The multi-faceted roles of Learning Support teachers in private schools

by

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Declaration

I declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

.....

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1 December 2017

Ethics Certificate

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to:

My loving parents
Martin and Tania Buys

Thank you for teaching me that I can achieve anything I set my mind to.
Your endless and unfailing love, support and encouragement has given me the strength and confidence to complete this challenge.

You have instilled in me “always try your best and do not give up”.

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Abstract

The formation of a democratic South Africa led to learners with barriers to learning being included in one education system. The South African Constitution, policies and white papers encourage inclusive education by providing mainstream schools which include support for learners with barriers to learning. Scholars described the role of the learning support teacher as unclear and ambiguous, yet, essential as part of mainstream education (Travers, 2006, Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Dreyer, 2013, Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). South African literature indicates that limited research has been conducted on the role of the learning support teachers (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Dreyer, 2014).

This study focused on defining the role of five learning support teachers in private schools. The focus fell on private schools due to the financial capability of such schools to employ specialised staff to support learners. The assumption was that the private school context was advantageous in having funding available for learning support. A qualitative methodological paradigm allowed for the learning support teachers' opinions and experiences on designing, implementing and managing learning support within their schools to be explored. A multiple case study design was utilised and data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with five learning support teachers.

Four themes emerged as a result of a thematic analysis, namely; the role of the learning support teacher, the nature of learning support provision, private school factors and general teacher and learning support teacher interaction. This study concluded that a multifaceted role was assumed by the learning support teachers. The participants' roles presented as a myriad of assumed roles within their schools. As part of their role, participants explained that a large portion of their role was to support learners with barriers to learning on an academic and emotional level. Additionally, their support role seemed to even extend to parents, general teachers and other staff members within their respective schools. The findings of this research seemed to correlate with literature (Walton et al., 2009, Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016, Dreyer et al., 2012).

Further research within the field of learning support could be advantageous, thus I recommended that a learning support forum be established. The forum could enable possible discussion and formation of consensus on the role learning support teachers should assume.
Keywords: learning support, learning support teacher, role, private school.

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To whom it may concern

This is to certify that I, Alexa Kirsten Barnby, ID no. 5106090097080, a language practitioner accredited by the South African Translators' Institute, have edited the dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education, titled "The multi-faceted roles of learning support teachers in private schools" by Amy Megan Buys.

The onus is, however, on the author to make the changes and address the comments.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
DBST	District Based Support Team
EWP6	Education White Paper 6
GED	General Education Development
GT	General Teacher
HDE	Higher Diploma in Education
IE	Inclusive Education
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
IEP	Individualised Education Plan
ILST	Institutional Level Support Team
INDS	Integrated National Disability Strategy
ISASA	Independent Schools Association of South Africa
LS	Learning support
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
LST	Learning Support teacher
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training
NCSS	National Committee on Support Services
PS	Private School
SA	South Africa
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SIAS	Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
ST	Special Teacher
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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1. Chapter 1: Research Focus

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

Benjamin Franklin (2015)

1.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter serves as an introduction to my study. I will describe the research context and rationale for this research, as well as introducing the reader to the background and contextual factors that relate to learning support (henceforth, LS) in South Africa. I will specify the research question and research problem that led to the problem statement. Terminology used in the area of LS and this research process will be clarified. I will explain the ethical and quality assurance methods employed in this study and discuss the assumptions found in the literature. I will describe the limitations in this study. This chapter concludes with an outline of the formulation of the remaining chapters in this dissertation.

1.2 Introduction

> "Inclusion is based on the conviction that all children with disabilities have a right to participate in environments as close to normal as possible and to benefit socially and academically from being in the central school and society"- Lerner and Johns (2012:110).

Scholars have noted a worldwide move toward inclusion and inclusive education systems (Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, Walton et al., 2009, Swart & Pettipher, 2011, Pather, 2011). Du Toit and Forlin (2009:644) describe the inclusion paradigm as "firmly embedded within a human rights discourse". The outcome can be seen globally as well as in South African education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Conference on Special Needs Education delivered the Salamanca Statement of 1994, an overarching document that has influenced Inclusive Education (henceforth IE) (UNESCO, 1994). Scholars recognise the Salamanca Statement as one of the most influential documents in international IE policy formulations with recommendations found in South African policy (Boyle et al., 2011, Keating & O'Connor, 2012, Bruggink et al., 2014, Mavuso, 2014). The document recognises that the formation of mainstream schools allows for support to be provided; all learners can therefore access an education (Walton et al., 2009). The Salamanca Statement describes a means to move to IE, describing mainstream schooling as a method to achieve IE (UNESCO, 1994). Mainstream schools establish an environment in which extra support can be provided for learners who

have barriers to learning; in this way, all learners can be educated in one school, with schools providing extra support to learners who may experience barriers (Landsberg et al., 2011).

South Africa's IE system has undergone considerable changes since the beginning of democracy (Engelbrecht et al., 2006, Engelbrecht & Green, 2007, Swart & Pettipher, 2011, Nel et al., 2013b). The influence of IE can be found in the formulation of our constitution. Section 1(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa values "(a) human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms" (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:5). Chapter 2, Section 29 of the Bill of Rights states "(1) everyone has the right – (a) to a basic education" (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:13). Both these founding values highlight the inclusive foundation on which South African IE is built. Through the formulation of our democratic constitution, South African IE focuses on educating all learners, despite any barriers they may have (Department of Education, 2001). An overarching consideration of Section 28(2) is, perhaps, most influential in the implementation of LS. This section focuses particularly on the best interests of the child. In considering the importance of the Constitution and the recommendations it makes, the best interests of the learner should be the main focus when implementing LS (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Therefore, in keeping this in mind, it should be possible for learners to access the curriculum. Access to schooling should be done in the most appropriate circumstances with the relevant support (Engelbrecht et al., 2006).

As part of IE, Education White Paper 6 of 2001 (henceforth EWP6) recommends that support should be provided for all learners in South African schools (Department of Education, 2001). EWP6 has been highly influential in the paradigmatic shift that has taken place in the South African schooling system. This paper is a strategy which was formulated and implemented after democratic elections in 1994. This white paper stresses the importance of mainstreaming and support for learners (Naicker, 2007, Walton et al., 2009). The implementation of EWP6 made way for a change in the inclusive nature of South African schools (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Ntombela, 2011, Mavuso, 2014).

Scholars reflect the shift in thought concerning the assessment of learners' barriers, moving toward a socially supportive system based on the Socio-ecological Model (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, Dreyer, 2013). A transformation in views on diagnostic assessment from the Medical Deficit Model to the Socio-ecological Model is evidence of a more inclusive approach to supporting learners worldwide (Fielding-Barnsley, 2005,

Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016). The Socio-ecological Model is inclusionary in nature and focuses on an overall *social* methodology to accommodate a learner with a diagnosis (Landsberg et al., 2011).

LS is support provided in mainstream schools by LS teachers (LSTs) with the aim of providing scholastic support to learners with barriers to learning (Nel et al., 2013b, Landsberg et al., 2011). Mulholland and O'Connor (2016:3) observe that LSTs "provide supplementary support to pupils with low achievement levels". Dreyer (2014) and Mavuso (2014) both believe that LS is essential for learners in mainstream schools who struggle with academic requirements and therefore need extra support. LS is specialist support, owing to the nature of the barriers and the type of support that is required (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Eloff and Ebersöhn (2004) observe that this support consists of various activities and support measures that are implemented by the LST. Walton et al. (2009), explain that as a part of formulating inclusive policy, LSTs are considered significant in the education systems of most developed countries.

LSTs assume various roles within their schools (Dreyer, 2014). Irish scholar Travers (2011:462) believes that the LST's role definition is problematic and that "the lack of clarity about the support teacher's role" could prove troublesome for the implementation of LS. Scottish scholars, Wilson et al. (2007), describe the role of support teachers as complex. These roles are often dependent on the nature of LS offered at individual schools and the nature of the support needed. South African scholar Dreyer (2013:57) describes "considerable variation in their roles internationally". LS could occur in different formats and LSTs could make use of various methodologies (Takala & Ahl, 2014, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Forlin, 2001, Travers, 2006). The expert knowledge of LSTs seemingly influences the methodologies they may use (Sundqvist & Ström, 2015). However, as a result of the varying nature of the support required in schools, the LST's role may be unclear and not specifically defined (Dreyer, 2014). There seems to be some ambiguity in the role of the LST nationally as well as internationally (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016, Keating & O'Connor, 2012, McConkey & Abbott, 2011).

A LST has specialised knowledge but an ambiguous role to fulfil (Travers, 2011, Tennant, 2001, Fielding-Barnsley, 2005, Rontou, 2013). Dreyer (2014:179) explains that "very few teachers are equipped and willing to provide the individualised and intense instruction needed in the modern diverse classroom". LSTs provide support based on their additional

knowledge (Wilson et al., 2007). With the focus on the learner in IE, support is based on the needs of the learner (Quah & Jones, 1996, Forlin, 2001, Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016). The indistinct role of the LST may be causing uncertainty about the type of support that should be offered and by whom in mainstream schools (Travers, 2011, Travers, 2006, Takala & Ahl, 2014).

The aim of this research study was therefore to understand and define the role of the LST in private schools. In order to understand this role, it was important to understand the influence of white papers and policies, international trends and context specific influences on the LST role. All these factors can be considered to be part of the LST's environment; in order to understand the individual's role, the social role of the LST had to be explored. Some uncertainty in defining the role of a LST exists; this study aimed to expose this role in private Pretoria schools. In order to define the role and to take into consideration the many complexities surrounding it, participants were interviewed and a thematic analysis was conducted. Conclusions and recommendations were formulated from this thematic analysis in an effort to define the role of LSTs in private Pretoria schools.

1.3 Problem statement

Having discussed the background to the study, in this section the problem statement is explained. This includes the reasoning behind the drive to implement LS, and the foundation on which this should be based. In other words, defining the role of the LST. I elaborate on the use of private schools in particular in this study.

It is clear that LS forms part of IE in South Africa (UNESCO, 1994, Department of Education, 2001). It is expected that, in particular, private schools, would have the funding to make use of an LST. It appears that LSTs are employed at such schools to provide support to learners because these institutions have the financial capacity to employ specialised staff (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008).

No specific role has been defined for LSTs, either nationally or internationally (Forlin, 2001, Fielding-Barnsley, 2005, Travers, 2011, Dreyer, 2013, Dreyer, 2014, Takala & Ahl, 2014). The absence of a role definition may have influenced the level of support that is provided to learners with barriers to learning (Rouse, 2008). As a result of the apparently limited nature of this support, the curriculum may not be fully accessible (Quah & Jones, 1996, Forlin, 2001).

For this reason, this study sought to explore the role of LSTs in private schools in Pretoria. Clarity was sought on the role of the LST and specifically on this role in private schools. As noted above, the literature reflects some ambiguity in the role of the LST, thus it was hoped that this study would go some way towards filling the gap in knowledge in this regard (Fielding-Barnsley, 2005, Dreyer, 2013). By exploring the role that LSTs currently assume, a definition was sought for the role of the LST.

1.4 Purpose of the study

> "Knowledge of the human condition, in short, is first qualitative in nature-and to the extent that measurement comes into play, it is for the sake of making more precise the qualities that we seek to clarify, understand and distinguish" - Alexander (2006:215).

In this section the purpose of this study and how it is linked to the rationale of conducting this research is discussed.

This research study focused on defining the role of LSTs in private schools in Pretoria. Its purpose was to understand the opinions and experiences of LSTs at these schools. The study was undertaken in order to formulate and define the role of LSTs in private schools in Pretoria. This role was conceptualised, based on the opinions and experiences of the LSTs interviewed in this study. The definition is thus based on five participants and the findings of this study.

Due to the social nature of this research, a qualitative methodology was adopted. A case study design was used to investigate the role of the five LSTs. This approach allowed me to compare the opinions and definitions of roles of these five LSTs (Wahyuni, 2012). The goal of this case study was to investigate the phenomenon of the undefined role of LSTs in private schools in order to provide a definition of the role of current LSTs (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

1.5 Contextualising the study

In the following section the study is contextualised. I explain how LS is defined in South African schools and discuss the various modes of education in South Africa. The private school setting that is specific to this study is discussed and the reasoning behind choosing private schools as the context of this study is explained.

The South African landscape has two main pathways to schooling available to learners. Firstly, learners can attend public schools, financed by the state. Secondly, learners can attend private schools, which are independently managed and funded (ISASA, 2016).

Private schooling in South Africa is seen as an "alternative" to public schooling (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008:123). A private school is privately governed and is independent from the state (ISASA, 2016). Although they are registered with the state of South Africa, they are privately managed, even though some private schools may be partially funded by the government (ISASA, 2016).

This research study was focused on private schools in Pretoria specifically; this defined the sites for data collection. This area was selected as it was convenient for all participants. For reasons of financial constraint, the study was delimited to the Pretoria area only.

1.6 Research Questions

The research question was:

What is the role of learning support teachers in private schools in Pretoria?

The main research question sought to understand and define the roles that LSTs' currently fulfil at their respective private schools.

1.7 Rationale for the study

In this section I explain the rationale for conducting this study and the personal reasons underlying the focus on LST.

Personal experience of the positive effects of LS has had a direct influence on my passion for LS. As a learner, I received support during my years at primary school. I have always struggled with mathematics and lack logical aptitude. I am a visual learner and at school I enjoyed colouring in and doing art rather than performing activities that seemed clinical and logical. This created troublesome obstacles when it came to mathematics. I struggled with mathematics from an early age and after receiving poor marks in grade 3 (three) it was suggested that I receive LS. Owing to the nature of the school I attended, LS was available. The LST was able to consult with me during the school day. In these sessions I remember playing games and doing enjoyable activities with her; I had sessions with her until I left

grade 7 (seven) and started my high school career. I was able to perform better at high school as a result of the support I had received.

Thus LS at primary school enabled my success at high school. I was able to achieve a matric with university entrance. I went on to study teaching and then decided to specialise in LS. During my honours degree in education, I recognised the methods the LST had used with me. I started working as an LST, but in a consultative role. This allowed me to make use of these methodologies to support learners who were struggling to cope with their schoolwork. Again, I realised that the process of support comprised not simply my input, but the input of all role players involved in an individual learner's life. In my job I consulted with other teachers, with au pairs, principals at schools and most importantly parents. The LS I provided would not have been possible without the support and input of these other role players.

The integrated roles we all played in providing support to individual learners stirred my interest: specifically, I noted that the LST undertook various roles in order to run an LS programme. Further investigation of the role of the LST seemed necessary. As I had attended a private school and was now working in private schools, this resulted in my focus on the role of the LST in private schools.

I hope that this research will inform my role as an LST and expose the roles my colleagues and I assume, a collaborative view of LSTs may emerge. A clear definition of the role of the LST, specifically in the context of the private school, will it is hoped allow clearer boundaries for practice.

LSTs, like myself, have specialised knowledge in this area of expertise. However, assuming these skills are specialised, this study questions what they are and how LSTs should implement them. This specialised knowledge includes differentiating the curriculum in order to facilitate easier curriculum access. This entails using the curriculum to adapt learning and teaching to the individual learner. It seems often the curriculum needs to be adapted to accommodate learners in my sessions. I have gained my knowledge from my undergraduate and postgraduate studies; this has been supplemented by case specific research. The methodologies I use in my sessions have been developed by sharing ideas with colleagues at work and by incorporating my own knowledge and experience. Scholars reiterate the need for specialised knowledge; however, they are often uncertain about the specific expertise

that is needed to conduct LS effectively (Forlin, 2001, Mavuso, 2014). This was the springboard for my study; once a learner, I had now become an LST in the research context.

1.8 Clarification of concepts

There are several concepts that are important to an understanding of LS and the role of the LST. These are discussed below.

1.8.1 Inclusion

Inclusion is a paradigm that influences the lifestyle one assumes: inclusion dictates one's manner of viewing the world one exists in an inclusive manner of thinking and living will have a direct influence on education. In South Africa, education has shifted from a previously discriminatory system to an inclusive one. Landsberg et al. (2011:4) explains that "Inclusion is about developing inclusive community and educations systems". Walton et al. (2009), illustrate that all learners are included in one education system by providing support. I agree with Landsberg et al. (2011) and Walton et al. (2009), views of inclusive education, and for the purposes of this study inclusion is defined as a culmination of inclusionary practices.

1.8.2 Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is a paradigm influenced by inclusion as a way of living. Providing education for all will include effective and non-biased education for all South African learners. IE is collaborative in nature. Bornman and Rose (2010:240) argue that "Inclusion also emphasises the role of closer collaboration between different members of a team, and teachers need to develop and build specific skills in negotiation, joint decision-making and problem solving". Thus, for the purposes of this research, IE is one education system that benefits all South African learners by providing extra support for individual learners. The term as it is used here relates to *one* education system that is intended to provide a curriculum that includes *all* learners, despite the barriers they may face to learning.

1.8.3 Learning barriers

Although the terms 'learning difficulties' and 'learning barriers' are used interchangeably they do, arguably, deal with the same concept. There are numerous barriers that are experienced by learners and these will affect learners in different ways (Landsberg et al., 2011, Nel et al., 2013a). Nel and Grosser (2016:80) believe that learning disabilities are

complex and "multifaceted". Walton et al. (2009), argues that these barriers can vary from severe to mild; whichever the learner experiences should be identified as well as facilitated in the most effective way. Barriers to learning can be categorised as either intrinsic or extrinsic factors (Nel et al., 2013a, Nel & Grosser, 2016). Nel et al. (2013a), describe intrinsic factors as those within the learner, for example being blind, deaf or a being diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Extrinsic barriers are those in the learner's context. Louw and Louw (2007) explain that extrinsic barriers are factors such as socio-economic status, poor school facilities or poor curriculum adaptation, and these affect the learner's ability to succeed. Walton et al. (2009), describe learning barriers as factors that prevent individual learners from performing well academically.

It was assumed that this study would identify numerous learning barriers that impeded learning and achievement (Nel & Grosser, 2016). There are many learning barriers facing South African learners as a result of the diversity in the classroom. This study makes use of the term learning barriers, and this includes any barrier or circumstance that might prevent a learner from accessing the curriculum.

1.8.4 Learning support

Learning support (LS) allows for the identification and support of learners with learning barriers in order to best help them to achieve academically (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Forlin, 2001, Chataika et al., 2012). Bouwer (2011:54) describes the goal of LS as the nurturing of the "potential of learners each to grow at their own pace toward maximum potential". LS is individualised, allowing learners to function in mainstream schools as well as they are able (Bouwer, 2011). LS consists of an accumulation of support services by knowledgeable individuals within the field. The National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and National Committee on Support Services (NCESS/NCSNET) report (Department of Education, 1997:3) notes that "Education Support Services include all human and other resources that provide support to individual learners and to all aspects of the system". Similarly, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994:12) prescribes that "within inclusive schools, children with special educational needs should receive whatever support they may require to ensure their effective education". Extra support may be influential and lead learners to achieve success at school (Todd & Mason, 2005). The focus on support is important if learners with barriers to learning are to succeed in an inclusive education system.

LS, simply defined for the purposes of this study, refers to the provision of extra support to learners who may experience barriers to learning (Department of Education, 1997, UNESCO, 1994, Todd & Mason, 2005). Furthermore, LS focuses on the inclusive nature of mainstream schooling and highlights the importance for individual learners to succeed according to their unique abilities (Bouwer, 2011).

1.8.5 Learning support teachers

LSTs are teachers with specialised knowledge in supporting learners with barriers to learning (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Forlin, 2001, Fielding-Barnsley, 2005). LS is widespread across the globe; however, this term is not always used although they perform the same tasks. The term LST is interchangeable with special needs teacher, special needs manager, a learning support assistant (henceforth LSA) or a special teacher. In the United Kingdom, LSTs are referred to as LSAs. McConkey and Abbott (2011) explain that LSAs have expertise in the area of providing academic support.

Swedish and Finnish literature refers to a special teacher who is considered to have specialised knowledge in providing academic support (Takala & Ahl, 2014). In Singapore, LSTs are referred to as LS coordinators and they too provide extra support (Quah & Jones, 1996). The Dutch speak of special educational support that needs to be provided by teachers who provide additional educational support (Bruggink et al., 2014). It is clear from the literature that although there are numerous titles given to LSTs, they all provide extra support to learners who experience barriers to learning.

LSTs' knowledge encompasses learning disabilities and the requirements of mainstream education. This knowledge may not include all learning barriers, however. The expertise of LSTs allows them to adapt the curriculum and accommodate learning barriers by facilitating learning differently (Nel et al., 2013b, Fielding-Barnsley, 2005).

LSTs are concerned with support that enables the inclusion of all learners, despite any learning barriers they may have. Nel et al. (2013a), indicate that the LST views each learner individually, using the learner's individual abilities to provide support. Similarly, Lerner and Johns (2012) illustrate that the LST provides individualised strategies for learning.

For the purposes of this study, I view the LST as one who uses specialised knowledge to provide support for learners in accessing the curriculum. LSTs provide specialised support

and implement various learning strategies (UNESCO, 1994, Todd & Mason, 2005, Lerner & Johns, 2012, Nel et al., 2013a). In addition, a LST is a specialist who has expert knowledge in learning barriers and curriculum adaption (Lerner & Johns, 2012, Nel et al., 2013b).

1.8.6 Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is an IE term, referring to the teaching of learners with special education needs in the same system as the rest of the population. They are not excluded (Boyle et al., 2011). Engelbrecht et al. (2006), explain that the previously exclusionary schooling system has made way for inclusion; mainstream schools now make provision for all learners, whether they have barriers to learning or not. Similarly, (Nel et al., 2013a) describe mainstreaming as a process of finding the best suited learning environment for all learners despite barriers to learning. Lerner and Johns (2012) speak of an integrated learning circumstance wherein learners with disabilities are all carefully and logically placed in general education.

Lerner and Johns (2012:111) observe that "The mainstreaming plan was carefully worked out and monitored for each student by a special and general education teacher". I believe that this is the essence of what mainstreaming should be. If a learner's particular barrier is too severe for the general or mainstream classroom there are institutions where they can be educated. However, learners with mild barriers should be incorporated in mainstream schooling, provided they are monitored and supported correctly.

1.8.7 Private schools

South African schools are either government or privately funded; private or independent schooling is an alternative to government schooling (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008). Independent schools, more commonly known as private schools in South Africa, are generally organised and managed by a board and the funding that is used to run these schools is independent from the state (ISASA, 2016). Nevertheless, private schools must be registered with the state of South Africa, ensuring that all schooling occurs according to policies (ISASA, 2016).

Thus in this study, I use the term private schools rather than independent school, due to the term private school being used commonly. For the purpose of this study private schools are registered but independent from the state.

1.9 Ethical consideration

The following section deals with the ethical criteria that were adhered to throughout the process of this study. Each of these points is explained in detail in Chapter Three.

The research was conceptualised with ethical measures in place, ensuring ethical research from the outset. Strydom (2011:113) explains that ethics are an important consideration when formulating a research study in that "ethical issues are pervasive and complex, since data should never be obtained at the expense of human beings". In order to gather rich data it was important to remain aware of participants' needs throughout the study. Qualitative research deals with human life and experiences and therefore demands ethical treatment of participants by researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In order to ensure ethical treatment of participants and data, the research proposal was successfully defended and ethical approval was received from the University of Pretoria, Groenkloof Ethics Committee, in July 2015, with ethics clearance certificate number (HU 15/05/02).

Ethical considerations were kept in mind through various means in this study: obtaining informed consent from all participants, confidentiality agreements and considering research rigour throughout the research process. These processes were as follows: informed consent (Addendum A) was obtained from each participant upon first meeting with each LST. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could leave at any time if they so wished. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

1.10 Quality measures

The quality criteria that were adhered to in this study were based on Lincoln and Guba's Trustworthiness Model, that is trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure research of a high standard, quality assurance methods were implemented (Maree, 2010). Qualitative research can be validated in a number of ways. Creswell and Miller (2000:124) observe that "qualitative researchers routinely employ member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits". Thus the following quality measures were taken in this research:

- Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation methods and detailed descriptions in the data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). External auditors were another method used to ensure trustworthiness, validating that the thematic analysis had been done

accurately (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility was ensured by employing member checking, ensuring the true and accurate accounts of their opinions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Transferability was guaranteed by providing detailed accounts throughout the study, enabling the research methodology to be duplicated in a different context (De Vos et al., 2011, Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail in the form of a research journal and a record of field notes ensured dependability. Confirmability was ensured by recording biases and assumptions in the researcher journal (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A detailed description of these quality measures is provided in Chapter Three.

1.11 Research assumptions

This section contains a discussion of the assumptions of scholars in the field of LS in mainstream schools. These assumptions were obtained from both national and international literature. These assumptions are therefore based on current trends in the literature.

- Scholars conclude that LS is being provided but that implementation is inadequate (Forlin, 2001, Gurgur and Uzuner, 2011, Dreyer et al., 2012, Bruggink et al., 2014). There does not seem to be consensus on the manner in which LS should be implemented; however, it is generally agreed that LS should be implemented by an LST, with specialised knowledge (Forlin, 2001, Takala & Ahl, 2014). Thus, it is advantageous when LS has appropriate funding for resources and employment of LSTs (Dreyer et al., 2012).
- There appear to be two main methodologies employed to provide LS, both nationally and internationally. LS provision is focused on either removing the learner from a mainstream class to provide remediation or is based on co-teaching. Co-teaching as a means of implementing LS has been explored, but the sole focus is not on the LST but rather on a collaborative team effort that provides support (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Butt, 2016). Scholars underline the fact that there appear to be different methodologies used to implement LS (Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Butt, 2016). The co-teaching or withdrawal methodologies seem prevalent in providing LS for learners (Forlin, 2001, Travers, 2006, Woolfson et al., 2007).
- The literature indicates that LS becomes more effective if it occurs collaboratively with colleagues at schools (Woolfson et al., 2007, Travers, 2011, Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Boyle et al., 2011, Takala & Ahl, 2014). Dreyer et al. (2012:180), explains that

"collaboration becomes essential" in implementing LS; all role players need to work collaboratively in providing this support. A LS programme becomes advantageous when, as Dreyer (2014:180) notes, "a whole-school developmental approach from an eco-systemic perspective" is followed.

- There is an assumption that a private school has adequate funding to employ a LST. Motala and Dieltiens (2008:132) found that "independent schools had been able to achieve better results, this was because they were able to muster resources that only a few can afford". The belief is that LS would be readily available and more effective in private schools in South Africa.

1.12 Delimitations

This section explains the areas of parameters within which this study was conducted.

This study was conducted qualitatively, owing to the social nature of this research. The opinions of each LST were important and therefore a qualitative methodology was implemented. The qualitative nature therefore, defines the methodologies which were employed throughout this study. As a qualitative stance was taken in this study, no quantitative methods were employed and the research did not aim to test specific variables, but rather to formulate a cumulative understanding of the roles of these teachers. Therefore no statistics or generalizable points can be drawn from this research.

This research focused on five LSTs and their experiences. The teachers who were interviewed shared their opinions and experiences as these related to their roles. Thus, the conclusions are based solely on the interaction with participants and cannot be generalised to all LSTs employed in private South African schools.

The study considered private schools in the Pretoria area only and cannot be generalised to public schools or to other geographic areas because of the uniqueness of the research context. The choice of conducting research in private schools was explained above. Deciding to conduct research in private schools only was based on the assumption that such schools would have funding readily available to employ LSTs as specialists in their schools.

1.13 Outline of chapters

This section provides an outline of the chapters making up this dissertation. The chapters are as follows:

Chapter One: Research focus

Chapter One provides the orientation and context of this study. It comprises an introduction to the study. The rationale and purpose of the study are discussed and the research questions are outlined. Important concepts that are used to formulate the research question and those that are used in the study are clarified. The ethical criteria and quality assurance methods are identified and described.

Chapter Two: Literature review

Chapter Two explores the literature, both national and international, pertaining to the role of the LST. The theoretical framework that underpins this research is discussed and its connection to the research is illustrated.

Chapter Three: Research methodology

Chapter Three explains the research methodology used in this research study. I discuss the research procedures and explain the manner in which sample participants were identified. I describe the data collection strategies that were employed in the research process and provide the data analysis strategies that was used. Finally, I elaborate on the ethical guidelines that were followed and the quality assurance methods that were used.

Chapter Four: Findings and analysis of data

In Chapter Four the findings of the study are presented. The findings of the data analysis concerning the role of the LST are discussed and interpreted.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and recommendations

Chapter Five provides a conclusion to the research study in relation to the research question and purpose. Findings are related to the literature discussed in Chapter Two, and inferences are drawn. Recommendations are made and suggestions for further research are provided.

1.14 Summary of chapter

Chapter One provided an orientation to the current study and a discussion of the context of the research. The research question and sub questions were stated. The chapter explained the rationale and purpose for the study. I discussed the delimitations of the current study and clarified briefly the particular concepts pertaining to the research question. An outline of chapters was provided. In Chapter Two a review of existing literature is provided.

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present review of literature on the topic of the role of learning support teachers (LST hereafter) in private schools in South Africa. The literature is grounded in Inclusive Education (IE hereafter) and therefore, in order to contextualise the LST's role, I briefly explain IE in South Africa. In doing so I illustrate how the LST fits into the realm of IE and how learner support forms part of this context. Specifically, the private school in the South African context and the role of the LST in the private school context are discussed. A literature review enables a researcher to examine and explain the context of a study as well as how previous studies in the particular field of expertise are applicable (Creswell, 2009).

I used a filtering process to examine both local and international literature, extracting information on the role of the LST in both mainstream and private schools. This filtering process is schematically illustrated in Figure 2.1.

