

## Communication of psycho-educational assessment results: remedial teachers' reading of assessment reports

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*Psychological methods of assessing intelligence have been criticised because of their limited diagnostic-remedial nature and especially their lack of potential for initiating effective and pragmatic intervention programmes. Similarly, the means through which the results of such methods are communicated in order to make them useful and constructive can be debated. In this research we aimed to establish the value of psycho-educational assessment reports in terms of the understanding and interpretation of the reports by their recipients, specifically remedial teachers, who participated in focus group discussions and offered their opinion on the utility of psycho-educational assessment reports. The outcomes of these focus group discussions pointed to the fact that psycho-educational assessment reports were problematic in the sense that they failed to provide useful, specific, and pragmatic information for learning support programmes to be developed from. The research revealed insights which may be of interest to psychologists writing assessment reports. Suggestions for multi-disciplinary collaboration are addressed.*

**Keywords:** assessment report; communication of test results; learning support; psycho-educational assessment

### Introduction

Psychological assessment usually involves a process of "collecting information and making a judgement about someone in relation to a large group of people" (Beech & Singleton, 1997:ii). According to Das, Nagleiri and Kirby (1994:5), "the essence of assessment is observation, [and] the noticing of some characteristic". This is a straightforward process when the characteristic being assessed has a non-contentious definition and when the inferences made from the assessment result from unambiguous tests, but it becomes a complex and controversial process when this characteristic cannot be clearly defined or tested (Das *et al.*, 1994). The assessment of cognitive ability or intelligence has long presented this problem since, although there is a broad understanding of what intelligence encompasses, there is little agreement on its exact nature or how it should be measured and assessed.

The debate over the nature of cognitive ability becomes especially prevalent when assessing children, since tests of mental ability are considered to be of great importance in predicting success in scholastic achievement (Foxcroft, 1996). Foxcroft (1996) outlines a four-fold purpose of assessment of children within an educational setting. She believes assessment is useful, firstly, in determining the status of a child's development at a point in time and looking at how this status changes over time and, secondly, Foxcroft (1996:2) believes that assessment serves "to provide information useful for

programme planning and curriculum development". Furthermore, assessment helps to identify children who might benefit from more specialised learning support and helps to determine the effectiveness of such programmes.

While the usefulness of assessment is purported by many professionals, assessment is generally viewed as a conceptual process and not a mechanistic endeavour. Shuttleworth-Jordan (1994) emphasises that assessment departs from a conceptual and academic framework where a rigorous questioning attitude is important and believes that the assessing psychologist needs to operate within such a framework. It is commonly accepted that psychometric tests are not equivalent to the assessment process and are mere tools in support of the inquiry (Shuttleworth-Jordan, 1994).

Acting from such a framework, an important, but often neglected part of the assessment process is the communication of assessment results. Wise (1989) strongly emphasises this aspect and, especially where assessments in educational settings are concerned, points to the psychologist's responsibility not only to propose practical and pragmatically executable conclusions and recommendations, but also to mediate the implementation of recommendations.

According to Anastasi and Urbina (1997), psychologists have given much thought to the communication of the results of psychometric assessment in a form which will be meaningful and useful. Sattler (1992) outlines a number of purposes that are served by what he calls psycho-educational reports. These include "providing accurate assessment-related information to the referral source and other concerned parties" and providing "an archive of ...current remediation and treatment plans" (Sattler, 1992:726). Because the assessment report provides such vital information, it is important to take into account the status of the person who is to receive the information, both in terms of general education level and in terms of that person's knowledge about psychology and psychometric testing (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997).

These considerations are particularly important in the light of the fact that children are not self-referred. Because the class or remedial teachers are often the persons who refer the child, they are usually the ones who receive the assessment report for implementation of recommendations. Indeed, the role of the teacher in the assessment process has become even more prominent in the newly adopted inclusive education system which proposes a learning support team to help learners with barriers to learning (Landsberg, 1999; 2005). According to Landsberg (1999:3):

In a school where there is inclusion, a regular teacher shares the responsibility for a diversity of learners with the learning support teacher at the school ... in order to assess and teach all learners.

