APPLICATION OF

CHARACTER STRENGTHS BY EDUCATORS

Minette van der Westhuizen, Honours B.Sc.

Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Applied Positive Psychology at the North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus

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For the reader's attention

The reader is reminded of the following:

- In the writing of this mini-dissertation, the referencing and editorial style as prescribed by the *Publication Manual (6th edition)* of the American Psychological Association (APA) was followed. This practice is in line with the prescribed referencing style for the Master's degree programme in Positive Psychology at the North-West University (Vaal Triangle Campus).
- This mini-dissertation contributes only 40% of the course evaluation. The other 60% derives from compulsory subjects for the MA (Positive Psychology) degree.
- The research findings in this mini-dissertation are submitted in the form of a research article. This is in line with the academic rule A8 and specifically rule A8.2b of the North-West University.
- Each chapter of the mini-dissertation has its own reference list.
- The mini-dissertation consists of an introductory chapter, chapter two containing the main findings of the study, and a final chapter outlining the conclusions, limitations, and recommendations pertaining to the study.

Preface

"Gratitude should not just be a reaction to getting what you want, but gratitude where you notice the little things too and constantly seek for the good, even in unpleasant circumstances".

-Marelisa Fabrega

This Master's degree has served as a witness to some of the most delightful and stressful times in my life so far.

It was with great gratitude that I heard that I was selected to study this course. Greater joy was yet to come when I got engaged in 2013, shortly after commencing my MA studies.

This Master's degree has witnessed me marry my come-rain-or-sunshine husband who I thank my lucky stars for every day.

It has seen me shattered by the sudden onset of my mother's illness shortly after our wedding. My mother, who relentlessly believed in me, motivated me and loved me unconditionally until the day she could no more. This Master's degree was temporarily pushed to the background and sat patiently waiting while I gave priority to acting as my mother's personal caregiver during her terminal illness and stood by her until her death due to Glioblastoma Multiform. This Master's degree has also nudged me into action and rekindled an inspiration in me to learn and develop again even in the midst of overwhelming grief.

It has supplemented me during my vocational journey, when doubting my fit within roles and trying to figure out my place in the world of work.

It has accompanied me during three different occasions of moving house: first out of my mother's home that my grandfather built and which has been my home since birth; then to our first rental-apartment as newly-weds; followed by us moving to an almost home-like apartment and finally to our beautiful first house together; at last somewhere to live that makes me feel like I am home again.

During all of the above I have lost, shed tears and struggled. I have also laughed, persevered and gained. This Master's degree has been a companion through a time of transition and of self-growth. Now, witnessing its completion and the closing off of that chapter in my life, I am thankful to new beginnings that lie ahead.

Lastly I would like to convey my deepest appreciation to:

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- Lindie Groenewald and Alet Prinsloo. My oldest (and best) friends, I greatly value you. *I get by with a little help from my friends. –John Lennon*
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- Jan Hugo van der Westhuizen. You are the best decision I have ever made. There are no words for how significant you are. Thank you for absolutely everything and so much more.

Declaration

I, Minette van der Westhuizen, declare that "Application of character strengths by educators" is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this work are those of the author and based on relevant literature references as shown in the list of references.

I further declare that the content of this research will not be submitted for any other qualification(s) at any other institutions.
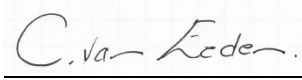
MINETTE VAN DER WESTHUIZEN   MAY 2017

Letter of Permission

The supervisor hereby gives permission to Minette van der Westhuizen to submit this document as a mini-dissertation for the qualification MA in Positive Psychology.

The research report is in the article format as indicated in the 2015 General Academic Rules (A4.1.1.1.4 and A4.4.2.9) of the North-West University.

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EDITING CERTIFICATE

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This certificate serves to confirm that the mini-dissertation with the title *Application of character strengths by educators* has undergone a professional language edit (including the checking of spelling, grammar, register and punctuation). The onus rests on the client to work through the proposed changes after the edit and accept or reject these changes.

Yours faithfully

Wendy Barrow

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Summary

This study aimed to explore how teachers use their signature strengths in the teaching context and their experiences regarding the use thereof. Further aims were to study the outcomes of the use of teachers' character strengths and the influence of the use of signature strengths on the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life of teacher-participants.

The use of character strengths have been proposed to enhance happiness, satisfaction with life and well-being, especially when a person's top strengths or signature strengths are applied. Insights obtained from the work of other researches have suggested that: contextual factors determine which character strengths are appropriate to use; character strengths do not function independently from one another, but rather operate in a complex, inter-related way and a balance of strengths is required for the application of character strengths to have healthy/constructive outcomes. Since character strengths are highly context-specific, the chosen context for this study was that of the educational setting.

The Classification and Theory of Character Strengths and Virtues and its operationalisation in the Values in action-Inventory of strengths VIA-IS of Peterson and Seligman (2004), is seen as a guideline for enhancing well-being and have even been viewed as a positive opposite of the Diagnostical and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Further investigations into the character strengths are needed, since there is a possibility that strengths exist that are not included in the classification and there seems to be a need for future amendments to the classification.

The challenging nature of the teaching context prompts teachers to be proficient in the use of character strengths, especially those directly related to their occupation. Furthermore, the use of character strengths by educators seems to be a worthwhile endeavour, since it may buffer against stressful school environments and may also facilitate the development of traits and capabilities that the teaching vocation requires efficient teachers to be equipped with.

Participants in this study were introduced to character strengths and their signature strengths were identified, after which they were requested to apply their signature strengths in the teaching context. Teachers used both signature strengths as well as other strengths which they reported in diary writings over the course of two weeks. The diary entries were qualitatively analysed by means of thematic analysis and using the ATLAS.ti software package. ATLAS.ti is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Lewins & Silver, 2007) and the abbreviation stands for the *Archiv für Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltagssprache*, which translates into the Archive of technology, lifeworlds and everyday language (Friese, 2012).

In addition to the qualitative methods, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) and Scale of Positive And Negative Emotion (SPANE) served as quantitative measuring instruments. The significances of differences in scores on measurements were calculated. The main qualitative findings were that the teachers meaningfully used their signature strengths as identified with the VIA-IS, but that other strengths of the VIA-IS also presented prominently in the teaching context and that even strengths not related to the VIA-IS emerged. Quantitative analyses showed that the satisfaction with life and emotional well-being of teachers did not significantly increase over the research period and due to the application of their strengths.

Signature strengths of teachers came mostly from the Humanity, Transcendence and Courage strength clusters and less so from the Wisdom and Knowledge, Justice and Temperance clusters. However, in application in the teaching environment, Wisdom and Knowledge and Temperance strengths became prominent, although strengths of Humanity were most frequently used by the teacher-participants. This finding seems to support the numerous other studies which found that strengths optimally function in context-specific applications.

For themes that emerged from the thematic analyses of the diary entries of teachers pertaining to the use of their signature strengths in class contexts and the outcomes thereof, the PERMA model of Seligman (2011) presented a good conceptual and theoretical framework for interpretation. The features of positive emotions, engagement, relatedness, meaning and purpose, and achievement were strongly present in the qualitative themes that emerged from teacher-participants' diary feedback of their experiences with the application of their strengths, and which attested to their general sense of psychosocial well-being. The study can be seen as successful, since the aims of the study, as indicated above, were met. Further research is however recommended pertaining to the inter-related and interactive functioning of strengths in the VIA-IS system. Strengths not included in the VIA-IS model could be further identified through research and strengths identification. Application research with larger groups of teachers and in various teaching contexts is also recommended.

Key Terms: achievement, character strengths, educators, engagement, meaning
positive affect, positive psychology, positive relationships, school
context, signature strengths, teachers, well-being

CHAPTER 1

The use of Character Strengths by Educators: A Literature Background and Research Methodology

Keywords: achievement, character strengths, educators, engagement, meaning

positive affect, positive psychology, positive relationships, school

context, signature strengths, teachers , well-being

This mini-dissertation entailed the study of teachers' use of character strengths in their work environments, by asking how the teachers used their character strengths, what happened when they used these strengths (how they felt, how it made others feel, and what teachers perceived to be the results of using these strengths) and whether the use of these strengths had any effect on measures of the teachers' emotional well-being and satisfaction with life.

The problem statement, literature that served as rationale of the study, research methods and chapter outline will be explicated in this section of the mini-dissertation. Since this chapter gives the theoretical framework of the study, some duplication may appear in the manuscript which will serve as the research report and will be presented in Chapter 2.

1.1 Problem Statement

According to Seligman (2002, 2011), a person's work is an important place that provides opportunities for strength utilisation, whilst models of well-being indicate the importance of such opportunities for people to refine and use their character strengths (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). The use of strengths facilitates the person to delve into various sources of contentment that make up a good life, both for the person himself/herself and for others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and by using their character strengths, teachers may experience a range of positive outcomes such as better engagement at work, fuller meaning in life, more happiness and increased satisfaction with life (Peterson & Park, 2011; Seligman, 2002). In other words, the use of salient character strengths by teachers relates to their psychological well-being, which in turn may be a precursor for the success of students and of the educational system as a whole (Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). For example, Park and Peterson (2006) found associations between teachers' use of the strength of social intelligence and their students' school engagement and achievement and in a study by Sanders, Munford, Anwar, Liebenberg, and Ungar (2015) about the resilience of adolescents, participants showed more positive classroom behaviour and engagement when their teachers understood them and their circumstances at an interpersonal level (the strengths of perspective and social intelligence). According to Martin et al. (2015), teachers who displayed kindness and care towards their students, were shown to have learners who stayed in school longer and performed better academically, while Lee (2012) proposed that the learners' psychological need for caring relationships that was perhaps not met elsewhere, were met by teachers who used the strengths of love and kindness and this enabled the learners to experience higher levels of well-being.

It is a well-known fact that teachers worldwide are enduring stressful work environments and that in South Africa particularly, teachers experience high levels of stress and burnout (Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012; Jansen, 2014; Schelvis et al., 2013). Vazi et al. (2013) were of the opinion that South Africa requires a continued search for ways to reduce educator tension in order to prevent possible frequencies in teacher absenteeism, poor work quality and resignation of educators due to psychological exertion. Jansen (2014) stated in this regard that psychological strategies can be utilised to help teachers in some of the most challenging school environments to prevent burnout. Such psychological strategies could entail the identification and use of their character strengths, since both Peterson and Seligman (2004) and Peterson and Park (2011) argued that people will experience an increase in their life satisfaction and psychological well-being when they engage in activities that harness their character strengths and that the use of character strengths may even serve as a buffer against symptoms of mental dysphoria. According to Seligman (2011), positive psychology theory about character strengths suggests that the deployment of strategies to engage psychological strengths may lead to positive outcomes such as improved psychological well-being and alleviation of distress, while Rettew and Lopez (2008) stated that when a person is using his/her character strengths, he/she functions in ways that are more triumphant, industrious, engaged, healthier and happier.

As indicated above, various studies have considered the pathologies associated with educators' stressful work experiences. Far fewer studies have however, studied the strengths employed by teachers who are able to cope with the demands made by the educational context. In a similar regard, Tweed, Biswas-Diener, and Lehman (2012) were of the opinion that the dearth of research on the topic may be due to a natural inclination of researchers to focus on the psychosocial difficulties and consequences of teachers' stress and burnout, thus the study of strengths may seem less relevant than the obvious urgent needs of burnt out teachers. The limited research attention on strengths of teachers hamper our understanding of their abilities to deal with and manage the stress of their work and how their coping and well-being can be better facilitated. Therefore, this study aimed at researching the ways in which teachers use their character strengths, their experiences thereof within the teaching context, as well as the influence on their well-being and satisfaction with life.

1.2 Literature Background to the Study

The following parts of the discussion will further motivate the rationale of this study.

1.2.1 The stressful context of teaching

Teaching is a significant yet challenging occupation in modern-day society and teachers are often susceptible to job-related tension (Chang, 2009; Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004). Teaching as a vocation may be associated, amongst other conditions, with exhaustion; burnout; and a risk of diminished beliefs regarding personal accomplishment. Teachers therefore seem to require high levels of emotional competence (Chang, 2009; Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012), since poor emotional health was found to be a predictor of ineffective coping skills, lack of self-efficacy and lower self-regulation (Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005; Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

Today's teachers experience high levels of complexity and intensity of occupational demands. The challenges that are faced by educators are multiple (Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012), and include increasingly diverse learners, tough school climates, poor socio-economic status, student discipline problems, adverse working conditions and lack of emotional support - all linked by research to teacher burnout and high teacher turnover (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Research mentioned by Jansen (2014) indicated that teachers in South-Africa often deal with stress-laden situations and the problems that such teachers have to deal with daily include endless administrative tasks, poor discipline among learners, lack of work ethic among colleagues and predicaments in their personal lives such as illness and financial deficits.

Due to the challenges faced by educators, increased burnout rates could result in lower employability of educators and this may have detrimental implications for society (Schelvis et al., 2013). A study by Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell (2012) indicated that participants in professions other than teaching have more perceived control over their own happiness, while many teachers feel that challenges are beyond their control. Sickness absence is found to be more prevalent among educators than among employees in any other occupational sector (Koppes et al., 2011) and people in other occupations than teaching seem to adjust better to changes and cope better with life's demands (Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012). Large numbers of teachers retire ahead of retirement age and commonly retire because of psychological troubles and psychosomatic sickness (Wegner, Berger, Poschadel, & Baur, 2011). Moreover, Corbet and Wilson (2002) were of the opinion that the poor psychological and physical health of teachers, due to an inability to cope with the stress that they experience, could lower their self-efficacy beliefs and indirectly influence learners' education and success in a negative way. Teachers, who struggle to cope, fail to adjust personally and may influence student performance and the overall education system negatively (Chan, 2006).

However, despite the negative picture painted above about the teaching environment, there are teachers who cope effectively with demands, show aspects of resilience and maintain their psychosocial well-being. The question posed by Antonovsky (1979) about people who manage to resist stressful dysfunction, comes to mind, namely "Whence the strength?" (p. 7). As mentioned before, Seligman (2011) proposed that the use of a person's character strengths may result in positive outcomes such as improved wellness and alleviation of distress and was found to serve as a buffer against symptoms of pathology or mental ill-health. In a study by Duckworth, Quinn, and Seligman (2009), the strength of zest differentiated between effective and ineffective teachers, since it buffered against negative emotion and stress for those teachers who used this strength. The contruct of character strengths will be briefly discussed below.

1.2.2 Character strengths

For the purposes of this study, the definition of strengths by Peterson and Seligman (2004) was used and specifically character strengths were studied as conceptualised in their *Handbook for the Classification and Theory of Character Strengths and Virtues*, as well as by the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), which measures character strengths. The goal of the handbook is to serve as a manual for the health, competencies and overall sanities of people and to emphasise what is good and correct about people, such as investigations into the character strengths that underpin the good life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). There are 24 character strengths derived from six types of virtues, as illustrated by Figure 1.
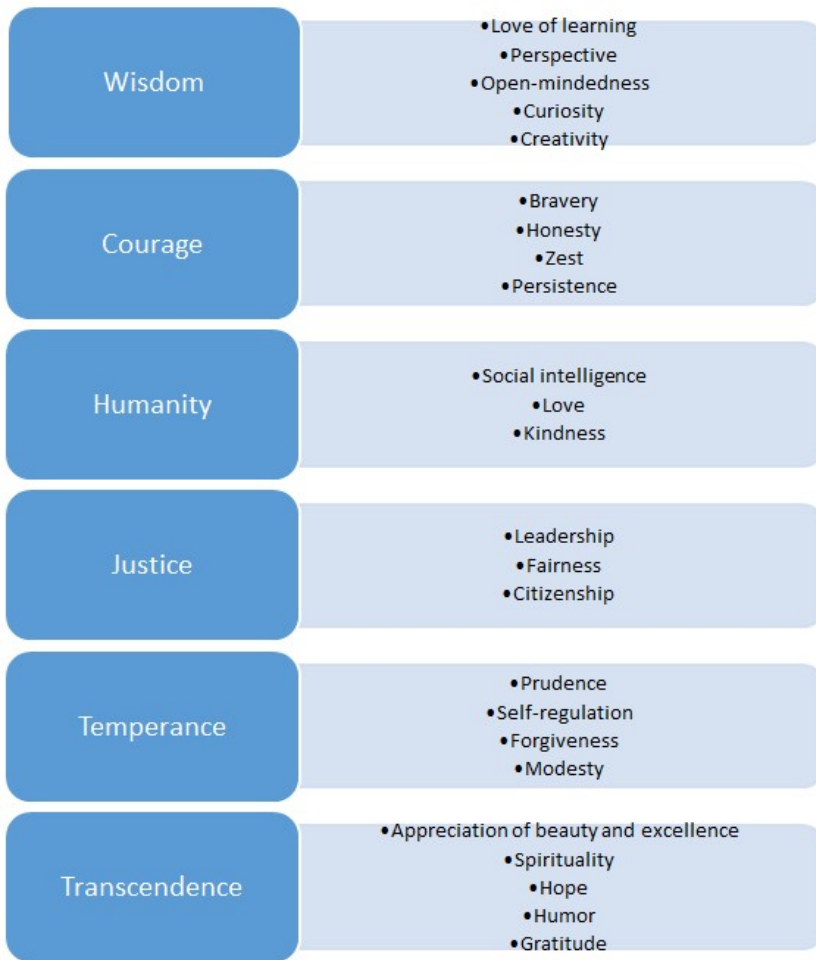
Figure 1: Virtue groups and accompanying strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

A virtue can be defined as an inner-procedure involving thoughts, feelings and behaviour that leads to a person engaging in such a way as to benefit the self and larger society (Snyder & McCullough, 2000). The virtues were proposed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) to be six broad categories that make up core characteristics of a virtuous person and have been found to emerge consistently from numerous historical surveys. These categories of virtue are wisdom, courage, justice, humanity, temperance and transcendence. People display a virtue by using the related character strengths in everyday life activities and according to Peterson and Seligman, a person may be said to have a virtuous character if he or she displays one or more strengths within each virtue group.

A character strength is a "trait-like, personified, fulfilling, intrinsically valuable, non-rivalrous characteristic that may be underdeveloped in some individuals, could be observed in some child prodigies, does not counteract desirable traits, is not a combination of other strengths in

the classification of strengths and virtues and is promoted by society" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 22). Character strengths are proposed to be a foundation for people to accomplish goals, enhance positive affect and achieve satisfaction in life (Seligman, 2011). Littman-Odavia and Lavy (2012) empirically confirmed that the use of character strengths leads to a significant increase in satisfaction with life. According to Rath (2007), the following are aspects that combine to describe character strengths: the strength is a predictable part of the person's performance and is applied with consistency; does not need to be present in every aspect of the person's life and deploying the strength may facilitate a person to excel.

