Parent-teacher Collaboration in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Limpopo Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT This study employed a qualitative approach, using phenomenology, to explore the in-depth perceptions of parents and teachers with regard to parent-teacher collaboration when educating children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in South Africa. This paper seeks to inform both teachers and policymakers on the importance of collaboration in teaching children with ASD. A purposive sample of five parents and three teachers selected from a public special needs school in Limpopo Province was utilised. Data collection was through individual semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Results indicated that barriers to effective parent-teacher collaboration included quality and quantity of communication, teacher perceptions about parents, parents' expectations and parents' perceptions of teachers, cultural perceptions, school related constraints and constrained school policies. The aforementioned barriers and associated challenges were found to negatively impact parents and teachers' self-confidence and role construction, which are likely to detract from the educational and psychosocial development of the child.

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration in education is important in order to facilitate change. It is a reciprocal dynamic process that occurs between two or more parties (for example, parent and teacher) who share in decision making towards common goals in relationships that are geared towards the development of the learners. Parent-teacher collaboration is effective when both parties try to create an accommodating relationship aimed at helping learners' development both academically and socially (Cowan et al. 2004).

Educating children is challenging and even more so when they have intellectual difficulties, like Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Schendel et al. 2012). Although sometimes not diagnosed until school age, ASD develops early in life and is life-long in duration, which has implications for education, social development, social interaction and social integration. The incidence of ASD in South Africa is unknown (Malcolm-Smith et al. 2013), but it is estimated that 1 in every 88 child born will develop ASD.

As a result of the many cognitive and social difficulties, educating ASD children can be over-whelming for parents and teachers (Goudie et al. 2011; Malcolm-Smith et al. 2013). Where successful partnerships exist, both parents and teachers report more self-confidence with associated positive educational outcomes for ASD learners (Brookman-Frazee 2011). Furthermore, conflict arises if parent-teacher relationships are not properly facilitated, which may be detrimental to ASD learners.

In South Africa, the education of children with disabilities has been given official recognition through policies such as Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education 2001) and the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Education 2008). These policies envision the provision of quality education in a system that respects and responds to diverse learner needs (Swart and Phasha 2011). Furthermore, the South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996 also recognises that these policies are only effective in partnerships with other stakeholders who provide support, resources and expertise. Despite these provisions research investigating parent-teacher collaboration in South Africa is scarce (Raborife and Phasha 2010).

In terms of education, children with ASD must have multidisciplinary assessments including comprehensive medical, psychological and speech and language based evaluations. This,

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together with observations in the classroom could help teachers identify the learning objectives for individual children (SEUSE 1999). The development of social skills is challenging for autistic children and educators need to facilitate instruction, as well as provide support in this sphere. The strategies needed are underpinned by helping ASD learners adapt to their environment and reduce maladaptive behaviours. In this regard parental involvement is a critical element. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) argue that successful parental involvement in collaborative relationships depend on the parents' beliefs (what influences them), parents' perception of the role they play in educating their children (Do they believe it is positive or negative?) and their life-context (for instance, cultural background, socio-economic status and educational background).

Blue-Banning et al. (2004) identified a number of interpersonal relationship attitudes, skills, values, and beliefs that appear to contribute towards effective partnerships between parents and teachers. These included, effective communications, commitment to educating the child, equality for parents and teachers, skill appropriation, trust, respect and cultural sensitivity. Barriers to collaboration included the parents' and teachers' own lack of self-confidence and role construction in terms of teaching and supporting ASD learners. Direct studies on parent-teacher collaboration in the education of ASD learners in South Africa could not be found, and thus this research attempts to fill that gap.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This was a qualitative study using a phenomenological design and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which sought to explore the in-depth experience of parents and teachers who collaborate in the education of children with ASD.

Research Setting

This study was conducted in one of the public special education schools, which had learners with ASD.

Population and Sample

The ASD programme in the school had three teachers and two teaching assistants and 19 learners, at the time of the research. A purposive sample of eight participants, comprising five parents of ASD learners and three teachers were recruited after a presentation was made at the school.

