

Peer helpers' experience of participation in an adventure-based experiential learning programme: A grit perspective

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I would further like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people who contributed to making this project such an enriching and memorable experience:

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SUMMARY

Peer helper programmes have increasingly been used by universities to address difficulties that especially first year students experience. A peer helper is a registered student who has been selected and trained to assist student counselling services in performing interpersonal helping tasks with persons of similar age or experience. Considering various demands in the context of South-African universities, these peer helper programmes have become an indispensable part of the optimal functioning for most tertiary institutions.

One of the main concerns in maintaining peer helper programmes in higher education, is peer helpers' lack of commitment and follow-through in fulfilling their duties. Previous research consider that the personal growth and skills peer helpers develop during their training, will contribute to the success of the programme. A number of peer helper programmes currently in existence have adopted, as part of their training, the facilitation of character strengths. This has been found to oppose the development of negative symptoms and have proven effective when individuals find themselves in challenging circumstances, such as peer helpers may often experience. Grit, a strength that has received extensive attention in the past decade, may be crucial for times when individuals experience their own troubles and concerns, or when they encounter critical situations. Grit can be defined as passion and perseverance in the pursuit of long-term goals, even when encountering challenges or adversities. Recent studies have revealed that grit can only be learned from actual experience of having overcome obstacles and through facing adversity outside of academic traditions. Adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL) provides unique possibilities for the enhancement of individuals' already positive functioning, and the development of various character strengths. The challenging nature of adventure activities represents an important underlying aspect of outdoor adventure programmes in fostering growth and change. More specifically, recent studies have found that the adventure component of adventure-based experiential learning engages the motivation and interest of the participants and develops the

determination to persevere when situations become complicated, which points strongly toward the potential facilitation of grit.

This qualitative case study focused on describing the subjective experiences of a group of peer helpers during their participation in an adventure-based experiential learning programme from a grit perspective. Data were collected through reflective diaries and focus group interviews. All 26 of the participants completed daily reflective diaries for the duration of the three days of the programme. After three months of performing their duties as peer helpers, the same individuals participated in three separate focus group interviews, reflecting on their experience of the programme, and its perceived impact on their functioning as peer helpers. Themes were identified through inductive analysis, and these themes were discussed regarding its relevance to the concept of grit. The main categories that emerged from both phases of data collection include intra-, inter-, and transpersonal/transcendent aspects. These main categories were prominent within both phases of data collection. Results suggest that adventure-based experiential learning, due to its specific nature and demands, may be an ideal intervention for the facilitation of personal growth of peer helpers and, more specifically, the improvement and/or development of their grit. An improved understanding of the potential impact of such interventions on participants' grit may prove valuable for the development of training programmes aimed at the improved functioning of peer helpers at South African universities.

Keywords: peer helpers, experience, participation, adventure-based experiential learning, grit

OPSOMMING

Portuurhelperprogramme word toenemend deur universiteite aangewend om probleme wat veral eerstejaarstudente ervaar, te hanteer. 'n Portuurhelper is 'n geregistreerde student wat gekeur en opgelei is om studentevoorligtingsdienste by te staan in die uitvoering van interpersoonlike take vir persone van dieselfde ouderdom of ervaring. Binne die konteks van Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite vorm hierdie portuurhelperprogramme 'n onontbeerlike deel van die optimale funksionering vir die meeste tersiêre inrigtings.

Een van die belangrikste kwessies in die handhawing van portuurhelperprogramme in hoër onderwys, is portuurhelpers se gebrek aan toewyding en deursettingsvermoë in die uitvoering van hul pligte. 'n Vorige navorsingstudie dui aan dat die persoonlike groei en vaardighede wat portuurhelpers tydens hul opleiding ontwikkel, sal bydra tot die sukses van die program. By sekere portuurhelperprogramme wat tans bestaan, is die fasilitering van karaktersterktes geïnkorporeer as deel van hul opleiding. Daar is bevind dat hierdie karaktersterktes die ontwikkeling van negatiewe simptome teenstaan en is bewys om doeltreffend te wees wanneer individue hulself in moeilike omstandighede bevind, soos wat portuurhelpers dikwels mag ervaar.

“Grit”, 'n karaktersterkte wat die afgelope dekade ekstensiewe aandag geniet, kan van kritieke belang wees in tye wanneer individue hul eie probleme en bekommernisse ervaar of wanneer hulle kritieke situasies teëkom. “Grit” kan gedefinieer word as passie en deursettingsvermoë in die strewe na 'n langtermyn doelwit, selfs in die aangesig van uitdagings of teenspoed. Onlangse studies dui daarop dat “grit” slegs geleer kan word uit werklike ervaring om struikelblokke te oorkom en teenspoed buite die akademie die hoof te bied. Avontuurgebaseerde ervaringsleer (*adventure-based experiential learning* – ABEL) bied unieke moontlikhede vir die verbetering van individue se algehele positiewe funksionering en die ontwikkeling van verskillende karaktersterktes. Die uitdagende aard van avontuuraktiwiteite verteenwoordig 'n belangrike onderliggende aspek van buitelugavontuurprogramme ter bevordering van groei en verandering.

Meer spesifiek het onlangse studies bevind dat die avontuurkomponent van avontuurgebaseerde ervaringsleer die motivering en belangstelling van die deelnemers betrek en die vasberadenheid ontwikkel om te volhard wanneer situasies moeilik raak, wat ten sterkste verwys na die moontlike fasilitering van “grit”.

Hierdie kwalitatiewe gevallestudie het gefokus op die beskrywing van die subjektiewe ervarings van ’n groep portuurhelpers tydens hul deelname aan ’n avontuurgebaseerde ervaringsleerprogram, vanuit die perspektief van “grit”. Data is ingesamel deur reflekerende dagboeke en fokusgroeponderhoude. Die 26 deelnemers het daaglikse reflektiewe dagboeke voltooi vir die duur van die drie dae van die program. Na drie maande, waartydens hulle hul pligte as portuurhelpers verrig het, het dieselfde individue deelgeneem aan drie afsonderlike fokusgroeponderhoude, wat hul ervaring van die program weerspieël, asook die impak daarvan op hul funksionering as portuurhelpers. Temas is geïdentifiseer deur induktiewe analise, en hierdie temas is bespreek ten opsigte van die toepaslikheid daarvan tot die konsep van “grit”. Die hoofkategorieë wat uit beide fases van data-insameling gekom het, sluit in intra-, inter- en transpersoonlike/transendente aspekte. Hierdie hoofkategorieë was prominent in beide fases van data-insameling. Resultate dui daarop dat avontuurgebaseerde ervaringsleer, as gevolg van die spesifieke aard en eise daarvan, ’n ideale intervensie kan wees vir die fasilitering van persoonlike groei van portuurhelpers en meer spesifiek die verbetering en/of ontwikkeling van hul “grit”. ’n Beter begrip van die potensiële impak van so ’n intervensie op deelnemers se “grit” kan waardevol wees vir die ontwikkeling van opleidingsprogramme wat gemik is op die verbeterde funksionering van die portuurhelper by Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite.

Sleutelwoorde: portuurhelper, ervaring, deelname, avontuurgebaseerde ervaringsleer, “grit”

PREFACE

Article format

This mini-dissertation is part of the requirements for the completion of the master's degree in Counselling Psychology and was prepared in article format according to North-West University regulations (rule: A 4.4.2.3). The mini-dissertation was completed to adhere to the guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (APA: 6th edition).

Intended journal for publication

The article (Chapter 2) will be submitted for publication in *The South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*. The article was compiled conferring as far as possible to the author guidelines (see next section) of the journal in which it might be published. This include the use of the Harvard style of referencing.

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For the purpose of examination, the pages will be numbered chronologically from the title page, ending with the addendum.

Language editing

A qualified language practitioner conducted the language editing of this mini-dissertation.

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We discourage the practice of parts of one study in different journals. Authors who submit a manuscript from a study of which some data has been or will be published elsewhere, must provide a strong justification in an accompanying letter to the Editor. The justification for not publishing all the data together in one paper must also be motivated in the covering letter.

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Abstract. Each manuscript must be accompanied by an abstract of approximately 150-200 words in *English* and should be set on a *separate page* as a SINGLE paragraph (one and a half *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation* spacing). A list of three to seven key words in *English* is required for indexing purposes and should be typed below the abstract. Articles in Afrikaans must include an *additional* extended summary (500-1000 words) in English. This summary must start on a new page (just before the reference list) and also provide the English title of the article at the beginning.

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DE RIDDER, J.H. (1999). Kinanthropometry in exercise and sport. In L.O. Amusa, A.L. Toriola, I.U. Onyewadume (Eds.), *Physical Education and sport in Africa* (pp.235-263). Ibadan (Nigeria): LAP Publications.

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- **Correspondence**

Example:

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RENSON, R. (Ed.) (1976). *The history, the evolution and diffusion of sport and games in different cultures*. Proceedings of the 4th International HISPA Congress, Leuven, Belgium, 1-5 April 1975. Brussels (Belgium): B.L.O.S.O.

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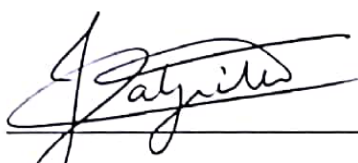
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PERMISSION TO SUBMIT THIS ARTICLE FOR EXAMINATION PURPOSES

We, the co-authors of this study, hereby grant permission that Marica Pienaar may submit the following manuscript for examination purposes, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Counselling Psychology:

Peer helpers' experience of participation in an adventure-based experiential learning programme: A grit perspective

The article may also be submitted to *The South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation* for publication purposes.