For the purposes of this study, teachers were requested to explore and make use of their signature character strengths after identifying such strengths through completing the VIA-IS. The VIA-IS has 240 items (10 items per strength) and is freely available on the internet. Numerous studies have indicated that the VIA-IS has high reliability and validity (Güsewell & Ruch, 2012; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This measure indicates what a person's top 5 character strengths (signature strengths) are and also accurately measures other character strengths at that given time, since character strengths are not fixed. For instance, scores of citizenship, spirituality, gratitude, hope, love, leadership and kindness increased dramatically one month after 9/11 compared to measures taken before (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), criteria constituting a person's signature strengths may be: that the person identifies with owning such signature strengths; that joy is obtained from activities relating to the person's signature strengths; that the person may learn quicker when combining the process of learning with the use of such strengths; that the person consistently continues to use the strength as a behaviour that feels natural for him/her to display; that he/she feels an intrinsic motivation to perform such strengths; that it refreshes, rather than exhausts him/her after having used such strengths and that he/she engages in projects or creates tasks which evolve around the acting out of his/her signature strengths. Furthermore, Peterson and Seligman (2004) made it clear that the VIA-IS classification might not be absolute and that there might be strengths that are not included in the classification or alterations that could still need to be made.

1.2.3 Positive effects of character strength deployment

According to Cohn and Fredrickson (2009), well-being occurs when individuals assign their strengths and personal experiences such as satisfaction, meaning and positive affect to the different domains of their lives in order to flourish. Seligman (2011) proposed that awareness

of personal traits and exercising of character strengths may lead to improved psychological well-being, resilience and the prevention of symptoms of psychological illness.

McGovern and Miller (2008) stated that people who do not use their character strengths in the workplace may experience poor job satisfaction and burnout, while a study by Kahn (2013) found that character strengths are significantly positively correlated with subjective well-being, mentoring and social support in an educational context. When people use their character strengths, they are more inclined to strive towards goals that are authentic, aligned to their implicit motives and that fit the real sense of self and, as a result ,they tend to experience improved well-being (Hofer & Busch, 2013; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001; Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004). Research by Peterson and Park (2006, 2011) on the application of character strengths by workers in various organisations, found that: leadership skills were predicted by humanity strengths; teaching effectiveness was predicted by zest, humour and social intelligence; the zest strength predicted the tendency to regard one's work as a calling and in general, work satisfaction was predicted by the strengths of zest and hope across numerous occupations, including teaching. Recently, Harzer and Ruch (2016) found that the more frequently participants used their signature strengths in the work place, the more they perceived their jobs to be a calling and furthermore that an individual is more likely to perceive his/her job as a calling if his/her signature strengths are in line with those strengths that his/her work context requires. This reminds one of the person-environment fit model (Harzer & Ruch, 2012; Kristof, 1996) where a good match between the individual and his/her job shows how effectively the person and the job can reciprocally provide what is required. Rodger and Raider-Roth (2006) stated that self-knowledge, trustworthiness, compassion and ability to form positive relationships are qualities that are crucial for the teaching profession.

Furthermore, Peterson, Stephens, Park, Lee, and Seligman (2010) and Smith (2011) found that the strengths of zest, hope, curiosity, gratitude, spirituality and social intelligence were linked to job satisfaction across various professions. The strength of persistence was found to be positively related to employees' engagement at work and negatively with counter-productivity. When employees derived meaning from their occupations, this mediated the link between persistence and employees' performance at work (Littman-Odavia & Lavy, 2015). The strength of hope was found to be associated with problem-solving, self-control, positive emotions and self-efficacy (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003) and the strengths of hope, love, curiosity, vitality and love were reported to significantly relate to life satisfaction (Park et al., 2004). Littman-Odavia and Lavy (2012) found that the strengths of love of learning, zest,

curiosity, hope and perspective were often related to the experience of positive emotions. In a study by Proyer, Gander, Wellenzohn, and Ruch (2016), participants were asked to perform exercises involving the strength of appreciation of beauty and excellence and increases in positive affect and diminished depressive symptoms were found for up to one week after the intervention. Another recent study that involved a six-year longitudinal design, indicated that hope was positively correlated with emotional well-being (Ciarochi, Parker, Kashdan, Heaven, & Barkus, 2015).

For the purposes of this study, it was important to note that when people learn how to use their strengths and use them frequently, they seem to turn their strengths into personal advantages, for example, adjusting how the self is viewed, transforming ways of relating to the world around them (Rettew & Lopez, 2008) and developing better knowledge about themselves (Williamson, 2002). When the person acts out his/her abilities in a positive way by finding out what he/she is good at (signature strengths), his/her self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy soar (Cantwell, 2006). Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, and Sheldon (2011) found that the gratification of basic human needs such as competence, relatedness and autonomy during strengths deployment and the events that happen during the process, promote the experience of psychological well-being. Furthermore, research by Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) found that people have some control over how happy and positive they feel and that they can alter their happiness by choosing the activities they engage in and the effort they wish to exert, following environmental cues such as context-related stressors. In this regard the observation of Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, and Minhas (2011) is of importance, namely that strengths are highly contextual phenomena that emerge in distinctive patterns alongside particular goals, interests, values and situational factors.

Positive psychology intervention strategies that aimed to cultivate strengths have been found effective in diminishing depressive symptoms and enhancing positive feelings (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). Strength-related activities have been associated positively with positive affect and negatively with negative affect and neuroticism (Littman-Odavia & Lavy, 2012), while Littman-Odavia and Nir (2014) found that uncomplicated self-applied strengths exercises performed on a daily basis can decrease pessimism, negative affect and emotional exhaustion and that these benefits can be sustained up to one month after an initial seven days of practising the exercises. Bromley, Johnson, and Cohen (2006) reported that youth who increasingly displayed the use of character strengths, continued to adapt better to further educational endeavours and future occupations and displayed lower levels of mental problems,

supporting the view that character strengths may protect against psychological suffering and buffer against stress. Duckworth, Steen, and Seligman (2005) found that there was a positive relationship between strength deployment and how good people felt about their future, or future-mindedness.

From the above discussion it is evident that research indicate the positive influence of character strength use on amongst others, emotional well-being (Littman-Odavia & Nir, 2014) and on satisfaction with life (Littman-Odavia & Lavy, 2012). In this study these two aspects of the well-being of participating teachers will be measured, in addition to the qualitative study of teachers' employment of signature strengths in the teaching context.

1.2.4 Psychosocial well-being

Since the influence of strengths usage by teachers in their educational context on their psychosocial well-being is studied in this research, it is necessary to briefly describe the concept of well-being or more specifically psychosocial well-being. William James, (1884) expressed that healthy people act out their creative, sublime potential and they fulfil these potentials in a balanced way. There are different ways to attain well-being. Hedonic well-being is the sense of happiness and pleasure (Diener, 1994) while eudaimonic well-being is the attainment of an integrated sense of self and of fulfilling one's human potential in terms of optimal psychological growth and development (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Subjective well-being, also seen as the more hedonic aspect of well-being, has been defined as experiencing significantly more pleasant emotions than negative emotions over time and by experiencing high levels of satisfaction with life (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), where life satisfaction is viewed as an individual's perception of how positive he/she feels about his/her general life circumstances (Jia Ng, Hueber, & Hills, 2015). Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) proposed that subjective well-being or happiness consists of three parts: a biological set-point for a person's capability to be happy; the circumstances/context, and intentional behaviour that may lead to increased happiness.

Well-being theories differ in their conceptualisations regarding what well-being entails, but most theories agree that if people want to enhance their well-being, this can be achieved by engaging in specific activities more frequently (Compton & Hoffman, 2013). The positive-activity model (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013) proposes that positive activities produce positive cognitive and affective processes and the fulfilment of psychological needs, which in turn support positive behaviour and positive activities, and this again promotes more well-

being. Even though hereditary/genetic factors determine the set-point for an individual's potential for hedonic well-being, much of it can be controlled by shifting one's thoughts and engaging in specific, intentional activities to enhance well-being (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Lykken & Tellegen, 1996; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). Positive activities are simple, deliberate and regular exercises intended to imitate the thoughts and behaviours associated with naturally happy people (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). The real self (authenticity) is found through activities that encourage and advance three inherent needs that every person has, namely needs for autonomy(control/mastery), relatedness (social support/connectedness) and competency (self-efficacy/goal achievement). Practicing strength-boosting activities satisfy these basic psychological needs and may therefore lead to increased well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Ryff's (1989) classical model of psychological well-being or eudaimonic well-being, state that psychological well-being entails the experience of positive relationships, autonomy, meaning, mastery and personal growth, while similarly according to Snyder, Lopez, and Teramoto Pedrotti (2011), psychological well-being involves self-acceptance, feeling positive about the self, personal growth, optimism, engaging in self-improvement, experiencing meaning in life, personal mastery/achievement, perceiving that one is autonomous and having supportive, positive relationships with other people. Participants who perceived themselves to be self-effective, masterful over their environment and supported by others, were found to be generally healthier after a three month break between taking well-being measures (Leon & Nunez, 2015).

Psychosocial well-being is experienced when all features of psychological and intra-personal well-being is related to and finds expression and fulfilment in inter-personal contexts (INEE, 2011; Reber & Reber, 2001). The conceptualisations of Ryff (1989) and of Snyder et al. (2011) mentioned above, have strong features of psychosocial well-being. More recently however, the complete mental health theory of Keyes (2002) is seen as a theory of psychosocial well-being in which emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being are integrated in a mentally well person, who feels good and functions well. In this model, emotional well-being is similar to subjective well-being, psychological well-being has Ryff's features of well-being and social well-being has five dimensions of interpersonal and communal well-being of Keyes (1998). Keyes (2006) describes the optimally psychosocially well person as flourishing.

Regarding well-being, Seligman (2011) proposed: "I now think that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the gold-standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing" (Seligman, 2011, p. 13) and he

theorised that well-being has five elements, presented by the mnemonic PERMA (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning in life, and Accomplishments). The five elements of this theory need to adhere to the following requirements (Seligman, 2011): the outcome(s) of each element of PERMA should lead to enhanced well-being; each element is engaged in for its own sake and not to gain anything else and each element can be measured and defined on its own.

Butler and Kern (2015) developed the PERMA-Profiler, a scale that measures the five elements of PERMA, along with negative emotion and health. The PERMA-Profiler was proven to show reliability, test-retest stability, construct validity and factor-analyses found evidence for the five-factor structure (Butler & Kern, 2015). Figure 2 depicts the five elements of PERMA and describes the accompanying items from the PERMA-Profiler. Additionally to the items shown below, the PERMA-Profiler also contains a general well-being item which is: "Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?" (Butler & Kern, 2015).

Positive Emotions
- In general, how often do you feel joyful?
- In general, how often do you feel positive?
- In general, to what extent do you feel contented?

Engagement
- How often do you become absorbed in what you are doing?
- In general, to what extent do you feel excited and interested in things?
- How often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy?

Positive Relationships
- To what extent do you receive help and support from others when you need it?
- To what extent have you been feeling loved?
- How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?

Meaning
- In general, to what extent do you lead a purposeful and meaningful life?
- In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do in your life is valuable and worthwhile?
- To what extent do you generally feel that you have a sense of direction in your life?

Achievement
- How much of the time do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your goals?
- How often do you achieve the important goals you have set for yourself?
- How often are you able to handle your responsibilities?

Figure 2: Components of PERMA and items from the PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2015)

The five PERMA dimensions are briefly discussed below:

1.2.4.1 Positive (and negative) affect

According to Butler and Kern (2015) both positive affect and negative emotions influence well-being and they fall within the same spectrum of human emotions. They state that positive emotion measures general tendencies toward feeling contentment and joy while negative emotion measures tendencies toward feeling sad, anxious and angry (Butler & Kern, 2015).

Positive affect is related to well-being, happy marriages, more robust immune systems and success in life (Lyobomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005) and experiencing positive affect in the work place, has been shown to increase teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cotè & Morgan, 2002). The direct-efforts model (Bandura, 1997) theorises that positive affect has positive results, while negative affect has more negative outcomes, for example that positive emotions foster self-efficacy beliefs, but negative emotion reduces it. Fredrickson (2001) explained such findings in her broaden-and-build theory by stating that experiencing positive affect activates a broader set of thoughts and behaviour which in turn leads to creating personal sources of well-being and produces upward spirals of more experiences of positive affect. Positive emotion also has an undoing effect on the results of negative emotions.

1.2.4.2 Engagement

Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, and Bakker (2002) defined work engagement as an occupational-related mind-set of a contented, positive nature and that it entails a person being zestful, committed and absorbed in his/her work role. Butler and Kern (2015, p.1) described engagement as being absorbed, excited and involved in an activity or the world itself and stated that very high levels of engagement are known as a state called flow, in which one is so thoroughly absorbed in an activity that sense of time is lost. By engaging in activities that promote engagement or flow, well-being is increased through nurturing talents and cultivating interests which lead to upward spirals of both subjective and objective well-being (Schueller, 2012). In a study by Lucardie (2014) where teachers applied the character strength of humour and playfulness in their classrooms, it was found that a sense of belonging and connection was established, which promoted the engagement, participation and academic efforts of learners. Learner engagement has been proven to promote well-being (Wang, Chow, Hofkens, & Salmela-Aro, 2015) and was linked to both general academic achievement and performance in mathematics (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Lyod, 2008; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Wang & Peck, 2013).

1.2.4.3 Positive relationships

Positive relationships are established when those involved experience being loved, supported and valued by others (Butler & Kern, 2015). According to Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (2000) positive relationships entail the experience of love, trust, commitment, satisfaction, intimacy and passion. Numerous studies have identified other characteristics of positive relationships such as respect, giving-and-sharing, positive emotions, acceptance, acknowledgement and emotional support (Hargreaves, 2001; Pogodzinski, Youngs, Frank, & Belman, 2012; Yo, 2005). Positive teacher-learner relationships have been found to be directly related to students' academic achievement, positive classroom behaviour, increased student learning and positive emotions of both teachers and learners (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, & Le Cornu, 2007; Trzcinshi & Holst, 2008; Hattie, 2012; Yo, 2005). Furthermore, teachers who experience more satisfaction in their jobs, reported more positive teacher-learner relationships than did teachers who experienced burnout (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Veldman, Van Tartwijk, Brekelmans, & Wubbels, 2013). Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) reported that employees who engaged in caring and generosity had better relationships, coped better with stress and showed less signs of burnout. According to Ryan and Deci (2001), people have a psychological need to feel cared for and to have fulfilling relationships and when this need is met, it enhances their well-being. Positive connections with others have also been linked to improved self-esteem, increased motivation, resilience and increased constructive behaviours (Townsend & McWhirter, 2005).

1.2.4.4 Meaning

Meaning has been regarded as an important component of well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and is specifically related to eudaimonic well-being. Butler and Kern (2015, p.1) defined meaning as "having a sense of purpose in life, a direction where life is going, feeling that life is valuable and worth living, or connecting to something greater than ourselves, such as religious faith, a charity or a personally meaningful goal". Victor Frankl argued that the search for meaning is what makes people more resilient in the face of adversity (Frankl, 1985). In a study by Marco, Guillèn, and Botella (2017) it was found that meaning in life buffered against hopelessness and suicide risk factors, whereas meaning in life has further been linked to subjective well-being, increased positive emotion, higher life satisfaction and found to buffer against the harmful effects of aversity (Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008; Ho, Cheung, & Cheung; 2010; Shrira, Palgi, Ben-Ezra, & Shmotkin, 2011; Shek, 2012).

1.2.4.5 Accomplishment

According to Butler and Kern (2015) accomplishment is experienced when a person feels masterful, works towards reaching goals, and is capable of completing tasks and daily responsibilities. It would also seem that the constructs of self-efficacy and competence are strongly represented in the experience of achievement. Teacher self-efficacy buffers against teacher burn-out (Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, & Barber, 2010) and improves coping (Maddux, 1995). When teachers experience self-efficacy they are more motivated towards self-development and working towards improving their learners' performance (Pintrich, 2003). Teachers who feel that they are competent set more goals for themselves, have better relationships with colleagues and parents and engage in more effective teaching strategies (Weiss, 2005). Believing that one is competent, will likely increase the tendency to engage with others, which leads to more opportunities for receiving social support (Cohen & Cairns, 2012; Baker & McNulty, 2010) and supportive social connections have been found to enhance well-being (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013).

Above, a brief description was given of the complex phenomenon of psychosocial well-being, including various views on aspects of psychosocial well-being and specifically the more recently proposed PERMA model by Seligman (2011). However, since signature strengths and their well-being outcomes are the focus of this study, a crucial variable that could influence teachers' strengths would be culture, and consequently, this will be discussed.

1.2.5 Cultural considerations about character strengths

Strengths must be considered within a cultural context, since they are derived from cultural facets, for example strong values of collectivism within a culture may foster more interpersonal strengths, such as caring for others (Snyder, Lopez, & Teramoto Pedrotti, 2011). Different cultural facets may have different meanings and application and may influence the definition of what positive behaviour or traits mean within a specific cultural context (Hays, 2008). Definitions of strengths may vary across different cultural groups (Snyder et al., 2011), for instance, that a word such as "wisdom" might not have the same meaning in one culture as in another. Snyder et al. (2011) stated that studies where there are participants from more than one cultural group must first determine what the construct definitions are for the different cultural groups in order to determine whether participants hold the same meaning for such constructs. Also, although a core set of positive traits and strengths may be present across cultures, positive traits and processes usually manifest in different ways for dissimilar reasons in various

cultures (Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003). An example of this variation is evident among some people who follow an eastern perspective on positive psychology and who value suffering as a transcendent virtue in life (Constantine & Sue, 2006).

Furthermore, one should consider the cultural appropriateness of the VIA-IS survey. The six virtues and their 24 character strengths are fairly accepted to be present among all cultures and universally recognised, but they have not been proven to be universal in meaning among all cultures (Seligman et al., 2006). For example, Biswas-Diener (2006) researched character strengths across three cultures (African, European and American) and found differences between and within cultures in terms of gender, the importance of strengths and cultural views on the promotion of strengths. In South-Africa, Khumalo (2006) found that the VIA-IS used with Setswana speaking students yielded three emic factors, indicating a collective cultural value system, rather than the six-virtue cluster model of the VIA-IS. The cultural relevance of the VIA-IS and all other measures and methods used in this study were thus considered within the context of the participants' cultures (Magyar-Moe, 2009) and were interpreted within the education context.