As such, the role of the teacher has expanded greatly and now requires that the class teacher be an "interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials" (Landsberg, 1999:4). However, it would seem that in order to design and implement programmes that meet the needs of all learners — which is an important aim of the inclusive educational approach (Landsberg, 2005) — the

difficulties experienced by individual learners "must be identified and the learners assessed in order to establish how the learning support should be given" (Landsberg, 1999:7). It would seem that, for this type of diagnostic assessment, teachers and parents still rely heavily on the services of professionals outside the school system, particularly psychologists. The psychologist makes recommendations to the class teacher or remedial teacher — now termed the learning support teacher (Landsberg, 1999) — based on the child's overall performance, the child's strengths and weaknesses, and the implications of these strengths and weaknesses for remediation (Sattler, 1992). According to Sattler (1992:730), "recommendations should describe realistic and practical intervention goals and treatment strategies". In a survey conducted by Rucker as early as 1967, as reported by Sattler (1992), it was found that teachers considered the most useful factor in psychological reports to be the quality of the recommendations. Anastasi and Urbina (1997) also claim that surveys given to the consumers of assessment reports showed that teachers welcome concrete recommendations in assessment reports.

While, in theory, most practising psychologists across the spectrum of current registration categories acknowledge the fact that assessment and testing are vastly different enterprises and that no proper assessment can be based on a single test or even a battery of tests alone, all too often, for pragmatic reasons — time and cost being two major considerations — children are referred by parents and teachers to psychologists 'to be tested'. Recent developments in inclusive education, learning support, and the change in discourse from a deficit focus to an asset-based model notwithstanding, it is the experience of the authors that many psychologists still practice within the framework of a deficit focus. They still 'test' children for pragmatic reasons, based on requests made by teachers and parents, and they are still required by 'remedial teachers' — who are still referred to as such by this redundant name in their schools despite changes in policy — to provide assessment reports to guide support programmes. With this in mind, the main aim of this research was to inquire into the understanding and interpretation of psycho-educational assessment reports by the recipients of those reports, specifically 'remedial teachers' who were directly involved in the implementation of recommendations, especially in the initial stages of learner support. The following specific research question was asked:

How do remedial teachers and class-teachers with remedial training interpret standard psycho-educational assessment reports written by psychologists?

### **Methodology**

As this research was specifically concerned with an in-depth understanding of remedial teachers' interpretation of psycho-educational assessment reports, a qualitative research design was followed. The research can best be described as exploratory and descriptive in nature (Adam & Schvaneveldt, 1985). The research was conducted in two distinct parts where the second part was a

replication of the first (the pilot study) in an attempt to verify the original conclusions and to expand the sample from the pilot study.

The initial stage of the study involved the selection of psycho-educational assessment reports from assessment files. The selection of reports included referrals of an educational concern where individual intelligence testing was a primary focus of the cognitive assessment. For this purpose, the psychometric tests used and reported on in the reports included the Das-Nagleiri Cognitive Assessment System (DN-CAS) (1997), the Junior SA Individual Scale (JSAIS) (1985), and the Senior SA Individual Scale – Revised (SSAIS-R) (1991). Because of the assumption that the selected reports were representative of the type of psycho-educational reports usually written by assessing psychologists, these assessment reports were given to two independent psychologists working in the field of psycho-educational assessment, in order to verify their representation of an acceptable format of reporting on a psycho-educational assessment process. One of these was an educational psychologist at a Department of Education Support Centre and the other a clinical psychologist working at a state hospital and in part-time private practice. Both were familiar with and involved in assessments of an educational nature. The selected reports were all written in a format generally accepted as a standard and well-accepted format for this type of report (*viz.* Bradley-Johnson & Johnson, 1998).

Participants were identified and selected by a process known as "nominations" (Krueger, 1994:84). This involved asking neutral parties in a particular field, in this case school principals and district office staff, for the names of people whom they thought would be suitable to participate in the focus group interviews. In total, ten participants with varying levels of experience and training in the remedial field were identified, approached, and agreed to participate. All participants were either trained remedial teachers or teachers with remedial training and were individually approached to participate in the study. The level of training was not considered to be a crucial factor for this inquiry, since all participants were required, as part of their normal duties in their schools or Educational Districts, to read and interpret psycho-educational assessment reports and base support programmes on their interpretation. However, the participants ranged in experience from 2 years to 23 years. They represented schools from a variety of socio-economic strata, from private independent schools to government schools in under-privileged previously disadvantaged areas.

The usual research ethical protocol was followed: The research was in line with the policies, procedures, and guidelines of, and approved by, the supervising institution's 'Ethical Standards Committee', which requires informed consent from participants through the signing of consent forms explaining the nature of the study, emphasising the voluntary nature of participation, addressing concerns regarding privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, offering feedback to participants, explaining the possible benefit of the research and addressing issues of potential risk or harm to participants by emphasising

voluntary withdrawal, at any stage, without penalty.