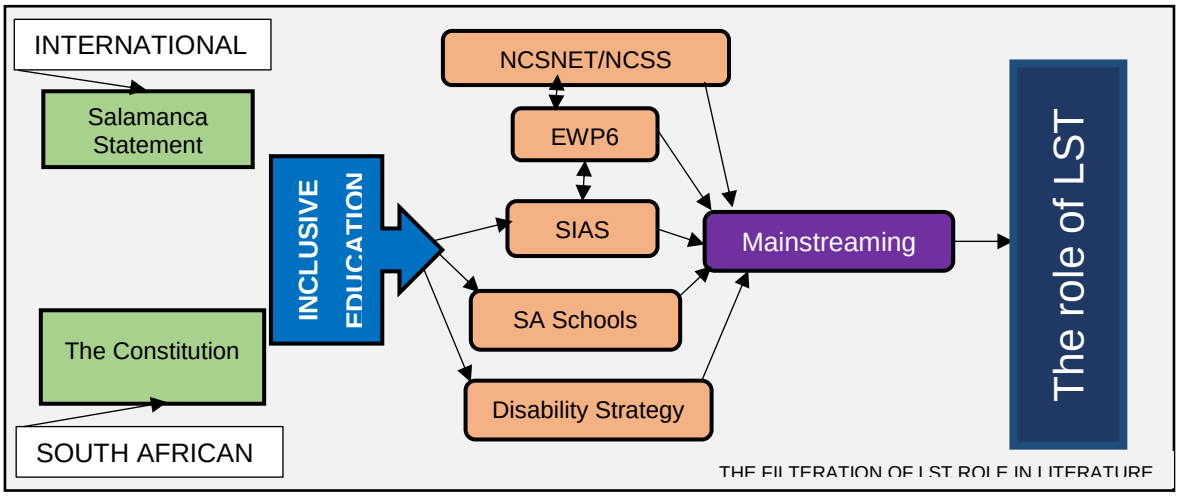

Figure 2.1: Filtering of literature search

This process enabled me to define the roles of the LST as they emerged from the literature. The abbreviations used in Figure 2.1 stand for Learning Support Teacher (LST), the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS), the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) and the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6). The following section contextualises this study in the IE realm. It provides a concise background to how LS and the role of a LST evolved.

2.2 An introduction to an inclusive (exclusive) education system

IE is a fundamental concept worldwide and has become a buzzword in the 21st century. IE highlights that *all* learners, no matter their socio economic circumstances and despite any disability or barrier to learning, are entitled to receive quality education (UNESCO, 1994). As a result of inevitable diversity, the worldwide movement to IE has been influenced by legislation and policies designed to combat exclusion and support learners (Bornman & Rose, 2010).

Despite the disparities of the past, South African policy, schools and teachers have made strides in terms of creating an inclusive system. South Africa has seen changes to the schooling system, as have many other education systems around the globe. Dreyer (2014) explains that because of the inequalities faced by some learners in the past, IE as a global concept was inevitable.

The need for inclusion in the South African education system was realised and gave rise to the formulation of inclusive policy. The formulation of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in 1996 was a springboard for inclusion in South African schools and the inclusive ideal has influenced schooling policies. Swart (2004) describes the importance of an education system that allows for diversity and supports diversity within classrooms. This shift in paradigm to an IE system meant that learners were viewed differently. Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001) describe a reconceptualization of the learner and the needs he or she may have. This has therefore initiated the need for specialised support for learners in a mainstream classroom.

The education system has undergone an evolution with a shift in focus to the learner. Learner support involves a whole school system as the provision of support is a collaborative process (Department of Education, 2001). The LST works as a specialist with a group of professionals in order to provide support as part of mainstreaming (Department of Education, 2001).

LS developed in an international realm. The Salamanca Statement, an overarching document, has informed the formulation of inclusive policy (UNESCO, 1994).

2.3 Salamanca Statement

The Salamanca Statement is regarded by scholars across the world as a highly influential document (Woolfson et al., 2007, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, Ainscow & Miles, 2008, Greyling, 2009, Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Boyle et al., 2011, Mavuso, 2014). It was formulated in 1994 at the World Conference on Special Needs Education. The Salamanca Statement highlights the need for access to quality education, including the provision of support. Importantly, the document recognises the need for support of learners with barriers to learning and for professionals who can provide this support (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement emphasises that there should be a global IE policy. Diversity calls for a range of needs and the Salamanca Statement requests policy makers, teachers and all educational role players to understand the need for change. The statement highlights the need for all governments to assume the ideals of IE and the particular needs of learners with special needs (UNESCO, 1994). The document recognises diversity as an unavoidable fact in the world and the fact that education systems may need to build the capacity to maintain special needs education. UNESCO (1994:6) explains that "Special education needs' refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties". This statement aligns itself with the Socio Ecological paradigm and highlights the view that learning for learners with barriers to learning should be inclusive (UNESCO, 1994).

The UNESCO framework (1994:12) emphasises that special needs schools should not be dissolved; rather, they should be used as "valuable resource(s)". The framework concludes that "Governments should concentrate on education for all persons, in all regions, in all economic conditions, through both public and private schools" UNESCO (1994:13). The framework calls for action from all participatory countries, highlighting the importance of support as well as action in implementing support and IE (UNESCO, 1994).

Scholars describe the Salamanca Statement as a policy used to formulate inclusive policies internationally; it has served as a basis for South African education policies (Woolfson et al., 2007, Greyling, 2009, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, Walton, 2011, Boyle et al., 2011, Bruggink et al., 2014, Mavuso, 2014, Swart, 2004). Swart and Pettipher (2011:8) believe that the Salamanca Statement is "a key international policy" that underlines the importance and principles of an IE system. Engelbrecht and Green (2007) highlight the fact that the Salamanca Statement emphasises that inclusion is not only necessary in all schools but is also a global right. The statement explains that in establishing mainstream schools, exclusive

education is disbanded and learning can occur with proper implementation of support for learners (Walton et al., 2009).

The influential nature of the Salamanca Statement has been emphasised in literature and is therefore important for all countries intending to implement an IE system. Not only has the statement added aspects to South African policy and law, but its influence has also been mirrored in international literature. The Salamanca Statement has initiated a revolution in the manner learners with barriers to learning are viewed.

In the next section the traditional Medical Deficit Model and the shift to the Social Model, characteristic of the shift to inclusion, are discussed.

2.4 The shift from the Medical Deficit Model to the Social Model

The Medical Deficit Model has been described by several scholars as entrenching the exclusive nature of education and support for learners with barriers to learning (Ainscow & Miles, 2008, Bornman & Rose, 2010, Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016, Rouse, 2008, Swart & Pettipher, 2011). A previously exclusive education paradigm viewed learners with barriers to learning as having a deficit. In most cases, a diagnosis would enable these learners to attend special schools. The Medical Deficit Model was the traditional paradigm from which to view a learner who had barriers to learning. The Integrated National Disability Strategy of 1997 describes people with a disability as to be "pitied" (INDS, 1997:9). There was a degree of prejudice towards learners with barriers; teachers tended to pity them and generally they received a "special" education (Bornman & Rose, 2010). As a result of the barriers these learners faced, poor performance at school level was ascribed to their diagnosis and therefore their inability to perform. Engelbrecht and Green (2007) observe that previously learners were separated according to ability and they were excluded on this basis. The Medical Deficit Model resulted in learners with barriers being excluded from mainstream schools and the greater society. The varying needs of each learner were not accommodated, resulting in exclusion. Walton (2010:1) explains that "ordinary schools […] catered mainly for learners who did not need additional support". Thus, learners who had a diagnosed deficit were not accommodated in "normal" schools. Scholars believe that the Medical Deficit Model was critical in defining education at the time (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007, Nel et al., 2013b).

A paradigm shift, characterised by a move away from the Medical Deficit Model to the Social Ecological Model occurred (Swart & Pettipher, 2011, Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). This resulted in a change in the attitude to learners with possible barriers to learning. The Social Ecological Model emphasised the uniqueness of each learner and that this diversity should form the basis for inclusion and the formulation of new schooling policies (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). The focus fell now on mainstreaming, thereby including all learners. The paradigmatic shift to the Socio Ecological Model allowed for social inclusion (INDS, 1997) and recognised learners with barriers to learning as equal, allowing them to be integrated into society. The approach to learners shifted from one of exclusion to one of inclusion.

In the next section the LST and the support provided internationally is discussed. Firstly, the various terms used to describe the LST internationally are discussed. This is followed by a description of the international LS realm, and finally, of the role of the LST internationally.

2.5 International trends in learning support

International trends tend to characterise the LST as a provider of specialised support to learners in mainstream schools who have barriers to learning (Travers, 2006, Woolfson et al., 2007, Forlin & Rose, 2010, Travers, 2011, Takala & Ahl, 2014).

2.5.1 Introduction

LS as part of inclusion is not unique to South African society; rather, it is a worldwide phenomenon. Owing to the different terminology used to refer to the profession, it must be noted at the outset that LST may not be a term used worldwide. International literature shows evidence of the LST within mainstream schools (Tennant, 2001, Woolfson et al., 2007, Travers, 2011).

A LST may be known by various names in international literature, including LST or support teacher (ST), as in Australian literature (Fielding-Barnsley, 2005). In the United Kingdom an LST may also be called a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) or a Learning Support Assistant (LSA). In Sweden and Finland, the literature speaks of a special teacher (ST) (Sundqvist and Ström, 2015). In these two countries, the LST is a person with special educational knowledge in the area of special needs education and is generally referred to as a special education professional. Singaporean literature refers to the LST as a LS coordinator who provides extra support. It is clear that although there several names for LSTs and even

if their roles differ somewhat, in all cases they are perceived to provide extra support to learners who experience barriers to learning.

The literature review revealed that the problems posed by LS are similar the world over (Forlin & Rose, 2010, Takala & Ahl, 2014, Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016). However, support staff and teachers may not have a clearly defined role in their field of expertise (Travers, 2006, Travers, 2011, Woolfson et al., 2007, Rouse, 2008).

2.5.2 The international learning support picture

The worldwide move towards IE and mainstreaming explains the importance of extra support for learners who have special educational needs. Woolfson et al. (2007:297), observe that "Mainstream regular class teachers and mainstream LSTs have a key role in implementing these inclusion policies". Mainstreaming includes providing support for learners experiencing difficulties related to academic performance as well to behavioural problems. International trends show that support is needed to allow learners to access the curriculum efficiently. LS is deemed vital in international literature (Forlin, 2001, Walton et al., 2009, Greyling, 2009). British scholars believe that LS is important and allows for mainstream schooling to occur effectively, whereas Irish scholars McLachlan and Davis (2013:173) describe mainstreaming as a process to "increase opportunities" for all learners to finish school and obtain a job in the workplace.

Scholars stress the influence of the Salamanca Statement (as discussed) in its global application, specifically in the IE realm (Woolfson et al., 2007, Boyle et al., 2011, Keating & O'Connor, 2012, Bruggink et al., 2014). As part of the paradigmatic shift to a more inclusive society, LSTs play a crucial role in implementing IE (Woolfson et al., 2007). However, Turkish scholars Gurgur and Uzuner (2011) explain that LS seems to be less prevalent in Turkey, even though their education system is inclusive, as support is a relatively new concept in that country. There appears to be few or no private support services available to Turkish learners (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011).

Not only do LSTs have an important role to play, but their attitudes toward support for learning are also influential to the whole school model (Woolfson et al., 2007). A mainstream classroom system would not be possible if there was no added support available for learners. In developed countries, not only is LS provided but teachers at some schools also receive information and extra training on how to most effectively provide LS.

In order to provide effective support to learners, LSTs need defined roles. Irish scholar Travers (2011) explains that the poor quality of support provided is the result of a "lack of clarity about the support teacher's role" and the inadequate boundaries of the LST's role. Equally, Swedish scholars Takala and Ahl (2014) explain LSTs' knowledge as being broad within their area of expertise; the LST needs to have an overview of barriers to learning. Furthermore, Scottish scholars Wilson et al. (2007), describe the role of support teachers in schools as being different and complex. McLachlan and Davis (2013) believe that the role of support teachers in the education system is complicated and emotionally involved. Literature from the United Kingdom holds that fulfilling the role of a support teacher is complex and some may not be equipped to provide the necessary LS (McLachlan & Davis, 2013). However, Travers (2006) found that LSTs has a false ideas of what their role was within mainstream schools. This underlines the ambiguity of the LST's role and responsibilities.

2.6 Methods of learning support provision by LST

Literature defines two main methodologies in the provision of LS, internationally and locally. The first method is withdrawal. This comprises removing a learner from a classroom environment and providing LS individually (Forlin, 2001, Travers, 2006, Fielding-Barnsley, 2005, Takala & Ahl, 2014, Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). Secondly, co-teaching is used both locally and internationally. This process involves the LST teaching collaboratively with the general teacher in the classroom environment and allows for immediate support while the learner is in the classroom (Forlin & Rose, 2010, Travers, 2011, Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Butt, 2016, Dreyer, 2014).

LS is provided using one of these methodologies. The LS provided should be feasible and make use of appropriate resources (Boyle et al., 2011, Takala & Ahl, 2014, Travers, 2006, Forlin, 2001). As Australian scholars explain, LS is provided on the basis of equity for learners (Boyle et al., 2011). Swedish scholars Takala and Ahl (2014:72) found that the support provided to learners took various forms such as "regular practice, special programmes, and individual and small group support".

2.6.1 Learning support: Withdrawal of a learner

Withdrawal of a learner means that the learner is taken out of the classroom environment to receive LS. Travers (2011) explains that this exclusive manner of providing support is a

well-used method of LS in Irish primary schools. Similarly, Mulholland and O'Connor (2016) explain that withdrawal of individual learners or small groups of learners is an effective manner through which support is provided. Travers (2006) adds that LS is offered to learners in mainstream schools by an LST who identifies and supports learners according to their needs, withdrawing them from the classroom and remediating them on an individual basis. Mulholland and O'Connor (2016:3) explain that the support is provided by removing the learner from the classroom and providing support in a "learning support room".

In Finland, however, the LST appears to be more therapeutic and hands on with learners (Takala & Ahl, 2014). Takala and Ahl (2014:72) describe the process of support as being "exclusive" when withdrawing a learner from a mainstream class to provide support. This kind of LS is generally provided to learners outside of their main classes (Takala & Ahl, 2014). When working one-on-one with learners, the session is more therapeutic and intense; when working in a classroom situation, the support may seem overall more inclusive and not focused solely on one learners' 'deficit' (Travers, 2006).

As part of the withdrawal process, each Swedish learner has an Individualised Educational Plan (IEP), developed in order to achieve the required results (Takala & Ahl, 2014). The support delivered by the LST could include differentiation, which means the curriculum is adapted to the ability of the individual learner. These methods are used in individual sessions with an LST (Butt, 2016). Similarly, Dutch LSTs implement inclusive ideals by making adaptations to the curriculum and referring learners for individualised support (Bruggink et al., 2014). It appears that the withdrawal method has proved effective in Australia, and is based on the time the LST needs to spend supporting the individual learner (Butt, 2016).

2.6.2 Learning support as co-teaching

Co teaching seems to feature as a popular trend in which LST are able to implement LS in mainstream schools (Butt, 2016, Travers, 2011). Turkish scholars explain that co-teaching is a method in which support is provided by the LST guiding learners while the class teacher teaches a 'normal' lesson (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011).

Irish primary schools do not make much use of the co-teaching model, however, and there seems to be criticism of this model at best (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). The Irish educational system makes use of inclusive principles. Travers (2006) explains that the Irish education system has moved away from focusing on the Medical Deficit Model, which

emphasised exclusion, to an education system that seeks to modify the curriculum in order to include learners with barriers to learning. The Salamanca Statement underlies the formulation of their inclusive stance.

2.7 The roles international LSTs play

The role of LSTs in schools is multi-faceted and complex (Wilson et al., 2007). The absence of a clear definition of the role has given rise to ambiguity in the role internationally. A role is a set of processes that someone assumes within a specific sphere. Scottish scholars Wilson et al. (2007:1153), describe the LST's role as covering a "wide range of activities". Dutch scholars Bruggink et al. (2014), emphasise that the LS system "remains scarce" and clearer role definition is required.

It is important for support to be effective, that LSTs are seen and treated as professionals in the area of LS. In so doing, clearer boundaries in terms of responsibilities of the LSTs could be set (Keating & O'Connor, 2012). Scholars observe that the role of the LST has been severely clouded and role confusion and discrepancies in responsibilities have allowed the LSTs' skills to be used in other areas (Travers, 2006, McConkey & Abbott, 2011, Keating & O'Connor, 2012). Travers (2011:476) stresses that the need for "a reconceptualization of support roles is vital". In the same vein, Fielding-Barnsley (2005:73) describes the role of the LST as "ever changing".

A study conducted by Australian scholar Forlin (2001:125) found that LSTs' roles comprise four main areas, "(a) identifying needs of students, (b) assessment and teaching, (c) collaborative planning, and (d) maintaining their teaching expertise". Bruggink et al. (2014), believe that IE caters for individuals and that learners no longer fit into a general mould. LSTs implement inclusive ideals by addressing the adaptations to the curriculum and refer to support for individuals (Bruggink et al., 2014).

The following sections discuss the various roles of the LST as described in the literature. These roles illustrate the vast expertise required and broad nature of the role of the LST in international mainstream schools.

2.7.1 A collaborative role

LSTs play a collaborative role in mainstream schools across the globe. If they are to fulfil a whole-school model, LSTs cannot provide support by themselves. Travers (2011) explains

that “in-class models of support” represent the ideal shift in LS. In order for in-class support to happen, an LST must embrace collaboration as one of his or her roles (Woolfson et al., 2007, Forlin & Rose, 2010, Boyle et al., 2011, Takala & Ahl, 2014, Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016, Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). The in-class model as conceptualised by Travers (2011) is a methodology in which the LST teaches with the general teacher in the same classroom. Australian scholars, Boyle et al. (2011:77), believe LS “requires collegial support to work effectively” in schools

In order to be a collaborative role player in providing LS, LSTs work together with general teachers on the foundation and implementation of LS programmes in international schools (Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016). Scottish scholars Wilson et al. (2007:1154), emphasise the importance of a “whole school” approach in providing support to these learners. This requires that an LST is an informant to support general teachers, so that LS can happen in and out of the classroom (Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016). Similarly, Travers (2011) believes that part of the role of the LST is the responsibility to support learners. LSTs work in collaboration with general teachers to work together on adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of the learners who need support (Travers, 2011). Australian scholars Boyle et al. (2011), stress the importance of the LST in providing support to general teachers in schools.

Takala and Ahl (2014) describe the role of the LST as collaborative in that he or she must collaborate not only with the other teachers within the school, but also with parents in devising the most suitable plan for individual learners.

2.7.2 Role differentiation between SENCO teacher and LST

Travers (2006) observes that it is problematic if the role of an LST is considered to be the same as that of a SENCO. It is commonly believed that LSTs have the same attributes as special needs teachers when performing their role in mainstream schools as they perform the same role in providing learners with barriers to learning with support (Woolfson et al., 2007).

Keating and O’Connor (2012:534) explain that the LST is seen as the medium through which “fulfilling the educational rights of pupils” can occur. The position of the LST is regarded non-academic and focuses rather on providing specific support for learners who have barriers to learning (Keating & O’Connor, 2012).

2.7.3 A context reliant LST

The role of an LST is context reliant; in other words the LS that is designed and managed will differ from school to school and country to country (Forlin, 2001). Takala and Ahl (2014:75) describe the role of the LST in Sweden and Finland as "context-dependent," meaning that in these two countries LSTs will have different duties depending on where they work.

2.7.4 The LST as LS coordinator

It becomes evident from the literature that the LST is required to assume a multi-faceted coordinator or leadership role in implementing LS. A coordinator seems a suitable term with which to describe this specific role. The LST coordinates and manages several aspects involved with the LS process, leading the process of support in schools (Walton et al., 2009). In Sweden, LSTs are seen as coordinators of LS as they are in charge of the individualised LS programmes for each learner (Takala & Ahl, 2014). In Hong Kong, Forlin and Rose (2010) discovered that as part of the various roles an LST needs to fulfil, the main role is to organise the LS programmes, almost consulting as an expert but working as the leader in the field.

In Spain one of the key functions of an LST is to manage the implementation of LS programmes within a school (Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016). Spanish scholars (Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016) describe the LST as organising the programmes as well as overseeing the curriculum adaptations that are made in order to support learners with barriers to learning.

In the United Kingdom an LST's role is seen more as a leadership role, in that LSTs lead the implementation of LS programmes and coordinate the collaboration with other staff members (Woolfson et al., 2007). Walton et al. (2009), describe the managerial role of a Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in schools as one in which advanced knowledge of how LS programmes should run and benefit the number of learners is required. Similarly, Irish scholars, Mulholland and O'Connor (2016) attribute a managerial position to the LST's role in primary schools, in that he or she is involved in the planning of LS programmes. The LST acts thus as a coordinator of LS programmes and an organiser of support for all learners in the school. LSTs coordinate their own IEPs for learners who require specific programmes.

2.7.5 The LST as a consultant

Regarding the LST as a consultant implies that he or she is able to consult not only with other colleagues in order to inform them, but also with learners when investigating how LS could assist them. Fielding-Barnsley (2005) describes an LST's role as mainly consultative in its aim to reintegrate learners with barriers into mainstream classrooms. This is to say that learners have less contact with the LST who enables them to attend mainstream classes, without being withdrawn for LS sessions (Fielding-Barnsley, 2005).

There seems to be general consensus that a vital aspect of the role of the LST is to consult regularly with the general teachers. This is emphasised by Forlin (2001), who observes that there may be a separation of the LST from the rest of the teachers.

Sundqvist and Ström (2015) describe how LSTs in Finland are unsure of their role in classrooms and tend to prefer to work as consultants for schools. The Finnish LS system works well and the majority of learners receive support on various levels. In Swedish schools, LSTs work on the basis of identifying learners with barriers and managing programmes to support individuals. Takala and Ahl (2014) note that LSTs work in collaboration with parents, teachers and institutions to provide the most appropriate support for individual learners. In this way they ensure academic and personal success.

Takala and Ahl (2014) describe the role of a Swedish LST as a consultant to general teachers, in that they provide information to these teachers about LS and how to provide LS to learners. They found that "their roles were providing pedagogical advice, observing/testing pupils with learning difficulties and providing a link to the head of the school" (Takala & Ahl, 2014:65). In Finland the LST also assumes a consultative role; however, this is limited in that he or she spends more time with learners (Takala & Ahl, 2014). The LST is largely a consultant in implementing LS.

2.7.6 The LST as a co-teacher

Co-teaching is a methodology that is sometimes adopted by schools as part of mainstreaming. In order to provide an inclusive setting for learners, and instead of using the withdrawal support method, the LST co-teaches in the class with the general teacher. Co-teaching as a method of LS has been described by several scholars (Forlin & Rose, 2010, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015). The task of teaching in a classroom is shared between the two

teachers and the LST provides support to learners throughout the lesson (Forlin & Rose, 2010).

In a Swedish study, Sundqvist and Ström (2015) found that the implementation of LS by LSTs (special teachers) was either collaborative in terms of co-teaching or the special teacher was solely used as a consultant. Australian scholars Forlin and Rose (2010) argue that in order for support to remain inclusive, co-teaching allows support to occur within a classroom setting, where the LST becomes a co-teacher.

2.7.7 The LST as a multidisciplinary professional

It is evident from the literature that the LST takes on a multitude of tasks, covering many aspects of LS, that subsumed into their role (Takala & Ahl, 2014, Travers, 2011, Woolfson et al., 2007). In Greece, an LST is regarded as a multidisciplinary professional in that he or she is able to provide advice to principals and support to general teachers (Rontou, 2013). The role of multidisciplinary professional should be one a role that is often taken on, but it has been described as lacking in a study by Rontou (2013). Scottish scholars Wilson et al. (2007), explain that LSTs seem to be out-sourced specialists who provide support that covers many aspects, academic or emotional, to learners.

Similarly, Travers (2006:156) describes an influx of support teachers to schools in an effort to support learners effectively when facing "emotional and behavioural" challenges. In a Spanish study by Sanahuja-Gavaldá et al. (2016:305), a member of staff from a school explained that "it is important that the support teacher is giving an intensive support to the student …". This support appeared to be multi-disciplinary in nature. Irish LSTs are regarded as professionals who are separate from class teachers (Keating & O'Connor, 2012). The LST is seen as a professional who focuses on providing specific support for learners who face barriers to learning. Keating and O'Connor (2012:534) explain that LSTs are seen as "fulfilling the educational rights of pupils". Mulholland and O'Connor (2016:3) argue that, in general, LS in Ireland is based on an assessment of learners by other "relevant professionals". The review of the literature revealed a picture of the LST as a professional with varied roles as a result of the multidisciplinary nature of the LST's work in schools.

2.7.8 Specialist knowledge informs the role

LSTs provide support based on their specialised knowledge (Wilson et al., 2007). In the Scottish education system, for instance, the vital role of the LST must be based on their

additionally acquired knowledge and skills if they are to provide support to learners (Wilson et al., 2007). Wilson et al. (2007), explain that LSTs are mostly out-sourced specialists, and that their support may be academic or emotional. As the whole school approach demands that all teachers provide support, only particular cases would receive specific support from LSTs.

Forlin and Rose (2010) explain that the use of teachers who have expertise in their support role supports colleagues but more importantly, learners. Similarly, Fielding-Barnsley (2005:69) stresses that the LST should have "specialist knowledge" and should have an "advanced qualification" in order to provide support to learners. Travers (2006) argues that an LST can only function effectively, firstly, once he or she has a general teaching degree and secondly, after specialising in LS.

Forlin and Rose (2010) highlight the importance of the specialised knowledge of the LST in managing the implementation of LS programmes in the Hong Kong education system. Santos et al. (2016), explain that such expert knowledge will enable the LST to design and manage LS programmes that effectively meet the needs of learners. Dutch literature speaks of special educational support that must be provided by LSTs who provide additional educational support (Bruggink et al., 2014). Similarly, Woolfson et al. (2007), note that it is important that learners with special needs receive extra support from LSTs who have a similar bank of knowledge as a special needs school teacher. This will ensure that the most effective support is provided.

In the Scottish education system specifically, the vital role of the LST must be based on their additionally acquired knowledge and skills (Wilson et al., 2007). Swedish literature states that the LST needs to have subject knowledge or expertise in order to provide adequate support to learners (Takala & Ahl, 2014). The LST's knowledge will cover subjects at school but will include knowledge of behavioural aspects in order to provide emotional support (Takala & Ahl, 2014).

The LST implements this change by changing the views of class teachers. (Forlin, 2001) believes that LSTs have specialised knowledge that allows them to inform change in the curriculum and implement support. Support should be specific to the needs of the individual learner and this is why individualised programmes are developed (Forlin, 2001).

2.8 Conclusion on International trends

International LS deals with numerous factors. Bruggink et al. (2014:167), found that "students scored significantly higher on all dimensions of additional LS than non-identified students from the same classroom". Some scholars conclude that the LS that is being provided and implemented is inadequate (Quah & Jones, 1996, Forlin, 2001, Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Bruggink et al., 2014). Not only does it seem that there is no specific method through which LS should be implemented, but the prevalence of LS is based on access to specialised LSTs (Forlin, 2001, Takala & Ahl, 2014).

It appears that LS is focused either on removing the learner from a mainstream class to provide remediation or on co-teaching. Co-teaching is a means of implementing LS that has received some attention, but the sole focus is not on the LST, but rather on a collaborative team effort in providing support (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Butt, 2016). Scholars highlight the view that implementation of LS has been severely clouded by role confusion that has resulted in LSTs' skills being used in other areas (Travers, 2006, McConkey & Abbott, 2011, Keating & O'Connor, 2012).

In the next section, I, contextualise LS in South Africa. I provide an overview of influential policies and acts that have driven the implementation LS in South Africa and explain the process of LS in schools, with a special focus on private schools. The section concludes with a discussion of the roles of the LST as they are described in South African literature.

2.9 Learning support in South Africa

South Africa's IE system has undergone much change in the post-apartheid era and this has led inevitably inclusivity as the education system has embraced the principles of the South African Constitution. LS is one of the key areas of development and the shift in paradigm emphasises a human rights' perspective of each learner and the barriers they may face (Dreyer et al., 2012). Engelbrecht et al. (2006), describes the South African education system as developing with the Constitution and Bill of Rights. In embracing human rights, including the rights to equality and education for all, the education system has been transformed from the previous dispensation which excluded support for learners.

The Schools Act of 1996 stipulates that education should be accessible to all, including learners with barriers to learning (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Matoti (2010) explains that in generating an education system that is focused on all learners, each individual should

be able to reach their full potential. Mavuso (2014:455) says that LS is "thus seen as one of the key areas to fulfil education for all".

By assuming that education should be accessible and fair for all learners, LS was established to assist learners with their school work. Dreyer (2014) explains that the onus is now on managers of mainstream schools to ensure that adequate and appropriate support is provided to learners. This influences the implementation of LS in South Africa (Dreyer, 2014, Mavuso, 2014). Nel et al. (2013a:85), emphasise that through implementing LS, "… every learner can learn and […] the teacher should make provision for every learner to succeed".

LS is a category of support provided by mainstream schools, with the aim of providing scholastic support to learners with barriers to learning. Eloff and Ebersöhn (2004) observe that this support consists of various activities and support measures that are implemented by the LST. In order to provide effective support, district based support teams and institutional level support teams have also been established (Dreyer et al., 2012).

LS specialists are considered essential by (Walton et al., 2009). LS has found its implementation in the worldwide move toward mainstreaming. Mainstreaming allows for learners with barriers to learning to be supported in schools. The emergence of LSTs comes from the necessity of having extra support available. Walton et al. (2009), explain that as a part of formulating an inclusive policy, LSTs are considered significant in most developed countries' education systems. International literature indicates that LS is provided at schools in developed countries (Forlin, 2001, Walton et al., 2009, Greyling, 2009). It may be that the process of implementing LS is similar nationally and internationally. It is critical that context is considered as this will have a direct impact on the level and quality of LS that is implemented in schools (Dreyer et al., 2012).

2.10 Overview of influential legislature

In order to best understand the role of the LST, the acts and white papers that have influenced the implementation of LS in South Africa are discussed here. Figure 2.2 illustrates the filtration method I used to evaluate these South African policies.

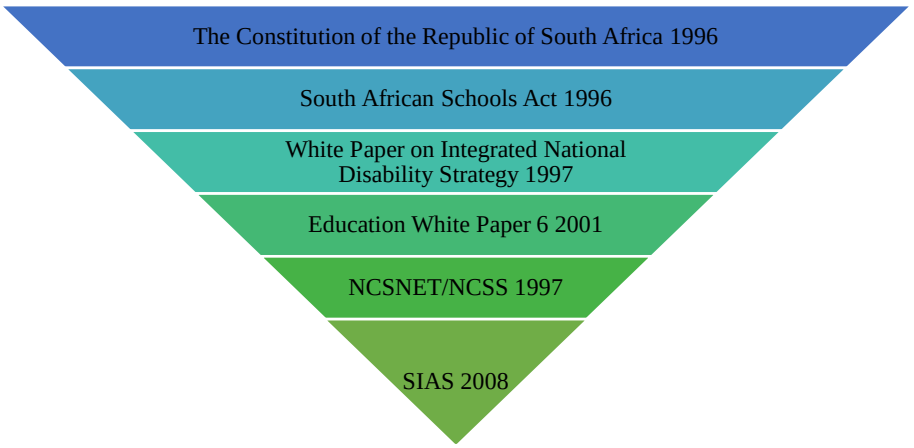

Figure 2.2: Filtration of influential South African policies

A number of South African policies and white papers have been published. These are discussed in order to provide an outline of what they stipulate LS should comprise of and the guidance provided for LSTs. The policies included here are the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, South African Schools Act, White Paper on Integrated National Disability Strategy, Education White Paper 6, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the National Strategy on Identification, Assessment and Screening.

