# School psychologists' views on challenges in facilitating school development through intersectoral collaboration

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The role of school psychologists has been debated and contested nationally and internationally for many decades, with an emphasis on the need for a paradigm shift in professional roles. Psychologists may be employed in the private sector, in non-governmental organisations, in higher education institutions, and by the state. Those employed by the state within the Department of Basic Education are referred to as school psychologists, and are tasked with providing psychological services to public schools. In the Western Cape, the context of this study, school psychologists are assigned to circuit teams, where they are expected to work collaboratively with other professionals to provide support to schools. This paper is focused on school psychologists' perceptions of the challenges that emerge when working with other sectors to facilitate school development. Eight focus group discussions were conducted with 47 school psychologists. The data collected resulted in the generation of five categories of challenges facing school psychologists when they collaborate with other sectors to facilitate school development. These were: diverse discourses and worldviews; roles and boundaries; personal and interpersonal factors; training needs; and organisational challenges. This research contributes towards the deepening of school psychology practice, and to providing important insights towards the enhancement of intersectoral collaboration and school development as aspects of the provision of support to schools in South Africa.

**Key words:** collaboration; educational psychologists; inter-professional; intersectoral collaboration; school development; school psychologists; school psychology

## Introduction

School development is a key focus of the work of many individuals and organisations within state departments and in the non-government sector in South Africa (Bertram, 1999; Christie, Butler & Potterton, 2007; De Jong, 1996; Westraad, 2006). It has become crucial for different sectors to network and to form partnerships, so that school development can be co-ordinated and facilitated collaboratively to enhance effectiveness and maximise opportunities for exploiting resources and expertise in various sectors. This is a necessity in the South African context, which reflects the realities of what is both a middle- and low-income developing country. Whether it be the lack of sufficient resources, the lack of adequate service delivery or policy implementation, or scarce and expensive human resources such as psychologists and other education support personnel, resources need to be optimally utilised.

This paper is based on the underlying assumption that school development is the responsibility of those involved in education, and that collaboration within the sector is crucial if schools are to be effectively supported and empowered to fulfil their function of providing quality education. Education White Paper 6 stresses the importance of interdisciplinary work (Department of Education, 2001), while research on the application of systems thinking in school development reveals that practitioners working within schools need to "move away from functioning as individuals in competition with one another [and] … should rather collaborate more often, because [...] problems cannot be solved in isolation" (Moloi, 2005:66).

Psychologists must complete a master's degree and register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) before being able to work for the state, in private practice, higher education, the corporate sector, non-government organisations and community-based structures, and are also able to hold the position of school psychologist within the Department of Basic Education. These individuals are trained as educational, clinical or counselling psychologists, and are registered with the HPCSA. In South Africa, the term *school psychologist* is used in the Department of Education to refer to those who provide psychological services to schools. The minimum qualification to hold the post of 'school psychologist' in the Department of Basic Education in South Africa is a four year degree (e.g. an Honours), which allows one to register as a counsellor or psychometrist (Daniels, Collair, Moolla & Lazarus, 2007).

School psychologists specialise in the provision of services to children and youth, as well as to their teachers and parents. Their practice thus encompasses direct and indirect interventions, including supporting children and youth, assessment and programme planning, in-service training, school development, supervision, and consultation with teachers, parents and other professionals (Jimerson, Oakland & Farrell, 2007).

Debates concerning the role of school psychologists have often centred on the need to employ a systemic perspective (Burden, 1999). A systems approach emphasises the relationship between people and their environments rather than examining the characteristics of either of these aspects in isolation, thereby moving

beyond a focus on the individual. This would entail school psychologists working on multiple levels. A large aspect of their practice involves providing direct services to learners; however, school psychologists are also trained to facilitate educator and parent development, and to intervene at the level of the school as an organisation.

School psychologists thus play and integral role in facilitating the development of the physical and social environment of the school organisation so as to ensure the provision of quality education. Schools need to be physically safe spaces if they are to support the development of children and youth. School psychologists can play an important role in assisting schools with identification of infrastructural needs that, when met, can support learners and teachers alike. The school psychologist is, however, particularly concerned with identifying and addressing psycho-social aspects within the school and community setting that impact on the safety of learners and teachers. Teaching and learning cannot take place optimally in a social environment that feels unsafe and threatening. An important aspect of school psychologists' practice thus includes the establishment and implementation of special projects and programmes that involve collaboration with other professionals, parents, and community organisations, in order to address such issues as gangsterism, violence, substance abuse, bullying and child abuse.

