they contacted different team members via email or WhatsApp requesting information or made use of the Internet to search for information.
- **Demand and refine:** During team assignments, the trainees had the opportunity to pursue answers to questions, uncover principles, refine their existing knowledge and develop critical reflection skills.

- **Apply:** The portfolio as the last assessment task was an overview of the training material to be applied to a specific policy document. This required that the trainees had to re-organise and re-index knowledge to reinforce and enrich new and existing knowledge (Gordin & Pea 1995; Hiebert et al. 1996). The general reflections on the portfolio as summative assessment were positive – 'I was resistant towards the SIAS [policy document] but I change my mind' and 'this document think[s] of everything that can lead to a barrier [to learning]'.

■ Conclusion

This chapter has focused on reconceptualising a framework for educational support teams within inclusive education by emphasising a deeper understanding of group dynamics and collaboration skills to overcome existing divides and challenges in support services and providing an example of a training programme for team members. As illustrated in the example of a training programme, it is clear that the success, effectiveness and sustainability of the implementation of the programme depend on more coherent, theoretically sound and pragmatic knowledge of the multiple components involved in the further development of the provision of effective support. This includes the acquisition and especially the maintenance of the skills needed to collaborate effectively in inclusive school communities and, ideally, the emerging development of CoPs in wider school communities in which knowledge can be created and critically shared to improve the functioning of educational support teams (Probst & Borzillo 2008). In reconceptualising the functioning of DBSTs and SBSTs, Hernandez's (2013:495) statement that 'collaboration is not just a set of actions but also a way of being' in the longer term should be kept in mind at all times by all role players.

Psychosocial educational support within rural school contexts: Examples of good practice

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■ Introduction

This chapter endeavours to show that psychosocial educational support in some rural schools is effective despite the lack of resources, and as a result, many schools can learn from the best practices of these schools. The provision of support services in education in South Africa has always been characterised by disparity, and support services have always been unequally provided to rural schools. The availability of resources is a big factor in this regard. Too little attention has been given to sharing resources with rural schools. The National Education Policy Investigation report (1992) pointed out that materials including resources for teaching, assessment tools, treatment equipment and books are limited, dubious in terms of quality and disproportionately distributed. Moreover, Hay (2003) stated that human resources in support services have suffered little attention, especially in rural areas. Consequently, the belief that rural areas in South Africa are degraded and under-resourced (African National Congress 1995) characterises the nature of rural schools and regrettably still exists after the democratisation of the country. However, it is noteworthy that since the dawn of democracy, the South African DoE at the national level has provided a comprehensive framework for ESS at the school, provincial and national level. In this framework, support teams at all levels of schools play a key role in identifying and addressing barriers to learning in their immediate setting (Donald et al. 2020). These teams act together with DBSTs that deliver integrated and, if needed, more specialised services (DoE 2005). This practice was and is mandatory for all schools, including those in remote or rural areas. The aim is to ensure the proper and effective provision of education support, especially in rural areas and small towns, through the transformation of the existing system to make it more effective, more equitable and more just (DoE 2001).

Whilst a reasonable proportion of research has been done on the roles and the challenges of support teams in rural schools, this study aims to make known the best practices that these teams exhibit when providing psychosocial educational support

in the midst of resource constraints. It is the opinion of the authors that rural schools can and do make a difference through the effective provision of psychosocial educational support. Thus, rural schools have the potential to put into place measures that will help them become sites of care and support (Bialobrzeska, Randell & Winkler 2012), whilst demonstrating pockets of excellence that others can learn from. In this chapter, conceptualising rurality, rurality and its support from transformative learning, rurality and its support from a strength- and asset-based approach, international perspectives and good practices in rural environments, some examples of good practice in South Africa and the ideal of reconceptualised support within rural schools will be explored.

■ Conceptualising rurality

The literature shows that the term 'rural' is undoubtedly ambiguous. Rasheed (2020) mentioned that conceptualising rural is an important but not a straightforward endeavour. According to Larsen and Dehle (2007), many definitions of 'rural' are based on the purposes of the definition, and all of them are arbitrary and unsatisfactory on some level, of which population density remains the most typical apex of definitions. For instance, Linley (2000) was of the opinion that the term 'rural' describes a setting where farm activities are more prominent, coupled with low concentration of population, inaccessibility and some non-farming activities. Abdulwakeel (2017) asserted that 'rural areas are clearly recognisable and constitute the space where human settlements and infrastructure occupy only small patches of the landscape'. Braga, Remoaldo and Fiúza (2016) added to this by defining 'rural space' as a traditional place where natural landscapes and low population density predominate. Chigbu (2013) puts forth that beyond the natural resources and population concentration, rural areas can be characterised in a different manner, including places where most people spend most of their working time on farms, and be associated with long distances and poor infrastructure. Based on the above, it is clear that there are

many definitions of 'rural' from different perspectives, and that these have been in dispute for a long time. Avoiding being involved in the debate, the authors prefer to look at the different approaches that clearly conceptualise the nature of the rural context.

The first approach that shaped the definition of 'rural' is *positivism*. Beesley and University (2003) postulated that the early wave of positivism brought with it the need to observe and record the nature of rural contexts. Through this approach, factors such as the landscape, land use, demographic variables and communal interdependence (solidarity) amongst people are assumed as the main features of 'rural'. Davoudi (2011) affirmed that the evidence can be found in the earliest rural studies that described rurality in terms of demographics, agricultural production and economic pathways. Cloke, Marsden and Mooney (2006) motivated that the understanding of the structures that sustained rural life is significant. In this regard, the importance of economic activity in rural areas was seen as the interaction between agriculture, farm families and the farming community. As a result, rurality was rooted within a plan that created it as a place of production (Beesley & University 2003; Halfacree 2006).

Furthermore, Winson and Leach (2002) emphasised that positivism allowed the exploration of how local rural communities responded to change (especially change from external powers such as national or provincial governments). In this respect, the focus in understanding rurality was positioned on the place-based aspect and knowledge of the local communities. Accordingly, farming, other available resources within the local community, culture and local knowledge were regarded as the most important tools to define rurality. It is clear that the lens of positivism recognised rural places as complex and diverse, and that contained elements that required actors within rural places to identify themselves as rural (Shortall 2016). Another opinion on the definition of rurality that is in line with positivism is that 'rural' can be best understood through the postmodern lens of the social representation theory (Halfacree 2006). Halfacree (2006) described 'rural' by using statistical and demographic approaches,

such as statistics, administration, built-up areas, functional regions, agricultural and population density. It is his opinion that these descriptive definitions of rural were functionally designed to respond to specialised academic and planning purposes.

The second approach that conceptualises rural is *sociocultural description.* The term 'sociocultural' relates to social and cultural factors that include the common traditions, habits, patterns and beliefs present in a population group. In this respect, sociocultural promotes the definition of rurality, as it includes the contributions that the rural community make to the development of individuals within the community (Halfacree 2006). The emphasis is on the interaction between the developing people and the culture in which they live. Furthermore, Argent (2016) points out that this approach promotes the notion that the cultural ideology of a particular rural community defines its rurality. Didkowsky (2016) and Argent (2016) stressed that sociocultural explorations position rural life as attractive, pristine and natural, moral, supportive and cohesive. Besides the above, Corbett and Boeck (2016) and Stenbacka (2011) believed in sociocultural constructions of rurality and that dominant culture can recognise both the natural and traditional aspects, as well as the marginalised, conservative and 'backward' aspects thereof. This added the idea that rurality is sometimes also defined according to the latter negative connotation, depending on the perspectives of those who create it.

Woods (2005) and Young (2008) suggested *locality as a manifestation of economic activity* as the third approach to define rurality. In this approach, rurality is perceived by the existence of the livelihood of rural life as influenced by politics in the economy. Reimer, Thompson and Prokopy (2012) mentioned that this approach acknowledges the contribution of rural economic activities to urban areas. As the contribution of rurality to urban areas is unmeasurable, however, the provision of natural resources such as farming, fishing, forestry and mining is considered to be the leading supply to making life possible worldwide. This puts forth the impression that the definition of rurality includes the supply of natural resources to urban areas. In agreement, the

definition of rurality should also involve the services of the rural community to urban development.

The fourth approach that defines rurality is that of *social representation*. Social representations offer the linking between the world and one's daily consensual understanding of it, including the potential to address social problems and foster interventions and change (Howarth 2006). This approach explains rurality in the context of how communities can reproduce and transform their public spaces. According to Howarth (2006), rural communities can show social representations through the empowering and disempowering of communities to battle stigmatisation in order to reconstruct steadiness and meaningful connections with one's own past. Within these contexts, social representation serves numerous functions that emerge together with the changes in reality: from initial cognitive coping and the social sharing of emotions to splitting mechanisms typified by irony to the safeguarding of identity and empowerment processes during the post-emergency phases (Sarrica et al. 2016). It is, therefore, appropriate to identify rurality according to a socially constructed and shared 'state of mind' (Parkins & Reed 2012) where meaning can only be ascribed through discourse that includes individuals with lived experience of that context.

■ Rural education and support services in South Africa

■ Rural education

In South Africa, rurality is categorised by diverse contexts. As a result, the DBE (2017:15) has warned that the classification of rural schools is informed by a set of the following indicators or filters to be included in a classification index:

- *Location*: Public schools in rural areas may be situated on government land, communal land or private land (primarily on

farms and on church land); isolationism and remoteness; and dispersed settlements.

- Other filters could include school phase, various social and economic deprivation factors, poverty, distance from services or facilities and service delivery, the physical and cultural environment, and the size of the school.
- The analysis must also extend the multi-deprivational indices, developed by Statistics South Africa, to categorise public schools in Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, to all public schools in rural domains.

The literature indicates that rural education in South Africa remains under-resourced and underprivileged compared to education in urban areas. Leibowitz (2017) puts forth that in this country, rurality is not a strong focus in education, whilst Hlalele (2014) noted that the problems experienced in rural South African education are, in fact, extensive and present, in varied degrees, in earlier disadvantaged communities. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) mentioned that 'many rural schools in South Africa have found educational changes to be more challenging than affluent schools and have struggled to maintain these changes'. Moreover, Pettersson and Ström (2019) emphasised that research regarding rural schools demonstrates that teachers working in such schools experience different working conditions compared to those experienced by teachers in urban schools. Therefore, the discussion below will explore a reflection on rural education in South Africa and the challenges thereof.

Rural status in South Africa is linked directly to apartheid and the colonial policies of dispossession, resettlement and systematic exclusion from opportunities (Hlalele 2012), and as a result, it has had a negative impact on education. Ebersöhn and Ferreira (2012), Modi (2016) and Leibowitz (2017) affirmed that rural education has been affected predominantly by apartheid. Nowadays, people may be highly educated compared to earlier, but they tend to depend more on government grants. Also, in terms of food production, they are less self-reliant and are more

likely to migrate to cities. Furthermore, factors such as travelling long distances to school, the bad conditions of roads and bridges to schools, an absence of or limited access to information and communication technology, inadequate health and educational facilities, and insufficient access to lifelong learning opportunities have been described as the greatest hindrances to education (Goddard & Habermann 2001; Guyvers et al. 2011; Hlalele 2012; Mabusela 2016; Taole 2015).

According to Hlalele (2012), the cost of education is another major problem in rural areas in South Africa. Many parents in rural areas are exempted from paying school fees, and they use their welfare grants for other necessities. Gardiner (2008) raised the issue that the cost of schooling has to do with more than school fees, and the poor find it just as difficult to pay for transport, uniforms and other school necessities. This affects children, as they need to contribute significantly to the income of the household. Hartnack (2017) and Moses, Van der Berg and Rich (2017) pointed out that children's contribution to household income promotes the high dropout rate in rural schools in South Africa.

The high rate of illiteracy that is dominant in rural areas in South Africa contributes to the challenges experienced in education. This prevails, despite the call made by the 2000 delegates from 155 countries agreed to at the Education for All Conference in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994, that primary education should be universalised and illiteracy reduced by the end of the century (UNESCO 2008). Illiteracy breeds exclusion in all areas of society, and it comes with a heavy price tag. In many instances, illiterate communities are easily exploited by sacrosanct and vested groups (Mkandawire 2010) and rarely does transforming schools to their benefit succeed (MacNeil, Prater & Busch 2009). Ari and Yilmaz (2017) insisted that in an illiterate environment, there is meagre scope for development. Moreover, schools in rural areas are classified as under-resourced, and so, education

in these schools becomes more challenging. Many rural schools are deficient in terms of the necessary physical resources and basic infrastructure for sanitation (Du Plessis & Mestry 2019). Leibowitz (2009) further mentioned that these schools suffer from conditions such as a lack of electricity, television or books, and discursive challenges, such as access to the dominant language, English. In research conducted by Hlalele (2014), it was found that a lack of basic services (water, sanitation, etc.), inadequate infrastructure in schools (buildings, information and communication technology, etc.) and the long distances learners have to travel to schools affect access to and the quality of education. These realities of a lack of resources and infrastructure in rural schools put both teachers and learners at a disadvantage.

A lack of qualified teachers and unproductive development programmes that should allow teachers to acquire essential knowledge and skills also seem like barriers to effective education in rural schools in South Africa. This has been affirmed by Taylor and Mulhall (2001) and Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) who have found that rural schools frequently experience a lack of well-qualified or experienced teachers, as experienced teachers prefer to move to more desirable (urban) schools. Some reasons for teachers not favouring rural schools include, amongst other things, a lack of available financial resources, teachers' unwillingness to stay in rural areas, an absence of support for newly qualified teachers and deficiency in career development opportunities. Moreover, poor morale and motivation on the side of teachers in rural schools exacerbate these problems. In studies conducted by Kiker and Emeagwali (2010) and Green (2012), it is indicated that teachers with low morale tend to view problems as failures, to experience decreased productivity and disengagement from their job, to take additional sick leave and to seek employment elsewhere. Also, Smith (2010) confirmed that especially teachers with low morale at rural schools take personal and sick days at increased rates because of their state of mind,

which could possibly be linked to a decrease in learners' achievement.

The curriculum in rural schools is a serious challenge as it does not fully help people to survive in their own environment. Research indicates that the curricula of South African schools are too academic, theoretical and examination-orientated. As a result, the curricula mostly are irrelevant to rural children. The findings in studies conducted by Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) were that rural schools offered fewer subjects, presented fewer electives such as art and computer studies and had fewer advanced placement offerings. Moreover, Pitsoe (2013) found that teachers in rural schools did not follow the procedures in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement. Van der Merwe (2010) emphasised that there is no culture of using teaching materials in rural schools. In terms of the curriculum, Avila and Gasperini (2005) concluded that it should combine the core national content and the local content, taking into consideration context, customs and livelihood activities.

The challenges of managing multigrade teaching, especially in large classes, compounded by the acute shortage of teachers, put a strain on teachers' ability to provide quality teaching and learning. This is aggravated by the demand by inclusion policies of providing individual attention because of the diverse needs of learners. Hlalele (2014) pointed out that multigrade teaching adversely affects the quality of education, whilst Brown and Swanson (2003) believed that it is challenging to discover teachers who are prepared to teach multiple grades and fit into a rural community. It further appears that the implications of a heavy workload, including the negative connotation of how individual teachers think about the multigrade context in rural schools, affect the retaining of staff (Gardiner 2008; Mulkeen & Higgins 2009). In addition, unpreparedness for multigrade teaching and the requirements thereof seem to influence prospective decisions to teach or not to teach within this context (Juvane 2007).

■ Education support services in rural areas

According to Mashau et al. (2008), support services exist for the sake and in aid of education. Its significance is highly rooted in education. Steyn (1997) and Mashau (2000) pointed out that support services are specialised functions that are not typically educational themselves but are aimed at improving teaching and learning in a particular education system. Nel et al. (2016) mentioned that schools become more effective if there are sufficient support services. Meijer, Pijl and Hegarty (1997) acknowledged way back that the provision of appropriate, high-quality education for all learners meant that any special services necessary for successful learning for all learners should be provided effectively within mainstream education. Therefore, Donald et al. (2020:161) envisaged the role of ESS as involving a move from focusing on the problem in the individual and embracing curative measures typical of the former system, to a 'systems change approach'. In this regard, practices such as addressing social problems affecting learners and harmonising the process of health promotion and prevention were recommended. Furthermore, Donald et al. (2020) described the role of ESS as providing teachers' development to raise awareness about barriers to learning and development and assessing centres of learning to support the recording of learners' strengths and achievements systematically in order to determine progress. Belknap, Roberts and Nyewe (2008) were of the opinion that support services should also promote the involvement of parents to the education of their children. Parental involvement promotes the implementation of the whole-school approach, developing appropriate curriculum material and delivering lessons (Blackmore & Hutchison 2010). Moreover, in ESS, consultation with school principals is deemed vital. This is aimed at assessing the responsiveness of the school to learners with barriers to learning and directly working with learners. Mulholland and O'Connor (2016) added the perspective that ESS involve the provision of quality specialist support to learners in the

mainstream to equip them with the necessary skills to overcome barriers to learning.

The state of ESS in rural areas in South Africa is perceived as poor because of various factors that weaken the quality of support provision. The EWP6 promotes the establishment of DBSTs to support teaching, address severe learning difficulties and accommodate a range of learning needs (DoE 2001). These teams are also entrusted with providing specialised professional support in curriculum delivery, assessment and instruction. However, in South Africa, supporting professionals are thinly spread throughout the provinces (Engelbrecht 2008), and this appears to hold back the DBSTs in their efforts to provide the services required by schools, specifically in rural areas. This is affirmed by Mphahlele (2017), who mentioned that because of a lack of resources, professional services in rural South African schools have been minimised, and in some schools, they never even existed. Moreover, rural studies on DBSTs indicate a lack of collaboration between professionals and teachers, the employment of unskilled staff to render support to rural teachers, insufficient school visits, limited professional development and being incapable of performing the crucial support functions designated to them (Du Plessis 2014; Makhalemele & Nel 2016; Pather 2011; Tsotetsi & Omodan 2020).

Parental involvement is regarded as crucial in support services in rural schools. The literature indicates that problems are more easily resolved by parents and educators together than by either group alone, and parents' attitudes strongly influence their children's progress (Mashau 2000; Pather 2011). However, in studies conducted by Tsotetsi and Omadan (2020), collaboration between parents and teachers towards the success of learners is often also missing in rural schools. In their study, the parents were allegedly not even aware of their children's health and learning barriers. Another study conducted by Du Plessis (2014) revealed the absence of parental and community engagement in many rural schools.

Blackstock et al. (2018) indicated that psychological services can assist both teachers and learners to overcome their challenges, and as a result, it is necessary to strengthen these in rural area schools. Künsting et al. (2016) mentioned that the aim of psychological services is to assist teachers and learners in coping with the demands of the school. In South Africa, it is evident that there is a shortage of psychologists and social workers trained to work in the education sector to provide support to schools, especially in rural areas. Makhalemele and Nel (2016) mentioned that 61% of the participants in their study indicated that human resources in ESS at district level were deemed insufficient in education districts. Human resources are inadequate and unequally spread, because in one district there may be two psychologists, two social workers and a limited number of learning support facilitators, but neither psychologists nor social workers in the next DBST. According to Pettersson and Ström (2019), a lack of support staff is identified as a common feature of rural schools. In the absence of such professionals at schools, teachers end up fulfilling the role of providing psychosocial support to learners, which they usually are ill-equipped to do. It is clear that the challenges in education caused by diverse learning needs amongst learners combined with the lack of qualified personnel at DBSTs may also place additional strain on teachers who work in rural areas.

In some rural areas, learners are unable to reach schools because there are no transport facilities available. This lack of transport is also applicable to some teachers who live outside the area, requiring support for transport to school (Leibowitz 2017). To address the problem with regard to transport, the government provides transport to learners in rural schools (DBE 2015), but in some provinces, this project has come to a standstill. In other instances, learners are provided with bicycles for daily travelling to schools. Another challenge is that most rural schools are poorly resourced despite the large numbers of learners who are dependent on these schools. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) pointed

out that limited educational facilities, big classes with high learner–teacher ratios and insufficient teaching and learning material contribute to a breakdown in learning and the incompetence of the system to sustain efficacious teaching and learning.

In rural schools, like their urban counterparts, there are many more learners than formally identified who live with special educational needs and who may benefit from special educational interventions. As a result, there is a need for coordinating teachers' identification of need and support within rural schools. Tsotetsi and Omodan (2020) remarked that SBSTs should solidify the trajectory of inclusivity in rural schools where learners with learning disabilities and other vulnerabilities are managed. However, the literature demonstrates that the successes expected to be recorded as a result of the establishment of SBSTs are declining, especially in rurally located schools (Masango 2013). Moreover, Makoelle (2014) reported that teachers experience tremendous stress in the implementation of SBSTs in their schools and that the lack of a formal support structure plays a significant role in the flawed implementation of support.

◾ An asset-based approach in support services in rural areas

◾ The asset-based approach

The asset-based approach has the potential of interest and the manner in which the existing potential is utilised towards an opportunity. As a theoretical framework, the asset-based approach can be understood as working from one level to the next, utilising existing potential in each level (see Figure 7.1) with the purpose to empower, strengthen, motivate and support. As the skills, capacity and social resources of people and their communities are key to the asset-based approach, it processes information from within the environment to form a perception of available skills and capacity instead of focusing on shortcomings and weaknesses (Ebersöhn & Eloff 2006).
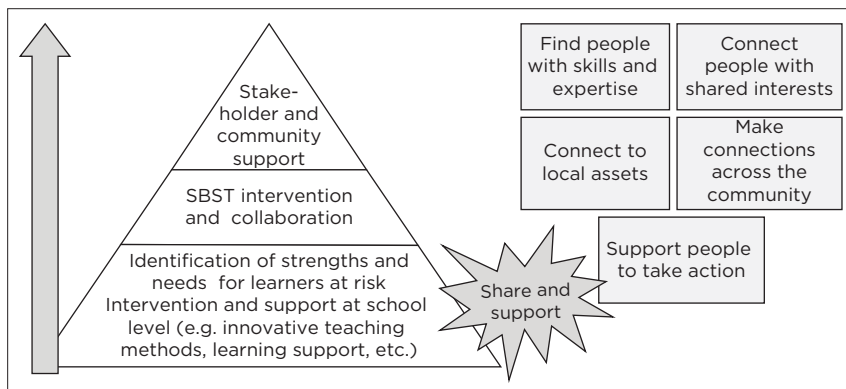
Source: Adapted from Black (2019) and (Eby 2018).
SBST, school-based support team.
FIGURE 7.1: Core concepts of the asset-based or bottom-up approach in education support services.

