

Experiences of educators teaching learners who are severely intellectually challenged

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I dedicate this study to my husband and children— the joy of my life

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SUMMARY

Education can be viewed as a challenging profession, even more so for educators teaching learners with severe intellectual challenges (SIC). The diagnostic criteria of learners with SIC are a significant sub-average ability in intellectual functioning and concurrent deficiencies in adaptive behaviour such as social and daily living skills. The majority of learners with SIC display disruptive and challenging behaviour such as aggression, hyperactivity, talking inappropriately, and inappropriate sexual behaviour. Educators teaching learners with SIC are confronted, daily, with a wide range of challenges such as an excessive workload, minimal progress, and challenging behaviour displayed by the learners with SIC. The intensity of the physical and emotional challenges experienced by the educators, consequently, results in negative outcomes such as stress, burnout, high staff absences, and premature resignations. Earlier studies conducted in this field of specialisation found that educators, overall, were not very keen to teach learners with SIC. South African research conducted within this field of specialisation determined that, despite similar negative challenges, the educators did not necessarily share the pessimistic view towards this teaching environment as experienced in other countries. Local studies indicated that some educators experienced less stress and better physical health than others. The aim of the research was to gain an understanding of the nature of, and possible contextual influences on, those experiences that contributed to some educators experiencing job satisfaction and working effectively, while others did not, to ultimately present possible guiding principles to develop support systems for educators teaching learners with SIC. This qualitative study was planned from a descriptive and explorative case study design by making use of the phenomenological method of inquiry. Ethical permission to conduct the study was obtained from the North-West University. The research group consisted of six educators who perceived themselves as effective in this strenuous teaching environment, working at two selected schools for learners with SIC in the Tshwane South District, Gauteng. Data were obtained by making use of semi-structured interviews, open-ended sentences, and follow-up interviews. Data analysis and interpretation were guided by Creswell's application of Tesch's method by an in-depth analysis, identifying possible themes and topics. The various categories were identified and described. A literature control was executed in order to interpret and evaluate the data. The final step involved recounting the findings in the format of a written article. Based on the research findings, it was concluded that the participants, despite the various challenges,

experienced high levels of job satisfaction and motivation. However, the study also confirmed that specific challenges such as the behaviour that learners with SIC display and a lack of acknowledgement could have a detrimental effect on motivational levels. The literature indicated that low motivational levels have a negative impact on job satisfaction and effectiveness. The emotional wellbeing of educators was recognized to be an important determining factor towards their effectiveness and ability to cope. The need for the development of appropriate support systems to enhance the educators' emotional wellbeing was confirmed.

Keywords: job satisfaction, lived experience, motivation, self-determination theory, severe intellectual challenge.

OPSOMMING

Onderwys word as 'n hoogs uitdagende professie beskou, des te meer so vir onderwysers wat leerders met ernstige intellektuele uitdagings (EIU) onderrig. Diagnostiese kriteria van leerders met EIU is, onder meer, ondergemiddelde intellektuele vermoëns, tesame met beperkinge ten opsigte van hul algemene funksionering, byvoorbeeld hul daaglikse sosiale en lewensvaardighede. Die meerderheid leerders met EIU openbaar ontwrigtende en uitdagende gedrag soos aggressie, hiperaktiwiteit, ontoepaslike verbale uitinge en ontoepaslike seksuele gedrag. Opvoeders wat leerders met EIU onderrig, word daaglik met 'n wye spektrum van uitdagings gekonfronteer soos, onder meer, 'n hoë werkslading, gebrekkige vordering en uitdagende gedrag van die leerders met EIU. Die intensiteit van die fisieke en emosionele eise wat aan die opvoeders gestel word, het dikwels negatiewe gevolge soos spanning, uitbranding, hoë afwesigheidsyfers en vroeë uitdienstrede tot gevolg. Vroeëre studies wat in hierdie spesialiteitsveld gedoen is, het bevind dat opvoeders, oor die algemeen, nie gewillig is om leerders met EIU te onderrig nie. Suid-Afrikaanse navorsing binne die betrokke spesialiteitsveld het bevind dat opvoeders, ten spyte van soortgelyke ervarings, nie die pessimistiese uitkyk van hul oorsese eweknieë deel nie. Plaaslike studies het getoon dat sommige opvoeders minder spanning en beter gesondheid beleef as ander. Die doel van die studie was om begrip te ontwikkel ten opsigte van die omvang van, en moontlike kontekstuele invloede op, die ervarings van opvoeders wat bydra tot die verskynsel dat sommige opvoeders beter werksbevrediging en effektiwiteit beleef as ander, ten einde moontlike beginsels voor te stel vir die ontwikkeling van ondersteuningsisteme vir opvoeders wat leerders met EIU onderrig. Die kwalitatiewe studie is vanuit 'n ondersoekende en beskrywende gevallestudie-ontwerp beplan deur middel van die fenomenologiese benadering as metode van ondersoek. Etiese goedkeuring vir die studie is vooraf by Noordwes-Universiteit verkry. Deelnemers aan hierdie studie het uit ses opvoeders bestaan wat hulself as effektief binne die uitdagende situasie beskou, wat onderrig gee by twee geselekteerde skole vir leerders met EIU in Tshwane-Suid-distrik, Gauteng. Die inligting is deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude, onvoltooide sinne en opvolgonderhoude versamel. Inligting is deur middel van Creswell se "Tesch"-metode ontleed deur die data in diepte te bestudeer en moontlike patrone en temas te identifiseer. Die onderskeie temas is geïdentifiseer en beskryf. 'n Literatuurkontrolle is uitgevoer om die data te interpreteer en te evalueer. Ten slotte is betekenis aan die bevindings gegee deur die beskrywing en toeligting

daarvan in 'n artikelformaat. Op grond van die navorsingsbevindings kan aangevoer word dat die deelnemers, ten spyte van die verskeie uitdagings, tog hoë vlakke van werksbevre­diging en motivering beleef het. Die studie het egter ook bevestig dat spesifieke uitdagings soos, onder meer, die gedrag wat die leerders openbaar het en die gebrek aan erkenning as dempers vir motiveringsvlakke aangedui kan word. Die literatuur het aangedui dat lae motiveringsvlakke 'n negatiewe uitwerking op werksbevre­diging en effektiwiteit mag hê. Die belangrikheid van emosionele welstand van die opvoeders is geïdentifiseer as 'n bepalende faktor ten opsigte van hul effektiwiteit en weerbaarheid. Die behoefte aan toepaslike ondersteuningsisteme om die emosionele welstand van die opvoeders te bevorder, is met hierdie studie bevestig.

Slutelwoorde: werksbevre­diging, beleving, motivering, self-beslissingsteorie, ernstige intellektuele uitdaging.

LETTER OF PERMISSION

PERMISSION TO SUBMIT ARTICLE FOR EXAMINATION PURPOSES

I, supervisor of this study, declare that the article written by Elizabeth M. Delpont reflects the research conducted by her on the subject. I hereby grant permission that she may submit this article for examination purposes and thereby confirm that it fulfills the requirements for the degree MA in Psychology.



Prof Cecilia Bower

CONFIRMATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING



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To whom it may concern

I hereby declare that I edited the dissertation entitled "Experiences of educators teaching learners who are severely intellectually challenged", written by Leria Delport. I am an accredited editor with the South African Translators' Institute (SATI Member No.: 1000193).

Yours sincerely



Hendia Baker

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SECTION A: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Experiences of Educators Teaching Learners Who Are Severely Intellectually Challenged

In South Africa, learners with severe disabilities are accommodated in schools for learners with special educational needs (LSEN), which provide specialised education services to those requiring high levels of support (SA, 2001, p. 21). There are 104 633 learners with disabilities in South Africa (such as the visually, hearing, physically, and intellectually challenged), of whom 8 079 learners in Gauteng have been classified as learners with severe intellectual challenges (SIC) (SA, 2011b, p. 17). The learners are accommodated in 36 schools, five of which are situated in the Tshwane South District (SA, 2011a, p. 24).

Learners with SIC are frequently regarded as the most daunting challenge of all, since they require exceptionally high levels of physical and emotional support (Barlow & Durand, 2011, p. 524; Ceglowski, Logue, Ullrich, & Gilbert, 2009, p. 124). The majority of learners with SIC display disruptive and challenging behaviour such as aggression, hyperactivity, body rocking, inappropriate talking, and excessive inappropriate sexual behaviour (Linna et al., 1999, p. 77; Stores, Stores, Fellows, & Buckley, 1998, p. 228). Meeting the daily learning and behavioural needs of learners with SIC makes teaching a profession fraught with pressure (Jonker, 2005, p. 18), by some considered one of the most stressful professions (Baker, 2004; Willers, 2009, p. 5).

Based on 20 years of personal experience working as an educator in schools specialising in education for learners with SIC, the researcher has, indeed, also observed that some of the educators apparently do not have the coping resources and/or support to deal with their everyday experiences at school, while others do.

Problem Statement

Existing research on education for LSEN within the new educational dispensation in South Africa has mainly focused on the implementation of the inclusive education policy within the mainstream schooling system and its impact on educators and learners (Hendriks, 2007, p. 13; Magare, 2008, p. 26). Findings indicate that educators feel overwhelmed and unqualified (Magare, 2008, p. 26; Van Wyk, 2006, p. 2) and display high levels of apprehension (Kalenga, 2005, abstract).

With the exception of studies done by Jonker (2005), Jacobs (2006), and Olivier and Williams (2005), the researcher could only find studies conducted in other countries

regarding the experiences of individuals working with learners with SIC in an exclusive environment (Forster & Iacono, 2008; Lloyd & Hastings, 2009; McNally, Goole, & Fwaughi, 2001). These studies indicate that the long-term daily interaction and experience of the challenging behaviour displayed by learners with SIC often generate negative emotional reactions in educators (Hastings, as cited in Lambrechts, Petry, & Maes, 2008, p. 454). Consequently, these result in negative outcomes such as the failure to effectively deal with these challenging behaviours (Lambrechts et al., 2008, p. 466), stress, burnout (Devereux, Hastings, & Noone, 2009, p. 261), high staff absences, and resignations (Howard & Hegarty, 2003, p. 3).

Willers (2009, p. 5), however, established in her study that some educators, those who displayed better coping strategies, experienced less stress and better physical health than others in the same teaching environment. Researching the nature of, and possible reasons for, this variation in educators' experiences locally could make a meaningful contribution towards the existing knowledge about South African educators teaching learners with SIC. The findings might contribute to creating a better understanding of the specific challenges experienced, more specifically, the skills, strengths, and strategies utilised in meeting the challenges effectively. These data could be useful in generating guiding principles for effective educational practices within this field of specialisation. Furthermore, it would obviously be relevant not to examine educators' experiences on the factual surface only, but to attempt to explore educators' lived experiences. The concept *lived experience* stems from the phenomenological tradition (Engelsrud, 2005, p. 268) and describes the specific ways in which individuals consciously reflect on, give meaning to, and portray their experiences (Langdrige, 2008, p. 1128) or tell their life stories (Langdrige, 2008, p. 1137; Mackewn, 2007, p. 223). The intensity and meaning of the lived experience prevent it from blending in with the rest of their lives (Gadamer, as cited in Saevi & Eilifsen, 2008, p. 3).