1.3 Research Questions and Aims

After reviewing the existing literature on character strengths, the awareness, deployment and effects thereof, it was assumed that there could be a positive effect on the teaching experiences of teachers after identifying and applying their signature character strengths. A research question thus proposed for this study was: After identifying their signature strengths by means of the VIA-IS of Peterson and Seligman (2004), how would teachers use such strengths, how would they experience the use thereof in their teaching context and would the use of signature strengths influence their emotional well-being and satisfaction with life?

Subsequently, the *research aims* were to: qualitatively explore how teachers use their signature strengths in the teaching context; understand the effects/outcomes experienced by teachers due to their use of signature strengths in the educational workplace; and measure the influence of the use of signature strengths on the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life of the participants.

For the purpose of this mixed-methods research, an open-qualitative exploration was done, without being biased by existing literature of what should be expected to happen when teachers deploy their strengths. By following this approach, a deeper understanding of teachers' ways of and experiences during strength exploration and deployment can be obtained, as well as a

possible indication of further aspects contributing to strength deployment and the effects derived from the use of strengths. To address the above research question, this research intended to qualitatively obtain reliable first-person accounts of strengths-related experiences; an indication of possible changes within participants through strengths use and an understanding of the outcomes of strength implementation experienced by participants over time. Quantitatively the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life of participants were measured on three occasions to determine whether strengths usage influenced these experiences.

1.4 Research Method

The research consisted of a literature and an empirical study.

1.4.1 Literature study

The literature study explored stress in the teaching context and conceptualised the construct of character strengths, how such strengths are used in the workplace and the effects or outcomes thereof.

1.4.2 Empirical study

1.4.2.1 Research design

This study made use of a time-based qualitative diary design (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005) and qualitative-thematic analysis from a phenomenological perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with the goal of studying what happens when educators use their signature character strengths within a teaching context – in other words, how they use their character strengths and what experiences they derive from using their strengths within the context of teaching. Furthermore, assessments of emotional well-being and satisfaction with life were completed by the participants on three occasions, in order to determine whether there is an influence of the use of their signature strengths on their emotional well-being and satisfaction with life. This was thus a mixed-method research design in which the weight or priority emphasised the qualitative component of the study. The emphasis was determined by the main focus of this research and the mainly qualitative methods used to gather data and to answer the research question (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative and qualitative methods for data gathering took place simultaneously.

The research was in line with Creswell's (2009) view that a research design is a plan to do the research and procedures followed to implement the plan, in order to move from assumptions

about the phenomenon to specific methods of collecting and analysing data with which to answer the research question.

1.4.2.2 Qualitative research paradigm

Qualitative research methods are useful for presenting a clear picture of the reality as experienced from the perspective of participants in the study (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). With qualitative research, the researcher is the instrumental tool and thus complete objectivity may not be possible, but this can be overcome by the researcher admitting personal biases and prejudgements and by discussing her own contribution in the phenomena being studied (Eisner, 1991; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). It is vital that qualitative research is credible and rigorous, in order to be an honest scientific endeavour (Akinyoade, 2013). Credibility adds to the truthfulness of a qualitative study and is attained when participants are the judges of how well their experiences and perspectives are portrayed (Creswell, 2009).

Low-inference descriptors, for example using the participants' words and direct quotations, may help the researcher towards attaining a more truthful description of the findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). According to Trochim (2006), careful judgement should be made over transferability of the qualitative findings through a comprehensive description given about the research context, experiences and expectations held, in order for readers to decide whether the research may be applicable to other contexts. However, Taylor-Powell and (2003) were of the opinion that transferability is not the main goal of qualitative research and rather, the qualitative approach accentuates the uniqueness of the particular participants within their specific context by pursuing to comprehend their perspectives and experiences. The findings obtained from qualitative data are for understanding the specific participants and their contexts for the purpose of the unique study, rather than for the goal of making generalisations (Creswell, 2009).

Some disadvantages of qualitative research are that both data collection and data analysis may be more time consuming than with quantitative research; that the research findings may be swayed by the researcher's personal preconceived notions if not taken into account and controlled for; and that the results from the study may not be able to be generalised to other situations (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

The advantages of qualitative research are that data themes can be grounded on the meanings and cognitive constructs of the participants themselves; more complexity can be obtained; depth of detail and emphatic appreciation of phenomena can be attained; and data in the

participants' own words may give superior insight into how and why phenomena come about (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Nicholls, 2011). The key focuses of qualitative research are meanings, qualities and important characteristics of individuals' experiences and relations (Tewksbury, 2009), which ask for richness of detail that cannot be sufficiently conveyed by numbers or statistics and encompasses a research method that is both systematic and flexible (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2007).

1.4.2.3 A phenomenological research perspective

Phenomenology aims to describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible, is not bound to preconceived theories or frameworks and remains honest to the specifics as they are given by the participants (Groenewald, 2004). Welman and Kruger (1999) stated that phenomenologists aim to understand social and psychological phenomena from the viewpoint of the participants and, according to Holloway (1997), the phenomenological approach to research is interested in giving a true account of the lived experiences of those involved in the study. Although a phenomenological approach was followed in this study, analysis of shared information (data) was done according to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

1.4.2.4 Researcher's paradigm

The researcher's intention was to understand and qualitatively interpret the experiences of the educators in this study regarding the application of their signature strengths and to "rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2009, p.8). She furthermore appreciated the individuality of participants and proposed the study to accommodate individual differences by allowing for each participant to explore character strengths true to himself/herself. Differences of perspective between human beings were taken into account by the researcher who is not acting as the expert, but who is rather seeking that the participants share their worlds, realities and experiences; shaping the findings of the study accordingly. Therefore, the research may have empowered the participants by them sharing their experiences from their own mental frameworks and the researcher facilitating the process through requesting that the teachers engage in character strength-related activities and making reports in the form of diary entries. The researcher's beliefs about reality (ontology), how knowledge exists and how things can be known (epistemology), was that reality is mostly socially constructed and may best be understood directly from the person's perspective who is experiencing that reality. Furthermore, the researcher held that many truths exist, that each participant's account of information given is based on his or her own psychosocial

constructions and that reality may not be experienced the same way by two different participants (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

1.4.3 Participants and procedures

A primary school under jurisdiction of the Gauteng Department of Education was selected as the target population and the school was within convenient proximity for the researcher. The principal of this school was informally contacted to establish the possibility of conducting the proposed study and it was agreed that the researcher may make an appointment with him to give detailed information about the study. After approval of the study proposal and obtaining ethical clearance, the researcher made an appointment with the principal to obtain permission and consent to involve staff at his school in this research study, whereafter the Department of Education's approval of the research was obtained.

The participants involved in this research were thus selected partly on purposive and partly on convenience grounds. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), an in-depth account of data with 10 to 15 participants is adequate when doing phenomenological research, however, Creswell (2009) suggested that data saturation may be used as a guideline for inclusion of participants in a qualitative study. Only teachers who agreed to willingly participate in the study and to signing the letter of informed consent participated in the research. Communication with teachers, who were willing to participate, was done outside school hours at a time arranged with and convenient to them. Each of the participants was informed what their rights are, enjoyed full transparency on information about the study and received contact details of the researcher to make use of if they had any further questions regarding the study. Further ethical considerations are discussed in section 1.5 of this document.

1.4.4 Gathering of data

In addition to qualitative methods, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) served as measuring instruments in order to gather data.

The *Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences* (SPANE) briefly measures a wide range of positive and negative emotions and was found to have a Cronbach Alpha of 0.87 for the overall scale (Diener et al., 2009). It consists of 12 items; six items for negative feelings and six items for positive feelings. Participants are asked to rate the extent to which they experienced feelings such as joy or anger. Each item is scored on a range from 1 to 5, where 1 is rated for ''very rarely or never'' and 5 is rated for ''very often or always''. The positive and negative

scales are scored separately and each can range from 6 to 30. By subtracting the negative score from the positive score, a balanced score is obtained which can range from -24 to 24. The higher a participant's score, the more pleasant emotions he or she experiences (Diener et al., 2009). In a study by Jovanovic (2015) it was found that the SPANE shows excellent incremental validity and that the SPANE predicts well-being better than the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) when used with adults and adolescents, since the SPANE subscales predicted life satisfaction and well-being more accurately in all the regression models that were used.

The *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) is a brief measurement of a person's general judgment regarding his or her satisfaction with life and has good internal consistency, ranging from .61 to .81 for the five items of the scale (Diener et al., 1985). It consists of five items on a 7-point Likert scale of which the scores can be added up to determine the total score for the scale. The scores can range from 5 to 35, where 20 represents the neutral point of the scale. A score between 21 and 25 indicates that the participant is slightly satisfied, and scores from 15 to 19 represents slightly dissatisfied. Scores between 5 and 9 represent high dissatisfaction with life, and scores ranging between 31 and 35 indicate satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS was proven to show a Cronbach Alpha of 0.66 with Setswana-speaking South Africans and 0.85 for English and Afrikaans speaking South-Africans (Wissing, Wissing, Du Toit, & Temane, 2008).

The SWLS and the SPANE are both available in the open domain for research purposes. These psychological measures were administered three times during the study and the first measurement was done just before the researcher introduced participants to character strengths through a presentation to facilitate the identification and use of their signature character strengths. Following the presentation, teachers received material from the presentation to refer to should they so wish. Teachers then completed the online VIA-IS in order to discover their signature strengths. The teachers were requested to use at least one signature strength daily during a period of two weeks. The researcher was available to the participants during the two weeks to offer support and answer any questions they might have had.

A diary-entry method was implemented for the qualitative purposes of this study, with participants sharing their experiences in the form of diary entries over the two weeks that they were requested to explore their signature character strengths (Krishnan & Hoon, 2002). Diary entries are seen as self-reported, first-person accounts of information that comprise repetitive, detailed entries of moods, experiences, manifestations, events, emotions, and interactions in

proximal time to when it happens (Lida, Shrout, Laurenceau, & Bolger, 2012). This can take on many forms, but for the proposed research, a pen-and-paper method was proposed (Krishnan & Hoon, 2002), though some participants requested to type and email their diaries to the researcher. The diary method for collecting data is good to use with educators who are usually well-literate and who have good visual and writing abilities (Meth, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, participants were required to make time-based diary entries once per day for the duration of two weeks (Lida et al., 2012). By limiting the research time to two weeks and requesting participants to spend no more than fifteen minutes each day on diary reports may have contributed to overcoming participant burden. Participant burden is where the task of diary entry becomes an inconvenience for participants and they react with non-compliance and withdrawal (Lida et al., 2012). Jacelon and Imperio (2005) found that the best duration for research using diary methods to gather data is between one and two weeks, as participants' diaries do not have enough richness in less than a week and if more than two weeks, the participants may easily lose interest in making a daily diary entry.

Some benefits of diary methods are: they study experiences as they happen naturally and provide unrehearsed accounts of information within its true context (Reis, 1994); by using diary methods a wide range of different experiences can be studied (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1997); diary methods have usefulness for describing how much a participant differs over time in variables such as emotion or volition and furthermore, it reduces chances of bias due to retrospection over extended durations of time (Affleck, Zautra, Tennen, & Armeli, 1999; Lida et al., 2012). Diary studies are self-reflective in nature and such writing may have a beneficial influence on participants' well-being. The researcher may counter the influence of this potential bias by making participants aware that diary writing may be therapeutic in nature, by discussing this with participants to minimise its effect and by checking with participants whether any perceived beneficial effects are due to the use of strengths and not to effects of self-reflective writing (Suedfeld & Pennebaker, 1997). The potential therapeutic effects of diary writing will also be kept in mind in the reporting and interpretation of the results of the study.

To keep diary entries from being over demanding, the researcher developed short, simple to answer guiding questions where self-report of information, such as experiences particularly within the context of teaching, is requested (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). For the purposes of this study, the participants were guided by four questions when making their diary entries:

- What signature strength(s) did you use today within the context of teaching?
- Describe how you used your signature strength(s) today within the context of teaching?
- Describe how you felt during and after using your signature strengths?
- Describe what you perceived and/or experienced in yourself, your work and in relationships with other teachers and pupils when using your signature strength(s)?

After having received the diary entries from participants and having done a first round of reading of the data, a brief interview was held with each participant. During the interview, the measuring instruments were administered again. In the discussion, participants were asked whether they have anything to add to their written reports, or on reflection would like to change or elaborate on those. They were also asked how they experienced the research exercise and debriefed. Participant checking was done in order to check with teachers whether the initial findings that arose from their diary reports are truthful and accurate. Finally the participants were requested to complete the psychological measurements for the last time on a scheduled date, two weeks after the interview.

1.4.5 Analysis of data

Scores on the measuring instruments were captured electronically by the researcher and re-checked for correctness. Thereafter, significance of differences in scores on measurements was calculated using the SPSS computerised program and assisted by the Optentia Research Focus Area's statistical consultant. SPSS stands for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and it is software that is designed for analysis of logical batched and non-batched data (Bryman & Cramer, 2011). Qualitative data from diary entries was analysed by means of the ATLAS.ti system of thematic analysis, of which a comprehensive description was obtained of the phenomena (teachers' use of character strengths) that was researched (Akinyoade, 2013). The interviews with participants were not included in the analyses. Thematic analysis is a useful and flexible research method in its own right and can offer a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Keeping memos was an important aspect during analysis and involved the researcher making notes regarding her ideas about the meaning of data. This was done throughout the process of analysis and served as a way to check for the researcher's own thought processes, biases and can also be used for the purpose of bracketing (Akinyoade, 2013).

Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that the process of conducting thematic analysis comprises six steps, which are discussed below.

Step one entailed familiarisation and immersion where the researcher familiarised herself with the data through typing, reading and re-reading the data and noting down early ideas. After obtaining information in the form of diary entries, the written texts were electronically captured by the researcher, by typing it into a word processor document such as Microsoft Word (Bailey, 2008). The typed text was helpful when it came to the coding of data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). By re-reading the data numerous times, brainstorming and making notes, the researcher found patterns, recurrent ideas and the general trend of findings (Bailey, 2008).

Step two of the thematic analysis entailed assigning initial codes by labelling parts of the text systematically and collating information related to each code or category, when a part of the text related meaningfully to that code or category (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). During the coding process, the researcher simultaneously started searching for themes so that step two and step three of the thematic analysis flowed into one another. However, Terre Blanche et al. (2006) do not consider these as two separate steps.

During step three of the thematic analysis the researcher examined for themes by collating codes into potential themes and gathering data applicable to each potential theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The actions of identifying themes and coding text flowed into one another as insights of experiences and phenomena were gained and as the interactions between them became noticeable. With time, certain themes produced sub-themes and the researcher regarded themes as fluctuating, not as final (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). When identifying themes, there were no strict rules of what made one theme better than another, although guidelines were followed as suggested by Terre Blanche et al. (2006) in order to make the identification of themes more credible. These guidelines were for the researcher to use the language of the participants instead of theoretical language when labelling themes; to do more than just summarise content by keeping an eye out for functions, contradictions, processes and tensions within data; to find an adequate number of themes so that the analysis is concise without lacking richness; not to settle on themes too soon, to find further possibilities from the data and not to lose track of the research question when identifying important themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The number of times a specific theme emerged, indicated how important and relative the theme was to the findings from the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006), but researcher judgement was needed to conclude what the themes were and more instances did not automatically make one theme more central than another (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step four of the thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), was to review themes by examining the themes in relation to the coded extracts and the broader data set and to

compile a thematic map of the analysis. By reviewing themes at the level of the coded data extracts, the researcher read all the coded extracts again and questioned whether there was a coherent pattern. The researcher re-evaluated the appropriateness of distinct themes in relation to the greater data set and questioned whether the thematic map fit the meanings that appeared in the data as a whole. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended that the researcher strive towards refinement and to re-code additional data within themes that has previously been missed during the coding process. The researcher elaborated as she refined the themes during which continued coding, elaborating and recoding were done until there were no further possibilities for arranging themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). During analysis, the researcher noticed data that served as exceptions or that did not fit well with other themes. This is called negative cases or outliers and the researcher searched for explanations for why the negative cases (outliers) did not comply with themes (Akinyoade, 2013).

Step five of the thematic analysis was to define and name themes by ongoing analysis in order to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions for each theme. By refining and defining, the researcher described what each theme was about, not just paraphrasing the language of the extracts, but stating what is important about the extracts. The researcher took into account why themes were suitable in relation to the broad story conveyed by the data and in relation to the research question. Themes must not be too similar, but able to be differentiated from one another (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Literature control was done at this stage in order to link findings to relevant theory (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

During the last part of the analysis - step six - the researcher compiled a written conclusion or report of the meaning of the data by using thematic categories as headings (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). While compiling the research report, the researcher collected persuasive extract examples and told the story of the participants' information in a way that assures the reader of the credibility of the analysis. The report should provide more than just data, go beyond description alone and make an argument that is suitable to the particular research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Furthermore, Braun and Clark (2006) suggests guidelines for doing good thematic research, namely: that findings should be checked against the diary entries for truthfulness; during coding, each item should be given the same amount of attention; all extracts for all themes should be collated and evaluated against one another and against the broader data set and should be coherent and consistent, yet distinctive; analysis should make an argument, be

persuasive and well-organised and the analytic narrative should weigh up well against illustrative extracts. Braun and Clarke also recommends that the language and ideas written in the report fit the research's epistemological view and that the style of thematic analysis be well-defined.

Possible pitfalls of thematic analysis may be a failure to analyse the data well. This was countered by ensuring that thematic analysis was illustrative of the points the researcher made about the data, to make sense of the data and to clearly convey what the findings were (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Another pitfall is having ineffective analysis where the themes are unconvincing, incoherent or inconsistent. Braun and Clarke suggested that this may be overcome by adequately capturing the data and by providing rich descriptions and adequate examples from the data, as was done in this research.

Braun and Clarke (2006) also stated that some of the advantages of thematic analysis are: that it is flexible, yielding qualitative analysis that is appropriate to inform policy development; that it is relatively simple to learn and to do thematic analysis; that it may bring forth surprising results; that it is suited for researchers who have little experience in doing research; that it easily summarises the main ideas from a large data pool and delivers a thick description; that it produces results that are generally accessible to the educated general public and that it is a useful method for working with participants as collaborators. These advantages were present in the current study.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

Terre Blanche et al. (2006) accurately stated that the ends of research do not justify the means and that the well-being of participants is the most important undertaking of any study. In addition to four basic principles applicable to research (respect for participants, beneficence, justice and non-maleficence), Terre Blanche et al. (2006) noted that there are also professional codes of ethics that guide research.