With education as a crucial method to unlock human potential, the asset-based approach makes sense within the education system. The EWP6 recognises that inclusive education is 'all about empowering learners by developing their individual strengths and enabling them to participate critically in the process of learning' (DoE 2010:3). Thus, it is about acknowledging the truth that each individual learner has potential and that all children can learn, provided they are given the required support.

The *Policy on* SIAS (DBE 2014) aligns support with an asset-based approach and allows for the implementation thereof by creating an inventory of the strengths or successes and needs or challenges of learners identified to be at risk or vulnerable. In order to mobilise the delivery of frontline support at school level, the SIAS policy promotes the establishment of an SBST at every public ordinary school. Policy expects SBSTs to consist of skilled and knowledgeable members and to strategise proficiency and skill in terms of the asset-based approach within the SIAS policy as follows: members with a specialised skill, knowledge or expertise to offer, who are interested and specifically skilled to

strengthen the team and who have a particular contribution to make (DBE 2014).

The relevance of the asset-based approach to the concept of inclusive education is further confirmed through the encouragement of community participation and collaborative efforts. This allows for skills and expertise (within the school, home and local community) to be roped in as stakeholders and role players as part of the intervention and support strategies in the SIAS process (DBE 2014; Ebersöhn & Eloff 2006).

As the asset-based approach not only is theory but also includes feasible strategies for intervention, it is promoted as an integral part of the inclusive education policy, practices and procedure. It, therefore, deliberately and intentionally seeks skill and expertise to fruitfully support and build on the strengths and potential of learners, educators and institutions whilst addressing barriers to learning.

◼ Strengths and weaknesses of support in rural areas

In South Africa, the right to basic education is highly valued on paper – even more than the provisioning of housing and health and nutrition services (Murungi 2015). The Constitutional Court describes the right to basic education as 'unqualified' and 'immediately realisable' (Hodgson & Khumalo 2016), whilst housing, health and nutrition should be 'progressively realised'. Failing to accommodate, support and help learners within the inclusive education system consequently results in the serious violation of learners' right to quality and equal education.

Within the South African milieu, the ideal model of inclusive education would ensure that a poor and disabled black girl (residing in a rural area) with an average ability is supported, empowered and educated in such a way that she is accepted by and can flourish in the community in which she lives (Right to Education for Children with Disabilities 2016). As stated by Osuju

(in Chakaninka et al. 2012:6), education is 'a necessity for human survival […] [and] enables people to efficiently and effectively function in their own environment'. However, reports on the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa reveal that general practices of inclusive education are still failing learners such as the girl mentioned above, and for some learners, serious and even tragic consequences may ensue.

A second scenario where a learner had been sadly failed by the system is reported to be a girl with a hearing impairment from Queenstown (Komani) who found herself 18 years old in Grade 8 and therefore identified as being overaged. Without a Grade 9 certificate, no Further Education and Training college could accept her to further qualify herself. Despite her adequate intellectual ability, the lack of support and implementation of inclusive practices at school level deprived her of opportunities instead of creating opportunities (Right to Education for Children with Disabilities 2016). That being the case, the question must be asked: But where were the support structures? With inclusive policies and initiatives in place, the obvious answer to the question and identified setback to learners and weakness in the system is either the non-existence of the SBST or the non-functionality thereof. Although SBSTs are structures intended to provide collaborative support at school level, it is evident that the lack of formal support structures is undoubtedly associated with no support being provided to learners, which has serious repercussions. At best, this also reflects a lack of political will on the part of schools and educators to support learners experiencing barriers to learning. The identified weakness, therefore, confirms Bosha's (2015:1) statement that '[i]f schools do not have functional SBSTs, then learners will not be properly diagnosed and appropriately placed to achieve their full potential'.

Although learners, educators and schools in rural environments are confronted by additional challenges and a greater variety of barriers to learning, such as poverty, unemployment and illiteracy (DBE 2010), success stories do emanate from these environments. With reference to research by Pather (2011), it is evident that

physically disabled learners in a black rural secondary school (in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal) are supported by not only the educators but also their peers, the community and the special school in the vicinity. Contributing to the successful support to learners experiencing barriers to learning at the mentioned school is the fact that the community accepts and treats disability as 'part of life' (Pather 2011:1110). Furthermore, the principal and school authorities hold the view that the school is at the service of the community, and therefore, all learners from within the local community are welcome at the school.

The nine physically disabled learners at the school in Pather's (2011) research highlighted 'kindness' and 'good teaching' as positive experiences. Additional factors such as 'lots of subjects and lots of time to study' and 'a good learning environment' were also mentioned to be strengths of the school. Interestingly enough is the fact that none of the educators valued as favourite teachers had any formal remedial or learning support training. Exceptional to the valued educators was their attitude of acceptance and willingness to accommodate all learners at school, despite their barriers to learning. Educators from the secondary school reported to be motivated by the collaboration with and support from fellow educators and the social workers, occupational therapist and nurse attached to the local special school. Workshops organised to capacitate educators on how to work with and support learners with physical barriers boosted the confidence of the educators.

Furthermore, 78% of the physically disabled learners participating in the research project undertaken by Pather (2011) reported to have non-disabled friends and described their friends as 'supportive'. In addition to the already mentioned strengths of the school, infrastructure projects such as adapted toilets, ramps and making the recreation area accessible to all learners materialised through collaboration between the school and the local community. This confirms Ntombela's (2013:270) view that 'schools are places of many possibilities', and when a welcoming

atmosphere is created at school level, it conveys a message of 'belonging' and enables learners to develop their potential to the fullest.

Echoing Pather's and Ntombela's findings, Motsoere (2016) added to the enthusiasm about educational successes in rural schools. He reports that a study by Makoelle and Malindi found that teachers in rural schools illustrated executing inclusive education practices and policy by means of differentiating the curriculum effectively, developing resource material that can be used across grades, managing multigrade classrooms efficiently through setting up proper timetables and classroom organisation and by encouraging peer tutoring. Makoelle and Malindi (in Motsoere 2016) further asserted that the value of partnerships with the local community, businesses and institutions of higher education is clearly understood at some rural schools, which are, therefore, involved in ensuring quality education for rural learners and achieving the goals set by the respective schools.

Good practices of inclusivity as reported by Pather (2011) and Makoelle and Malindi (in Motsoere 2016) serve as identified strengths in the understanding of inclusive education and the feasibility thereof. A supportive environment where learners are exposed to positive modelling, encouragement and acceptance is illustrated as being especially beneficial to learners experiencing barriers to learning. Evidently, so too are the intervention strategies undertaken to support learners, educators and the school itself. Effective collaboration between the school management team, educators, peers, neighbouring schools and the wider community confirms the importance of support structures and practices being in place, aligned with the asset-based approach. Moreover, the particular research projects illustrate that inclusive education based on effective support can be successfully implemented in rural schools.

Strengths of inclusive education, as reported above, endorse the view of the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* (1994), as quoted by Murungi (2015:3168), that 'regular schools

with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all'. As rural children, like urban children, have the aspiration to acquire knowledge and skills (Chakaninka et al. 2012), it can be concluded that it is the responsibility of SBSTs and educators – being the custodians of education support at school level – to safeguard that every learner is given access to education, regardless of the barrier to learning they may experience or their location, be it urban or rural.

■ A transformative approach to support services in rural areas

■ Transformative approach and rural education: Implications for practice

For rural teachers to engage effectively in a learning experience that is transformational in nature, Curran and Murray (2008) pointed out that individuals should assess their validity and credibility in light of new experiences or information. In this regard, teachers should set aside their predispositions, share and assess their experiences and reach a mutual understanding in relation to the current situation they experience. This is attained when individuals are fully involved in fostering collaboration, providing appropriate feedback and respect one another as teachers.

Based on the context of rurality, effective teaching in rural schools is possible, especially when teachers have knowledge about themselves. This is rooted in the understanding of rural culture, the circumstantial situation and the social context in which they find themselves. To improve teaching in rural areas, teachers may promote self-awareness and self-knowledge.

Understanding the teaching environment and how the role players in that environment can interact to maximise learners' intellectual and personal growth is regarded as the key activity in

achieving transformational teaching (Slavich & Zimbardo 2012). Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) suggested that it includes examining the roles teachers may play in transforming learners' values, attitudes and beliefs, as well as the responsibility learners have for modelling their own and their peers' learning experience. Slavich and Zimbardo further mentioned that collaborative interdependence is significant for maximising the likelihood that learners will obtain valuable skills from one another, including those that are involved in analysis, synthesis, evaluation, reasoning, problem solving and communication. To achieve this, teachers can use transformational leadership strategies that create a shared vision that involves learners and teachers working together. In this regard, teachers describe skills, strategies and tools for learners and model the implementation thereof (Barling et al. 2010).

According to Eisen (2001), peer learning partnership is important for transformative learning for learners, specifically in big classes with high learner–teacher ratios and insufficient teaching and learning material. Peer learning in the classroom can keep learners engaged and motivated in academic work, whilst peer groups outside the school can provide positive reinforcement of academic achievement by expanding learning time and enhancing the effectiveness thereof. Consequently, teachers in rural schools are encouraged to employ peer learning partnerships, peer feedback, modelling, joint and self-reflection, role reversal and peer-supported experimentation as strategies for encouraging transformative learning (Eisen 2001).

King (2004) observed transformational learning in the context of the professional development of teachers. The study discovered how educators enhancing their skills in technology could experience changes in their perspectives regarding teaching practices. The results of the study indicate that a vast majority of the participants pursuing professional development experienced perspective transformation as a result of their experiences in the transformative classroom. This concurs with Donald et al. (2020),

who mentioned that teacher development helps teachers to identify possible barriers to learning and development in schools.

Moreover, teaching in rural schools provides teachers with no opportunities for extensive interaction with parents or professionals from the education districts. The literature indicates that teachers who have not received transformative teaching opportunities may become involved in more hierarchical relationships with parents and other professionals, and accordingly, successful outcomes for learners may be limited (Curran & Murray 2008). It is, therefore, necessary to equip rural teachers with the disposition and skills to effectively partner with parents and professionals.

■ The transformative learning and teaching approach

The transformative learning approach entails a constructivist view of how people learn. This approach emphasises that for adults to internalise and properly apply professionally pertinent concepts, skills and strategies, learning must be a transformational rather than simply informational experience (Baumgartner 2001). Makoelle (2018) argued that in this process, when people are confronted with new knowledge, they construct and reconstruct knowledge as a process of continual critique and reflection on current forms of knowledge by the knowledge holder. Thus, transformative learning allows learners to examine their own beliefs, assumptions and perspectives in order to construct new knowledge. Mezirow (1998) emphasised that through the transformational learning process, individuals may free themselves from unexamined or distorted ways of thinking and engage in more rational assessment and action. Transformational learning is appropriate to the method and practice of teaching in rural schools, and by benefiting from having depth as well as breadth of rural life experience, teachers and learners have, at present, formed particular frames of reference through which they construe the world around them. Consequently,

transformative learning, to a great extent, involves self-awareness, self-critique and self-reflection (Makoelle 2018), which are substantial if one has to exist within a rural learning context. Care should be taken that transformative learning cannot take place in the absence of transformative teaching.

Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) and Makoelle (2018) described transformational teaching as the expressed or unexpressed goal to increase learners' mastery of key course concepts whilst transforming their learning-related attitudes, values, beliefs and skills. It is notable that this process includes creating dynamic relationships within those involved and promotes learners' learning and personal growth. Makoelle (2018) asserted that it enhances the ability of learners to be critical about and reflect on how they learn, what they learn and why they learn. So, learners turn out to be meta-critical participants in the learning process and are well practised at goal setting, critical thinking and reflection. Furthermore, in this approach, teachers are regarded as intellectual coaches who create teams of learners who collaborate with one another and their teacher to master bodies of information (Slavich & Zimbardo 2012). Therefore, in rural teaching and learning environments, service learning, inquiry-based learning and project-based learning are central, as they foster individual responsiveness to survival in the midst of resources. Hence, the transformative approach is important as it responds to the needs of all learners and teachers in rural areas.

■ International perspectives and good practices in rural environments

Research revealed that most countries – developed and developing – have problems with regard to rural education. As the concept of inclusive education is perceived and practised against different historical, societal and traditional backgrounds, as well as local and international influences and trends (Mpofu et al. 2007), the literature on rural education asserts that

although rural education is diverse and complex, there are qualities that are unique to rural sites.

Good practices and qualities in rural education in the United States of America and developing countries, such as India and Nigeria, tend to confirm the fact that the education and schooling of learners with disabilities and the previously deprived are attended to through legislation and policy. In a country such as India (being the world's largest democracy and second largest education system), with a kaleidoscope of languages, cultures, traditions, geographical landscapes and socioeconomic classes, the schooling and education of approximately 200 million learners of school-going age pose a formidable challenge. However, inclusive education has gained status within the Indian education system, and ever since 1994, the Indian government has been committed through programmes and policy to safeguard that all learners have access to mainstream schools and enjoy the advantage of a uniform curriculum (Hodkinson & Devarakonda 2009).

With a literacy rate of 80% (where most parents are literate at primary school level), it is interesting to note that no legislation, but only circulars signed by the Secretary of Education, enforces inclusive education practices in Zimbabwe. Contributing to the success of education in Zimbabwe, Jamela (in Sadomba, Chigwanda & Manyati 2015) is of the opinion that the local communities tend to set their own standards and do not hesitate to rope in and mobilise support (local or from outside the community) to achieve the set goals. In many rural environments, a school is regarded as the most important public institution in the community and provides opportunities for communication and participation. Moreover, in many rural communities, the local school building serves as a nodal point for services to poor families and children, houses sporting and cultural events, and serves as a polling station, library and community centre. Because of opportunities for frequent contact, small rural schools report harbouring greater parental involvement (Redding & Walberg 2012; Rural Trust 2005).

The ideology of inclusive education is, furthermore, promoted in all of the mentioned countries as the responsibility of every educator. The fact that all learners should be taught and educated within mainstream schools, regardless of their disability, is emphasised. The Nigerian *National Policy on Education* (2004:7) declares that 'every Nigerian child shall have the right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her ability', and so, statistics on learners (of primary school age) attending rural primary schools in Nigeria are reported to have remained relatively constant over the past 12 years, for example, 56% in 2003, 55% in 2008 and 59% in 2015, whilst attendance at rural secondary schools has shown growth from 39% in 2003 to 46% in 2015 (Nigeria National Population Commission 2015). In the United States of America, research found that schools situated in rural environments were more likely to offer remedial programmes to learners with educational needs, and educators in rural and small-town schools were found to be spending more time with students at school and outside of school hours.

Other educational practices globally found to work well in rural environments are reported to include, for example, cooperative learning (where learners of different levels of ability are grouped together and a variety of learning activities are used to improve their understanding of a subject), multigrade classrooms, a strong bond amidst rural community members that nurture commitment to protecting and supporting their children, interdisciplinary studies (combining two or more areas of learning in a task or project) and peer tutoring.

From the above, it is illustrated that globally the idea of inclusive education (with or without adequate external school support) is perceived as the cornerstone of development and social transformation. Although inclusive education and what it entails are divergently interpreted and understood, global research has reported that implementation is at the order of the day – even in rural environments – despite deviation in the experience and the manner and tempo of implementation.

■ Research methodology[1]

This chapter is grounded on qualitative research that explored the good practices of SBSTs in rural contexts through managing effective support whilst in the midst of resource constraints. Members of the SBSTs of two rural schools in each of three provinces of South Africa –Gauteng, Free State and North West – participated in the study. Therefore, the total number of participating schools was six. The schools were chosen from different education districts in each province. These schools were well suited to provide qualitative meaning about the essence SBSTs assign to providing effective support for learners, teachers and schools.

Data were collected through focus group interviews. Interviewing is essential when behaviour cannot be observed or when it is difficult to observe how people interpret the world (Merriam 2009). In this study, four members in each of the SBSTs were selected through purposeful sampling (cf. Henning, Gravett & Van Rensburg 2004). The total number of SBST members who took part in the study was 24. The selected SBST members comprised coordinators, principals or any member who represented the school management team, the secretary of the SBST and teachers who referred learners to the SBSTs. The participants had served in the SBSTs for more than a year. The participants did not have the same work experiences in learner support and credentials. They were recruited by the researchers, who clarified the purpose of the research to them.

The data were analysed through thematic content analysis, which, according to De Vos et al. (2009), involves breaking down data into manageable sections and then analysing the data. Differences, relations, similarities and interactions within themes were identified. Trustworthiness was achieved through measures of dependability, transferability, credibility and

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1. For the application of the school-based support team members' execution (SBST) in rural areas on South Africa, see among others Tsotetsi and Omodan (2020).

confirmability. Credibility was guaranteed through prolonged engagement with the study, until data saturation was achieved, probing for deeper meaning and triangulation (cf. De Vos et al. 2006). To address transferability, the researchers delivered a thick description of the study, highlighted the demographics of the participants and used purposeful sampling that included participants who could describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible (cf. Mertens 2010). Dependability of the study was attained by using different methods of data collection, following procedures in line with the stated research methods, implementing feedback from the promoter and submitting the research to a peer-review process with formal feedback (cf. Mertler & Charles 2011).

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study. These encompassed permission to conduct the research, which was obtained from the DBE in the three participating provinces, and ethical clearance acquired from the institution where the study was proposed. Also, informed consent was requested from the participants. The participants were assured about confidentiality and anonymity and that participation was voluntary. Their safety in participation was confirmed, and they were informed that they could withdraw at any time, without any consequences. The benefits of participating in the research were highlighted to the participants. Feedback on the research was provided to the participants.

■ Findings and discussions: Examples of good practice in South Africa

From the data analysed, six themes emerged about good practices of SBSTs in rural contexts through managing effective support whilst in the midst of resource constraints. These themes were resource mobilisation for the sustainability of rural schools, understanding inclusive policies and insight into their roles and responsibilities, collaboration in the support process, skilled and experienced SBST members, the utilisation of teaching aids

and assistive devices, and leadership and SBST award for functionality. These themes are presented in the next subsections. To validate and distinguish the responses from particpants, the following attributes were considered: participant number (SB plus number), role in the study, focus group (FG plus number). For instance, SB1/Coordinator/FG1.

■ Resource mobilisation for the sustainability of rural schools

Most of the participants indicated the mobilisation of resources as the most important matter in rural schools. It is clear that there is a need for rural schools to find ways through which stakeholders can mobilise resources. This concurs with Myende's (2015) statement that rural schools should be central to strategies of resource mobilisation, as research proves that locally initiated strategies may lead to sustainability and a sense of ownership. Therefore, these participants felt that they mobilised resources for the sustainability of efficient psychosocial educational support within their schools. Some of the participants commented as follows:

> 'In the rural context, we perform our role as ordinary as others in urban schools, but our focus is more on [the] mobilisation of resources. We further ensure that our school has a clear, coordinated approach to soliciting, acquiring, utilisation, monitoring and managing of all the resources.' (SB5/Coordinator/FG2)

> 'Having and keeping resources is [sic] our priority in this school. Normally, we increase internal resource mobilisation and broaden the resource channels by exploring alternative sources of funding in order to reduce dependence on resources from [the] Department of Education.' (SB2/Principal/FG1)

It was further noted that the participants understood the nature of resources that could be identified within their contexts and that they regarded the private and public sector, churches, political

leadership and community individuals and groups as major resources. In this regard, SB17/Coordinator/FG5 had this to say:

> 'Our management team are capable to spot the support from private and public sector, the churches as well as from the political leaders. I can assure you we never went wrong; we always get support from them whenever we need.' (SB17/Coordinator/FG5)

This was confirmed by participant SB4/Referral teacher/FG1, who stressed the significance of getting support from the community:

> 'The community plays an important role in supporting our school. There are individuals and groups within the community that provide us with necessary resources. Some of them are having one-on-one consultations with learners and teachers who need support.' (SB4/ Referral teacher/FG1)

It was also noted that the participants expressed their success in developing various strategies for mobilising resources to ensure the continuation of teacher and learner support services that would support the teaching and learning process. In this respect, some of the strategies mentioned included building sustainable partnerships, engaging numerous stakeholders, and preserving and narrating their history. Some comments of the participants were as follows:

> 'It is necessary to work together. We have a long history of working with other government departments, private sectors as well as local leaders.' (SB23/Secretary/FG6)

> 'Our SBST has been working with government and private sectors since my arrival here. The support from stakeholders within and outside the school is immense.' (SB13/Coordinator/FG4)

> 'Our school is Roman Catholic in nature; this quality markets the school and attracts support to local churches and new partnership.' (SB9/Coordinator/FG3)

> 'This school is named after the former chief minister of the homeland. This rich history attracts many people who want to know the history

of the place where the school is built. As a result, people across the world do visit the school and offer some support to us.' (SB11/Secretary/FG3)

■ Understanding inclusive policies and insight into their roles and responsibilities

The understanding of inclusive policies and insight into the roles and responsibilities of the SBST emerged as a best practice in rural schools. According to Makhalemele and Nel (2021), it is evident that when the SBST members understand the purpose of their team, it will help to solve their problems, encourage passion and commitment and prevent them from withdrawing as members of the team. A thorough understanding of the tasks and responsibilities of both the team and individuals will promote accuracy and a workable procedure and result in less conflict. In this study, the researchers found that the SBSTs in rural schools were, in general, of the opinion that they were effective in defining goals, able to clarify the main purpose of the team and understood their main tasks and priorities. Consequently, the SBST members participating in the study illustrated a good understanding of the relevant inclusive policies and insight into the role, function and responsibilities of the SBST.

The following statement summarises the participants' views: 'Our main responsibilities are to identify such learners who are having [*sic*] barriers to learning and come up with ways [by which] we are going to assist them' (SB3/Secretary/FG1). The crisp response of a participant supported the responsibility of the SBST towards educators (as per definition of a functional SBST): 'The SBST is there to […] ensure that […] educators are also well equipped and have the knowledge; they are developed to be able to help those learners who have barriers to learning' (SB19/Secretary/FG5). For the sake of triangulation, a second participant is quoted: '[…] the SBST supports this learner assisting the teacher to lift up this [*sic*] learners to progress in learning' (SB24/Referral teacher/FG6).