Prof. J. C. Potgieter

Supervisor



Cornelia Schreck

Co-supervisor



Ilana Coetzee

Assistant supervisor

DECLARATION

I, Marica Pienaar, declare herewith that this mini-dissertation entitled *Peer helpers' participation in an adventure-based experiential learning programme: A grit perspective*, is my own work and that all sources have been fully referenced and acknowledged. This study serves in partial compliance with the requirements set for the degree Magister Artium in Counselling Psychology done at the North-West University in Potchefstroom.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. Pienaar', is written above a horizontal line.

Marica Pienaar

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Considering the various demands and, accordingly, the many difficulties that students experience in the current context of South African universities, peer helper programmes have become an indispensable part of the optimal functioning for most tertiary institutions (De Jager, 2012; Lee & Bush, 2003; Lennox Terrion & Leonard, 2010). Recent research, however, expresses concern in maintaining these peer helper programmes, mainly because of the peer helpers' lack of commitment regarding the responsibilities of their roles (De Jager & Ntlokwana, 2011). Aladağ and Tezer (2009) are of the opinion that the personal growth and skills peer helpers develop during their training, will contribute to the perpetuation of such programmes. The question is how peer helper programmes can incorporate such interventions as part of their training.

A review done by Bowen and Neill (2013) demonstrated the efficacy of adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL) interventions for the facilitation of character strengths. The present study more specifically focuses on the possible impact of ABEL programmes on the participants' grit, a character strength that has attracted research attention in the past decade. The aim of the study is to describe the subjective experiences of a group of peer helpers during their participation in an ABEL programme from the perspective of grit.

This chapter offers an overview of the literature regarding relevant constructs central to the aims of the study.

1.2 Emerging adulthood

University students find themselves on a bridge between the developmental stages of adolescence and early adulthood. This period, ranging between the ages of 18 and about 25 years, is often referred to as "emerging adulthood", and presents significant changes and challenges for

young people today (Arnett, 2000, 2007). Apart from the larger number of choices and opportunities they encounter, this is also a time in which they face unprecedented levels of uncertainty and risk, leading to various adjustment difficulties (Arnett, 2000). Typically, individuals finding themselves in the developmental phase of emerging adulthood have to take on new roles, form new relationships and become more independent from their families. Identity problems are thus conspicuous as students experience a substantial amount of change and unsteadiness while establishing a life structure (Arnett, 2014). In addition, they also have to go through a process of socialisation where they become aware of more responsibilities that require rescheduling time and necessitate greater flexibility (Akkermans, Blonk, Brenninkmeijer, Schaufeli, & Van den Bossche, 2013; Arnett, 2000, 2007). Kitzrow (2003) emphasises that students are often overwhelmed by these difficulties. This period of potential distress explains the increased demand for counselling services at university counselling centres (Arnett, 2007; Kitzrow 2003).

1.3 Peer helpers

In an attempt to address this increased demand, universities started extending and enhancing their counselling centres by incorporating peer helper programmes (Kitzrow, 2003). According to Carr (as cited in De Jager, 2012), the popularity of peer helping originates in large part from research that reveals that students rely primarily on friends as sources of assistance when experiencing difficulties or making decisions, instead of seeking help from professionals. These peer helper programmes have become a valuable resource that allows counselling centres to serve more students and thereby improve the academic success, educational experience and retention of university students (Lennox Terrion & Leonard, 2010).

A *peer helper* can be defined as a person who is trained and supervised to assist student counselling services in the helping process by providing practical and emotional support to persons of similar age or experience (De Jager, 2012; De Jager & Ntlokwana, 2011). This assistance can take the form of helpful listening, the facilitation of decision-making and problem-solving, the

provision of practical support, one-on-one mentoring or peer education, as well as support with reference to professionals (De Jager, 2012). The peer helper can also collaborate with psychologists to implement well-being programmes aimed at the psychological well-being of residence members (De Jager & Ntlokwana, 2011).

De Jager and Ntlokwana (2011) report a number of challenges in maintaining peer helper programmes in higher education, of which the peer helpers' commitment and continued motivation have become one of the main concerns. As peer helping is a voluntary process, it is often difficult for peer helpers to stay committed to certain compulsory tasks, responsibilities or actions included in their roles. The students also often have misconceptions about this commitment when they first apply to serve in this role (De Jager, 2012). As peer helpers, they have to be willing to talk fellow students through their difficulties and to provide moral support through guidance. At times, they may feel unskilled, puzzled and overwhelmed in this role. Moreover, the peer helpers often feel that their assistance has been ineffective or that they have failed their roles (De Jager, 2012). Lewis and Lewis (1996) further explain that the heavy reliance on peer helpers creates the possibility of excessive responsibility being placed on some of them in dealing with potentially serious matters. The types of problems they may encounter in terms of individual work include adjustment problems and adaptation to life in university residences, anxiety and uncertainty of first-year students, emotional problems, relationship problems, academic matters and substance abuse – to name just a few (De Jager & Ntlokwana, 2011). Consequently, the peer helpers may be left feeling emotionally and physically drained (Okun, 2002).

In order for the peer helper, and ultimately the peer helper system, to function optimally, it is critical to understand what skills, behaviours or attitudes are essential for peer helpers to stay on healthy pathways, despite the challenges they may encounter (De Jager, 2012). As such, Lawson (1989) identifies a number of personal characteristics considered fundamental for the peer helper to function optimally. These include empathy, maturity and a sense of responsibility, self-confidence, effective communication skills and stability. In addition to this, qualities such as intrinsic

motivation, determination and/or resilience may be essential for the peer helper to deal successfully with the challenges inherent in their experiences (Lennox Terrion & Leonard, 2010).

1.4 Positive psychology: A grit perspective

The movement of positive psychology has, at its core, the objective of examining such inherent qualities with a view to strengthen and facilitate its development and to foster excellence in life (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005). Research validates the protective effect of developing these so-called character strengths, which have been found to oppose the development of negative symptoms, particularly for people finding themselves within challenging circumstances (Gillham et al., 2011), such as the peer helpers. Seligman effectively summarises this approach to interventions, which facilitate health and well-being, with his observation that “treatment is not just fixing what is wrong, it is also building what is right” (2002, p. 4).

A number of character strengths (e.g. perseverance, courage) have been identified by Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004). In the past decade, Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) conceptualised another strength that Tiittanen (2014) recently added to the resilience cluster, called ‘grit’.

Grit can be defined as the passion and perseverance to accomplish long-term goals, even in the face of challenges and adversities (Duckworth et al., 2007; Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). It may be a crucial character strength for the times when individuals experience their own troubles and concerns or when they encounter critical situations. Gritty students have been shown to not only accomplish tasks at hand, but to have the ability to pursue a given aim over years (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). In other words, grit includes the capacity to maintain both the interest and effort in projects that can take long periods of time to complete. Individuals high in grit do not swerve from their original goals (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The essence of grit can, therefore, be captured as follow-through or the purposeful, continuous commitment to activities and responsibilities encountered in order to still achieve one’s goals successfully (Duckworth et al., 2007).

The concept of grit was originally developed through considering what those individuals, who do attain their highest potentials, have in common (Tiittanen, 2014). Perkins-Gough (2013) found that the reason why some individuals succeed at pursuing their goals, while others ultimately give up, is that grit represents not only showing resilience when facing setbacks, but also remaining loyal to commitments. Duckworth et al. (2007) articulate it by saying that “the gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina” (p. 1088). Duckworth and Quinn (2009) affirm that grit predicts achievement in challenging areas above and beyond measures of talent. It has also been found to contribute to individual success in diverse settings and throughout an individual’s lifespan (Reed & Jeremiah, 2017). In brief, grit is a compound and stable individual characteristic, which influence attitudes and behaviour across different contexts, and is shared by the most outstanding leaders in every field (Duckworth et al., 2007; Wolters & Hussain, 2015).

Several studies across multiple domains offer examples where grit appears as a significant predictor of success: In a study of the drop-out rate of cadets at West Point Military Academy, multiple indicators of success were measured, considering the continuous demands placed on these young individuals. In comparison to a range of other characteristics, grit was found to be the best predictor of successful goal achievement (Duckworth et al., 2007). Eskleis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal and Duckworth (2014) additionally examined the association between grit and retention in other challenging domains and revealed the following: grittier soldiers participating in a selection course for Army Special Operations Forces were more likely to complete it; grittier sales employees were more inclined to stay in their jobs; grittier school children finished more hours of purposeful practice for a national spelling bee, despite not enjoying it as much as other activities; and grittier students were more likely to graduate from university. In summary, the individuals with higher levels of grit consistently show fewer dropouts from their respective life commitments (Eskleis-Winkler et al., 2014).

Considering the challenges faced by the peer helpers as discussed above, the relevance of this construct becomes clear. In the past, peer helper commitment was often only maintained by incentives (e.g. stipends, food), but having grit means having an intrinsic, future-orientated motivation to stay on one's course in the long term, even without clear indicators that the hard work is paying off (De Jager & Ntlokwana, 2011; Duckworth et al., 2007).

Recent studies confirm that grit is not a fixed quality, but one that can be developed. The essentials of grit can, however, only be learned from the actual experience of having overcome obstacles and through facing adversity outside of academic traditions (Ris, 2015; Wong, 2015).