Finally, conducting the research within a context generally regarded as challenging, such as schools for learners with SIC, could serve to focus the lens in order to make the most powerful and/or effective traits and strategies of the educators visible.

Research Question and Purpose of the Study

The primary research question that guided the study was the following:

What are the lived experiences of educators who are teaching learners with severe intellectual challenges effectively?

The primary research question was unpacked to contain the following secondary research questions:

- What are the positive experiences in teaching learners with SIC?
- What are the incidents and professional demands that are experienced as challenging in teaching learners with SIC?

The purpose of the research was to explore and describe the lived experiences of educators who were teaching learners with SIC effectively. The purpose in that was to contribute to a deeper understanding, not only of the specific challenges experienced in this particular environment of education, but also of the skills, strengths, and strategies utilised in meeting the challenges effectively. Data obtained in this study could hopefully be used to generate guiding principles for effective educational practice more broadly within the environment of SIC.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Study

In order to provide a theoretical framework for researching the lived experiences of educators teaching learners with SIC, the principles of phenomenological theory are, firstly, relevant. This study utilised phenomenological theory as a way to understand people's perceptions of, and perspectives on, their world (De Vos, Strydom, Schultz, & Patel, 2011, p. 8) and to describe the meaning that individuals gave to their "lived experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Secondly, the part that job satisfaction (Gargiulo, 2011, p. 315) and motivation (Fernet, Gruay, Sénécal, & Austin, 2012, p. 522) might play in either upholding or straining the ability to deal with the specific challenges effectively was recognised. The concepts of self-determination theory (SDT) and job satisfaction were contemplated in that regard.

The term "lived experience" originated from Husserl's theory as a means to describe the world as experienced – as lived – rather than as a world separate from the people who experience it (Langdrige, 2008, p. 1128). The primary focus of this theory is on the way things appear (Langdrige, 2008, p. 1127), the way people perceive their world, their conscious experiences of everyday life and social actions (Fouché & Schurink, 2011, p. 316), and how the individual makes sense of a specific experience or situation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 36).

By describing educators' experiences in their *lived world*, awareness is created of educators as "real people" with emotions and feelings of vulnerability, acknowledging their *humanness* (Van Manen, as cited in Saevi & Eilifsen, 2008, p. 4). Teachers invest their "selves" in their work, resulting in a merged sense of personal and professional identity

(Nias, as cited in Van Veen & Lasky, 2005, p. 895). One can, therefore, not describe the educator as a professional without considering the human behind the profession. Part of being human is acting (living), and every action implies behaviour.

Behaviour and motivation are interrelated, as behaviour is almost always motivated (Green, 2000, p. 3). Kelchtermans (as cited in Canrinus et al., 2012, p. 116) sees the level of motivation as a determining factor for an educator's sense of professional identity. Motivation derives from the Latin word "to move" (*movere*) and refers to the moving force that "energises behaviour" (Westen, 1996, p. 367), "to be moved to do something" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 45). Although there are several theoretical perspectives on motivation, for the purpose of this study, the researcher utilised the *self-determination theory* (SDT) to describe the influence motivation had on the levels of job satisfaction of the educator teaching learners with SIC. SDT is based on the work of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, who propose that humans are inherently motivated and identify three basic psychological needs that are necessary for a person to feel motivated, namely, *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness* (McCarthy, 2012, para. 5). Walsh (2011, n.p.) postulates that the level at which these psychological needs are met determines a person's level of self-determination.

Autonomy is viewed as an essential part of SDT (Fernet et al., 2012, p. 516) and refers to the opportunity to make responsible choices (Fernet et al., 2012, p. 516), being able to see the other's point of view (Deci & Ryan, 2012, p. 422), and experiencing feelings of competence (Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 332). Walsh (2011, n.p.) defines *competence* as a perceived self-belief in one's ability to perform well in an activity. According to Canrinus et al. (2012, p. 118), this feeling of self-belief (competence) positively contributes to an individual's level of intrinsic motivation. *Relatedness* is defined as a sense of shared experience, which improves when a warm and accepting atmosphere is experienced (Walsh, 2011, n.p.). According to Deaux (2001, p. 5), relatedness has an influence on most of life's aspects, from volunteering for an organisation to participating in social protest and choosing a life partner, in other words, on life as a whole. According to Ryan and Deci (2000a, p. 334), the desire to belong and feel connected (relatedness) inspires a willingness to accept values and behaviour that are held by significant others and that are necessary to generate social and professional relationships.

Gagne and Deci (2005, p. 353) identify a link between job satisfaction and motivation, as the motivational levels of an individual will have a positive or negative influence on his/her experience of job satisfaction and even job performance. Job satisfaction, according to Hoppock (as cited in Aziri, 2011, p. 77), is "any combination of

psychological, physiological, and environmental circumstances that cause a person truthfully to say ‘I am satisfied with my job’”. Mullins (2005, p. 700), on the other hand, describes job satisfaction as more of an approach, an inner state that could be associated with a person’s feeling of achievement and satisfaction with his/her own life.

The detrimental implications of the long-term daily interaction and experience of teaching learners with SIC for the educator’s level of motivation and job satisfaction were confirmed by previous research. Jacobs (2006, p. 4) and Gargiulo (2011, p. 315) state that, due to the high levels of personal investment and social interaction by educators for learners with SIC, lower levels of motivation and job satisfaction have been noticed. Similar to these findings, Lambrechts et al. (2008, p. 454) have recognised feelings of doubt among educators in their own abilities to deal effectively with these challenges. However, Strydom, Nortjé, Beukes, Esterhuyse, and Van der Westhuizen (2012, p. 255) and Williams (as cited in Jacobs, 2006, p. 102) report that some educators teaching learners with SIC experience average levels of job satisfaction and regard their occupation as fulfilling and rewarding, where others do not.

SDT provides a useful understanding of the importance of employees’ need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in order to establish not only job satisfaction, but also feelings of effectiveness and coping (Fernet et al., 2012, p. 516). These feelings have an influence not only on the educators but on the learners with SIC as well.

The foregoing discussion grounds the decision to describe the lived experiences of educators teaching learners with SIC through a phenomenological lens, acknowledging the uniqueness of each individual’s experiences.

Research Methodology

Conceptual Framework

Ontology is the starting point of all research (Grix, 2002, p. 177) and refers to the assumptions that the researcher makes about the nature of social reality (Grix, 2002, p. 177; Hill et al., 2005, p. 2). The researcher explores and describes the participants’ experiences, while taking into consideration that reality is in a constant state of revision by the individual (Grix, 2002, p. 177) and that there is no singular reality for all. The social world, according to Fouché and Schurink (2011, p. 309), is discovered through the meaning that people attach to their everyday experiences.

Epistemology focuses on the knowledge-gathering process (Grix, 2002, p. 31) and entailed, in this study, that the researcher attempted to get as close as possible to the

participants being studied in order to assemble subjective evidence (Creswell, 2012, p. 20). Utilising the appropriate methods of enquiry (Fouché & Schurink, 2011, p. 309), the phenomenological method of enquiry was employed to achieve a deep understanding of people's lived experiences. This method involved conducting one-to-one interviews with the participants and sharing their lived experiences of how they were affected by, and gave meaning to, their experiences as educators working with learners with SIC.

Axiology refers to the researcher's beliefs about the role of values in research (Creswell, 2012, p. 20). From a phenomenological researcher's point of view, the researcher tried to identify the essence of the phenomenon that was being studied (Weideman, 2007, p. 24), describing rather than explaining the subjective lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The researcher avoided biased assumptions and attempted to bracket preconceived ideas and beliefs (Langdrige, 2008, p. 1129) by writing field notes and reflective notes and translating the interviews verbatim.

Research Design

This qualitative study was planned from a descriptive and explorative design as method of inquiry by making use of the phenomenological approach to attempt to understand people's perceptions of, and perspectives on, their world (De Vos et al., 2011, p. 8) and describe the nature of the participants' lived experiences (Fouché & Schurink, 2011, p. 316).

The reason for taking a qualitative approach was that teaching can be described as a relationship that necessarily involves the educator's emotions, a dynamic part of himself/herself, as the heart of teaching (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835; Nias, as cited in Van Veen & Lasky, 2005, p. 895). The phenomenological approach is particularly effective for bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals, in this way attempting to comprehend the structure or essence of lived experience through accurate description (Delpont, Fouché, & Schurink, 2011, p. 305). These experiences are intangible and, therefore, cannot be quantified.

Rubin and Rubin (2012, p. 15) argue that qualitative research focuses on a naturalistic approach where reality cannot be measured, but can only be perceived by people through the lens of their prior experiences. The lens through which this particular study was conducted was transcendental or psychological phenomenology, described by Moustakas (as cited in Creswell, 2012, p. 80) as the approach "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time", focusing less on the interpretation of the researcher and more on the description of

the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). The researcher focused on the educators' experiences in teaching learners with SIC, keeping in mind that experiences could only be described and not explained (Weideman, 2007, p. 13).

Participants

The population (Neuman, 2006, p. 155; Strydom, 2011, p. 223) was identified as educators teaching learners with SIC at two schools specialising in teaching learners with SIC in the Tshwane South District. From this pool, the sample was drawn (Babbie, 2010, p. 199) by means of non-probability, purposive sampling, for their particular characteristics that would enable in-depth exploration and understanding (Boeije, 2010, p. 35; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2009, p. 78; Strydom, 2011, p. 231). The study was introduced to the whole staff at the two participating schools, and educators were invited to participate. Participants who met the inclusion criteria of educators with a minimum of two years' experience teaching learners with SIC and who perceived themselves as coping and working effectively in this strenuous field of education were interviewed.

Data Collection

Data were obtained by making use of a range of sources (Yin, 2011), namely, two phases of semi-structured interviewing, reflective notes, open-ended sentences, and field notes. The semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 1) were structured around the phenomenon in question, that is, *lived experiences of educators working with learners with SIC*, but still allowed considerable flexibility and depth (Greeff, 2011, p. 351; Roulston, 2010, p. 15). Thus, a better understanding could be gained of the meaning that participants gave to their lived experiences. Written consent to videotape the interviews was obtained from the participants beforehand. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. The researcher wrote field notes (Greeff, 2011, p. 359; Patton, 2002, p. 302) immediately after the interviews, giving an account of the circumstances prevailing during the interviews (see Appendix 2). This procedure added to the measures of trustworthiness (Roulston, 2010, p. 84). In order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and also with the intention of promoting reliability and trustworthiness, the participants were subsequently requested to complete nine open-ended sentences in their own time (see Appendix 3). The open-ended sentences focused on the meaning that the participants gave to their own lived experiences. Finally, follow-up interviews (see Appendix 4) were conducted with three educators selected for their display of effective teaching measures in the first phase of interviewing and in the open-ended sentences. These interviews served as a means of prolonged engagement and

confirmed previously collected data, thus assuring validity and trustworthiness (Strydom, 2011, p. 113). The data were transcribed verbatim in order to describe the world as perceived by the participants rather than to explain or give meaning to gathered data (Babbie, 2010, p. 306).