Consultation with key stakeholders such as principals, teachers, parents and school governing bodies is an important aspect of their work, as is the development of school programmes focusing on issues including violence, study skills, reading, sexuality, substance abuse and classroom management. The role of a school psychologist thus encompasses work with individual learners and teachers, as well as interventions in the classroom and the school. This would indicate the potentially valuable role of school psychologists in the field of education and in the formal education system in particular (Moolla, 2011). The contribution of these professionals is clear, despite the challenges facing their profession, which include limited resources, inadequate training and lack of acknowledgement (Daniels et al., 2007; Farrell, Jimerson, Kalambouka & Benoit, 2005; Lazarus, 2007; Pillay, 2003).

Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2010) explain that s*chool development* aims to ensure that all aspects of school life are geared towards fostering effective teaching and learning so that learners develop optimally as individuals and make a positive contribution towards society. This requires that school authorities engage in self-reflection towards effecting change. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) thus contend that schools ought to be 'learning organisations', with educators constantly reflecting on their own practice, and consequently shifting and changing. This shift to facilitate school development is not only a South African phenomenon. *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (Jimerson et al., 2007) provides an overview of school psychology practice in 48 countries around the world, reporting that school development activities are occurring at multiple levels of the system, including classrooms, playgrounds, staffrooms and administration offices in schools.

Schmuck and Runkel (1994) describe school development as encompassing systematically planned and sustained efforts at 'school self-study' and improvement. This activity focuses on changing formal and informal procedures, processes and norms, or structures within the school as an organisation. The goal of school development, they argue, should be a focus on improving the quality of life of both the individual as well as the organisation, whose mutual focus must both directly and indirectly be on educational issues. Official policy emphasises the need for school improvement and directs schools to develop plans towards this (Xaba, 2006). Xaba (2006) argues that schools require support in this process, and suggests that departmental officials should be held responsible for facilitating school development, planning and implementation.

*Intersectoral collaboration* is an interactive process that brings together diverse sectors, to execute plans for common goals as well as to generate solutions for complex problems. It refers to 'working together', or partnerships developed between professionals and other role players (Robinson, Langhan, Lazarus & Moolla, 2002). Such collaboration involves drawing together different sectors, disciplines and professions, which, in working together, cross boundaries to work within a common conceptual framework (Ahgren, Axelsson & Axelsson, 2009). The effectiveness of collaborative ventures is dependent on co-ordination and efficient management (Goldman & Schmalz, 2008).

Moloi (2010) and Oswald and De Villiers (2013) emphasise the positive effect of collaborative partnerships. They argue that working in a team builds a sense of belonging and forms a crucial network of support in which accountability and responsibility is shared by those working in partnership to address the many challenges faced in schools. El Ansari and Phillips (2001) however, note that intersectoral collaboration requires effort, since its efficacy is influenced by relationships, communication patterns, intra- and inter-personal dynamics, and time and resource constraints.

An analysis of *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (Jimerson et al., 2007) reveals that collaborative work of school psychologists is not given much prominence. Cursory mention is made of the various sectors with whom school psychologists collaborate, including teachers, principals, specialist teachers, parents, and other health

professionals. The nature of the collaboration with these sectors reveals a focus on direct service provision to learners rather than on school development. This suggests that collaboration around school development is a neglected aspect of the work of school psychologists that needs further exploration and debate, which are the key focus of this paper.

## Methodology
### Research Aim and Questions
In this study, we investigated the challenges that emerge when school psychologists work with other sectors to facilitate school development, highlighting school psychologists' perceptions of the struggles of practice. From this research, we propose ways in which these challenges can be addressed. The specific research questions were as follows:

    (1) What challenges face school psychologists when collaborating with other sectors to facilitate school development?

    (2) How can these challenges be addressed?

### Research Design
The research was framed within a constructivist interpretivist paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain that it is accepted that multiple subjective realties are constructed, interpreted and observed by the researcher. Within this paradigm, it is understood that the researcher and the participants are able to construct understandings both separately and together. Consistent with a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, a qualitative approach was adopted in the data generation process to facilitate an enriched explanation of the research problem (De Vos, 2005).