Data Collection

The method of data collection was individual semi-structured interviews, which were formulated from reading the literature. The questions included:
- "What is the quality of communication between you and your child's teacher?"
- Probe: "Is the communication clear, honest and frequent?"
- "How would you describe the level of commitment displayed by the teacher with regards to the educational and social development of your child?"
- Probe: "Do you feel a sense of reassurance, loyalty, determination, interest…on the teacher's part?"
- "Do you feel empowered to influence outcomes regarding the education of your child?"
- Probe: "Are your inputs/suggestions welcomed?"

Interviews with teachers were conducted at the school while those with parents were either at the school or an alternate venue deemed convenient by the parent (for instance, the parents' home). Participants were also allowed to choose the time for the interviews. Interviews were tape recorded, and later transcribed. Field notes were also taken to ensure that non-verbal communicative nuances were not lost (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014). Prior to commencement of the interview, participants were briefed on the objectives of the study. This was necessary to keep the conversation focused.

Interviews were conducted to saturation. On average interview sessions lasted for 40 minutes with the longest being an hour. In one instance, a parent burst into tears after speaking passionately about her son, while another was overcome by grief while recounting her day-to-

day ordeal with her son. In all cases debriefing sessions were conducted. Parents who needed extra help to deal with their emotions were referred to a psychologist.

Data Analysis

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework was used to analyse data (Smith and Osborne 2008). The IPA in the study was inductive in nature and was based on the following (out of which themes naturally arose):

a) A movement from what is unique to a participant to what is shared among the participants.
b) Description of their subjective experience, which moved to a more objective interpretation of their experience.
c) A commitment to understanding the participant's point of view.
d) A psychological focus on personal meaning making within a particular context (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014).

This was undertaken using a verbatim transcription of the semantic content of each individual interview and immersion in the data. The data was engaged with by reading and re-reading the transcripts, and making observations and notes during this process, as well as focusing on the content and reflecting on possible themes. These themes naturally arose out of the data and were grounded in the participants' accounts. Connections across and between themes were sought and descriptive phrases or keywords found. This process continued until saturation of themes.

Quality Criteria

Credibility checks were used to check the integrity of data. Participants were given the transcribed audio recordings to read. Grounding in examples was used. This allowed examples of participants' responses to ground each thematic category. Coherence was insured by integrating data and establishing a correlation between themes. All researchers in the study discussed different approaches, meanings, interpretations and perspectives inherent to the data, which allowed for the recognition of biases and preferences.

In order to minimise bias the following steps were taken (Patton 2002), that is, the researchers refrained from judgment (also known as *Epoché*). This enabled the researchers to investigate the phenomenon without prejudgement or imposing meaning too soon. Bracketing, which involves putting aside pre-conceived notions, was used so that emergent themes were as objective as possible.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from University of Limpopo Ethics Committee (REC-310111-031). Permission was obtained from the Department of Education (DOE) in Limpopo Province and the Special Needs School. Ethical issues such as informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and discontinuance were addressed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A summary of parents' demographic information is presented in Table 1. They are coded as P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5.

Teachers' demographic information is provided in Table 2. They are referred to as T1, T2 and T3.

Themes and Subthemes

There is some overlap between themes, as a result of the cycle of cause and effect relationships.

Theme 1: Quality and Quantity of Communication

This theme highlights the challenges pertaining to efficient and effective coordination of communication between parents and teachers. The main obstacles (barriers) affecting the quality and quantity of communication was one-way communication, and limited access to resources and challenges pertaining to frequency of communication.

Sub-theme: One-way Communication

Communication between parents and teachers was predominantly one-sided. Teachers felt that parents played passive roles during meet-

Table 1: Parents demographic information

	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female
Race	Black	Black	Black	Black	White
Age of child	15	11	14	9	22
Child's age at diagnosis	2	7	2	3	3
Number of siblings	2	3	N/A	1	3
Marital status	M	M	S	S	D
Highest educational qualification	BED (Hons)	MBA	National Diploma	Diploma National	National Diploma
Employment status	Employed	Employed	Employed	Employed	Employed
Religious/cultural orientation	Christianity	African spirituality and Christian*	Christianity	Christianity	Christianity

Key: M, married; S, separated, D, divorced; MBA, Master of Business Administration; * practises both

Table 2: Teachers' demographic information

	T1	T2	T3
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Race	Black	Black	Indian
Highest educational qualification.	BED (Honours)	BED (Honours)	BED (Honours)
Number of ASD children in class.	9	10	7
Years of experience teaching children with ASD or other disability.	8	6	25
Number/ type of training undertaken during period mentioned above.	Several short courses on inclusive education and workshop on ASD	1 workshop on ASD	*Short courses on special needs/ inclusive education, ASD, policy implementation

ings or other forums for dialogue. Parents attributed their inability to initiate or sustain conversations to the fact that they perceive teachers to be more knowledgeable about ASD and their lack of self-confidence.