1.5 Adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL)

Adventure-based experiential learning (hereafter ABEL) provides unique possibilities in this regard. ABEL programmes typically incorporate a selected variety of adventure activities as a means of assisting the participants in developing physical, social and mental competencies, thereby strengthening their positive psychological characteristics (Lee & Ewert, 2013; Sheard & Golby, 2006). According to Lee and Ewert (2013), these positive changes are promoted by the inherent risk in adventure programmes that potentially evoke uncertainty, anxiety and dissonance. This corresponds to previous research explaining that learning and growth take place when people are in a state of dynamic tension (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002). Personal empowerment, therefore, occurs through controlled exposure to challenging experiences, whereby individuals develop advantageous character strengths (Bowen & Neill, 2013; Daniel, Bobilya, Kalisch, & McAvoy 2014; Sheard & Golby, 2006).

When taking part in ABEL, learning occurs when individuals are taken out of their comfort zones and into a psychological stretch zone where they become aware of their personal boundaries (Human, 2012). Although this learning process may show variation from one individual to the next, Fletcher and Hinkle (2002) describe the following general phases: At the beginning of an ABEL programme, the benefits are first realised in the form of a raised awareness of the

relationship with nature and an increasingly undemanding attention to one's environment. A feeling of tranquillity and an increase in self-confidence appear as the second benefit. Lastly, a benefit of the adventure part, described as "personal contemplation", can lead to uncovering a different self and a new intensity regarding one's contact with nature (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002). McKenzie (2000) found that the contrast provided by an unknown environment can allow the participants to acquire new perspectives on the known environments of everyday life. Moreover, the importance of the unfamiliar environment also lies in the fact that a state of dissonance occurs as it creates a constructive level of anxiety, a perception of risk and a sense of the unknown. By overcoming this dissonance through mastering the environmental tasks, it has been found that the participants experience personal growth benefits (McKenzie, 2000). Bandura (1997) explains that "successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy" and that "a resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort" (McKenzie, 2000). By exposing them to appropriate levels of challenging activities, the ABEL programmes are typically structured for mastery, and success is not only possible, but probable (McKenzie, 2000; Sheard & Golby, 2006). In contrast, despite the significance of success, it appears failure is also important to the achievement of positive outcomes. Bandura (1997) explains that some setbacks and difficulties play a beneficial role in one's understanding that sustained effort is mostly necessary for success. With reference to grit, Von Culin, Tsukayama and Duckworth (2014) agree that any focused interest continued over time will have both gratifying rewards and unpleasant adversities and that perseverance and consistency of effort facilitate the successful achievement of long-term goals. Also, being aware of boundaries can lead to accomplishing goals effectively, which, in turn, authenticate new goals leading to further success (Sheard & Golby, 2006).

An underlying principle of ABEL is the process of reflection on the adventure experience, where participants become self-aware as a first step toward the change of behaviour. The boundaries are further extended when this personal learning process, created through adventure activities, is transferred to other areas of life (Human, 2012).

In essence, the challenging nature of adventure activities represents an important underlying aspect of outdoor adventure programmes fostering growth and change. Norton et al. (2014) and Bloemhoff (2016) reiterate that action, reflection and integration are incorporated as the key elements of the learning process, where adventure is the basis of the experiential milieu. In turn, the adventure component of ABEL engages the motivation and interest of the participants and develops the determination to persevere when situations become complicated (Sibthorp & Jostad, 2014). As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) concludes, “challenge gives people vision and direction, focus and perseverance” (p. 17), which in fact is a statement that strongly refers back to the concept of grit.

1.6 Relevance of the study

Fletcher and Hinkle (2002) are of the opinion that many individuals have inherent qualities which are often suppressed by the other facets of modern life. Hill, Burrow and Bronk (2014) further report that during emerging adulthood, individuals may start to commit to a purpose, which can serve as an incitement for the development of personality traits. The utilisation of an ABEL programme as a developmental intervention might be an efficient way for peer helpers to recognise and understand their own strengths, weaknesses and personal resources (Sheard & Golby, 2006), more specifically regarding the promotion of their grit. Grit can be crucial to the success of 21st-century learners (Shechtman, DeBarger, Dornsife, Rosier & Yarnall, 2013) and, hypothetically, also for the voluntary peer helper.

Although research strongly supports the value of ABEL interventions for the enhancement of psychological strengths, a recent literature search showed only limited research findings in the South African context (EBSCOhost, 18 October 2017). More specifically, the potential impact of such interventions on the participants' grit has not received sufficient research attention. Especially within the peer helper programme, an increased understanding of the value of an ABEL programme

for the facilitation of the individuals' grit could prove beneficial in terms of overcoming the numerous challenges they may face in successfully reaching their objectives.

The aim of the current study is to explore and describe the subjective experiences of the peer helpers' participation in an ABEL programme from the perspective of grit. This will serve to deepen the understanding of the extent to which the participants call upon their grit during these activities and how, if at all, grit may be improved or developed during the participation in ABEL programmes. A better understanding of the importance of ABEL to help develop character strengths, and specifically grit, in the South African context may thus be helpful for future intervention programmes (Park et al., 2012; Strydom, Pretorius & Joubert, 2012).

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CHAPTER 2
MANUSCRIPT FOR EXAMINATION

Manuscript Title, Authors and Addresses

Peer helpers' experience of participation in an adventure-based experiential learning programme: A
grit perspective

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Abstract

The study focused on the adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL) component of the North-West University peer helper training programme. The aim of this study was to explore and describe the subjective experiences of the peer helpers after their participation in an adventure-based experiential programme from a grit perspective. A total of 26 peer helper students of the North-West University, both male and female, participated in the study. A qualitative research approach with a case study research design was used. The participants completed daily reflective diaries for the duration of the three-day adventure-based experiential learning programme. After three months of performing their duties as peer helpers, the same individuals participated in three separate focus group interviews. Themes were identified through inductive analysis and these themes were discussed regarding their relevance to the concept of grit. The main themes that emerged from both phases of data collection include

intra-, inter-, and transpersonal/transcendent aspects. Within these main categories, the participants reflected and called upon various character strengths, and their reflections regularly referred to elements of grit. It was concluded that adventure-based experiential learning, due to its unique nature and demands, may facilitate personal growth on various levels and more specifically, may lead to the improvement and/or development of grit.

Keywords: Peer helper, experience, participation, adventure-based experiential learning, grit

2.1 Contextualisation of the research

This study focuses on the adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL) component of the peer helper training programme, conducted by the Department of Student Counselling and Development and the Recreation Sciences Department of the North-West University (NWU) in 2017.

The peer helpers attended a three-day ABEL programme, as part of their training, under the guidance and supervision of professionally trained guides who accompanied them in various activities. The activities included rock climbing and abseiling on the first day of the programme, river rafting and mountain hiking on the second day, spending an evening camping in the open veld and another hike on the last day to conclude the programme. The ABEL component is a new addition to the peer helpers' training programme, which has as a general goal the preparation of individuals for the tasks and challenges inherent to the role of a peer helper.

2.2 Introduction

Peer helper programmes have increasingly been used by universities to address the extensive range of difficulties that especially first-year students experience; they have become a valuable resource that allows university counselling centres to serve more students (Lennox Terrion & Leonard, 2010; Lee & Bush, 2003). A peer helper is a registered student who has been selected, trained and supervised to assist student counselling services in performing interpersonal helping tasks with persons of similar age or experience (De Jager, 2012). The most demanding period for fulfilling their duties is usually during the registration and orientation (R&O) programme of the first-year students, where they have to assist with providing optimal help and support with the various adjustment difficulties the first-year students may experience. As peer helping is a voluntary process and because of the sometimes excessive responsibilities placed on them, De Jager (2012) reports a number of challenges in maintaining peer helper programmes in higher education, of which the peer helpers' commitment and continued motivation have become one of the main concerns.

According to Von Culin *et al.* (2014), any focused interest continued over time will have both gratifying rewards and unpleasant adversities. Research regarding the protective effect of various character strengths during times of adversity has recently received increasing attention (Gillham *et al.*, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2004). The facilitation of such strengths has been found to oppose the development of negative symptoms, particularly for people finding themselves in challenging circumstances (Gillham *et al.*, 2011), such as the peer helpers. As one of the most recent additions to this family of strengths, the concept referred to as 'grit' has shown the individuals who possess this character strength to be less likely to swerve from their original goals in the face of adversity

(Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Defined as the character strength of passion and perseverance in the pursuit of long-term goals, even when encountering challenges or adversities (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015), grit is generally accepted as a multidimensional construct, including elements such as resilience, perseverance and commitment (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). However, no single model that distinguishes all the different components of this fairly new phenomenon currently exists. Grit is a dimension of resilience in successfully adapting to overwhelming stress and adversity, but Perkins-Gough (2013) reiterates that the reason why some individuals succeed at persisting towards their goals, while others ultimately give up, is that grit represents not only showing resilience when facing setbacks, but also remaining loyal to commitments.

Within the context of the peer helper, commitment was, in the past, often only maintained through incentives (e.g. stipends, food) (De Jager & Ntlokwana, 2011). Showing grit, however, means having an intrinsic, future-orientated motivation to stay on one's course in the long term, even in the absence of any tangible reward or clear indicators that the hard work is paying off (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). It could, therefore, be argued that in order for the peer helper, and ultimately the peer helper system, to function optimally, grit can be considered a fundamental characteristic.