◼ Collaboration in the support process

The participants from the SBSTs in rural schools articulated their belief that they were successful in collaborating effectively during the process of support. All the teams confirmed that they successfully collaborated with different stakeholders when addressing the barriers that learners experienced. The participants admired the effort of every stakeholder to ensure that collaboration contributed to success in support services. SB6/Principal/FG2 commented: 'Forming partnerships with faith-based, non-governmental organisations and political leadership is worthy to the successful functioning of support structures'. Furthermore, many of the participants acknowledged collaboration with stakeholders in the support process as a function of the SBST. For example: 'We interact with various stakeholders' (SB19/Secretary/FG5); 'we include parents' (SB20/Referral teacher/FG5); 'In fact, we must include all the stakeholders like [...] social workers, parents, psychologists and doctors as well' (SB17/Coordinator/FG5).

Moreover, it was noted that collaboration amongst the SBST members themselves, teachers and members of other teams within the rural schools was evidence of their success. All the participants insisted that effective collaboration in the support services provided by their schools enhanced success in teaching and learning. Some comments of the participants in this regard are as follows:

'To coordinate support for teachers is very challenging. But all of us, as SBST members, we encourage collaborative support within our school to enable us to help each other during the support process.' (SB9/Coordinator/FG3)

'It is better when we collaborate with colleagues to support each other.' (SB21/Coordinator/FG6)

'None of us has a problem to collaborate with stakeholders within our school. We are highly involved in a [*sic*] day-to-day planning and delivery of support services in our school.' (SB8/Referral teacher/FG2)

■ Skilled and experienced school-based support team members

The participants were quite aware of the designation and qualifications of members serving on the SBSTs. The responses of the participants captured below clearly illustrate that the SBSTs of rural schools were established according to guidelines as outlined in the SIAS policy (DBE 2014), as SBSTs mainly comprised school management team members and teachers with specialised skills and knowledge in the field of learning support, life skills and life orientation. The following responses were provided:

'Members of the SBST were nominated by the HoD who is responsible for inclusive education, e.g. life skills teachers and LO teachers.' (SB2/Principal/FG1)

'HoD's of both phases, the deputy and the principal, the educators who have skills or expertise and we also involve district-based support.' (SB15/Secretary/FG4)

'Four educators who are responsible for remedial. We opted for the HoD from Intermediate Phase because most of the educators were from the Foundation Phase.' (SB5/Coordinator/FG2)

'The SMT, one teacher from Foundation Phase and one teacher from Intermediate Phase.' (SB7/Secretary/FG2)

'We looked at the qualifications of the teachers which [*sic*] specialised in learner support and who attended workshops frequently.' (SB21/Coordinator/FG6)

'Two teachers have done Inclusive Education at tertiary as majors […] it was built around them.' (SB18/Principal/FG5)

■ Utilisation of learning and teaching aids and assistive devices

In facilitating the provision of support where needed (DBE 2014), learners experiencing barriers to learning were supported with assistive devices and learning aids to level the playing field for

those learners in the classroom. Some participants clarified this matter as follows:

'If a learner is having a hearing problem, we must not disadvantage that learner; we must ensure that that learner gets an assistive device.' (SB17/Coordinator/FG5)

'Learners with learning barriers are given learning aids.' (SB3/Secretary/FG1)

However, efforts were also made to support learners by means of alternative methods of assessment (DBE 2014). For instance, application for accommodations, such as enlarged print, was done. One of the participants mentioned that 'for learners with poor vision, the font must be enlarged' (SB22/Principal/FG6). Furthermore, in supporting the teaching and learning process (a core function of the SBST) as highlighted in the SIAS policy (DBE 2014), the participants reported that the SBST members extended their core tasks and took up the responsibility of providing and distributing teaching aids to teachers in order to enhance the teaching and learning process. This was evident from what the SB13/Coordinator/FG4 said: 'They make sure we have resources, valuable resources for the lessons'.

■ Leadership and school-based support team award for functionality

Positive leadership and support from the principal (in accordance and compliance with the SIAS policy), were regarded by the participants to be noteworthy as an additional factor contributing to SBST functionality in rural schools. The participants acknowledged and appreciated the good example set by the principals, positive leadership, involvement and taking ownership of inclusive education matters. Some participants mentioned the following:

'Our principal really supports the team.' (SB15/Secretary/FG4)

'When we encounter some challenges, we even go to the principal; he also gives his advice.' (SB16/Referral teacher/FG4)

As measured against the implementation of the SIAS policy, SBST functionality was recognised at district level. Although the SBST participants did not explicitly say that it served as motivation, the SBST members of two rural primary schools proudly reported that they had been awarded a certificate and floating trophy in recognition of SBST functionality. They made the following comments:

> 'The award that we got tells you a lot about us.' (SB17/Coordinator/FG5)

> 'We have the certificates, the awards, at least our school can say we do better in remedial.' (SB19/Secretary/FG5)

Subsequent to the discussion of these six best practices, some recommendations are offered below.

■ Recommendations: Reconceptualisation of support within rural schools

Policy implementation is a mandatory matter with no exception to the rule, not even for schools in rural environments. Research and literature studies have identified the need for schools, educators and SBSTs to recognise that the improvement of schooling and support to learners in rural areas should go beyond 'fixing up schools' (Gardiner 2008:10). For the purpose of embracing SBST functionality and increasingly adopting an agile approach to inclusive education practices and operation, schools need to reconceptualise and rethink learner support strategies as presented against the framework of the seven pillars of inclusive education as mentioned by Loreman (2007).

■ Pillar one: Attitude

Loreman (2007:24) stated that 'attitudes govern the day-to-day practices of classroom teachers'. This implies that learners are to benefit from the positive attitudes of educators, and surely it will contribute to the functionality of the SBST. To enhance, embrace, foster and expand the positive attitudes of educators, efforts and

strategies should be deliberately and intentionally actioned. For example, the establishment of an SBST should be a transparent process, all staff members need to benefit from teacher development programmes and opportunities, and the mediation of the SIAS referral process and support pathway should include all staff members.

For educators to stay abreast of the latest developments on inclusive education and be committed to lifelong learning, they should be encouraged to further their qualifications. Previous research projects in the field, as reported by Loreman (2007), found a correlation between positive attitudes towards inclusive education and the qualification levels of teachers.

◼ Pillar two: Policies and leadership

With the future of learners at stake, the need and necessity for the implementation of policy (inclusive education), not only, especially in rural environments, are non-negotiable. Research findings reported in this chapter have proven that compliance is determined by the willingness of the school and its educators and have also illustrated that the decision to implement policy that guides SBST functionality is essential and beneficial to learner and learning support.

To emphasise the importance of the SBST and its activities, the SIAS policy allocates the responsibility of the establishment and functionality of the SBST to the principal. At school level, an SBST policy needs to be developed to govern and ensure effective intervention, prevention, teaching and support to learners experiencing barriers to learning.

◼ Pillar three: School and classroom processes

Although only a few key people (the SBST) may carry the major responsibility for the coordination of support activities at school level, all educators should be involved in the supporting process, as Loreman (2007:27) stated: 'For inclusive education to be truly

successful the entire school needs to be committed to making it so as it is extremely difficult for individual educators to "include" in isolation'. As the SIAS process calls for the screening, identification, assessment and first-line support and intervention by the class teacher, it is crucial that educators make the policy and practices of inclusive education part of their day-to-day classroom management activities and strategies and do not treat it as an add-on responsibility.

With the development of each child as a shared responsibility, by having all staff members on board regarding inclusive education practices and school and classroom processes, a positive learning environment that is beneficial to all can be created.

■ Pillar four: Excellence in teaching and learning

One of the goals of the EWP6 is to provide education and schooling to learners, as far as possible, at a school close to home and in the community in which they live. The intention of this goal is to bring education and support services to the learner instead of taking the learner to the support. The placement of learners into a special school must, therefore, be treated as a last option and resort.

As inclusive education idealises the development and extension of learners' talents, strengths and skills within an integrated classroom setup, educators and SBSTs are tasked to provide accessible and quality education to all learners, even those experiencing barriers to learning. Inclusive classroom practices contributing to improved performance and a feeling of acceptance, worth and inclusivity amongst learners include the following strategies: preparation and presentation of interesting lessons; informing classmates about the different barriers their peers experience; emphasising the fact that 'different' does not

mean inferior; implementing an appraisal system in class; zero tolerance of bullying and belittling; creating a welcoming and friendly class atmosphere; establishing open communication channels to prevent and clear misconception and suspicion; and modelling ways on how to approach, interact with and support learners who experience barriers to learning.

■ Pillar five: Community involvement, collaboration and partnerships

Given the social construct of inclusive education, support within this concept refers to the bigger picture of extended or expanded support. The school is part of the community at large, and as such, the community has a part to play in the learning support process. An important aspect of community involvement is the establishment of networks within the community that can support the school, indeed referring to the African philosophy of ubuntu – 'I am because we are' (Hay 2013:265).

The literature widely agrees on the importance of community involvement in schools. Many issues affect child well-being, but the school does not solely carry the responsibility for it. Building sustainable relationships with community members and organisations such as social workers, police officers, churches and so forth can provide valuable services to the school in support of learners experiencing barriers to learning. School-based support teams play an extremely important role in unlocking services and support to poor and marginalised families. The impact that positive collaboration between parents and the school has on the academic performance of learners is confirmed by literature and research.

Hoy and Gregg (in Mosia 2011:70) confirmed the necessity of collaboration and partnerships with the following statement: 'no one discipline has the expertise to solve the multifaceted problems students […] can present to school systems'.

■ Pillar six: Communication and reflection

Problem solving and support within inclusive education are intended to be a collaborative approach where knowledge, skills and motivation are shared in order to identify and address the needs of learners, educators and the institution. But working together does not simply happen. Proper communication amongst different partners is essential to ensure that the necessary support and assistance are agreed upon and eventually provided. As communication has an impact on aspects such as creativity, productivity and effectiveness, it is of great importance to ensure that all partners collaborating are communicating clearly.

Reflection is argued to be an important strategy for improvement and, therefore, should be done at school level to establish, adapt, improve, expand or celebrate the current status of inclusive education and education support services (SBSTs) at school level.

■ Pillar seven: Training and resources

An inclusive education approach does not expect educators to have all the knowledge, skills and expertise to support learners experiencing barriers to learning. To enhance the functionality of the SBST, it is important that the team has access to support from the DBST, SSRCs, FSSs and sister departments.

When a school claims to operate within a culture of care, kindness, respect and support, physical resources have a place and value to add to the improvement of inclusive education, for example adequate access to classrooms and school facilities, a welcoming atmosphere, and so forth. Assistive devices (e.g. wheelchairs, walking rings, hearing aids, touch screens and adapted worksheets) as a strategy of support to include all learners effectively in the classroom should be seen as a right of learners who need them and not as a privilege or an advantage.

For inclusive education to be well supported at school level and preventing it from being a shaky practice, each of the interdependent concepts addressed as a pillar should receive the necessary attention and focused implementation to offer learners, especially rural learners, the opportunity to receive the care and support they deserve, as facilitated and coordinated by a functional SBST.

■ Conclusion

To eventually unlock the unique potential of all learners – including those experiencing barriers to learning or living in rural environments – and secure equal education and schooling opportunities for all, the implementation of inclusive education policies and practices becomes an unequivocal priority at school and community levels. Like democracy, inclusivity, in theory, is seen as 'self-evidently good' (Makoelle 2012:100), and therefore, it should be promoted and carried through. However, to make it 'evidently good' and a reality in practice, SBSTs need to rethink and reposition themselves as viable support structures to create a platform at school level where learners' confidence, worth, strengths, sense of belonging, hope, value, enthusiasm and creativity are supported and encouraged. This may require additional support to the 'normal' delivery of teaching and learning.

With an asset-based approach to supporting practices within inclusive education, the SBST is uniquely positioned to coordinate overarching and supplementary supportive strategies for individual learners and thereby ensure that no child is left behind. Although learners in rural environments have additional needs that need to be addressed, the success with which SBSTs in some rural schools come forward in practice is directly linked to the functionality of the teams. A functional SBST has proven to be the difference between inclusive education as a feasible practice at school level or an unimplemented possibility.

In the spirit of inclusive education, where it is emphasised and believed that all learners can achieve, provided they are given the necessary support, it is believed (and proven) that all SBSTs can be functional, provided they implement inclusive education policies.

Repositioning full-service schools and special schools as resource centres

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■ Introduction

In 1994, the post-apartheid era commenced with inclusive education for South African schools, guided by the EWP6 of 2001. This policy focused on an inclusive pedagogy that pursued a social justice perspective to address and transform the South African school system. The EWP6 (DoE 2001) and the *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support* (DBE 2014b) acknowledge that all learners need some kind of support during the learning process. These policies promote inclusive practices to accommodate all the needs of learners and ensure that all learners are meaningfully participating in the learning processes. Full-service schools and SSRCs were envisioned by these policies as two of the ways by which the inclusive education system can be supported. The focus of these schools was envisaged as assisting learners, teachers and communities in addressing and supporting all forms of diverse educational needs in the school system and spreading valuable resources (human and material) to all role players within the system. However, the practical implementation of the functioning of these support structures remains a challenge in reality. Studies (e.g. Badat & Sayed 2014; Dreyer 2014; Makhalemele & Nel 2016) have indicated that providers of ESS such as FSSs and SSRCs do not function effectively to provide the necessary support to assist adequately in providing inclusive support services.

The focus of this chapter is the repositioning of FSSs and SSRCs as centres of excellence in inclusive ESS. Considering the best practices of FSSs and SSRCs, we can redirect inclusive ESS to the diverse educational needs of all learners, schools and communities. Theoretical perspectives will be discussed first, followed by international and national developments and focus areas of inclusive support for both FSSs and SSRCs. These will be followed by a description of the empirical research component, including the research design and recommendations for best practices of these support structures.

■ Theoretical perspectives on full-service schools and special schools as resource centres

The paradigm shift from the concepts of normalisation, mainstreaming and integration towards inclusion occurred as democratic principles, human rights advocacy and social justice imperatives became part of the educational landscape. Noteworthy changes were initiated in the past three decades for the provision of education for learners with diverse educational needs (Engelbrecht & Green 2017). The medical model was mostly utilised in special education, and learners were categorised according to their disabilities and special needs. Learners with disabilities were categorised as having shortcomings that rendered them for the most part incapable to profit from education as it existed at that time (Engelbrecht & Green 2017). The governments of high-income countries and, later on, also middle- and low-income countries took on the responsibility for the education of special needs learners. These learners were educated in separate educational settings for their 'special educational needs' (Engelbrecht & Green 2017:5).

The special education system in the South African context before 1994 was separated according to race and from the broader education system. It followed the American trend of categorising learners based on physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities (Drake 2015). As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, part of the medical model or the within-child or individual model is founded on the principle of diagnosis and treatment (Meltz, Herman & Pillay 2014; Swart & Pettipher 2019). Learners were placed according to the medical model, categorising learners in specific groups; the focus was to identify the deficiencies in the learners, and interventions were centred on restoring learning to the general norm (Drake 2015).

During the 1990s, the focus on special needs education underwent a paradigm shift to a broader understanding and consideration of learners' inclinations and direct environment (Drake 2015). After the first democratic elections in 1994, the South African environment transformed to focus particularly strongly on human rights. Important was the acceptance of the South African Constitution in 1996 and the EWP6 (DoE 2001), which aimed to build an inclusive education and training system policy that steered inclusive education in South Africa. The policy focused on moving to a broader emphasis on barriers to learning and development, with the focus on the whole system and not just the medical model that focuses on the shortcomings of the learners (Drake 2015). The concept of inclusive education embraces and focuses on values of equity, diversity and social justice (Lessing & De Witt 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the social-ecological model focuses on the 'changing of attitudes, regulations, systems and institutions that create and maintain exclusion' (Engelbrecht & Green 2017:7). The EWP6 – the policy of building an inclusive education and training system – provides key strategies concerning the development of support structures. These strategies are placed within Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. Bronfenbrenner (1979:3) described the environment as a 'set of nested structures' (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono-structures), where each of these structures influences the development of the learner. One of these systems is the mesosystem, in which support structures such as FSSs and SSRCs are located (Nel et al. 2016b). The delivery of support is the main focus of the EWP6, whilst it also takes into account low-intensity support for learners in mainstream schools, FSSs servicing moderate-intensity support and special schools servicing intensive support needs of learners in addition to converting these schools into resource centres for mainstream schools (Drake 2015). According to Phasa (2016), these core aspects in the EWP6 (DoE 2001) are linked to the Afrocentric perspective of inclusive education, which encapsulates the philosophy of ubuntu, consisting of three comprehensive

aspects, namely humaneness, interdependence or interconnection and communalism. Phasha stated that these aspects of ubuntu sustain the principles of respecting and upholding the rights of all children (including the marginalised and vulnerable), encouraging their teaching and learning in a community of mainstream schools and supplying need-responsive support services that inform inclusive education policy, curriculum content and pedagogic practices.

In line with the paradigm shift to an inclusive education framework, FSSs are 'mainstream schools that were transformed to attend to the underlying inclusive principles and to provide quality education to all learners' (Phala 2019:iv). Hence, we need to discuss the development of FSSs as community-connected centres, in that the social-ecological model plays an important role in assisting with diverse educational needs that take the context of the learners, parents and communities into consideration.

■ Full-service schools

The EWP6 (DoE 2001:22) defined FSSs as 'schools and colleges that will be equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs among all our learners'. Box 8.1, as adapted from the DoE (2010:7–9), indicates the ideal resemblance of FSSs.

BOX 8.1: Overview of the aspects of focus for full-service schools.

FSS/inclusive schools
• FSS/inclusive schools are able to provide a wide range of learning needs because of being equipped and supported.
• They are focused on inclusion in the way it is planned in terms of structure, policy, procedures, pedagogy and ethos.
• They understand that cultural and systemic barriers to learning can also occur and that barriers to learning are not only intrinsic to learners.

Source: Adapted from the DoE (2010:7–9).
FSSs, full-service schools.

BOX 8.1 (Continues...): Overview of the aspects of focus for full-service schools.

• They have additional teaching programmes and structures for teaching and learning.
• With the aim of transforming the school as a whole, they must be prepared to explore and address the challenges of everyday school life through capacity building amongst educators and continuous institutional development.
• In order for learning and development to take place, they must remove or reduce and address practices that exclude learners.
• They must realise their potential by ensuring that the schools are accessible and by ensuring that all school-age children in the area attend school.
• They are schools with good leadership.
• They are places where both learners and educators feel safe and supported.
• They are schools that are clean and orderly.
• They are schools with good governance.
• They have a collaborative approach to service delivery.
• They allow learners from neighbouring schools to attend a few days intensive training in specialised areas, such as braille, mobility, skills for daily living or sign language, and make educators from schools in the area feel eager to explore new skills and ideas.

Source: Adapted from the DoE (2010:7–9).
FSSs, full-service schools.

■ International and national developments regarding full-service schools

In Chapter 2 and Chapter 5, a comprehensive discussion of both international and national developments of FSSs has been provided. Therefore, only a brief overview will now be given to highlight specifically the community basis of FSSs. In an international context, it can be observed that many countries have moved to a more social-ecological model for support, realising that community schools can play a vital role in supporting learners, parents and school communities. Mnguni (2017) explained the concept of FSSs as follows: it can be in diverse formats, but the rudimentary principle of FSSs focuses on a variety of agencies that are grounded in the school to offer

support. Maintaining a strong connection to the community and addressing the diverse educational needs are at the forefront of the development of community schools or FSSs. Learners in need of support have access to integrated services from diverse agencies or stakeholders, which include parental and community involvement (Mnguni 2017). According to Malone (2020), there is a worldwide interest in community schooling and the importance of the role that community schools play as 'anchor institutions in neighbourhoods', especially in communities with limited access to resources and support structures. The facilitation of critical academic, social and emotional learning is the main purpose of community schools to provide learners with adequate learning resources and opportunities (Daniel, Quartz & Oakes 2019). The incorporation of academic, health and social support in strategies of youth and community development is the vision of community schools (Biag & Castrechini 2014). An understanding of and connection to the community to support learners holistically are of critical importance in community schools.

The three key elements of an FSS are as follows: assets, connections and collaboration in communities; the understanding of inclusive practices that support all learners and that the support must be holistic; and the importance of parents and guardians in the learning and development of learners. The first key aspect of community FSSs is the connection to the community and the valuable assets within the communities, that is, the social capital of communities. Galindo, Sanders and Abel (2017) argued that the capacity to produce, expand and capitalise on the resources of their environment is fundamental to the effectiveness of FSSs. The assets or social capital of communities is an important component thereof, and the utilisation of indigenous knowledge can contribute to support. Van Wyk (2015:47) defined indigenous knowledge as 'a dynamic and multifaceted body of knowledge, practices, and representations that are maintained and developed by people with a long history of close interaction

with their local natural environment'. In distinctive ways, societies make meaning of the world and how this understanding addresses local problems and finds context-specific solutions thereto (Van Wyk 2015). The concept of indigenous knowledge connects to the key element of FSSs, namely, that community-specific assets of communities are utilised to support learners.

The second key point in establishing FSSs leads to the understanding that the whole child needs to be supported, that is, learners should be holistically supported. McKinney, De Royston and Madkins (2019) alluded to the consideration of the whole child, which incorporates attention to the ecologies of access and opportunities neighbouring the learner that influence his or her well-being for educational and learning success.

The third key point is the active engagement of parents and guardians in their children's learning and development. Parents are seen as 'vital sources of information' (McKenzie, Loebenstein & Taylor 2018:238) for their children in the inclusive educational environment. McKenzie et al. (2018) explained that learners' success in school is connected to parental involvement in the school. Consequently, getting parents actively engaged in school communities is important, not only in inclusive education but also in FSSs. As a possible strategy to engage parents, schools need to suggest an assortment of possible types of parental involvement to match parents' strengths with the needs of the school (McKenzie et al. 2018). The knowledge and strengths of parents, as well as the application of indigenous knowledge, can be an asset to schools.

The concept of community schools originates mostly from the USA, but Malone (2020) affirmed that other countries are also focusing on community schooling; for example, Germany has all-day schools and England has extended schools, whilst Wales focuses on community schools. Fischer, Theis and

Züchner (2014) experienced the all-day schools as found in Germany as follows:

> In particular, as all-day schools offer additional support for weaker students (e.g. homework support, remedial lessons in specific subjects), and it was argued that all-day education would provide at-risk groups with the assistance needed to achieve better results at school. (p. 81)

The concept of all-day schools focuses on support for learners to improve school outcomes. Du Bois-Reymond (2013) was of the opinion that in the Netherlands, the 'brede' (broad) school in the primary section should be the midpoint of networking with institutions and municipalities, contributing through resources and knowledge to the functioning of the schools (libraries, cultural centres, health and child well-being services, etc.) In South Africa, the implementation of FSSs was also influenced by the need to provide services and address diverse educational needs in communities with a network of support and resources and through capitalising on the indigenous knowledge systems of communities. The focus is on providing quality education for all and addressing specific community-based barriers.