    The qualitative approach adopted in the study provides an in-depth description of school psychology practice and the challenges experienced. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain that qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world, where methods are employed that make the world visible by transforming it into representations that include field notes, interviews and conversations. Qualitative research allows for comprehensive, interdependent, dynamic structures to be understood. It facilitates the collection of rich data that can explore the "why" and "how" of the problem, and not just the "what". Qualitative methods are characterised by their complexity, and their acknowledgement of the contextual, where exploration and discovery are emphasised (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Mertens, 2005). This study was conducted in an attempt to understand and interpret people's experiences of the phenomena of school development and intersectoral collaboration, and the meanings ascribed by psychologists to these experiences.

### Research Context and Participants
Findings reported in this article are based on data collected in the Western Cape, a province often regarded as well-resourced and engaged in alternative and innovative practices (Moolla, 2011). The research was conducted across eight educational districts in the Western Cape, where the provincial structures include circuit teams that are responsible for bringing professional education support closer to schools. These circuit teams are multifunctional, interdisciplinary and inter-professional teams and usually comprise of a school psychologist, a curriculum advisor, a learning support advisor, a social worker, an institution-management-and-governance (IMG) advisor, and an administrator. The structure necessitates a collaborative approach to supporting provision to schools.

    All circuit-based school psychologists employed by the Western Cape Education Department were approached to participate in the study. All participants who were invited (49 Western Cape Education Department circuit-based school psychologists) accepted the invitation. However, 47 actually participated, and two sent their apologies, due to an absence from work on the day the focus group interviews were scheduled to take place.

### Data Collection
Focus group discussions stimulate debate and engagement around specific events or experiences shared by participants in the group, generating large quantities of material in fairly short periods of time, and producing data that cannot be obtained in an individual interview, because they rely on the interaction between participants to elicit opinions and perceptions (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Mertens, 2005). Greeff (2005) explains that focus groups are helpful when trying to explore thoughts and feelings and not just behaviour, because the group dynamic allows information to come to the fore, as participants share and compare perceptions, positions, experiences, desires and concerns. In this study, one focus group was conducted in each of the eight districts and involved between six and eight participants per group.

### Data Analysis
Data that emerged was systematically organised, stored and coded. Thematic analysis was employed in the analysis of focus group discussions aiming to identify broad categories and, within these, key themes. This analysis facilitated the formulation of insightful, meaningful and comprehensive responses to the research questions (Babbie & Mouton, 2004). The process entailed a systematic examination of the data, with the purpose of identifying patterns, salient themes, recurring ideas and biases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Participant re-

sponses were coded, and analysed with the research questions and literature, providing the broad framework for first-level analysis. Deeper analysis focused on emerging patterns and themes within the broader categories that were first identified. This process receives support from Terreblanche, Durrheim and Kelly (2006), who emphasise familiarisation and immersion, inducing themes, coding, elaboration, and interpretation and checking, as key steps in interpretive data analysis.

### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of data is enhanced if consideration is given to the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity of the data (Mertens, 2005). Since Leedy and Ormrod (2005) have argued that the interpretation of qualitative data is often influenced by the researcher's biases and values, care was taken to ensure rigour in the recording, checking and analysis of data in this study. The following strategies were employed to address these challenges: purposive sampling, piloting, triangulation, peer review, audit trail, peer debriefing and supervision, unexpected case analysis and member checks.

### Ethical Considerations

Babbie and Mouton (2004) stress the importance of grounding research in ethical practice. This study addressed such ethical issues through informed consent, right to withdraw, right to privacy and confidentiality, and protection from harm. Ethical clearance was obtained through the University of the Western Cape, and permission to conduct the research granted from the Western Cape Education Department.

### Findings and Discussion

The findings presented below constitute the key patterns that emerged from the data. Unless otherwise stated, the issues raised and evidence provided represent the majority views of participants. School psychologists who were interviewed described five categories of challenges that emerge when they collaborate with other sectors to facilitate school development. These were: (1) diverse discourses and worldviews; (2) roles and boundaries; (3) personal and interpersonal factors; (4) training; and (5) organisational challenges. These findings are discussed below, supported by excerpts from the data generated, and expounded upon with reference to relevant literature.

