

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMATION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

“...a great deal of power and social control is exercised not by brute force or even by economic coercion, but by the activities of the ‘experts’ who are licensed to define, describe and classify things and people”

Cameron (2001, p.16).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As reflected by my thoughts and observations of my own role as a trainee helping professional involved in learning support in Chapter One, the study was predominantly initiated as a result of my personal query into how parents’ construct the role of the helping professional in learning support. I was particularly curious as to whether parents’ were aware of the development of strengths-based approaches in reaction to the criticism of needs-based approaches, and, as such, wanted to explore whether parents’ were informed of my strength-based role as a helping professional. I also sought to delve into whether parents’ were *au fait* with the ‘new’ role that they might be expected to play when I initiate a strengths-based approach to learning support. I, therefore, wanted to investigate parents’ preparedness to engage actively in exploring their strengths and self-generated solutions during their interactions with myself.

The foundations for the central research question into parents’ constructions of the role of the helping professional in learning support also rested on apparent silences in the literature regarding parental views of helping professionals. It specifically appeared that greater emphasis is placed on the theoretically driven position of the helping professional and how theorists’ assume that clients such as parents should be enabled to interact with helping professionals (see O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1988; Davis & Spurr, 1998; White & Epston, 1990; Gergen & Warhus, 2001; Losoncy, 2001; White, 2002; Case, 2001; Swain & Walker, 2003; Akin- Little, Little & Delligatti, 2004; Pinkus, 2005, as examples).

As related to the central question for the study, questions about what parents may expect of the helping professional in learning support and what parents’ value about helping professionals also arose. Parents’ views of their own roles in learning support as associated with their constructions of the role of the helping professional were another line of inquiry to be broached along with a query into the discourses that might inform parents’ constructions of helping professionals.

Figure 5.1 [a replica of the one first presented as Figure 1.1 in Chapter One] shows my initial visual representation intended to illustrate my first personal construction of meaning for the study. It indicated my initial assumptions about the associations between the constructs for the study, particularly, in terms of what may possibly influence the relationship between parents and helping professionals for learning support.