According to the DoE (2010), the focus of FSSs is:

> [*T*]o adopt a holistic, flexible and accommodative approach to development and uphold a spirit of collaboration among all members of the school community as well as reaching out to various stakeholders around the school. (p. 7)

However, the establishment of the FSSs in South Africa are slow in addressing these community-based barriers, as Ayaya, Makoelle and Van der Merwe (2021:2) indicated that the transformation of FSSs are gradual, and since the implementation of the EWP6 (DoE 2001) in 2001, only 6% of ordinary schools have been adapted to full-service entities.

Consequently, the focus areas of FSSs will be discussed to elaborate on fundamental aspects in the understanding of supportive schools within an inclusive school environment.

◼ Focus areas of inclusive support in full-service schools

Full-service schools are ordinary public schools that are selected to provide support to all learners within the area of the school, whatever their learning needs. The *Guidelines for Full-Service Inclusive Schools* (DoE 2010:7) defined full-service or inclusive schools as follows.

Full-service or inclusive schools, colleges and further and higher education institutions are first and foremost mainstream education institutions that provide quality education to all learners by providing in the full range of learning needs in an equitable manner These schools should:

- Strive to achieve access, equity, quality and social justice in education.
- Promote a sense of belonging so that all learners, staff and families experience a sense of worth in the learning community.
- Have the capacity to respond to diversity by providing appropriate education for the individual needs of learners, irrespective of disability or differences in learning style or pace or social difficulties experienced.
- Establish methods to assist curriculum and institutional transformation to ensure both an awareness of diversity and that additional support is available to those learners and educators who need it.

Figure 8.1, on the next page, illustrates the main focus areas of FSSs.

The main focus areas of FSSs are discussed in the following points.

☐ Achieve access, equity, quality and social justice

The *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* affirms that 'schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic,
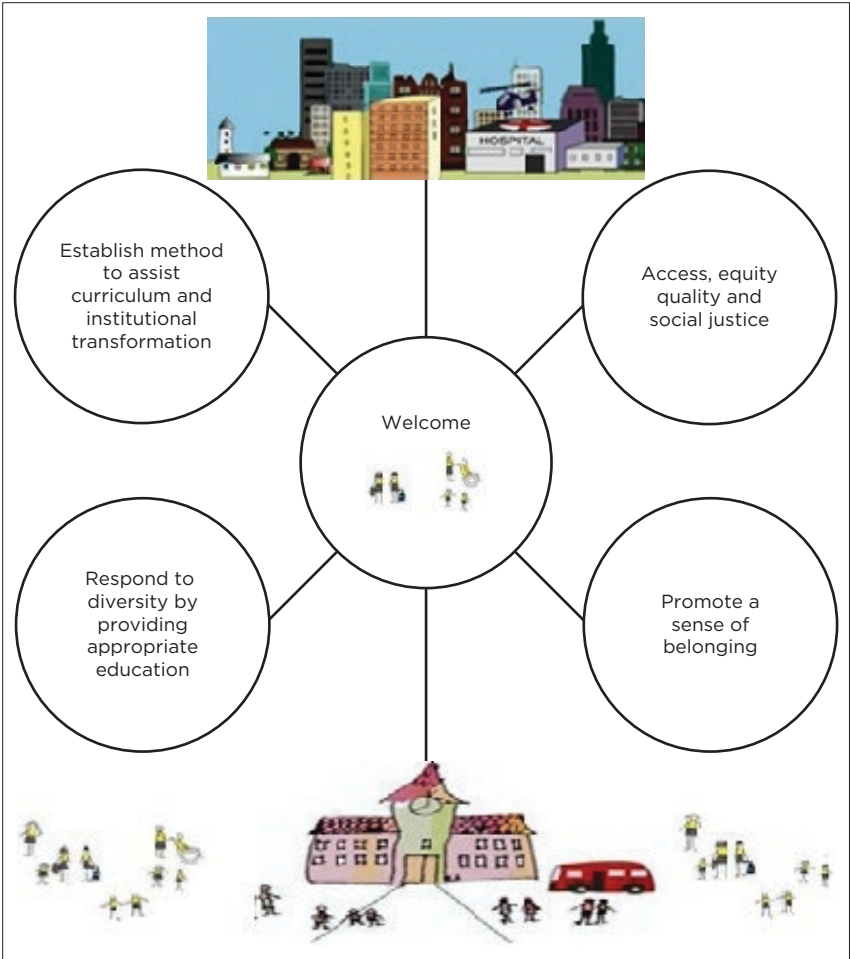
FIGURE 8.1: Main focus areas of full-service schools.

or other disorders' (UNESCO 1994:6). The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa is connected with constructing a new democratic society, grounded in social justice to eliminate exclusivity in education (Mfuthwana & Dreyer 2018). This forms the basis of access for learners with diverse educational needs to be included in the school process; and as for FSSs, the basis of

support is the needs of learners experiencing moderate barriers. To become a beacon of transformation in the areas in which they are located, FSSs must be steered by the following ideologies: strives for a holistic, flexible approach to learning, such as collaboration with others, where everyone is responsible for the education of learners through the development of an inclusive society; the celebration of diversity and getting rid of the stigma and labelling of learners with diverse educational needs (Conway 2017).

☐ Promote a sense of belonging

To foster a sense of belonging is a critical aspect of FSSs, and as exclusion was the focus of the educational history of South Africa, the transformation of schools and the communities around schools needs to convey a sense of belonging and that all are welcome. All learners, including those at risk of becoming relegated, including learners with disabilities, chronic illnesses, learning disabilities and behavioural problems, must be advocated by FSSs (Conway 2017). By advocating for and supporting learners, a culture of support is created where learners are included in the educational process. Sotuku and Duku (2015) explained that an element of ubuntu is a spirit of compassion – being caring and understanding of one another. When compassion and caring are promoted in FSSs, learners, parents and community members can feel they belong in and are part of the school.

☐ Respond to diversity by providing appropriate education

Conway (2017) illuminated an essential focus of FSSs is to encourage a shift in the way schools view barriers to learning, including disabilities. Full-service schools must provide appropriate training and facilities to meet the specific needs of each learner to respond to diversity and address barriers to learning (Conway 2017). In the delivery of suitable education to support diverse educational needs in FSSs, schools are encountering a variety of

challenges. Ayaya et al. (2021:1) have shown in research that limited training for teachers in FSSs on inclusive education has been done by the South African Department of Education. In research done by Mfuthwana and Dreyer (2018) on teachers' perspectives of inclusive education teams, teachers indicated that they were mindful of their role concerning differentiation, individualised support and collaboration in inclusive schools. However, they indicated a lack of confidence in doing this, centred on contextual elements such as sizeable classes, insufficient material and human resources, little support from DBSTs and SBSTs and ineffective training. In a study done by Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2020), the findings suggested that selected SBSTs of FSSs in their research did not support teachers with curriculum adaptation to address the needs of learners experiencing barriers to learning.

☐ Establish methods to assist curriculum and institutional transformation

Mokala (2017) noted that flexibility in learning and teaching and the delivery of educational support to learners and educators are inclusive principles on which FSSs are constructed. The ability of teachers to accommodate all learners and form their perceptions of learner support is central to the inclusive pedagogy (Conway 2017). An aspect of teachers' professional knowledge is inclusive pedagogy, which starts with teacher training, lasts throughout the teacher's career and needs to be an essential everyday practice of the teacher (Conway 2017).

Strategies such as collaboration and networking are key aspects in the development of teachers and the functioning of FSSs, which allow for the needs of learners with diverse educational needs to be met and assist in curriculum and institutional transformation. Collaborative functioning with all role players, learners, teachers, parents, members of the community, and other mainstream and special schools is a key function of inclusive education (Conway 2017). Collaboration is an important aspect, as school-based ESS specialists

(occupational therapists, speech therapists, counsellors and [educational] psychologists) form part of some schools. In terms of the role of occupational therapists in school-based support in FSSs, Sonday et al. (2012:5) pointed out that 'collaboration and dynamic interactions between the members of the team is [*sic*] critical when determining the services offered and implemented by occupational therapists within full-service schools'.

The aim of FSSs is to collaborate to share expertise in order to increase the learning potential of all learners (Mahlo & Condy 2016). Thus, FSSs should consider the fact that learners are connected to a community with an indigenous knowledge basis. By such collaboration, learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders can develop schools that can create environments of care, in other words, environments of ubuntu.

■ Special schools as resource centres

This part of the chapter starts with constructing an SSRC as separate concepts – 'special school' as a 'resource centre' – in order to understand its meaning. International and national developments related to SSRCs are subsequently reviewed. It will be followed by a discussion on specific focus areas for an improved understanding of how an SSRC must function.

Special schools as resource centres includes the concepts of 'special school' and 'resource centre'. A special school refers to a school catering for learners who experience severe or high-intensity barriers to learning or special educational needs because of learning difficulties, physical disabilities or behavioural problems. Special schools admit learners whose support needs can be accommodated under the areas of specialisation of the school and provide specialised education to the enrolled learners (Oxford Dictionary 2014). It is important to highlight that most provinces in South Africa are not always favoured by a variety of special schools (cf. ch. 5), and therefore, the aim is that internal support should be given to learners in special schools as well as external support to surrounding schools (Landsberg &

Matthews 2016). A resource centre can be viewed as a centre that provides assistive resources for improved support (DBE 2015) and should provide consultation and continued support to surrounding schools. Special schools and resource centres in combination are specifically designed, staffed and resourced to provide appropriate specialised education for learners with additional needs (DBE 2014a).

National and international developments regarding SSRC will be discussed next.

■ International and national developments regarding special schools as resource centres

International developments of ESS in various countries have been discussed broadly in Chapter 2, and therefore, only a general overview related to SSRCs will be provided here. The transformation of special schools into special schools or resource centres seems to be a common trend in many countries (Datta 2015; Segrott, Rothwell & Thomas 2013; Sheppard & Clibbens 2013). Most countries report that they are planning to develop, are developing or have already developed a network of resource centres for special schools in their countries (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2017).

International trends, such as inequity in the provision of quality education and support (Nel, Nel & Hugo 2012), have directly influenced and continue to influence educational policies and practices in South Africa (Swart & Pettipher 2016). The introduction of inclusive education to South Africa aimed to transform the practice of supporting learners who experience barriers to learning. This has especially had an impact on ESS (Makhalemele & Nel 2016). National developments of SSRC highlight that South Africa adopted an inclusive approach to education through the EWP6 in 2001. This policy outlines strategies to be implemented for the provision of support in

education to accommodate a wide range of learning needs. In acknowledgement of the resources and expertise that exist in special schools, the policy envisaged the strengthening of special schools to function as resource centres offering system-wide support to learners who require a high level of support (DBE 2014a).

■ Focus areas of inclusive support in special schools as resource centres

The purpose of this section is to gain a clear view of the focus areas that must be in place for an SSRC to function optimally. Guidelines to ensure quality education and support in special schools and SSRCs to support inclusive education were developed to address challenges based on the findings and recommendations by the DBE (2014a). This document – *Guidelines for Special Schools as Resource Centres* – was introduce in 2014. Special schools as resource centres are being guided by the guidelines for the minimum standards to function properly in order to provide quality education, care and support for all learners. These guidelines form the foundation or basis that must be adhered to for a functional SSRC. The ultimate goal of these guidelines is to guide, special schools and SSRCs at all levels in obtaining, maintaining and monitoring (DBE 2014a).

It is acknowledged that system-wide support can be delivered to learners who need a high level of support through the knowledge and resources of specials schools (Landsberg & Matthews 2016). The DBE (2014a) has commenced with a programme to support learners who need high levels of support by ensuring that all special schools have the necessary resources and expertise to function as resource centres. The support of enrolled learners at special schools as well as those at other schools can only be realised if special schools are strengthened to function as resource centres (DBE 2014a). According to the *Inclusive Education Policy*, over time, all special schools will be converted into SSRCs and serve as centres of excellence (DBE 2014a).

Figure 8.2 below illustrates the main focus areas of SSRCs.

The main focus areas of SSRCs are discussed in the following points.

☐ Legislative and policy framework

Special schools as resource centres are special schools; therefore, legislation and policies that ordinary schools, as well as special schools, abide by and follow also apply to SSRCs (DBE 2014a). As indicated by the *Inclusive Education Policy*, SSRCs should
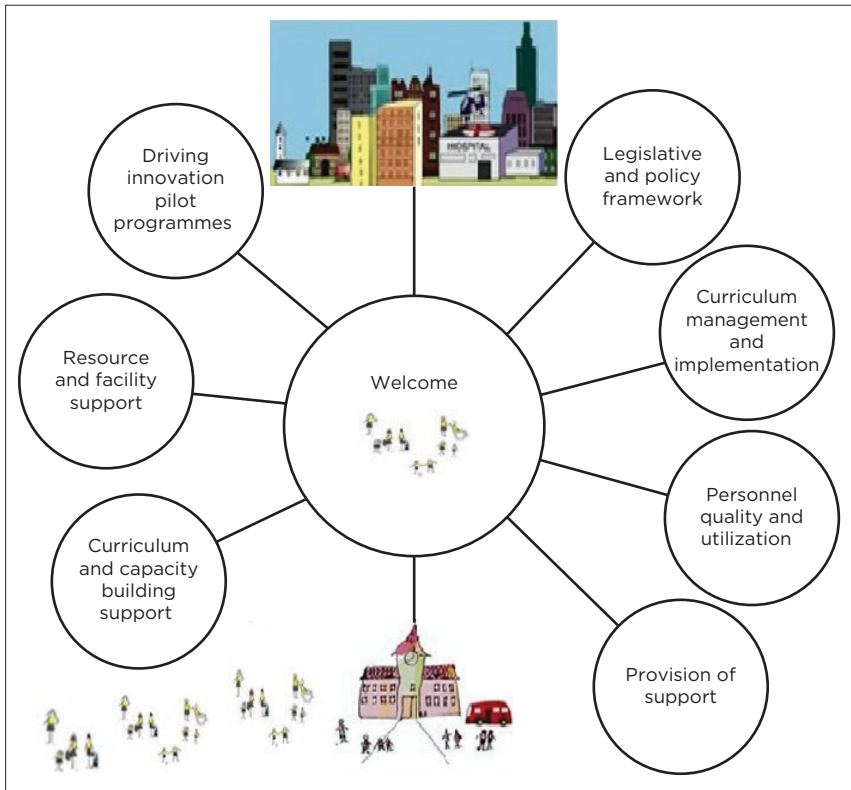

FIGURE 8.2: The main focus areas of special schools as resource centres.

form part of DBSTs (Makhalemele 2011). Specialised professional support in curriculum, assessment and teaching must be provided to designated full-time and other neighbouring schools, by SSRCs forming part of these teams (Nel et al. 2014). They should supply the support and ensure that it is also delivered to registered learners who need a high level of support to improve educational services at their schools (DBE 2014c). Special schools as resource centres must, therefore, have school policies, rules and regulations in line with their role as a resource centre and part of the DBST. Special schools as resource centres should, therefore, be supported by legislative and policy changes that confirm their existence, steer their functioning and grant funding for their extra obligations as part of a DBST (Du Plessis 2013).

☐ Curriculum management and implementation[3]

For admission, learners who require a high level of support must be permitted in SSRCs in feasible numbers. This will enable staff to perform their supporting role internally as well as externally through outreach tasks (Inclusive Education South Africa n.d.). Special schools as resource centres should accommodate learners who need a high level of support and who can benefit from the school's specialised area of support (Inclusive Education South Africa n.d.). The most important source of the SSRCs is the enrolled learners. Building and retaining SSRCs staff expertise are obtained through the teaching, assessing and experiencing the long-term development of these learners (Donohue & Bornman 2014).

For the planning and delivery of the curriculum programmes for SSRCs, the guidelines must not just be followed, but SSRCs must also have the expert knowledge and skills that are not available in other schools (Smit & Mpya 2011). Enabling enrolled learners at their schools to learn and develop including, but not

3. See Inclusive Education South Africa, n.d., 'Special school resource centres', viewed 03 September 2021, from http://www.included.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/WEB_IESA_EU-Factsheet-06_Special-School-Resource-Centres.pdf

limited to, the alignment of their programme, to the national curriculum and the differentiation and adjusting of the curriculum (DBE 2014a).

☐ Personnel quality and utilisation

Special schools as resource centres should be adequately and appropriately staffed so that they are able to fulfil their role as a resource centre (DBE 2014a). This means that they must have an additional personnel establishment and funding (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey 2010). The outreach staff and administrators along with the school teaching staff must, therefore, receive funding for support. The most experienced, most conversant professionals must be staffed to provide quality education to learners who need high levels of support (Inclusive Education South Africa n.d.). Staff must have developed specialist knowledge that is not available in ordinary schools (Inclusive Education South Africa n.d.). Collaborative discussions, administration, management, networking and working with organisations outside the school setting, not just the support of learners who need a high level of support is important, expertise that SSRC staff must avail over is also of utmost importance (Du Toit, Eloff & Moen 2014; Makhalemele & Nel 2016; Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden 2018; Nel et al. 2014). For the affirmative attitudes, energy, passion and dedication to the education of learners who experience barriers to learning must be characteristics of SSRCs staff (Hofman & Kilimo 2014; Savolainen et al. 2012). The support of other learning institutions is an important component of support and SSRCs should give their staff the opportunity to experience these services (Inclusive Education South Africa n.d.). Appointments of professional specialist staff can be done at district offices and then be stationed at SSRCs (DBE 2014a). This would ensure that professional specialist staff with their scarce skills can easily move around to support schools. Special schools as resource centres must, therefore, develop and use creative ways to utilise their staff and experts within their communities (Nel, Nel & Lebeloane 2016a). Private practitioners with different

expertise in their community may be requested to work in collaboration with and to devote their time to assist with some of the programmes (Savolainen et al. 2012).

☐ Provision of support

Quality support in SSRCs must be provided to learners but also to other schools. This support should include the supplying of learner, family and community support, depending on the school's capacity. Special schools as resource centres should also be the centre or focal point of educational services for learners who need high support levels, no matter where they attend school, not just learners enrolled at the specific school (Inclusive Education South Africa n.d.). Multidisciplinary assessment for learners and learners in ordinary schools can be offered through supportive measures such as the function of multidisciplinary assessments and review centres (DBE 2014a). This can be done at the school or it could be an itinerant service. When learners with disabilities attend ordinary schools, SSRCs should also receive therapeutic support as well as programmes for early intervention with the aim of minimising learning barriers (DBE 2014a). They should offer additional services, such as holiday programmes and special workshops for children and young people who need a high level of support and provide family support services (breaks or respite for families, support groups and training) (DBE 2014a). Learners who need a high level of support should be supported by the SSRCs that serve as an educational centre for parents and the community (Makhalemele 2011). Furthermore, sign language training must be provided for the community and adults (DBE 2014a). To support teaching and learning, SSRCs must work with community organisations and structures, including organisations for the disabled, parenting organisations, trade unions, NGOs, traditional healers, parents, grandparents and caregivers (DBE 2014a). Advocacy and awareness programmes should be implemented within the community aimed at changing negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and supporting

the implementation of an inclusive education system (Inclusive Education South Africa n.d.). Lastly, the mobilisation of children and young people who are outside the system and receive no access and schooling must be done by SSRC and the community (DBE 2014a; Nel et al. 2016b).

☐ Curriculum and capacity building support

Ordinary schoolteachers with learners in need of specialised curriculum support, SSRCs can provide specialised curriculum planning and support (DBE 2014a). The training needs of neighbouring ordinary schools and the community can be obtained to provide teachers with training on a variety of skills, depending on the expertise of the school (Nel et al. 2016a). The supplying of learning and teaching support materials, the use, management and maintenance of specialised equipment and technology, South African sign language, braille, supplementary and alternative communication, disability-specific educational requirements, curriculum differentiation and adaptation and teaching technology can be used as teaching aids (DBE 2014a).

Working with learners who experience barriers to learning, SSRCs can form a basis for the exchange of the different teachers to gain experience in a wider field (DBE 2014a). They can collaborate with training institutions and offer a practical training base for a range of professionals, including teachers, therapists, social workers and medical practitioners (DBE 2014a). Moreover, health, social development (welfare), labour, justice, correctional services, transport, safety and security departments, together with the sectors can develop a network of support to schools (DBE 2014a).

☐ Resource and facility support

The provision of essential infrastructure and resources, including a physical base for the storage, maintenance and use of specialised equipment for the benefit of learners in ordinary

schools, is essential (Donohue & Bornman 2014:1). For example, an SSRC could store and produce braille and other tactile resources that can be used by learners who have visual impairments enrolled in ordinary schools (DBE 2014a). They could also be general resource centres by providing resources such as learning and teaching support material, information and communication technology and access to technology services (DBE 2014a). In addition, the SSRC can assist by being a loan centre for the loan of expensive equipment to learners in ordinary schools, providing e-learning facilities and providing space and resources for various activities that are aimed at supporting learners who require a high level of support. These may include space for consultations with learners or parents who need support, non-profit organisations to provide relevant training, hold meetings and so forth, and other government departments to acquire relevant services (DBE 2014a). Equipment and aids can be used for teaching and learning at the SSRCs as well as neighbouring schools, SSRCs can also provide access to a library of technology for customisable assessment or individual use, and can have full-time technical assistants (DBE 2014a.)

☐ Driving innovative pilot programmes

To improve the learning and development of learners who requires a high level of support, SSRCs should facilitate the development and implementation of innovative programmes. For example, the establishment of relationships with stakeholders such as businesses, the departments of social development and labour to introduce programmes for transition to the work environment and to have access to inclusive work for school leavers (DBE 2014a).

This concludes the theoretical overview of the repositioning of FSSs and SSRCs. The empirical research regarding this topic will be explicated next.

■ Empirical research about the repositioning of full-service schools and special schools as resource centres

■ Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research was to explore and understand FSSs and SSRCs in as far as effective inclusive support is concerned so as to make recommendations for the repositioning of FSSs and SSRCs as centres of excellence within inclusive ESS.