Ris (2015) believes that grit is not a fixed quality and enunciates that it can be developed through facing adversity outside of academic traditions. Adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL) provides unique possibilities in this regard. The challenging nature of adventure activities represents an important underlying aspect of outdoor adventure programmes in fostering growth and change. ABEL programmes typically incorporate a variety of adventure activities as a means of facilitating the development of physical, social and mental competencies, thereby strengthening positive psychological characteristics (Lee & Ewert, 2013; Sheard & Golby, 2006) in individuals and groups. More specific to our research, the adventure component of ABEL engages the motivation and interest of the participants and develops the determination to persevere when situations become complicated (Sibthorp & Jostad, 2014). As Csikszentmihalyi (1990:17) concludes, "challenge gives people vision and direction, focus and perseverance..." – a statement that strongly refers to the concept of grit.

Aladağ and Tezer (2009) state that the success of peer helpers mainly depends on the self-growth and skills they develop through their training programmes. ABEL, when included as part of this training, may provide opportunities for the development of a variety of character strengths (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005), including grit. Therefore, the utilisation of an ABEL programme as a developmental intervention might be an efficient way for peer helpers to recognise and understand their own strengths, weaknesses and personal resources, which could prove beneficial in

terms of the numerous challenges they may face in successfully reaching their objectives (Park *et al.*, 2012; Sheard & Golby, 2006; Strydom *et al.*, 2012).

It is hypothesised that the concept of grit, which has been identified as a character strength that is crucial to the success of 21st-century learners (Shechtman *et al.*, 2013), is important for the effective functioning of the voluntary peer helper and that ABEL interventions offer an ideal opportunity to facilitate the development of this character strength among peer helpers.

Although research strongly supports the value of ABEL interventions for the enhancement of psychological strengths, a recent literature search showed only limited research findings in the South African context (EBSCOhost, 18 October 2017) or, more specifically, on the participants' grit. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to explore and describe the subjective experiences of the peer helpers' participation in the ABEL programme from the perspective of grit.

2.3 Method of investigation

2.3.1 Research design and methods

A qualitative research approach was used for this study. According to Maree (2007) and Birchall (2014) qualitative research attempts to collect descriptive data in order to develop an understanding of how individuals construct meaning from their experiences and allows the researcher to explore descriptions, with an emphasis on the quality and depth of information. A case study research design was applied to investigate how the adventure programme, in which peer helpers participated, is experienced from a grit perspective. Case study research explores an existing phenomenon within its real-world context when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not distinctly evident (Maree, 2007). It allows the researcher to focus on a "case" and hold onto a holistic perspective, while it aims at gaining greater insight and understanding of the dynamics of a specific situation. More specifically, the present study refers to a single-case (holistic) design, because different experiences are described within one group of participants finding themselves in the same context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case study research can, therefore, be distinguished from other qualitative research methods by the fact that it is a bounded system. This is appropriately applied to this study as the researcher concentrated only on the experiences of peer helpers of the NWU with respect to an aspect of their training programme (Maree, 2007; Yin, 2014).

2.3.2 Participants and sampling

The participant group in this study was the peer helpers of the NWU (Potchefstroom Campus), who were pre-selected by the staff of Student Counselling and Development (SCD) for

the 2017 academic year. The peer helpers form part of a well-defined group of university students, who all partook in the same training programme to prepare them for their responsibilities as peer helpers. Since the participants hold a defining characteristic that is needed for the data of this study, a purposive sampling method (a form of non-random sampling) was used in the selection of the participants, thus, with a specific purpose in mind (Maree, 2007). The main aim for purposive sampling is the selection of a small number of people whose information will generate an in-depth understanding of the people, programme and situation involved (Yilmaz, 2013). Permission for data to be collected from the participants, specifically regarding their experiences of the ABEL component of their training programme, was obtained from the acting director of SCD – the principal gatekeeper of the peer helpers – as well as from the Dean of Students (now Director Student Life) at the NWU. Further discussions were held with the staff members involved in the training of the peer helpers (as secondary gatekeepers to the peer helpers), as well as the staff responsible for the ABEL programme. The training included the total population of 31 peer helpers, both male and female. The final sample size consisted of 26 participants, 11 of which were male and 15 female, who all voluntarily agreed to participate in the research.

2.3.3 Data collection

After the group of peer helpers was selected by the staff of SCD, informed consent was obtained from the participants. Data regarding the individuals' experience of their participation in the ABEL component of their training programme was collected in two phases – during, as well as after their training had taken place. The first phase required the participants to complete a reflective diary on a daily basis for the duration of the three-day ABEL programme. The diaries provided some guidance on the reflective process in order to make it as easy as possible for the participants, without providing too much structure that may potentially restrict the nature of data obtained. The diary entry started with *“My experience of today”*, with adequate space provided for the participants to reflect on their own experiences in writing. Two incomplete sentences followed: *“My favourite part of today's adventure activity...”* and *“What I have learned about myself...”*.

After they had completed their training and the participants performed their duties as peer helpers for a period of three months, the researcher conducted focus group interviews. Focus groups provide the opportunity for interaction between the participants to both question and explain themselves to one another, creating an active synergy (George, 2012; Morgan, 1996). Morgan (2013) recommends that a focus group preferably consists of six to ten individuals. Therefore, three focus group interviews were conducted, consisting of eight to ten individuals each, which lasted for approximately 60 minutes each. The questions of the focus group interviews were structured to obtain an informed understanding of the participants' experiences, as well as the possible personal

growth or added value of their participation in the ABEL programme to their current roles as peer helpers (see Appendix A). These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with the participants' permission.

2.3.4 Data analysis

Thematic analysis can be described as the groundwork method of qualitative analysis, aimed at identifying and analysing patterns in the content (Clarke & Braun, 2013). In the current study, this was done through the process of inductive data analysis. The main purpose of inductive analysis of the data is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes and to develop concepts or a model inherent in raw data (Maree, 2007; Thomas, 2003). By using an inductive approach to thematic analysis, several steps need to be taken in order to analyse the data effectively (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Firstly, the researcher thoroughly familiarised herself with the data from the diaries and focus group interviews after it had been transcribed. The researcher became immersed in the transcriptions to generate initial codes by means of documenting where and how patterns occur and reoccur. Themes were then constructed from the patterns in the data relevant to the research question. After reviewing the themes, the researcher defined and further refined each theme and wrote a detailed analysis of each (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

2.3.5 Trustworthiness

The model proposed by Tracy (2010) was followed in order to evaluate the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings generated in this study. Explicit attention was given to all eight criteria for the quality of the qualitative data. First, a *worthy topic* was chosen. As argued in the introductory section, this type of training could help establish the positive impact of ABEL programmes on the effective functioning of peer helpers while assisting the student population in South Africa. *Rich rigour* was obtained by using multiple sources of data collection and a solid theoretical base against which to examine the data. *Sincerity* was maintained by the researcher remaining honest and transparent about own biases, goals and personal imperfections through applying self-reflexivity. *Credibility* was ensured by providing comprehensive descriptions, concrete detail and explanations of knowledge, which show where the findings come from, rather than merely reporting it (Ellingson, 2009). *Resonance* was ensured by the findings of the study, which can both theoretically and practically be extrapolated beyond the immediate setting and transferred to other contexts or situations. The study stands to make a *significant contribution* by potentially extending knowledge about the value of grit with regard to the effective functioning as a peer helper at a South African university. *Ethics* was a priority throughout the study and ethical

principles were followed in all the relevant areas (see next section). *Meaningful coherence* was also obtained by ensuring that the data collection methods were suitable and provided the best possible chance to achieve the aims and objectives of the study successfully.

2.3.6 Ethical considerations

Before the participants were invited to participate in the research study, ethical approval was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the NWU (ethics approval number NWU-00361-16-A1). Throughout the entirety of the study, the researcher adhered to the ethical guidelines of the North-West University's Health Research Ethics Committee (NWU-HREC) as well as the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA: Health Professions Act 56 of 1974).

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from both the acting director of SCD and the NWU Dean of Students. All the relevant information was provided to the participants beforehand and written informed consent (administered by an independent mediator) was obtained after an opportunity was given to clarify any uncertainties that prospective participants might have had. A unique ethical matter in focus group interviews involves the concept of partial confidentiality due to the nature of focus groups (Morgan, 2013). Rules and limitations regarding confidentiality were, therefore, discussed with the group beforehand and were also included in the informed consent. Respecting the confidentiality, privacy and rights of all the participants was of key importance throughout the research process. They were also reminded that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences (prior data analysis).

2.4 Results

Following the completion of each phase of data collection, the themes and subthemes were explored and categorised into the following main categories: *intra-*, *inter-*, and *transpersonal/transcendent* aspects (see Figure 1). The data gathered from the participants' reflective diaries during the ABEL programme and data from the focus group interviews conducted after they have performed their duties as peer helpers for a few months, were analysed separately. However, during the data analysis, there were a significant degree of overlapping between the themes that emerged and the findings will, therefore, be reported as an integration. The themes that emerged, are graphically depicted in Figure 1 and will each receive explicit attention in the description that follows.

