PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISORDERS

by

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DEDICATION

To my beloved parents,

None of this would have been possible without your endless love and support. I am forever grateful for everything that you have taught and given me throughout my life. You have shown me the depth in kindness and what it means to accept others for who they are. You have inspired me to constantly work hard and never take the value of my education for granted. Thank you for always believing in me, encouraging and supporting me in my determination to find my potential, and being there for whatever I needed, whenever. I love you both so much.

This is dedicated to you.

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To my precious family, Ryan, Amy, Aryeh Leiby, Leah and Sara, Josh and Kerry, Daniel; words cannot describe how grateful I am for your continued support, love, and belief in me. Thank you for always having my back, encouraging me with such love and caring so deeply for me in every journey that I undertake, especially this one! You have taught me that family is everything and together, we can overcome anything.

To my friends, you know who you are, my world and life is a better, happier and more fulfilled one with you in it. I feel so blessed that I have had the best people in my life who make me feel understood without having to explain anything – thank you for loving, accepting, and supporting me always.

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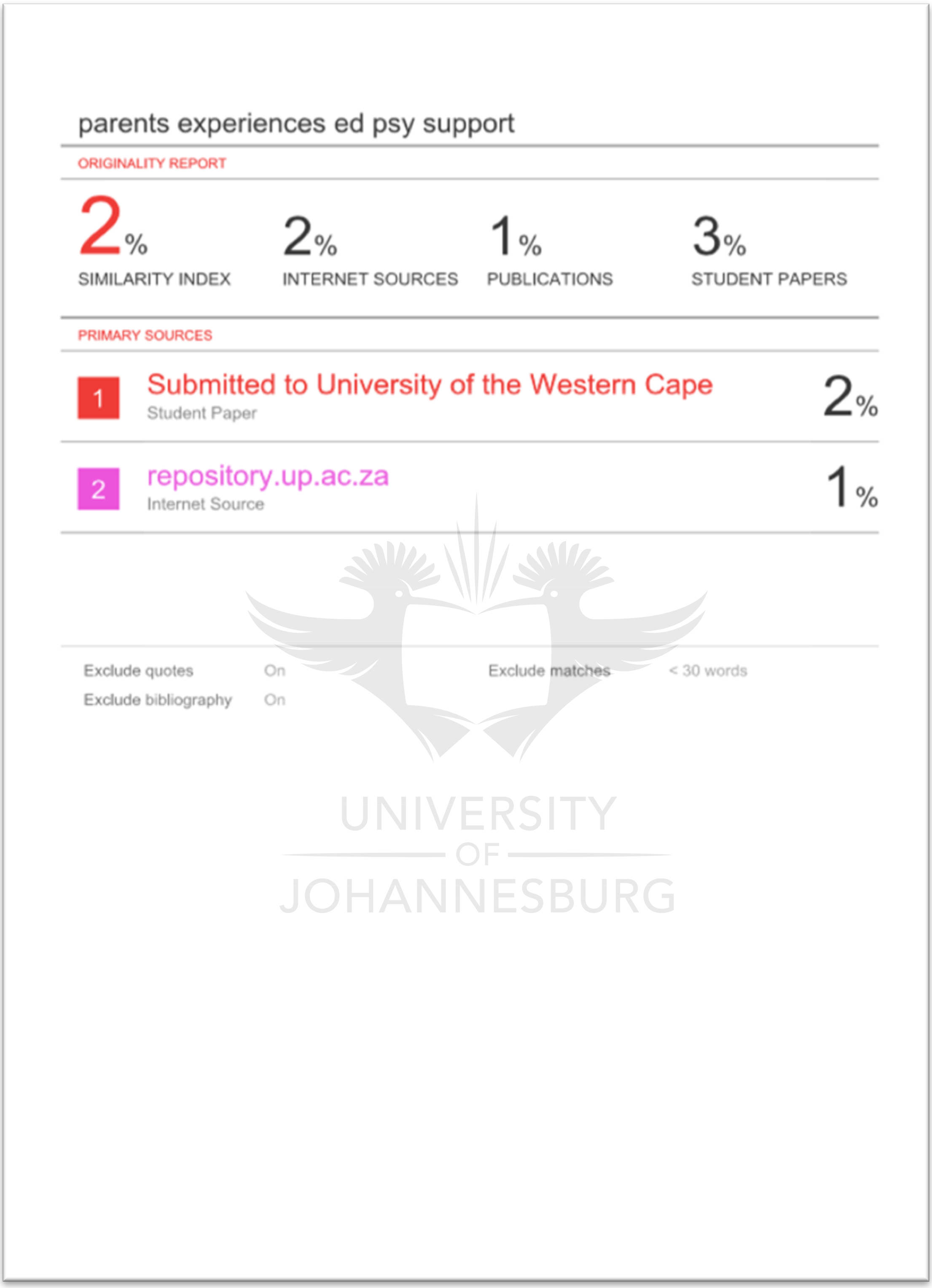
And, finally, thank you to everyone who has contributed to putting this study together, both academically and personally. To my extended family, teachers, friends, and peers – I appreciate all you have done for me.

ORIGINALITY REPORT



parents experiences ed psy support

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences and perceptions of parents of the psychoeducational support provided at a full-service high school for their children with specific learning disorders (SLDs). The purpose of the investigation was to indicate better means to empower the parents through knowledge to become proactive participants in assistance to their children as provided by educators and health professionals. A descriptive qualitative approach embedded in an interpretative and phenomenological framework was used. Data were collected by means of individual semi-structured interviews with six parents and analysed through thematic data analysis. Three themes were identified: parents' experiences of SLDs, supporting children with SLDs, and the school's challenging role in facilitating intervention/support. Subthemes addressed parents' dynamic understanding of SLDs, their parenting a child with an SLD and its resulting burden on their living contexts, their difficulties in supporting their child with an SLD, their actively facilitating intervention/support, their perceptions of their child's experience, and their concerns about narrow thinking in the broader school system and conflicting experiences of support provided to their children via an educational support programme. Findings indicated the need for improved support to parents of children with SLDs not only in a domestic but also in a school and community setting.

Keywords: interpretative phenomenological analysis, full-service schools, parents' experiences, psychoeducational support, specific learning disorder, qualitative research

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADD:	Attention deficit disorder
APA:	American Psychological Association
CRPD:	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
DoE:	Department of Education
DSM-5:	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition
EWP6:	Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education
IDEA:	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEB:	Independent Examination Board
IPA:	Interpretative phenomenological analysis
LSE:	Learning support educator
SASA:	South African Schools Act
SIAS:	Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SLD:	Specific learning disorder
UN:	United Nations
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

CHAPTER 1:
OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In contemporary democratic societies, education is considered an essential and basic human right that empowers individuals through access to information about *inter alia* their health, social environment and working milieu, but, most importantly, how to continue learning throughout life (Vilhena & Pinheiro, 2016). Thus, an education system has a vital responsibility in ensuring that all learners are provided with the appropriate individualised support, aimed at facilitating the fulfilment of their potential (Ebersohnn & Eloff, 2006; Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Onerous as this responsibility already is, it is further amplified when the needs of children with learning disorders (referred to as specific learning disorders or SLDs in this text) are factored into the equation of a society's educational obligations. Considering that these children have increasingly been accommodated in mainstream educational contexts, particularly for high-school tuition, the provision of multidisciplinary teams and relevant resources for supporting and encouraging their development and progress in school has accordingly become crucial (McConkey, Kelly, Craig, & Shevlin, 2016; Swart & Pettipher, 2011). The more effective communication about and access to these support services are, the better encouraged and more satisfied parents[1] are in trusting certain learning environments and the education system as a whole with enabling their children as learners – a space in which they are most vulnerable and may consequently feel intimidated (Clegg, Murphy, Almack, & Harvey, 2008; Ryan & Quinlan, 2017).

One of parents' greatest responsibilities is to ensure that their children have appropriate and relevant access to an environment and resources which will support, facilitate, and enhance their individualised learning experience (Hassall, Rose, & McDonald, 2005; Robert, Leblanc, & Boyer, 2015). Parenting is an exhausting, challenging and complex task that assumes further ramifications when a child has an SLD, which is invariably accompanied by additional, unexpected demands on parents in juggling their personal and self-care along with broader family, medical, financial, or

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[1] In this study, the term "parents" should be understood as including the concept of "guardians" as defined in § 1.7.

social responsibilities while having to manage their child's adaptive behaviour and learning needs (Kishore, 2011; Plant & Sanders, 2007).

This constraint upon parents to confront a diverse and unique range of challenges inescapably precipitates the need to regard them as essential collaborators in their child's education (Hastings & Taunt, 2002; Heiman, 2002; Jones & Passey, 2005). The nexus of problems arising from such circumstances has motivated the focus of this study on parents' experiences and perceptions of SLDs and the psychoeducational support received in addressing the needs both of parents and of their children as learners. In the main, the study entailed an exploration of parents' understanding of and motivation for interaction, as well as their children's successful adaptation, or lack thereof, to the complex learning environment. Understanding how parents perceive and experience their children's SLDs, in addition to the diverse services and forms of support to which they may gain access, is crucial (Robert, Leblanc, & Boyer, 2015). If assisted in achieving an improved understanding of both the nature of SLDs and the resources available to diminish their deleterious impact, parents may be able to deal more dynamically with their children's learning difficulties because of experiencing a sense of enhanced personal well-being and of being better adjusted to adapting to and accommodating their children's SLDs (Robert et al., 2015). The endeavour of this investigation was to gather information that may provide deeper insight to educators and school systems in developing their accommodation of children with SLDs and enhancing their collaboration with parents in doing this successfully.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION

SLDs are an expression of various information-processing neurodevelopmental disorders and are customarily acknowledged to have the greatest prevalence in relation to other neurodevelopmental disorders (Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Neurodevelopmental disorders are primarily concerned with how the neurological system and brain function (APA, 2013). Although hereditary factors fulfil a predominant role in several neurodevelopmental disorders, they cannot be regarded as sole, distinct causes since several other multiple contributors to the clinical course of these disorders may come into play, such as environmental factors, medical conditions, and social issues such as fetal alcohol or drug exposure (APA, 2013). Children with SLDs struggle significantly in areas of number skills, written expression, reading, spelling, or social skills, which can compromise their developmental progress in the course of their schooling careers. Furthermore, they are at risk for subsequent non-academic problems such as social malintegration, psychological distress, and difficulties in self-control over their behaviour (Morrison & Cosden, 1997; Starr & Foy, 2006).

While children and adolescents with SLDs are exposed to the same challenges within society as other individuals, such challenges are exacerbated by the existence of a disorder and these children consequently need to confront additional stressors on a daily basis (Bögels, Hellemans, Van Deursen, Römer, & Van der Meulen, 2014; Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Consequential factors such as behavioural problems, loneliness, and perceived delinquency among other interpersonal problems within an individual learner can contribute to greater classroom complexities, which educators and parents should address consistently if negative short- and long-term outcomes are to be pre-empted (Morrison & Cosden, 1997; Starr & Foy, 2006).

Living with a child with SLD increases parents' vulnerability to "to anxiety, turmoil and a loss of identity" (Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013, p. 459) as they are facing pressures of everyday life along with the challenges and uncontrolled effects associated with such disorders (Hassall, Rose, & McDonald, 2005; Jones & Passey, 2005). The distress and disruption associated with diagnosis often bring about unexpected complications in daily routines and home environments, which parents can experience as overwhelming and isolating since they have to confront significant demands and emotional challenges for the first time (Ahn, Miller, Sharon, & McIntosh, 2004; Hastings & Taunt, 2002). This can lead to parental attention becoming biased because of children's problem behaviour and learning needs, resulting in unintended, negative consequences that are associated with the absence of adequate interventional assistance (Bögels et al., 2014). Such assistance will enhance increasing exposure to beneficial experiences associated with having a child with learning disabilities through highlighting the personal growth and positive attitudes that can evolve despite challenging circumstances (Hastings & Taunt, 2002).

If an educational system is to assist learners with SLDs effectively, parental involvement is essential in its contribution towards constructive progress as indicated by persuasive research. Overall trends that have been identified in the literature emphasise the positive effects of parents' involvement in facilitating significant improvement in their children's learning outcomes, developmental progress, and perseverance in surmounting obstacles more successfully (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014; McConachie & Diggle, 2005; Nix, Bierman, & McMahon, 2009). Parents and families – as functioning in the secure matrix of the home context – are considered to be one of the most frequent and successful sources of support for children with SLDs. When parents have an integrated and substantive understanding of their children's needs and if relevant support structures are in place, they are more inclined to become the best protagonists for assisting their children and thus develop into essential collaborators in their developmental progress (Starr & Foy, 2006). The better parents are informed and encouraged to be actively involved, the more confident they feel and the better equipped they are in accepting and handling their children's diagnosis and facilitating their developmental progress (McConachie & Diggle, 2005).

Although most parents are able to cope and adapt successfully to the stress associated with their children's having SLD (Heiman, 2002), for numerous others the initial shock and lack of knowledge create feelings of helplessness leading to negative reactions that often cause a denial of diagnosis and a feeling of motivational paralysis because if having to confront what is to them unknown and disconcerting (Heiman, 2002; Jones & Passey, 2005). When parents feel supported by knowledgeable and supportive collaborators, they are better motivated to become involved and willingly contribute to their children's journey in confronting SLDs and actively embracing school-based support teams and educational initiatives (Jones & Passey, 2005; Starr & Foy, 2006).

The experiences and perceptions of parents formed the rationale for this study in an investigation of what they might have considered a debilitating pscyhosocial situation. The participants were parents whose children were enrolled as learners in the Educational Support Programme at Oakwood Academy,[2] a private, full-service high school that served as the research site. For ethical reasons and anonymity concerns, no revealing details can be disclosed except that the school offers a full-service programme which is run by a counselling department. This means that the school functions as an independent, ordinary entity that aims to provide a caring and welcoming environment which allows both learners and parents to feel a sense of

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[2] A pseudonym for the high school concerned.

belonging by giving access to all learners who, as defined by the Department of Education (DBE, 2010), choose to attend the school, whatever their learning needs may be. The school offers practical support, inclusive teaching skills, and assessments that give feedback and insight into where the learners are holding and what can realistically be expected from them. The school is consequently aware of what learning conditions and intervention strategies are needed for learners who present with an SLD, and its Educational Support Programme accommodates diverse learning needs so that all learners can participate meaningfully in education. Thus, the school has committed itself to creating a nurturing and productive environment that assists learners academically while providing them with opportunities to integrate comfortably within the broader school context, whether it be culturally or socially (DBE, 2010).

Especially if SLDs are involved, it is essential to give critical consideration to the experiences of parents since guidance for learners' educational and psychosocial support is inevitably rooted in the decisions and actions taken by their parents (because of their children's immaturity to make active decisions) that will contribute to both their present and future well-being (Jones & Passey, 2005; Starr & Foy, 2006). Consequently, learners in full-service schools are not the only ones who need assistance, but their parents and teachers who are committed to supporting them do as well. Individual experiences of SLDs are dynamic and can lead to many unforeseen and difficult obstacles that may exert an impact on the lives of learners and their parents because of financial, emotional, and psychological strain (Heiman, 2002; Jones & Passey, 2005). The deleterious potential of such challenges for family life in its entirety requires that parents' needs for relevant support be understood adequately via an analysis of their experiences and perceptions if situation-appropriate guidelines are to be formulated for overcoming their difficulties.

Despite the overwhelming volume of literature on SLD as a general phenomenon, relatively few sources are available on the associated impacts that it may have on parents and the basic social unit of the nuclear family. As noted in the problem statement below, insufficient consideration is given to parents' experiences as valuable indicators of their needs in supporting their children's educational requirements. This is a shortcoming that may be addressed through using a holistic framework at a full-service school with a programme specifically aimed at identifying learners' needs and providing effective interventions. The chief aim of the present study was therefore to factor in parental perspectives on the needs of nuclear families with regard to the effects of SLDs on educational and domestic life.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although many parents cope positively and adapt themselves successfully to the stress associated with their children's having an SLD, for most others the initial shock of a diagnosis and their lack of knowledge about the issue create feelings of helplessness. As mentioned before, ensuing negative reactions often cause a denial of the diagnosis of an unfamiliar situation that they find uncomfortable to confront, which may lead to debilitating feelings of powerlessness (Heiman, 2002; Jones & Passey, 2005). This could be the consequence of parents' limited understanding about SLD, the stigma that surrounds it or circumstances that inhibit their interest or ability to intervene appropriately in a capacity as informed contributors to initiatives undertaken at schools. It appeared, for example, that whereas Oakwood Academy had invested in supporting learners with various SLDs through an Educational Support Programme and had created capacities for intervention and opportunities for development, effective collaboration on the part of parents was still lacking. Thus, this study was aimed at exploring parents' experiences of psychoeducational support for learners with SLDs to promote successful learning experiences.

1.4 RESEARCH RATIONALE

With the alarming incidence of SLDs as remarked upon in recent literature, researchers have highlighted various protective factors and interventions as measures for countering their incapacitating psychological effects and for building resilience among learners with such disorders (Boivin, Kakooza, Warf, Davidson, & Grigorenko, 2015; Ebersohn & Eloff, 2006). However, not only is there a paucity of research addressing the experiences and perceptions of parents within school contexts, but such research as exists is also limited and negatively focused. There is consequently an identifiable need for investigations with an intentional emphasis on the way in which parental views may either compromise or promote the quantity and quality of intervention in the school environment to offset the constraining effects of SLDs.

According to *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education – Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (EWP6), the South African government is obligated to reinforce education support services to all learners without distinction. These services are provided at national and provincial levels and their main support functions are aimed at constituting a policy and management framework for facilitating direct and indirect services to schools and education institutions (DoE, 2001). Ideally, this would include school psychologists, counsellors, social workers, learning-support advisors, learning-support educators, and curriculum advisers. EWP6 outlines the necessity behind establishing structures in facilitating the provision of support to schools, which enables holistic support and intervention at an individual level (DoE, 2001). It highlights the importance of providing and accommodating learning opportunities for all learners – regardless of what barriers they experience – to ensure that learning contexts will include them in the quality provision of education (DoE, 2001). Of special concern to this research, EWP6 emphasises the role of parents in the process of supporting learners in the planning and implementation of inclusion activities with a view to assigning a more active role to parents in the learning and teaching of their children (DoE, 2001).

In addition, the vision of EWP6 was later refined and evolved specifically to facilitate its implementation in one of its main elements, namely the "Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support" (SIAS), which is a policy framework "for the standardisation of the procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school" (DBE, 2014, p. 12). The SIAS further requires that support programmes be established to accommodate learners who present with learning barriers and that decisions about such programmes should involve interactive partnerships between parents, educators, and educational support services (DBE, 2014). It is a key component of the SIAS to promote a systemic approach, which implies that problems relating to learning barriers should be viewed through a comprehensive lens; in other words, the problems need to be understood not only in relation to the individual but also the environment in which the individual functions (DBE, 2014).

Thus far, scant research has been conducted on how parents experience the SIAS process of identifying and supporting their children with learning disorders in South

Africa. It is difficult enough for trained professionals to define and identify specific behaviours as included in diagnostic frameworks and to decide at which point individual differences in behaviour begin to constitute "abnormality". Parents may well be predisposed to the misinformed view that such decisions are largely subjective, especially because these assessments are indeed to some extent influenced by cultural values and expectations that are prevalent in South African communities and full-service schools (Norbury & Sparks, 2013). Nevertheless, professionals in the educational field constantly endeavour to improve their understanding of SLDs in order to render well-substantiated appraisals in their diagnosis of disorders. This striving was, for example, reflected in the initiatives at the school site selected for this study as discussed in § 3.6.2.

Worldwide, evaluations of "early childhood developmental status in low- and middle-income countries" estimate that "15,7% of children are significantly delayed in their cognitive development, 26,3%" in socio-emotional development and "36,8% in either or both" (Boivin et al., 2015, p. 527). This phenomenon has special relevance in South Africa since the predominant part of the population lives in rural areas where poverty as a common denominator is a matter for concern because of its adverse effects on large numbers of school children. Research has indicated that numerous children are struggling with various neurodevelopmental delays and SLDs that are not being adequately addressed (Boivin et al., 2015). It is necessary to examine what resources and tools are available for confronting a wide range of learning disorders so that effective countermeasures can be accurately identified and implemented in an accountable manner. Educators and health professionals (such as therapists) should encourage all initiatives that all learners have access to education and equal opportunity that support them positively. This is particularly important because childhood is a high-priority developmental stage "for both preventive and remediating interventions to address the pervasive developmental needs" (Boivin et al., 2015, p. 527).

Effective support to children with SLDs has a positive ripple effect in expanding into improving the quality of life of the whole family in that cogent guidance of parents in particular will inform their perceptions of SLDs, facilitate the family's adaptation to a potentially problematic situation, and contribute to the implementation of effective intervention at an appropriate time and capacity (Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Since research of this nature can create a better understanding of what is not being addressed or accurately rationalised in school–parent communication, the present study was aimed at achieving constructive insight into ways in which deficiencies in school–parent communications can be addressed so as to promote better interaction between educators and parents with a view to earlier, more effective intervention in the problems of children with SLDs. It became clear that an investigation of parents' experiences of the psychoeducational support received in a full-service, high school would form a sound point of departure for arriving at a better comprehension of the value of an educator–parent partnership in counteracting the impairing effects of SLDs. Hence, a research question had to formulated to capture the essence of the investigative endeavour.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

How do parents of children who manifest with specific learning disorders in a full-service high school experience psychoeducational support?

1.6 RESEARCH AIMS

This study was aimed at exploring and describing the experiences and perceptions of parents of the psychoeducational support provided at a full-service high school for children with SLDs. The ultimate purpose of the investigation was to indicate better means to empower them through knowledge to become proactive participants in assistance to their children as provided by educators and health professionals.

1.7 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

The core concepts pertinent to this study are explained below.

Neurodevelopmental disorders are a group of conditions that begin to manifest in the developmental period (APA, 2013). They typically become more apparent early in childhood development before the child begins primary school and are characterised by developmental deficits that produce "impairments of personal, social, academic, or occupational functioning" (APA, 2013, p. 32). The range of developmental deficits extends from explicit limitations in learning or executive functioning to global impairments of intelligence and social skills. This includes intellectual disability, specific SLDs, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, motor disorders, communication disorders and the autism spectrum (APA, 2013).

Specific learning disorders are diagnosed, internal problems in an individual's abilities in perceiving and processing information efficiently and effectively that often exert a compromising impact on school performance and interaction (Morrison & Cosden, 1997; APA, 2013). This usually first manifests during the years of formal schooling and can be identified "by persistent and impairing difficulties with learning foundational academic skills in reading, writing, and/or math. The individual's performance of the affected academic skills is well below average for age, or acceptable performance levels are achieved only with extraordinary effort", or verbal and non-verbal learning difficulties are involved (APA, 2013, p. 32). The term "specific learning *disorder*" is used throughout this study in contrast to the term "specific learning *disability*", which refers to a deficiency in academic learning and skills that does not interfere with or influence other areas of learning and/or functioning but is limited to a particular area instead. In this study, the term "specific learning disorders" (SLDs) encompasses any learning disorder whether manifesting singly, for example attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or in association with other intellectual impairments and are not distinct diagnostic entities, but specifiers instead.

Parent, as defined in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, "means – (a) the parent or guardian of the learner; (b) the person legally entitled to custody of the learner; or (c) the person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the learner's education at school" (DoE, 1996). This definition of "parent" holds in the present study for any person who has adopted the above responsibilities in assuming an obligatory role in a child's educational life. Since such a role and its associated responsibilities are fluid and flexible in many families in South Africa, the definition is of special value for the local context.

Participating parents or simply *participants* will, for the sake of brevity, occasionally be used for referring to parents with children with SLDs who participated in this investigation.

Experiences are subjective constructs that can be described as understanding the phenomena of the participants' world from their perspectives, interpretations, and cognitions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). However, it should be noted that the term "experiences" was coupled with the term "perceptions" in § 1.1: "the focus of this study on parents' experiences and perceptions of specific learning disorders (SLDs)". A slightly different view on relation between these two concepts and their definition is best illustrated by the explanations in the *APA Dictionary of Clinical Psychology* (VandenBos, 2013), which considers "experience" to be "a conscious event: an event that is lived through, or undergone, as opposed to one that is imagined or thought about," or as "the present contents of consciousness" (p. 221). This does not imply that experience is necessarily devoid of subjectivity, which is emphasised by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2013), but it is not to be seen as purely imaginary. *Perception*, though, as defined by the APA dictionary (VandenBos, 2013), clearly contains a more subjective component as "the process or result of becoming aware of objects, relationships, and events by means of the senses, which includes such activities as recognizing, observing, and discriminating. These activities enable organisms to organize and interpret the stimuli received into meaningful knowledge" (p. 423). It may be seen that a dynamic interrelationship exists between experience and perception in that parents, for example, may try to make sense or meaning of experience via perception.

Full-service schools are "mainstream education institutions that provide quality education to all learners by supplying the full range of learning needs in an equitable manner" (DBE, 2010, p. 6). These schools are expected to evidence an overall striving towards achieving "access, equity, quality and social justice in education" with a view to establishing a sense of belonging in accordance with which all learners, staff, and learners' families experience a sense of worth in the learning community. Furthermore, the schools need to display a commitment to embracing diversity by providing education that is appropriate for the "individual needs of learners, irrespective of disability or differences in learning style or pace, or social difficulties experienced" (DBE, 2010, p. 7). Such schools are required to establish methods and programmes tailored for assisting curriculum development and institutional transformation to facilitate the provision of additional support to learners and educators who need it. They must also ensure an awareness of diversity (DBE, 2010).

1.8 OUTLINE OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following exposition of the research methodology is merely an outline, since the detail is discussed in Chapter 3. This study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach embedded within an interpretative and phenomenological framework. Qualitative research permits researchers – instead of only observing a specific phenomenon – "to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences" (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 226). Thus, this research stems from an idiographic (as opposed to a nomothetic) paradigm encouraging personal and meaningful accounts of people's experiences in their social life, highlighting their beliefs and values, as expressed within descriptive data in the participants' own words (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011). Whereas a nomothetic approach concentrates on investigating cases with a view to formulating general and universally valid laws through studying groups of people, idiographic investigation facilitates the description and investigation of the individual case in order to characterise uniqueness in individuals' behaviour (VandenBos, 2013). In the present study, the objective was to clarify the unique experiences of parents as explained in § 1.1. and 1.3.

1.8.1 Research approach and paradigm

This study adopted an interpretative approach, with underpinning phenomenological values, drawing on qualitative research (Babbie, 2016; Gray, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014). Because of its interpretative nature and being a dynamic, flexible and unstructured method, it is dependent on critical scrutiny of participants' interactions that are explored through detailed descriptions and understanding of how people make meaning of their environments and experiences (Henning, 2011).

1.8.2 Research design

Since the aim of this research was to gain a deep, holistic understanding of parents' experiences of SLD through exploring the psychosocial support provided to them in a full-service school, a descriptive, qualitative approach using the lens of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was selected and applied as the most relevant. IPA strives to interpret research participants' personal experience and perception of an object or event through their detailed, reflective, and subjective accounts of their lived experiences (Alase, 2017; Cronin & Lowes, 2015). As a methodology that enabled the researcher to focus on the subjective interpretations of parents of children with SLDs, it was possible to extract valuable insights from the rich narratives that they provided in the context of their lived realities.

1.8.3 Selection of participants

For this study, a purposive (or purposeful) convenience sampling technique was adopted whereby parents of children diagnosed with an SLD and currently enrolled in an educational support programme were invited to participate via email (Gray, 2017). Six parents chose to participate of their own accord and out of their personal interest in the research topic, with no form of either compensation or coercion being involved. The selection was carried out in accordance with the appropriate IPA guidelines as the most relevant to this study for accessing in-depth data from participants about the phenomena of the research (Babbie, 2016; Durrheim & Painter, 2014).

1.8.4 Data gathering

The data for the investigation were collected through semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face interviews with parents of children diagnosed with an SLD. This was the most ideal method of data gathering in terms of IPA methodology as the flexibility of this type of interview allows participants to explore and express perceptions of their experiences giving the researcher rich and detailed information for the data on a particular phenomenon to be analysed (Alase, 2017; Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The researcher also kept an account of personal reflections throughout the research process on the understanding of the participants and their perceptions about their experiences.

1.8.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis is the process whereby the researcher meaningfully makes sense of the raw data collected through the lens of the research participants and their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The researcher used thematic data analysis to confront the data material so that "topics, issues, similarities, and differences" that were identified and "revealed through the participants' narratives" could be grouped into categories and developed into themes that explored the data in a coherent, cogent way (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 228).

Thematic data analysis allowed for a detailed, thorough interpretation of the participants' subjective shared experiences and perceptions as parents of children with SLDs, which facilitated the exploration of a focused phenomenon and its accompanying perspectives and insights that would enhance the results.

1.9 QUALITY CRITERIA

It is frequently debated whether reliability and validity can be assured in qualitative research because of its flexible and evolving nature, especially since trustworthiness remains a critical and crucial touchstone for valid and reliable research (Babbie, 2016; Kumar, 2019). Research is essentially an active process whereby researcher and participants construct knowledge together. The researcher remained cognisant of own subjectivity during data collection and analysis through consistent reflection and honest scrutiny so that the research would not be compromised (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Therefore, this research relied on four key criteria for sound qualitative research as outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1985) in assuring that findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

Credibility is the assurance that the participants' lived realities were accurately and successfully described and that findings are reflective of their opinions and feelings (Babbie, 2016; Kumar, 2019). Credibility ensures validity and establishes trustworthiness *inter alia* through member checking aimed at revealing and eliminating discrepancies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This was done in this study throughout the interview process as participants had the opportunity to summarise, adapt, or clarify what they had discussed with the researcher. They could also have access to the transcripts if they wished.

Transferability in qualitative research is often considered problematic in that it relates preponderantly to individual applicability of the data since generalising results to a larger population can rarely be accomplished successfully (Kumar, 2019; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). To mitigate this difficulty, the researcher needed to rely on the rich and detailed exploration of the research framework through IPA methodology so that it could be readily interpreted and accounted for by other researchers with regard to relevance and applicability to their own research interests.

Dependability is similarly held to be problematic in qualitative investigations but can be reflected in research that is logical, coherent and documented in an organised manner (Babbie, 2016; Gray, 2017). This was ensured by participants and the research supervisor reviewing the themes that developed from data analysis.

Lastly, *confirmability*, which ensures objectivity throughout the data analysis and is essential for ensuring trustworthy findings, is achieved through eliminating subjectivity in the research process. The researcher strived for confirmability in this investigation through research supervision, peer debriefing, and recording all relevant thoughts and ideas in a reflexive journal so that the development of research themes and findings could progress consistently and systematically (Alase, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical dilemmas and considerations are an important part of research practice and need to be carefully contemplated and implemented throughout the research process, specifically in qualitative research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The researcher must be guided by ethical principles such as those set out by a research ethics committee highlighting the importance and relevance of respecting and protecting the integrity and privacy of individuals participating in the social research process (Bain, 2017). Research is essentially an active process whereby researcher and participants construct knowledge together. The researcher remained cognisant of own subjectivity during data collection and analysis through consistent reflection and honest scrutiny so that the research would not be compromised (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

The researcher scrupulously adhered to the ethical standards stipulated by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. Participants were invited to participate in the study voluntarily and were given a participation information sheet that provided all the relevant information, procedures, and goals pertaining to the research process so that they would be able to make informed decisions (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014). They were subsequently given informed consent forms to confirm their permission for participation and audio-recording of interviews, and were furthermore assured of confidentiality and anonymity so that they were able to engage comfortably and frankly with the researcher during interviews. Because of the sensitive nature of the research topic, the researcher ensured that the participants would be exposed to no perceived risk and they were informed that psychological support would be provided if they should experience the need for it.

1.11 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 provides a background to the study and orientates the reader about the research topic before discussion of the rationale underpinning the investigation.

Chapter 2 situates the research study within a bioecosystemic framework and the current literature.

Chapter 3 clarifies the methodology and study design used for developing a response to the research question, as well as the measures implemented to ensure adherence to appropriate quality and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 strives to present an answer to the research question, using the findings from the research study, and highlights the relevance of the findings to the available literature.

Chapter 5 provides a brief summary of the study and outlines its strengths and limitations. The potential contribution of the research is considered, as well as possible avenues for further research.

1.12 SUMMARY

This chapter began with an overview of the experiences of SLDs with a broad understanding of its impact and consequences, followed by an explanation of the problem statement, which is that a lack of understanding or relevant perceptions of learning disabilities can compromise effective intervention at appropriate times within suitable contexts. The aim of this study was to describe parents' experiences in the education of children with SLDs and explore the ways in which their perceptions could exert an impact on their motivation for more effective intervention. With the focus of the research being established, it was possible to elucidate the manner in which a qualitative methodology for data analysis within the IPA paradigm would allow the researcher to gain deeper insight into strategies that could lead to better understanding of SLDs with the aim of proposing effective intervention and proactive collaboration of parents with school professionals. The next chapter will conceptualise, contextualise, and explain the information that relates to the research question of this study within the framework of the bioecological model of development as designed by Bronfenbrenner.

CHAPTER 2:
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to conceptualise and explain the information and content that are relevant to the research question of this study within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's bioecosystemic theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986), while developing an understanding of the research problem from a holistic perspective in the context of the relevant academic literature. In order to explore and understand the experiences of the participants in this study, namely as parents concerned about the school education of their children with SLDs, similar situations in other studies were investigated, specifically with reference to factors that influence psychosocial support structures that influence the experiences of parents and learners in full-service schools.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ECOSYSTEMIC THEORY

The ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner has since the 1980s been employed as a particularly appropriate model for explicating the complex environmental systems within which schools function, for example in aiding the development of learners as individuals in that network of systems (Johnson, 2008). In the present study, the ecosystemic theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) served as the theoretical framework for generating insight and understanding into parents' experiences of psychoeducational support for learners with specific SLDs. Below, this theory will be explained and illustrated briefly regarding its application to this study. Within the ecosystemic theory, no system can function in isolation and must be considered as part of an interactive and collaborative whole (Maynard, Beaver, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2014; Swick & Williams, 2006). As noted by Johnson (2008), aside from having identified the various ecological systems in which development takes place, Bronfenbrenner also remarked on the importance of context, which relates to the behavioural interaction between the individual and the environment – an aspect that is crucial to the concept of development. For this investigation, Bronfenbrenner's model was therefore highly suitable to serve as the theoretical framework for collating insights into parents' experiences of psychoeducational support for learners with

SLDs, especially since the research was centred within a particular environment influenced by multiple systems (Maynard et al., 2014; Swick & Williams, 2006).

2.2.1 The fundamental value of the bioecosystemic theory

Bronfenbrenner's model has the advantage of facilitating an understanding of the development of individuals within a context "of the system of relationships that form the person's environment" (Johnson, 2008, p. 2) and, as a result, also an understanding of society's potential to influence the lives of people in their relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Christensen, 2016). Bronfenbrenner duly acknowledged the relevance of biological and genetic components to the development individuals, but also highlighted the importance of personal characteristics that they bring with them into any social situation or context (Addison, 1992; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). Since the environment fulfils a highly significant in development, careful consideration must be given to the way in which it is subjectively experienced by the individuals living within it (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Bronfenbrenner strongly emphasises that a person's reality is continually moulded in accordance with human aspirations and requirements, highlighting the influence of an individual's thoughts, beliefs and feelings (Addison, 1992; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

With its focus on relationships and the influence that social interaction between people and between the various multiple systems exerts on their lives, Bronfenbrenner's theory explores how all these interrelated factors interact with each other at different times and have a mutually contributing effect on one another (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Ryan, 2001). This framework consequently provides an ideal matrix for investigating the various social relationships that exist within these systems and the individual, playing an integral role in both growth and development (Christensen, 2016; Ryan, 2001), since Bronfenbrenner's innovative insight was that

> research investigating human development should involve a field-theoretical approach in which the interaction of processes, person, and context are taken into consideration. Such research would focus on how developmental processes and outcomes vary as a joint function of the characteristics of the person as well as the environment, and their interactions over the course of time (Johnson, 2008, p. 5).

Johnson notes that the process-person-context research model can also be applied to organisational development in the endeavour to understand, for example, “how developmental processes (e.g., teaching and learning) and outcomes (e.g., student achievement) vary as a joint function of the characteristics of not only the school itself but also those of the ecological systems or environment surrounding the school” (Johnson, 2008, p. 5).

Considering the complexities of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between learners and the systems within which they find themselves, Bronfenbrenner acknowledges that healthy development is influenced by a series of influences within an ecological chain that are ever changing over time and often more common in certain environments than others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

2.2.2 The ecosystemic theory and psychoeducational support for learners with SLDs

Bronfenbrenner’s bioecosystemic perspective, so called because of its scientific study of the ecology of human development in relation to growing human beings within their immediate settings (Johnson, 2008), offers insights that can enhance – for the purposes of this study – understanding of the dynamics between educators, parents, learners and addressing the learners’ educational and emotional needs. This perspective facilitates a description of all the systems that these individual “actors” are enmeshed in and affected by in changeful interrelationships (Ryan, 2001; Swick & Williams, 2006).

2.2.2.1 The eco-system as a suitable theoretical framework

The dynamic structure of Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystemic theory (see Figure 2.1) highlights the reciprocal and mutual relationships of an individual within the five successive layers that constitute the living world of every person. These five systems of interaction are described as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Johnson, 2008; Maynard, Beaver, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2014; Moore, 2003).

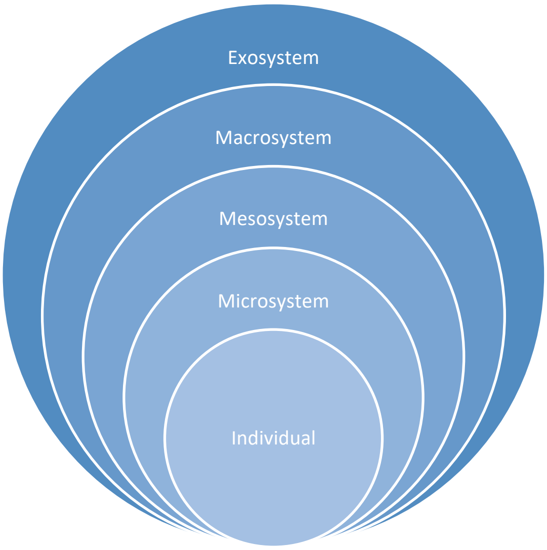

Figure 2.1: Diagram of Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic theory (adapted from Ryan, 2001).

It stands to reason that not only individuals but also their families are in engagement in the various systems within which they experience diverse events and situations, "inclusive of the cultural, social, economic, and educational dynamics that are a part of their various systems" (Swick & Williams, 2006, p. 5). Each system is dependent on the contextual nature of a person's environment that ultimately restructures and moulds that person's personal and social standing by offering a consistently evolving diversity and source of growth. Bronfenbrenner's research entailed an exploration of the ways in which direct and indirect interactions between the different systems around an individual result in growth, development and change – physically, socially, emotionally, biologically, and culturally (Moore, 2003; Swick & Williams, 2006). In view of the present investigation, learners as perceived according to Bronfenbrenner's experimental and descriptive theoretical framework can never be understood in isolation but must be considered within the multi-faceted system of structures in their world, each with its own significance (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Christensen, 2016).

An explanation of the relevance of the various systems to this study follows below, with special reference to Johnson's (2008) views on an organisational perspective that can be added to the traditional individual-centred perspective of Bronfenbrenner. The purpose of including Johnson's interpretation is not to introduce a comparison of individual versus organisational emphasis in Bronfenbrenner's model, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The purpose is merely to illustrate how complex the educational environment is in which remedies are to be sought for countering the negative effects of SLDs at individual, personal as well as organisational, institutional level. This interrelated intricacy has already been implied in the text above with reference to the complexity of educators' and parents' tasks, the learning environment, the classroom context, environmental systems, and individual and systemic influences, interactions, and interrelationships. The figures also underscore this point: a standard example of Bronfenbrenner's model might appear deceptively uncomplicated as illustrated in Figure 1.1 as suggested by Ryan (2001), whereas Johnson's (2008) diagram in Figure 2.1 serves better to indicate the complexities that the model underscores.

THE MICROSYSTEM

This is the most immediate setting in which the individual lives and includes – in the case of this study – a learner's family, peers, school and neighbourhood. It is in the microsystem that the most direct interactions with social agents take place, for example parents, peers, and teachers (Christensen, 2016). The individual is not a passive recipient of experiences, despite how highly significant they may be and how participants contribute to constructing and interacting with the various platforms within this system have a major influence (Moore, 2003). Within the framework of the current research, the microsystem would be the centre point for learners initially understanding their experiences and the world around them and as a reference point the initial set of interrelations that the learner or the parent experience in terms of developing trust and mutuality with their significant people that influence their experiences of SLDs (Swick & Williams, 2006).

Johnson (2008) makes the important of point of also positing an organisational aspect by viewing the microsystem for individuals as "a set of structures with which a person has direct contact, and the influences between the developing person and these structures are bidirectional" (p. 2). However, "[i]f this theory is extended from human development to organizational development, and an individual school is the unit of interest, the microsystem of the school would include students, parents and family members, administration, teachers, and the surrounding community" (p. 2; see Figure 2.2).

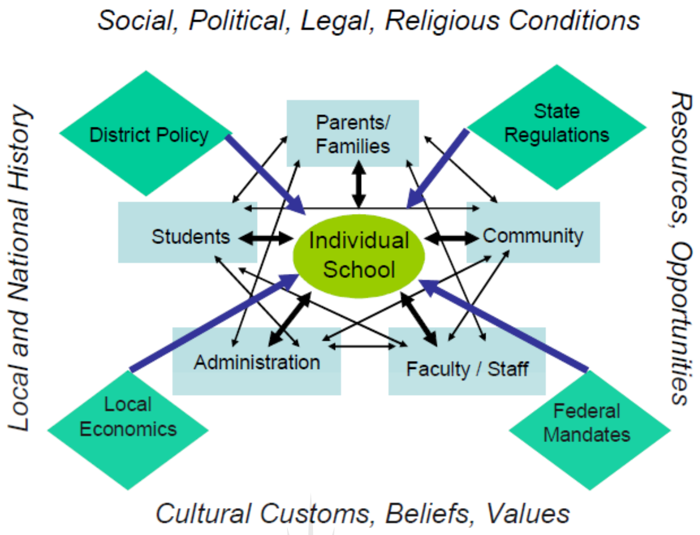

Figure 2.2: A working model of the ecological context of an individual school (as presented by Johnson, 2008, p. 4)

This view has particular value for the present investigation in that it is unusual in encapsulating the importance of the positioning of parents as an essential "organisational" component in the microsystem of the school in relation to other "elements" such as school authorities, educators, and the specific community.

THE MESOSYSTEM

This system concerns the relations between microsystems or connections between contexts that are relevant for parents and learners alike (Swick & Williams, 2006; Christensen, 2016). As Johnson (2008) explains, "The mesosystem, simply stated, comprises the linkages between microsystems" (p. 2). For the purposes of this investigation, these relations are seen as permeating the engagement of parents and their children with SLDs and are often explored as the support structures that are implemented and incorporated within the various systems (Swick & Williams, 2006; Christensen, 2016). This can be referred to as the relationship of family experiences to school circumstances, school experiences to therapeutic interventions, and family experiences to peer interactions (Swick & Williams, 2006). Similar to the bi-directional interaction that exists in the microsystem between school and each structure, so, from Johnson's (2008) organisational viewpoint, "the mesosystem involves bi-directional influences between these various structures. An example of the mesosystem of an individual school can be seen in the interactions and dynamics between two of its microsystems, students [learners] and parents" (pp. 2–3; see Figure 2.2).

THE EXOSYSTEM

Involving the indirect links and influences between relationships within a social setting in which individuals do not have an active role since it is not their immediate context (Christensen, 2016), the exosystem includes the contexts that individuals experience vicariously but which are nevertheless significant through exerting a direct impact on their lives, either negatively or positively (Swick & Williams, 2006). Exosystemic examples for this study may include a parent's experience of SLDs being influenced by financial circumstances at home, children's interaction with their school context or an emotional dynamic that exists outside of their paradigm. For the individuals, Johnson (2008) considers the exosystem to be unidirectional in its direct or indirect influences on their development (e.g., events and policies in the larger social system). With emphasis on organisational aspects, Johnson views the exosystem of a school itself as encompassing matters ranging from governmental regulations to local economics.