■ Research design

The intention of this chapter was to deliberate about repositioning FSSs and SSRCs as centres of excellence in inclusive support services. Hence, a qualitative research approach was followed to achieve the research objective, namely to explore inclusive support in FSSs and SCRSs to assist with the diverse educational needs of learners. The methodological approach of the empirical research was qualitative in nature within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. Furthermore, purposive sampling was employed, and the data were collected via semi-structured individual interviews. Thereafter, the data were analysed through the six phases of thematic analysis. Ethical considerations guided the research process.

□ Methodology

Qualitative research emphasises an understanding of the belief structure of individuals or a group and the meaning they attach to actions (Okeke 2015). Qualitative research helps one to understand meaning in that, in such an approach, particular methods need to be used to represent the voice of said individuals by using their actual words (i.e. verbatim quotations) in the research report. Qualitative research pursues the understanding of how individuals

in a selected setting make sense of their surroundings, and it places great emphasis on understanding the phenomenon under investigation (Nieuwenhuis 2016). A qualitative research approach affords the researcher the opportunity to conduct an in-depth investigation about the perceptions, opinions and feelings of the research participants. Therefore, in this investigation, a basic qualitative research design was used to obtain information and insight into the experiences of the SBSTs of FSSs and SSRCs that are faced with the task of teaching and learning and addressing the needs of learners with diverse educational needs. By conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants, they could construct their lived experiences of supporting learners with diverse educational needs in FSSs and SSRCs.

☐ Philosophical orientation

Considering the characteristics of qualitative research, the interpretivist-constructivist research paradigm was deemed best suited for this study. An interpretivist-constructivist orientation was, therefore, followed in the empirical investigation. This framework is concerned with people's subjective, lived experiences and how they understand and reflect on these (Nieuwenhuis 2016). In line with the interpretivist-constructivist framework, inductive reasoning and communication were used as a form of data generation and collection. Hence, the focus was cooperative and humanistic research. The interpretivist-constructivist framework relies on making meaning through the views and understandings of people within a particular context (Nieuwenhuis 2016), in this case, the support services in FSSs and SSRCs. It was important to bear in mind that participants' perspectives on support services for learners with diverse needs may vary. To fully understand how people construct meaning within this multiplicity, one has to move into their world and observe their direct experiences from within (Nieuwenhuis 2016). We worked directly with the participants to investigate their experiences of inclusive support and the challenges they

encountered whilst trying to realise the expectations of policies. These expectations are quite diverse.

☐ Population and sample

Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight; therefore, a sample from which the most can be learnt should be selected (Merriam 2009). This type of sampling is based on the judgement of the researcher; ultimately, the sample should have characteristics or be representative or have typical attributes of the research population (Maree 2014). Therefore, participants were purposefully selected, as we wanted to gather information about the optimal functioning of both FSSs and SSRCs so as to gain more insight into how these schools could be repositioned to deliver best practices to learners, teachers, parents and communities. Participants were selected based on their knowledge and experience of rendering inclusive support at FSSs and SSRCs; hence, we invited SBST members of each of the schools that made themselves available for participation. As permission from the North West education department was not granted on time (which we originally set out to do), we had to find participants from other provinces who timeously provided permission. Participants from schools in the Gauteng education department responded on short notice. Convenient sampling was, therefore, also used according to the availability of the SBST members. Moreover, we had to conduct the interviews via Zoom, because social distancing was still required under the COVID-19 regulations. The participants of the study were six SBST members: three members from SSRCs and three members from FSSs in the Gauteng education department.

☐ Data collection

Data were collected by means of semi-structured individual interviews. Such interviews are conducted when the researcher

directs questions in such a way that they yield open-ended answers from participants (Okeke 2015). Semi-structured interviews consist of a concise list of guiding questions that are supplemented by follow-up, probing questions, which depend on each interviewee's responses. All questions should be open-ended, neutral and clear, and leading language should be avoided. In addition, familiar language should be used, and jargon avoided (Josselson 2013).

☐ Data analysis and interpretation

As the research was conducted from the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, thematic data analysis strategies were employed to explore how the participants gave meaning to the phenomenon under investigation. Data were collected on SBST members' perspectives on support for the diverse needs of learners in FSSs and SSRCs. The data were interpreted and thematically analysed so as to present themes. We drew on the following phases of analysis, as delineated by Braun and Clarke (2006:16–23), to analyse and interpret the data and to generate the themes:

- **Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with the data:** We needed a comprehensive understanding of the data through the transcription and re-reading of the data to ensure accuracy.
- **Phase 2: Generating initial codes:** Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasised that codes can be interesting data concepts in the transcribed text. These codes were generated as we re-read and familiarised ourselves with the data.
- **Phase 3: Searching for themes:** We reflected on the relationship between codes, themes and different levels of themes. Levels of themes included the main overarching themes as well as the subthemes within each.
- **Phase 4: Reviewing the themes:** The themes of the research need to be reviewed and refined to form a clear coherent picture.

- **Phase 5: Defining and naming themes:** We described and explained each theme to introduce the essence of the theme. The naming of each theme should indicate to the reader what the theme is about.
- **Phase 6: Producing the report:** This phase involves all identified themes and the final writing of the report. The report should tell the story reflected by the data, without repeating information, and should provide coherent, concise and logical information.

☐ Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the research project was obtained from the North-West University. The Gauteng education department also granted permission for the research. We informed the participants about the following ethical aspects: what the research entailed, anonymity, confidentiality and that the participants had the option to withdraw from the research at any time (cf. Creswell 2013). Each participant and school principal gave their permission by signing an informed consent form in which all mentioned ethical aspects were explained.

■ Themes, discussion, findings and recommendations for the repositioning of full-service schools and special schools as resource centres

The participants' perceptions concerning the focus areas of FSSs and SSRCs, challenges, constructive experiences and optimal support were explored. We wanted to explore these aspects to gain insight into and an understanding of inclusive support to attempt to reposition FSSs and SSRCs so as to address and accommodate the diverse educational needs of learners.

TABLE 8.1: The main and subthemes from the data of the full-service schools and special schools as resource centres.

Theme	Main theme	Subthemes
Theme 1	The necessity of support	• Holistic learner support
		• Community understanding and support
		• Integration of curriculum for support
		• Teachers need specific training on support
Theme 2	Resources	• Beneficial resources
		• Deficiency of resources
Theme 3	Ideal FSSs and SSRCs	• Comprehensive resources
		• Accepting schools
		• Flexible teaching methods
		• Teacher personal and professional support and development
		• Human resources

FSSs, full-service schools; SSRCs, special schools as resource centres.

■ Combined discussion of themes and findings regarding full-service schools and special schools as resource centres

In this section, the combined findings in terms of FSSs and SSRCs are discussed. We found it appropriate to collate the findings, as there were similarities between the FFSs and SSRCs. The main and subthemes that emerged from the data are presented in Table 8.1 above.

□ Theme 1: The necessity for support

The necessity for support for FSSs schools to function optimally to deliver integrated inclusive support to learners with diverse educational needs was indicated by the FSS participants in the following statement: 'What we need in FSSs is support; if we can support from head office, from district to the parents ... and even

the teachers need support' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member). The involvement and support of all role players were emphasised: 'regular visits from head office ... regular visits from stakeholders, regular visits from the public figures' (Participant 3, FSS, SBST member). The SSRC participants agreed and expressed the importance of support especially in such a school:

> 'You cannot do all of this support on your own; you have to realise that you need help. Once you've realised that, you can move forward in providing effective support in the special school and be able to give support to full-service schools.'(Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator)

The subthemes discussed below supported the main theme *necessity for support*. These aspects need to be in place for the optimal functioning of inclusive support in FSSs and SSRCs.

☐ *Holistic learner support*

The focus on the learners in FSSs was emphasised by the participants and confirms a key aspect of FSSs as previously mentioned by McKinney et al. (2019) – that is, to consider the whole child – which draws attention to the ecologies of access and opportunities that influence learners' well-being for educational and learning success. This aspect is a crucial element of inclusive support. Learners' diverse needs should be considered, and the child, as a whole, needs to be considered in the support process. An FSS participant elaborated on this aspect: 'We must not use the one-size-fits-all approach'. The focus area of FSSs is the uniqueness of learners and that learners need to be supported: 'We treat each child differently and focus on the uniqueness of the child the FSSs will succeed'(Participant 1, FSS, SBST member). The participants also emphasised that learners' diverse needs should be addressed in an all-inclusive way: 'We need to understand [the] child holistically' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member). The focus is on the uniqueness of learners and to support them holistically. The developmental needs of learners are important if learners are supported holistically. A means of

addressing the developmental needs of learners is the provision of vocational skills in FSSs and SSRCs. These skills can assist learners to develop ideally. In this regard, one participant said: 'We need to consider the vocational, field of interest training … specific school for a specific vocational … then the educational system will go somewhere' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member). An SSRC participant elaborated as follows:

> 'Not all of them can go to university. We need mechanics; how will our cars be fixed if everyone becomes doctors? […] and hairdressers; you will see that every person have [*sic*] a gift and everyone is not the same, especially in special schools; you will see they are best with their hands […] and other talents.' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator)

☐ *Community understanding and support*

According to Malone (2020), there is a worldwide interest in community schooling and the importance of the role that community schools play as anchor institutions in neighbourhoods, especially in communities with limited access to resources and support structures. It seems that such a relationship between the community and FSSs as well as SSRCs has been developing. The participants of both groups strongly indicated that establishing inclusive support in communities may still need to focus on the promotion of inclusive practices and the *de-stigmatisation* of learners with diverse needs. The following was said: 'denial of the parents, the parents need to be taught and need understand their children are unique' (Participant 2, FSS, SBST member). The education of communities on inclusivity was alluded to as 'a lot of teaching in our communities'(Participant 3, FSS, SBST member). It was further stated that the education of parents on the role of inclusive schools was crucial:

> '[…] make parents aware so that they will not be in denial because most parents are in denial. They do not what their children to go to special schools; we must educate them – if your child is in a special school, it does not mean the end of the world for your child. We are

trying to help and assist your child by placing your child in a [*sic*] right school.' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member)

The participants indicated that teachers were despondent and parents did not always understand the support process, as learners with special needs often were stigmatised:

'No, my child does not have any learning challenges; the previous teacher did not call. It was working; now you call me [...] that is why teachers end up leaving everything to say, "Let the child go," as in the end, the parents have a right.' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator)

The labelling of learners with special needs is a challenge in most communities: 'They laugh at my child [...] they say if they are in a[n] LSEN class or in a special school, you cannot do that'(Participant 5, SSRC, SBST member). Teachers' own attitudes were also mentioned: 'You [*sic*] wasting my time; these teachers contribute negatively to that kind of learners. The teacher will ignore the child and say, "I want the quantity of work and not the quality of work"' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator). Previously, it was mentioned that SSRCs should be a training base for parents and communities to support learners who needed high levels of support (Makhalemele 2011). One participant also mentioned the education of communities 'through the media, through the [*sic*] books and through handouts, parents should be told that if your child [is] behaving like this [...] this can help' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator).

☐ *Integration of the curriculum for support*

Policies on inclusive education were put in place, with the EWP6 (DoE 2001) as the guiding policy to accommodate learners with diverse educational needs. Furthermore, Mokala (2017) noted that flexibility in learning and teaching and the delivery of educational support to learners and educators are inclusive principles on which FSSs are constructed. However, according to one participant, it seemed as if when district officials were visiting schools, these policies were not always taken into account:

'people do not what to understand the policies how these FSSs are run'. The conflicting messages from the inclusive policies and, for example, the curriculum, were highlighted by the participants of both groups. An FSS participant commented:

> '[…] if the curriculum people come, they expected us to do the same weighting as mainstream schools. They do not accommodate us. The FSSs are all about accommodation […] our own district office does not accommodate us if they come; they want stats and numbers.' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member)

The participants indicated that the influence of district officials on the curriculum had an impact on the accommodation of learners: 'the district office and curriculum division are not on board with this; they want to see the curriculum' (Participant 2, FSS, SBST member). According to the participants, the district office also showed a lack of support, especially in the understanding of the differentiation of the curriculum to accommodate learners with diverse educational needs. An SSRC participant said that 'they do not what to prescribe the special curriculum for learners with special needs' (Participant 6, SSRC, SBST member). The participants also commented on the demands of district offices and the integration of the curriculum:

> '[…] if they come for a visit, they will say: "This is not enough activities, and the activities are not the same." […] we try to tell them: "Here I was doing curriculum differentiation; I was supporting this child." They will tell you: "No, I want this lesson."' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member)

No efficient support was received from the education department in terms of flexibility in the curriculum to accommodate diverse learning needs.

☐ *Teachers need specific training on support*

The participants also mentioned the lack of training, even a lack of training on the SIAS policy process. The implementation of this policy also seemed to be a challenge because of the number of

learners in classrooms. One participant indicated that it 'is difficult for us to practice it in our schools, especially the township schools, because of the ratio' (Participant 5, SSRC, SBST member). The number of policies and the amount of paperwork on these policies were also mentioned as hindrances to support. Teachers have a lot of paperwork to complete when a learner needs additional support: 'teachers do not want to fill in the paperwork' (Participant 3, FSS, SBST member). This leads to learners not being given the support they need. The role of the SBST is important to identify specific training needs and to network with various stakeholders. Collaborative functioning with all role players, learners, teachers, parents, community members and other mainstream and special schools is a key function of inclusive education (Conway 2017). However, the participants indicated that an SBST coordinator was often alone in the support process: 'SBST is your baby, you are alone' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator). Furthermore, they reported that teachers in FSSs and SSRCs lacked knowledge and skills to support learners with barriers:

> 'They do not get the training that they [are] supposed to get, even the special school; they [are] still trying to adjust to this inclusive thing. They get different pupils with different challenges. For them, to adjust is also a challenge.' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member)

The need for training was further elaborated on:

> '[…] the teachers don't know how to handle barriers, even the new teachers who graduated. They should know about inclusive implementation, but it is like they do not have the necessary training […] and even most of our more experienced teachers, they just don't know how, and they don't care.' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator)

It was suggested that 'if a person wants to become a teacher, they should have a passion for helping learners in any way that they can' (Participant 6, SSRC, SBST member). A lack of specific teaching methodology and skills in assisting and accommodating learners with unique barriers hampers the adequate functioning of FSSs and SSRCs and was highlighted as follows:

'Our teachers need more training. Please, you must hear us out and we need to be heard […] the Department and other members of the SBST are appointed without the proper knowledge. If they don't know, how will the teachers know?' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator)

Moreover, the participants explained that even though training was provided by the DoE, the Department remained incompetent:

'The Department provides us with training, but it feels like they don't understand themselves. They sometimes just hand out documents, but then they leave us there […] without giving a proper workshop; so, nobody takes it seriously.' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member)

☐ Theme 2: Resources

Establishing resources in FSSs and SSRCs is of the utmost importance. Galindo et al. (2017) argued that the capacity to produce, expand and capitalise on the resources of their environment is fundamental to the effectiveness of FSSs. This also applies to SSRCs, according to Donohue and Bornman (2014). Two subthemes – beneficial resources and the deficiency of resources – emerged from the data.

☐ *Beneficial resources*

According to the DoE (2010), the focus of FSSs is:

To adopt a holistic, flexible and accommodative approach to development and uphold a spirit of collaboration among all members of the school community as well as reaching out to various stakeholders around the school. (p. 7)

Special schools as resource centres are similar to FSSs, which are community-based and, therefore, involve community stakeholders. The participants mentioned that various stakeholders were involved in and networked with schools to support learners with special learning needs: 'we do have stakeholders; we have Social Development; we have a school social worker, NGOs that work with us' (Participant 6, SSRC, SBST member). These are valuable resources for both FSSs and SSRCs and are key to assist learners with diverse educational needs.

Inclusive special school units of the districts were also indicated as beneficial resources*:* 'when you call them, they do support' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator). Learning support educators were also highlighted as a valuable resource. Learning support educators assist in the process by helping with assessment: 'give assessments and then [the] parent see, now my child is struggling, please help and the child is almost 14 years' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator). In addition, SSRCs were indicated as a positive resource:

> '[…] catering [*for*] other schools, which are the neighbouring schools, maybe if there are FSSs in the area, if they need the assist[*ance*] of the psychologists, speech therapy or OT, that school acts as a resource centre. Sometimes they will assist them with material, for instance maybe training in the SIAS policy. The resource centre can give this training to those neighbouring schools, especially the FSSs; they liaise with SSRCs and then they can distribute as FSSs to mainstream schools.' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member)

An SSRC participant confirmed that there were beneficial resources when they reflected on positive experiences:

> 'There are successful cases where the various stakeholders, such as educational psychologists, [*and*] occupational therapist, trained teachers on a specific area, which have the necessary resources, even though very limited. But I have seen such schools that also give help to other schools.' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator)

☐ *Deficiency of resources*

Most schools had limited resources, such as the involvement of the necessary stakeholders, physical facilities and staff capacity, which might hamper the provision of inclusive support. Parents' lack of knowledge and skills also seemed like an important aspect that influenced inclusive support:

> 'The parents, they don't have enough understanding themselves, and how are they supposed to then help their children if they are not literate or don't have what it takes to learn their poor children about life and other intelligent things? […] it means that they stay or keep the child behind. They also do not even realise that their kid has got an impairment, because sometimes they have the same, and even if

they do realise there's something wrong, they don't want to accept it.' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member)

A deficiency of resources was highlighted by the participants. This included a lack of professional therapists and specialists to support the diverse needs of learners: 'they need to send some therapist to schools [...] we need other professionals to come to school to help us' (Participant 2, FSS, SBST member). Furthermore, it was indicated that psychologists at district level were also lacking resources:

'[...] we have a problem of psychologists – they do not want to stay for a very long time [...] so the files piled up even if the ISS [*inclusive special school*] unit try to help, but the files are piling up. It take[*s*] a lot of time for learners with learning problems to be place[*d*] to [*sic*] the resources centre or specialised schools.' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator)

In addition, the reality of crime in the South African context needs to be considered. Some FSSs have to function in crime-ridden communities, and the resources that are provided are stolen: 'the LSEN classes we have, most of the stimulating toys we have, become [*sic*] stolen' (Participant 3, FSS, SBST member). The poor socioeconomic circumstances of learners and a lack of resources were also mentioned by the participants. They listed insufficient transport to school, child-headed households and the impact of COVID-19 as socioeconomic circumstances that had a severe impact on the effective delivery of support to learners:

'Parents have their own problems. They lost incomes and even more during COVID; that is why they cannot provide effectively for their children. They stress and lose hope when let [*sic*] everything over to the child to take responsibility [...] And how is the child getting to school without transport?' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator)

Moreover, the Department of Health was highlighted as a resource that needed to address the needs of learners: '[The] Department of Health also must come aboard. They just come for school health programmes; they do not come frequently'. According to one participant, Home Affairs could also assist with important documentation so that learners could be placed in schools, as many parents did not have the correct documentation. In addition,

the participants expressed their concern about the limited number of SSRCs and FSSs available in South Africa at the time: 'There are not enough schools for all the special needs children in our country' to accommodate learners with diverse needs and 'the little that is [*sic*] available, are not able to manage or give the help that is needed'.

☐ Theme 3: Ideal full-service schools and special schools as resource centres

The participants reflected on aspects that needed to be in place for FSSs and SSRCs to function optimally to address the diverse needs of learners in an inclusive environment. The subthemes that emerged from the data are discussed below.

☐ *Comprehensive resources*

The addition of physical resources in schools to accommodate the various needs of learners was suggested: 'resources are in place' and 'classrooms will arouse interest, toilet[s] must be user-friendly; ramps; if you enter [the] school, you see FSSs' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member). According to one participant, an ideal FSS would be 'when you see everything you need is there […] and you see the teaching methods and support are different' (Participant 3, FSS, SBST member). One participant expressed her view on the provision of support to FSSs and other schools as follows: 'you can see that they are doing their best with whatever they can to help other schools in supporting learners with barriers' (Participant 2, FSS, SBST member).

☐ *Accepting schools*

It was also underscored that a school should be accepting, inclusive and a safe milieu for learners, teachers, parents and the community. Learners should experience 'total support; they [should] feel wanted and feel accepted' (Participant 5, SSRC, SBST member). Also, 'everybody [teachers] will love to work there', and 'as a parent, if you enter the FSSs, you will enter fully

satisfied' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member). It was further emphasised that a school should create a warm atmosphere: 'you must feel welcome when you are treated as part of the school from the moment when you walk in there' (Participant 6, SSRC, SBST member).

☐ *Flexible teaching methods*

According to the participants, the approach to learning should involve flexible methods. It was suggested that a play-based teaching approach ('learning through play') should be implemented and that teaching and learning should focus on the basics to help learners acquire the necessary skills ('we need to go back to the basic[s]') (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator).

☐ *Teacher personal and professional support and development*

The participants pointed out that teacher morale was very low, as they faced numerous challenges. The needs of teachers should be a top priority, as systemic issues and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on teachers' well-being: 'Motivation of teachers by the teacher of the month […] we do a lot of paperwork […] COVID-19 also impact[ed] […] teachers are not demoralised; they are depressed' (Participant 6, SSRC, SBST member). In addition, teacher training and the importance thereof were underscored:

> 'Teachers' training are [*sic*] not adequate, and they will feel more equipped and motivated if they feel that they know what to do. If they train new and teachers in-service more, they will have more belief in their own abilities.' (Participant 4, SSRC, SBST coordinator)

☐ *Human resources*

The need for human resources to provide inclusive support was highlighted by the participants. These resources include

professional and skilled persons to assist with and address the diverse needs of learners:

> '[…] without human resources, if we do not have human resources, that are [*sic*] a challenge as well; so for me, resources and human resources work hand in hand. If I talk about human resources, I am talking about specialists: your psychologists, your OTs, speech therapists, your teachers. Teachers that are there to teach and not be [*sic*] placed by some favour or something; they do not qualify to be there.' (Participant 1, FSS, SBST member)

The objective of the study was to gain a deeper insight, from the perspectives of SBST members, into how inclusive support was provided in FSSs and SSRCs. The data were analysed and drawn upon so as to make the following recommendations for the repositioning of FSSs and SSRCs.

■ The repositioning of full-service schools and special schools as resource centres: Recommendations

The discussion of the themes and findings underscored various aspects that need to be considered to reposition FSSs and SSRCs to address the needs of learners with diverse educational needs. An aspect that clearly influences the functioning of FSSs and SCRSs is that although policies are in place for the implementation of inclusive education, the implementation of these policies is problematic. The following recommendations are made for the repositioning of FSSs and SSRCs:

- A paradigm shift needs to occur by creating inclusive classrooms that reflect inclusive communities. Inclusive *citizenship* opportunities should be used to promote communities of care. All role players in education need to understand and promote inclusive practices. This includes taking into account the diverse needs of South African school communities. If we move towards educating and promoting inclusive education, we can achieve access, equity, quality and social justice. We need to actively

engage in inclusive citizenship, where the focus is on educating and promoting an inclusive understanding in South Africa. The focus needs to be actively 'talking' and 'promoting' diversity.