Autonomy and respect for the dignity of participants mean that all persons and institutions that are being studied remain anonymous and information is confidential (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In this study, the informed consent form explained: participants' right to voluntary participation and to withdraw without consequence at any time; the purpose, procedures and methods of the study; participants' right to ask questions and to obtain a copy of the results; rights to confidentiality and partial anonymity; the potential benefits of participating in the study as well as signatures of both the participant and the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Partial

anonymity meant that participants will be known to the researcher only. Permission from gatekeepers, the Gauteng Department of Education and the school principal, was obtained in writing. Cresswell (2009) suggested that the extent of time, potential impact and the outcomes of the research should be shared with these gatekeepers. During analysis of the data, participants were assigned numbers instead of using their names, so that anonymity in reporting of findings was ensured. Creswell (2009) further recommended that should any potentially sensitive information (for example stress within the context of the teacher's family) be disclosed to the researcher, the participant should have the guarantee that such information will not be shared with another party.

Non-maleficence means that the participants will be treated well, and that no acts be performed which may in any way lead to possible harm to the participants. All forms of deception should be avoided, so that participants are not wronged or harmed in any way (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The researcher strove for an ethical research study by making the research protocol transparent and by including information such as: the location of the research; the rationale and purpose of the research; the tasks and procedures to be used; detail on how confidentiality will be ensured; the research design used to answer the research question; precautions taken to prevent pitfalls in research; how non-malevolence to participants will be ensured; identifying any risks to participating in the research; potential benefits to participating and whether the procedures are experimental (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Johnson and Christensen (2008) also recommended that even though teachers are usually well literate, the information about the study and participants' rights should be written at an eight-grade reading level to ensure that all participants comprehend all material presented to them. The researcher made sure that an accurate account is given of the participants' shared information by checking the data with the participants in a follow-up interview and by debriefing them during this interview (Creswell, 2009).

Beneficence entails that the study is designed so that participants benefit in a non-monetary manner, such as, access to health facilities, learning, improving well-being, accumulating skills or gaining knowledge (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The research questions of this study were designed for the study to ultimately benefit and not harm participants. Furthermore, the design of the study lent itself to empowering participants and establishing a relationship of trust between the researcher. Participants gained information and discovered their signature character strengths through the VIA-IS. Participants used these strengths and were the experts

who judged how they experienced the use and outcomes of their character strengths (Creswell, 2009).

By adhering to the ethical *principle of justice*, the researcher treated all participants equally and did not personally discriminate against any participant. Justice also required that the researcher had the responsibility to provide support and care to the participants, such as being available for questions and establishing a good relationship with participants (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Respect was shown to the participants of this study by not studying vulnerable groups and by upholding the rights of the participants. During the writing of the report, the researcher refrained from using language that is biased towards people by means of gender, ethnic group, disability, age, racial group or sexual orientation (Creswell, 2009). The researcher will keep the data safe (electronically) in a keyword-protected file for a period of five years after the study has been completed; after which it will then be safely discarded (Sieber, 1998).

1.5.1 Trustworthiness

Creswell (2009) provided guidelines for the evaluation of qualitative research's trustworthiness, for example, that the transcriptions should be accurate when conducting phenomenological-related research. This was accounted for in the present study, as participants' diary entries conveyed their own words in written form and no alteration of their words was needed. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the message intended by the participant, was the message received by the researcher, by having a discussion with each participant during which participant checking was done. Participant checking served to check with teachers whether the initial findings that arose from their diary reports were truthful and accurate. According to Holloway (1997), the phenomenological approach to research is interested in giving a true account of the lived experiences of those involved in the study.

Since this study's focus was mostly on the qualitative ways in which insights can be obtained and taking into consideration that a sample of ten participants would be unsuited for a true quantitative study, the eight criteria for qualitative research, as set out by Tracy (2010), were utilised for evaluating the trustworthiness of the present study namely, that quality qualitative research is marked by: a worthy topic; rich rigor; sincerity; credibility; resonance; significant contribution; ethics and meaningful coherence. These criteria and how they are met by research practices carried out in the present study are briefly discussed below.

The study of character strengths used by educators is seen as a *worthy topic* for the following reasons: the classification of character strengths and virtues is not viewed as absolute and there

is the possibility of the existence of strengths that are not included in the classification and the need for future amendments to the classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Therefore, studies like this one that aimed to explore participants' experience of strengths, what these strengths are, how these strengths are presented and the outcomes thereof, may produce new insights and interesting results. Psychological strategies, such as strengths usage by teachers, can be utilised to buffer against challenging school environments (Jansen, 2014). Introducing teachers to character strengths and promoting the use of character strengths by educators is seen as a worthwhile endeavour, since it may facilitate the development of traits and capabilities that the teaching vocation requires efficient teachers to be equipped with (McGovern & Miller, 2008; Park & Peterson, 2009; Bryan, 2009; Sutton, 2007; López-Martínes, 2014).

Aspects of *rigor* (Tracy, 2010) have been adhered to, since plentiful data was obtained and literature control conducted, in other words findings from the current study was compared and linked to relevant insights from literature. Also, adding to trustworthiness, was specification of the research context (Tracy, 2010) and that the sample size was appropriate. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008) an in-depth account of data with 10 participants is adequate when doing phenomenological research and when data-saturation is achieved, as was the case in the present study. Furthermore, appropriate procedures were followed in terms of making memo's or field notes, which served as reflective commentary or a way to monitor the researcher's own developing ideas and biases, all proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) to be important for establishing rigor and credibility. The researcher's field notes served as a record for self-reflection, coding and theorising and was used for auditing (Koch,1994), as well as serving as a source for interpreting the qualitative data, thereby contributing to trustworthiness (Rice & Ezzy, 2000). Rigor and credibility were enhanced by the researcher's academic supervisor acting as a co-coder, who also reviewed the themes and comparison of findings to literature theories and previous research. By including and interpreting the negative case of the teachers who experienced negative affect with regard to the use of kindness, rigor was further strengthened (Peräkylä, 1997). Rigorous data analysis was achieved by providing the reader with a detailed description and explanation of the thematic analysis by which data was analysed and interpreted, since trustworthiness is best indicated when the reader finds this to be so (Tracy, 2010).

Sincerity has been achieved by the researcher reflecting on personal values and beliefs in the writing of the research report by recognising biases and taking steps to counter it by presenting

the research procedures and limitations in a transparent manner and by giving credit to those researchers that were cited (Tracy, 2010).

Credibility was achieved by showing rather than telling, through expressing to multiple participant's perspectives by means of meaningful quotes, which provided rich detail of their view points (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Low-inference descriptors, for example using the participants' words and direct quotations, helped the researcher towards attaining a more truthful description of the findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). A short discussion with participants for the purpose of debriefing and participant checking was also done. This gave participants the chance to ask questions, offer feedback and ascertain whether findings obtained from their data were accurate and truthful. Checking for truthfulness with participants has been seen as the most important method for establishing credibility by Guba and Lincoln (1989) and according to Creswell (2009), credibility is attained when participants are the judges of how well their experiences and perspectives are portrayed.

Resonance was adhered to by presenting the text in an aesthetically pleasing and evocative manner and by presenting the research with clarity (Tracy, 2010). Furthermore, the study provided theoretic resonance by supporting and contributing to disciplinary knowledge and heuristic resonancy by providing suggestions for aspects that need to be explored and studied further (Abbott, 2004).

Ethics are not just an important part of benevolent research, but it also adds to the trustworthiness of data (Tracy, 2010), for example that participants in this study were fully informed about the specifics of the research, were aware about their participant rights and that participation was voluntary with no consequences for them in the case of non-compliance. This would have influenced the quality of participants' data in a positive way, since transparency and respect for participants increase the tendency of participants to open themselves up in a genuine way (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Meaningful *coherence* was achieved, since the study's aims were met, appropriate methods and procedures were followed, and literature, themes and interpretations were meaningfully integrated (Tracy, 2010).

According to Trochim (2006), careful judgement should be made about *transferability* of qualitative findings through a comprehensive description of the research context, experiences and expectations held, in order for readers to decide whether the research may be applicable to other contexts. However, Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) were of the opinion that

transferability is not the main goal of qualitative research, but rather that the qualitative approach accentuates the uniqueness of particular participants within their specific context, by striving to comprehend their perspectives and experiences. The findings obtained from qualitative data are for understanding the specific participants and their contexts for the purpose of a unique study, rather than for the goal of making generalisations (Creswell, 2009).

1.6 Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2, the empirical study that was conducted according to the research questions and aims as set out in Chapter 1 is reported on, in the form of a manuscript. Chapter 3 provides the conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a discussion of the problem statement, a brief overview of relevant literature and the research questions and aims. Furthermore, the research methods, participants and procedures, data gathering and analyses thereof, as well as ethical principles, were explained followed by a brief overview of the chapters to follow.

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CHAPTER 2

Manuscript of the Study: Character Strengths as Applied by Teachers in the Educational Context

Abstract

The aims of this study were to qualitatively explore how teachers use their signature strengths in the teaching context, to understand the effects/outcomes experienced by teachers due to their use of signature strengths in the educational workplace and to measure the influence of the use of signature strengths on the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life of the participants. A mixed-methods approach was used with a primarily qualitative approach from a phenomenological perspective. Participant diary records and results from the Scale of Positive and Negative Emotion (SPANE) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were analysed. The results obtained from quantitative analysis showed no significant differences in participants' levels of life satisfaction and emotional well-being, although qualitative results yielded more insight into the emotional well-being and life satisfaction of the teachers. Qualitative thematic analysis identified themes of positive emotions, engagement, relatedness, meaning and purpose and achievement, therefore the PERMA model of Seligman (2011) presented a good conceptual and theoretical framework for interpretation. Teachers meaningfully used their signature strengths as identified with the VIA-IS of Peterson and Seligman (2004). Other strengths of the VIA-IS also presented prominently in the teaching context and even strengths that are not related to the VIA-IS. Furthermore, strengths often co-occurred and seemed to function optimally in pairs or combinations.

Keywords: achievement, character strengths, educators, engagement, meaning

positive affect, positive psychology, positive relationships, school

context, signature strengths, teachers, well-being

The aim of this paper was to qualitatively explore how teachers use their signature strengths in the teaching context; understand the effects/outcomes experienced by teachers due to their use of signature strengths in the educational workplace; and measure the influence of the use of signature strengths on the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life of the participants.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) compiled the *Classification and Theory of Character Strengths and Virtues,* a guidebook for what constitutes health, goodness and happiness in people and that emphasises investigations into the character strengths that reinforce a life of flourishing. The classification structures character strengths in six virtue clusters representing the virtues of wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. The virtues are expressed in behaviour by means of six strengths for each virtue, thus constituting the 24 character strengths for human functioning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However, the authors conceded that this classification is by no means absolute and that they foresee the possibility of the existence of strengths that are not included in the classification and the need for future amendments to the classification. Studies like this one, that aims to explore participants' experience of strengths, what these strengths are, how these strengths are presented and the outcomes thereof, may therefore produce new insights and interesting results.

The application of character strengths is proposed to provide a basis for people to achieve their objectives, boost positive emotions and attain fulfilment (Seligman, 2011) and during such application of strengths, there occurs a gratification of basic human needs such as for competence, relatedness and autonomy, which may in turn promote the experience of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Character strengths are claimed to promote well-being and happiness, but more so if the character strength is a signature strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Signature strengths are seen as a person's top five strengths (Seligman, 2011). In a study by Harzer and Ruch (2012), participants who applied four and more signature strengths were more inclined to view their job as a calling and had more positive affect than those participants who applied less than four signature strengths. People may also have more signature strengths than Peterson and Seligman initially proposed, since a study by Mayerson (2013) indicated that half of their participants reported to have seven or less signature strengths, while a third of participants identified having 11 and more signature strengths.

2.1.1 Character strengths and well-being outcomes

Character strengths seems to be heritable, but environmental factors also influence the development thereof, for instance the strengths of citizenship, modesty, humor and love have been found to be the strengths that are mostly influenced by the environment (Steger, Hicks, Kashdan, Krueger, & Bouchard, 2007). Although genetic characteristics may determine a person's set-point for his/her capacity to experience hedonic well-being, people have some control over how positive they feel and they can increase their own well-being by engaging in specific activities intended to enhance feautures such as positive emotions, hope, successful coping methods etc., in themselves (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005; Compton & Hoffman, 2013; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). Gene expression is also affected when people choose, make use of and adjust to their environments (Steger et al., 2007).

According to McGrath, Rashid, Park, and Peterson (2010, p. 167), character strengths are individual differences that vary in degree, rather than in kind and "in the real world one is not wise, but wiser and the application of character strengths is of varying relevance across different contexts". Therefore, character strengths are highly context-specific and also appear to be dimensional, not categorical (McGrath et al., 2010; Biswas-Diener, Kashdan & Minhas, 2011). Contextual aspects determine how suitable it is to use character strengths (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011) and strengths of wisdom have been proposed to be a prerequisite in order to know when which strength is called for in a specific situation (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Research that provide information regarding specific strength pairs and the interplay between character strengths may thus be valuable (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011), as strengths do not function independently of one another, but rather operate in a complex, inter-related way (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006; Fowers, 2008). Research has indicated that instead of focusing on and employing a select number of signature strengths, it is not ideal to be lacking in some strengths and overusing other strengths, since a balance of strengths is important and levels of concurrance or disagreement between strengths may influence well-being (Allan, 2015).

It is well known that a lack of character strengths can harm performance and diminish well-being, but few studies have noted when, how and why the over-use of a character strength can impair well-being and human functioning (Grant & Schwartz, 2011).

Fowers (2008) proposed that an integrated character, which focuses on unifying character strengths in a harmonious way, is needed for character strengths' use to be constructive. Some character strengths have been found to cultivate other character strengths, for instance in a

study by Kruse, Chancellor, Ruberton, and Lyubomirsky (2014), humility was fostered when participants expressed gratitude and this process was mediated by a decrease in self-focus, while Laurin, Kay, and Fitzsimons (2011) found that aspects of spirituality and religiousness enhanced the strength of self-regulation. From the above it seems clear that insights regarding how people use their character strengths, in other words how character strengths function and the balance and interactions between strengths, play an important part in understanding the links between people's well-being and their use of character strengths.

With regard to well-being, Seligman (2011) conceptualised a model of well-being, presented by the mnemonic PERMA, which is proposed to represent five pillars of well-being. Seligman further stated that the usage of character strengths will result in an increase of these elements of well-being. Table 1 indicates the elements of well-being as represented by PERMA.

Table 1: *Elements of well-being as represented by PERMA*

Mnemonic key	Element of Well-being
P	Positive emotions
E	Engagement
R	(Positive) Relationships
M	Meaning (in life)
A	Accomplishment (Achievement)

2.1.2 Character strengths and stressful work contexts

Seligman (2011) proposed that awareness of personal abilities and exercising character strengths may lead to improved psychological well-being and resilience and that it may decrease symptoms of psychological illness and buffer against contextual stressors. One source of such contextual stressors, is the work place, for example the stressful work environment of South-African teachers (Jansen, 2014). People who do not engage in their character strengths at their workplace, may experience poor job satisfaction and burn-out (McGovern & Miller, 2008). In contrast to this, Harzer and Ruch (2016) found that the more people engaged in character strengths use at their place of work, the more they perceived their work as a calling and found meaning in their work and, in a study by Hone, Jarden, Duncan, and Schofield (2015), employees who were aware what their strengths were, were 9.5 times more flourishing than those who were less aware about their strengths. Jansen (2014) suggested that

psychological strategies, such as strengths usage by teachers, can be utilised to buffer against challenging school environments. In this regard, a study by Crabb (2011) found that participants who applied their character strengths in the workplace processed their emotions more constructively and experienced more engagement, purpose and meaning at work, while in a study by Nilsson et al. (2015), teachers reported that finding meaning at work enhanced their happiness and coping abilities. Therefore, involving teachers in activities that require of them to discover and use their character strengths, may be directly beneficial to them and indirectly beneficial to the wider school-system in numerous ways.

Teachers are often faced with tough school environments, low socio-economic status, student discipline problems and delinquency, endless administration tasks, taxing extra-curricular obligations, poor work ethic among colleagues, insufficient social support and a lack of efficient time in which to complete a hefty work-load (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Chang, 2009; Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012; Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012; Jansen, 2014). The detrimental effects of work place stressors and challenges faced by teachers frequently lead to increased sickness absence, psychosomatic illness, high employee turn-over, retiring ahead of retirement age and lower employability of teachers, all factors that are detrimental to society and the larger educational system (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Koppes et al., 2011; Wegner, Berger, Poschadel, & Baur, 2011). Corbet and Wilson (2002) further found that teachers' poor psychological and physical functioning are often outcomes of perceived unmanageable stressors, which further result in their diminished self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy has contrastingly been found to increase as people learn more about their personal strengths, act out their strengths in positive ways and purposefully choose the strength-related activities they wish to engage in (Cantwell, 2006; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). When teachers apply their strengths and feel self-efficient, they tend to set more goals, frequently engage in self-development, use more effective teaching strategies and interact more positively with colleagues and learners, which promote positive relationships (Pintrich, 2003; Weiss, 2005; Cohen & Cairns, 2012). Self-efficacy is closely linked to the sense of achievement (Cantwell, 2006; Bandura, 1997), which can be seen as an element of well-being in the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) and teacher self-efficacy has been shown to buffer against burn-out (Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, & Barber, 2010). Furthermore, Seligman, Rashid, and Parks (2006) found that positive psychology strategies aimed at cultivating character strengths are effective in diminishing depressive symptoms and enhancing positive affect, while self-applied strength exercises decrease pessimism, negative affect and emotional

exhaustion and buffer against psychological distress even in dire circumstances (Seligman, 2011; Littman-Odavia & Nir, 2014).