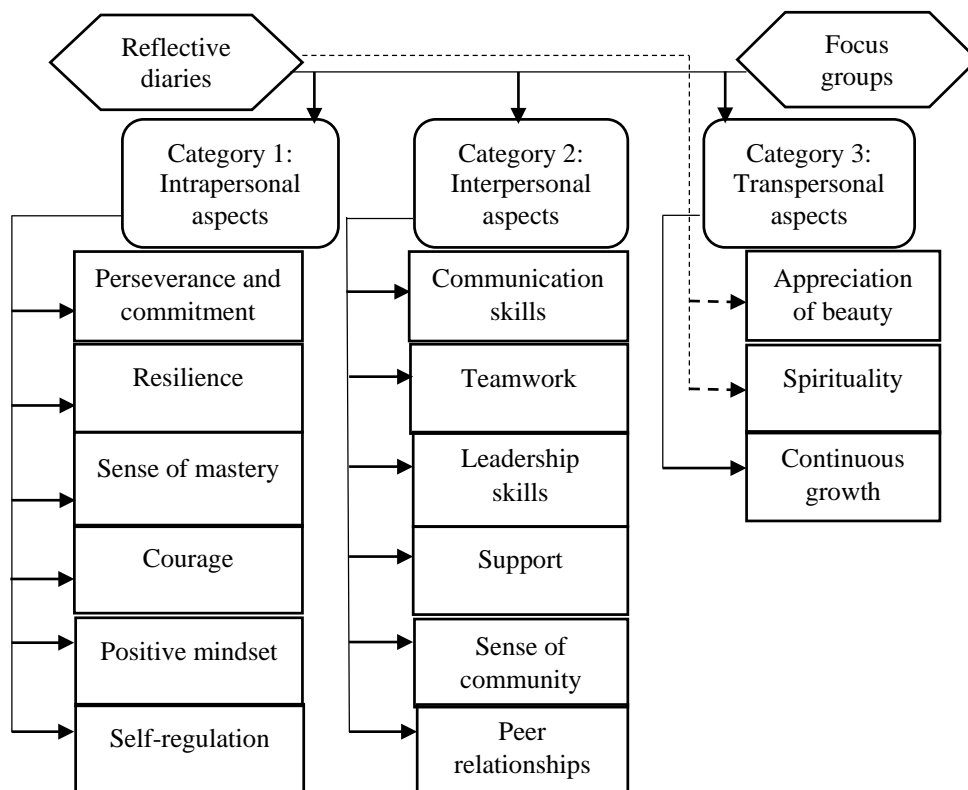


Figure 1: Themes identified regarding peer helpers' experience of participation in adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL).

2.4.1 Category 1: Intrapersonal aspects

Owing to the challenging nature of the ABEL programme, the participants' experiences involved a strong element of self-awareness which, during their reflections, were associated with the development of intrapersonal strengths. In this respect, one participant reported, *"I learned so much about myself today. Above all I realized that growth happens outside of our comfort zone. That's exactly what today was: completely out of my comfort zone."* After a few months, the participants also elucidated this profound sense of self-discovery, which was facilitated through the ABEL activities, *"For me, the adventure programme tested me a lot and I pushed myself further than I thought I can go. With that I got to know myself better... that if I don't want to go on, I must just push myself a little harder."*

The prominent themes that emerged from the participants' reflections regarding the discovery or sensitisation to their intrapersonal strengths during this intervention were ***perseverance and commitment, resilience, a sense of mastery, courage, positive mindset and self-regulation***.

While they were tested and stretched to their limits, it is evident from the participants' remarks that the challenging nature of the adventure activities was a test of their physical endurance and consequently served as a strong metaphor for the discovery and improvement of their own

perseverance and commitment. Some of them also accentuated a feeling of satisfaction that was brought about from showing persistence in completing an activity. The participants stated the following,

“I realized that although a breather is extremely important, that the best is to bite on your teeth, to stand up and to go on if you are tired. Keep on going... don’t stop.”

“What I have learned about myself is that when I want to do something then I will do it and finish it to the best of my abilities.”

When reflecting on their experience of the ABEL component after spending three months in their roles as peer helpers, the participants’ experiences of the ABEL activities, especially the challenging nature of the river rafting and hiking, again elicited responses on their perseverance and commitment in the achievement of goals. The participants remarked,

“I have learned – especially at the rapids that sometimes something looks really difficult and you are maybe scared to go through the situation, but... you will do everything in your power to get through it and when you get to the other side you then realize that it wasn’t that bad after all... to just stay motivated and keep on going because you will get through it...”

“... I just realized that ‘never stop until you’re at the top’ (laughing). But like really, it’s like one of those things... often you go and then it is almost at the end... then you are already tired and like a little bit over it, you just want to finish. But to realize you must go all out until you are done... until you achieved your goal.”

Together with their capability to persevere, the participants became aware of their capacity to show **resilience** when faced with obstacles. One participant remarked, *“I realized that I can still function well through tough times”*, while another one emphasised, *“If things get tough and difficult, don’t just seek the negative. Look for the positive and use it for your next step.”* This ability to show resilience while coping with demanding situations was associated with the person’s adaptability.

“There were certain things we knew about the camp but there were many things we didn’t know either, so you had to be able to adjust. If you couldn’t adapt easily, you learned to adapt. And it is a very cool thing, because life throws a lot of times things you did not think was going to happen and then you must cope with it... go on.”

From the above reflections, it is apparent that by doing the things that seemed impossible at first, the participants often surprised themselves in a positive way and eventually experienced a **sense of mastery**. *“My experience of today was very empowering. I did things I never thought I will be able to do.”* Some participants explained it in terms of exceeding their expectations. *“We limit*

ourselves by our thoughts, but above it all we are capable of so much more. Overall the adventure camp made me grow as a person. I have exceeded my expectations.”

These feelings of accomplishment were often strongly associated with a call on the participants’ **courage** and thereby also conquering their fears. After their experiences of and behaviour during challenging activities, one participant, for example, mentioned the physical and mental intensity of the river rafting and stated her learning experience as follows,

“What I have learned was to take it on and finish it and not to avoid the problem because it seems impossible. Rather use every moment of fear as an opportunity to learn and get to know another part of yourself and with that to enjoy the moment.”

Another participant reflected on the same component of the ABEL programme as follows, *“Today I have learned that I am stronger and braver than I thought. At times, I was in the water before the difficult parts – I was very scared and did not think I could do it, but I did it every time.”*

After a few months, during the focus group interviews, the participants associated their determination and courage with choosing to implement a positive frame of mind. They explained that a good attitude and a **positive mindset** was a crucial factor in following through with the adventure activities,

“Yet again... it is one of those things that it comes back to a positive attitude... you can partially choose if you will enjoy something or will not enjoy it. Like when we... it was the last day of hiking when we came to that moment we didn’t know whether we are going straight on the road or are we going up the mountain... then they told us okay no, we are going up the mountain, with our bags and everything. Then I was just like... ‘okay, okay, now I must choose, am I going to be negative now or do I go for it?’ So, it was just one of those things that you realize again how you approach something will determine how it will be for you in the end. And it was... when we were on top, the view was... it was really worth the effort.”

Another participant put it as follows, *“I have learned that your brain is your strongest but also your weakest link. Because it is your mind telling you what you cannot do and it sometimes limits you, but it is also your mind that gets you through something in the end. And if you can realize yourself that you can do this, although you are not used to it, in the end you will be able to do it if you can put your mind to it.”*

The participants’ realisation of the value of a positive mindset was also associated with and built upon their ability of **self-regulation** during the ABEL programme activities. This required the intentional transformation of their thoughts, emotions and behaviour when experiencing demanding situations –

“The hiking was uphill and at times I wanted to stop and give in, but through renewing my thoughts and focusing on what is important, I could pull myself through and with help from above get to the top. Bad and tough times will follow and it is okay because after every storm there will be a rainbow.”

Another participant conveyed, *“There were moments where I had to convince myself (my thoughts) to finish the activity. I got so tired physically and I could not regulate it. But if my mind gets tired I can regulate my thoughts and with that I could overcome the physical shortages.”*

Another one remarked, *“... if you started something and you realize closer to the end that it is complicated you can always still find a way to achieve your goal. It may be different than your original plan, but it can also work – thus it is sometimes important to change your approach to something”*

During the focus group discussions, the same theme emerged. The participants reflected on acquiring patience and regulating their emotions towards other group members when confronted with discomfort. *“I have learned to be very patient. Everyone was tired and short-tempered so to still be patient with people was difficult and to stay positive because I was also tired.”*

In summary, it is apparent from the participants’ responses that intrapersonal strengths were not experienced in isolation. One participant summarised, *“I definitely came out stronger at the other end of the adventure programme.”* Another participant’s description of her learning experience illustrated the coherence between the themes quite well, *“If you are tired, persist. Look forward to reaching the top. Stay positive. Have courage. See the good in everything.”* The association between these intrapersonal themes, which emerged from the participants’ experience of the ABEL programme and the construct of grit, receives attention in the discussion of the results.

2.4.2 Category 2: Interpersonal aspects

Owing to the nature of the adventure programme, the participants often needed to function as close social entities. While most participants were focused on the intrapersonal benefits of the programme, others brought attention to the interpersonal aspects they gained from their participation in ABEL. When reporting on the most prominent aspect of her experience, one participant remarked, *“... just how you go about with other people... like your people skills that... that grow the whole time.”* These interpersonal aspects mainly involved the themes of ***communication skills, teamwork, leadership skills, support, sense of community and peer relationships.***

From the participants’ reflections, it was apparent that effective ***communication*** between the teammates was regarded an essential part of understanding one another, especially for the effective

management of challenging situations. One participant remarked, *“The river rafting was fantastic and it helped me to work on my communication skills.”* Another one acknowledged, *“When we were on the water it was great fun but it required very effective communication and we had to understand each other, where after it was much easier.”*

During the focus group discussions, the participants emphasised the importance of acquiring effective communication skills during the ABEL programme and especially that they learned to listen more attentively. Referring to the debriefing sessions, one participant remarked,

“... we were forced to communicate with each other in a certain sense. We had to report and have feedback sessions after every activity and I realized how important it is to regroup after you did something and to speak about what worked, what you struggled with... and you share your struggles, but you also share your victories and in that you can learn from each other.”