- In the de-stigmatisation of diverse needs in schools and communities, we need action to start implementing policies. The focus must be on action on a regular, everyday basis. It is not enough to have policies on paper, in files, or talking about them on certain days. Intentional activities should be executed in schools and communities.
- To promote a sense of belonging in school communities, we should create intentional spaces where teachers, learners and parents feel welcome. This may be done by promoting ubuntu, representing a true African view of community care. If we promote inclusive citizenship in our South African communities, we can create spaces where people feel valued, and a culture of care will follow. Empowering communities to understand and promote diverse needs will create inclusive communities.
- We need to respond to the diverse needs of learners by means of appropriate education. This starts with appropriate teacher training and should be embedded in all student teachers' modules during their training. It cannot be only one module on 'special needs' or 'learning problems', as all teachers will be involved in inclusive education, and therefore, it is an aspect that needs to be fully embedded in teacher training in South Africa. Such training should also be integrated into work-integrated learning periods for teachers-in-training.
- Furthermore, to respond to diverse needs, appropriate education must be embedded in the curriculum utilised in classrooms. We cannot expect to train teachers in inclusive education and to accommodate learners if we do not allow for this differentiation in classrooms.
- To assist curriculum and institutional transformation, a focus on inclusive pedagogy is required. Teacher training needs to include the transformation of ideas. Teachers should understand that accommodation and differentiation need to be done.

To address inclusive education needs in FSSs and SSRCs, the following resources and training should be in place for these schools to function optimally:

- The promotion of an asset-based approach and a concomitant focus on abilities rather than disabilities in an inclusive society.
- The DBE needs to consider infusing the curriculum with inclusive practices, embedding accommodation and differentiation in all phases of the school system.
- The DBE should invest in more specialised and professional persons to address the various needs of schools. The employment of multidisciplinary teams in all SSRC and FSSs to assist in addressing the needs of learners, parents and communities should be considered, within the constrained budget.
- The DBE should reconsider the class-to-teacher ratio or, at least, be strict with regard to adherence to the learner-to-teacher ratio.
- The DBE has to consider streams of training; vocational training would give many learners a specific skill set and would address the skills gap in South Africa.
- Qualified, trained and passionate teachers who understand the developmental needs of learners are needed to create classrooms that are welcoming and address the needs of learners.
- Teacher training needs to be more practical-focused training, and work-integrated learning periods should focus on the development of the mastery of skills to address the diverse needs of learners.
- A play-based learning approach should be implemented with consideration of a culturally responsive curriculum.
- Continuous development of teachers and focusing on training in addressing the diverse needs of learners are essential.
- Schools and SBSTs must be trained in networking and collaboration to access the social capital of the communities they are servicing.

- Stronger collaboration and networking should be established between FSSs and SSRCs.
- The sharing of best practices between FSSs and SSRCs as well as multidisciplinary team discussions of cases amongst schools urgently need to happen. Such collaboration can contribute to the sharing of knowledge, skills and expertise.

■ Conclusion

Since 1994, we have moved forward in addressing and accommodating the diverse needs of learners. In the South African context, various problems are still impeding the implementation of inclusive practices. Full-service schools and SSCRs contribute to promoting a more inclusive pedagogy, but we still need to create communities that are welcoming and promote a sense of belonging. In this chapter, we sought to reposition FSSs and SSRCs through a literature review, an empirical study and making recommendations in this regard.

Reimagining district-based support in South Africa: Voices from districts

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∎ Introduction

The advent of democracy brought about several changes that were aimed at ameliorating the plight of marginalised groups in South Africa. Many of these changes affected the education system that was organised and managed according to the policies that characterised the apartheid system of governance. One of the major changes came as a result of the SASA No. 84 of 1996. This act was aimed at unifying all the different education systems that had prevailed in South Africa before 1994.

The preamble of the SASA (Republic of South Africa 1996) states:

> [*T*]his country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the State. (p. 5)

From the excerpt above, it is clear that the intention of the democratic state in South Africa was to create a national unitary system of education to redress the imbalances of the past in education provision. This system should provide equal, high-quality education in line with the rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The national system of education proposed was devolved into provincial education subsystems, which were further devolved into districts. These districts are the closest to schools and are charged with the responsibility to, amongst other things, facilitate the provision of academic, psycho-educational and psychosocial support to learners who are at risk of poor developmental outcomes.

In this chapter, the focus is on the role of DBSTs in facilitating support for at-risk or vulnerable learners. Following an empirical

study, we document how practitioners in the districts believe district support should be reimagined for efficiency and access.

■ Global perspectives on district support

Education support services involve several role players who strive to enable learning and development amongst learners who are at risk of poor developmental outcomes. These role players give district support a multidisciplinary character that brings together collaborators from different but related disciplines. Whilst schools are the main sites for delivering quality teaching and learning, Makhalemele and Nel (2016) added that support from the districts is essential to ensure that vulnerable learners learn optimally. Teacher quality, as determined by their qualifications and performance, remains the most important lever for improving learners' outcomes (Hanushek 2008), with further support from the district and other role players in communities.

The advent of inclusive education required reform and transformation across the globe. The reforms focused on improving teaching skills, changing classroom practices and providing educational services to vulnerable learners to accommodate and include a diversity of learning needs. Improving the quality of support services within schools is part of the whole-school approach that enhances learner performance (Roll-Pettersson 2001). According to the South African Centre for Development and Enterprise (2008), it is important that all learners are afforded opportunities to learn, and their performance needs to be monitored. Hanushek (2008) added that countries should set performance standards and measures of success and introduce mechanisms to support schools to achieve teaching and learning outcomes.

Different countries have different arrangements with respect to the support given to vulnerable learners. For example, Canada has a system-wide approach to inclusive education that involves the provision of regular in-service training on methods and

resources to teachers who are employed as special education consultants in schools, thus enabling teachers to develop and sustain the expertise and credibility required (Peters 2003).

In the United States of America (USA), the quality of inclusive education programmes has grown exponentially (Metts 2000). Continuing professional development for teachers is regarded as the best component of inclusive education in the USA. The focus is on training teachers to competently address the needs of learners. Not only are special education teachers privy to programmes aimed at enabling learning amongst learners who are at risk, but all teachers should also be knowledgeable in terms of inclusive education practices (Crispel & Kasperski 2019). Peters (2003) added that in the USA, a within-school support strategy is used over and above external expertise. The characteristics of a within-school approach include providing immediate support to regular class teachers by specialist teachers and assistants in the school, thereby increasing skills in curriculum differentiation, the preparation of assessments, the writing of an individualised education plan and curriculum development, which includes the development of curriculum material to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs (McLaughlin & Rouse 2000).

In Denmark, personnel from the districts are mandated to supervise school leadership, coordinate services, bring into effect multidisciplinary planning and provide in-school support systems to build capacity as part of the whole-school reform (Andrews 2002). A similar model is used in Ireland, where district personnel are responsible for monitoring and coordinating learner support and special needs services in schools (Training and Development Agency for Schools 2012).

According to the EWP6 (DoE 2001), one of the main functions of the system of education in South Africa is to establish a system of education that is inclusive. This is in line with the goal of removing the imbalances and inequalities that characterised the previous system of apartheid education. These inequalities were, according to the EWP6 (DoE 2001), more glaring in the education

of African learners. There was a realisation that particular barriers made it difficult for learners to access the curriculum and that the creation of structures that would facilitate support for vulnerable learners was needed. District-based support teams were proposed as the best way to go, and these teams would be at the centre of educational support for vulnerable learners. District-based support teams would be made up of personnel from the provinces, districts, regions, head offices and special schools. Broadly, the main functions of DBSTs would be to (DoE 2001):

> [*E*]valuate and, through supporting teaching, build the capacity of schools, early childhood and adult basic education and training centres, colleges and further and higher education institutions to recognise and address severe learning difficulties and to accommodate a range of learning needs. (p. 47)

At school level, these teams would help to establish and support SBST to provide support to learners with diverse needs. It is important to note that existing special schools would be turned into resource centres, which would be part of DBSTs, providing professional support to FSSs and neighbouring schools as regards the curriculum, assessment and instruction (DoE 2001).

District-based support teams have been hampered by various challenges. According to Mabaso (2019), the members of the DBST at a school he studied lacked adequate training, and thus, they could not train teachers who served in the SBSTs. It was, however, noteworthy that members of the district supported schools for the deaf and the blind, in collaboration with professionals from SSRCs. Professionals from SSRCs provided support in terms of sign language interpretation and the reading of braille.

The EWP6 (DoE 2001) states that there is a shortage of special schools, as these special schools are concentrated mostly in the former Transvaal and Cape provinces. Makhalemele (2011) found that in the Free State Province, there were vast districts in which there were only a few special schools that served as resource centres to FSSs and neighbouring mainstream schools.

Some DBSTs failed to fully perform their functions because of a dire shortage of essential human resources. Another problem related to inadequate storage spaces for files, which compromised confidentiality. District-based support teams apparently did not receive adequate support from the provincial and national education departments. Chapter 5 in this book elaborates on the nature and functioning of DBSTs.

■ Methodology

In this study, we chose qualitative research as our strategy of inquiry. We specifically adopted phenomenological research as our research design. We designed a qualitative questionnaire and emailed it to the districts. When the questionnaires returned, we noticed that Senior Education Specialists (SESs), whose designations were Learning Support Advisors (LSAs) volunteered to participate in the study. The participants were all members of the DBST from three provinces in South Africa. A total of 15 participants took part in the study. In one province, eight participants from two different districts volunteered to participate in the study. The remaining seven participants came from two different provinces, with three participants from one district in one province and four from one district in the other province. A more detailed description of the sample appears below in Table 9.1.

We used a questionnaire with open-ended questions to collect data. We sent the questionnaires via email to consenting members of DBSTs. Our questions centred on what they did as members of the DBST and what they would like to see happen, based on their experiences. The textual data were processed through content analysis. We read the data sets several times as a way of immersing ourselves in these. We engaged in a process of open coding (cf. Nieuwenhuis 2007) whereby we apportioned labels to sections of the data. These labels are referred to as codes. These codes were compared to achieve consistency and so that we can eliminate weak codes. We discussed and grouped them under two broad themes, which will be presented and discussed below.

TABLE 9.1: Demographic information of the participants.

Provinces	Participants	Gender	Age	Designation	Language
Province 1	SES1	Male	39	LSA	IsiZulu
	SES2	Female	45	LSA	Isizulu
	SES3	Female	47	LSA	Sesotho
Province 2	SES4	Male	58	LSA	Sesotho
	SES5	Female	49	LSA	Setswana
	SES6	Female	52	LSA	Sepedi
	SES7	Female	51	LSA	Sesotho
Province 3	SES8	Female	46	LSA	Setswana
	SES9	Female	51	LSA	IsiZulu
	SES10	Female	50	LSA	Sesotho
	SES11	Female	42	LSA	Sesotho
	SES12	Female	44	LSA	IsiXhosa
	SES13	Male	48	LSA	IsiZulu
	SES14	Female	46	LSA	Setswana
	SES15	Female	51	LSA	Setswana

SESs, senior education specialists; LSAs, learning support advisors.

We support our assertions with excerpts from the raw data. These excerpts were not language edited to keep them original.

■ Findings and discussion

The processing of data resulted in two broad themes, namely district staff dedication despite resource constraints and the need to reimagine DBSTs. Below, we discuss these themes and support our assertions by means of the most frequent and effective excerpts from the raw data.

■ District staff dedication despite resource constraints

The findings of this study show that the participants served varying numbers of schools, ranging from 16 to 32. The schools differed with respect to quintile and type of school – primary schools, secondary schools, township schools, former Model C schools, FSSs or special schools. Some of the participants

mentioned that they also had farm schools on their lists. The following excerpts bear evidence to the above assertions:

'31 schools are allocated to me and these schools range from quintile 1 to 5. There are 14 full-service schools, 17 mainstream schools and 6 ex model C schools that are able to run on their own and one supports them when necessary.' (SES11, 42-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

'I have 32 public secondary schools (mainstream) and combined schools on my list. Out of 32 schools 24 of them are performing in terms of academic progress and manage to produce top performing learners at provincial level in terms of Grade 12 results.' (SES8, 46-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

'I manage 16 schools: 1 special school (TOC), 1 full-service school, 1 school with LSEN class and the rest are ordinary primary schools and secondary schools – 1 school is Quintile 1, and others are Quintile 3–5.' (SES9, 51-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

The nature of a school determines the kind of support the school needs. For example, former Model C schools have more material and human resources compared to other schools. They are in better positions to function more independently. This is not the case in disadvantaged schools, according to our findings. A similar finding was made by Mashau et al. (2008) and Strydom et al. (2012), who noted that ESS in historically disadvantaged areas and schools were left behind. It is, however, noteworthy that some of the schools that were in impoverished contexts functioned well and produced good Grade 12 results.

The participants encountered challenges in their efforts to support schools, as the following excerpt shows:

'Teachers not filling in SNA forms, SBST not supporting teachers during the SBST meeting (ISP not drawn), learners are in the class more than 2 years and they are not supported by the teacher and SBST, and a shortage of special schools leads to learners being dropouts.' (SES10, 50-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

It is evident that there are schools where the SBST is not fully functional yet, and that special schools are absent in some districts. Likewise, Khumalo and Hodgson (2017) and Makhalemele and Tlale (2020) have found that in some districts, there are only a limited number of special schools that are also located far away from district centres. This results in learners with high-intensive needs not being able to be referred to special schools and growing too old for their current grades, resulting, in turn, in some dropping out of school.

Probed about the nature of support the participants provided to schools, SES4 provided a more comprehensive response that showed that some staff members were determined to do well despite the challenges they were facing as the system was transitioning into an inclusive one:

> 'I am [a] senior education specialist in the ISS [inclusive special school] unit. My main job is to facilitate inclusion education in all the schools that I manage. I support SBSTs, CBSTs and DBSTs. I implement processes related to early identification, baseline assessments, appropriate referral, appropriate support provisioning as well as the development of individual learner support plans (ILSPs), support the application and implementation of assessment accommodations. Provide support in curriculum differentiation and modification in term of CAPS specifically for Full Service and Special Schools.' (SES4, 58-year-old male district-based staff member, date unspecified)

The participants thus offered support that related to the implementation of the inclusive education system, curriculum adaptation and differentiation, alternative assessment, the identification of vulnerable learners and the referral procedure. Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2020) suggested that curriculum adaptations involve the process of modifying, extending and differentiating teaching methodologies, teaching strategies, assessment strategies and the learning content in the curriculum in order to respond to the needs of learners with diverse learning needs.

The participants lamented the fact that the schools they served did not have support teachers who were qualified in the field of special and remedial education. Nel et al. (2016) noted that in recent years, LSEs have been appointed in schools to help with regard to the identification and support of learners who are at risk of poor developmental outcomes. Some participants also mentioned a shortage of teachers who had been trained as lay counsellors. The shortage of support teachers often led to learners proceeding through the system without acquiring the skills of reading, writing and spelling. This backlog is coupled with the fact that some of the SBSTs are not fully functional yet, as the following excerpts show:

> 'Learners cannot read fluently. Reading comprehension is lacking. Writing and spelling becomes [*sic*] a problem. Some of the SBST are not functional and schools become functional if they are monitored continuously, and support to school is not good as one cannot do follow-up to schools.' (SES6, 52-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

> 'In most of the schools that I have visited so far, the SBST functionality has been the biggest problem. The SBST Coordinators were reluctant to do their duties and members we not supporting the functions of the committee. There was a lot of blaming when requesting their work such as the referrals, completion of SNA forms and attaching supporting documents.' (SES13, 48-year-old male district-based staff member, date unspecified)

It can be argued that SBSTs that are not staffed by support teachers or personnel who have been trained in other aspects of support services will not function as expected.

Whilst some participants mentioned how well they worked with their schools, others lamented the fact that some schools did not fully cooperate with the district. They also decried the lack of parental involvement, learners without the necessary documents and the burden of paperwork, as shown in the next excerpt:

> 'Schools not cooperating with the district – late submissions and not submitting at all. Not referring learners that [*are*] at risk of failing

and those with learning barriers. Learners that are without identity documents or birth certificates. Parents not taking the central role in the education of their children. Schools complaining about a lot of paperwork that is expected from them.' (SES6, 52-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

Those participants who worked with secondary schools mentioned that they dealt more with contemporary social problems in their schools:

'We deal with a lot of difficulties that include parent negligence, bullying, attempted suicide, substance abuse, pregnant learners, trauma cases, sexual harassment – between learners, learners and teachers, and outside school – adult and learners.' (SES8, 46-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

Others mentioned that in order to deal with social problems, they relied on professionals in other departments and on NGOs:

'Different stakeholders, namely department of health, department of social development, Transnet, NGOs like FAMSA. The private sector provides any type of support that might be needed such as infrastructure, counselling, etc. We always collaborate with other stakeholders to get best results.' (SES11, 42-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

Other participants were satisfied with the quality of collaboration amongst them as districts and other departments and NGOs, as the excerpt above shows. However, researchers, such as Makhalemele (2011), have noted in earlier research that DBSTs do not have professionals in sufficient numbers. It is noteworthy and commendable that districts could source professionals from other departments and NGOs, but this is apparently more applicable to schools in urban contexts where these services abound.

Furthermore, requested to comment on the nature and quality of support they rendered to schools, the participants were doubtful, as the following excerpt shows:

'The support is not 100% […] there are some challenges such as transport issues to schools or schools that have complained over [*sic*] [*a*] number of challenges but will not get assistance timeously.

> Referring learners to different stakeholders for assistance, especially those affected by poverty, bullying, [*a lack of*] technology, [*a lack of*] parent involvement, bad behaviour of learners, and educators not having enough motivation can be difficult because of staff shortages and being far from services needed.' (SES1, 42-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

It can be concluded that the participants were dedicated to performing their duties even when there were barriers that made it difficult. In their schools, they received learner referrals for support with respect to the curriculum, psychosocial and socioeconomic risks to development and learning.

■ The need to reimagine district support teams

Makhalemele and Nel (2016) argued that the support that districts should provide to schools in South Africa is essential to ensure the effective delivery of ESS to learners in need of support. This view is in line with the recommendation of the EWP6 (DoE 2001). The EWP6 was aimed – apart from the move to inclusive education – at reconfiguring ESS in the entire country to eliminate the inequalities that had been inherent in the apartheid education system.

The findings of our study show that there is a dire need for rethinking district support as envisaged in the EWP6. For example, all the participants lamented the fact that there were few special schools and that those institutions had not fully become part of their district support teams. On the other hand, it was evident that some district staff did not see the staff of these schools as part of district teams, as the following excerpt shows:

> 'It is difficult when special schools do not function as part of us. If they did, they would provide advice to other schools and this would lighten our burden. As it is now, the schools on my list rely only on me. I am often unavailable when they need me. Anyway, special schools are fewer too. We must think creatively about this and make it formal.' (SES4, 58-year-old male district-based staff member, date unspecified)

This shows that the participants believed that the arrangement that special schools should be integrated into district support teams needed to be rethought and formalised.

The participants were detailed in the description of their duties and in naming further areas that required being rethought, as the following excerpt shows:

'The other area of improvement we must think about is that we do everything because we are few. For example, I am a senior education specialist and my job entails assessing learners with scholastic barriers to determine their level of support, giving strategies to teachers to support learners with barriers to learning, consulting parents with regard to learners' barriers, empowering teachers with the implementation of SIAS, distributing sanitary towels to quintile 1 schools, and coordinating the Integrated School Health programmes for the district.' (SES11, 42-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

It is evident from the excerpt above that SESs serve as generalists who assess learners and determine their support needs, empower teachers to provide support to learners, meet parents and coordinate school health programmes. Evidently, the participants seemingly still function as they did in accordance with the medical model. However, they apparently performed more duties than they would if they had enough specialists in their districts.

Some of the participants felt that teachers had to be retrained regarding support, whilst others felt that they too needed to be trained. Some complained about frequent changes in the system when a new minister was appointed, and they were anxious that more changes were imminent. Others added that they were still uncertain about the situation at the time, as not much information was provided.

In view of the challenges besetting the system, the participants made recommendations regarding quality training for in-service teachers and the employment of more staff in the district. Moreover, closer collaboration is needed between ordinary schools and FSSs, and district support to schools has to improve, as indicated in the excerpt below:

> 'I believe that our work would be easier if skill developments were to be implemented in schools. Continuous support of DBST to schools is important. More support staff should be employed at district offices. Again, FSS[*s*] should empower mainstream schools.' (SES3, 47-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

Three participants recommended that schools should have social workers and psychologists on site to bring psychosocial services within reach of the participants:

> 'Each school must have a social worker and psychologist allocated and in charge for that school, based at that school to offer services in time.' (SES15, 51-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

Others, especially those who worked with high schools, recommended that rehabilitation facilities be made available to assist learners who were addicted to substances, as seen below:

> 'Learners are addicted to drugs over the age of 18 [*sic*] and disrupt classes because they cannot cope without smoking dagga within school premises. We are in need of an institution that will assist learners who are above 18 struggling to [*sic*] drugs addiction and get rehabilitated.' (SES8, 46-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

The idea of a closer relationship between high schools and universities was put forward by some of the participants, as indicated in the next excerpt:

> 'I have secondary schools on my list of schools. With them, I focus on study skills, motivational talks and granted concessions. We need to work closely with universities. Most of [*the*] learners who receive support from our section manage to pull through their secondary education and they are resisted [*registered*] learners at different tertiary institutions.' (SES3, 47-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

According to Sieving and Widome (2008), the benefits of district and university partnerships may include a mutual exchange of knowledge, skills, resources and providing support to meet needs that could not be met by district alone.