THE MACROSYSTEM

This describes a larger system that involves the overall societal culture in which individuals live that have a contributing influence on the other systems and is a powerful source of energy within one's life (Christensen, 2016). The "cultural beliefs, societal values, political trends, and community circumstances" exert an impact on the way in which people interact with their contexts and relations (Swick & Williams, 2006, p. 372). Like the mesosystem, the macrosystem is unidirectional and serves as a "social blueprint" of an entire culture (Johnson, 2008, p. 3). Because, as Johnson notes, the macrosystem of "an individual school is embodied not only in the cultural, political, social, and economic climate of the local community, but that of the nation as a whole" (p. 3), it follows that education policies and legislation on disabilities and inclusion will also affect parents' experiences and perceptions of support for their children with SLDs in the context of the entire cultural, economic and socio-political milieu. A good example of macrosystemic effects can be found in the Salamanca Framework for Action (1994), which occurred at a critical juncture in South Africa's history and had a strong influence on the concept of inclusiveness (regarding children with disabilities and special needs) in the new South African educational dispensation. It is also significant that these developments in the country's educational approaches can equally be related to the chronosystem (Murungi, 2015).

THE CHRONOSYSTEM

This can be understood as a time-based framework that has evolved and influences the operations of all levels of the ecological systems over a period of time within which important considerations are made in various systems that are relevant and contribute to understanding of certain circumstances (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Swick & Williams, 2006). Regarding the individual, this system can be regarded as "both short- and long-term time dimensions . . . over the course of a lifespan, as well as the socio-historical time dimension of the macrosystem in which the individual lives", whereas for the school it functions as all the developmental changes that take place in its structures and policies from day to day and year to year over its entire existence (Johnson, 2008, p. 3). In South Africa, with reference to inclusiveness and SLDs, the operation of the chronosystem can best be interpreted in changes in the educational landscape that have been influenced by a multitude of events internationally and locally, *inter alia* the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990, the Salamanca Conference in 1994, the South African democratic election of 1994, the South African Constitution of 1996, the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All of 2000, EWP6 of 2001, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006 and SIAS in 2014 (Murungi, 2015). Concerning this study, the narrative on full-service schools and the way in which parents respond to certain stressors relating to the education of their children with SLDs are consequently rooted in the dynamics of historical events occurring within the various systems (Christensen, 2016).

Thus, in Bronfenbrenner's model, each of the dynamic and interactive systems influences parents' experiences of psychoeducational support for learners with SLDs by establishing evolving educational platforms for consistent engagement of parents and children, both independently and together. An understanding of these various contexts or systems allows better application of their relevance in empowering parents or minimising their negative experiences in supporting their children with SLDs (Swick & Williams, 2006; Christensen, 2016). A particular profile of the bioecological model of human development is “its interdisciplinary and integrative focus” on development, and advocating and applying policies and programmes that are both relevant and important for enhancing youth and family development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007, p. 794).

2.2.2.2 Exploring psychoeducational support for learners with SLDs within the ecosystemic framework

This investigation of the reciprocal relationship between parents, learners and their learning environment was aimed at achieving a better understanding of the way in which factors within the various systems and, more specifically, educational support programmes, exert an influence on parents’ understanding and educational development. Considering the lengthy period of time that learners spend in an educational context, a primary parental concern is “the need for teachers to know etiological specific information and concordant ‘best practice’ teaching strategies” (Starr, 2006, p. 334). Satisfied parents with confidence in effective support structures often find that having a “knowledgeable and supportive staff, feeling a part of decision-making concerning their child, and having teachers who are willing to learn about the disability and make appropriate adaptations” will enhance their motivation (Starr, 2006, p. 331). The current investigation was consequently devoted to a critical analysis of the ways in which the various systems of the Bronfenbrenner model affect one another, the significance of their interaction and how this can be used to empower and support parents in their strengths and needs.

A decisive advantage of Bronfenbrenner’s system is that it allows pertinent focusing on the quality and context of learners’ dynamic environments by means of emphasising the pivotal role that parents, educators, therapists, social peers, the community and even government policies and structures fulfil in supporting learner development and stressing the need for comprehensive collaboration (Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Although all families will experience challenges and successes in supporting children with SLDs, each family will confront issues differently as its members are bringing either their own unique reflections of resilience that support and sustain them, or their restricting circumstances that make certain parts of the journey more difficult (Swick & Williams, 2006; Ryan & Quinlan, 2017). Effective collaboration involves health professionals' understanding parents' unique knowledge of their child and valuing their experiences in managing their child's condition (Swick & Williams, 2006). This study utilised these relevant, authentic learned insights that had been judiciously and sensitively obtained from listening and engaging parents' concerns as well as their pockets of relief (Ryan & Quinlan, 2017; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). The deeply personal knowledge and journeys of parents who have children with SLDs were valued but also critically explored so that potential effective changes could be considered for evolving the world of SLDs for these parents across multiple and diverse contexts (Ryan & Quinlan, 2017; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013; Swick & Williams, 2006).

2.3 PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SLDS WITHIN A FULL-SERVICE SCHOOL CONTEXT

2.3.1 Specific learning disorders

SLDs, which are neurobiological in origin, are often considered to be social constructs within a given society, yet the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth Edition; DSM-5) of the American Psychological Association (APA) has expanded the context within which SLD is understood: it is currently viewed as a single, overall diagnosis that is used to address a wide range of neurological disorders, incorporating deficits that impact academic achievement (APA, 2013; Grünke & Morrison, 2016; Shifrer, 2013). Despite this generally accepted standard set in the DSM-5, the specifics of SLDs are often understood and defined according to the social and cultural contexts of people around the world (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Grünke & Morrison, 2016). This subjectivity about and substantial lack of understanding of SLDs could perhaps explain the general confusion regarding these phenomena and lack of consistency in defining them (Hammill, 1990; Kavale, Holdnack, & Mostert, 2006).

Instead of limiting SLDs to diagnoses relating specifically to reading, mathematics and written expression, the DSM-5 criteria describe the shortcomings in general academic skills and provide detailed specifiers for the above areas that explain the limitations to perform academically at a level appropriate to learners' intelligence and age (APA , 2013; Dednam, 2016; Grünke & Morrison, 2016; Haft, Duong, Ho, Robert, & Hoeft, 2018; Sahoo, Biswas, & Padhy, 2015; Shifrer, 2013). Since individuals with a diagnosable SLD are often physically intact and do not outwardly appear to have a disability, their challenges are not always evident immediately (Grünke & Morrison, 2016). Yet, there are many distinctive mannerisms that are associated with SLDs, but academic achievement levels are the primary criteria considered across diagnostic models (Shifrer, 2013; Dednam, 2016).

The understanding of SLDs is still influenced by the early medical model of learning disabilities from the 1960s and a diagnosis can only be made once an individual’s developmental, medical, educational, and family history have been investigated comprehensively (Hammill, 1990). These elements must be considered carefully in conjunction with reports of learner test scores and teacher observations, as well as in response to academic interventions (APA, 2013; Hammill, 1990). Assessments should furthermore be guided by persistent learner difficulties in reading, writing, arithmetic, or mathematical reasoning skills during formal years of schooling (Grünke & Morrison, 2016; Hammill, 1990; Kavale et al., 2006). The definition of SLDs in the DSM-5 has only recently been amended to include “environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantages” as an added criterion for diagnosis, broadening the framework in understanding them (Dednam, 2016; Grünke & Morrison, 2016, p. 2). However, the continued inconsistency and subjectivity around the SLD diagnostic criteria mean that criticism and skepticism about their reliability still prevail (Kavale et al., 2006; Shifrer, 2013). However, the more knowledge that is both dispersed and gained concerning SLDs means that the more the understanding of teachers, parents and peers will be developed and the more realistic their expectations about learners’ abilities can be (Shifrer, 2013).

SLDs do not function in isolation and are often associated with distinct difficulties that interfere with and influence learners’ educational context, development and experience (Bear, Mantz, Glutting, Yang, & Boyer, 2015; Morgan et al., 2015; Schuchardt, Maehler, & Hasselhorn, 2008). They are furthermore often linked with discrepancies in learners’ working memory function, which can significantly slow down engagement with the learning material and lead to further under-performance in school (Schuchardt et al., 2008). Children with SLDs confront many academic difficulties, causing them to struggle with numerous socio-emotional challenges and psychological maladjustments such as anxiety, shame, and inadequacy, which lead to behavioural disturbances that potentially disrupt key cognitive processes that are essential to learning (Bear et al., 2015; Sahoo et al., 2015). This often affects their social interactions and relationships negatively because they incline not only to more aggressive or disruptive behaviour in the classroom that frustrates their peers, but also bullying or rejection of behavioural standards (Bear et al., 2015; Sahoo et al., 2015).

2.3.2 Stigma associated with SLDs

Consciously or not, people are strongly influenced by the norms, ideals, historical heritage, language, scientific paradigms, and political currents that affect education and social well-being within their social living context (Grünke & Morrison, 2016). Stigma can be described as negative attitudes to and prejudicial treatment of people – frequently unjustifiably – regarded as exhibiting dangerous, unworthy and undesirable characteristics, making an individual feel ostracised and isolated (Haft et al., 2018; Mueller, Fuermaier, Koerts, & Tucha, 2012). Stigma is thus a "negative social attitude" that "implies social disapproval and can lead unfairly to discrimination against and exclusion of the individual," (VandenBos, 2013, p. 560). Consequently, it is easily translated into self-stigma as stigmas often become acceptable labels and forces of understanding that influence how labelled – or even only formally diagnosed – persons perceive themselves or behave because they begin to internalise and fulfil others' perceptions of them, which has a negative impact on their own educational expectations, social functioning and socio-psychological outcomes (Ditchman, et al., 2013; Shifrer, 2013; Mueller et al., 2012). Ironically, learners with SLDs are therefore often less concerned or frustrated by the effects of the disorder itself than by the stigma attached to it by society because they have to cope with the consequential uneasy combination of discomfort and pity (Ditchman, et al., 2013; Haft et al., 2018).

Teachers and parents alike are also influenced by negative perceptions and societal attitudes, causing them to maintain lower educational expectations for individuals with SLDs and unintentionally feed the stigmatised narrative that society has created for these children (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Shifrer, 2013). Such negativity often disrupts the accepting and encouraging framework that is necessary for families who are confronting SLDs, making it difficult to implement interventions or address the disorder by enhancing confidence and feelings of being supported (Haft et al., 2018;

Shifrer, 2013). An understanding of stigma as a barrier to accommodating parents and their children with SLDs emphasises the need to develop an inclusive outlook and practice within schools (Bowers, Manion, Papadopoulos, & Gauvreau, 2013; Ditchman et al., 2013; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013).

2.3.3 Parents’ experiences of children with SLDs

Parenting in itself is a challenging dynamic, yet parents of children with SLDs have to surmount additional, unique socio-emotional obstacles in carrying out their parental responsibilities (Benn, Akiva, Arel, & Roeser, 2012; Bögels et al., 2013). Parents of children with SLDs often feel less capable and successful in helping their children with their academic tasks and consequently feel incompetent and exhausted, doubting their own parenting abilities (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014). Such feelings of inadequacy often arise because of the conflict and stress associated with maintaining a balance between managing the ongoing and dynamic changes that accompany their children’s SLDs on the one hand, and coping with generic family responsibilities and expectations on the other (Haft et al. 2018; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Further challenges involve financial constraints, social isolation, and disruptive family interactions that often combine and place immense pressure on parents’ adaptive capacities (Guralnick, 2017; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Such ramifications have motivated education and health professionals to focus particularly on improving the quality of life for parents and their children who are confronting SLDs because of the ripple effect that extends beyond the individual and thus influences the entire family dynamic (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014).

These demanding circumstances heighten stress in parents and could interfere with good parenting because of giving rise to negative interaction between parents and children, which will only be countered if the strain on protective factors that enable parents to minimise their “parent-related stress” is relieved. Parents therefore need to address the anxiety, disbelief, or confusion that dominate the new, unexpected turn in the “narrative” of their lives as parents of children with SLDs (Bögels et al., 2013). This new reality and highlighted constraints on daily activities mean that parents are often confronted by many fears regarding perceived social isolation because of its possible impact on numerous areas of their family and social life (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014). Some parents have additional concerns regarding their abilities to carry out such dynamic and demanding responsibilities which may have a debilitating effect on their coping mechanisms (Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Ineffective coping by parents may cascade onto children, whose cognitive and social competence and development are directly associated with positive parent–child and family-orchestrated interactions (Guralnick, 2017; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Therefore, education and health professionals need to consider the above concerns carefully when contemplating support to families.

However, intimidating emotions often dissipate as parents accept the reality of the situation and harness their supportive and protective resources, thus allowing them to remain focused on meeting their children's needs and implement positive coping strategies (Anaby et al., 2013; Guralnick, 2017; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Parents who lack the essential resources such as their personal characteristics, financial means, and social support that assist them in successfully confronting these persistent challenges are often more likely to experience the stressors of SLDs negatively, with the ultimate result that their patterns of family interaction are compromised and that they become isolated from community-based institutions (Bögels et al., 2013; Guralnick, 2017; Lawson & Lawson, 2011). It is precisely the critical resources such as finances or coping strategies that are first strained in family units when trying to manage the exaggerated and unexpected responsibilities that accompany SLDs (Anaby et al., 2013; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013).

Fortunately, irrespective of the stressfulness of these circumstances, numerous parents are able to engage in processes that enable them to make adjustments, avoid stressors, and confront challenges emerging at the level of the family's resources (Bögels et al., 2013). When parents have access to sustainable protective factors, they are better able to implement problem-solving skills and valuable, flexible coping strategies successfully so that they can recognise and concentrate on their child's achievements and progress (Haft et al., 2018; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). With sufficient knowledge about various disorders and relevant interventions at their disposal, parents feel more prepared and assured in their journey (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014). An enhanced sense of security enables parents to commit confidently to building better relationships with other parents or professionals and counters their feelings of being isolated and overwhelmed by unexpected circumstances (Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013).

Appropriate education about SLDs therefore make parents feel better informed and more empowered in their roles as caregivers so that they do not fall victim to a knee-jerk reaction to a diagnosis and unthinkingly apply it as a label to their children's behaviour, which then becomes the immobilising narrative that defines them. Moreover, by maintaining an open, unbiased focus towards their children, parents do not feel that the diagnosis and its journey are bigger than them (Bögels et al., 2013). However, having a strong framework of support may be an important foundation in developing parents' resilience and ensuring positive experiences in managing SLDs, but is not always a realistic countermeasure for parents who fail to communicate with their children (Bögels et al., 2013). Success in dealing with the difficulties of SLDs is more evident in families characterised by consistent communication through which parents are able to establish connections and build relationships with their children because they themselves have benefited from social communication and levels of scaffolding (Guralnick, 2017).

2.3.4 The philosophy of inclusion

The term inclusive education refers to the placement of learners with learning difficulties into mainstream environments that offer traditional, standard spaces and practices for education (Dalton, Mckenzie, & Kahonde, 2012). Learners who experience barriers to learning are put into regular classrooms with a curriculum that facilitates their learning and highlights the uniqueness of each individual learner (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015). Inclusive education is not only about fair and appropriate access to education, but also about accepting and participating in the implementation of inclusive education with the intention and potential promise of everyone accessing quality education in supportive and conducive learning environments (DBE, 2010; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015; Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2016). However, the the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) adopted during the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, redirected "the focus of basic education to be on actual learning acquisition and outcomes" in additon to concerns around enrolment and partiicpation in educational contexts (Murungi, 2015, P. 3161; Wapling, 2016). The continuing debate about inclusion entails the evolution of a dialogue that affects the entire field of education since the focus is placed not only on educating the child but also on the construction of the system itself (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015; Wapling, 2016). Internationally and nationally, the barriers that are preventing children from accessing learning have become equally relevant and the need to reform the structure of education in schools and mainstream classrooms has become a matter of urgency (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015; Wapling, 2016).

The philosophy behind inclusion highlights the importance of surmounting the barriers that any learners may experience in their learning (especially by being restricted or excluded from mainstream classrooms), so that they have the opportunities to feel comfortable and fully participate in the usual activities and schedule of the school day (De Jager, 2011; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015). Inclusive schools are about nurturing and educating all learners while ensuring that they feel supported, appreciated, and accepted, regardless of differences in culture, gender, class, language, religion, and ethnicity (De Vroey, Struyf, & Petry, 2015; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015; Modisaotsile, 2012). An inclusive classroom strives to support and reflect learning that is appropriate and relevant to a wide range of learners, and to ensure access to rigorous and meaningful curricula that reflect greater consistency and coherence in differentiating learning (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015). The successful implementation of inclusion, in which difference in ability is celebrated and accommodated, enables students with barriers to learning to have appropriate learning opportunities that maximise their highest potential (Dalton et al., 2012; Obiakor et al., 2016).

Developing a philosophy of learning that is built on acceptance, participation, diversity, and support is fundamental to establishing an inclusive culture within a progressive and proficient education system and should be regarded as a challenging advancement within education (De Jager, 2011; De Vroey et al., 2015). This is crucial in ensuring that every child has the right to be part of a mainstream schooling system in which they are well-educated and supported regardless of their social, physical, emotional, intellectual, or linguistic differences (De Vroey et al., 2015; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015; Modisaotsile, 2012).

The advancement in inclusion is also essential for human, social, and political development (De Vroey et al., 2015; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015; Modisaotsile, 2012). The most recent and significant step towards facilitating official recognition and development of policies on inclusion in South Africa was both integral and necessary when embracing its philosophy. The publishing of the protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities means that there is an official, continental, binding legal document which aims to protect the human rights of persons with disabilities in South Africa (African Union, 2017). This policy development demonstrates an imperative and progressive step towards recognising the equal dignity that all individuals deserve, even persons with disabilities on the continent. The Disability Rights Protocol was formulated to provide for the rights of people with disabilities from an African perspective with careful consideration of their realities, while maintaining fair commitment to the core principles and values that were outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNESCO, 2007). However, individual states still have to ratify the Protocol and there has been no indication of financial commitment to match this legal obligation just yet (UNESCO, 2007).

2.3.5 The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa

Formerly, the delivery of education in South Africa was filtered by racially ingrained attitudes and discriminatory practices that led to extreme inequality in access to education, reflective of a fragmented and unequal society (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015). Since the establishment of democracy in South Africa in 1994, there has been a commitment to evolve government policy from an apartheid context to a framework in which all South Africans would have equal access to services and opportunities (De Vroey et al., 2015; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). However, today still "between 500,000 and 600,000 children with disabilities are out of school" because they lack access to appropriate and recommended accomodations. There are not enough adequate learning materials available or teachers are not equipped or trained to offer the necessary support to learners (South African Human Rights Commission, 2017, p. 17).

2.3.5.1 The development of inclusion in South Africa

Since the establishment of democracy in South Africa in 1994, there has been a commitment to evolve government policy from an apartheid context to a framework in which all South Africans would have equal access to services and opportunities (De Vroey et al., 2015; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Formerly, the delivery of education in South Africa was filtered by racially ingrained attitudes and discriminatory practices that led to extreme inequality in access to education, reflective of a fragmented and unequal society (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015). The synchronicity of the Salamanca Conference decisions and the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 was referred to in § 2.2.2.1 with reference to Bronfenbrenbrenner’s chronosystem. After the Salamanca Framework for Action (1994) at the UNESCO conference regarding inclusiveness in education, which was a widely-accepted and positively argued approach among scholars around the world, it was abundantly clear that the philosophy and motivation driving the concept of inclusion could be considered within a human rights framework advocating the improvement of social justice, specifically in South Africa (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Obiakor et al., 2016). In terms of the principle of learning for all, enshrined in the South African Constitution of 1996 as the right of "everyone" to "a basic education" (Murungi, 2015), the problem still remains that there are a diverse range of vulnerabilities that affect a child’s ability to learn, such as ethnicity, poverty, and language skills (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Wapling, 2016). Only when all learners are assured of equal opportunities to quality education will they have a better advantage at becoming productive, contributing citizens (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015; Obiakor et al., 2016; Muthukrishna & Schluter, 2011).

According to the Department of Education (2001), at a policy level an inclusive philosophy is an essential method in addressing discriminatory attitudes and behaviour. Thus, an integral element in this process towards equality which was prioritised and highlighted in the South African Constitution was the inclusion of the Bill of Rights (section 29). The Bill reviewed educational opportunities in South Africa and emphasised the importance of everyone having a right to basic education and adopting the necessary measures that would make this progressively accessible and easily available (Dalton et al., 2012; De Vroey et al., 2015; Topkin, Roman, & Mwaba, 2015). The operative word “everyone” in the South African Bill of Rights relates to the word “all” in general research on access to education, which maintains that learners with all abilities and disorders from all cultures, races and religions, and despite gender or language, be considered and provided for within the development of an inclusive education system and should not be discriminated against (Anaby, et al., 2013; Dalton et al., 2012; De Vroey et al., 2015; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Topkin et al., 2015). This needed to be carefully and sensitively considered because although integration and inclusive environments can be sources of significant support in some cultures, there was a threat that it may be a barrier to progress in South Africa (Anaby, et al., 2013).

A presenting challenge in South Africa after 1994 that needed to be confronted was the lack of policy regarding educating children with disabilities, which – in the pursuit of an equal and just society – set the foundation for significant education policy developments reflective of an ideal that would promote attending to groups who had traditionally been disadvantaged (Wapling, 2016). In the United States, for instance, as an example of similar initiatives undertaken around the world at the time, clear and effective state and federal legislation was guided by ethical and professional codes of conduct to ensure the thorough implementation of inclusion (Obiakor et al., 2016). However, despite the political and social progress that South Africa experienced, the expectation that constitutional principles would filter into the educational framework was not realistic (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015; Obiakor et al., 2016). This encouraged the development of official and specific policies that addressed the exclusion and isolation of learners with various barriers to learning within the mainstream schooling system. Such initiatives were a critical step in ensuring that the socio-educational culture and ethos of schools would endorse a philosophy of inclusion according to which the beliefs, values, boundaries, and responsibilities regarding diversity were reflective of the expectations and policy guidelines for inner and broader community contexts (De Vroey et al., 2015).

South Africa’s new Constitution did include a specific section (i.e., Section 9) that was focused on the rights of people with disabilities, but the introduction of EWP6 brought with it an anticipation for transformation of the educational system by developing an integrated system for all learners that eliminates segregation and inequality in classrooms (DBE, 2001; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van

Deventer, 2015). Despite this intention, currently in the South African context, some racial, cultural, and ethnic groups are still under-represented and have fewer opportunities in accessing adaptive education services because of their barriers to learning, a phenomenon that is reflected throughout many international communities as well (Morgan, et al., 2015). The goal of the EWP6 (DoE, 2014) as an inclusive education policy in South Africa was to address barriers to learning within the education system and provide good-quality education for the majority of children through new policies and more flexible and suitable curricula aimed at actualising an undivided, caring, and integrated education system for all learners, even those with barriers to learning (Dalton et al., 2012; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Obiakor et al. , 2016; Topkin et al., 2015).

This drive towards the implementation of inclusion in South Africa was further endorsed by the Government in 2007 at the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which emphasised the educational and social sector's obligation to recognise how people who have disabilities have just as much a right to education as anyone else (DBE, 2010). The only way that this striving could be actualised was through providing equal opportunities to all people for access to learning at all levels in an inclusive education system without discrimination (DBE, 2010). Learners, both with and without barriers to learning, should therefore all be educated within the same mainstream environment, progressing at their own rate and level in a differentiated curriculum regardless of what differences set them apart from one another (Obiakor et al., 2016; Topkin et al., 2015). Fears that inclusiveness might be to the detriment of learners without SDLs appear to be unfounded, since research has indicated the contrary and evidence has suggested that the implementation of teaching practices with differentiated instruction is in fact more effective in addressing the needs of multilevel classrooms (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015). Regarding the outcomes of inclusion initiatives, a study in Canada showed how it was evident that individuals who had experienced inclusive learning environments were more likely to be actively involved in community settings, graduated from secondary school, and gainfully employed than those who were in lower inclusive learning contexts (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013).

2.3.5.2 The reality of inclusion in classroom settings

Despite the initial commitment towards recognising each learner's individual and unique ability within mainstream learning contexts in South Africa, it is a matter of concern that almost 70% of school-going children who have barriers to learning are not attending schools. Moreover, it remains a constant struggle to raise awareness of the need for inclusion in communities (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Majoko, Phasha, & UNISA, 2018). Difficulty has also been evident in converting an inclusive philosophy into practice, which, based on a critical evaluation of inclusive education policies, could be attributed to the concern that apparent ambiguities in the policy hampered the discussion of effective strategies or goals to make it more applicable and sustainable (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015). Although the majority of South African teachers have positive interpretations and perceptions about inclusion, their opinions vary about inclusive education as such (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013; Topkin et al., 2015). Numerous teachers consider a lack of resources for the South African educational system as a major cause of the unsuccessful progress of inclusion (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015; Obiakor et al., 2016).

Introducing new educational policies in the pursuit of inclusive education was intended for shaping broader institutional and social contexts in which teachers function. However, how teachers interpret, understand, and represent inclusion will determine their success in translating and reformulating policy into everyday professional practice (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015). The literature has indicated that there are still many teachers who experience social, economic, and cultural challenges in implementing differentiated teaching practices and who feel unable to cope in inclusive-minded classrooms (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Wapling, 2016). Furthermore, considerable numbers of teachers feel that they lack the theoretical and practical knowledge required for foundational support. Their experience of frustration and stress, and their concerns about the practicalities of inclusion, have been exacerbated because of minimal preparation for and restricted access to resources and equipment that would facilitate the implementation of differentiated learning (De Jager, 2011; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Topkin et al., 2015). Research has further indicated that inclusive education should not be considered unattainable or impractical, but governments and the international development sector need to be more cognisant of how schools and teacher programmes must function if they are to cater effectively for children with barriers to learning (Kavale et al., 2006; Wapling, 2016).

2.3.6 Full-service schools

In order to actualise an inclusive education system, the pursuit of establishing full-service or inclusive schools required not only integrating children, but also adjusting and changing the regular infrastructure of mainstream schools to expand its services to children with learning barriers and achieving access, quality, equity, and social justice in education (DBE, 2010; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015). The functioning of full-service schools and its contribution towards supporting learners with SLDs are critically explored below as the philosophy followed at the research site for this study (see § 3.6.2).

2.3.6.1 Functioning of full-service schools

Full-service schools strive to embody the vision and potential emphasised in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, namely for everyone to live in a just and fair society that recognises strength in diversity (DBE, 2010; Ditchman, et al., 2013). Ensuring that the philosophy and policy behind the medical deficit model would not be regulating the establishment of these schools was a crucial consideration towards maintaining an ethos that eliminated any form of discrimination, labelling and stigmatisation (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015; Shifrer, 2013).

In order for this to be practically realised, as outlined in the EWP6, full-service schools need to be equipped with the appropriate material, physical, and human resources that enhance transformation in curriculum and institutional settings and support the accommodation for a diverse range of learning needs through sufficient staff professional development (DBE, 2001; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2015). Although parents will do whatever they can to ensure that their children's educational needs are adequately met, they will not be able to change their children's academic abilities. However, parents actively contributing to improving and adapting their children's learning environment are more reasonable and effective, which highlights the importance in establishing full-service schools that support the various challenges learners are facing, while allowing them to be integrated, contributing members of school communities (Anaby et al., 2013; Perkins, Columna, Lieberman, & Bailey, 2013).

2.3.6.2 Intervention strategies for SLDs in full-service classrooms

Although several unique challenges faced by lower- and middle-resourced countries have been addressed in implementing an inclusive educational policy, early and appropriate intervention has been marked as a constructive way of establishing progressive full-service schools (World Health Organisation [WHO] & United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2012; Sahoo et al., 2015). The implementation of the correct intervention strategies contributes significantly towards children's development or improvement in social and cognitive competency and self-confidence, which broadens their framework for opportunity and success (WHO & UNICEF, 2012; Sahoo et al., 2015). It is widely accepted that early intervention programmes assist in preventing extensive escalation in the severity of the SLDs because well-informed understanding of a child's developmental strengths and weaknesses ensures that parents and teachers are better able to provide relevant intervention and support (Guralnick, 2017; Schuchardt et al., 2008)

Major obstacles that educational planners and school support teams have to surmount entail firstly the development of intervention programmes and transition plans that honour learners' individual needs sensitively and critically, and secondly obtaining practical input and support from key stakeholders who are responsible for ensuring the learners' educational and personal growth (Buchanan, Nese, & Clark, 2016). Regarding the first challenge of evolving and enhancing the child's learning experience, school-based support teams need to adopt a comprehensive approach in identifying the various risk and protective factors at the learners' development level that would influence the outcome of various intervention programmes (De Jager, 2011; Buchanan et al., 2016). Successful intervention strategies often include practical visual or auditory aids that help clarify concepts for learners with barriers to learning, or alternative questioning techniques and content construction so that their thinking is challenged in a way that addresses their strengths and develops various integral skills (De Jager, 2011).

Success in the second challenge of securing stakeholder support may well depend on success in the first challenge of enhancing learning experience. Suitable intervention may prove itself as a problem-solving strategy and consequently win increasing support from various structures within the community if such intervention is seen to empower parents in coping better with their children's learning barriers. Such empowerment may arise from increased optimism in parents about their children's learning experiences and future education, as well as greater confidence in their own abilities to support their children's barriers to learning while juggling their varied responsibilities more successfully (Ditchman et al., 2013; Guralnick, 2017). Establishing and facilitating the development and implementation of individual education programmes are thus important for both productive learning progress and enhancing opportunities for parents to feel sufficiently included, informed and equipped to assist with critical aspects of their children's education that often appear to be overwhelming and frustrating. Practical accomplishment of this objective, however, requires parents to be actively and meaningfully involved with school-based support teams in educational planning for their children's learning (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes, 2012).

2.3.7 Supporting parents

Since parents retain the primary responsibility for decision-making about their children, collaboration between them and the school-based support team is crucial for ensuring effective support not only to learners with barriers to learning but also their families (Bock Hong & Reynolds-Keefer, 2013). A mesosystemic reciprocity may come into play here, since support to parents may result in their increased involvement in turn exerting a positive influence on learner achievement, successful intervention strategies, social inclusion, and diminishing the stigma around disability and barriers to learning among community members (Anaby et al., 2013; Bock Hong & Reynolds-Keefer, 2013; Charach et al., 2014; Perkins et al., 2013). The more actively involved parents are in their children's schooling in a manageable and appropriate manner, the better learner progress and achievement will be (Modisaotsile, 2012). Parent involvement can be defined by broader decision-making within the educational framework or extended to advocacy around SLDs and acting as figures of support at home (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014; Modisaotsile, 2012).

On the one hand, parents of students with barriers to learning may be more resistant to involvement, but on the other hand measures of parent involvement are often influenced by certain characteristics such as children's age, academic abilities, or level of needs in addition to the structure of classrooms and school procedures (De Jager, 2011; Fishman & Nickerson, 2014; Smith et al., 2013). Some parents of children with SLDs often become distracted by the barrier to learning itself and expend their attention or resources on their children to such an extent that they neglect themselves emotionally and materially (Bögels et al., 2013). A sound balance must therefore be achieved to ensure that neither parents nor their children suffer neglect.

Parents' involvement in assistive educational initiatives remains crucial, however, as they are indeed more likely to be willing to make sacrifices and advocate for an inclusive education that their children are entitled to (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Wagner et al., 2012). More active parent participation further ensures that their children receive the promised opportunities created by the law so that they are benefiting from positive learning environments that support them (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Wagner et al., 2012). Parents who are more involved have a better understanding of who their child is interacting with and how they are experiencing their educational contexts, which gives these parents greater insight into whether their children need them and what support they can offer (Modisaotsile, 2012). Equipped with a comprehensive understanding of the various resources and policies within the education context through being better informed, they can become proactively involved in making decisions regarding their children and could potentially influence and establish solutions to the diverse challenges in the education system. It is therefore regrettable that numerous parents remain unaware of the significance of their role in supporting and assisting their children to manage barriers to learning (Modisaotsile, 2012).

Considering that benefits far outweigh disadvantages in parents' active participation in their children's schooling lives, there has been a considerable call to help both educators and parents maintain their well-being and reduce their stress. Support at all fronts will strengthen their ability to fulfil their roles in maximising the educational skills of children with barriers to learning (Benn et al., 2012). This aspiration has also motivated the present study because of the paucity of literature on parents' experiences of psychoeducational support for learners with SLDs. An in-depth exploration of parents’ experiences should assist in providing valuable insight into how they can be encouraged, empowered, and supported in contributing to educational efforts – a field that they traditionally consider intimidating – to overcome the limitations imposed by SLDs in the lives of their children.

2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The bio-ecological systemic perspective assumed in this study was explained as a framework for comprehending the various social and educational contexts in which parents and learners with SLDs are obliged to function. The contemplation of assistance to parents and their children in their capacity as learners should therefore be undertaken in an ecosystemic perspective if effective educational growth and development in the learning of these children are to be achieved. A broad, critical overview of the literature on SLDs, inclusive education and full-service schools within a framework that maximises the role of education emphasised the necessity of various support systems in an ecosystemic framework for surmounting barriers to learning. The international origin of the concept of inclusiveness in education was outlined and linked with its development in South Africa in a new sociopolitical dispensation after 1994. The progress that has been made in South Africa to implement an inclusive philosophy addressing the difficulties of SLDs was examined to reveal to what extent it had relevance to parents’ experiences of supporting their children. The Bronfenbrenner ecobiological model and the ecosystemic environments of the research circumstances were investigated through a thorough literature search to enable the structuring of sound foundation for this investigation: gaining better insight into the phenomenon of SLDs in full-service schools in relation to parents’ experiences and perceptions. The next chapter will focus on the research design and methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Aimed at presenting the research methodology and the reasons of its selection for this study, this chapter contains a critical discussion of the choice of the research design regarding its potential to generate a valuable, deep and descriptive answer to the research question, as recommended by Babbie (2016) and Gray (2017). The research question is: How do parents of children who manifest with specific learning disorders in a full-service high school experience psychoeducational support? Throughout this chapter, the strengths and weakness of the research methodology and design are evaluated comprehensively. Ethical considerations are also be addressed in their relevance to and influence on this study's research approach.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research paradigm, frequently known as the blue-print for the research, can be understood as the perspectives that will establish a rationale for the investigation and the manner in which all subsequent approaches and processes will be directed (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014). This study adopted an interpretative approach, with underpinning phenomenological values, thus drawing on qualitative research (Babbie, 2016; Gray, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014). Within interpretivism, knowledge is not constructed through observation only but also understanding and detailed descriptions of "people's intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, [and] self-understanding", all of which contribute to the ways in which they make meaning about the world around them (Henning, 2011, p. 2). This framework, which is constructed qualitatively, follows an inductive approach in which the design evolves throughout the research process. It is consequently a significantly dynamic and flexible research paradigm that is mostly dependent on the participants' interaction, which is typical of interpretivism's epistemological roots in phenomenology (De Vos et al., 2011; Durrheim, 2014). Therefore, the paradigm does not follow a strict sequential process since once the research is engaged, many changes may be stimulated by the emergence of more practical issues or interesting discoveries and insight from participants (De Vos et al., 2011; Durrheim, 2014). The characteristic flexibility and unstructuredness are often of particular value when exploring and describing the nature of a problem embedded in situations of lived experience and involving phenomena requiring meaning-making, such as in the present study (De Vos et al., 2011; Smith & Osborne, 2015).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design can be referred to as the resourceful framework and strategic reference that guide the research process through a critically analysed, particularly organised and intensely focused lens that allows for systematic and methodical observation in the most appropriate and constructive discipline (Babbie, 2016; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014). Ultimately, the purpose of the research design is to develop a structure that is best suited in directing the research to results that are comprehensive and thorough conclusions, as well as to maximising the potential of validity in findings (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014). The purpose of this study is to allow for "deep, context specific exploration in order to gain a holistic understanding of a predominantly subjective phenomenon" – in other words, a descriptive qualitative approach using the lens of IPA as best suited to the subject and purpose of this study (Babbie, 2016; De Vos et al., 2011; Maree, 2016).

3.3.1 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

It is important to clarify which qualitative method and research paradigm used for this investigation in accordance with the requirement to allow subsequent researchers to evaluate and compare the findings to additional studies at a later stage (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The paradigmatic framework for this study was based on IPA because of its strong and foundational belief that research is a dynamic, interactive process in which the researcher plays an active role (Alase, 2017; Cronin & Lowes, 2015). As a qualitative analysis approach that is phenomenological in nature and focused on exploring the detailed, reflective, subjective, and personal account of research participants, it not only permits the researcher to give them a voice but also gives them an opportunity to make meaning of their lived experiences within their particular contexts (Cronin & Lowes, 2015; Smith, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Accordingly, rather than attempting to produce an objective exploration of the nature of a phenomenon, IPA aims to interpret participants' personal experience and perception of an object or event, firmly rooted in a comprehensive philosophical structure (Alase, 2017; Cronin & Lowes, 2015).

Ultimately, IPA triangulates the research participant, the phenomenon, and the meaning or detail attached to the various experiences of the individual (Alase, 2017; Smith , 2011). The meaning that participants make of their own social and personal experiences is a particularly sensitive matter that could give rise to confrontation during research questioning. It is for this reason that detailed, flexible, and sensitive exploration is required in understanding the participants' world – which in turn highlights the need for reflexivity as the researcher is embedded in subjectivity (Alase, 2017; Cronin & Lowes, 2015). IPA involves the interpretation of a phenomenon that participants are attempting to make sense of – event trying to interpret it for the researcher – whereas the researcher aims to make sense of the participants' interpretations by submitting them to critical analysis (Vicary, Young, & Hicks, 2016). This approach of empathic analysis was particularly relevant to this study as elucidated below.

3.3.2 IPA procedures as used in this study

IPA was an eminently suitable method for this study as it was based on a specific phenomenon situated in lived experience in which meaning or sense was sought, namely, the experiences of parents of children with SLDs within a particular full-service school context (Smith & Osborne, 2015, Vicary et al., 2016). Furthermore, IPA provides a wealth of information and data that highlight the relevance of participants' lived reality instead of merely emphasising the influencing factors in their environment (Alase, 2017; Cronin & Lowes, 2015). This study focused on the subjective interpretations of participating parents, and IPA allowed the researcher to enter the world of these parents through the use of semi-structured interviews. In analysing the data, the researcher was able to concentrate on the subject and language use of the participants, which deepened the rich descriptions that they shared (Alase, 2017; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013; Smith, 2011). Moreover, in having personal access to the participants during interviews, it was essential that a consistent sensitivity had to be maintained about the details about their cognitions to allow the researcher deeper insight into their experiences as phenomena that were being investigated (Vicary et al., 2016).

The IPA approach was also indicated for the exploration of a particular problem or issue since qualitative research and a phenomenological approach were the most appropriate methodological traditions to employ for arriving at an in-depth comprehension of the experiences of participating parents (Alase, 2017; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). The integration of a phenomenological and an idiographic approach is furthermore best suited for a smaller sample group, such as the one in this study, as it focuses qualitatively on individuals in a very specific manner rather than quantitatively on group populations (Alase, 2017; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

3.3.3 Advantages and disadvantages of IPA

IPA provides a research framework that facilitates not only deeper but also more comprehensive exploration and insight into a particular phenomenon because of the approach taken to data information, participants, and their environment from an inside perspective (Hefferon, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015). As an epistemological paradigm, it has a significant advantage in the endeavour to acknowledge and appreciate particular experiences sufficiently as reflections of an individual's inner world and perspectives (Alase, 2017). This was especially valuable for the purposes of this inquiry in which it was necessary to do justice to the viewpoints expressed by the participants in guiding the development of the research (Cronin & Lowes, 2015; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

Another advantage is that IPA methodology is that different perspectives are used in laying the foundation for a direction of learning that encourages dynamic and enriched insights into a specific phenomenon (Alase, 2017; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). The researcher is regarded as a key factor in the research process and subjectivity plays a central role in contributing significantly to enriching the data (Cronin & Lowes, 2015; Vicary et al., 2016).

A disadvantage in using IPA, however, is that its interpretative element is frequently not sufficiently understood by some of its users, thus not accurately reflecting the established IPA paradigm of thinking which often results in distrust among other researchers who suspect broadly descriptive IPA that lacks depth (Hefferon, 2011). Thus, research that is embedded in IPA in which the researcher demonstrates inadequate skills or knowledge when interpreting the data often results in findings that are poorly constructed and superficially descriptive (Hefferon, 2011). It should be noted that this disadvantage relates to unsound application of IPA methodology, which can be counteracted by scrupulous adherence to its proper methodological principles.

Another disadvantage of IPA frequently raised by its critics is that small sample sizes and unique detail preclude its findings from being readily applied to other contexts, since its subjective nature minimises extrapolation to a general population (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013; Smith, 2011).

The question of bias is also a frequently raised objection to IPA because of its characteristic acknowledgement of subjective interpretation and meaning-making in data analysis, which must be carefully considered and attended to throughout the data analysis stage of research (Cronin & Lowes, 2015; Smith , 2011).

3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology as a way for the researcher to solve the research problem systematically can be understood as the logic behind the methods adopted for conducting a research study. It entails exploring the reasons for using particular methods or techniques and not others so that research results are capable of being appropriately evaluated (Babbie, 2016). The descriptive qualitative approach to research for this study is explored below.

3.4.1 Qualitative research

As noted about the difference between idiographic and nomothetic methods of inquiry (see § 1.8), the latter involve quantitative research in which findings are arrived at by statistical procedures and the focus is placed on elements of social behaviour that can be quantified and patterned (Rahman, 2017). Large amounts of data are quantified in order to produce a numerical result in terms of which researchers simply record behaviour and look for causal relationships (Long & Godfrey, 2004; Mason, 2017).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned not only with observing phenomena, but also with constructing a detailed, in-depth investigation and understanding of the experiences and beliefs from the participants’ subjective point of view within a particular context (Babbie, 2016; Henning, 2011; Mason, 2017). This approach highlights the belief that human beings create individual, subjective constructs of the world around them and that there is an intended focus on their individual personal experiences as well as their interpretations and perceptions of them (Babbie, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Long & Godfrey, 2004). Thus, qualitative research is about people's "lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as about organisational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena and the interactions between them" (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Rahman, 2017, p. 103). In terms of an idiographic paradigm aimed at investigating the individual case to characterise uniqueness in behaviour (VandenBos, 2013), this study concentrated on encouraging personal and meaningful accounts of participants' experiences in their social life, highlighting their beliefs and values, which were expressed in descriptive data in the participants' own words (De Vos et al., 2011).

The specific nature of qualitative research requires an extensive, careful, and non-judgmental approach entailing total immersion in a specific context and an understanding of its complexity in order better to explore and understand the subjective experiences of participants in their social milieu (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Mason, 2017; Salkind, 2018; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014). Consequently, as an outsider, the researcher must be committed to adopting an intersubjective, empathetic stance whereby knowledge is created between people through the way in which they understand certain phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Salkind, 2018; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014). From this a more naturalistic observation with less controlled measures and non-statistical methods ensues, and smaller samples are purposively selected so that emphasis can be placed on critical description and understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Unlike quantitative research that is characterised by a fixed research process consisting in a sequence of activities aimed at a specific question with very little opportunity for flexibility or change, qualitative research is a preponderantly interactive and flexible process that is open and less resistant to change (Durrheim, 2014; Rahman, 2017).

3.4.2 Advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research for this study

The advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research may show relatedness to those relevant to IPA. It should be emphasised that quantitative and qualitative methodologies should not be viewed as mutually inclusive since they have individual strengths and weaknesses depending on the purpose for which they employed, thus making them alternative rather than opposing research strategies. It is the responsibility of the researcher to assess critically which strategy is better suited to the purpose of a research study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Durrheim, 2014). The nature of research studies determines whether they would benefit from a controllable quantitative or a mixed-methodological approach, but the intention of this investigation into a lived reality indicated that greater advantage could be gained from a qualitative approach in explaining psychological phenomena as highlighted below.

Qualitative research design's interactive approach is flexible in its structure, enabling it to be constructed and reconstructed to provide a thorough and appropriate analysis of more complex dynamics (Rahman, 2017). Being rooted in the idiographic research convention, qualitative research allows for an in-depth and non-restricted understanding of the participants' individual perspectives or experiences that can be expressed in their language and whatever way they prefer, enabling the researcher insight into dynamic voices and interpretations of phenomena in their lived world (Mason, 2017; Rahman, 2017).

Since it was the central intention of this study to develop an understanding of the participants' world and experiences from their perspective, it was apparent that the qualitative research method would be most appropriate in addressing the research question (Babbie, 2016; Rahman, 2017). In the endeavour to gain an in-depth understanding of other persons' subjectively constructed experiences, sensitive employment of language serves as an essential instrument for rendering a reliable and detailed expression of participants' deep-seated feelings and perceptions about their inter- and intra-personal experiences, which cannot be fairly captured in an exclusively quantifiable manner in a research investigation (Henning, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Also advantageous for this investigation were the qualitative methods of participant observation, unstructured interviews, and direct observation as means of data collection. Direct interaction with the research participants throughout the interviews during the data collection allowed the researcher to discuss potential thematic material frankly but non-intrusively. Data collection of this nature leads to information that although subjective, is comprehensive and detailed (Rahman, 2017), which is ideal for rich-data analysis.