### Diverse Discourses and Worldviews

Professions and disciplines, wittingly or unwittingly, draw on different paradigms and frameworks to guide their practice. The language and jargon used may also vary from one discipline to another. Sectors working with schools need to be conscious about the theories and paradigms which guide their practice (Lazarus, 2007) and the language they use when discussing their practice. The challenge of divergent *discourses and worldviews* has emerged as central in this study. School psychologists have emphasised the importance of clarifying concepts and terminology, and the way in which these should be operationalised in collaborative initiatives between different sectors. In particular, the findings highlighted the importance of a common understanding of school development and intersectoral collaboration, both in theory and practice. Without a clear understanding of what school development and intersectoral collaboration mean, and how these can best be facilitated, the processes may be misinterpreted and poorly implemented, as is reflected in comments made by most participants:

> *I had a different expectation or view of what this multi-disciplinary circuit team was going to look like. It was really, for me, going to be like a team with specialists in* [it] *that goes into a situation and where your expertise is needed,* [where] *you sort of* [sic] *deal with it.* [But] *it is not like that;* [instead] […] *you are expected to become a generalist* […] *I think we missed the boat* [sic] *with this multi-disciplinary* [approach].

> *I think the notion of whole school development is not thoroughly understood in this province, so the role of psychologists as* [agents of change] *is minimal. I do not think that the current cadre of psychologists feels that this aspect of service delivery forms part of their responsibilities.* [It is very sad].

Participants explained that different sectors operate with different worldviews and this influences the ways in which school development is facilitated. This perception, which was reflected by many of those interviewed, is aptly captured in a particular participant's reflection thus:

> *Everyone will tell you that the relationship that school psychologists have with schools is a 'different'* [kind of] *relationship. You don't come to judge. You don't check up on anybody. You come to help with problems.*

The results of this study highlight how support provision to schools can be hampered as a consequence of differing discourses and worldviews. Participants described how the nature of the support provided depends on one's world view. They argued that differing worldviews result in different philosophical underpinnings, and consequently, in differing practices. Similarly, different discourses (interpretations of intersectoral collaboration) resulted in different expectations in terms of roles, relationships and service provision. When different sectors work together, it is crucial that the collaboration is characterised by a common vision and a shared understanding of the required processes. Concepts that frame collaborative projects and [the way in which] these are operationalised, must therefore be clarified (Sanders, 2001).

## Roles and Boundaries

The findings of the study also show that intersectoral collaboration entails different sectors working together by contributing their expertise (Ahgren et al., 2009), rather than on all developing similar generalist roles. Effective collaboration depends on each sector focusing on its area of specialisation, and contributing its expertise. This is contrary to the ways in which many school psychologists are expected to work in these multi-functional teams.

Donald et al. (2010) explain that defining roles and clarifying how these are operationalised to achieve goals within a system is crucial for successful collaboration. Role definition generates clarity regarding what each individual role player is able to contribute by way of skill and expertise.

This pooling of expertise and knowledge heightens the potential impact of the intervention (Ahgren et al., 2009).

Findings of this study suggest that the roles of school psychologists are generally poorly defined, and the experience is that these are not clearly communicated to all stakeholders in the education system. This often results in ineffective implementation of their functions. Participants explained that the contribution they make to school development encompasses interventions at the level of the individual, as well as at the level of the organisation, although this is not clearly understood by the sectors with whom they collaborate. The range of school development activities identified by the participants is captured in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** School development activities of school psychologists

| | School psychologist involvement in school development activities |
|---|---|
| At the level of the individual | Consultation with educators |
| | Consultation with principals |
| At the level of the organisation | Training and group interventions with teachers |
| | Development and support of the Institution Level Support Team (ILST) |
| | Special programmes and projects |
| | Monitoring and evaluation of schools |
| | Supporting teaching, learning and management |

Given the systemic understanding underpinning the study, activities at the level of the organisation must be understood to include engagements beyond the school's boundaries. Special programmes and projects often include interaction with the broader school community, especially when it comes to addressing issues that impact on the safety and well-being of its learners and teachers.