Other participants recommended that other government departments and treatment centres be invited to support districts more frequently, as shown in the excerpts below:

'The department of social development and health support our efforts as the district. We need more of their support because we receive appropriate referrals that require debriefing, counselling, [*and*] donations such as assistive devices. These departments support us a lot.' (SES1, 39-year-old male district-based staff member, date unspecified)

'We work with other role players to support learners such as the department of health, social development, parents, and the SAPS. We work on children grants, disability grants, primary health services, corrective behaviour from [*the*] SAPS, rehabilitation centre, and department of home affairs.' (SES5, 49-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

One participant made a profound statement that touched on the mental health of colleagues in the district because of the COVID-19 pandemic:

'From the day I started working at the district it has been challenging and overwhelming taking into consideration the status quo. The impact of the coronavirus has made things difficult for new district officials to adjust and do their work effectively and efficiently. Sadly, in a very short space of time I have experienced the loss of staff members who lost their lives due to the pandemic and I was getting to know them better and looking forward to working with them.' (SES6, 52-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

From the excerpt above, it can be deduced that the mental health of the participants needs attention. This would ensure that they function effectively.

The participants recommended more focused training in relation to particular barriers to learning, as the following excerpt shows:

'Most of SBSTs are functional[.] [*T*]hat is why we receive [*a*] high number of referrals because learners with barriers are identified on time and referred accordingly. But others do not function so well.

> So, we must strengthen SBSTs to deal with learners with dyscalculia and dyslexia.' (SES12, 44-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

The participants felt that schools had to have people dedicated to particular functions, which included referral submissions to the district. The involvement of the school governing body (SGB) is suggested to encourage parental involvement and was mentioned as one of the challenges experienced:

> 'The schools need to appoint different people to assist with different submissions to the district. Also, to involve the SGB in matters involving parents and learners such as of [*sic*] submissions of personal documents like ID or birth certificates. The SGB to [*sic*] encourage parent involvement and lead by example. Encourage full involvement of the SBST because it is the main committee of the school that is like an engine of the car.' (SES14, 46-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

There are tests that are not classified for the exclusive use of registered professionals such as psychologists, registered counsellors or psychometrists. The participants recommended that teachers be encouraged to use these tests to lessen the burden of assessment on the districts, as indicated below:

> 'My wish is that we should be trained on how to do scholastic assessment that maybe a teacher can do on reading, for example. Serious cases can be referred to psychologists. The referral procedure is hampered by the fact that we do not have the specialists that we need. That is why we do almost everything within professional limits.' (SES11, 42-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

Another participant mentioned that many schools were located in disadvantaged areas. The districts have to ensure that all schools are supported to function well and be successful. This would require adequate structures to support development and strengthen support for schools to produce good results. Collaboration was mentioned as a key aspect of support:

> 'Some of the schools are disadvantaged. I think we must ensure that all schools are given the opportunity to be successful in general. Proper structure must be provided for teachers and parents when

learners are experiencing difficulties. Always collaborate with other stakeholders to get best results.' (SES8, 46-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

Others recommended a different staffing approach in schools to have teachers trained to become lay counsellors, as the following excerpts show:

'Districts should provide any type of support that might be needed such as infrastructure, counselling, etc. Districts must train and employ support teachers in every school as lay counsellors.' (SES10, 50-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

'I would say the main thing is training. Some in the district are not therapists, like me. So perhaps training in counselling since secondary school learners are suicidal, abuse substances sometimes and they are in the stage of development when they are most confused. They need to be motivated and taught study skills.' (SES5, 49-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

'Districts should ensure that school-based support teams are fully functional. Training on aspects such as counselling skills, drug abuse, child abuse and the treatment thereof is of vital importance. These problems occur a lot in schools and often, districts focus on academic performance and barriers relating to it.' (SES11, 42-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

From the above, it is clear that SBSTs should continually undergo training so that they can acquire a more comprehensive understanding of learners' disabilities (Makhalemele & Tlale 2020; Mashau et al. 2008; Strydom et al. 2012).

Another participant recommended a better working arrangement amongst all spheres of government and NGOs:

'I wish [*the*] government was a well-oiled machine with each department supporting each other. In other words, the left hand should know what the right hand is doing. Collaboration will then become easy and possible. And districts will be able to support schools more efficiently. Now, departments function as silos. NGOs are not funded the way they should. They take the burden off the department of basic education, so they need money.' (SES14, 46-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

The participants suggested that events that stimulate lifelong learning, such as conferences, seminars, short courses and projects, should be organised. Professional development has to be taken seriously, and administration needs to improve in the districts, as the following excerpt shows:

> 'To arrange conferences, seminars, short courses, projects and performing other delegated functions, to establish and maintain learner record database, to coordinate training, monitoring and reporting of educators as per training plan, to establish and maintain [*an*] annual training schedule for programmes allocated, trainings to underperforming schools per subject, workshopping school SMT teams [*sic*] on CPTD and uploading their points [*to*] the system, ensure that all schools are given the opportunity to be successful in general, proper structure must be provided for teachers and parents when learners are experiencing difficulties.' (SES9, 51-year-old female district-based staff member, date unspecified)

It can be concluded that the participants believed that psychosocial educational and psychosocial services required a rethink in districts in South Africa. This emphasises the need for targeted training, collaboration, staffing and parental involvement.

■ Recommendations and limitations of the study

The participants made important suggestions based on their experiences. Their reflections show that school-based support is hampered by insufficient training and a shortage of teachers trained in special education, remedial education and lay counselling. A strong recommendation from their side is that retraining should be done and support teachers should be employed in schools. They further proposed a model of staffing that would involve the employment of social workers and psychologists who would be placed in schools to make psychosocial services accessible to learners.

The fact that there is no formal working arrangement between DBSTs and special schools that should be part of district teams was flagged. In this regard, special schools mostly do not see

themselves as part of DBSTs yet; neither do districts see them as such. Special schools benefit from having therapists on site, an arrangement the participants proposed should be made for full-service and ordinary schools as well. Continuous professional development was suggested for teachers and district support personnel. The aim thereof is to improve efficiency. There is a concern about township and rural schools, as they lack the resources that are found in former Model C schools. Remote rural schools are often located far from community-based services, which weaken collaboration. Having therapists on site is a long-term solution for schools that are far away from community-based services such as NGOs, healthcare, social and psychological services.

A rethink of district support would include a formalised working arrangement between education departments and NGOs, which would improve efficiency and the pooling of services. It is evident that educational support services in the entire country need to be strengthened by employing more professionals in education departments. The participants recommended that districts invited universities to partner with them in supporting vulnerable learners. Universities annually produce research on all the challenges experienced by schools and communities. Through community engagement efforts, universities can be important assets to schools and communities. Furthermore, universities may prioritise the training of future professionals in the fields of education, medicine, psychology and social work to embrace the value of servanthood. Perhaps the curriculum needs a rethink too. In this regard, the participants recommended differentiation in and more adaptations to the curriculum. They further suggested that teachers should be trained in the use of unclassified scholastic tests of reading and spelling, to which we add mathematical ability. The participants recommended an efficient allocation of duties in district- and school-based teams to improve performance. As there were learners who abused substances, the participants recommended that treatment centres should be made available and accessible.

The participants recommend that the mental health of district-based staff should also be considered, in view of both occupational stress and the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

The above recommendations were offshoots of this study; however, the study was not without limitations. It is important to note that no therapists volunteered to take part in this study, although the invitation was open to them too. As a result, all the participants that volunteered to take part in the study were SESs who, although they were skilled in curriculum issues, had to do more because of a shortage of therapists in their districts. It is not clear whether this shortage of therapists accounts for their absence in the sample. The picture might have been different had social workers, psychologists, registered counsellors, speech therapists and occupational therapists been involved in the study.

Those in more senior positions in the districts did not volunteer to participate in the study. Perhaps the findings would have reflected the views of management too had they volunteered to participate. The fact that the academic year had started late because of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the districts were busier than usual. This may explain why fewer participants took part in the study. A country-wide study is needed to assess the strengths of districts and glean more suggestions from them as a diverse group.

■ Conclusion

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the current role of DBSTs in strengthening schools to support learners who are at risk and to suggest a rethink of these support services based on the recommendations of the practitioners. The findings show that districts are manned by staff who are dedicated and willing to perform their functions despite the context-specific challenges they experienced. What is key is that the participants are functioning as generalists who do more than they have to because of staff shortages in the districts. Some suggestions and recommendations are made to improve the functioning of district-based support in South Africa.

An integrated vision of effective education support services in South Africa

An integrated vision of effective education support services in South Africa

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■ Introduction

The South African ESS have been dissected and analysed in-depth across Chapter 1 to Chapter 9. Part 1 dealt with the theoretical perspectives that ground ESS and provide ESS members and educators with a sound conceptual basis from which to engage in learner and teacher support. Part 2 focused on the current situation and status of psychosocial educational

support services in the country across the nine provinces. In Part 3, on reconceptualising ESS in South Africa, an effort was made to foreground possibilities of how ESS could be re-envisioned nearly three decades post-democracy.

In this final chapter I will try to summarise the reconceptualisation of ESS, as Part 2 quite clearly provided evidence that much more should be done to optimise the rendering of ESS. I am writing this chapter against the background of my 13 years of multidisciplinary and ESS practice experience as an educational and clinical psychologist and educator, combined with 23 years in the academy of teaching ESS within the context of inclusive education to students. This chapter is mainly based on a reading of the previous nine chapters, especially with my doctorate in ESS and my experience as an ESS practitioner as grounding.

■ The paradigm shift in support services from special education to inclusive education

An issue that perhaps has not been discussed explicitly and adequately in the pages of this book is whether the paradigm shift from special education to inclusive education has been made by educators and ESS members in South Africa. This matter has been introduced in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Through the EWP6 (DoE 2001), South Africa opted for what can be called a 'nuanced inclusive education model'. This meant that special schools and some specialised settings (e.g. full-service schools – FSSs) would be retained or established and transformed to support the inclusive education system. Full inclusion never was on the cards (Kaufman & Hallahan 1995), with special schools and all specialised settings being closed and only regular or ordinary schools remaining, where all learners are accommodated in inclusive classrooms, regardless of the severity of their barriers to learning. The South African government realised that full inclusion

would most probably not work in our country, as so many teacher assistants or aides would have been needed to care for severely impaired learners in ordinary classrooms. Twenty-six years ago already, Kauffman and Hallahan (1995) referred to this in the title of their book as the 'illusion of full inclusion', implying that it would never be viable to include all learners experiencing barriers to learning in inclusive classrooms.

Unfortunately, the nuanced inclusive education system has been confusing for educators and some ESS staff, especially for those who were used to the previous special education system where the referral and placement of learners in specialised settings were the rule. The new paradigm asks educators and ESS staff to support a learner in the ordinary classroom for as long as possible (Hay 2003), compared to the old paradigm where referral, assessment and alternative placement were everyday habits. Anecdotal evidence suggests that even younger educators have been influenced by older educators to follow the mentioned habits of referral and alternative placement, with arguments that inclusive education is unrealistic, that learners with moderate to severe impairments will never progress in ordinary classrooms, that learners without obvious barriers will be disadvantaged, and so forth. The empirical research reported in this book focused mainly on the lived experiences of ESS staff such as SBST members, and these educators seem to be relatively *au fait* with the shift to support within inclusive classrooms. However, teachers not involved in ESS structures are seemingly struggling to come to terms with this grey area of referral to specialised settings versus sustained support for challenging learners within the ordinary classroom.

The real challenge with the transition to an inclusive education paradigm that I – as a previous ESS or DBST staff member, and later an academic teaching about inclusive education – experienced is that this change requires a change of heart, and not only a cognitive shift in the mind. Very few changes in life, in education and in academia require the double shift of mind and

heart, and this may be the reason why South African educators (and some ESS staff) are mostly still stuck somewhere between special education and inclusive education. Also, one needs to believe with one's heart that inclusive education is the right thing to do and the right direction to move in, to provide the most appropriate education for all learners. A cognitive shift only will not ensure buy-in into inclusive education, a change of heart also needs to take place. This may be the real reason why a substantial percentage of educators are not convinced that keeping a learner who experiences barriers to learning in the inclusive classroom is the way to go. They have not had a change of heart regarding this relatively new system, or they have to deal with such large classes that attending to a small number of learners with barriers, and without adequate ESS support, is not viable.

My experience is thus that South African educators (and some ESS members) can be plotted on a continuum somewhere between special education and inclusive education. The reality in South Africa of large classes without adequate ESS support, inadequate training of educators in terms of supporting learners with barriers, training of some ESS staff still only within the medical model (Hay 2012) and in-service training of qualified educators in terms of inclusion that does not address the change of heart issue are some of the contributing factors that prevent a decisive move towards the inclusive education paradigm. In my view, this represents a pertinent factor explaining the relatively slow progress towards a unified and consistent inclusive education system (with concomitant, consistent ESS) across the nine provinces.

■ What have we done right since the new dispensation?

A critical positive is the fact that ESS have been transformed to include all South African learners (and teachers). It is well known that highly discrepant ESS structures and services were rendered by the previous racially segregated education departments, with

whites having the best dispensation in terms of special schools and multidisciplinary psychosocial educational support teams, Indian education the second best, followed by coloured education and then black education. An example is that in the old Department of Education and Training (for blacks), no multidisciplinary support teams existed, but only single support staff working at a high ratio.

Secondly and linked to the above is the fact that with the advent of inclusive education and the bio-ecological systems perspective, the concept 'support' has been broadened to include a much wider range of barriers to learning than what was earlier focused on. Apart from the intrinsic barriers that a learner may experience, all the extrinsic barriers are also viewed as crucial to address – inclusive of, for example, pertinent South African issues such as poverty, father absence in families, crime and a dysfunctional culture of teaching and learning in schools (cf. ch. 3 with its focus on at-risk learners). These barriers were not totally ignored within the special education paradigm, but certainly did not receive the full attention they deserved.

A third positive is that a realistic decision was made to retain elements of special education whilst simultaneously making an effort to transform these special education structures. As stated, it would have been disastrous to embrace a fully inclusive system in a developing country such as South Africa, as few classrooms have aides or classroom assistants to support the teacher with learners experiencing high-intensity barriers (cf. ch. 5). It, therefore, makes sense that special schools for high-intensity needs were retained, but with the added responsibility of transforming these schools to become SSRCs that serve surrounding schools, even if it is only on a consultation basis (cf. ch. 8).

Full-service schools are a welcome addition to support an inclusive education system, or for that matter, any education system that may develop in future. They provide a levelled approach to supporting learners experiencing moderate-intensity

barriers and make ESS much more accessible to learners close to their homes.

Fourthly, the ideal of a fully functional DBST in a district is also commendable. Such a combination of the ESS team and other crucial sections that can support learners on the systemic level is appropriate to support learners not only on the psychosocial educational level but also on the broader systemic level (e.g. the infrastructure section as part of the team to improve an FSS) (cf. ch. 5).

In the fifth place, the foregrounding of specialist educators in ESS teams (especially leadership) at district level may also be viewed as a positive. Although the influence of psychology and psychologists has been indispensable in the development of a strong ESS system over the past decades, the focus on the medical model, psychometry and viewing support from a psychological lens may have skewed a balanced focus on psychosocial educational challenges. Unfortunately, it has also led to power being located in those with high-level psychology training, with specialist educators, school social workers and paramedical staff experiencing less power and authority. This situation reminds me of an earlier work situation in a department of psychiatry, where just about all power and the final authority was located in the psychiatrist leading the multidisciplinary team. This often led to unsatisfactory and inappropriate diagnoses and treatment, where the input from the rest of the team members was not adequately considered.

■ What have we done wrong since the new dispensation?

The downside of extending and transforming ESS to serve all learners is that ESS in the form of multidisciplinary service rendering are thinly spread across all the provinces. Some provinces are rendering a relatively good service to learners, with manageable ratios (e.g. the Western Cape) and in a

multidisciplinary context, but in some provinces, specialist educators dominate the ESS teams, with very few registered psychologists, mid-level counsellors, psychometrists or paramedical staff available. Even school social workers are not present in many teams.

On the whole, the ratios of ESS member to learners are not conducive to rendering effective support at all. How should one psychologist render effective psychological services to 193 250 learners, as in the North West province (Hay 2018)? And what if there is no psychologist in ESS teams across a province such as Limpopo (Schoeman 2015)? And how can an occupational therapist contribute meaningfully when serving 216 667 learners in the Free State (Hay 2016, 2018)? This very thin spread of services across most of the South African provinces, unfortunately, leads to a situation where a large percentage of learners in moderate or severe need of support are not served, and where nuanced inclusive education can thus not be fully implemented. The Human Rights Watch Report (2015), with the title *Complicit in Exclusion*, makes the following statement:

> Segregation and [*a*] lack of inclusion permeates all levels of SA's education system and reflect fundamental breaches of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [...] Several factors underpin these problems, including undercounting children with disabilities in governmental data, inadequate funding for inclusive education, and lack of adequate information and support services for parents, families, and children with disabilities. (p. 3)

Unfortunately, it furthermore seems as if very few appropriate adjustments in rendering ESS have been made to counter this scarcity of human resources. One would have thought that ESS teams (as part of DBSTs) would have totally changed their way of supporting learners when working against such huge ratios, but this has not been found to be the case in, for example, the Free State and North-West (Hay 2018). The concept of indirect service rendering – as opposed to direct service to a learner – has long ago been suggested as the way to proceed when ratios become too big (Gutkin & Conoley 1990). Indirect services focus on

supporting the adults in a learner's life so that the former are capacitated to support the learner as far as possible in the absence of direct ESS support. Indirect services also have a strong preventative flavour, where training and capacitation are provided to the teachers and parents of learners experiencing some kind of barrier. These include printed and electronic material to empower these adults on a continuous basis. Another component of indirect services is that ESS members are constantly available to teachers for consultation. Within the main thrust of indirect services, direct services are only provided to learners with high-intensity and acute needs. This restructuring of service rendering when services are thinly spread is probably the only real option to ensure providing optimal services to learners across our vast country.

Funding has also, in many instances, not followed the reasonably well-thought-out ESS structures, and ideals could not be made into reality. A case in point is SSRCs: special schools were to be transformed to SSRCs, with the added responsibility of rendering services to surrounding schools. Anecdotal evidence from SSRC staff members indicates that no extra positions have been created at SSRCs (as alluded to in ch. 8), with the expectation from provincial education departments that current staff should continue to render services to both the internal school complement and surrounding schools. It is seemingly not viable to extend the roles of the staff in this way, as direct services are utilised within the SSRCs – with no time left to render even more indirect services to schools in the vicinity.

The inclusion of ESS teams in DBSTs may have been a noble idea but is, in most instances, not working well. The role of the district director is described as follows (DoE 2005):

> Within each district, the designated district director should act as leader of the support team, with major responsibility for providing leadership and management to it, focusing on coordination and collaboration to ensure holistic and integrated support provision. (p. 18)

Research in the Free State and North-West indicates that the district director plays no direct role in leading the ESS component of the DBST; in the instance of each ESS team, it is the team leader who fulfils this role, with very little formal liaison with the district director. Team leaders have also stated that very little has materialised in terms of working formally with the other sections in the district offices (Hay 2016, 2018). The ideal of a DBST working together as a tight unit for the good of ESS and inclusive education has seemingly not materialised in most districts of most of the provinces. One of the reasons may be that policy documents focusing on DBSTs have mostly been developed by inclusive education or ESS officials and have not been synchronised with other district education documentation; consequently, it probably did not attain high status in the eyes of the district directors.

From especially Chapter 5, it can be deduced that the national Department of (Basic) Education (DoE/DBE) should have been much clearer on how ESS structures (and funding for these) must be established and should function. Too much leeway has been afforded to the provinces to implement their own ESS structures, especially regarding ESS teams, learning support educators, learning support advisers or learning support facilitators (LSEs, LSAs or LSFs) and at teacher assistant level. Special schools, SSRCs and FSSs seem to be relatively synchronised across the provinces in terms of post provisioning and service rendering, but a serious challenge can be seen in how ESS teams are structured and render services. Serious discrepancies also exist in terms of the provision of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs and teacher assistants across the provinces and to this can be added the provisioning of special needs and remedial teachers. The DoE and DBE were not prescriptive enough in terms of especially the latter ESS structures, with the result that it appears as if very little consistency can be detected across the provinces. In some provinces, these ESS structures are seemingly neglected to the point that very little support can effectively be provided to learners and teachers.

'The challenges ahead for education support services' section will elaborate on the challenges that are foreseen in improving ESS across the country.

■ The challenges ahead for education support services

■ Alignment of structures across provinces

In line with what has been said in the 'What have we done wrong since the new dispensation?' section, it is recommended that the DBE develops much clearer directives at national level on how the provinces should provide ESS, especially related to ESS teams operating as part of DBSTs and post provisioning and modes of operation of LSEs, LSAs or LSFs, special and remedial educators and teacher assistants in all types of schools. Apparently, FSSs and SSRCs are not experiencing these huge discrepancies, although reports from the provinces indicate that discrepancies exist in terms of the roll-out and details of the transformation of these structures. It seems critical that – despite the thin spread of ESS in most provinces – there at least should be more consistency in terms of by whom and how services are rendered.

The provinces have been given a relatively free hand in terms of structuring ESS over the past two and a half decades, but clearly, this has led to inconsistencies of structure – to the detriment of learners, teachers and schools as systems (cf. ch. 5). A number of provinces seemingly confused inclusive education structures with ESS structures, and although these are interrelated, there should be a very clear focus on the multidisciplinary support side of inclusive education.

■ Alignment of funding across provinces

The alignment of funding across provinces is linked very strongly with the previous matter. It appears as if the provinces have had too much flexibility to make decisions by themselves on the

allocation of funding for specific sections such as ESS, and unfortunately, ESS may be seen as a support service that does not directly contribute to the core of the educational endeavour. The provincial education departments are faced with tough decisions in this regard: if the classroom teacher-to-learner ratio becomes too high because of various reasons, such as an influx of rural people into a metropolitan area, it surely is a difficult choice to maintain ESS positions.

However, making this choice should not be allowed to happen; if clear parameters are provided to provincial education departments on the percentage spending per section, ESS should not be neglected in any way, even though the ratios of ESS members to learners and teachers may not be optimal. For the purpose of optimal funding of ESS, it is also suggested that a split funding model be applied between inclusive education and support services. Unfortunately, it appears as if ESS have been seriously neglected by some provinces that do not know how to distinguish between what should happen in inclusive education and what should happen in ESS.