2.1.3 The use of character strengths and its outcomes

From the above, it can be seen that general strength-related exercises have been found to produce beneficial outcomes. Specific strength usage has also been linked to specific well-being outcomes. The strengths of zest, humor and social intelligence have seemed to predict teacher effectiveness and specifically zest was linked to perceiving one's work as a calling and deriving meaning therein (Peterson & Park, 2011). The strength of persistence has been positively related to employee engagement and negatively to poor work performance (Littman-Odavia & Lavy, 2015). Hope has been found related to effectively solving problems, self-control, positive affect and self-efficacy (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003) and to emotional well-being (Ciarochi, Parker, Kashdan, Heaven, & Barkus, 2015). Life satisfaction has been shown to increase when the strengths of hope, love, curiosity, vitality and love were performed (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004), while appreciation of beauty and excellence have been linked to an increase in positive affect and lower depressive symptoms (Proyer, Gander, Wellenzohn, & Ruch, 2016). Higher positive affect is known for its influence on robust immune systems, success in life, teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Lyobomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cotè & Morgan, 2002). Affective strengths were found also to promote bonding between colleagues, increase employees' work performance and buffer against stress in the work-place (Rudolph, Clark, Jundt, & Baltes, 2015), while performing acts that involve the strength of humor and playfulness, lead to improved learner engagement and teacher-learner relationships (Lucardie, 2014). Humanity strengths have been found directly related to learners' academic performance, positive classroom behaviour and positive emotions of teachers and learners (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, & Le Cornu, 2007; Trzcinshi & Holst, 2008; Hattie, 2012; Yo, 2005) and good relationships with others have been reported to increase motivation, resilience and self-esteem (Townsend & McWhirter, 2005). The strength of gratitude was reported to counteract negative effects of aversive experiences and to facilitate meaning-making and constructive interpretation of experiences (Adler & Fagley, 2005; Kim & Lee, 2011; Kang, Lee, & Jang, 2014).

The challenging nature of the teaching occupation prompts teachers to have high levels of emotional competence (Chang, 2009; Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012). A study by Park and Peterson (2009) showed that effective teachers (as indicated by their learners' achievements and improved performance on standardised tests), had signature strengths of social intelligence,

zest and humor. Teachers need high levels of social intelligence, since the way in which learners are compiled in classrooms has become more socially and culturally diverse and this puts greater demand on teachers' social and emotional abilities (Ruiz-Párraga & López-Martínez, 2014). The character strengths most strongly indicated as emotional strengths are zest, bravery, hope, love, humor and social intelligence (Güsewell & Ruch, 2012). Furthermore, teachers require high levels of self-regulation, since teachers have reported experiencing frequent negativity and frustration and that they need to monitor themselves and self-regulate on a daily basis in order to not take their frustrations out on their learners (Sutton, 2007).

The strength of social intelligence and perspective were found to enable teachers to have an understanding of their learners' personal circumstances, which prompted learners to co-operate in the classroom, behave positively towards their teachers and lead to more classroom engagement (Sanders, Munford, Anwar, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015). Teaching is a helping-profession, which requires that teachers display the character strength of kindness (Bryan, 2009), therefore teachers who were well-equipped with the character strengths of love and kindness, had more learner engagement in their classrooms and learners who performed better academically (Martin et al., 2015). Teachers who are proficient in the strength of creativity, are better able to promote creativity in their learners (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014) and creative learners showed better academic achievement even when other academic abilities were controlled for (Morgues, Tan, Hein, Elliot, & Grigorenko, 2016).

Finally, teachers who frequently engage in the character strength of hope, are better able to instil this characteristic in their learners and hope facilitates learners to find pathways to goals and increases their motivation to take action, since hope promotes learners' belief that they can achieve their goals (Snyder, 2000). Introducing teachers to character strengths and promoting the use of character strengths by educators, seems to be a worthwhile endeavour, since it may facilitate the development of traits and capabilities that the teaching vocation requires efficient teachers to be equipped with. McGovern and Miller (2008) proposed a model for the development of teachers' skills and effectiveness, based on research into character strengths and virtues as manifested in exemplary teacher behaviour, that would facilitate educators in being more reflective and deliberate regarding their teaching, strengths, skills and self-development processes.

2.2 Research Question and Aims

After reviewing the existing literature on character strengths, the awareness, deployment and effects thereof, it was assumed that there could be a positive effect on the teaching experiences of teachers after identifying and applying their signature character strengths. A research question thus proposed for this study was: After identifying their signature strengths by means of the VIA-IS of Peterson and Seligman (2004), how would teachers use such strengths, how would they experience the use thereof in their teaching context and would the use of signature strengths influence their emotional well-being and satisfaction with life?

Research aims were to qualitatively explore how teachers use their signature strengths in the teaching context; understand the effects/outcomes experienced by teachers due to their use of signature strengths in the educational workplace; and measure the influence of the use of signature strengths on the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life of the participants.

2.3 Research Method

The research consisted of a literature study and an empirical study. The literature study explored the stressful teaching context and conceptualised the construct of character strengths, how such strengths are used in the workplace and the effects or outcomes thereof. The empirical study researched the aims as stated above and findings obtained were reported and interpreted.

2.4 Research Design

This study made use of a time-based qualitative diary design (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005) and qualitative thematic analysis from a phenomenological perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with the goal of studying what happens when educators use their signature character strengths within a teaching context, in other words, how they use their character strengths and what experiences they derive from using their strengths within the context of teaching. Furthermore, assessments of emotional well-being and satisfaction with life were completed by the participants on three occasion, in order to determine whether there was an influence of the use of their signature strengths on their emotional well-being and satisfaction with life. This was thus a mixed-method research design in which the weight or priority emphasised the qualitative component of the study. The emphasis was determined by the main focus of this research and the mainly qualitative methods used to gather data and to answer the research question (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative and qualitative methods for data gathering took place simultaneously.

2.5 Participants and Procedures

A primary school under jurisdiction of the Gauteng Department of Education in South Africa was selected as the target population and the school was within convenient proximity for the researcher. After approval of the study proposal and obtaining ethical clearance from the North-West University's Human Health Research Ethics Committee (NWU-HS-2014-0241), the researcher made an appointment with the school principal to gain permission and consent to involve staff at his school in this study, whereafter the Department of Education's approval of the research, was obtained.

The participants involved in this research were thus selected partly on purposive and partly on convenience grounds. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), an in-depth account of data with 10 to 15 participants is adequate when doing phenomenological research however, Creswell (2009) suggested that data saturation may be used as a guideline for inclusion of participants in a qualitative study. Only teachers who agreed to willingly participate in the study and to signing the letter of informed consent participated in the research. Communication with teachers, who were willing to participate, was done outside school hours at a time arranged with and convenient to them. Each of the participants was informed what their rights are, enjoyed full transparency on information about the study and received contact details of the researcher to make use of if they had any further questions regarding the study.

2.6 Gathering of Data

In addition to qualitative methods, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) served as measuring instruments in order to gather data.

The *Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences* (SPANE) briefly measures a wide range of positive and negative emotions and was found to have a Cronbach Alpha of 0.87 for the overall scale (Diener et al., 2009). It consists of twelve items: six items for negative feelings and six items for positive feelings. Participants are asked to rate the extent to which they experienced feelings such as joy or anger. Each item is scored on a range from 1 to 5, where 1 is rated for ''very rarely or never'' and 5 is rated for ''very often or always''. The positive and negative scales are scored separately and each can range from 6 to 30. By subtracting the negative score from the positive score, a balanced score is obtained which can range from -24 to 24. The higher a participant's score, the more pleasant emotions he or she experiences (Diener et al., 2009). In a study by Jovanovic (2015) it was found that the SPANE shows excellent

incremental validity and that the SPANE predicts well-being better than the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) when used with adults and adolescents, since the SPANE subscales predicted life satisfaction and well-being more accurately in all the regression models that were used.

The *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) is a brief measurement of a person's general judgment regarding his or her satisfaction with life and has good internal consistency, ranging from .61 to .81 for the five items of the scale (Diener et al., 1985). It consists of five items on a 7-point Likert scale of which the scores can be added up to determine the total score for the scale. The scores can range from 5 to 35, where 20 represents the neutral point of the scale. A score between 21 and 25 indicates that the participant is slightly satisfied, and scores from 15 to 19 represents slightly dissatisfied. Scores between 5 and 9 represent high dissatisfaction with life, and scores ranging between 31 and 35 indicate satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS was proven to show a Cronbach Alpha of 0.66 with Setswana-speaking South Africans and 0.85 for English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans (Wissing, Wissing, Du Toit & Temane, 2008).

The SWLS and the SPANE are both available in the open domain for research purposes. These psychological measures were administered three times during the study and the first measurement was done just before the researcher introduced participants to character strengths through a presentation to facilitate the identification and use of their signature character strengths. Teachers then completed the online VIA-IS in order to discover their signature strengths. The teachers were requested to use at least one signature strength daily during a period of two weeks. The researcher was available to the participants during the two weeks to offer support and answer any questions they might have had.

A diary-entry method was implemented for the qualitative purposes of this study, with participants sharing their experiences in the form of diary entries over the two weeks that they were requested to explore their signature character strengths (Krishnan & Hoon, 2002). Diary entries are seen as self-reported, first-person accounts of information that comprise repetitive, detailed entries of moods, experiences, manifestations, events, emotions, and interactions in proximal time to when it happens (Lida, Shrout, Laurenceau, & Bolger, 2012). This can take on many forms, but for the proposed research, a pen-and-paper method was proposed (Krishnan & Hoon, 2002), though some participants requested to type and email their diaries to the researcher. The diary method for collecting data is good to use with educators who are usually well-literate and who have good visual and writing abilities (Meth, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, participants were required to make time-based diary entries once per day for the duration of two weeks (Lida et al., 2012). By limiting the research time to two weeks and requesting participants to spend no more than fifteen minutes each day on diary reports may have contributed to overcoming participant burden. Participant burden is where the task of diary entry becomes an inconvenience for participants and they react with non-compliance and withdrawal (Lida et al., 2012). Jacelon and Imperio (2005) found that the best duration for research using diary methods to gather data is between one and two weeks, as participants' diaries do not have enough richness in less than a week and if more than two weeks, the participants may easily lose interest in making a daily diary entry. To keep diary entries from being over demanding, the researcher developed short, simple to answer guiding questions where self-report of information, such as experiences particularly within the context of teaching, is asked (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003).

The participants were guided by four questions when making their diary entries:

- What signature strength(s) did you use today within the context of teaching?
- Describe how you used your signature strength(s) today within the context of teaching?
- Describe how you felt during and after using your signature strengths?
- Describe what you perceived and/or experienced in yourself, your work and in relationships with other teachers and pupils when using your signature strength(s)?

After having received the diary entries from participants and having done a first round of reading of the data, a brief interview was held with each participant. During the interview, the measuring instruments were administered again. In the discussion, participants were asked whether they have anything to add to their written reports, or on reflection would like to change or elaborate on those. They were also asked how they experienced the research exercise and debriefed. Participant checking was done in order to check with teachers whether the initial findings that arose from their diary reports are truthful and accurate. Finally the participants were requested to complete the psychological measurements for the last time on a scheduled date, two weeks after the interview.

2.7 Analysis of Data

Scores on the SWLS and the SPANE were captured electronically by the researcher and re-checked for correctness. Thereafter, significance of differences in scores on measurements was calculated using Friedman's ANOVA (Field, 2005) and assisted by the Optentia statistical consultant. Qualitative data from diary entries was analysed by means of the ATLAS.ti system

of thematic analysis (Lewins & Silver, 2007; Friese, 2012), from which a comprehensive description was obtained of the phenomena (teachers' use of character strengths) that were researched (Akinyoade, 2013). The interviews with participants were not included in the analyses. Keeping memos or field notes was an important aspect during analysis and involved the researcher making notes regarding her ideas about the meaning of data. This was done throughout the process of analysis and served as a way to check for the researcher's own thought processes and bias and used for the purpose of bracketing (Akinyoade, 2013).

Thematic analysis is a useful and flexible research method in its own right and can offer a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed that the process of conducting thematic analysis comprises six steps, namely: immersion in the data to become familiar with the content, developing of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, naming and defining of themes and writing the narrative that emerged. The theoretical importance of themes were interpreted and linked to relevant theories and other literature (Patton, 1990). Although the ATLAS.ti program was used to analyse the data (Lewins & Silver, 2007; Friese, 2012), the study supervisor served as a partial co-coder and played a role in identifying, checking and refining of themes.

2.8 Trustworthiness

Creswell (2009) provided guidelines for the evaluation of qualitative research's trustworthiness, for example that the transcriptions should be accurate when conducting phenomenological-related research. This was accounted for in the present study, as participants' diary entries conveyed their own words in written form and no alteration of their words was needed (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the message intended by the participant, was the message received by the researcher, by having a discussion with each participant during which participant-checking was done. Participant-checking served to check with teachers whether the initial findings that arose from their diary reports were truthful and accurate (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Creswell, 2009).

Since this study's focus was mostly on the qualitative ways in which insights can be obtained and taking into consideration that a sample of ten participants would be unsuited for a true quantitative study, the eight criteria for qualitative research as set out by Tracy (2010) were also utilised for evaluating the trustworthiness of the present study namely, that quality qualitative research is marked by: a worthy topic; rich rigor; sincerity; credibility; resonance;

significant contribution; ethics and meaningful coherence. These criteria were stringently adhered to by the research practices carried out in the present study.

Above, the literature background to the study and the research methodology used, were described. Following, the findings of the empirical component will be reported and discussed.

2.9 Results and Discussion

Below, the findings of the empirical component will be reported and discussed. Firstly participants' signature strengths as determined after completing the VIA-IS, other strengths related to and those not related to the VIA-IS, as well as themes identified after qualitative analysis has taken place and unexpected findings are reported. Thereafter the quantitative findings are indicated.

2.9.1 Participants' signature strengths identified by the VIA-IS

The categories of signature strengths as shown in Figure 3, represented those of the participants.
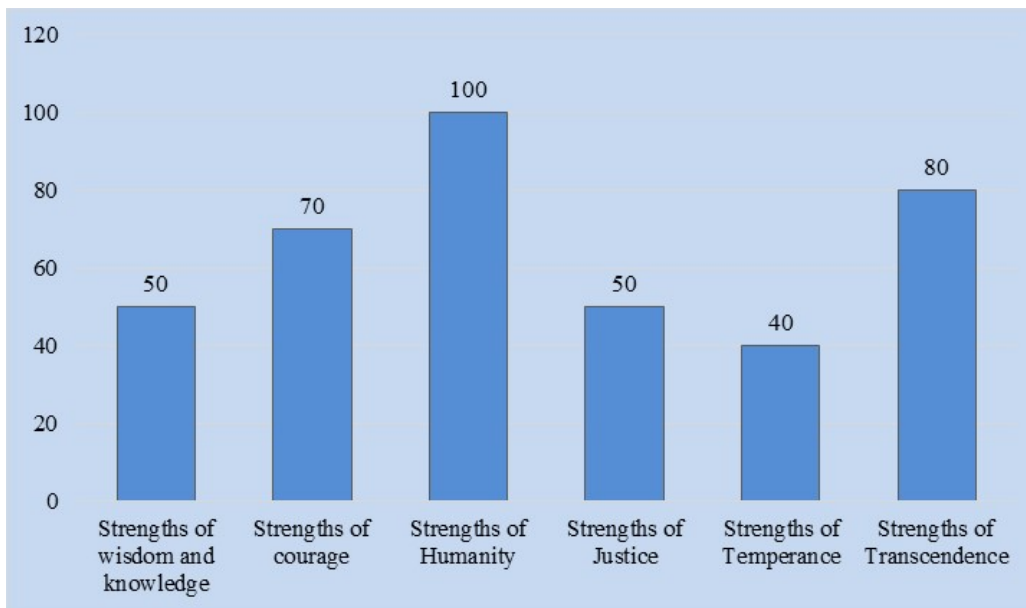

Figure 3: Percentages of signature strengths identified by participants

In Figure 3, the following is evident: strengths of wisdom and knowledge (creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning and perspective) were identified by 50% of participants as

signature strengths. Of these strengths, no participants presented with the signature strength of curiosity, although curiosity was identified in the data obtained qualitatively. Strengths of courage (bravery, persistence, integrity and vitality), were identified by 70% of participants as their signature strengths. Half of the participants had strengths of justice (citizenship, fairness and leadership) as their signature strengths and although no participants had leadership as a signature strength, this strength was used and presented numerous times in the qualitative data obtained. For strengths of temperance, 40% of participants had signature strengths from this category and 80% of participants identified strengths of transcendence as their signature strengths. Most participants had more than one strength from a particular category, but only the humanity strengths were manifested in 100% of participants.

2.9.2 Signature and other VIA-IS strengths relevant to the teaching context

Qualitative data was entered and analysed in ATLAS.ti and with ATLAS.ti's imbedded analyses functions, the researcher created co-occurrence frequencies and tables to assist with analysis of the data.

Although most of the 24 character strengths were used by participants, the following ten VIA-IS strengths were reported to be used most frequently by the teachers during the two weeks of research:

- Perspective was used 45 times by 100% of participants
- Kindness was used 36 times by 100% of participants
- Citizenship was used 23 times by 70% of participants
- Self-regulation was used 21 times by 70% of participants
- Social intelligence was used 18 times by 70% of participants
- Love was used 16 times by 60% of participants
- Forgiveness was used 15 times by 90% of participants
- Integrity was used 15 times by 70% of participants
- Hope was used 9 times by 80% of participants
- Creativity was used 12 times, by 80% of participants

When these strengths are classified into their categories, it indicates that the strengths of humanity were used 70 times, strengths of temperance and of wisdom and knowledge were both used 36 times, the strength of transcendence was used 26 times, strengths of justice was used 23 times and strengths of courage were used 15 times, as shown in Figure 4.
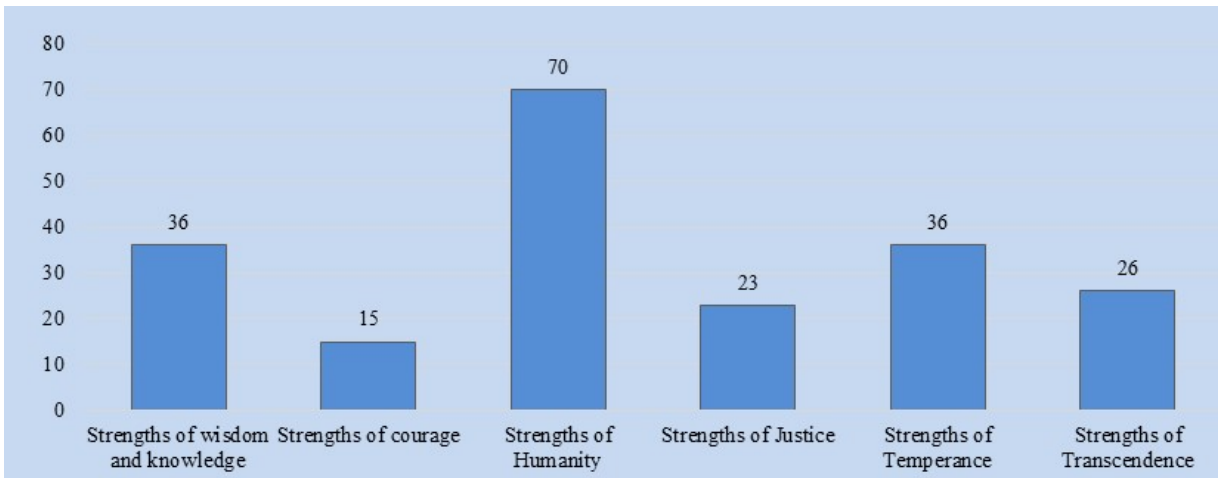
Figure 4: Frequency of strengths used

Strengths that were not used frequently were as follows. Gratitude was used 12 times; fairness, open-mindedness and spirituality were used 11 times; leadership was used 8 times; humor/playfulness and persistence were used 7 times; bravery, humility/modesty, love of learning and vitality were used 6 times; prudence was used 5 times; appreciation of beauty and excellence was used 4 times and curiosity was used once by one participant.

