

# **Educators' experiences of their relationships with adolescents involved in drug use**

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## FOREWORD

This dissertation is presented in article format according to the guidelines set out in the Manual for Postgraduate Studies 2008, North-West University. The technical editing was done according to the guidelines and requirements set out in Chapter Two of the Manual.


The article will be submitted to the South African Journal of Education for publication. The guidelines for the submission to the journal are attached in addendum 3, Technical Guidelines for Journal.

## DECLARATION

I, Karen Walton, declare herewith that the dissertation entitled:

**Educators' experience of their relationship with adolescents involved in drug use**, which I herewith submit to the North-West University: Potchefstroom Campus, is my own work and that all references used or quoted were indicated and acknowledged.

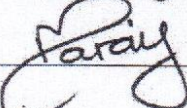
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## **SUMMARY**

### **Educators' experience of their relationship with adolescents involved in drug use**

**KEY TERMS:** Adolescence, drug use, educator experience, relational well-being

This study focuses on the experiences that educators have of their relationships with adolescents involved in drug use. It has been recognised over time that school communities are becoming more important with regards to the impact they have on learners, in particular the impact that learner-educator relationships have on the well-being of learners. A qualitative, phenomenological design was therefore used in order to ascertain the educators' lived experiences.

In total, sixteen educators were purposely selected from a secondary school in the area of Delft in Cape Town. In-depth interviews were conducted with all sixteen participants after which a World Café group session was organised in which the same 16 educators participated. These methods collected rich information. The results of the study are reported in an article. The aim of the article was to explore educators' lived experiences of their relationships with adolescent learners involved in drug use.

The study has shown that educators can have positive relationships with learners involved in drug use despite the challenges they face. It seems that it is most likely to occur when the educator feels motivated to nurture these relationships – possibly experiencing personal well-being – and uses a variety of skills and strengths to attempt to achieve this goal. This has implications for how other cases with learners involved in drug use should be treated and how the educators and school can assist these learners.

Recommendations that emerged as a result of this study are to make educators aware of their own personal well-being and the importance of nurturing their well-being, in order to enable them to, in turn, nurture positive relationships with learners involved in drug use. Schools themselves can also play a role in creating an organisational culture that places emphasis on the relational and personal well-being of teachers as well as students.

## OPSOMMING

### **Opvoeders se belewenis van hulverhouding met adolessente wat dwelms gebruik**

**SLEUTELTERME:** Adolessensie, dwelm-gebruik, opvoeder-belewing, verhoudingswelstand, Positiewe Sielkunde

Die fokus van hierdie studie is opvoeders se verhoudings met adolessente wat dwelms gebruik. Dit blyk dat skoolgemeenskappe oor tyd van groter belang geword het veral ten opsigte van die invloed wat dit het op leerders, en meer spesifiek die invloed van leerder – onderwyser verhoudinge op die welstand van hierdie leerders. 'n Kwalitatiewe, fenomenologiese ontwerp is gebruik om opvoeders se geleefde ervaringe te bepaal.

'n Totaal van sestien opvoeders verbonde aan 'n sekondêreskool in die Delft-omgewing die Kaapse Metropool is doelgerig gekies. In diepte-onderhoude is gevoer met die sestien deelnemers waarna 'n 'World Cafe' groep sessie beplan en uitgevoer is waar tydens dieselfde 16 opvoeders deelgeneem het. Beide hierdie metodes is gebruik ten einde ryk data te bekom. Die resultate van die studie is weergegee in artikel formaat. Die doel van die artikel was die verkenning van opvoeders se geleefde ervaringe van hul verhouding met adolessente leerders berokke by dwelmmisbruik. Die studie het getoon dat opvoeders positiewe verhoudings met leerders wat dwelms gebruik, kan handhaaf ten spyte van vele uitdagings. Dit blyk om meer voor te kom wanneer die opvoeder gemotiveerd is om hierdie verhoudinge te koester (moontlik omdat hulle persoonlike welstand ervaar) en om 'n verskeidenheid vaardighede en sterkpunte te gebruik om hierdie doel te kan bereik. Dit het implikasies hoe ander gevalle waar leerders wat dwelms gebruik, hanteer moet word en hoe opvoeders en die skool hierdie leerders kan help.

Aanbevelings wat na vore kom as 'n resultaat van hierdie studie is om onderwysers bewus te maak van hul persoonlike welstand en die belangrikheid om hul eie welstand te koester, ten einde hul verhouding met leerders wat betrokke is by dwelm gebruik te koester. Skole kan ook 'n rol speel deur 'n organisatoriese kultuur te skep wat klem lê op verhoudings- en persoonlike welstand van opvoeders en leerders.

## **PART I: ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH**

### **1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The researcher currently works for the South African National Council against Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA). In the time that the researcher has worked there – owing to the demand for services with children – the researcher became involved with a number of schools dealing with cases of drug use. Over time it became clear to the researcher that the learners who have been identified as drug users were experiencing changes in their relationships with their educators and that this may impact on the learners' overall level of well-being. The researcher therefore decided to explore the educators' experience of their relationship with adolescent learners involved with drug use.

There are many challenges in a learner's life which are difficult to control and can affect their well-being. Research indicates, however, that relationships can have a significant impact on levels of well-being (Seligman, 2011), because relationships can be a protective factor for promoting well-being. For this reason, the study focused on educators' experiences, since their experience of learners involved in drug use may influence how they interact with these learners. Whether intentional or not, this could in turn possibly affect the learner's levels of well-being as well as those of the educator, seeing that relationships are about interconnectedness and reciprocal positivity or negativity (Fredrickson, 2013).

Educators with a wealth of experience would yield rich data regarding their relationships with such learners. This would give a better understanding of their experiences and challenges in such circumstances in order to assist other educators in addressing these challenges. For this reason, a school in the area of Delft in Cape Town was chosen as the setting for the research study. According to the City of Cape Town Census 2001, it is a community where there are high levels of drug and alcohol abuse, gangsterism and mass unemployment (City of Cape Town, 2001), making it the ideal place to conduct research on educators' experiences of their relationship with adolescent learners involved in drug use.

Drug use in South African schools has become a major problem, with 12 being the average age of first use and a fifth of children having tried a drug by the time they

complete primary school (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004). Research indicates that this crisis regarding the use, abuse and addiction to drugs, is increasing (Van Niekerk, Suffla & Seedat, 2012). Statistics from the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use - SACENDU (Dada et al, 2012) show that adolescent drug use is rife and it seems that most people coming for treatment later in life, did initiate their experimentation with substances during adolescence (A. Pluddemann, Personal communication, MRC, 2012). This is also supported by the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) which asserts that the earlier use of drugs creates an increased risk of abuse later on.

The abuse of drugs also has huge repercussions on society at a number of different levels – firstly, on a cognitive level, impairments relating to attention and memory (Solowi et al, 2002); secondly, on an individual, physical level, there is the risk of increased susceptibility to mental illness and breathing problems from inhaling or smoking substances; thirdly, on the family level, the chaos and misery that it creates; and lastly, on the social level, the participation in criminal activities to subsidize continued drug use (National Institute for Drug Abuse, 2007). According to Ray Eberlien, the acting chairman of the Central Drug Authority (CDA), drug abuse is costing the South African economy R130 billion annually, with the country ranking as one of the nations with the highest consumption of drugs worldwide (South African Broadcasting Corporation, 2011).

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), an adolescent is considered to be a young person between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Although adolescence is generally seen as a time of good health (WHO), it can also be a developmental phase where many of the illnesses and disorders displayed in adulthood have their roots (Van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2010). Diseases and disorders associated with drug use are a particular example of this. During adolescence, many challenges occur, such as the increasing importance of the peer group, with the possible implications of higher risk behaviours (Pluddeman, Flischer, McKetin, Parry & Lombard, 2010). It is also a life stage where it is almost “normal” to be moody and relationships with adolescents can be difficult (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2011; Thom, Louw, van Ede & Ferns, 1998). In a South African study it was found that 6 out of 10 adolescents do not experience high levels

of well-being and do not function optimally (Van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2010). This is important, seeing that positive relationships are an indicator of wellness, as well as a crucial facet of the higher levels of well-being, which is referred to as flourishing (Keyes, 2005).

Drug misuse and abuse can be seen as the absence of well-being, where an adolescent with problems wants a “short cut” to happiness or the “quick fix” that drug use seems to provide (Krentzman, 2013). In a study by Van Schalkwyk and Wissing (2010), it was found that the use of drugs by adolescents can be seen as a sign of “languishing” or an “absence of mental health” (Keyes, 2007), indicating the category of lower levels of mental well-being, which is also supported by the view of Krentzmann (2013). Languishing as the lower levels of well-being can indicate greater vulnerability to the development of disorders, such as mood disorders, depression and substance abuse. These disorders often occur with other co-morbid illnesses, and have an impact on overall functioning. This means that the use of drugs can have major implications for the adolescent’s health, functioning, relationships, engagement and achievement, which are all important indicators of well-being (Seligman, 2011).

With the school community playing a greater facilitative role in healthy development such as self-esteem, coping with adversity and prosocial behaviour, there is also a growing acknowledgement of the importance of positive educator-learner relationships. It is recognised that positive educator- learner relationships affect more than just academic outcomes, but also have an impact on behaviour and a sense of belonging within the school context (Liberante, 2012). Educators have to increasingly deal with adolescents’ problems, for example secondary school learners and drug use. It is often encouraged that, if a learner has personal problems, approaching their educator to talk about it is an adaptive way of coping (Anonymous, 2012). It is imperative that educators are able to deal specifically with learner drug use in terms of what is set out in the legislature (Government Gazette No 23490, 6 June 2002; Government Gazette No 22754, 12 October 2001), the National Drug Master Plan, the Department of Education and individual schools drug policies.

According to legislation (Government Gazette No 23490, 6 June 2002), more than mere preventative measures must be considered for educators to cope with this

challenge within school communities. In the past, schools have dealt with drug use by expelling learners (National Drug Master Plan, 1999 - 2004), resulting in restrained relationships with learners and parents. Legislation and school policy has changed over time and relational well-being is now recognised as a protective factor (McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010). In addition, it is important to mention that the restraining of the educator-learner relationship may not be in the best interest of the learner (Pluddemann et al, 2010) and does not help solve the problems the learner may be having, leading to – for example – leaving school which may affect the chances of success in life (Bridgeland, Di Iuliojr & Morison, 2006). South African legislature supports this by requiring the Department of Education to not rely merely on disciplinary measures, but also to support learners who have become involved in drug use (Government Gazette No 23490, 6 June 2002). It also goes further by requiring that if a learner wants help, that learner cannot be denied access to their normal school community. Only if a learner is unwilling to make use of assistance can he/she then be suspended or expelled provided other criteria are fulfilled, such as that the learner is using drugs at home and it is not causing impairment in terms of school related functioning. Educators are also meant to be equipped with training to cope with learner drug use.

