The lived experiences of adolescents with barriers to learning who participate in an alternative assessment programme

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Declaration of the researcher

I, Karin Adriana Bursey, hereby declare that the manuscript with the title, *The lived experiences of adolescents with barriers to learning who participate in an alternative assessment programme* is my own work. I further declare, that I have not previously in its entirety, or in part, submitted the said manuscript at any other university to obtain a degree.

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Declaration of the text editor

Hereby I declare that I have language edited and proof read the thesis, *The lived experiences of adolescents with barriers to learning who participate in an alternative assessment programme,* by Karin Bursey for the degree MSW. I am a freelance language practitioner after a career as editor-in-chief at a leading publishing house.

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Preface

Declaration of the supervisor

The candidate, Karin Adriana Bursey, opted to write an article, with the support of her study leader. I, the study leader, hereby declare that the input and the effort of Karin Adriana Bursey in writing this article, reflects research done by her on the topic. I hereby grant permission tha t she may submit this article for examination in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree Magister in Social Work.

- The dissertation is presented in article format as indicated in Rule A.5.4.2.7 of the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus Yearbook.
- The dissertation consists of Section A, Part 1: Orientation to the research, Part 2: Literature review, Section B: The Article and section C: Summary, conclusions and recommendations.
- The article is intended for submission to the journal, The South African Journal of Education.
- In Section B, which comprises the article, the researcher has followed the Harvard Method of referencing as well as the guidelines of the article format stipulated by SAJE.
- Section A and C have been referenced according to the Harvard Method of referencing, as stipulated by North-West University.

Dr Shanaaz Hoosain

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Abstract

South Africa has adopted the international trend towards inclusive education. The result is an increasing number of learners with barriers to learning accommodated in mainstream schools. Alternative assessment programmes make provision to address the barriers to learning of these learners during formal assessments. Alternative assessment programmes are a good start to afford learners with barriers to learning a fair chance to impart their knowledge. However, the programmes are adult driven and, as the users of these programmes, we need to consider the learners' views also. Knowledge of their experience will increase understanding of their needs, which in turn will help to refine the programmes and adjust the programmes to these needs.

General aim of the study: to explore the lived experience of learners with barriers to learning, who participated in an alternative assessment programme in a mainstream high school in the Western Cape, in a qualitative way, through a phenomenological design. The phenomenological design provided a deeper understanding of the learners' experience of the alternative assessment programme from the learners' viewpoint. We held unstructured, individual interviews with the eight participants who consented to participate in the study. As requested, the participants made collages of their experiences of the alternative assessment programme in a group setting, prior to the interviews. Section B presents the findings of this qualitative study and relates the learners' experience of the alternative assessment programme during test- and formal examination series. The findings highlight the importance of considering the opinions of learners with barriers, participating in an alternative assessment programme.

Key terms: adolescence, alternative assessment, barriers to learning, lived experience

Samevatting

Suid-Afrika volg die internasionale neiging na inklusiewe onderrig. Dit het tot gevolg dat hoofstroom skole toenemend leerders met leerhindernisse akkommodeer. Alternatiewe assesseringsprogramme maak tydens formele assesserings voorsiening vir hierdie leerders.

Alternatiewe assesseringsprogramme is ’n goeie beginpunt om iets daar te stel om leerders met leerhindernisse ’n regverdige kans te bied om hul kennis weer te gee. Hierdie programme word egter deur volwassenes gedryf; terwyl ons ook nodig het om die leerders, as verbruikers van die programme, se siening en ervaring van die programme in ag te neem. Kennis van hul ervaringe sal die begrip vir hierdie leerders se behoeftes vergroot en noodwendig help om die programme te verfyn en volgens hul behoeftes aan te pas.

Algemene doelwit: om leerders met leerhindernisse se belewenisse van hul deelname aan die alternatiewe assesseringsprogramme in ’n hoofstroom skool in die Wes-Kaap te ondersoek, op ’n kwalitatiewe wyse, deur middel van die fenomenologiese ontwerp. Die fenomenologiese ontwerp het ’n dieper begrip van die leerders se belewenis van die programme vanuit hul perspektief gebied. Ons het ongestruktureerde onderhoude met agt deelnemers, wat toestemming tot deelname aan hierdie studie verleen het, gevoer. Die leerders het op versoek collages in groepverband gemaak voordat die onderhoude begin het, om hul belewenis van die alternatiewe assessering uit te beeld. Die artikel in Afdeling B sit die bevindings van die kwalitatiewe studie ten opsigte van die leerders se belewenis van die alternatiewe assesseringsprogramme tydens formele toets- en eksamenreekse uiteen. Die bevindings beklemtoon die belang daarvan om leerders met leerhindernisse, as deelnemers aan die alternatiewe assesseringsprogramme, se opinies ten opsigte van die programme in ag te neem.

Sleutelbegrippe: adolessensie, alternatiewe assessering, belewing, leerhindernisse

SECTION A: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

PART 1: Orientation to the research

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the Western Cape, 20 076 learners are accommodated in 84 special schools. Of these learners, 2 611 have been diagnosed with specific "learning disabilities" (Department of Education, 2014). In a study by Walton (2011:241), it was found that 19 034 learners were attending special needs classes in mainstream public schools nationally. A significant increase in applications to special schools nationally, with over half of the applications being learners with barriers to learning, is a further indication of the South African situation (Pather, 2011:1004-1005). The World Health Organisation estimated that there are 18 million disabled children under the age of 18 years old worldwide (World Health Organization, 2011:36). The Constitution of South Africa outlines the right of all learners to an education, therefore, embracing diversity, and refraining from exclusivity. The White Paper on Education for Special Needs (Department of Education, 2001:16) supports the notion that provision is made for learners with special needs in mainstream schools, as part of the inclusive education policy. The latter includes learners with *academic barriers to learning*.

Academic barriers to learning refers to challenges with information processing, resulting in lower than expected academic achievement, given the learner's academic ability (Lean & Colucci, 2010:8). The responsibility of the school to meet the individual needs of each learner is emphasised by Bower and Jordaan (2002:198). Schools are expected to address the *academic barriers to learning* experienced by the learners they accommodate, and not merely to accommodate these learners in a mainstream school. According to Massat, Stoddard-Dare and Workman-Crewnshaw (2011:35) social workers in a school setting need to advocate for learners with barriers to learning accommodated in the schools they service. Not addressing their unique learning needs, can be construed as "mainstream dumping" (Bower & Jordaan, 2002:199). Mainstream dumping refers to placement of learners with special needs, in this case *barriers to learning*, in a mainstream school without meeting their specific support needs (Topping, 2012:17). It would seem that, internationally, the need to accommodate learners with *barriers to learning* is increasing.

Recent statistics in the United States of America confirmed a rise in *barriers to learning*; where as many as 6% of all learners enrolled in public schools require entry to programmes for *barriers to learning* (Lean & Colucci, 2010:8). The United States based National Centre for Education Statistics found that in 2007, 5, 5% of school children had *barriers to learning* (Gregg, 2009:23, 24). This seems to culminate in over 3 million learners in the United States alone receiving special

education services, due to the demonstration of *barriers to learning* or mental impairments (Bolt & Roach, 2009:42). In Israel, there is a yearly increase in students with barriers to learning with 21, 1% of high school learners needing *alternative assessments* (Ben-Simhon, cited in Sharabi & Margalit, 2010:217). South African statistics for learners with *barriers to learning* needing *alternative assessment* are scant. The only official indication of learners using an alternative form of assessment is the annual applications for concessions in the Matric examination by the different high schools to the Department of Education (Du Toit-Stegman, 2014). For the purpose of this study, *barriers to learning* refer to any form of reading impediment, as well as spelling and reading comprehension difficulties.

Learners with *barriers to learning* are accommodated in mainstream schools, due to the lack of affordable specialised education in the Western Cape. Special schools can be defined as institutions operating within the framework of inclusive education, serving as resource centres to assist mainstream schools and as educational institutions for a wide range of learners experiencing a spectrum of *barriers to learning* (Van Schalkwyk, 2012). Only 9 of the 84 public special schools in the Western Cape accommodate learners with physical challenges, as well as *barriers to learning*, up to Grade 12 level (Lampbrects, 2014). The rest of the special schools only accommodate learners up to Grade 9. Since these schools (who accommodate up to Grade 9 only) have limited space and only accommodate learners up to Grade 9, learners have no option but to attend mainstream schools from Grade 9 till 12.

The school where the research of this paper was conducted accommodates learners who can benefit optimally from the mainstream environment, as well as learners with *barriers to learning*. Learners with *barriers to learning* include learners who were subjected to *alternative assessment* in primary school as a result of *barriers to learning*. Many primary schools employ remedial teachers who identify *barriers to learning* experienced by learners. During examinations, *alternative assessment* methods are used to assist the learners identified to be in need of the service. Learners, who were not accepted at schools specialising in special needs education due to limited space, behaviour challenges, or parental refusal, are also accommodated in this mainstream school. To assist these learners during the test series and examinations, an *alternative assessment programme* was implemented in 2011 by the social worker. The social workers in a school setting are instrumental in developing and implementing programmes, referring in the current study to the alternative assessment programme, to assist learners in achieving academic success (Baffoe & Dako-Gyeke, 2014:124). *Alternative assessments* can be defined as testing formats or procedures that provide learners with *barriers to learning*, or other learning difficulties, the opportunity to impart the knowledge they have obtained (Department of Education, 2010:35). *Alternative assessments* at

the school where the research was undertaken, refers to additional time, use of mobile audio digital players, hereafter referred to as MP3's and amanuenses. Implementation of *alternative assessments* affords learners with *barriers to learning* the same opportunity as learners without these barriers, providing them with a fair chance to demonstrate their mastery of skills and impart their knowledge on the subject they are tested on (Goh, 2004:3). The social worker was responsible for the identification of the learners, referral for assessment, and implemented the recommendations of assessment. The social worker also motivated learners to participate and emotional support to learners who participated in the programme was another aspect of the programme. The logistical arrangements, such as the organisation of separate classrooms, and converting the questionnaires to an audio format, were additional tasks that were completed by the social worker. Openshaw (2008:125) highlights the responsibility of school social workers to assist learners, "especially those who experience difficulty in the school system". The barriers to learning experienced by learners participating in the a*lternative assessment programme* can be construed as difficulties experienced in the school system.