Data Analysis Procedures

According to Schurink, Fouché, and De Vos (2011, p. 397), analysis brings order, structure, and meaning to the data collected. Data analysis and interpretation were guided by Creswell's application of Tesch's method (Creswell, 2009, p. 184; Fouché & De Vos, 2011, p. 403; Schurink et al., 2011, p. 403), and research findings were verified by means of a literature control (Delpont et al., 2011, p. 305).

This process consisted of the following procedures:

Step 1: the data acquired via the various methods were organised and prepared for analysis by transcribing the interviews in a table format reflecting the researcher-participant interaction. Through this process, a general sense of the information obtained was developed (Creswell, 2009, p. 185).

Step 2: a preliminary analysis of the data was done by reading and rereading the transcripts and identifying possible themes and topics, summarising the findings on the tabled data.

Step 3: identified themes and topics from raw data were organised, leading to the development of categories. The various categories were named and described and summarised in table format.

Step 4: a literature control was developed in order to evaluate and interpret the data.

Step 5: the final step involved recounting the findings in the format of a written article.

Rigour of the Study

Trustworthiness (validity) of a research study is essential in evaluating its scientific worth (Ellingson, 2009, p. 240). Measures towards increasing trustworthiness were based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985, p. 219) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility (authenticity) ensures that the subject has been accurately identified and described. Credibility was achieved by *prolonged engagement* with the participants and creating a trusting relationship. This was established through making contact with the participants in two to three different situations, namely, the main interviews, the open-ended sentences, and, for three participants, a second interview. The researcher also made use of

member checking, assuring validity and objectivity as well as preventing bias (Creswell, 2007, p. 266).

Transferability of the data was guaranteed, since the study was not conducted at only one school for SIC, but at two, creating the possibility that the findings would not be restricted to only one situation.

Dependability was assured through a well-documented and audited (Schurink et al., 2011, p. 420) research process. Dependability was enhanced by making video recordings of the interviews and transcribing the participants' views verbatim, thus ensuring that the findings were based on what the participants revealed in the interview and not on the researcher's bias or expectations; additionally, field and self-reflective notes were written. Findings were reviewed and correlated against the literature through critical reflection.

Conformability entailed procedures that strived to guarantee that, as far as possible, the research findings were the result of the experiences and thoughts of the educators at schools for SIC and not those of the researcher. From a phenomenological point of view, it was important to develop an understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Self-reflective notes were written after each interview in an effort by the researcher to engage in acts of self-defamiliarisation in relation to the study (Shenton, 2004, p. 680).

Trustworthiness was further strengthened by making use of crystallisation as a method to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Ellingson, 2009, p. 249) by utilising more than one method of data collection and analysis (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2010, p. 40) in order to describe the phenomenon from different points of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 7).

The researcher plays a significant role in the research process. Langdridge (2008, p. 1129) stresses the importance of the researcher becoming aware of his/her own beliefs, biases, and assumptions, subsequently setting them to one side in order to see the world through the participants' eyes. This research must, however, be seen as a journey that started with an idea and developed along the way into a representation of the reflections and opinions of the phenomenon of not only the participants who were studied, but also of the researcher. As part of the researcher's self-reflection, a journal was used to record her thoughts. The journal proved to play an important part towards the researcher keeping in touch with her own personal experiences and beliefs. The researcher realised after the very first interview that she was struggling to set her own biased thoughts about the topic aside and, therefore, tended to ask leading questions. From there on, the researcher made every

effort to give the participants the opportunity to share their own experiences, without influencing them with her biased thoughts. To ensure an objective and trustworthy research product, it was important that there had to be another school participating in this study. The fact that the data the researcher obtained at both schools were similar and that the same themes were presented assured the researcher that the study was trustworthy.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the North-West University Ethics Committee under number NWU-00060-12-S1. The researcher further subscribed to the ethical principles for psychologists as stipulated by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (Health Professions Act 56 of 1974).

Ethical Measures Taken in Obtaining the Collaboration of the Participants (See Appendix 5)

Informed consent was obtained from all parties concerned in this study. The freedom to withdraw at any given time was explained to all participants prior to the interviews.

In order to avoid any *physical or emotional harm* to the participants, debriefing sessions were offered after interviewing, should they prove necessary.

The right of *privacy and confidentiality* of the participants was taken into account; consequently, codes were used to refer to the participants in the transcriptions of the data as well as in this report.

Taking *risks, precautions, and the safety* of the participants into consideration, the interviews were conducted at a venue of the participants' choosing. Two participants preferred the interviews to be conducted at their homes and four at the school after school hours.

The participants received adequate verbal and written information regarding:

- the *goal* of the study;
- the *duration and nature* of participation;
- the *procedures* to be followed during the investigation;
- the *potential advantages, disadvantages, and dangers* to which the participants could be exposed;
- the *right to refuse and withdraw* without prejudice;
- the measures taken to *assure confidentiality, privacy, etc.*;
- *publishing* of results;

- availability of debriefing (if required); and
- *credibility* of the researcher.

Ethical Considerations Concerning the Data Collection

It is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to have sufficient skill and competency to execute the chosen procedures of data collection as well as to seek adequate supervision throughout the process (Strydom, 2011, p. 123). The researcher's studies and professional experience equipped her with the necessary interviewing and research skills.

No immediate direct benefits were expected from this research. However, the interview did create awareness concerning the need for professional growth and development in this field of specialisation.

Assuring security and confidentiality entailed that all data were kept locked away in a cabinet at the researcher's private residence; the personal computer was password-protected and accessible only to the researcher. The data will only be made available if the academic institution requires it for control purposes.

SECTION B: ARTICLE

Manuscript intended for The South African Journal of Education (SAJE)

Experiences of educators teaching learners who are severely intellectually challenged

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Guidelines for the article

This article was prepared for The South African Journal of Education (SAJE: 2013).

The journal publishes original research articles reporting on research done in a specific field in education that is characterized by transformation, and/or an emerging economy/development state, and/or scarce resources. The article was written according to the editorial policy and specifications supplied by the journal (see Appendix 6) taking into consideration the ethical, language and overall preparation requirements such as:

- The length of the article, which is 5430 words without the footnotes containing the Afrikaans data (to be removed from the submission to the journal), is within the 5500 word limitation as stipulated.
- In accordance with the requirement to cite at least three articles published earlier in the SAJE and relevant to the subject matter, the author cites articles written by Hay, Smit and Paulsen, 2001, Pillay & Terlizzi (2009), and Strydom, Nortjé, Beukes, Esterhuysen and Van der Westhuizen (2012).
- The text of the article is divided into unnumbered sections and follows the Harvard method of referencing in accordance with the requirements of the journal (whereas references for Sections A and C are formatted according to the APA style of referencing as stipulated by the Psychology Department, North-West University).

Abstract

Educators teaching learners with severe intellectual challenges (SIC) need to cope with many additional challenges to those of their main stream teaching counterparts. Challenges such as work overload and challenging behaviour and limited progress of the learners, who further require a specialised educational programme. Experiencing the daily challenges in the long term often generates negative emotional reactions, which might result in negative outcomes such as increased stress levels, burnout and high staff absenteeism and staff turnover rates. However, there are incidences of educators, in the same teaching environment, who exhibit better coping strategies resulting in less stress and better physical health than their colleagues. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe, by means of the phenomenological approach, the lived experiences of educators teaching learners with SIC. The research included six educators from two schools for learners with SIC in Gauteng. Educators who perceived themselves as effective in this strenuous teaching environment were included in the research. The data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews, incomplete sentences, and follow-up interviews. The results indicated that, while acknowledging it as a severely challenging teaching environment, the participants experienced high levels of job satisfaction. This job satisfaction was not primarily due to their effective teaching, but to their intrinsic motivation to teach learners with SIC.

Keywords: job satisfaction, motivation, self-determination theory, severe intellectual challenge, special educational needs

Introduction

Education is viewed as an exceedingly stressful profession (Buys, 2006; Hendriks, 2007), even more so for educators teaching learners with special educational needs (LSEN) (Baker, 2004; Hay, Smit & Paulsen, 2001; Willers, 2009). The challenges include a constantly changing educational environment (Buys, 2006), lack of knowledge and experience (Pillay & Terlizzi, 2009), large classes, and learners' behavioural problems (Arends, 2007). All teaching requires educators to enter into a relationship with each and every learner in the classroom (Elmars, 2011). This involves their emotions, a dynamic part of themselves, as the heart of teaching (Hargreaves, 1998; Van Veen & Lasky, 2005). However, the toll taken of the educator is often overlooked, often with detrimental results for the educators and learners.

It is important to take the physical and emotional well-being of educators into consideration. Job satisfaction and motivation are integral to the sense of well-being and

professional identity (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink & Hofman, 2012), which, in turn, is influenced by the educator's own experience, personality, and expectations, as well as physical, psychosocial, emotional, and economic factors and the teaching environment per se (Strydom, Nortjé, Beukes, Esterhuyse & Van der Westhuizen, 2012). Job satisfaction is described as a positive, enjoyable, and rewarding experience that implies enthusiasm and happiness with one's work (Aziri, 2011). The important part that motivation plays towards job satisfaction must not be overlooked.

Ryan and Deci (2000b) describe motivation according to the principles of self-determination theory (SDT). This theory identifies three basic psychological needs, namely, *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness* (McCarthy, 2012). Walsh (2011) argues that the level at which these psychological needs are met determines a person's level of self-determination.

Educators of learners with LSEN not only have the task of teaching, but are expected to specialise in a wide range of learning, intellectual, emotional, and physical disabilities and needs displayed by their learners (Crutchfield, 1997; Jacobs, 2006). One of the fields of specialisation is teaching learners with severe intellectual challenges (SIC). Additional to a significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning (IQ < 70) (Sue, Sue & Sue, 2003), the majority of learners with SIC also display disruptive and challenging behaviour such as aggression, hyperactivity, inappropriate talking, and excessive, inappropriate sexual behaviour (Stores, Stores, Fellows & Buckley, 1998). Not only are the educators responsible for meeting the diverse intellectual needs of their learners, but they must also manage the social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties with which these learners present (Jonker, 2005; Olivier & Williams, 2005). The frequency and intensity of their challenging behaviour (Jacobs, 2006; Jonker, 2005), as well as the numerous special tasks educators for learners with SIC have to perform, are experienced as extremely strenuous. In the long term, daily interaction and experience of these challenges contribute to negative emotional reactions in educators and generate feelings of doubt in their own abilities to effectively deal with the challenges (Lambrechts, Petry & Maes, 2008), wearing down their autonomous motivation in the classroom, resulting in the educators being more exhausted at the end of the school year and possibly less effective (Fernet, Gruay, Sénécal & Austin, 2012). Gargiulo (2011) speculates that, given the stressful challenges with which the learners with SIC present at school, many educators may not experience job satisfaction.