Participants in the study were given copies of the reports to read prior to the focus group discussions. For ethical reasons, all identifying data were removed from the reports. The next step of data collection involved conducting focus group discussions in order to gauge the opinions of the selected participants with regard to the assessment reports. Berg (1998:100) defines focus group interviews as "either guided or unguided discussions addressing a particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and the researcher". A typical focus group consists of a small number of participants under the guidance of a facilitator or moderator whose task it is to draw out information from the participants (Berg, 1998). In planning the focus groups, we drew on the work of Krueger (1994) who states that focus groups are special types of groups in terms of their purpose, their size, their composition and the procedures they undertake. Krueger (1994) believes that the group must be small enough for everyone to have an opportunity to share insights, but must be large enough to generate a diversity of ideas and opinions, and the group-size selection for this study was based on this recommendation. Two focus group interviews were conducted, each with a different group of participants. The first focus group, during the pilot study, consisted of four participants while the second consisted of six participants.

The last stage of data collection followed on from the analysis of the data gleaned from the focus group interviews. Analysis of the focus group data elicited a number of themes and ideas which needed to be followed up to ensure clarity and understanding. An in-depth interview, with one participant from each focus group discussion, was conducted. Because these were clarifying interviews conducted to gain a better understanding of some of the themes that dominated the focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Berg (1998) claims that interviews are particularly useful in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants came to attach certain meanings to phenomena. It was therefore important to probe the participant's answers to make sure they were fully understood. Clarifying interviews are common practice following focus group discussions, and the participants for the individual interviews were selected based on their participation and contribution during focus group discussions. Kvale (1996) uses the interview as a conversation in which knowledge is created through the views of the participants. Burgess (1980 in Silverman, 1993) argues that an interview provides greater depth than other research techniques simply because it is based on a sustained relationship between the participant and the researcher, where it is acknowledged that

far from being an impersonal data collector, the interviewer, and not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:88).

Both the focus group interviews and the in-depth interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed for analysis. The focus group interviews were transcribed and analysed before the final interviews were conducted so as to

identify themes that needed further exploration during the interviews. The transcriptions were verified by participants to be reflecting the views expressed during the interviews. Once the data had been transcribed, they were analysed using open coding following the grounded theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (as adapted by Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998:137), this approach

is a method for discovering theories, concepts, hypotheses, and propositions directly from the data rather than from *a priori* assumptions, other research, or existing theoretical frameworks.

During feedback, themes that emerged from the transcribed data were verified with participants. While some clarifying suggestions were made by participants, in general the themes generated were accepted.

The epistemological debates around a (now not so) new paradigm of qualitative research where human subjects are concerned and the researcher is positioned as subjective researcher, where, in the words of Parker (1994:6), the "subject and object coincide", have been well documented since the late 70s and early 80s (*viz.* Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). The issues of reliability and validity in quantitative research have largely been translated in qualitative research to, amongst other things, issues of 'transferability' and 'credibility' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), 'contextualism' (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994), 'reflexivity' and 'replicability' (Banister *et al.*, 1994). Parker (2005) points out that interpretative research will inevitably remain controversial by the very nature of the interpretation and its subjectivity. In this article, we attempt to remain reflexive in our stance and attempted throughout our reporting to contextualise our interpretations and reflections. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985) we attempted to engage in a continuous process of audit of the research conducted. As such we continually reviewed the data, our method and our analyses for consistency and applicability and built such measures as report-back into the process of research.

## Results

Because similar themes emerged from both the focus groups and the interviews, results of the two were combined into one set of emerging themes. While all the themes which emerged provided interesting insights, they could be divided into dominant and less dominant themes. There were six dominant themes which emerged from the transcribed data. These were:

1. The non-specific or vague nature of the reports;
2. the usefulness and value of the IQ score given by the tests;
3. the value of the confirmatory nature of the reports;
4. the language used in the reports;
5. the time factor; and
6. the administration of tests.

In addition, there were a number of less dominant, but nonetheless important, themes which emerged from the combined data of the focus groups and

the interview discussions, discussion of which lies beyond the scope of this article. We shall proceed with a discussion of the six dominant themes.