Testing formats or methods used at the school where the study was conducted include the use of MP3's. Examination question papers are read onto the computer and downloaded to the MP3's with the "cool edit pro" computer programme. Learners listen to the question paper while following it on the hard copy that is also provided. Amanuensis, referring to questions being read to learners and their answers written down by a scribe, is another form of alternative assessment (Department of Education, 2010:5). Additional time to complete question papers also forms part of alternative assessment. Learners included in the *alternative assessment programme* complete examinations in a classroom separate from the learners not included in the programme, because of the possible disturbance to learners not participating in the programme. The *alternative assessment programme* forms part of the support services rendered to learners at the school. The researcher is a social worker rendering psychosocial support services to learners in a mainstream high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town. Therefor understanding the learners' experience of the *alternative assessments* was of particular importance to the researcher. Addressing the needs of learners who can benefit from an *alternative assessment programme,* is in accordance with the expectations of social workers in a school setting that apart from psychosocial support, learners be provided with the opportunity to succeed academically (Openshaw, 2008:4; Jarolmen, 2014:45 & Massat, 2012:x). Nugent and Masuku (2007:1) describe psychosocial support as meeting the emotional, social and spiritual needs of children, as they are faced with the challenges of life. In the context of this study, psychosocial support refers to support that includes emotional support for learners in the *alternative assessment programme*, support to parents, motivating and educating parents and

learners to participate in the *alternative assessment programme*, and assuring the implementation of the recommendations made during assessments.

Since the inception of the *alternative assessment programme*, the amount of learners participating in the programme has increased. Studying their lived experience of the programme provided valuable data that could be used by the researcher and members of the support team to render assistance appropriate to learners with *barriers to learning* participating in the programme. A better understanding of the adolescents' lived experience might provide insight into their specific needs. The information obtained in this study can guide the support team of the school, which the social worker forms part of, to render services addressing the identified emotional and educational needs, in a school setting, of the learners participating in the programme. Other schools, where *alternative assessment programmes* are implemented, could also use the information. The researcher intended to establish what the participants' lived experiences were, of the *alternative assessment programme*. A similar study has not been undertaken in South Africa, and therefore the lived experience of learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme* in the South African context is not known. The results could be used to set guidelines to accommodate learners with *barriers to learning* in South Africa, in terms of effective *alternative assessment programmes*, tailored to the participants' needs. The results will contribute to the database of the subject being studied. In addition, the opportunity for learners with *barriers to learning* to experience academic mastery, as participants of the *alternative assessment programme*, could increase motivation and assist learners with *barriers to learning* to achieve to their academic potential (Corpus, Ogle & Love-Geiger, 2006:343, Conger, Little, Masyn, Shebloski & Williams, 2009:100). Social workers in a school setting will benefit from the results as it will inform services rendered to learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme.*

In light of the problem orientation, the following research question can be formulated: What is the lived experience of adolescent learners with *barriers to learning*, when participating in an *alternative assessment programme* in a mainstream high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town?

2. RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experience of learners experiencing *barriers to learning*, when participating in an *alternative assessment programme* in a mainstream high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town. The learners' in the study participated in the *alternative assessment programme* during the test series in March 2013.

3. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

A phenomenological study, devoted to understanding adolescents' lived experience when participating in the *alternative assessment programme* in a mainstream high school, might contribute to setting guidelines for the support team at the school to meet the emotional and educational needs of learners with *barriers to learning*. A phenomenological research study, where the meaning adolescents attach to their experience is valued, will provide the support team with insight as to the support needed by learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme* in the school setting, where the social worker forms an essential part of the support team.

4. CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this study, the following concepts are defined, namely *barriers to learning*, *alternative assessment*, lived experience and adolescents. Definitions of the concepts used in the study are discussed in the next section.

4.1 Barriers to learning

According to Reid and Lienemann (2006:2), *barriers to learning* comprise a number of different "problems" in academic, behavioural and socio-emotional areas. With a focus on the academic area, Lean and Colucci (2010:8) stated that *barriers to learning* comprise of a variety of "disorders" affecting lifelong learning. Lean and Colucci (2010:8) further mention that learners with *barriers to learning* experience challenges with information processing. These information-processing challenges often result in significantly lower academic achievement than could be expected from their intellectual ability. Flack (2005:321) adds to this that the learners are of average or above intelligence. The learners experience academic difficulty in

> "oral language (e.g. listening, speaking, understanding), reading (e.g. decoding, comprehension), written language (e.g. spelling, written expression) and mathematics (e.g. computation, problem solving)"(Lean & Colucci, 2010:8).

Organisational and social skills offer a further challenge (Lean & Colucci, 2010:8).

There is no consensus, however, on the definition of *barriers to learning* in South Africa, where there are differing opinions between provinces, teachers and areas (Flack, 2005:321). But the fact remains that b*arriers to learning* are likely to impede the ability of learners to impart their knowledge during tests and formal assessments, which could be addressed through *alternative assessment*.

4.2 Alternative assessment

Alternative assessments can be defined as testing formats or procedures providing learners with *barriers to learning* or other learning difficulties the opportunity to impart the knowledge they have obtained (Department of Education, 2010:35). Implementation of *alternative assessment* affords learners with *barriers to learning* the same opportunity as learners without these barriers, providing them with a fair chance to demonstrate their mastery of skills and impart their knowledge on the subject they are tested on (Goh, 2004:3).

Since the inception of democracy in South Africa in 1994, the idea of inclusive education has been strongly promoted. This idea of inclusive education refers to the accommodation of all learners in mainstream education. The White Paper on Education for special needs outlines a policy whereby the differences in learners must be recognised. The policy also indicates that the focus should be on identifying and growing learner strengths, thus "overcoming barriers in the system that prevent it from meeting the full range of learning needs" (Department of Education, 2001:16,17).

Education should, therefore, be centred on each learner, upholding their human right to be integrated into the education system and refraining from excluding them (Engelbrecht, 2006:256; Naicker, 2006:3). *Alternative assessment*, in the context of this study, refers to extended time, audio question papers, and amanuensis.

4.3 Lived experience

The practical activities and the manner in which a phenomenon is experienced in the immediacy of the experience, is referred to as "lived experience" (Clandinin, 2006:51; Grassley & Deal, 2012:473; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011:182). The lived experience is the search for the underlying, deeper meaning of the person's experience. Such experience is related to others as well as to other subjects and the phenomenon being experienced (Dahlberg, 2006:16; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011:182). The lived experience in this study is accessed through the adolescents' collage making and subsequent explanations of their participation in the *alternative assessment programme*.

4.4 Adolescents

Adolescence is a developmental stage from the age of 12 to 18 years. This period can be described as a time of great change, not only physically, but also socially, cognitively and emotionally (Schunk & Meece, 2006:71; Wilson, Ruch, Lymberg & Cooper, 2008:162). According to McConville (cited in Toman & Bauer, 2005:182) adolescents, develop a separate "self". During this stage, there is a need to discover and develop an authentic self, as well as to establish this "separate self" (Toman & Bauer, 2005:16; Meuleman, 2003:51). The peer group becomes more

important than the family and there is a realisation that different contexts require different behaviours (Toman & Bauer, 2005:162; McConville, 2013:8).

High school, with all its facets, including social and academic challenges, is one of the contexts adolescents have to contemplate. Eccles and Zarrett (2006:16-17) maintain that some adolescents experience a decline in academic performance, academic interest and the perceptions they hold of their academic ability during their high school years. The authors referred to research relating this to the high school environment not meeting the adolescents' changing needs, increasing the risk of failure and dropout (Eccles & Zarrett, 2006:16-17). The next section discusses the methodology applied to the research.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Literature review

A literature review was conducted to obtain existing information about the lived experience of adolescent learners with *barriers to learning* in an *alternative assessment programme*. Data obtained in the study was verified and supported by literature. Literature, specific and broadly related to the subject, was also studied. The literature studied, included national and international, online and other scientific resources, such as books, journals, completed dissertations and dissertations in progress. To ensure a goal directed investigation, databases *inter alia* ebsco-host, Academic Search Premier, Psych Lit, ProQuest, Eric and Psycinfo were consulted.

5.2 Empirical investigation

5.2.1 Research design

The qualitative, phenomenological design was followed in order to study the lived experience of adolescents with *barriers to learning* participating in an *alternative assessment programme* in a mainstream high school. A phenomenological design "examine(s) the complexities and different aspects" of the lived experience of a common phenomenon, experienced by several people (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:94). The mainstream high school where the research study was conducted is one of the high schools in the Northern Suburbs of the Western Cape, where an *alternative assessment programme* is implemented to accommodate adolescents with *barriers to learning*. The meaning attached to the experience was investigated and a description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals was developed (Creswell, 2007:252-253). The focus was on "the participants' specific statements and experiences", rather than the researcher's interpretation of events (Creswell, 2007:252).

The research was applied, as it explored and described the lived experience of the adolescents, depicting their direct experience and the meaning they attach to *alternative assessment* (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:96). The study was of a contextual nature, referring to the manner in which adolescents gave meaning to their experience of the *alternative assessment programme* (Hays & Singh, 2012:6). The inductive analysis ensured that the data collected, regarding the experience of *alternative assessment*, provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher was mindful to approach the study without any preconceived ideas (Hays & Singh, 2012:5).

5.2.2 Participants

The population in this study referred to the adolescents participating in the *alternative assessment programme* in a specific school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town, in the Western Cape. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:110) argue that a non-probability sample represents a particular group. In this current study, the sample represents all learners who agreed to participate in the *alternative assessment programme* at the selected high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town. The researcher made use of non-probability, purposive sampling, where specific criteria is indicated for the selection of participants, as stated by Strydom and Delport (2011:392). The number of adolescents who agreed to participate in the research programme determined the size of the sample. The sample consisted of 8 adolescents, who participated in the *alternative assessment programme* during the March 2013 test series. In total, 13 adolescents participated in the *alternative assessment programme* in March 2013, and they were all informed of the intended research.

Criteria for inclusion in the sample were that adolescents must be:

- learners from Grade 8 to 11 (aged 14 to 17 years), attending a specific high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town (refer to Annexure 1 for individual profiles);
- English and Afrikaans speaking;
- who participated in the *alternative assessment programme*;
- and whose parents provided written consent.

Parents' consent was required due to the age of the learners. Participants gave their assent to take part in the study.

The participants were involved in the *alternative assessment programme* for a minimum of 6 months, ranged in age from 14 to 17 years old, and they were Grade 9- and 10 learners.

5.2.3 Research procedures

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethical committee at North-West University, code, NWU 00060-12-A1 (refer to Annexure 2).

Consent was obtained from the Western Cape Department of Education to conduct the study in April 2013 (refer to Annexure 3).

Permission was obtained from the principal of the specific school where the research was conducted in April 2013 (refer to Annexure 4).

Adolescents participating in the *alternative assessment programme* during the March test series at a mainstream high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town were identified for inclusion in the study. Since the researcher is the co-ordinator of this programme all the participants in the programme were informed of the intended research and were given consent forms. Consent forms were also given to their parents.

Eight adolescents and their parents gave written consent, based on their understanding of the purpose of the study, as explained to them in writing (refer to Annexures 5 and 6). The consent forms were returned to the researcher prior to the commencement of the study in May 2013.