However, some educators teaching learners with SIC have been noted to experience less stress and better physical health than others in the same teaching environment (Willers,

2009). The question then arises as to what contributes to their ability to cope in this most challenging teaching environment. The aim of the research was to gain an understanding of the nature of, and possible contextual influences on, those experiences of educators teaching learners with SIC that afforded them the job satisfaction and motivation to persevere. To achieve this aim, it proved necessary to delve into their experiences all-encompassingly in order to gain an understanding of their perceptions of both the challenges and the rewards. The research question was, therefore, quite simply, “What are the lived experiences of educators who are teaching learners with SIC effectively?”.

Method

The study was qualitative and planned from an exploratory and descriptive design. The phenomenological approach was utilised to attempt to understand the participants’ perceptions and lived experiences of their world, viewed here as a classroom for learners with SIC (De Vos, Strydom, Schultz & Patel, 2011; Fouché & Schurink, 2011). Research was conducted in compliance with the ethical guidelines as described by Strydom (2011). Participants were assured of their privacy and confidentiality and signed their informed consent. Risks and the safety of the participants were taken into account.

Measures towards increasing the trustworthiness of the research were based on Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Data were obtained by making use of a range of sources (Yin, 2011), namely, two phases of semi-structured interviewing, reflective notes, open-ended sentences, and field notes. A pilot study was conducted to refine the interview schedule. The first phase of interviewing was constructed around the phenomenon in question, that is, *lived experiences of educators working with learners with SIC*, but allowed considerable flexibility and depth. The first interviews lasted approximately one hour. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences and also with the intention of promoting reliability and trustworthiness, the participants were subsequently requested to complete nine open-ended sentences in their own time. The open-ended sentences focused on the meaning that the participants gave to their own lived experiences, for example, “My biggest secret for my success is ...” and “I find it difficult to ...”. The open-ended sentences were based on data obtained during the first interview. Follow-up interviews were conducted with three educators selected for their display of resilience and effective teaching measures during the first phase of interviewing and in the open-ended sentences. These educators, answering to Keyes’ (2007) definition of resilience as individuals filled with positive emotions and

functioning optimally on a social and psychological level, were judged by the researcher to be best able to maintain their control of the teaching situation and constantly thinking of new ways to tackle problems by utilizing their skills and strengths. The follow-up interviews served as a means of prolonged engagement and member checking regarding the collected data, thus assuring validity and trustworthiness (Strydom, 2011). It so happened that the three teachers qualifying for follow-up interviews were all from school B. The data were transcribed verbatim in order to closely describe the world as perceived by the participants rather than to explain or give meaning to gathered data (Babbie, 2010).

Research participants

The data were obtained within the context of two selected schools for SIC in Gauteng, South Africa. The study was introduced to all the teaching staff at the two participating schools. Educators who perceived themselves as coping and working effectively in this strenuous field of education were invited to participate. Three participants at each school, who also met the additional inclusion criterion of at least two years' experience of teaching learners with SIC, volunteered to participate. Table 1 gives a brief description of the participants.

Table 1: Description of participants ¹

| Participant | Gender | Age | Years' teaching experience | Years in education for learners with SIC | Training in education for LSEN | Follow-up interview |
|-------------|--------|-----|----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| A1 | Female | 51 | 18 | 7 | No, child with SIC | No |
| A2 | Female | 38 | 15 | 4 | No | No |
| A3 | Female | 48 | 26 | 3 | No | No |
| B4 | Female | 45 | 20 | 9 | No, child with SIC | Yes |
| B5 | Female | 44 | 20 | 4 | No | Yes |
| B6 | Female | 46 | 21 | 7 | Yes | Yes |

All the participants were female. Although the significance was not investigated, the researcher observed that, other than the principals and deputy principals, there were only one

¹ In the article presented to the journal, Table 1 will not be embedded in the text but presented on a separate page, as required by the journal guidelines.

and two male members, respectively, on the teaching staff of the two participating schools. The participants were all between the ages of 38 and 51, with many years of teaching and life experience. Both schools had younger educators with similar years of experience in teaching learners with SIC, but they did not perceive themselves as being effective. Except for participant B6, the participants had more than 10 years' teaching experience in mainstream education and could, therefore, distinguish between their experiences in the two fields of education. Although three participants (A2, A3, and B5) had fairly limited experience teaching learners with SIC they were able to draw a distinct comparison between their experiences in mainstream education and their experiences as educators for learners with SIC.

Of the six participants, only one had further training in education for LSEN. B6 stated the importance of specialised training: *“Major! Major! Without training in special needs, without knowing what your aims are, and without knowing the learner, you cannot do it [teach].”*²³ (Int1-6)⁴. Two participants, one at each school, had a child with SIC. Both participants indicated that they had volunteered to participate in the study because they thought their lived experiences made them “specialists”. *“OK, now why I volunteered. I not only have the experience at school, but I am also a mother of one [a child with SIC].”*⁵ (A1, Int1-2).

Data analysis

Data analysis and interpretation were guided by Creswell's application of Tesch's method for thematic analysis (Creswell, 2009). Preliminary analysis of the data was done by reading and rereading the transcripts and identifying possible themes and topics, which were then organised, leading to the development of categories. The research literature was checked to evaluate and interpret the data.

Findings

The findings are limited to an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and are not intended to be generalised. The following themes emerged from the analysis: challenges experienced, rewarding experiences, influences of experiences on the individual, and coping

² For examination purposes the original Afrikaans transcriptions are provided. However, they will not be included in the article submitted to the journal.

³ “Major! Major! Sonder ‘special needs’ opleiding, sonder dat jy weet waarheen jy werk en sonder dat jy die kind ken nie, kan jy dit nie doen nie.”

⁴ Codes: A/B – participating school; 1-6 – participant number; Int – interview (1 or 2) + stanza in interview; S – open-ended sentences.

⁵ “OK, nou hoekom ek aangebied het. Ek het nie net ervaring by die skool nie, ek is ook 'n ma van een.”

strategies. These are presented below and directly confirmed from the literature, where appropriate.

Challenges experienced by educators

Physical exhaustion

Teaching learners with SIC entails being actively involved in their learning process. This can be physically tiring, especially since the learners are still functioning at a concrete level, and their learning takes place through play: “... to present everything you do, in a play-therapeutic way.”⁶ (B6, Int2-15). The physical challenges as described by A1, “... you know that you have to walk more slowly, she messes when she eats, and you do not hear her clearly when she speaks”⁷ (Int1-16), moreover required educators to be “physically busy the whole day”⁸ (B6, Int1-9). Four participants (A1, A3, B4, and B6) acknowledged that teaching learners with SIC “takes a lot of energy”⁹ (B4, Int1-15). The literature acknowledges that working with learners with SIC can be experienced as strenuous (Olivier & Williams, 2005).

Inappropriate behaviour displayed by learners with SIC

The realistic picture of the challenges must also be acknowledged, as B4 stated: “Initially, it was a hell of a punishment for me. Several times I really thought that the Lord is busy making me serve a severe sentence at this school.”¹⁰ (Int2-4). Similarly, A3 pointed out: “In the beginning it was terrible; something that I thought, ‘Gee, how am I going to make it?’”¹¹ (Int1-6). The participants admitted that, even though they viewed themselves as effective, the behavioural problems displayed by the learners at times left them feeling uncertain: “I did not really know how to handle it”¹² (B4, Int2-10) and “... at that point, I had really tried everything”¹³ (B5, Int2-10). B4 admitted: “It took me four years to find my bearings really properly.”¹⁴ (S9). Several different aspects of the learners’ behaviour were identified as challenging. B4 indicated the “foul language that these learners use”¹⁵ (S4), and A3 mentioned the learners’ excessive frustration, which often resulted in aggressive outbursts. Gargiulo (2011) identifies inappropriate or immature behaviour as typical of learners with

⁶ “... alles wat jy doen op ’n spel-terapeutiese wyse aan te bied.”

⁷ “... jy weet dat jy moet stadiger stap, sy mors as sy eet, en jy hoor nie mooi wat sy sê nie ...”

⁸ “... die heel dag fisies besig te wees ...”

⁹ “... vat baie energie.”

¹⁰ “Dit was aanvanklik vir my ’n hengse straf. Ek het regtig menigmaal gedink die Here is besig om my ’n groot straf te laat uitdien by hierdie skool.”

¹¹ “Aan die begin was dit vreeslik, iets wat ek gedink het, ‘jissie hoe gaan ek dit regkry?’”

¹² “Ek het nie lekker geweet hoe ek dit moet hanteer nie.”

¹³ “... by daai punt het ek al regtig elke ding probeer.”

¹⁴ “Dit het my vier jaar gevat om regtig behoorlik my voete te vind.”

¹⁵ “... die vuil taal wat hierdie kinders gebruik.”

SIC. The participants' statements confirm that such behaviour can, indeed, be seen as a major contributor to emotional exhaustion (Hastings & Brown, 2002). Most of the time, learners with SIC have difficulty controlling and understanding their own behaviour. A1 declared: *"my biggest frustration is that the learners do not 'read' your strictness."*¹⁶ (Int1-30). The participants voiced their frustration with the lack of knowledge and understanding of "other people", as A1 strongly stated: *"... people outside do not know. They say, 'Oh, they're such little angels, such children from heaven'. That is so far from the truth, because a child with a brain injury, I want to say, 80% have some kind of behavioural problem!"*¹⁷ (Int1-16). The type of behaviour varied, but the frequency and intensity of the behaviour contributed to the participants' experience of a severely demanding situation. Participants professed feelings of *"hopelessness"*¹⁸ (B4, Int1-7) and also total loss of control: *"... it made me lose it totally."*¹⁹ (B5, Int2-7). Although the participants expressed their understanding of the learners' behaviour, the fact that they sometimes experienced incidents as virtually traumatic was undeniable, especially those interactions that were violent in nature. As described by B4: *"I was highly upset; I could not believe that a child would slap me!"*²⁰ (Int2-8). Similarly, B5 declared: *"... who provoked, and provoked, and provoked me, and it made me lose it totally."*²¹ (Int2-7).