#### The non-specific or vague nature of the reports

The remedial teachers seemed to indicate that, in general, the reports they receive from psychologists who administer psychometric tests are too broad and do not provide specific information regarding the areas of cognition that are problematic. This was in line with Sattler's (1992) caution that assessment reports should guard against being too broad and generalised. When talking about her experiences of assessment reports in general, one participant claimed that she found that the reports "*are actually very broad*" and later that they don't "*really go into any detail*". A second participant agreed that the reports "*don't pinpoint the exact problems*". Because of the vague and broad nature of the reports, participants perceived the reports as limited for establishing learning support programmes. They noted that

*"If you just gave this [the report] and said 'Well, we need remedial lessons', you actually couldn't start here. Then ... you've got to start all your things to make it more specific before you can start any of your remedial. So this is just a very general ... general thing."*

They added that "*This [the report] doesn't say 'well, this is what we should do'*". The participants claimed that when they receive the assessment reports, they conduct their own perceptual and scholastic tests to identify the exact nature of difficulties. The participants offered their own solutions to what they perceived to be a serious limitation of psychologists' assessment reports. They claimed that psychologists who write the reports need to break the identified concerns down and to provide some practical information which the remedial teachers can use to plan appropriate learning support. One participant claimed that "*What would be nice is ... specific problems which you can start working on*". Participants suggested that each subtest be explained in detail so that, in the event of the report writer not being available for consultation, the reader of the report — parents or teachers — would understand the exact nature of the child's presenting learning barriers and difficulties. It would have been useful to know exactly what the tests actually drew on and an explanation of each subtest would have been helpful in this regard.

#### The usefulness and value of the IQ score

The remedial teachers claimed that the assessment reports were useful in that they provided an indication of the child's IQ score which helped the teacher to better understand the child's cognitive strengths and limitations, suggesting provision of learning support within specific areas of cognitive functioning or suggesting extra lessons to help him or her keep up with academic work. One participant claimed that, as a teacher, she would like to know how the child was functioning scholastically and if this level of functioning was realistically in line with cognitive functioning levels. A second participant pointed out that the report

*"does show you that he has highs. If he was just a very low IQ child, you know, you wouldn't find those highs ... So then he has problems in specific areas, he's not just scholastically very low".*

The other participants agreed and said that

*"for you as a remedial teacher, you know if he or she is underperforming ... Like say it says there 'performance was above average to superior', and then you find that in class he's below average on those modalities. Then you immediately know that ... he's underachieving".*

The remedial teachers also expressed concern and frustration about the current education system in South Africa where a child can only be retained once within a period of four years. They believed this policy has complicated their duties, for children are referred for inclusion in learning support programmes, yet these children seemed to be cognitively or scholastically not ready to be in the class or grade they have been promoted to. One of the participants shared her experience with such cases and commented:

*"So you can only keep them back once. So ... I've got a little one or two little ones that really should be in a special needs class. So, they didn't make [Grade 1], so they weren't ready for ... they weren't ready. So they had to be put up to me so now they haven't finished [Grade 1] yet and they need [Grade 1] work. Now those aren't ... So those children, what happens is they go to the remedial teacher ... But they're not a remedial case at all, so they're actually taking up the remedial time".*

The teachers perceived the assessment report as a great help in solving this problem. As one participant said: *"This just tells us it is or it isn't a remedial case ... by looking at his IQ"*. And continued to say:

*"This [the report] is very important to tell you that. It really is. I mean, sometimes you just wonder is this child in class ... whether he's really very low IQ'ed or whether he has a huge problem that maybe you can sort out in a certain area".*

Clearly statements of this nature are of grave concern, in how they reflect gross labelling practices still evident amongst trained professionals working within the field of learning support.

The value of the confirmatory nature of the reports

The participants believed that the reports were also useful in that such reports confirmed cognitive or scholastic limitations. In a way they provided "evidence" for what the teachers had suspected about the child. The participants believed that a teacher often refers a child for assessment

*"... because then she's got backup ... All this [the report] is really, it's really kind of just I've spoken to somebody, I didn't leave it. There is a problem'. So when the child doesn't cope in class they can say 'Oh, but we had the child tested and there is a problem'".*

The same participant also believed that the assessment report can confirm specific areas of difficulty, which the teacher might suspect the child has. Referring to one of the example reports, she said



*"If you say to them [teachers] 'Um, he has a concentration problem', okay, we know he's got a concentration problem. The test tells us this, but I already told you that. Or the test tells you ... any of these things ... he has an attention, here [points to the report], the attention scale. But they know that before they even send him in".*

Of these particular reports, one participant pointed out: *"We know that he has reading problems, so it's just confirming why you sent him"*. Participants questioned the value of, or reasoning behind, sending the child for assessment, if all teachers were getting from the assessment reports were confirmation of what they already knew. One of the participants wanted to know: *"What is the actual point of sending them to a psychologist if the class teacher knows the problem and all you're getting from the report is confirmation?"*. However the other participants were quick to agree that even though a teacher may know that there are learning difficulties, they needed *"to be sure"* and hence psycho-educational assessments were valuable in providing this confirmation.