Whereas the flexible nature of qualitative research counts in its favour, it is to its disadvantage that it is also a considerably difficult and complex process in which data analysis is continuous and requires consistent engagement and interaction (Rahman, 2017). Furthermore, the researcher needs to be cautious of focusing too much on the participants' experiences, which can often result in ignoring any other imperative issues within the research context or the various systems that the research participants belong to (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Rahman, 2017). This can sometimes lead to neglecting the social and cultural constructs that have influenced the way in which participants have made sense of their experiences and the world around them (Mason, 2017; Rahman, 2017).

Critics have also labelled qualitative research as non-scientific on account of readily lending itself to bias via the way in which research findings are analysed (Durrheim, 2014). This imputation may explain the fact that policy-makers the world over often still maintain that results from qualitative approaches lack credibility since it is thought to lack the same value and reliability as quantitative data by being based on subjective, unquantifiable data that are furthermore vulnerable to bias during interpretation. However, considerable progress has been made in winning formal acceptance for qualitative inquiry as an acceptable and effective research methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Durrheim, 2014; Rahman, 2017). Being aware of these assertions, the researcher has endeavoured to maintain a high level of objectivity throughout the research process.

A major concern about qualitative research projects is their smaller sample size. However, small sample size is often dictated by the very nature of the research because it is easier to deal with experience of a smaller group in depth for greater authenticity and rich descriptions (Rahman, 2017). Smaller samples may indeed be accompanied by a reduction in transferability of findings to a larger population. However, this should not minimise the potential of qualitative research to generate significant results as the research data retain their validity and usefulness by contributing to other research that could allow generalisation and transferability to take place (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Mason, 2017; Rahman, 2017). A soundly research project will also retain value for providing deeper insight into a highly specific phenomenon.

3.5 RESEARCH PROCESS

Figure 3.1 illustrates the steps taken to arrive at an answer to the research question about the experiences of parents of children with SLDs in a full-service school, and whether the Educational Support Programme has facilitated improved parent-school intervention and collaboration. These steps are examined and explained in greater detail in the next chapter.

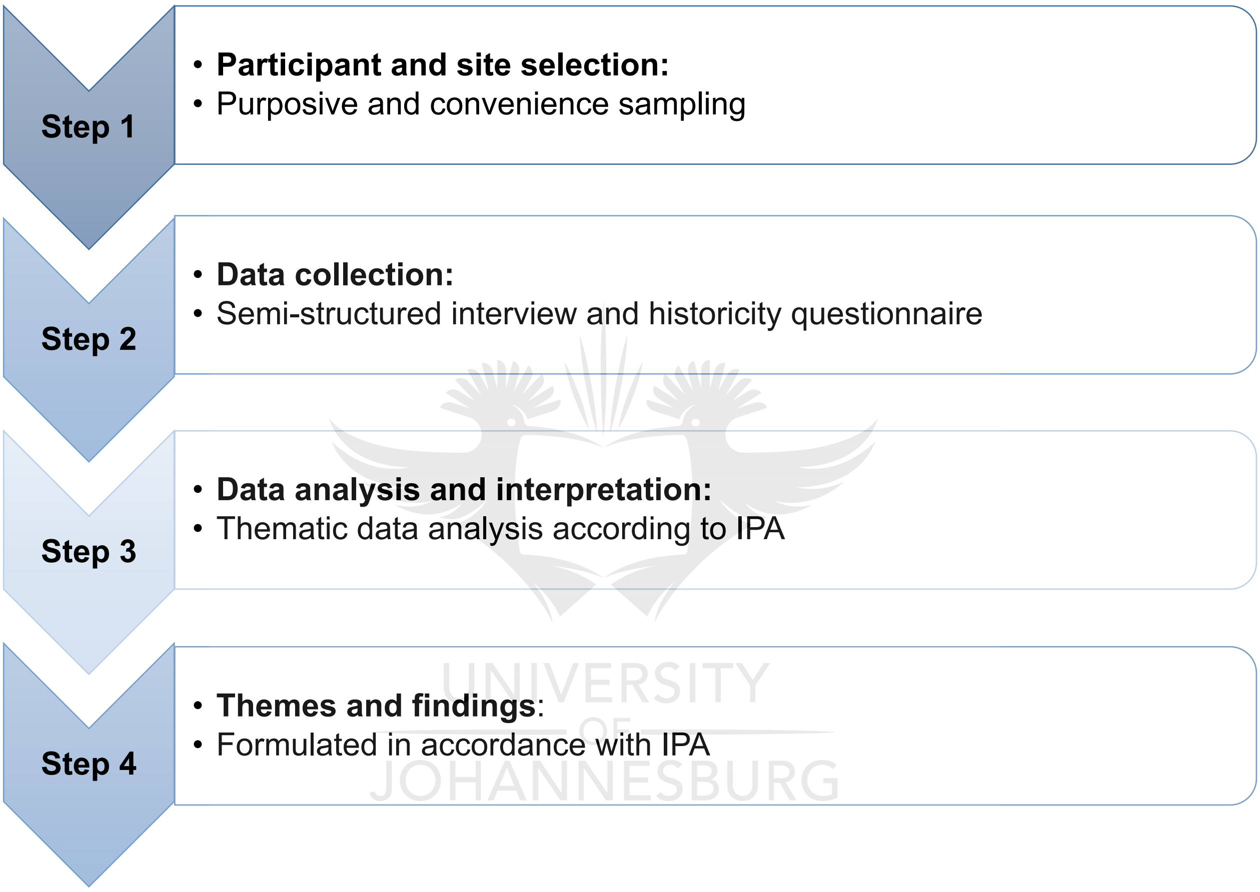

Figure 3.1: Basic steps of the research process

3.6 SITE AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION

In accordance with the requirements of the research question, it was convenient to select a site that would appropriately lend itself to inviting potential research participants' whose children attended and were part of the Educational Support Programme at the same school that served as the researcher's work environment, especially because the school functions as a full-service school. The nature of qualitative research methodology influenced the decision to use a small selection of six participants, aided by the guideline of determining a point at which data saturation would be reached. Saturation means that “no new information is discovered in data analysis” and is achieved when any further data collection would “yield similar results and serve [only] to confirm emerging themes and conclusions” (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017, p. 1).

3.6.1 Purposive and convenience sampling

The process of selecting individuals to participate in a study is known as sampling and is used more informally in qualitative than quantitative research (De Vos et al., 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For this study, a purposive convenience sampling tecnique was adopted (Gray, 2017). The individuals who participated were six mothers with children who had specific SLDs. These children were attending Oakwood Academy as participating learners in its Educational Support Programme. As recommended by qualitative methodology, the motivation behind selecting these participants in particular should reflect and represent the homogeneity existing among them to constitute an appropriate sample pool (Alase, 2017). They were invited via email and chose to participate voluntarily without any form of compensation. The parents, as adults, were able to sign the required informed consent forms (see Appendix A).

The sampling strategy entailed non-probability sampling as not every person in the population had an equal chance of being selected and only parents who had children in the Educational Support Programme were invited to participate (Mason, 2017; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014). More specifically, the purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed as appropriate for the IPA method in formulating in-depth data that provide greater insight into the research phenomenon (Babbie, 2016; Durrheim & Painter, 2014).

Purposive sampling refers to the search for and selection of participants who fit the specific criteria of the research question and will suit the study, instead of randomly selecting them (Gray, 2017; Mason, 2017). This is a common form of sampling in qualitative research with its intended focus on particular participants with a specific agenda, as the aim is to comprehend the sample within a deliberate context (Babbie, 2016; Gray, 2017). These criteria were fulfilled by parents of children with SLDs in the high school and who were enrolled in the Educational Support Programme, with a view to achieve a deeper understanding of the parents’ experiences in this environment.

Convenience sampling relates to the selection criteria used for the sample, based on the understanding that ready access can be obtained to the potential participants (Durrheim & Painter, 2014; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014). This was achievable for the current investigation since the school appreciated the nature of the research being done and was eager to facilitate the process in whatever way possible, more specifically by giving the researcher access to the Educational Support Programme data base. Selection was also dependent on potential participants' availability and willingness to volunteer to participate, as well as whether they felt that the research was sufficiently relevant to them to warrant contributing to a penetrating discussion (Durrheim & Painter, 2014; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014).

Owing to the nature of qualitative research and the additional consideration that a smaller sample is more beneficial to the study when using the IPA methodology, six parents or guardians were the selected sample for the study. This is typically an idiographic mode of inquiry and the smaller sample size encourages meticulous analysis of data to interpret the perceptions and thoughts of participants' experiences of a specific phenomenon (Cronin & Lowes, 2015). The focus in this study was not on the environment or the resources and factors that participants might perceive to be beneficial, but rather on their experiences of the particular context. Although the sample size was conventionally small, it facilitated in-depth and critical yet sensitive engagement with the participants (Babbie 2016; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014).

3.6.2 Description of the research site

As mentioned in § 1.2, the site chosen for this research study functions as a full-service high school reflective of inclusive education. The school has an education support programme that provides specialised and individual assistance to learners who, for various reasons, need additional help and support to facilitate their learning process. These learners may experience one or more of the following barriers to learning: visual impairment, hearing impairment, reading problems, spelling problems, writing problems, problems with attention and concentration, speech disorders, or various other psychological disorders. Social workers, educational psychologists, and teachers work together to ensure that children who form part of the education support programme have their emotional, social, and academic needs met through individual and group counselling services for parents, learners and staff, educational and preventative workshops, educational support, and a specialised academic support programme.

Learners would be considered for placement in the programme if it is in both the staff and the learners' own best interest and recommended in a psychoeducational assessment and school report (cf. the principles suggested in the United States' Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004; Gordon, 2006). The school facilitates reasonable physical and psychosocial accommodations to support learners in the educational context, which are always linked with individual assessment and individually tailored solutions. Assistive means relate to adjustments or modifications to the environment, tasks, or procedures so as to enable all learners – regardless of their barriers to learning – to have equal learning opportunities (US Department of Education, 2007). The development and investment in reasonable accommodations in the school are in accordance with the IDEA, which highlights the importance of providing educational rights and benefits for children with disorders. This includes the right to a free appropriate public education, requires the school to provide an individualised education programme designed to meet the learners' unique needs and from which they receive educational benefit and inclusion in addition to procedural safeguards (IDEA, 2004; Gordon, 2006). The school confidently embraces learners as long as it is within its means and the learners' barriers to functioning do not constitute a serious cognitive or physical impairment that cannot be accommodated. The family or caregivers are required to provide the necessary assistance to support their child within an inclusive learning environment, such as a scribe, reader, or classroom facilitator.

3.6.3 Description of each participant

The individual background information on each participant in the context of the school and their children was collected by means of a historicity questionnaire provided to each participant in accordance with guidelines outlined by IPA so that the collected data could be better contextualised. Each participant was the mother, despite all parents or guardians being invited if their children were participating in the Educational Support Programme at Oakwood High School. Pseudonyms were used for each participant to maintain confidentiality. To avoid repetition of particulars, it should be noted that all of the participants were married women from a Jewish background.

PARTICIPANT 1: MEEP

Meep worked in the field of information technology. Her son was diagnosed at the age of six with an auditory processing disorder, a symptom of SLD, and had been part of the Educational Support Programme for five months at the time of the interview. He was the only one in their family who had been diagnosed with an SLD.

PARTICIPANT 2: LYN

Lyn was a stay-at-home mother with a son in Grade 10 who, at the age of six, had provisionally been diagnosed with an SLD, specifically a non-verbal learning weakness comorbid with attention deficit disorder (ADD). However, a concrete diagnosis was only made when he was thirteen. While her son had a strong verbal ability, his written processing abilities were weak and compromised his skills level. Lynn’s son had been part of the educational support programme for two and a half years at the time of the interview, which had supported him in various assessment accommodations such as having a scribe and extra time for the examination period.

PARTICIPANT 3: JADE

Jade, who worked in marketing for a non-profit organisation, was a divorcee who had subsequently remarried. Her son from her first marriage was in Grade 11 and had been part of the educational support programme for the previous four years at the time of the interview. He had derived considerable benefit from the assessment accommodations, therapy sessions, and overall care provided by the school counsellors. He was diagnosed at four years old with a processing disorder that was later followed by dyslexia.

PARTICIPANT 4: TARRYN

Tarryn was involved in events management as a career. Both her sons, in Grades 9 and 11 respectively, had been diagnosed with specific SLDs – the elder with ADD at four years old and the younger with dyslexia at eight years old. Intervention was begun immediately after the diagnoses had been made. Both also joined the educational support programme as they entered high school and had benefitted from the extra lessons provided during class time. The elder son in particular received extra time during examinations, help from a scribe and reader, and a spelling concession, all of which contribute to facilitating his learning progress.

PARTICIPANT 5: CAROLINE

Caroline, an events co-ordinator, had a daughter who was diagnosed with an auditory processing disorder and generalised anxiety disorder at five years old. Intervention began once she reached Grade 1. In Grade 10 at the time of the interview, she had been part of the educational support programme for two years and received extra lessons in English, Mathematics and Afrikaans at school.

PARTICIPANT 6: JOY

Also a stay-at-home mother, Joy had a daughter diagnosed with bilateral hearing loss at two months old. The child was immediately fitted with hearing aids, followed by speech therapy. At school in later years, especially in a noisy environment, her limited incidental hearing compromised her learning because of her inability to process auditory information properly. At present in Grade 8, she was benefitting from extra Mathematics, Afrikaans, and English, as well as lower-level Hebrew offered by the educational support programme.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is the primary and most important step in research and refers to the process of gathering and then critically analysing information and material retrieved from all the relevant participants. This information is further evaluated to develop themes that answer the research question (Maree, 2016).

According to the IPA methodology, information and data can be obtained through any channels that provide a platform for participants to share their personal experience in a detailed, comprehensive manner (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) – in the case of this investigation, through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with the participating parents. A critically organised semi-structured interview directs explicit questions from the interviewer as a way of ensuring that data are captured in key and focused areas while retaining sufficient flexibility to provide opportunity for participants to bring their own perspective and personality to the discussion (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The interview was the main source of data collection for the current research and was particularly useful for its idiographic approach by allowing for an in-depth exploration of the way in which participants interpret and make meaning out of their experiences (Alase, 2017; Rahman, 2017). According to the IPA methodology, semi-structured interviews are the ideal method of collecting data due to its flexibility and potential to elicit rich responses about affective perceptions (Alase, 2017; Cronin & Lowes, 2015). Interviews are also the most direct and straightforward method for gathering rich and detailed information regarding a particular phenomenon (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

The interview questions were asked orally, and all the answers were audio-recorded and transcribed, which was a suitable method for not restricting participants' expression or communication. It furthermore provided the researcher with an opportunity to engage in conversation that stimulated interaction with the participants in gaining access to raw information and rich content (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Audio-recordings ensured transparency and accurate transcribing of the interviews for later analysis. The interview schedule created structure for the interview but was not in the form of a formal questionnaire. The questions were carefully chosen and structured (Maree, 2016) with the aim of unfolding parents' experiences about educational assistance to their children with SLDs. The interviews provided the researcher with rich insight into the participant's lives, experiences, and points of view, which were transcribed, analysed, and consolidated into themes that addressed the research question (Maree, 2016). These themes explored the various trends that could include understanding, resilience, and positive collaboration by parents in promoting early intervention. The researcher needed to be cognisant of the fact that such open-ended exploration of personal experiences would mean that participants were talking about issues highly sensitive to them, which had to be considered appropriately throughout the interview process (Cronin & Lowes, 2015).

Participants also had to fill in a separate, short historicity questionnaire to allow the researcher access to the basic information necessary for providing context to their experiences for the research data. The procedure took place in a classroom set aside for the was conducted at a convenient time for participants with the minimum disruption of their daily programmes.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involves critically scrutinising the collected data and breaking them down through various methods such as critical, yet empathetic interpretation aimed at developing meaningful insights (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Data analysis has been referred to as the most complicated phase of qualitative research but is often a less heeded element in the research literature (Nowell et al., 2017). This process requires the researcher to capture the meaning of the data successfully in writing, showing comprehensive understanding of the data process and material by adhering to the principle that the most important part of data analysis and management is to be true to the participants' narrative (Henning, 2011; Saldaña, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015).

3.8.1 The idiographic and inductive approaches

The aim of data analysis in IPA is to explore in detail the participant's personal phenomenological experience and can be described as idiographic, interactive, and inductive (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

An idiographic methodology as mentioned in § 1.8 explores a detailed analysis of an event or experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013), such as parents' experiences of children with SLDs, as themes emerge through their descriptions. Because of the idiographic nature of this study, each transcript was critically analysed through thematic data analysis and coding once the interviews had been transcribed and checked (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Interactivity as used in this study (see § 3.8.2) involves critical engagement with the data material in order to probe it for potential meaning (Nowell et al., 2017).

Data analysis and coding in thematic analysis are driven by either an inductive or a deductive approach, and the nature of this inquiry necessitated a preponderantly inductive approach in which the codes and themes were driven by the data content itself (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Inductive analysis means that the themes are developed throughout the interview based on the experiences of the participants and then grouped together as clusters, which often allow for rich raw data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Flexibility is both necessary and expected in qualitative research, which was the reason for employing semi-structured interviews (Smith, 2011). In this study, the use of a deductive approach to data analysis was necessary, since the codes and themes were developed from the ideas that the researcher utilised as constructs for approaching the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

3.8.2 Thematic data analysis

This research made use of thematic data analysis in which the themes were organised and established via similar experiences of participants discernible in the research (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Saldaña, 2015). Coding of the data is a systematic method for identifying, organising, analysing, describing, and reporting any themes that were found in the data information of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017). Thus, once codes have been drawn together from one or more transcripts, they can form the nuclei around which the findings of qualitative research can be formulated in a coherent and meaningful way (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

The aim of thematic analysis is to render a detailed, thorough account of the data by interpreting the relevant information and making meaning out of shared experiences reflected in the research. This method is especially important as it enables the researcher to portray and interpret participants' reality accurately by examining their perspectives and highlighting the similarities and differences in them with the intention of exploring focused phenomena; in other words, discerning relevant themes that will generate unexpected knowledge and insights (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017). Coding of the data in the context of IPA is intersubjective, which means that the process is open to interpretation of the researcher who has personal influences on the analysis (Gray, 2017; Saldaña, 2015). Since this is an element that can compromise data integrity if not done correctly, the researcher used caution to avoid skewing the participants' perceptions through personal bias.

Once the data material was transcribed, six stages were followed in thematic analysis as represented in Figure 3.2. The detailed transcribed interviews were compared with the audio-recordings and scrutinised to ensure accuracy, after which comprehensive notes were made to capture ideas that appeared relevant for thematisation. This interactive approach to data analysis, as mentioned above, allowed for meanings or themes to emerge more easily because of consistent, critical cognitive and empathic engagement with the data material to garner cogent potential key motifs from it (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017). The data material was therefore visited consistently for simplification aimed at pinpointing specific elements as sufficiently significant for systematic labelling as the foundational set of data codes.

Figure 3.2: Thematic data analysis process

Subsequently, thematic data analysis proper was initiated by identifying common themes first, attaching meaning to them and checking whether they were compatible with the cues of the prompt sheet used for navigating the semi-structured interview (Nowell et al., 2017). From this activity the following three themes were identified:

- Parents' experiences of SLDs.
- Supporting children with SLDs.
- The school's challenging role in facilitating intervention/support.

The coded data extracts for each subtheme were reviewed to determine if a coherent pattern was apparent, followed by a written detailed analysis for each individual theme, identifying the story that each told. Simultaneously, it was considered how each fitted into the overall story about the entire data set in relation to the research questions and ordering them in a way that best reflected the data (Nowell et al, 2017). The final analysis of the established themes served as the foundation for a constructive report on the exploration and findings of the research, represented in a table format in accordance with the use of thematic analysis in IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013; see Appendix B).

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND QUALITY

If research is to be reliable and valid, its qualitative design needs to be persuasive and trustworthy (Babbie, 2016). However, it has been heavily debated whether or not qualitative research has the ability to ensure reliability and *validity* (the latter as relating to quantitative research) when it essentially refers to the capacity of credible qualitative research findings "to demonstrate that it [a qualitative inquiry fulfilling the criterion of *credibility*] is finding out what you designed it to and reliability refers to consistency in its findings when used repeatedly" (Kumar, 2019, p. 218). The validity objective appears to be at variance with the framework of qualitative research as a consistently evolving, flexible and multi-methodological approach (Kumar, 2019). Nevertheless, trustworthiness in the present qualitative inquiry as an integral part of the research process was pursued with the same sense of necessity and critical application characteristic of quantitative research because "there is a need for greater disclosure and more sophisticated tools to facilitate researchers in conducting trustworthy qualitative research" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1). The researcher relied on Guba and Lincoln's (1985) classic four criteria conceived to guarantee trustworthiness, acceptability, and value in this qualitative study, which meant that findings needed to be credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable to be a fair and effective reflection of validity and reliability (Kumar, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

Credibility suggests that the researcher successfully reflects participants' expressed lived reality by establishing results that are believable and sincere from the perspective of the participants themselves (Babbie, 2016). As qualitative research studies explore experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and feelings, it is accepted that the participants themselves would be the most appropriate judges in determining whether or not the research findings reflected their opinions and feelings accurately and clearly. Therefore credibility, as the equivalent of validity in quantitative research, is validated through "respondent concordance" whereby the researcher's findings are checked by the research participants for "confirmation, congruence, validation and approval" (Kumar, 2019, p. 277). Furthermore, in accordance with Creswell and Cresswell's

(2017) recommendations, the participants were allowed access to the transcripts so that the researcher could be ensured about authenticity and the avoidance of discrepancies in the interview process (otherwise known as member checking).

Transferability refers to the feasibility of applying the results of the qualitative data to various people in different contexts or settings (Kumar, 2019). In qualitative research, this concerns only to case-to-case transfer, which differs from external validity as applicable to quantitative data in which the focus is on generating results that can be generalised to a larger population (Nowell et al., 2017). However, the researcher is still equally responsible for ensuring transferability potential by maintaining high quality through thick descriptions in accordance with the IPA research framework to allow other researchers to relate findings to their own research (Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability in qualitative research is also enhanced through purposive sampling where participants were selected because of their unique characteristics (Babbie, 2016; Gray, 2017). This facilitates the possibility of using the rich, thick and deep data exploration in one study for building sustainable foundations for others.

Dependability in qualitative research is considered to parallel reliability in quantitative research (Kumar, 2019). Although dependability suggests that if the research were to be conducted again with similar participants and circumstances it would yield the same results, this is difficult to achieve in qualitative context because of its dynamic and evolving nature and emphasis on the contextual, subjective experience of participants (Babbie, 2016; Gray, 2017). However, the dependability of qualitative findings is reflected in a research process that is “logical, traceable, and clearly documented”, which the researcher ensured by audio-recording and transcribing the interviews for ready reference in developing themes systematically and methodically (Nowell et al., 2917).

Lastly, confirmability refers to the degree in which the findings can be confirmed or corroborated by others involved, which accounts for the importance of crucial and evident objectivity in data analysis (Kumar, 2019). Enhancement of the trustworthiness of the current research and elimination of subjective bias were strived for through research supervision, peer debriefing, and participant scrutinisation of transcripts so that the process was considered with responsibility and adequate preparation for any further findings or interactions (Babbie, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Gray, 2017).

To ensure transparency in the endeavour for objectivity, the researcher recorded all relevant thoughts and ideas in a reflexive journal (Alase, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As an essential recommended method, it assisted the researcher in identifying any preconceptions or judgements that could compromise an open-minded, bias-free analysis of the data (Alase, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.10 RESEARCH ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

High ethical standards have particular importance in research in the field of psychology because of involving sensitive, in-depth investigation into the life-worlds of people (Babbie, 2016; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In any interaction between individuals and their environment a potential for conflict of interests exists, especially when inquiry into matters of personal importance to them could lead to ethical compromisation of their privacy and human integrity (Babbie, 2016; Gray, 2017). Research ethics often touch on issues beyond a mere dynamic of right or wrong and entail achieving an understanding of people's experiential life-worlds that should be respected (Babbie, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014). It is therefore imperative that the researcher take full responsibility for the ethicality of the research and ensure that participants' rights are not encroached upon in any manner. The following approaches were consequently taken in this study.

Before the researcher initiated the research, ethical clearance was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg (see Appendix A). Some authorities in the field even consider this to be the most important step of a study because if a researcher is refused clearance, the study cannot proceed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014). Since that the sample of this study consisted of parents of learners attending the Oakwood Academy, a private school that also served as the site for the research, the researcher had to seek permission from the school management team (see Appendix A). Additionally, participants were provided with the required information letters and consent forms to ensure that all ethical obligations towards them had been considered and met. This included assuring them of participant confidentiality and anonymity, as well as their right to free, unencumbered withdrawal from the research study at any time. The following specific measures were taken to protect the participants.

Protection and welfare: Participants were handed a participation information sheet that guaranteed the protection of their rights throughout the study. The participants were required to keep and peruse the sheet, and were encouraged to call the researcher should they have any questions or concerns. The researcher assessed the degree of risk to participants carefully to protect them from any potential danger, stress or harm arising from the investigation. Participants were furnished with a list of contact numbers if they experienced any personal need for assistance (Babbie, 2016; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014). Moreover, feedback was available upon request from the researcher or supervisor, whose email addresses were listed in the participant information sheet.

Voluntary participation: Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and not compromised by any form of compensation. Participants were also assured that the study involved no form of deception so that they felt at liberty to express personal information, thoughts or feelings frankly (Babbie, 2016; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014). The participants were aware that they had the right of withdrawal from the study without any negative consequences at any time, as well as the right to withhold responses to any questions that made them feel uncomfortable (Babbie, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014).

Informed understanding and consent: Before the initiation of the investigation, the researcher familiarised potential participants fully with the nature of the study, the intention of conducting such research, and the obligations and responsibilities incumbent on the researcher throughout the study (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014). Aside from providing any additional information that could influence their decision to participate, the researcher emphasised potential value of the inquiry towards promoting positive change in the South African educational context by assisting parents of learners with SLDs. Participants were required to sign two consent forms: one for permission to be interviewed and the other to be audio-recorded. Frank, open communication thus served to underscore informed understanding of what was expected and agreed upon as regarded voluntary participation (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014).

Confidentiality of data: This was maintained by avoiding any personal identifying information about the participants, who chose a pseudonym for use in the transcript and data to protect their identity and ensure anonymity – a measure known as sanitising the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As the only person aware of the identities of the participants, the researcher respected the principles of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the data analysis and in any form of communication such as written work within the university or publications ensuing from the data. These measures were explained in the participation information sheet and the consent forms perused and signed by each potential participant before joining the study (Babbie, 2016; Gray, 2017; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2014).

Storage of data: All of the information collected throughout the study were secured in a password-locked computer that is accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisor to preclude any unauthorised access to delicate information (Babbie, 2016). The data will be stored for a period of three to five years in a secure facility at the University of Johannesburg, after which time it will be destroyed.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the required processes and principles that ensure an appropriate and fair research study, which included the broad ethical considerations that directed the research process. The most important feature of the discussion was aimed at exploring the relevance and value of the descriptive qualitative approach to research, using the lens of IPA. By means of describing what was best for the study, participants, data, findings, researcher, and the research site, the researcher elucidated the motivation for employing this particular methodology and design. The main features of qualitative methodology as used specifically in this investigation were highlighted, and the chief elements of the research process were outlined. The next chapter will focus on the emerging themes and findings that were constructed in response to the research question through in-depth analyses and interpretative explanations of the raw data derived from the participant interviews.

CHAPTER 4:
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis and interpretative explanation of the emerging themes and findings in response to the research question: How do parents of children who manifest with SLDs in a full-service high school experience psychoeducational support? To arrive at an answer, participants were selected who could inform the research through describing their experiences and perspectives. Their views and life situations were further explored in reference to the various circumstances and factors that influenced the way they supported their children and provided appropriate intervention. A more comprehensive and conclusive understanding of this particular group of parents' journeys could potentially contribute towards the national educational commitment in developing inclusion and fighting the stigma that has dominated the narrative around learning disorders for decades.

The introductory overview of this chapter is followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged from the data. The findings of each theme are presented, accompanied by extracts from the raw data supporting its development. Each of the participants' subjective experiences and perspectives were carefully analysed, evolving into the formulation of three main findings: "Parents' experiences of SLDs", "Supporting children with SLDs", and "The school's challenging role in facilitating intervention/ support".

The research methodology of thematic analysis through IPA formed the foundation for the findings and was further considered in conjunction with the ethics, trustworthiness, and quality of the data and its relevance to the study. Themes were developed from thematic analysis of raw data that were examined and rigorously re-examined to ensure that the data presented would be as bias-free and accurate as possible (Vicary et al., 2016). In accordance with IPA recommendations, each theme was explained and illustrated, allowing for an in- depth analysis of participants' experiences and the meanings that they assigned to them (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Saldaña, 2015). In the discussions below, relevant examples and extracts from the raw data are presented in the form of verbatim accounts from each participant within each theme. This approach is supported by excerpts from a reflexive journal kept during the data analysis process to account for the researcher's personal thoughts and interpretations.

4.2 EMERGING THEMES AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The raw data was derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with six parents who have children who are currently part of the Educational Support Program at Oakwood Academy. Specific participating requirements were outlined in section 3.6. After an initial examination of the raw data to determine significant patterns throughout the interviews, the data was re-examined and grouped into three main themes. Further scrutinisation of the raw data led to the identification of subthemes under all three main themes as illustrated in Figure 4.1. A more detailed presentation of themes, subthemes and relevant quotes from the raw data can be found in the appendices.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Parents' experiences of SLDs	**Supporting children with SLDs**	**The school's challenging role in facilitating intervention/support**
•Parents' dynamic understanding of SLDs	•Parents' difficulties in supporting their child with an SLD	•Parents' concerns around narrow thinking in broader school system
•Complexity of parenting a child with SLD	•Actively facilitating intervention/support	•Parents' conflicting experience at the school
•Burden of SLD	•Parents' perception of their child's experience	•Support from the Educational Support Programme

Figure 4.1: Diagram of findings as themes and subthemes

4.2.1 Theme 1: Parents' experiences of SLDs

Participants shared their views and insight into their journey of being parents of children with SLDs, with each narrative specifically focusing on how this exerted an impact on them personally, how they addressed challenges, and whether they experienced successes. This was a particularly important theme to address as discussed in the literature since parents' experiences have a direct effect on the learners' social and cognitive competence and development as associated with the broader family dynamic (Guralnick, 2017; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Parents' experiences in general are diverse and dynamic, but were best illustrated in this inquiry through evaluating how the participants understood SLDs, how their understanding had evolved over time, and whether it influenced their roles as parents. Confronting learning disorders is not an isolated challenge and its impact is far-reaching in the various contexts in which parents of children with SLDs find themselves. It was especially significant to determine whether external perceptions, misunderstanding, and the possible stigma attaching to SLDs in parents' communities and social circles had filtered into their experiences during their journey. A comprehensive evaluation of parents' experiences was therefore strongly indicated in seeking to design suitable methods for supporting them (Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013).

4.2.1.1 Parents' dynamic understanding of SLDs

When parents have a more detailed, comprehensive understanding of SLDs and their accompanying ramifications, the better equipped they are for providing appropriate support and intervention (Howie-Davies & McKenzie, 2007; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Understanding the cognitive abilities and adaptive skills of their children with SLDs and dealing with the consequential influences are an ongoing and necessary pursuit for parents, and such understanding often develops as the child grows older (Guralnick, 2017). The literature highlights the concern that many parents have low expectations of their children's academic and social abilities (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Shifrer, 2013). The current study yielded more positive interpretations by participating parents, however, since their understanding of SLDs had been informed by experience gained in supporting their secondary-school children several years after their diagnosis. They were thus significantly further along in their journey of coping with SLDs. For example, one parent mentioned that she understood that SLDs might compromise her child's learning capacities, she also understood that this did not mean that her child would not be able to accomplish anything in life.

> Participant 2: We are all made differently. It means it is a disability; it means you are not as clever as the next person – that is the truth; thank goodness it is just a handicap that is a school handicap, not a life handicap.

Some participants stressed that learning disorders did not define their children's abilities or determined whether they were less capable in achieving academic or personal success. According to the participants, SLD is alternatively described as learners' functioning in a different way to what has become the expected "norm" and where their differing set of strengths and abilities challenge the traditional approach to intelligence.

> Participant 1: ... can't learn in the same way as your every-day child … be a child that doesn't fit the mould; a child that struggles with standardised testing; I think my biggest thing is that it is not life or death. This is not a life sentence.
>
> Participant 2: It is our journey. I have learnt that we are all different and we all have to follow our own path. Well, I just that we have overcome a lot of obstacles and we are still in the fight. But that is what I have to do, I am his mother, I have to make sure he tries his best.
>
> Participant 3: Our brains are all different; just challenges in, like, looking at the norm of what is expected at a certain age, and milestones and achieving them.
>
> Participant 4: May not read as fast as your kid but he may be the most unbelievable soccer player; it is just a barrier to learning which ultimately they are going to get over and mustn't let the diagnosis dictate your child's life either.
>
> Participant 5: It is also maybe just a different way in which your brain functions; it is a bit of a label as well; I think there is a total misunderstanding in general of intelligence.

Learners' cultural and biological backgrounds, personal experiences, and individual histories mean that children cannot be understood along "a single axis of intellectual accomplishment" or development, because they think differently from one another or process information through other modes and have varying strengths and weaknesses (Gardner, 2018, p. 129). Unfortunately, some vestiges remain in current educational systems of outdated conventional measures of intelligence that emphasise traditionally accepted conceptualisations of intelligence as the major component of success and academic achievement, entailing a narrow range of skills such as reading, writing, and number abilities (Najafi, Akouchekian, Ghaderi, Mahaki, & Rezaei, 2017; Pritchard, 2009). However, for several participants in this study, an SLD diagnosis, although difficult, is just a barrier to learning and does not mean that learners are considered to be unfit for the educational system. Instead of being regarded as failures, they have diverse, alternative ways of navigating learning and classroom environments.

> Participant 1: Inability to take in things as quickly in class as the other kids, taking in bits and pieces and need more time, effort.
>
> Participant 3: ... just barriers to grasping the information.
>
> Participant 6: Anything that will literally like a film or a sheet or something that is between the teacher and the child, or the learning material and the child.

According to Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences, there are other strengths demonstrated by many individuals who are clearly "intelligent" but not skilled with words or numbers for whatever reason (Najafi, Akouchekian, Ghaderi, Mahaki, & Rezaei, 2017; Rile, Catalan-Opulencia, Decenorio, & Tan, 2015;). This theory has many implications for children with SLDs in whose case intelligence should particularly not be singularly defined but rather be described as a "combination of psychological and biological characteristics that enable individuals to solve problems or create products" (Rile et al., 2015, p. 895). Moreover, their learning environment should share the parents' understanding of learners' diverse abilities and attitudes (Najafi et al., 2017). Being diagnosed with an SLD does not mean that learners are academically incapable or educationally destined for failure, yet participating parents have highlighted that that there is no deficiency in their children's understanding of the work or grasping the material, but rather that their learning process takes longer and needs to be done in smaller components and with alternative teaching methods.

Because SLDs are often associated with slower and limited engagement with learning material and can compromise working memory function, learners tend to work at a slower pace, take longer for information processing and thus underperform in school (Schuchardt et al., 2008). Processing speeds have long been closely associated with learning disorders and are often indicative of co-occurring problems in attention which contribute to a reduction in learners' working pace or understanding of the material according to the school's expectations or specifications (Moll, Göbel, Gooch, Landerl, & Snowling, 2016). These phenomena were clearly reflected in participants' observations in the data:

Participant 3: ... accessing that information was a little bit more difficult, because of the way his brain works.

Participant 4: ... any kid with any learning disability ... takes so much time – to reach a goal post just takes SO much longer and SO much hard work from everybody.

Participant 5: ... you just have to work that little bit harder.

Participating parents acknowledged that their children's minds just worked differently from those of other learners but insisted that it did not define or determine their abilities or potential. However, it did make working in the classroom and learning a significantly longer and more difficult process than for others, which required their children to concentrate more, work with diligence and maintain a consistent commitment to their classwork. The participants considered the experience of children with an SLD in the classroom as manageable. It could be a successful environment but required much more effort, time, and patience than for their children's peers.

Reflexive Journal:

Parents who have children with learning disorders have a more open-minded approach to their children's struggles and understand that this doesn't mean that they are incapable, but rather work differently. I wonder whether this was because of their journey as it progressed over time or whether this was their approach to learning disorders all along. This must be a coping mechanism for them in feeling as though SLD is something that they can manage and confront.

It appeared that parents of children with learning disorders may have a more evolved and progressive approach towards SLDs and their implications for learners. However, the literature points out that the stigmatisation of learners who carry labels such as SLD is still a concern, especially because of the potential impact that it may have on their physical, emotional, social, and educational lives and functioning (Al-Yagon, 2018; Franklin, 2012). The SLD label carries its own burden and complications, potentially causing learners sometimes to behave in a way that is reflective of the label that they have been given. A noticeable social differentiation may also be evident because of the associating symbols that are attached to their diagnosis (Kohli, Sharma, & Padhy, 2018; Shifrer, 2013). Learners with SLD are often referred to as lazy or mischievous when, unbeknownst to their teachers, they may have co-morbid disorders that influence their classroom interactions (Kohli et al., 2018). Unfortunately, the stigmatising prejudices and often misunderstanding associated with SLDs cause many learners to become more hesitant in embracing therapy or being frank and open about their diagnosis with their peers (Bowers et al., 2013; Mueller et al., 2012). Successful social inclusion is influenced by acceptance from one's society, teachers and peers, an issue that was important to address in this study (Kohli et al., 2018). The literature has presented a perturbing negative awareness around and understanding of SLDs (Bowers et al., 2013; Ditchman et al., 2013; Shifrer, 2013; Muelle et al., 2012). However, the data results concerning stigmatisation of SLDs and its influence in this inquiry were not particularly consistent with the literature and few of the participants felt that stigmatisation was significant or had influenced their journey in supporting their children as learners.

> Participant 3: Sometimes people in my family and friends used to feel sorry for him; I think the biggest fear for me is that my child isn't allowed to be who he needs to be because of other people's expectations, not mine.

> Participant 4: They will pity you and in their brains they think thank God it is not my child; I think they think it is infectious; I think that when we talk about children with learning disabilities, that would not fit into their box.

In general, educators and parents alike tend to have reduced expectations of the potential of learners "labelled" with SLDs because insufficient knowledge and awareness of the SLD label are thought to cause learners to feel isolated because they do not learn in the same way as their peers (Fuermaier et al., 2012; Haft et al., 2018). Limited SLD recognition has often resulted in an inaccurate or inadequate representation of this group of individuals (Chennat & Singh, 2014; Moll et al., 2016). In contrast to the literature, according to the participating parents, there was a general and consistent approach that emphasised the present-day positive development in understanding and responding to SLDs, which they recognised as not always being a mainstream approach in society. Their experience of stigmatisation was centred more on difference and not fitting a particular mould existing in the school system.

> Participant 1: That stigma thing I haven't really seen it as much as 20 years ago.

> Participant 2: I believe parents are quite tolerant. I think our community is quite evolved.

> Participant 5: There is maybe a stigma, which I don't think exists at all anymore. Everyone was amazing and no one ever looked down on her because she was at a different school, or

unfriendly to her. They included her; I told her middle-group teacher that she was going to (a remedial school) and she went "aah" there was no shame.

Participant 6: When she was younger she was always seen as different because she wasn't in a mainstream school. In some environments, yes, there is still stigma around it.

The majority of the participating parents acknowledged that society's tolerance, appreciation for and acceptance of SLDs had not always been diverse and positive, yet through their journey of addressing SLDs, a positive trend has evolved. This could potentially be due to increasingly open and frank diagnosis of SLDs, which has accordingly increased familiarity with them. Moreover, learners have had an opportunity to become further integrated within educational contexts under the influence of positive changes inspired by deeper insights reflected in the DSM-5 (Tannock, 2014). The definition of SLD has been updated and is currently referred to as having a neurobiological source, which includes genetic, epigenetic, and environmental factors that affect an individual's ability to process both verbal and non-verbal information (Pham & Riviere, 2015; Tannock, 2014). Updating the term from "learning disorder" to "specific learning disorder" highlighted the multiple "sub-skill impairments individuals may demonstrate" in academic domains such as mathematics, reading, and written language. The diagnostic criteria now have a broadened "identification by allowing indicators to come from more than one of the three academic areas" (Pham & Riviere, 2015, p. 4; Tannock, 2014).

These updates within the DSM-5 and developments in applying the SLD appellation meant that several derogatory and more stigmatised "labels" were replaced and it became widely accepted that learners with learning disorders have normal or above normal intelligence and that there are other contributing factors influencing their progress that would need to be accounted for (Chennat & Singh, 2014). This has even led to an unnecessary increase in demands from parents that their children be categorised as SLD learners, irrespective of their children`s level of disability – however, standardised tests are available for assessing and measuring the severity of SLD to ensure that equitable decisions are made (Mehta, 2011). Along with the positive awareness around SLDs, many learners and students might integrate useful insights regarding their diagnosis to support and enhance their learning instead of allowing it to hamper their endeavours in life (Shifrer, 2013).

Although there were indications of a positive consensus among participating parents about the progressive psychoeducational approach towards the SLD diagnosis and clear lessening of a stigma in society or at least among their peers, there was significant agreement among them that this did not imply a concomitant increase in understanding of what living with an SLD diagnosis entailed. Only direct experience, even among the parents themselves, led to an increased awareness.

> Participant 1: I do think some people understand, but a lot of people don't, no.
>
> Participant 2: It is like anything in life; when you don't go through it or you don't experience it, you don't really understand it.
>
> Participant 3: I think if someone has not had a child or a sibling who has had to go to a special needs school, they probably don't think about it much.
>
> Participant 4: Nobody will ever understand unless you have got a child or you are a therapist – but nobody will ever understand. There is no empathy. You don't want pity.
>
> Participant 6: They don't understand.

All the participating parents stressed the inability of others to understand fully their journey, which they referred to as a deeply personal, specific, and complicated process that required hands-on experience and day-to-day confrontation to be fully appreciated and internalised. They appeared to ascribe a lack of understanding not to be rooted in stigmatisation but rather in insufficient engagement with the daily trials and tribulations that allow one to comprehend entirely what daily living with SLDs entailed.

Reflexive Journal:

It appears as though there is a general consensus among parents that a broader, negative stigma around SLD is not very common, yet there is general mis-understanding around SLD and parents who don't have children with SLD cannot attempt to understand their experience. This made me think about whether this is an isolating experience or whether parents found comfort easily in the understanding of others who share this narrative with them.

4.2.1.2 Complexity of parenting a child with SLD

Parenting children with SLDs is a complex, unpredictable, and frustrating journey that disrupts the multiple life contexts in which parents find themselves (Bögels et al., 2013). The existing literature has highlighted that parents who are actively raising and supporting a child with an SLD often experience higher levels of stress that negatively affects their social lives and physical, psychological, and emotional well-being (Chien & Lee, 2013; Guralnick, 2017; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Many parents become emotional, frustrated, worried, and depressed when caring for their children's academic progress and managing challenging behaviour that causes negative attitudes towards and lower acceptance of their children (Chien & Lee, 2013; Gasteiger-Klicpera, Schwab, & Gebhardt, 2013; Guralnick, 2017).

Parents' initial exposure to and interaction with SLD are intimidating and overwhelming for parents whose attitudes to the education of their children have been grounded in outdated conventional thinking about learning (Guralnick, 2017; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Participating parents addressed these considerations but highlighted that accepting their child's diagnosis was initially very difficult for them. The world of parenting as they knew it had now been redirected along a path that was foreign and unplanned, offering them little insight into what this practically meant for their children as learners and themselves as parents. There was a general lack of understanding among parents about SLDs, especially immediately after their children had received their diagnosis. According to the participants, there was still a lack of comprehensive information furnished on SLDs, which left them confused and uninformed.

> Participant 1: I burst into tears and told my husband that my child … will never function in society basically because I didn't understand what this report was all about. I didn't really understand what it was so I would panic.

> Participant 2: I was being told he wasn't remedial; I was told he just wasn't concentrating. I was told he wasn't trying and as a naïve new mom I had no idea. You are told that your child has an issue or told that there is something, but no one knows what it is.

> Participant 3: You just know that they [children] are not coping and grasping information, or concentrating or memory. It doesn't mean that they need Ritalin or Concerta. Initially I was a bit in denial and blamed other factors and thought that the challenges would be more easily overcome by maybe just going to speech therapy or occupational therapy.

> Participant 5: I never actually understood … like I don't even know if she has a diagnosis, actually. I have never really been sure what it is.

> Participant 6: No, it [information] was available to me. As I said, I was lucky. I got the best of the best. I was very lucky.

Parents found it comforting and experienced hope for potential progress by finally having a designation and diagnosis to the various worrying symptoms or behaviours that could not be explained or sufficiently supported until then. Nevertheless, they felt conflicted because of not being sufficiently informed and knowledgeable about the possible short- and long-term consequences and academic, social, and personal implications for their child. This made them hesitant to accept the diagnosis readily.