Although in the past, learners have been expelled from schools when their drug use has come to the school's attention, the researcher holds the opinion that positive educator-learner relations could be a crucial protective factor for the learner. Having a positive relationship with an educator may help a learner to stop the use of substances and perhaps avoid becoming addicted to the substance, with all the negative consequences that are associated with that, such as criminal involvement, prostitution and greater vulnerability to mental illness. (NIDA, 2007; Rawatlal & Petersen, 2012). Research has shown that learners who have supportive relationships with educators have better academic outcomes and engage in less problem behaviour (Liberante, 2012).

The educator-learner relationship is therefore the most significant relationship within the school community. Learners are able to cope with challenges better when they feel as though they are cared about within their school community, in particular by their educators (Knesting, 2008). This implies that when a learner is facing

challenges the relationship with the educator can be one of invaluable support. This promotes a sense of belonging and connection to the school community which can translate into more relational well-being, leading to an increase in overall feelings of well-being and mental health (Keyes, 2007). However, it is also common that learners who are dealing with problems related to drug use, for example declining academic performance and success, can be viewed negatively by educators. Stigma and a lack of sympathy from educators contribute to further problems, even to the learner dropping out of school (Kranke & Floersch, 2009). Educators consequently have the potential to be a source of support to learners and the experiences that they have may either be facilitative or an obstacle to this potential for support.

With this in mind, the research question is posed:

What are the educators' experiences of their relationship with adolescents involved in drug use?

## **2. RESEARCH AIM**

The research aim was to explore educators' experience of their relationship with adolescents involved in drug use. Educators were all from a particular school in the community of Delft in the metropolitan area of Cape Town.

## **3. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT**

It is now recognised that the relationship between learners and educators have an impact on their well-being. In the field of drug abuse, learner-educator relationships can contribute towards positive or negative outcomes. For this reason, it is important to explore how educators experience their relationships with adolescents who are involved in drug use.

## **4. CONCEPT DEFINITIONS**

### **4.1. Substance Use Spectrum Disorders**

For the purposes of this study, the term "drug use" is used as a term to focus on the use of illegal drugs such as dagga, methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin. It is not certain whether learners at the school where the research took place are using, abusing or even addicted to drugs. The main criteria that the learners "use" of drugs has come to the school's attention is used throughout the study, referring to a

situation where the school is aware of such a problem. However, it is important to understand the substance use spectrum of disorders as described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Substance use can be seen as occurring along a continuum of use, ranging from “no use” on one end, to “very frequent use of large quantities” on the other end (Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2009). It has been found that, as the rate of use increases, so does the chances of an individual experiencing negative consequences as a result of this increased use. Learners who are using drugs more frequently will have greater chances of being exposed to negative consequences and in this way, the use comes to the attention of the school. This continuum of use includes substance use, substance abuse and substance addiction (Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2009). Recovery is not represented on the continuum of use as by definition, it involves no substance use at all (Schwarzlose et al, 2007). Relapse can be seen as the resumption of substance use after a period of abstinence (Government Gazette No 23490, 6 June 2002).

#### **4.1.1. Substance Use**

“Substance use” can be defined as the intake of low or infrequent amounts of a substance, so that the consequences experienced as a result of “use” are either minor, or on rare occasions, can be negative. This type of use is most often associated with the terms “experimental use” or “casual use” (Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2009). As the use of substances increases or becomes more frequent over time, an individual may begin to experience more negative consequences as a result of “substance use”, leading to the individual beginning to abuse the substance.

#### **4.1.2 Substance Abuse**

“Substance abuse” can be defined as “a pattern of substance use resulting in clinically significant physical, mental, emotional, or social impairment or distress, such as failure to fulfil major role responsibilities, or use in spite of physical hazards, legal problems, or interpersonal and social problems” (Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2009). In the context of youth, educational impairment may take the form of absences from school, the habitual failure to complete homework or suspensions. It is possible that an individual abuses a substance for a period of time and may change their using behaviour for any number of reasons (Barlow & Durand, 2005).

The reasons may relate to consequences the individual has been experiencing such as a negative effect on health. Some may reduce their use or even stop using completely at this stage, while others may begin to engage in more frequent use of greater amounts, leading to substance addiction.

#### **4.1.3. Substance Addiction**

“Substance addiction” or “dependence” has the hallmark of the need or compulsion to use a particular substance. This can be a physical need where the user experiences withdrawal symptoms or a psychological need where the user wants to “feel normal” (Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2009). This need is fulfilled despite negative consequences for the individual in terms of social, physical, educational, relational or psychological impairment (Barlow & Durand, 2005). The Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) has certain criteria that must be present for a diagnosis of “substance addiction” to be made. It focuses on length of impairment and tolerance – needing more of a substance to achieve the desired result – as well as withdrawal when access to the substance is denied. Another characteristic that is emphasised is the continued use of the substance despite problems related to the use thereof.

#### **4.1.4. Relapse & Recovery**

The legislature uses the following definition of relapse – “when a person has been abstinent for a period and starts using drugs again” (Government Gazette No 23490, 6 June 2002; Government Gazette No 22754, 12 October 2001). Due to the nature of addiction, however, relapse is considered not only a possibility, but a likelihood owing to the fact that it requires the change of behaviours that are deeply embedded. Over time, addiction has come to be viewed as a chronic illness requiring maintenance and research shows that it has relapse rates similar to those of other chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma (NIDA, 2007).

For a long time, there has been no formalised definition of what it means to be in recovery. Those who are in “recovery” know exactly what it is, but this lack of a working definition has made research on the topic challenging. A working definition of “a voluntarily maintained lifestyle characterized by sobriety, personal health, and citizenship” was, however, put forward by The Betty Ford Institute (Schwarzlose et

al, 2007). In this definition, the criterion of “sobriety”, meaning abstinence from all drugs and alcohol, is seen as the foundation of recovery and must be present for definitions of recovery. Personal health refers to improved physical, psychological and spiritual health and citizenship refers to having respect for those who live around you.

## **4.2. Adolescence**

An adolescent is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013) as a person between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Although most adolescents enjoy good health (WHO, 2013), many of the illnesses and disorders which become apparent in adulthood may have their roots in the adolescence developmental period, particularly those associated with drug use (Van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2010). This is because, during adolescence, many changes occur in the individual on a physical, social, cognitive and emotional level. These changes bring with them new challenges for the adolescent, such as using their new abilities to think in abstract terms and creating a new sense of identity that is separate and different from that of their parents (American Psychological Association, 2002). These challenges can potentially seem to be overwhelming for the adolescent, possibly leading to drug use in an attempt to cope.

Another major change that occurs in adolescence is in the domain of relationships. The peer group becomes more important as adolescents attempt to create an identity that is distinct from their identity as a child. This does not mean that family relationships decrease in significance, the relationships with family members are still the most important and can serve as a protective factor (American Psychological Association, 2002). However, adolescents who struggle to gain acceptance within peer groups are at a higher risk of delinquency, for example experimentation with substances as a way of attempting to gain acceptance and create an identity within the particular group (American Psychological Association, 2002). Other risks associated with this stage are aggression and school dropout. And yet, most adolescents are able to successfully overcome this stage. Erik Erikson (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003) viewed the “overcoming of the identity versus role confusion stage” of adolescence as gaining the “ego strength of reliability”. Gaining a sense of certainty of identity whilst simultaneously being aware of other identity choices that were not

chosen, along with a sense of loyalty towards the roles the individual has chosen, is the hallmark of the ego strength of this stage (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003).

Although many adolescents who are exposed to risky behaviours in high risk communities are using drugs from an early age, adolescents from more affluent families are not immune to drug use and may be at as high a risk as their less affluent counterparts (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). Money and social status cannot make one immune to the risks associated with drug use. Other protective factors then become important, such as positive relationships with significant others (NIDA, 2003).

### **4.3. School Community**

A school community can be seen as a collection of the people connected to a school – learners, educators, administrators and learners' families. The school community is not apart from other communities but exists within them (Redding, 1991). When looking at how community is defined, there is some disagreement, with some focusing on the importance of geographical location (Osterman, 2000, Redding, 1991), while others downplay this aspect. Nevertheless, it seems as though most authors agree that in a community, members feel that they belong, are safe and are able to trust others who are also a part of this community (Osterman, 2000).

One of the uses of a school community is the relational impact that it can have on its members, since it provides a sense of acceptance and the feeling that the individual matters to the group while the group also matters to the individual. This creates a situation where an individual's social needs can be met by the group as he or she is being cared for by others (Osterman, 2000). Since human beings are social beings, a healthy sense of community and the need for a sense of belonging is inherent to us all, making it of central importance for fully functioning human beings and sustainable well-being.

The sharing of common values is seen by some as another important aspect with regards to school community – all members of this community (learners, educators, school staff administrators and parents) share the value of being interested in the education of children (Redding, 1991) as well as taking responsibility for and fulfilling roles that support this value. Although it can appear that the school community is limited to a relatively small number of individuals, it also has the ability to progress

outwards from its centre, including other complementary aspects of the wider community into its overall community (Redding, 1991).

#### **4.4. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed the ecological systems theory, which emphasizes that an individual is embedded within a number of subsystems, some of which have a direct or indirect influence on the development and growth of the individual. These systems can be divided into *proximal* and *distal* systems, where proximal systems have a direct influence on the individual and distal systems having a more indirect effect (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The first of the two proximal systems is the *microsystem*. This consists of the immediate environment of the individual, family, peer group and community and is where the individual – who is at the centre of this system – influences and is influenced by this environment. The *mesosystem* is the second proximal system and is concerned with the inter-relationships that exist between parts of the microsystem in which he or she exists, such as how the family system is influenced and interacts with the school system. In this way, changes in one part of the system influences another system (Van De Merwe, Dawes & Ward, 2012).

The following two systems are both distal systems, the first of which is the *exosystem*– a system of wider support that includes the wider social setting that an individual exists within but does where the individual does not play an active role, such as how a child might be affected by his or her mother getting a job in another province. Next is the *macrosystem*, the last system which has the most indirect influence on the individual. However, this can still have an impact on how an individual develops and matures since religion, ideology, values and law fall within the ambit of this system (Van De Merwe et al, 2012).

The ecological systems theory is well suited for explaining pathways to ill-being, such as drug use, abuse or addiction, as its framework enables us to consider both the relationships between individuals and their environments, as well as the ways in which those environments and the way they are experienced can interact with each other across contexts (Felner, 2006; Huebner, Gilman & Furlong, 2009). This framework also helps to identify individual along with contextual conditions that relate to well-being such as social competence.

## **4.5. Positive Psychology**

Positive psychology is a particular school of psychology which focuses on “the good life” and what is going “right” in a person’s life (Keyes, 2009). This is important because a problem that has been highlighted in the profession of psychology today is the emphasis that is given to diagnosis, treatment and pathology while failing to look at both the strengths and weakness of the person concerned as well as the environment that they find themselves in (Maddux, 2002; Wright & Lopez, 2002). Positive psychology can complement this emphasis on pathology by focusing not on “what’s wrong” with a person, but also “what’s right” with them.