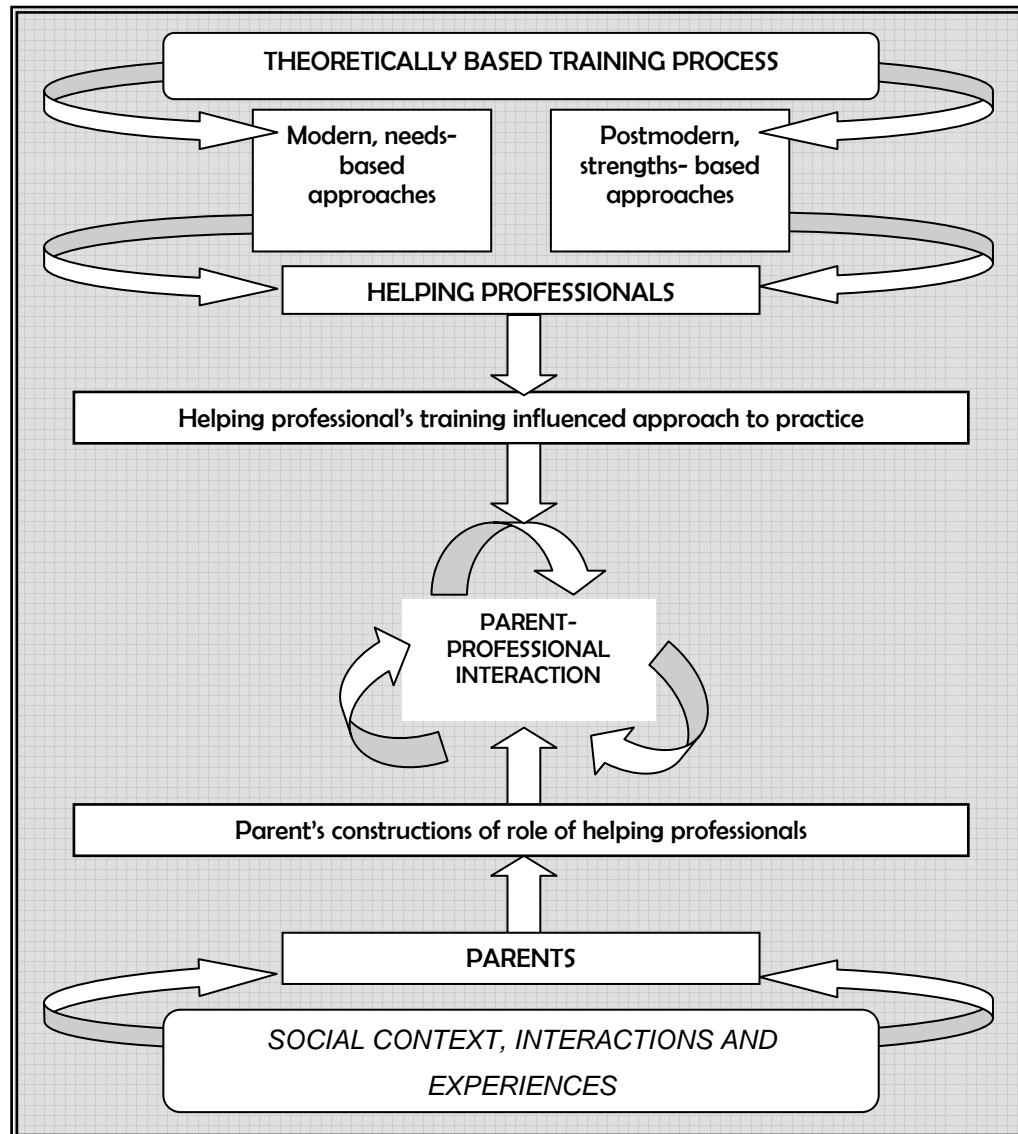


Figure 5.1: Visual representation of the researcher's assumptions of the relationships amongst constructs at the commencement of the study

The visual representation particularly illustrated my assumptions of the backgrounds that helping professionals and parents bring to their interactions for learning support. I proposed that helping professionals' theoretical training, as informed by needs-based approaches or strengths-based

approaches, will direct both their ideas of the parent-professional interaction, their view of their role and the role of the parent in learning support. The representation also supported my recognition that parents' constructions of the role of the helping professional and their roles in interaction with these professionals may be influenced by their experiences and interactions in their social context.

To explore the assumptions that I held at the outset of the study and in an attempt to address the research question, a case study approach was employed to gain access to participants. Initial data collection was undertaken via semi-structured interviews with the participants and content analyses of the interviews was subsequently employed to elicit themes for use during a further modified form of Interactive Qualitative Analysis [IQA] with the contributors to the study.

In this chapter, the research questions posed at the beginning of the study will be revisited to consider the relevance of the findings in relation to these questions. A synthesis of the results of the study and their potential significance will also be addressed in this manner. Finally, the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for helping professional practice and propositions for further research will be offered as a conclusion to the study.

5.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS REVISITED

5.2.1 Research questions

5.2.1.1 Central research question

- How do parents construct the role of helping professionals in learning support?

The participants' social representations of the role of the helping professional in learning support both share themes and introduce differing elements in interaction that highlight each of their own unique constructions of the role of the helping professional in learning support.

A comparison of the participants' representations, as illustrated in Figure 4.2 on page 114, Figure 4.6 on page 119 and Figure 4.9 on page 124, reveals that Participant A's construction of the role of the helping professional in learning support is distinctive from the others as a result of the addition of the parent-professional *Interaction* and *Values* about helping professionals as affinities in her system of meaning. Participant B's representation presents the addition of the role of *Stigma*, and, Participant C's representation incorporates *Assessment*, *Recommendations* and a *Team approach* as affinities, all of which are not present in the other participants' SIDs. Moreover, both Participant A and C's SIDs share *Status of the helping professional* as an affinity, which Participant B's does not, and, Participant A and B's SIDs present *Parent's emotions* and *Parent's personal experiences*

within their representations, both affinities which are not apparent in Participant C’s representation. This is not to conclude that those affinity themes not present in an individual participant’s representation do not play a role in the construction for that particular parent. It may be possible that the theme just did not feature in the initial parental interview and the content analyses that took place as a result.

Table 5.1 below provides a breakdown of the properties of the affinities comprising the participants’ social representations in terms of their placement, relative impact and role in each of their representations.

Participant	PARTICIPANT A	PARTICIPANT B	PARTICIPANT C
Affinity	Parental expectations		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Secondary outcome	Primary outcome	Secondary driver
<i>Direct impact</i>	Parent-professional interaction	Professional approach	Parents’ role
<i>Direct influence</i>	Parents’ role	Parents’ emotions	Assessment
<i>Potential role in parents’ constructions</i>	For those parents who participated in this study, <i>Parental expectations</i> can both influence their constructions of the role of the helping professional and be influenced by actual experiences in seeking helping professional assistance. As such, for participant A, a <i>Parent’s expectations</i> can influence their <i>Interaction</i> with the helping professional. For Participant B, <i>Parents’ expectations</i> influence their ideas of the <i>Professional approach</i> , which then impact on the <i>Helping process</i> . For Participant C a <i>Parent’s expectations</i> determine the <i>Parent’s role</i> , which then impacts on <i>The helping process</i> through the mediation of the parent’s involvement in a <i>Team approach</i> . As well as potentially influencing views of <i>Professional approach</i> , the actual <i>Interaction</i> with the helping professional or the <i>Parent’s role</i> , <i>Parental expectations</i> are also impacted on by other constructive variables in the participants’ representations. For Participant A, <i>the Parent’s role</i> , as an outcome of the influence of the <i>Interaction</i> with the helping professional, directly influences <i>Parental expectations</i> . For Participant B, the <i>Parent’s role</i> influences the <i>Parent’s personal experiences</i> and the <i>Stigma</i> associated with these experiences and, as a result, impacts on <i>Parent emotions</i> . <i>Parent emotions</i> about the possibility of their child having a learning difficulty then result in the <i>Parent’s expectations</i> of the helping professional. For Participant C, the <i>Parent’s role</i> leads to the seeking of the expertise of the professional resulting in an <i>Assessment</i> , which then influences <i>Parental expectations</i> .		
	Professional characteristics		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Secondary driver	Secondary outcome	Primary driver
<i>Direct impact</i>	Helping process Parents’ role	Parents’ role	Status of the helping professional
<i>Direct influence</i>	Status of the helping professional	Parents’ personal experiences	None
<i>Potential role in parents’ constructions</i>	In all three SIDs the <i>Professional characteristics</i> , and, for Participants A and C, the <i>Status of the helping professional</i> , can possibly be considered as playing a key role in determining the <i>Parent’s role</i> for learning support. For participants A and B <i>Professional characteristics</i> have a direct influence on the <i>Parent’s role</i> in learning support. For Participant C, <i>Professional characteristics</i> will also influence the		