2.10.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996

All South African policies are influenced and aligned with the Constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996. This is the overarching and most influential of all the laws and it is thus important to recognise its influence in all educational policies in South Africa, including legislation on LS. In Chapter One of the Constitution it is stated that "This constitution is the supreme law of the Republic; law or conduct inconsistent with it is invalid …" (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:5). This statement in the founding provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa underlines all actions within our country and all informs policy on LS. As a result of the educational inequalities in the past, the Constitution of South Africa has been used to inform policy. Three specific rights from the South African Constitution Act 108 of 1996 are as follows:

Firstly,

> "Equality (Section 9): The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age,

> disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth" (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:7).

Secondly,

> "Children (section 28)(2): A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child" (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:13).

Thirdly,

> "Education (section 29): Everyone has the right – (a) to a basic education, including adult basic education and, (b) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible" (Republic of South Africa, 1996a:13).

In terms of education, the significant rights are firstly, Equality (section 9), secondly, Children (Section 28) and, thirdly, Education (section 29), (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). These three human rights inform education policies such as the Education White Paper 6 of 2001, South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 and the White Paper on Integrated Disability Strategy of 1995, all of which are discussed below. The democratic change seen in South Africa allowed for education for *all* learners. Greyling (2009) states that on the basis of these fundamental constitutional rights inclusion in education is inevitable.

An overarching consideration of Section 28(2) is perhaps most influential in the implementation of LS. This section deals with the best interests of the child; the best interests of each learner should be the main focus when implementing LS. This includes enabling all learners to access schooling in the most appropriate circumstance with the relevant support (Engelbrecht et al., 2006). LS as part of mainstreaming is effective support for learners with mild barriers to learning (Dreyer et al., 2012, Dreyer, 2013, Mavuso, 2014, Krüger & Yorke, 2010). Learners with more severe barriers to learning will be placed in a special needs school, where specific needs can be catered for.

2.10.2 The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996

> "The member of the Executive Council must, where reasonably practicable, provide education for learners with special education needs at ordinary public schools and provide relevant educational support services for such learners" – Section 12(4) (Republic, 1996b:10).

The South African Schools Act of 1996 is the policy that underpins general education in South Africa and ensures the implementation of the Constitution in all South African schools (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Greyling (2009) argues that on the basis of fundamental constitutional rights, inclusion in education is inevitable. Education must keep up with changes in society and this means providing support for learners with special needs.

2.10.3 Integrated National Disability Strategy for South Africa of 1995

> "Equity for learners with disabilities implies the availability of additional support mechanisms within an inclusive learning environment", Chapter 3, White Paper on Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS, 1997:39).

As part of a human rights approach, the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy focuses on integrating people with disabilities into society. The focus therefore is socially rather than medically inclined. The strategy states that the vision is for "a society for all" (INDS, 1997:v). In Chapter 3 of the White Paper on Integrated National Disability Strategy, the section on education explains the tendency for learners to be defined by their diagnosis (INDS, 1997). In order to best accommodate learners within an IE system, the White Paper calls for a "single education system" that enables learners to attend school and be provided with LS. The Integrated National Disability Strategy highlights the disparities people with disabilities may face. The National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training report (discussed later), considers this document and underlines the need for people with disabilities to be accommodated (Department of Education, 1997).

IE assumes a society for all learners and requires teachers to work as a support team to guide learners. Bornman and Rose (2010:240) argue that "Inclusion also emphasises the role of closer collaboration between different members of a team, and teachers need to develop and build specific skills in negotiation, joint decision-making and problem solving". Diversity is unavoidable in South African classrooms and teachers need to make use of the IE strategy.

2.10.4 Education White Paper 6

The Education White Paper 6 (EWP6 hereafter) is focused on creating a democratic schooling system in South Africa which is not biased against learners who may face barriers to learning. Based on the Constitution and informed by the Integrated National Disability strategy, EWP6 strives to provide mainstream schools to learners where feasibly possible (Department of Education, 2001). EWP6 states that "all children and youth need support" and that in accepting all learners into schools where possible, appropriate support should be provided (Department of Education, 2001:16). The EWP6 stipulates that the support provided to learners may be provided by various stakeholders and different levels of support may be necessary (Department of Education, 2001).

The appropriate support should be provided to learners on a learner-centred basis. Although the EWP6 does not specifically define the role of the LST, it does stipulate that the support

should be provided by professionals who have the capacity and knowledge on how best to provide the appropriate support to learners (Department of Education, 2001).

2.10.5 National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS)

In order to redress the inequalities of the past, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) was established and this commission generated the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS Report) in 1997 (Nel et al., 2013b). The committee was established in 1996 by the government at the time and the aim was to establish a clear understanding of what support learners with barriers in South African schools were receiving. The commission was formulated with the purpose of making "recommendations on all aspects of 'special needs' and support services in education and training in South Africa" (Department of Education, 1997:2).

The NCSNET/NCESS report discusses the various policies and legislation that were used to formulate conclusions within the report. These include the Constitution, EWP6, The South African Schools Act, the Integrated National Disability Strategy and the Salamanca Statement. All these are discussed individually in the respective sections. However, it is important to note that the report on Special Needs Education took into account these documents and policies when formulating the conclusions to the report (Department of Education, 1997).

The report makes recommendations to the education system in order that LS is implemented in South African schools. The report states that all learning centres have a "centre-of-learning-based support structures" that could provide support to teachers and learners should they need it (Department of Education, 1997:56). The report (Department of Education, 1997:3) states that "Education Support Services' include all human and other resources that provide support to individual learners". Again, the report does not provide a particular definition of the role of the LST; however, it is stated that LS could be "teaching and learning interventions" as well as the assessment of learners by LSTs (Department of Education, 1997:3). In addition, it is stated that LS should be provided by "specialised educational support personnel" (Department of Education, 1997:3).

2.10.6 National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)

The National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support, also referred to as the SIAS, is a strategy that was developed by the Department of Education in 2008 (Department of Education, 2008). This paper was drafted to help and guide teachers within schools in understanding the process of identifying learners with barriers to learning and implementing the most suitable path of support for them Department of Education, 2008). The document underlines and highlights the responsibilities of each of the role players in providing support for learners. District-based support teams (DBST) and institution level support teams (ILST) are crucial in the implementation of this policy and the greater ideal of IE within the South African education system.

The document recognises that learners need to be identified as soon as possible to receive the best and most suitable level of support from all the role players in a school. The document describes a "Support Needs Assessment;" to assess how effectively these learners are performing in the education they are receiving, and to design a support system for the individual and then assess whether this plan is benefiting the learner (Department of Education, 2008:9).

2.11 Conclusion on influential acts and policies

All of the acts and policies discussed here should have a combined influence on the implementation of effective IE and LS in the South African education system. Ntombela (2011) notes the numerous polices that have been written but expresses concern as to how effectively these policies are implemented. Awareness of the policies is important for both general teachers and LSTs (Ntombela, 2011).

It is evident from the literature that the Constitution of South Africa has played a very important role in developing policy for education in *all* schools for *all* learners. The NCSNET/NCESS has allowed for an assessment of where South Africa is in terms of IE and where it should beEWP6 is a policy that is still used in schools today and written about in the literature (Engelbrecht et al., 2006, Walton et al., 2009, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001, Ntombela, 2011, Pather, 2011, Dreyer et al., 2012). The National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) is a helpful document for teachers as well as LSTs in that it provides the legal process to followed when referring a learner for extra support. The white paper on Integrated National Disability

Strategy allows for a deeper understanding of who is considered disabled and how society needs to involve individuals who may be regarded as disabled in some way; it remains society's responsibility to include and enable these individuals.

It is clear that these policies should be kept in mind in order to ensure the best support in schools and to develop IE in South Africa.

2.12 Learning support in South African schools

A paradigmatic change has occurred in terms of Special Needs Education in South African schools. Dreyer (2013) argues that LS has been directly influenced by IE and therefore LSTs need to support learners with barriers to learning. IE allows learners with barriers to participate in a learning environment that is as conventional as possible, advantageously interacting socially and participating in society (Lerner & Johns, 2012). LS finds its origins from this change in view, in that learners now receive the necessary support to learn more effectively. LS is effectively supporting learners through the schooling system so that they can succeed in society. Mavuso (2014) argues that IE underpinned by the ideal of education for all implies that LS is a prerequisite for all learners in South Africa.

The increased focus on LS in South African schools comes with responsibilities for all teachers, not only the LST. Dreyer (2014) explains that the onus is now on managers of mainstream schools to ensure that adequate and appropriate support is provided to their learners. This then influences the implementation of LS in South Africa.

The importance of LS is expressed throughout the literature. In the South African context, (Dreyer, 2014) highlights the importance of LS as part of an IE system. LS in South Africa has not been widely researched (Dreyer, 2014). However, this should be investigated together with the concept of mainstreaming. Dreyer (2014) notes that the relationship between mainstreaming and LS has been largely left unexplored. LS is the vital support from which learners with various barriers and needs will benefit. Eloff and Ebersöhn (2004) argue that this support takes the form of various activities and support measures put in place by the LST. LS came about when the ideal of IE was formed soon after South Africa became a democracy. The LS system is still being formulated and refined even though the inclusive paradigm has been dominant in South African schools since the beginning of democracy (Pather, 2011). Dreyer (2014) and Mavuso (2014) both believe that LS is essential for learners in mainstream schools, specifically for learners who struggle with the academic

demands. Diversity manifests in varying degrees and therefore individualised support is essential. Dreyer (2014:179) explains that "very few teachers are equipped and willing to provide the individualised and intense instruction needed in the modern diverse classroom". This poses a dilemma as many learners in the South African schooling system need support but their teachers may be ill equipped to provide it. Mavuso (2014) explores the reality of poor teacher education and training in the past that has resulted in poor support being available to learners. Naicker (2007) confirms that learners are not receiving proper and timely LS.

IE principles have come a long way in South Africa. Previously disadvantaged learners had little access to education and even less to LS. The South African school system has become known for its constant change and development. In embracing human rights such as equality and education for all, the education system, and particularly LS, has made great strides. Pather (2011) describes a tension in the system between the policies that have been formulated to implement LS in South Africa and the actual practitioners. Learners in South Africa have a right to education despite any barriers they may face. The learners need support to obtain an education.

As previously discussed, the LS process should occur within a team. It is a collaborative process that requires different skills and knowledge from all staff members of a school. Dreyer (2014) argues that LS cannot be provided in the same manner for every learner; it must be individualised.

Few studies have been conducted in the field of LS. There may be a misconception in LS about roles and responsibilities as there appears to be a discrepancy between the roles that demanded of an LST in policy and practice (Dreyer, 2013). A study conducted by Dreyer (2014) found that LSTs were not used effectively in the collaboration process, but were regarded as individual staff members there to deal with learners with barriers to learning.. Her study also revealed that LSTs were being used as providers of advice rather than as specialists who should be working in a team to provide support. Dreyer (2014) reiterated that the process of support within the school was still focused on the Medical Deficit Model rather than on the inclusive principles as learners were being sent elsewhere for support. This highlighted the point that the LST tends to be regarded as a specialist who deals with learners, rather than someone who works as a cooperative member of the IE system.

The pattern that emerges in the South African literature of LSTs who are underutilised as a result of misunderstandings about their role. Dreyer (2014:188) describes a misconception of the "role and function of the LST" adding that this has been brought about by a lack of collaboration between LSTs and school teachers.

2.13 Learning support in private South African schools

Private schools are schools that run independently from government funded schools. It appears that owing to the independent nature and the affluence of private schools, they are more likely to employ LSTs (Walton et al., 2009). Government schools may not have readily available funding to employ an LST. Walton (2011) explains that in the past private schools were able to provide special education to learners of all racial groups as they were privately funded. Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001:314) ascribe the affordability of IE at private schools to their "access to resources". Private schools are generally owned by shareholders and chosen by parents if government schools are not a primary choice (Walton et al., 2009). Certain schools may have more advanced LS programmes and resources than others. LS models are based on schools that are well resourced and on the type of LS provided in first world countries (Dreyer et al., 2012).

Walton et al. (2009), argue that in general, private schools in South Africa have greater financial resources and are thus better able to provide support by adapting classrooms, teaching methods and timetable requirements to support learners with barriers to learning.

Walton et al. (2009), argue that more support personnel LS are employed in private schools, because of these schools' greater financial. The importance of LS should be considered in every school; however, private schools are more likely to have access to funds that could be utilised for this purpose. These funds could be used for extra resources for support sessions to help learners, such as computers or IT labs.

2.14 The exclusivity of withdrawal

It seems that the traditional values of the Medical Deficit Model are still upheld, and Dreyer (2013:61) observes that "the old medical model still prevails" (Dreyer, 2014) with learners being supported outside the mainstream classroom. LSTs provide individual LS to learners by withdrawing them from the classroom (Dreyer, 2014).

LSTs in particular fulfil an ambiguous role in the South African school system in. The literature indicates that some aspects of their role which overlap do to occur at some schools when the appointed LST provides learners with LS (Dreyer et al., 2012).

2.15 The role of the LST in South African schools

There seems to be an absence of role definition in the field of LS; an LST's job description "is still vague and is still deeply rooted in the medical model paradigm" (Dreyer, 2013:62). LSTs should deal with support services required by learners and the role of the LST is "complex and multifaceted" (Dreyer et al., 2012:286). Internationally, there is a range of definitions of the LST's role (Dreyer, 2013). Dreyer (2014) argues that many teachers do not see their function as one to provide support for learners, but prefer to refer such learners to an expert in the field. Very often the role of the LST is misdirected in mainstream schools. Dreyer (2014:187) again argues that LS is "experienced as an advice-giving session by LSTs" But some changes in the role of the LST in South African schools are becoming apparent (Dreyer, 2014). Previously, the role of supporting learners with barriers to learning would have been the responsibility of the special needs teacher. There are, however, still teachers who have specialised in the field of providing support, and this indicates that a role shift has taken place (Dreyer, 2014).

LSTs have a moral duty to include learners with barriers to learning; in order to provide them with an education, it is necessary for all members of the school team to work together (Krüger & Yorke, 2010). Below are some roles and responsibilities of the LST that have emerged from the literature. None of these roles seems explicit.

2.15.1 Collaborative role of LST

In the reconceptualization of LS in South Africa, educationists favoured a collaborative, whole school approach as most effective in supporting learners with barriers to learning. Dreyer (2014) describes the role of an LST to be a member of the support staff team, in that the LST is simply one aspect of providing support to learners. If LS is to be effective, Dreyer et al. (2012), emphasises that LSTs should work collaboratively with general teachers. Krüger and Yorke (2010:304) also stress the need for collaboration with general teachers, stating that "team work" is necessary for effective support of learners.

2.15.2 "Specialist support" provider

Specialist knowledge has been highlighted in the South African literature. It is generally accepted that part of practising as an LST includes the requirement of specialist knowledge to inform the implementation of LS in schools. Dreyer (2014:187) speaks of "specialist support" providers as LST, in that general teachers do not appear to provide LS on their own, but rather make use of an LST to support learners.

2.15.3 LST as coordinator

As seen in international literature, LSTs often assume a managerial role. This is reflected in South African literature as LSTs managing the implementation of LS programmes. Dreyer et al. (2012), explains that initially, LSTs in South Africa were employed at schools to oversee the implementation of LS programmes; however, this may not be the case any longer. Dreyer (2013:62) did find, however, that the LST "should be acknowledged as part of senior leadership.

2.15.4 LST as a consultant

As a result of the progression in LS, LSTs are now required to provide guidance and support to general teachers (Dreyer, 2013). A study conducted by Dreyer (2014) found that LSTs gives advice to general teachers after having done an assessment of each individual learner's needs. The LST provides advice and resources to general teachers so that they can provide LS in their own classrooms (Dreyer et al., 2012). Krüger and Yorke (2010) found that the LST's role in schools is to consult collaboratively with general teachers and school management systems.

It appears that LSTs are using their specialist knowledge of the barriers to learning to provide support and information to general teachers (Dreyer, 2014).

2.15.5 LST as co-teacher

One of the roles an LST assumes is that of co-teacher. Krüger and Yorke (2010) explain that when an LST co-teaches he or she becomes the specialist teacher in the classroom and teaches together with the general teacher in order to support the learner.

2.16 Conclusion on South African trends

It seems that there is no clear definition of the LST's role in South African schools. Krüger and Yorke (2010) observe that "Very few studies have focused on LSTs in independent schools and their possible contribution to an inclusive model of education" (2010:294). Evidence of role definition and the attendant responsibilities is not found contained specifically in literature or in the relevant policies. What is clear is that the field of LS has not been as widely researched locally as it has been international. Dreyer (2014:179) notes that this area of expertise is "relatively unexplored".

It is evident from the literature, particularly South African literature that LS should be offered as a whole school model. Du Toit and Forlin (2009:650) describe LS as a collaborative process as this "… describes the complexity of influences, interactions and interrelations between a learner and all the systems …" Collaboration is a trend that is evident in the South African literature; collaboration in planning and implementing LS programmes appears to be the key to implementing IE (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Dreyer, 2014).

There is evidence, however, that LS is highly individualised in the manner it is currently being implemented. In this model, an LST is a specialised individual who withdraws a learner from class in order to provide academic support (Engelbrecht et al., 2006, Walton et al., 2009, Pather, 2011, Dreyer, 2013).

2.17 Summary of findings regarding the literature review

Both international and South African studies were reviewed. The thread of legislation and policies was woven through all these studies. Scholars cited the Salamanca Statement of 1994 as an overarching policy that was used globally and emphasised its influence on LS (Ainscow & Miles, 2008, Greyling, 2009, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was particularly influential, in that it provided the groundwork for the evolution of IE in South Africa (Engelbrecht et al., 2006, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009). South African literature also stressed the influence of the EWP6. This white paper focuses on the transformation of the South African school system into an inclusive and supportive one (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Ntombela, 2011, Mavuso, 2014).

In both national and international literature there was evidence of a dramatic paradigm shift, a move from the individualistic Medical Deficit Model to the whole-school based Social

Model (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Dreyer, 2013, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009). This paradigm shift reflects the move from exclusive education systems to inclusive systems globally. Du Toit and Forlin (2009:647) call for a process of transformation to a Social Model in that it "encompasses a move away from the Medical Deficit model, seeking ways to include learners at every level of educational practice". Scholars deem this revolution to be crucial as it has the potential to provide a new inclusive method by which to assess and manage learners with barriers to learning (Fielding-Barnsley, 2005, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016).

International literature constituted studies from the United Kingdom, Scotland, Ireland, Turkey, Sweden, Finland and Singapore. A few studies had been conducted in Australia, specifically relating to the role of the LST in Australian schools. A study in Hong Kong highlighted the importance that an LST was available to oversee the implementation of LS; such an individual should be a member of the management team of the school.

The review of the international literature revealed several different titles for an LST. Nonetheless, they all indicated that in essence an LST is a teacher on the staff of a school who provides support to learners, whether academic or emotional in nature (Woolfson et al., 2007:297). The importance of the LST cannot be overlooked, in that "mainstream LSTs have a key role in implementing these inclusion policies". Irish scholars repeatedly referred to the ideal of an LST being part of mainstream schooling and the overall implementation of IE (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016).

Internationally, there appeared to be two methods that were most favoured in providing LS. These were the withdrawal method and the co-teaching model (Travers, 2006, Walton et al., 2009, Forlin & Rose, 2010, Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Butt, 2016). An evolution in LS is occurring and is gradual in its implementation is evident. Scholars mentioned different methodologies that were being used globally to implement LS (Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Butt, 2016). These included curriculum adaption, curriculum differentiation, co-teaching and withdrawal (Forlin, 2001, Travers, 2006, Woolfson et al., 2007, Takala & Ahl, 2014, Butt, 2016).

The reviewed studies did not reveal a specific definition of the role of the LST in a school, however; rather, a plethora of roles and responsibilities, varying from country to country emerged. South African scholar Dreyer (2013:57) describes "considerable variation in their

roles internationally". Irish scholar Travers (2011:462) believes that the LST's role definition is problematic and that "the lack of clarity about the support teacher's role" could prove troublesome for implementation of LS. The various terms associated with the role of LST included a collaborative role, a context reliant role, a management role, a consultative role, a co-teacher role and a paraprofessional role. It was emphasised that the process of providing support is not based solely on the programme designed by the LST; rather, it is highly collaborative in nature (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). Travers (2006) reiterates the importance and advantages of the LST working in collaboration with the class teacher. In the same vein, Takala and Ahl (2014:61) describe the process of LS as collaborative as the LST works with "several partners". The LST not only provides support to learners, but also lends support and provides information and knowledge to colleagues (Takala & Ahl (2014). Quah and Jones (1996) believe too that the process of implementing LS cannot be anything but collaborative. The LST should lead the coordination of the support implemented for learners' individual needs.

From the consulted literature it became clear that LSTs (whatever they may be called) should have specialised knowledge to provide support (Tennant, 2001, Fielding-Barnsley, 2005, Travers, 2006, Travers, 2011, Takala & Ahl, 2014, Rontou, 2013, Santos et al., 2016). In Sweden, Finland and Ireland, it appears that LSTs are required to have a basic teaching degree and a specialisation in LS for learners with barriers to learning (Travers, 2006, Takala & Ahl, 2014).

LS in South Africa is a result of the IE movement. In the past, there were inequalities in the way children were educated. Disadvantaged learners who experienced learning barriers were effectively excluded twice from mainstream society (Walton et al., 2009, Greyling, 2009). Private schools seem to focus on inclusive practices, specifically mainstreaming (Walton et al., 2009). Private schools in South Arica have to adhere to the basis of the South African Schools Act, but generally seem to have more funding available for LS resources and the employment of LSTs (Walton et al., 2009, Krüger & Yorke, 2010).

It appears that in South African, the withdrawal method is used to provide learners with LS (Mavuso, 2014). Dreyer (2013:55) explains this methodology, noting that either individuals or "small groups of learners can be withdrawn for additional support".

Du Toit and Forlin (2009:655) mention the "misconceptions about learner support" and the ambiguity between the roles of LSTs, remedial teachers and special needs teachers. This appears to cause confusion and affects the implementation of LS. South African literature does not specifically define the role of an LST (Dreyer et al., 2012). In fact, scholars observe that their role is vague and unsubstantiated in literature (Krüger & Yorke, 2010).

Several roles of the LST emerged from the literature. These included The LST as collaborative role player, as specialist, support provider, manager, consultant and co-teacher. The LS process should occur within a team. It is a collaborative process that requires different skills and knowledge from all staff members of a school. This means that the process of providing LS will require information from various role players and is led by the LST. The role of the LST is conceptualised as developing support measures for each learner, collaborating with subject teachers and engaging in the management of schools in order to best facilitate support for the learner. Dreyer (2012:180) explains that "collaboration becomes essential" when managing and designing LS programmes. However, South African literature reiterates international trends in that LSTs need to have specialised knowledge in order to provide LS (Walton et al., 2009, Pather, 2011).

2.18 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework allows a researcher to define the stance from which he or she works. The theoretical assumptions assumed by a researcher provide the rationale for a study. Sefotho (2015:23) observes that "philosophy is like a roadmap for research without which one's investigation lacks illuminated direction". Tuli (2011:106) explains that social studies seeks to "understand the meaning of social phenomena" and that the aim of research in this field is to understand the individual rather than the generalised population. Bryman (2012) adds that research in social studies is concerned with the social phenomena at hand, therefore it is complex and based on context. Research in this area can be intricate and multifaceted and must take into consideration numerous contextual factors. The researcher interprets knowledge based on the experiences of participants (Tuli, 2011, Sefotho, 2015). Researchers inevitably have their own philosophical views; their studies will be based on their frameworks (Tuli, 2011). Sefotho (2015:25) believes that researchers conduct studies in keeping with "the beliefs they hold about phenomena and about the world".

Social research highlights an understanding of the manner in which people interact with one another in their own world (Tuli, 2011). Sefotho (2015:25) explains that in conducting social

research, the researchers seek to understand, "the world [which] in this sense refers to a social world and the experiences of people in that social world".

After reviewing the existing literature, the theoretical framework, Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Theory was chosen (Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, Walton et al., 2009, Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Dreyer, 2014).

2.19 Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's Model was founded in the late 1970s and highlights the process of "human development" (Swart & Pettipher, 2011:10). The model focuses on the constant interaction of levels of society (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Swart and Pettipher (2011:11) explain that the model focuses on "the product of a network of interactions". This model highlights the interplay of various role players and systems in the learner's school career. Nel et al. (2013a). claim that the interplay between the systems and role players is both life-long and continuous. Similarly, Swart and Pettipher (2011:13) believe that the Ecological Model explains "direct and indirect" influences on the individual at the centre of the model. This model is ideal when considering an individual within a school system. In this case, the LST is at the centre of the private school system in which he or she is employed. Nel et al. (2013a:11), observe that "Inclusive Education focuses on a systems approach, which means that systems in society (e.g. classroom, school, family, community, government) need to interact with each other to provide a supportive structure for the learner …". Particularly within this study, the LST is at the centre of the system and is affected by all these influences. Regarding the LST as the centre of the system in this research study meant that the following interacting systems would directly and indirectly influence the LST.

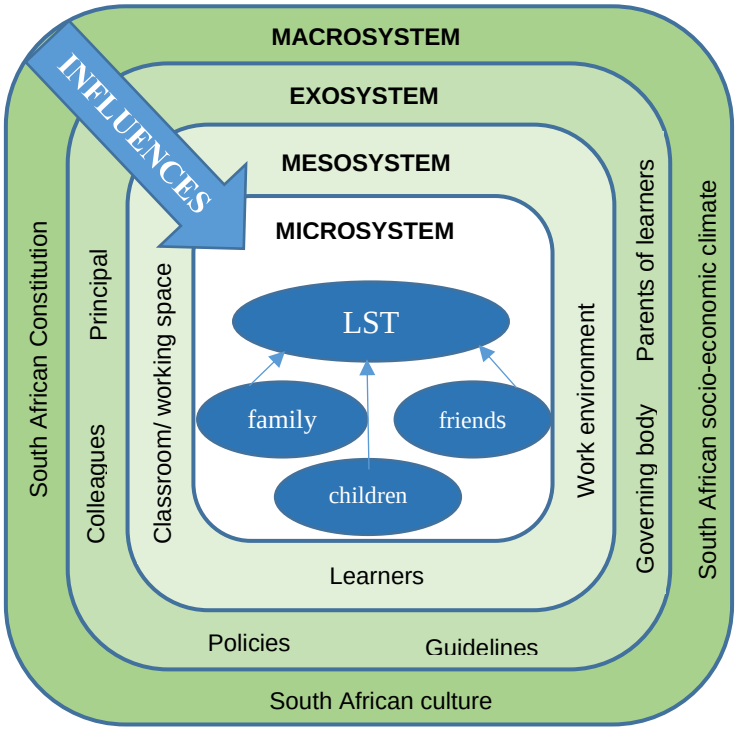

Figure 2.3: Adapted Ecological Model – Landsberg et al. (2011:13)

As there are multiple interacting systems in this theory, it is necessary to view these individually, but to understand the interaction between them. The microsystem is at the centre of the interacting systems, being the direct environment of the individual. One understands the individual by considering the influences around him or her. In this case, the LST is in the centre of the system as the study seeks to understand the role of the LST in a private school. Influences on the LST include home life, family and friends.

The mesosystem is the secondary level that has an influence, not only on the LST but also on his or her work environment. This would be the LST's colleagues and peers at the school at which they are employed. The exosystem is the LST's working environment, the actual setting of the school, the classrooms or office and the resources that are available to the LST within their school. The macrosystem is the overarching and greater South African climate in which the LST finds him or herself. This system consists of South African legislation, including the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, South African Schools Act, EWP6, SIAS and the NCSNET/NCESS report, all of which informs the role the role an LST has in a South African school.

2.19.1 The Ecological Systems Model: Microsystem

Based on the various levels, an individual would firstly interact with members of his or her family, this being the microsystem. Nel et al. (2013a) and Bornman and Rose (2010) explain that these interactions at the first level of interaction between the individual and his or her family will have the first and most profound impact. With particular reference to this research study, the microsystem will consist of LSTs and their direct influences. These influences would be their close family, children and friends. This would be the level with the most influence on them as an LST as their primary or first level environment would directly affect their mood, or affect, when dealing with learners at work.

2.19.2 The Ecological Systems Model: Mesosystem

The second level of interaction, the mesosystem, consists of the individual's extended family and peer group. These role players would have a moderate influence on a LST's school career and influence his or her support provision at school. Louw and Louw (2007) describe the mesosystem as the system that interacts with and influences the microsystem and therefore is closely linked to the individual. The mesosystem of LSTs in this particular study would consist of their work environment, the classroom or office, the learners they support and the daily interactions and responsibilities within the school environment.

2.19.3 The Ecological Systems Model: Exosystem

The exosystem, the third interaction level, consists of influences not directly relating to or influencing the individual, but in some way nonetheless affecting the individual's context or environment (Nel et al., 2013a). This layer could consist of the LST's workplace stress. Similarly, Louw and Louw (2007) place emphasis on this system as not being a direct influence on the individual but rather one that influences the development of the individual. The exosystem of the LSTs would consist of the following variables: principal, governing body, policies and guidelines, parents and colleagues. This level of interaction, as previously stated, may not be as direct as the microsystem but may have a considerable impact on the LST's role in the school. In this system, it may also become evident that school ethos, aims and objectives are factors that influence the role of the LST within the school.

2.19.4 The Ecological Systems Model: Macrosystem

The fourth layer of influence, the macrosystem, is a system which has a lesser impact as it is the impact of broader South African context. This level consists of the LST's cultural

background and value system that will have an impact on his or her job. This will influence the individual as a member of South African society. Louw and Louw (2007:27) describe this level as "the broadest environmental context" and this will have a less direct impact on the individual but will still influence his or her environment. This layer influences individuals on a level that is not directly related to LSTs' circumstances. Rather, it applies to the individual's development and time frame. The influence of the macrosystem on the LST would include the South African economic climate, South African diversity and culture and, very importantly, the South African Constitution.