Positive psychology, on the other hand, sees wellness as occurring on a continuum, with pathology on the one extreme and “flourishing” on the other, with “languishing” in between. If we focus on just pathology with learners in school communities, we may lose a great deal of what is really going on in their lives. Although some learners will experience some difficulties and problems in the form of mental illness, most learners will remain free of mental illness (Barber, Abbot, Blomfield & Eccles, 2009). However, health and well-being is not necessarily equated with the absence of mental illness (Keyes, 2002).

Positive psychology has a focus on positive health – emphasizing well-being, happiness, personal responsibility and citizenship (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). It is recognised that a vital part of the overall puzzle of well-being is that healthy relationships between people are a part of positive human health (Keyes, 2002). For this reason, positive psychology was used as a theoretical framework for the study.

### **4.5.1. Well being**

In positive psychology, mental health is seen as more than just the absence of pathology. Instead it is understood as being active and a part of your world, having a sense of purpose, the presence of healthy relationships and feeling a connection with others (Keyes, 2007). With this in mind, three categories of well-being are identified, namely psychological, emotional and social well-being (Keyes, 2005). Emotional well-being can be seen as an individual’s perception of happiness and satisfaction with life in general. Psychological well-being can be seen as holding a positive attitude towards the self with regards to aspects such as personal growth,

having a purpose in life, a sense of environmental mastery, a sense of autonomy, self-acceptance and the ability to have positive relations with others (Keyes, 2007). Social well-being can be seen as positive functioning in terms of an individual's level of perceived social acceptance, integration, contribution, coherence and actualization.

Seligman (2011) sees well-being as central to positive psychology. Positive emotions, positive relationships, engagement, achievement, and living lives full of meaning are viewed as the most important indicators of well-being. According to Keyes (2007), individuals who are flourishing function better than others, having less impairment and disability, as well as being more functional members of society (Keyes, 2007).

#### **4.5.2. Relational Well-being**

Healthy relationships are necessary in order for individuals to experience well-being, making relational well-being a necessary precondition for the experience of overall well-being (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011). Research has shown that the quality of these relationships is important, so having close social relationships and feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance are needs that must be met in order to experience well-being (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011).

Positive relationships have a number of benefits, such as development of the self, social development, physical health, the creation of opportunities as well as access to them and support. In terms of psychological development, individuals learn a great deal about themselves from the way that others relate to them and this may affect self-esteem. Social development refers to social skills as well as the understanding of what is deemed to be appropriate and moral behaviour in individual contexts. This is learnt through relationships with others. Relationships can also have a positive or negative effect on an individual's health since negative relationships can lead to poor health, by stimulating unhealthy behaviour and failing to provide positive support. On the other extreme, positive relationships can be related to good health through more effective stress management and being able to secure support. The existence of not just close relationships, but also those that can be described as more superficial may also have benefits, in particular with regards to creating opportunities and access to them (Ashcroft & Caroe, 2007). Another major benefit that comes about through

positive relationships is the ability to muster support, which can take the form of practical support such as being able to borrow money from a relative, or emotional support that requires more trust in the relationship. Individuals who are able to secure support for themselves may feel more secure, enhancing their well-being. What is significant is that relationships can create a gateway to well-being while, at the same time, acting as a type of buffer against situations that may have a negative impact on an individual's well-being. In the context of this study, it is highly significant that relationships can have such supportive effects (Ashcroft & Caroe, 2007).

## **5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Literature Study**

A literature study was undertaken which focused on themes such as positive psychology, well-being in schools, relational well-being, school communities, the developmental phase of adolescence and educator-learner relationships. Particular authors such as Flisher, Parry and Pluddemann who write specifically on substance use by South African youth were also included.

Statistics from the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU) were consulted, as well as legal documents that pertain to school policies and drug use by learners. Websites, dissertations, journal articles and newspaper articles are sources that were searched for appropriate literature. Databases such as Science Direct, EBSCO Host, PsycLit, Google Scholar and Proquest were also used. Furthermore, a number of older references were used in the literature study owing to challenges in finding current sources relating to particular concept definitions as well as for their use as historical sources.

### **5.2 Empirical Investigation**

#### **5.2.1 Research Approach and Design**

A qualitative, phenomenological research design was used as the study is concerned with the lived experiences of the participants (Delport, Fouche & Schurink, 2011). Qualitative research is seen as the most appropriate method when

findings are not predetermined and the information that is collected takes the format of the opinions or values of particular individuals within a social context (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005).

Phenomenological studies are concerned with the meaning that people give to their own experiences (Delpont et al, 2011), and focus on describing a phenomena accurately but with an open mind, allowing the story to speak for itself (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenological research attempts to view social and psychological phenomena using the experiences of those involved in the phenomena in order to understand it. It can therefore be said that phenomenological research is concerned with individual's lived experiences (Groenewald, 2004) which is what the current study focuses on.

Exploratory research is particularly suited to the needs of this study as its focus is mainly on describing and understanding phenomena, not giving solutions to a problem (Durrheim, 2006). Although the findings of exploratory research may not always be generalizable to larger populations, it is very effective in exploring areas where not much is known and through rich, meaningful information brings understanding and insight to a phenomenon. The study focuses on the relatively unknown area of educators' experiences of their relationship with adolescent learners involved in drug use. It looks to expand the knowledge gap that we have about their experiences through descriptions which then create meaning.

Since exploratory research requires in-depth information in order to understand the complex experiences described by participants, their lived experience forms the focus of this study. And, because qualitative research is flexible, using an inductive approach to aid in the exploration and understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Durrheim, 2006), themes naturally emerge from data which was important in the context of the study. Consistent with both the methods of exploratory research and phenomenological research, the data was initially collected through the use of in-depth interviews with participants (Mack et al, 2005). Thereafter, the World Café – a group activity that focuses on the creation of shared knowledge – was used to collect further data (Brown, 2002).

### 5.2.2 Participants

The study made use of non-probability sampling and the selection of participants was purposive, which is common in exploratory research designs where there is a need to gain information from participants who are known to have had certain experiences so that rich and meaningful data can be collected (Mack et al, 2005). The sample was drawn from a population of secondary school educators who have had experience dealing with adolescent learners involved in substance use. Participants who were selected as part of the sample were all secondary school educators working in a specific school in the area of Delft in the city of Cape Town.

The specific selection criteria were that all participants were secondary school educators in Delft who:

- Speak English either as a first or second language.
- Have more than three years of experience of teaching.
- Have more than two years of experience of dealing with learners who are involved in drug use, abuse or addiction.

For the purposes of this study, the selection criteria of “knowledge of adolescent drug use” covered situations of the educator physically seeing the learner use a drug, the learner testing positive on a random drug test, the learner approaching the educator for assistance with a drug use problem, the learner’s peers approaching the educator about a friend’s drug use or where a learner’s parent has approached the educator for assistance with the learner’s drug use problem. The participants for the in-depth interviews were furthermore chosen based on their having a number of experiences, both positive and negative, with adolescents using drugs.

The sample size for both the in-depth interviews and the World Café was 16 participants. Large samples are not necessary in exploratory phenomenological research as the detail and depth of the information is the focus as opposed to the quantity of particular responses (Delpont et al, 2011). The principal of the school approached educators about participating in the study. Sixteen participants in total agreed to participate in the in depth interviews and World Cafe. According to Brown (2002), the World Café needs four – five participants per table in order to ensure there is sufficient diversity in opinions to stimulate conversations. Therefore the sixteen participants were sufficient for the World Café.

### **5.2.3 Research Procedure**

- Ethical clearance was gained from North-West University.
- The researcher made contact with the Western Cape Department of Education, gaining permission to conduct the study in a school in the Delft area of Cape Town.
- Contact was made with a secondary school in Delft and permission was gained from the Principal after the purpose, goals and duration of the study had been explained.
- Informed consent was gained from all participants in the study, all of which are secondary school educators.
- The premises of the school itself were organised to be used as the venue for the study. Dates for collection were set and participants informed.
- Data was collected, transcribed and analysed.
- A literature study was conducted.
- Findings will be discussed in Part II.

### **5.2.4 Data Collection Methods**

The in-depth interview is an effective method for the collection of data on individuals' experiences (Mack et al, 2005), making it ideal for use in this study. Interviews are one of the most common methods of data collection used in qualitative research (Delpont et al, 2011). In interviews, the participant almost takes on the role of an expert on the subject while the researcher is in the role of a student, attempting to understand and learn from the participant's experiences. The interview is also an effective method of gaining insight into emotions, opinions and experiences (Mack et al, 2005).

For these reasons, in-depth interviews were conducted with all participants. An interview schedule (see addendum 2) was used to guide the process, while still allowing for flexibility to probe and ask further questions in order to clarify understanding (Delpont et al, 2011). Interviews were held on the school premises to

allow easy access to participants. Each participant was interviewed by the researcher and interviews lasted roughly 30 minutes with most participants. The first 2 interviews completed took longer as these participants had been identified as being involved in almost all cases of drug use in the school setting. These interviews lasted roughly an hour and a half each. Biographical data was collected from all participants, and thereafter five questions were posed to each of them as set out in the interview schedule:

- What was the educator's experiences with learners using drugs?
- How did the discovery of the drug use affect their relationship with the educator?
- What lessons does the educator feel he/she has learnt from this experience and how does this affect their relationships with learners now?
- Focusing on the relationship with the learners, what does the educator feel works well when dealing with these learners?
- Once again focusing on the relationship, what does the educator think does not work well?
- Finally the educator was invited to share a personal story about a relationship with a drug using learner that he/she feels is positive.

From the information gained in the interviews, the questions for the World Café were formulated (see addendum 3).

The World Café method is based on the idea that within themselves, people have the wisdom to create their own answers to their questions. It focuses on conversations that individuals have with one another that empower them to make meaning of their experiences as well as constructive change (Brown, 2002). As a process, the World Café fits well within the field of phenomenological research since participants are actively involved in the creation of meaning out of their own experiences – even assisting in the interpretation of data in order to ensure that the researchers' understanding is what was meant by participants. In the World Café, an atmosphere similar to a coffee shop is simulated to encourage open interaction between participants in small groups. A central focus of the World Café method is an exploration of questions together with others, allowing for participants to see the broader picture beyond themselves (Brown, 2002).

The process began with four volunteers being selected to be the “hosts” of their tables. Instructions were then given to the hosts concerning what they will need to do, in particular keeping the group on topic, stimulating conversation and giving feedback to the group on what others have said. Paper and voice recorders had already been placed on the tables beforehand. The remaining participants then divided themselves among the four tables. Each table was given a topic on which to either write or draw something while discussing it with their respective group. After a set time of 15 minutes, the participants went to another table until all groups had shared their experiences at every table. The hosts were then invited to give feedback on the experiences at their table, asking participants to add in any points that they felt were important to understanding that particular topic.

While this was occurring, the researcher took notes of the themes arising from the hosts’ feedback. The researcher also shared what was noticed in the data with the participants in order to ensure that the researcher’s understanding was correct and in so doing enhance the trustworthiness of the study. These themes will be discussed in the next chapter presented as an article.

Both phases of the data collection were audio recorded. Permission and consent was gained from all participants prior to the study.