The dates and times for the collage making and interviews were set with participants, depending on their schedules, and communicated to the participants and their parents. The art class at the identified school was organised as the venue where the collages were to be made and interviews were conducted in an office and classroom, respectively. The researcher had free access to the offices, as she is an employee at the school.

Data was gathered during unstructured interviews over a period of three weeks. The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews and analysed the data through a process of coding and identification of themes.

The findings of the research study are discussed in Section B. The next section discusses the method of data gathering.

5.2.4 Method of data gathering

For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of collages, as well as in-depth, unstructured interviews, as methods of gathering data.

5.2.4.1 Collages

Participants were requested to each make a collage, depicting their experience of being involved in the *alternative assessment programme*. Collage making took place in a group setting and participants were assured that artistic talent was not a prerequisite for the activity (Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith & Campbell, 2008:23). Art-based activities, such as collage-making, provide participants with the opportunity to describe their environments or as in the current study, their experience of the *alternative assessment programme (C*oad, 2007:492). Participants enjoy collage-making and can capture their inner world in a spontaneous manner (Coad, 2007:493; Mitchell et al, 2011:20). Different materials, which they could choose from, were provided. Participants requested the researcher to clarify the expectations of the collage making and commenced with the activity. The collages allowed the researcher to gain insight into the meaning learners attached to the collages (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2010:156; Coad, 2007:496; De Kock & Hattingh, 2008:5) during the individual unstructured interviews with the participants. The collage activity took place in the art class of the school where the study was conducted. The activity lasted approximately an hour, providing adolescents with enough time to finish the activity at their leisure, as suggested by Mitchell *et al*. (2011:24). Participants could leave once their collages were finished. The completed collages were collected and kept in the researcher's office (refer to Annexure 7). This session was video recorded, to enable the researcher to reflect on participants' participation in the collage making activity, to ensure thoroughness, as the video captured the participants' level of participation and engagement in the activity. During the unstructured interviews the researcher reflected on participants' non-verbal behaviour observed from the video recording, such as their enthusiasm while making the collages.

Colucci (2007:1424-1431) found group activities to be especially beneficial with young people, as feelings and ideas can be expressed in an active manner, whilst inhibitions and restraints are reduced, and some thought is given prior to discussion of the topic. The collage making was done in a group setting, but no discussion was undertaken during the activity, nor was any information shared regarding the meaning of the collages. The group members share characteristics relevant to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2010:149). The group setting created a more natural atmosphere and was more relaxed than a one-to-one interview. While introducing the collage activity, the researcher reminded the participants about the information in the consent forms they had signed and repeated information given in the consent forms. Collage making was included in the consent form, as suggested by Mitchell *et al*. (2011:23). The collage making was followed by individual unstructured interviews as an additional method of data collection.

5.4.2.2 Interviews

In-depth, unstructured individual interviews were scheduled with the 8 participants at convenient times. Each participant was interviewed once as the necessity for follow-up interviews were not indicated. The first three interviews were conducted after school hours, in the same week that the collages were made. These interviews took place in the researcher's office. The remainder of the interviews were conducted two weeks later, in a vacant classroom, as the researcher's office was occupied. This classroom is also used for the *alternative assessment programme*. The participants were familiar with all the settings where interviews were conducted. The shortest interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and the longest, 70 minutes, with a median of 50 minutes across the eight interviews.

The interviews were of a phenomenological nature, to determine the lived meaning of the participants' understanding of alternative assessment, a phenomenon they have in common (Creswell, 2007:140; Marshall & Rossman, 2010:149; Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320-323). Open-ended questions gave the participants an opportunity to expand on their responses, as it required elaboration and clarification in order to obtain a "richer interview" (Hays & Singh, 2012:242; Marshall & Rossman, 2010:145). An interview guide was not used in order to allow participants to engage in discussions regarding issues of importance to them spontaneously, through active facilitation (Reid & Mash, 2014:6). Examples of unstructured, open-ended questions asked by the researcher included the following: *What can you tell me about your collage? What is it like to be part of the programme? Can you describe what happens inside you?* The intension of these questions was to obtain the participants' experience, while refraining from using leading questions.

The collages were used to start the interviews. Additionally, collages assisted with the expression of experiences, especially when participants had trouble with verbal responses. Collages were discussed with participants in the individual interviews. This was done in accordance with the view of Hoffman (2004:226); that narratives, or explanations, must accompany collages, to ascertain the meaning and experience that a person attaches to the collage. According to Greeff (2011:353), the one-to-one interview with participants provided an opportunity to obtain more in-depth data. During the interview, descriptive field notes, capturing non-verbal behaviour, providing a description of events, were made (Greeff, 2011:335; Hays & Singh, 2012:228).

Field notes referred to non-verbal behaviour, as well as the researcher's thoughts and experiences during the interviews (refer to Annexure 8). Reflective notes were compiled after each interview. Hays and Singh (2012:228-229) describe reflective notes as the researcher's ideas, assumptions, attitude and impressions about the data collected (refer to Annexure 9). This gave an indication of

areas that needed to be explored further, points for clarification, and themes coming to the fore. It became clear that some participants struggled to identify emotions related to the programme and this prompted the introduction of a “feeling faces” chart, which participants could revert to in naming their emotional experience. Reflective notes focused on making sense of the information and reflecting on the strategies used during the interviews. Reflecting on the first interview the researcher was of the opinion that the questioning had become leading resulting in caution against this approach in subsequent interviews. Reflexivity of the researcher’s self and role in various aspects of the study is an aspect of crystallisation, which speaks to the trustworthiness of the study and is discussed in detail under the section, trustworthiness (Ellingson, 2008:10). Data analysis followed data collection.

5.2.5 Data analysis

The researcher transcribed the data, as suggested by Hays and Singh (2012:258), to ensure accuracy and thoroughness. Care was taken to transcribe interviews verbatim and to use punctuation in a manner so as not to change the meaning of the data as well as being mindful of translation or interpretation of slang language (Hays & Singh, 2012:257-258).

The data was analysed in a cyclical manner, as described by Creswell (2007:150-154). The first step in this process was managing the data, by organising data in files. Following this, the researcher engaged with the data or was immersed in the data, by reading the data several times and identifying key concepts such as stress levels, self-belief and comprehension of academic work. This was done by making notes in the margins of the data. Through a process of classifying where the information identified as key concepts was analysed and interpreted, codes were identified. The codes included better marks, better concentration and less anxiety.

Following coding, the researcher identified two main themes namely, the experience of formal assessments, and psychosocial aspects of participation in an *alternative assessment programme*, with subthemes under each main theme. Under the main theme of experience of formal assessments, examples of the subthemes were preparation and self-motivation during formal assessments. Under the main theme of psychosocial aspects, examples of the subthemes were self-confidence and self-esteem. In the case of phenomenological studies, this refers to “individual experiences and the context of those experiences” (Creswell, 2007:153). Literature control, in support of the identified themes and findings, was done. Finally, the data was presented.

5.2.6 Ethical considerations

Research ethics entail that no harm should come to participants, their informed consent must be ensured, and participants should not be misled (Strydom, 2011:129). Further, researchers should be competent and responsible, advocating for a code of ethics as prerequisite to research undertaken (Strydom, 2011:129). The researcher is a social worker, governed by the Social Services Professions Act (No 110 of 1978, as amended in 1998) and required to adhere to the SA Council for Social Service Professions' code of ethics. Therefore, the researcher ensured competency, responsibility and that a code of ethics was advocated. (Creswell, 2007:141-142; Hays & Singh, 2012:79-80; Marshall & Rossman, 2010:47-48; Strydom, 2011:129). Consent forms were given to all 13 adolescents who participated in the *alternative assessment programme* during the March 2013 test series, and their parents.

5.2.6.1 Voluntary participation, anonymity and privacy

Autonomy, meaning that participants must always have a choice, was achieved by informing participants about the aspects of the research, making them aware of the voluntary nature of participation and acknowledging the right to withdraw (Hays & Singh, 2010:79). Respect for persons refers to avoiding using participants as a means to an end and respecting their privacy and anonymity (Marshall & Rossman, 2010:47). Privacy could not be protected entirely, as other learners might have seen the participants with the researcher. However, the classroom provided sufficient privacy, as other learners were unlikely to enter the classroom. Interviews were conducted during times all learners had to be in their respective classrooms or after school hours.

5.2.6.2 Consent forms and information

Both the right to withdrawal and the voluntary nature of participation were specifically stated in the consent forms. The consent forms were distributed to all participants and their parents one week prior to the commencement of the empirical research that started with the collage making. Learners were requested to give the forms to their parents for the latter's consent as well as to familiarise themselves with the content of the forms they had to sign, granting permission for participation in the research. The researcher was able to hand out the consent forms to the learners personally, as she had access to the learners due to her position as an employee at the school where the research was conducted. Information regarding the research was repeated at the beginning of the collage activity. At the start of each interview, the researcher enquired whether the participants knew what was being researched and clarified any uncertainties. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents and the learners brought the signed forms back to the

researcher at the school prior to the collage making activity. Participants were informed of the video recording of the collage making session and audio recording of interviews for the purpose of thoroughness and to exclude interviewer bias. Written consent for the video recording, interviews and the collage activity was obtained and included in the consent form.

5.2.6.3 Avoidance of harm

Non-maleficence means that no harm should come to participants (Hays & Singh, 2012:79). For this purpose, the participants' reactions were monitored, being cognisant of risks to them for the sake of research. The researcher has 22 years of experience working with children and young people and is qualified to recognise distress and support the participants if they showed any signs of distress. In the consent form signed by participants, it was stated clearly that learners had the right to not answer questions they did not wish to and could choose to end the interview at any time. The consent forms alluded to the risk of some questions possibly resulting in participants being uncomfortable, such as information regarding struggling with schoolwork and related feelings. The consent form signed by the participants indicated that participants could withdraw at any time if they wished to. A social worker was available in the event of participants requiring debriefing after an interview. None of the participants required debriefing.

5.2.6.4 Benefits to participants

Maximum benefits to participants were advocated through beneficence (Marshall & Rossman, 2010:47).Therefore, participants with *barriers to learning* stood to benefit from the research study as their contributions might improve the *alternative assessment programme* they are consumers of.

5.2.6.5 Equal opportunity

Distributive justice considered equality for participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2010:47) experiencing *barriers to learning*. All participants in the *alternative assessment programme* were afforded an equal opportunity to participate.

Confidentiality of all information was maintained and information gathered was kept in a safe setting only accessible to the researcher. Data on computer was password protected. When the study was completed the data was locked and stored at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies for the time prescribed by the university.

5.2.6.6 Feedback to participants

Participants and their parents were informed of the findings and it was explained to them at a joint meeting, after the study was examined and completed.