> Participant 1: ... all I kept thinking to myself was, oh my gosh, my child is remedial, and he is never going to be able to learn.

> Participant 3: You think there will be a quick fix or I just have to feed him more healthily, change his/her diet.

> Participant 4: When [my son] was five years old and they said to us put him in a home because he is never going to read or write. That is very stressful.

> Participant 5: Will they be able to be a normal child in a normal mainstream school with friends and social interactions, and eventually go on to have a career one day? I think that is the scariest thing. I think the biggest fear was that she would fit in, be normal; because when you start off with a learning difficulty you don't know where it is going to lead or how bad it is when they are so young.

> Participant 6: Coming to terms with it was very, very difficult, to know that I've got a child that is not the same as everybody else's.

There were conflicting concerns among these parents about how they were meant to proceed practically with their children's educational needs as they were unsure and doubtful about their progress not only at school but also after they had matriculated. Their anxieties correlated with findings reflected in the literature, which note that it is particularly stressful for parents to consider the impact of the diagnosis on their children's potential to manage socially and academically in school, or successfully navigate their way in working environments when they are older (Bögels et al., 2013). The entire future of their children has been compromised and is being re-evaluated, while they as parents have been thrown into a position requiring them to remain strong and provide support when they feel at their most vulnerable and limited in their ability to fulfil their role as responsible parents.

Reflexive Journal:

The initial experience of diagnosis seems to be more difficult because despite getting a diagnosis which was a big relief and made them feel confident to confront the challenges because they were aware of what was going on. This made me realise how providing a label or diagnosis isnt actually enough and how difficult this journey continued to be because they didn't understand what this actually means. It would be interesting to see whether this correlates with their experience of psycho-social support and feedback and what can be done to support this from the findings in this current study and whether this influenced early intervention/support. We need to be conscious that our support, communication and intervention with parents don't end at the diagnosis, but rather just begins. A diagnosis with no concrete understanding means nothing to parents, leaving them feeling as helpless and unsure of themselves as before.

The most significant step towards confronting the initial battle with an SLD diagnosis and beginning to implement the appropriate interventions requires parents to come to terms with the new, alternative set of challenges and accept their new reality. This process can often be protracted as there are many adjustments that parents need to manage, especially those that influence the broader family contexts (Reid, 2007; Sahu, Bhargava, Sagar, & Mehta, 2018). A genuine, practical level of acceptance requires parents to address their pain, anxiety, and confusion about a diagnosis and the almost immediate isolation – real or perceived– in which the child has been placed (Chien & Lee, 2013; Khan & Humtsoe, 2016). Participating parents were initially ignorant regarding their child's diagnosis and were left in denial, rejecting the need for acceptance and seeking or accepting support.

> Participant 3: Because it is not what you chose so it might take a little bit longer for you to accept.

> Participant 5: It was quite difficult for me personally to see that I had a child that had a learning difficulty and wasn't going to go to a mainstream school. It made it difficult that why my child, why couldn't my child be like all the other children? Why was she different, why wasn't she normal, why is she the one that had to go? I think the main thing is not accepting that your child has a problem which is such a weird thing as a parent, for me. I would only think to give your child the best no matter what.

> Participant 6: Coming to terms with it was very, very difficult to know that I've got a child that is not the same as everybody else's. I have come a long road; and she is my biggest accomplishment.

There is a genuine internal struggle for parents who understand that their child will be different, and they feel that their life narrative would now be viewed through the lens of this diagnostic “label”, placing them in a state of denial (Mehta, 2011; Sahu et al., 2018). Participating parents’ shock and frustration about their children’s alternative abilities, making them apparently different from their friends’ children or the children in school, left them feeling angry and resentful. The literature points out that these feelings of anxiety, sadness, and self-blame cause parents to struggle with retaining and assimilating information as, ironically, they constantly seek after reasons for their child’s so-called condition (Al-Yagon, 2018; Reid, 2007; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Without any warning, these parents are deprived of the vision of future good opportunities and successful endeavours for their children and are challenged to find alternative ones. Yet, there was a consensus among the participating parents that acceptance was imperative as this allowed them to align their expectations more realistically.

> Participant 2: I’ve had to realise my levels of expectation. You can’t really work around it; you have just got to deal with it; that is my regret; my biggest fear, well that he isn’t adequate. I am over the victor ludorum. I won’t be sitting in the front of the stage, it’s okay.

> Participant 4: But we can do our best. Line up your expectations and your kids always exceed more than you expect, always. You have to be strong; I think it is all about expectations.

> Participant 5: ... not to expect perfection and that things grow and change; I had to learn to accept that things aren’t always perfect … things aren’t as important as they seem to be. I tell her that you just work your hardest and do your best and it doesn’t matter if you get an A or not.

Once parents have reasonable expectations from their children, they can assume the necessary responsibility towards supporting them and addressing their barriers to learning so that these barriers do not become insurmountable obstacles in their path to fulfilling their potential (Alazemi, Hadadian, Merbler, & Wang, 2015). Parents’ expectations about their child’s learning needs and educational responsibilities are often built on their “own experience and information provided by the school concerned, the media, and informal networks of parents” (Russell, 2003, p. 145). Skewing of expectations can therefore easily occur if parents’ sources of information are inadequate or superficial.

> Participant 1: A big responsibility. It is huge, and I carry that.

> Participant 3: The minute I accepted that my child needed more special remedial education, everything fell into place very well. It would have been easier if I had just accepted it earlier. Just embracing this road and knowing that my son has got such exceptional qualities and characteristics that you can't be defined by just output.

> Participant 6: I kind of had to mourn the loss of what I was expecting and then celebrate the gift of what I was given because she is actually a phenomenal child.

Acceptance of their child's diagnosis at this level allowed these parents to appreciate their children for who they were and not what society or "the norm" expected them to be. The gravity of accepting what they had lost in terms of expectations was painful, but it gave them an opportunity to explore their children's unconventional strengths and abilities and made it easier to move forward. When parents define their expectations more realistically, they are then better able to identify their child's academic, social, and emotional potential and strengths that they may never have expected or recognised. The parents consequently become more involved and less despondent about their child's future (Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). These motifs were clearly identifiable in the responses of the participants.

Reflexive Journal:

This was quite sad for me to learn about in terms of their experience, because this initial acceptance was such a diffficult dynamic for them and it made me think about whether this influenced their relationship with their child at that point or whether it was the diagnosis alone that they were struggling to accept, or their child in general and whether this was projected in any way? This could potentially impact how these children think about themselves at an already very vulnerable stage of development.

4.2.1.3 Burden of SLDs

The distinctive experience of living with an SLD is a life-long challenge that exerts an impact both on children and on their families (Al-Yagon, Lachmi, & Danino, 2019; Benn et al., 2012). Besides accepting the diagnosis of SLD and thinking positively about managing the diagnosis, it is important for parents to confront, reduce, resolve, and of necessity live with the accompanying difficulties that they may encounter (Alazemi et al., 2015; Chien & Lee, 2013; Khan & Humtsoe, 2016). The literature stresses how parents' personal and physical needs, social and family life, and work commitments and responsibilities are often side-lined and compromised when meeting the needs of a child with SLD (Bögels et al., 2013; Kenny & McGilloway, 2007; Smith, Cheater, &

Bekker, 2013). The financial burden of SLD in particular is significant for parents by increasing the family's expenditure through medication, extra lessons, special accommodations at school, and assessment procedures (Mehta, 2011; Khan & Humtsoe, 2016; Sahu et al., 2018). Participating parents reflected the literature's conclusions and emphasised the magnitude of the financial consequences and the burden of meeting the ongoing and wide-ranging financial demands of SLD interventions or educational support structures.

> Participant 1: From a financial aspect it is just impossible. So that is why I have taken a lot of the burden onto myself.
>
> Participant 2: We had a full-time tutor last year. What we paid in extra lessons, in doctors, in assessments... I was blessed that financially it wasn't a limitation; we made it a priority.
>
> Participant 3: I mean the school fees were very, very expensive (at the remedial schools). You just had to pay it. So we did, we paid it and it all worked out. Sleepless nights but it worked out.
>
> Participant 4: The costs are insane… I mean medical aid does pay, but a large portion of your salary goes for therapy. It is a lot of money for not just the therapy but it's the extra lessons, and then when it comes to writing tests or exams and they need a private venue.
>
> Participant 5: It was extremely expensive, but you can actually get a tax rebate; it actually works out.
>
> Participant 6: I can't be in a full-time job, and so financially it has been difficult. I mean we have paid thousands; hearing aids cost a fortune.

Even when finances were not a limitation or considered an uncompromisable priority for the benefit of their children, parents acknowledged that supporting interventions for SLD was extremely expensive and constituted a considerable portion of their monthly financial commitments. Regardless of the financial strain that this placed on participants' families, all forms of intervention and support for learners remained a priority. Although the financial burden is a manifestly observable aspect, the burden of SLDs extends beyond financial constraints to less perceptible matters. For instance, participating parents foregrounded how their immediate family context was most affected by consistent stress, both at an individual level for family members or at an encompassing level for the family dynamics and resources (Strnadová, 2006). The relationships between family members are most significant because living in the same household touches on every aspect of individuals' existence – even though all family members have unique experiences of their surroundings, they have shared circumstances (Guralnick, 2017; McHale, Updegraff, & Feinberg, 2016). The participants' comments relating to family dynamics underscored the relational tensions that SLDs might occasion.

> Participant 1: We get irritable with the rest of the family. It brings down the morale of the rest of the family. There is a lot of screaming and shouting; I am carrying work stress and his stress … and everybody's stress.
>
> Participant 3: So they knew there were sacrifices that needed to be made but they knew that education is a priority.
>
> Participant 4: We had huge arguments. It is very, very stressful and you have both got to be on the same page.
>
> Participant 6: Any family with a special-needs child is going to feel the consequences of it.

The family context becomes disrupted through pressurising lifestyles and demanding circumstances that often focus on addressing the child's SLD and its influence, leaving many other family responsibilities and needs unmet or secondary, and consequently creating potentially chaotic home environments or relations (Al-Yagon et al., 2019; Alazemi et al., 2015; Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). The participating parents commented on how managing their child's diagnosis and addressing the child's practical workload, carrying out therapeutic recommendations and commitments, or coping with everyday interactions were manifestly stressful through their impact on family life. For example, siblings might be left feeling disregarded and frustrated because the child in the family with an SLD was prioritised as the primary focus of the parents' emotional, psychological, or physical support. This reflects dynamics related to the exosystem within Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework as it addresses the indirect links and influences that have an impact on their lives (Swick & Williams, 2006).

Reflexive Journal:
This made me realise that the journey and narrative in having a child with SLD is one shared beyond the parent-child dynamic, even when not directly involved or impacted. It is a very demanding and emotionally challenging situation and this unintentionally filters into the lives of many family members.

The complex reality of SLDs explored above highlights the effects on parents of having to make special effort in meeting the needs of their child who has been diagnosed (Al-Yagon et al., 2019). Burdens reflected in the interviews with the participating parents correlated with findings in the literature that parents of children with SLDs experience higher levels of frustration, stress, and dissatisfaction with their home circumstances, leaving them feeling more anxious, worried and with a lower quality of living (Amerongenm & Mishna, 2004; Howie-Davies & McKenzie, 2007; Khan & Humtsoe, 2016; Smith et al., 2014). Compared to parents with children not affected by SLDs, parents of affected children often experience psychosomatic and emotional disturbances that give rise to more negative responses to the world around them (Alazemi et al., 2015; Chien & Lee, 2013; Smith et al., 2014). Since SLDs are not well understood because of their complexity, parents who have to cope with the unexpected diagnosis of a child may also have to deal with additional difficulties such as a lack of support from family, friends, or community on account of trying to continue concealing a “condition” which is not always obvious. This is done while, for instance, having to find support intervention such as appropriate educational placement for their child (Al-Yagon et al., 2019; Danino & Shechtman, 2012; Khan & Humtsoe, 2016). Parents are therefore often required to confront these circumstances in a hidden fashion and alone, which exacerbates their building frustration and pain (Sahu et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2014). For the participating parents, having a child with an SLD was a difficult and emotionally draining experience that often left them feeling overwhelmed because of having to confront raw, honest feelings about embarking on an arduous journey they did not choose but were forced to endure.

> Participant 1: I do get very emotional. Thank you for thinking of the parent, because nobody else does. My heart breaks; I don’t always get it right. From a psychological or emotional perspective I am a nervous wreck for that month [of exams] so I don’t function properly at work.

> Participant 2: Hardest thing we have ever had to deal with because he is our boy, you know. So it is not an easy thing, it is not an easy journey.
>
> Participant 3: I mean I have faith, but I don't know what is required, I don't know how difficult it is going to get for him.
>
> Participant 4: It is very easy to give up, emotionally it is hard. I mean we had good cries, it is really hard.
>
> Participant 5: As a parent it was hard, it wasn't hard for my husband. A happy child has a happy parent. Being at different schools, different schedules, different locations, those things are all difficult.
>
> Participant 6: Emotionally it is hard. When your child is sad you are sad. You are only as happy as your most unhappy child.

Families that have a child with an SLD need higher resilience as they manage circumstances and experiences that strain their overall well-being and threaten their roles as confident caregivers (Al-Yagon et al., 2019; Fishman & Nickerson, 2014; Guralnick, 2017). Parents often struggle with low self-confidence, feelings of shame or embarrassment, and an overall fear of being judged as a "bad parent" because they are not managing what is known to be exceptionally stressful and demanding circumstances (Alazemi et al., 2015; Fishman & Nickerson, 2014; Khan & Humtsoe, 2016; Smith et al., 2014). The literature's presentation of parents' emotional roller-coaster feelings was echoed by the participants, who could attest that the responsibilities of raising a child with an SLD are demanding and require constant competence, participation, and attention. These parents were confronting constant daily emotional turmoil while having to manage many other roles and responsibilities, which was a constant drain on their motivation and drive for being involved.

Reflexive Journal:

The whole process of supporting learners with SLD is a very clinical and methodological process and the technical elements of SLD often become the focus, especially for professionals. This made me quite aware of the emotional turmoil that parents experience and reminded me how much empathy and understanding we need to have as educational psychologists working with parents and children diagnosed with SLD, as the emotional journey is wild for parents and something they are often tackling alone or with a smile on their face.

This theme was developed by exploring the participating parents' experiences and perceptions of SLD because they form part of the contributing systems of psycho-social support. Parents of children with an SLD come to have a more dynamic, enhanced understanding of the disorder and its impact on their children because they eventually develop a less narrow perspective different from that of parents whose children are not affected. Moreover, parenting a child with an SLD is challenging and complicated, making it difficult for parents to understand what exactly is expected of them, especially when the SLD places several financial, social, psychological, and physical burdens not only on the parents personally, but also on their family contexts and broader social circles. Gaining a better insight into the burdens that parents perceive as exerting a significant impact on them allows educational and health professionals to understand what the parents are struggling with and what forms of support are necessary to make their journey easier and more sustainable.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Supporting children with SLDs

As the primary caregivers for their children, all parents fulfil an integral role in their academic progress and psycho-social development. As learners, the children's personal well-being and educational success are influenced by the quality of parents' caregiving (Alazemi et al., 2015; Benn et al., 2012; Khan & Humtsoe, 2016). Parents of children with SLDs have additional, more challenging responsibilities and circumstances that threaten their confidence in how they can influence their child's academic or psycho-social experience positively (Benn et al., 2012; Fishman & Nickerson, 2014). The level of parent involvement in counteracting the effects of SLDs is significant and it is essential that parents should not only be aware of various interventions but also need to participate actively in the transitional process with the school as this strengthens the learners' progress over time (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014; Lawson & Lawson, 2011; Wagner et al., 2012).

It would be irresponsible to ignore the role of parents in addressing the problems associated with SLDs, the way in which they experience this responsibility as their own personal journey through their knowledge and experience with SLD, or the manner in which they are able to facilitate the implementation of the appropriate intervention and support (Strnadová, 2006). Because the literature indicates that parents' experiences of supporting their child are influenced by the nature of their child’s experience as a learner, this aspect was explored in the present study through the perspective of parents with the aim of scrutinising it as a central concern in assessing parents’ role in providing support (Al-Yagon, 2018; Bögels et al., 2013).

4.2.2.1 Parents’ difficulties in supporting their child with an SLD

Accepting the reality of SLDs through adequate understanding is essential, yet this does not make parents’ responsibilities towards managing their child’s diagnosis and ensuring sufficient access to appropriate intervention any easier. It is a constant battle that has to be fought every day (Chien & Lee, 2013). The participating parents understood that their child’s SLD diagnosis presented new, challenging, and important responsibilities that required sacrifice and love, which meant that they needed to be open and honest about what they could manage or where support needed to be supplemented.

> Participant 1: I do the best I can as a parent. I carry that weight on my shoulders right through. That is what we as parents have done for 10 years [through] trial and error. It’s not easy, for a parent, it is very difficult, because I keep thinking – am I doing the right thing or am I not doing the right thing.

> Participant 2: My experiences have been eye-opening. It was a process.

> Participant 4: We know what his boundaries are, we know where we can help, we know what we can do.

> Participant 6: You sacrifice whatever it is so that you can give your child the necessary things.

The vast majority of parents approach their roles with uncompromising commitment irrespective of how unprepared or ill-equipped they may feel: they are willing to do whatever necessary to support their children (Bögels et al., 2013). The participating parents commented that regardless of what was expected from them as caregivers or the pressure that this put on them, they had always approached their responsibility in accommodating their children’s barriers and learning needs with dedication and consistency, even when their efforts were clouded in self-doubt and hesitation. Since parents cannot do everything and become physically and emotionally drained, and it is important that they should be aware when they need to rely on professionals, peers, or institutional support (Bögels et al., 2013). For example, one of the participating parents expressly voiced her fear about not being able to fulfil her responsibility adequately and that her child might suffer as a result:

> Participant 1: My biggest fear as a parent is because I am so responsible for everything he is doing every day; I fear I am letting him down.

Assuming the onus can be difficult when some parents of children with a complex SLD feel that they receive less support or information than other parents of children who have been diagnosed with an SLD considered to be less severe (Howie-Davies & McKenzie, 2007). Frequently, SLDs are indeed not seen as equally important or relevant (O'Hara & M, 1984), which may lead to the impression among some parents that their circumstances are not given due attention, thus giving rise to feelings of resentment.

Reflexive Journal:

Parents hold a huge amount of responsibility when it comes to managing their child's diagnosis and this is a very draining and difficult experience –this made me conscious of how often their own needs are ignored at the expense of their child's diagnosis and its evolving impact in their lives. How many parents are unfortunatley left struggling alone, putting their journeys at the back end? This made me feel very sad for these parents and realised the deeply emotional element of an often very structured, clinical journey.

As their ongoing commitment to implementing intervention for SLDs is draining, isolating, and difficult, parents must not only feel supported and capable in providing the relevant interventions for their children but must also experience actualised empowerment via information and external assistance for themselves (Benn et al., 2012; Bögels et al., 2013). In normal daily life, parents frequently have to cope with anxiety and frustration in ensuring effective educational services for their children because of a lack of external support resources understanding from schools, friends and professional organisations (Alazemi et al., 2015). The participating parents were well aware of the responsibilities and expectations that they had to meet, yet also felt as though there was not enough readily available support for them to access and benefit from, specifically from a social or cultural perspective.

> Participant 1: Bottom line is there is not enough support for the parents, no.

Participant 3: And if they are true friends they are not going to neglect you just because you have a child in a remedial school.

Participant 4: I mean we started a support group; a whole lot of moms. You learn which are really true friends – who needs to be around you, who doesn't. So your circle of friends changes.

Participant 6: Some of my friends were amazing and some of them weren't.

Parents are aware that their social dynamics shift throughout the process of working out and finding the best form of intervention available to their children, however much they need to make compromises and juggle their own interests. Naturally, friends who fail to grasp the complexity behind encouraging and helping children with SLDs inevitably become an inadequate source of advice and assistance. However, even with the evolving expectations of friendships, parents' genuine social communities and close circle of friends with whom they surrounded themselves might not know how to offer support regarding SLDs as such, but they are able to make these parents feel comfortable and included, which in itself is an important form of support. This dynamic of support for parents reflects the ecosystemic theoretical framework used as model for understanding parents' individual experiences and challenges within multiple contexts – as influenced by the various relationships and interactions that exist within them – of supporting their children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Christensen, 2016).

Parents in this study voiced their concerns that the active support or resources accessible to them were sparse, which they found isolating and disorientating. However, according to a study by Howie-Davies and McKenzie (2007), parents of children diagnosed with an SLD received both less support and information than parents of children identified with another, more specific diagnosis. The difficulty of the former group in accessing services, along with the inadequacy of uncoordinated platforms of information and resources, are factors that hamper the effective management of SLDs (Alazemi et al., 2015; Khan & Humtsoe, 2016).

Participant 1: We don't understand their disorder and we don't understand how to help him; so we are doing trial and error.

Participant 2: My own lack of understanding and lack of knowledge is what contributed also to not being able to recognise how to support him.

> Participant 3: You just know that they [children] are not coping and grasping information, or concentrating or memory. It doesn't mean that they need Ritalin or Concerta. It doesn't mean anything necessarily.

Reflexive Journal:

Parents feel isolated and alone when it comes to supporting their children with an SLD. This made me conscious of how many other parents feel this way and how many children are undiagnosed or don't receive sufficient and appropriate academic or therapeutic interventions, simply because their parents don't have access to the correct information or empowering forces of support.

The participating parents emphasised that their understanding of their child's diagnosis was very limited when they first entered the world of SLDs, which made it difficult to understand what was expected of them and how they were going to ensure that their child received the medication, therapeutic intervention, or education best suited to the child's strengths and weaknesses. In general, a persistent lack of information and supporting details is evident about work training opportunities, effective community employment or work systems for people with SLDs in later life, which also involves a scarcity of sufficient insight into how learners' independence can be prepared for at an early age. Such concerns cause parents to feel anxious because they do not know how to recognise "poor knowledge, delayed identification, and lack of guidance for their child's learning problem" so that they can provide appropriate support (Alazemi et al., 2015; Sahu et al., 2018, p. 4). Minimal information about SLDs and special education services often leave parents more stressed, less optimistic, and with lower expectations of their child's potential and future (Alazemi et al., 2015; Fishman & Nickerson, 2014). Their lack of knowledge causes parents to mistakenly label their child's behaviour, attitude to learning, and concentration as ..... and providing inappropriate or insufficient intervention and support (Chien & Lee, 2013; Karande, Mehta, & Kulkarni, 2007). Unfortunately, this is an issue that participating parents did not feel had been alleviated or accommodated for by the professionals whom they perceived as furnishing only limited and mostly negative feedback.

> Participant 1: They are just showing you where his weaker areas were but when they give you that feedback you just feel like, what can my child do? You haven't put anything he can do in this report. I came home and I just cried because I didn't actually understand.

> Participant 2: The professionals that I put my trust in let me down and they never looked at anything from another angle.

> Participant 3: You know all the assessments he had, every area was always weak and under-average, below average of the norm. But there was never like an explanation.

> Participant 4: It was the most horrific experience for a month because she kept on saying, maybe he is brain damaged, he is not reading, he is five, but in the meantime the kid was bored as anything, he was ADD. We went for a million and one assessments but she scared us; it was our first child. We were petrified.

Signs of overwhelming frustration were evident among the parents because the professionals and psychologists who ultimately introduced them to the world of SLDs through their assessments and diagnoses were their immediate and most critical resource of information and comfort. However, the parents thought that they had been more unsupportive and destructive to parents' expectations of their child. Even though they might have provided a name or important information concerning their child's abilities, this was focused negatively in relation to their child's SLD, adding to parents' anxieties and concerns instead of alleviating them. Participating parents further shared concerns expressed in the literature about the threat of insufficient information on SLDs for parents and expressed the need for accessible, consistent, and constructive information that can be used as practical, reliable resources.

> Participant 1: There definitely needs to be more educating people better, even me, myself. I have read up and done a lot of my own and figured out things along the way. I am going to have to do it myself.

> Participant 2: The information that I managed to find through Googling, I have educated and informed myself.

> Participant 4: We could do our own research; we weren't relying on somebody else. I did a lot of research on my own; I did a huge amount of research on my own.

> Participant 5: I suppose we've all got the Internet and Facebook.

Parents' participation is crucial to developing an inclusive philosophy in education, advocacy about SLDs, and active facilitation and collaboration with the school system. However, a lack of information is one of the multiple, complex factors that contribute to their lack of commitment and involvement (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014; Martinez, Conroy, & Cerreto, 2012). Therefore, the literature supports the urgency behind the commitment of participating parents to researching and finding information about their child's SLD on their own. These parents understood that they could not wait for the information to be given to them or rely on the professionals who had made the diagnosis. Proactively, they took advantage of what was digitally available to them, sifting through informal and formal information resources while trying to make sense of the material for themselves. This could be considered a risky approach, but for the parents it was necessary. Parents of children with SLDs often have to do their own research and actively seek out neighbours, teachers, parents, healthcare practitioners, psychologists and special educators in their personal pursuit of knowledge about their child's disorder, its consequences, and what the best intervention strategies would be (Chakraborty, Kommu, Srinath, Seshadri, & Girimaji, 2014).

Reflexive Journal:
I found it to be very interesting that these parents come from middle-upper class backgrounds where they are educated and have access to a diverse range of brilliant, qualified professionals, and yet they still don't feel as though they are receiving the correct feedback, insight, and direction from them. How much more so when this can be applied to the broader South African context where parents don't have access to professionals who can communicate effectively with them or don't have the funds to seek out support.

4.2.2.2 Actively facilitating intervention and support

Particularly in family context, parents have a valuable influence on their children's academic support and psycho-social development, but in the case of children who have SLDs their parents struggle with how to facilitate intervention and support (Al - Yagon et al., 2019; Chien & Lee, 2013; Sahu et al., 2018). Many parents need direction from enlightened professionals in guiding their children since their own thinking is often dominated by societal preconceptions having their children fit into the conventional mould. Especially regarding children with SLSs, a properly informed narrative of supporting their children should shift parents' focus to addressing their children's barriers responsibly and sensitively.

> Participant 1: I would say a lot of frustration with figuring out ways to help him [child] take in the work. I don't have all the resources. No, it is very difficult, because I keep thinking am I doing the right thing or am I not doing the right thing. There is frustration all around.

> Participant 2: I think I helped make it a lot worse because I wanted him to fit into the system. And all that did, that stress actually just fuelled the fire. It certainly didn't benefit him; I don't feel like I have succeeded in providing appropriate intervention for him.

> Participant 4: And it's not the school's fault, it's not the school's fault, it is the community. They don't allow children to be individuals.

Additional, external support is a necessary component of successful inclusive education practices as the needs of many learners with disabilities are beyond the basic services available in typical general education classes (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Danino & Shechtman, 2012). Within an ecosystemic framework, the narrative of utilising guidance and support from professionals or peers in systems directly and indirectly related to the individual is emphasised and underscores Bronfenbrenner's acknowledgement of the ever-changing influences existing within an ecological chain (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Participants highlighted the need to be aware and make use of various external supportive resources that assist parents in this journey.

> Participant 1: I do send him for extra Mathematics. If he wants me to get somebody else, a tutor, a full-time tutor or whatever, I will do so. He is on Ritalin just to try and help him take in what is happening in class.

> Participant 2: If we are going to get him concessions, you can only have the assessment in Grade 8, [to] book it. I did it. I booked it, [but] should have been told this years ago and we would have fixed it [earlier].

> Participant 3: He can only type on the iPad, and he has got that concession, or a computer.

> Participant 4: But he is dyslexic and he will always struggle. There are wonderful computer programs out there now. There are great tutors and we get all the help that we can. We went through tons of medication before eventually we found he wasn't arguing about taking it because he was feeling better on it.

> Participant 6: She went to OT [occupational therapy], she went to physio, she went to – obviously – speech therapy so that she was always keeping up and reaching the milestones. You do what needs to be done and you don't pretend that there isn't an issue; I am very lucky to have had amazing people around me, including the speech therapist, and her [child's] needs have kind of always been priority.

Supporting children with SLDs is a complex, stressful, and difficult role because the pressures on and expectations of parents are often excessive. It is for this reason that the participating parents have addressed the importance of not just implementing the correct intervention strategies but finding the right professional to take care of certain therapeutic and academic needs or listening to recommendations for providing appropriate support. For this to be a reality, it is essential that professionals working with SLDs should be cognisant of the needs of their clients for a deepened, conscious understanding of and sensitivity towards them (Vera & Speight, 2003).

Reflexive Journal:

Parents need to rely on professionals as the world of SLDs is new and complicated – they often have very little understanding of what this means and how best their children can be supported. It must be very hard for parents to have to rely on others for their children, but sometimes not be able to afford it or find the suitable one. I would imagine parents are left feeling helpless and frustrated in their own limitations as a parent within this context.

Participant 1: I left a tutor to take care of my child and it was a disaster because she didn't understand how a child with a learning disorder thinks and how a child like that needs to learn. Need to have patience and realise how he needs to learn.

Participant 2: Hearing what the school has to say, and following the advice and the road that they send me on.

Participant 3: The right intervention, the therapist must have the right personality to suit. I know you can't just chop and change but I think it is important that anyone who can understand a child who is in extra therapy, the child will have a lot more success.

Participant 4: I think you have just got to trust the therapist. You have got to work together as a team. You can't have somebody who doesn't believe in your child; has to work for a goal. You need therapists who are open to different things, not necessarily only what they know. I think you need to be regularly tested.

Participant 6: You must listen to the professionals.

In view of their experiences, participants considered finding a suitable therapist or tutor to address their children's academic needs was imperative. As a specific and individualised pursuit, it required patience because a trusting relationship had to be established in which the child would feel comfortable, supported, and genuinely understood. Thus, the therapist or educator ensures that the correct and suitable strategies are directed by the needs of the learner within an inclusive framework (Corey, 2013), which entails maintaining a level of unconditional positive regard. Such unique understanding evolves from flexibility, compassion, and genuine care towards children with an SLD through a belief in their potential and confidence in the direction they are taking (Gatongi, 2007; Nelson-Jones, 2012). If a relationship of trust has been achieved, the potential for successful intervention is greater because these children will feel less isolated, will be more receptive to embracing change, and will be more amenable to putting in effort in confronting their SLDs.

4.2.2.3 Parents' perception of their child's experience

An SLD entails a reciprocal experience in which the interactions between children, their families, and the environment contribute to a highly exacting living experience in which all in this milieu should ideally play a role in providing support (Heiman T. , 2002). These children face a diverse range of personal socio-emotional and psychological challenges because of their academic difficulties and are therefore at risk for current and future psychosocial impairment (Haft et al., 2018; Yuen, Westwood, & Wong, 2005). Learners with SLDs are more likely to struggle with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which causes poor relationships with friends and family (Buckley & Mahdavi, 2018; Yuen et al., 2005). Consequently, their parents often struggle with rigidity, over-protection and anxiety concerning their children’s experiences academically, socially, and psychologically, which can be taxing when they feel inadequately equipped to cope effectively (Heiman, 2002). Exploring these parents’ perceptions of their children’s experiences with SLD is an important element in understanding their journey if they are to be supported professionally.

According to the Salamanca Framework for Action in 1994, the general education setting should be regarded as a fundamental venue for child development regardless of the child’s physical, emotional, and intellectual disabilities (UNESCO, 1994). This identifies the classroom context as the foundational learning environment for any child. In spite of progress made in inclusive education since 1994, however, and in contrast to their peers in general education classrooms, many children with SLDs are still experiencing difficulties in these classroom settings (Wood, Moxley, Tighe, & Richard, 2017; Yuen et al., 2005). In this study, some reflections by parents highlighted how difficult their children found the classroom environment to be.

> Participant 1: The kids with learning disorders drown; their frustrations and their having to really go slowly and learn.

> Participant 3: Everything was difficult. Like everything was a battle.

> Participant 6: She has to concentrate very hard in class so that they don't miss out, otherwise half of what is going on in the classroom goes over their heads. To everybody else it is just a bit of a noise, get on with it.

Reflexive Journal:
Children with SLD in full-service schools are still adressing their difficulties in learning; it doesn't mean that because they are in mainstream environment they are immune to the challenges of the environment. This made me think about how quickly we blame the child or the diagnosis, but we need to be aware of how the environment is influencing these learners' experiences and what we need to do to adapt the context appropriatley.

According to these parents, learners find the learning environment to be too fast and busy, which leaves them feeling overwhelmed and falling behind with the workload. The parents feel that the learning context has become increasingly difficult for learners who are not incapable of learning in a mainstream environment but just need to work harder and concentrate more to manage with its demands. The literature reflects the evolving problems that are often emphasised by those who have to cope with SLDs in their life environment – namely Bronfenbrenner's microsystem as the starting point for learners' understanding their experiences and the world around them – and research has noted the negative short- and long-term outcomes if children's difficulties are not addressed (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Morrison & Cosden, 1997; Starr & Foy, 2006)..

> Participant 1: Knows what he has got to do, but he will panic. He has got a fear of failing, he has got a fear of letting the teacher down because he is starting to really take his mark seriously.

> Participant 2: The worst part was, and this is a child who was very anxious, which made his anxiety a thousand times worse. He got so anxious that his brain shut down.

> Participant 3: He had a lot of anxiety and a lot of fear about meeting new friends, going to such a big school.

> Participant 4: I think for [my son] to come back to was huge for him, for him.
>
> Participant 5: So you [the child] don't absorb any information because you are so worried about everything around you; so you are not actually learning.

Thus, even a mainstream educational environment can potentially create highly stressful and sometimes disruptive educational contexts for children with SLDs and, as parents noted, cause their children to become increasingly anxious and compromise their class performance (Lambie & Milsom, 2010). Learners with SLDs have a predisposition towards lower academic self-concept, expectations, and persistence, which leads them to having more excessive absences from school or diminished hope in their abilities, resulting in a decrease in their interest and effort in academic activities (Buckley & Mahdavi, 2018). Such academic and social experiences exert a detrimental subconscious impact on these children as their complicated experience in the classroom environment often results in their feeling isolated as they perceive themselves to be different from their peers (Buckley & Mahdavi, 2018; Haft et al., 2018). The participating parents raised the issue of their children's difficulty in confronting these confusing emotions in everyday life.

> Participant 1: They struggle in dealing with that they know that they have got this issue, and they struggle to deal with it sometimes, not always; struggle in dealing with that they know that they have got this issue.
>
> Participant 2: He is angry that it is hard for him, he has definitely had a chip on his shoulder about it, but I think we have worked through it. No matter how much I begged him and pleaded with him and tried to appeal to him and rationalise with him, he would not use an iPad because no one else did. At that age, you don't want to be different, you just want to fit in.
>
> Participant 4: I think with a child with learning disabilities, you can't be defined by what you do – you have to be defined by who you are.
>
> Participant 5: I suppose only personal social limitations but not academic related.
>
> Participant 6: She doesn't want to talk because it's like hard. It's not just a natural thing.

Reflexive Journal:
Even when learners are aware of their SLD diagnosis and can adress it with intervention and support, they still focus on its presence in their lives, which makes them uncomfortable, which is interesting as we discussed how parents felt stigma around SLD was no longer significant but perhaps according to their children it is?

Parents highlighted the constant battle that their children had to wage and although this might not define their children, managing their SLDs still presented significantly challenging circumstances that they needed to confront and work through – both in the classroom with learning material and in their broader social settings. Parents were sensitive to the fact that these overwhelming expectations and psycho-emotional experiences were difficult and had had negative consequences on their children's self-image and self-confidence.

> Participant 1: My fear is the detrimental damage to his self-confidence; only when it comes to academic, you watch this confidence just deflate. My child constantly feels like he is a failure.
>
> Participant 2: Developed tics, he lost his confidence.
>
> Participant 3: You know, sometimes the truth hurts and there were sections of the assessment that were hurtful to [my son] because of the fact that there are a lot of weak areas.
>
> Participant 6: She was also very tiny and people used to think that she was much younger than she is, and that made some of the kids that were the same age as her used to look down on her.

Participating parents acknowledged how struggling with the reality of SLDs had compromised their children's confidence, especially since an awareness of their weaknesses was heightened in the school context that emphasised the importance of academic prowess. The children therefore felt less capable and less significant as human beings. Learners with SLDs often focus on the negative messages that they receive from their teachers, parents, or peers, which, when understood in the frame of their negative experiences of learning, create and feed a destructive personal narrative that limits their potential and feeds their reduced self-concept (Lambie & Milsom, 2010). This triadic experience and reciprocal relationship between child, learning environment, and parents not only underscores the potential social-emotional challenges that children with SLDs must face, but also provides the framework within which clear recognition of needs can serve as the foundation for major successful assistive initiatives and better learning opportunities for these children (Buckley & Mahdavi, 2018). Of special significance was that the children began to realise the transformation of “problem” into “challenge to be tackled” themselves.

> Participant 1: My son came home once with 52% for Mathematics, I stuck it on the fridge, I framed it I was so excited.
>
> Participant 2: Maturity and he doesn’t want to fail. I have come to see firstly his growth, his resilience that he has built up and my respect for him when he has overcome certain things.
>
> Participant 3: His willingness to take risks in not just following what he is comfortable with but going out of his comfort zone. It made him resilient and able to overcome his challenges in that he is motivated. He didn’t give up. [My son] just developed these strategies and compensatory skills that he carried with him. He became more motivated to reach his potential. If he is passionate about it, he will put his whole heart into it but slowly, slowly he started to be able to accomplish more and achieve more goals because they were small realistic goals.
>
> Participant 5: They are resilient, and we are more aware of the little things. Just seeing how she has grown and how well she has done by giving her that skill base and seeing how brilliantly she is doing in every sphere. Like how well she has integrated, how good her marks are.
>
> Participant 6: She is an unbelievable child; if you think about it, as I said, she is a miracle.

Participating parents recognised that this demanding journey that their children had embarked on could also direct these learners towards the insight that SLDs did not define or restrict them from fulfilling their potential. The parents themselves had developed a more acute awareness of positively recognising their children’s abilities, strengths, and resilience. These participants commented on how difficult it had been for child, parents, and family to cope with SLDs, but also proudly acknowledged their children’s growth and resilience by being able themselves to rewrite the conventional, preconceived narrative that the uninformed had scripted for them.

Reflexive Journal:
Parents experiences of SLD have led them to understanding its imlications better but also gave parents a different perspective of SLD and how their children have overcome this. This made me think about whether this observation because their child had made some form of progress or accomplished something important or whether their exposure as parents made them more aware of their children's strengths which allowed them to see the strengths and abilities that were previously clouded.

Theme 2 was developed through the data-analysis quest aimed at discovering the origins of parents' more open-minded, evolved approach or understanding of SLDs. It appeared that participants' increased, active commitment, involvement, and support for their children had equipped them with better skills to intervene and address their SLDs. They explored their perceptions of their children's experiences as this gave them better insight into how they could support them. When these parents embraced their children's disorder, worked on various interventions, and made an effort to understand what was needed for effective coping, they acknowledged the diverse range of people and places from which they could receive of psycho-social support.

4.2.3 Theme 3: The school's challenging role in facilitating intervention and support

Inclusive education refers to the process whereby children with learning difficulties are placed within mainstream environments providing conventional and standard spaces for education, often preferred because it is regarded as most encompassing and equitable. Furthermore, this new paradigm in which learners with diverse learning needs are being educated is ever-evolving and has created an educational context that considers and celebrates the individual learner (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2007; Forlin, 2010; Thomas & Uthaman, 2019; Tony, 2019). Inclusiveness has influenced the structures and philosophies of numerous schools in their approach to support learners' diverse needs and to provide the appropriate accommodations. Even though it has been close to two decades in South Africa since the implementation of EWP6 (DoE, 2001), which has promoted the necessity of inclusive schools, most children with disabilities or barriers to learning in the country are still not being taught in classrooms together with their typically developing peers (Arango, 2019; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tiale, 2015; Thomas & Uthaman, 2019). The context site in which this study took place was a full-service school that prided itself on supporting learners with diverse learning needs, and its educational support programme structure was focused on implementing the appropriate individually determined interventions within the necessary capacity. This in turn facilitated extended assistance to parents in their journey of actively supporting their children in coping with their SLDs.

4.2.3.1 Parents' concerns around narrow thinking in the broader school system

As discussed earlier, the participating parents mentioned how working through their child's diagnosis and developing their understanding of its implications for their child allowed them to evolve their perceptions of SLDs and broaden their insight into the child's strengths, of which they might otherwise have remained unaware. This had heightened the parents' awareness of how narrow and limited the educational system, as a present given, still is when it comes to understanding and appreciating children whose minds work differently, as observed below.

> Participant 2: I believe it is an unhealthy environment. I do believe it is not geared up to deal with the different flavours that human beings bring; it is too generic and it is too stereotype for one kind of person; the school system needs to be more flexible to cater to different kinds of people; the world is changing and evolving at such a rate, the school system is behind in offering the support that is necessary for kids with certain learning disorders.

> Participant 4: I do believe that school has its place. I think socially it is amazing; I think sportswise it is incredible; sometimes the education is lacking but school is not the be all and end all of life. It doesn't give you a good education. I don't believe. The difference between Johannesburg. South Africa, and anywhere in the world, we are so focused on what you are, not who you are. Not everybody is an academic, no problem. But we seem to nurture those that are going to get the A's because is that what we focus on.

> Participant 5: The bigger mainstream school systems can sometimes break you. The pressure, the exams, the tests – you know they built her and you don't need to put that pressure on children. You need to build their confidence and skill base, which I think is more important than anything. Some children are just able to learn and regurgitate the information as per the exam that the school sets or the IEB sets, but it doesn't mean that because you can't do it in that way that you are less intelligent. Big schools like that only recognise academics, leaders, whatever, that is all they recognise.

Participating parents expressed their frustration that the school system had highly specific priorities and parameters within which children were expected to progress and excel academically, and that this approach was characteristic of the educational system as a whole in terms of how learners were taught and examined. These views were in contradistinction to the research literature that highlights the need for inclusion, and advocates an educational philosophy that promotes social acceptance for children with disabilities and champions progress towards meeting the needs of all learners under one roof so that no one is excluded from learning (Thomas & Uthaman, 2019; Tony, 2019). As perceived by the participants, children with SLDs who have diverse strengths and abilities often fall beyond the scope of this framework – even though intended as a positive construct theoretically aimed at countering exclusion – which still makes their academic school experience very isolating. From the participants' stance, the educational system's focus was on the unimportant expectations that were not matched by the evolving functioning of society today, and the school system therefore needed to be more flexible.

Reflexive Journal:

This made me adress my own hesitations and concerns around Inclusive Education and whether this is a philosophy that I believe can be practically implemented with more beneficial consequences than negative ones for learners and their classroom environments. It made me aware of how I need to consider the role of an educational psychologist in implementing interventions that include learners more than isolating them, even if this requires more work, consistent supervision and conscious planning with various stakeholders.

4.2.3.2 Parents' conflicting experiences at the school

The participants broached the issue of conflicting experiences of the inclusive education philosophy and although expressing a general opinion that the broader school system was lacking in embracing this new paradigm within which their children should be learning, all them noted how Oakwood Academy as a school had progressively developed inclusive practices, especially via their children's positive integration into the school. This matter was particularly important to reflect on when considering the school as an integral structure for each child's adjustment to the social environment (Charitaki, Marasidi, & Soulis, 2018). Holistic models of inclusion further support learners' social-emotional development in addition to their academic or cognitive abilities (Arango, 2019; Schwab, Gebhardt, Krammer, & Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2015). The educational context and more specifically the Educational Support Programme form part of a system within an ecosystemic framework and have an integral influence on parents' understanding and learners' educational development, and vice versa. Some of the parents did comment that their children's integration into

Oakwood Academy had been slow, especially in the beginning, which might have caused them some concern initially.

> Participant 2: It took us longer; so the integration was harder for high school obviously. I am sure everyone with a kid in the Ed Support Programme has told you the same thing.
>
> Participant 3: So it took time; I felt that there was still a stigma when he was here in Grade 8.

Observations throughout the literature underscore that children with SLDs are often viewed as less acceptable than their classmates because they are more willing to participate in antisocial activities and are less willing to interact with educators and classmates – behaviour that puts them at risk of being isolated by teachers and peers (Bimbu, Polychroni, & Hatzichristou, 2010; Charitaki et al., 2018; Schwab et al., 2015). However, all parents confidently commented on how the school created a platform for their children to cultivate and express their alternative interests and develop them as strengths, which allowed them to not feel defined by their academic abilities in school context and to integrate positively into the school system socially and culturally.