### **5.2.5 Data Analysis**

The researcher subjected the data to a process of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). All data that was collected from the recordings at the interviews and World Cafe, including textual data, transcribed audio recordings and field notes, was analysed using the 6 steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

- The first step is that the researcher becomes familiar with the content. In this case, the researcher listened to and read and re-read the transcriptions of the interviews and World Café many times. Preliminary coding began at this stage.
- Generation of initial codes is the second step, where data that is of interest to the researcher begins to be singled out and the researcher begins the active search for codes. The researcher used highlighters to colour code

different themes on the transcripts, which were then transferred into electronic format for printing.

- The third step is that of creating the themes. The researcher printed out all the codes that had been identified and put them up in such a way that they could be seen in their entirety as well as moved around and manipulated so that overall broader themes could be formed.
- In the fourth step themes are reviewed. Some themes were combined and reorganised, which was a refining process of identifying the links between themes.
- The fifth step involves the naming of themes and beginning the process of defining them.
- Finally, the themes were written and presented as the research findings.

The themes that began to arise from the interviews informed the questions which were presented in the World Café. Analysis of data ceased once data saturation was reached and no new themes emerged from the data.

#### **5.2.6 Ethical Considerations**

Research findings should never come at the expense of its human participants (Strydom, 2011) and for this reason, ethics has become an important issue. The researcher has dealt with the ethical issues involved in this project in the following way:

- Ethical approval was granted for the study by North-West University : NWU-00060-12-A1
- Permission was sought from the Western Cape Department of Education to conduct the study, outlining the purpose, duration, goals and potential benefits of the research.
- Entrance to the school was gained from the Principal. Consent for the study to be conducted was obtained from the school.
- Consent was then obtained from participants, with the understanding that participation is voluntary and that participants may withdraw from the study at any time without any judgment or harassment. Aspects of the study, such as purpose, duration and process were clearly communicated to participants.

- Participants were made aware of the fact that they would not be offered any remuneration for their participation in the study.
- Consent for audio recording of the research process was obtained from participants.
- Confidentiality of information will be respected. Participants are only to be identified by a number. While participants do know one another and sharing was encouraged in a small group setting during the World Café method, no information that was disclosed during the private interview setting was shared with other participants.
- The storage of hard and soft data was outlined. Physical data is kept in a locked filing cabinet and all electronic soft data is stored on a computer that is password protected.
- Due to the fact that the topic is potentially a sensitive one, the Department of Education has an Employee Assistance Programme with a helpline that is available to their employees. The helpline was informed about the study before the time. It was acknowledged that some educators in the area may also be struggling with a family member or significant other who is using drugs and this could potentially be a difficult subject for them. The educators were informed about the helpline and encouraged to make use of it should they feel the need. The number of the helpline was made available by being clearly displayed on the wall of the venue. Cards displaying the number were also distributed to all participants.
- Once the research is concluded and has been through the examination process, a summary of the written article will be forwarded to the school where the research was conducted, as well as to the individual participants. This is to fulfil the requirement that participants receive feedback and are able to potentially use the information in ways that will be beneficial to their learners.

## **6. CHOICE AND STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The dissertation follows the article format prescribed by the North West University. The dissertation contains the following sections:

Section A:

Part I: Orientation to the Research (APA referencing format)

Part II: Literature Study

Section B: Article (Harvard referencing format)

Section C: Summary, Evaluation, Conclusion and Recommendations (APA referencing format)

Section D: Addenda

The South African Journal of Education has been identified as a possible journal for submission.

## **7. SUMMARY**

Educators have contact with adolescent learners who are involved in drug use and it is hoped that we will be able to learn from their experiences of dealing with these learners. The method of the study and rationale was described in this section. Key concepts were outlined briefly, along with discussion on the research methodology. Part II will be the literature study, followed by Section B which will detail the study further, along with the analysis and results in article format.

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## **PART II: LITERATURE STUDY**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The literature study began by broadly reviewing international literature that pertains to relationships between educators and learners in the context of drug use. The focus was then narrowed to local literature relating to relational well-being in South African schools. International and local statistics were furthermore studied in order to ascertain the prevalence of adolescent drug use. Information that deals specifically with the educator's experience of the relationship with adolescent learners involved in drug use, was however found to be very limited, in particular within the South African context. The research gap was therefore identified and the focus of this study was placed on how secondary school educators are experiencing relationships with learners who are using drugs. Once the Western Cape and the Delft community was chosen as the locale for the study, research was undertaken into the socio-economic problems of the area by obtaining the census information, as well as reading newspaper articles and other literature.

Next, a review of the adolescent phase of development and the particular challenges that are faced during this time was undertaken and theories used as a framework for the research – such as positive psychology and the ecological approach of Bronfenbrenner – were explored. In addition, recommendations on the prevention of adolescent drug use were reviewed, including the National Drug Master Plan. In order to gain a perspective from the legislature as well, documents outlining the management of adolescent drug use within the school context were also studied, such as: the National Policy on the Management of Drug Abuse by Learners in Schools and in Public Further Education and Training Institutions of 2002 The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 and the Regulations: Safety Measures at Public Schools of 2001.

Facts that came to the fore during the literature study were first and foremost that levels of drug use by South African youth is on the increase (van Niekerk et al, 2012). This is of the utmost concern owing to the fact that drug use is associated with an increase in learners' chances of poorer academic outcomes and dropping out of school, which – in turn – may lead to other negative outcomes in adulthood (Pluddemann et al, 2010). Research also indicated that the school can be seen as

the ideal place for prevention work to be done since most South African children do attend school (General Household Survey Statistics South Africa, 2010). The school community has also gained importance (Barber et al, 2009) and problems related to drug use by adolescent learners is coming to the attention of educators, in particular where there is insufficient support from home, peer groups or the community (Johnson & Lazarus, 2008). It was furthermore noted that positive relationships are important in overall academic success at school (Liberante, 2012) and so it is vital that we know what is occurring in the relationships between educators and those learners who are at risk of poor academic outcomes, in particular the adolescent learner who is involved in drug use.

## **2. DEFINITIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

### **2.1. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND WELL-BEING**

#### **2.1.1. Positive Psychology**

Psychology as a profession has placed a lot of emphasis on diagnosis and treatment and has given less focus to the fact that a healthy person is not just someone who is free of pathology, but also has “positive” aspects to their life which need to be considered in order to have a holistic understanding of the individual (Maddux, 2002). Positive psychology, on the other hand, has as its focus what is “good” and “positive” in the life of an individual (Huebner et al, 2009), including aspects such as: the ability to have fulfilling relationships with others, the ability to cope with the everyday stresses of life and the ability to feel like a productive member of the society to which the individual belongs (Keyes, 2007). Positive psychology and the theoretical concept of well-being, therefore forms a major part of this study, which not only focuses on what is not working in the relationships between educators and learners involved in drug use, but also on what works well.

#### **2.1.2. Well-being**

According to Seligman (2011), well-being is central to Positive Psychology, with positive emotions, positive relationships, engagement, achievement, and living lives of meaning as the most important indicators of well-being. If we view an individual by focusing only on their pathology, we may not be seeing that individual holistically and

we might miss important aspects of their lives such as having healthy relationships, being an active participant in their world, feeling connected to others and having a purpose in life (Keyes, 2007). By focusing only on what is wrong – in particular with learners in school settings – we can deprive the individual of the opportunity to make use of the positive aspects of their lives.

Many learners in schools experience challenges and problems at times, however, the majority will not be diagnosed with a mental illness (Barber et al, 2009). And yet, health and well-being does not necessarily mean there is an absence of mental illness (Keyes, 2002). All the components of well-being – emotional, psychological and social – need to be healthy in order for an individual to achieve overall well-being and mental health (Keyes, 2005; Wright & Lopez 2002). In this sense, emotional well-being can be described as the individual's perception of life satisfaction and happiness while psychological well-being can be viewed as a positive attitude towards the self – in particular with regards to personal growth, self-acceptance, having a purpose in life and the potential to have positive relationships, a sense of autonomy and environmental mastery (Keyes, 2007). Social well-being, on the other hand, focuses on the individual's feeling of social acceptance, social contribution, social integration, social coherence and social actualization.

Thus, in positive psychology, the term “languishing” is used to describe individuals who may be considered mentally healthy from a traditional approach in the sense that they do not display pathology, but who do, in fact, display low levels of well-being in the areas described above (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). The notion of “languishing” can therefore be described as the absence of well-being, or as incomplete mental health. The identification of individuals experiencing this can be useful in order to assist these individuals to raise their levels of wellbeing to that of “flourishing” so that a future diagnosis of mental illness can possibly be prevented. “Flourishing” is described as the presence of overall well-being and describes individuals who are viewed as mentally healthy while experiencing high levels of emotional well-being coupled with a minimum of six subcategories from psychological and social well-being. (Frederickson & Losada, 2005; Keyes, 2007).

According to Keyes (2007), individuals who are considered to be flourishing tend to function better than those who are not flourishing, being more functional members of

society as well as suffering from less disability and impairment. Van Schalkwyk and Wissing (2010) views flourishing as optimal human development and other research suggests that adolescents who are considered to be “flourishing” have fewer emotional and conduct-related problems, engage in less risky behaviours such as drug use, and have better academic outcomes (Low, 2011). Flourishing is clearly important for learners in terms of enabling positive outcomes for their future, and for this reason it can be argued that interventions need to be directed at raising levels of wellbeing to that of “flourishing” (Seligman, 2011).

### **2.1.3. Positive relations and well-being**

Positive relationships are essential to relational or social well-being, and social well-being is an indicator of high levels of overall well-being, which – as explained above – is referred to as flourishing. When young people are thriving, they are not simply doing well as individuals, they are also connected and contributing in meaningful manners to the common good that is realized through the groups, communities, and societies to which they belong (Felner, 2006). As explained by Keyes, well-being has both private and public components, which include a social or relational aspect (Keyes, 1998). The opposite is that when adolescents do not thrive, they are not doing well, and there is a lesser chance that they can contribute in meaningful ways to the families and communities to which they belong (McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010). With this in mind, it is clear that social well-being is central to the overall well-being described by Keyes (2005), with relationships playing a central role.

### **2.1.4. Prilleltensky’s theory of Well-being**

Prilleltensky (2005) also views well-being as more than the mere absence of pathology, but rather as a state where the personal, relational and collective needs of both individuals and communities are being fulfilled. He argues that well-being is dependent on both the relationships that one has as well as the community that one lives in. With the emphasis that is placed on the relational and community aspect of well-being, Prilleltensky describes sites, signs, sources and strategies of well-being. “*Sites*” describe the location of well-being, for example it may be the community where a person resides (collective), the relationships within that community (relational) and the feelings within an individual (personal). “*Signs*” can be seen as expressions of well-being and occur within “sites”. Within the site of a collective, for

instance, a sign of well-being may be universal healthcare. “*Sources*” of well-being can be viewed as the determinants of signs, such as in the example of universal healthcare, a source of that could be citizens’ contribution to the creation of a national health service. “*Strategies*” need to work across sites, signs and sources in order to be effective, and are the ways that signs are nurtured from sources within its site. They can be seen as specific actions that need to be taken in order to achieve the goal, for example creating a system of taxation to fund the universal healthcare system (Prilleltensky, 2005).