I like to think that the training... Whatever that they do at school makes them [teachers] better placed to deal with autism than me. (P2)

Some of the parents are afraid to open up because of their lack of self-confidence. Some think if they open up then the child's chances of being retained in school may be compromised. (T3)

As a consequence the parents seldom made inputs and waited for the teacher to initiate communication.

Normally, if there is anything with the child, the teacher will just phone my wife and then tell her. But we listen rather than speak too much. (P2)

Parents seem to adopt the role of listening. Therefore, communication inherent in sharing responsibilities and resources in an effective parent-teacher collaboration was compromised.

Sub-theme: Poor Access to Resources

One of the attributes of effective communication in collaborative partnerships is the ability of all stakeholders to have access to, and share, available resources. In this setting, parents' limited access to information was identified as a barrier. Many doctors in the area are perceived as not having sufficient information and knowledge about ASD.

Many of the doctors around the province don't really know about autism. Some of them say they know about it from the school because we refer to them and say we think this child is autistic but they don't give parents information about it. (T2)

Even when information is available, it is only available in English.

One of the barriers is that all the resources and books we have are in English and most of

the parents do not speak and read the language well. It makes it difficult to talk about something they do not really understand.

Pamphlets and books and many brochures were given out. But as I told you those books are written by professionals and some of the books have terminologies they [parents] don't understand and they get bored. When we give them these resources they gather dust at home. (T3)

Sub-theme: Tactfulness in Communication

The ability of teachers to convey critical information to parents without being perceived as insensitive, or judgemental, was considered extremely challenging.

The expectations from some parents are unreasonable. Sometimes the truth is difficult, but must be told. One parent asked me, "When is my child going to go to normal school?" If the parent and the child are to be helped we all must be on the same page… Sometimes the truth creates a barrier between us and they feel you hate them [or judge them]. (T1)

One of the parents made a statement, which underpinned this teacher's statement.

I think there were instances where I felt it [a sense of being judged]. For example, when my child eats, it is easy for him to hold the bread, but when it comes to feeding himself with a spoon it's very hard for him. The principal, asked me why, up till now, my child can't eat by himself. (P3)

The parent said she was saddened by this lack of tact by the principal.

I said you know it hurts me when I see that my child cannot do what others his age can do easily but it is important to understand these children individually. So you see I was hurt… I was so stressed and I felt like I didn't want my child to go back to the school. How can the principal talk like that? (P3)

Sub-theme: Frequency of Communication

Both parents and teachers concur that frequency of communication was insufficient. They attributed this to the fact that parent-teacher consultative meetings are linked with school social events such as sports day. These events are occasional.

These kinds of activities are a sort of inducement. They are aimed at making it look like we want parents to come close to us and not run away. (T1)

Actually there is no plan. It is random. But at least we get the school report card and we see the feedback. (P2)

The teachers stated that parent-teacher consultative meetings or workshop (with a focus on educational development of ASD learners) are new concepts.

But last week we developed a session where we advise the office [referring to school management] to organise the parents to come and see the teacher so that we can discuss the education of the learner. (T3)

Teachers also suggested that poor communication with parents was a result of the bureaucratic approach of management. One teacher indicated that most of the communication with parents is indirect.

We are not allowed to talk to the parents in that fashion [referring to being informal or casual]. The protocol is to go to the office and report if we have any challenges with the learner. Management take up issues with the parents. As educators (teachers) we are at distance but I thank God that we have made some progress because last month we met the parents. (T2)

Another teacher confirmed that letters to parents must be signed by the principal who has the power to dictate the content. In fact teachers do not see the final letter.

If I cannot write a letter to the parents in my own words how I am going to talk to them? (T1)

It is likely that this practice prevents teachers from expressing their true feelings (whether positive or negative), which compromises honesty in the parent-teacher collaborations. However, one parent had more telephonic conversations with a teacher because she was an acquaintance.