2.19.5 The interaction between systems

Nel et al. (2013a), Bornman and Rose (2010) and Louw and Louw (2007) all believe that while all these systems are factors that can stand alone in their influence on individuals, they are interdependent and work together to shape and mould the individual. If one part of the system exerts a negative influence the whole system will be affected and have a negative impact on the individual being considered. In this particular study the researcher examined individual factors. However, to understand the LSTs as part of the whole system it was useful to evaluate the LST within the whole system.

2.20 Ecological Systems Model and this study

It is evident from the literature that Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model provides a theory that is applicable to this field of research (Walton et al., 2009, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Dreyer, 2014). The LST forms part of his or her own system. Nel et al. (2013a), speak of the continuous influence each of the interacting systems would have on the individual. In order to understand the LST's role, it is important to understand the various influences exerted on them by these systems and how this influences them in providing LS. (Walton et al., 2009) describe the multifaceted and complex role of the LST and the interaction the LST has with the rest of the staff. Du Toit and Forlin (2009:649) suggest an "eco-systemic approach" as it consider the barriers within each system that the LST needs to support.

Each of these systems would influence the LSTs in many different ways and define their role as LST. As explained above, the microsystem would be their family, children and friends. These factors would have a direct impact on them, influencing who they are and what their own belief system entails. The LSTs' mesosystem would directly relate to their

work environment. This would consist of their role as a support specialist, what they do and how this job affects their home and family life. The exosystem would be related to the parents of the learners and members of the governing body who inform their own practice as a support specialist. This system could pose the greatest challenge for the LST as it entails the support or lack thereof from colleagues at school, polices that underpin LS and other national trends in LST. The macrosystem with the greatest impact would be South African factors such as socio-economic climate, policies and South African life as a whole and the influence of these on LS.

It became evident from the literature review that LSTs are required to work in collaboration with other role players and assume a systemic approach to LS. Dreyer (2014:180) describes the role of the LST as collaborative, in that LS should be conceptualised and delivered in a "whole school development approach from an eco-systemic perspective". The shift from the Medical Deficit Model to a systemic model was evident, in turn allowing LSTs to work collaboratively with general teachers (Dreyer, 2014). Du Toit and Forlin (2009:644) explain the move to a "human rights discourse" away from the Medical Model, seeing practitioners working within a whole school approach, reiterating the systems theory. Similarly, Krüger and Yorke (2010:301) describe a "transformative shift to a social systems model of inclusive LS". The NCSNET report of 1997 (Department of Education, 1997:45) calls for a paradigm shift, particularly in the LS sphere: "The shift away from a predominantly 'individualistic' approach to a 'systemic' approach in understanding and responding to learner's difficulties". The White Paper on Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS, 1997:79) states that "Inclusion implies a change from an 'individual change model' to a 'system change model'" that emphasises that society has to change to accommodate diversity. This involves a paradigm shift away from the 'specialness' of people to the nature of society and its ability to respond to a wide range of individual differences. From this comes the understanding that one cannot simply label a child that has a barrier but should rather identify the barrier and work positively to achieve a goal.

2.21 Conclusion

In this chapter I positioned my study within the existing body of knowledge as well as within the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model. I explored the literature dealing with LS both nationally and internationally. A brief background to IE and how it was founded was provided. In taking a global view of IE, the influences that have

contributed to the formulation of policies for IE, including the importance of the Salamanca Statement were explored. In order to understand the process of LS I discussed how mainstreaming requires LS in order to be effective. The methodologies that were predominant in international and South African literature were examined. I discussed emerging roles of the LST, both internationally and locally. I explained the theoretical background to my study and how it was underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's Bio Ecological Systems Model, and how it was applicable to this study. I explained each system of the model and how these were applicable to this study.

In Chapter Three I discuss the methodological and ethical principles followed in the research process.

3. Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to achieve an understanding of the role of a learning support teacher (LST) in private schools in Pretoria. The research aimed to collect data to formulate an understanding of the roles of LSTs in private schools, based on their opinions and experiences. Therefore, I reviewed literature pertaining to the roles of LSTs in schools both locally and internationally in Chapter Two. This chapter describes the methodology used to explore the role of the LST. I had to assume various roles during this research study and these are explained. I describe the qualitative paradigm and its social nature. I detail the theoretical positions I assumed while conducting the research. These theoretical ideals informed the choice of qualitative research and supported the aim of the study. Following this, I explain how the validity of the methodological decisions was ensured. The methods used to analyse the data are explained and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the quality measures that were implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

3.2 My role as researcher

In the following section I discuss my role as the designer of this study. I explore the various roles I assumed during the research process and explain how these roles were used in conducting the study.

3.2.1 Researcher as creative artist

The role of researcher as artist is based on my previous studies as well as on the outlook I have on life. I am a creative person and spend my spare time working with art. As an artist, I am a 'meaning maker'. I seek to make meaning of the world around me. I am an inductive individual, I understand the world around me based on a multitude of social realities (Bryman, 2012, Kumar, 2011). Therefore, I assume an artistic understanding of the world. These experiences build a knowledge basis which allows for an explanation of social nature. This view is not only my view in life but has influenced my research and my understanding thereof.

Artistic impressions have dominated almost all my life; the artistic flair I have is also evident in my academic work. In order to understand the influence, I illustrated it by using a creative

method when formatting my dissertation. Included in all the sections of the dissertation are quotes that I feel epitomise the sections they follow.

3.2.2 Researcher as counsellor

I use counselling skills frequently as part of my day-to-day work. My upbringing was in a family of caring professionals. Caring for others is part of my nature. This context has influenced my role as a researcher as it forms an essential facet of my character.

Throughout the research process, when dealing with participants I embraced a counselling approach. This meant ensuring that participants were at ease and felt comfortable to share their opinions and experiences. However, I had to be careful not to become the participants' counsellor and keep to my role as researcher.

3.2.3 Researcher as manager and designer

In undertaking this research study, I become its manager and designer. As manager of this study, I saw myself as the coordinator and designer of every process involved in the research. Assuming both the managerial and designing roles in my study meant that I had to discuss and reject any bias from the outset or the moment they occurred to avoid prejudicing the study in any way. As part of the research process, it was necessary to maintain a neutral stance when dealing directly with the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This was another aspect that I had to manage.

In order to maintain good working relationships with the participants in my study I had to manage personal relations. It was my responsibility as designer of this study to ensure that all data collection processes were designed to deliver rich data. Inevitable challenges had to be managed throughout the research process. As part of the managerial role I ensured that ethical procedures were described and implemented throughout the research process.

3.3 Paradigmatic stance

In this section I explain the paradigms that underpin this study. I discuss the meta-theoretical paradigm followed in this study and I elaborate on the constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology that underlie this research study. I explain the positioning of the study within a qualitative research paradigm.

3.3.1 The art of social research: A meta-theoretical paradigm

> "Characterizing the nature of the link between theory and research is by no means a straightforward matter" - (Bryman, 2012:20).

Social research is based on how best to understand human nature; therefore, social reality could be studied using any of several methodologies (Bryman, 2012, Creswell, 2014, Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A paradigmatic stance defines every aspect of a research study, therefore, it is imperative to define the stance before conducting research. Similarly, Mack (2010) describes the various philosophical underpinnings of a study as a means to acquire knowledge through research. In defining one's meta-theoretical stance, one defines the theory informing the practice of conducting research and underlining the methodology. The research paradigm is a fundamental set of rules that guides research studies (Wahyuni, 2012). Fouche and Schurink (2011:298) explain that the paradigm researchers study within "guides their inquiries". The researchers' theoretical stance influences all research decisions (Berman & Smyth, 2015).

It became evident from the literature review that it is important that researchers define their theoretical understanding when conducting research (Wahyuni, 2012, Fouché & Schurink, 2011, Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2010). A theoretical basis is essential. Similarly, Sefotho (2015) describes a metaphorical road map that should underpin theoretical assumptions in a study. Sefotho (2015:233) explains that theoretical assumptions should be employed "… because philosophy is like a roadmap for research without which one's investigation lacks illuminated direction". I found Sefotho's metaphor effective and I followed a roadmap as described in this section. Theoretical assumptions allowed me, as the researcher, to view my research methodology and processes through a metaphorical lens in order to position my interpretation of the research process from the chosen theoretical stance. In order to construct the roadmap for this study, I identified and elaborated on chosen epistemology and ontology that informed every aspect of the process (Sefotho, 2015). In order to define the difference between epistemology and ontology, simple definitions of each are provided. Mack (2010:5) states that an ontology is "one's view of reality" and epistemology is "how one acquires knowledge".

I discuss my constructivist ontology and interpretive epistemology and how these informed my choice of a qualitative paradigm. As the meta-theoretical assumptions underline and define the inquiry in this study I explain and validate the theoretical assumptions below.

3.3.2 A constructivist ontology

Ontology is the manner in which one understands the world and the reality one faces within it. Mack (2010) argues that the belief one has on how social reality is formed will directly affect the manner in which one collects and exposes knowledge. Petty et al. (2012:269), describe an ontology as "the nature of reality" that relates to the construction of reality. Similarly, Sefotho (2015:30) explains that ontology is "conceptions of being;" it reflects one's "reality". In order to understand the LST's reality, I needed first to understand and define my reality as a researcher.

Constructivism is based in social phenomena; a constructivist researcher is concerned with a social understanding of the world (Schurink, 2009). A constructivist ontology entails the ideal of no single reality; rather, a reality constructed by many role players (Braun & Clarke , 2013a). Therefore, a constructivist ontology is linked to the social nature of qualitative research (Alexander, 2006). Similarly, Bryman (2012:33) argues that constructionism "asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors". (Tuli, 2011) explains that a constructivist ontology allows the researcher to interpret socially constructed meanings. A constructivist ontology allows the researcher to draw conclusions from participants' experiences of the topic through their own perceptions (Tuli, 2011).

A constructivist ontology informed my research approach by exposing the perceptions of the LSTs and how they viewed their roles. As the study was based on the opinions of these individuals, a constructivist view orientated the ideal of societal views that were constructed. I focused on the views of LSTs and *their* construction of their role within their field of expertise, facilitating the socially accepted reality within which LSTs perform their role (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). Their views were exposed by questions that encouraged them to share opinions and experiences. In this manner I was able to construct a final view of their roles as part of the data analysis process.

3.3.3 An Interpretivist Epistemology

> "Epistemology is the beliefs on the way to generate, understand and use the knowledge that is deemed to be acceptable and valid" - Wahyuni (2012:69).

An epistemology is defined as the philosophical view that informs the manner in which knowledge is attained and understood (Mack, 2010). Epistemology is concerned with knowledge, the construction of knowledge and how it affects one's study (Sefotho, 2015).

Therefore, the philosophical decisions I made informed, the ontology I assumed guided my epistemology, these assumptions were a means of understanding the world (Maree, 2010). I therefore assumed a socially constructed reality and achieved knowledge interpretively. In order to understand the LSTs' roles, I interpreted their socially constructed roles.

Qualitative research employs an interpretivist epistemology (Goldkuhl, 2012, Cleary et al., 2014, Chowdhury, 2014, Chowdhury, 2015). Knowledge is created socially, individuals create their own meaning through experience and therefore, add to the accumulation of knowledge (Bryman, 2012). Thus, drawing on the knowledge and experiences of the LSTs in this research study allowed the acquisition of knowledge of the roles of LSTs within the social school environments. An interpretivist researcher is concerned with understanding individuals' meanings that are the result of their circumstances (Bryman, 2012). Interpretive researchers assume that there are a multitude of world views that create society; an interpretivist epistemology therefore suits this research study (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The LSTs in this study worked in a social environment and an interpretive paradigm allowed for a multitude of social intricacies pertaining to their roles to be understood. Petty et al. (2012:270), describe interpretivism as a philosophy that relates to the social need of individuals to "seek an understanding of world in which they live". In acquiring knowledge interpretively I followed Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Model (Bornman & Rose, 2010, Nel et al., 2013a), the identifying theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Two. As discussed in Chapter Two, different systems create different meanings and I therefore needed to interpret the various impacts on LSTs in order to understand their roles (Sefotho, 2015).

Similarly, Cohen et al. (2013) describe interpretivists as viewing individuals within their context, focusing on their interactions with others in this context. LSTs are members of an integrated private school system. I viewed each participant as a role player within a larger system. In order to understand the LSTs' roles, I had to generate an understanding of each school's support system first. In the same vein, Bryman (2012:712) argues that interpretivism is a view that requires the inquiry and understanding of "social action". The focus of interpretivism on social phenomena links with the qualitative research paradigm (Bryman, 2012). It is apparent that both interpretivism and social constructivism are connected to the qualitative research paradigm (Creswell, 2009) and that there may be a

connection between qualitative methodology and using an interpretivist epistemology (Jacobson et al., 2007).

An interpretivist paradigm allowed me to examine how individuals "construct meaning" (Mack, 2010:7). With the aim of defining the role of the LST, I viewed their opinions and experiences within their social circumstances. Wahyuni (2012:71) describes interpretive researchers as people who "recognise that individuals with their own varied backgrounds, assumptions and experiences contribute to the on-going construction of reality" (Wahyuni, 2012:71). In order to interpret the view of the LST, I explored their opinions, beliefs and values as LSTs. Pring (2015:120) believes that "to understand particular events one must see things from the point of view of the participants". Similarly, Mack (2010:8) states that interpretive research is conducted by "observ[ing] from inside through the direct experience of the people".

In order to understand their socially constructed 'world,' I had to conceptualise the LSTs' world through their opinions and experiences as LSTs. Jacobson et al. (2007:3), explain that conducting "interpretive inquiry makes the researcher the research instrument". An interpretive researcher is "non-manipulative, unobtrusive and non-controlling" in the manner he or she conducts research (Tuli, 2011:100). Thus, fulfilling my role as manager and designer of this study, I became the research instrument and was not obtrusive in any way. The interpretive researcher seeks to understand the phenomena present, rather than explaining them (Mack, 2010). This coincided with the aim investigate the LST's role. As the researcher, I was concerned about the impact of their whole school environment. Owing to the qualitative nature of this study, I was able to inquire about their roles unobtrusively and to remain empathetically neutral in my interpretive stance (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, Tuli, 2011).

An interpretive epistemology is informed by a constructivist ontology, according to Goldkuhl (2012). The interpretive stance I assumed in this study allowed me to understand the intricacies of the multiple realities the participants faced in their roles at their respective schools. Tuli (2011:100) observes that "an interpretivist-constructivist perspective" is a manner in which researchers understand participants and their interactions with others. Importantly, the relationship the LSTs had with their colleagues, the principal and the learners at their school was crucial to understanding their roles. Multiple realities that are found in society inform interpretivism; as a result of the multifaceted nature of the current

reality, interpretive researchers seek to understand the multitude of meanings made by participants within that reality (Sefotho, 2015). The diversity in South African schools, specifically private schools as discussed in this study, supported an interpretive epistemology in that diversity is socially created (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This diversity added richness to the data.

An interpretive stance has been defined in this section, however, upon reflecting on researcher roles defined earlier, an interpretive epistemology seems prevalent in my world view. One of the roles I defined was researcher as creative artist. This mirrors the nature of living in an interpretive manner and emulates an interpretive world view. I refer to an excerpt from my researcher journal, where I have noted my epistemology:

Sometime at the end of March 2016

I once again realise that I have defined all of this, but it is part of my human philosophy, my inner being. One can only view the world as a mixture of opinions that create one reality. I cannot view the LST as a single entity, I have to view the individual within his or her circumstances and as an individual who is made up of his or her own opinions and experiences.

3.4 Research design: A qualitative stance

In the following section, I provide the reason for using a qualitative research design. I give a condensed explanation of the theory of qualitative research design as well as the specific choice for using a case study methodology this research.

> "A qualitative study does not attempt to control the multitude of factors involved in the phenomenon under investigation; it seeks to explore the whole in its complexity" – (Petty et al., 2012:382).

I followed a qualitative methodological paradigm, owing to the socially constructed nature of my topic. The research study aimed at understanding the role of LSTs in private schools in Pretoria. The methodology had to reflect the social nature of the phenomenon being studied, hence a qualitative approach was most suited (Braun & Clarke, 2013a).

Qualitative research seems to be a common methodology when inquiring into social phenomena (Maree, 2010, Bryman, 2012, Crowe et al., 2015, Chowdhury, 2015, Pring, 2015, Petty et al., 2012). Qualitative research is a research structure through which social intricacies can be examined and explored (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Strydom and Bezuidenhout (2014:173) define qualitative research as concerned with "the underlying

qualities of subjective experience". Bryman (2012) describes features of qualitative research, which are illustrated in the methodology of this study. Firstly, an "inductive view of the relationship between theory and research," highlighting the "roadmap" described by Sefotho (2015:233). This roadmap explains the link I had made in the study between the use of an interpretive epistemology, a constructivist ontology and a qualitative methodology. The feedback type of relationship among between these three facets revealed the cohesive nature of the methodology chosen in this study. Secondly, Bryman (2012:380) states that qualitative research has "an epistemological position described as interpretivist". This highlights the epistemological position I assumed throughout the process of the research. Thirdly, Bryman (2012:380) explains that qualitative research is an examination of "interactions between individuals" rather than a whole phenomenon. Specific to this study, I studied the role of the LST and therefore had to explore the interactions between LSTs and their environment, including learners, general teachers, principals and the wider South African environment to explain the roles within private schools.

Thus, these three factors explain that the qualitative research paradigm can be seen as interpretivist in nature and one that explores the complexities of human relations. A qualitative research paradigm seeks to describe findings by means of narratives and rich descriptions from participants. Wahyuni (2012:71) describes the process of qualitative research as being "reality […] constructed by social actors". Qualitative studies emphasise the opinion of the participant (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, a qualitative research paradigm was best suited to this study as the role of LSTs could be understood from their own experiences. A qualitative research methodology allowed me to investigate their opinions of their roles in their particular private schools (Creswell, 2014, Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Several studies that have been conducted in the area of LS have made use of a qualitative research paradigm (Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Abbott et al., 2011, Mavuso, 2014). In order to address the research question posed in this study, rich data were needed to define the roles of each participant. A qualitative approach allowed me to focus on the narratives of the participants, and allowed for an in-depth understanding of each participant's situation (Creswell, 2014, Marshall & Rossman, 2011, Bryman, 2012).

Considering each participant holistically, I was able to come to conclusions interpretively on how they understood their roles, how their colleagues understood their roles and how they as LSTs fitted into the private school structure in Pretoria (Bryman, 2012). The

qualitative research methodology allowed me to ask them about their understanding of their role as an LST and revealed their views of on what expert knowledge was required (Kumar, 2011). I was able to explore their responsibilities and how these influenced the effective implementation of LS. Such enquiry and investigation of the roles of LSTs would only have been possible through qualitative investigation.

3.4.1 A case study approach

The case study approach has been widely used as a research design in the social sciences, particularly in the area of education (Tight, 2010, Rule & Vaughn, 2011, Wahyuni, 2012, Dumez, 2015). A case study research design is useful to qualitative researchers as it is an in-depth investigation into a particular phenomenon (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Baxter and Jack (2008:544) describe a case study as a "phenomenon within its context," allowing researchers to focus on one phenomenon within a context. Case study methodology allows the researcher to extract detailed data from each particular case from which conclusions can be drawn (Bryman, 2012). Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014:178), describe case study research as a methodology that allows for "a thick and detailed description of a social phenomenon that exists within a real-world context". Cohen et al. (2013:289), similarly highlights the fact that a case study design "provides a unique example of real people in real situations". In order to obtain data which were focused and explored the role of LSTs, interviewing was employed as a means of data collection. A case study design lends itself to obtaining information directly from participants. In this study semi-structured interviewing allowed direct and detailed questions to be asked (Bryman, 2012, Kumar, 2011, Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Thus a case study delivers data on real events in a participant's circumstances and was a suitable methodology to use in this research study (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Using the detailed and varied opinions LSTs had on the roles they took on, I was able to obtain in-depth data from each case in the study. Each LST was considered within a private school environment, highlighting the 'real situation' they faced in their role as a LST (Kumar, 2011).

A multiple case study design was implemented in this research study, comparing various cases within one phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2013). The data obtained from a multiple case study methodology will be richer (Yin, 2013). By conducting a multiple-case study design, the researcher is able to apply a set of characteristics to different contexts (Rule & Vaughn, 2011). Case study methodology allows researchers to focus on a smaller group of

participants within a wider phenomenon (Noor, 2008). Maree (2010:76) emphasises that a key feature of case study design is to make use of "multiple sources" of data collection. Whilst each of the LSTs formed part of one phenomenon, they were employed at different private schools in the Pretoria area. Therefore, a multi-case study design was employed. In order to identify and define the role of LSTs in their schools, each LST formed his or her own case study. Therefore, a multiple case study design proved most appropriate (Wahyuni, 2012, De Vos et al., 2011).

3.5 Selecting participants

Qualitative research seeks participants with specific characteristics that will have a direct link to the focus of the study. Therefore, participants chosen for a study are generally chosen for a specific characteristic (Robinson, 2014). Scholars have stated that qualitative sampling is based on selecting the most suitable people or sites for a study (Bryman, 2012, Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014:228) reiterates that a researcher "select(s) people or sites that can best help you understand the central phenomenon". Bryman (2012) notes the need to select participants who are suitable participants in the study. In this study, five participants were chosen who were a) easy to maintain contact with and b) were able to answer questions specifically related to the role of the LST (Bryman, 2012). In other words, they were convenient to reach and were employed as LSTs.

In order to sample the most suitable participants for this study, I conducted a sample of "context" first, as described by Bryman (2012:417). This method allowed me to sample schools which were convenient for me to access. Thus, the population of this study consisted of all the LSTs in private schools in the Pretoria area. Secondly, I sampled the "participants" Bryman (2012:417) describes this type of sample as a second process to recruit the most suitable participants within the chosen context. Therefore, a sample of convenience, followed by a purposive sample was employed. These sampling procedures are explained in detail below.

3.5.1 Sampling strategies

A non-probability sampling procedure was conducted, highlighting the qualitative nature of this study (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Creswell (2014) observes that the purpose of qualitative study is not to generalise within a population but rather to describe a phenomenon among a set of participants. Rather, the sample of participants should allow for an "in-depth

understanding" to answer the research question (Du-Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:137). Participants should be selected for a study with certain characteristics. In order to obtain data from a multiple case study design, the researcher must define the specific characteristics from the outset (Rule & Vaughn, 2011). In this case, specific inclusion criteria were formulated to select the five LSTs. The process of sampling therefore included a convenience sample and a purposive sample. These sampling methods are explained below.

3.5.1.1 Convenience sampling

As stated above, Bryman (2012:417) describes a "context sample" as a means of selecting the context of the participants for the study. The context of this study was private schools in Pretoria. The focus on this context was informed by assumptions in the literature that private schools have more funding available for LS (Walton et al., 2009, Krüger & Yorke, 2010). Scholars have observed that effective access to participants is beneficial to the research process (Bryman, 2012, Kumar, 2011, Maree, 2010, Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The schools that were selected as part of the convenience sample were all located in the Pretoria area of Gauteng. This meant that I was able to access them fairly easily. This criterion was influenced by financial and time constraints. Therefore, to define the context of the participants in this study, a convenience sample was the first sampling technique used. I was able to identify and select schools which were close to my place of residence. In conducting a sample of convenience, I considered only private schools within a 20km radius of my home. The identified schools formed the first sample and provided a platform from which to conduct further purposive sampling to identify specific LSTs.

3.5.1.2 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is employed when the researcher wants to explore a particular trait (De Vos et al., 2011, Robinson, 2014). The aim of this study was to investigate the role of LSTs in private schools in Pretoria. In order to be included in the study, the LSTs had to meet the following inclusion criteria: firstly, the participant was required to be employed as an LST in a school context in order to understand the role of the LST in a school context. This specific criterion was included because some LSTs practice LS outside the school environment. Secondly, the participant was required to be employed at a private school in the Pretoria area as the study was focused on LSTs employed in private schools in the Pretoria area. Thirdly, the participant had to be employed in a primary school setting, providing support for learners from grade 0 to grade 7. The reason of this criterion was

linked to the nature of LS provision in South Africa. More often than not, LS is provided to learners in the primary school phase (Department of Education, 2005). Participants who fulfilled these criteria were approached to take part in this study.

3.5.2 Recruiting participants

After obtaining ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria (Certificate number HU 15/05/02), I conducted the sampling. Once I had identified a list of private schools within a 20km radius of my residence, I was able to retrieve their contact numbers from their school websites. I contacted the reception office at each of the schools and asked whether they had a LS programme. If they did, I asked who the relevant LST was in order to contact him or her. This was repeated until five private schools had been identified and I had confirmation that LSTs were employed there. A sample of five participants was drawn for reasons of financial constraint, an important factor when selecting a sample in a qualitative study (Robinson, 2014). I requested the contact details of the LST if one was employed at the school. I sent emails to potential participants. The email explained my role and the aim of the research study and attached an invitation letter. I attached both an invitation letter (Addendum B) and a consent form (Addendum A) to be signed by the LST. If a contacted LST was not willing or able to participate in my study the process was followed again until I had sampled five willing participants.

3.6 Data collection

In this section I describe the data collection process used in qualitative research and explain the specific data collection strategies employed in this study. I explain the process of the semi-structured interviews as well as the thematic analysis of the data.

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a method widely used in qualitative research studies (Ibrahim & Edgley, 2015, Rabionet, 2011, Cleary et al., 2014, Bryman, 2012). "Interpretivist researchers favour … interact[tion] and have dialogue with the studied participants" (Wahyuni, 2012:71). The social nature of constructivism seeks data which are detailed; semi-structured interviews seemed the best method of asking specific questions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured interview was chosen for this study because of the nature of the type of questions that would be asked. The semi-structured interview meant that I could formulate relatively broad questions to explore the roles of the LSTs (Bryman,

2012). Rabionet (2011:564) explains that the nature of the semi-structured interview allows a researcher to "narrow down some areas or topics" that could be discussed in each interview. Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask questions based on literature and theory to explore LSTs' opinions and experiences of what made up their roles.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the participants in order to discuss their opinions and experiences of their roles as LSTs. The interviews were held at the LST's school, in his or her office or classroom. It was necessary to interview LSTs in their school environment in order to understand the environment in which they worked and the facilities they had at their disposal. The interviews were generally scheduled for an hour at a time so that participants were not tired and could continue with their responsibilities. I had to schedule more than one interview session with three of the five participants as they seemed to have more to say, or because the interview took longer to reach data saturation. The interview sessions were scheduled with each of the participants when it was convenient to them. The participants were sent the interview protocol via email (Addendum C) before the interview session, so that they could prepare for the interview and contribute to the relaxed atmosphere I tried to achieve as part of my role of researcher as counsellor.

Before beginning the interviews I requested each participant to sign an agreement that the interview could be audio recorded (Addendum D) and to fill in biographical data forms (Addendum E) and contact information form (Addendum F). I reminded them that any names of teachers, colleagues or schools would be assigned pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality. Furthermore, I explained that their biographical information as well as their contact information would remain confidential and were solely for my use. I explained to each participant the process of managing the transcripts after the interviews had been conducted. The LST was also reminded that the process was voluntary. Each participant was given a printed copy of the interview schedule with the six formulated questions. The participant was asked whether he or she would like to add any information to the protocol before beginning with the interview. The interviews were conducted after switching on the recording devices. Once the interviews had been concluded, the recording device was switched off and participants were asked if they had a queries about the research process. I then explained that member checking would take place once the interviews had been transcribed.

3.6.2 Interview protocol development

In the following section I describe the manner of formulating the final interview protocol. I discuss the methodology used to formulate the questions and the techniques for ensuring good quality questions for use in the semi-structured interview data collection process.

An interview protocol serves as a guide to the questions a researcher wants to pose during the interview (Maree, 2010, Creswell, 2014). This guide can be compiled in various ways. The interview questions in the interview protocol were based on the literature review and designed to explore the role of the LST. In order to formulate the questions, I typed and printed the questions generated from the literature review. I then cut them into strips and placed individual questions down and then grouped the questions according to themes. Once the themes had emerged, I was able to paste the strips onto coloured paper and reformulate enriched questions from the themes. This methodology proved productive and appealed to my artistic nature and the fulfilment of my role of researcher as artist.

Different types of questions were asked in order to make participants feel at ease and in this manner I was able to obtain rich data about their roles (Rabionet, 2011, Yin, 2013). I formulated six appropriate questions for the interview protocol, which I sent to LSTs before the interview. The first phase of questioning should establish a means of understanding for the participant and should put the participant at ease (Rabionet, 2011, Yin, 2013, Bryman, 2012, Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The questions went into particular detail on the ideal LST's role. The questions were open-ended, allowing LSTs to answer in a narrative manner. It is important for the researcher to think of probes for each of the interview questions (Rabionet, 2011). I added probes (Addendum G) to each question for my own use (Bryman, 2012). The probes for each question were already formulated and were logically drawn from the question themes, ensuring a thematic link between the interview question and the probe.

To ensure appropriate and valid interview questions, experts in the qualitative education field validated the nature and content of the questions (Rabionet, 2011). In this manner, rigour was added to my study. The experts were identified based on their roles as lecturers and their expert knowledge in the field of LS. I particularly sought professionals who were employed as university lecturers in order to draw on their expertise in qualitative questioning. I assured the identified experts that their contributions would remain anonymous and that only I would read their feedback. The personal information of these experts was not disclosed at any time and they were not aware of each other's identity. I

emailed them the list of six proposed questions and asked for feedback on the questions. Lastly, asked a specialist in the field of counselling and support services to answer the questions to establish whether any changes were necessary, to ensure that questions were respectful yet probing. These professionals were not biased in any way, as they were not involved in the study.

3.7 Data management

In this section I explain how the data was managed during and after its data collection. I begin by explaining the role of the researcher journal and go on to describe the field notes that were collected. Lastly, I describe the audio recordings and the transcription process that was followed. The following section details each data management method and highlights the importance of each process.