> Participant 1: He mixes well, he is in his committees, he has got friends, he is bubbly, he is a happy, outgoing, very confident child. But from a mixing with other children, blending and adapting to high school, he is perfect. His friends treat him the same, you know, whether he gets 10% or 100% on a test, they treat him the same.
>
> Participant 2: He is enjoying school, he is happy. He has friends now, it took time. I am a fan of it. It is for everybody.
>
> Participant 3: And then the committees; he made lots of friends through that, participating and availing himself. He is keen to do whatever he is asked or whatever is out there; whether it is going to listen to a talk and interacting with his teachers.
>
> Participant 4: So I think that is up to the kid. I think the school encourages it all the way. I think that is up to the child. And there are a million committees; I always tell [my son] if you can’t find something to fit into it is your fault because there are so many. Like you could choose a different thing every day.
>
> Participant 5: She is really integrated brilliantly. Like she’s got loads of friends and she is doing well academically and she does well on the sports field and in the plays and she is very involved. She has been totally so happy.

> Participant 6: She has integrated amazingly. She plays hockey, she is going to play soccer, she played touch rugby. She is in the outreach committee. She has got a great group of friends but it has been a long hard road.

Manoli et al. (2010) argue that the inclusion of these children implies not only their placement in regular schools, but also inclusion in regular classes that should ensure and provide infrastructure for them to function properly. Regarding this study, all the participating parents had praise for the successful integration of their children into the school on account of its multiple, diverse, and smaller learning contexts in which learners could explore the particular interests with which they felt most comfortable. The school was particularly large and several of the parents felt that this had allowed their children not only to have multiple opportunities to explore many social dynamics and groups, but also to gain access to the various committees that reflected wide-ranging interests. These opportunities involved numerous non-academic areas in which learners could express themselves and develop their socialisation skills through interaction with their peers.

Participating parents' experiences therefore did not correlate with the general tenor in the literature that learners with SLDs invariably struggle academically and have trouble with associating psychosocial complexities, which often cause parents and teachers to have cynical perceptions about their successful integration at school (Arango, 2019; Charitaki et al., 2018; Schwab et al., 2015). A reason for this may be that their integration is directly related to their interactions with teachers and peers, requiring social skills that can be even more difficult to manage than academic problems (Bimbu et al., 2010; Charitaki et al., 2018).

Reflexive Journal:

This was especially interesting for me to see because although parents didn't have exclusively negative experiences with the school, they really highlighted how the school's structure and commitment to creating various platforms of interest and focus for a diverse range of learners directly and positively influenced their children's integration at school. This must have had an enormous impact on them as this was a part of the educational system which historically highlighted their children's weaknesses but were also foccusing on their strengths that parents were made aware of over time but alwys felt was ignored by the school.

Although participating parents remarked on how well their children had integrated into the school system despite their SLDs, they had found that the areas related to academic performance and interactions proved to be more difficult and less successful. This reflection by parents in this study was also directly linked to the role of teachers and their influence in personalising and individualising the learning environments of children with SLDs, which enabled them to have a better understanding of their learners' unique experiences, preferences, and needs through a developing teacher–child relationship (Tony, 2019). The bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) suggests that the process of learning and development takes place through teacher–learner interactions in the classroom, which explains why the philosophy of inclusion has encouraged teachers to collaborate in serving learners with SLDs in the general education classroom" (Richards, Pavri, Golez, Canges, & Murphy, 2007, p. 60) as teachers are not just primarily advocates for inclusive education but responsible for practising inclusion (Thomas & Uthaman, 2019; Tony, 2019).

However, current research mentions concerns about teachers' limited knowledge and understanding of SLDs, their symptoms, and best-fit intervention strategies, despite the fact that the teachers generally possess a positive attitude to and genuine appreciation for the principles of inclusion (Arango, 2019; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tiale, 2015; Thomas & Uthaman, 2019; Yuen et al., 2005). Teachers develop their student's perceptions with SLD based on their academic background, but this is risky when teachers in classrooms often manifest negative associations and understanding of children with SLDs (Arango, 2019; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tiale, 2015). The literature findings were echoed by the concerns of participating parents about teachers' not understanding their children's SLDs and having insufficient response strategies and training for providing effective assistance.

> Participant 1: Teachers not understanding their history from primary school. The teachers do not have any idea where these children have come from.

> Participant 2: There was a lack of knowledge and I don't believe they understand when they are faced with kids that do things differently. I would say the teachers need to be educated more.

> Participant 3: They [the teachers] can't understand them the way an educational psychologist who has studied in that arena, can understand them.

Parents in this study were convinced that mainstream teachers were not appropriately trained, which caused them to have a very superficial understanding of each child's SLD (Arango, 2019; Thomas & Uthaman, 2019). The chief responsibility of a teacher is to provide children with successful learning experiences regardless of their barriers to learning, which requires a comprehensive understanding of what the learner is experiencing (Kumar & Raja, 2010; Yuen et al., 2005). The changes in the policy architecture in the mainstream school, addition of material, and technical support – outcomes of sound theoretical intentions – may nevertheless leave learners with SLDs still feeling isolated if theory is not carried into practice by teachers not being sufficiently trained to manage SLDs through appropriate, focused interventions (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tiale, 2015). Teachers therefore need to engage in more multilevel teaching and implement differentiated assessment strategies to adapt the curriculum and teach at a level and in a way that best support all learners (Yuen et al., 2005).

Ntombela (2011) argues that teachers in schools today are assessing learners more than ever, increasing their workload more than before. This additional variable of including children with SLDs in the mainstream classroom weighs heavily on teachers' overall responsibilities and often infringes on the right of all learners to learn smoothly and effortlessly, emphasising teachers' hesitation at times (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tiale, 2015; Hay & Beyers, 2011; Yuen et al., 2005). This sentiment was reflected by participating parents who were of the opinion that teachers were tackling classroom environments that made it more difficult to implement diverse teaching methods and classroom structures that were required for a smooth transition into inclusive learning.

> Participant 1: Classrooms where teachers will scream at him he will not perform at all. He keeps complaining that the teachers are going too fast and that they need to go slower. They are busy and the class is 20 people. They are not teaching him the way he is able to learn – they [the learners] are just not capable of answering questions like that [if quick responses are required]. A teacher cannot slow down, she can't always go back and re-explain and I understand from the teacher's perspective, she has got a syllabus to finish.

> Participant 2: I think even though it is private education, where teachers are probably more tolerant and geared up than if we were talking about a government school, but these teachers aren't geared up. A child comes in that doesn't fit into the box, and they don't know what to do with the child.

> Participant 4: I think the teachers are scared of taking on too much to be honest. So you are in a class with a teacher who you just don't get; your marks are showing that you don't understand, no matter how much effort you put in [they] are struggling with something – give them a head start; it makes no difference.

Some parents in this study have reflected on chaotic classroom structures and sizes that make it difficult for teachers to focus patiently and enthusiastically on the needs of individual learners with SLDs.

> Participant 1: I think the kids are overlooked because they are sitting in a classroom, they are sitting in a class with very mixed academic levels, sometimes in probably the speed at which the teacher needs to move ahead.

Reflexive Journal:

Parents are looking at the practicality of inlcusion through a lens that is filtered by their exposure and active engagement with its implementation at a full-service school. The research site that this study took place at was able to successfully embrace and represent an inclusive philosophy in many areas of the school, but perhaps academically this is still a concern and struggle for many parents and their children with SLDs. How can this gap be bridged to better faciliate the academic experience of learners with SLDs at the current school?

Their experiences of participants have echoed some critical concerns also raised in the literature about the practical feasibility of inclusive education, which is often marked by hesitations and frustrations (Maloni, et al., 2010; Oswald & Swart, 2011). According to Ntombela (2011), inclusion requires that the regular infrastructure of the mainstream school be adjusted to extend services to children with learning barriers, which has led to counterarguments that such initiatives might interfere with the adaptability of other children. Full inclusion might not be the optimal placement for every learner, especially those with SLDs, because the general education dynamics are rarely individualised (Oswald & Swart, 2011). Frequently, the extra burden that teachers must carry in inclusive schools in the inordinate division of attention commitment to children with SLDS can take up precious instructional time, so that teachers may gain the impression that they are engaged more in maintaining class disciplining than in teaching (Maloni, et al., 2010). This can be especially true if general education teachers do not have any additional support staff in the classroom, which was a problem that participating parents were worried about (Oswald & Swart, 2011). Interactions between parents and teachers in the important and evolving context of the school are reflective of Bronfenbrenner’s exploration of the bi-directional narratives and interactions that exist and impact parents’ experiences at the school.

These complex, dynamic teaching circumstances that added further pressure to teachers’ responsibilities beyond the classroom environment, or direct focus on the learners in their classrooms, came to be reflected in the views of participating parents as negative experiences of limited communication with teachers. The special significance of communication – invaluable to informing the roles and responsibilities of parents – was also emphasised by the participants regarding knowledge and “awareness about school events, volunteer opportunities, and teacher contact information, as well as an understanding of school-based material” relating to their children’s school environment or progress, particularly as pertaining to SLDs (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014, p. 526). The experiences of participants in this study conflicted with the expectations outlined in the existing literature because of an overwhelming consensus among participating parents, as expressed by them below, that teachers were not communicative and they lacked direct “on the ground’ knowledge of what is going on with their children’s progress at school.

> Participant 1: So I contacted the teacher myself but I did it; and she gladly helped me, she was very helpful and she gave it to me. [But] I had to ask who she was and how I get a hold of her.

> Participant 2: And at high school level, the norm is for them [teachers] not to get overly involved and not to go out of their way. Very few of them have gone out of their way and very few of them have accommodated us with responding to things on emails. I am not asking for anything else but for the communication to improve with the teachers when you are dealing with a kid that doesn’t fit in the box.

> Participant 4: The teachers need to be more communicative.

> Participant 5: I think Grade 8 you kind of have some teacher feedback but from now I don’t even know what her teachers look like. I mean she just got a report so there are some comments from the teacher, but besides that we have no interaction.

> Participant 6: I said that is not okay the parent needs to know as well; I didn't say it like that but the parents do need to know. We need to understand. There has not been proper communication.

Parenting children with SLDs is an isolating and unfamiliar experience that adds additional stress to the daily complexities that numerous parents have to deal with in their lives (Chien & Lee, 2013; Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013; Guralnick, 2017). Current research emphasises that parents of children with SLDs often struggle with participating in initiatives that are centred on their children's learning, but parents who are actively involved in their children's educational experience benefit from better communication and relationship dynamics with their children, increased parenting efficacy, and valuable relationships with teachers and various stakeholders in school context (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014). This contributes towards and emphasises participating parents' frustration about not receiving consistent communication from teachers about their children's progress or workload, because it leaves them feeling alienated from their child's learning experience. The available research has echoed the sentiments of the participating parents and has indicated that teachers who maintain intentional and consistent communication, feedback, or personal and professional practices fulfil an invaluable function in encouraging parents to be willingly engaged (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014).

4.2.3.3 Assistance from the Educational Support Programme

Educating learners with SLDs has undergone significant shifts because of new policy developments according to which learners are no longer educated or categorised solely in terms of their intellectual and academic abilities, but are all granted equal access to learning opportunities irrespective of learning barriers (Forlin, 2010). This social development is explored as part of the chronosystem in the ecosystemic framework and addresses the intended shift in evolving the political and social narrative that has dominated SLD diagnoses for so long (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Consequently, this has changed the responsibilities and roles of the many professionals who are actively involved in supporting learners. It also served as motivation for Oakwood Academy's creation and development of its Educational Support Programme as an official framework in which various professionals can collaborate. The programme prioritises encouragement of a focus on learners' progress and worthiness, actively reflecting the assets-based approach paradigm of positivity (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001). The aims and functioning of this programme were outlined in Chapter 3, and the participants' perspective on their experiences is discussed below. Their views provided insight into their personal understanding of psycho-social support from within the school context in their journey of supporting their children.

Every classroom, school or learning environment boasts a wide range of assets that should be identified as quickly as possible because they actively create effective learning environments. One of the best ways to identify these assets would be to draw an asset map with all the "skills, talents, capacities and resources that are available" (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001, p. 151). Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) have pointed out that because of the diverse and increasing schooling options to which parents have access, there need to be important and numerous defining and differentiating factors about a school that sets it apart and according to which parents can judge how well it is equipped for facilitating their child's progress in learning and development over time. The participants expressed their initial enthusiasm about the program and how it ultimately incentivised their decision to choose this particular high school, despite its intimidating size and well-known high academic expectations. A school's culture, ethos and departments prioritised for providing specialised assistance are closely linked to the levels of learners' social and academic outcomes (Forlin, 2010). In this study, the participating parents were aware that the school prioritised learners with SLDs and supported their successful integration into a mainstream school system through an official programme with recognised responsibilities. Considering that children with SLDs are most vulnerable academically and socially in the initial phase of enrolling at a new school, the existence of the programme encouraged the participants to trust the school as an educational context in which their children's needs would be understood.

> Participant 1: I had no hesitation whatsoever. I was very excited about it, very. Very enthusiastic but I might have had a bit of an over-enthusiastic view of what the Ed Support actually was. I was expecting something a little bit different to what I am seeing.

> Participant 2: So I wouldn't have gone to [to the school] if it wasn't there. I was very nervous for her to go. Very. Their grade is the biggest intake in 10 years; there are over 200 kids. And her diagnosis was social anxiety! So I was very worried.

Participant 3: We were going to give it a try. I knew that he could only come here because that existed. If it didn't exist I wouldn't have made the choice to come here. Not because I had another child here and it was convenient, not at all. It was because I knew it was in place that we had a good chance of making this work well for him.

Participant 5: I was enthusiastic because the other schools actually don't offer an Ed Support Programme. So I was enthusiastic although I had heard from other parents that it wasn't as amazing as it seemed to be and when my son was coming into Ed Support, he had a temper tantrum because he is a rugby player and he likes the girls and he was not going to Ed Support because people tease you.

Parents observed how influential their awareness of the programme was in offering them alternatives in choosing a high school for their children, despite concerns from other parents in the community about its credibility. Irrespective of doubt expressed by others, the parents realised the importance of a school context that offered hands-on support and a genuine understanding of SLDs. Observations in the literature correlated with the sentiments expressed by the participating parents by noting that parents' "values and habits serve as a filter to determine what factors, priorities or utilities they seek to maximize in their choice of schools" (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007, p. 92). As parents with children with SLDs, the participants – unlike other parents – were confronted with limited choices in selecting appropriate educational options for their children and were initially at least strongly influenced in their selection by the fact that the Oakwood Academy offered a dedicated Educational Support Programme.

Although the presence of this support programme was sufficient in itself to encourage parents to entrust their children to its framework of support, it appeared that some parents came to experience doubts about the effectiveness of the programme in the later phases of their children's schooling. It is possible that such signs of disillusionment might have been due to unrealistic expectations of a programme ultimately aimed at addressing the needs of learners with SLDs to ensure that they learn in a productive, integrated, and resourceful environment. Parents in this study reflected their understanding of how important a function the Educational Support Programme fulfilled in facilitating academic maintenance and growth for their children, especially because of their unique learning needs as individuals.

> Participant 2: They are there to guide you and they have experience and that they have got very educated experienced social workers working there; it is important. Not because it was mainstream and it is just a support system. That to me is what it is.

> Participant 4: The kids who are in the Ed Support Programme are going to become politicians and entrepreneurs because they have to think out the box. The fact that it is available is huge.

> Participant 5: I think what the Ed Support Programme is, is that they are giving them extra help in subjects like English, Afrikaans and Maths. I don't know if it is beneficial. As far as I know, I think there is no Ed Support system.

Thus, the participating parents had no substantial doubt about the value of the Educational Support Programme and acknowledged that they understood its contribution to the school system and learners' well-being in providing additional academic and psychosocial support. Some hesitation expressed by other parents as reported by participants, as well as by some participants themselves, should be viewed against the ramifications of the phenomenon investigated. For example, McDonald, Miller, and Sandler (2015) have highlighted how complicated collaboration between parents and community professionals can be and that it takes time to evolve a relationship of trust between families, schools and the community to realise the goals of inclusion, which "has the capacity to increase both overall child well-being and learning outcomes" (p. 227).

Reflexive Journal:

There is a need for better communication and explanation about the educational support programme and what being part of it means to parents. This is causing a breakdown in any potential for collaboration from the very beginning and risks parent involvement and interest in supporting their children's progress.

A learning environment builds the foundation from which all learning and progress takes shape, which is why the school itself has the responsibility to support and facilitate the holistic development of learners towards accomplishing their academic potential and goals. Success in this endeavour requires sound communication and effective collaboration among learners, teachers, therapists, and parents (Phillippo & Stone, 2006). Current research therefore emphasises the importance of collaborating with parents in encouraging learner development holistically. However, several participants in this study mentioned a lack of understanding about the practical functioning of Oakwood Academy's Educational Support Programme and professed to having virtually no knowledge of daily, active support offered to their children. This restriction appeared to present a fundamental barrier to effective collaboration in encouraging parents to become actively involved in their children's progress.

> Participant 1: I don't even know who takes him or what they do, how often they have it. I just know they have it instead of Hebrew, but I don't know what they do in these classes. Has my child been gaining anything from these extra Ed Support classes? There are a lot of parents who don't really know what their kids do every day.

> Participant 4: I think that the Ed Support Programme in principal is a brilliant, brilliant idea and I think it is so needed, but use that time wisely. So I am not quite sure what their role is. I think that they can be a lot more proactive.

> Participant 5: I don't know what they do in those lessons. I don't even know who takes her for any subjects in the Ed Support Programme. I don't really think there is much support, but maybe I also haven't asked for it.

Having minimal and restricted awareness of what the Educational Support Programme practically did on a daily basis, with little being clarified or communicated to them by their children, the participants were questioning whether sufficient support, if any, was being offered to their children since it could not be identified by anyone other than the school itself. Because of a lack of understanding and limited knowledge about what the Educational Support Programmed did, parents felt frustrated with the school and expressed a general lack of satisfaction with what was being delivered.

> Participant 1: I am fighting back because a child can't go and join a clinic with children that are trying to get 90% and that is why they are going to the clinic.

> Participant 4: I don't think that they use the time wisely; I really don't. I think a lot of the time it's just okay kids do your homework. I also think that they promise the world; like I am going to sit with your child once a week and we are going to do a study programme and I am going to show them study skills; never happens, never happens.

> Participant 5: I think maybe the school should have fought for it [more concessions]. We will probably have to apply again which means we will have to have another assessment and pay again. I think as far as she says they are frees. The Ed Support Programme could offer them more emotional support.

A significant contributing factor identified in the interviews regarding the insufficiency in parents' knowledge of what the Educational Support Programme actually entailed at a practical level was the lack of communication and feedback. One parent did mention that she had a positive experience in maintaining communication with the psychologists from the programme.

> Participant 3: The Ed Support phoned me after the report came out to congratulate [my son], to say that really we have got nothing to worry about, it's like onwards and upwards for the next 18 months.

However, this was not confirmed by other parents who felt that they received no communication and how frustrating this was.

> Participant 1: I don't get feedback from the school – so I think feedback from the school in that this is what we have been doing in the Ed Support for this term. I haven't had any communication. There is general communication to the Ed Support parents about a class or when the clinics are. But no feedback.

> Participant 4: I think a bit more communication would be really nice; maybe explain the Ed Support Programme to us at the beginning of every year. What their plans and goals are, that would be amazing. As I said earlier I just think a little bit more communication would be good.

These parents acknowledged the Educational Support Programme's communication at an organisational level, meaning that parents were made aware of clinics or examination programming. However, they did not receive sufficient feedback that allowed them to understand what their children were gaining or in what areas they were developing, and they expressed the opinion that they would have appreciated such information. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model and systems theory, along with an organisational development philosophy, are invaluable for understanding that by fostering and nurturing the interactive and interdependent relationships within the school community and between the multiple systems affecting it, a philosophy of inclusivity is fostered naturally and more comprehensive interventions can be delivered (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). The most successful way to accomplish this is through consistent communication and feedback between all stakeholders in the school context.

Reflexive Journal:

This has made me reflect on how the educational support programme can better facilitate communication with parents. This is an essential need that is currently not sufficient enough and filtering into many other areas of the triadic relationship, negatively impacting many potential positive interactions.

Although the participants experienced some conflicting feelings regarding the Educational Support Programme, they did underscore the value of its assistance to their children that in turn filtered through as indirect support to them as parents. Parents feel most supported when their children are encouraged in their learning environment. Two key areas that parents focused on were the alternative Hebrew classes that were offered to the learners and the assistance to learners in obtaining assessment accommodations from educational bodies for their examinations or learning conditions.

> Participant 1: They have taken his stress of Hebrew off him because he struggled immensely with Hebrew, he is in a class where he feels like he is on top of it. When he saw 72% for Hebrew on his report, I don't know, this child was ecstatic. That is when he felt I am on top of my game because I can do this.

> Participant 2: I can't fault it. I personally have only had good experiences. But the Ed Support System from my side is a pretty well-thought-out system, so far.

> Participant 3: The biggest accomplishment and celebration we had was when the concession came through after many, many trials and appeals to the IEB. I think it is great. I haven't had any problems; everybody has responded to me quickly if I have had concerns about him academically. We are fortunate that we could stay at the school because of the interventions, the support, the care, like I say the benefit of the doubt, like everything. I think they are a very, very worthy department. I mean I don't believe the school could do without them because I mean for many children… I have had a child in the school before who didn't even know they existed or look at them or go near them because that is not what she needed. But for a child coming in from a remedial environment, where they know that is their safe space, and that it is available.

> Participant 4: He has got an Afrikaans exemption. I think probably the fact that they don't do mainstream Hebrew, because I think that is really, really difficult for a child with any learning disability. It was a big extra subject that they didn't have to worry about. I wanted them both to be in it to be able to give them the opportunity to be the best that they can be.

> Participant 5: The only person that we do have a little bit of interaction with is her psychologist. We do get messages for the Ed Support kids that there is extra Afrikaans and a few things like that. The main thing about the Ed Support Programme is that you don't need to do Hebrew.

> Participant 6: The psychologist is applying to the IEB to get an Afrikaans concession. Just that I know that it is around and it's available. So now she is in the Ed Support Programme and she is not doing such high-level Hebrew, so that is a big help. That is where it is the biggest help. It takes the stress off by not having that high-level Hebrew So it gives her a bit of a break in that she is only doing like half a subject.

Parents observed that it would have been difficult for them if their children had to manage the mainstream levels of Hebrew, which would have added considerably to the pressures on their children's lives both inside and outside the classroom. Although it is possible for learners with SLDs to learn a foreign language, it remains a difficult challenge for them (Myer & Ganschow, 1988). The participants noted furthermore that their children were better able to confront examinations and learning circumstances because of the various accommodations and concessions that were organised and facilitated for by the counsellors and psychologists running the Educational Support Programme. Thus, in spite of doubts that the parents had voiced about the efficacy of the programme, the psychologists and counsellors were key components of the programme that made parents feel supported and part of a bigger team that provided the best intervention strategies.

> Participant 2: Lots of kids have it! We will get on with it, he will be fine, we will work around it. That is why I am grateful to the counsellor that Ed Support because if I didn't have her... Without them he would have drowned, no question. My son would have been in a stronger position if I would have had the counsellors and Ed Support supporting us from day one.

> Participant 3: They taught me to manage my expectations well. They have given him the benefit of the doubt, like not said look you have really failed flat out you need to leave the school. Incredible. We wouldn't have been able to do it without that department and programme because they have held our hand and given us confidence, they have had faith in my son. So they have given him skills, they have had an open-door policy. I remember the relief my son had in Grade 8 when the educational psychologist said, if I am not here just put a piece of paper under my door and I will get back to you. I mean that was like giving him a million dollars because when things were just too hectic, he had somewhere to go. I think more importantly is the availability and having someone you feel understands you one on one.

> Participant 4: So from a social work point of view, like I know [my son] has a great relationship with [counsellor], whenever we shout at him he goes and reports us.

> Participant 5: I think the relationship I have with the psychologist, when I have asked her for support or I have asked her to help us with subject choices and that she has been helpful.

The most positive references for the Educational Support programme and channels of psychosocial support related to the psychologists and counsellors, not only for their practical assistance but also because parents felt understood. Although the participants mentioned that they had struggled to gain access to external forms of psychosocial support, they felt confident in their abilities to support their children by being aware of the Educational Support Programme and that advice could be obtained from the counsellors.

Theme 3 was developed by focusing on the parents' perceptions of the school system and their experiences of engaging with the school that their children are attending. Critical analysis of their multifaceted encounters indicated that the parents had experienced limited feedback and inconsistency in information, which gave rise to frustration about being insufficiently informed about the practical aspects of the Educational Support Programme. Despite several conflicting and difficult encounters, parents were appreciative of the understanding and support provided by the counsellors and psychologists in the department, more specifically assistance in terms of assessments, concessions for examinations, and alternative Hebrew classes. It appeared that parents felt most positive about their experiences of psychosocial support in having the reassurance that their children were not only benefitting from educational guidance, but were also deriving long-term advantage from gaining self-confidence about their abilities and who they were.

4.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The themes and subthemes that emerged from this research study were interpreted and discussed in this chapter. This was done within the framework of existing literature and with consistent reflection by the researcher.

CHAPTER 5:
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides an overview aimed at bringing the study to a coherent close and serving as the background for the contextualisation of the findings in response to the research question. It includes a summary of and reflection on the findings. The strengths and limitations of the study are critically considered, followed by recommendations for potential future investigations into and exploration of the research problem that was addressed.

5.2 SUMMARY

This study aimed to explore parents' experiences of psychoeducational support for learners with SLDs. A brief summary of the research process and findings will be described below.

5.2.1 Motivation and rationale

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of parents of children with SLDs, specifically focusing on their perceptions of psychoeducational support. The rationale behind research of this nature was the evolving concern about the phenomenon of SLDs and how parents' perceptions of their child's diagnosis influences their role as parents and the quality of support offered to their children. The intention of this investigation was to gain insight into the world of this particular group of parents and gain a better understanding of their knowledge about SLDs and their experiences of initiatives by schools to facilitate interventions or manage educational and even psychosocial difficulties usually associated with these disorders. Since SLDs exert a far-reaching impact on various areas of people's lives, research of this nature could potentially contribute to better structures of support for parents and interactions between them and educators, ultimately leading to more effective interventions in the problems of children with SLDs. This study was motivated by the fact that parents have difficult and demanding responsibilities in counteracting the negative effects of their children's SLD and meeting their co-occurring physical, emotional, and academic needs (Smith, Cheater, & Bekker, 2013). Parents' lives are often disrupted and their strengths, resources and circumstances are threatened, which is a major concern because of the decisive roles that they fulfil in their children’s nurturing and personal growth.

Thus, reflection on and careful consideration of the above problems created the framework in which this research question evolved: “How do parents of children who manifest with specific learning disorders in a full-service high school experience psychoeducational support?”

5.2.2 Research design and methodology

Using the qualitative approach of IPA, this research study has endeavoured to investigate six participants’ lived experiences and perceptions of psychoeducational support. Taking subject and context into consideration, the aim of data analysis in IPA is to explore in detail the participants’ personal phenomenological experience and can be described as idiographic, interactive, and inductive with underpinning phenomenological, interpretative, and postmodern approaches (Babbie, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Gray, 2017). Because the main was to gain a holistic understanding of a specific phenomenon through the investigation of subjective experiences, it was decided that a descriptive qualitative approach using the lens of IPA was the design best suited for this study (Babbie, 2016; De Vos et al., 2011; Maree, 2016). Semi-structured interviews and historicity questionnaires were the primary method for the collection of data that were thematically analysed according to the IPA guidelines (Alase, 2017; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). A purposive convenience sampling technique was adopted as appropriate for the IPA method (Gray, 2017). Taking the expectations of qualitative research, IPA and the data collection methods into account, the researcher acknowledged her subjective role in the research and incorporated reflexivity into the analysis process to eliminate bias (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Owing to the sensitive nature of this study, careful consideration was given to ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and quality throughout to ensure reliability and credibility (Kumar, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

5.2.3 Main findings from the research question

Through the use of primary data collection, thematic analysis, and IPA, the investigation of shared experiences of the six participants and subsequent data suggested three thematic main findings and subsequent subthemes in this study.

These themes were discussed in detail in Chapter 4 and included excerpts from the participant interviews and several personal reflections from researcher that elucidated them. An overview of the themes follows below.

The participants described their dynamic experiences as parents of children with SLDs and it was apparent that this was a shared complexity between children and parents that also exerted a significantly disruptive influence on the lives and responsibilities of the latter. Thus, if considered in terms of Bronfenbrenner's model, the learners' evolving environments were influenced by the pivotal roles and responsibilities of various other stakeholders such as parents and teachers, but the parents noted that their lives were affected in turn. This first theme of parental experience did not entail negative perceptions only, since it became evident that the parents had a more evolved and progressive approach toward SLDs and its implications. There was a shared reflection among the participants that society had made considerable progress towards combating and overcoming the stigma about SLDs, but they also agreed that this did not necessarily imply adequate understanding from their (the parents') peers of what living with SLD entails – for such understanding people had to have been directly exposed to the phenomenon themselves.

The participants further explored their experiences by emphasising the lack of understanding that confused them about SLDs, especially initially, despite the relief that a diagnosis eventually brought to them. They needed to accept their new reality regardless of the accompanying pain and anxiety, as this gave them an opportunity to accept their children for who they were – a major motivating factor for becoming actively involved in their children's development. Parents analysed the life-long challenges, difficulties, and burdens of SLDs that compromised their abilities to provide appropriate and consistent support to their children. This highlights the appropriateness of applying Bronfenbrenner's approach to understanding human development, in this case parents' contribution to and influence on their child's progress over time, bearing in mind that their motivations are also directed by their own interactions with and perceptions of the different systems of their life environments (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

The second theme that was derived from the interview data related to the support that the participants had to provide. Besides the conventional obligations that all parents have, the participants, as parents of children with SLDs, had additional, more challenging responsibilities which ensued from the atypical circumstances and emotional perspectives affecting their parental task of caring. An SLD is often accompanied by adjunct ramifications with further constraining repercussions for parents' already onerous duties in child-raising. Their difficulties in supporting their children are exacerbated by the complexity of a phenomenon that they do not grasp adequately, which undermines their confidence and motivation. Knowledge about a problem that must of necessity be dealt with is a prerequisite that many parents of children with SLDs lack. The participants emphasised their limited understanding of the SLD diagnosis, particularly at the beginning, and described how this negatively influenced their self-assurance and abilities to know what their children needed and how best to support them practically. In requiring guidance towards better insight, they felt that they had not been adequately supported by advice or insight from psychologists and educators who, ironically, tended to focus on the problems associated with SLDs rather than on alleviating the concerns of the parents. It is therefore significant that the participants concurred that although dealing with SLDs was an isolating journey, their road was considerably smoothed when being given access to clarifying knowledge and practical advice from educational or therapy professionals, as well as genuine understanding from their friends and family. They further discussed their children's experiences of SLDs according to their personal understanding and perspective, which facilitated an individualised view of their experiences. It appeared that the parents might even have empowered by a phenomenon that they had observed in their children, who had been pushed out of their comfort zones and had to be encouraged to tackle diverse and challenging experiences that made them vulnerable and often compromised their self-confidence. A correlation of the experiences both of parents and of their children was discernible because of having to become aware of a difficulty and dealing with it as best they could. Moreover, the participants observed that when they had won sufficient insight into their children's lived experiences, they were more confident and better equipped to intervene responsibly and ensure that a diagnosis of SLD did not define their children's personal growth and academic journeys. This insight about not being defined by negative societal labels also enriched the life-experience of the parents themselves, as they implied in their interview communication, although some of them may even have been unaware of this.

The pattern of awareness or knowledge followed by effective action or initiatives could also be related to the role of the school in a systemic perspective. Although a theoretical ideal, it was clear that the third theme of the school's practical challenging role of facilitating support was firmly embedded in a systemic framework. Knowledge at microsystemic to exosystemic level could be considered the life-blood flowing through the entire ecosystem that was investigated. If changes in the educational landscape globally from the 1990s are related to the local South African situation, the chronosystem also had a crucial role to play in inclusiveness in education.

Considered according to Bronfenbrenner's bioecosystemic model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Christensen, 2016), the views of the participating parents revealed and interplay ranging from the microsystem to the mesosystem in particular; in other words, from their child's microsystemic personal domestic life-world, to the mesosystemic schooling world, to the exosystemic influences from economic to educational requirements, and even to macrosystemic community and societal values. Although unaware of doing so, parents communicated their experiences of the school context in facilitation towards supporting their children's educational, emotional, and social needs within the framework of the Bronfenbrenner model as perceived by the researcher.

The third theme was derived from parents highlighted concerns around the narrow thinking about educational and cognitive abilities throughout the broader school system, which contradicts the national pursuit of inclusion throughout South Africa and ignores children's unique strengths and abilities. The school system is the most relevant and attainable system of supported learning for children with SLDs that parents rely on, even though they do not have direct access to it. In the case of this investigation, Bronfenbrenner's model helps to highlight how the parents understood and engaged the complex school context that influenced their experiences of psychoeducational support for their children. For example, the principle of interaction between various systems as explained by Bronfenbrenner (see § 2.2.1) could be illustrated by the participants' perception that, as a result of their contact or interaction with the school, their confidence in and commitment towards coping with their children's SLD had been affected positively. Within Oakwood Academy's context, parents have emphasised how the school successfully created platforms for learners to discover and evolve their wide-ranging interests, allowing them to feel successful at school despite their academic challenges. The scope thus provided to them fostered an experience of overall positive integration into Oakwood Academy, especially socially. Concerning academic expectations, however, the participants regarded the demands as far more difficult. Despite Oakwood Academy's committed pursuit of inclusion, parents believed that the dynamics of bigger classrooms and concerns around teachers' understanding of and capacity for educating learners with diverse needs mitigated against the practical implementation of inclusiveness. They also concurred that the lack of communication from teachers was another weakness that inhibited positive experiences of psychoeducational support.

Regarding their experience of the Educational Support Programme, which Oakwood Academy presented as its most significant resource for parents and their children with SLDs in high-school context, the participants expressed ambivalent feelings. Their initial enthusiasm about the programme came to be diluted in the course of time, in all likelihood because of initial high expectations about the programme's efficacy not being realised. A major reason for this was that the parents had a limited understanding of how the programme functioned in practice and had virtually no information about what it was offering their children on a daily, consistent basis. The parents all appeared to know about Hebrew being taken away as a subject and minimising the pressure placed on their children. Dissatisfaction with Oakwood Academy's support programme seemed to be rooted in a lack of adequate feedback and communication on learners' progress from the persons presenting it. However, the participants noted that the counsellors and psychologists made parents and children alike feel supported. For some of the parents, even simply knowing that professionals were available for advice contributed positively to their experiences of psychoeducational support from the school. This highlights the necessity for each system within the ecosystemic framework to support these parents of children with SLDs, because how parents identify, utilise, and collaborate with their support structures will effectively influence quality support provided for their children's psychosocial and academic development (Johnson, 2008, Starr, 2006).

5.3 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

The following aspects could be considered strengths that contributed to the endeavour of exploring the research problem.

The school management of the research site found the research topic to be interesting and relevant to their context and student-parent body when presented with the proposal. The department managing the Educational Support Programme was enthusiastic to participate in this study and wished to explore parents' experiences of SLDs and interactions with the programme since involvement could improve its support, services, and intervention strategies for appropriate support through gaining a better understanding of the needs of parents. This facilitated the initial process of the research as the researcher was furnished with a list of parents whose children were enrolled in the Educational Support Programme and was granted convenient access to the school grounds for the interviews.

The interviews were conducted at a time and on a day that were most suitable to the parents, which meant that each participant could be focused and present in their interview. Feeling comfortable in a convenient environment encouraged them to be frank, open, and forthright when discussing their experiences with the researcher. In turn, the researcher was enabled to give personalised and individualised attention to each participant throughout their interactions as there were no distractions to what could be described as sensitive sharing in "pockets in time".

The small sample size of the study meant that the researcher could maintain a specific focus and intention throughout the data collection, which enabled descriptive and distinctive findings to emerge throughout the data analysis. This aided consistency and similarity in the data that were collected, thus facilitating adequate data saturation.

The paradigmatic framework of IPA within qualitative research was pre-eminently suitable for the research study as the researcher could gain an in-depth, personal interpretation of participants' experiences. Because the IPA approach is less restrictive by nature, it allowed the participants to feel in control of their narrative.

The findings of this research may contribute to improving on and developing support structures for parents of children with SLDs, especially through having indicated the need for effective communication that could encourage a wide range of psychosocial and psychoeducational insights into what parents and their children need to feel supported in counteracting negative ramifications of SLDs.

The research participants and researcher were from the same cultural community context, which enabled the latter to have a fundamental understanding of the many underlying concerns, expectations, and circumstances that influenced parents' experiences that were spoken about but not necessarily elaborated on.

No contradictory or significant differences were apparent in the experiences reported by participating parents which contributed to the credibility of the findings.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limiting aspects of the study can be divided into two groups: generic aspects over which the researcher had no control and specific aspects that related to the study as an individualised inquiry.

The generic limitations related to the nature of the investigation as a qualitative study for which a specific methodology had to be employed. Qualitative phenomenological research aims to be aware of and focus on the experiences of each participant and is a process that requires meticulous attention to detail. However, this was also a possible limitation of the study and could potentially invite criticism regarding limited applicability as there is a single researcher collecting potentially subjective data from parents in the interviews. This issue related to the typical problem of transferability that characterises ideographically directed research.

A pertinent issue of method involved the audio-recording of all the interviews and discussions, which was important for accurate transcriptions. However, it later revealed a problematic question about interpretation of the data since the approach had an unforeseen impact on the transcriptions in two ways. The transcriptions were done a few days after each interview and it was no longer possible to remember all the non-verbal cues that the participants expressed. It would therefore have been better to write down more specific reflections throughout the interviews, but this could have impeded the natural flow of conversation. Ideal, however, would have been to video-record the discussions and interviews, which would later have allowed the researcher to take note of body language and facial expressions as an additional way of collecting data when transcribing and looking for themes.

Convenience and purposive sampling meant that all the participants were parents of children with SLDs who were attending a specific community, full-service school at which they were enrolled in its Educational Support Programme. It is important to note that although both parents of a child were invited to participate in the research, only mothers responded and took part in the study. Consequently, a form of bias might be identified because the participants were interviewed in a specific academic setting, and that the validity and generalisability of the research findings might be restricted to mothers in this environment and in a specific community context. Thus, further research is indicated in a similar educational environment, but in different communities and with the inclusion of fathers, to improve the generalisability of the current findings.

The research was focused on parents of children with SLDs, but neither for parents nor for children use was made of further particulars such as specific diagnostic category, age or gender. It was consequently not possible to determine whether these aspects would have indicated differences among parents' experiences or whether commonalities would have been possible to identify. Although the perceptions or experiences of parents could not be correlated by more detailed categorisation, the researcher strived to focus the investigation appropriately on the issues central to the research.

The quality of the data could have been improved through more comprehensive and varied data collection. Time constrains, *inter alia*, motivated the researcher's selection of semi-structured interviews since doubts existed whether parents would be willing to commit themselves to more demanding structured, in-depth interviews, for instance. The nature of the semi-structured interviews limited opportunities for more pertinent questions to be asked and answered by participants. This influenced the researcher's ability to gain relevant data that provided a more diverse and in-depth understanding of the participating parents' experiences. Introducing additional data collection methods would have been beneficial so that participants would have time to reflect on their experiences and perceptions or express themselves in other ways.

A specific issue of concern was that the researcher's life context was different from those of the participants in that the parents would have difficulty responding to an unmarried younger person without children, let alone a child with an SLD. However, all the participants proved to be generous in sharing their vulnerable stories and grateful for the opportunity to discuss their experiences.

Lastly, the limited academic literature specifically relevant to parents of children with SLDs in a full-service high school's experiences of psycho-social support in South Africa presented itself as a frustrating limitation initially. There was more research material available on the overall experiences of parents of children with SLDs in more general contexts and in other countries, however these were used as guiding frameworks that the researcher would refer to.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can be made in relating the findings of this study to other research findings in the literature. The three themes that emerged from this investigation focused on parents' experiences – in an educational milieu – of SLDs, supporting children with SLDs, and the school's challenging role in facilitating intervention/support to learners and ultimately parents. One of the central aims of this research study was to consider the narrative of support from an ecosystemic perspective. The intention was to arrive at recommendations that would not only be relevant or applicable to the current context of parents at Oakwood Academy, but also across the board to parents of children with SLDs and schools who are committed to creating inclusive learning environments for these children.

Parents voiced their concerns about the limited amount of readily understandable, practical information that was made available to them, especially when they initially found out about their children's SLD diagnosis. This made the experience overwhelming and intimidating for them and, feeling at a loss, they thought themselves incapable of providing the relevant and appropriate intervention for their children. Most of the participants noted how they wished they had been given more understandable and detailed feedback regarding SLD and more particularly tools that would help them cope with its demanding circumstances. Support should therefore be contextualised in a systemic framework so that professionals in the community, such as educational stakeholders and psychologists who have the resources to facilitate psychoeducational assistance, should recognise how much parents would benefit from more practical guidance about their children’s schooling in particular. The challenges of concerns about a child’s educational and career prospects cannot be underestimated, and the positive ripple effect that academic aid from schools to learners with SLDs can have on the lives of their parents may be invaluable. These parents already have to deal with their multiple demanding domestic, career and community obligations in circumstances that others do not fully understand. Relief provided in their children’s schooling system may contribute significantly to minimising parents’ feelings of isolation and lack of support by enhancing their skills for building their resilience. Specifically in the context of the school that served as the research site it appeared that a clearly expressed need existed for the improvement of communication channels so that parents could assume the role of proactive partners – confident in their own abilities and those of their children – in accompanying their children in their educational journey at school. If feasible, this commitment should be carried over into fostering a community awareness around SLDs and the value of promoting the cause of inclusiveness in South African society as a whole.

The broader family often has to bear the impact of a diagnosis of an SLD in a child, which necessitates an awareness of its ecosystemic effects between individual, family, school, and community. As a source of learning and knowledge, the school could fulfil an important function in guidance and counselling not only to individual learners, but also to their families in order to mitigate their feelings of being isolated or their needs being sidelined.

There is a need for teachers to be trained to deal with larger class numbers and accommodate the wide range of learning needs, specifically those of children with SLDs. Teachers need to be equipped with the tools to teach in ways that are reflective of inclusion and be given additional information, resources, and assistance to engage with learners confidently and more comprehensively. Knowing that this is something that has been prioritised in schools, encourages parents and fosters the parent–educator relationship, especially through the development of more consistent feedback and communication.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In view of the highlighted strengths and limitations of the study outlined above, the following recommendations may be put forward for consideration.

Through exploring and gaining better insight into parents' experiences as voiced from vulnerable and personal perspectives, valid and significant contributions can be made in informing future research in what parents practically need to feel supported and empowered to facilitate their child's development and growth. This would potentially include specific strategies and initiatives that could improve parents' experiences of psychoeducational support.

A research study that consists of a larger sample size and includes both mothers and fathers would increase the amount of comparative data that is developed. This can be accomplished by interviewing parents who are not part of an organised educational support programme such as offered at the research site for this investigation, but who have children with diverse learning disorders and psychoeducational needs. Such an investigation could also focus on discovering whether mothers and fathers differ in their attitudes, perceptions and experiences of aiding the learning of their children with SLDs. It could also be considered to compare the views of parents from the same families with those of mothers and fathers from different nuclear families. Moreover, this inquiry focused pertinently on the experiences of parents, which leaves a gap in research for investigations into the roles, responsibilities, and experiences of, for example, other family members such as siblings, or teaching staff at schools.

It would be further advisable to examine existing structures of support and explore the ways in which they can be more made more accessible to parents, especially those who have limited resources. Such investigations could derive special benefit from the expertise and inputs of school-based support teams for conversations about increasing collaboration. Despite the doubts that some participants had expressed about the effectiveness of Oakwood Academy's Educational Support Programme, the indications were that poor communication may have led to lack of clarity about the initiatives undertaken. A single remark in a qualitative investigation may be highly significant in hinting at an underlying question for further investigation. In respect of the various uncertainties voiced about the programme, one participant had observed, "I don't really think there is much support, but maybe I also haven't asked for it." The findings thus indicate the importance of the Educational Support Programme at Oakwood Academy, and deeper investigation into the structure and contributions of similar programmes at other educational venues could serve to inform further training for teachers in successfully accommodating diverse learning needs.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter summarised the research study, followed by a discussion of the findings that emerged, including the strengths and limitations of the investigation. Key to the findings was the emphasis that the participating parents placed on the fact that when their children were accommodated and supported in surmounting their learning difficulties, they as parents gained by feeling more confident in their roles and responsibilities. A further highly significant indication was that they appeared to be less concerned with the theoretical research concept of an SLD diagnosis of their children, but were seriously interested in practical, “hands-on” ways of coping with a perplexing “phenomenon” in a day-to-day, living experience context. This need, if viewed in a bioecological perspective, could also be interpreted in the framework of interaction between the various systems of Bronfenbrenner’s model.