	<p><i>Parent's role</i> but through the mediation of the expert <i>Status of the professional</i>, the <i>Assessment</i> and the consequent influence on <i>Parent expectations</i>. <i>The Helping process</i> itself also leads to <i>Recommendations</i> from the helping professional that will determine the <i>Parent's role</i> too. As such, in all cases the helping professional plays a fundamental part in influencing the parent's ideas of their own role in learning support.</p>		
Affinity	The helping process		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Secondary driver	Primary driver	Primary outcome
<i>Direct impact</i>	Parent-professional interaction	Parents' role	Recommendations
<i>Direct influence</i>	Professional characteristics	Professional approach	Team approach
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	<p><i>The helping process</i> can influence the <i>Interaction</i> of the helping professional and the parent determining the <i>Parental role</i> via the influence of <i>Professional status</i> and <i>Professional Characteristics</i>, as illustrated in Participant A's SID. In Participant B's SID, <i>The helping process</i> directly establishes the <i>Parent's role</i>. Participant C's SID indicates that <i>The helping process</i> will influence <i>Recommendations</i> to the parent regarding the <i>Parent's role</i> too. Therefore it is evident that the ongoing process that is initiated for learning support may continually affect the parent's ideas of their own role, through the mediation of the helping professional.</p>		
Affinity	Parents' role		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Pivot	Secondary driver	Secondary driver
<i>Direct impact</i>	Parent expectations Professional approach	Parents' personal experiences	Status of the helping professional Team approach
<i>Direct influence</i>	Professional characteristics	The helping process	Parental expectations Recommendations
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	<p>For Participant A, the <i>Parent's role</i>, as an outcome of the influence of the <i>Interaction</i> with the helping professional, directly influences <i>Parental expectations</i>, which then, once again, impact on the parent-professional <i>Interaction</i>. For Participant B, the <i>Parent's role</i> influences the <i>Parent's personal experiences</i> and the <i>Stigma</i> associated with these experiences and, as a result, impacts on <i>Parent emotions</i>. For Participant C, the <i>Parent's role</i> leads to the seeking of the <i>Expertise of the professional</i> resulting in an <i>Assessment</i>, which then influences <i>Parents expectations</i>, and subsequently influences ideas of the <i>Parent's role</i>. The <i>Parent's role</i>, as decided by the <i>Assessment</i> process may then lead the parent to become involved in a <i>Team approach</i> to assistance of their child.</p>		
Affinity	Status of the helping professional		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Secondary outcome	-	Secondary driver
<i>Direct impact</i>	Professional characteristics	-	Assessment
<i>Direct influence</i>	Parent-professional interaction	-	Professional characteristics
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	<p>Participant C's SID shows that the <i>Expertise of the professional</i>, as determined by <i>Professional characteristics</i>, drives <i>Assessment</i>. In Participant A's SID <i>Professional status</i> leads to <i>Professional characteristics</i> which then impact on <i>The helping process</i> and the <i>Interaction</i> of the parent and the helping professional.</p>		
Affinity	Professional approach		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Secondary outcome	Secondary driver	-
<i>Direct impact</i>	Parents' personal	The helping process	-