Most school psychologists who participated in the study argue that they have distinct roles in facilitating school development and that other sectors have a narrow perception of what they can and should be able to do. They expressed their concern that:

> circuit team managers are 'clueless' [sic] *about what a psychologist can and cannot be expected to do.*
> *The ignorance with regard to our work!* [sic] *I realise they don't know,* [and], *I don't want to generalise – they don't* always *know what we really do.*

Some participants argued that there is an assumption that school psychologists are only responsible for conducting psycho-educational assessments and providing therapeutic services. One participant explained:

> *there is a perception that my training has equipped me to do an assessment and write a report and that* [this assessment is the most important aspect] [...] *that: 'you are only doing your work if you do an assessment'. There is still* [the

misconception] *that you are not doing your work if you are not testing.*

Ironically, the job description for school psychologists employed by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED, 2010) is extremely broad, resulting in increased workload for school psychologists and extended expectations from managers and supervisors. All participants acknowledged that the job description at present is open to varied interpretation, in many instances finding school psychologists in roles that do not draw on their psychological expertise, as one school psychologist explains:

> *It is such a wide job description and most people who weren't trained previously weren't exposed to* <u>all</u> *aspects of the job* [...]. *So people will have a speciality; amongst us school psychologists, we have such specialist expertise. But often in a single person … not everybody can cover all the areas of the job description.*

Some participants, who have been in posts for a long time, described their experience of the way in which dynamics in the organisation have changed:

> *At the moment the way the work is enforced as a result of the redesign. Previously people worked together naturally, without* feeling [the sense that]: *'I am tramping on someone else's toes'* [sic]. *Every team member knew where the boundaries were.* [In the] *new dispensation, I, as a school psychologist, then become an extension of the IMG. My role as a specialist changes to that of 'generalist'. The disadvantage is the developmental work that I used to do as a school psychologist is now*

*replaced by something else. The schools are possibly confused about my role as a school psychologist.*

The findings of this study indicate that school psychologists have been redefining their roles to include more consultative and preventative services, and have been engaging with schools in a more systemic way, despite the many challenges identified. These findings support experiences noted elsewhere, where the traditional roles of psychologists have been challenged (Burden & Brown, 1987; Engelbrecht, 2009; Jimerson et al., 2007; Nichols, Parffrey & Burden, 1989). Hatzichristou (2002) states that school psychologists in most countries around the world are grappling with changing roles and evolving professional identities, and that practices are shifting.

### Personal and Interpersonal Dynamics

The effectiveness of a team is often influenced by the intrapersonal and relationship dynamics between members of the team (Gajda, 2004). Issues such as trust, openness and communication often have an impact on collaboration. Power and marginalisation were two key themes within the category of *personal and interpersonal factors* affecting intersectoral collaboration in this study. For example, the hierarchical structure of the WCED, where decision-making powers and authority lie at "post" level, is experienced by participants as rigid and disempowering, and most participants in the focus groups described circuit team managers as authoritarian and controlling in their management styles. This sense of a lack of power within the team was described by many of the participants as having a significant effect on the process and outcome of many collaborative efforts, as is reflected in the following statement:

*I think certain people work easily in teams and other people are more […] individualist*[ic]. *What we find with the team dynamics is quite interesting, because you have a team leader, who sometimes […] will listen to you, but* [who will] *ultimately […] call the shots. Your role is* [somewhat] *minimised to that of* [someone who simply follows orders].

Many school psychologists expressed feelings of exclusion from decision-making processes and described themselves as a *"marginalised sector"*. Their perception is that their opinion and expertise is not valued and that they are not acknowledged or consulted in processes of transformation within education and education support in the province. As a sector, they appear to feel unacknowledged and voiceless, a finding which confirms that of Farrell et al. (2005), who highlight school psychologists' perceptions of themselves as a marginalised profession. It was frankly stated in one focus group that *"the status of the school psychologist has disappeared."*

Burden (1999), Donald et al. (2010) and Plas (1986) concur that the distribution of power is an important element in collaborative teams, which has an effect on the system as well as on the individuals included in it. Intersectoral collaboration is influenced by relationships, communication patterns and intra- and inter-personal dynamics (El Ansari & Phillips, 2001; Gajda, 2004). Most participants agreed that the lack of a common understanding of what teamwork entails influences collaboration:

[the most significant aspect] *is* [that] *the guys* [sic] *don't understand. They don't understand teamwork. They don't understand group dynamics. They don't understand human relationships. They don't understand the work of each person in the group.*

### Training and Development

Findings in this study suggest that all relevant sectors require training in intersectoral collaboration and school development. Professional training and development of school psychologists was identified as crucial to supporting and facilitating a paradigm shift where more systemic, consultative approaches can be adopted by school psychologists. Most participants acknowledged that training needs are different, and that service providers such as universities need to review the curricula of educational psychology training programmes at both preservice and in-service levels. Training would, however, be most effective if it targeted all sectors, and not just school psychologists. This would provide opportunities for the sectors to explore varied discourses, develop shared understandings, and build relations in the process of deepening knowledge and expertise. One school psychologist empathised with colleagues who may feel inadequate:

*I think some school psychologists are a bit reluctant to get involved, because I think it is* […] *a* [matter of] *confidence* […]. *It's about training and orientation; that my training has equipped me to do an assessment and* [to] *write a report,* [where that is the only aim].