SPECS, which is an acronym for Strengths, Prevention, Empowerment and Community Conditions, is seen as a way to integrate these aspects of well-being (Prilleltensky, 2005). When designing interventions for a site, the strategies also need to take into account the signs and sources. To choose interventions that are consistent with the values of SPECS, we can view signs, sites, sources and strategies as occurring on a continuum, with two overarching categories describing the variety along this continuum. These two categories are the contextual and affirmation fields. The contextual field is comprised of intersection of the temporal and ecological fields. This describes whether interventions occur on an individual or collective scale (ecological field), intersected with interventions being proactive or reactive (temporal field). This intersection creates four quadrants. The affirmation field consists of the participation and capabilities field, which describes an intersection of the level of involvement of recipients of the intervention on a continuum from empowerment to detachment, as well as continuum of focusing on strengths or deficits (capabilities field) (Prilleltensky, 2005).

By using Prilleltensky’s theory, educators therefore have the opportunity to intervene on a number of different levels. This study looks at experiences with learners involved in drug use, which on a temporal domain, can be both reactive for those learners who are already addicted and proactive as some learners may just be experimenting. On the level of the ecological domain, educators also have the potential to intervene on both an individual and collective level, by relating individually to their learners as well as collectively in the class room and extra-curricular settings. When looking at the participation domain, educators who are aware of the impact that relationships can have, can ensure that their interventions

take place on the level of empowerment. Lastly is the capabilities domain where educators can nurture strengths rather than focus on negatives and deficits (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007).

## **2.2. EDUCATOR-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS**

Research has found that relationships have a big impact on an individual's quality of life and that well-being is directly related to personal relationships (Knoell, 2012). With this in mind, the relationship which exists between an educator and learner can be seen as one of the most important elements that affect school connection and engagement, as well as academic motivation (Liberante, 2012). This relationship influences academic performance and the behaviour of the learner (Hamre & Pianta, 2006) and it can furthermore serve as a protective factor in preventing certain negative outcomes such as drug use and school dropout (Knoell, 2012).

From the educator, nurturing and building relationships is seen as the ability to connect with learners and cultivate a relationship which is based on care, support, respect and personalization as well as being "human". The emotional bond that the educator can forge with learner helps to create a sense of belonging and safety within the school and in particular within that educator's classroom (Knoell, 2012). However, it is not necessarily easy to have positive relationships with learners. Adolescence can be a turbulent phase for even "normal" learners who can be reluctant to talk about their feelings. It is estimated that 1 in 5 adolescents have some emotional, behavioural or mental health problem which can make relationships with these learners even more complex (Johnson, Johnson & Walker, 2011). Learners with internalizing disorders may "fall through the cracks" while those with externalizing disorder may act out, making having a positive relationship a challenge. And yet, even though it might be challenging, educators are in the ideal position to recognize signs and provide support for these learners.

## **3. CONCLUSIONS**

Drug use by South African youth is on the increase, affecting behaviour within school systems and in this way coming to the attention of educators. Due to the importance of the relationship between learners and educators, it is necessary to explore the

experiences of educators who have found themselves in the situation of dealing with drug using learners, focusing on what works and what does not.

During the course of the literature study, no literature was found that dealt specifically with educator-learner relationships when the learner has been identified as involved in drug use. Adolescence comes with its own set of challenges as a normal part of this developmental phase, however, the use of substances can make an already turbulent time even more challenging for all concerned. And yet, educators can be seen as in a particularly important position in terms of being able to identify it, as well as serve as a source of support and assistance.

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**Section B: Article**

**Educators' experience of their relationship with adolescents involved in drug use.**

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## Abstract

A phenomenological, explorative study was undertaken in order to gain insight into secondary school educators' experience of their relationship with adolescent learners involved in drug use. In-depth interviews were conducted with sixteen participants from a particular school in the Cape Town community of Delft. Thereafter, the same participants participated in a World Café group discussion in order to tap their collective wisdom. The data was analysed thematically – using positive psychology as conceptual framework – and two main themes emerged which created a narrative of the educators' lived experiences. These two themes were: challenges to the relationship, and the skills and strengths used to nurture positive relationships. Despite the challenges to the relationship that they faced, it was found that educators' overall well-being is important in order for them to nurture relationships with learners. Educators also used a number of different skills and strengths in order to overcome challenges and nurture a positive educator-learner relationship. Findings were discussed, focusing on how these two themes fit into the picture of relational and overall well-being.

Key terms: adolescents, drug use, educator-learner relationships, positive psychology, relational well-being

## Introduction

In South Africa, learner drug use is becoming a significant problem, with a fifth of children having tried a drug by the time they finish primary school. On average, the initiation of drug use is at the age of 12 years (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004: 4). Owing to such an early age of experimentation and the possible progression of drug use to drug abuse and addiction, behaviour related to continued drug use may come to the attention of educators who then need to deal with these challenges.

The principle of *in loco parentis* offers some guidance on the educator-learner relationship, with the educator being a guide to the learner – someone who helps equip the learner for the future, motivating and giving assistance to those experiencing stressors (Mashau et al, 2008: 418 - 419). This indicates that a “good” educator nurtures positive relationships with learners and is not merely someone who teaches “content” mechanically. It has been shown that such relationships can act as a protective factor (Mashau et al, 2008: 419; Bester & du Plessis, 2010: 204).

However, learners who are involved in drug use will often exhibit problematic behaviour in the classroom, such as inattention and disruptiveness (Liberante, 2012; Stein, 2009). This is because drug use can have a significant impact on a learner’s well-being and also their ability to achieve, be healthy and engage in their world as well as have positive relationships. In a study by van Schalkwyk and Wissing (2010), it was found that drug use by adolescents is associated with lower levels of well-being and that this could imply a bigger probability of vulnerability and more problems relating to peers, parents and especially educators. Quite fittingly, it has also been found that educators struggle more to deal with the emotional and social challenges presented by learners than academic issues (Garner et al, 2013: 472; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003: 334), in particular showing more anger and frustration towards disruptive students (Yoon, 2002: 487). It is therefore clear that the behavioural issues that result from drug use, can hamper the formation of a positive relationship between the educator and learner, leading to the learner feeling unable to access support from the school community (Garner et al, 2013: 482).

All schools in South Africa are obligated to adopt a code of conduct for learners

(South African School Act 84 of 1996: 5) as well as methods for dealing with problems such as learner drug use within the school community. However, these documents focus more on administrative aspects of dealing with these learners and do not lay out guidelines as to how educators can support them. This can be problematic as it may limit the efficacy of educators in dealing with challenges and may lead to educators feeling helpless (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003: 334).

According to Seligman (2011), relationships are a core indicator of a flourishing individual and interconnectedness will have a major effect on personal well-being. In a study by Knesting (2008), it was reported by learner participants that the presence of educators who were committed and cared about them was even more important than the administrative aspects designed to support them. Similarly, it was found that when educators focus on positive interactions and communications with learners, they are better able to deal with learners' problematic behaviour (Mashau et al, 2009: 420). It is therefore apparent that relational well-being as the experience of warm connections and positive resonance is a vital aspect of complete well-being (Keyes, 2005: 547).

When a learner has a positive relationship with an educator, it is possible that the support the learner receives assists him/her to stop drug use and avoid becoming addicted. In a study by Meyers et al (1998: 304 - 305) it was shown how relationships contributed towards more positive outcomes with drug users entering treatment. Another effect of positive supportive relationships is that learners engage in less disruptive behaviour and fare better academically (Liberante, 2012: 2). Continuous supportive relations can furthermore lead to learners experiencing a sense of belonging within their school community which may enhance overall well-being (Keyes, 2007: 97). It is therefore clear that educators can be a source of support to learners, with their experiences being facilitative.

For this reason, it is important to ask the research question: What are educators' experiences of their relationship with adolescent learners involved in drug use?

## **Method**

### **Empirical Study**

A qualitative, phenomenological research design was used as the study was explorative – describing and focusing on understanding the lived experiences of individuals in their social context (De Vos et al, 2011:316 – 318; Mack et al, 2005:1-2). There is little research that has been conducted which specifically focuses on educators and their relationships with learners involved in drug use. In-depth and rich data was therefore required in order to gain insight and understanding into the phenomena.

A non-probability purposive sample of 16 participants was used. All participants were secondary school educators who work for a particular school in the Delft area of the city of Cape Town, which has been identified as one of the 20 high risk communities in South Africa (Personal conversation, Captain Williams, SADP, October 2013) where there is a high incidence of drug abuse and addiction. Participants were also all chosen because of their experiences dealing with learners involved in drug use. Of the 16 participants, 7 were male and 9 were female with an average age of 41 years. The average number of years' experience as an educator was 15 years, with a maximum of 25 years and a minimum of 3 years. There was also a great deal of variability in the number of years the educators had been working in Delft, ranging from 1 year to 19 years, with an average of 7 years of working in the community.

Initially in-depth individual interviews were conducted with all participants, where open-ended questions regarding their experiences with learners involved in drug use were posed to them. From these interviews, the questions for the World Café group discussion were developed. In the World Café, 4 questions were asked of participants who were gathered in small groups of 4. Responses were audio recorded.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from both the interviews and the World Café session were subjected to thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The following six-phased process was used: Firstly, the familiarisation of the data was done by

reading and re-reading the data with a view to identify important ideas. Secondly, provisional codes were created from the ideas identified in the previous phase. Thirdly, codes were combined to create broader themes. Fourthly, combined codes were then refined to identify the links between them. Fifthly the themes were named and finally, the themes were presented as the research findings.

### Trustworthiness

Crystallisation is a method for ensuring the trustworthiness of data by the use of multiple perspectives to explain the data as well as different types of data (Tracy, 2010: 843). In order to attain crystallisation, more than one method was used to collect data. These were in-depth interviews, followed by a group activity using the World Café method. Emerging themes were checked with participants (Tracy, 2010: 844) in the World Café, adding to the trustworthiness of the study.

### Ethical Considerations

First and foremost, ethical approval was granted for the study by North West University: NWU-00060-12-A1. The Western Cape Department of Education likewise gave approval for the study to be conducted in a specific school in the province. Thereafter, permission was gained from the Principal of the school concerned, and informed consent was given by all the educators involved. All participants were also informed of the purpose of the study and that all identifying information would be kept safe and confidential by not revealing any personal information about the participants. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the study, the researcher informed the Department of Education's counselling help line as well as Lifeline about the study and when it was scheduled to take place. Next, all educators were informed about the counselling services and its availability should they feel the need to make use of it. Cards advertising the appropriate contact details for Lifeline as well as the Department's helpline were placed on all tables at the group activity.

### **Results**

From the thematic analysis, the following two themes emerged with a number of sub-themes attached to each:

- Challenges to the relationship
- Skills and strengths for nurturing positive relationships

### Challenges to the Relationship

Educators experience a number of challenges with regard to building and maintaining relationships with learners who are involved in drug use. Three sub-themes emerged out of the data: emotional challenges; behaviour that restrains relationships; pressure to play multiple roles.