The special significance of this model, as noted by Johnson (2008), is vested in the concept of development, pertinently that of the individual in a social context. Assistance to the individual learner appeared to have a positive ripple effect beyond the learner’s microsystem of family, peers, neighbourhood, and school, into the mesosystem of linkages involving the relationships of family experiences to school circumstances, school experiences to therapeutic interventions, and family experiences to peer interactions (Swick & Williams, 2006). As noted before, Johnson sees the organisational “mesosystem of an individual school ... in the interactions and dynamics between two of its microsystems, students [learners] and parents” (Johnson, 2008, pp. 2–3). It is for this reason that the role of the Educational Support Programme at Oakwood Academy came to feature prominently in the findings that emerged from the analysis of the participating parents’ experiences.

In providing psychoeducational support to children with SLDs via its Educational Support Programme, Oakwood Academy fulfils an important role that has a positive societal impact. Whether parents viewed the efforts of the programme as effective or not in its implementation, it was significant that none of them denied its meaningfulness in principle.

The findings of this study cannot be viewed as levelling criticism against Oakwood Academy's Educational Support Programme, since the participants' views were subjective perceptions that had to be interpreted for meaning-making of a real-life phenomenon. Although practical implementation of the programme's inclusion efforts could perhaps be subject to criticism by parents of children with SLDs, it was evident that they appreciated the principles to which it subscribed. When carried into effect, these principles involve not only the empowerment of parents and children who have to cope with SLDs, but also the furthering of societal ideals that are essential for building stable, equitable communities.

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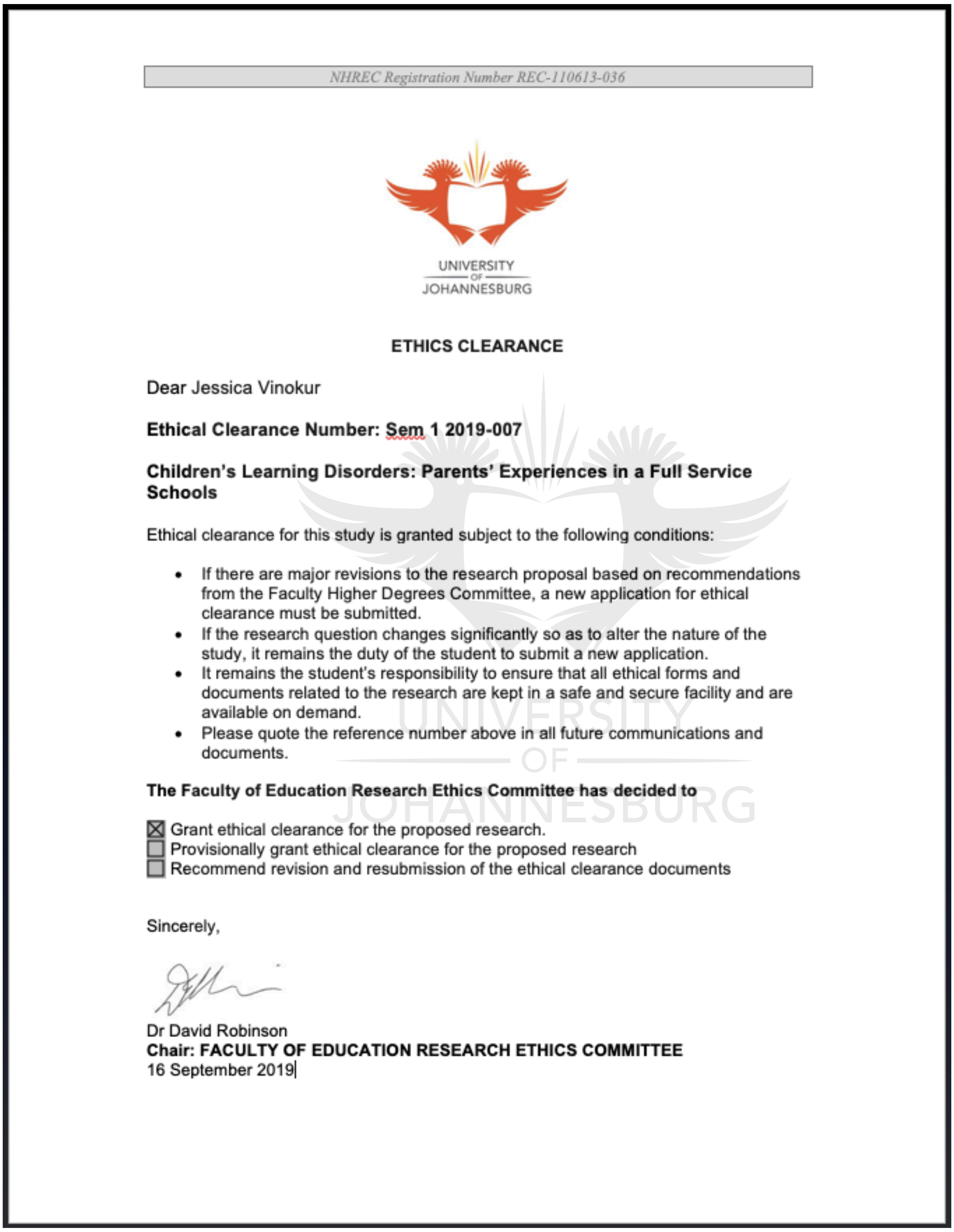
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PERMISSIONS

University of Johannesburg Ethics Clearance



NHREC Registration Number REC-110613-036

UNIVERSITY
OF
JOHANNESBURG

ETHICS CLEARANCE

Dear Jessica Vinokur

Ethical Clearance Number: Sem 1 2019-007

Children's Learning Disorders: Parents' Experiences in a Full Service Schools

Ethical clearance for this study is granted subject to the following conditions:

- If there are major revisions to the research proposal based on recommendations from the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted.
- If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, it remains the duty of the student to submit a new application.
- It remains the student's responsibility to ensure that all ethical forms and documents related to the research are kept in a safe and secure facility and are available on demand.
- Please quote the reference number above in all future communications and documents.

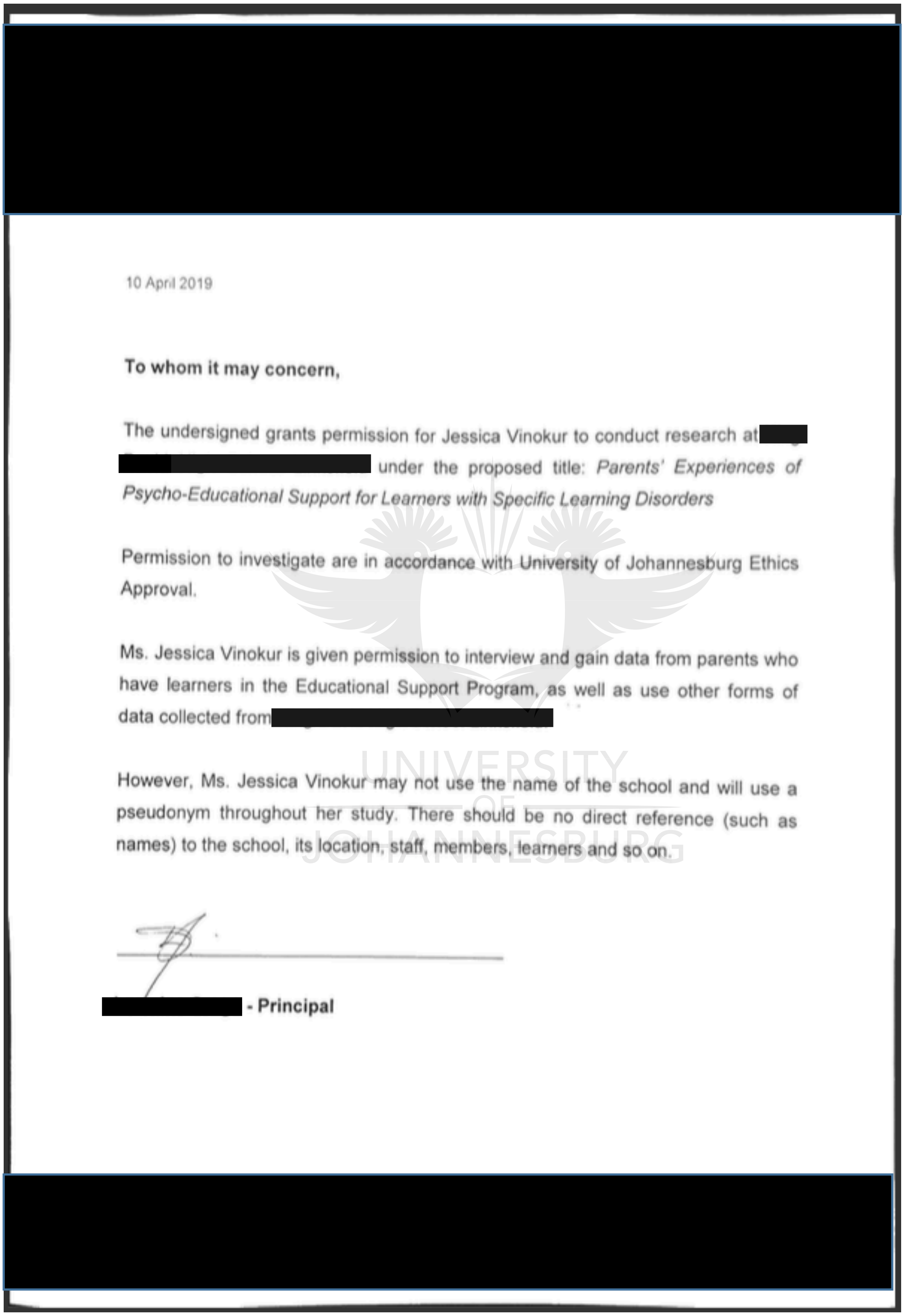
The Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee has decided to

☒ Grant ethical clearance for the proposed research.
☐ Provisionally grant ethical clearance for the proposed research
☐ Recommend revision and resubmission of the ethical clearance documents

Sincerely,

Dr David Robinson
Chair: FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
16 September 2019

Research Site Permission



[redacted]

10 April 2019

To whom it may concern,

The undersigned grants permission for Jessica Vinokur to conduct research at [redacted] under the proposed title: *Parents' Experiences of Psycho-Educational Support for Learners with Specific Learning Disorders*

Permission to investigate are in accordance with University of Johannesburg Ethics Approval.

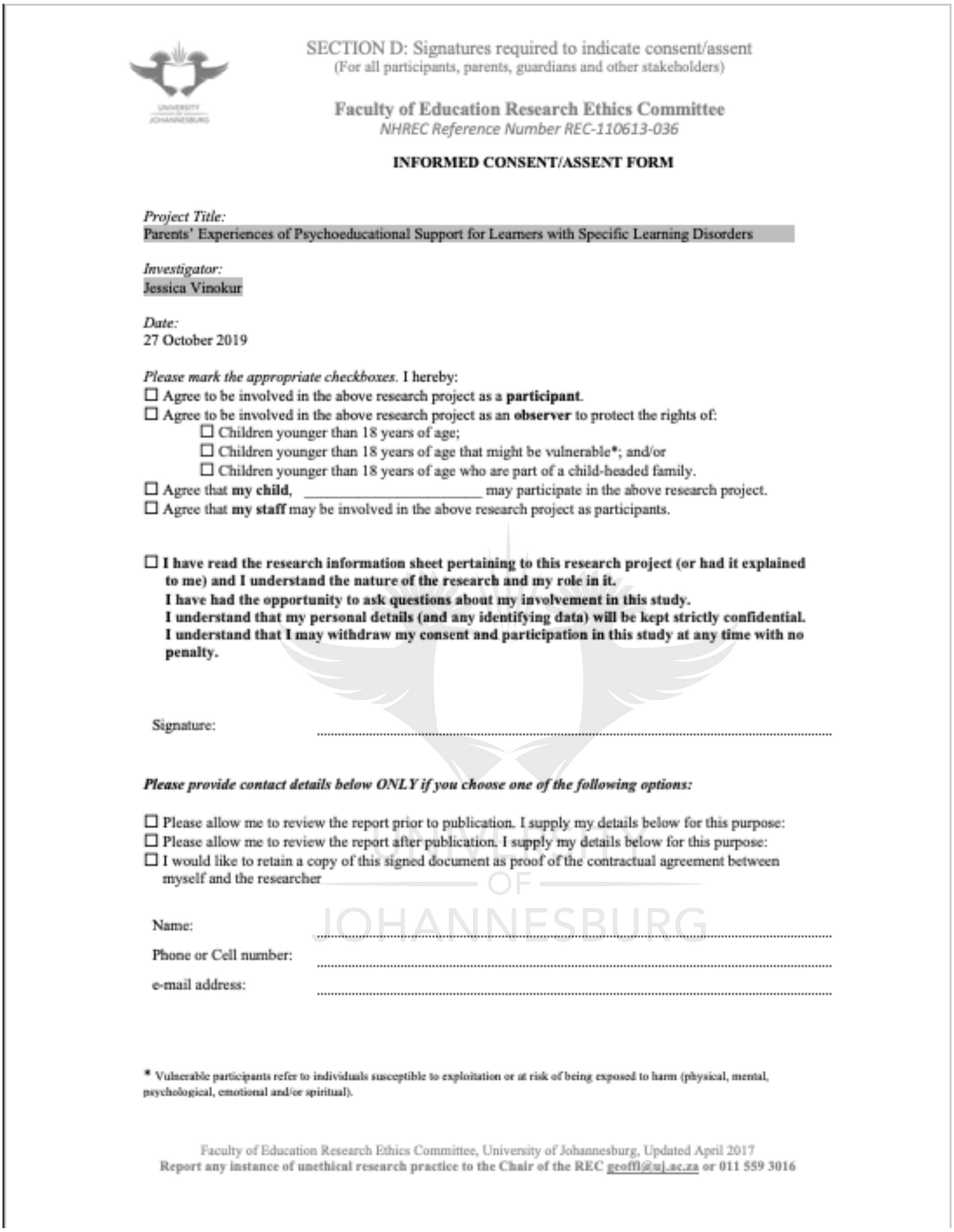
Ms. Jessica Vinokur is given permission to interview and gain data from parents who have learners in the Educational Support Program, as well as use other forms of data collected from [redacted]

However, Ms. Jessica Vinokur may not use the name of the school and will use a pseudonym throughout her study. There should be no direct reference (such as names) to the school, its location, staff, members, learners and so on.

[redacted] **- Principal**

[redacted]

University of Johannesburg Informed Consent/Assent Form



SECTION D: Signatures required to indicate consent/assent
(For all participants, parents, guardians and other stakeholders)

Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee
NHREC Reference Number REC-110613-036

INFORMED CONSENT/ASSENT FORM

Project Title:
Parents' Experiences of Psychoeducational Support for Learners with Specific Learning Disorders

Investigator:
Jessica Vinokur

Date:
27 October 2019

Please mark the appropriate checkboxes. I hereby:
- ☐ Agree to be involved in the above research project as a **participant**.
- ☐ Agree to be involved in the above research project as an **observer** to protect the rights of:
    - ☐ Children younger than 18 years of age;
    - ☐ Children younger than 18 years of age that might be vulnerable*; and/or
    - ☐ Children younger than 18 years of age who are part of a child-headed family.
- ☐ Agree that **my child**, ______________________ may participate in the above research project.
- ☐ Agree that **my staff** may be involved in the above research project as participants.

☐ **I have read the research information sheet pertaining to this research project (or had it explained to me) and I understand the nature of the research and my role in it.**
I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study.
I understand that my personal details (and any identifying data) will be kept strictly confidential.
I understand that I may withdraw my consent and participation in this study at any time with no penalty.

Signature: ....

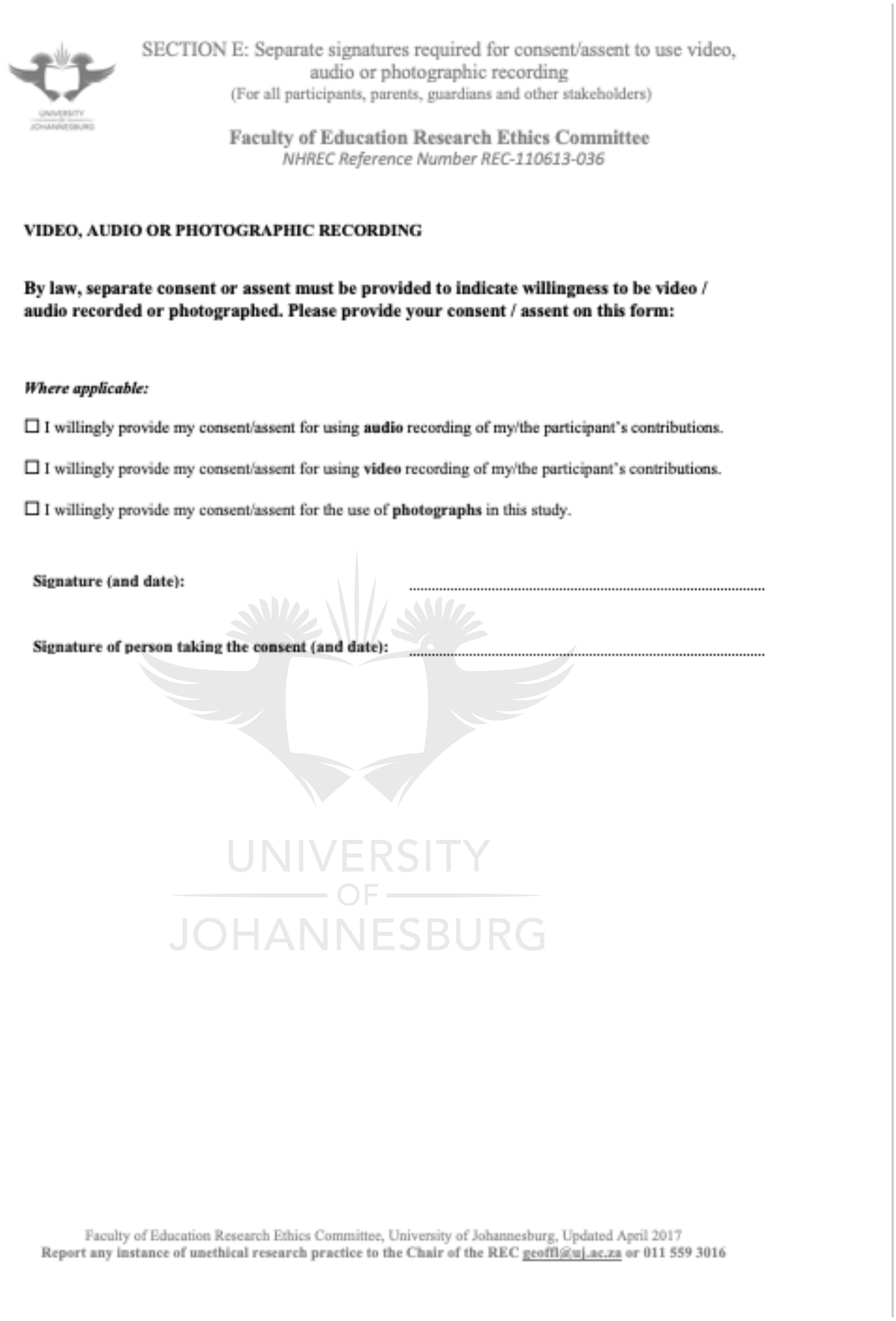
Please provide contact details below ONLY if you choose one of the following options:

- ☐ Please allow me to review the report prior to publication. I supply my details below for this purpose:
- ☐ Please allow me to review the report after publication. I supply my details below for this purpose:
- ☐ I would like to retain a copy of this signed document as proof of the contractual agreement between myself and the researcher

Name: ....
Phone or Cell number: ....
e-mail address: ....

* Vulnerable participants refer to individuals susceptible to exploitation or at risk of being exposed to harm (physical, mental, psychological, emotional and/or spiritual).

Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee, University of Johannesburg, Updated April 2017
Report any instance of unethical research practice to the Chair of the REC geoffl@uj.ac.za or 011 559 3016



SECTION E: Separate signatures required for consent/assent to use video, audio or photographic recording
(For all participants, parents, guardians and other stakeholders)

Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee
NHREC Reference Number REC-110613-036

VIDEO, AUDIO OR PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDING

By law, separate consent or assent must be provided to indicate willingness to be video / audio recorded or photographed. Please provide your consent / assent on this form:

Where applicable:

☐ I willingly provide my consent/assent for using **audio** recording of my/the participant's contributions.

☐ I willingly provide my consent/assent for using **video** recording of my/the participant's contributions.

☐ I willingly provide my consent/assent for the use of **photographs** in this study.

Signature (and date): ....

Signature of person taking the consent (and date): ....

Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee, University of Johannesburg, Updated April 2017
Report any instance of unethical research practice to the Chair of the REC geoffl@uj.ac.za or 011 559 3016

APPENDIX B: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS EXAMPLES

Historicity Questionnaire

Research Participant 1

Historicity Questionnaire – Research Participant 1.

What is your pseudonym?

Neep.

Are you mom/dad/caregiver?

Mom.

Are you single/married/divorced?

married

What do you and/or your partner do for a living?

Both in IT.

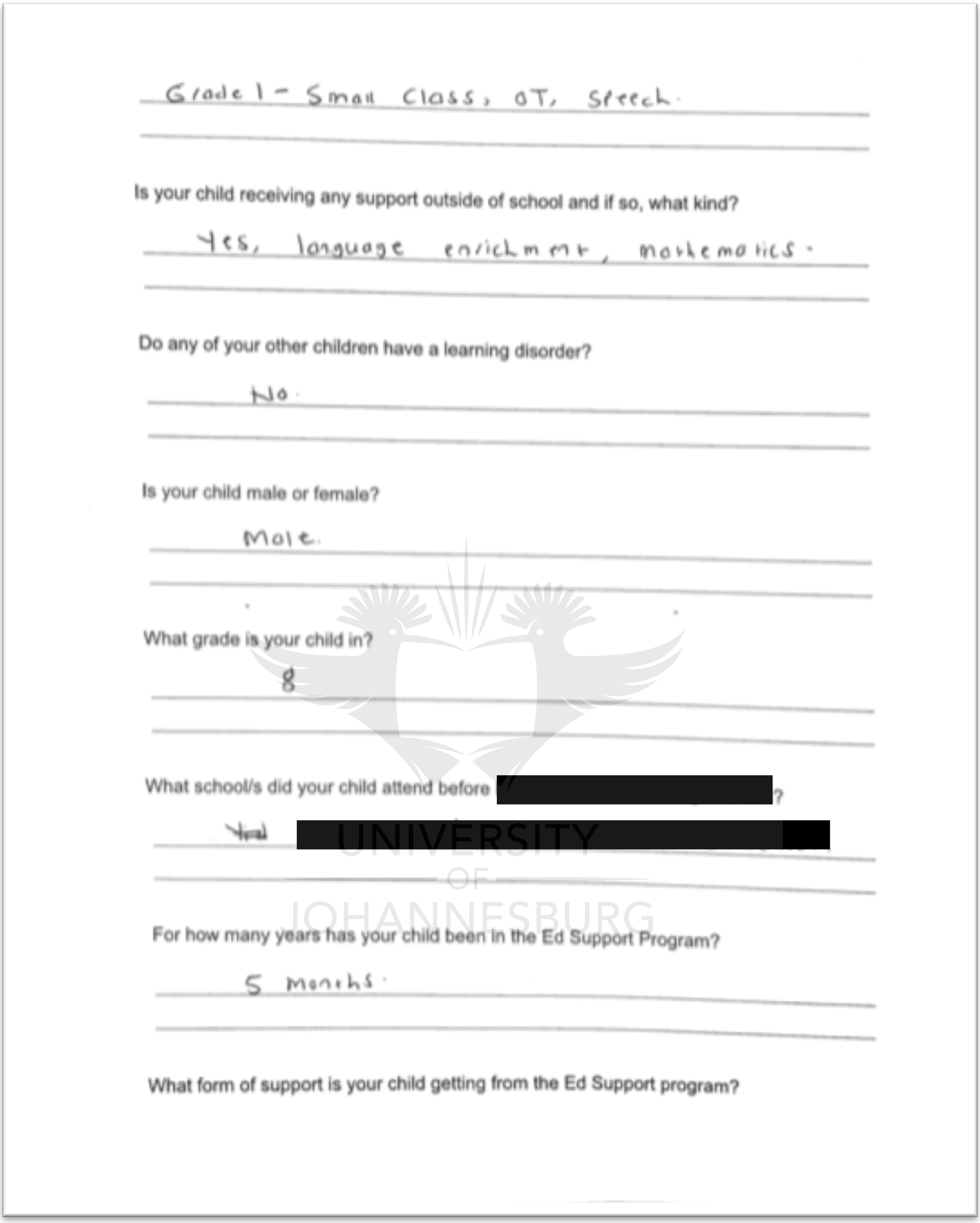
How old was your child when he/she was diagnosed with a learning disorder?

6 years old.

What are your child's barriers to learning/ specific learning disorder?

Auditory Processing.

At what stage of development/ age did you begin intervention/support?



Grade 1 - Small Class, OT, Speech.

Is your child receiving any support outside of school and if so, what kind?

Yes, language enrichment, mathematics.

Do any of your other children have a learning disorder?

No.

Is your child male or female?

Male.

What grade is your child in?

8

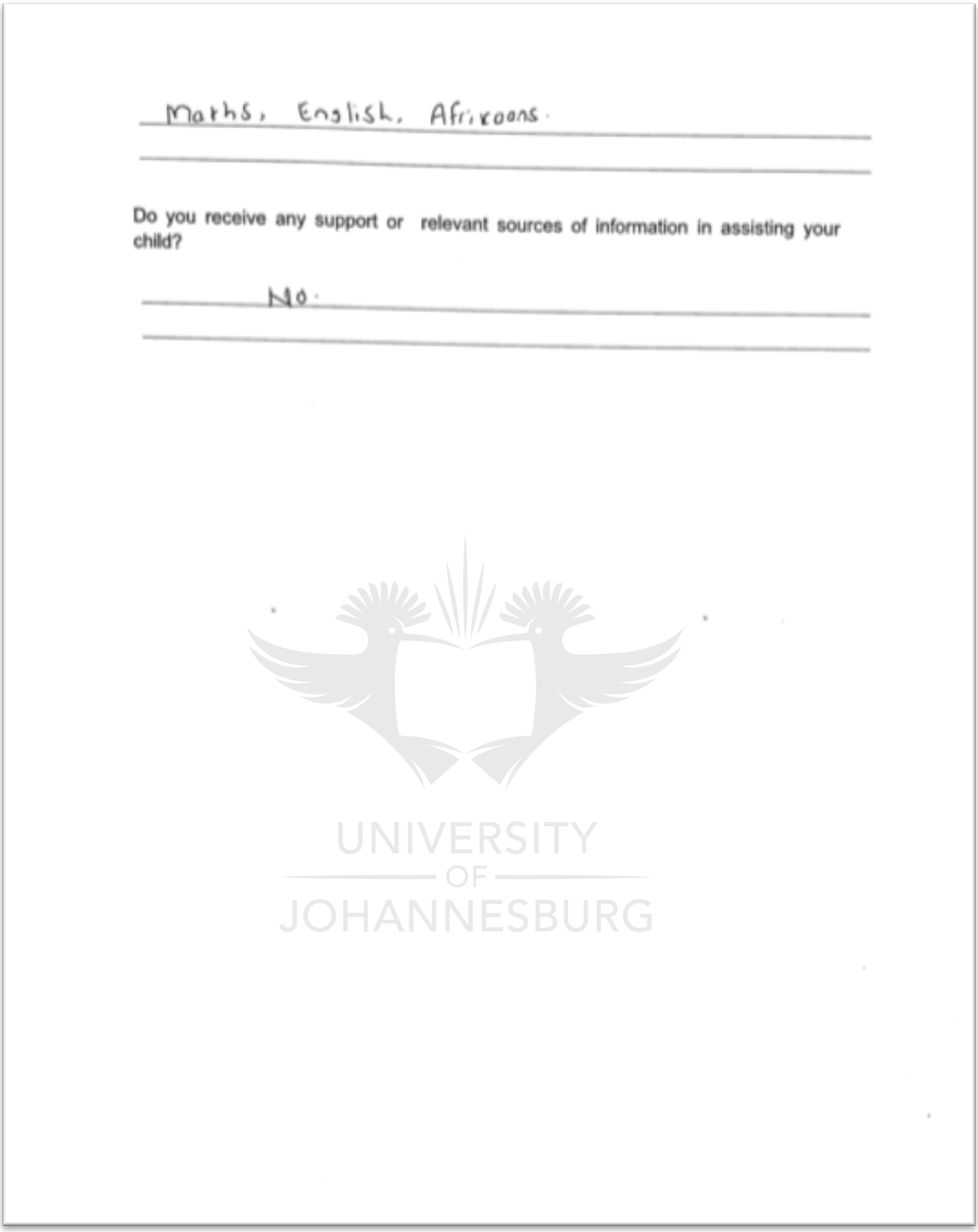
What school/s did your child attend before [redacted]?

[redacted]

For how many years has your child been in the Ed Support Program?

5 months.

What form of support is your child getting from the Ed Support program?

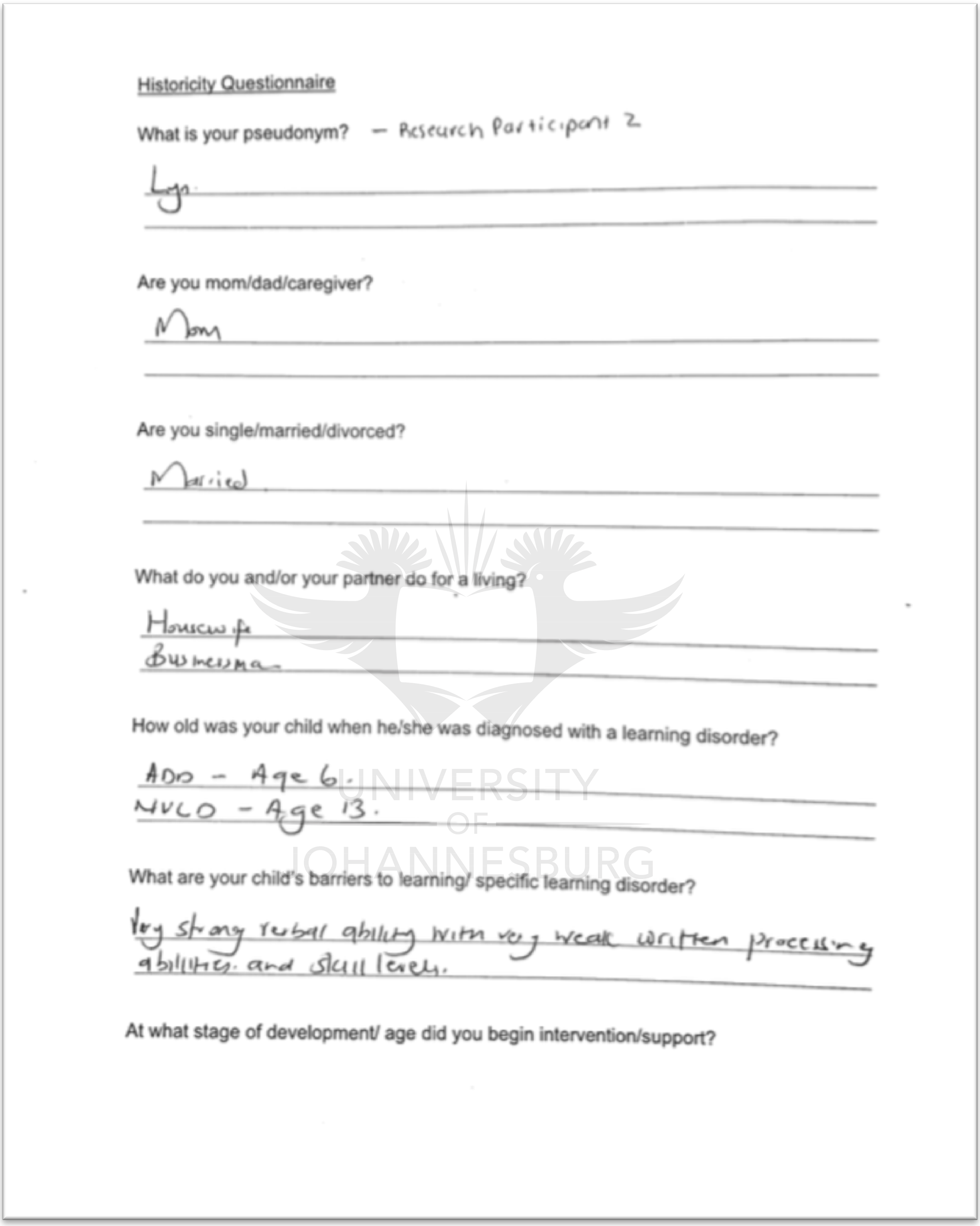


Maths, English, Afrikaans.

Do you receive any support or relevant sources of information in assisting your child?

No.

Research Participant 2



Historicity Questionnaire

What is your pseudonym? – Research Participant 2

Lyn.

Are you mom/dad/caregiver?

Mom

Are you single/married/divorced?

Married

What do you and/or your partner do for a living?

Housewife
Businessman

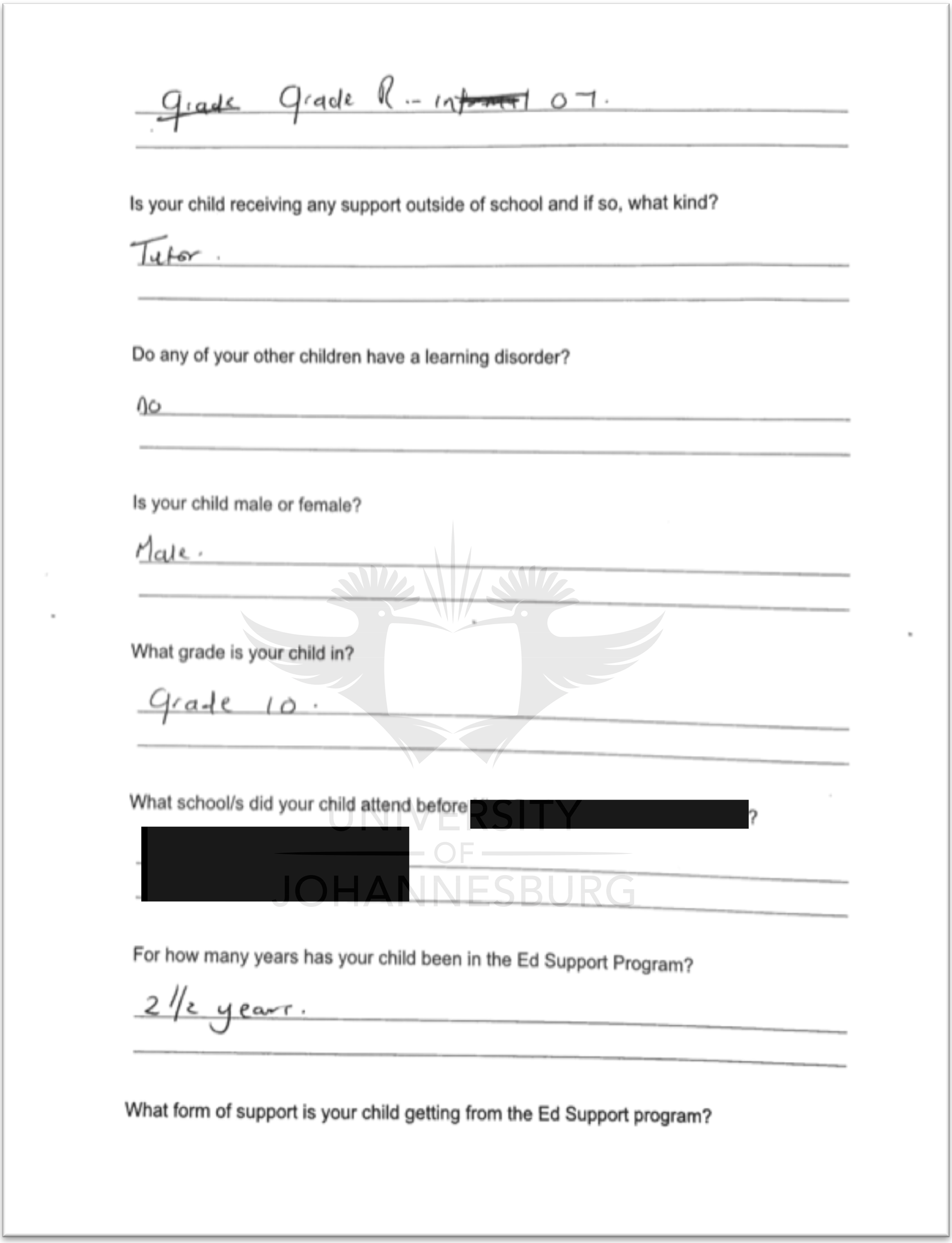
How old was your child when he/she was diagnosed with a learning disorder?

ADD – Age 6.
NVLD – Age 13.

What are your child's barriers to learning/ specific learning disorder?

Very strong verbal ability with very weak written processing abilities and skill levels.

At what stage of development/ age did you begin intervention/support?



~~grade~~ Grade R .- in[illegible] 07.

Is your child receiving any support outside of school and if so, what kind?

Tutor.

Do any of your other children have a learning disorder?

no

Is your child male or female?

Male.

What grade is your child in?

Grade 10.

What school/s did your child attend before [redacted]?

[redacted]

For how many years has your child been in the Ed Support Program?

2 1/2 years.

What form of support is your child getting from the Ed Support program?

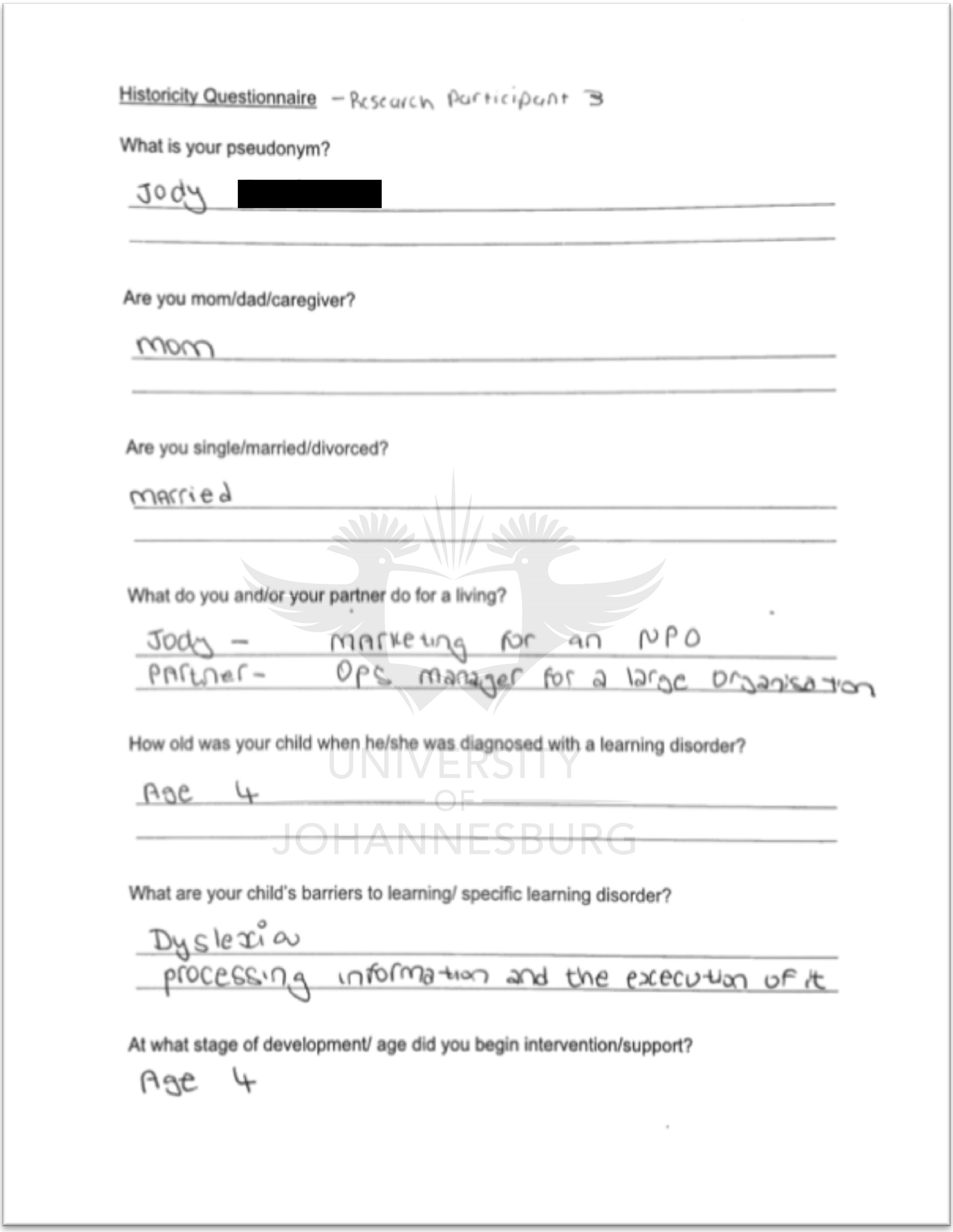
He has approved Concessions up to an including Matric Exams from IEB. / Approval for a Scribe for exams + 5 min extra time per hr per paper

Gayn is a port of call for support / guidance / information.

Do you receive any support or relevant sources of information in assisting your child?

No.

Research Participant 3



Historicity Questionnaire – Research Participant 3

What is your pseudonym?

Jody [redacted]

Are you mom/dad/caregiver?

mom

Are you single/married/divorced?

married

What do you and/or your partner do for a living?

Jody – Marketing for an NPO
Partner – Ops manager for a large organisation

How old was your child when he/she was diagnosed with a learning disorder?

Age 4

What are your child's barriers to learning/ specific learning disorder?

Dyslexia
processing information and the execution of it

At what stage of development/ age did you begin intervention/support?

Age 4

Is your child receiving any support outside of school and if so, what kind?

no

Do any of your other children have a learning disorder?

no

Is your child male or female?

male

What grade is your child in?

11

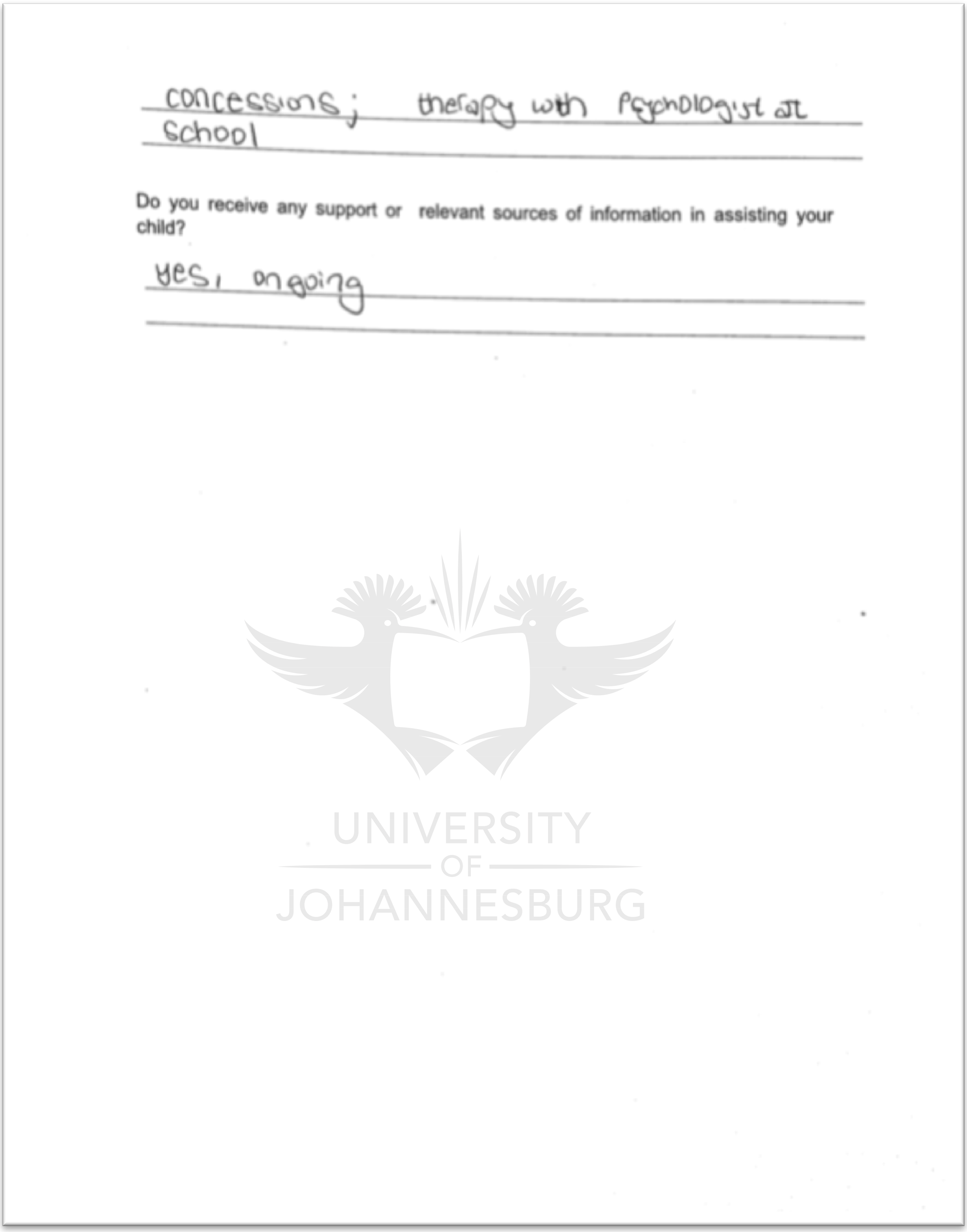
What school/s did your child attend before [redacted]?