Linked to the theme of effective communication, was the participants’ realisation that conflict is sometimes an inevitable part of working through disagreements, but that effective communication plays an important role in the resolution of that conflict –

I tend to think that I should avoid conflict situations (like with the river rafting). Me and my teammate fought about how and when to row. Conflict or to differ from someone is not a bad thing, and it doesn’t mean that the relationship with the person took a knock. It is possible to differ, and sometimes necessary.

Linked with communication as a key aspect of working together effectively, the participants experienced the importance of **teamwork**. One participant conveyed,

“I have realized the importance of teamwork. We would have flipped over the boat if me and my teammate didn’t work together to conquer the rapids. It was great to see how important inspiration is. I would have been much slower with the rowing if my teammate didn’t paddle as incessantly.”

Working as part of a team, the participants also learnt acceptance of interpersonal diversity. One participant remarked, *“It was good to realize that you can work nicely with anyone, regardless age or other factors. You should just view them as the type of person he/she is.”*

Through these teamwork opportunities, the peer helpers also developed their **leadership skills**. One participant mentioned, *“I have learned a lot of lessons about how to act as a leader and supporter for others.”* Another participant’s experience could be considered a form of servant leadership, *“The camp has taught me that I find joy in helping others through tough times so that I can experience them smiling afterwards.”*

Within the interpersonal category of themes, the participants also learned to accept or receive **support** from the collective (i.e. other group members). Moreover, they became aware of

the value of a support network to get through troubled times. *“I think you should have support from the right people, then you can do anything.”* This awareness of how support contributed to their ability to succeed was still a strong theme that emerged from their responses during the focus group interviews. *“I think community is just really important and I realized it there. I didn’t realize what the importance of it is in your life, to have a support network... and I only realized it on the camp.”*

By working as a peer helper for three months, support played an imperative role to them. They explained that their interpersonal understanding regarding others’ emotions and behaviour increased through their participation in ABEL:

“I also think, the fact that we saw each other out of our comfort zones so much and how it affected us, helped us to support the HC (house committee) members because they were also out of their comfort zones... they never did the things they had to do: getting the first years at certain places, arranging things etc. They never did such things before. So, to also support them through it because you know now how to support someone who is out of their comfort zone.”

Another participant added,

“I think the fact that the camp tested us a lot... up to a point where you felt you don’t want to go on... it has taught us empathy, especially with the first years during the R&O period. That if they tell us they can’t go on anymore, we know we went through similar experience and how to motivate them... and that they must keep going.”

The support the participants initially experienced as part of the ABEL component of their training was also strongly associated with the **sense of community** they conveyed. During the ABEL programme, an interdependence was formed between the group members and the participants started to experience the value of belonging to a group.

I think what contributed to my ability to keep on going and to persevere was because I was not alone in it, but that the whole group suffered together and especially that motivated me to go on and finish. I internalised the motivation around me and with that drove myself.

After a few months, the participants acknowledged the impact of the ABEL programme on the enhancement of their group cohesion as peer helpers, who were representing different residences, which led to this sense of community they still experienced within the peer helper group as a whole. One participant reported,

“You see them as a co-peer helper, not as someone in a certain residence. So, you look away from... you see each other by the name... as another friend, a peer helper... not a residence member. And I think that the camp helped with that a lot, because without the camp we wouldn’t have known one another.”

Another participant remarked,

“Uhm... sometimes we are... uh... the peer helper group is in a professional capacity. And it feels to me as if you sometimes just go about in a professional capacity with each other and then it is that cold friction of ‘I don’t really know you.’ But the moment when you get to know each other on such personal level it helps that you function more optimally in a professional capacity as well.”

The participants accentuated that this sense of community and reciprocal support gave rise to the development of trust, which created an opportunity of forming strong, unique and close **peer relationships**. *I think if everything was just nice and easy we wouldn’t have bonded, but in tough times you try to support each other and we built another bond this way.* This was still evident after a few months of working as peer helpers. The participants again reported that the unique environment, and sometimes stressful circumstances, allowed them to form **relationships** with one another that might not otherwise be possible – *“There were... you got to know people... and it wasn’t just like knowing them by seeing them... but you’ve sweat with each other through tough times for three days.”* Even more, the participants valued that the adventure programme created the opportunity for the development of friendships. They could afterwards still relate to one another about the struggles they encountered in being peer helpers. One participant mentioned, *“...and... it carries over in circumstances because you know you face the same trials. So, you understand each other and it creates a platform for really deep friendships...”*.

The association between these interpersonal themes and the participants’ grit receives more attention in the discussion section.

2.4.3 Category 3: Transpersonal/Transcendent

The participants’ reflections in a number of cases went beyond intra- and interpersonal aspects, describing aspects of their experiences during the programme that also transcended their current personal functioning and context. The main themes that emerged from the data in this regard were the **appreciation of beauty**, **spirituality** and **continuous growth**.

The participants valued being close to nature and, as a result, the expression of their **appreciation of the beauty** of their surroundings was quite a strong theme that emerged from the data. One participant portrayed her admiration of the sunset, *“Today got me in love with nature! As I am writing this I am admiring an indescribable sunset – the last beams are giving every cloud a silver lining.”* Another participant described this closeness to nature as follows, *“Exhausting, nice, challenging, exciting. It was a day of falling into the river and surviving rapids to sitting peacefully and quiet in the veld and realize how amazing things are. I learned that I love to see the beauty in everything. Sometimes one should just pause and take life in.”*

In relation to their appreciation of nature, the participants reflected the realisation of their significance as being part of something much bigger, which added a sense of meaning to their experiences. One participant remarked, *“To sit on top of the mountain and to see the view helped me remember that we are part of something much bigger.”* This clearly led to experiences of **spiritual upliftment**. Some participants expressed it in terms of a religious experience and made specific reference to the value of their religious beliefs in conquering challenging situations:

“... I was beyond my human strength and the power of God carried me through... By focusing on God’s grace, I could overcome one of the most difficult challenges.”

“My favourite part of it all was being one with nature all day and just spending time in God’s amazing creation! I encountered God on such a personal level...”

A significant aspect of the participants’ reflections that illustrates the transcendent nature of their experiences, was their perception of an important and **continuous growth** process. During the ABEL programme, the participants often emphasised that the ABEL component of their training allowed them to step beyond their regular response to a situation and how this learning experience served as a metaphor, which aided in the expansion of their perspectives regarding future situations and different contexts. Its applicability to life, in general, is powerfully illustrated through a very simple experience related to the following quotes:

“My favourite part was when we fell off the boat. Although it was uncomfortable and unpleasant, I have learned a lot from it. Life is difficult and there will be days that we will fall off the boat, but in such times, we should stay focused on the solution and not the problem. The bad things let us appreciate the good.”

“Today was challenging, but nice. The moment when I saw the view from the top of the mountain, I forgot about the tough climbing. Life is a climb, but the view is great! Thus, I have learned that it is necessary to just go on, no matter how discouraged you feel. In the end, the results will be worth the effort.”

Some of them considered the benefits of this growth and learning process more specifically with regard to their roles as peer helpers in the coming year. Some participants remarked,

“The camp has taken me out of my normal comfort zone and helped me to grow into a more conscious person in terms of other’s emotions, weaknesses and strengths.”

“River rapids... gave me an idea of my role as a peer helper. I feel that when I speak to someone I must handle it the way I handled the river rafting. The rapid is the difficult situation, the boat is God or the staff of SCD that will help the person through the situation and I can only climb into the boat through giving empathy and support and helping steer through it by showing the way, but I cannot be the boat.”

Other participants shared their experiences according to their expectations of the registration and orientation (R&O) programme lying ahead, which is the most challenging period.

“Rock climbing – there I have noticed the obvious, that you first must get over the difficult part before you can enjoy the best times. For example, R&O is the rock climbing and abseiling is the student experience. Both adventure activities of the day reflected the uncertainty and challenges of R&O.”

“I think in R&O there will come a time where first years and HC and me also will be tired and negative. After this adventure camp, I am SURE I will still be able to go on and motivate others, because this was much worse and I could still go on... You are probably never 100% sure what awaits, but I am definitely more equipped than 3 days ago.”

Three months after the intervention, the participants were already able to affirm how these experiences benefited them on a personal level and equipped them for their roles as peer helpers – making the sustainability of the learning experience apparent. Importantly, as illustrated by the following quotes, the participants seemed to continue this process of self-discovery after the programme has reached its conclusion:

“I think what I also learned about myself... especially with the abseiling, is that I wasn’t afraid or anything and I did it quickly, but then I realized I do a lot of things in my life quickly just to get it done with and I don’t stop to see what is going on around me... I often do things quickly and then I don’t always see the beauty in the things around me...”

“I learned to get to a place where I must tell myself, ‘you know what, I know you want to pull through and you want to finish, because you don’t want to disappoint the people around you, but your body can’t go any further now’ ... like your mind can, but your body can’t... to also have a good balance between those two things, otherwise you will get hurt in some or other way... either physically or emotionally. So, it was for me... in life I have learned a huge thing there. In R&O I got to a place where I told myself, ‘okay you know what, emotionally you can’t do it now... yes, physically you can and you will, but just quickly go back to... that place again where you should get a balance between those two things again... and know where your boundaries are’.”

At the same time, it became clear that the participants had the ability to apply the skills they have learnt in context-specific situations and that they could transfer the learning from one context to another. One participant explained,

“Like I think... I wish every first year can go on a camp like this, because it really equips you, it changes your perception... you see things in a whole different way... just because of 3 days that you were out of your comfort zone. Because what I think about the whole time what we learned is that there is a comfort zone, a growth zone and a panic zone and to stay

in the comfort zone will get you nowhere, so you should climb into your growth zone and run with it. And that is what I got out of it... to realize to be out of your comfort zone is okay, because that is where the magic happens.”