Another participant highlighted that training alone would not resolve the challenge, as school psychologists, amongst others, also need to be ready to embrace change:

*Before you do any sort of intervention, you need to realise* [the need for a] *readiness for change. I think that is not happening within the education* [system]. *So we have a lot of* [repeated training], *and then it comes to nothing* [sic]. *So people feel that training is some sort of panacea for all the problems* [faced]. *I think you need to look, first of all, at how ready people actually are for this sort of change.*

Daniels et al. (2007) and Pillay (2003), in their critique of school psychology in South Africa, concur that levels of training, expertise and experience will vary among school psychologists, and must be ad-

dressed urgently. This is mirrored in other countries around the world (Jimerson et al., 2007). Weist (2003) highlights the importance of training in intersectoral collaboration, working closely with schools and community stakeholders, and understanding systems. Training can facilitate the adoption of a new paradigm by school psychologists and other sectors responsible for providing support to schools. This has the potential to shift practice (Jensen, Malcolm, Phelps & Stoker, 2002; Moore, 2005) and to have a consequent effect on collaboration and school development interventions.

Organisational Challenges
In this study, organisational challenges that impede the ability to work as a team or in partnership, are identified. These challenges emerge at both micro and macro levels of the education system, and include inadequate structures and procedures, poor management and co-ordination, and lack of resources. School psychologists contend that *structures and procedures* within the WCED are not always clear. For example, all participants in the study felt that with little clarity as to how circuit teams ought to function, it is difficult to ensure consistency and effectiveness in the functioning of these teams across the districts in the province. In one focus group, a participant highlighted the negative effect of poor management thus:

> *My experience of managers was that my role wasn't understood within the team, and* [that] *s/he was busy finding her feet, basically.* [There was a] *lack of vision; lack of direction. A very autocratic kind of approach* [was taken] *and only now after many induction sessions have occurred, I find 'the penny is dropping'* [sic]*; only now,* [is there a sense in which others are realising]*: 'oh this is what you do* […] *I never realised that this is your role'. Only now I think we are finding our feet.*

These findings highlight poor coordination and management of collaboration as a major challenge when facilitating school development. This echoes Goldman and Schmalz (2008), who identify coordination and management as fundamental to the success of collaborative interventions.

Most school psychologists who participated in the study, expressed concern about the lack of *co-ordination* and poor management of intersectoral collaboration at the level of the circuit team. They claimed that teamwork and collaboration between and across disciplines is not successfully managed. This is further influenced by ineffective channels of communication, lines of accountability and decision-making procedures, all of which have a negative impact on the process and product that emerges from collaborative efforts. One school psychologist reiterates that poor management constrains collaboration thus:

> *…circuit team management lacks in the ability to manage teams. And I am saying this hesitantly, because what they need to do is, they need to manage the expertise that they have in the team to address that problem. That is where the problem lies, because what happens now – the whole team goes out to fix that one* [sic] *toilet. The team is not managed according to the skills that the team has.*

Since regular and effective communication within organisations is vital to ensuring effective collaboration (El Ansari & Phillips, 2001), it is imperative that open lines of communication and transparent decision-making procedures are established and maintained.

Even though the WCED may be regarded as well resourced, in comparison to other provinces in South Africa, the school psychologists participating in this study felt that the number of school psychologists remains insufficient to meet the needs of schools in an efficient and effective way. All the participants described themselves as overloaded, and hardly ever able to respond to schools' requests when called on timeously:

> *There is no way* [that it is possible] *to expect me to deliver quality service to so many schools.*
> *I think the demand is very great and we can't … I simply can't manage what I have on my plate* [sic]. [There are] *only six psychologists* […] *one psychologist per circuit, and a circuit has 40 schools.* [There are] *forty schools and it is only one psychologist that must see to those schools. When the psychologists* work […] *in 14 schools, they* [aren't able to] *reach all the schools and all the children. We know we have disadvantaged areas like Khayelitsha,* [where one is aware of being] *the only psychologist. You can't give long term therapy* [to] *those children, although they need it, because they have nowhere else to go – only to you.*

Intersectoral collaboration requires time and human resources capacity (El Ansari & Phillips, 2001). The lack of human resources in the school psychology sector has a serious impact on the provision of education support to teachers, learners and schools. Consequently, the ratio of school psychologists to learner remains a serious challenge in the South African context (Daniels et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2005). This challenge must, however, be viewed within the constraints of the broad socio-economic realities of this country, and the limitations of the national education budget. It is unlikely that more posts for school psychologists and other district personnel will become available. This means that psychologists and other support staff need to find more effective ways of working together to provide a valuable service to local schools.