5.2.6.7 Anonymous reporting of data

No identifying details are evident in the research report on the current study. Findings were recorded in a dissertation and recommendations provided to the school where the research was conducted and all other interested parties after the study had been examined and completed.

5.2.7 Trustworthiness

The researcher implemented guidelines proposed by Lincoln and Guba (cited in Creswell, 2007:204; Marshall & Rossman, 2010:40), who suggested the use of credibility, dependability, conformability and member checks, amongst other constructs, to ensure trustworthiness and validity. Credibility was achieved through engaging with participants during the unstructured interviews and attempting to gain in-depth understanding of their experience of the *alternative assessment programme*. In order to gain dependability, audio recordings were transcribed and listened to, to ensure accuracy.

Data was also analysed, coded, interpreted and described in detail. Furthermore, data was reported in such a manner as to relate the participants' direct meaning, thereby ensuring conformability. Member checking was realised through clarifying the meaning of participant responses during the unstructured interviews that was used as a method of data collection. In order to ensure that the researcher understood participant responses correctly, these responses would be repeated to the participant by the researcher to "check" correctness. The researcher obtained rich descriptions, of the participants' experiences of the *alternative assessment programme* in order to enable readers of the study to transfer information to other settings (Creswell, 2007:209).

The unstructured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews, field notes and reflective notes were part of the multiple forms of data collection required for crystallisation, thereby increasing reliability of the study (Ellingson, 2008:4). Crystallisation was achieved through interpretation of the data (Ellingson, 2008:10).The idea of crystallisation is not to discover one single finding, but rather to gain a thorough understanding of the issue being researched (Tracey, 2010:844). Trustworthiness was increased through specific procedures in the implementation of crystallisation, which included transcribing audio recordings of interviews, listening to the recordings several times, reading through field notes to correlate findings and providing context for specific meanings, and patterns or

themes that emerged (Suther, 2003:96). Validity of the study will be increased with crystallisation, thus incorporating self-critique and self-reflexivity (Marshall & Rossman, 2010:43-44). Several limitations were identified in relation to the study.

5.2.8 Limitations of the research

The researcher had relationships with all the participants in the study, due to the position as co-ordinator of the *alternative assessment programme* since the inception of the *alternative assessment programme* in 2011. Participants might have provided positive responses when asked about their experience of the programme, out of loyalty to the researcher. The sample of participants comprised of eight learners. The total population was 13, and restricted to grade 9 and 10 learners. Older and younger learners might have had different experiences. Another limitation was that the participants had more than four test and examination series, which they used alternative assessment methods for. The learners were thus "seasoned" participants in the programme and newcomers to the programme might have a different view. Some participants had trouble expressing themselves, possibly because of their *barriers to learning*.

6. CHOICE OF STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The dissertation follows the article format as prescribed by the North-West University. The dissertation consists of the following sections:

Part 1 Orientation to the research (North-West referencing style)

Part 2 Literature review (North-West referencing style)

Section B Article (Harvard referencing style)

Section C Summary, evaluation, conclusion and recommendations (North-West referencing style)

Section D Annexures

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

7. SUMMARY

The lived experience of adolescents with barriers to learning, participating in the *alternative assessment programme* in a school setting, is not known to staff responsible for the implementation of the programme. It is hoped that exploration of this topic may shed light on their experiences. In this section, the problem statement, research aim and methodology, as well as research procedure,

were discussed. Key concepts were defined briefly. Part 2 will be the literature review, followed by section B, which further explains the research study.

PART 2: Literature review

1. INTRODUCTION

The literature review explored the importance of the perspectives of learners accommodated in *alternative assessment programmes*, as part of inclusive education. Inclusive education policies demand that learners with *barriers to learning* be accommodated in mainstream schools (Department of Education, 2001:16). Extensive research has been completed on *barriers to learning* and learners with *barriers to learning* attending mainstream educational facilities. The literature review provides international and national perspectives of *barriers to learning*. One way of meeting the needs of learners with *barriers to learning* in mainstream schools, is *alternative assessment programmes*, which are explored in the review.

The researcher reviewed South African studies regarding learners *with barriers to learning* in mainstream schools, and found the focus mainly on:

- policies,
- structures,
- educator attitudes,
- evaluating the non-implementation of the inclusive education policy,
- as well as reporting on inclusive education programmes implemented (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007; Stofile, 2008; Ntombela, 2011; Oswald & Swart, 2011; Pather, 2011; Walton, 2011; Mweli, 2012; Bujowoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla & Sylvester, 2014).

There were limited studies conducted on the experiences of learners with *barriers to learning*, who are involved in *alternative assessment programmes* in South Africa. The current study pertains specifically to adolescents and, therefore, the adolescent developmental phase was reviewed in relation to the developmental theory as a theoretical basis for the study.

The strengths-based approach was explored as an additional theoretical basis for the study. The reason for exploring the strengths-based approach is the assumption that the *alternative assessment programme* focusses on the strengths of the learners participating in the programme. The strengths of the learners include their ability to comprehend text better when it is listened to as opposed to being read. The learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme* form part of a wider field and are in contact with their environment. Hence, the field theory was also explored in relation to the study. The literature review therefore highlights the gaps and limitations

of previous research on the subject matter and, for that reason; the following section focuses on international perspectives of *alternative assessment*.

2. INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Lovett and Leja (2013:72-80) reviewed a number of studies on learners' and students' perceptions of *alternative assessment* conducted from 2000–2011. It was concluded that learners' perceptions of the *alternative assessment programmes* should be part of the overall evaluation of said programme in the school (Lovett & Leja, 2013:85). In fact, Roach, Beddow, Kurz, Kettler and Elliot (2010:78-79) go further to suggest that students should be involved in the accessibility of tests, and that those most likely to be affected by *alternative assessment* should be consulted on the development thereof. Lang, Elliot, Bolt and Kratochwill (2008:110) reiterated the importance of understanding students' perspectives on alternative accommodation, as they are the consumers of the service. Another reason for considering learners' views is not only to explore the effect of the *alternative assessment* on the learners' academic results but also the learners' reactions to using the different methods of *alternative assessments* (Lang *et al*., 2008:110). There are limited studies on learner's views of educational support. The researcher identified two South African research studies, depicting learners' views and the experience of support from the learners' perspective (Mweli, 2012; Bujowoye *et al*., 2014).

The lack of research, both internationally and nationally, where learners are included as participants was highlighted by Bujowoye *et al*. (2014:5). The research gap that has been identified for this study is the lack of data in South Africa on the lived experience of learners *with barriers to learning*, participating in *alternative assessment* in a mainstream school. What *barriers to learning* entail is consequently discussed.

3. BARRIERS TO LEARNING

In order to understand the lived experience of learners with *barriers to learning* participating in an *alternative assessment programme*, it is necessary to have background on these concepts and how learners with *barriers to learning* are identified.

Learners with *barriers to learning* are identified when chronic, severe academic difficulties, particularly concerning literacy, are experienced, and their academic achievement is lower than could be expected from their intellectual ability (Lean & Colucci, 2010:8; Obiakor & McCollin, 2011:20; Flack, 2005:321). There are two types of barriers to learning – intrinsic and extrinsic (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009). *Intrinsic barriers* refer to "physical, sensory, neurological and developmental impairments, chronic illness, psychosocial disturbances and differing intellectual

ability" (Walton *et al*., 2009). *Extrinsic barriers* refer to external factors influencing the learners' ability to learn, such as family, social circumstances, cultural norms and economic circumstances (Walton *et al*., 2009). According to Lean and Colucci (2010:8), learners with *barriers to learning* experience challenges with information processing that causes academic difficulty. *Barriers to learning* also impede the development of cognitive skills, such as the skill to read (Bolt & Roach, 2009:42). *Barriers to learning* pose challenges to learners in the mainstream educational setting.

3.1 Challenges in the school environment

Swanson (cited in Reid & Lienemann, 2006:9) stated the following four commonly experienced challenges for learners experiencing *barriers to learning*:

- Learners have difficulty assessing, coordinating and organising mental activities that occur simultaneously or in close succession.
- Even when learners have an idea of appropriate strategies, they use them ineffectively.
- They fail to engage in self-regulation of mental activity (e.g. planning, monitoring, revising).
- They have a limited awareness of the usefulness of specific strategies for a given task.

Coordination challenges (contributing to poor spelling), poor time management (negatively affecting the ability to gauge time needed for tasks), poor organisational and social skills, difficulty with working and long-term memory, task completion, remembering personal responsibilities and recollection of daily activities, are additional challenges faced by learners with *barriers to learning* (Gregg, 2009:119,120; Montgomery, 2007:70). A study by Heiman and Precel (2003), comparing Israeli college students with and without *barriers to learning*, resulted in findings that learners with *barriers to learning* had difficulty in concentrating and were concerned about time constraints during examinations. Peleg (2009:12) and Steele (2008:198) added test anxiety, carelessness, poor use of time and confusion as limitations for learners experiencing *barriers to learning*. Therefore, in addition to self-doubt, the above-mentioned factors pose difficulty for learners with *barriers to learning*, when they have to prepare for formal assessments (Cohen, Lufi, & Okasha, 2004:177). Difficulty in preparing for formal assessments and tests will be reflected in test results.

Barriers to learning, influence results at school and affect lifelong learning (Gregg, 2009:125; Lean & Colucci, 2010:8). According to a definition in American legislation, in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), difficulty with information processing causes academic difficulty which include understanding or using of language, spoken or written, manifesting in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical computation and problem solving (Obiakor & McCollin, 2011:20). It makes sense then that reading

the questions and directions in question papers, working independently and constructing meaningful answers will pose difficulty for learners experiencing *barriers to learning*. The results of examinations and test series are predominant determinants for academic success and progression to higher grades. The academic challenges experienced by learners with barriers to learning could potentially result in learners dropping out of school, due to their academic needs not being met.

3.2 Dropping out

In South Africa, according to the ministerial committee (Department of Education, 2008:27), different definitions for "dropout" exist. For the purpose of this study, "dropout" will refer to those learners who have not completed school, or successfully graduated from school or obtained associated qualifications (Daniel, Walsh, Goldston, Arnold, Reboussin & Wood, 2006:511).

In America, more learners with *barriers to learning* than learners without barriers to learning drop out of school (Dunn, Chambers & Rabren, 2004:315). Over 75% of learners with *barriers to learning* drop out of school in America (Pasternack, cited in Adelman & Taylor, 2006:12), while only one in ten further their education through a college or other form of secondary training (Gregg, 2009:2). The South African situation is not much better, as Klinck (2013) quoted various South African government reports reporting a dropout rate of over 60% for Grades 9 to 12 learners. Twenty percent of Grade 10, and 22% of Grade 11 learners repeated the grade, while an increase of 14% was noted in drop out of Grade 11 learners (Chisholm, 2005:212; Department of Basic Education, 2012a:25).