3.7.1 Researcher journal

Throughout the process of this study I articulated my reflexivity in a researcher journal. Nadin and Cassell (2006:216) explain that the "the use of a research diary [is] grounded in the epistemological position of social constructionism," highlighting the constructivist ontology that was employed in this study. The use of a researcher journal allowed for reflexivity which is an important part of establishing trustworthiness in social studies (Nadin & Cassell, 2006). The researcher journal became an ever-growing document, filled with inferences surrounding processes of the research. I noted my feelings and experiences throughout the research process. The researcher journal was a method through which I could manage bias. I documented insights about the profession of LS provision and how the LSTs defined their roles. It was a platform to express my own thoughts on interactions with participants and their inferences on the topic. Recording challenges or periods of enlightenment enabled inferences to be drawn from my researcher journal and added depth to my data analysis. Nadin and Cassell (2006) explain that the researcher diary becomes a tool for debriefing, conceptualisation and explanation. I could engage in intense self-criticism in order to continue with the study without clouding my interactions with participants or the research process. I found that in consulting with other people in my field I became more confident in the significance of this study.

Nadin and Cassell (2006:209) describe the reflexive nature of a researcher journal as a means to explore "in-depth thinking about methods". The journal remained a research document

and therefore did not disclose any information pertaining specifically to participants' details. Although interviews were reflected upon, the researcher journal did not contain any names of participants of or schools where interviews took place. I made use of the journal to reflect solely on the actions and processes that occurred during the research process.

3.7.2 Field notes

As part of my documentation of experiences during the semi-structured interviews I made field notes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) immediately after each interview had been conducted. I created a field note document (Addendum H) which provided structure to the manner in which I took these notes what I reflected on. These notes focused on the setting of the interview, the noise levels inside the venue and how this affected the conversation. I noted the mood of the participant and my opinion of how they felt about the interview (Bryman, 2012). I considered the flow of the questions and whether the participant appeared to have difficulty in providing answers. I observe whether the participant appeared to misunderstand any questions and whether these then required rephrasing. It was important to note the detail in which the participant discussed an issue and whether it made him or her feel uncomfortable; in this regard I noted whether the participant spoke faster or deliberated over a question. I was able to gauge from participants' reactions whether a question had made them feel anxious or whether they had a strong opinion on a societal norm.

I observed participants throughout the interviews and their attitudes toward the interview and content. This allowed me to reflect on the same items after each interview. A section in my field notes allowed me the freedom to reflect and note anything I had found thought-provoking. The procedure of compiling the field notes allowed reflection on the interview and would, it was hoped, add depth to the data analysis. Upon debriefing after the interviews, I was able to reflect in my researcher journal on the manner in which I posed probe questions based on responses from participants and how further conversation could be held on the topics discussed.

This process gave me the time to reflect on how each interview had progressed and what data had been recorded. After each interview I listened to the audio recording again and added any notes I thought I had excluded. The process of reflection after each interview was a manner in which I ensured that all the data had been captured, including any notes I had thought of afterwards. In this way I was able to include information that I had been unable to note down at the time of an interview. The interview protocol was kept the same for all

the participants, and no questions or probe questions were altered at any stage of the reflection process. This process thus allowed me to organise my thoughts if another interview with a participant was required.

3.7.3 Audio recordings and transcriptions

Audio recordings were made of the dialogue of every interview. Before any interview was audio recorded, the participant was asked to give consent to this (Addendum D). The audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim to enable a thematic analysis on the interview. As transcription is time consuming, I used a private transcription company to complete this task. The transcriber assured me that all data would remain confidential and signed a confidentiality agreement (Addendum I). Before submitting the interviews to the transcription company, I ensured that the files were saved under alphabetical names, rather than the names of the schools. Once I received the transcripts from the transcriber, I ensured that no names of schools appeared in the transcripts, replacing names in the transcripts with pseudonyms. After making these changes, I went through a process of validating the transcript with the interview recording. This was done to ensure that data in the transcript matched the recording. Where there were discrepancies in the transcription, I added the appropriate words in a coloured pen. This was to ensure the transcriptions were accurate and allowed for proper analysis. The audio recordings were stored on a password protected computer and external drive for safe keeping.

3.8 Data analysis

The following section describes the data analysis process that was followed in this research study. I explain the processes and the reasoning behind them.

Qualitative data analysis is an iterative and cyclical process and a researcher is required to constantly assess the data in a method that is recurring, re-examining numerous times in order to draw conclusions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, De Vos et al., 2011, Liamputtong, 2009, Creswell, 2014, Maree, 2010). De Vos et al. (2011:398), argue that qualitative data analysis can in no way be seen as a “linear” process and go on to describe the process as being “messy”. Equally, Marshall and Rossman (2011:207) observe that the analysis of data is “messy” and “time consuming” but focuses on reaching consensus on the themes that emerge from the data. Petty et al. (2012:381), label qualitative data analysis as “laborious” and emphasise its iterative nature. Data analysis as an engrossing procedure that allows

researchers to understand through repeated inspection what data have been achieved (Liamputtong, 2009). Immersing oneself in the data is a well employed method in beginning the data analysis (Creswell, 2014, Marshall & Rossman, 2011, Green et al., 2007).

The following entry in my researcher's journal describes the day I found a thematic analysis framework. As the methodology used in thematic analysis is vitally important, I found (Braun & Clarke, 2013b) framework for methodology most suitable for my research study.

20 February 2017 – a cold and windy day

Finally! A method of thematic analysis that makes sense and connects to my study. This technique speaks to my research, it appeals to my creative side and includes all methodologies found thus far in one framework! YES!

Thematic analysis was the process followed in interpreting the data in this research study. It allowed me to conduct analysis by using my epistemology and ontology as a background, but working inductively with the data to draw conclusions from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). As thematic analysis is flexible in nature, Braun and Clarke (2013a:178) explain that this method of data analysis "does not prescribe data collection, theoretical positions, epistemological or ontological frameworks". The data analysis process in my study was based on the methodology described by Braun and Clarke (2013b). This methodology follows in a six stage process allowing for a cyclical process. The was an iterative and cyclical process that explored all aspects of the thematic analysis of the data set I collected (De Vos et al., 2011).

- **Step 1: "Familiarisation with the data"**

The process of internalising or immersion in the data is common practice in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014, De Vos et al., 2011, Yin, 2013, Green et al., 2007, Crowe et al., 2015). Braun and Clarke (2006:87) explain that this process entails a "reading and re-reading of the data". Creswell (2014:267) describes this first step in analysis as "preliminary exploratory analysis". Thus as part of the first data analysis step, I read and reread the transcripts in order to familiarise myself with the data from each interview. As part of this process I made notes on salient points in each interview. I reflected on these points in the researcher journal in order to refer to them when discussing my findings.

- **Step 2: "Coding"**

> "Coding is a process if identifying aspects of the data that relate to your research question" - Braun and Clarke (2013a:206).

Complete coding was employed in this study. Complete coding is a process in which the researcher highlights all items which seem relevant to answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). This coding process allows the researcher to identify tags of information, tagging them to highlight them or draw the attention of the researcher (Green et al., 2007). This coding process allowed me to absorb all items of interest in the body of each transcript and later decide which were of importance. Each code represented the "essence" of what was being discussed a (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). I coded items in each of the transcripts; after each new code was assigned, I compiled a code list and in this manner I was able to see and reuse codes if the item matched the coding word. I was thus able to code all of the transcripts according to these code words making it to identify sub themes and themes later. Thus the coding process that in this study was "data-driven". Braun and Clarke (2013a:207) describe this coding methodology as being involved solely with the data and not driven by any philosophical underpinnings.

- **Step 3: "Searching for themes"**

Identifying themes from the coding process allows the researcher to identify concepts (themes) which are recurrent in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). As part of creating themes that captured the essence of the data, I employed "features" as a preliminary coding method (Braun & Clarke, 2013a:224). This process allowed me to draw similar features or ideas together before using a theme as an overarching organisational element. Therefore, features were compiled into subthemes and these were then used to compile overarching themes. These themes were a temporary set of themes that were sought for through the data.

- **Step 4: "Reviewing themes"**

In order to formalise the provisional themes, a process of reviewing the themes then commenced. This required managing the themes and deciphering rich themes suit one another. (Green et al., 2007) argue that themes should become saturated with codes which then formulate the subthemes; after a process of revisiting and reviewing the themes, they will become *full*. As part of this process Braun and Clarke (2013a:203) describe the process of compiling a "thematic map" on which the researcher maps out content from which to compile subthemes and then form themes. This method appealed to my creative side. I took

the coded items and collapsed them into subthemes which were again further collapsed into form themes. In this manner I drew a theme map that allowed me to distinguish between the themes visually and replace them where necessary.

- **Step 5: "Defining and naming themes"**

In order to discuss the themes in the dissertation a process of naming them was necessary. This entailed considering each theme and subtheme to formalise a theme name. Braun and Clarke (2013a:249) describe a process of "writing theme definitions" to capture the essence of what the theme relates to and what it contains. This step entailed cutting and pasting names of themes onto coloured paper, creating a visual image of data themes.

- **Step 6: "Writing up"**

The final step of the process involves the narrative of each theme. This process was again cyclical; I had to revisit each of these themes while writing about them. In particular, specific excerpts were an important inclusion in the narrative for each theme. This was a manner of triangulating the data, including excerpts from what participants had said in each of the interviews that supported and highlighted the essence of each theme. This part of the data analysis was vital in explaining the value of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013a).

As the thematic analysis was iterative in nature, the process I followed took a period of two months, in which I constantly revisited the data and viewed it interpretively in order to ensure that all features and codes had been extracted. In order to draw conclusions on the roles of participants in this study, in-depth and arduous analysis took place to deliver sound and validated conclusions (Green et al., 2007).

Qualitative data analysis is conducted in an interpretive manner in order to produce rich and meaningful conclusions (Nieuwenhuis, 2010, Marshall & Rossman, 2011, Creswell, 2014). In this study, the nature of the data analysis was interpretive and therefore followed an inductive methodology. An inductive philosophical stance allowed codes and themes to emerge from the dialogue in transcripts (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). The inductive nature of the coding process and theming of the data allowed me to reveal codes and therefore themes from the data, rather than analysing with preconceived codes. An inductive methodology allowed me to consider the opinions and experiences of the LSTs and construct their roles from the emergent themes, in this way addressing the research question. Rigour was added to the study by employing two external auditors to verify the categories, subthemes and

themes in this study. The auditors did not have access to raw data, thereby protecting the anonymity of the participants. The auditors were not known to one another. Furthermore special care was taken in selecting the external auditors. One auditor had experience specifically in learning support, whilst the second auditor was a qualitative researcher. The process of external auditing confirmed the accuracy of the categories, subthemes and themes I had identified.

3.9 Ethical considerations

> "Research should be based on mutual trust, acceptance, cooperation, promises and well-accepted conventions and expectations between all parties involved in a research project" - (Strydom 2011:113).

The quotation above epitomises the importance of researchers approaching their studies in an ethical manner, appreciating that research is *about* the people and *for* the people. Marshall and Rossman (2011:47) describe the ethical procedure as a process whereby the researcher "does whatever he reasonably can to ensure that participants are not harmed". In the following section I explain the ethical concerns that were kept in mind in this study. Qualitative research deals with human life and experiences and this implies the ethical handling of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). First, I explain how the participants provided informed consent. Secondly, I highlight the manner in which voluntary participation was achieved. I then explain the processes that ensured that no harm would come to participants. Finally, I explain how anonymity and confidentiality were ensured in this study.

3.9.1 'Conscio consensu'– Informed consent

Participants were required to sign a consent form. They could only give consent once they had been made aware of what was required of them throughout the research process and what the implications of participating would be (Louw, 2014). Informed consent is a process which informs the participants of what they agreeing to disclose during the research process (De Vos et al., 2011). Maree (2010) explains that this will ensure that both the researchers and the participants fully understand the conditions of information transfer. In obtaining the consent from each of the participants, I appealed to their free will to take part in the research process and in no way coerced them.

Informed consent was the first principle highlighted in the invitation to the study. Participants who were identified to take part received a consent form (Addendum A). Before

they signed this form, I discussed the aim of the study and what would be asked of them if they decided to participate. Informed consent demanded an explanation of what would be required of them during the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

3.9.2 'Voluntarium participationem'- Voluntary participation

I did not influence or intimidate participants to take part in my study in any way. I highlighted the fact that participation in the process was voluntary. Providing information about the study and the opportunity to decline participation is part of informed consent (Bryman, 2012). In order for a participant to be a part of my study he or she had to voluntarily return my invitation. In communications with each participant, I explained the aim and process of my study. I informed the participants that even though they had signed consent forms, they had the right to discontinue participation at any time. At the beginning of each session with the participants I reminded them that their participation was completely voluntary and if they so wished they could withdraw at any time.

3.9.3 'Primum non nocere' – No harm to participants

The responsibility I undertook was to the prevent any harm to participants. I had to employ beneficence when dealing with the participants. Beneficence is "*primum non nocere* (first, do no harm)". In other words, I undertook the responsibility that no harm would come to individuals when they took part in my study. Strydom (2011) articulates that the responsibility of shielding participants from harm lies solely with the researcher. Harm could be categorised as stress or anxiety related to participating in the study, which is relatively difficult to prevent (Strydom, 2011, Bryman, 2012). One of the main objectives of research and the research study is to cause *no* harm to participants. Louw (2014:263) suggests that in order to bring no harm, in terms of anxiety or stress, the participant needs to "feel safe with you". In this case, if a participant seemed to me to be anxious upon arrival for the interview, I reminded him or her that participation was voluntary.

3.9.4 'Servo anonymiam'- Confidentiality and anonymity

Throughout the research process participants were assured that their anonymity would be preserved. It was essential that participants' identity remained private (Louw, 2014). Participants were assigned a pseudonym in order to keep track of them and this ensured their anonymity. Anonymity meant that participants' names would not be divulged at any time during the study or thereafter (Louw, 2014). The participants were reminded during every

session that the confidentiality of their responses was ensured and that information they provided would be kept safe. As this study dealt with private schools, it was important to keep the names of the schools confidential. The implication of confidentiality is the assurance that participants' responses will not expose the school. Confidentiality ensures that access to private information is limited (Strydom, 2011). I ensured confidentiality by reconfirming anonymity of participants and schools. The external transcriber assured me that the information in the interviews and transcriptions would remain confidential and signed a confidentiality form stating that no information or data relating to the study would be shared.

As part of the quality assurance methods, the anonymity of the external auditors was ensured by not disclosing their details as part of the study. Thus, their information was not shared. The external auditors did not have access to the interviews or the transcripts; consequently, the participant information and data remained confidential throughout the process of the study.

3.10 Quality measures

In the following section I explain the measures employed in the research study to ensure quality. The quality criteria are based on Lincoln and Guba's Trustworthiness Model which was published in 1985. This Model names trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as important. I explain the criteria used in the study and how I ensured that my study fulfilled each criterion. Qualitative research allows for the interpretation of social phenomena. The nature of qualitative research is dependent on human experience and opinion. Researchers therefore need to explain how credible their studies are by describing the quality assurance measures taken in a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Quality assurance throughout the research process is crucial and is solely the responsibility of the researcher (Meyrick, 2006). Similarly, Loh (2013) states that the researcher is the entity who is responsible for the validity of his or her research. Trustworthiness in a study validates the quality of the study and highlights the study as noteworthy if all the quality measurements are implemented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the following section, I highlight the quality assurance measures employed in this study, namely trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity.

3.10.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an overarching term that relays the factors that ensure the trustworthiness of a study. Trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985:290), describes the "… *'truth value', 'applicability', 'consistency'* and *'neutrality'*…" (writer's own italics) of a study. Bryman (2012:390) highlights the importance of the trustworthiness model as a process of checks to ensure that the study is credible and is an "absolute account of social reality". Marshall and Rossman (2011) also highlight the importance of the model of trustworthiness. There are numerous methods in which the trustworthiness of a study can be tested. Creswell and Miller (2000:124) observe that "Qualitative researchers routinely employ member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits". This underlines the quality measurements that are explained by Lincoln and Guba's Model. As qualitative research is based on human thoughts and beliefs it is imperative that trustworthiness is ensured (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The trustworthiness measures employed in this study were member checking, thick description and external audits.

Firstly, member checking was a used. After the transcription process, I sent the transcripts to all participants and asked them to validate them. Each participant confirmed that the transcript reflected what had been said in the interview. Participants were given the opportunity to correct any aspect in their transcript they felt was necessary. I also informed participants that during the process of member checking they could discuss any changes or topics they felt were not appropriate. Four of the five participants were satisfied with the transcripts and responded via email or telephone to convey their satisfaction. One of the participants queried one aspect of the transcript and we corrected the transcript collaboratively to the participant's satisfaction.

Secondly, "thick description" was employed throughout this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:43). As this study was social and narrative in nature, thick description detailed its every aspect. The nature of the study lent itself to a narrative quality; literature, theories, methodologies and findings were described in a narrative and this was intended to ensure the replication of the study. The researcher journal was also used to add additional narrative. As the journal formed a method of triangulation, a condensed and saturated narrative was provided. I was able to add inferences from the LS policies provided by participants in writing a narrative of findings.

Thirdly, external audits were conducted to ensure the trustworthiness of the questioning, objectives and data. As part of the protocol development, external audits were conducted by two professionals to ensure the validity of the questions. The findings of the study were audited by two professionals with extensive knowledge and experience in the area of LS. In this way I undertook the responsibility, as part of my role as designer of the research, to ensure trustworthiness in this study.

3.10.2 Credibility

Credibility is a quality measure through which I illustrate the truthfulness of the data. Bryman (2012) argues that through the research process many accounts of one topic will be received by the researcher. Credibility is achieved when the researcher ensures that the accounts are recorded as the participants intended. Similarly, De Vos et al. (2011), explain that the researcher needs to be sure that in some way the researcher's description and analysis of the data is true and accurate. In order to ensure that the accounts of the participants were credible and factual I made use of member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking, as discussed above, allowed participants to validate the truthfulness and accuracy of the transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I remained neutral throughout the process of the study. I did not discuss my views with any of the participants. Keeping a researcher journal allowed me to note my biases and therefore refrain from sharing them with participants or allowing them to cloud my judgement. Discussions with my supervisor allowed me to remain objective throughout the research process.

3.10.3 Transferability

The transferability of a study enables the researcher to carry the findings of a study into another context and to replicate the study. Transferability is ensured when a researcher has provided thick, rich and detailed accounts of the participants' context, making replicability possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). De Vos et al. (2011:420), describe transferability as a process whereby "the research can be transferred from a specific situation or case to another". Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014), emphasise that transferability recognises the importance of generalising an approach of a study rather than the results. Lincoln and Guba (1985:316) explain that a researcher ensures transferability by providing an "index of transferability," meaning that a study specifies each step of the process so that it can be replicated. These descriptions would include the setting and the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Similarly, Bryman (2012) argues that thick descriptions of the social

phenomena being studied will allow the circumstances to be reconstructed within a different context.

In order to ensure that this study fulfilled this criterion I included detailed and rich accounts of the contexts in which participants were employed as well as my reasons for selecting these participants. I explained my methods of sampling above (section 3.5.1). This would enable another researcher to make use of a similar population, sampling methods and inclusion criteria if the study was replicated. By providing all these accounts and descriptions, the study could be replicated.

3.10.4 Dependability

Dependability refers to the integration of the study methodology and the possibility of the study being replicated. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014:259), describe the dependability of a study as a co-relationship between the "data collection method, data analysis and theory". De Vos et al. (2011), argue that the researcher needs to ensure that the research process that has been designed is logical and well managed. In order to ensure the dependability process of this study's methodology I kept an audit trail that accounted for the methodology choices and ensured that they were logical. Petty et al. (2012:381), discuss dependability as an "audit trail" that allows the researcher to identify their influence. The audit trail consisted of my researcher journal and the field notes I made throughout the process. I reflected about the process in this journal and used these reflections to make inferences when conducting data analysis. Field notes were kept during the data collection process and were made after each semi-structured interview. These notes included observations on the conduct of the interviews and helped to ensure effective data collection from the interviews.

3.10.5 Confirmability

Marshall and Rossman (2011) and Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014), explain that the confirmability of a study is ensures when it is confirmed by another person; this person acts as an auditor of the study to assess how objective the researcher has been during the process of the study. Confirmability is a quality measurement that refers to the researcher's objectivity in carrying out the research. De Vos et al. (2011:421), explain that one method of ensuring the confirmability of the study to have the study audited or specifically "confirmed by another". Research reflexivity is one way of ensuring confirmability (Creswell & Miller, 2000, Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell and Miller (2000:127) observe

that the researcher explains his or her "entering beliefs and biases" at the outset. In order to ensure confirmability in this study, I did not share my views on the research topic with the participants. It was important that at all times my personal opinions and beliefs were kept as neutral as possible. Furthermore, it was important for me to stay neutral when eliciting data from participants. I avoided influencing them in any way. This quality measurement is known as research reflexivity and entails the researcher maintaining a neutral stance. Creswell and Miller (2000:127) explain that through researcher reflexivity researchers are able to "self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs and biases," maintaining awareness of these factors so that they in no way cloud any process during the research process.

Researcher reflexivity was practised by explaining and expressing my own bias on the research topic in my researcher journal before the research started. All of these biases and beliefs surrounding the nature of the topic were dealt with here. The journal provided a platform where these ideas and feelings could be channelled in order to avoid influencing the processes or outcomes. Reflection in the researcher journal on preconceived ideas about this study enabled me to maintain a neutral stance throughout the study. I remained completely neutral in all aspects of the research and was not in any way able to express my own beliefs regarding the topic. In this way confirmability was achieved.

3.10.6 Authenticity

Authenticity was achieved by ensuring accurate accounts of participants' opinions and experiences with regard to their roles as LSTs. The authenticity measure was aimed at ensuring what I had written was accurate. I approached the participants to assess the correctness of the transcripts. (Loh, 2013) believes that an effective method of checking the authenticity of a study is to make use of member checking. Similarly, Bryman (2012) describes member checking as a process through which the researcher relays the interpretation of what participants have contributed, so that they can certify that the data represents what they meant and reflected upon within the interviews.

3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed various sections related to the methodology of this study. I detailed the aim and purpose of his study. I highlighted the various roles I assumed whilst conducting the research which included researcher as artist, researcher as counsellor and researcher as manager and designer. I mentioned the importance of defining a paradigmatic

stance and highlighted a meta-theoretical paradigm. I discussed the constructivist ontology and interpretive epistemology and how these were related to the theoretical framework, as discussed in Chapter Two. I explained how a qualitative research methodology was appropriate to this study and the manner in which it was linked to the social nature of the study. Thereafter, I discussed the choice of case study design and the reason for choosing a case study design. Furthermore, I defined the study context and explained the sampling strategies that were implemented in order to sample the appropriate participants for the study. I discussed the choices of data collection strategies and how data would be documented to enable data analysis. Finally, I discussed the ethical considerations and the quality criteria used to ensure the trustworthiness of this research study.

In Chapter Four, I present findings and explain and describe the findings of the data analysis. I will present and discuss the research findings based on the data analysis.

4. Chapter Four: Presentation of findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the findings of the research study. The findings are based on the semi-structured interviews conducted with five LSTs in private schools in and then took part in the study. I go on to present the findings. All themes identified in this study collectively form the role of the LST. I name and discuss the four themes which became evident after completing a thematic analysis on the data. These themes were focused on defining the role LSTs assume in private schools. Firstly, in theme 1, I discuss the data pertaining to the role of the LST and what their role activities encompass. In the second theme, I illustrate the nature of LS provision as reported by the participants in their respective schools. In the third theme I discuss the private school factors that had an impact on the role of the LST. Theme four concerns the interaction between the LST and General Teachers (GTs) according to participants. Where appropriate, I provide participants' statements verbatim to support the findings. I give a summary of findings after each theme and concluding with a summary of all findings at the end of the chapter.

4.2 Description of participants

I invited a sample of five LSTs at private schools in Pretoria to participate in semi-structured interviews. All these participants were working with learners up to grade 7 level. These parameters were defined as inclusion criteria. While conducting the interviews, I questioned participants on their role as LSTs in their respective schools. Participants discussed what they were required to do at their schools. They were asked what their role encompassed and their role activities. Participants answered questions related to their specialised knowledge and types of LS they implemented. The process of LS intervention was explored as well as the nature of the policies relating to the implementation of LS. Further discussion was held on the collaborative nature of LS and supplementation by other specialists in the LS programmes.

Two of the five LSTs had postgraduate qualifications in LS, while the remaining three had no further formal qualifications but had attended workshops and continued their own research in the area of LS. All five of the participants were qualified teachers with prior teaching experience. The teaching experience ranged from 20 years to 32 years. The

participants had spent varying periods in LS. The most experienced LST had been involved in LS for 10 years and the least experienced LST had been involved for two years.

Table 4.1: Summary of biographical information of participants

Participant	Teaching Experience	LS experience	Formal qualification
Abigail	22 years	7 years	B.Ed. Honours
Beatrice	20 years	7 years	B.Counselling
Celia	20 years	2 years	B. Prim. Ed.
Danielle	31 years	5 years	HDE
Edith	32 years	10 years	HDE

LSTs' biographical data was not linked to the participants' real names but have been assigned pseudonyms in order to protect each participant's identity, this was agreed with each participant.

4.3 Presentation of findings

The following section provides an overview of the findings. Table 4.2 illustrates the process of naming themes in this study. Codes were logically combined when they seemed to address the same topic and formed categories. Topics were then combined when dealing with the same concepts, these formed subthemes. The subthemes were then collapsed according to a "central organising concept" to form the four themes in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2013a:224). The table provides a succinct overview of the data findings, after which I discuss in detail each theme and subsequent subthemes.

Table 4.2: Summary of themes from data

Theme name	Subtheme	Category
Theme 1 Roles of LST	Roles of LST	General roles and misconception about roles
	Role activities	Support and counsel
		Co-ordinator
		Consultant
		Assessor
		Specialist
	Reason for becoming LST	Personal experience
		Influence of personality
Theme 2	Processes informing LS provision	Inclusive nature of LS
		Informal vs formal LS

Theme name	Subtheme	Category
Nature of LS provision	LS environment	Safe and effective creation of LS environment
	Nature of assisting learners	Experience vs theory
		Intuitive nature of LS
	Goals of LS	Treatment with diagnosis
		Different learning methods
		Whole school support
	Types of LS	Team teaching
		Group LS
		Individual LS
	Collaborative nature of LS	Collaboration with other specialists
		Collaboration of LSTs at different schools
	Dealing with parents	Feedback and convenience
Theme 3 Private school factors	Advantage of PS setting	Flexibility of PS setting
		LS Policy
	LST as staff member	LST member of staff team
	Resources available for LS	Awareness of resource costs
		Technological influences
		In-service training
	Cost of LS	Cost to parents
		Cost to school
	Societal impact of LS	Society's influence
		Negative effects of LS
		Effect on LST
Theme 4 GT & LST interaction	LST & GT interaction	LST provides LS knowledge
		LSTs and GTs collaborate
		Age of GT
	Misconceptions of GTs	Misunderstanding of LS specifics

In the paragraphs below I discuss each theme in detail, considering the categories that were found to formulate subthemes. In each theme I provide a table of the specific themes findings. I continue to explain the findings in each theme and illustrate the contents of each theme with quotations from participants' responses.

4.4 Theme 1: The multifaceted role of the learning support teacher

Participants were asked various questions pertaining to their roles in their schools (Addendum C), such as what they thought their role was in their school. They were also

questioned about what they believed their colleagues' and principals' understanding of their role to be. Participants were asked to share information on their role as an LST. In order to explore their roles, questions were posed such as to whom they provided support and how they did so.

4.4.1 The role of the LST

The LSTs in this study described their role as consisting of various components which could not be defined as a clear and specific role. Rather, participants described their role as fluid and constantly changing. The changing nature of the role became a common trend among all the participants; one participant said "*I'm extremely fluid, put it that way, in my place it's very fluid*" *(Beatrice)*. Another participant, explained, "*Yeah I can't define it. It's busy, very busy*" (*Celia*), thus describing the many tasks and responsibilities she had. Another participant responded that she provided support to various people at her school, not just learners, "*I think maybe you need to be available to as many people as possible*" *(Danielle)*. Another participant explained "*that's what I'm supposed to do. I don't just support the learners, it's the staff support as well*" *(Beatrice)*. Danielle explained that "*My role becomes dual discipline in the school*" *(Danielle)*. All participants described their role as constantly changing and evolving, depending on what was needed: "*It's a lot of different things and it changes constantly as well*" *(Abigail)*.

As a result of the undefined nature of their role, participants spoke of the misconceptions about their roles that were prevalent at their schools. One participant explained the broad nature of her role made her feel that she was a "*Jack of all trades, master of none*" *(Edith)*. Not only was the role described as ambiguous, but participants felt that there were misconceptions regarding their role in schools. One LST explained, *"I think some of them think that I sit and play games and don't do much"* *(Abigail)*.

It seems that members of the LST community are unsure of their role in a school setting. Misconceptions about their role were illustrated by examples such as GTs asking LSTs to 'fix' learners, dismissing the ideals of support and inclusive education. Two of the five LSTs described an ideology of 'fixing' learners. I quote Celia's words: *"Okay, now I'm fixing the child, here is your child back and yeah*" *(Celia)*. Yet participants reported that their role was to support learners with barriers and find different methodologies to support them. One LST explained "*I think primarily it is to assist with children that have some learning difficulties*"

(Celia). Another participant explained the importance of the LST's role in identifying and supporting learners, "*so my role is just to make sure that the children are identified early and they get the correct therapy that they need to get or extra input or whatever, extra classes*" *(Edith)*.

According to all the participants in this study the role of the LST appeared undefined and was described as fluid. They all mentioned the variety of roles they fulfilled and the variation in the processes they were required to perform. They reported the necessity of identifying learners with barriers to learning and of supporting them with alternative methods of learning.

4.4.2 Role activities

Participants were asked to explain their daily duties and whether there were any duties which detracted from LS. Participants were asked questions based on what would qualify them as specialists within the field of LS. They were asked if they believed that they were specialists and whether or not their colleagues at school agreed with this. The questions explored what participants believed their specialist role to be and what expertise and specific knowledge qualified them as experts in the field.

- **Support and counsel**

Support was the activity most often mentioned by the participants in this study. All five participants described support as a major aspect of their daily programme. This support took various forms in the LST's role. Thus, support was also constantly in flux and varied from one day to another. The LSTs reported both academic support and emotional support as part of their role. However, support and counselling was not provided solely to learners, but also to GTs and staff members. Therefore, one of the most important and most often discussed roles in this study was the role of LST as a counsellor or supporter. In their role as counsellor, LSTs emphasised the importance of a constant awareness of the emotional state of learners receiving their support. One LST stated, "*I learnt more to focus on the emotional being of the child*" *(Celia)*. All participants discussed the importance of accepting the learner and how this promoted LS: "*it is about the child needs to experience love and patience and then acceptance*" *(Celia)*. Another participant stated that "*I think umm total, total, unquestionable acceptance of this child*" *(Beatrice)*.