Adapting to the child's needs

The diverse levels of abilities and disabilities displayed by the learners were experienced as challenging by the educators. To determine how each learner learns best and then to design or modify instruction and develop an individualised educational plan (IEP) can be very challenging indeed (Danfort & Gabel, 2006). According to B4, real understanding of the learner was only possible when *"... every child must be seen for who and what he is"*²² (Int2-6). Similarly, B5 stressed the importance of *"having to find every child's good and strong points and build on that"*²³ (Int1-9). In order to develop the learners to the best of their abilities, B6 declared: *"I push those boundaries [the learners'] every time."*²⁴ (Int2-4). B5 stressed the importance of remembering that *"... with each child it works differently"*²⁵ (Int2-7). However, B4 admitted that she struggled to differentiate at three different levels *"to give*

¹⁶ "... my grootste frustrasie is dat die leerders lees nie jou kwaaiheid nie."

¹⁷ "... mense daar buite weet nie. Hulle sê: 'Ag dis sulke engeltjies, sulke hemelkindertjies.' Dis so ver van die waarheid af want 'n brein-beseerde kind, ek wil sê 80%, het een of ander gedragsprobleem."

¹⁸ This interview was in English.

¹⁹ "... dit het my heeltemal laat flip."

²⁰ "Ek was hoogs ontsteld; ek kon nie glo dat 'n kind my sal klap nie."

²¹ "... wat my so getart, en getart, en getart het, en dit het my heeltemal laat flip."

²² "... elke kind moet raakgesien word vir wie en wat hy is."

²³ "... om elke kind se goeie en sterk punte te moet kry om daarop te moet bou."

²⁴ "Ek 'push' daai [die leerders se] 'boundaries' elke keer."

²⁵ "... met elke kind werk dit anders."

plenty individual attention”²⁶ (S3). The participants, indeed, defied Gargiulo’s (2011) perception that, no matter how much effort teachers of learners with SIC put into it, failure is inevitable, since they persevered and simply would not stop trying.

Demotivating experiences

B6 admitted her frustration due to the lack of tangible evidence of the learners’ progress: “*We do not have Matric exams here, where you can walk down the hallway and say: ‘I have three distinctions. How many do you have?’ That is not there. Here it is that Patricia stood up today and fetched her own bag. That is the ‘wow’ here.*”²⁷ (Int2-1). B4 sometimes felt that “*Although I put in all my energy and time, the learners still did not achieve the goals I had set out for them*”²⁸ (Int1-16). The lack of acknowledgement and feedback contributed to higher levels of frustration: “*There is hardly any feedback. In mainstream schools, the parents thank you. They give you presents at the end of the year. Not here, here you get nothing. Here you get nothing.*”²⁹ (B6, Int1-5). One participant verbalised her need for positive feedback by stating: “*I never really know if I really make a difference in the child’s world.*”³⁰ (B4, S8). These statements are confirmed in the literature, as Dos Santos (2002) emphasises the importance of positive feedback to enhance feelings of competence, which Ryan and Deci (2000a) also identify as a necessity in order to sustain a sense of motivation. Educators need to experience that they are contributing to the school’s aims (which mainly concern the academic progress of their learners) to experience job satisfaction (Jacobs, 2006), and there is, indeed, little of that in a school for learners with SIC.

Rewarding experiences

Job satisfaction

Taking the challenges presented above into consideration, it is notable that all the participants indicated that they experienced a sense of job satisfaction. Strong statements were voiced, such as “*for me [it is] 100% better than any reward that they can give me*”³¹ (B4, Int2-1), “*... deepest sense of satisfaction ...*”³² (A1, S10), and “*I think I can now say, ‘I have arrived’*”³³ (B4, Int2-30). These feelings of satisfaction support the participants’ ability to cope and experience effectiveness. The literature accentuates the importance of job satisfaction

²⁶ “... om baie individuele aandag te gee.”

²⁷ “Ons het nie hier matriekeksamens, wat jy in die gang kan afstap en sê ek het drie onderskeidings, hoeveel het jy? Dit is nie daar nie. Hier is dit, Patricia het vandag opgestaan en haar eie tas gaan haal! Dit is die ‘wow’ hier.”

²⁸ “Alhoewel ek al my energie en tyd daarin sit, het die leerders steeds nie die doelwitte bereik wat ek vir hulle gestel het nie.”

²⁹ “Hier is feitlik geen terugvoer. In hoofstroomskole, die ouers bedank jou. Hulle gee vir jou geskenke aan die einde van die jaar. Nie hier nie, jy kry niks. Hier kry jy niks.”

³⁰ “Ek weet nooit regtig of ek werklik ’n verskil in die kind se wêreld maak nie.”

³¹ “... vir my 100% beter as enige beloning wat hulle vir my gee.”

³² “... die diepste bevrediging.”

³³ “Ek dink ek kan nou sê ‘I have arrived!’”

towards efficiency and effectiveness (Aziri, 2011). These statements suggest a deep sense of intrinsic motivation where the participants voiced their feelings of relatedness and competence, both contributing factors towards self-determination (Walsh, 2011).

Passion for the job

The passion and satisfaction the participants displayed emerged as the main motivation for them in working with learners with SIC. A1 defined passion as, “*it is higher than normal motivation; you have enthusiasm for the task*”³⁴ (Int1-13). A3 stated: “*I then realised it is my passion to work with those little kids. It is where I most want to be.*”³⁵ (Int1-3). Similarly, B4 declared: “*My best characteristic for this job is my absolute passion and love for what I do.*”³⁶ (S4). Although Elmars (2011) was referring to educators in general, her statement that educators perceive teaching as a calling, a way of life, and a commitment to shaping the coming generation is borne out richly by the participants’ statements. This passion contributes to a high sense of meaningfulness (Williams, 2003).

Influence of experiences on the individual

Reasons for teaching learners with SIC

At schools for SIC, there is said to be an unwritten “two-week rule”. According to tradition, if one starts teaching at a school for SIC, and one stays for longer than two weeks, one will stay forever. This belief holds true in this particular study, as five of the six participants had decided to start teaching at schools for learners with SIC after 10-plus years in mainstream education (see Table 1). Two participants referred to this principle in declaring “*I am one of those who wanted to stay*”³⁷ (B6, Int1-1) and “*after those six weeks, I was obviously hooked*”³⁸ (B5, Int1-2). Religion played an important part in A2’s choice to stay: “*it is where the Lord wanted me to be. So that’s why I am maybe very relaxed.*”³⁹ (Int1-6). The participants all started teaching at schools for learners with SIC by chance, in temporary or substitute positions, and ended up staying, as B5 stated: “*Yes, I would never have thought it, but the road went this way, and I don’t want it differently.*”⁴⁰ (Int1-22). It would, thus, appear that the reasons for teaching learners with SIC stem perhaps less from an extrinsic drive or interest to enter into such practice as from a desire to remain once having engaged with the

³⁴ “... dis hoër as normale motivering; jy het entoesiasme vir die taak.”

³⁵ “Toe besef ek dit is my passie om met daai kindertjies te werk. Dis waar ek die graagste wil wees.”

³⁶ “My beste karaktertrek vir hierdie werk is my absolute passie en liefde vir wat ek doen.”

³⁷ “Ek is een van daai wat wou bly.”

³⁸ “... ná daardie ses weke was ek ‘obviously hooked’.”

³⁹ “... dit is waar die Here my wou gehad het. So daarvoor is ek dalk baie ‘relaxed’.”

⁴⁰ “Ja, ek sou nooit gedink het nie, maar die pad het so geloop, en ek wil dit nie anders hê nie.”

learners. The participants, despite emotional and physical challenges, described their experience of teaching learners with SIC as rewarding, with a deep sense of satisfaction.

Subjective perspective: integration into the personal life

Although the participants acknowledged that the ability to distance oneself from one's job was important, four participants admitted that they struggled to separate their work and home lives, in the negative as well as the positive sense. A1 admitted that *"I identify a bit too much with them; I cannot go home and leave it here ... I just cannot do it!"*⁴¹ (Int1-17) and then, shrugging, added, *"Aah! It was sitting on my shoulder so much ... I just couldn't let it go"*⁴² (Int1-17), while B5 laughingly disclosed that *"They [her family] know that everything in life is actually for the school. It brought a big change."*⁴³ (Int1-22). These statements confirm Van Veen and Lasky's (2005) view that educators invest their "selves" in their work, resulting in a merged sense of personal and professional identity. In a negative sense, on the one hand, this merged sense of identity might have contributed to participants' emotional exhaustion, but, on the other hand, it enhanced feelings of significance: *"it gave me a bit of purpose."*⁴⁴ (B5, Int1-22).

Objective perspective: no longer seeing the disability

The following statement succinctly describes one of the effects of being an educator for learners with SIC: *"It is very bad that it [disability] is becoming your norm, that you view other people from the disabled world. Yes, that is what I am saying: 'I am looking through tinted spectacles'."*⁴⁵ (B6, Int1-13). A1 confirmed this experience by disclosing that *"you get so used to the level at which the child is functioning, you adapt so much to that that you later experience it as your 'normal'"*⁴⁶ (Int1-34). Similarly, Danfort and Gabel (2006) state that, in the course of time, educators for learners with SIC fail to notice the learner's disability as a barrier to learning.

Making a difference

The participants' answers to the question "What is the one important consideration that makes it all worthwhile?" bring to mind Tetrick and Quick's (2001) declaration that work can provide a sense of meaning and structure in modern life. All the participants felt that they

⁴¹ "Ek identifiseer amper 'n bietjie te veel met hulle; ek kan nie huis toe gaan en hom hier los nie ... ek kan dit net nie doen nie."

⁴² "Ag, dit het só op my skouer gesit ... ek kon dit net nie laat gaan nie."

⁴³ "Hulle [haar gesin] weet alles in die lewe is eintlik vir die skool. Dit het 'n groot verandering gebring."

⁴⁴ "dit het my bietjie 'purpose' gegee."

⁴⁵ "Dis baie sleg dat dit [gestremdheid] vir jou 'n norm word, dat jy uit die gestremde wêreld na ander kyk. Ja, dit is wat ek sê. 'Ek kyk deur 'n getinte bril'."

⁴⁶ "... jy raak so gewoond aan die vlak waarop die kind funksioneer, jy pas so daarby aan, dat jy dit later as jou normaliteit ervaar."

were making a difference: “*I think I can also make a difference*”⁴⁷ (A1, Int1-25); “*In this situation, it is not the child’s grades that are making the difference; it is just the fact that I am here*”⁴⁸ (B5, Int2-17); and “*The little you achieve is ‘wow’, it is fantastic!*”⁴⁹ (B5, Int1-11). Similarly, B6’s face lit up when she stated: “*It is wonderful to see the difference that you make.*”⁵⁰ (Int1-2). The participant’s contribution towards the progress of the child was viewed as a personal achievement – “*I see the difference that I make with the learners*”⁵¹ (B4, S2) – and created feelings of competence: “*... when I see what I achieve with the learners.*”⁵² (B4, S7).