	experiences		
	Parents' emotions		
<i>Direct influence</i>	Parents' role	Parental expectations	-
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	For Participant A, the <i>Professional approach</i> determines <i>Parent emotions</i> whereas for Participant B, <i>Professional approach</i> will influence <i>Parent emotions</i> as a result of <i>The helping process</i> influences on the <i>Parent's role</i> , the <i>Parent's personal experiences</i> , and <i>Stigma</i> associated with a <i>Parent's personal experiences</i> .		
Affinity	Parents' personal experiences		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Primary outcome	Pivot	-
<i>Direct impact</i>	None	Stigma	-
		Professional characteristics	
<i>Direct influence</i>	Professional approach	Parent's role	-
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	In Participant A's SID, <i>Parent's experiences</i> are influenced directly by the <i>Professional approach</i> , which has been influenced by the <i>Parental role</i> . In Participant B's representation, <i>Parent's personal experiences</i> are influenced directly by the <i>Parent's role</i> which is determined by the <i>Professional approach</i> in <i>The helping process</i> . However, in Participant A's SID the <i>Professional approach</i> also directly influences <i>Professional status</i> and <i>Professional characteristics</i> , which determine the <i>Parental role</i> . Thus, it is feasible that for both participants the <i>Professional approach</i> is central in influencing <i>Parent's personal experiences</i> .		
Affinity	Parents' emotions		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Primary outcome	Secondary outcome	-
<i>Direct impact</i>	None	Parental expectations	-
<i>Direct influence</i>	Professional approach	Stigma	-
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	In Participant A's SID, <i>Parent's emotions</i> act as any outcome of the interaction of all the other affinities. This suggests that the parent's overall experiences with the helping professional will impact on their personal emotional outcomes. For Participant B, <i>Parents' emotions</i> are directly determined by the <i>Stigma</i> that they experience as a result of either their own learning disabilities or as related to the difficulties their child experiences. The <i>Parent's emotions</i> then directly influence <i>Parental expectations</i> of the helping professional.		
Affinity	Assessment		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	-	-	Secondary driver
<i>Direct impact</i>	-	-	Parental expectations
<i>Direct influence</i>	-	-	Status of the helping professional
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	From participant C's perspective helping professional <i>Assessment</i> serves as a central determinant of <i>Parental expectations</i> in learning support. The Status of the helping professional will determine how they undertake the <i>Assessment</i> process, which suggests that the helping professional's actions in the assessment will influence the parent's expectations directly.		
Affinity	Recommendations		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	-	-	Secondary outcome
<i>Direct impact</i>	-	-	Parents' role
<i>Direct influence</i>	-	-	The helping process

<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	Recommendations may be given during or as a result of <i>the helping process</i> . Professional Recommendations can then influence the parents' ideas of their own role in learning support.		
Affinity	<i>Stigma</i>		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	-	Secondary outcome	-
<i>Direct impact</i>	-	Parents' emotions	-
<i>Direct influence</i>	-	Parents' personal experiences	
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	The <i>Stigma</i> that parents' may associate with their child's difficulties as a result of the <i>Parents' personal experiences</i> may influence the <i>Parent's emotions</i> . For Participant A these affinities then impact on her expectations, her ideas of the professional approach and The helping process as a whole.		
Affinity	<i>Team approach</i>		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	-	-	Secondary outcome
<i>Direct impact</i>	-	-	The helping process
<i>Direct influencer</i>	-	-	Parents' role
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	A <i>Team approach</i> in which multiple professionals are involved will also be influenced by the <i>Parents' role</i> and, as such, both the involvement of the parent and a team of helping professionals together can directly influence <i>The helping process</i> .		
Affinity	<i>Parent- professional interaction</i>		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Secondary driver	-	-
<i>Direct impact</i>	Status of the helping professional	-	-
<i>Direct influence</i>	Values	-	-
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	Participant A constructs the <i>Parent-professional interaction</i> as a driving influence in her construction of the helping professional. The parent's <i>Values</i> about helping professionals may play a role in this interaction, and, how the helping professional does act towards the parent during this interaction will then influence the parent's views of the <i>Status of the helping professional</i> and the helping professional's characteristics, feeding back into further interactions.		
Affinity	<i>Values</i>		
<i>Placement in SID</i>	Primary driver	-	-
<i>Direct impact</i>	Parent-professional interaction	-	-
<i>Direct influence</i>	None	-	-
<i>Potential role in parents' constructions</i>	The <i>Values</i> that a parent holds about helping professionals can impact on the <i>Parent-professional interaction</i> for learning support. These values may be held prior to or potentially as a result of consultations with helping professionals.		

Table 5.1: Comparison of the properties of the affinities generated by each participant

Although the participants' constructions revealed varying interactions and effects, broad trends are apparent in their representations. As evidenced by the content of Table 5.1, the role of the helping professional is constructed around interacting factors or affinities for each of the parents who

participated in the study. As related to the social constructionist theoretical insights conveyed in Chapters One and Two of the study, certain factors or affinities are seemingly broadly associated with the **circumstances** of the parent in their social context. These factors include *Parents' personal experiences* in their context; their *Values* about helping professionals, the societal *Stigma* that a parent may experience in association to their child's difficulties and the *Parent's emotions* about their child's difficulties. Specific contextual and experiential factors may also contribute to ideas of the kind of person and professional the helping professional will be.

Other factors that impact on constructions of the helping professional appear to be more closely related to actual **contact interactions** with helping professionals for learning support. These contact influenced factors may include *The helping process*, the *Professional approach*, *Professional characteristics* and *Status of the helping professional*, a *Team approach* to consultation and the dynamics of the *Parent-professional interaction*.

5.2.1.2 Sub questions

- What are parents' expectations of the helping professional in learning support?

The expectations that the parents in this study hold can be positioned within two categories, namely (1) **prior expectations** and (2) **general expectations**. Prior expectations, which are generally present preceding consultation with the helping professional, may be modified as a result of interaction with the helping professional whereas it appears that the parents' general expectations of the helping professional are less yielding. The parents' in this study generated a number of scenarios for how these *Parental expectations* may both influence and be influenced by other factors, as indicated in Table 5.1.