The significance and the relevance of these themes to the construct of grit receive more attention in the following section.

2.5 Discussion

The current study was done within the context of the peer helper training programme of the North-West University (NWU). Peer helping is becoming an important resource for promoting the wellness of the general student population in higher education (Budge, 2006). As peer helping is a voluntary process, one of the main concerns in maintaining the peer helper programme has become the students' commitment and continued motivation to complete certain compulsory tasks, responsibilities or actions included in their roles (De Jager, 2012), which require the presence of 'grit'. The question arises whether the aspects of the peer helpers' training could potentially be used to facilitate the development of this character strength among the peer helpers. The aim of the research is, therefore, to explore and describe the subjective experiences of the peer helpers during and after their participation in a training programme that included an ABEL component, specifically from a grit perspective.

Extensive attention has been given to the construct of grit in the past decade (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Ris, 2015; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). Considered one of the latest additions to the strength-based approach, the proponents of this construct suggest that grit can be learned (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Ris, 2015). The same author also recommends ABEL interventions, like those typically presented by organizations like Outward Bound International, as intervention possibilities for the facilitation of grit in individuals. However, this suggestion has, until now, not received the research attention it deserves.

Grit is a multidimensional construct that is defined as perseverance and passion towards the accomplishment of long-term goals, despite the sometimes inevitable adversities or setbacks (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). A number of the themes that emerged from the analysis of the peer helpers' experience of the ABEL component of their training programme and which have been categorised into intra-, inter-, and transpersonal/transcendent aspects, bear a strong resemblance to the above definition of grit.

2.5.1 Intrapersonal aspects

From the themes identified and described in the results section, it is evident that the participants' experiences of being out of their comfort zones at various times during the ABEL

programme, led them to a greater sense of awareness. The participants were stretched in terms of their personal boundaries and, as a result, became more aware of their strengths. A number of specific strengths that came to the fore, included perseverance and commitment, resilience, a sense of mastery, courage, a positive mindset and self-regulation.

The participants were challenged in terms of their physical endurance, and accordingly discovered and developed their *perseverance* and sense of commitment. Ris (2015) states that the basic theme of grit is one of persistence in the face of challenge. Likewise, Christensen and Knezak (2014) regard the perseverance of effort as a vital component of grit, which entails overcoming setbacks to conquer a challenge. The participants' reports that the challenging activities inherent to the programme forced them to find ways to stay motivated and to persist cognitively towards their end goal, mirror those of Sheard and Golby (2006), who reported that a high *commitment* level reflects the propensity of being involved in what one is doing, rather than withdrawing. Grit entails sustainable commitment when encountering adversity towards the attainment of goals (Eskreis-Winkler *et al.*, 2014). In summary, perseverance involves the evidence of purposeful and continuous commitment, capturing the essence of grit (Dukworth *et al.*, 2007).

Another character strength that frequently found expression in the participants' self-reported experiences of the ABEL programme, is *resilience*. As mentioned in the introduction, grit entails showing resilience when faced with adversity (Perkins-Gough, 2013). The participants' experiences of showing resilience also involved adaptability and a *positive mindset*, as reported in the results. This is related to the participants' experiences of applying more effort and adopting positive approaches to overcome the challenges. O'Brien and Lomas (2016) found that a person's mindset has immense implications for producing successful outcomes in the lives of young people, which supports the study of Pappano (2013), stating that the participants' approach to learning may be an integral part of what they learn. Individuals will be able to embrace challenges and learn from failures when they have a positive mindset, while having grit entails working strenuously towards challenges, despite possible setbacks (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Reed & Jeremiah, 2017).

Apart from regulating their thoughts and behaviour, the participants reported being confronted with regulating their emotions as well. *Self-regulation* adds value through self-generated thoughts, emotions and actions, which are purposely altered to optimise the achievement of personal goals (Zimmerman, 2000). Ivcevic and Brackett (2014) consider grit as a self-regulating trait. They clarify that to achieve challenging goals requires working hard and the ability to control impulses and to manage emotions, which are related to the pursuit of goals. On the other hand, grit is comprised of self-control, motivation and a positive mindset (Pappano, 2013).

Another important outcome of the participants' experiences during the ABEL programme, was the *courage* they gained in overcoming or facing their fears. Courage is the ability to perform

an action by overcoming fear. In turn, when having to persist at a task, grit is the courage of overcoming the fear of failure (Lucas *et al.*, 2015).

When combining the above-mentioned character strengths, which all formed part of the intrapersonal aspects of the participants' experiences, the large degree to which the participants' experiences reflected the essence of grit becomes clear. Goodwin and Miller (2013) consider perseverance, tenacity, resilience, stamina and persistence as synonyms for grit. Each of these concepts could be independently regarded as a predictor of success, but a greater effect may result from the combination of qualities (Reed & Jeremiah, 2013), yet again showing the multidimensionality of grit.

2.5.2 Interpersonal aspects

Interpersonal aspects that emerged from the participants' reflections on the ABEL programme, included communication skills, teamwork, leadership skills, support, sense of community and peer group relationships – all of which formed an essential part of the participants' interpersonal understanding and, ultimately, their group cohesion.

As confirmed by a study of Greffrath *et al.* (2013), the challenging circumstances of ABEL result in all the participants' experiences occurring in relation with others or with others' support. Reed and Jeremiah (2017) found that grit depends not only on what is within us, but on being in the right circumstances with people we can trust. The participants reported that by going through the same tough situations and facing the same obstacles, provided them with the opportunity to form a closer bond with one another, which resulted in the establishment of trust. Some of them explained that other people's *support* contributed to their ability to persevere, which correlates with a study of Neill and Dias (2001) explaining that experiencing challenges with a support network is positively linked to individual growth and especially effective in building psychological resilience, which – as previously confirmed – is related to grit.

According to the participants' reflections, ABEL activities also provided teamwork opportunities, which contributed to the development of *leadership skills*. Considering the importance of these leadership skills in their roles as peer helpers, the research considers grit as a stable and compound characteristic, which is shared by the most outstanding leaders in every field (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007).

While all the themes of this category could not directly relate to grit individually, it is clear that all of the interpersonal aspects in combination are imperative to the facilitation of group cohesion, which is an essential component for the development of grit.

2.5.3 Transpersonal/Transcendent aspects

Transpersonal/Transcendent aspects went beyond the participants' experience of the self and the current situation and focused on the larger context. The specific themes that emerged, represented the participants' *appreciation of being in nature, spirituality* and *continuous growth*.

Referring to ABEL, Fletcher and Hinkle (2002) indicate that being immersed in nature captivate and increase the experiences of the participants, which may improve their learning capability. *Nature*, an essential component contributing to the facilitation of change (Taylor *et al.*, 2010), also emerged in the results as an ideal context for the facilitation of grit. The participants admired the elements of nature and explained their closeness to nature as “exhausting, nice, challenging, exciting”. These descriptions match the results of Reed and Jeremiah (2017), who found that grit can be fostered through activities that challenge the participants and, at the same time, encourage them to have fun. Coupled with their appreciation of nature, the participants' experiences of their insignificance regarding nature raised feelings of relatedness with a Higher Power, which gives meaning to life, resulting in growth on a *spiritual* level. Some of them undoubtedly found grit through their religious beliefs. These experiences of the participants correspond to a study of Barton and Miller (2015) suggesting that for most people spirituality is the foundation of positive psychological traits, including grit.

During the programme, the participants described aspects of their experiences by means of metaphors, which transcended their current situation to future contexts. Reed and Jeremiah (2017) view future-mindedness as an asset of grit that helps a person to persist, even when encountering setbacks and to stay committed until he or she reaches his or her goal. Therefore, because grit promotes success, the development or deepening of this characteristic may result in greater satisfaction, which sequentially serves as feedback for the need to be gritty in the future (Hill *et al.*, 2014). This process of *continuous growth* is further illustrated by the participants' reflections a few months after their training, which were directly equivalent to their diary inscriptions during the programme. The participants clearly viewed the actions in which they were engaged during the ABEL programme as representative of the challenges that they experienced during the R&O period. They developed metaphors that form profound and meaningful links with real-life situations – in the current study, especially with relevance to grit. In this regard, it was clear that they learned about persistence in the pursuit of goals, how to be adaptable in coping with demanding situations and how to apply perseverance in other life areas. Gass (1991) report that the transfer of learning to other areas of the participants' lives is one of the distinguishing characteristics of ABEL, while Newes and Bendoroff (2004) add that the use of metaphors aids in the process of change and facilitates the transfer of learning. It is thus evident from this category of transpersonal/transcendent aspects that, during and after the ABEL programme, the participants

were able to identify the relevance and inherent benefits of their experiences and the accompanying growth process for future situations. The participants' feedback demonstrated transcendence of the ABEL experience by means of a continuous process of growth, which equipped them better for a variety of challenging situations. Furthermore, considering all the categories of the findings, the similarities between the themes that emerged from the participants' reflective diaries during the ABEL programme and the themes from the focus group interviews after they had performed their duties as peer helpers for a few months, clarified the sustainability of the learning experience.