While Flisher, Townsend, Chikabou, Lombard and King (2010) are of the opinion that repetition of a grade does not contribute to dropout, Grannis (cited in Gouws, Kruger & Burger, 2008:179) has an opposing view where repetition of a grade could possibly be due to experiencing *barriers to learning*. Chisholm (2005:211) reiterated that South Africa has a high number of over aged and repeating learners which could be due to unidentified *barriers to learning*. The *barriers to learning* might not be not adequately addressed by the current education system.

According to the Department of Basic Education (2012a:16), Department of Education (2008:16) and Klinck (2013), reasons for dropout were the inability to perform at school, difficulty with school work and a mismatch between learners' academic needs and education offered. The mismatch referred to, could be construed as education not meeting the needs of learners experiencing *barriers to learning*. The high number of learners stating unacceptable academic performance as reason to leave school might have been learners who potentially could be assisted by the *alternative assessment programme*. Indeed, Grannis (cited in Gouws *et al*., 2008:179), stated that

poor reading skills, grade repetition and low or failing marks resulted in an unrewarding school experience and lack of interest in schoolwork, contributing to drop out rates. Suggestions to address the latter included the assistance of learners with special needs (Department of Education, 2014). There is evidence (Department of Basic Education, 2012a:16; Department of Basic Education, 2008:16; Klinck, 2013) to suggest that, in the South African context, drop out due to inability to perform academically is an area of concern, which needs to be addressed, especially in high school. The inability to perform academically also has psychosocial implications for learners with barriers to learning. Learners spend a great deal of their time at school, where the focus is not only on pedagogy, but also on social and relational aspects (Hallberg, 2014). Including learners with *barriers to learning* in a mainstream school, serves to acknowledge these learners in society and increases acceptance by those persons without *barriers to learning* in the environment (Hallberg, 2014). Educators, peers and parents should be informed of the psychosocial challenges experienced by learners with *barriers to learning*, to enable them to understand the needs of these learners.

3.3 Psychosocial challenges

According to Gouws *et al.* (2008:116), a strong relation between emotions and memory or learning exists, as “the amygdala encodes emotional messages when they are strong and bonds them to learning for long-term storage”. Failure in a specific subject, due to *barriers to learning* creating a negative feeling, will possibly result in avoidance of the subject to protect against further negative emotions (Gouws *et al*., 2008:116). In addition, the risk of failure invokes fear in learners experiencing *barriers to learning*, inadvertently lowering academic achievements (Peleg, 2009:16). *Barriers to learning*, experienced by learners in the school environment might have a bigger influence on the learners’ emotions than the influence of hormonal changes (Santrock, 2008:156). Although adolescents are equipped to deal with stress and emotional fluctuations, many of them cannot manage their emotions effectively, resulting in vulnerability to depression, anger and poor emotional regulation, which can lead to academic difficulties, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency or eating disorders (Santrock, 2008:157). Learners with *barriers to learning* were found to experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, and helplessness due to victimisation and difficulty with socialising in combination with vulnerability to emotional difficulties (Gallegos, Langley & Villegas, 2012:57; Skeryté-Kazlauskienė, 2013). Higher levels of test anxiety were experienced by learners with *barriers to learning* than learners without *barriers to learning* (Peleg, 2009:12; Nelson & Harwood, 2011:9). In addition, test anxiety is more intense for fear of disappointing parents (Peleg, 2009:16).

In light of the literature, educators and parents must be mindful of the possible emotions that learners in the *alternative assessment programme* might experience and render the necessary support. Providing learners in the *alternative assessment programme* with the opportunity to share their experiences will contribute to better understanding from educators and parents and provision will be made to meet their needs (Manion & Nixon, 2012:33). Another challenge posed to learners with barriers to learning, is the effect on self-efficacy.

3.2.1 Self-efficacy

Academic self-efficacy can be defined as “an individual’s belief in his or her ability to manage and master academic expectations” (Gregg, 2009:95). Failure, especially if repetitious, and if viewed by the learner as easy academic work, further contributes to lower self-efficacy (Schunk & Meece, 2006:11). The link between learners’ views of their academic abilities and their perceptions of the quality of their lives accentuate the importance of the belief systems of learners (Suldo, Riley & Shaffer, 2006:578). In view of this statement, learners experiencing barriers to learning may feel that their worth is linked to academic results, especially when receiving feedback from others, indicating worthlessness and inadequacy, thereby negatively impacting the development of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010:10; Bear, Minke & Manning, 2002:406; Pattison, 2006:557; Zeleke, 2004:149). Findings in a study comparing Israeli students with *barriers to learning* to students without *barriers to learning*, as mentioned earlier, suggested that the former experienced lower academic self-efficacy, in comparison to high and low achiever students; confirming negative results contributing to low self-efficacy (Lakaye & Margalit, 2006:442). They further found that the students’ belief in their academic competence was similar to the belief that failing students had of their academic competence (Lakaye & Margalit, 2006:442). In a study by Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck, (2007:259) it was found that “children’s beliefs become the mental baggage that they bring to the achievement situation”, because there is a relationship between self-concept and academic achievement, influencing motivation (Gouws *et al*., 2008:101; Rice & Dolgin, 2008:163). Therefore, learners who believe that they are capable of achieving good results, is likely to have a positive self-concept, which in turn might motivate them to achieve to their potential. Elaborating on this, Rice and Dolgin (2008:163) stated that confident learners have the courage to try and are motivated to live up to the belief they have about themselves.

Gregg (2009:98), however, is of the opinion that, academic self-concept evaluation depends on the group the learners with *barriers to learning* compared themselves to. Favourable comparison to a similar achieving group, or lower achieving group, might thus result in a more positive self-concept. Learners with *barriers to learning* have a negative academic self–concept, which could not be

generalised to general self-concept (Gons, Kenny & Ghany, 2003:291; Bryan, Burstein & Ergul, 2004:46). It is stressed by Gregg (2009:99) that, although barriers to learning was found not to be the cause of low self-concept, there is a stress risk factor attached to being diagnosed with *barriers to learning*, which could lead to more serious psychological disorders if adequate services are not provided. Al-Yagon (2010) stated that adolescents with negative expected selves, display unproductive, antisocial behaviour. These adolescents might be vulnerable to poor self-esteem, inability to socialise with peers and engaging in negative behaviour.

The next section will explore challenges learners with *barriers to learning experience*, with regards to relationships.

3.3.2 Relationship challenges

Barriers to learning can have an influence on the learner's ability to communicate, resulting in problems with peers (Meece & Daniels, 2008:81). While there is strong pressure to conform during adolescence, peer influence can be positive or negative (Santrock, 2008:320,322). Negative influences could lead to drug use, delinquency and depression, while rejection and ignorance from peers may result in hostility or loneliness (Santrock, 2008:320,321). Experiencing rejection by peers could hamper formation of self-concept and sense of identity (Gouws *et al.*, 2008:91). Labelling, stigmatising and stereotyping of learners can influence expectations and judgements about learners with barriers to learning and thus participants in the *alternative assessment programme* (Kelly & Norwich, 2004:413). For learners experiencing *barriers to learning*, rejection by peers in the classroom is a reality (Berk, 2003:634). This treatment of learners with *barriers to learning* might be attributed to peers not experiencing *barriers to learning* who typically do not have knowledge of what *barriers to learning* entail (Goodfellow, 2012:75). In addition, when discredited, learners with *barriers to learning* might be excluded by their peers or self-exclusion takes place (Goodfellow, 2012:76). Loneliness, experienced by learners with *barriers to learning*, is evident from responses to a website created for learners with *barriers to learning*. It was found that they benefitted from the site, as they no longer felt alone, for they belonged to a group with similar difficulties (Raskind, Margalit & Higgins, 2006:260). The learners posting on the site experienced social rejection and exclusion from peer activities, affecting their need to relate to their classmates (Raskind *et al*., 2006:262). Feelings of loneliness might impact on learners' motivation to study and achieve to their academic potential.

3.3.3 Motivation

Motivation is defined as cognitive beliefs and processes formed by earlier learning experiences and immediate learning situations (Meece & Daniels, 2008:384). Intrinsic motivation is described by

Gouws *et al.* (2008:72) as a person's will to be enriched, driven by their interest in what they are doing, and their sense of self-actualisation derived from their action, regardless of the reward. The extrinsically motivated person is doubtful of their abilities, takes little initiative, is often anxious about the possibility of failure, and needs approval and continuous encouragement from others (Gouws *et al.*, 2008:72-73). Although, according to Smith, Davy and Rosenberg (2012:234), the type of motivation is determined by the situation and the person in the situation, extrinsic motivation is sometimes necessary to enable adolescents to begin a process or to go in a direction they were unaware of.

Meece and Daniels (2008:356) state that a learner's self-perception, regarding their competence, influences their motivation to learn and, thus, their school performance. Learners without motivation might present with school fatigue, truancy, drop out, underachievement and behavioural challenges (Gouws *et al.*, 2008:75). When learners develop the motivation to learn, they seem to display a long-term commitment to learning (McCown, Driscoll & Roop, cited in Gouws *et al.*, 2008:75). The inference can thus be made that a positive experience of the *alternative assessment programme* could be experienced as motivational by participants.

3.3.4 Negative self-perception and motivation

Research indicates that learners' perceptions of their abilities are often unrealistic (Meece & Daniels, 2008:388). Learners diagnosed with *barriers to learning* were found to have a negative perception of their abilities, and to have less motivation to learn Peleg (2009:12).

Learners' internal beliefs and self-doubt that success is possible, have a negative influence on performance and motivation (Gouws *et al*., 2008:101; Tilstone, Layton, Anderson, Gerrish, Morgan & Williams, 2004:10). According to Rice and Dolgin (2008:163), children use strategies, such as procrastination, deliberately not trying, and allowing distraction from others, rather than their inability to do schoolwork, as reasons for their poor performance. Learners with *barriers to learning* tend to avoid written work and therefore the assumption is that they do not reach their academic potential. Educators may, therefore, develop a perception that they are lazy, unmotivated and have an uncaring attitude towards schoolwork, instead of recognising their challenges. In support of the assumption by educators, learners with *barriers to learning* had fewer past accomplishments and thus less positive reinforcement, compared to learners without *barriers to learning*, (Hampton & Mason, 2003). Low perceptions of ability are reinforced by experience (Hampton & Mason, 2003), therefore repeated failure becomes internalised, which impacts on the learners' belief about their academic ability (Hampton & Mason, 2003). Learners who have negative attitudes about

themselves impose limitations on their own achievement, which might be true for participants in the *alternative assessment programme*, as they experienced academic failure in the past.