Frustration with other colleagues’ perceptions

The participants shared a love and protectiveness for learners with SIC. They voiced strong opinions about colleagues who, according to them, did not share their views. A1 declared: “*That same passion [for the learners] causes me to get angry about it. Then I have to tell myself, ‘No, wait a bit, the entire world is not tuned in to people with disabilities’.*”⁵³ (Int1-13). A3 stated: “*I know there are people [educators] who get terribly frustrated with the children. That makes me so angry.*”⁵⁴ (Int1-15). B4 suggested that teaching learners with SIC was not something that everybody was capable of doing: “*It is not everybody’s cup of tea to teach these children.*”⁵⁵ (Int2-30).

Coping strategies

Coping

Coping is defined as “the cognitive and behavioural efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demand and conflicts” (Folkman & Lazarus, in Krohne, 2002:3). Ntoumanis, Edmunds and Duda (2009) identified two types of coping strategies namely *problem-focused*, aimed at finding a solution for the stressful encounter, and *emotion-focused*, exploiting measures to regulate the unpleasant emotions that resulted from a stressful encounter. Two of the participants identified problem-focused coping strategies: “*... structure or routine and, secondly, creative thinking*”⁵⁶ (B6, Int2-2) and creativity: “*...*

⁴⁷ “Ek dink ek kan tog ook ’n verskil maak.”

⁴⁸ “In hierdie situasie is dit nie die kind se punte wat die verskil maak nie ... net die feit dat ek hier is.”

⁴⁹ “Die bietjie wat jy regkry is “wow” dis fantasties.”

⁵⁰ “Dit is wonderlik om die verskil wat jy maak, te sien.”

⁵¹ “... ek sien die verskil wat ek maak met die leerders.”

⁵² “... wanneer ek sien wat ek met die leerders bereik.”

⁵³ “... daardie selfde passie maak dat ek kwaad raak daaroor. Dan moet ek vir myself sê, ‘Nee, wag so bietjie, die hele wêreld is nie ingestel op gestremdes’.”

⁵⁴ “Ek weet daar is mense [onderwysers] wat vreeslik gefrustreerd raak met die kinders. Dit maak my so kwaad.”

⁵⁵ “Dit is nie elkeen se koppie tee om hierdie kinders te leer nie.”

⁵⁶ “... struktuur of roetine en die tweede is kreatiewe denke.”

the fact that I can think on my feet and adapt to the situation”⁵⁷ (B5, Int2-2). The participants’ coping strategies were also emotionally focused, as B6 identified the value of socialising outside the working environment: “I think it is important to do something involving intelligent conversation, outside of the school environment (laughing)”⁵⁸ (Int1-32) and “It is important that you are able to debrief somewhere”⁵⁹ (Int1-22). B4 indicated the importance of her religious faith as a coping resource, describing it as “my trust and faith in God alone”⁶⁰ (S1). B4 also viewed her own emotional well-being as essential: “It is very important that you first sort out your own life; then theirs [the learners’] will just fall into place.”⁶¹ (Int2-5). B4 strongly advised: “If you come here with the attitude of ‘Oh hell! These children are going to drive me up the wall today!’, then you can forget it; you will not win.”⁶² (Int2-5). The need to acknowledge her own personal emotional and physical limitations and take care of herself was also identified by A1: “I need to get enough rest.”⁶³ (Int2-19). The literature identified coping resources as inherent in individuals, allowing them to handle stressors more effectively, experience symptoms less intensely, and recovers faster from traumatic exposure (Kayal, 2004). This was displayed in B5’s ability to “go through the day, and end the day, and tomorrow you do not start with yesterday’s baggage”⁶⁴ (Int2-11). B4 indicated that when she experienced a challenging incident, she would only reflect momentarily on the incident and then “put it behind me”⁶⁵ (Int2-7).

Control

Control was described not as personal control, but as the educator’s perception of being in command of what was happening in the classroom. B6 indicated: “The reason why I cope is because I am in control.”⁶⁶ (Int2-2). A1 expressed her feelings of hopelessness when she experienced loss of control as “It makes me feel hopeless when things get out of control, for instance, when my hyperactives [learners] bounced like balls and the class looked like a battlefield”⁶⁷ (S4). Howard and Hegarty (2003) identify the importance of educators’ experiencing control of the situation in order to cope with strenuous situations.

⁵⁷ “... feit dat ek op my voete kan dink en aanpas by die situasie.”

⁵⁸ “Ek dink dit is belangrik dat jy iets doen met intelligente geselskap, buite die skoolverband.”

⁵⁹ “... dit is nodig dat jy iewers kan ontlai.”

⁶⁰ “my vertrou en geloof in God alleen.”

⁶¹ “... dit is baie belangrik dat jy jou eie lewe eerste uit te sorteer, dan sal hulle [leerders] s’n somer in plek val.”

⁶² “As jy hier kom met die houding van ‘O hel! Hierdie kinders gaan my vandag teen die muur uitdryf’, dan kan jy vergeet; jy gaan nie wen nie.”

⁶³ “... ek moet genoeg rus kry.”

⁶⁴ “... gaan deur die dag, en sluit hom af, en more begin jy nie met gister se bagasie nie.”

⁶⁵ “... dan skuif ek dit verby.”

⁶⁶ “Die rede waarom ek ‘cope’, want ek het beheer.”

⁶⁷ “Dit maak my moedeloos as dinge buite beheer raak, byvoorbeeld toe al my ‘hiperaktiewes’ soos rubberballetjies gebons het en die klas soos ’n slagveld gelyk het.”

Importance of knowledge of the child

Although the participants indicated that they no longer “saw” the learners’ disability, the importance of understanding and knowing the learner with SIC was also identified. B5 stated that, taking the learner’s background into consideration, “*you know what to address and what not to address*”⁶⁸ (B5, Int2-13). Knowing the learner created a better understanding of “*the things she does and why she does them*”⁶⁹ (B5, Int2-13) in order for the educator to intervene timeously. The importance of really knowing the learner can never be stressed enough. Not only do educators in many situations fill the void of absent parents (Elmars, 2011), but knowing the learners also provides the educator with intuitive knowledge of what is appropriate for a learner at any specific moment (Hargreaves, 1998).

Discussion

The research question posed by this study focuses on experiences of educators teaching learners with SIC. The literature indicates that educators teaching in this field often experience it as more demanding (Jacobs, 2006) and emotionally draining (Hendriks, 2007) than teaching in the regular classroom. The results of the study suggest that the participants, while fully acknowledging the challenges of their task, nevertheless experienced high levels of job satisfaction and perceived themselves as being effective and coping. This confirms that, contrary to the findings in other countries, the participants indicated that, despite negative challenges, they maintained a professional attitude and tried to remain positive, as found by Jonker (2005), regarded their occupation as fulfilling and rewarding, as also reported by Jacobs (2006), and experienced job satisfaction, in accordance with Willers (2009).

However, job satisfaction had not come easily for all the participants. Two participants, especially, indicated that they had initially struggled to adapt to the teaching environment of learners with SIC. The difference between the individuals who had struggled to adapt to this field of specialisation and those who had adapted with ease can be attributed to the diverse aspects that add to job satisfaction, which can then differ from one individual to the next. Job satisfaction can be intrinsically motivated by factors such as personal motives and values (for instance, attitude) and non-material recognition (for instance, the satisfaction derived from the difference that one makes in these learners’ lives), while extrinsic motivation includes the environment (for instance, seeing the learners’ progress), supervision

⁶⁸ “... jy weet wat moet jy aanraak en wat moet jy nie aanraak nie.”

⁶⁹ “... wat sy doen en hoekom sy dit doen.”

(for instance, guidance and support from senior staff and colleagues), and working conditions (for instance, sufficient learning support material) (Strydom et al., 2012). It follows that indefinite combinations and degrees of intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation are possible (Westen, 1996), contributing to the unique set of motivational standards held by each individual. The themes that emerged from the data indicated that motivation was a determining factor towards job satisfaction and coping. Within a specifically challenging context such as a school for learners with SIC, the motivational interplay could then become complex. The same two participants who had initially struggled to adapt indicated that part of the satisfaction they now experienced (intrinsic motivation) could be attributed to the love and acceptance they received from the learners (extrinsic motivation). According to the participants, their passion for their job was an important intrinsic motivational factor, which was further enhanced by their sense of making a difference (also intrinsic motivation) and seeing progress, however limited, in the learners (extrinsic motivation). However, their statements concerning lack of positive feedback and limited tangible evidence of progress (both extrinsic motivations) displayed their need for acknowledgement (extrinsic motivation) in order to sustain their feelings of competence (intrinsic motivation). Ryan (in Gagne & Deci, 2005) states that feelings of competence are increased when a person feels responsible for his or her successful actions, which can be further enhanced, as suggested by Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (2001), through positive performance feedback. This corresponds to literature that identifies the degree of motivation, be it extrinsic or intrinsic, as being a determining factor for an educator's sense of professional identity (Canrinus et al., 2012:116). Motivation plays an integral role towards the sense of personal well-being and efficiency (Dos Santos, 2002). Extrinsic motivation, however, is more temporary and should preferably be supported by intrinsic motivation, which is more sustainable (Deci et al., 2001). The participants indicated that their sense of job satisfaction was sustained by their passion and love for the learners, but was again moderated by negative extrinsic factors such as the learners' behaviour and lack of positive feedback and acknowledgement.

However, in order to raise diminished intrinsic or autonomous motivation levels, a need for extrinsic motivation (rewards) might be indicated. In other words, educators who display lower levels of autonomy due to continuous exposure to a strenuous teaching environment (Fernet et al., 2012) might try to satisfy this need with external rewards. This could be a contributing factor to the participants' strongly expressed need for external feedback in the sense of verbal acknowledgements of their teaching efforts. The tone of numerous responses, in fact, suggests that participants might actually have utilised the

interviews conducted during the research to meet this need. The participants' dependence on positive feedback could be attributed to the fact that efficiency in the education profession is often evaluated according to the learners' progress. Learners with SIC show progress in totally different respects and also substantially more slowly than other learners, with the result that the educators could feel that they have nothing to "show" for their efforts.

All the participants indicated that the challenges of, especially, the behaviour displayed by the learners had a negative impact on their self-worth and even contributed to them doubting their own abilities to cope in the teaching environment. This corresponds to the view expressed in the literature that meeting the daily learning and behavioural needs of learners with SIC makes teaching a profession fraught with pressure and is, indeed, considered as overwhelming (Jonker, 2005). Emotional well-being and efficiency are essential for educators to sustain a healthy educational programme. It is, therefore, important that attention be given to the levels of motivation and job satisfaction of educators.

The participants provided appropriate and effective ways of dealing with the daily challenges experienced by educators teaching learners with SIC. It became evident that a positive attitude and passion for the task were essential "ingredients" for educators to effectively cope in this field of specialisation.