2.9.3 Co-occurrence of strengths

For the purpose of making sense of the co-occurrence of strengths that seemed to sometimes function in pairs, the researcher regarded any two strengths that co-occurred more than 20% of the time used, as frequently co-occurring. For a co-occurrence of 20%, it means that one in five times that a particular strength was used, it presented itself along with another strength and it seemed to be used in a pair with this other strength. Because some strengths were used more often than others, one strength pair can show different percentages of co-occurrence. For example, perspective was used 45 times, but 10 times in co-occurrence with social intelligence (22.2%). Social intelligence, however, was used 18 times, co-occurring 10 times with perspective which is a percentage of 55.5%. Therefore, if seen as working in a pair, social intelligence and perspective had co-occurring percentages of both 22.2% and 55.5%, depending on the way in which the strengths were used. Such co-occurrence of strengths as discussed above, also apply to other strengths categories and will be indicated in the discussion below.

Further research would be recommended to understand the way in which certain strengths may seem to function in pairs, especially when used in a teaching context. For example, Takaku,

Weiner, and Ohbuchi (2001) found that forgiveness and perspective functioned together in the sense that when people were asked to forgive offences, they were more able to forgive if they could gain perspective regarding the offense and whether they were also capable of offending in the same manner. Exline, Kraft, Zell, and Witvliet (2008) proposed that the ability to reflect or think about matters promotes empathy and humility and makes forgiveness possible. Further, Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, and Fredrickson (2006) found that kindness increases people's likeliness to display gratitude, while gratitude in return increases the likelihood that a kind act will be returned and this creates a positive cycle of giving and receiving (Howels & Cumming, 2012).

From the research findings mentioned above it would seem that if not functioning in pairs, another possibility is that strengths perhaps function together in an interactive manner, since Brdar and Kashdan (2010) found that most strengths within the VIA-IS showed some inter-correlation with each other. A a recent study by Canter, Youngs, and Yaneva (2017) also found that kindness does not function as a solitary concept, but that it interacts with other strengths and with the environment and like attachment and generativity, the construct of kindness links the person and the social world.

2.9.4 Strengths used by teachers

As shown in Figure 4 and according to the ATLAS.ti analysis, certain strengths were more specifically used by the teachers in their classroom context. These will be discussed below.

Among the **strengths of wisdom and knowledge**, those often used were perspective and creativity. In the current study, **perspective** co-occurred mostly with social intelligence as indicated above. In other studies, strong correlations have been found between the strength of perspective and that of social intelligence, for instance that these two strengths showed a correlation of 0.73 in a study by Brdar and Kashdan (2010). Shim (2008), proposed that the role of teachers inherently require of teachers to think about matters and to engage in perspective-taking and reflection. In other words, the strength of perspective could be a central strength in the teaching context and may require of teachers to use this strength, whether it is a signature strength of theirs or not. Seligman and Peterson (2004) proposed that social intelligence comprises of emotional intelligence and personal intelligence and furthermore, that these three intelligences require of a person to be able to perceive, have cognition/knowledge and awareness of emotions, behaviours and interpersonal situations and to monitor/regulate this

in favour of personal/social growth and well-being. The following quote is from participant 1, regarding the application of perspective:

I listened to her problems, gave practical advice on how to have better control of the class. I felt that I mean something to somebody who has problems. The result is that I have a new kind of relationship with the teacher.

Creativity co-occurred once (8.3% of the time) with each of the following strengths: vitality, love of learning, gratitude, fairness, courage and citizenship. The following quote is from participant 9, who does not have creativity as a signature strength, but who used this strength in the context of teaching:

I used creativity today. We painted flowers in vases. I was excited and satisfied with the end products. I thought about how beautiful and colourful the decorated flowers are and how joyful it will make my classroom look... I shared my end-products with a colleague, it feels good to share ideas with others and to share decorations with learners who don't have their own.

Teske et al. (2017) found that higher levels of participants' creativity was preceded by higher levels of positive affect which facilitated the participants to feel safe, to take more creative risks and increased their working memory so that they could produce more intricate ideas and come up with a wider range of innovative ideas. Contrary to this, George and Zhou (2002) proposed that not just positive affect, but also negative affect could lead to creative thinking in the case where grave or discerning emotional states might motivate people to produce original, useful ideas in order to remedy their negativity. Beghetto and Kaufman (2014) proposed that teachers who are creatively competent, are better able to stimulate creativity in their learners. According to Glăveanu (2011) children who display more creativity tend to present wider perspective, more open-mindedness and higher flexibility of thoughts, while a study by Morgues, Tan, Hein, Elliot, and Grigorenko (2016) indicated that creativity predicted future academic achievement even when other academic abilities were controlled for.

The **strengths of humanity** were among the strengths that were used most often, specifically kindness, love and social intelligence. **Kindness and love** co-occurred frequently (27.7% of the time) and kindness also co-occurred with citizenship (25% of the time) and with perspective (22.2% of the time). The following quote is from participant 2, who has kindness as a signature strength:

I helped another student teacher to register for her subjects on UNISA's web page so that she does not have to drive all the way. I like helping others and felt like I meant something to her. Love was used by participants 2 and 8 in the following examples:

What stood out to me at the new school, was how friendly the personnel are. They really welcomed me, hugged me and gave me love. I respond positively to others friendliness, because I am also a very friendly person. I am able to give that back to others. –Participant 2

After I reached out to him, I could see he felt better and his smile returned. Compassion and love goes a long way. –Participant 8

In a study by Bryan (2009), helping professions such as teaching, seemed to require that employees display kindness. Furthermore, it is possible that there might be different forms of kindness such as kindness typical to occupational contexts or kindness typical to personal contexts (Canter et al., 2017). Watson (2009) proposed that caring involves being open to compassion towards other people and to see things from the other person's perspective and that "we learn from another how to be more human by identifying with others … we learn to recognize ourselves in others" (Watson, 1985 p.59 as cited in Watson, 2009). Watson (2009) found that helping/healing professions that incorporate kindness and love, have strong benefits for the well-being of both the givers and the receivers. Exline, Lisan, and Lisan (2011) reported that acts of kindness increased participants' sense of being loved and cared for, while other studies (Linley et al., 2007; Yoo, Feng, & Day, 2013), found positive correlations between the strengths of kindness and love. Numerous researchers have reported that better quality human relationships are strongly associated with higher well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Townsend & Mc Whirter, 2005; Seligman, 2011; Hattie, 2012; Yo, 2005) and that participants experienced better relationships when loving-kindness was involved (Germer, 2005). In contrast to this, disparagement and condescension in relationships have been linked to poor quality relationships (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

Social intelligence, a strength of the humanities, was used 18 times. The following is a quote from participant 5 who has social intelligence as a signature strength:

A girl in my class had an 'accident' today (she wet herself). Instead of overreacting, I tried to be discreet by making sure that the rest of the class wasn't present when I talked to her about it. I also arranged clean and dry school clothes for her. I talked to her gently and tried to save her from embarrassment. At the end of it all, I felt like I won a bit of her trust.

Ruiz-Párraga and López-Martínez (2014) proposed that social intelligence is crucial for teachers to have, since the way in which learners are compiled within the classroom has become more socially and culturally diverse and this puts greater demand on teachers' social and emotional abilities, while Peterson and Park (2011) found that social intelligence predicted teacher effectiveness. Social intelligence enables people to integrate the behaviour of themselves and others and to negotiate with others (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007). Furthermore, Boal and Hooijberg (2001) have proposed that social intelligence enhances self-development, wisdom and leadership. According to Kwok, Yeung, Low, Lo, and Tam (2015) emotional competency and social problem-solving has been negatively associated with tendencies toward violence and suicide ideation and Bertrand, Sutton, Achim, Malla, and Lepage (2007) found that mental ill-health is strongly linked to deficits in social intelligence.

Among the **strengths of justice**, the strength that was used most often was citizenship, while fairness and leadership were not often used. **Citizenship** co-occurred most frequently with kindness (39.1% of the time) and with perspective (21.7% of the time). The following quote, is from participant 8, who used citizenship in the teaching context, but who does not have it as a signature strength:

The trip with the chess players was very pleasant. I enjoy the kids and the funny things they say. During the trip, I got to know my principal and colleague better. I feel an extreme amount of respect towards them and am eager to work with them. I'm definitely loyal to my school and am grateful each day that I can teach at the school.

According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), social responsibility, loyalty and teamwork are aspects of citizenship. Kohlenberg et al. (2015) reported that citizenship is related to increased kindness, emotional self-regulation, ability to take perspective, feeling cared for, increased self-awareness and experiencing intimacy towards others. Putnam (2001) further found that citizenship is linked to social engagement, while having an interest in one's social group and interacting in ways that would benefit the social group was found to correlate strongly with mental health (Schwartz, Meisenhelder, Ma, & Reed, 2003). Altruistic behaviour is proposed to enhance well-being, because it increases social connectedness, serves as a distraction from one's own misfortune, adds meaningfulness and a sense of achievement to one's life and increases positive affect (Midlarsky, 1991). In a study by Binder and Freytag (2013), regular volunteering was strongly associated with subjective well-being and when volunteering was sustained over time, subjective well-being kept increasing.

Among the **strengths of temperance**, the strengths that were used most often were self-regulation, forgiveness and mercy. Humility/modesty and prudence were not often used. **Self-regulation** co-occurred frequently with perspective (23.8%) and less so (9.5% of the time) with courage, integrity, persistence and prudence. The following quotes are from participants 3 and 4 who have self-regulation as signature strengths:

Some parents did not even pitch up. I was, however, able to communicate my side of the story in a very respectful and calm, but honest way. One parent in particular thanked me for my 'positivity' (I didn't feel so positive though) towards her child. I was also able to shed some perspective on a few demanding issues regarding the learners' progress. I felt exhausted and frustrated, but was able to self-regulate my emotions towards the parents. –Participant 3

Not just today, but in general, I feel that I am very self-controlled when learners test my patience. There's one such learner in the class. He manages to distract the other learners' attention. I feel like I can jump on him or slap him! I have to control myself daily not to do this. I know that I will never physically harm him, it is a mercy that my self-control is strong, and I see it as that I am working with a creation of God. –Participant 4

In a study by Sutton (2007), teachers regularly experienced strong feelings of anger and frustration towards their learners and two thirds of these teachers reported, without being prompted, that they needed to practise self-regulation on a daily basis in order not to vent their negative emotions on the learners. The teachers in Sutton's study who showed lower self-regulation, reported a lower sense of self-efficacy and classroom management while teachers with higher self-regulation reported feeling more efficient in coping with classroom management and having better relationships with learners (Sutton, 2007). Thompson (1994) found that being able to self-regulate one's emotions requires that a person is able to monitor and examine oneself, and Seligman (2004) stated that one's emotional reactions and being able to appraise oneself, is integral to perspective and wisdom. Self-regulation has been shown to increase positive affect, but more so if self-awareness and mindfulness are also present (Short, Mazmanian, Oinonen, & Mushquash, 2016). A study by Gottschling, Hahn, Maas, and Spinath (2016) suggested that self-regulation and self-efficacy decreases neuroticism, while hopefulness and self-regulation may enhance social connectedness. Low self-regulation has been linked to frequent procrastination (Rebetez, Rochat, Barsics, & van der Linden, 2016) and procrastination has been associated with depression and anxiety (Senecal, Koestner, & Vallerand, 1995).

Forgiveness and mercy, also a strength of temperance, co-occurred frequently with perspective (33.3% of the time it was used), with fairness (26.6% of the time), open mindedness (20% of the time) and with kindness (20% of the time). The following is a quote from participant 8, who has forgiveness and mercy as a signature strength:

Learners apologised for not attending class, I insisted on a reason and forgave them. I felt humble when I used this strength. I make mistakes as well, we need to forgive each other.

The following is a quote from participant 1, who used forgiveness and mercy in the teaching context, but who does not have it as a signature strength:

A learner made me so angry today by not listening what I am saying to her. I wanted to give her a warning, but instead decided to talk with her in a nice way. She said sorry, we both felt better and she behaved herself for the rest of the time.

The examples given portray features of forgiveness as found in literature. McCullough, Root, and Cohen (2006) proposed that forgiveness depends on the situation and that change is necessary for a person to be able to forgive. This change entails that a person needs to become open, merciful and kind towards the other person. Other studies by Snyder (2002) and Snyder and McCullough (2000) found that empathy (kindness) is positively related to forgiveness, while Fincham, Palaeri, and Regalia (2002) also found that a person is likely to be more forgiving if that person is able to have empathy toward their offenders. According to Enright's model of forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000), a person is more likely to forgive if able to reason about the misdemeanour, and Exline et al. (2008) found that a person's capability to see himself as also capable of offending, enhances the likeliness of forgiving. Numerous studies have indicated the positive effects of forgiveness, such as diminished negative affect, religious coping, mental health, decreased smoking behaviour, less drug and alcohol use and that it buffered against impulsivity due to aggression (Worthington, 2001; Seybold, Hill, Neumann, & Chi, 2001; Lawler et al. 2005; Pargament & Rye, 1998; Mauger et al. 1992; Kovácsová, Lajunen, & Rošková, 2016). Failure to forgive oneself has been linked to low self-esteem, social disconnectedness, persecutory beliefs, depression and anxiety (Mauger et al., 1992).

For the **strengths of courage**, integrity was the only strength that was frequently used. It co-occurred with social intelligence (26.6% of the time) and somewhat with fairness, citizenship and kindness (13.3% of the time for each). The following is a quote from participant 2, who has integrity as a signature strength:

I made a mistake again by calling out the wrong class for not attending outside. One learner raised his hand and said that they've never met me before. I acknowledged my mistake and said that everybody makes mistakes, let's start over. Being fair to them and being honest regarding my mistake, made a big impression on the learners. I think they sometimes appreciate a person's humanity in a situation. It shows to them that mistakes can be made, but that it must be corrected.

According to Peterson and Seligman (2004, p. 250), **integrity** refers to "moral correctness and self-unity and it encompasses authenticity (accurately/genuinely representing one's internal states) and honesty (interpersonal sincerity and truthfulness)". Authenticity and integrity is in line with Carl Rogers' (1961) theory regarding psychological congruence, where congruence is proposed to enhance self-actualisation and refers to a person whose ideal self (who a person would like to see himself/herself as), is in line with his/her actual self (self-image). Peterson and Seligman (2004) further proposed that authenticity is when a person feels inner motivation to behave in a certain way, but inauthenticity is when a person feels he/she is externally propelled to behave in a certain way. Thus, authentic behaviour is seen as outonomous behaviour and according to Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, autonomy is one of three pillars of well-being. Authenticity has been connected with higher scores on various variables, including life satisfaction, self-esteem, autonomy, self-efficacy, mindfulness and well-being (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Integrity has also been linked to high job performance (Gentry et al. 2013), successful interpersonal interactions (Palanski & Yammarino, 2009) and spiritual and psychological health (Gavin, Cooper, Quick, & Quick, 2003), while the strength of creativity in the absence of integrity has been viewed to be malevolent creativity, for example coming up with creative ways to deceive others and creatively lying (Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, & Runco, 2010; Beaussart, Andrews, & Kaufman, 2013).

For the **strengths of transcendence**, hope and gratitude were most frequently used. **Hope** co-occurred somewhat with citizenship, perspective and kindness (14.2% of the time for each). The following are quotes from participant 8, who has hope as a signature strength:

I did introspection this weekend and felt that I want to adapt my style of teaching to one that is more positive. I want to be a teacher who makes a difference. I applied this principle throughout the day and it worked out excellently. Both the learners and I were more positive. I hope that I will be able to persist so that frustration and discouragement doesn't get me under. After break I received a letter from a learner which said thanks for everything I do. This letter

gave me hope again and let me know that somewhere in one of these children's' lives, I made a difference.

Snyder (2000, p. 188) stated that "teachers are instrumental in imparting hopeful thinking and they do so by showing their students that they can produce their own routes to goals and then motivate them to use these routes. This is accomplished most easily by adults who themselves are high in hope… we know that high hope is infectious". Peterson and Seligman (2004) described hope as involving optimism, a future-mindedness and future-orientation that involve the belief that good things will happen and acting in ways that make them more likely to happen. Hope has been found to enhance happiness and life satisfaction (Demirli, Türkmen, & Arik, 2015), psychological and physiological well-being (Snyder, 2002; Snyder & McCullough, 2000) and resilience (Granek et al., 2013) and has been negatively associated with depression (Snyder, 2000) and anxiety (Meeks et al., 2016).

Gratitude co-occurred somewhat with kindness (11.1% of the time). The following is a quote from participant 4, who has gratitude as a signature strength:

I feel a great amount of gratitude, because I can see what my friend/colleague intended for me. Teaching keeps my thoughts occupied and I am surrounded by supportive colleagues. They opened doors for me that I could not foresee. Gratitude and showing it back, is very important to me.

The following is a quote from participant 8, who applied gratitude in the context of teaching, but who does not have it as a signature strength:

I talked with him in private. Positive, instead of scolding him. The results was fantastic. I had a more positive learner for the rest of the day and for the first time in a long time he participated in a positive manner. I definitely used my compassion towards him and the result make me feel thankful.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) stated that gratitude correlates with spirituality, empathy and prosocial behaviour. Gratitude of teachers has shown to buffer against aversive experiences and enable teachers to meaningfully and constructively interpret both positive and negative experiences (Kang, Lee, & Jang, 2014; Kim & Lee, 2011; Adler & Fagley, 2005). Various other studies have indicated the beneficial effects that practising gratitude has, such as enhanced interpersonal relationships, social support, optimism, positive affect, subjective well-being, self-esteem, vitality and increased life satisfaction (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Timmons, Ekas, & Johnson, 2017).