LS was reflected upon as a support session by the participants in this study. Generally, participants spoke of LS as focused on remediation or academic support for learners. This academic support could take place in two ways, either group LS or individual LS, both of which are discussed later. However, the support that was provided was aimed at helping identified learners to function at the same level as their peers. Therefore intervention was focused on support for learners. This support was described by participants as consisting of emotional or purely academic support.

Thus LSTs focused not only on academic barriers but on emotional barriers as well. All the participants reflected on their role as a counsellor. One participant explained that the role of LST was more one of a counsellor than any other: *"so I suppose that my role here is more of a counselling role" (Danielle)*. The participants felt that a large part of their role each day was to act as a counsellor. All five participants described the emotions of the learner as an important factor. I quote: *"the remedial problems are not always ironed out because sometimes there are other problems that prevent those remedial problems from being ironed out" (Danielle).*

The emotional connection each learner had with their necessity for LS influenced the nature of how each LST worked with the learner. Three of the five participants reiterated the necessity of considering the learner's emotional state when providing LS. Thus, it was clear that the LST ought to assume a counselling role needed.

- **Learning support teacher as Co-ordinator**

The role as learning support co-ordinator was described as having various facets by the LSTs in this study. This was explained as a managerial role assumed by LSTs: "*I co-ordinate the whole team*" *(Beatrice)*. Edith also explained "*I just co-ordinate all of that and I co-ordinate with the therapists*" *(Edith).*

In order for LS programmes to be effective, each participant acted as a co-ordinator. It became clear that a great deal of organisation formed part of what they were required to do at their respective schools. One LST explained that co-ordination formed a large part of her role: "*There's a lot of co-ordination with others*" *(Abigail)*. The organisation and operation of the LS process was described by participants as an important role. All participants reported on the processes of running the LS programmes at their schools and explained that their management of the LS programme was integral to effective LS.

- **Consultation**

Consultation seemed to be a role expected of LSTs. All the participants explained that consultation with parents was one of their responsibilities. The LSTs mentioned consultation with other staff members concerning the type of LS being implemented in each case. *Edith* explained, "*I meet with parents, I meet with the teachers*". Thus, consulting was described and performed by all participants. As part of the consultation; advice and referrals to other specialists were also reported. LSTs mentioned the importance of having knowledge of other therapies that could supplement LS. All the participants seemed to have a close working relationship with and knowledge of other professionals with whom they could consult or to whom they could refer learners.

In describing consultation, LSTs explained that they provided advice to parents and to GTs. All participants reported providing resources and advice to general teachers. *Abigail* explains*, "We have a lot of teachers who do learner support, I have to check their prep and guide them as well" (Abigail)*. Therefore, this part of the consultancy role that LSTs assume centres on learning materials or resources that could be used in classrooms to further support learners. One of the participants explains, "*I assist with extra resources, umm either what they can use in class or what they can send to the parents*" *(Celia)*. Thus, the consultancy role was described by participants as covering various responsibilities.

- **Assessor and assessments**

Assessment was reported to form a large part of the LST's role. LSTs indicated that they were generally involved with the assessment of learners at the schools. *Abigail* explained that "*I do assessments*" (*Abigail*). Similarly, *Beatrice* explained "*assessing, that's a very big part that I play here*" (*Beatrice*). Two LSTs explained that the task of assessing could be done formally or informally as part of the LS process. Formal assessments assessed for barriers to learning and informal assessments gauged the stage learners were at in therapy. Participants explained that formal assessments, in other words formal scholastic assessments, were used to diagnose a learner's barrier to learning and generally to inform the type of LS that was provided. Informal assessments were described by all participants as methods of gauging where learners were within their specific LS programmes. These assessments were done mostly during LS sessions to inform the progression of learner support.

Participants mentioned their role of mentor to general teachers. Mentoring related to the provision of LS, as GTs were inevitably involved in LS. LSTs become mentors to GTs by providing support and guidance in the LS provided at their school. I quote: *"Sometimes teachers are a little bit more aloof and those teachers need to be mentored so that they can actually tune in" (Danielle)*.

- **LST as a specialist**

The mention of specialist knowledge by LSTs confirmed that they were specialists in the field of LS. Three of the five participants had completed postgraduate qualifications in LS. The necessity of having a formalised qualification in order to provide LS was clarified by *Beatrice*, *"you would need to have some sort of formal qualification" (Beatrice)*. All the participants recognised the importance of theory in the provision of LS, explaining that the role of the LST would not be practical or viable if the LST did not attain specialised knowledge. "*Ahh you need the knowledge, you need the practical knowledge and you need to umm be able to identify the problem areas*" *(Edith)*. All of the participants spoke of subject specific terminology when discussing LS; this specialised knowledge was not part of a GT's knowledge base apparently. One participant justified the emphasis on specialised knowledge to perform assessments and understood the results: "*Absolutely immensely I mean, we can't, without the studies I wouldn't have been able to conduct the tests that I do*" *(Beatrice)*. All participants in this study considered themselves specialists in the field of LST, *Celia* illustrates this: *"So actually you are the educational expert on how to teach children*" (*Celia*).

As part of their specialised knowledge LSTs, the theory of specific LS terminology is very important: *"I think you have to have that theory to understand why I'm doing this activity with the child*" *(Abigail)*. All of the participants in this study explained the importance of subject knowledge and that GTs did not have the expert knowledge. The subject knowledge relates to different teaching methodologies, specific terms used in conducting these methodologies and the various barrier that learners may face. All subject knowledge conveys the importance of theory as part of an LST's knowledge base, underpinning how they specifically apply their knowledge to each learner's LS programme. As LSTs have this specialised knowledge, GTs and parents trust their recommendations and advice. One participant explained that "*people now trust my knowledge you know*" *(Edith)*. This trust in

the LSTs knowledge benefits the implementation of LS as learners, GTs and parents are comfortable that the LST is fully equipped to manage and implement therapy.

The role activities provided a clear overview of what LSTs in this study were required to perform in their respective roles at schools where they practised. It was found that LSTs' roles comprised four main role activities, namely support and counselling, co-ordinating, consulting and assessing. The LSTs in this study described themselves particularly as specialists in the area of LS and reported that other staff members viewed them as specialists.

4.4.3 Reasons for becoming an LST

Participants seemed to all have a personal connection with becoming an LST. One participant struggled with her own barriers to learning and therefore chose the profession as a career as support had made a difference to her life. Two of the participants felt that LS was a calling and they became LSTs because of their personalities. All the participants had their own path to becoming an LST; two had achieved postgraduate degrees, another had a counselling background and as a result of her passion for working with children had become an LST.

A factor which seemed to overarch all others was personal characteristics. All the participants in this study described the importance of having a friendly yet patient personality to perform the role of LST. Specifically, three of the participants were steadfast that *not everyone* could be an LST and that it took a specific type of person to become one. One LST explained: "*You either have it or you don't*" *(Beatrice)*. All participants reported the influence of a personality type on becoming an LST: *"I really feel your personality is a big factor*" *(Abigail)*.

All the participants spoke of the personality traits that a LST should possess. All five LSTs explained the importance of an ability to be creative and flexible when conducting therapy sessions. One participant described it thus: *"the ability to be flexible, learn on the spot. Research what you're doing and be able to learn all the time and change*" *(Abigail)*. All participants reported the importance of being patient when dealing with learners, not only in therapy sessions but with time therapy could take.

All participants described an unfaltering passion for LS; it became evident in the interviews that each participant was passionate about her role as LST. *Celia* illustrated this: *"that it is a heart thing, it must be within your soul to really help to make a difference umm you know*"

(Celia). Although all the participants' processes and therapy techniques varied, they had passion in common. Passion allowed for each of them to be completely focused on the learners they had in therapy: "*If your heart isn't in it then it's not gonna work you know you need to understand is that you've gotta give of yourself emotionally to the staff, to the children and to the parents"* *(Danielle).* Thus the LSTs were clear that remuneration for their LS provision was not an influential factor; rather, the driving force was helping learners overcome barriers. *Celia* explained: "*You must really have the heart for it. I think I've said it before, don't go and do it because you think you are going to make a lot of money*" *(Celia).* This was evidence of the fact that the role of LST is not based on promotion and monetary value but rather on a moral code of helping and assisting learners. One participant said that her role as LST was satisfying as she was able to assist her learners: "*No, it's the most gratifying job ever"* *(Danielle).* As part of this passion, LSTs reported the success of the learners they supported as their reward: "*how the kids are flourishing after you have been um helping them and that is quite rewarding*" *(Celia).*

4.4.4 Summary of theme

The LSTs in this study described their reasons for becoming LSTs as based on personal experience in their field of expertise. One participant mentioned her own experience with LS and the direct impact it had had on her role as an LST. All the participants noted that personality was an influential factor and that only a certain helpful, caring and patient personality would thrive as an LST.

Overall, theme 1 provided insight into the role of LSTs in this study. Participants explained the broad nature of their role and its fluidity. The LSTs described the various role activities they had to assume while employed as an LST at their respective private schools. They described their role as ever changing and dependent on learners and the support and consultation required by staff members. The LSTs reported their role as specialised, observing that they had acquired expert knowledge and had the expertise and specialist knowledge to support and advise GTs.

4.5 Theme 2: The nature of LS provision

Participants were asked questions relating to the implementation and provision of LS at their respective schools. Specifically, they were asked how they implemented LS and how their LS programmes were designed. Questions were asked pertaining to the types of LS they

used and the purpose of LS at the school, when the LS took place and who was involved in its provision. Participants were also questioned on the therapies that were used to supplement LS.

4.5.1 Processes informing LS provision

The following subtheme covers the findings from the interviews on the various processes influencing the nature and implementation of LS at their respective schools.

- **Learning support is inclusive**

All participants in this study described the inclusive nature of LS. LS was described as being prevalent because of the inclusive nature of their schools. In particular, participants described the inclusive nature of General Education Development (GED) and Independent Examinations Board (IEB) policies but reiterated the lack of manpower and resources that hindered the implementation of LS. One participant described the GED policy as an inclusive ideal: "*I think their idea of inclusion is fantastic*" *(Beatrice)*, but explained that the lack of professionals to implement LS was a disadvantage as "*we just do not have the manpower resources for that*" *(Beatrice)*. One of the participants expressed concern about the ideal of an inclusive system as many did not have the necessary knowledge to be fully inclusive: "*It's a big worry because the government is pushing for inclusivity and you can only be fully inclusive if you have the knowledge*" *(Beatrice)*.

- **Informal and formal LS**

The participants described the difference between formal and informal LS provided at their respective schools. All had different ideas on what they considered formal and informal provision. However, all participants made use of these two types of LS.

Formal LS generally encompassed the accommodations made for learners and the process of the LS that was followed. Accommodations were reported as being a sensitive matter, and one that often received criticism from parents and General teachers (GTs). One participant described the difficulty of accommodations and named the process as sensitive: "*So it's quite. Actually a sensitive issue*" *(Abigail)*. The formal nature of LS was been described by the participants as the process of receiving LS, the making of a diagnosis or referring a learner to other specialists.

Informal LS was based on informal discussions with parents or GTs, in which the LSTs reported giving simple advice. Advice might be simple methods of placing learners in classrooms, seeing an optometrist or writing in a different colour on the white board. All of these suggestions were considered informal accommodations made by these LSTs and did not require a paper trail. These informal accommodations formed part of the LSTs' role as they were often consulted informally. One participant reported that informal accommodations were sometimes easy and quick procedures to benefit learners: *"we feel our way and it's done informally and we try and give them techniques to work faster" (Abigail).*

Participants explained that some sort of diagnosis was required. This diagnosis was usually based on the recommendation of a psychologist or educational psychologist. The participants explained the necessity for this process in formal LS provision.

4.5.2 Learning support environment

The environment in which LS is provided should be safe, inviting and creative according to the participants in this study. Two of the five LSTs elaborated on the importance of the environment, observing that the LST's office should be inviting and appealing to learners. One of the participants explained that learners should not feel intimidated or punished by LS. Therefore, the environment where the LS occurs should eliminated the stigma.

4.5.3 Nature of helping learners

The following subtheme explains the findings concerning the implementation of LS. The following paragraphs describe various factors that the LSTs in this study described as necessary to their process of implementing LS.

- **Experience vs theory**

All participants in this study reiterated the importance of experience in LS. They explained that having experience was an advantage in implementing LS correctly and most effectively. One LST explained that her experience in the area of LS allowed effective identification and design of programmes: "*Look you need to be able to identify with reason*" *(Beatrice).* Another participant mentioned the juxtaposition of theory and experience, explaining that "*then I read in the book what to do. I think you need to know where to go to source that knowledge and I think you need the whole. Like I say, the practical thing was actually more*

important" *(Abigail)*. Another participant explained that through experience, she was able to identify barriers early and effectively: "*As to say I just have an affinity to be able to pick up children with problems*" *(Edith)*. The participants in this study believed that experience allowed them to provide effective LS. Danielle illustrated it thus: "*I have years of experience that I can pick up a child's book and say that this child has a problem*" *(Danielle)*.

All the participants explained that the theory of LS, barriers to learning and methodologies of LS were important. However, it was important that the LST had the ability to absorb the knowledge and apply it correctly to each learner's case. One participant explained the importance of practical knowledge: "*you need the practical knowledge and you need to umm be able to identify the problem*" *(Edith)*. This LST went on to explain that experience informed practice: "*I think experience is a huge thing, umm as to say I just have an affinity to be able to pick up children with problems*" *(Edith)*. Another participant explained that experience had taught her what was effective in LS: "*you realise what is working and what not, and from my previous teaching experience*" *(Celia)*.

The participants in this study all reported their own awareness and additional research on LS, new techniques and different resources. One participant referred to the ability to constantly change according to developments in LS as being advantageous: "*Research what you're doing and be able to learn all the time and change*" *(Abigail)*. Four of the five participants stated that they used the internet to research LS techniques, methodologies and new developments: "*the internet today you can actually find such amazing things and read up such amazing studies and things like that*" (*Edith*). Researching aspects pertaining to LS seemed an important part of the LST's role: "*Research what you're doing and be able to learn all the time and change*" *(Abigail)*. This research was done not only for their own use but also to be shared with other staff members. All the participants reported sharing information, as previously noted in their role as a consultant. The LSTs all reported researching different techniques or methodologies to implement different ways of learning that would appeal to learners.

These LSTs emphasised the importance of research into using other therapies to supplement LS to provide better support for the learner. One participant explained the advantage of being aware of other specialists who could provide supplementary support: "*I also think you need to have a knowledge of other therapies, you've got to understand the terminology*" *(Abigail)*.

- **Help intuitively**

Intuition was described by all participants as being a part of LS and the role of the LST. All LSTs in this study repeatedly spoke of how the role and ability to help was intuitive and came naturally to them. One participant relayed that she became an LST through intuition and realising her need to help learners: "*umm it came about to me that I really have something that I can offer kids that need help*" *(Celia)*. The participant spoke of the inborn need to help people: "*You have to have that inner feeling, I have to help or I want to help people and sometimes it's not just the children that you help*" *(Celia)*. A second LST explained the same ideal: *"I think learning support teachers naturally have that in them, you actually have that nurturing way*" *(Beatrice)*.

LSTs described the importance of taking a holistic view of each learner. By considering all aspects of a child's life and personality, emotions and academic barriers which required support, the LST was able to support effectively. One participant described the process of LS as "*see(ing) what's happening and getting a global picture of the child*" *(Danielle)*. The LSTs all that their view of a child encompassed all aspects of that individual: "*you study the children as they are the whole being*" *(Celia)*.

The learner and LST relationship seemed an aspect which was crucial to the effective and successful implementation of LS. Creating a relationship of acceptance of the learner seemed to be beneficial according to all participants: "*I think umm total, total, unquestionable acceptance of this child. I get you and I like you just the way you are*" *(Beatrice)*. In order to work effectively with each individual "*I think that they feel secure with me and they trust me and that's important in learner support, the children have got to trust you*" *(Danielle)*.

The ability to support learners effectively and successfully through the process of LS was described as intuitive by all participants in this study. In each participant's view, a common thread of awareness of the learner's emotions and the need to create a safe and accepting environment in which therapy could take place was of great importance.

4.5.4 Goals of LS

The LSTs described various goals of LS in the interviews. One goal was supporting learners to nurture their academic and emotional state. One participant described the LS process as enabling learners to become functioning adults after school: "*at the end of the day they also*

need to be functioning adults and they need to feel good about themselves" *(Danielle)*. Another participant explained that the goal of therapy was to facilitate growth to a stage where learners no longer had barriers to learning: "*I really would like to equip kids to be fine adults with no issues*" *(Celia)*.

LSTs explained that the goals of LS were reached through making use of different methods of learning. All the participants explained that each learner taking part in LS could learn; it was the role of the LST to define the best method of learning. Once the learning method had proved effective, LSTs all described the process of LS as being effective as well. One participant described LS as a process that is "*about learning in a different way*" *(Celia)*. Another LST described the LST's role as accepting the learner's difficulties in learning in a mainstream way and "*understand[ing] and accept[ing] children that are different and learn differently*" *(Abigail)*.

In basing the LS on different methods of learning in order to overcome barriers to learning, all participants explained that LS should be based on an individual learner's needs. One participant reported that the LST sought a way of learning that appealed to the individual: "*this is what this kids likes, this is the best way that this kid learns and then we do that*" *(Celia)*. It was reiterated by all participants that the ideal of LS was to focus on the individual learner and his or her specific needs in order to overcome barriers effectively: "*at the root of it, at the centre of it must be the child*" *(Danielle)*.

- **Recommendation of accommodation**

The participants explained the importance of employing monitoring techniques throughout the process of LS. They all explained that in order for LS to be effective, evidence of progress and support was required. The process of keeping a log or paper trail of the support learners receive informs future interventions. One of the participants spoke of "*a paper trail for them*" *(Edith)* and how this was used as a monitoring technique. It appeared that the process defined the support required by learners and a record informed other specialists of the type of support which had been provided.

The LS process was described as collaborative effort at all LSTs' schools. It was a process of sharing information on learners' process and progress with staff members and therapists. Thus, the ideal of informing GTs and therapists of all aspects of LS provision was common to all LSTs' programmes. The collaborative nature of the LS programmes supports effective

implementation. Therefore, a whole school support system was reported by all participants. This suggested that all individuals involved with learners were able to participate in the process.

4.5.5 Types of LS

The LSTs reported two main types of LS: group LS or individual LS. Individual LS appeared to be the preferred manner of providing LS in all participants' cases. One of the participants described individual LS as advantageous because "*one on one session with a kid reveals sometimes so much more*" *(Celia)*. Another participant described individual LS as working "*with an individual and I work at their pace and I just see that whole thing when you see that a child gets it*" *(Abigail)*. A third LST described the individual sessions as beneficial to learners with specific needs: "*that's on a one on one which is great*" *(Danielle)*.

Participants reported that group LS was a method used to re-teach a concept rather than to provide therapy for a specific barrier to learning. Two of the five participants mentioned that group LS allowed learners with difficulties to learn from one another. Therefore, these LSTs used of this methodology when the barrier seemed less intense and therapy was not needed for a prolonged period. In some cases, the participants described group LS as beneficial to learners: "*I think that you get more, there's more dynamics in a group situation*" *(Edith)*.

Two of the five participants described team teaching as a methodology for delivering LS. This occurs when the LST teaches alongside the GT. This type of LS was described as beneficial if there was a group of learners that struggled with one particular concept. One participant said: "*I am expected to offer support in classes so if the teacher wants a team teach they will ask me*" *(Beatrice)*.

4.5.6 Collaboration with LSTs at different schools

Collaboration was reported as a vital aspect of LS by all participants in this study. Not only did it appear that collaboration occurred between LSTs and other specialists, but also with GTs. Thus, a whole school model, as described earlier, was followed. The LSTs were in constant contact with GTs regarding learners' progress and therapy status, "*whether it's us as the learner support teacher or us as the teacher, we're a team*" *(Danielle)*. One participant described the nature of whole school support, requiring GTs to assume an LS stance: "*You must remember that every teacher should be a learning support teacher. Not a. It shouldn't be separate*" *(Danielle)*. All the participants described a whole school support

team and the process of LS being delivered collaboratively: *"we have a team that works together"* (*Beatrice*).

To make the LS process effective in its planning and implementation, participants described brainstorming and sharing ideas on individual cases. Participants also described the brainstorming process with GTs and other specialists: *"It's a bit of brain storming as well" (Abigail).* LSTs seemed to view the sharing and processing of ideas in order to best support each learner as a necessity: "*we have a team discussion and we bounce ideas off each other and the therapists are here*" *(Beatrice).* Another participant explained that it was enjoyable to work alongside the specialists: "*I think it is better to have extra support specialists with you because it's quite nice, we speak to one another*" *(Celia).*

Participants explained the advantage of brainstorming with other specialists. They all mentioned the advantages of working in collaboration with other specialists in supplementing the process and implementation of LS. LSTs in this study all reported the benefits of working with other specialists on specific cases, and how brainstorming was a method through which the most effective LS programmes were created.

LS discussed by participants in this study included collaboration with other therapies. All participants explained the importance of implementing LS concurrently with either occupational therapists, speech therapists or psychologists. The use of various therapies was beneficial when planning a support programme which would allow the whole learner to be supported. All aspects were covered by a multidisciplinary team according to these participants. They emphasised the importance of a multi-disciplinary team, of which the LST would form only one facet. All five LSTs had the advantage of being in close contact with other specialists, with these individuals working on the premises or being fewer than five kilometres away. This proximity made referrals easier and meant that feedback was received promptly. All participants described this collaboration as essential; having other specialists close by made it easier to meet frequently and discuss support plans for each learner.

4.5.7 Summary of theme

Theme 2 dealt with the nature of LS provision as experienced by the participants in this study. The provision of LS at each school differed slightly; however, overall there were broad similarities. All participants described the inclusive ideals of LS. LS in this study had certain formal and informal aspects which differed, although all programmes consisted of

formal and informal aspects of LS provision and implementation. LSTs described that the environment in which LS was provided should be safe, consistent and suited to each learner's needs. LS programmes were provided on the basis of different but suitable learning methods and supported by a whole school model. Thus, all staff members, principals and parents worked together to provide support for learners with barriers to learning. All participants described the advantages and necessity of collaborating with other specialists to supplement the provision of LS. They responded that both individual and group methods of LS provision were applied at their schools. Two participants described team teaching as a means of LS provision in certain cases.

4.6 Theme 3: Private school factors

Participants were asked questions regarding the implementation of LS in a private school setting. Questions centred on the nature of designing LS programmes in private schools and explored the nature of private school policies and how these differed from government policy. The LSTs were asked whether there were ant advantages in designing and implementing LS programmes at a private school. The following paragraphs describe the provision of LS at private schools.

4.6.1 Advantage of PS setting

The private school setting was advantageous to the provision and implementation of LS, according to all five LSTs in this study: "*I know there's a lot to be said for private education*" *(Beatrice).* One participant described the role of financial capacity and resources of her school in providing support to learners: "*a lot of our parents really sacrifice a hell of a lot to put their children into a private school. So that's why we take it so seriously that we give them money for their buck*" *(Beatrice).* The financial nature of a private school meant better resources and allowed specific therapists to be employed to provide LS. One participant explained, "*I think you get far more support because it's private and I think it's because the therapists also think the parents can afford it*" (*Edith*).

One of the participants described the smaller number of learners in the classrooms of the private school as advantageous to LS. Smaller number meant that learners with barriers could be identified and supported faster, according to this LST. Smaller numbers of learners also allowed teachers to be more in touch with learners and to gauge their progress. One participant explained the advantage of smaller classes thus: "*I mean our class sizes are*

smaller umm we can afford to get people in to come" *(Beatrice)*. The private school setting also allowed for progress and feedback to occur within one school because of smaller classes, according to one LST.

One of the participants described the private school setting as more flexible which meant that support could be provided to learners during non-academic lessons. The flexibility of the private school was also identified by an LST as accommodating a learner based on his or her particular needs. As these schools facilitated staff and LST collaboration, LS could take place at any time during the day.

4.6.2 LST as staff member

The LSTs in this study explained that they were perceived as members of the staff team by the GTs in their respective schools. Those LSTs who worked as individual therapists, however, were considered members of staff by GTs and the principals. One of the LSTs explained that she was a member of the staff team as she had decided to collaborate. She was able to join staff meetings and break times with the other staff members. Two of the LSTs explained the importance of being part of the staff at their schools as they were able to forge relationships with the GTs. These relationships were important and influenced their role as LST. One participant stated "*they see you as the specialist but yes, make sure that you become part of the staff*" *(Celia)*. General teachers, in the LSTs' opinion, were able to refer more easily and ask for assistance sooner because of the personal relationship that existed between GT and LST. Another LST described the process of developing a relationship of trust with GTs in order to provide better advice and co-teach with GTs.

All participants mentioned the support and understanding of the principals at their schools. They described their relationship with their principal as beneficial to their role and to provision of LS in schools. The empathy and respect of the principal allowed LSTs to be used in the correct manner, according to one participant. One of the LSTs described the empathy the principal demonstrated for learners in therapy as a result of his remedial background. This was described as advantageous to her role, in that the principal was able to better understand what she needed to do with the learners. The support and encouragement of the principal at each school allowed the LST to provide LS and not to be used in other areas of schooling.

All LSTs in this study considered themselves part of the staff. However, their role as LST enabled them to focus solely on LS. Therefore, they noted that none of their responsibilities at their schools detracted from the provision and implementation of LS. One participant reported: "*No other activities, none at all, they do not umm expect that from me and that was in my job description*" *(Celia)*. Another LST explained that "*No grade duty, no extra murals, nothing*" *(Beatrice)* detracted from her providing support. Although all the participants listed their duties they were obliged to fulfil like all other members of staff, none of these tasks conflicted with their duties as LST. One participant described her responsibilities as "*the same responsibilities, duties, whatever as other teachers and I think that's only fair. Umm it doesn't take away duties because I have to take an afternoon activity. I need to see children in the afternoon*" *(Abigail)*.

Participants noted the importance of being a member of staff in building relationships with GTs and principals, but agreed that no tasks impinged on time meant for LS.

4.6.3 Resources available for LS

LSTs made use of various resources that were readily available to all of them. One participant explained: "*We have access to that which a lot of schools won't have*" *(Abigail)*. Three of the five LSTs did explain that the resources that were purchased for them were paid for from an amount budgeted for LS. However, all LSTs stressed the freedom of using resources for LS; most necessary resources were purchased when required, or LSTs made use of electronic resources. Given the financial freedom allowed LSTs to purchase resources, international resources were also used. One of the LSTs explained that as a result of the financial capacity of her school, she was able to request expensive international scholastic assessments. All LSTs reported making use of electronic resources, computer programmes or iPads during LS sessions: "*I get far more from the kids on a computer program than what I do with pen and paper*" *(Beatrice)*. The overall conclusion was that the financial resources of private schools meant that educational resources were readily available to them.

4.6.4 LS policy

The LS policy implemented at each school had been written by the LSTs interviewed in this study. All reported that they had made use of both the GED and IEB guidelines in their implementation of LS. Three of the participants had drawn up a checklist that GTs could use

to tick off certain characteristics to help them to identify learners with barriers sooner. The other schools followed a referral approach in which a GT would report worrying behaviour or poor academic performance to their head of department who would then refer the learner to the LST. All participants reported that both informal and formal processes were followed in order to best accommodate learners at their schools. All the LSTs interviewed spoke of accommodations and recommendations being part of their consultancy. Generally, they would consult with the GT as a first step and then formally discuss the LS accommodation with parents before implementing any LS accommodation. In order for learners to receive accommodation at any of these schools, they would have to have a history of difficulties with schoolwork or a formal diagnosis by the LST or a psychologist. All participants described the process of providing accommodations to learners as a very sensitive matter, and mentioned the difficulty of recommending accommodations to parents.

All participants described the inclusive nature of both the IEB and GED guidelines but pointed out that these guidelines were not always practical. The formulation of their own policy allowed LSTs to create policy guidelines which were appropriate to the resources available to their respective schools. I quote a participant: "*In an independent school we don't follow their guidelines. My policies are my policies*" *(Abigail)*. The guidelines took into consideration staff availability, cost of accommodation and specialists available to the school. Each of these policies was unique to the school for which they were written. Therefore, each of the LSTs had their own means of implementing LS at their school. They also explained that all GTs were aware of the policy at the school and the policies allowed for early identification of learners and implementation of LS recommendations. Two of the participants highlighted the importance of reviewing and renewing the LS policy at their school.

4.6.5 Cost of LS

All the participants in this study reported that the costs were divided into school costs and parental costs. The costs of LS varied from school to school. However, generally in-school support where the LST provided LS during the school day, was for school's account. It was evident that if learners received LS after school hours parents were required to pay for the sessions.

4.6.6 In-service training

All participants in the study reported the importance of in-service training for both LSTs and GTs. This was suggested by LSTs to broaden the knowledge of the GTs. Generally, participants in this study reported that GTs did not have wide enough knowledge of what LSTs were required to do, what assessments consisted of and what LSTs' knowledge encompassed. In-service training was co-ordinated and implemented by LSTs in this study. Those who had been involved with in-service training believed that the greater exposure to LS specific concepts and learning barriers were important to GTs' knowledge. The training was mostly provided in a workshop for GTs. These workshops covered psychological diagnostics, new learning techniques and awareness of mental barriers faced by learners. One of the participants stressed the importance of LSTs collaborating and sharing information with other schools In order to share knowledge and techniques with other LSTs and to provide a wider knowledge base for all LSTs.

4.6.7 Societal impact of LS

Society and societal issues had an impact on LS and its implementation, according to the participants in this study. LSTs believed this was a factor influencing the implementation and need for LS. One participant in particular reported on the impact of home and family time and the fact that parents were unable to help with school tasks. LSTs mentioned the nature of parents' involvement: "*That's the new age parent*" *(Beatrice)*. The pressures faced in modern times created a greater need for LS, these LSTs believed. One participant described the influence of societal issues on learners thus: "*I think there are so many social issues today for children to cope with*" *(Celia)*. There appeared to be and therefore greater pressure on learners at school: "*I think because the school is quite pressurised and the academic standard …*" *(Celia)*.