2.6 Conclusion

The aim of this research study was to describe, from a grit perspective, the subjective experiences of the peer helpers during, as well as after, their participation in an adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL) programme. The results correspond with previous research that showed ABEL to be a successful intervention in the facilitation of intra- and interpersonal aspects of development (Priest & Gass, 2005; Sheard & Golby, 2006; Sutherland & Stuhr, 2012). In addition, the results indicated growth beyond the self and beyond the present moment to represent a transpersonal/transcendent aspect, which played an important part in the participants' self-reported growth. These main categories were prominent in both phases of data collection, confirming the sustainability of the growth process initiated during the intervention.

The peer helpers' experience of participation in an ABEL programme not only showed a strong association with the facilitation of grit, but also illustrated how an increased understanding of grit could be transferred to other areas of life. The participants' reflections suggested that the challenges faced in an ABEL intervention early in their training programme increased their commitment as peer helpers, which, in turn, could enhance the effectiveness of existing student counselling services at universities (Hsi & Chung, 2010). Grit has, however, been found to constitute more than merely work ethic, as it appears to be a character strength that affects all the areas of a person's life (Reed & Jeremiah, 2017). Therefore, apart from their functioning as peer helpers, increases in grit could also increase the academic performance, professional success, lifetime educational achievement, life goals and well-being of these participants (Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Eskeis-Winkler *et al.* 2014).

It is, therefore, strongly suggested that quantitative follow-up studies are done to empirically investigate the significance of the associations suggested by this exploratory study. An additional recommendation would be to create a participant group through random assignment to include participants from diverse ethnic or language groups in order for the research population to be more representative of the larger peer helper population in the diverse context of South Africa.

In conclusion, the findings of the current study suggest that grit, which represents a potentially significant strength within the context of the peer helper at South African universities, could be strongly influenced by participation in an ABEL programme. The inclusion of an ABEL component in the peer helpers' training furthermore shows the potential to empower the participants in the long term through the transfer of its effect on grit into other life contexts.

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CHAPTER 3

CRITICAL REFLECTION

3.1 Introduction

The current research study focused on the adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL) component of the North-West University (NWU) peer helper training programme of 2017, conducted by Student Counselling and Development (SCD). The peer helpers attended a three-day ABEL programme, as part of their training, under the guidance and supervision of professionally trained guides. Activities during the course of the programme included the following: With arrival on the first day participants were divided into two groups in order to participate in two different activities on a rotating basis. The one group had an introduction to paddling and participated in water games with inflated rafts on the river. At the same time the other group went rock climbing and abseiling on a ten-meter artificial abseiling wall. The second day of the programme involved a 15 km river rafting session which was completed around lunch time. After this, food was distributed for a mountain excursion. All of the participants packed their own backpacks and prepared for this excursion, after which they did a 5 km hike into the mountain to their overnight site. Upon arrival participants had to set up camp, and had to prepare their own food. On the last day, participants went on an early morning hike of about 8 km back to basecamp to conclude the programme.

Since it was the first year SCD incorporated ABEL in the training programme of the peer helpers, the research was conducted to extend knowledge about the significance of such programme with regard to the role of being a peer helper in South African universities. In accordance, the study may also be used as a possible pilot study for future ABEL interventions on the student population of the NWU, thus raising awareness of the potential positive impact of ABEL on the effective functioning of the student population in South Africa. In this chapter, a critical reflection regarding the strengths and limitations of the research process is discussed, with the inclusion of the researcher's personal reflection.

3.2 The decision-making process

When initially deciding on the topic for the research, various role-players were involved. Discussions had to be arranged with the acting head of SCD, staff members involved in the training of the peer helpers, as well as colleagues from recreation sciences. The research process thus required the researcher and her study leader to collaborate with a team in discussing and deciding upon the logistics of the study. Several meetings were held in this regard, as it was the first attempt to incorporate ABEL in the peer helpers' training programme. Although the multifaceted nature of this research process, as a part of the initiation of ABEL, required effective planning, it offered clear advantages in balancing the theory with the practical feasibility of the research (Shneiderman, 2016).

3.2.1 Research design

The study made use of a case study research design. This is considered a relevant design for the present study as the peer helpers form part of a well-defined group of university students participating in the same training programme (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The qualitative research approach was, therefore, deemed appropriate to explore descriptions of participants' experiences to develop an understanding of the potential positive impact of ABEL programmes in the different life contexts of university students.

It is strongly suggested that quantitative follow-up studies are done to empirically investigate the significance of the associations suggested by this exploratory study.

3.3 Participants

The participants of the research study consisted of the peer helpers of the NWU, pre-selected by staff of SCD. This should be considered a possible drawback, as the researcher was not able to create a participant group through random assignment, resulting in the group of participants not being representative of the larger peer helper population in South Africa.

An additional factor that could have influenced the results, is that participants were all from the same ethnic and/or language group. Although the final sample size consisted of both male and female students, it is suggested that future research choose a sample that include participants from diverse ethnic or language groups to make the research population more representative within the diverse context of South African universities.

3.4 Data collection

The two methods of data collection proved to be sufficient in gaining an understanding of participants' experiences of the ABEL component of their training. In accordance, Zainal (2007) emphasises the importance of a reflective component to not let biased interpretation influence the direction of the findings. Using a data source in written format, in combination with verbal discussions, served to enhance the richness and the trustworthiness of the data gathered.

3.4.1 Reflective diaries

The researcher was actively involved during the ABEL programme and could thus see to it that participants complete their diaries daily during the allocated time. However, there are some suggested improvements that need to be taken into consideration in the future. On the second day, when hiking up the mountain, some participants reported that they forgot their diaries at the camp site. This resulted in them having to complete their diaries on extra paper provided to them, which could have gotten lost. Thus, the physical activities, in this instance river-rafting and hiking, may complicate the use of diaries as a data-collection method for ABEL interventions.

3.4.2 Focus group interviews

Apart from the pragmatic benefits of focus group interviews, compared to individual interviews, group discussions provide insight into complex incentives and behaviours (George, 2012; Morgan, 2013). Participants were divided into three distinct groups, which made it possible

to schedule a suitable date and time for every participant to be part of one of the groups. What also made this process easier, is that participants all lived in residences on or near campus, near the venue where the focus group interviews would be conducted. Establishing the questions beforehand, helped to limit possible bias of the research that could have prejudiced the data collection process (Krueger & Casey, 2009). During the focus group interviews, all participants were actively involved in the discussions, although a limitation of the focus group interviews was that the more outspoken individuals initially dominated the discussions, which made it difficult to assess the viewpoints of the less assertive participants. The researcher therefore had to encourage discussion and maintain focus on the question being asked.

3.5 Data analysis and interpretation

The data analysis was a more complex and a time-consuming process because of the amount of data that were brought about from using two separate data collection methods. Multiple means of data gathering can elicit a great deal of data, which may be difficult to systematically manage and organise (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2012). Reviewing, editing and refining the themes also took time, as the themes were overlapping quite a lot. Choy (2014) confirms that the labour-intensive process of the data analysis procedure is one of the weaknesses of qualitative research. On the other hand, the researcher found that by immersing herself in the data, she could recognise patterns and identify themes that were a really satisfying part of the research process. Also, several researchers (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Greffrath, Meyer & Strydom 2013; Martin & Leberman, 2005; Romi & Kohan, 2004) prefer qualitative research to understand the true meaning of ABEL, as it minimise generalisation and infer the true meaning of the experience accurately.

Because the researcher had her own personal views regarding the effect of adventure programmes on character strengths such as grit, she had to take into consideration the impact she might have on the study and try to account for personal bias through the process referred to as “bracketing” to ensure that no personal biases play a role in the interpretation of the data.

Bracketing involves putting aside personal views regarding the phenomenon in order to increase the understanding of the unique experience of participants (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). In addition, a research psychology intern, appointed for the 2017 academic year, acted as co-coder regarding the data-analysis process.

3.6 Results

With the research findings and, especially, the sustainability of the participants' experiences, the researcher could explore to what extent the results correspond or can add to previous research. However, the most challenging part of this study was to reduce participant quotes, considering the length of the manuscript. The significance of most of the feedback made it difficult to distinguish what quotes to leave out that would not affect the quality of the results.

Overall, this study produced noteworthy and useful results that have possibly set the stage for future research regarding the use of adventure programmes as a means of preventative intervention at universities. The aim of developing character strengths such as grit, in the context of higher education, is to help students persevere when encountering challenges, increase their academic performance and improve the retention of the students. Thus, despite its inherent limitations, the approach and methodology applied within this research study were sufficient in answering the research question and in attaining the aims and objectives of this specific study.

A significant strength of this research study was the researcher's active involvement during the ABEL programme. It is considered beneficial for the researcher to not only observe participants in their engagement of the various adventure activities, but to participate with them, which provided her with more insight and a better understanding regarding the expectations and the challenges participants faced.

3.7 Personal reflection

This research process may be one of the most challenging endeavours I have had to take on, but at the same time it was a prodigious privilege to me and a valuable personal growth experience. The research itself not only expanded my knowledge and improved my academic skills, but I rediscovered my passion through putting effort and time into something I believe in. Working together with a high-quality supervisor and a team of extraordinary people contributed to the richness of the experience.

“The best journeys answer questions that in the beginning you didn’t even think to ask”

– Jeff Johnson.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

The opening question of the focus group interviews was:

“What were your experiences of participating in the adventure-based component of your training programme?”

This opening question was followed by secondary questions:

“What did you learn about yourself during the programme?”

“What value, do you feel, the adventure programme added to your role as a peer helper?”

“What experience in the last few months reminded you of your participation in the adventure programme?”

“What was the most difficult thing you had to deal with in your duties as a peer helper? How did you handle the situation?”

“What personal growth do you feel might have resulted from your participation in this adventure programme, if any?”