Above the strengths of the VIA-IS most prevalently used by the teacher-participants in the teaching context were discussed. Below the qualitative themes that emerged from the diary entries of teachers over the research period will be described.

2.9.5 Qualitative themes of teachers' strengths

The themes identified showed correspondence with the five elements of well-being in the PERMA model of well-being according to Seligman (2011). These five elements are: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships and accomplishment. Seligman proposed that the five elements of well-being each have three properties, namely: they are pursued for their own sake and not to attain another element; they can be measured and defined independently of another element; and they enhance well-being in people. In other words, the thematic analysis of this study revealed that elements of well-being were recurrently manifested as prominent themes, supporting Seligman's view that using signature strengths would foster the five elements of PERMA, as discussed below.

Positive affect was reported 39 times and was experienced by 100% of participants. The positive affect was seen as a result of positive environmental stimuli experienced in daily life as well as from the use of various strengths. Positive affect, the first component of the PERMA model of well-being (Seligman, 2011) has been linked to strength usage, either as signature strength usage or general strength usage. In a study by Rust, Diessner, and Reade (2009), one group of participants were encouraged to use their lowest strengths together with signature strengths while another group was encouraged to use their top five (signature) strengths. The study indicated that both groups benefitted from using the strengths. Participants who combined the use of their signature strengths with lower strengths, experienced higher levels of happiness and satisfaction with life than the rest of the participants. Positive affect was further found to enhance the integration between co-workers, to increase their performance and to buffer the negative effects of stress in the work-place (Rudolph, Clark, Jundt, & Baltes, 2015). Examples are as follows:

I could lift their spirits and convinced them that their best is good enough. I think I have the ability to calm others down. –Participant 2

I could achieve more and get more co-operation from the children. I think my ability to think differently in this situation achieved better results. I felt much calmer and more relaxed. –Participant 3

The past two days, he has been looking happy and normal again. I feel good that he is acting normal again and I feel good about my strong point. –Participant 4

Today I realised that I regulated myself well, regarding my time. It takes hard work and perseverance to be able to manage your time efficiently so that you can still have time for your own family. At the end of the day, I felt more relaxed and calmer. –Participant 5

I am satisfied with their results of their assessments. Because my learners accomplish their goals, I feel my day has succeeded. –Participant 6

What I experienced, is that I went the extra mile and that both sides (me and the learners) felt better afterwards.–Participant 7

After I reached out to him, I could see he felt better and his smile returned. Compassion and love goes a long way. I am grateful for moments like these in which a person can make a difference in a child's life. –Participant 8

Engagement, the second element of PERMA, was a prominent theme that emerged during the analyses of this study's data. By using their strengths, teachers seemed to become more engaged in their work. Learner engagement was also both actively pursued by teachers through using strengths and occurred as a result of teachers using their strengths for other reasons than purposely wanting to attain learner engagement. Learner engagement was reported 17 times and by 70 % of all participants. Enhanced teacher engagement, was reported 10 times and by 60% of all participants. Examples are:

We played with a water bottle in class today and I squirted water (just a little) at them with my water bottle each time they gave a wrong answer. They made a big noise, but they laughed a lot and even tried to get the water bottle from me so that they can squirt back with it. I also laughed a lot and it made me feel good that the learners enjoyed it so much. –Participant 10

I talked a bit of Sotho to the learners. I felt friendly, part of the group. What I perceived is that learners felt I am interested in their language, the learners were friendlier and they appreciated it. They were more willing to learn. The atmosphere was lighter. –Participant 7

Today I chose to remain calm. I chose to start my day with some gentle coaching and by lowering my voice; it seemed like I could achieve more and get more co-operation from the children. –Participant 3

I can see something light up in their faces. It is important to me that they understand and that I have every learner's attention. –Participant 1

According to Crabb (2011), when participants were facilitated to become familiar with their strengths and applied these strengths in the work place, they experienced better engagement at work, and felt that their career was purposeful and they were better able to process their emotions. Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) described student engagement as when students show an improved sense of belonging in the classroom/school, show more cooperative/constructive behaviour at school and that they are more involved in their own learning process. In a study by Lucardie (2014), teachers who were asked to exercise the strength of humour and playfulness in their classrooms reported that their learners showed enhanced engagement in the sense that learners became more spontaneous, enthusiastic and cooperative in school.

Positive **relationships** was a theme that came up frequently. It was identified 20 times and reported by 100% of participants. Examples are as follows:

Luckily the principal supported our conduct. It was a bad experience, but my colleagues mentioned after wards that they have a lot of respect for me that I stood up for that which is the right thing to do. –Participant 8

The feedback from the meeting was that I succeeded in my leadership role, my colleagues feel satisfied and that they know what to do. This builds healthy relationship between me and the other teachers. –Participant 6

Parent came to see me and asked advice regarding a big problem that she has with her child. I can't say what the problem was, but the parents were very happy with the advice I gave and they left with happiness. –Participant 10

One of the rambunctious boys sat next to me. The church service was getting too long for him. I just put my arm around him and he settled down. You really get to love these children very quickly. –Participant 8

We were able to devise a plan of action so that we can motivate the boy in a positive manner. This brought a feeling of hope to the mother. I feel a lot of compassion towards the mother. –Participant 8

I received a rose from a learner and it made me feel like I am appreciated. –Participant 1

According to Seligman (2011), positive relationships is an element of the PERMA model of well-being, since it is in relation to other people that the challenges in life seem lighter. Baumeister (1991) and Baumeister and Leary (1995) stated that fulfilment of needs for

relatedness leads to greater satisfaction with life, happiness and a sense of meaning and purpose. When the need for relatedness is not fulfilled, it has detrimental effects on adjustment, health and well-being (Wissing, 2014). Williams and Bartlett (2015) found that the strength of gratitude leads to the forming of better relationships and expressing gratitude may motivate or make those to whom one does not have a close bond, aware of the value of working towards a social bond.

Teachers need to have **meaning**, to feel significant and the desire to make a difference in the lives of others, was another theme and a PERMA dimension. Meaning was reported 14 times and by 70% of teachers. Teachers either used their strengths purposefully with the goal to make a difference to others or used their strengths solely for the sake of using the strength and which lead to them feeling significant or that they meant something. Examples are:

I helped another teacher with discipline problems. I listened to her problems, gave practical advice on how to have better control of the class. I feel that I mean something to somebody. The result is that I have a new kind of relationship with the teacher. –Participant 7

I am grateful for moments like these in which a person can make a difference in a child's life. –Participant 8

His behaviour will probably never change, but I decided that from today on I will give everybody a chance. Maybe it will even mean something to him in the long run. –Participant 10

Again I respond back with love and receive it back. I realised some learners really need this, especially those who come to school looking untidy and a bit dirty. I feel like I make a difference. –Participant 2

I think teenagers feel comfortable speaking to me about difficult or emotional situations. I feel that I can make a difference in learners' lives. –Participant 3

According to Steger, Kashdan, and Oishi (2008), meaning is when a person feels that he/she is serving a greater cause in life and that her/she is doing something purposeful. McGovern (2011) proposed that the teaching context is one where teachers aim to reach learners and to make a difference in their lives and that this role of teachers become central to their life stories and identities. In a study by Nilsson et al. (2015) regarding teachers' experiences of salutogenic aspects in their lives, the researchers found that meaningfulness was an aspect that teachers

reported as enhancing their well-being and that buffered against stress. Allan (2015) interestingly found that meaning is enhanced when certain strength pairs are correspondent to each other, suggesting that balance between strengths is important for meaning in life and that all strengths need to be exercised, and not just a person's signature strengths. The strength pairs involved in Alan's research were honesty and kindness, love and social intelligence and hope and gratitude.

With regard to **achievement**, teachers tended to use their strengths as a tool to reach goals, solve problems, achieve success and master a situation. This theme was reported 17 times and by 90% of all participants. Examples are:

We did very difficult work. Therefore I prepared very extensively. Subject knowledge is very important in order to have the week go as uncomplicated as possible. The day went rather successfully and with a short test, most learners mastered the week's material. –Participant 1

I had an appointment with parents who have difficult circumstances at home. Their child has a lot of behavioural problems. The mother was not offensive and they're going to get help. I accomplished my goal by helping the mother to gain the insight needed to seek much needed help. –Participant 7

I am a netball coach and my team had a match against another school. I motivated my players to give their best. I stand next to the field and encourage my team. I succeeded in my goal and we won. They showed gratitude and we have a close relationship. –Participant 6

I carried on with my lesson and kept myself-control even after the incident. I felt victory. The outcome was that I received help from the HOD in maths and life orientation and I received cooperation. I felt victorious. –Participant 7

Today was a good day at the school. I received my netball theoretical test results and received 89%. It improved my sense of self-worth, because I am a new teacher and feel that I still need to prove myself. –Participant 8

Achievement is the last element of the PERMA model of well-being and it refers to the sense of mastering and achieving goals (Seligman, 2011). Character strengths, such as hope, self-regulation and perseverance has been positively correlated with achievement (Coffey, Wray-Lake, Mashek, & Branand, 2014; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003). Furthermore, the self-related strength of self-efficacy is closely linked to a sense of achievement (Cantwell, 2006; Bandura, 1997) and Caprana, Borgogni, Barbaranelli,

and Rubinacci (1999) found that teachers' efficacy beliefs directly influence climate perception, collective efficacy, task commitment, involvement and satisfaction of learners.

Above, the strengths-related themes that emerged from analyses of teachers' diary entries were discussed within the well-being framework of PERMA, as conceptualised by Seligman (2011). However, as is succinctly acknowledged in the field of positive psychology (Wong, 2011), negative emotions also emerged as a theme of teachers' experiences.

2.9.6 Negative affect and challenges experienced by teachers

Negative affect and mostly challenges were experienced by 100% of participants and reported 26 times. Negative affect was reported once as being a result of the use of a specific strength, (kindness) where the participant used kindness and it was being taken for granted. The following quote illustrates this experience:

I showed kindness when I offered extra lessons for an upcoming and very difficult test. I felt very bad afterwards, because nobody attended! The result was that I was disappointed. It is very demoralising to offer help and nobody is interested. –Participant 8

The other 25 times that negative affect were reported, it was related to challenges within the difficult context that teachers work in. For example:

A learner made me so angry today by not listening what I am saying to her. I wanted to give her a warning, but instead decided to talk with her in a nice way. –Participant 1

Some learners at our school are also identified with emotional and behavioural difficulties, such as conduct disorder or oppositional defiant disorder. Our learners usually have an average to above average IQ, but some are hindered by their circumstances and/or a disability. As a result, most of them do not achieve up to their full potential. A small number of learners have below average IQ's, but are too old to be transferred to schools where they can follow a more practical curriculum. They often drop out after Grade 9 because of poor marks and inability to cope with a mainstream/academic curriculum. Coping with this type of challenging behaviour of learners, can be quite stressful and emotionally taxing on teachers. – Participant 3

He shows severe attention deficit tendencies and all he wants to do is to make jokes and talk. He has no interest in his school work and if he could only give his best, he would actually do really well. I feel like I can jump on him or slap him! I have to control myself daily not to do

this. I know that I will never physically harm him, it is a mercy that my self-control is strong. –
Participant 4

I have two boys in my class who test me the whole time. They are very disobedient and make me feel extremely negative and frustrated. It is difficult to stay positive in my class and I tend to get dispirited. No amount of discipline helps. –Participant 8

Negative affect refers to the experience of negative emotions over time (Diener, 1984) and according to Ben-Shahar (2010), in order to experience happiness (positive emotion) a person is required to have experienced some negative experiences, because the overcoming of obstacles is often a prerequisite for being able to experience happiness. Since teaching is an occupation that is related to caring and having compassion, it may be subject to what Joinson (1992) described as compassion-fatigue. Compassion-fatigue is where, as a result of caring, bearing concern over and having compassion for another whom you are responsible for as a result of your occupation, you are more likely to experience stress and burnout as a cost of caring. However, Duckworth, Steen, and Seligman (2005) found that using a person's strengths, buffers against and decreases negative affect and according to Park (2004), character strengths serve as protective factors that lessen stress and adversity and enhance optimal human functioning even under dire circumstances.

Above the qualitative themes about applying their strengths in the teaching context that emerged from teachers' diary entries, were discussed. All the strengths discussed thus far were VIA-IS related, but other strengths also emerged.

2.9.7 Strengths relevant to the participants' teaching context, but not related to the VIA-IS

There are strengths that seem to be apparent in the teaching context, but that do not fall into one of the categories of the VIA-IS. One example of such a strength is the strength of openness to the other, proposed by Fowers and Davidov (2006) to be a possible new strength of character that the VIA-IS could include. For instance participant 3 reported:

When a learner asked me how much a pregnancy test costs, I answered very calmly and respectfully. Without preaching first or displaying shock, I can be very sympathetic to a learner who oversteps a line.

According to Du Toit, Wissing, and Khumalo (2014), some strengths that are not mentioned by the VIA-IS, are strengths related to the self, such as self-awareness and self-esteem, for example participant 3 said: *Today I trusted my own judgement and presented my ideas more*

confidently. I think I should trust myself more and be more confident in my own creativity, and also self-forgiveness for example: *I acknowledged my mistake and said that everybody makes mistakes, let's start over* – Participant 2. In a study by Durkin, Beaumont, Hollins-Martin, and Carson (2016), participants who displayed more self-compassion, were less likely to experience burnout. The self is an important component to be taken into consideration when viewing people as a whole (Johnson, 2015) and the self (along with its abilities and traits) has been conceptualised as playing an important part in optimal human functioning (Maslow, 1970; Bandura, 1997).

Two other strengths that are also not related to the VIA-IS, but that were frequently reported by the participants in this particular study, were industriousness, for example participant 6 said:

I prepared very extensively. Subject knowledge is very important in order to have the week go as uncomplicated as possible and *We already don't have enough time. To complain and argue won't help, all that I can do is to simply put in another extra lesson again in order to catch up* and also assertiveness for example participant 8 said:

A difficult learner cursed me for catching her cheating on a test. I didn't stand back and let her make me feel inferior.

Above the qualitative findings of this study were reported. A second aim of the study was to measure and quantitatively interpret the influence of the use of signature strengths on the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life of the participants, which will be discussed below.

2.9.8 Results of pre-measurements and post-measurements applied

Teachers' life satisfaction and emotional well-being was assessed on three occasions in this study and specifically just after completion of the VIA-IS, after their diary entries for two weeks, and also two weeks later. The teachers' SWLS and SPANE test results were investigated by comparing the differences between test 1, test 2 and test 3. Because the data are from the same participants and skewness and kurtosis were not present everywhere, the chosen calculation for comparison was Friedman's ANOVA, which is a non-parametric calculation. Calculations were performed with the help of quantitative analysis software, SPSS. Friedman's ANOVA can be performed when noting differences between more than two instances and when the same participants were used in all instances (Field, 2009). According to Field (2009), the underlying method of Friedman's ANOVA is to rank scores of participants per instance and per participant. The ranks for each instance is then added and the significance of the

differences is calculated. The Friedman test of the current study showed that the mean ranks were fairly similar across the three times that participants took the SWLS and SPANE, as indicated by Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: *Mean ranks of participants' test results for the satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)*

Ranks	Mean rank
SWLS 1 (Binned)	1.88
SWLS 2 (Binned)	2.25
SWLS 3 (Binned)	1.88

Table 3: *Mean ranks of participants' test results for the scale of positive and negative affect (SPANE)*

Ranks	Mean rank
SPANE 1 (Binned)	1.57
SPANE 2 (Binned)	2.21
SPANE 3 (Binned)	2.21

The exact significance (p) for the differences in participants' SWLS scores, was 0.44 and $x^2(2)$ = 2.67, indicating that there was no significant difference in participants' satisfaction with life for any of the three times that SWL was measured, as shown by Table 4.

Table 4: *Friedman Test (Using participants' test scores from SWLS)*

Chi-Square	2.667
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.264
Exact Significance	0.444
Point probability	0.222

The exact significance (p) for the differences in participants' SPANE scores, was 0.38 and $x^2(2)$ = 3.00. Thus, no significance in participants' positive and negative affect over time occurred, as shown by Table 5.

Table 5: *Friedman Test (Using participants' test scores from SPANE)*

Chi-Square	3.000
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.223
Exact Significance	0.379
Point probability	0.198

2.9.9 Information obtained from participant interviews

Participant interviews were in the format of a brief discussion during which each participant was asked whether he/she had anything to add to their written reports, or on reflection would like to change or elaborate on those. They were also asked how they experienced the research exercise and debriefed. Participant-checking was done in order to check with teachers whether the initial findings that arose from their diary reports were truthful and accurate.

The outcomes of these discussions were similar for most participants, as almost all participants stated that they would not like to make any amendments or elaborate on their written reports and all participants expressed agreement with how their diary reports were viewed, but offered no further comments. One participant was the exception and had additional information to offer. This participant reported experiencing positive outcomes from both the use of strengths and from the act of writing self-reflexive diary reports and she further stated that she felt the diary writing itself might have been more beneficial to her than those benefits she experienced from the use of her signature and other strengths. According to her, writing in her diary increased her self-awareness where usually her days would just go by without realising all the detail of what was happening around her. She used this self-reflexive writing for self-enrichment and aimed to use her strengths to change the aspects that she wanted to improve in herself and in her teaching practice. Furthermore, she attested that the awareness of her own positive qualities and strengths lead her to become more aware of her learners' positive qualities and she reported that this made her feel more positive towards the learners as well as generally experiencing more positive feelings throughout the day. This participant's feedback is in line with the previously mentioned possible therapeutic effects that diary writing might have (Chang, Huang, & Lin, 2013; Nicholls, 2009) and with empirical findings from previous research about the influence of character strength use on positive affect, that was also discussed in the findings and literature review of this present study.

2.10 Concluding Discussion

In this multi-method study of the application of signature strengths by teachers in the educational context, the aims were to: qualitatively explore how teachers use their signature strengths in the teaching context; understand the effects/outcomes experienced by teachers due to their use of signature strengths in the educational workplace and measure the influence of the use of signature strengths on the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life of the participants.

The main qualitative findings were that the teachers meaningfully used their signature strengths as identified with the VIA-IS, but that other strengths of the VIA-IS also presented prominently in the teaching context and that even strengths not related to the VIA-IS emerged. Quantitative analyses showed that the satisfaction with life and emotional well-being of teachers did not significantly increase over the research period and due to the application of their strengths. These findings will be briefly discussed below.