The findings of this study confirmed the findings of previous studies that teaching in this particular field of education could have detrimental effects on the educators teaching learners with SIC and had to be acknowledged in real terms. Even those educators who perceived themselves to be effective and as experiencing job satisfaction displayed average to high levels of uncertainty and frustration. This, in the long run, could have negative effects not only on the educators, but also on the learners. Capitalising on the rewarding experiences that emerged from the study, support programmes such as group debriefing sessions could be devised to supply not only professional but personal support as well. This would contribute to feelings of relatedness and competence, which Ryan and Deci (2000a) claim are important for internalisation of motivation.

Conclusion

The present study confirms that the educators teaching learners with SIC experience high levels of stress due to their challenging working environment, often straining their level of motivation and job satisfaction. However, contributing to their ability to cope in this

challenging teaching environment, the study also highlights the positive attitude, love, and empathy these educators display towards their learners, promoting effective interactions.

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SECTION C: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of the study

This study explored and described the lived experiences of educators teaching learners with severe intellectual challenges (SIC). Previous studies established that the education of learners with SIC was frequently regarded as a daunting challenge, which required providing exceptionally high levels of physical and emotional support (Barlow & Durand, 2011, p. 524) and often resulted in physical illness, exhaustion, and burnout (Hendriks, 2007). However, contrary to the findings in other studies, research conducted in South Africa indicates that, despite negative challenges, many educators of learners with SIC maintain a professional attitude and try to remain positive (Jonker, 2005, p. 78); they regard their occupation as fulfilling and rewarding (Jacobs, 2006, p. 117) and display resilience and experience job satisfaction (Willers, 2009, p. 7).

The researcher explored and described the lived experiences of educators teaching learners with SIC who professed to be dealing effectively with the daily challenges that came with this field of specialisation. The findings of the study revealed that, despite all participants experiencing similar challenges and emotional exhaustion, some of them utilised effective coping strategies. The coping strategies and character traits that enabled the educators to effectively deal with the challenges were noted at two contextual levels: personal and professional. In respect of the personal context, the participants shared values and beliefs in terms of their passion and purpose in teaching learners with SIC, which revealed their love for, and acceptance of, the learners. The relationship with colleagues was indicated by the participants in terms of two definite “groups”: those who shared their passion and those described by one participant as “not fit to teach” learners with SIC. They expressed their frustration and even anger towards the latter. In respect of the professional context, the participants acknowledged the value of experience and support, and one indicated the importance of specialised training.

The findings suggested that emotional well-being and support provided a buffer for dealing with the challenges associated with teaching learners with SIC, which was often described as tiring and emotionally draining due to the sometimes violent behaviour displayed by these learners and the diversity of the tasks expected from them. The fine line between coping and exhaustion, even burnout, must be acknowledged. Personal feelings of achievement can be determined by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors (Strydom et al., 2012, p. 257). Intrinsic motivational factors identified by the participants, such as the

satisfaction derived from the difference that one made in these learners' lives, and extrinsic motivational factors, for instance, seeing the learners' progress, were identified as contributing factors towards feelings of personal achievement. Motivational levels play an important role towards the establishment of emotional well-being and satisfaction. Motivation will moderate the relation between job satisfaction and job performance (Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 353). A key feature, according to Ololube (2006, p. 8), that determines work motivation is the relationship between the effort it takes to perform a job and the result that is obtained. The findings suggested that teaching learners with SIC required a great deal of effort and that the results were limited. However, the little progress the participants experienced seemed to strengthen their levels of motivation and to contribute to their job satisfaction, which was imperative not only for the educator, but for the learners with whom they worked as well.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings indicated that educators could not disregard the demanding challenges and the effect of teaching learners with SIC on each individual. The daily interactions between the learners and the educators could be described as “ebb and flow” – from very rewarding to exhausting. The solution, for effective educators, might be in finding the balance between the two extremes. This is only possible if an awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses is created. However, not everybody has the ability or inner strength to establish the equilibrium between dissatisfaction and satisfaction; this often results in lower levels of motivation and even causes stress and burnout. In order to enhance autonomous motivation and feelings of competence, the assignment of mentors is advised. The task of the mentors will be to provide support, positive feedback, and acknowledgement of accomplishments to enhance and establish emotional well-being.

The inappropriate or immature behaviour that learners with SIC displayed was identified as a major problem, with detrimental effects on the educators. Two primary issues were identified during the study. Firstly, there was the perception of the participants that people not working with the learners – “other people” – did not have an idea of the negative effect these learners' continuously challenging behavioural problems had on the educators. Secondly, the frequency and intensity of the behaviour, which sometimes became violent and physical against the educators, could be seen as the main contributor to emotional exhaustion (Hastings & Brown, 2002). Behavioural problems displayed by learners with SIC are a given; finding possible solutions to effectively deal with the challenging behaviour is no easy

task. Schools ought to recognise the importance of dealing with the behavioural problems of learners with SIC as a team effort. Participants indicated that they sometimes felt hopeless due to a lack of resources and support. Developing a disciplinary system, where the educators are incorporated as partners, would not only enhance autonomous motivation, but improve feelings of competence and relatedness. When talking about dealing with the learners' behavioural problems, the participants identified structure and routine, as well as knowledge and understanding of the learner, as important factors to take into consideration. The educators, with the experience and knowledge of the learners they teach every day, could, indeed, make valuable contributions towards developing such a disciplinary system.

In order to prevent a negative merged sense of personal and professional identity (Nias, as cited in Van Veen & Lasky, 2005, p. 895), educators ought to be guided against getting too personally and emotionally involved with the learners. Again, the fine line between too much or too little must be recognised. Part of being an educator involves emotions, a dynamic part of each individual, at the heart of teaching (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835). The balance between displaying empathy and losing oneself – the “me” – in the process of caring and giving must be acknowledged. Providing ample opportunities for the educators to receive support and guidance by mentors, such as colleagues, might prove to be valuable for the educators' emotional well-being.

Recommendations for Research

Previous research conducted internationally established that educators teaching learners with SIC experienced exhaustion and even symptoms of burnout. In this study, the specific behaviour displayed by the learners and their lack of progress were established as contributing factors. More research is needed concerning the coping strategies of those educators who display effectiveness in this demanding teaching environment in order to ensure physically and emotionally healthy educators within this specialised field of teaching.

Although it was not intended, the inclusion policy that was implemented in 2001 by the South African Department of Education (DoE) (SA, 2001), in the researcher's opinion, left educators at schools for LSEN experiencing themselves as those who defied the policy. The important part that the schools, as well as their teaching staff, play towards attending to the growing number of learners with special needs must be further researched and acknowledged.

Contributions of the Study

The study confirmed that educators teaching learners with SIC experienced high levels of stress due to their challenging working environment. However, the study also indicated the positive attitude, love, and empathy these educators displayed towards their learners, promoting effective interactions. The zeal these educators had for their job, challenged prior research that identified reluctance among educators to teach learners with SIC (Jobling & Moni, 2004, p. 5).

In terms of praxis, the study contributed to new knowledge on the experiences of educators teaching learners with SIC and the aspects that contributed to their experiences of job satisfaction. Previous research identified recognition, income, promotion, and achievement as the key ingredients for job satisfaction (Kaliski, as cited in Aziri, 2011, p. 78). Despite the lack of the above “ingredients”, the participants attributed their experience of job satisfaction to their passion for the job and the difference they made in the learners’ lives. Their job satisfaction was, thus, primarily intrinsically motivated despite strenuous extrinsic challenges. The study also contributed to confirming the principles of self-determination theory, which states that levels of motivation can be influenced by the presence or absence of feelings of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (McCarthy, 2012, para. 5). The participants declared their need for extrinsic motivation such as positive feedback to strengthen their levels of competence, providing some understanding of how the educators’ feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction were determined by a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

In terms of contributing to the literature on special needs education, the study contributed a better understanding of the lived experiences of educators teaching learners with SIC and the positive and negative impact this challenging teaching environment had on each individual.

Limitations of the Study

This research had a limited scope as part of a master’s degree in psychology. It was seen as a preliminary study, which included only two schools. Although only three participants per school participated, which might be seen as not representative of the sample, the responses from the participants at both schools were quite similar. The data contributed to developing a better understanding and awareness of the challenges and coping resources of

educators who perceived themselves as effective in teaching learners with SIC. In order to better understand this essential field of specialisation, more research is, however, needed.

The lens through which this particular study was conducted was that of transcendental or psychological phenomenology, as the researcher focused on the educators' experiences in teaching learners with SIC, keeping in mind that experiences could only be described and not explained (Weideman, 2007, p. 13). These experiences could never be objective because they were based on reality experienced by a subjective individual and could, therefore, not be generalised (Weideman, 2007, p. 16).

A further possible limitation was that the interpretations of the participants' experiences were inevitably influenced by the researcher's lived experiences, being an educator for learners with SIC herself. It was, therefore, important for the researcher constantly to be aware of her own beliefs, biases, and assumptions in order to see that work environment through the participants' eyes (Langdrige, 2008, p. 1129). To ensure an objective and trustworthy research product, it was important that there had to be another school participating in this study. The fact that the data the researcher obtained at both schools were similar and that the same themes were presented assured the researcher that the study was trustworthy.

This limitation was increased by the fact that the researcher was a head of department at one of the schools. Some of the participants might have viewed the researcher as a representative of the management team at the school and, therefore, used the interview as the ideal opportunity to project their frustration regarding the children's behaviour and their frustration due to lack of support towards the researcher. In such situations, the researcher made the participants aware of this and requested them to bracket the researcher's role at the school and see the researcher as a neutral individual, not a colleague.

All three of the follow-up interviews were conducted at one participating school because, based on the data obtained during the first interviews and the incomplete sentences, the researcher was of the opinion that the selected participants were the most suitable to provide a deeper understanding of the research topic. The researcher failed, however, to make a thorough comparison between the schools to try to understand the contextual basis of the imbalance.

Except for one, the interviews were conducted in Afrikaans and had to be translated into English. Some data might, therefore, have been lost or misinterpreted through mistranslation.

Conclusion

Educators for learners with SIC are bombarded with numerous challenges daily, not only to address the learners' diverse levels of disabilities and their individual behaviour trends, but also to provide emotional support and acceptance. This is an emotionally and physically challenging task, which often leaves the educators feeling "drained". However, the positive attitudes and passion for these learners provide them with the inner strength to start each day stating: *"I don't want to do anything else!"*

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview schedule 1

Interview schedule 1

Experiences of educators teaching learners who are severely intellectually challenged

Today we are here to understand your personal experiences working as an educator with SIC children within a LSEN school system. People at schools for learners with SIC often joke about the “two week rule”. The word is that if you start at a school for learners with SIC, and do not run away within the first two weeks, you will stay forever.

1. What made you stay longer than two weeks?
2. What are the factors that play a role in the people not staying?
3. How do the following aspects influence your working experience?