Our case is different… If there is anything wrong with the child, the teacher will just phone my wife and then tell her. This is probably because they are in the same church. (P2)

In this school it seems the teacher-principal relationship is also problematic.

Theme 2: Teachers' Perceptions About Parents

Teachers held generally negative perceptions about parents' willingness and ability to collaborate effectively with them. The most recurrent negative themes that emerged were, parents' lack of commitment to the learners' education, their inability to fulfil parental roles, and lack of respect for teachers.

Sub-theme: Lack of Parental Commitment

Teachers felt that many parents showed very little commitment towards developing parent-teacher collaboration in respect of furthering the educational, social and developmental needs of the children. They described parents as not willing to go the extra mile. The following underpin this sub-theme.

Every time a parent brings a child to the hostel there is an invitation for the parents to meet the staff. However, they make excuses and say they have come from far and have to rush back. Parents say they do not have enough time to stay but they need to get an idea of what is happening. (T3)

Some parents go to the office at the school but don't come to talk to the teachers. (T2)

Sub-theme: Inability to Fulfil Designated Roles

The teachers were sceptical about parents' ability and skills in terms of the curriculum, as it prescribes an Individualised Education Plan (IEP), which parents are to help with at home (often social and behavioural skills). They expressed dissatisfaction with some of the ASD learners' progress, or behaviours, after spending time with their parents.

I think the parents are seriously challenged. They don't [or won't] understand how to support the learners. When they come back from weekends or holidays you can see that at home there has been no routine and we have to start all over again. (T2)

Teachers associated parents' difficulties in fulfilling their obligations to their displaying excessive sympathy towards the child, limited knowledge about ASD and their inability (or lack of desire) to enforce rules.

They can't fulfil their roles because sometimes they feel pity for their children and they do everything for them because they are disabled. I remember one time a parent told me that my child never washes the dishes. I immediately called the child and asked her to wash the cups in the classroom. She did it... Her mother cried saying I just didn't think she could. (T1)

One teacher stated that parents have a key role in helping their children develop positive interpersonal and social skills.

I think parents can help their child in life skills, like getting dressed properly and with their moral development and personal hygiene. (T3)

Sub-theme: Lack of Respect

Mutual respect between partners in a collaborative relationship is a vital attribute. Although the teachers enjoyed respect from some parents, they expressed resentment towards others (especially those with either an educational, political or financial advantage). These parents were described as bossy, mean or stubborn. This was described as a demotivating factor in their efforts at engaging in a collaborative relationship.

Some of the parents bring the child and they treat us as if we are their nannies [especially the rich ones]. Another thing is that some of the parents are bossy. Some of them are not open and not friendly... They think that teachers are like nothing... [Pauses and shakes head in disapproval]. (T3)

Theme 3: Parents' Expectations

All parents have expectations for their children. However, setting goals must take into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of ASD learners. A significant challenge with parent-teacher collaboration at the school was differences in expectations between parents and teachers.

Sub-theme: Unrealistic Parents' Expectations

Teachers felt that parents' expectations for their children were unrealistic. Parents attested to wanting more from the teachers and expressed disappointment in that regard.

The first year that he was there I was not actually happy. It felt like they are just keeping the children away from home, with no reason for it. As a result, there was a time that I thought I need to take my child out of this school. (P3)

They expect miracles, when in essence these things take time. (T3)

Teachers, felt that parents' lack of knowledge about ASD was the reason for their unrealistic expectations.

They think that the school is a place that will perform miracles. Whenever you say an autistic child becomes an autistic adult, it becomes very difficult for them to accept. They will say, "What is the point of bringing my child to this school then?" They don't understand that there are limits within which the child can develop. (T3)

They [the parents] will want them [the children] to write their name and their surname and then they expect them to know their numbers but they don't understand that ASD children, even if they have intellectual ability, may not be able to do this. (T2)

Failure to meet parents' expectations often results in parent-teacher conflict. As a result, teachers experience various challenges in sustaining honest and open conversations with parents.