#### Emotional Challenges

Participants reported various negative emotions that they felt hampered their relationship with learners involved in drug use.

P13: "... learner mustn't see you that you can be afraid you know. "

P5: "...you can't trust them, because they will disappoint you."

P15: "...getting to a point where you feel despondent towards the learner."

#### Behaviour that restrains relationships

Participants reported how a learner's behaviour can be so disruptive in the classroom that the learner is removed from their presence. In particular, if the educator raised concerns to the learner, they would come to class less, and eventually not at all.

P8: "... if a problem is in class, look you sit with say forty learners in a class one disrupts, you send to the Principal, you don't have time to go outside and talk to him."

P5: "When you start asking them, you will find that they come less to your class and they will start bunking and then eventually when it's by the time we must bring his parents in, he's out of the school."

#### Pressure to play multiple roles

The area of Delft has a high rate of single parent families and poverty, as well as alcohol and drug abuse which can lead to parents being absent. Apart from the many difficulties linked to extreme poverty, there is also a lack of access to mental health facilities and rehabilitation centres. Confronted with these realities, educators experience extra pressure to fulfil the roles of social worker or care-giver, in addition to being an educator.

P9: “... sometimes it feels to me like I'm the mother, I'm an educator, I'm a social worker, but it's deeper than that, it's deeper than that, yes. ”

### Skills and strengths for nurturing positive relationships

Participants reported a number of competencies which they thought enabled them to encourage healthy relationships. Almost all participants expressed their knowledge of the use of confidentiality and respect as well as being trustworthy. Several other sub themes also emerged out of the data. They are: educator motivation; being approachable; being flexible; investing time in learners; knowing the learner and the learner's context; listening skills, encourage and empower, setting boundaries, being a positive role model; follow up and trust.

#### Educator Motivation

Most participants spoke about experiences that keep them motivated when they struggle to cope. For this reason, educator motivation appears to be how participants deal with the challenging and mixed emotions mentioned in the sub-theme: emotional challenges. Many spoke of how their job involves “a calling”, having a life purpose to make a difference in the lives of learners.

P6: “... in one of the houses in Delft of the learners who are studying here in school there's a possibility that one day they will be a lawyer, they will be a judge, they will be a magistrate so at the end of the day I need to be part and parcel of that.”

P9: “...I feel that um there's a need for me to be here.”

#### Being Approachable

Participants highlighted the importance of learners seeing their educators as approachable and nonjudgemental. Participants value this perception as being of key importance for learners to disclose difficulties.

P7: “...um you don't condemn, still treat them the same, let them keep their dignity. ”

P4: “... my room is open, you can come, break time, you need help after school... I said after half past two you can come to my class, I always open the door for them.”

#### Being Flexible

There is a realisation that these learners are coming from different environments and facing different challenges. A set of “one size fits all” rules will not necessarily work, especially if the goal is more than just teaching a subject. Many participants felt that if they were too strict, not taking into account learners' personal circumstances and

challenges, that it would effect the formation of positive relationships with learners.

P7: *"...a child must have a letter if a child stays absent, but sometimes you need, it's important if you know the history, let it slide."*

P12: *"I think if you are very strong to the children as a teacher, children they run away and they don't want to speak because, they know that they cannot, they cannot speak out to you because we don't have that relationship with them."*

### Investing Time in Learners

Participants reported that spending time with learners is important in the process of forming a positive relationship with them. In the classroom it can take quite a bit of time to get to know learners. Time spent, whether in the class room or during extra murals, can form the basis of the positive relationships so that later more personal experiences can be shared.

P2: *"...you need to make time for the kids really you need to make time."*

P5: *"... they will say, look Mr. X I came in the running, I came third or second and now that relationship is way better than in class and afterwards you will see that that learner's much better in class as well, because he's with me after school as well."*

### Knowing the Learner and the Learner's Context

Participants expressed the importance of having some information about the learners, as this would alert them to possible problems in the learner's personal life. Knowing the learner makes identifying changes, either in behaviour, school performance or physical appearance easier. Participants all agreed that it was important to know and understand where learners are coming from, treating every learner and situation as individuals, as (P7) stated *"not taking a hammer and beating everything down"*.

P16: *"...I was worried about them, knowing that they were good learners, above average learners and so on, why the change?"*

P3: *"...dont' just judge that child and say you are bad and what and this, like I told you, go a little deeper, you don't know what is wrong at home, some of their parents even sell this stuff."*

### Listening Skills

Participants spoke about allowing the learner to talk and just listening to what they are saying. It was highlighted that at times, learners might need guidance to talk

about their lived experiences. Listening attentively to learners sharing their life-stories with the educator was seen by participants as a way to assist the learners.

P1: *“And after a while you get other signs, um... until you ask for the learner, ‘Can I see your fingers, can I see your hands?’ . And he suddenly starts talking to you, ‘Sir, I’ve tried it, I’ve done it.’ ”*

World Cafe: *“Now your help, your help is listening. ”*

### Encourage and Empower

Many participants emphasized the importance of empowering learners by providing emotional support and enabling the learner to take responsibility for their own problems. When learners are struggling, most of the participants mentioned the significance of encouraging the learner by acknowledging his/her strengths and capabilities.

P14: *“...that’s when I start encouraging him, telling him, showing him the better picture of if you leave that this is what can happen and I always praise him for because I know he is a very good student, he’s a very good dancer and I always refer to those two things.”*

P1: *“... somebody’s seeing my effort and acknowledging my effort and it’s not just: ‘jy’s ‘n gemors, um... jy’s sleg’, it’s: ‘you’re looking quite nice today’. ”*

### Setting Boundaries

The participants agreed that it is important to have boundaries with the learners so that the learner can take responsibility and thus be empowered. This involves being able to specifically outline what the learner needs to do, and what the educator undertakes to do, while the educator is protected (protected from blame by not making promises and involving the appropriate people in order to get the effective assistance).

World Café: *“...you need to also maybe draw a boundary, um... to what you are going to do, um... how far you going to help a learner.”*

### Being a Positive Role Model

Educators expressed their aspiration to be an example to learners, and to be a positive role model in the school community. Many participants shared their views on how their personal experiences and family members dealing with substance abuse

or addiction enables them towards a better understanding of the learners involved in drug use. There were participants with family members who are addicted to drugs, and one participant even shared his own personal struggle with alcoholism. Educators who did not have personal experiences with addiction have shared their experiences of growing up in similar social circumstances as the learners. In this way the educators were able to use their personal experiences to model positive behaviour to the learners.

P6: *"I normally refer them to myself, just because I've been there, I've... grew up in the township you see, so I know how life is in the township, I did smoke, I did drink, so at the end of the day, I'm talking from personal experience that these things are not gonna take them anywhere."*

#### Follow Up and Trust

Participants were of the opinion that following up with learners about how they are doing and taking an interest in them is very important. It was highlighted that the participants were concerned that, without care and support, the learner may be at heightened risk for dropping out. Participants outlined the importance of trust, seeing that learners have been disappointed many times by others.

P7: *"... we call it in Afrikaans 'drop' them - And maybe you are the only anchor that they are holding onto. "*

World Cafe: *"Follow up, because why? If you don't follow up, the learner is, um... he's not coming, he won't come to anymore. Ja, he will feel alone also. Maybe he is going to drop out of school. "*

Themes and sub-themes were identified as to educators' experience of their relationships with adolescents involved in drug use. The discussion of the results follows.

## **Discussion**

In the discussion of the themes that follows, links between existing literature and research findings are highlighted. They are also put into the context of positive psychology, with a particular focus on relational well-being.

The first theme to be discussed is that of challenges to relationships. The emotional challenges that participants reported took the form of mixed and difficult emotions such as fear, disappointment and despondency. In literature focusing on the general experience of educators when dealing with “misbehaviour”, emotions of anger and frustration have been the most commonly reported (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003: 333 - 334), along with feelings of being overwhelmed by the difficulties to connect with learners, in particular those at risk of emotional problems (Johnson et al, 2011: 9 – 10). This is different from the feelings reported by educators dealing with learners involved in drug use since there were no reports of anger, although some mention of frustration.

Theory on well-being states that positive emotions can lead to more flexible and creative thinking (Frederickson, 2013). On the other hand, negative emotions limit the ability to pay attention and solve problems (Frederickson & Joiner, 2002: 172). So, even though the emotional experience in this specific context is different from educators who are involved with learners who just have emotional problems, the effects of the negative emotions can influence educators dealing with students involved in drug abuse in a similar way and lead to them feeling ineffective and unable to help learners (Diener, 2006: 400).

This is important because, as research shows, positive relations is about shared positivity and positivity resonance, while shared negativity and negativity resonance restrains relationships and could hold serious threats for interpersonal connections and levels of well-being (Diener, 2006: 400; Frederickson & Joiner, 2002: 174 – 175). Educators must therefore recognise that levels of positive emotions must be higher than the levels of negative emotions on a daily basis. (Fredrickson, 2009: 120 – 129).

There were also many reports of how a learner’s behaviour – such as disrespect to educators, not coming to class, avoidance and even dropping out of school – clearly affected the emotions of the participants and made it very difficult to have a positive relationship with them. Participants were also able to highlight their own behaviour which hampered relationship building, such as avoiding the learner or not dealing with them and making them someone else’s problem. Both educator and learner therefore make use of avoidance strategies in order to sidestep more personal

relationships with one another. And yet, what becomes clear is that the educator's emotional experience of the learner's behaviour can have an effect on how the educator behaves (Garner et al, 2013: 472; Sutton & Wheatley, 2004: 133) which can have a reciprocal effect, creating a negative feedback cycle. In support of this, a study by Zineldin and Hytter (2012: 756) found that the interactional leadership patterns used by leaders have an effect on others around them in relation to their emotions, with positive emotions enhancing well-being.

Participants furthermore reported feeling pressure to perform multiple roles beyond that of educator, such as that of caretaker and social worker. It appears that due to circumstances within their wider social context, there is a lack of appropriate people to fulfil these roles and so participants can feel that they "need" to fulfil them. In a study by Sutton and Wheatley (2003) it was found that when major role responsibilities are not fulfilled by appropriate role players, such as parents, it can result in a lack of positive emotions for those who then need to attempt to fulfil these roles. Singh and Billingsley (1996) and Billingsley (2004) also found that educators who experience role conflicts and ambiguity may experience negative emotions. Billingsley (2004: 47) clearly related the stress of role expectations to decreased levels of job satisfaction, which according to Zineldin and Hytter (2012: 749), effects overall well-being. So, although the participants were often willing to go this extra mile for their learners, attempting to fulfil roles that they realistically cannot fulfil – such as being a parent or a social worker – often leads to stress and decreased levels of well-being. Such negative emotions, coupled with stress are one of the leading predictors of negative learner-educator relationships (Yoon, 2002: 485 – 486).