Environment:

Severely intellectually challenged learners

Training and experience

Colleagues

Appendix 2: Field notes (example)

Prosesnota 9 June.
Onderhoud met [redacted] van [redacted] school.

The interview took place at her home on a Saturday morning because she has two disabled kids children to look after.

She is friendly and well at ease in her home environment.

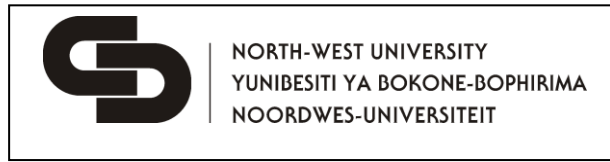
I was sick (sinus) and struggled with a block nose. We made good contact but her focus was on her experience as a mother of a disabled child and not primarily on her experience as an educator.

She made good contact and indicated with ease when she did not want to talk about a subject eg. her divorce.

She did however talk about it after the formal interview.

I was aware of my own physical state - not feeling well.

Appendix 3: Incomplete sentences



Experiences of educators working with severely intellectually challenged learners.

Name : _____

Date: _____

Please complete the following sentences.

My two most important aims are

.....

.....

.....

It gives me hope

.....

.....

.....

My best characteristic is

.....

.....

.....

I feel self assured

.....

.....

.....

I feel discouraged when

.....

.....

I never know

.....
.....
.....

I experience difficulty

.....
.....
.....

I feel uncertain

.....
.....
.....

Appendix 4: Interview schedule 2

Interview schedule 2

Experiences of educators teaching learners who are severely intellectually challenged

1. What are the lived experiences of this educator who is teaching learners with severe intellectual challenges effectively?
2. What are the positive experiences that signify success and job satisfaction in teaching learners with SIC?
3. What are the incidents and professional demands that are experienced as challenging in teaching learners with SIC?

Appendix 5: Consent forms for the participants

**NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY-
POTCHEFSTROOM
PARTICIPANT CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Title of the Research:

Exploring the subjective experiences of educators working with severely intellectually challenged learners.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Elizabeth M. Delport MA (Psychology), from North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The results of this study will be in fulfilment of a MA degree in psychology

- **Purpose of the study**

The research goal is to explore and describe the experiences of educators working with severely intellectually challenged learners and to determine if and to what extent these experiences influence the educator.

- **Procedures**

After obtaining permission from the Gauteng Department of Education, an introductory meeting will be conducted. The aims and objectives of the study will be explained to the staff of the school during this meeting, where after educators will be invited to voluntarily participate in the study. All educators volunteering to participate in this study will participate in semi-structured one-on-one interviews which will help enhance the researcher's understanding of the educators' experiences while teaching severely intellectually challenged learners. Interviews with the volunteers from two schools for learners who are severely intellectually challenged in the Tshwane South District, Gauteng, will be held after school hours. All interviews will be video recorded, transcribed, and all data will be stored in a safe place and will only be accessible to the researcher. In addition, feedback will be provided on request.

- **Potential risks and discomforts**

Participants will not be exposed to any unnecessary risk. The study will be using semi-structured one-on-one interviews to explore the participants' everyday experiences. Sharing information might cause some discomfort, therefore participation is totally voluntary and participants are allowed to withdraw at any given time. The researcher will be available to

address any queries, issues, concerns and provide participants with necessary support in the form of recommendations, information or referrals.

- **Potential benefits to subjects and/or to society**

There are no immediate direct benefits expected from this research. However, this proposed study will be beneficial to recognise the everyday experiences of educators and create awareness with the educator about the influences these experiences might have on the total being (mind and body) be it negative or positive. Findings could contribute towards creating awareness and knowledge about the working conditions of this specialised field and provide input towards guidelines in support of those educators working and interacting with learners with SIC, which could benefit and support both the educator and the learner.

- **Payment for participation**

The participants and selected Schools will not be paid for participating in this study neither will a payment be required to participate in this study.

- **Confidentiality**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with the LSEN School will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with the school's permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms for each participant for the duration of the study to ensure that they are not identifiable. All data will be labelled with pseudo codes and stored in a locked filing cabinet or on the researcher's PC, which is protected by a password only known by the researcher. The researcher's supervisor and external examiners and the university that the researcher is associated with will have access to the information, however no identities of the research participants will be revealed. Interviews with the participants are to be video recorded, for reference purposes and will be destroyed once the research is complete. The participants have the right to review/edit the tapes. The final research report, using pseudo codes, will be published at the Northwest University Potchefstroom campus.

- **Participation and withdrawal**

Participation is voluntary and participants may refuse to answer any questions and still remain part of the study. The researcher may withdraw a participant from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. Participants may withdraw at any time without any consequences.

- **Identification of researcher**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs. Delpont at 082 789 6168 or email (leriadelpont@yahoo.com).

- **Rights of research subjects**

You can decide to withdraw from participating at any stage of the research without penalty. You are not breaching any legal claims, rights or remedies as a result of your participation in this research study. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Mrs Colleen Potgieter (082 338 5900).

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by Mrs. EM Delport in English or Afrikaans (as preferred by the participant) and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the participant*] (He/she) was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English or Afrikaans (as preferred by participant).

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix 6: Author Guidelines-South African Journal of Education

South African Journal of Education

Author Guidelines

Guidelines for Contributors

Editorial policy

The South African Journal of Education (SAJE) publishes original research articles reporting on research that fulfils the criteria of a generally accepted research paradigm; review articles, intended for the professional scientist and which critically evaluate the research done in a specific field in education; book reviews, i.e. concise evaluations of books that have recently appeared; and letters in which criticism is given of articles that appeared in this Journal.

Indicate the relevance of the study for education research where the education system is characterised by transformation, and/or an emerging economy/development state, and/or scarce resources.

Research articles of localised content, i.e. of interest only to specific areas or specialists and which would not appeal to the broader readership of the Journal, should preferably not be submitted for consideration by the Editorial Committee.

Ethical considerations: A brief narrative account/description of ethical issues/aspects should be included in articles that report on empirical findings.

All articles will be submitted to referees (national and/or international). The consult editors/referees will have documented expertise in the area the article addresses. When reviews are received, an editorial decision will be reached to accept the article, reject the article, request a revision (in some cases for further peer review), or request arbitration. As a rule not more than one article per author or co-author will be accepted per year for refereeing and possible publication.

Authors bear full responsibility for the accuracy and regency of the factual content of their contributions. A signed declaration in respect of originality must accompany each manuscript. On submission of the manuscript, the author(s) must present a written undertaking that the article has not been published or is not being presented for publication elsewhere.

The author(s) must ensure that the language in the manuscript is suitably edited and the name and address of the language editor must be supplied.

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Page charges

ZAR R190 per page (from the second issue of 2013 onwards). Authors will be invoiced for the required page charges. Total number of pages should preferably not exceed 15 pages (\pm 5,500 words).

Preparation of manuscripts

The manuscript, including abstract, figure captions, tables, etc. should be typed on A4-size paper and the pages numbered consecutively.

The title should be brief (max. 15 words), followed by the author(s) name(s), affiliation(s) (Department and University), and an e-mail address for the corresponding author.

An abstract in English (approximately 190 words) must be provided, followed by up to 10 keywords, presented alphabetically.

The text of the article should be divided into unnumbered sections (e.g. Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, Acknowledgements, References, Appendix, in that order). Secondary headings may be used

for further subdivision. Footnotes, if any, will be changed to endnotes.

Authors must observe publishing conventions and should not use terminology that can be construed as sexist or racist.

Figures should be clear, black/white originals, on separate pages — not embedded in the text. Grey or coloured shading must NOT be used. **Tables/figures** should be numbered consecutively, with a brief descriptive heading/caption. Information should not be duplicated in text and tables. Each table/figure must be referred to in the text by number — not 'above' or 'below'. They will be placed where possible after the first reference.

References

Authors should cite at least three earlier articles in SAJE that are relevant to the subject matter of their article.

References are cited in the text by the author(s) name(s) and the year of publication in brackets (Harvard method), separated by a comma, e.g. (Brown, 1997).

If several articles by the same author and from the same year are cited, the letters a, b, c, etc. should be added after the year of publication, e.g. (Brown, 1977a).

Page references in the text should follow a colon after the date, e.g. (Brown, 1997:40-48). In works by three or more authors the surnames of all authors should be given in the first reference to such a work. In subsequent references to this work only the name of the first author is given, followed by the abbreviation et al., e.g. (Ziv et al., 1995).

If reference is made to an anonymous item in a newspaper, the name of the newspaper is given in brackets, e.g. (Daily News, 1999).

For personal communications (oral or written) identify the person and indicate in brackets that it is a personal communication, e.g. (M Smith, pers. comm.).

List of references

Only sources cited in the text must be listed, in alphabetical order, after the article. References should be presented as indicated in the following examples. Special attention should be paid to the required punctuation.

Journal articles:

Johnson DW & Johnson RT 1999. Gifted students illustrate co-operative learning. *Educational Leadership*, 50:60-61.

Books:

Van Zyl R (ed.) 1994. *Recent advances in classroom research*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Chapters in books:

Dukzec S 1988. Gender issues. In D Hicks & J Brown (eds). *Education for peace*. London: Routledge.

Unpublished theses or dissertations:

Squelch J 1991. Teacher training for multicultural education in a multicultural society. Med dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Anonymous newspaper references:

Citizen 1996. Education for all, 22 March.

Electronic references:

Published under author's name:

Wilson J 2000. The blame culture. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26. Available at

<http://www.govsources/gtp%access>. Accessed 20 April 2005.

Website references: No author:

These references are not archival and are therefore subject to change in any way and at anytime. If it is essential to present them, they should be included in a numbered endnote and not in the reference list.

Personal communications:

Not retrievable and not listed.

Submission of manuscripts for publication:

Manuscripts may be submitted electronically by e-mail or via the internet. Manuscripts should be submitted in MS Word format.

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Manuscript and covering letter must be e-mailed to *Estelle.Botha@up.ac.za*

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Website: <http://www.sajournalofeducation.co.za>

Use the "Register as Author" link to register and submit an article. This will enable you to track the status of your article on the website.

For inquiries contact *Estelle.Botha@up.ac.za*

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1. The submission has not been previously published, nor is it before another journal for consideration.
2. The submission file is in Microsoft Word or RTF document file format.
3. All URL addresses in the text (e.g., <http://pkp.sfu.ca>) are activated and ready to click.
4. The text adheres to the stylistic and bibliographic requirements outlined in the [Author Guidelines](#), which is found in About the Journal.
5. The text has had the authors' names removed. If an author is cited, "Author" and year are used in the bibliography and footnotes, instead of author's name, paper title, etc. The author's name has also been removed from the document's Properties, which in Microsoft Word is found in the File menu.
6. The article is approximately 5500 words or 15 pages.
7. The text was approved by a language editor.
8. Empirical data must be checked by a statistical consultant.

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