- **Prior expectations**

The parents' prior expectations are based on the idea that the helping professional will be able to **identify** or **confirm** the nature of their child's difficulty. The parents also expect that, if their child does have a problem that requires professional learning support assistance, then the helping professional will be able to **solve** or **fix the problem quickly**. These prior expectations may require **adaptation** by the parent as they gain an understanding of the nature of their child's difficulty and what learning support for their child will entail. It would seem that the helping professional plays a central role in assisting the parent towards this understanding of their child's difficulty and also in explaining what support will involve to the parent. Ultimately, the parents' initial foci on having their

child's problem fixed by the professional could imply that their expectations of the helping professional are largely centred on the remediation of their child, and, possibly not aligned to their own interactive engagement with the helping professional and the role that they as parents may play in the process.

- General expectations

In terms of parents' general expectations throughout the process of learning support, the parents involved in this study expect **evidence of progress** and, ultimately, expect that the problem that they sought assistance from the helping professional for will be addressed and **solutions will be found**. The parents in this study also require **information, guidance** and **advice** from the helping professional.

Moreover, the parents expect the helping professional to **get to the point** and **not waste unnecessary time**. They want their consultation with the helping professional to be a **relaxed** and **caring interaction** in which the helping professional **shows an interest**. The helping professional is expected to **support the child and the family as a whole**. For any therapeutic interventions that the helping professional undertakes with the child, the parents expect **communication** with the helping professional and **constant feedback** regarding the child's progress. **Teamwork** with the helping professional particularly involving a **balance of contributions** between the helping professional and the parent is also expected.

The general expectations that the parents did provide suggest that needs-based and strengths-based approaches may come into play. For instance, the parents do acknowledge that the helping professional is an **expert** in terms of their field of training and they expect the helping professional to **act to lead the parent** to an understanding of what they need to do. The parents also recognised that the **diagnostic function** often associated with helping professionals may indeed be of assistance to parents as it helps the parent to understand the nature of their child's difficulties. As suggested by one of the participants, parents may also be **amenable to the idea of generating possibilities and becoming more actively involved** if it is clear what the helping professional intends to accomplish.

- The characteristics the helping professional should have

A theme closely related to the process expectations that the parents' have appears to be the their anticipatory ideas of the characteristics of the helping professional which play a prominent role in

their interactions with the helping professional and outcomes for learning support. It is these characteristics that may influence the parent's role both directly and through the mitigation of other variables in the parents' constructions of the role of the helping professional. From the parents' perspectives, the characteristics of the helping professional can have the power to change the parents' ideas of the status of the helping professional and feature prominently as a determinant of the overall success of the helping process with the parent

The parents who participated in this study expected the helping professional to be **friendly, warm** and **welcoming**. The **helpfulness, caring, compassion** and **consideration** of the helping professional was also deemed as important. The helping professional must be **accessible** to the parent and display actions that convey **honesty, interest** and **sincerity**. Other qualities that are expected by parents are **patience**, a **softhearted** nature, a **sense of humour**, a **non-aggressive** approach to interacting with the parent and the ability to **judge and move to the level of the child**. A **positive** demeanour, **confidence, self-assuredness** and **personal strength** are also imperative characteristics that the helping professional needs to possess. In terms of their specific work-related qualities, it helps if the helping professional is **capable** and **experienced**. The parents also determined that the helping professional needs to be **passionate about helping others** and not solely focused on financial gain in their assistance of others.

- What do parents value in their interactions with helping professionals?

Participant C values the act of **formal assessment** as it can assist with confirmation of the thoughts of the parent, help the parent to believe a problem exists or aid the parent's understanding of and decision-making about a problem their child experiences. A **team approach** to consultation may also be valued as multiple professional perspectives can help to validate the existence of a problem for the parent.

Other essential aspects that the parents in the study value is the ability of the helping professional to **work with their child at his or her level** and to be **honest** with the parent. Furthermore, the parents value **positive outcomes** that they see in their children as a result of experiences with helping professionals. The parent may appreciate **helpful** and **informative** helping professionals especially with regard to **feedback** and **advice** on **different options** and ways of doing things. It may be a valuable experience for the parent if the helping professional is able to **confront them with their negative actions**. A parent may also value the **timesaving convenience** of seeking helping professional assistance as they feel it takes less time to try and work out what may be going wrong. Parents may also potentially view helping professional assistance as a valuable

necessity in light of a society they perceive as somewhat stressful with less interpersonal warmth and caring.

- What are parents' understandings of their roles in learning support?

The parents in the study viewed their involvement in learning support of their child as essential. However, how this involvement should be undertaken differed between the parents. Participant C chose to **remain detached** from the actual therapeutic process as she felt that she must leave the professional to carry on with their work. She only tended to get involved by means of regular **feedback** from the helping professional, when **decisions** about her child's educational future were necessary or in following the helping professional's specific **recommendations** to her.