#### The language used in the reports

The participants complained that they didn't always understand the language used in assessment reports. One participant said:

*"I think the report is actually written in psychologists' language. And I think many actually don't understand them [the reports] ... Well, I don't".*

The participants agreed that those writing the reports should aim to use what they called *"teachers' language"*. The participants also claimed that, because there was such a shortage of remedial teachers, the reports were often given to the class teachers. Because the class teachers had not been trained in remedial work, they understood even less of what was said in the reports and often simply filed them away without taking much notice of the content. Speaking about one of the sample reports, one participant claimed: *"If this is given to the class teacher, this goes straight into a file ... the class teacher can't read it properly"* and a second participant agreed that *"she [the class teacher] wouldn't understand that [the report]"*.

One of the participants also claimed that this problem was cumulative, because the report got passed from teacher to teacher without any of them understanding it. She said:

*"You must remember though, that this gets put in his file. Say he gets tested in Sub A [sic]. So the teacher looks at it, she doesn't really know anything about it other than he has been tested and he does have a huge problem, so now it's put away and whatever and now the teacher carries on teaching .... Next year, I pull out his file, and I look at it. He's come from ... wherever [another school] and this comes with him. So I read it, it makes no sense to me, so I put it away again. And I think that's what's happening to a lot of these [reports]"*.

In this way, the participants believed that while teachers may realise that there are barriers to learning for a particular child, they are often powerless

to do anything about it because they do not understand the language used in the assessment reports. The participants also were of the opinion that the parents might benefit from more specific suggestions offered in the reports. For example, the one participant said:

*"If I were the parent I would want to know 'Ja, that's what happened', but I need to know the next step ... For me, if I'm going to be told bad news, I want to know what I can do about it".*

The discussion also included concerns about how vague the terms used in the reports were. One participant, referring to a particular example, claimed:

*"You can see the psychologist is trying to cover themselves [sic] ... It seems to be' [reading from the report] ... They are not putting their head on the line!. 'That could be used in a remedial programme' [reading from the report]. It's all those lovely softening words that you don't say".*

The others agreed that the example seemed to use non-committal terminology.

The participants offered similar solutions to this problem as to the problem of the reports being too broad. They seemed to agree that they needed the reports to go one step further in the explanations that are given. They believed that an explanation of each of the tests would help to clarify and pinpoint difficulties that a child may experience, and what could be done to support the child. The participants also suggested simply using language which is more accessible to those who haven't been trained in a remedial capacity. One participant illustrated a suggested solution using an example from one of the reports:

*"Like it said here, you know, ... 'work on auditory processing', so you tell them [the class teachers] 'work on the listening skills' ... that's what teachers understand".*

However, the participants did also acknowledge that "... it all depends who the psychologist is aiming this at".

These comments were in line with Bradley-Johnson and Johnson's (1998) caution against the use of jargon and their guideline that the feedback report should always be written with a specific recipient in mind.

### The time factor

The participants claimed that, because of teacher-learner ratios in classrooms, teachers, both remedial and class teachers, do not have the time to analyse the assessment reports or to try and work out the child's problems for themselves. One of the participants speaking about the reports said:

*"If this only landed in the hands of somebody that is trained and has got time to do further testing, then it's fine ... But I don't think that's what happens because how many of those have all been tested and how many do you see?".*

She shared her own experiences and her interpretation of the situation:

*"I, as a remedial teacher in a class situation feel incredibly frustrated because I know I've got so many children with problems and I don't have the time. I recognise the problems but I've got a class of thirty and I can't*

*remediate in a class. And they need help. And there isn't ... They don't get enough time because [it is] remediation you need ... Those children need frequent, frequent help".*

The participants thus claimed that, because of the time constraints, they were unable to spend enough time trying to understand the assessment reports. One of the government remedial teachers said: *"We work in groups, ja. And so you've got too many kids. You don't have time to go and sit and analyse these things [the reports], do all the little subtests"*. Later she stressed this point again saying:

*"It's just sometimes you get reports that you actually don't understand and it takes you quite a while to go through all your old notes and see what this means and this means and ... you see a lot of reports and you get ... it's difficult"*.