The mentioned challenges can result in a cycle of rejection, underachievement and failure; leading to loss of self-esteem (Montgomery, 2007:20). According to Gregg (2009:100), some adolescents with *barriers to learning*, have negative beliefs about their learning, potentially influencing their efforts because they have already experienced a "long history of struggle, frustration and difficulty" (Lakaye & Margalit, 2006:443). Without the hope of improved results, despite their best efforts, learners might become less motivated to prepare for tests and examinations. Having made this statement, motivation is imperative for learning. Therefore, lack of motivation will maintain *barriers to learning* (Adelman & Taylor, 2006:55).

Barriers to learning are a reality in mainstream schools in South Africa (Engelbrecht, Eloff, Oswald, Swart, 2003:295). One way of addressing the *barriers to learning*, is through *alternative assessment programmes*, as it provide learners with the opportunity to impart their knowledge.

4. ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Heiman and Precel (2003) conducted the study of Israeli college students with barriers to learning, compared to students without barriers to learning previously mentioned. The finding was that most students experiencing *barriers to learning* were of the opinion that they would benefit from special test conditions during examinations (Heiman & Precel, 2003). Therefore, according to Bolt and Roach (2009:42), there is no reason to deny learners access to *alternative assessment* when the assessment is not intended to measure, for instance, reading or writing ability, but would rather enable them to impart their knowledge of the subject. Lovett and Leja (2013:85) elaborated on this by stating that "accommodations are meant to increase the validity of inferences about students' skills, typically by allowing them to access test content and show their skills…". Allowing learners with *barriers to learning* to use *alternative* methods of *assessment* specifically geared towards addressing the barrier preventing them from imparting their subject knowledge, will provide them with a fair chance to achieve to their potential.

The Department of Education (2008:5) allows for additional time, adaptation of question papers, computer assisted assessment, use of a Dictaphone, oral examination, and assistance from a reader, planning aid, tape aid and amanuensis, as methods of *alternative assessments* for learners experiencing *barriers to learning*. MP3 players are used instead of tape aid at the school where the study was conducted. MP3 players, additional time and amanuensis are the *alternative assessment* methods used in the current study.

Alternative assessment was found to reduce test anxiety, leading to learners feeling more comfortable and relaxed, showing improved results and experiencing the examination as “easier” (Heiman & Precel, 2003; Lovett & Leja, 2013:84,85). Whether *alternative assessment* indeed improves results, has not been established beyond reasonable doubt (Lovett & Leja, 2013:85). However, there are studies that explore the benefits of *alternative assessments*.

Many studies (Gregg, 2009:233; Sireci, Scarpati & Shuhong, 2005:484; Zenisky & Sireci, 2007) found evidence supporting the benefits of extended time for learners with *barriers to learning*, as this provides them with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities. In another study exploring extended time, Logan (2009:26-28) found a correlation between the motivation, performance goals and emotions experienced by learners with *barriers to learning*, when afforded additional time as a method of *alternative assessment*. There is controversy about this type of alternative assessment, as Bolt and Roach (2009:48) found no difference when additional time was afforded to both learners with and without *barriers to learning*.

With regards to amanuensis, Gregg (2009:145) reported on the importance of a private room for students who need to read aloud to assist them in monitoring and attending to what they read. Learners making use of amanuensis as *alternative assessment*, have a room assigned to them and their scribes during formal assessments. With regards to the use of technology in “reading” the material, Gregg (2009:188) predicted that MP3 players could “increase the writing proficiency” of persons with *barriers to learning*. Millard (2007:63) confirmed the use of MP3’s as *alternative assessment* to be particularly beneficial to students with *barriers to learning*, while Wong (2008:69) highlighted the relative cost-effectiveness of this device. Boyle, Rosenburg, Connelly, Washburn, Brinckerhoff and Banerjee (2003), however, noted that adolescents experiencing challenges with organisation and attention might find repeated fast forwarding, rewinding and stopping of the MP3 player frustrating and difficult. Providing learners with *barriers to learning* MP3 players can be construed as a supportive measure during formal assessments.

4.1 Supportive environment

Alternative assessment can be viewed as a form of support and the learners’ experience of this support might be an indication of their awareness and willingness to find and utilise support in the form of *alternative assessments*.

Blake (2008:144) is of the opinion that adolescents are more prone to awareness when support is needed and will move towards finding the support, while Toman and Bauer (2005:188) argue ambivalence towards receiving assistance. In the context of this study, adolescents might thus

request to participate in the *alternative assessment programme*, or decide not to make use of the opportunity. Learners value support from caring adults at school, especially when support is lacking at home (Meece & Daniels, 2008:364). Learners with *barriers to learning*, who experienced their teachers as caring and available, displayed a higher level of positive affection than learners who had an opposite experience of teachers (Al-Yagon, 2010:1301). Behavioural challenges were more prevalent in the group where teachers were perceived as uncaring and not available (Al-Yagon, 2010:1304). In a study by Dunn *et al*. (2004:321), 23% of learners who dropped out of school reported that they did not find anyone being helpful while in high school, while 8% of the learners who remained at school were unable to identify a helpful person.

Social workers in a school setting has a duty to be helpful and to assist learners, especially learners experiencing difficulty in the school system (Openshaw, 2008:25), which include learners with *barriers to learning*. In order to assist learners in the school environment, social workers have a role to promote inclusive education for all learners inclusive of learners with *barriers to learning* (Baffoe & Dako-Gyeke, 2014:126). According to Openshaw (2008:11) social workers at schools can assist learners with *barriers to learning*, in terms of assessment, identification and direct service. Baffoe and Dako-Gyeke (2014:126) advocate for school social workers to develop programmes in collaboration with other professionals to promote inclusive education. Joseph, Alfred, Slovak and Broussard (2010:15) are of the opinion that social workers are obliged to "question school structures that impede the growth and development of the least advantaged". Learners experiencing *barriers to learning* count amongst learners who are less advantaged in terms of their ability to reach their full academic potential. Joseph *et al* (2010:15) suggest that social workers in a school setting have to identify practices impeding on academic success, placing learners at risk. Interventions has to be implemented by the social workers in schools to meet the needs of learners who are at risk (Openshaw, 2008:20), Accessing opportunities to enhance academic success is one of the responsibilities of the school social worker (Openshaw, 2008:4).

The provision of an environment where adolescents with *barriers to learning* are encouraged and supported, by valuing their individuality and acknowledging their achievements, has been encouraged by Armstrong *et al*. (2010:140). More effort and greater persistence in the face of difficulties is likely when adolescents believe in their ability to accomplish a task (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006:18). Experiencing feelings of capability are in accordance with a statement by Rapp, Saleebey and Sullivan (2005:83) who concluded that inner strengths develop and become apparent when learners are assisted in difficult circumstances, by caring adults, implying learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme*. While the *alternative assessments* are

intended to support learners with *barriers to learning,* learners' experience of the support should be taken into account.

Lovett and Leja (2013:73) acknowledged the importance of learners' perception and knowledge regarding the benefits of *alternative assessments*. Learners, who do not perceive the *alternative assessment* recommended to them as helpful, might not use it (Lovett & Leja, 2013:73). The support team who recommended the specific *alternative assessment* might not be aware of the learners' perceptions and continue to implements the *alternative assessments,* which learners are not benefiting from. Therefore, it is necessary to afford learners an opportunity to relate their experience of the *alternative assessment programme* of which they are participants. However, there are few studies that focus on the experiences of the learners who participate in *alternative assessments* (Lovett & Leja, 2013:72-89; Lang *et al*., 2011:107-124; Lang *et al.,* 2005:49-62). Learners afforded the opportunity to give their opinion on *alternative assessment*, may be equipped with self-determination skills, which is needed when they have to request accommodation for their *barriers to learning* in higher education or the workplace (Lovett & Leja, 2013:73). In addition, the views of the learners using *alternative assessment* are important in determining possible negative impact on the users of the *alternative assessment* (Lovett & Leja, 2013:74).

4.2. Importance of learner perspectives

"Children are experts in the service they receive" (Manion & Nixon, 2012:38) and therefore, their capacity to contribute to decisions affecting them should be valued (Landsdown, 2010:15; Manion & Nixon, 2012:38; Cook, Blanchet-Cohen & Hart, 2004:10). It stands to reason that, when the opinions of the learners are taken into consideration, they are more likely to receive the service they need, thereby providing them with an opportunity to experience success (Manion & Nixon, 2012:33). Disregarding the contributions by learners, because of their *barriers to learning*, will be stigmatising and will inhibit participation (Manion & Nixon, 2012:34). The study by Lang *et al.* (2008) is a comparison between the reactions of learners with and learners without *barriers to learning*, when afforded *alternative assessment* methods in specific tests, as well as without the *alternative assessment* methods. Participants, grade four and grade eight learners respectively, were subjected to interview schedules, including open-ended questions. Although valuable information was gained, the lived experience of the participants was not the focus of the study, and the deeper meaning of the responses was not explored. The experience of older high school learners is likely to differ from that of the younger learners in the previously mentioned study. The lived experience of learners participating in an *alternative assessment programme* in the South African context might differ from that of the learners in America, where Lang *et al. (*2005 & 2008) conducted their research. Programmes that fail to meet the needs of adolescents are likely to leave them with a

sense of powerlessness, especially in view of past failures (Manion & Nixon, 2012). Sensitising of school staff to appreciate the contributions of the participants in the *alternative assessment programme* and taking their opinions seriously, will give the participants the respect they deserve and harness their strengths (Landsdown, 2010; Healy & Darlington, 2009).

As recipients of the *alternative assessment programme*, participants are placed uniquely to contribute to the design and decisions regarding the programme (Manion & Nixon, 2012:38). Subsequently, when taking the contributions of adolescents into account the sustainability and effectiveness of programmes are enhanced (Cook *et al*., 2004:10). Additionally, the effectiveness of the *alternative assessment programme* is likely to increase, given a supportive environment. The experience of *learners with barriers to learning* of the *alternative assessment programme* has to be considered within a theoretical framework.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In light of understanding adolescents' lived experience of the *alternative assessment programme*, the researcher worked from the Developmental Theory, focussing on the adolescent developmental phase, and Gestalt Field Theory perspective. Furthermore, the experience of adolescents participating in the programme was analysed by reviewing the Strength–Based approach.