Overall, the parents in this study thought that in interacting with the helping professional their role is to be **open-minded** about the helping professional from the outset. They considered their own **honesty** in the process of interacting with the helping professional as a necessary contribution that they have to make to the effective learning support of their children. The parents specifically thought that their ability to get **straight to the point** of the matter with the helping professional would help to **eliminate unnecessary time wastage** in the process. The parents also think that they need to **ask for clarification** from the helping professional if they do not understand something that the helping professional mentions to them. Further to this, they constructed one of their roles to be that of being **inquisitive** about the practical tasks that the helping professional suggests for learning support of their child. They want to know what the helping professional will be able to do for their child and will also aim to find out from the helping professional what they as parents can do for their child. **Reflection** on the ideas of the helping professional and **evaluation** of the relevance for their personal situation is another role that the parents think they must undertake. They think that they must also **give their input** as a parent.

The parents' ideas of their parental role also extend to ideas of what they think the helping professional will expect of them in their parental undertakings with their children. They think that the helping professional expects them to be involved in "**positive parenting**" of their child and acting as a **support system to their child, being available** and putting their child's needs first. Another role as related to the expert recommendations of the helping professional is to **carry out the recommendations** that the helping professional may expect them to carry out.

As such, the parent may be eager to **listen** to and **learn** from the helping professional. In their own time parents may **do their own research** into the difficulty their child experiences or **offer**

assistance to other parents whose child experiences a learning difficulty. Parents may not always find it easy to carry out the recommendations of the helping professional due to time constraints, lack of experience with the issue, work and other family commitments.

- What are the discourses that may influence parents' views of their own roles and those of the helping professional in learning support?

For the participants involved in this study **stigma** about learning problems and disabilities, their ideas of the **status of the helping professional**, their own **personal experiences** and their **emotional responses** to their child's difficulties influence their ideas of their own roles and those of the helping professional. However, it appears that the participants' **discursive interaction** with the helping professional, in which the helping professional conveys certain personal characteristics, initiates approaches with the parent, makes recommendations to the parent and undertakes the entire helping process may be most influential in determining their views of their parental role and their ideas of the role of the helping professional. As such, Parents' ideas of their role in learning support may change as a result of their interaction with the helping professional. Moreover, the role that parents do undertake in learning support can impact on other discourses surrounding negative past experiences, the stigma they may feel, their emotions and the entire helping process.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Overall, the research findings presented in this study reflect the personal experiences and ideas of three unique individuals in a specific setting and thus the findings may not be directly applicable to other parents in different settings. Despite this shortcoming, as stated in Chapter Three, the goal of the study was to elicit an illustrative, in-depth description of these parents' constructions of the role of the helping professional to afford "others... a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieus" (Bryman, 2004, p.275; Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p.181).

In consideration of the possible limitations of the research methodology itself, a number of points are offered. (1) During the phase two modified Interactive Qualitative analysis, it, at times, seemed that the participants found it difficult to determine the causal relationships amongst their own affinities. This was specifically apparent during their attempts to generate personal statements reflecting the nature of the relationships from their own personal experiences. (2) The methodology necessitates that participants' read the affinity descriptions and write down their personal hypotheses of the relations amongst these affinities. This did present a challenge for one of the participants in the study who experiences a learning disability. It may therefore not be an

appropriate methodology for use with people who have difficulty sustaining attention, or who struggle with reading or writing tasks, unless the researcher is present to provide support with these aspects, as was the case in this research.

(3) Another factor related to the implementation of the research methodology in this study, is that, due to circumstances preventing Participant C's contribution to the follow-up IQA interview in phase two of the research, adaptations had to be made to the planned method of data collection with this participant and there was less opportunity to seek out further understanding of the participant's ideas about helping professionals. IQA methodology necessitates multiple research contact occasions with participants, especially if modifications that are made place greater importance on the participation of all participants in the study during all phases of the data collection, particularly in instances where small participant samples are used. This may be inconvenient or even unfeasible for some potential participants. (4) It also has to be noted that Northcutt and McCoy's (2004) IQA is a recent theoretical and methodological development. Thus, its premises are yet to be subjected to long-term scrutiny and commentary by academic communities regarding its value across multifarious research settings.

The parents' recollections of their experiences point out that they have had many different interactions with helping professionals in obtaining assistance of their children, both in their children's' present scholastic environment [Participant A, B and C], other remedial scholastic environments [Participant B], as well as through consultations with helping professionals in the private sector [Participant A, B and C]. However, another possible constraint to the study that must be noted is that the participants' interactions with helping professionals in their children's current LSEN school may be grounded in a practice ethos particular to the specific school. This may mean that the helping professionals in the school follow a particular approach to helping professional practice that may not necessarily reflect helping professional undertakings in the broader context of helping professional practice. Particularly, as LSEN schools, by their prevailing educational focus on the intrinsic barriers to learning that learners experience and the remediation of these learner deficits, may mean that the research participants have been predominantly exposed to this outlook and professional practice methods associated with this outlook.

Furthermore, all the participants in the study were mothers. This means that, although the gender of the parent was not a central consideration in the design of the study, the parental perspectives of fathers have not been represented. Finally, the participants' awareness of my role as an intern psychologist at the LSEN school their children attended may have influenced the nature of their responses to my queries into their ideas of helping professionals due to my within-group position as

a helping professional. Despite these limitations, the study does make a number of contributions that will be considered in the next section.