Again the participants concluded that, in order for the reports to be useful, they needed to be simple and to provide a quick and specific reference to the problems of a child.

#### The administration of tests

The participants shared the perception that, while remedial teachers were not qualified to administer most psychometric tests, such as tests of intelligence, the psychologists who administered these tests often did not have the necessary educational background to know what kind of remediation was required. There seemed to be a gap between the psychologist's knowledge and the remedial teacher's knowledge and it was this gap which caused the difficulties in communication between the two.

*"You see, I think that is problematic. That a psychologist can do it [testing]. Because you [psychologists] wouldn't know, on the educational side, where to come in from. So what you're doing is just plain testing and not going any further"*.

The participants were adamant that those administering psychometric tests on learners needed to be trained educationally. One participant even went as far as saying:

*"If you have some knowledge, a pre-knowledge about this test, like educational knowledge, you would administer it differently from a person who doesn't know a thing in education"*.

The participants argued that they were in a good position to do similar assessments and administer tests reserved for psychologists and should be allowed to do so. One participant explicitly questioned the practice:

*"Do you really need a psychologist to give this test? I mean, why couldn't a remedial teacher ... ? I'm just saying that it doesn't make sense, does it? It almost sounds like the wrong person's giving the test"*.

The participants also believed that, because of limited training in psychometric testing, they often did not know what the test was testing for. They all agreed that very little of their remedial training dealt with psychometrics, so they found it difficult to understand the different parts of the tests. They

trusted that a basic knowledge of each of the subtests would allow them to make more productive use of the assessment reports. They also believed that if remedial teachers were to administer the tests, they would benefit from the qualitative observation of the child during the assessment procedure.

## **Discussion**

### **Bridging the training gap**

There seemed to be much concern amongst the remedial teachers about the training needed to successfully administer psychometric tests and engage in psycho-educational assessment. Despite South African legislation controlling psychometric tests being in line with global trends, participants indicated that they believed the wrong persons were qualified to administer specific psychometric tests. Assessing psychologists are not in contact with the child over an extended period, and yet they are expected to make decisions about learning support programmes, based on limited, often once-off, assessment contacts. Remedial teachers and class teachers, on the other hand, are in contact with the child over long periods of time, and yet they are not qualified to do psycho-educational assessments based on the use of psychometric tests, specifically tests of intellectual and cognitive functioning.

It seems, since remedial teachers are, in our opinion, in the better position to make decisions regarding the possible learning needs of the child, that perhaps these teachers need to be given the opportunity to qualify to administer certain psychometric tests currently exclusively reserved for psychologists. While there are some scholastic tests which fall within the range of psychometric tests available to remedial teachers, individual intelligence scales such as the CAS, JSAIS, SSAIS-R and WISC do not, because of current laws regulating these tests, contributing to the monopoly and exclusivity of, for example, the profession of psychology. We certainly do not advocate merging these two professions, but perhaps remedial teachers need to have the qualifications needed to administer such psychometric tests. Another possible solution to this problem is adapting the training of remedial teachers, which is clearly not comprehensive enough to give them the skills needed to interpret and fully make use of assessment reports. The remedial teachers complained that they were not familiar with the tests used by psychologists to assess children and thus did not have an understanding of what the tests are testing. Perhaps an ideal would be expanding remedial training so that, if the teachers are not permitted to administer the tests, they are at least familiar with the different kinds of psychometric tests available to the psychologist, and what each of these means in terms of utility to assist the child.

From the other side of the perceived gap, psychologists who administer these psychometric tests need to have training that meets the needs of the remedial teachers. This suggestion is in line with that of Sanders (1979) who believes that psychologists who recommend remedial intervention need to be familiar with educational contexts and problems and their influence on the child's classroom behaviour and functioning. While this knowledge may not

entail as much educational detail as the training of remedial teachers, training in the use of psychometric tests should be contextualised to the extent that the administrators of tests know who is going to make use of the assessment report and who is going to work with the child, so that they can include aspects of the child's behaviour which may help to explain the child's difficulties. While this is, hopefully, included in training courses of educational psychologists, it may not be a cornerstone in the training of other categories of psychologists who are, nevertheless, not excluded from practising educational assessment. Because the remedial teachers do not observe the child during the assessment and testing situation, it is imperative that the psycho-educational assessor be trained to record the qualitative behaviours which would assist the remedial teacher in setting up a learning support programme for the child.