▪ Overcoming the divisive special or inclusive education paradigms

This matter was argued under 'The paradigm shift in support services from special education to inclusive education' of this chapter but needs further elaboration. I submitted that South African educators and some ESS staff could be found somewhere on a continuum from fully supportive of inclusive education to fully supportive of special education. Although freedom of conviction is given in a democratic country, this continuum creates serious challenges for education authorities hoping to implement a nuanced inclusive education system across the country. Unfortunately, the paradigms of special education and inclusive education differ dramatically and are mostly opposed, as has been discussed in a number of chapters of this book (e.g. ch. 2). Within the special education paradigm, learners with

specific needs were assessed to be placed in a specialised setting with learners experiencing similar challenges; within the inclusive education paradigm, learners are assessed, but with the express intent to support them and their teachers best in their current, ordinary classroom. Disability and incapacity predominated in the special education paradigm, whereas strengths and capacities are focused on within the inclusive education paradigm (cf. the discussion of the asset-based approach in ch. 7).

Aligned with the two mentioned paradigms, it has already been spelt out in some chapters of this book that ESS also operate quite differently in special education and inclusive education. In special education, support was there to assess, diagnose and mostly remove the learner from the current classroom (and often school) setting – to relieve the teacher from the challenging learner. In inclusive education, support is there to guide the teacher on how best to support the learner within the current classroom, and only as a last alternative remove the learner to a different setting.

Teachers' convictions are key to what they expect of ESS, and the convictions of ESS members are also critical for the way in which support will be rendered.

Let us look at two scenarios: In Scenario 1, a teacher with a strong special education inclination refers a learner with a serious concentration problem to the SBST. The SBST does not really have the capacity to intervene with support measures, and after 3 months, accedes to have the learner referred to the ESS team of the DBST. The ESS team leader allocates the referred learner to an occupational therapist who has been predominately trained in the medical model of disability. She assesses the learner and suspects attention deficit disorder. She refers the child to a paediatrician, who then recommends medication and that the learner be placed in a special school for neurologically impaired children, quite a distance from home. The teacher is satisfied, as she reasons that the learner would not have been able to progress in her class.

In Scenario 2, the same learner with concentration problems finds himself in the class of a teacher who is fully supportive of inclusive education, as she has a child herself who is in need of extra support. She is willing to cooperate with the parents to support the child best; however, the learner's lack of concentration is seriously challenging. She refers the learner to the SBST, which, after further assessment, decides to request support from the ESS team of the DBST. The ESS team leader refers the learner to an educational psychologist who has been well trained in inclusive education principles and believes that children should preferably be schooled closest to home. After assessment, the child is referred to a paediatrician for possible prescription of medication, but with supportive psychotherapy and teacher and parental guidance from the educational psychologist's side. Through these support measures, the learner is kept in the inclusive classroom and close to home. The teacher is relieved, as are the parents because the child can be emotionally nurtured in the familiar school and home environment.

These two scenarios demonstrate two outcomes based on the different convictions of two teachers and two ESS team members. Unfortunately, these contradictions happen every day in South Africa, because teachers and ESS members are not following similar strategies within the nuanced inclusive education system. It becomes clear from these scenarios that much more needs to be done to get teachers and ESS team members on the same page with regard to support within an inclusive education environment. One simple strategy that all teachers need to buy into is that learners are retained (with the necessary support) for as long as possible within the ordinary classroom, and that ESS members are not there to 'rescue' teachers by removing challenging learners from the classroom.

How would this materialise? I suspect only through a large-scale, concerted training effort of all teachers and ESS staff in the basic principles of support within inclusive education. Such training should encompass cognitive and affective learning about

inclusivity and should emphasise that the reality of our country is that only learners with high-intensity needs can occupy the scarce special school spaces that are available.

Currently, the proponents of special education and the proponents of inclusive education are creating a divide that does not take ESS forward within an inclusive environment. Teachers and ESS staff need not fully agree on their sentiments about this but should at least realise that in the best interest of learners, there should be a common understanding of the support principles within the inclusive education system.

◾ Attracting high-level staff in education support services

The perception gained from research done over the past few years is that specialist educators qualified at postgraduate level are willing and even motivated to leave the classroom to work in ESS teams. However, attracting other disciplines to ESS teams remains a challenge; this was so even before 1994. I remember vividly how tough it was to fill any paramedical position in the ESS team prior to 1994, and if it was filled, it often was a young, recent graduate who would not stay long with the team before finding greener pastures. The filling of these types of positions has seemingly become even more difficult under the current dispensation, when potential candidates hear about the learner ratios they have to work with and the predominant lack of operational costs to fund support equipment, travel and basic necessities to do one's work. Most of the paramedical staff, such as occupational, speech and physiotherapists, and some categories of psychologists are mainly trained to render direct services by working with individuals or smaller groups, and this remains their first love; they are not keen to engage predominantly in rendering indirect service via the training of teachers and parents, and then choose to rather move into private practice where direct service rendering flourishes.

The salaries of ESS professionals are probably not the biggest obstacle to attract high-level staff, as government salaries seem to be higher than comparable private-sector salaries (Johnson 2017). The occupational-specific dispensation in the state has also helped to improve the cost to company of professionals with scarce skills. The challenge can be seen as twofold: the circumstances under which professionals must work and the higher education training received by professionals, which do not account well for the educational environment with its large ESS member-to-learner (and teacher and school) ratios. School social workers can also not engage in statutory work, which may lower the attraction of ESS employment to some.

Higher education institutions will have to adjust their professional training of multidisciplinary ESS members to ensure that the educational environment, with its strong focus on indirect services, is properly taken into account and they do not only prepare these disciplines for predominant direct services in private practice and hospital environments. This would entail that skills levels will have to be adjusted to be able to influence and train adults in large-group settings so that they can support learners at their best. These competencies represent totally different skills compared to rendering direct services. In this way, the educational context may not prove to be such a shock to these disciplines, and better continuity will be ensured in ESS.

■ Changing the way we work in education support services

Research into especially the functioning of ESS teams over the past few years has led me to the conclusion that insufficient planning is being undertaken to deliver a fair service to all learners in need of support. Not enough is being done to change the way in which ESS teams are rendering their services.

One of the most urgent matters to address across ESS teams is whether a better balance can be struck between indirect and

direct services. In Chapter 5, snapshots have been provided about the structure of ESS teams (in DBSTs) in the Free State and North-West. Psychologists would, for example, work in a psychologist-to-learner ratio of 1:108 333 in the Free State and 1:193 250 in North-West. In terms of speech therapists, the ratio is 1:130 000, and for occupational therapists, it is 1:216 667 in the Free State (Hay 2016, 2018). Against this background, two issues become clear: ESS team members cannot predominantly work in a direct way where learners are seen individually, and secondly, the prioritisation of services is non-negotiable. If one psychologist needs to serve more than 108 333 or 193 250 learners across an education district, direct services can only be delivered in the most urgent of instances. Most of a psychologist's time should be spent on capacitating teachers, SBST members, LSFs and parents in order to fairly reach most of the learners in need of psychological support; this is called 'indirect service rendering' (cf. ch. 1). Clear criteria should be set on how to prioritise individual support to learners, otherwise it will happen as one psychologist in the Free State mentioned: 'From some LSFs I consistently receive a number of referrals, but from most LSFs I do not hear at all' (Hay 2018). This points to the fact that ESS teams should have clear criteria on how priorities of assessment and treatment are determined, in the absence of which fairness will fall short when learners will only receive attention when they are actively referred by SBSTs and LSFs.

Proper planning for direct services, therefore, also involves a clear strategy on how ESS teams in DBSTs capacitate SBSTs and LSFs in respect of urgent referrals across the district that is served. Currently, the impression is created that little scientific analysis is done about incoming referrals and that ESS teams are just trying to work away backlogs without having time to reflect on the bigger picture in terms of planning.

Creative solutions will have to be found to render a fair service by the often-meagre ESS staff complement. Consultation services may be one creative indirect service solution that can be implemented by SSRCs and ESS teams in DBSTs. Consultation

services will imply that staff are available at arranged times for consultation via telephone, email or WhatsApp; in this way, knowledge is spread as widely as possible, but without requiring ESS staff to leave their offices.

Another measure that I implemented with very good success from the perspective of an ESS team whilst being head of the Child Guidance Clinic in Welkom is called 'pre-referral intervention' (cf. Stewart 1986). Two or three members of the ESS DBST team visit a school per appointment, and in a 15-min appointment with the teacher, a learner's challenge is discussed and assessed – of course with optimal information obtained from the SBST beforehand. In this way, 12 learners can be supported indirectly within a 3-h time span, and in many cases, further formal referral to the ESS DBST team can be prevented.

One of the most powerful ways in which the ESS teams of DBSTs should operate is by empowering SBSTs and FSSs. This indirect service will go a far way in ensuring fair access to services within a resource-constrained environment. Basic social work, psychological and paramedical principles can be provided to SBST and FSS staff, which could capacitate these staff to render improved services to learners and teachers. This indirect service rendering assumes that SBSTs are established and functional; however, in many cases, SBSTs that have initially been established are not functional anymore (Botha 2019). Here, ESS teams have the responsibility to support these teams to become operational once again – an endeavour that would need consistent support over a period of time. This will be further elaborated on in 'Establishing and maintaining high-level support services' below.

Another powerful indirect way of supporting learners and teachers is to engage in school systems improvement in collaboration with the principal and the school management team (SMT). This is only possible when ESS team members have an excellent relationship with the principal and the SMT over a period of time. Collaborative support strategies abound – whether it is to strengthen the learner record system of the school or

improving the discipline through some measures or, for example, providing workshops for teachers about the emotional trauma that learners experience.

For too long did ESS teams in DBSTs not engage in systemic intervention and support because of only focusing in a curative way on identifying and treating individual learners. The curative mindset still links strongly to the medical model where patients are treated after developing an illness; however, the preventative mindset within the bio-ecological systems perspective is crucial in preventing problems from occurring or preventing them to increase in intensity. With indirect systemic intervention, preventative work is being done, which can alleviate and prevent many individual problems that may develop, and in this sense, more meaningful support can be brought about by ESS teams in DBSTs.

■ Perfecting transdisciplinary teamwork in education support services

In a developing country with resource constraints such as South Africa, true multidisciplinary service rendering is not possible (cf. ch. 1 & ch. 6). In many instances, in especially deep rural areas, LSFs or LSAs are called upon to render uni-disciplinary services, as a multidisciplinary team may be far away. The most realistic way of rendering services in ESS teams of DBSTs and SSRCs may be via transdisciplinary functioning. In this instance, the ESS team leader would assess the referral or indirect service to be implemented and allocate it to the staff member most appropriate to either assess the learner or to take the lead in the envisaged indirect service. This manner of operating saves time for all the other ESS members and has the further advantage that, should the allocated member experience obstacles in completing the assessment or implementing the indirect service component, other staff members are close at hand for consultation or further referral.

Two critical matters need to be mentioned here to ensure perfecting this way of work. Firstly, the team leader should have a very good sense and adequate knowledge of the scope of practice of each of his or her team members' disciplines to ensure that referred learners are allocated appropriately and that indirect service is rendered by the suitable discipline. This also implies that the leader should be able to read referrals between the lines – that is, picking up what may lie behind the written referral note. Furthermore, the leader should have a sense of the interaction amongst specific needs that learners and teachers experience, as one need often presents in combination with others. Secondly, it is of the utmost importance that regular, weekly team conferences are held by an ESS team to present learners' challenges and the experiences related to indirect services that have been delivered. In this manner, a feedback loop is created where issues can be picked up, assessment improved and guidance on further intervention be provided.

■ Establishing and maintaining high-level school-based support teams in all schools

This matter has briefly been alluded to under 'The Challenges Ahead for education support services' but deserves further attention. I view a fully functional SBST at each school as the heart of ESS in a resource-constrained country such as South Africa. This team or structure is, apart from the teacher in front of the class, the first line of defence in minimising barriers to learning. A creative team of specialist educators at a school can come up with so much relief for learners experiencing barriers to learning, whilst also guiding other teachers on how to support these learners. This team also has the ability to muster community-based support of parents and influential people in the private and public sector who are in related helping professions and can assist the SBST where it falls short (cf. ch. 8 where the mustering of community assets was foregrounded).

Unfortunately, a pattern has been detected where many SBSTs are not functional anymore (Botha 2019). In most of these instances, SBSTs had been established, but the momentum was lost in terms of functionality. Teachers serving on SBSTs often find it time-consuming, and if they are not relieved of other extramural duties, this may often be the end of a functional SBST. It should, furthermore, be noted that a functional SBST performs two main roles, namely to assess learners who are referred by teachers and to support these learners in terms of intervention. Both these roles take a lot of time and usually need to be carried out after school hours. This commitment by SBST members is only sustainable if they are substantially relieved of other duties in the school; if that does not happen, it is no wonder that many SBSTs are established with enthusiasm but then fade as the realities of operating such a team kick in.

Principals will, therefore, have to be part and parcel of the intervention of an ESS DBST team to help sustain functional SBSTs, as principals need to understand the demands of being part of such a team. Only when this type of understanding develops, it will be possible to ensure sustainable SBSTs. SBST members are not paid – in fact, it is voluntary work. However, without some incentives in terms of time and other work relief, this ESS structure and its operations are doomed.

It is unfortunate that many principals do not seem to realise the importance of a functional SBST (inferred from Botha 2019). Many principals have studied further in fields such as management and leadership without having the background of the importance of ESS; nor have they studied further in learner support, inclusive education, special needs and the like. For us engaged in the field every day, it is unthinkable that some principals do not have an idea of what the EWP6 (DoE 2001) entails, but this is a reality. It is also a reality that principals need to deal with a multitude of issues being the manager and leader of a school, and that ESS may not be one of their top priorities.

■ Our ideal for education support services over the next decade and beyond

As a team of authors with direct experience of ESS and a serious interest in the field, we are concerned about the current status of the psychosocial educational support that learners (and teachers) are receiving in South Africa. Apart from pockets of excellence in some districts and provinces, the transition to supporting learners and teachers has not been made at a satisfactory level 20 years after the publication of the EWP6.

As clearly explicated in the 'The challenges ahead for education support services' section, seven primary challenges need to be addressed within the next decade. Concisely formulated, an ideal ESS provisioning in South Africa by the 2030s would look as follows:

• ESS structures would be aligned across all nine provinces, after decisive intervention from the DBE. This includes how DBSTs function at district level and not leaving support regarding barriers to learning only to ESS teams.
• ESS funding would be consistent across all nine provinces, again after very clear stipulations have been developed by the DBE. This would include distinguishing between money earmarked for inclusive education and that for education support.
• Clear direction via training would have been provided to focus all educators and ESS staff on how the inclusive education paradigm should be implemented within our nuanced inclusive education system. This would imply that all educators work towards including learners in their inclusive classrooms as long as it is viable and receive the necessary support to do this.
• High-level staff would have been attracted to ESS in all the provinces by improving working conditions. Higher education

institutions would have trained all ESS staff in the bio-ecological systems theory and inclusive education paradigm with its concomitant indirect service component, over and above the direct service competencies.

- A changed way of work would have been embraced in ESS structures, with the balance towards indirect and consultation services to serve all learners (and teachers) in need fairly and equitably. This changed way of work would include determining priorities on how to systematically serve all learners in need as well as possible, despite huge learner-to-ESS member ratios.
- Transdisciplinary teamwork in ESS (especially DBSTs) would have nearly been perfected to ensure that referrals and indirect services are addressed as swiftly and efficiently as possible.
- SBSTs would have been established in all schools and are functional as first-line interveners regarding all barriers to learning and development. Moreover, SBSTs would have mustered community resources and strengths optimally to support learners and teachers, especially in areas where DBSTs are not reaching schools adequately.

This represents an ideal that is only attainable if the political and leadership will is present in the DBE and the provincial education departments. On the one hand, working towards these seven goals is a daunting prospect, but on the other, it is not so complex at all if the necessary leadership and understanding of ESS exist at the national and provincial levels.

■ Integrating theory and practice within ideal education support services

It has been argued in Chapter 1 that there is nothing as practical as a good theory – the words ascribed to Kurt Lewin but apparently originating from Dorpfeld from 1873 (Bedeian 2016). This perspective is held strongly by us as authors, namely that the ideal ESS that we envisage can only come about by thoroughly

integrating theory and practice, or research and experience in the field.

Two simple examples are as follows: If the members of multidisciplinary SBSTs and DBSTs are not all conversant with the bio-ecological systems theory, and some are still schooled predominantly in the medical model of disability, focused momentum in ESS practice within the nuanced inclusive education system of South Africa will not be possible (cf. Hay 2012). The second example relates to theoretical knowledge of indirect service rendering: if ESS members have been trained to render high-level direct services as in private practice, without a substantial component of indirect and consultation service training, ESS structures will not achieve fair service rendering to all learners (and teachers and school systems) in need.

■ Mustering resources and networks to work towards this ideal

A number of chapters in this book have emphasised the critical role of collaboration, effective teamwork and the inclusion of community resources to ensure effective ESS support (cf. ch. 6, ch. 7 & ch. 8). In a developing country, such as South Africa, with an annual budget that will never provide adequate ESS human and material resources for the real psychosocial educational needs of learners, teachers and schools as systems, it is imperative that all community resources are mustered through effective collaboration and teamwork to supplement existing ESS structures. Higher education institutions training ESS staff also need to take note of this crucial emphasis on collaboration with the community, which requires different skills of ESS staff. These collaboration skills relate strongly to the previously described indirect service skills that are direly needed by ESS staff, including skills such as persuasion, influencing, the ability to cooperate with another adult on equal terms, problem solving amongst equal partners and so forth (cf. Hay 2013).

This matter is especially pertinent in rural contexts, as has been described in Chapter 7.

■ Practical steps to implement to move towards this ideal

The first step to be taken in this regard is to convene a national review committee on ESS, consisting of the relevant DBE leaders, provincial ESS leaders and ESS experts from universities and other external agencies. Crucial to add to these ESS members is the adequate representation of district directors across the country. This review committee would be rather similar to the NCESS that was constituted in 1996 and helped to produce the NCSNET and NCESS Report of 1997, *Quality Education for All, Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development* (DoE 1997). The purpose of this review committee should be:

• To determine how effective ESS have been over the past 20 years since the inception of inclusive education.
• To determine how well aligned ESS provision and structures are across the nine provinces and 86 districts.
• The development of a funding model to align ESS better across the provinces and, furthermore, to ensure that the working conditions of specialist DBST staff, in particular, are improved with regard to operational budgets (transport, equipment, basic necessities, etc.).
• The development of a training model to reach all educators and ESS members regarding paradigm shifts related to support within a nuanced inclusive education system.
• The establishment of a task team on ESS training that will liaise on a continuous basis with universities regarding the training of specialist educators, psychologists, school social workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and speech and hearing therapists; high on the agenda will have to be the exposure of all these disciplines to the social or ecological model of need, transdisciplinary teamwork, rendering indirect and consultation services and concomitant collaboration skills.

Secondly, the findings of the review committee on ESS will have to feed into new DBE directives about consistent ESS structuring across the provinces and districts, and, also consistent, earmarked ESS funding by the provinces (including adequate operational funding for specialist DBST staff). Furthermore, the DBE will then have to roll out a well-planned training initiative to ensure that educators and ESS members across South Africa have a clear picture of the paradigm shifts that have to be made to ensure effective support within a nuanced inclusive education system. The task team on ESS training will then, under the supervision of the DBE, liaise on a continuous basis with university department heads of the mentioned ESS disciplines to ensure that training is aligned with ESS perspectives and needs.

The third step will have to be to oversee the implementation of the directives regarding consistent structuring and funding of ESS in the provinces. This will imply the restructuring of ESS in probably all of the provinces to ensure alignment for improved service rendering, which will be a challenging endeavour in especially those provinces with already well-established structures. In provinces with inadequate ESS structures, it may be an easier process to restructure, as it may predominantly entail the filling of posts that did not previously exist. In such provinces, the challenge will rather be to align with the earmarked funding model that needs to be complied with by all.

This is probably a 10-year project, but the authors of this book are confident that even if it takes that long, it will be more than worthwhile. South Africa will then be able to be proud of how ESS are rendering fair and appropriate support to learners, teachers and schools again.

■ Conclusion

In this chapter, an effort has been made to provide an integrated vision of a reconceptualised ESS model in South Africa, subsequent to Chapter 6 to Chapter 9 that provided the groundwork for reconceptualised psychosocial educational

support services in South Africa. It is hoped that ESS policymakers and staff members will take serious note of what has been envisaged here.

This book has been produced to stimulate further thinking and debate about effective ESS in South Africa – and beyond its borders. It is a focus that often gets subsumed by the emphasis in research and practice on inclusive education; however, we, as authors, believe that it is crucial to separate inclusive education and support services to ensure that adequate focus is generated on both issues. Of course, it is an artificial separation, and the two streams eventually flow as one, but we believe that the time has arrived to place real emphasis on ESS again. The excellent work of the National Education Policy Initiative's *Report on Support Services* (1992) and the NCESS (1997) hopefully lives on with this publication.

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<div style="background:#000;color:#fff;padding:4px 12px;display:inline-block;font-weight:bold;">Chapter 1</div>

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Chapter 2

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Chapter 10

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Reconceptualising Education Support Services in South Africa deals with the past, present and future of psychosocial educational support services (ESSs) in the nine provincial education departments of South Africa. Learners and educational systems at school and districts levels experiencing barriers to learning and development are supported by this crucial service, and research in this regard has often been neglected over the past 20 years in the country, in favour of the current inclusive education system. ESS is critical to the success of any educational system designed to support learners and systems with diverse needs, whether it was the special education venture in the past, inclusive education at present, or perhaps a social equity focus in future. These psychosocial ESSs are the constant within changing educational environments – and need to be cherished and developed if any system is to thrive. The book starts out by scrutinising theories that are relevant to support services. Further chapters build on these theories to provide a solid basis for ESS practice. In the second section the current status of ESS is reviewed within school and district contexts. The last section deals with how ESS could be reconceptualised over the next 10 years to eventually provide the high quality support service that learners and educational systems are entitled to for optimal learning.

Reconceptualising Education Support Services in South Africa is a relevant and conversation-provoking work by academic scholars from the North-West University in South Africa. This well-structured collaborative effort presents a sound theoretical framework that integrates a variety or theories and approaches as a basis for reconceptualisation. A comprehensive historical overview of the development of ESSs forms the backdrop for reconceptualisation. The argument for reconceptualization is strengthened by the findings of the research conducted to investigate the current situation in ESS in South Africa. Changes that could enhance the efficacy of ESS are indicated in research reports that propose a focus on team development, urgent attention to rural contexts and synergy between support services across provinces. In a final integrative discussion, an extensive and practical strategy for the transformation of ESS in South Africa envisions a reconceptualised service by 2030. Considering the challenges that South African schools have encountered and will continue to encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic, this book is a much-needed guide for optimising educational support.

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