Recommendations
The following recommendations encompass some ways in which shifts in paradigms, policy and practice can be facilitated.

There is a need for a common, shared understanding of intersectoral collaboration and school

development. Collective understandings of what people do when they work together and how they work together to facilitate school development is crucial. Although the diverse realities across and within contexts must be acknowledged, the principles that guide collaborative practice and service provision need to be consistent and common across circuits, districts and provinces.

Job descriptions for school psychologists need to reflect an expanded view of school psychology practice, where practitioners are expected to work systemically. It is important, however, that the job description is not so wide so that it is open to misinterpretation and manipulation by other sectors. It is crucial that we move beyond the traditional stereotyped view of the profession, towards a more comprehensive understanding of what school psychologists have to offer.

In order to address personal and interpersonal dynamics, time and energy must be invested in establishing the team and making explicit those requirements that are often implicit and assumed. Some emphasis must be placed on addressing issues of power and boundaries, to engage with relationship dynamics in such a way that negative influences are dealt with, and positive effects exploited.

Training and development in areas relating to intersectoral collaboration for all sectors involved in school development is imperative. This will facilitate a paradigm shift, so that a more systemic and consultative approaches can be adopted. Training programmes would need to include aspects of systems thinking, education policy and indirect service delivery, as well as a focus on co-ordinating and managing multi-disciplinary and multi-functional teams.

Organisational challenges require action at provincial and national levels of education. Macrosystem-level intervention is crucial to supporting and sustaining interventions in districts and schools. Effective leadership and management, collective visioning and goal-setting, clear communication, realistic resource allocation and the establishment of effective and efficient structures and procedures are fundamental.

### Limitations

This article illuminates the practices and experiences of school development and intersectoral collaboration in school psychology in only one of the nine provinces. The findings are limited to the realities of the Western Cape, which are different from those of most other provinces, particularly with regard to school psychology services.

The findings also prioritise the perceptions and experiences of only one sector in collaborative initiatives to develop schools. Although the study was designed to investigate the collaboration between different sectors involved in school devel-

opment, it focused on the experiences of only one role player. The perspective presented in this article is therefore clearly based on the subjective experiences of school psychologists who participated in the study, and may indeed differ from, and may be challenged by those in other sectors within the education system and beyond.

A broader study that incorporates perspectives of others involved in school development work across the nine provinces would undoubtedly result in invaluable insight.

### Conclusion

School development is a fundamental aspect of educational support. In this study, we investigated the challenges that emerge when school psychologists work with other sectors to facilitate school development. The study presents school psychologists' perceptions of issues that constrain intersectoral collaboration. The findings suggest five categories of challenges that emerge when school psychologists collaborate with other sectors to facilitate school development.

The challenge of *diverse discourses and worldviews*, where different sectors and professions employ varied frameworks and language as they engage in school development and collaboration, was found to affect collaboration if shared understandings were not mediated. School psychologists also stressed the importance of the need to clarify *roles and boundaries,* as well as to acknowledge and address *personal and interpersonal dynamics* among team members. Findings point to the need for *training* in the areas of school development and intersectoral collaboration. School psychologists argue that deepening knowledge and understanding of these concepts will enhance their practice. Finally, the study reveals that *organisational challenges,* such as inadequate structures and procedures, poor management and coordination and lack of resources, must be addressed to facilitate both collaboration and school development.

The findings of this study highlight the challenges that are often experienced when sectors collaborate in school development interventions. They draw attention to the factors that emerge as hindrances to collaboration, thereby indicating the ways in which the challenges can be addressed early on in school development processes so as to maximise effectiveness of the interventions and subsequent outcomes. In so doing, this research contributes to the development of school psychology in South Africa and provides direction for those engaged in collaborative developmental work with and within schools.

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