Bellavista - Primary

For how many years has your child been in the Ed Support Program?

4 yrs

What form of support is your child getting from the Ed Support program?



concessions; therapy with Psychologist at School

Do you receive any support or relevant sources of information in assisting your child?

yes, ongoing

Research Participant 4

Historicity Questionnaire – Research Participant 4.

What is your pseudonym?

Tarryn [redacted]

Are you mom/dad/caregiver?

Mom

Are you single/married/divorced?

married

What do you and/or your partner do for a living?

Event management + father - sales.

How old was your child when he/she was diagnosed with a learning disorder?

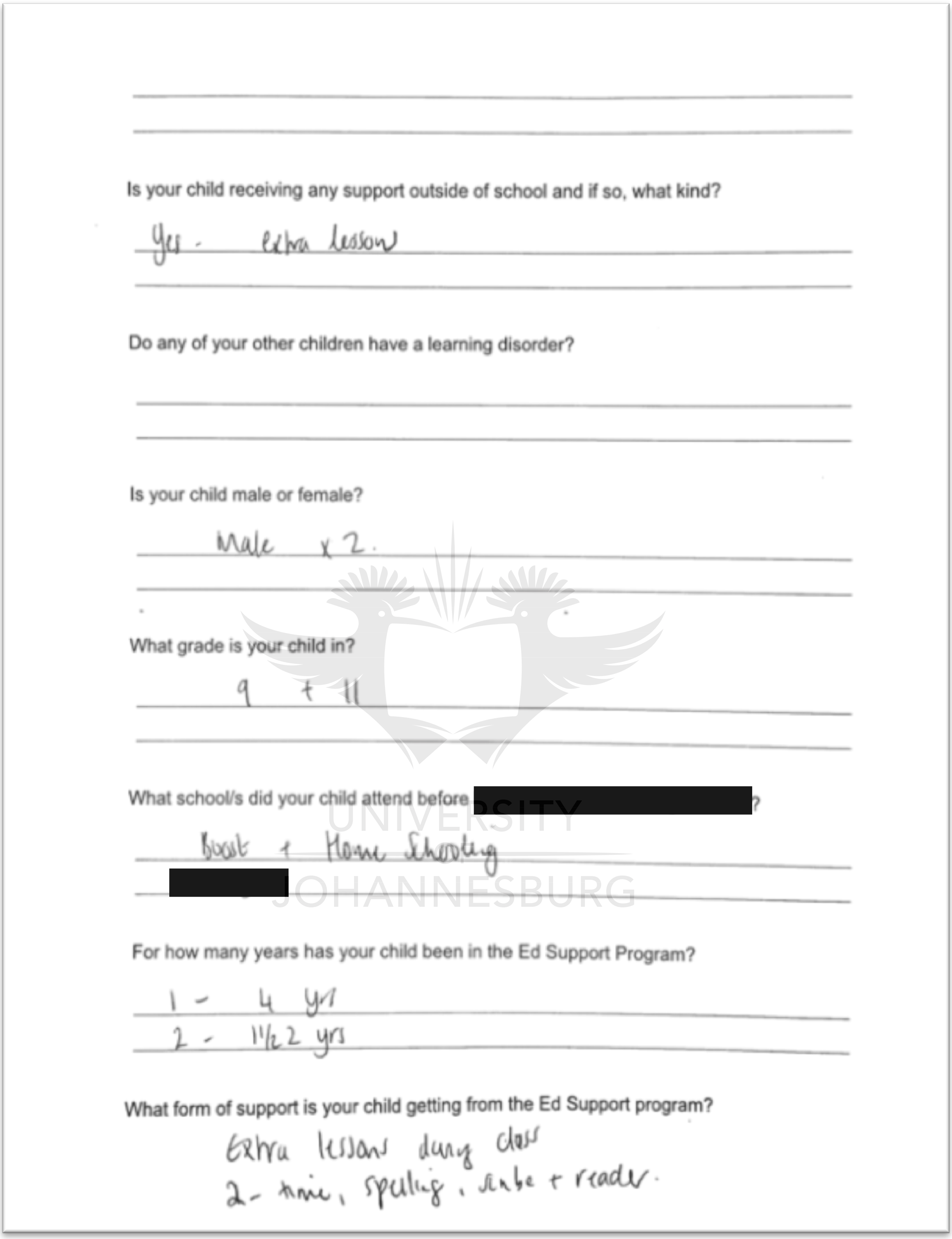
1 - 4 yr old
2 - 7 yrs old

What are your child's barriers to learning/ specific learning disorder?

1 - ADD
2 - Dyslexic

At what stage of development/ age did you begin intervention/support?

Immediately.



Is your child receiving any support outside of school and if so, what kind?

Yes - extra lesson

Do any of your other children have a learning disorder?

Is your child male or female?

Male x 2.

What grade is your child in?

9 + 11

What school/s did your child attend before [redacted]?

Boost + Home Schooling

[redacted]

For how many years has your child been in the Ed Support Program?

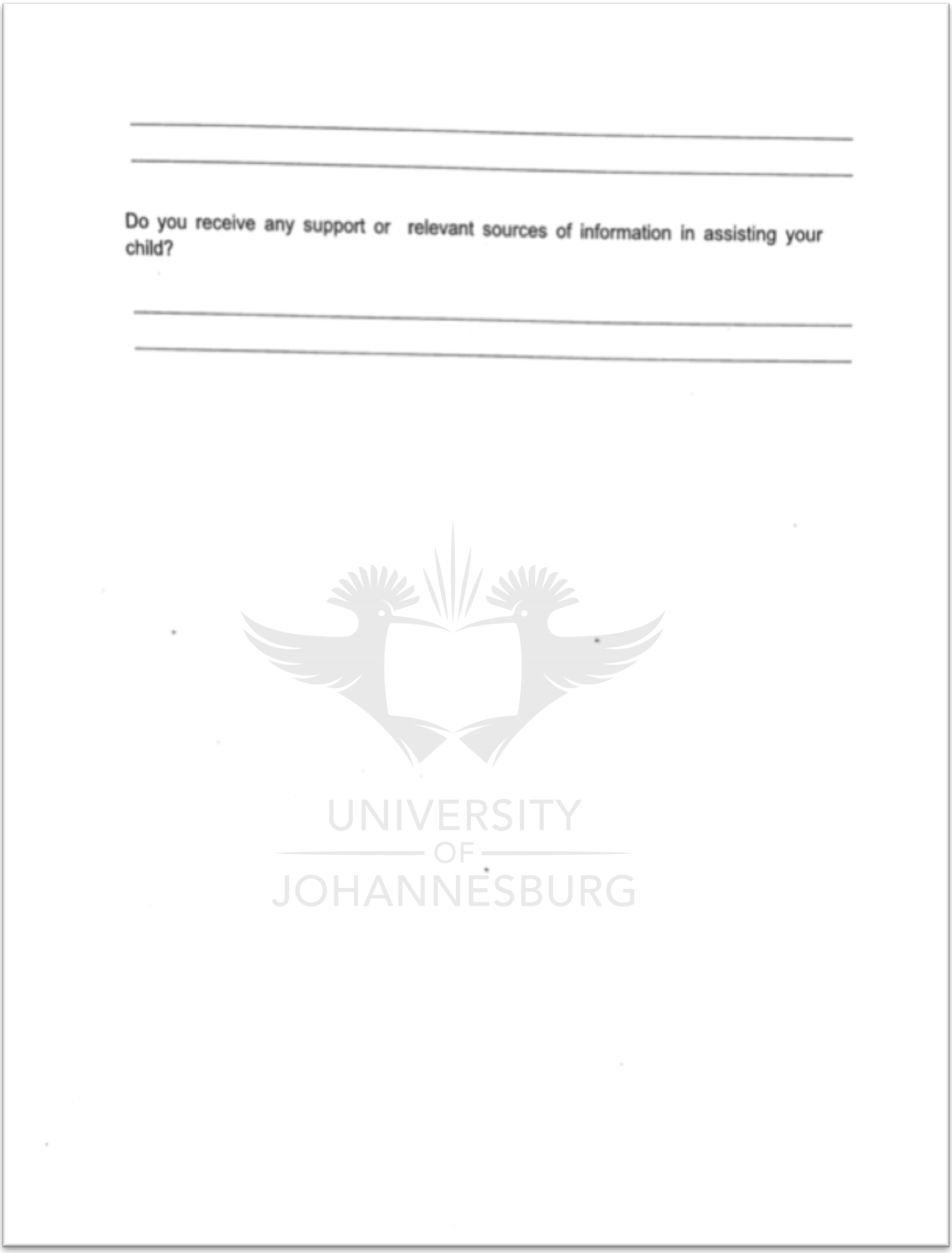
1 - 4 yrs

2 - 1½ 2 yrs

What form of support is your child getting from the Ed Support program?

Extra lessons during class

2 - time, spelling, scribe + reader.



____

____

Do you receive any support or relevant sources of information in assisting your child?

____

____

Research Participant 5

<u>Historicity Questionnaire</u> – Research Participant 5

What is your pseudonym?

Caroline

Are you mom/dad/caregiver?

Mom

Are you single/married/divorced?

Married

What do you and/or your partner do for a living?

Event Co-ordinator

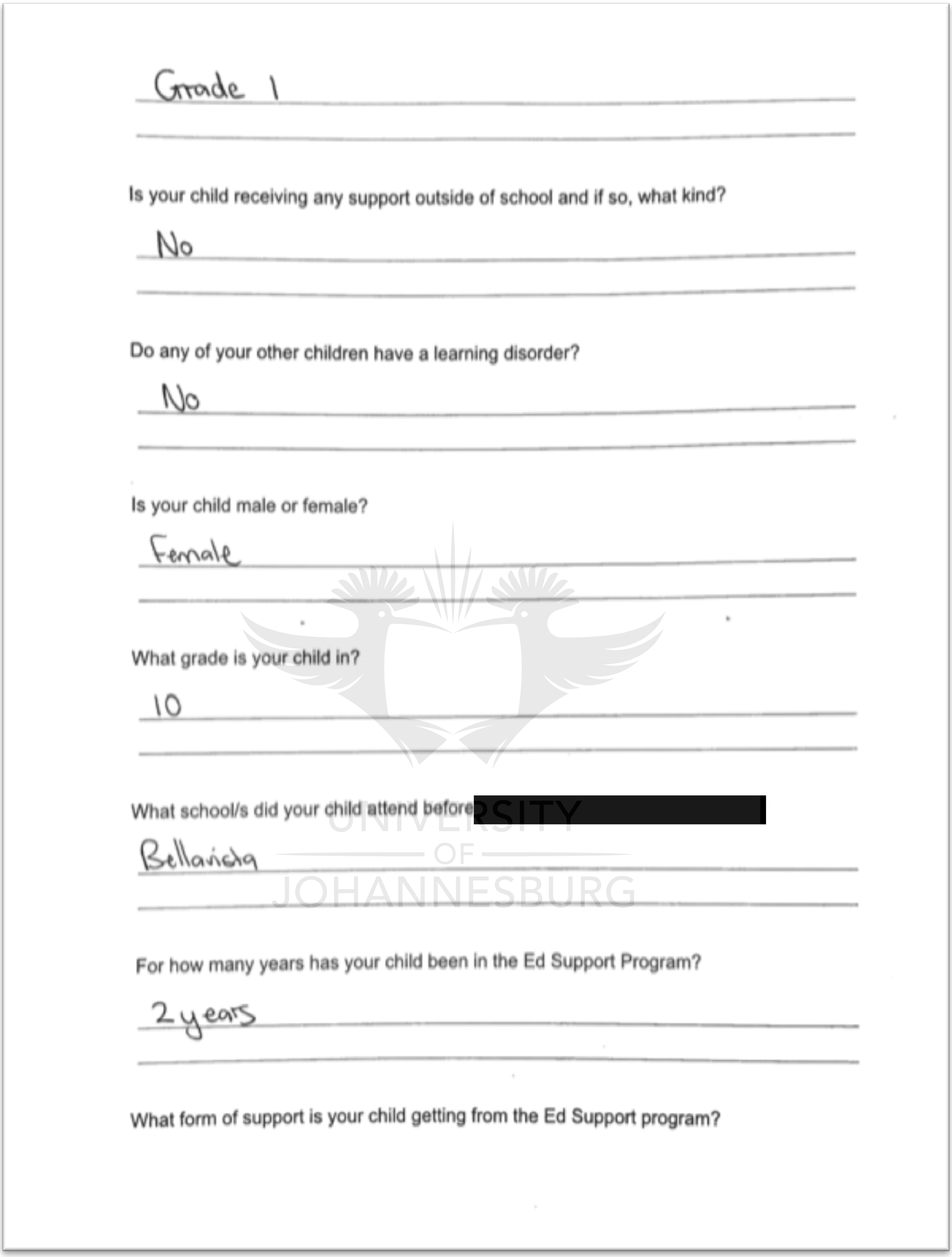
How old was your child when he/she was diagnosed with a learning disorder?

5

What are your child's barriers to learning/ specific learning disorder?

Audio Processing - anxiety

At what stage of development/ age did you begin intervention/support?



Grade 1

Is your child receiving any support outside of school and if so, what kind?

No

Do any of your other children have a learning disorder?

No

Is your child male or female?

Female

What grade is your child in?

10

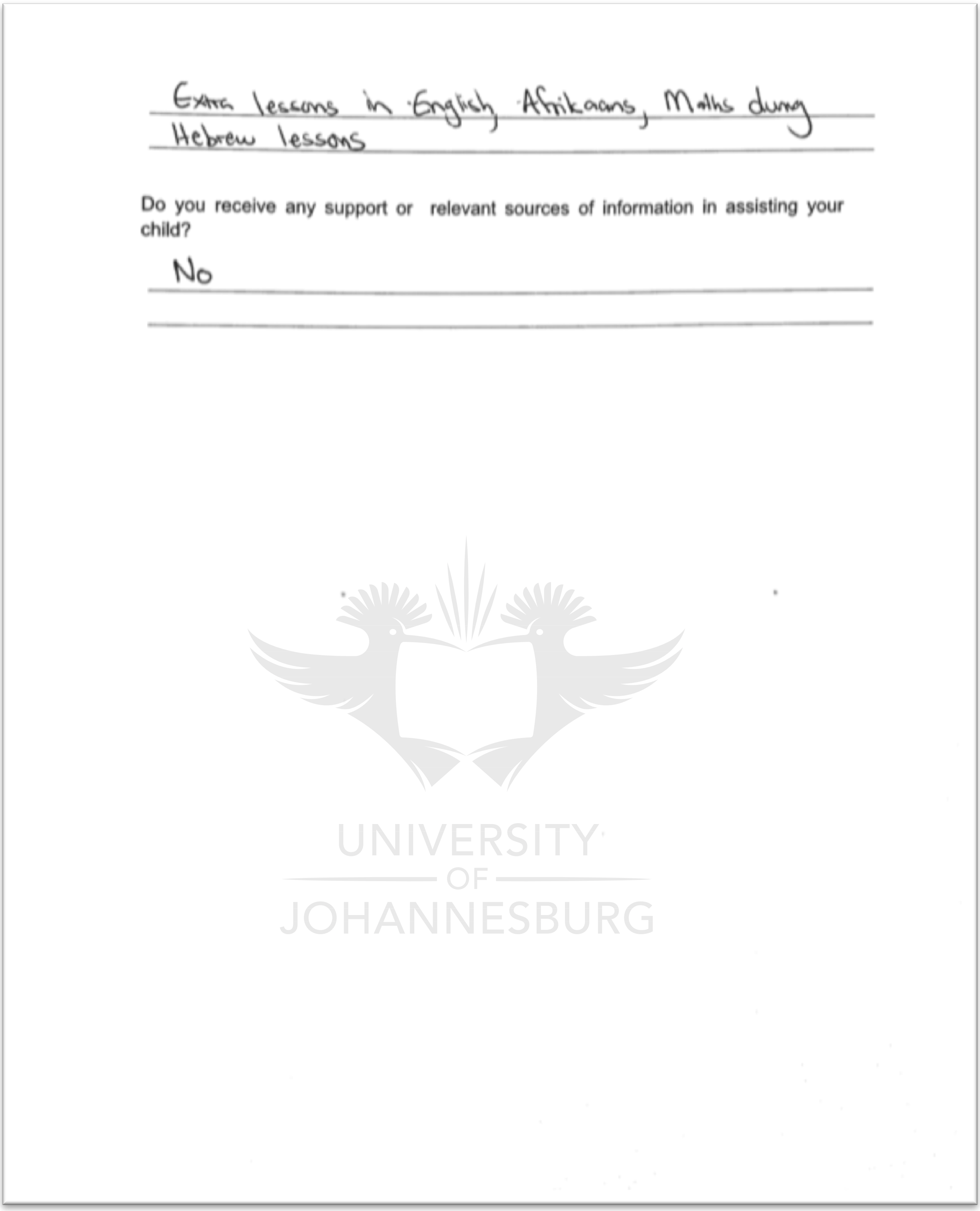
What school/s did your child attend before [redacted]

Bellavista

For how many years has your child been in the Ed Support Program?

2 years

What form of support is your child getting from the Ed Support program?

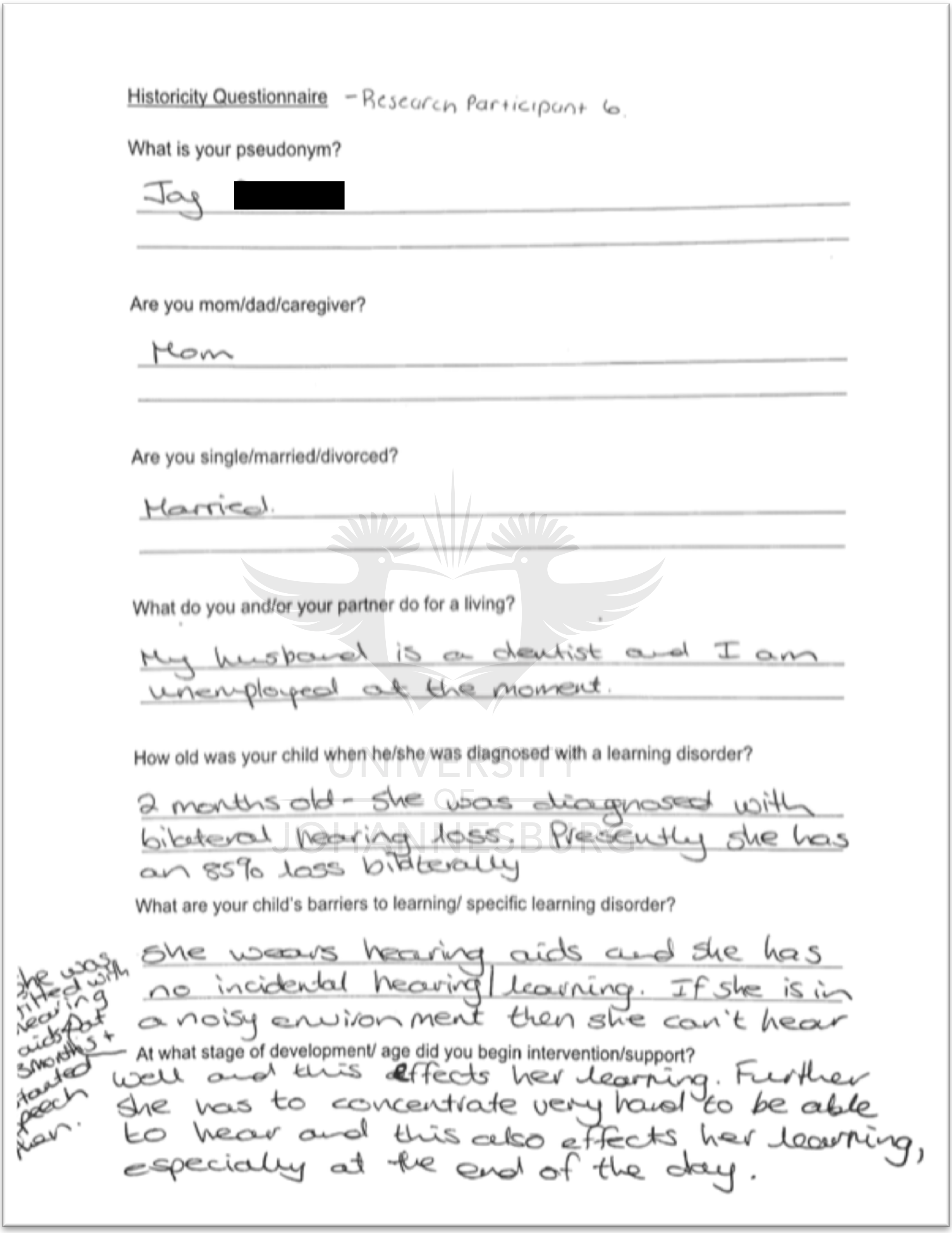


Extra lessons in English, Afrikaans, Maths during Hebrew lessons

Do you receive any support or relevant sources of information in assisting your child?

No

Research Participant 6



Historicity Questionnaire – Research Participant 6.

What is your pseudonym?

Jay [redacted]

Are you mom/dad/caregiver?

Mom

Are you single/married/divorced?

Married.

What do you and/or your partner do for a living?

My husband is a dentist and I am unemployed at the moment.

How old was your child when he/she was diagnosed with a learning disorder?

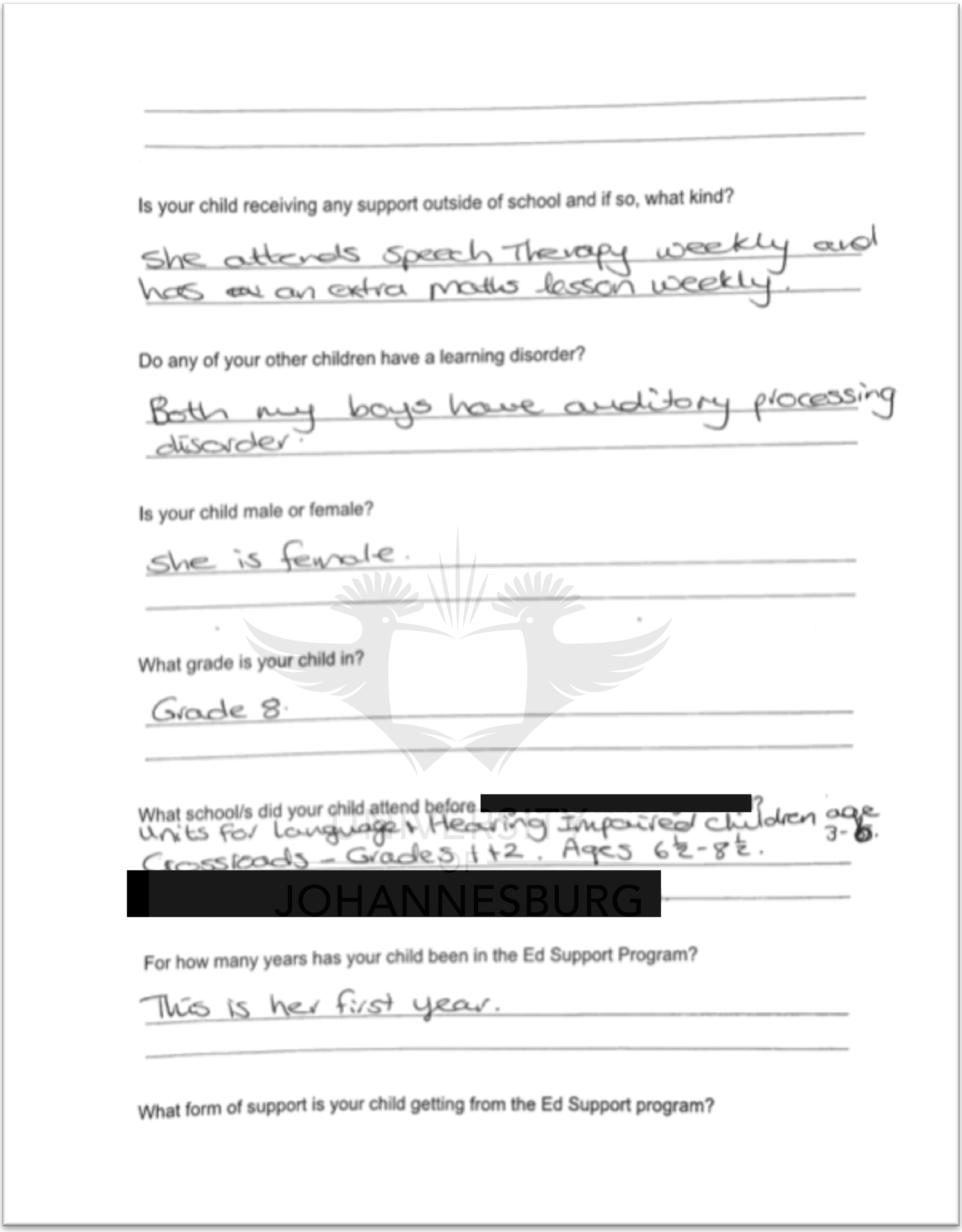
2 months old – she was diagnosed with bilateral hearing loss. Presently she has an 85% loss bilaterally

What are your child's barriers to learning/ specific learning disorder?

She wears hearing aids and she has no incidental hearing/learning. If she is in a noisy environment then she can't hear well and this effects her learning. Further she has to concentrate very hard to be able to hear and this also effects her learning, especially at the end of the day.

At what stage of development/ age did you begin intervention/support?

She was fitted with hearing aids at 3 months + started speech then.



Is your child receiving any support outside of school and if so, what kind?

She attends Speech Therapy weekly and has ~~an~~ an extra maths lesson weekly.

Do any of your other children have a learning disorder?

Both my boys have auditory processing disorder.

Is your child male or female?

She is female.

What grade is your child in?

Grade 8.

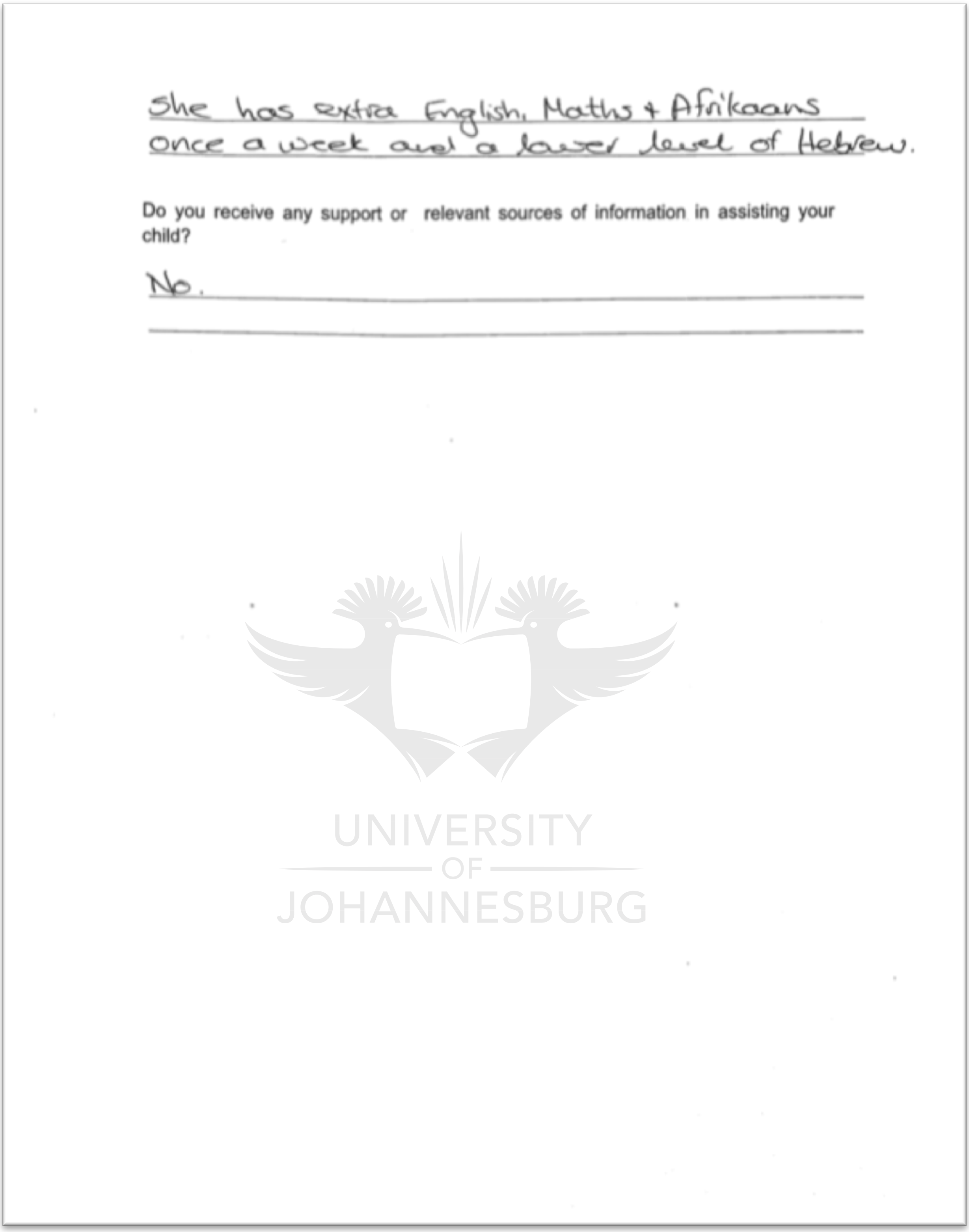
What school/s did your child attend before [redacted]?

Units for language + Hearing Impaired children age 3-6.
Crossroads - Grades 1+2. Ages 6½-8½.
[redacted]

For how many years has your child been in the Ed Support Program?

This is her first year.

What form of support is your child getting from the Ed Support program?

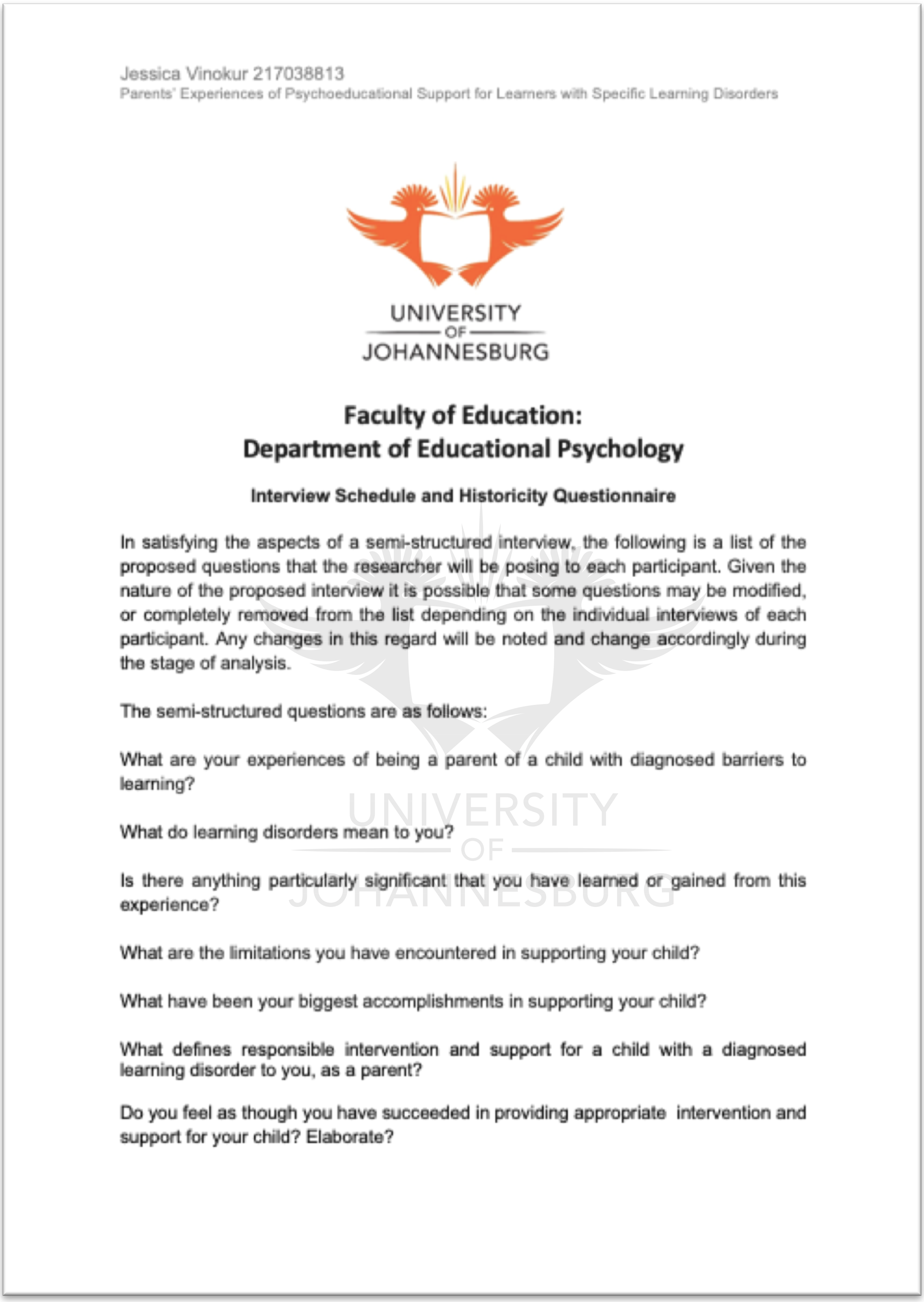


She has extra English, Maths + Afrikaans once a week and a lower level of Hebrew.

Do you receive any support or relevant sources of information in assisting your child?

No.

Semi-Structured Interview Question and Prompt Sheet



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JOHANNESBURG

Faculty of Education:
Department of Educational Psychology

Interview Schedule and Historicity Questionnaire

In satisfying the aspects of a semi-structured interview, the following is a list of the proposed questions that the researcher will be posing to each participant. Given the nature of the proposed interview it is possible that some questions may be modified, or completely removed from the list depending on the individual interviews of each participant. Any changes in this regard will be noted and change accordingly during the stage of analysis.

The semi-structured questions are as follows:

What are your experiences of being a parent of a child with diagnosed barriers to learning?

What do learning disorders mean to you?

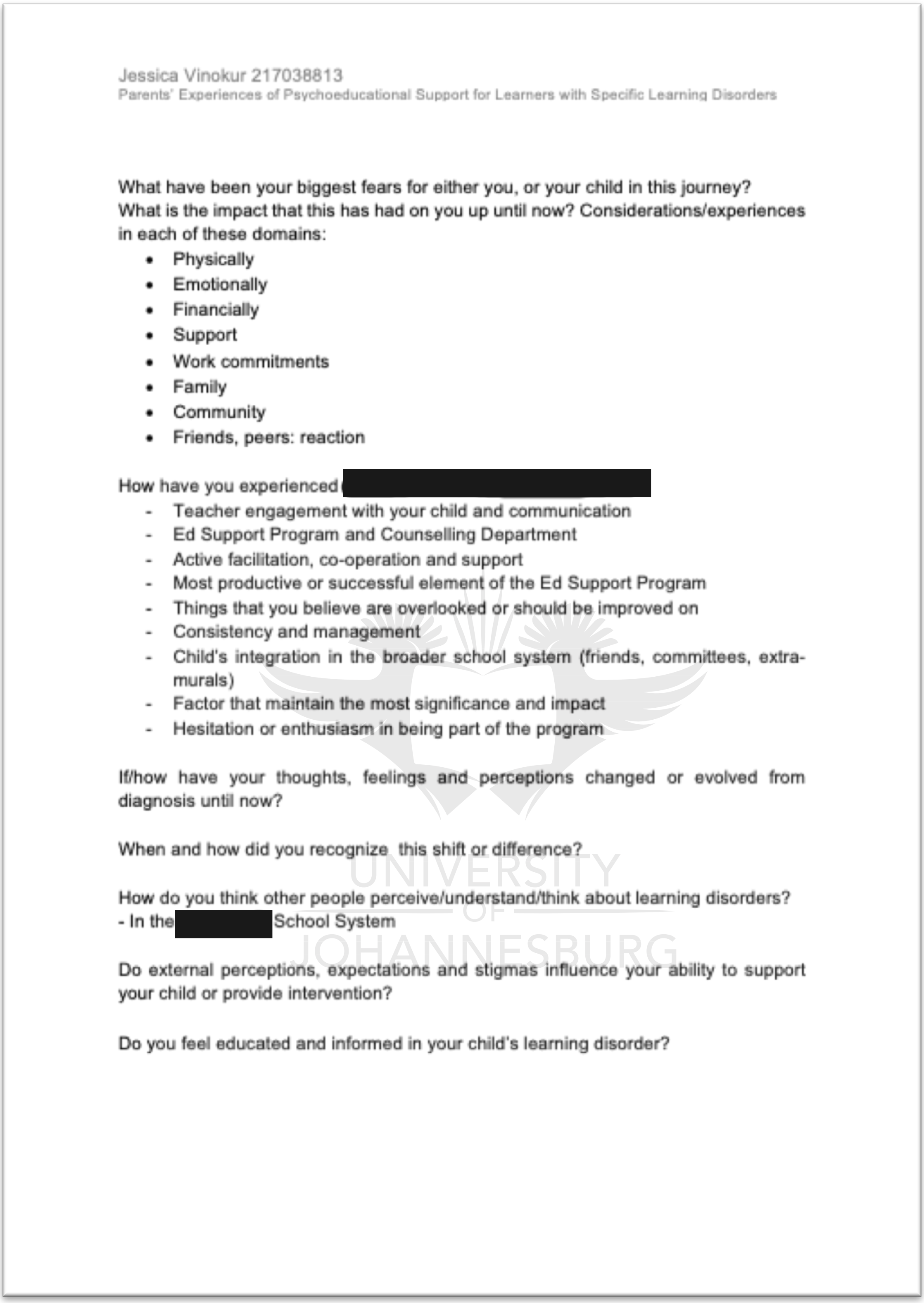
Is there anything particularly significant that you have learned or gained from this experience?

What are the limitations you have encountered in supporting your child?

What have been your biggest accomplishments in supporting your child?

What defines responsible intervention and support for a child with a diagnosed learning disorder to you, as a parent?

Do you feel as though you have succeeded in providing appropriate intervention and support for your child? Elaborate?



What have been your biggest fears for either you, or your child in this journey?
What is the impact that this has had on you up until now? Considerations/experiences in each of these domains:

- Physically
- Emotionally
- Financially
- Support
- Work commitments
- Family
- Community
- Friends, peers: reaction

How have you experienced [redacted]

- Teacher engagement with your child and communication
- Ed Support Program and Counselling Department
- Active facilitation, co-operation and support
- Most productive or successful element of the Ed Support Program
- Things that you believe are overlooked or should be improved on
- Consistency and management
- Child's integration in the broader school system (friends, committees, extra-murals)
- Factor that maintain the most significance and impact
- Hesitation or enthusiasm in being part of the program

If/how have your thoughts, feelings and perceptions changed or evolved from diagnosis until now?

When and how did you recognize this shift or difference?

How do you think other people perceive/understand/think about learning disorders?
- In the [redacted] School System

Do external perceptions, expectations and stigmas influence your ability to support your child or provide intervention?

Do you feel educated and informed in your child's learning disorder?

Extracts from Interview Transcriptions

Participant	Extract
Theme 1: Parents' Experiences of SLD	
Parents' dynamic understanding SLD	
P1	• can't learn in the same way as your every-day child • be a child that doesn't fit the mould; a child that struggles with standardized testing • inability to take in things as quickly in class as the other kids. • him not being able to take in the classwork as well as another child • taking in bits and pieces • They need more time, effort • Kids that struggle academically are not really organized children • I do think some people understand, but a lot of people don't, no. • That stigma thing I haven't really seen it as much as 20 years ago. • I think it is becoming so common and so natural that children are in extra lessons or remedial schools or whatever the case may be, that stigma didn't force me or influence me in any way to give or take away intervention, no.
P2	• it balances out at the end of the day because we are all different. We are all made differently. • It means it is a disability; it means you are not as clever as the next person – that is the truth. • With NVLD, his tracking and spatial – he would never have been able to play tennis. It was very hard as a parent. • So everyone is different; but he is nothing like these other kids on this Facebook group that I am on. • As long as he finds a way to process information that works for him, so what if it isn't the way that I process information or you process it. • Thank goodness it is just a handicap that is a school handicap not a life handicap. • No. No one really knows. We don't really discuss it and he is a very normal child. • I believe parents are quite tolerant. I think our community is quite evolved, as a community. • It is like anything in life; when you don't go through it or you don't experience it, you don't really understand it.
P3	• Our brains are all different. • Just challenges in, like looking at the norm of what is expected at a certain age, and milestones and achieving them. • Just barriers to grasping the information in order to be kind of like graded on that scale. • Accessing that information was a little bit more difficult for him because of the way his brain works.

	• Teaching the other members of the family not being in denial or not like lying about it. • Sometimes people in my family and friends used to feel sorry for him • I think if someone has not had a child or a sibling who has had to go to a special needs school, they probably don't think about it much. • Some people think that it is just going to be accommodating for that person's needs • I think if people are like insecure then they will worry about other people speaking about them • No one really cares about you; they are worried about their own problems and their own children.
P4	• Any kid with any learning disability, I think the thing is it takes so much time – to reach a goal post just takes SO much longer and SO much hard work from everybody. It is just a barrier to learning which ultimately they are going to get over. • You mustn't let the diagnosis dictate your child's life either. • I wish you could change the perception but I don't think you ever will. • Nobody will ever understand unless you have got a child or you are a therapist – but nobody will ever understand • They will give you the most random advice and they will say to you shame. That's my worst. They will pity you and in their brains they think thank God it is not my child. • I think they think it is infectious. • I think that when we talk about children with learning disabilities, that would not fit into their box. They would be distraught; and if their child was friends with a kid who had a learning disability, that wouldn't tick their boxes either. • Hmm, from a social point of view, we had to be the ones to phone and say [my son] would love an arrangement and you just hear the dead silence on the other side. So I used to make 4 arrangements on a Saturday for him because I knew that at least 3 would cancel. • There is no empathy. You don't want pity.
P5	• It is also maybe not a difficulty but just a different way in which your brain functions; and mainstream school wants you to learn in a certain way and for your brain to function in a certain way. Because you don't it doesn't always mean that you have a difficulty. • I think it is a bit of a label as well. • I think many kids actually do have learning difficulties that aren't picked up. • It doesn't matter if you have a learning difficulty, you just have to work that little bit harder. • I think there is a total misunderstanding in general of intelligence because she did very well in this last term because it was a non-exam term • There is maybe a stigma, which I don't think exists at all anymore. • I have never felt it and she has never had any form of a stigma against her. But I think it might still exist; I don't think it is huge but I think that is hard for a parent to say my child has got to go to a remedial school. • Never. Not once, and not one ever to her, ever. And none of her friends parents either. • Everyone was amazing and no one ever looked down on her because she was at a different school, or unfriendly to her. They included her. I will be honest, we never had one person who ever said one thing.
P6	• Anything that will literally like a film or a sheet or something that is between the teacher and the child, or the learning material and the child.

	• Her hearing; that is a barrier in that she can’t always hear what everybody else hears. • So a barrier is literally something between the child and the learning material • When she was younger she was always seen as different because she wasn’t in a mainstream school. • In the beginning everyone was amazing • In some environments, yes, there is still stigma around it
Complexity of parenting a child with SLD	
P1	• I didn’t really understand what auditory processing really was; all I kept thinking to myself was oh my gosh my child is remedial and he is never going to be able to learn • It’s not easy, for a parent, it is very difficult, because I keep thinking am I doing the right thing or am I not doing the right thing • My biggest fear as a parent is because I am so responsible for everything he is doing every day; I fear I am letting him down • I don’t know if I am overdoing it, am I under doing it, must I just leave him to get on with it and maybe it would be better if he fails a few things • My fear is the detrimental damage to his self-confidence. • I do get very emotional • Thank you for thinking of the parent, because nobody else does. • I don’t always get it right • My heart breaks • A big responsibility. It is huge, and I carry that
P2	• it’s been hard because you give birth to this perfect child and there is no reason for this child not to be as good as anyone else • He was a very sensitive little boy; I am sensitive though so that to me was never anything for red alarms. • So they said no no it’s just his concentration, and you need to go and see one of these ADD doctors. • Went to this doctor and he listened to what I had to say, he didn’t contribute much and then he said okay let’s put him on medication • As a first time mom I wish I would have actually just said he is who he is and let him just be and let him find his way. • So this wasn’t an easy situation to understand; I was being told he wasn’t remedial; I was told he just wasn’t concentrating. I was told he wasn’t trying. If I was told from day one there are gaps, they are going to get bigger, we need to fill them, put him into… we would have done that. • The primary school made the experience a lot more intense by their lack of knowledge. I relied on them as professionals and they let me down. • Well, initially it was good to be able to have a name. Then the reality of what it was, was devastating. • You are told that your child has an issue or told that there is something but no one knows what it is – which was my experience with the education. • My experiences have been eye opening; I’ve had to realize my levels of expectation. • It is very frustrating. I feel like I chased my tail for a long long time. • My biggest fear, well that he isn’t adequate. I am over the victor ludorum. I won’t be sitting in the front of the stage, it’s okay.