The perceived gap between the knowledge and training of the psychologists and those of the remedial teachers needs to be bridged from both ends. The remedial teachers need to be made familiar with various psychometric tests, while the psychologists need to be made aware of the types of behavioural and cognitive aspects which would be useful to report on for those working in the educational setting, and to write their reports accordingly. This would break the perceived monopoly and enhance collaboration between the related professions.

The current move towards inclusive education proposes a support team approach which, if implemented as intended, should encourage improved cooperation amongst education professionals and a more holistic approach to learner support (Landsberg, 2005). However, as resources are still scarce in the education sector, access to an in-school multi-professional support team is a rarity and access by schools to district support teams involves, in our (the authors') experience, long waiting lists and a great deal of administrative organisation. For the time being, therefore, it would seem that schools often rely on 'outside' psychologists for psycho-educational assessments, with class teachers or, in better resourced schools, learner support or remedial teachers, interpreting these assessment results and implementing recommendations based on their interpretations.

### The perceived hierarchy

The remedial teachers seemed to somehow doubt their own judgement about the child's learning barriers and needed reassurance and confirmation from psychologists. While this is understandable in the light of the fact that remedial teachers are not qualified to administer individual intelligence scales, it seems impractical to send a child for assessment when the remedial teacher clearly may have a thorough understanding of the child's learning needs. Ironically, parents and teachers are more likely to trust the opinion of a psychologist who, although not ideal, might have seen a child once, but who has administered a standardised and frequently used psychometric test, rather than the opinion of a remedial teacher who is trained to work with children

with barriers to learning and, in many cases, has had extensive contact with the child. The psychologists seem to be perceived as having more status than the remedial teachers in diagnosing learning difficulties and giving advice on intervention strategies.

Remedial teachers seemed to agree that they had more knowledge and were better trained to understand and interpret assessment reports than were class teachers. While they were more privy to, and had more exposure to, psycho-educational assessment reports than did class teachers, remedial teachers also claimed that they did not have the training required to understand psycho-educational assessment reports. It would appear, therefore, that the difference between remedial and class teachers, in terms of the knowledge and training which equip them to interpret psycho-educational reports, is a perceived rather than real one. However, the remedial teachers still seem to have a higher status than class teachers in making use of the psycho-educational assessment reports. This difference in status can be understood as some kind of hierarchical judgement, where the psychologist is perceived to have more knowledge and expertise than the remedial teacher; and the remedial teacher in turn is perceived to have more knowledge and expertise than the class teacher. There is an urgent need to recognise the different roles that each of these professionals play in assisting the child rather than cultivating the competitive relationship which appears to exist between them.

In addition, remedial teachers agreed that the reports they received from psychologists needed to include more specific suggestions for learning support. However, there appeared to be some contradiction here as well. Remedial teachers claimed that they were in the best position to identify the problems of the child and that psychologists, often with little or no educational background, did not understand how the identified problems of the child manifested in the classroom. The question could be asked: Are remedial teachers expecting too much from psycho-educational reports from psychologists when they appeal for specific intervention strategies? Indeed, whose responsibility is it to identify, on a micro level, the specific needs to be addressed in an individualised learning support programme? While the psychologists are trained to interpret individual intelligence scales, there is confusion as to who should be translating these psychometric test results into practical remedial strategies and specific intervention exercises.

Again, the implementation of an inclusive education system, which supports a team approach to learner support, as is currently in the process of being adopted (Landsberg, 2005), could go some of the way to alleviating the perceived hierarchy which seems to exist amongst educational support specialists. The district support team which, in theory, should be available to schools in a particular area, should include a variety of specialists including various therapists (such as occupational therapists and speech therapists), remedial teachers, and educational psychologists (Landsberg, 1999). This could, therefore, lead to better co-operation and understanding between remedial teachers and psychologists. However, if the psycho-educational assessment is still seen as the basis for intervention programmes, the formation

of such a support team may serve to widen the perceived hierarchy by placing the psychologist in a position of leadership. Historical reality also taught us that learner support is often under-resourced, especially in semi-urban and rural areas, forcing more privileged schools to continue to rely on non-educational psychologists for assessment support.