The second theme to be discussed looks at the skill set that educators can make use of in order to nurture positive relationships with learners involved in drug use. According to Freiberg and Lamb (2009: 101), education is about building relationships, with the need for these relationships becoming greater as the demands for results and focus on tests and performance increase (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009: 101; Osterman, 2000: 324). In a study by Kitching et al (2012: 41 – 44) it was found that certain ways of relating to others had the effect of creating nurturing relationships and a study by Patton et al (2006: 1585), established that such

relationships, and the sense of connectedness and belonging that they created within the school community, helped decrease particular types of problem behaviours, in particular drug abuse.

This indicates how a difference can be made by promoting positive relationships in order to foster a sense of belonging. In the absence of other sources of support, a learner who has a positive relationship with their educator can offset many of the risks that they would otherwise be exposed to. Positive relationships can increase feelings of belonging and connectedness (Johnson et al, 2011:12), leading to “upward spirals” of overall well-being (Frederickson, 2009). In this way the role model of the educators’ positivity can have a positive effect on the well-being of learners. And, as Frederickson and Joiner points out, positive emotions stimulate creative thinking and so is linked with coping with adversity (2002: 172). When a person is in an environment where they feel they have “caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution” (Benard & Slade, 2009: 354) they will be better equipped and able to fulfil their needs. Thus resilience is promoted through the educator creating a positive relational environment.

In coping theory, coping is seen as a dynamic response of thoughts and behaviours to manage stressful situations and how a person appraises the situation can affect how they respond to it (Folkman et al, 1986: 992 – 993). By reminding themselves that being an educator involves a “calling”, participants can be seen as coping with the stressors associated with their profession. It was important to participants to make some meaning of why they chose to try to support learners who may at times be rude or insult them. This is consistent with studies by Folkman et al (1986) and Blank et al (2012) where positive meaning is created from a situation in order to facilitate coping. It appears that just having a sense of purpose fulfils the important function of enabling the educator to persevere.

Being approachable has also been mentioned in studies as one of the key traits of an effective educator (Gurung & Vespia, 2007; Mokhele, 2006; Peel, 2000). Participants understood that learners may be reluctant to disclose their problems if they thought they would be criticized, blamed or judged by the educator. In support of this view, Knesting (2008) found that learners would only approach educators

when they felt safe and respected. Participants also identified other traits linked to being approachable such as being open and communicating effectively (Sturgeon & Walker, 2009; Knesting, 2008). Flexibility towards the learners involved in drug use was also acknowledged to be important. It was pointed out that if an educator was too strict, learners would be reluctant to approach them. Research lends some support to this, where it has been found that flexibility is a trait that contributes towards an educator's likeability (Gurung & Vespia, 2007:5). However, the participants were also aware that it is not always desirable or possible to make exceptions and so there are times when they need to be consistent in their treatment and dealings with learners, in particular when dealing with behavioural problems in a classroom context.

It takes time to form open, trusting relationships and participants thought that spending time with learners or making time for them was a further way to help the process of relationship building. Research by Hamre and Pianta (2006: 52) also supports this view. Offering learners the opportunity to come and see the educator after school was one way of allowing the learner to view the educator as available to them. Many participants also spoke about how their involvement in sporting activities was a way of spending quality time with their learners, allowing them to get to know each other better. This idea is confirmed in a study by Hamre and Pianta (2006: 53) where it was noticed that spending time with learners who display problematic behaviours improved their educator-learners interactions, leading to less problem behaviours.

By spending time with their learners, educators are also better able to come to know their learners as well as their personal situations, the significance of which was highlighted by the participants. This is supported by Freiberg and Lamb (2009: 101) and Kitching et al (2012: 42) where they emphasize the importance of knowing learners in order to connect with them. As we've already established, connection and the sense of belonging to the school is beneficial (Kitching et al, 2012: 42), and participants highlighted that if they did not know their learners at least a little bit, it would be difficult to pick up when they were having problems. However, they also felt it was necessary to be aware of the greater context of the learner. Without an understanding of the personal circumstances of the learner, it can be difficult to

understand the motives and behaviours that the learner displays.

Participants furthermore reported the primary function of the educator – in situations where a learner has a problem – to be that of listening. Knesting (2008: 7) supports this idea by observing that by listening and knowing what is going on, educators will be more able to help procure appropriate assistance for the learner. Hamre and Pianta (2006: 56) likewise noted that by listening to learners, it is possible to provide support as well as to take appropriate action. Most participants also mentioned encouraging and empowering learners – calling attention to their positive strengths – as a way to assist them. In support of this, Seligman (2009: 301) speaks about the importance of recognising our positive strengths, which leads to feelings of more satisfaction in life and achievement.

Although being flexible was considered important by participants, they also viewed having boundaries and making expectations explicit as necessary in order to nurture these relationships. According to Knesting, effective educators communicate their expectations in an effective way to their learners (Knesting, 2008: 6). Also, the boundaries can be seen as a way for educators to protect themselves by making it clear what they are prepared to do, and outlining the responsibilities of the learners involved in drug use.

Self-disclosure was also identified by the participants as a way to act as positive role models and so nurture positive relationships with their learners. In a study by Mazer et al (2009: 175 -176), it was highlighted that educators who self-disclose are seen as more trustworthy and caring which would help in the further building of positive relationships. Sturgeon and Walker (2009) similarly reports that self-disclosure helped to ease communication between educators and learners. It appears that the participants attempted to show the learner that they understood what was happening in the learner's life and to inspire that learner with their own tale of resilience.

Finally, participants highlighted following up with learners as a way to build trust and relationship. Hamre and Pianta (2006: 54) also indicated the importance of following up with learners. The participants felt that because learners had often experienced people disappointing them, it was important for the learner to see that their educator can be trusted and cares about them.

Through the use of such skills and strategies as have been outlined above, a supportive and accepting school community can be created where learners can experience a sense of belonging. In South Africa we have the concept of “Ubuntu” which means that through others we come to realise our humanity. This highlights how relationships are important for us as people and are a way of making us whole. And yet, in education today, there is often such great emphasis on achievement, performance and results that the relational aspects are not attended to as much as they should be (Seligman, 2009: 293; Osterman, 2000: 324). This can be a problem in education, since our relational well-being directly affects our overall level of well-being and so also our ability to learn (Seligman 2009: 394, Osterman 2000: 329). Then again, the deliberate building of quality relations can encourage upward spirals of personal and collective well-being.

The empirical results of this research project have given some insight into the challenges that are faced by educators dealing with learners involved in drug use in the field. It has also highlighted the ways that educators – through their own lived experiences – have found to cope with these challenges whilst still nurturing positive relationships with such learners. It is recognised that relationships between learners and educators have an impact on well-being and that, within the field of drug abuse, learner-educator relationships can contribute towards positive or negative outcomes. For this reason, it is important to explore how educators experience their relationship with adolescents who are involved in drug use.

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## **SECTION C:**

### **SUMMARY, EVALUATION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The previous sections have dealt with the orientation, results and discussion of the research project. In this section, the research findings as well as the research process will be evaluated after which recommendations will be made. A summary of the research will be presented, along with an evaluation in terms of the aims of the study.

#### **2. RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The research problem of how the educator's level of well-being can facilitate nurturing relationships with learners involved in drug use was addressed using a phenomenological research design. The study hypothesized that understanding how educators' experience relationships with adolescent learners involved in drug use can assist in identifying challenges and skills necessary to nurture their own well-being.

#### **3. RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question was formulated from the research problem: What are educators' experiences of their relationship with adolescents involved in drug use? The research question was answered by following a phenomenological research design and conducting in-depth one-on-one interviews, allowing the educators to give a personal account of their experiences. Thereafter the educators shared further experience and knowledge in the World Café setting. This yielded rich information that created a story of how educators are experiencing their relationships with these learners.

#### **4. RESEARCH AIM**

The aim of the study was to explore educators' experience of their relationships with adolescents involved in drug use, which is a field where little information is currently available. The way in which the research aim was attained is set out in the research

procedures. If it is known how educators are experiencing their relationships with adolescents involved in drug use, it may be possible to learn from these experiences and in so doing enable other educators to deal more effectively with adolescent drug use in their own contexts.

## **5. RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

The researcher used two different research techniques in order to fulfil the research aims. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with all the participants and thereafter the World Café method was used for the group activity.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the Principal, Deputy Principal and 14 other educators who met the selection criteria for the study. The World Café session that followed used the same participants. The interviews and World Café were audio recorded. During the interviews, the researcher made notes of observations while also using member checking in order to ensure that the researcher's understanding was correct. Member checking was likewise used in the World Café where participants presented their ideas themselves and were invited to add their opinions throughout the feedback phase of the World Café. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The methodology that was used was sufficient in order to achieve the goals of the study.

## **6. RESEARCH SUMMARY**

All the participants were educators at a secondary school in the Delft community in the City of Cape Town. All of the educators have had experience dealing with adolescents who are involved in drug use. The educators had an average of fifteen years of experience as an educator and an average of seven years working in the community of Delft. Many of the educators grew up in similar environments to that of Delft, although a few had little experience of a community like Delft prior to coming to work there. Participants were asked the same questions and appeared motivated to participate and relaxed during the data collection process.

Two themes emerged from the data, giving insight into the educators' lived experiences of their relationships with adolescents involved in drug use. The first

theme was that participants experienced a number of challenges in terms of forming relationship with learners. These challenges could be divided into the following three subcategories: dealing with the emotions experienced in their interactions with learners involved in drug use; the difficulties of dealing with such learners' behaviour in the school environment as well as their own behaviour in response to those of the learners; and coping with the pressure to fulfil multiple roles.

And yet, the study found that despite facing such challenges, educators were able to build and nurture positive relationships with their learners. The participants showed the resilience and commitment that many educators can have in terms of building and maintaining relationships with learners. Coping theory was used to explain how educators overcame the challenges that can restrain relationships, in particular using their belief that being an educator is "a calling" to motivate themselves. Such belief created positive emotions which then contribute towards the well-being of the educator.

The skills and strengths which educators use to nurture positive relationships with learners involved in drug were identified as the second main theme and these included: being approachable, being flexible, investing time in learners, knowing the learners and learners' context, the use of listening skills, encouraging and empowering learners, setting boundaries, being a positive role model, following up with learners and being trustworthy. Together these sub-themes form a system that has helped the participants to nurture relationships with learners. This system also helped learners to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to their educator. This is significant because positive relationships along with the feeling that one belongs can enhance the well-being of the learner. Learners who are experiencing higher levels of well-being are less likely to engage in risky behaviours such as drug use. Educators furthermore had a sense of pride and accomplishment when they were able to support a learner, which in turn also enhanced their well-being.

Evidently, the use of these skills and coping mechanisms are important for enhancing positive human health in the school community. There are times when educators do not know how to deal with a situation, especially when they have limited experience as might be the case with students involved with drug use. In that case, this research clearly has merit in the sense that it can inform educators of

ways they can assist learners from a relational standpoint, rather than merely an administrative and bureaucratic one.