	• Hardest thing we have ever had to deal with because he is our boy, you know. • It never comes up anymore; put it this way, it is something he has been diagnosed with; it never comes up. It is not part of our everyday life; it is not part of anything; we live a normal life • You can’t really work around it; you have just got to deal with it.
P3	• Initially I was a bit in denial and blamed other factors and thought that the challenges would be more easily overcome by maybe just going to speech therapy or occupational therapy. • The minute I accepted that my child needed more special remedial education, everything fell into place very well. • It would have been easier if I had just accepted it earlier • Because I was a younger mother; now I would have accepted it much more easily because I am older. • I was, are in denial, that you think there will be a quick fix or I just have to feed him more healthily, change his/her diet; they don’t acknowledge it and don’t want to see the real problem. • Because it is not what you chose so it might take a little bit longer for you to accept; but ironically of course, always in hindsight once you are a bit older, you realize it was just such pathetic nonsense, wasted energy on something so trivia. • He is a stubborn child; he has a stubborn personality so that has been an experience that he hasn’t always wanted to listen • I mean I have faith but I don’t know what is required, I don’t know how difficult it is going to get for him.
P4	• We found it hugely positive when we had a diagnosis. • Okay yes when you have just found out. When [my son] was 5 years old and they said to us put him in a home because he is never going to read or write. That is very stressful. • Maybe just not in our environment that for us it was an abnormal thing, but in the big world it is a completely normal thing. • The hardest part is to get a diagnosis. I think the frustration and stress involved in getting a diagnosis. Once you’ve got the diagnosis I found it much easier to deal with. • I think when you are young and you have got young children, you want to fit in. When your child is not invited to parties because shame he has got learning problems or there is something wrong with him, it is horrible, it is horrible. • You have got to believe in your child because if you don’t they don’t believe. It is very easy to give up. • The motivation had to come from himself. • Ja so I think the biggest fear for me is that my child isn’t allowed to be who he needs to be because of other people’s expectations, not mine. • Emotionally it is hard. • I think the biggest thing is not to let your kids see that you are upset because they mustn’t think that there is anything wrong with them. • That is what He [G-d] gave us and you have to just deal with that. Do we like it, no. Can we fix it, maybe not. But we can do our best. So I think emotionally, I don’t think my kids have ever (I hope not) felt that we are not okay with them. I hope not. • I think my biggest thing is that it is not life or death. It is not life or death. This is not a life sentence.

P5	• When I found out that she wasn't communicating and talking for her age appropriate, I started investigating. She was diagnosed with social anxiety and auditory processing difficulties. • It was quite difficult for me personally to see that I had a child that had a learning difficulty and wasn't going to go to a mainstream school. • It made it difficult that why my child, why couldn't my child be like all the other children? Why was she different, why wasn't she normal, why is she the one that had to go? So that was my initial feelings • I think I picked it up easily because my son is actually 14 months younger than her, so they were quite close in age • You know will they be able to be a normal child in a normal mainstream school with friends and social interactions, and eventually go on to have a career one day. I think that is the scariest thing • I think just emotionally the beginning was hard to accept it, it was very hard for me. But once she was there, maybe the first year was hard… and I always wished that she didn't need to be there, but it was fine. I mean she was at an amazing school with amazing support. • I was thinking parents worry so much about who their children are playing with and if they have got no friends; and it actually doesn't matter now. I know when you are in it it is like so worrying and so important; but when you look back you think why did I worry about all that because it eventually comes, but you can't help it. • As a parent it was hard ja. It wasn't hard for her; it wasn't hard for my husband
P6	• So in hospital when they are born they do a hearing test and she was in ICU because she was tiny. The day before she was meant to be coming home the audiologist did the hearing test and she got a bad reading, and from there • it is isolation; the isolation was very hard, very hard. Coming to terms with it was very very difficult to know that I've got a child that is not the same as everybody else's. • I kind of had to mourn the loss of what I was expecting and then celebrate the gift of what I was given because she is actually a phenomenal child. • You sacrifice whatever it is so that you can give your child the necessary things. • I fear that she will have no friends and she won't have a social group. • Emotionally it is hard. When your child is sad you are sad. You are only as happy as your most unhappy child
Burden of SLD	
P1	• it is isolation; the isolation was very hard, very hard. Coming to terms with it was very very difficult to know that I've got a child that is not the same as everybody else's. • I kind of had to mourn the loss of what I was expecting and then celebrate the gift of what I was given because she is actually a phenomenal child. • You sacrifice whatever it is so that you can give your child the necessary things. • I fear that she will have no friends and she won't have a social group. • Emotionally it is hard. When your child is sad you are sad. You are only as happy as your most unhappy child • Exam month for me is hell. In our household it is hell.

	• We get irritable with the rest of the family. Sometimes Devan gets very frustrated; I am screaming at him; he is screaming at me. So it brings down the morale of the rest of the family. There is a lot of screaming and shouting. • My husband because he comes home and everybody is screaming at each other, and it does it has a huge impact on family life all round. • We don't see psychologists or we don't have counselling or anything like that • There is a lot of guilt involved from both the parent and the child. • I am screaming at him; he is screaming at me. • I have got a full time job that I have to attend to • I am carrying work stress and his stress, and my child in matric's stress, and everybody's stress. So I do tend to take it out on everybody • So impact on work is huge. From a psychological or emotional perspective I am a nervous wreck for that month so I don't function properly at work, and I can't attend any afternoon meetings
P2	• There is the financial aspect; I mean we have had to pay a tutor, we had a full time tutor last year, what we paid in extra lessons, in doctors, in assessments • I was blessed that financially it wasn't a limitation; we made it a priority. • Of course, it is stressful, it is very stressful because every time it is exams and tests and it's not holidays, we are under pressure because things are hard • I don't mollycoddle him. I'm quite hard on him because you can't do that in life
P3	• I mean the school fees were very very expensive (at the remedial schools) • I also got divorced and I was carrying the load; I was supporting three children on my own. So obviously it was tough; but he couldn't leave the school. He had to be there • They are not a kind environment; it's a business • They used to say they needed to make sacrifices because here he was at a school that charged a fortune, as well as the other children at private schools. So they knew there were sacrifices that needed to be made but they knew that education is a priority. • So at home it was like, we made it worse because we treated him as if he was even younger than he was, because of his developmental stages, instead of maybe doing the opposite. • Just keeping him to school and getting him home from school. And you see because you had to get the other children home from school as well; it's not like we just had one child. So I always had three children at three different schools so that was what I had to work out every morning.
P4	• Insane. Insane. Ja, the costs are insane. Every therapy session – I mean medical aid does pay but a large portion of your salary goes for therapy, ja. • And it is a lot of money for not just the therapy but it's the extra lessons, and then when it comes to writing tests or exams and they need a private venue, • So we definitely grew. We had huge arguments; it is very stressful; it is very very stressful and you have both got to be on the same page because otherwise that kid can twist and manipulate as well because it is hard. • So we have been very lucky from that point of view, and we both need work, I am not giving up work – not yet.

	• So very lucky, everybody is very accepting. My parents are brilliant. My parents are the ones who step in if we are working; that has been fine • Family is important, support is important. • I don't know if it has been so much as the learning disability or it is just really nice to have a close family. I think my kids are accepted for who they are in my family because we have got different. • Then I am happy to help; but you also have to draw the line.
P5	• It was extremely expensive but you can actually get a tax rebate; it actually works out. • it's the cashflow that kills you in the beginning. • Because my son is just a bit younger sometimes he would say like are you stupid, like you can't spell or what are you saying. • Just if it was holidays and they would say she is always on holiday but otherwise it didn't really • Obviously having different holidays was always difficult because you have always got a child at school, so you never ever have a break. The one complains while the other one isn't on holiday; so those are personal limitations I would say. Being at different schools, different schedules, different locations, those things are all difficult.
P6	• One of the biggest limitations is financial because I have had to take a drop, I can't be in a full time job, and so financially it has been difficult. • I mean we have paid thousands; hearing aids cost a fortune. • He is very protective of her and he doesn't say that he resents it, but I used to have to drop him at school with the maid. • Any family with a special needs child is going to feel the consequences of it • But because we treat her like a normal child and they see that there is no favouritism in terms of discipline or that kind of stuff • I think it affects you; I can never know what the effect is now, in 20 years' time they might turn around to me and say you were a terrible mother, you didn't look after us, all you did was look after [my sister]. I don't know. I tried not to. • You can't work if you have a child that goes to school half an hour away, and you have to take them and fetch them. Where are you going to work, and if you are working then you are paying somebody else to do that job for you.
Theme 2: Supporting Children with SLD	
<u>Parents' difficulties in supporting their child with a SLD</u>	
P1	• There isn't really enough education because he did an educational assessment and when I went for feedback I was expecting something a lot different to what they gave me. • I burst into tears and told my husband that my child is retarded, he is dyslexic and needs to stay at home or will never function in society basically because I didn't understand what this report was all about. It was almost like it was in another language. • There definitely needs to be more educating people better, even me, myself. • Yes I have read up and done a lot of my own and figured out things along the way, but if somebody could also teach me a little bit more

	about what is this auditory processing thing, what kind of learning difficulties do you get – I would love to learn more. • I didn’t really understand what it was so I would panic • I am going to have to do it myself; so I just went and read up what auditory processing is. • We don’t understand their disorder and we don’t understand how to help him; so we are doing trial and error • Bottom line is there is not enough support for the parents, no. We don’t really understand what they need, how they learn, what have they got because so many kids are the same. • And I pride myself on the things that have worked because I have given other people a lot of pointers. • I have been a mother, a desperate mother, trying to find a way that my child can learn • I do the best I can as a parent. • I think I went from panic mode to actually, when I started working with my child, I actually realized what the teachers were telling me so I started to understand what his issues were, whereas in the beginning I didn’t. • I would say a lot of frustration with figuring out ways to help him take in the work • I get very frustrated. • So I don’t have all the resources, no. • I don’t always get it right • I am redoing what is happening in class because the teachers go too quickly. • It’s not easy, for a parent, it is very difficult, because I keep thinking am I doing the right thing or am I not doing the right thing • When it comes to exam time I just become the monster.
P2	• As a naïve new mom I had no idea, no broached NVLD with me, I never even knew it existed. • My own lack of understanding and lack of knowledge is what contributed also to not being able to recognize how to support him • the information that I managed to find through Googling and looking into it made me realize that even though it has now got a name, it actually doesn’t mean anything because there were 10 kids who described the way they are as completely different • I have educated and informed myself; but as I say I don’t believe it defines him. • It is our journey. I have learnt that we are all different and we all have to follow our own path. • Because life carries on and we have been able to overcome the obstacles and through perseverance he is not sinking. He is not drowning. But yes I live in fear. • But that is what I have to do, I am his mother, I have to make sure he tries his best. • Hearing what the school has to say, and following the advice and the road that they send me on. This is responsible intervention as a parent. I am there and whatever we can do we will do kind of thing • So when he was diagnosed at the beginning of Standard 8, we were like right what are we going to do to help him cope through high school otherwise he is going to drown.. • I don't feel like I have succeeded in providing appropriate intervention for him

P3	• You just know that they are not coping and grasping information, or concentrating or memory, it doesn't mean that they need Ritalin or Concerta. It doesn't mean anything necessarily; it just means that the remedial environment will give them the strategies which basically this is what happened. • And I think from that assessment, that psychologist explained to [my son] and I very well. • And if they are true friends they are not going to neglect you just because you have a child in a remedial school. • just embracing this road and knowing that my son has got such exceptional qualities and characteristics that you can't be defined by just output. I am happy that he has never just fitted into the box • So with him accepting so many different kinds of people and different cultures, made me accept that more; so I grew as a person too • I have learnt so much from him. I have become so surprised at what he is able to do and achieve and memorize, the volumes. • Responsible intervention is well firstly not labelling anybody; not labelling the child. • There is support in the school; there is support outside the school if you need it with extra help. So there were no fears; just day by day.
P4	• We could do our own research; we weren't relying on somebody else. • Again once you have got a diagnosis you can do your own research • I did a lot of research on my own; I did a huge amount of research on my own. Once we got the right therapy team it was phenomenal, and they worked together and we achieved results. • You have to do your own research because you have to believe in the therapy. If you don't believe in it then it's not going to work. • I mean we started a support group; a whole lot of moms. • I never stopped working. For me that was very important. I don't think I could have done this full time. I think that it can be draining, and for me I needed normality. I needed to go to work, I needed to be under work pressure, I needed to do what I needed to do • You learn which are really true friends, who needs to be around you, who doesn't and ja. • So your circle of friends changes, and it is not that you identify with each other because you have got this problem, but you identify with each other because you are not judging what you are going through • You see people for who they are. • So I think it has made my husband and I actually more understanding of other parents with kids like ours • I think it is all about expectations. I think you need to be regularly tested. If your assessments can be done every 2 to 3 years, I think you need to follow through with that because things do change and things do shift
P5	• I still don't actually know; even when she had those assessments every few years at Bellavista and we would have the feedback I never really… like I understood why she needed to go but I never actually understood… like I don't even know if she has a diagnosis, actually. • I have never really been sure what it is. • I suppose we've all got the internet and Facebook; and I suppose at mainstream schools there are talks and there is support • I have learnt so much. Also not to expect perfection and that things grow and change, and with the right intervention and with the right skill base you can achieve anything. • So I learnt a lot; I had to learn to accept that things aren't always perfect.

	• You learn to accept different things; things aren't as important as they seem to be. • I think it has changed in that I was sort of hesitant and was unhappy that she needed to go to remedial school. And now looking back I don't think it is such a bad thing. I think rather that she went and she got the skill base and the problem was fixed, and what I gave her.
P6	• No it was available to me. As I said, I was lucky. I got the best of the best. I was very lucky. • Some of my friends were amazing and some of them weren't • I went through a whole process of mourning the loss of a child that I thought I was going to have, and getting to know the child that I do have, and embracing the child that I do have. • It is very hard. I have lived a real… I have come a long road; and she is my biggest accomplishment
	Actively facilitating intervention/support
P1	• I do send him for extra maths • If he wants me to get somebody else, a tutor, a full time tutor or whatever, I will do so. • I left a tutor to take care of my child and it was a disaster because she didn't understand how a child with a learning disorder thinks and how a child like that needs to learn. • And the tutors, I will be honest, are just not experienced enough because they don't know his frustrations and he won't tell them. • I would love to have somebody who understands the way he learns • They are just showing you where his weaker areas were but when they give you that feedback you just feel like, what can my child do. You haven't put anything he can do in this report. So I just never want to see another psychoeducational report as long as I live. • You have got to tell us what he can do as well; what are his strengths? • He was upset because he does this assessment and says Ma, I couldn't think on the spot in one minute what my favourite holiday was – I just needed one minute to think about it, and then I can write it. • When I went in to speak to them about it, they still kept telling me this what your child can't do. They are below average on this, they are below average on that, they are below average on that – I used to… I came home and I just cried because I didn't actually understand.
P2	• We went to the top OT's; My point is if you had to say to me after five years of OT, what kind of gains were there – I will tell you, 0%. Not 5%, not 10%, it was a waste of time.. • If we are going to get him concessions you can only have the assessment in Grade 8; book it. I did it. I booked it. He went for an education assessment in Grade 8 and they told us what was wrong with him without giving it a name. • I have friends with kids younger than mine along the way have come and said there is something wrong with my child, he is ADD. When they don't know, when they are not sure, when the kid doesn't fit in the box, what do they say, your child is ADD. The professionals that I put my trust in let me down and they never looked at anything from another angle. • It is a money making business as well. It is an industry
P3	• You know all the assessments he had, every areas was always weak and under average, below average of the norm. But there was never like an explanation.

	• That makes it okay, because an assessment is just looking at everything whilst nobody is Jack-of-all-Trades going to be able to do everything. • I think the assessment made us appreciate that this is where we are at. • There were moments in the feedback where I was sad, I was saddened and a bit disappointed – not disappointed, sad for my son in that I had hoped he had overcome more of these challenges.
P4	• I think you have just got to trust the therapist. You have got to work together as a team. You can't have somebody who doesn't believe in your child. • Sit there with them, listen to what your child says because children don't lie. • So I think you have got to have a brilliant team; everybody has to work for a goal. • I think that for us was getting to the diagnosis point was more stressful than the actual diagnosis • You need therapists who are open to different things, not necessarily only what they know. • I think the limitation is finding the right therapist for your child because there are not that many and the good therapists, as you know, you can stand on your head to get a space. • And then they also have a lifespan; because their age has changed, their needs have changed.
P5	• I think there is only one way to go if you child has a learning difficulty and that is to go to a remedial school. • So I think her skills from Bellavista • One thing I think is he comes from a very loving family, and because of that it has given him the strength and we are very blessed because of that. • I think it is to acknowledge that your child has a problem. I think that is the first thing. And then to find the right mediation and give that mediation. • I think the main thing is not accepting that your child has a problem which is such a weird thing as a parent, for me. I would only think to give your child the best no matter what. • I always say just take them for a full assessment. • You can't make a wrong decision by helping your child. • You can see that a learning difficulty can be fixed
P6	• I have been told by many professionals that she is where she is at because of my input; speech is carved in stone, it is non-negotiable even though she doesn't hate it but it is at the end of the day, the end of the week, so she is tired by the time we get there and so she is moany about it. • You must listen to the professionals. • She went to OT, she went to physio, she went to obviously speech therapy so that she was always keeping up and reaching the milestones. • You do what needs to be done and you don't pretend that there isn't an issue. • You don't say no my child will be fine; we live in the 21st century and I am very lucky to have had amazing people around me, including the speech therapist, and her needs have kind of always been priority.

Parents' perception of their child's experience	
P1	• The kids with learning disorders drown • my son keeps on apologizing to me. I am sorry that you have to do this with me everyday Mom. • My fear is the detrimental damage to his self-confidence. • They struggle in dealing with that they know that they have got this issue, and they struggle to deal with it sometimes, not always. • only when it comes to academic, you watch this confidence just deflate. • Impact him the most is when he is sitting with the lowest mark in the class, yet he has done really well for him. • Issues with himself that he is getting upset with himself. • My child constantly feels like he is a failure • I am seeing an improvement in his comprehension and his understanding; the lady is great and he is definitely improving. • My son came home once with 52% for maths, I stuck it on the fridge, I framed it I was so excited. • I started seeing a big maturity in him; I don’t know why at that age but he started understanding himself better and what he could do and what he couldn’t do. • He is very socially mature. He mixes well, he is in his committees, he has got friends, he is bubbly, he is a happy outgoing very confident child. • But form a mixing with other children, blending and adapting to high school, he is perfect. We have got no social issues at all. • His friends treat him the same, you know, whether he gets 10% or 100% on a test, they treat him the same.
P2	• The worst part was, and this is a child who was very anxious, which made his anxiety a thousand times worse • He is angry that it is hard for him, he has definitely had a chip on his shoulder about it, but I think we have worked through it • I believe it is a part of him, it is something that impacts him with his school environment, but I don’t believe that it is going to impact him in his life after this. • he is not focusing, everyone else is on the 10th sum and [MY SON] is still on the 1st sum. He got so anxious that his brain shut down. • He is angry that it is hard for him, he has definitely had a chip on his shoulder about it, but I think we have worked through it. • But remember at that age they don’t like to stand out; so he wouldn’t want a facilitator. • Now we are going into exams. But it was the first time I have seen that shift. Maturity and he doesn’t want to fail. He is not a rebellious child. • My son would have been in a stronger position if I would have had a Karen and an Ed Support supporting us from day one. • I have come to see firstly his growth, his resilience that he has built up and my respect for him when he has overcome certain things • He is enjoying school, he is happy. He has friends now, it took time. • It is a great school; I can’t fault that high school. I really can’t, I am a fan of it. • It is for everybody. • It took us longer; so the integration was harder for high school obviously. I am sure everyone with a kid in the Ed Support Program has told you the same thing.

P3	• His willingness to take risks in not just following what he is comfortable with but going out of his comfort zone. • It made him resilient and able to overcome his challenges in that he is motivated. He didn't give up. • [My son] developed his own compensatory skills without even knowing the weaknesses; he just developed these strategies and compensatory skills that he carried with him. • He became more motivated to reach his potential. • Everything was difficult. Like everything was a battle. He couldn't play sport; such low muscle tone; the physiotherapy – he was always like 3 or 4 years behind. • He could speak but you couldn't really understand what he was saying. • it was a lot of patience, building his confidence and then when he was in the right environment, it obviously didn't happen overnight, but slowly slowly he started to be able to accomplish more and achieve more goals because they were small realistic goals. • Then only after he started to prove himself as like hey I am think really intelligent funky guy, then we started treating him as more of a grown up. • So it took time; I felt that there was still a stigma when he was here in Grade 8 and then people said where did you come from and he said Bellavista and then their faces would change; their expression. • And then the committees he made lots of friends through that, participating and availing himself. • He is keen to do whatever he is asked or whatever is out there; whether it is going to listen to a talk and interacting with his teachers. It is good.
P4	• I think when they are little they don't understand and I think when they are little you don't want them to say… like we never told [my son] he was ADD until he was about 11 or 12 because we knew he would use it as a reason for being different. • If they have done their work, sometimes if they haven't then I think failure is important. I don't think that there is a negative… yes it is hard, yes it is difficult but I also don't think it is the end of the world. • I think with a child with learning disabilities, you can't be defined by what you do you have to be defined by who you are. • They have got to be responsible adults. • I am not prepared to fight that fight anymore. When they were little it was my decision but not anymore. • I think that you learn it is not a death sentence; it is just an obstacle that they are going to overcome. • So I think that is up to the kid; I think the school encourages it all the way, I think that is up to the child. • If you want to get up and you want to exercise in the morning, you can be in the athletics team. If you want to get up and go and play rugby you can – and the coaches don't know you. So I think it is a very even playing field actually. • And there are a million committees; I always tell [my son] if you can't find something to fit into it is your fault because there are so many. Like you could choose a different thing every day.
P5	• I suppose only personal social limitations but not academic related. • Can you imagine struggling everyday in a classroom environment, it then affects your social environment. • They diagnosed her as socially anxious because she was struggling with her whole environment that she wasn't absorbing information.

	• So you don’t absorb any information because you are so worried about everything around you so you are not actually learning. • They are resilient and we are more aware of the little things. • Just seeing how she has grown and how well she has done by giving her that skill base and seeing how brilliantly she is doing in every sphere. • Like how well she has integrated, how good her marks are. I realized that the skills that she learnt, like she knows how to learn, those are things that they don’t teach you at a mainstream school. And not having that pressure; I think that is huge! • She is really integrated brilliantly. Like she’s got loads of friends and she is doing well academically and she does well on the sports field and in the plays and she is very involved. • She has got a huge friend group • I don’t know if they have all fitted in but thank God she has. • I think the main thing was that she came with confidence. • I think social integration is probably the most important to have a happy child at school.
P6	• She has to concentrate very hard in class so that they don’t miss out, otherwise half of what is going on in the classroom goes over their heads. • She doesn’t want to talk because it’s like hard. It’s not just a natural thing. • To everybody else it is just a bit of a noise, get on with it. For her it is not get on with it, she cannot hear. • It affected her and friendships in the beginning but it didn’t stop me from taking her where she needed to go • She has always been an amazing child. But when I relaxed a little bit was when she was in Grade 4, and she became friends with those other girls. • She is an unbelievable child; if you think about it, as I said she is a miracle. She shouldn’t even be here • She does have her challenges obviously but she has got a great group of friends but it has been a long hard road. • She has integrated amazingly. She plays hockey, she is going to play soccer, she played touch rugby. She is in the outreach committee. • I also facilitate it, like I said to her that she must play hockey, she must play soccer. She has done first aid.
Theme 3: The School’s Challenging Role in Facilitating Intervention/Support	
<u>Parents’ concerns around narrow thinking in broader school system</u>	
P1	
P2	• The school system only caters to that stereotype, but I have lived it. • I also think that the environment that he was in for primary school highlights issues with these kids. • I believe it is an unhealthy environment • I do believe it is not geared up to deal with the different flavours that human beings bring. • It is too generic and it is to stereotype for one kind of person, and that is the fundamental problem with the system; which obviously impacts on children with learning disorders.

	• That is the core issue here is that the school is too generic or too what's the word I am looking for…Rigid. Rigid. The school system needs to be more flexible to cater to different kinds of people.
P3	• In a mainstream environment you can get absolutely nothing
P4	• It is a challenge; school is hard, but I also know that school is not the be all and end all. You have just got to get through it. I am one for looking at all different opportunities. • I do believe that school has its place; I think socially it is amazing; I think sports wise it is incredible; sometimes the education is lacking but school is not the be all and end all of life. I really don't believe that.
P5	• The bigger mainstream school systems can sometimes break you. So I think it took me all those years but I really learnt that, it was so beneficial to be at a school like that and to build that skill base. • The pressure, the exams, the tests – you know they built her and you don't need to put that pressure on children. You need to build their confidence and skill base, which I think is more important than anything. • They learn to accept other children; so there are kids there that are autistic, there are different races and religions, some kids are quite normal and other kids struggle a lot. Some kids have physical disabilities
P6	• She went to a school that built her and she left with such confidence that she didn't know she was any different.
<u>Parents' conflicting experience at the school</u>	
P1	• [This school] is a lot of pressure. This is a private school. IEB is not an easy syllabus, and there are clever kids that struggle • I definitely think smaller classes because the teachers do get frustrated, and I don't blame them. • Got very mixed levels of academic levels in a classroom. • Classrooms where teachers will scream at him he will not perform at all • He keeps complaining that the teachers are going too fast and that they need to go slower. • They are busy and the class is 20 people • They are not teaching him the way he is able to learn • A teacher cannot slow down, she can't always go back and re-explain and I understand from the teacher's perspective, she has got a syllabus to finish • I don't think that they respond negatively as such; I think the teachers are actually very good in that way. But I do think that they are a little bit impatient with the kids, and I am not blaming the teachers, like I said they have got a syllabus to finish and they have to move on. • So I contacted the teacher myself but I did it; and she gladly helped me, she was very helpful and she gave it to me. • I had to ask who she was and how I get a hold of her
• P2	• It is a mainstream situation where, get on with it. • I think that infrastructure at the school, I don't have a bad word to say about it. I think that they are really on top of it and they know what they are doing. • These teachers aren't geared up.

	• A child comes in that doesn’t fit into the box, and they don’t know what to do with the child • And at high school level, the norm is for them not to get overly involved and not to go out of their way. Very few of them have gone out of their way and very few of them have accommodated us with responding to things on emails • I am not asking for anything else but for the communication to improve with the teachers when you are dealing with a kid that doesn’t fit in the box.
P3	• The school is phenomenal in that we wouldn’t have been able to do it without the school. • We are really grateful that the school accepts the children without any kind of an entrance exam or anything, we are grateful for that. • I can confidently say to other parents who are worried, the high school caters for this kind of child. They don’t only cater for a child getting 80% throughout primary school. • They will cater for the child who comes from a remedial background, who needs the support • The range of subjects has been phenomenal. We also would not have been able to go into a mainstream school that offers only a limited amount of subjects • They [the teachers] can’t understand them the way an educational psychologist who has studied in that arena, can understand them
P4	• School is not for everyone and this one is not for the faint hearted. • So we are very limited, we are very limited in this school frame of mind because it is still seen as a disadvantage – not a disadvantage – it is actually seen as a disability and it’s not. • There is a stigma attached to it in the school. I wish we could change that. • I think the teachers are scared of taking on too much to be honest, because every time there is a case study there is more work for them. I get that, I get that. I understand that and there is only so much time in the day. • The teachers need to be more communicative.
P5	• Because it is such an academic school and they only acknowledge the kids that do brilliantly, and they don’t acknowledge it. • But if you have just gone from a remedial school to getting like an A for English when you have had auditory processing difficulties, you are not acknowledged for that. • They are all highly academic, it is all about the A’s. I think it is still very much like that. I don’t like it. • There is so much pressure. That is all they strive for and any parent will tell you that they don’t care, and they do, because that is all the school recognizes. • I think Grade 8 you kind of have some teacher feedback but from now I don’t even know what her teachers look like. I mean she just got a report so there are some comments from the teacher, but besides that we have no interaction.
P6	• I had a case conference at the beginning of the year to explain what it means and how they can facilitate her in the classroom, and things to be aware of • Here – no this school is particularly good.

	• From the day that she arrived here she was never treated… she never got one concession. She was marked like everybody else; she didn't get differentiated marking; she didn't get a differentiated worksheet • I never drop the ball; if that makes any sense. I don't leave anything to the school • I said that is not okay the parent needs to know as well; I didn't say it like that but the parents do need to know. We need to understand. There has not been proper communication
<u>Support from the Educational Support Program</u>	
P1	• The Ed support program is really great, but the classes are too big • I don't even know who takes him or what they do, how often they have it. I just know they have it instead of Hebrew but I don't know what they do in these classes • Has my child gaining anything from these extra Ed support classes? • I had no hesitation whatsoever. I was very excited about it, very. Very enthusiastic but I might have had a bit of an over-enthusiastic view of what the Ed support actually was. • I did think that it was more structured; but then again maybe it is and I just don't know about it. I was expecting something a little bit different to what I am seeing. • There are a lot of parents who don't really know what their kids do every day. • They have taken his stress of Hebrew off him because he struggled immensely with Hebrew, they have taken that stress off him, he is in a class where he feels like he is on top of it, • When he saw 72% for Hebrew on his report, I don't know, this child was ecstatic. He felt like he had won the lottery because they get a different test entirely to the rest of the grade; that is when he felt I am on top of my game because I can do this • I am fighting back because a child can't go and join a clinic with children that are trying to get 90% and that is why they are going to the clinic. • I think the Ed support kids are overlooked because they are sitting in a classroom, • they are sitting in a class with very mixed academic levels • sometimes in probably the speed at which the teacher needs to move ahead. • I don't get feedback from the school – so I think feedback from the school in that this is what we have been doing in the Ed support for this term. • Parents have no idea what lessons these children are having in Ed support – I am not seeing anything coming home • there is general communication to the Ed support parents about a class or when the clinics are. But no feedback. I feel like the Ed support teacher should be phoning me, we are working on it, we can see where the kids are struggling
P2	• And the ed support needs to be from primary school not from high school. • They are there to guide you and they have experience and that they have got very educated experienced social workers working there; it is important. • So I wouldn't have gone to [to the school] if it wasn't there. • No because it was mainstream and it is just a support system. That to me is what it is.

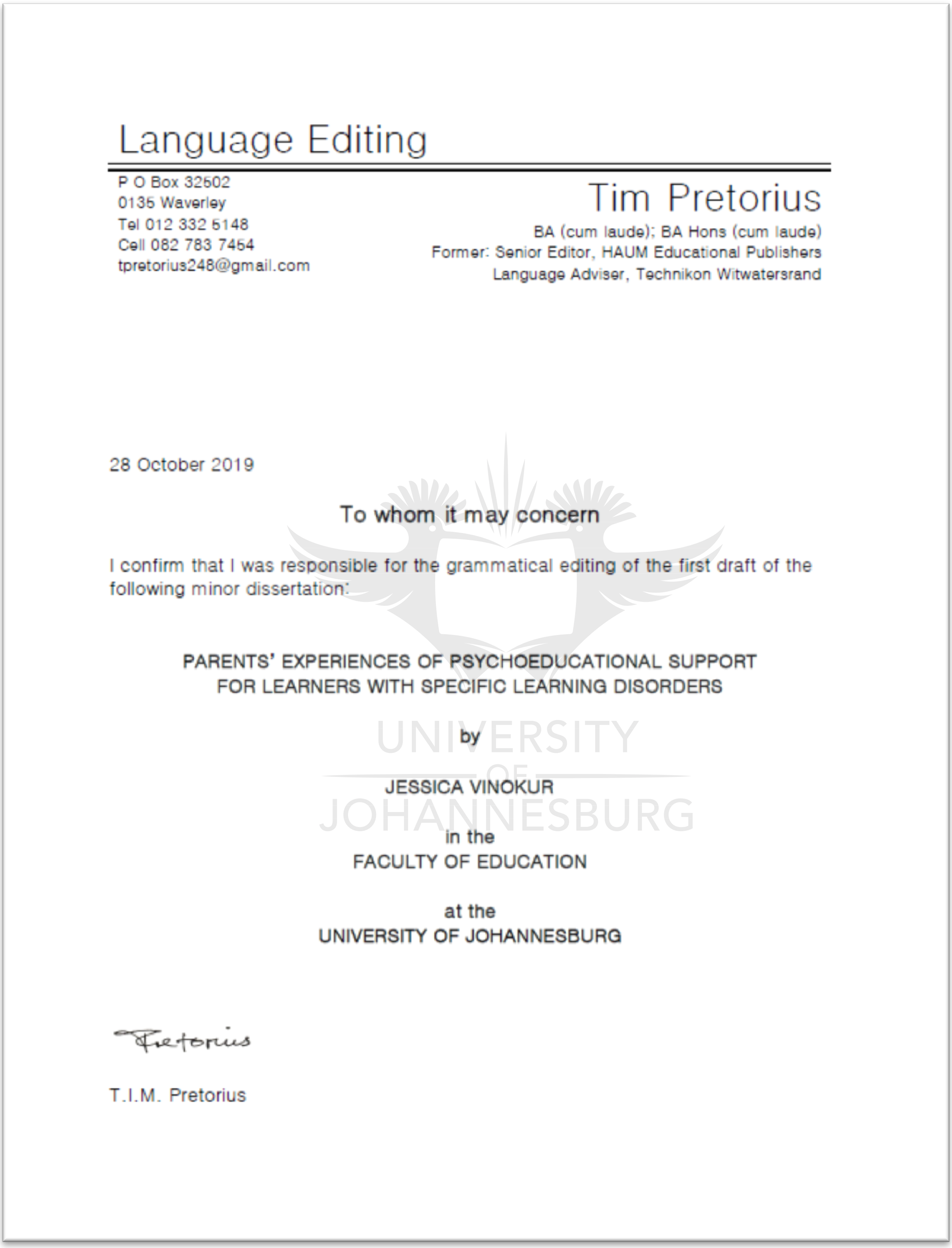
	• It works because I don’t think it is an issue; most of the kids don’t even know what it is. • I was very nervous for her to go. Very. Their grade is the biggest intake in 10 years; there are over 200 kids. And her diagnosis was social anxiety! So I was very worried. • Lots of kids have it! We will get on with it, he will be fine, we will work around it. • That is why I am grateful to the counsellor that Ed Support because if I didn’t have her, and I must tell you the director, because Jay had an incredible director. Without them he would have drowned, no question. • I can’t fault it. I personally have only had good experiences.
P3	• We were going to give it a try; we were not making it that this is now it; let’s go to Grade 8 and see how it goes. • Remember the Hebrew part he could pass was they taught them the map of Israel and where everything was • No no; I knew that he could only come here because that existed. If it didn’t exist I wouldn’t have made the choice to come here. Not because I had another child here and it was convenient, not at all. It was because I knew it was in place that we had a good chance of making this work well for him. • A partnership with the school, is getting him the Afrikaans concession. • So he wouldn’t have been able to stay at a mainstream private school if he did not get that concession because firstly you have to pass, you have to take a subject that you cannot do, you have got no confidence in • I think it is great. I haven’t had any problems; everybody has responded to me quickly if I have had concerns about him academically. • They taught me to manage my expectations well. They have given him the benefit of the doubt, like not said look you have really failed flat out you need to leave the school. • We are fortunate that we could stay at the school because of the interventions, the support, the care, like I say the benefit of the doubt, like everything. Just the confidence; you know if someone has confidence in you, then in turn you want to prove yourself. So you kind of like push yourself maybe a bit harder. • So they have given him skills, they have had an open door policy • I think more importantly is the availability and having someone you feel understands you one on one. • I’ve had meetings where they have just been there to mediate for me, to explain like for example a breakdown of the assessment which came back • The Ed Support phoned me after the report came out to congratulate [my son], to say that really we have got nothing to worry about, it’s like onwards and upwards for the next 18 months.
P4	• I think that the Ed Support Program in principal is a brilliant brilliant idea and I think it is so needed, but use that time wisely. • So I am not quite sure what their role is. I think that they can be a lot more proactive. • No no I asked for it; my kids needed it. Again, I think there is enough pressure in the world that you don’t have to be under academic pressure unnecessarily. • The fact that it is available is huge. • When he came here we applied for him to be in the small class, and he has got an Afrikaans exemption.

	• So from a social work point of view, like I know [my son] has a great relationship with [counsellor], whenever we shout at him he goes and reports us • I think probably the fact that they don't do mainstream Hebrew, because I think that is really really difficult for a child with any learning disability. • So you are in a class with a teacher who you just don't get; your marks are showing that you don't understand, no matter how much effort you put in. • Kids are in the Ed Support Program are struggling with something – give them a head start; it makes no difference. I don't think that they use the time wisely; I really don't. I think a lot of the time it's just okay kids do your homework. I think; according to my kids. • I also think that they promise the world; like I am going to sit with your child once a week and we are going to do a study program and I am going to show them study skills; never happens, never happens. • I think that these kids need to be made a priority. • So I think what would be amazing is if once a term you had a case study, like we have never had one for Adam and he is in Grade 9 now, we have never had one; I think for the teachers and for us. • I think a bit more communication would be really nice; maybe explain the Ed Support Program to us at the beginning of every year. What their plans and goals are, that would be amazing. As I said earlier I just think a little bit more communication would be good.
P5	• As far as I know, I think there is no Ed support system. I think she will tell you that it doesn't really exist. I don't know what they do in those lessons. I know when the other kids do Hebrew they go and I think English, Afrikaans and maybe Maths, but I think she would tell you that it is like a free period. • I don't really think there is much support but maybe I also haven't asked for it. • So that is what my understanding is, to give them the extra support in those subjects. I don't know if it is beneficial. • I was enthusiastic because the other schools actually don't offer an Ed Support Program. So I was enthusiastic although I had heard from other parents that it wasn't as amazing as it seemed to be. • The only person that we do have a little bit of interaction with is her psychologist, • We do get messages for the Ed Support kids that there is extra Afrikaans and a few things like that, • I think the relationship I have with the psychologist, when I have asked her for support or I have asked her to help us with subject choices and that she has been helpful. • The main thing about the Ed Support Program is that you don't need to do Hebrew. • The Ed Support Program could offer them more emotional support. I tell her that you just work your hardest and do your best and it doesn't matter if you get an A or not. But they should actually be doing that, encouraging those kids. • No. I don't even know who takes her for any subjects in the Ed Support Program.
P6	• Yes they have. So she had a full psych ed at the end of last year and now the psychologist is applying to the IEB to get an Afrikaans concession. I am not sure what other concession she will get. • Just that I know that it is around and it's available.

	• So now she is in the Ed Support Program and she is not doing such high level Hebrew, so that is a big help. That is where it is the biggest help.

APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

Confirmation of Editing



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28 October 2019

To whom it may concern

I confirm that I was responsible for the grammatical editing of the first draft of the following minor dissertation:

PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL SUPPORT
FOR LEARNERS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISORDERS

by

JESSICA VINOKUR

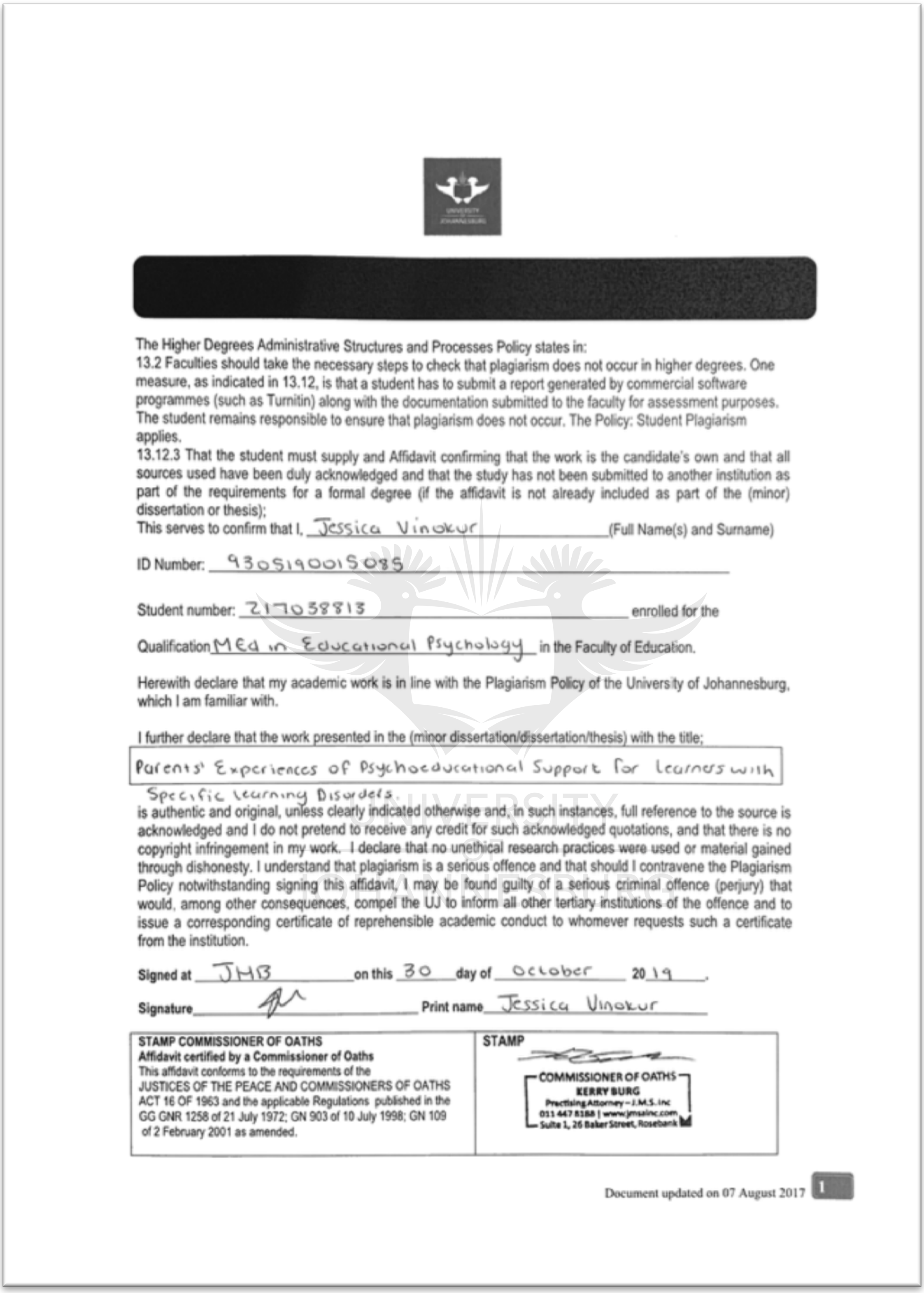
in the
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

at the
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Pretorius

T.I.M. Pretorius

Affidavit: Declaration of Originality



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This serves to confirm that I, Jessica Vinokur (Full Name(s) and Surname)

ID Number: 9305190015085

Student number: 217058813 enrolled for the

Qualification MEd in Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education.

Herewith declare that my academic work is in line with the Plagiarism Policy of the University of Johannesburg, which I am familiar with.

I further declare that the work presented in the (minor dissertation/dissertation/thesis) with the title;

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Signed at JHB on this 30 day of October 2019.

Signature Print name Jessica Vinokur

STAMP COMMISSIONER OF OATHS **Affidavit certified by a Commissioner of Oaths** This affidavit conforms to the requirements of the JUSTICES OF THE PEACE AND COMMISSIONERS OF OATHS ACT 16 OF 1963 and the applicable Regulations published in the GG GNR 1258 of 21 July 1972; GN 903 of 10 July 1998; GN 109 of 2 February 2001 as amended.	**STAMP** COMMISSIONER OF OATHS KERRY BURG Practising Attorney – J.M.S. Inc 011 447 8188 | www.jmsainc.com Suite 1, 26 Baker Street, Rosebank

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