### The issue of IQ

Despite ongoing criticism levelled at the use of IQ scores as an indication of achievement potential, remedial teachers still seemed to place much emphasis on the IQ score and seemed to perceive the IQ score as the most useful information gained from psycho-educational assessment reports. They believed that children with low achievement on IQ tests should not occupy their time but really needed extra lessons, rather than remedial intervention. This perception of IQ as being indicative of intellectual ability is in line with Murphy and Davidshover's (1998) view that IQ scores have become synonymous with the concept of 'intelligence' and conventional intelligence tests are still perceived as the most reliable intelligence assessment method. This perception and the value of IQ scores seem rather entrenched. Despite well-documented criticism against the use of IQ tests as an exclusive method of gauging intellectual functioning within multi-cultural societies, and a subsequent move towards dynamic and process based assessment methods (Tzuriel & Haywood, 1992), remedial teachers still relied heavily on conventional methods of assessment. Perhaps this was indicative of resistance to change and progression on the part of some remedial teachers. However, this belief in the IQ score could be the result of teachers' lack of knowledge regarding the nature of the tests and the composition of their subsections. Perhaps it is because teachers are not familiar with the various sections and subtests of the tests, but are familiar with the meaning of IQ scores only, that they tend to centre their understanding and interpretation around this conventional static appraisal of intellectual ability. This position continues to reinforce a biased and labelling view of intelligence measures and needs urgent redressing.

### Issues of language

The remedial teachers complained that the reports contained typical "psychological language" to describe the child. While the language used in the reports sometimes included psychological terms, it appeared as though the teachers were referring to terminology related to the actual tests. Reports comment on scores obtained in particular subtests and use the terminology of the test manual to express these. While this seems the logical way to differentiate between sections in the tests, the remedial teachers, who were not familiar with the subtests, often did not gain any insight into the child's difficulties when these terms were used. Again, perhaps the solution would be for the remedial teachers to obtain a more thorough knowledge, through training, of individual intelligence scales used in psycho-educational assessment. However, perhaps psychologists could use less technical terms to explain problem areas or could provide a more explicit pragmatic explanation of the subtests in which weak-

nesses were identified. Terminology is not the only aspect of the reports about which the psychologist should be sensitive. Bearing in mind that some of the remedial teachers receive numerous assessment reports to process, small considerations become important. The size of the printing and the layout of the report can greatly affect the teacher's ability to focus on the essence being conveyed. Careful consideration of the technical composition of the report can greatly reduce the frustration of the reader.

### Using the reports

The remedial teachers claimed that, from their general experience with psycho-educational assessment reports, they had found that they were not able to use the reports of psychologists at all and needed to do their own assessment in order to pinpoint the specifics of the child's difficulties. The question then arises as to why the teachers would request a psycho-educational assessment if they believed that the reports had no value in assisting them to set up an intervention programme. It seemed, however, that the teachers did make use of the assessment reports which they received during the course of their work, but that they needed to administer further testing to pinpoint exactly which specific aspects of the problem area, as described by the psychologist, were problematic. In one of the follow-up in-depth interviews, one remedial teacher demonstrated how she would go about setting up an intervention programme for the child based on the example assessment reports as well as an additional assessment report of a child she was working with at the time. While the reports were by no means exhaustive in describing the difficulties the child experienced, this remedial teacher felt confident that she had a good basis from which to develop a support programme and, after further observation of the child, she would administer more specific tests. This echoed the perception amongst remedial teachers that, if psychologists had no educational background, their interpretation of test results has little value in a remedial setting. Indeed, even when the psychologist had some educational training, the remedial teachers were of the opinion that, because they had not administered the tests themselves, they would not be able to fully use the recommendations of the psychologist. Again, the solution seemed to be the need for a more co-operative relationship between psychologists and remedial teachers where there is less competition, and knowledge and skills can be combined in order to serve the best interest of the child.

### Conclusion

Through the years there have been attempts to move towards multi-disciplinary involvement of different professionals in providing assistance to learners. This has been exemplified in the past through previous education departments' attempts to formalise multi-disciplinary assistance and diagnostic processes such as Didactic Aid Teams (DAT) and the Panels for Identification, Diagnosis and Assistance (PIDA). Once again, in recent times, the urgency for collaboration during this process of assessment has been emphasized (Landsberg, 2005). Unfortunately, largely because of lack of person-



nel and resources, assessment practice proves different. The results and the ensuing discussion in this article point to a need for a shift in the attitudes and actions of psychologists and learning support/remedial teachers, when dealing with assessment findings. There seems to be a need for transformation in both professions towards an acceptance of the backgrounds and training of the other group and a subsequent change in the communication patterns of each group. There also appears to be a need to bridge the gap between the training of psychologists and the training of remedial teachers in terms of assessment techniques so that each profession has a more holistic understanding of the assessment process rather than the diverse approach which seems to exist at the moment, unintentionally creating a certain 'monopoly of knowledge'.

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