5.4 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

5.4.1 Implications for helping professional praxis

From the findings presented in the study, it seems that open discussion with parents with regards to the practicalities of the theoretical approach the helping professional intends to initiate and the parents' expectations of the helping professional are in order at the initiation of any parent-professional consultation for learning support. Thus, role negotiation between the parent and the helping professional may contribute to the achievement of collaboration and an equitable partnership relationship. Continual reflection on parental satisfaction and subsequent role negotiation with the parent may be most appropriate, regardless of which theoretical underpinnings the professional wishes to utilise. Regular feedback sessions with the parent whether formal or informal may assist in this process.

Ultimately, the helping professional needs to be aware of the factors that may contribute to parents' emotions and expectations during the process. Interactions with helping professionals have the ability to change previous experiences or heighten constructions of helping professionals that parents already have. It is essential for the helping professional to deal with these factors with the parent rather than just focusing on the practicalities of learning support of the child, as these aspects may influence parents' participation in the learning support of their child.

A parent's feelings of vulnerability and non-awareness of how the helping professional will assist also reminds of the need to portray acceptance of the parent and their position and to also focus on assisting the parent towards an understanding of what will take place. It is possible that professional characteristics that convey warmth and compassion in the helping process may assist to achieve this.

Personalised, honest information and discussion of this advice and information are another crucial element in the support of parents. The parent needs to understand the reasons behind how the professional interacts with them. Thus, although a strengths-based approach may be helpful, the parent needs to know why the helping professional acts in certain ways or uses certain approaches to interacting with the parent and also needs to understand the need for any therapeutic action be it with their child or with themselves.

5.4.2 Further research possibilities

As already stated, the findings of the study represent the meaning constructions of a small-scale purposively selected sample of parents in a specific setting. Future research can concentrate on larger and/or more diverse participant samples for the determination of parental viewpoints of the relationships between the affinity constructs generated in this research. It may also be meaningful to explore helping professionals' cause-effect analyses of the affinity constructs to allow for comparison of their constructions of their own roles in learning support with those of parents.

This study also focused on parental constructions of the role of any helping professional involved in learning support of their children. Further studies into similar research areas could explore parents' role constructions of specific helping professionals. For example, it may be most valuable to concentrate on constructions of the role of the psychologist in learning support, parent assistance or emotional interventions with children. This may be especially informative in terms of parental or psychologist constructions of strengths-based approaches to practice, as related to the Positive psychology movement, especially as the present study only touched on parents' possible views of this approach to practice.

The findings also relayed brief insights into how parents may construct their own roles in learning support. However, it may be important to conduct further research that specifically focuses on parental views of their own roles in learning support, as, although the role of the parent is considered to be a fundamental part of this process, there appears to be little evidence of research studies that have sought to investigate parental role construction for these purposes.

Parents' in this study also seemed to emphasise the importance of their own judgement of the therapeutic alliance between their children and helping professionals. It may thus be meaningful to explore the dynamics of this judgement process and its impact on the parent-professional therapeutic alliance. The parents did mention that other parents whose children experience learning difficulties are a source of support that they can make use of. Parents coping strategies/ resource initiation when there is a lack of access to 'specialised' learning support services in their child's educational context is another line of investigation that may be of value.

In an era of self-help literature and web-based sources for parenting and issues that children experience, it may also be meaningful to initiate research into parents' choice and usage of literature and other information sources to inform their understanding of their child's needs and how this impacts on their interactions with helping professionals.

5.5 CONCLUSION

5.5.1 Final visual representation of the researcher's growing construction of meaning

Based on my reflection of the meaning of the participants' SIDs and the associated affinities, the visual representation of my personal process of meaning giving that I provided in Chapter Four [Figure 4.1, p.111] will be updated and reconsidered. Figure 5.2 on the next page presents my personal construction of the relations amongst all the affinities generated for the research

From my social constructionist theoretical position, parents' personal experiences and interactions in their social context drive their representations of the role of the helping professional, assisting them to construct the role of the helping professional in certain ways and thus leading them to have certain expectations, be they for expert-driven remediation of their child's difficulties or for supportive assistance as they actively participate in assisting their child. The stigma that can be felt as a result of societal factors associated with seeing helping professionals or with the specific nature of a child's difficulties will also influence expectations but these feelings of stigmatisation also have the propensity to be influenced, either positively or negatively, by the parent's interaction with the helping professional, as determined by the professional's characteristics, approach and handling of the power associated with their expert status.

The effects of the parent-professional interaction on stigmatisation associated with a child's difficulties then influence helping professional activities undertaken with the parent such as assessment and the recommendations that result from assessment. The person of the helping professional in the interaction and the approach of the helping professional which impact on feelings of stigmatisation and lead to certain assessment tasks and recommendations will then influence the values that the parent holds about helping professionals and parents emotions as a result. Parents' emotions also impact on the interaction of the helping professional and the parent initially too. Parents' emotional reactions to the interaction outcomes with the helping professional then influence their views of their own roles for learning support ultimately affecting the overall helping process, and how the process is initiated. The helping process itself will also impact on parents' values about helping professionals too and these value judgements of the process will ultimately feed back into the parent-professional interaction for learning support.