Sometimes the truth is so very hard to hear that they cannot accept it. They want the child to hold a pencil properly and write in columns. As teachers we say we are doing our best...but sometimes they don't believe us. (T3)

Sub-theme: Lack of Shared Goals

Shared goals and responsibilities involve coordination, cooperation and actions from parents and teachers are geared towards common objectives. Parents and teachers experienced conflict in terms of unrealistic expectations. Barriers such as this resulted in an ineffective, and possibly damaging parent-teacher relationship.

At home I am training my child to write and here at school they say they are still busy assessing her. I say, you know what my child can write but they say she is not yet ready to write. I am trying to push the child to write and I am patient so she does it over and over again. Sometimes I have the feeling that the teachers delay [learning]. (P4)

Theme 4: Parents' Perceptions of Teachers

Although teachers were described as reliable, devoted and committed, parents' main concern was the teachers' ability to successfully and efficiently educate their ASD children. There was a perception that they were unable to meet the ASD learners' individual needs.

Sub-theme: Teachers' Inability to Meet Children's Individual Needs

Ideally, in parent-teacher collaborations, the teacher's knowledge of, and ability to fulfil his or her role construct is crucial. Central to teachers' competency and skills is the amount of training received. Parents felt that the teachers were not adequately trained. As a result they felt that teachers were likely to be stressed, as they were not able to meet the child's educational needs.

The teachers still don't understand what ASD is because they have not been trained for special school education. In this school most of the teachers are not special needs teachers so they don't have adequate knowledge of ASD, because of this teachers are stressed. (P1)

Another parent felt that teachers at the school had varying degrees of competence.

The teachers show commitment, but I still feel as a school, there is more that they need to do. There are times when if a teacher that I know is competent is not at work, I don't take my child to school. Because I don't know how he is going to be treated. (P3)

Such perceptions suggest that some parents may undermine teaching staff and favour others. This is likely to jeopardize their relationships with other teachers. This could also create mistrust and lack of mutual respect between parents and teachers.

Theme 5: Cultural Perceptions

In addition to conflicts in parent and teacher perceptions, negative cultural perceptions were another key theme. Parents feel that ASD children are treated negatively in various societal settings.

You feel like all eyes are on you... Every move of the child is being analysed... You can hear them saying things like, "What did she

do? Shame…and so on". Eish [expression of discontent] *... it is embarrassing especially in our African culture.* (P5)

The old people, when they see the child coming they will be like, "Oh... This one is not alright." They will start recommending Prophets and Men of God or some strong Sangomas [African traditional healers]. I mean everywhere we go with him people keep recommending people that might help [as if we hadn't tried everything]. We are struggling as Africans to accept these ASD children. Culturally, when a child can't speak proper sentences and can't communicate, it is something that nobody [African] understands. Where I come from this is the first case in the family and the area. Sometimes people look at him and they wonder [aloud] what you have done or what have you not done for this child to be this way. (P2)

Some parents stated that children with ASD are conceived as a result of witchcraft, an ancestral curse or a punishment from God (P1, P2 and P4). This, in day-to-day living in their communities, means that anyone who associates with the child [or family] runs the risk of *catching* the illness. As a result, parents sometimes find ASD children burdensome.

I can't take my child shopping, because she likes the ball so much, so she will take a ball from the shelf and run around the whole shop playing...if you try to stop her she will cry. You run after her and people look at you as if you are crazy. Even at church my child wants to do what others are doing. She wants to hold the microphone and go up to the stage. She cries when I don't let her participate and nobody understands or helps me. I feel so bad but I suppose it's my burden in life. (P4)

Parents interpreted negative cultural attitudes as lack of understanding in the African community about ASD. This is associated with a lack of trust and confidence in the community, which includes the teaching staff. This adds to parents becoming over-protective towards their child, which may manifest in confrontational, defensive and judgemental attitudes towards teachers.

Theme 6: School-related Constraints

Parents and teachers noted that there were constraints of school management, in terms of parent-teacher collaboration. Three sub-themes identified were teachers' knowledge about ASD, teachers' lack of self-confidence in their skills, and adequate school facilities and school policies.

Sub-theme: Teachers' Knowledge about ASD

Teachers perceived special education as an entirely new experience with very different challenges. They felt that their limited knowledge of ASD contributed towards their low self-confidence in their teaching abilities and overall poor implementation of policies.