## **7. GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCHER'S EXPERIENCE**

The researcher has not previously been involved in the community in which the research took place and therefore had no preconceived ideas about the information that would emerge as well as the direction of the research. An initial literature study was performed and this showed the lack of emphasis placed on the quality of relationships between educators and learners, in particular those involved in drug use. The plight of South African schools struggling to deal with learner drug use was however illuminated. Statistics furthermore revealed how many of the people coming to treatment later on in life, began experimenting with and using drugs in their teenage years. Of all of the people coming for assistance for a drug abuse problem in the Western Cape, 90% of those reporting the use of dagga initiated first use before nineteen years of age, with an average age of initiation being fourteen years. (A Pluddemann, personal communication, 1 Feb 2013). The researcher therefore began investigating educators' relationships with adolescents involved in drug use with little more information than the type of statistics outlined above. The researcher spent a few hours in Delft in order to try to gain a better understanding of the context where the educators are working. The researcher was also able to take a drive through Blikkiesdorp (a part of Delft) to see the makeshift zinc houses where many of the school's learners are living and where every two houses share a toilet. Broken fences leading into the bush were seen, which is where it is rumoured that the communities' gangs engage in their own nefarious activities. With houses so very close together and dirt streets, it was clear that this is an area where there is a daily struggle with poverty. The researcher felt interested and like a "tourist", looking at a place very different to where she comes from.

The interaction with the educators was enlightening and it appeared that they were interested in making a difference in the lives of learners, and perhaps also in being able to help other educators. They willingly shared their experiences and stories and little encouragement was needed. The researcher found the participants inspirational and enjoyed the brief opportunity to get to know them. The researcher also found the

school itself friendly and welcoming, with a genuine interest in the welfare of all their learners.

## **8. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS**

The research had a number of strengths: Firstly, the research process displayed a strict adherence to methodology. Secondly, the use of the World Café method helped participants to relax, engage with one another and freely share their thoughts and experiences. Furthermore, both the in-depth interviews and the World Café techniques produced data of sufficient quality and quantity that it enabled the researcher to become immersed in the data during analysis.

And yet, the current study also had several limitations: Since a convenience sample of educators from one specific school took part in the study, these findings are not representative of all educators in South Africa and conclusions cannot be generalised to all educators. Also, although several cultural groups were part of this investigation, all various cultural groups of South Africa were not represented. Further studies, particularly more qualitative studies with more representative samples and in more rural African areas are necessary.

However, this study is the first in South Africa to focus on the educators' experience of their relationships with adolescents involved in drug use and it contributes to a better understanding of the lived experiences of educators who deal with drug use on a daily basis. It also points to the need for a focus not just on the well-being of learners, but also on that of the educator.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The educator can be seen as fulfilling a central role as to relational well-being of learners. The well-being of the educator as well as his/her ability to nurture and encourage positive relationships with learners is central to the study. Recommendations will therefore focus on the educator's well-being. Seeing that the emotional challenges faced by the educators are some of the most challenging to deal with, it is suggested that the well-being of the educator must be deliberately promoted. For this reason, recommendations are made to counterbalance negative emotions and contribute towards overall well-being. In the study, the participants highlighted how they formed positive relationships with learners and these same skills and strengths can also be used to enhance the educator's well-being.

On an individual level, educators themselves need to be aware of their emotions and the effects these have on their levels of well-being. Being aware of times when they feel more negative than positive emotions can enable them to be proactive in terms of making use of effective coping strategies, such as reminding themselves about their “calling” and sense of motivation to be an educator. Stress is part and parcel of everyday life and cannot be avoided. Personal strategies to cope efficiently with continuous distress are however needed, since this can pose a significant threat to well-being. Positivity creates “upward spirals” of positive functioning and resilience, and so it is imperative for educators to find ways to experience more positive than negative emotions on a daily basis. Such an honest awareness of feelings and emotions in order to “flourish” is of key importance, seeing that merely dealing with negative emotions such as frustration is necessary, but not sufficient for personal capacity-building.

On an inter-personal level, educators can form connections with other educators with the aim of both sharing their experiences and debriefing themselves after facing challenges. Just as educators can be a source of support and strength to learners through the existence of positive relationships, so they can also be a support to other educators by nurturing positive relationships with them. Cultivating an approachable and flexible way of relating to other educators can make a difference, because educators are unlikely to secure support from someone they do not trust or fear rejection from in the same way that learners may not want to approach someone they feel will judge or criticize them.

A culture of care, trust and concern for the well-being of others may therefore enhance not only the well-being of students, but also those of other educators. One way for this climate to be created is by placing emphasis on shared and collective knowledge, rather than individual wisdom and competence. In the study, the World Café session created a way of sharing knowledge in a non-threatening and informal manner. As the World Café does not require a great deal of specialised skills and knowledge to administer, this is a technique that could be used regularly to encourage sharing, listening together for insights and cultivating collective wisdom.

At the level of the school community, the school itself can nurture positive well-being in their educators by creating opportunities and support structures that enhance well-

being and school connectedness. Just like a “good” educator is someone that teaches more than merely content, so “good” relationships are more than just interactions. Schools can therefore encourage positive relationships by providing the opportunities for meaningful interaction between educators. Educators have a great deal of work and limited time, so it is imperative that the school itself takes some responsibility for creating specific opportunities such as holding a World Café or making use of team building to encourage knowledge sharing and meaningful interactions. Creating norms at the organisational level that promote empathy and understanding for everyone in the school community may have positive effects on the well-being of all who come into contact with the school community. Finding ways to increase educators’ job satisfaction, such as showing appreciation for effort, can also have a reciprocal effect on their well-being and should be investigated.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

Educators’ experiences of their relationships with learners involved in drug use emphasize the impact of healthy connections within the school community. These relationships hold many challenges and difficulties for educators, and for many at-risk learners it is all too easy to fall between the cracks and drop out of the school system. However, positive relationships between learners and educators can provide a protective factor, acting as a source of support to empower learners to cope with challenges.

For educators to be able to assist learners in need, it is vital for them to maintain positive relationships with learners. However, relational well-being is a process of building and nurturing relationships that occurs over many interactions. It is also not necessarily something that “just happens” as a result of interactions but requires effort. This study highlighted how the challenges that educators experience when relating to learners involved in drug use can act as obstacles to creating and maintaining positive relationships.

Educators used a number of skills in combination in order to cope. The skills focused on enhancing the learner’s well-being and represent a significant investment of time and effort that educators are willing to put into these relationships. In order to manage this, however, educators need to be able to deal with the challenges and enhance their personal well-being because well-being has a reciprocal effect

whereby the positive functioning of the educator will affect the well-being of the learner. Hence an educator who is experiencing higher levels of well-being will be better equipped to nurture a positive relationship and provide assistance to a learner in need and in turn, also enhance the learner's level of well-being.

Relational well-being is therefore of key importance for personal and overall well-being. Positive relationships can serve as protective factors, but in particular for those at-risk. This study has contributed towards understanding the challenges to relational well-being that educators face when working with learners involved in drug use, as well as how they overcome them.

## SECTION D:

### Addendum 1:

## CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies

Corner of East and College Street

Wellington

7655

Tel: 021 8643593

Fax: 021 8642654

29 July 2013

Dear Participant

### CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

(A research project of the North-West University)

**TITLE:** “Educator’s experience of their relationship with adolescents involved in drug use”

You are invited to participate in a project of the North-West University about secondary school educator’s experience of their relationship with adolescent learners involved in drug use.

Ethical approval was obtained for the research project which is conducted by the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies (CCYF), Faculty of Health Sciences at the North-West University’s Potchefstroom Campus. This research has been registered under the project: Developing sustainable support to enhance quality of life and well-being for children, youth and families in South Africa: a trans-disciplinary approach. The ethics number is NWU-00060-12-A1.

Below follows some information about the project. Please read this carefully before indicating your consent.

The research process will involve two phases, firstly where I will be participating in an in-depth interview and secondly in a World Café group session. Both will take place in the last week of August 2013. Interviews will not exceed an hour and the world café will take roughly 90 minutes in total. Both phases of the research process will be audio recorded.

There are not any foreseeable risks to participating in this study. However some questions asked during the research process may cause some discomfort. Should I feel the need for additional support, counseling with the Department of Education’s helpline is available on 0800111011 or alternatively Lifeline can be contacted on 086 132 2322 or 021 461 1111. The results of the study will be published but all identifying information and names will not be disclosed. All recordings and material will remain confidential and will be kept in a secure filing cabinet.

Any questions that I have concerning this research or the consent forms will be answered by the researcher. I understand that I may at any time withdraw from participation in this study without any penalties or losses to myself. In signing this consent form, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights and remedies.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
Name and Surname	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
Name and Surname (Researcher)	Signature	Date

## **Addendum 2:**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Thank participant for participating in the study, appreciate them taking time out of their busy schedules to help out. Explain purpose of study briefly.

Biographical information:

AGE:

GENDER:

Years of experience:

Question 1:

Years in Delft as an educator:

Question 2:

Can you tell me about your personal experience of learners using drugs?

Remember do not assume, ask for clarity!

Question 3:

How did it affect your relationship with the learners?

Question 4:

What lessons have you learnt from your dealings with learners “using” drugs? How does that impact your present relationships with these learners?

Question 5:

In terms of your relationships with these adolescent learners now, what do you feel is working well?

Question 6:

What is not working so well for your relationship with these learners?

Question 7:

Do you have a good story to share about a particular personal experience with a learner?

Thank participant again. Anything else they would like to share.

### **Addendum 3:**

#### **WORLD CAFÉ QUESTIONS**

- Write or draw something that explains how you see educators as a source of support for adolescent learners involved in drug use (within the school community).
- Write or draw something that explains how educators and/or the school go about creating an environment where learners feel they can get support.
- Write or draw something that explains what you feel is the best way for an educator to address the issue of learners using drugs while still building the relationship with the learner.
- Write or draw something about how the level of well-being of the educator impacts building relationships with learners (focusing on both constructive aspects as well as obstacles).

## **Addendum 4:**

### **TECHNICAL GUIDELINES FOR JOURNAL**

#### **Journal submission guidelines**

#### **South African Journal of Education**

#### **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 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.

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 consulting editors/referees will have documented expertise in the area the article addresses. When reviews are received, an editorial decision will be reached to either 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 recency 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.

Copyright of all published material is vested in the Education Association of South Africa

(EASA).

### **Page charges**

ZAR R185 per page. 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. Text should be set in Arial font, 12 point in size with 1.5 line spacing. Margins should be 2.54 cm all around.

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.

### *2 South African Journal of Education*

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. (Zivet *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.

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*Website references: No author:*

These references are not archival and are therefore subject to change in any way  
and at any  
time. 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.

**E-mail submissions:**

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

**Internet submissions:**

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*

## **Addendum 5:**

### **ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS WITH JOURNAL**

Dear Author

The total amount of words may not exceed 6000 (this excludes the following: The title; the author's name and institutional affiliation; the abstract; the keywords; the references; footnotes/endnotes; appendices and supplemented materials).

Regards

Estelle

Ms Estelle Botha

Administrative Editor: South African Journal of Education

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0002

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