The adolescent developmental phase is characterised by differentiation from the family and forming of an own identity (Blake, 2008:285; Oaklander, 2006:94), which is also referred to as a separate self (Toman & Bauer, 2005:182). According to Rice and Dolgin (2008:160), the self is the part of the individual's personality of which he/she is aware. During this phase, there is greater preoccupation with the "self" as well as "fragility of the sense of self" (Blake, 2008:144), and thus, adolescents become aware of their strengths, such as having a deeper understanding of themselves, and weaknesses, such as the *barriers to learning* (Toman & Bauer, 2005:188). Therefore, adolescents become more introspective (Santrock, 2008:135) and have an increased ability to self-reflect, resulting in greater understanding of themselves, but also an increased sense of self-consciousness, due to their perception that others are observing and evaluating them (Meece & Daniels, 2008:360). Adolescents participating in the *alternative assessment programme*, it becomes clear, are concerned about others' perception of them, because of their participation in the programme (Lovett & Leja, 2013). Therefore, should participants in the *alternative assessment programme* being studied by the researcher, experience similar concerns, these concerns must be addressed by the staff concerned with implementation of the programme. Another aspect of the adolescent development phase is emotional development, which is discussed in the next section.

5.1 Emotional development

Emotional development forms part of changes adolescents experience in their journey to adulthood. Comparative studies confirmed the impact *barriers to learning* have on the adolescents' emotional development, as opposed to adolescents without *barriers to learning* (Skeryté-Kazlauskienė, 2013; Gallegos *et al*., 2012:55).

Santrock (2008:155) defines emotion as "feeling or affect that occurs when a person is in a state or an interaction that is important to the individual, especially to his or her well-being". Gouws *et al.* (2008:116) refer to emotional development as "the development of attachment, trust, security, love and affection, as well as a variety of emotions, feelings and temperaments", including the development of concepts of self and autonomy. Participation in the *alternative assessment programme* could potentially influence the emotional development of adolescent participants, as they have to develop trust in the persons recommending participation, as well as scribes and the programme itself. Emotions affect physical health, and behaviour towards others, but also cause pleasure, enjoyment and satisfaction (Gouws *et al.*, 2008:116). According to Dahl (2004), the biological changes in the neural system during adolescent development, affect the adolescents' emotions and motivation, which results in a natural increase towards risk taking, sensation seeking and changing emotions and motivation. Participation in the *alternative assessment programme* is initially a risk, as participants must contemplate the reaction of peers and educators to their participation. Other aspects of the adolescent developmental phase, as highlighted by Blake (2008:144), are the "risk of acting out, impulses breaking through, powerful transference and difficulty of disengagement". Participants in the *alternative assessment programme* should be consulted on the emotional impact of the *alternative assessment programme*, to ensure that the programme meets their needs and does not add to the negative emotions attached to *barriers to learning*. Further to the emotional development, adolescents also develop in terms of their self-concept and self-esteem.

5.2 Self-concept and self-esteem

Adolescents tend to alter their behaviour, depending on the context, or role they have to play in different contexts (Santrock, 2008:136). Furthermore, their self-understanding, self-clarification, self-appraisal and self-development are influenced by the views of their friends (Santrock, 2008:137).

Self-concept can be defined as individuals' conscious, cognitive perception and evaluation of themselves, referring to the thoughts and opinions they hold of themselves (Rice & Dolgin, 2008:160; Meece & Daniels, 2008:356; Gouws *et al.,* 2008:98). This definition would provide the

answer to “Who am I?” (Gouws *et al.,* 2008:98). Adolescents gather evidence about aspects related to physical appearance, competence, and intellectual ability, amongst others, on which they base the formation of a self-concept after comparing their findings with their ideal self, as well as opinions of others (Rice & Dolgin, 2008:160). This is also true for learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme* (Kelly & Norwich, 2004:412). The participants’ self-concept might be based on reality or be far from it (Rice & Dolgin 2008:160). The self-concept is dynamic, as it changes according to the situation, influencing the participants’ behaviour, as well as the participants’ experience of the situation (Gouws *et al.*, 2008:98). Therefore, participants experiencing support and a sense of mastery in the *alternative assessment programme* might display different behaviour than in a “normal” formal assessment situation, where no support is provided.

The self-concept is important as it motivates and directs behaviour (Rice & Dolgin, 2008:161). Additionally, Manning (2007:12) found that a learner’s self-concept is a reliable predictor of academic achievement. Gouws *et al.* (2008:98-99) perceive the self-concept to be organised, in that different concepts have different levels of importance to certain people. A highly valued concept, such as academic success, will thus have a detrimental influence on the self-concept if failure in that concept occurs, and it will further have an effect on other seemingly unrelated abilities. The opposite is then true for success in a highly rated area, where the self-concept will be influenced positively if academic success is achieved (Gouws *et al*., 2008:98-99). Differentiation is made between academic, non-academic and general self-concepts, as indicated by March (cited in Gouws *et al.*, 2008:98). A study by Skeryté-Kazlauskienė (2013) found contradicting results as the self-concept of learners experiencing barriers to learning were found to be lower than that of learners without *barriers to learning* in all areas. The importance that participants in the *alternative assessment programme* attach to academic success could possibly influence their self-concept positively, if the programme meets their needs. Conversely, should they receive the support with no change in their academic efficacy; it might contribute to negative self-conceptions.

Self-esteem refers to self-related feeling, which is based on adolescents’ feelings about who they are and their value (Gouws *et al.*, 2008:98). Self-esteem is also referred to as self-worth, or self-image (Santrock, 2008:140). Additionally self-worth has to do with the evaluation of the person’s traits, abilities and characteristics, involving a sense of self-acceptance and self-respect (Meece & Daniels, 2008:356). Santrock (2008:143) refers to the findings of several studies confirming that peers, families and schools contribute to participants’ self-esteem. Confident learners, with high self-esteem, are motivated to live up to their beliefs about themselves, while the reverse is true for learners with low self-esteem who might not try, as they expect failure (Gouws *et al.,* 2008:101).

Learners with high self-esteem and self-concept perform better, scholastically (Meece & Daniels, 2008:357). Low self-esteem may cause adolescents to feel isolated, lonely, and lead to awkwardness in social situations (Gouws *et al.*, 2008:100). Participants in the *alternative assessment programme* could experience low self-esteem and isolation, especially in view of being separated from the rest of the learners during formal assessments. Low self-esteem can be temporary, but may also result in more serious problems, especially if accompanied by difficult family life, challenges at school, or other stressful factors (Santrock, 2008:144).

Adolescents have a good reasoning ability; their thinking is more complex and sophisticated, while there is an increase in self-consciousness and self-criticism (Meece & Daniels, 2008:345; Blake, 2008:144; Dahl, 2004). In view of participants' more sophisticated reasoning ability, participants have to be included in decision-making regarding participation in the *alternative assessment programme*, and their contribution should be respected, which could also increase their sense of belonging.

5.3 Sense of belonging

Toman and Bauer (2005:189) and Blake (2008:144) are in agreement regarding the prominence of the need for belonging to a group during this phase of life. Learners in the *alternative assessment programme* are accommodated in a classroom separate to that of the rest of the learners at the school during test and examination series, possibly affecting their sense of belonging. The need for adolescents to be accepted and liked by the peer group, referring to "individuals who are about the same age or maturity level", is one of the most important aspects of their lives, causing pleasurable feelings when accepted, and stress and anxiety when excluded or rejected (Santrock, 2008:319). Participants in the *alternative assessment programme* might be excluded or rejected, because of *barriers to learning* or due to their participation in the programme, adding another reason to explore their experience of the programme.

Interaction with peers is important for cognitive- and emotional development and adjustment of adolescents (Burkowski, Buhrmester & Underwood, 2011:155). Peers also provide in various needs, including companionship, entertainment, and assistance with problem solving, personal validation and emotional support (Wentzel, 2011:531). Additionally peer groups set certain behaviour standards that are monitored and enforced (Wentzel, Baker & Russell, 2009:235). Through interaction within these groups, members, including participants in the *alternative assessment programme*, learn what is needed to be accepted and be competent members of their social worlds (Wentzel, 2011:534), as well as to integrate with peer activities, while disagreements with peers create opportunities to explore fairness and justice (Santrock, 2008:320). Relationships

with peers are important for the forming of self-concept and self-actualisation (Gouws *et al.,* 2008:90). Through peer relationships, participants in the *alternative assessment programme* gather self-knowledge, insight and self-evaluation, which contribute to the formation of identity (Gouws *et al.*, 2008:91).

Learners, who experience care and support from peers, were found to be interested and engaged in academic work, while those not being supported and cared for are at risk of motivational and academic difficulties (Wentzel *et al.*, 2009:236). Academic difficulties are cited as one of the reasons for peer rejection (Meece & Daniels, 2008:420). An ideal self is influenced by the expectations, values and ideals of peers and adults and, if participants perceive that they do not meet the criteria for this ideal self, it lowers their self-esteem (Meece & Daniels, 2008:362). Research found a link between "the nature and quality of peer interactions and relationships and students' academic motivation and performance" (Wentzel, 2011:540). Relationships and interactions with peers form part of the adolescents' field.

In order to enhance their sense of being in control, participants need to experience success within and outside of school (Santrock, 2008:323). Therefore determining the participants' experience of the *alternative assessment programme* is important. Gestalt field theory was explored, as basis for the current study because field theory suggests that the participants are inseparable from their environment, and are connected to consistently, or in contact with, everything while also maintaining a separate identity (Joyce & Sills, 2010:27; Parlett & Lee, 2005:43,46; Senreich, 2014:59; Toman & Bauer, 2005:182). The field theoretical perspective is central to Gestalt theory (Joyce & Sills, 2010:27).

5.4 Gestalt field theory

According to Joyce and Sills (2010:27), there is no existence, except in relation to the field, of which everybody and everything is part. Parlett and Lee (2005:51) state that the field includes family, social and economic circumstances, while Joyce and Sills (2010:28) add body, mind, emotion, current and historical circumstances, as well as cultural, spiritual and political influences. The participants in this study therefore have to be seen in a broader context (Fernbacher, 2005:123; Parlett & Lee, 2005:51). Consequently, the participants' experience of the *alternative assessment programme* cannot be understood without considering all the influences (Senreich, 2014:58). This includes the external, as well as the internal world of participants, and all other persons involved in the programme (Wilber, cited in Woldt & Toman, 2005:182). Adolescents spend more time at school than any other setting, which presumably influences every aspect of their development (Eccles & Roesner, 2011). The experience of school could be indicative of the view of the wider

field, causing the adolescent shame, and thereby limiting contact and meaning–making opportunities (Pattison, 2006:557; Pearl & Donahue, 2004:148).

The field is relational and co-created and, as such, any change in the field, shifts the field (Clegg, 2010:251), or as Parlett and Lee (2005:43) state, the field is constantly made and remade. According to Joyce and Sills (2010:28), adolescents, their peers, parents and school staff, in relationship with each other are shaping and being shaped by each other. This implies that the field is never constant, but continues to change due to the mutual influences in that field. Each role player in the *alternative assessment programme* has a subjective view of the programme and its elements, depending on their previous experiences and their behaviour consistent with creative adaptations due to previous experience (Clegg, 2010:251; Senreich, 2014:59). Consequently, learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme* have a history of experiences with *barriers to learning*, which subjectively influences their current experience of *alternative assessment*. Educators, parents and peers, when interacting with learners labelled with *barriers to learning*, bring their own previous experience into the situation.