I have been here for six years and attended only one workshop in special education. Before that I used the knowledge that I learned from educating mainstream children. I taught in the mainstream for 25 years. I have spent six years in special needs education so I don't have all the skills. (T2)

I don't interact with all the teachers and I might be judging them wrongly but I know that they still need to know more about these children and the different levels of autism. (P3)

The teachers are from the mainstream absorbed in this school. So they don't have knowledge of these kids. (P1)

Sub-theme: Lack of Self-confidence in Teaching Skills

One of the key attributes of self-confidence in teaching is for staff to demonstrate their ability to meet the needs of learners. A sense of mastery in special needs teaching was lacking. Teachers felt ill prepared and inadequately skilled and parents concurred.

You know the spectrum [ASD] is broad. Sometimes you are faced with a new behaviour and you don't know what to do. (T1)

Basically in Limpopo, none of the special schools are specialised in ASD. I know what they have helps, but if you are dealing with different disabilities it is difficult to get good outcomes for ASD learners. (P2)

Sub-theme: Lack of Adequate Facilities and Poor Policy Implementation

Another consequence of lack of knowledge was the poor implementation of policies on special education at the school. Teachers felt that

the Department of Education (DOE) at the provincial and district level tried to implement policies that did not fit in with the environmental and cultural context of the school.

They do not understand these children or our needs as teachers, how can they enforce the wrong policies? The problem is our educational system. They must empower others properly and get a group of teachers [who teach special needs and have the skills] to develop a curriculum for these kinds of learners. (T1)

I think the policies are there but schools don't take the policies in to consideration. If you ask management to give you a copy of White Paper 6 they will say, "What is that one about?" and that person is a manager…management don't help us. (T2)

Another teacher felt that the concepts of inclusive and special needs education are at a developmental stage in South Africa, and as such, challenges with policy implementation are inevitable. She also felt that South Africa was trying to emulate other countries that have successfully implemented these programmes but does not have the infrastructure or resources.

It's like you go somewhere and you see a nice garden and you come home and you want your garden to be the same as the beautiful one right now. But overnight it cannot happen. In South Africa it [referring to inclusive/special education] is only a baby.

They must make the environment safe and friendly. At the school it should be safe for the children no barriers or bricks lying around. Also, we should have more teaching aids for ASD learners. They need special resources. (P3)

Most of the workshops that I attended, I paid for myself. I think the department should support us more so that we can acquire more skills and knowledge. (T1)

The class teacher to learner ratio is also a big problem. We do not cope properly and are stressed but we don't complain and carry on. (T3)

Theme 7: Constrained School Policy

The last theme was the inadequate school policy on parent-teacher collaboration. Efforts put in place by school management to facilitate effective collaboration with parents was considered inadequate by teachers and parents.

Sub-theme: Restricted Parental Involvement in Programmes

Invitations from schools to attend workshops or discussions were infrequent and restricted to informal events (such as sport and recreational or fundraising activities). Parent-teacher meetings focusing on the development of ASD learners did not take place on these occasions.

Parents are invited when the learners have sports day. On that day you find that parents who think that the children can't run are happy to see them participating. We also see them on special days like Mandela day so they can help us paint. We don't talk about education. (T1)

Sub-theme: Lack of Formal Parent-teacher Collaboration Workshops and/or Discussions

One of the most significant drawbacks to effective parent-teacher collaboration at the school was the absence of formal workshops and discussions on parent-teacher collaboration.

There are no such programmes at the school. I think we should form a support group so we can have a parent-teacher collaboration and then discuss how we can collaborate interactively. (T2)

CONCLUSION

Overall teachers felt ill prepared and inadequately skilled to assume their roles and were overwhelmed by the needs of ASD learners. The potential for educational development of ASD learners' was influenced by both parents' and teachers' lack of adequate knowledge about ASD and perceived lack of self-confidence. The nature of parent-teacher communication, at the time the study contributed towards the lack of a successful partnership. The psychosocial development of the child was influenced by the dominant discourse of African cultural practices and societal misconceptions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In-service training and workshops on parent-teacher collaboration should thus be a first line of intervention in addressing observed knowledge gaps, which are barriers to effective parent-teacher collaborations. Greater sensitisa-

tion and awareness campaigns are needed as both long and short-term solutions to these challenges to effective parent-teacher collaborations.

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