4.6.8 Effect on LST

All participants in this study commented on the emotional toll LS took on the LST. They explained that the process and implementation of LS was emotionally taxing. Two LSTs described the treatment as long lasting and never a quick fix. The LST became emotionally invested in the learner. One participant explained: "*it's quite an emotionally demanding thing*" *(Edith)* and another described LS as "*quite emotionally draining because you're dealing with children that struggle and often emotionally don't cope*" *(Abigail)*.

One of the LSTs described the LS process as one of self-growth and improvement, constantly renewing the LST's knowledge. Another LST noted that the nature of the job required the LST to be strong emotionally and to come from an environment which was happy and healthy. She continued by explaining that the LST's emotional and private life should to be secure to counteract the taxing effect of LS on the LST's emotions.

Participants in this study described the difficulties and challenges of providing feedback to parents of learners in therapy. Two participants described this as particularly challenging after assessments of learners. One participant explained that parents were often not open to the idea of therapy, not believing that their child was experiencing difficulties. The process was described as stressful at times by another participant, as there was pressure on the LST exerted by parents of learners in therapy. This pressure was constant and parents expected a speedy solution, as described: "*Sometimes it takes some time and I think sometimes parents are not as patient they want a quick fix and unfortunately it takes some time*" *(Celia).*

4.6.9 Summary of theme findings

The private school setting was described as advantageous to the provision and implementation of LS by all the LSTs in this study. Smaller numbers of learners in classrooms was reported as the most important factor. Participants described the LS process as readily available to all learners in their respective schools. They explained that more learners could benefit from LS as a result of early identification. The flexible nature of private schooling was noted by all LSTs. The private school environment allowed for the LS programme to be flexible and for learners to receive therapy from the LST or other specialists during the school day. The policies were suited to each individual school and were generally formulated by the LSTs themselves. These policies benefited learners and allowed for individual application in every learner's case. LSTs in this study mentioned that it was important that they were accepted as part of the staff team. In this way, support from staff members and principals allowed for effective provision of LS to learners. The affluent nature of private schools was reported as the main factor in the availability of resources for LSTs. The LSTs in this study also mentioned the influence of changes in society on the need for LS. Specifically, the pressures on learners and parents to perform in school and work spheres were a societal factor in the need for LS.

4.7 Theme 4: GT & LST interaction

Participants were questioned on the collaborative nature of LS provision and implementation. These questions pertained to the interaction of LSTs with other staff members at their school and how this interaction became part of their role. LSTs were asked for their opinions on collaboration with GTs and what they believed GTs understood about their role. They were also asked how they interacted with the principal at their school and what the principal expected their role to be. LSTs were asked what specialists they collaborated with and how this collaboration influenced LS and what specialists they consulted with in order to supplement LS. These questions focused on various aspects of collaboration involving these LSTs.

4.7.1 LST and GT interaction

The LSTs in this study explained the interaction and relationship with GTs as highly advantageous to LS provision. All participants reported a generally positive relationship with GTs. One LST describes the importance of collaborating with GTs as "*You cannot work on your own, it's impossible*" *(Beatrice)*. Participants noted that most interaction involved providing knowledge to GTs. This was applied by GTs who were unsure about LS or the LS process. All participants said that they supported the GTs in their provision of primary LS and the implementation of LS techniques. One of the LSTs reported that the GTs welcomed the advice she offered: "*They welcome what I have to say and they don't take everything I say 100%, there's lots of conversation that happens so I think they've seen me as a teammate as opposed to somebody on the outside*" *(Beatrice)*. One of the participants described the interaction with GTs as a reassuring role, providing advice on the process of LS or referring learners for LS or other therapies. Another LST mentioned the assistance she provided to GTs in the process of providing LS: "*So I assist them with what they do extra with those children*" *(Celia)*. One participant described the relationship between LST and GT: "*they just need that assurance that they are on the right path with this child*" *(Celia)*.

A factor that all participants mentioned as influencing the implementation of LS was the age of the GT. Three of the five participants explained that the age of GTs affected their advisory role and had an influence on their relationship with the GT. LSTs observed that younger GTs were more open to suggestions and more likely to ask advice: *"But I think the age of the teachers play most definitely a role yes"* (*Celia*).Older GTs were more reluctant to be involved with LS or to ask advice from the LST. This aspect seemed to hamper the provision

of LS and for this reason three participants mentioned the impact of age on their role of providing advice or acting as a consultant to GTs.

As the process of LS may be formal or informal, GTs are inevitably involved, according to the participants in this study. GTs were normally the first line of staff to implement LS or to recommend that learner be referred for LS. Three of the five LSTs explained that GTs were required to be part of LS or in certain cases to provide LS. One participant explained, *"A lot of the teachers now are giving that general learner support through re teaching" (Abigail).* The level at which GTs were involved in LS varied from school to school.

LSTs in this study all mentioned that there were misconceptions among GTs with regard to the role of the LST and the process of LS. All participants mentioned various misunderstandings of their role on the part of GTs. Two participants said that GTs' misunderstanding became apparent through conversation and poor guidance of learners who had been diagnosed with learning difficulties. One participant explained the a GT's misunderstanding by saying "*Yes I mean they all think we play all day, that's fine, that's absolutely fine*" *(Beatrice).* Another participant explained that GTs are not aware of the intricacies of LS and often misunderstood their role and what they were required to do. As a result of such misunderstandings *"Teachers will often want. They're concerned about a child and they want a full assessment, they don't understand what a full assessment is*" *(Abigail).* Three participants explained that the age of a GT had led to misconception of the LST's role and the process of *"But I think the age of the teachers play most definitely a role*" *(Celia).* It was reported that older GTs expected LS to take place in special needs schools rather than in mainstream schooling. Thus, a misunderstanding of the inclusive principles of LS created a wider misunderstanding of the LST's role.

4.7.2 Summary of theme

Theme 4 findings were focused on the interaction between the LST and the GT. This relationship was noted as an important one by all participants. The interaction between GT and LST was regarded as an influential factor in the implementation of LS. LSTs reported the necessity of providing GTs with LS specific knowledge, expertise and advice. These LSTs mentioned a type of support relationship with the GTs in their respective schools. All participants described the LS process as dependent on collaboration between LSTs and GTs. LSTs agreed that they needed to give feedback to GTs in order to monitor the progress of learners who were in therapy with either the LST or other specialists; GTs and LSTs ought

to have a close working relationship and a feedback relationship in order to best assist each learner in LS. Participants commented on misconceptions and misunderstandings among GTs on LS and the role of the LST. Three of the participants described the influence of the age of GTs: older GTs seemed to misunderstand the role of the LST and the intricacies of the LS process.

4.8 Summary of research findings

LSTs in this study were interviewed and questioned about the nature of their role in private schools. All participants described the fluidity of their role and could not therefore provide a specific definition. Their responses indicated that their roles consisted of five main activities. These were support, counselling, consulting, assessing and providing specialist guidance. These activities varied from case to case. Thus, the role of the LST was dependent on learners' needs; not only was their role determined by learners needs but also by input from staff members. Participants described the ideal of their support being used by staff members and GTs alike.

Participants described personal experience as a contributing factor when choosing to become an LST. However, all participants observed that passion for the field was the greatest contributor. They explained that there were certain personality traits and qualities that were required to be an effective LST. All participants in this study explained the intuitive nature of LS provision. Thus, experience in this area of expertise was a necessity. Participants mentioned the importance of supplementing experience with LS theory. A constant juxtaposition of theory and practice resonated through the interviews.

Both emotional and academic barriers are considered when formulating individual LS programmes. Each learner is considered individually by the LS team and the best support for his or her needs is designed. The LSTs reported the implementation and adoption of different learning methodologies where necessary.

Participants in this study illustrated the necessity of collaboration between LSTs and other therapists, and they mentioned the importance of collaboration with GTs although they did note the misconceptions about LS among GTs. The LSTs agreed that a whole school model of LS was advantageous; the effective implementation of LS was only possible if all members of the team were involved in the design and implementation of LS.

These LSTs believed that all GTs should have some knowledge of the LS programme and its implementation within their schools and they mentioned in-service training which was generally organised by the LST. They explained that GTs were inevitably involved with LS and this necessitated the constant renewal of their knowledge in this area of expertise. The feedback process was highlighted as a one that was very important to the progress of individual cases. This feedback was provided by LSTs to GTs and other specialists in order to track the status of each learner in therapy.

Societal pressure and the impact of today's socio-economic situation was described as a reason for the growing demand for LS. Participants noted that parents were less involved and there was thus a greater financial burden on parents who had to pay for LS. The financial circumstances of private schools allowed for the employment of LSTs and for smaller classes facilitating quicker identification of barriers.

Participants in this study were able to illuminate the nature of LS provision and therefore their roles at their respective schools. As only a small number of LSTs took part in this study, the findings were applicable to this study only.

4.9 Conclusion

Chapter 4 has discussed the data on the role of the LST in private schools as perceived by the participants. I introduced the participants and the number of years' experience they had. I named and described the four themes that emerged from the data. I illustrated the content and types of questions participants answered for each theme. Namely, theme 1: the multifaceted roles of the LST; theme 2: the nature of LS provision; theme 3: private school factors; and theme 4: GT & LST interaction. Together, these four themes illustrated the role of the LST. Each facet of the LST's role was explored during the semi-structured interviews. In theme 1, I was able to illustrate the fluidity of the role the LSTs in this study assumed. The data enabled me to illustrate the various role activities which constituted the LSTs' daily responsibilities. Theme 2 highlighted the LS provision currently being implemented in the private schools involved in this study. Theme 3 focused solely on aspects concerning the private school setting, nature of the resources available and the LST as a member of staff. Theme 4 covered the findings pertaining to the interaction of LSTs with GTs at their schools.

Chapter 4 presented the analysed data. Chapter 5 provides the conclusions to the study of the role of the LST in private schools in Pretoria.

5. Chapter Five: Conclusions and recommendations

> "… key tenet of qualitative research is an appreciation that information and knowledge always come from somewhere" - (Braun & Clarke, 2013a:21).

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I conclude the study and make suggestions on how to further investigate the topic of LSTs' roles. Triangulation of research findings and literature is provided (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). Furthermore, contrasting findings that were not valid to this study findings are discussed. I highlight the conceptual framework and its suitability to the study and illustrate how it is compatible with the findings of this study. The limitations of this study are discussed followed by the significance of this study and its findings. The research assumptions are revisited, followed by a discussion of the validity of these assumptions. The conclusion of this chapter is illustrated by use of an artwork expressing a supplementing my academic understanding of the findings of this study.

5.2 The research question and purpose of this study

This research study sought to explore the role LSTs assume in private schools in the Pretoria area. Thus, the research question that guided this study was:

What is the role of learning support teachers in private schools in Pretoria?

As the ambiguous and undefined role of the LST that is a common thread in literature, this study aimed to explore the role and investigate the responsibilities LSTs had to assume (Baxter & Jack, 2008, Dreyer, 2014). The context of this study was private schools in the Pretoria area, as only a few studies have focused on LSTs in private schools (Krüger & Yorke, 2010). In order to understand the role, a definition was proposed in Chapter 1: a set of complex and interrelated tasks (Hillel Lavian, 2015). Therefore, the *role* that LSTs in this study assumed included responsibilities performed at their respective schools. The qualitative analysis of the data in this study revealed a multifaceted role as described by participants. A case study methodology allowed for each LST to be considered in their own school environment and combining these views produced a collective description. Findings suggested the suitability of the Socio-Ecological Model to the role of the LST as conceptual framework. In order to illustrate the conclusions of this study, I discuss the findings of this study in comparison to the reviewed literature.

5.3 Findings which resonate with literature

The findings in this study relate to findings from other studies. The findings of this study were categorised into four main themes, namely the role of the LST, the nature of LS provision, private school factors and GT and LST interaction. These four themes were triangulated with literature, as is explained in the following section. The subthemes of each theme are discussed under the theme headings.

5.3.1 The role of the LST as echoed in literature

The first theme discussed in Chapter Four relates directly to the role the LST assumes. Thus, the nature of the multifaceted role, role activities and responsibilities found in this study is triangulated with the literature.

5.3.2 The ambiguous nature of the LST's role

Throughout literature the role of the LST has been described as ambiguous and undefined (Abbott et al., 2011, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Takala & Ahl, 2014, Forlin, 2001, Dreyer, 2013). The findings in this study corroborated what was found in literature. Scholars Wilson et al. (2007), described the LST role as complex. Scholars McLachlan and Davis (2013) described the multidimensional nature of the LST role. The indefinite and complex nature of the role of the LST was reiterated by the participants. Similarly, Fielding-Barnsley (2005:69) describe the LST role as "ever-changing".

No specific definition was provided by the participants in this study and LSTs described an ambiguous role. They explained the changing nature of their role and that in their experience LS provision was context bound. Participants also described their role as being adaptable. *Beatrice,* one of the five participants, described her role as being extremely fluid and ever-changing as a result of the different daily demands of LS. *Danielle* added to this by describing her role as requiring her to be available to many individuals at one time. Thus, the role was not regarded as a prescribed or defined role. The multifaceted and undefined role of the LST was evident in both national and international literature and evident in this study's findings (Travers, 2011, Dreyer et al., 2012, Dreyer, 2014).

The participants described the role as being essentially emotionally involved, highlighting the impact that the emotional nature of the role had on them as individuals. Moreover, it was evident in the literature that the role of LST was to provide support, emotional or academic

(McConkey & Abbott, 2011, Boyle et al., 2011). However, participants also described the role as satisfying and gratifying once findings became evident.

International as well as local scholars indicated that misconceptions of LS and the LST's role were common (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, Dreyer, 2013, Dreyer, 2014). Similarly, participants described misconceptions among GTs, parents and other staff members that had an impact on their role. Misconceptions about their role resulted in misdiagnosis by GTs or failure to refer to the LST. *Edith* explained that her role made her feel like a "*Jack of all trades, master of none*" while *Abigail* described the misconceptions people had about the LST speciality, explaining "*I think some of them think that I sit and play games and don't do much*. Likewise, scholars have named misunderstanding as a factor which could affect the implementation of LS (Du Toit & Forlin, 2009). This concern was also reported by the participants. *Abigail* illustrated a mistaken idea that LSTs 'played' with learners and thus, GTs and parents showed a lack of confidence in LS and its provision. Furthermore, *Celia* and *Beatrice* highlighted the false impression parents had of 'simply fixing' the learner's problem in LS sessions. It was evident from these participants' accounts that misunderstandings existed as to the nature of LS and the particular role of the LST.

Misconceptions about the role added to that the ambiguous and undefined nature of the role. Consequently, the multifaceted and constantly changing role could result in misunderstanding. Cognisant of these issues, LSTs in this study explained the necessity of their role being varied and context bound in order to provide the best possible support for each individual learner.

5.3.3 Role activities of LSTs

In the following section I describe the links between role activities evident in literature and role activities described by the LSTs in this study. Each role activity was assigned a 'name' in order to group and define the roles of the LSTs in this study. The role activities that corroborated with literature were as supporter and counsellor, co-ordinator, consultant, assessor and specialist.

5.3.4 Counsellor and provider of support

The literature review revealed that emotional support formed part of the LST's role (Wilson et al., 2007, Sanahuja-Gavaldà et al., 2016, Travers, 2006). In particular, Wilson et al. (2007), discussed the academic or emotional support LSTs were required to provide. Irish

scholar Travers (2006) explained the importance of the emotional aspect of support provided to learners with barriers. Moreover, LSTs in this study highlighted the holistic way in which learners were considered, thus counselling formed an extensive part of their role. *Celia* explained that her sessions with learners focused initially on the emotional wellbeing of the learners, after which academic support could take place. Furthermore, Participants mentioned that the support they provided included many individuals including staff members and parents. As a result, LSTs assumed a multifaceted role that was context bound and they were available to all members of the school community. Consequently, the role of supporter and counsellor cannot be divorced from the role of LSTs in schools.

5.3.5 Co-ordinator

Co-ordination was described as a large part of the LST's role. Co-ordination by participants included managing the LS programmes in their schools as well as the implementation of managerial skills in collaborating with supplementary specialists. Equally, the role of co-ordinator was evident in both local and international literature and was identified as a prominent role by scholars (Dreyer, 2013, Walton et al., 2009, Forlin and Rose, 2010). All participants explained their role as co-ordinator as encompassing the management and design of LS programmes as well as co-ordinating duties with GTs, principals and other specialists in the implementation of LS.

5.3.6 Consultant

Scholars claim that consultation is a frequent role assumed by LSTs (Dreyer, 2014, Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Forlin, 2001, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015). Similarly, participants in this study explained that they were available to give advice, consult on resources and make suggestions to GTs, all of which formed part of their consultative role. Dreyer (2014) described the LST as acting as a consultant in order to provide specialist knowledge to the whole school support team. Owing to LSTs' expert knowledge that LSTs, all GTs could consult with LSTs for advice on learners in their classrooms (Sundqvist & Ström, 2015). LSTs in this study reported that they made informal accommodations and suggestions to GTs at their respective schools.

5.3.7 Assessor

LSTs in this study explained that they were assessors of learners, diagnosing and drawing up treatment plans for learners. Scholars explain constant monitoring and assessment is

necessary (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Boyle et al., 2011). Thus, participants noted the importance of assessment in the LS process.

5.3.8 Specialist

In order to provide effective LS, participants in this study reiterated the importance of specialised knowledge. The ideal of acquiring specialised knowledge specifically within the area of LS was echoed in literature (Travers, 2006, Bruggink et al., 2014, Takala & Ahl, 2014, Woolfson et al., 2007). *Abigail*, explained that the expert knowledge was influential, but she found a broader knowledge basis on various barriers was valuable in her practice. Furthermore, specific knowledge allowed for the effective application of different learning methodologies. Similarly, Santos et al. (2016), discussed the impact of specialised knowledge on the LST's application of theory and implementation of differentiated learning.

Subsequently, participants explained that a formal teaching qualification was necessary. Scholars described the importance of a teaching degree and teaching experience informing the LST's knowledge base and to providing effective LS (Fielding-Barnsley, 2005, Travers, 2006). Yet, a LS specific qualification was not essential, according to the participants. LSTs who took part in this study described their own research and knowledge gain in LS and technique developments. Particularly, in-service training seemed common in the schools where the LSTs were employed.

In summary, LSTs who took part in this study performed various roles as well as role activities. Some of the role activities reported on were evident in the literature. A counselling and supportive role was the most important role LSTs took on, according to participants. LSTs in this study reported a co-ordinating role. This role encompassed designing and managing the implementation of LS programmes at their respective schools. Participants also mentioned their role of consultancy in which they were able to provide GTs and parents. LSTs explained that they all performed assessments on learners in order to inform the LS process, thus assessment formed part of their role. Importantly, participants explained that their role as LS specialist was crucial to the implementation of LS.

5.4 LS provision and resonated literature

Similar to the literature, the findings from this study illustrated the manner in which LS was provided by the participants in this study. Consequently, the Medical Deficit model was a common thread in participants' accounts and the literature. Literature abounds with

mentions of the inclusive nature of LS; this was supported by the LSTs in this study. Participants who took part in this study used individual LS methodologies.

5.4.1 The recurring Medical Deficit Model

Scholars have found that the ideal of IE stresses the use of the Social model, thus deviation from the exclusive Medical Deficit Model was expected (Dreyer, 2013). Yet, participants discussed the continued use of the Medical Deficit Model as it allowed for the diagnosis of learners. They explained that diagnosing a learner allowed for the provision of effective support. As a result of the variety of barriers experienced by learners, a diagnosis allowed for the design of precise and personalised support and its implementation by the LST. LSTs in this study explained that the diagnosis was not a matter of labelling a child, but rather a more precise way of providing LS. Dreyer (2014) explains that the implementation of the Medical Deficit Model is still common in spite of the inclusive view teachers and LSTs assume. Thus, participants explained that the use of this model was necessary to inform an inclusive process of LS provision.

5.4.2 Learning support is inclusive

Both national and international scholars have described LS as an inclusive method in which to involve learners with barriers in mainstream schooling (Department of Education, 2001, Walton et al., 2009, Woolfson et al., 2007). The formulation of white papers and policies such as the Salamanca Statement, EWP6 and the influence of the South African Constitution has paved the way for inclusive education provided by LS (Woolfson et al., 2007, Greyling, 2009, Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, Walton, 2011, Boyle et al., 2011, Bruggink et al., 2014, Mavuso, 2014, Swart, 2004).

The LSTs who took part in this study stressed the inclusive nature of LS in mainstream schooling. Similarly, they described the paradigm shift, which has occurred in the education system, reiterating the ideal of inclusion in mainstream schools. All participants mentioned the inclusive practices that their schools made use of to implement LS They described LS as a means of IE by supporting learners academically to function at the same level as their peers. Yet, participants expressed concerns that misunderstandings about LS had resulted in exclusive GT teaching behaviours.

5.4.3 Individual support sessions

Literature conveys individual or withdrawal LS as a frequently used methodology (Forlin, 2001, Travers, 2006, Fielding-Barnsley, 2005, Takala & Ahl, 2014, Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015). Just as scholars observe that individual LS is effective, so too did the participants. LSTs in this study illustrated that individual support allowed learners to receive more intense and specific support. *Abigail* described individual support as (working) "*with an individual and I work at their pace and I just see that whole thing when you see that a child gets it*". Consequently, individual LS was reported as most frequently used by all participants in this study. All the LSTs acknowledged individual LS as most appropriate for learners in therapy. Furthermore, participants explained that individual LS was the preferred methodology for case specific support of learners with barriers.

5.4.4 The context of the private school setting

Participants explained the advantage of the affluent private school setting and the availability of resources when providing LS to learners. This was supported by the literature. LS was described as more accessible and more readily available in a private school setting because of the availability of resources (Walton et al., 2009, Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). LSTs all explained that the availability of funding for their positions as well as LS resource material was a result of the affluent nature of the school setting. Subsequently, private schools had more funding available for LS, making LS more readily available to learners who attended these schools.

5.4.5 Collaborative nature of LS

Collaboration was suggested as essential to LS by the participants in this study. A collaborative, whole school approach seemed to be effective. This shift was noticeable in literature as well. A collective and team approach to designing and implementing LS was reiterated by scholars (Dreyer, 2014, Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Woolfson et al., 2007, Forlin & Rose, 2010).

Participants explained that LS was essentially a team effort. In order to provide the ideal LS, many role players are involved. LSTs explained that the supplementation of other therapists such as occupational therapists, speech therapists and educational psychologists was critical if support was to be effective in certain cases.

As part of providing LS within a whole school model, LSTs in this study noted that GTs were inevitably involved with LS. One participant described the GT as the first person to provide LS to learners. As GTs were generally the first individuals to note that a learner was struggling, they became involved in the LS process, even if only to provide informal LS initially.

5.5 Findings echoing literature

In conclusion, literature indicates that LSTs have an ambiguous role. The participants in this study mirrored the multifaceted and undefined nature of their role. As scholars mentioned, these participants included the activities of counsellor, co-ordinator, consultant, assessor and specialist in their role. Literature indicated the use of the Medical Deficit Model and its exclusive nature; conversely, participants explained the importance of this model in the LS process. Both literature and the participants described the inclusive nature of LS and the evolution that inclusive education has undergone. Moreover, individual LS as a methodology was supported by participants as well as in the literature. Literature recognises the advantage of private schools as did participants, who reflected on the availability of resources to support learners. Literature indicates that LSTs are critical for LS implementation, but that LS is supplemented by other therapists as well as GTs. The collaborative nature of LS was reflected in the responses of participants and this echoed the literature.

5.6 New insights brought to the fore in this study

In the following section I describe findings of studies that were not reflected in this study.

5.6.1 Undefined role and implementation

Scholars have highlighted the vague and undefined nature of the LST's role and how this leads to LSTs being used in other areas of the school (Travers, 2006, McConkey & Abbott, 2011, Keating & O'Connor, 2012). However, this was not evident from participants' responses in this study. All participants noted that they were not required to work in any other area than LS at their schools. For instance, *Celia* explained that she had "*No other activities, none at all, they do not umm expect that from me and that was in my job description*". Although discussed in the literature, this was not mentioned by the participants in this study. Furthermore, the premise of the private school environment, as was the setting

for this study, may influence this aspect and may not be applicable in under-resourced schools.

5.6.2 Co-teaching

International and national scholars suggest that co-teaching is a well utilised methodology to provide support to learners with barriers (Travers, 2011, Forlin & Rose, 2010, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Dreyer, 2014, Butt, 2016). However, this methodology was not overly prevalent according to the participants in this study. Participants reported making use of individual or withdrawal methods as well as group LS when providing support.

This suggests that the findings from this study mostly resonated with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, these findings suggested that these two findings were not applicable to this research study as they were not reported in participants' accounts.

5.6.3 Sharing of LS information

Collaboration in LS is evident, in that LSTs, GTs and supplementary specialists work together in its implementation (Travers, 2011, Woolfson et al., 2007, Dreyer, 2014). Participants in this study explained that this collaboration should go a step further and reported a need for greater collaboration amongst LSTs at different schools. LSTs explained that the sharing of information was advantageous to all parties involved. They were constantly renewing and reflecting on their LS methodologies and their implementation. Participants noted that a greater level of collaboration could provide more sharing of information, resulting in more effective LS provision. Furthermore, the sharing of LS information could be used to formulate and develop policies. Although all the participants reiterated that the writing of policies formed part of their role, the sharing of LS information between schools could result in a further collaborative development of policies. One participant suggested that LSTs based at different schools should have an annual meeting or some such gathering in order to share new ideas and developments in the area of LS.

5.6.4 In-service training

Participants reiterated the need for LSTs to constantly renew and update their knowledge. They reported the necessity of in-service training. The extra training received was essential for them as specialists. They described knowledge gained through extra training as critical in passing on information to GTs and principals at their schools. The participants explained

that in each of their cases they organised the in-service training at their schools. Although they generally attended workshops or courses outside the school boundaries, they organised in-service training for staff members. *Danielle* and *Edith* both described the workshops and informative talks they held for the other staff members at their schools. *Abigail* mentioned the sharing of additional LS information during meetings and assemblies with staff members. Moreover, it was evident from such interaction with participants that in-service training was an essential part of their role and reflected their role as consultant in LS. All in all, in-service training was revealed as an important aspect of the LST's role.

5.6.5 Informal versus formal learning support

LSTs illustrated the importance of having both formal and informal implementation of LS at their schools. As learners have different needs, formal and informal LS was useful in providing various degrees of support. Participants described the sensitive nature of accommodations and noted the lengthy formal procedures learners had to go through in order to receive LS. LSTs could provide informal LS to learners who were not formally diagnosed by making suggestions to GTs. Moreover, the LST's consultancy role was highlighted once again; in providing informal LS, LSTs could provide advice on aspects that could easily be changed in the classroom environment. Hence LSTs in this study reiterated the importance of both informal and formal LS provision. Moreover, informal measures were reported as being purely context dependent. Formal LS provision was also context dependent but they were obliged to follow a formal procedure in order to provide support to the learner. Thus, the need for diagnosis was reported as critical to providing support. All formal accommodations were reported as a whole support team effort that included GTs, principals and supplementary therapies. Formal and informal support was not discussed in the literature but was identified as forming a large part of the LST's considerations in this study.

5.6.6 Experience

All participants explained the importance of experience in both the teaching profession as well as LS. Participants in this study had over five years' experience in LS specifically, excluding their teaching experience. They explained that experience in both teaching and LS enhanced intuitive therapy design and implementation. Participants observed that the experience they had gained had contributed to their intuitive provision of LS. LSTs believed that LS was mainly intuitive and thus required experience. Equally, this experience could be

nurtured by working as a GT first, acquiring teaching experience and knowledge of learners in schools. Consequently, participants explained that teaching experience was invaluable in providing LS to learners.

In conclusion, the findings that emerged from this study all provided information on the influence and impact of the role LSTs assume. New findings emerged from this study from LSTs' understanding of their role and the activities they performed. These findings were considered within the whole school support framework. The sharing of LS knowledge was an important finding in that LSTs illustrated the constant collaboration that is required in providing LS. The importance of collaborative knowledge sharing was a finding that could be beneficial to all LSTs and GTs as they are all involved in the provision of LS. In-service training was described by the participants as another means of sharing and integrating LS specific knowledge. In addition, the acquisition of new knowledge was critical for LSTs in that they were able to constantly renew their subject knowledge. The LSTs reiterated the importance of sharing this information with colleagues. Formal and informal LS formed part of the LSTs' consultancy role which was a role often assumed. The importance of experience was illustrated in the understanding and intuitive nature of participants' ability to support learners and is a vital issue for individuals who are interested in becoming LSTs.

5.7 This study and Bronfenbrenner's Socio-ecological Model

In the following sections I describe the connection between the theoretical underpinnings of this study and the findings discussed in Chapter Four.

This study used Bronfenbrenner's Socio Ecological Model. This model consists of the various layers that make up an individual (Chapter Two). Bronfenbrenner's Model illustrates the various factors which influence the individual at the centre of the system (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). I adapted the model for the purpose of this study. The LST forms the centre of the system and the interrelated systems all influence the LST's role. When considering the findings it became clear that this model was well suited to the study. I quote an excerpt from my researcher's journal concerning this aspect to illustrate this:

> Somewhere in April 2017
>
> After reading *Danielle's* interview again, I once again realise the aptness of Bronfenbrenner's Model. This is what the LSTs are all illustrating, interrelated systems, no one can work on their own and everyone has various influences. How brilliant the influences are and how they add to the LST's role!

The findings revealed another connection to the conceptual framework, indicating that the LST's role is context dependent. Thus, every environment the participant is exposed to will have a particular impact on his or her role as LST, and on the LS that is provided. The interrelated nature of the layers of Bronfenbrenner's system explain the various impacts the LST will experience. These layers all interdependent and therefore relate to the mutually dependent nature of the LST's environment at school.

5.7.1 Socio-Ecological equals a whole school approach

Participants described personal experience as an important factor in their becoming an LST. This illustrated the importance of the first layer of Bronfenbrenner's model. The microsystem describes the immediate environment of the LST (Bornman & Rose, 2010). Participants described the importance of personal circumstances. *Danielle* illustrated the microsystem and its importance, by explaining the direct impact her own circumstances had on her provision of support. Illustrating the importance of the LST's stability and security within the immediate environment allows for effective LS provision. Equally, factors such as passion and personal qualities also form part of this first layer. This layer inevitably has an impact on the role of the LST because of the inherent nature of these factors. These factors cannot be removed from the LST and therefore illustrate the ideal of Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model. All participants in this study explained the intuitive nature of LS provision. Thus, experience in the area of expertise proved a necessity. Participants reported the importance of supplementing experience with LS theory. Therefore, a constant juxtaposition of theory and practice resonated throughout the interviews. I include an excerpt from the researcher journal that illustrates a reflection on the use of Bronfenbrenner's Model.