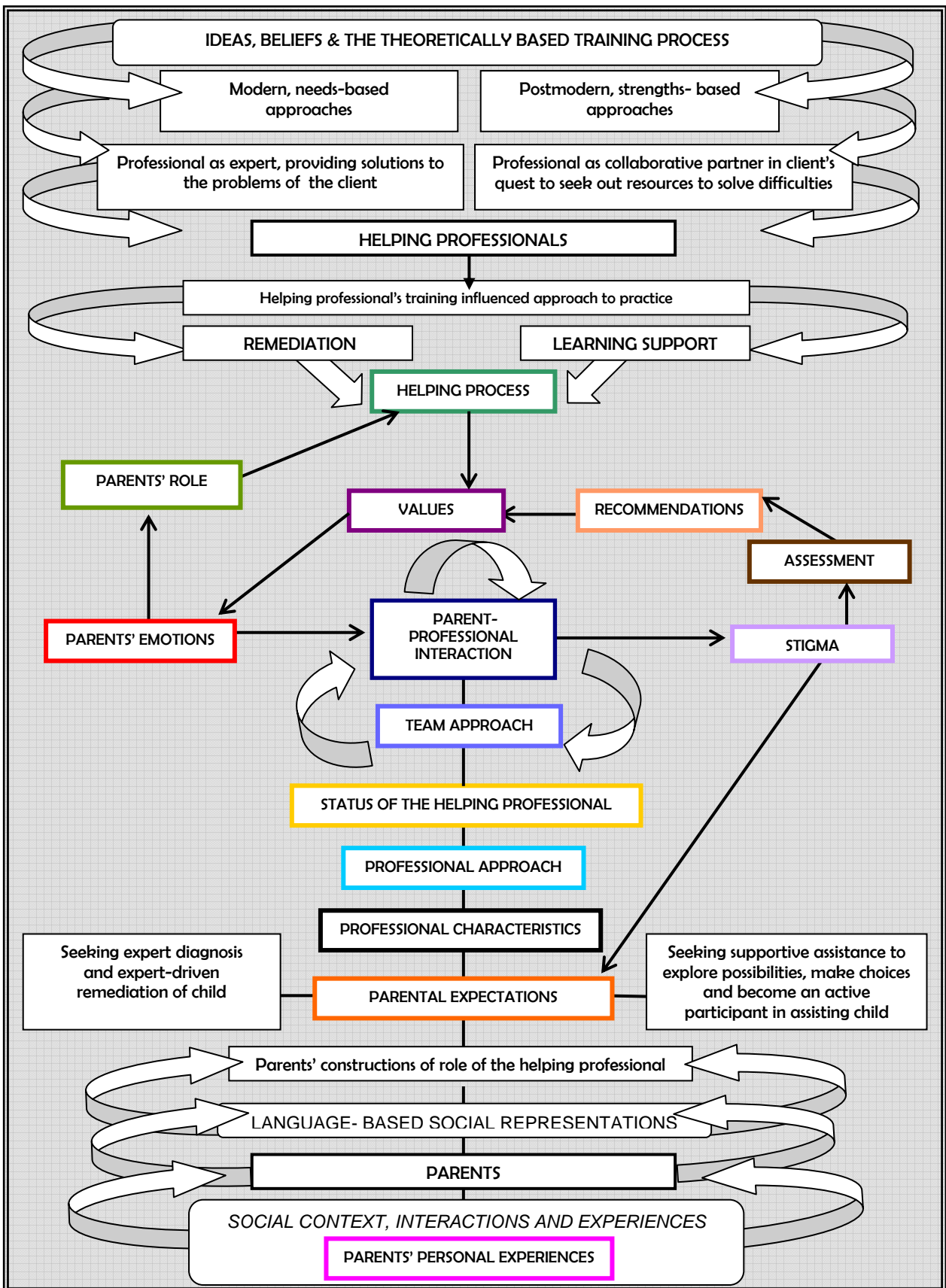


Figure 5.2: Final update of the researcher's construction of meaning for the study

5.5.2 Closing remarks

The aim of this qualitative research study was to explore parents' constructions of the helping professional in learning support. As such, the primary aim is to explore how parents view helping professionals who have been involved in learning support of their child. Underlying the central aim of exploring parents' views of helping professionals was the secondary aim of exploring the discourses that contribute to parents' construction of their own roles and those of the helping professional during learning support.

The findings provide indications that suggest that parents' constructions of the role of the helping professional are strongly influenced by the nature of their interactions with helping professionals. On the whole, it would appear that the parents' undertakings with the helping professional and how the helping professional acts towards the parent have the most influential effect on the parent for those parents involved in this study. Thus, it seems likely that, regardless of approach, the professional **may still hold the most power** with regard to the determination of the outcomes of the consultation between the parent and the helping professional and how the parent constructs the role of the helping professional. Therefore, it may be how the professional handles this power position in terms of the characteristic ways they interact with the parent and the advice they impart which may make the greatest impression on the parent.

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