Signature strengths of teachers came mostly from the humanity, transcendence and courage virtue clusters and less so from the wisdom and knowledge, justice and temperance clusters. However, in application in the teaching environment, wisdom and knowledge and temperance strengths became prominent, although strengths of humanity were most frequently used by the teacher-participants. This finding seems to support the numerous other studies which found that strengths optimally function in context-specific applications (Park & Peterson, 2009; Shryack, Steger, Krueger, & Kallie, 2010). Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, and Minhas (2011) stated in this regard that strengths are highly contextual phenomena that emerge in distinctive patterns alongside particular goals, interests, values and situational factors.

Relating to the view of Biswas-Diener et al. (2011), an interesting feature of the strengths in application in the teaching context was that strengths often co-occurred and seemed to function optimally in pairs or combinations. Strengths seem to function interrelatedly and interactively and this finding is in line with the work of Bdar and Kashdan (2010) and Canter, Youngs, and Yaneva (2017), amongst others, who indicated the inter-relatedness (inter-correlations) among strengths and that most strengths do not function as solidary characteristics. Research in this regard is recommended.

For themes that emerged from the thematic analyses of the diary entries of teachers pertaining to the use of their signature strengths in class contexts and the outcomes thereof, the PERMA model of Seligman (2011) presented a good conceptual and theoretical framework for

interpretation. The features of positive emotions, engagement, relatedness, meaning and purpose, and achievement were strongly present in the qualitative themes that emerged from teacher-participants' diary entries of their experiences with the application of their strengths, and which attested to them mostly experiencing a sense of psychosocial well-being. The qualitative findings reminded one of Ryan and Bernard's (2003, p. 96) view that "if you want to understand what people are talking about, look at the words they use" (such as their diary entries). A salient characteristic of the teachers' strength application and the effects thereof, was that a balance of strengths is required for optimal flourishing or for feeling good and functioning well (Keyes, 2002). This finding seems to support those of Niemec (2014) and Young, Kashdan, and Macatee (2015) that a balance between strengths enhances well-being. Kashdan and Rottenberg (2010) showed that balanced development and use of strengths enables adaptation to environmental stressors and psychological flexibility in individuals, while Freidlin, Littman-Odavia, and Niemec (2017) found that an imbalance (over or underuse) could lead to maladaptive outcomes such as social anxiety.

The quantitative analysis of scores of teachers on a measure of satisfaction with life (SWLS) and an emotional well-being scale (SPANE), taken at three instances, found no significant difference in levels of life satisfaction and emotional well-being during the span of about six weeks (the research period). It is important to note that a healthy population group was used and participants may already have had good levels of happiness and satisfaction with life. Therefore, any increase in positive affect or life satisfaction would likely not have been significant. According to Nielsen (2004, p.1), the benefit of performing quantitative analysis, is to "boil a complex situation down to a single number that's easy to grasp and discuss", but in the case of the present study, qualitative results yielded more insight into the emotional well-being and life satisfaction of the teachers. Nielsen (2004) also argued that sometimes a finding is statistically insignificant because of the experiment's design, for instance, when a study didn't include enough participants to observe a significant finding in sufficient numbers, which seemed to be the case in this study. It would therefore be necessary to perform this study with a much larger participant group in order to establish whether any significant quantitative findings occured in pre and post-testing of the life satisfaction and emotional well-being of teachers, after their use of strengths.

From the above brief explication of the findings of this multi-method study, it could be concluded that the aims of the study were met. However there were also limitations to the study, namely that although it was indicated as a multi-method study, it turned out to be

primarily a qualitative study. Furthermore, although the diary-entry method yielded sufficient qualitative data for analyses, in-depth interviews could perhaps have been less time consuming and yielded different responses from participants.

Further research is recommended pertaining to the interrelated and interactive functioning of strengths in the VIA-IS system. Strengths not included in the VIA-IS model could be further identified through research and strengths identification. Application research with larger groups of teachers and in various teaching contexts could be valuable.

In conclusion, this study could be seen as successful, since the aims were reached and research questions were satisfactorily answered. The researcher experienced the study as personally meaningful, having been a teacher herself and she feels grateful towards the teacher-participants who shared their experiences of the difficult, but also rewarding world of teaching.

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CHAPTER 3

Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

This chapter consists of conclusions pertaining to this study and in line with the specific research aims. After the conclusions have been discussed, the limitations of the study will be pointed out and recommendations for further research and practical application will be made.

3.1 Conclusions of the Study

This study aimed to: qualitatively explore how teachers use their signature strengths in the teaching context; understand the effects/outcomes experienced by teachers due to their use of signature strengths in the educational workplace and measure the influence of the use of signature strengths on the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life of the participants. These aims were all met in the research conducted and conclusions drawn from the findings were as follows.

Firstly, teachers meaningfully used their signature strengths as identified with the VIA-IS. Other strengths of the VIA-IS also presented prominently in the teaching context and also strengths that is not related to the VIA-IS. Strengths usage were context-bound and strengths did not operate independently from one another.

Secondly, for the effects and outcomes of using strengths experienced by teachers in the educational setting, the themes that emerged from the thematic analyses of the diary entries of teachers could be reported using the PERMA model of Seligman (2011), which provided to be a suitable conceptional and theoretical framework for interpretation. The features of positive emotions, engagement, relatedness, meaning and purpose, and achievement emerged clearly in the qualitative themes from teacher-participants' diary feedback of their experiences with the application of their strengths, and this attested to their general sense of psychosocial well-being.

Thirdly, the quantitative analysis of scores of teachers on a measure of satisfaction with life (SWLS) and an emotional well-being scale (SPANE), taken at three instances, found no significant difference in levels of life satisfaction and emotional well-being during the span of about six weeks (the research period). However, regarding interpretation of the influence of the use of signature strengths on the emotional well-being and satisfaction with life, qualitative results yielded more insight into the emotional well-being and life satisfaction of the teachers. This finding seems to be what Nielsen (2004) referred to when he stated that insignificant findings from quantitative analyses may sometimes occur as a result of a study not having included a sufficient number of participants to yield significant findings. This interpretation may seem more likely than the interpretation that character strength use did not at all influence

participants' emotional well-being and satisfaction with life, since qualitative findings about positive and negative affect and satisfaction with life seem to contradict the findings from measurements of these constructs in this study. Furthermore, findings from other research studies seem to support this interpretation, since various previous studies have indicated the influence of character strength use on their participants' emotional well-being and satisfaction of life.

Further conclusions are drawn from the literature study.

1. Previous studies as well as the present study indicated that the context in which character strengths are used, greatly influences whether character strengths are appropriate for use (Keyes, 2002; Park & Peterson, 2009; Shryack, Steger, Krueger, & Kallie, 2010). It would thus seem as if character strengths are intra-personal abilities that are expressed in inter-personal and inter-environmental contexts, from which feedback is received to further develop and meaningfully use such strengths.

2. Character strengths do not operate independently, but rather interactively and a balance of strengths is needed for character strength usage to be optimal and beneficial (Bdar & Kashdan, 2010; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Young, Kashdan, & Macatee, 2015; Niemec, 2014; Freidlin, Littman-Odavia & Niemec, 2017; Canter, Youngs, & Yaneva, 2017). The inter-relatedness of the human psyche and the bio-psycho-socio-spiritual nature of human functioning is evident.

3. There are crucial strengths that are not included in the VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues (Fowers & Davidov, 2006; Du Toit, Wissing, and Khumalo, 2014; Durkin, Beaumont, Hollins-Martin, & Carson, 2016). If one considers that a healthy sense of self is paramount to psychological well-being, then a virtue cluster of self-respect with strengths such as self-esteem, -efficacy, -awareness, -assertiveness, -compassion and other self-related competencies could be proposed (also see Caprara & Cervone, 2003).

4. Teachers work in a challenging environment which prompts them to require character strengths (Chang, 2009; Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004; Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012), especially those directly related to their vocation (Rodger & Raider-Roth, 2006; Harzer & Ruch, 2016). The use of character strengths may further facilitate the development of traits and capabilities that efficient teachers require (Park & Peterson, 2009; Bryan, 2009; Sutton, 2007; Ruiz-Párraga & López-Martínez, 2014). It could be

considered to research occupational-related strengths covering a wide spectrum of careers and the strengths that seem to be relevant and/or required to optimally perform in such disciplines.

5. The use of character strengths may buffer against stressful school environments (Bromley, Johnson, & Cohen, 2006; Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorents, 2008; Ho, Cheung, & Cheung; 2010; Shrira, Palgi, Ben-Ezra, & Shmotkin, 2011; Shek, 2012; Marco, Guillèn, & Botella, 2017) and other research have indicated that character strengths usage may foster certain aspects of well-being (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Lyobomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, & Barber, 2010; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Lucardie, 2014; Butler & Kern, 2015; Wang, Chow, Hofkens, & Salmela-Aro, 2015). The protective, as well as enabling role that strengths seem to fulfill in human behaviour has been found in many studies as shown above. Yet, the research possibilities about the buffering and fostering nature of strengths in many diverse contexts, abound.

The following conclusions are drawn from the empirical findings of this study.

1. Character strengths usage in the current study were teaching context-related in the sense that teachers used their identified signature strengths as requested, but they also used other character strengths that were related to their teaching situation. This study found that strengths of humanity were most frequently used by participants, specifically kindness, love and social intelligence, while strengths of wisdom and knowledge and temperance were also prominent. Literature in line with these findings, are that of Shim (2008), who proposed that the role of teachers inherently require of teachers to engage in the strength of perspective as it is a crucial strength for the teaching profession and Park and Peterson (2009), who found that effective teachers required the strengths of social intelligence, zest and humor. The present findings therefore seem to support numerous other studies that proposed that the teaching vocation requires of teachers to be equipped with certain character strengths, such as, bravery, hope, self-regulation, perspective, kindness, creativity and others (Snyder, 2000; Sutton, 2007; Bryan, 2009; Güsewell & Ruch, 2012; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Ruiz-Párraga & López-Martínez, 2014; Martin et al., 2015; Sanders, Munford, Anwar, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015).

2. The themes that emerged from qualitative analysis of participants' diary entries in the current study were: positive and negative emotions, engagement, relatedness, meaning

and purpose, and achievement. These themes were linked to and conceptualised by means of the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). Being elements of well-being, the prominence of these themes seemed to indicate participants' general sense of psychosocial well-being. These findings also resonate with the theoretical model of Deci and Ryan (2000), who conceptualised the competencies of competence, autonomy and relatedness as not only basic psychological needs, but also as the pilars of self-determination and autonomous or intrinsic motivation.

3. During the qualitative analysis of the current study's data, ATLAS.ti's co-occurance function was utilised (Friese, 2012), and an interesting finding was that certain strengths co-occurred frequently and seemed to function interactively with others. This seems to support other studies' findings that character strengths often function in pairs or combinations (Bdar & Kashdan, 2010; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Young, Kashdan, & Macatee, 2015; Niemec, 2014; Freidlin, Littman-Odavia & Niemec, 2017; Canter, Youngs, & Yaneva, 2017). The perspective strength co-occurred with nearly all other strengths, which supports research that propose perspective to be a master strength (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006), which is needed to ascertain when and how the use of character strengths is appropriate and constructive.

4. In the current study, participants also used strengths that are not included in the VIA-IS. This finding supports other researchers' statements that the VIA-IS classification is not final and that further research is needed (Fowers & Davidov, 2006; Du Toit, Wissing, & Khumalo, 2014; Durkin et al., 2016).

5. Writing in general, and specifically diary writing, may have had positive effects on participants' well-being (Chang, Huang, & Lin, 2013; Nicholls, 2009) and one participant reported that the writing was beneficial to her in terms of experiencing positive feelings, feeling in control and facilitating the use of constructive teaching efforts. Furthermore, the diary entry method of qualitative data collection proved to be successful and can be recommended for future use.

3.2 Limitations of this Research

Limitations of the current study were as follows.

1. The coherence of the research design was somewhat lessened by the inclusion of quantitative measurements before and after implementation of research activities, which may have hinted towards an intervention and the expectancy of improvement on test

results (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). The participant sample size was adequate for a phenomenological qualitative research (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) and data saturation was also obtained (Creswell, 2009), but it was not an adequate sample size for quantitative research (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In the current study, the difference in participants' satisfaction with life and positive and negative affect as measured on different occasions, would likely not have been big, since the participants were a healthy sample to begin with and the smaller the difference that is to be detected, the greater the number of participants that would be required (Faber & Fonseca, 2014).

2. The research sample lacked diversity, since all participants were caucasian females. Samples that are too homogeneous may cause over-representation of certain findings in the analysis of the data (Houser & Bokovoy, 2008). The inclusion of male participants and also African, Coloured and Indian teachers could have yielded a much different research outcome.

3. The participants engaged in strengths usage and reporting thereof in their diaries for a limited time of two weeks, which might have been too short (Terre Blance et al., 2006) to produce significant differences in participants' satisfaction with life and positive and negative affect. If this was done over a longer period, it could have had different results. Participants were followed-up with two weeks after the study (Avey, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2008).

4. Although the study was indicated as a multi-method study, it turned out to be primarily a qualitative study, since the quantitative analysis yielded no significant findings and valuable findings were only derived from qualitative analysis. Furthermore, although the diary-entry method yielded sufficient qualitative data for analyses, in-depth interviews could perhaps have been less time consuming and yielded different responses from participants (Terre Blance et al., 2006).

Despite the limitations mentioned, the research proved to be successful in meeting research aims and in answering the research question. The qualitative findings provided valuable information about, and insights into, the functioning of characher strengths within a specific career context and also about the inter-relatedness of character strengths towards healthy functioning of teachers.

3.3 Recommendations from the Study

Recommendations for further research and for practice or practical application are given below.

3.3.1 Recommendations for further research

The following is recommended for further research.

1. Further research is recommended pertaining to the inter-related and interactive functioning of strengths in the VIA-IS system. Interesting findings from this study was that strengths usage seem to co-occur. Future research could focus on the role of strength pairs and combinations in influencing participants' well-being, life satisfaction, flourishing and performance in their workplace. Quantitative research to indicate the significance of co-occurrance of strengths and the underlying dynamic regarding relationships between strengths and interactive ways in which strengths operate, is also recommended.

2. Further investigations into the strengths not included in the VIA-IS model and further studies on the constructs and content of the Classification of Strengths and Virtues are required.

3. This research was not intended to be an intervention study, but rather had a phenomenological nature where the researcher had no expectation regarding what the results from the strength-based exercises would entail and exploring/gaining knowledge of how teachers use their strengths and what happens when teachers use their strengths was seen as more important than assessing what possible salutogenic effects this study could have on teachers. In future, a similar study could employ an interventional research design and larger participant sample.

4. Application research with larger groups of teachers and in various teaching contexts could also be valuable. For example, that a comparative and cross-cultural study could be done on possible differences that may exist regarding strength inter-relatedness and processes underlying the ways in which strengths function and are used by different types of participants within different occupations and sectors.

5. The PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2015), which specifically measures elements of the PERMA model could be used in future studies to measure the well-being of teachers in the context of character strength application, since the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) seemed to be a good conceptual and theoretical model for themes identified from this study's qualitative analysis. A different measure than the VIA-IS for identifying strengths could also be used, for example the Gallup Organization's Clifton

Strengths Finder which identifies participants' greatest areas for potential strength development (Buckingham & Clifton, 2000).

3.3.2 Recommendations for practice/practical application

From the discussions in the previous chapters it could be seen that character strength use is linked to psychosocial well-being (Seligman, 2011), and a flourishing teacher will more likely perform better in his/her teaching role (Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009; Park & Peterson, 2009; Littman-Odavia & Nir, 2014; Nillson et al., 2015;). It is therefore recommended that teachers in schools be facilitated to become aware of their own character strengths and to apply such in the teaching context. Furthermore, the findings from the current study could, in practice, be beneficial to the educational system and schools in the sense that it could lay a foundation for further investigation into strengths use which have been proposed to enhance effective teaching practises (McGovern & Miller, 2008). New models for developing teacher effectiveness may advance from such investigations, especially since introducing teachers to character strengths and promoting the use of character strengths by educators, may facilitate the development of traits and capabilities that the teaching vocation requires efficient teachers to be equipped with (Park & Peterson, 2009; Bryan, 2009; Sutton, 2007; Ruiz-Párraga & López-Martínez, 2014).

3.4 Personal Reflection

I recall how a quite clueless me grappled at the start of this journey with the plethora of information available regarding character strengths and that, in desperation, I emailed the expert, Martin Seligman, saying that I am a MAPP student in South Africa, writing a research proposal and asking advice. To my surprise, he replied. He wrote me an instruction to read up on a long list of literature he recommended. Sitting here now, I can't think what could ever have been that confusing about character strengths that I needed to email him. There is a big difference in the person I was then, compared to who I am now, in the sense that I have learnt so much. The carrying out of this project has indeed taught me how to do research and it speaks to my own character strengths of curiosity and love of learning. Furthermore, I do not want it to end. It does not make sense to expand on a skill and then have it end there. I suspect that further research and applying for a PhD may be in store for me for the future. But first, I think it would be a wise step to allow myself not to be an academic student for a little while and to have other areas of my life flourish.

Having been a teacher myself, I felt immense empathy for, and gratitude towards, the participants in this study. I knew how it felt for me when I needed strengths like self-regulation and just wanted to jump on a learner or slap him/her (like one of the participants reported). I knew how it felt for me when I broke down and cried after a few difficult days (as reported by another participant) and needed the strength of hope and persistence to see me through. During this research project, I continiously noted my own feelings regarding the teaching context and teachers and set them aside by documenting the process and carefully weighing all evidence against each other. After obtaining the findings from this study, I believe that elements of well-being are needed for teachers to be able to cope in their work environment and that the application of character strengths may facilitate this. I also know that good teachers, like the participants in this study, are those who want to make a difference in the lives of others and who find meaning in their work. There are people who have the educational background to be able to teach and then there are people who have this, plus also seem to be born to teach. My mother was one of those teachers and this is very admirable to me. In contrast to this, I realised that teaching was unfortunately not something I experienced as a calling or derived satisfaction from like my mother did. Teaching is not an easy task, especially in these times. I've heard people say that teachers have nice half-day jobs with plenty of holidays ... this cannot be further from the truth. I see it as important for a challenging job to also bring forth a sense of purpose and satisfaction. It takes a very special type of person to teach as a calling and my experience is that this type of person examplifies remarkable character and exemplary use of personal strengths.

In conclusion, the research question about the use of character strengths by teachers and the outcomes thereof was successfully answered and the findings obtained provided an even broader perspective on the functioning of character strengths in human well-being behaviour.

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