May 2017 A positive day Whilst I have been working through these themes it becomes evident that Bronfenbrenner's model was well suited. One participant quotes the "whole school model" the influence of considering all aspects when conducting LS. She herself discusses the intensity in influence of all aspects within her school life and personal life and therefore the learner's life.

The mesosystem in this study, as described in Chapter Two, consisted of the LST's work environment. All participants in this study clearly articulated the impact and influence of the private school setting in which they worked. The nature of the private school meant that LSTs had access to classrooms or offices that enhanced the implementation of LS. All

participants had offices or classrooms that were colourful, light and clean in which to provide LS. *Celia* described the LST's classroom or office as being a safe environment which allowed learners to learn while being supported in whichever barrier they faced. This had a definite influence on her implementation of LS. Participants explained the impact of their work environment and the direct influence of their classroom or office had the provision of LS. All participants made use of technological resources and could make use of numerous games and activities during sessions. It was clear that the environment participants worked in had a direct impact on the level and amount of support they could provide, and this was beneficial to learners who required support.

The exosystem was described as consisting of the parents, colleagues and principals in this study (cf. Chapter Two section 2.19.3). Parents were described as an influence on the LS system in that participants felt pressure from parents. The parents had expectations that LSTs would help their children and support them children as much as they could. Three of the participants in this study described the support and understanding they received from their principal at in fulfilling their roles. All LSTs explained that their LS processes were available and functioning as a result of the support of their principal. They explained that a whole school support model was advantageous. The exosystem thus had a positive influence on LSTs in this study.

The macrosystem was described as the overarching influence of the South African culture and South African socio-economic status. This system inevitably influenced all the participants in this study as they were employed in South African schools. However, this influence was felt to varying degrees by participants. *Beatrice* discussed the influence in an in-depth manner, explaining the inevitable impact of South African policies and the focus on inclusivity in schools. *Abigail* and *Celia* both explained that the socio-economic status of parents and the necessity to work longer hours had a direct influence on the number of learners who were receiving LS. *Danielle* illustrated this impact by explaining the influence of societal pressures in terms of the well-being of learners and parents. The impact of the South African setting was discussed from various viewpoints by the participants, but all mentioned that one positive point was that parents were able to pay for LS. A negative aspect was, however, that parents were unable to spend time supporting their children. Both these aspects were described as factors that had a significant impact on the provision of LS. Thus,

the South African culture and environment had a considerable impact on LS that was provided by LSTs as well as on LSTs themselves.

As the preceding paragraphs illustrate, the Socio-Ecological Model was followed in this study and its influence and suitability of this framework is evident. The model was prevalent and identifiable in the interviews conducted with the participants. I illustrate the Socio-Ecological model with a quote from Pring (2015:118): "We each inhabit subjective worlds of meaning through which we interpret the social world".

All the participants in this study illustrated the interrelated nature of LSTs, GTs, principals, learners and parents interacting in the South African environment. It was evident through these interactions and accounts of the participants that Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model was attuned to the social nature of this study. Moreover, the model relates to the interpretive yet social outlook portrayed by LSTs in this study when explaining the nature of their role and their view of the learners they were supporting.

5.8 Limitations

The limitations of this study relate to its size and scale. As a very small group of participants took part, the findings cannot be generalised to the wider population. The study specifically focused on the Pretoria environment and this limited the study to the area. As part of the study context, private schools were chosen specifically because of the lack of research which had been conducted in this setting. Thus the context, although rich in findings, limited it to private schools only. The methodology created another limitation, in that case study research considers each participant's context only; if the study were to be reproduced it would prove difficult to identify the same cases.

5.9 The significance of the study

The necessity of conducting this research has been underlined by several scholars (Krüger & Yorke, 2010, Dreyer, 2014, Fielding-Barnsley, 2005, Travers, 2011). Owing to the ambiguous nature of the LST's role reported by scholars, they have stressed the importance of further investigation specifically in this area of expertise. Travers (2011:476) suggested that "a reconceptualization of support roles is vital". Similarly, Rouse (2008) highlighted an absence of consistency in the roles that LSTs assume. Thus the study was significant in adding to a deeper understanding of the LST's roles. Little research related to the role of LSTs, particularly in the private school context has been conducted up to now (Dreyer, 2014,

Krüger & Yorke, 2010). The significance, therefore, is that this study adds to the body of knowledge on the role of the LSTs in private schools. The research further highlights the silences evident in both local and international research by adding new findings to this area of expertise. In addition, this study indicates the applicability of Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model to LSTs and the realm of LS, highlighting as it does the importance of collaboration in the field of LS.

5.10 Revisiting research assumptions

In the research field it is good practice to consider assumptions within an area of expertise (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Assumptions are aligned with literature and reiterate common ideals or beliefs in an area of expertise (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The assumptions that were listed in this study were found to be either in line with the literature or not. In the following section I state the assumptions taken from the literature review and discussed in Chapter One (section 1.11). I discuss the assumptions of this study by conceptualising them in association with the findings of this particular study. The assumptions are expressed in italics as they have been taken from Chapter One, I explain each assumption and if it is in line with research findings or not.

Assumption 1: Scholars conclude that learning support is being provided but implementation is inadequate (Forlin, 2001, Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Dreyer et al., 2012, Bruggink et al., 2014). There does not seem to be a defined manner in which learning support should be implemented. However, LS should be implemented by a learning support teacher with specialised knowledge (Forlin, 2001, Takala & Ahl, 2014). Thus, it is advantageous when LS has appropriate funding for resources and employment of LSTs (Dreyer et al., 2012).

This assumption was not in line with findings. The implementation of LS was reported as effective and implemented on a daily basis according to participants. Although the LST's role was ambiguous and undefined, effective LS was reported by participants. The ambiguous nature of the LST's role did affect the process to a limited extent, however. The concerns of the participants were based on early identification of learners. LSTs explained that in-service training and consultations with GTs were intended to address this concern. In this manner LSTs, specifically those in this study, built relationships with GTs, encouraging these teachers to trust LSTs' knowledge and recommendations for learners. As a result of misconceptions among GTs and staff members at schools, LSTs explained the importance

of interaction with these individuals in order to create bonds with them. This included interacting with them at teatime, in meetings and on break duty. Thus, an informal early detection system was built in, with LSTs making themselves more readily available to all staff members. This was intended to curb misdiagnoses or misunderstandings with regard to learners who had barriers to learning. LS was deemed context and learner dependent, hence no specific definition could be assigned to the role or to therapy strategies. The LSTs conceded that specialised knowledge enabled them to perform their role as LST and therefore experience and theory allowed them to implement LS according to the needs of the learners at their schools.

Assumption 2: There appear to be two main methodologies employed to provide learning support, nationally and internationally. Learning support provision is focused either on removing the learner from a mainstream class to provide 'remediation' or is based on co-teaching. Co-teaching appears to be an explored means of implementing learning support, but the sole focus in providing support is not on the learning support teacher but rather on a collaborative team effort (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Butt, 2016). Thus, scholars are in agreement that different methodologies are used to implement LS (Sundqvist & Ström, 2015, Butt, 2016). The co-teaching or withdrawal methodologies are prevalent in implementing LS (Forlin, 2001, Travers, 2006, Woolfson et al., 2007).

The second assumption was found to be in line with findings based on evidence from participants in the study. The interview data revealed that LSTs made use of two types of LS, namely individual LS and group LS. Individual LS was described by all participants as more effective where learners needed specific therapy and support with particular barriers. Individual support allowed LSTs to provide intensive assistance to learners in help them to function at the same level as their peers. However, group LS was a methodology used by participants in this study when there was a group of learners who needed support with a particular concept. This group support could occur in a co-teaching situation or simply be provided by the LST. Co-teaching, although mentioned by one participant, did not feature as a common methodology. Based on the interactions with participants, individual support appeared to be the preferred approach.

Assumption 3: Literature indicates that learning support becomes more effective if it occurs collaboratively with colleagues at schools (Woolfson et al., 2007, Travers, 2011, Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011, Boyle et al., 2011, Takala & Ahl, 2014). Dreyer et al. (2012:180), explains

that "collaboration becomes essential" in order to implement LS; all role players need to work collaboratively in providing support. A learning support programme becomes beneficial when, according to Dreyer (2014:180), "a whole-school developmental approach from an eco-systemic perspective" is followed.

This assumption was found to be in line with findings and was expressed by all participants more than once. Those LSTs who took part in this study explained that the collaboration between LSTs, GTs and other specialists was imperative to the implementation of effective LS. All participants observed on more than one occasion that LS could not occur or be implemented without collaboration. All participants described collaboration as most effective in implementing LS and essential to GTs' classroom management, discipline strategies and management strategies. A whole school model was illustrated by the participants and was used in their respective schools. The inclusive nature of a whole school model was captured by the LSTs and described as valuable to the implementation of LS. A whole school approach demonstrated alignment with the conceptual framework and emphasised its applicability to this study.

Assumption 4: The assumption seems to be that a private school has adequate funding to employ a learning support teacher within their schools. Motala and Dieltiens (2008:132) "independent schools had been able to achieve better results, this was because they were able to muster resources that only a few can afford". Thus, learning support would be readily available and more effective in private schools in South Africa.

The fourth assumption evident in the literature illustrated the need for this study to be conducted, specifically in private schools. The assumption was in line with the study findings and illustrated by the study participants. All participants discussed the advantageous nature of the private school setting in implementing LS. The flexible nature of the private school setting and policy formulation facilitated consideration of learners' interests when implementing LS. The private school setting also provided various resources and allowed assessments to be conducted as these schools tend to be more affluent than government school. LSTs explained that the economic circumstances of parents who sent their children to private schools implied the affluent nature of the schools and made it more likely that they would incorporate LS. Secondly, parents were able to pay for scholastic assessments and any other specialists who were required to supplement the LS process.

Thus, the resources and affluent nature of the private school setting allowed for LSTs to be employed and to utilise resources that would best support each individual learner.

5.11 Suggestions for further study

In this section I make suggestions for further research. After completing this research study, I identified the necessity of further research into the complex and multifaceted role of LSTs. Further research would enable a deeper exploration into this specific topic and provide additional understanding of the complexities that LSTs accept as part of their role. I propose two methods of research in this area and I recommend a mixed methods approach to investigating the role of the LST, as well as a forum to achieve consensus on the role of LSTs in the Gauteng area.

Firstly, the findings of this study convinced me of the necessity of further research on the role of LSTs, specifically in private schools. The multifaceted and complex nature of the LST's role requires further exploration, as no single, specific role is assumed by the LST, according to the participants in this study. Other staff members' perspectives on how LS is implemented should be included. While conducting this study I wondered about the means of the implementation of LS. Observation of the LSTs during their daily tasks could add a different perspective to defining their role. One of the findings was that the collaborative nature of the relationship between LST and GT was a theme that had emerged from the data. Thus, exploring GTs' understanding of LSTs from their own perspectives could provide a better understanding of the role of the LST.

A possible research question that emerged from this study is thus:

- What is the practised role of LSTs in private schools in Pretoria?

In order to investigate this specific question, I propose a mixed methods research study. Mixed methods research would allow the researcher to combine both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to reach a conclusion on the research question (Creswell, 2014). Experiences of LSTs and collaboration with GTs could inform a further understanding of the LST's role. Observations of LSTs could take place over a period of time in order to validate the findings from this study. Semi-structured interviews with principals to explore their understanding of the LST's role and to contribute to our understanding of the practised

role of LSTs would also be useful. General teachers could answer questionnaires on their views of the roles played by LSTs and their understanding of the LST's practised role.

Secondly, after conducting this study and receiving positive feedback from the participants, I recommend establishing a LS forum. Forums are useful when attempting reach consensus on a topic (Pring, 2015). In this study, two participants discussed the idea of collaboration between schools to allow LSTs to generate specialised knowledge. Thus, as a continuation of this study, a forum could be established to collaboratively establish a definition of the LST's role. Such a forum should be led by a researcher. As a forum is a collaborative manner in which to reach consensus, LSTs could be invited and once established, further sampling methodologies could take place.

The forum could be held at a school or an independent venue in order to host a number of members. In order to reach consensus on the role of the LST, a list of topics could be provided for discussion. In this manner, the findings from this study would form the basis of the role topics to be discussed. The forum would require a document containing discussion points and further points for discussion. These points would focus on the LST's role, role activities and role responsibilities.

Once the forum had taken place and its findings recorded, these could be circulated to all private schools in South Africa to spread awareness and information on the role of the LST.

5.12 Summary

This study was conducted to explore the role of the LST in private schools in Pretoria. In order to explore this role semi-structured interviews with five LSTs employed in private schools in Pretoria were conducted. It became evident from the data that a specific role could not be determined due to varying roles and responsibilities LSTs assumed. The LSTs in this study explained the nature of their role as being multifaceted and ever-changing. LSTs explained that their availability to each learner was dependent on the support the learner required. Owing to the broad nature of the barriers learners might face, LSTs explained that they required specialised knowledge to provide support to them. Their specialised knowledge was broad in terms of various barriers, but was specifically focused on the details of each learner's specific case. Thus, the LST's knowledge was required updating and renewal constantly to keep up with developments in diagnoses, methodologies and support strategies.

The support provided by LSTs is not solely academic in nature; participants described the emotional support they provided also. The fluidity of their role meant that their role was not limited to learners but extended to staff members and parents.

In order to understand the multifaceted role of the LSTs, it was necessary to explore the various activities and responsibilities they participants performed. These various role activities constantly influenced the role they assumed in their respective schools, and each LST's role differed. As part of the findings of this study, I identified supporter and counsellor, co-ordinator, consultant, assessor and specialist as role activities. Support and counselling was noted earlier as support provided on an emotional as well as an academic level. Co-ordinator was a role activity the participants described when managing and designing the implementation of LS programmes. This role activity focused on the development of LS programmes for individual learners, that is all the organisation of the LS, including supplementation by other specialists. All participants mentioned consultancy as part of their role when dealing with GTs and other specialists. All the LSTs described assessments as part of their role as a formal process, these assessments informed treatment plans. Participants described the continuation of knowledge creation and in-service training that they coordinated at their respective schools in order to maintain specialist knowledge that would inform LS practice. All participants reiterated the importance of specialised knowledge and the necessity of sharing this knowledge with GTs.

LS was found to be more readily available at private schools as a result of the affluent nature of these schools. Scholars have noted the advantageous nature of private schools in providing LS, as they have the resources and the capacity to employ LSTs (Walton et al., 2009, Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001, Dreyer et al., 2012). Thus, the circumstances of private schools had a direct impact on the development of the LST's role. All participants in this study explained the advantages and the resources available to them. The private school setting allowed LSTs to be creative when implementing LS and to develop their roles at their schools by collaborating with GTs and other specialists. LSTs also had the opportunity to develop policies collaboratively in their schools, thus directly enhancing their own roles.

Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model proved well suited to this study. The myriad influences in the school system as well as the South African environment had an influence on LSTs. The constant interaction between all the systems influenced their role and their role activities. As discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.4), the exclusive Medical Deficit

Model was still used. This Medical Deficit Model allowed for more effective treatment in that identifying a learner with a specific diagnosis informed the treatment of the learner. Its negative connotations of diagnosing a child seemed less pronounced and it was used simply to formalise the LS process, according to these participants.

It was evident when dealing with the data that LS and the LST's role was not possible without collaboration, however. The LST inevitably collaborated with someone in the whole school support team. In this way, the study provided evidence of Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model. The LST was at the centre and was constantly interacting with all staff members, principals and other specialists. Participants explained the importance of having security and strength in one's family life (microsystem). They discussed their work environment and the advantageous circumstances they worked under with plentiful resources (macrosystem). The LSTs described the manner in which colleagues and principals were supportive of their role (exosystem). The overarching South African environment was described by participants and their concerns for the socio-economic pressures on parents and the effect of these factors learners and their need for LS (macrosystem).

It was evident from literature as well as from the findings from this study that there has been a paradigm shift in the provision of LS (Forlin and Rose, 2010). The LS system has become a whole school model, with members at all schools, involved in the implementation of LS. In concluding this study, I include an excerpt from my researcher's journal:

> 6 June 2016 – Cold
> *THE lightbulb* moment
> The role of the LST *cannot* be defined. The role of the LST is completely dependent on the individual cases at school. The LST is dependent on the school context, their role is defined by the whole school support system. The LST is a context, time and learner dependent role.
> There can be no specific defined role each day, hence an ever-changing and completely fluid role is assumed by the LST.

Thus, based on the opinions and experiences of the participants in this study, LSTs appear to 'juggle' various role activities during the course of any given day at a private school. Their role is never the same specific set of tasks and they provide support on emotional and academic matters to both learners and GTs. Their role is thus not defined and is likely to remain ambiguous.

5.12.1 Artistic closure to the study

In Chapter Three of this dissertation I discussed my roles as researcher and named one of them as researcher as creative artist. As part of this role I explained that I am intuitively a creative person and make sense of the world I live in by creating art pieces. As a means of internalising and processing the findings from this study, I created an artwork. This artwork is an expressive method of supplementing my academic understanding of the study findings. Below is the artistic closure to this study. I have created an interactive spiral. It is inspired by a bicycle chain and the gears. I have created three intersecting circles, representing the LST in the centre, the learner to the left and the staff member to the right. These circles and their various layers imitate the conceptual framework, Bronfenbrenner's Socio-ecological Model, that was employed in this study. In order to represent the various factors that influence the LST's role, a number of layers have been created within the cogwheels. This represents the numerous influences on an individual when performing the role of LST. The spirals are representative of the pedals used to move a bicycle forward. The LST is thus at the centre and is the mover and controller of the implementation of LS. The LST is manager, coordinator and supporter and therefore keeps the spiral constantly moving and initiates, designs and implements LS that will best support each learner.

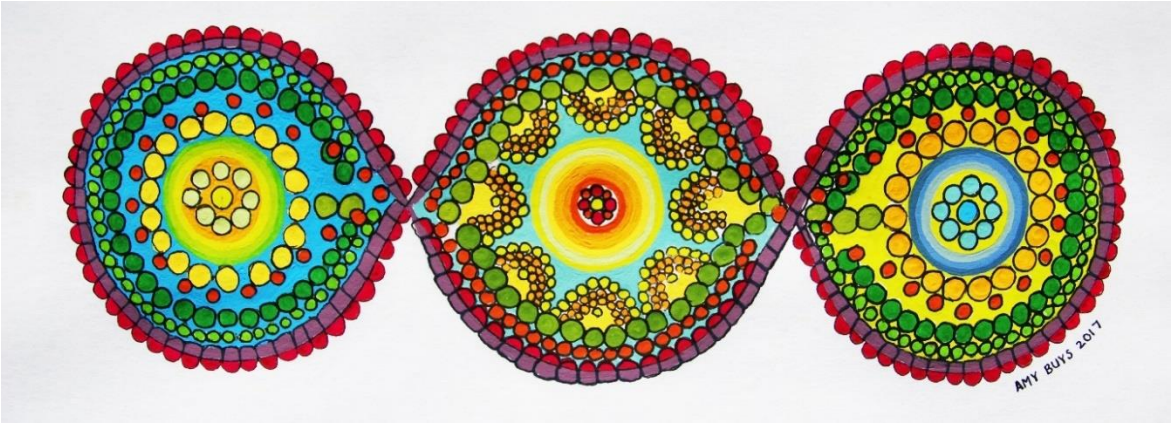

Figure 5.1: Researcher's artistic interpretation of study findings

5.13 Conclusion

In Chapter Five, I compared the findings of this study with the findings in literature. I made conclusions based on scholars' findings as well as the data elicited from participants. Triangulation exposed the similarities between the literature and the study findings. I described findings which were made in my study but not discussed in the literature. I made suggestions for further research in this area of expertise by recommending action research.

I explained the limitations of this study and discussed the significance the findings and what the study had contributed to the existing body of knowledge. I provided closure to the study and highlighted the conclusive findings. I conclude with the quotation from Benjamin Franklin, which I quoted in Chapter One. This quotation has proved true and applicable to the study and epitomises the ideal of LS in mainstream schools.

> "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn," (Franklin, 2015).

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7. Addenda

7.1 Addendum A: Consent Letter

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN MASTERS STUDY

I, _____ state that, I willingly and voluntarily choose to take part in the study titled *The actual role of the learning support teacher in private Pretoria primary schools* conducted by Amy Megan Buys. This research study is being conducted by the fore mentioned student in the Department of Humanities Education at the University of Pretoria.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of what the actual role of the learning support teacher is in private primary schools in the Pretoria area. To inquire and explore the expertise the learning support teachers have and utilise within their role as a learning support teacher. Lastly to explore the responsibilities learning support teachers have whilst employed as learning support teacher.

2. Procedural consideration

I understand that the researcher needs to collect data through conducting semi-structured interviews with me. I am aware that these interviews will take place at a time and place which is of convenience to me. The researcher has informed me that these interviews will be recorded and I will need to sign consent for permission to be recorded. I have been informed that I would be allowed to contact the researcher at any time concerning any questions of further information relating to the research. I will then be contacted by the researcher to verify the information I have shared with her to ensure that they have not been distorted or manipulated in anyway.

3. Conditions of signing

I have read the entire letter and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, I have also been provided with the researcher's cell phone and email address in the case of further

enquiries. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time with no consequences. I understand that my personal information is confidential as well as that my anonymity is ensured.

Signed (Full Names of participant) _____ on (Date) __/____/2015.
Contact Numbers: _____
Email Address: _____
Signed by researcher: Amy Megan Buys _____on (Date) __/_____/2015.

7.2 Addendum B: Invitation Letter

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

Dear …… Date…..

Invitation letter to participate as a learning support teacher

I am currently busy with my Master's studies at the University of Pretoria and I am conducting research on the role of learning support teachers in private primary schools in the Pretoria area.

You have been identified as a learning support teacher within a private primary Pretoria school. Through this information letter I am inviting you to participate in this research study.

The title

The title of my research is: *How do Learning Support specialists practice learning support in private Pretoria schools?*

The purpose

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of what the actual role of the learning support teacher is in private primary schools in the Pretoria area. To inquire and explore the expertise the learning support teachers have and utilise within their role as a learning support teacher. Lastly to explore the responsibilities learning support teachers have whilst employed as a learning support teacher.

Ethical Principles

In my role as a researcher, I have obtained Ethical clearance from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (certificate number: xxx). I can only start with data collection once all participants understand the underpinnings of my study and have given their informed consent. Below are a few internationally accepted ethical principles which are applied in the informed consent process:

1. Autonomy and voluntary participation

At all times throughout this study it is your decision whether or not to participate. You can at any point decide you are no longer willing to participate for whatever reason without any consequences.

2. Full disclosure

As a researcher I undertake to provide you with further details on what the study is about as well as what would be required from you as a participant should you require more information than what is contained in this letter. You are welcome to contact me on my contact details set out below.

3. Confidentiality

This study in no way seeks to explore personal information as it is solely concerned with work place information. You as a participant in this study have the right to privacy and therefore I need to protect your anonymity at all times. Information gathered will be published but cannot be traced back to the participant.

4. Safety in participation

Throughout this study I undertake that you will not be placed in harm's way whether it be physically or psychologically. This implies that I will ensure that you will not be placed in situations of unnecessary stress, embarrassment or place you in a situation in which loss of self-esteem occurs.

5. Trust

The information which I receive will be communicated in academic but comprehendible English. The information which I report will in no way be manipulated or changed in any way.

Participation and estimated time frame of this study

The research would consist of completing semi-structured interviews with each participant. Each teacher will be interviewed approximately three times. The interviews will be organised at a time and place that is convenient to you as participant. Data collection will take place between July 2015 and March 2016.

Your participation in this study will be much appreciated and valuable to the completion of this study. I look forward to hearing from you and taking part in this collaborative research process.

Please feel free to contact me for any further information.

Researcher: Amy Buys
Email: amz.buys@gmail.com
Cell: 082 820 9227
Supervisor: Yolandi Woest
Email: yolandi.woest@up.ac.za

7.3 Addendum C: Participant Interview Protocol

Interview protocol

Research Study:

How do Learning Support specialists practice Learning Support in private Pretoria schools?

Time of Interview:

Date of interview:

Place of interview:

Participant

Questions:

1. Could you please tell me how your interest in learning support came about?
2. Could you tell me about the knowledge a Learning Support teacher needs in order to provide support?
3. Could you tell me about the Learning Support you provide within your school?
4. What do your colleagues believe your role is as a Learning Support teacher?
5. What is your opinion on the guidelines provided by South African policies on Learning Support?
6. Could you describe all of your duties as a Learning support teacher?
7. What advice would you give to someone who is interested in becoming a learning support specialist?
8. Describe a typical working day in the life of a Learning Support teacher.

Thank you Kindly for your responses!

Amy Buys

7.4 Addendum D: Consent for Audio Recording

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

CONSENT LETTER TO BE AUDIO RECORDED DURING SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

I, (full names)_____ have accepted the invitation to be a participant in the research study titled: *The actual role of learning support teachers in private primary Pretoria schools* conducted by Amy Buys as part of her master's study at the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria. I hereby willingly give consent to Amy Buys to audio-record the semi-structured interviews which I have voluntarily agreed to be a part of.

I understand by signing this letter of Informed Consent that the interview may be transcribed by the researcher for the purpose of research. I understand that this audio recording as well as its accompanying verbatim transcription will be kept in the safe storage of the researcher. After the period of time for safe keeping has elapsed the recording will be destroyed. The transcription will however be used to formulate the final dissertation to be published.

Signed (full names of participant)

_____on (Date) __/____/2016.

Contact Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Signed by researcher: Amy Megan Buys _____on (Date) __/_____/2016.

7.5 Addendum E: Biographical data form

Biographical data – Learning Support teacher

Participant Code:

As part of the richness in data collection and interpretation it is important to add information about the participants in the study. Please note that the information from this document will be kept separate to the form containing your contact details so as to protect your confidentiality.

Gender of participant (please mark with a X)	Male		Female
Age Group (please mark with a X)	20-29		50-59
	30-39		60-69
	40-49		
Qualifications obtained; Please indicate the following: • First degrees • Postgraduate degrees • Certificates • Short courses	Name of Qualification	Institution	Date obtained
Are you currently registered for any other qualifications?	Name of Qualification	Institution	Year of study
Please indicate the amount of time you have been employed as a Learning support teacher.	Current position		
	Previous positions (please list)		
	Total Experience		
Please indicate the amount of time you have been employed as a teacher.			
Please indicate what other responsibilities			

you have as part of your employment at your school.	
Please provide any further information you feel may be relevant to this research study.	

Thank you for this information

Amy Buys
Masters Candidate

7.6 Addendum F: Contact Information Form

Learning Support teacher contact information

Participant Code:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the research study entitled: *How do Learning Support specialists practice learning support in private Pretoria schools?*

Could you please complete the contact information. Please keep in mind that any identifying contact information is kept confidential and will only be known by the researcher. These forms will be kept in safe keeping together with all research documents as explained in the informed consent letter.

Contact Details

Name (full names)	
Title	
School	
Official employment title	
Employment status (ie. Full time, part time)	
Work Contact number	
Cellular contact number	
e-mail address	
Postal Address	

Thank you for this information

Amy Buys
Master candidate
Cell : 082 820 9227
e-mail : amz.buys@gmail.com

7.7 Addendum G: Researcher Interview Protocol

Interview protocol

Research Study:

How do Learning Support specialists practice Learning Support in private Pretoria schools?

Time of Interview:

Date of interview:

Place of interview:

Researcher

Questions:

1. Could you please tell me how your interest in learning support came about?
    - Could you tell me more about what your role as Learning Support teacher is?
    - What would your responsibilities consist of?
2. Could you tell me about the knowledge a Learning Support teacher needs in order to provide support?
    - In your opinion what type of skills does a Learning Support teacher need to have?
    - Could you explain the expert knowledge you need as a Learning Support teacher?
3. Could you tell me about the Learning Support you provide within your school?
    - In your opinion who would the other specialists be with whom you could collaborate within your school?
    - Are these specialists readily available to refer learners to?
    - When do learners receive their support?
    - Do the parents need to pay extra for this support?
    - Which resources are available to you when providing support to learners?
    - What type of materials do you make use of to provide this support?
4. What do your colleagues believe your role is as a Learning Support teacher?
    - What kind of support do you receive from colleagues?
    - What do you believe the principal's view is on Learning Support within your school?
5. What is your opinion on the guidelines provided by South African policies on Learning Support?
    - Could you tell me about the guidelines set out by the school management?

- How do you believe the guidelines have been useful in your Learning Support programmes?
- Are there certain documents that you need to work with in order to provide learning support?
- Are there certain guidelines that you need to work with in order to provide learning support?

6. Could you describe all your duties as a learning support teacher?
    - Are there any activities you need to complete which take time away from Learning Support?
    - Could you tell me a bit about these activities?
7. What advice would you give to someone who is interested in becoming a learning support specialist?
8. Could you describe a typical working day in the life of a Learning Support teacher?

Thank you Kindly for your responses!

Amy Buys

7.8 Addendum H: Field note form

Interview field notes

Date of interview: _____

Time of interview: _____

School: _____

Setting interview took place:

_____

Arrival of interviewee (how do they appear, mood, anxiety level)	
Interview room and context (What is the area like, is there ambient sound, aircon etc)	

Flow of the interview (were there any glitches, did it flow smoothly)	
Answering of questions	
Obstacles throughout the interview	

What did I learn?	
What would I change next time?	

7.9 Addendum I: Transcriber confidentiality form

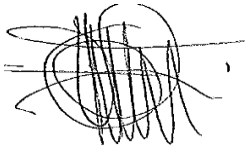
Confidentiality Agreement

Title of research: The role of learning support teachers in private Pretoria schools.

By signing this document I understand and agree to keep the information from the transcriptions confidential.

I, **perfect transcribers** (transcriber) hereby sign this agreement and understand that the information pertained in the transcriptions will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone but the researcher Amy Buys. I undertake to keep all audio recordings and transcriptions safety during the transcription process and to delete all electronic files after the transcription process has taken place.

Transcribers full name:



Transcribers signature:

Date: 12 March 2016