Therefore, educators should be mindful of their own field circumstances in their interactions with participants experiencing *barriers to learning,* and who are participating in the *alternative assessment programme* (Fernbacher, 2005:125). School staff that make assumptions about labels, without considering other influences, are likely to come to conclusions derived from distorted perceptions (Senreich, 2014:59). The field theory can be applied effectively in the development of *alternative assessment programmes* and can influence the policy on inclusive education (Senreich, 2014:60). In order to influence programme development and policy, the field of each role player, as well as the culture of the school, should be considered and understood (Senreich, 2014:60).

5.5 Strenght-based approach

The strengths-based approach focuses on the positive aspects of the individual and the situation, recognising individuals' inherent capacities and potential (Gray, 2011:6, 7). While it is emphasised that challenges related to *barriers to learning* or perceptions of the *alternative assessment programme* and inclusive education should not be ignored, strengths are viewed as "pathways to solutions" whereby the challenges could be addressed (Davis, Mayo, Sikand, Kobres & Dollard, 2007:89). There is a belief in the adolescents', educators' and parents' "natural potential to grow, heal, learn, and their ability to identify wants and strengths of the person and environment, self-determination, individuality and uniqueness" (Fast & Chapin, 2002). These strengths are used to build capacity and skills, equipping all role players to make decisions, deal with the challenges of *barriers to learning*, and access opportunities provided through the *alternative assessment*

programme (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg & Furlong, 2004:12; Gleason, 2007). The point of departure is the identification of the strengths in the adolescents, parents, school staff team and community ; development of these strengths and accessing resources to meet the needs of those individuals needing assistance (Davis *et al*., 2007:89; Saleebey, 2011:483). Seven key strengths can be identified and used in assessment, planning and intervention, namely talent strength and competencies, resiliency strengths, possibility strengths, resource strengths, borrowed strengths, past or historical strengths and hidden strengths (Davis *et al*., 2007:90-91).

Adolescents finding difficulty in recognising their strengths can be guided in this process by "inviting, inspiring, encouraging, questioning, and empowering them to recognize and realize their potential" (Gray, 2011:7). The school staff team is in an ideal position to identify the strengths of the adolescents they engage with. Once these strengths and resources have been determined, an individualised strengths-based plan can be formulated, and be specifically tailored to their needs (Davis *et al*., 2007:89). In the context of the current study, adolescents with *barriers to learning* can access *alternative assessment* methods that harness their specific strength.

Relationships are central to the strengths-based approach. The involvement of parents and other role players in mutual decision-making is important (Gray, 2011:7). The school setting lends itself to the implementation of the strengths-based approach, due to the link between this approach and adolescent development and school success (Jimerson, 2004:3; Arnold, Walsh, Oldham & Rapp, 2007:91). According to Jimerson (2004:3,4), it is important for academic success to focus on adolescents' cognitive and social abilities. McLaughlin and Talbert (cited in Rapp *et al*., 2005:83), emphasise the importance of caring adults and educators in nurturing the inner strength of learners in a safe environment, which also challenges them to learn and develop. Related to the alternative assessment programme, scribes would be included as caring adults. Recognition of an adolescent's strengths, by the school staff, scribes and parents, has the potential to bring "hope, motivation and optimism" to all the role-players in the lives of the learners with *barriers to learning*. Awareness of the adolescent's strengths will stand in contrast to being overwhelmed by the learner's challenges (Jimerson *et al*., 2004:12).

LeBuffe and Shapiro (2004:52) propose that there are advantages to all parties being involved. Due to the adolescents' participation in the programme, they discover strengths that they could generalise to other areas of their lives (LeBuffe & Shapiro, 2004:52). Additionally co-operation between parents and the school improve, as the focus is not on their child's deficits (LeBuffe & Shapiro, 2004:52). Lastly, greater compliance from learners, due to growth in self-esteem and empowerment is likely (LeBuffe & Shapiro 2004:52). Strengths-based programmes provide the

opportunity for learners to be affirmed and validated (McCammon, 2007:96). Benefits of the strengths-based approach, as described in literature include pride, hope, a sense of achievement, autonomy (decision making) and self-determination (McCammon, 2007:96; Benard, 2006:201). The benefits mentioned above could serve as motivation for adolescents to remain in the *alternative assessment programme*. Additionally educators who realise the value of the mentioned benefits to the academic self-efficacy of these adolescents might be motivated to implement the strengths-based approach.

Terjersen, Jacofsky, Froh and DiGuiseppe (2004:166) advocate for a strengths-based model focussing on prevention. LeBuffe and Shapiro (2004:51) elaborate on this notion, by suggesting that possible challenges should be anticipated and the characteristics of role-players affected, strengthened, prior to problems emerging. Early identification of *barriers to learning* and timeous inclusion of these learners in *alternative assessment programmes*, uniquely suited to their needs, could address the effects of these issues on adolescents, as previously discussed in the literature review. There is a lack of resources in the South African educational context, for individually focused professional services, and suggests community participation including parents, educators and community resources (Lubbe & Elof, 2004:34). Therefore, it is imperative that parents, the adolescent, school staff team, and community resources work in partnership, harnessing each other's strengths, in order to tailor the *alternative assessment programme* to the needs it must address.

6. CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed shows that the number of learners experiencing *barriers to learning* is increasing worldwide. Specific statistics of learners experiencing *barriers to learning* in South Africa, or in need of *alternative assessment*, are not available. There does seem, however, to be a correlation between *barriers to learning* and the high dropout rate in South African schools.

Adolescents with *barriers to learning*, who participate in *alternative assessment programmes*, are affected on all levels, including emotional, social and academic development. Therefore, the need exists to explore the consumers' (adolescents) perception of the *alternative assessment programme*. In accordance with the strengths-based approach, it is vital to affirm and use learners' and the community's strengths in the implementation of programmes. Obtaining the view of the adolescents affirms their capacity, as postulated by the strengths-based approach.

The field theory provides insight into how adolescents in the school setting do not function in isolation, but are constantly interacting and connected to their environment. This refers to the adults

in the environment, as well as the resources. This means that adolescents' experience of participating in the *alternative assessment programme* has to be taken into consideration by their field. Section B will follow, discussing the research findings.

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SECTION B: ARTICLE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ADOLESCENTS WITH BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME

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Worldwide, alternative assessment programmes are implemented as part of the inclusive education practice to ensure equal opportunities for the increasing number of learners experiencing barriers to learning in mainstream high schools. The experiences of adolescents, as consumers or participants of these programmes, and effectiveness, from their perspective, are largely unknown. This article is based on research using a qualitative, phenomenological design to study the lived experience of adolescents participating in an alternative assessment programme in a mainstream high school in the Northern Suburbs of the Western Cape, South Africa. A collage activity and unstructured interviews were conducted with 8 of the 13 learners taking part in the alternative assessment programme of the said high school, while data was analysed using a process of coding and identification of themes. The investigation revealed that participating adolescents experienced the alternative assessment programme as beneficial, both psychosocially and during the experience of formal assessments.

Keywords: adolescent, alternative assessment, barriers to learning, lived experience

INTRODUCTION

Internationally, there is a focus on inclusive education and the right of all children and young people to receive quality education (Rieser, 2012; Polat, 2011).

Inclusive education is a policy that celebrates diversity, by recognising that all children and youth can learn, and this advocates for schools to have structures in place to meet the needs of all learners (Ntombela, 2011). South Africa adopted the international trend towards inclusive education (Maher, 2009), which culminated in a policy, known as the *Education White Paper 6: Special needs – Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*; outlining the blueprint for implementation of inclusive education (Department of Education, 2001). While inclusion is demanded by the Department of Education (hereafter referred to as DoE), and should be advocated by school social workers (Baffoe & Dako-Gyeke, 2014:126), those learners with *barriers to learning* are increasing and exerting pressure on mainstream schools (Tomlinson, 2012). *Barriers to learning*, is the term used in South Africa for learning disorders (Mohamed & Laher, 2012). While there is no consensus regarding one definition for *barriers to learning*, it is generally accepted to refer to any difficulties

with written language, impeding learners' ability to read, write, and spell, and comprehend what is read (Reid & Lienemann, 2006:2; Obiakor & McCollin, 2011; Lean & Colussi, 2010:8; Mohamed & Laher, 2012). Challenges with spelling, reading, writing, mathematical computations, concentration, memory and time management, are the aspects learners with *barriers to learning* face in this study (Bolt & Roach, 2009:42; Gregg, 2009:119,120; Montgomery, 2007:70; Obiakor & McCollin, 2011). The participants therefore required assistance during formal assessments.

Alternative assessment refers to changes in test administration including the manner in which the test is presented, test venue and learners written and verbal responses, (Sireci, Scarpati & Shuhong, 2005; Stansfield, 2011). According to Ms Lambrechts at the Western Cape Education Department (hereafter referred to as the WCED), many schools in the Western Cape have *alternative assessment programmes* in place. However, implementation of *alternative assessment programmes* is not monitored or being evaluated. The only official statistics available on *alternative assessment programmes* are concessions for matric examinations, where alternate methods of assessment were granted to learners at 218 schools in the Western Cape Province in 2013.

Given the Education Department's lack of monitoring *alternative assessment programmes*, it is imperative that the views be heard of learners using the *alternative assessment programmes*. Studies by Lovett and Leja (2013), Roach *et al.* (2010) and Lang, Elliot, Bolt and Kratochwill (2008), advocate that participants in *alternative assessments* be involved in evaluation of the *alternative assessment programme* as well as consulted on the development thereof. Learners therefore act as co-researchers, which is a form of inclusion (Messiou, 2014). The School's Act 84 of 1996 and the Children's Act 38 of 2005 endorse the right of children to participate in decisions regarding their best interest. The possibility of adult dominated programmes failing, is highlighted by Landsdown (2010), thereby potentially increasing a sense of powerlessness in recipients of the service (Manion & Nixon, 2012). In social work literature, much has been written about the importance of children's participation in the decisions affecting their lives (Cook *et al*., 2004; Landsdown, 2010; Healy & Darlington, 2009; Manion & Nixon, 2012; Viviers & Lombard, 2012; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). Adolescents are aware of when they need support and will engage with the available support (Blake, 2008:144). Social workers in a school setting are in a position to assist and support learners (Openshaw, 2008:125). Finding appropriate, affordable support in the South African context is difficult. South Africa has limited resources (Lubbe & Eloff, 2004) and the programmes should therefore meet the needs of the consumers. In the context of this study, the consumers refer to learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme*. Therefore, this article is based on the experiences of learners who use alternative methods of assessment at a specific mainstream high school.

The *alternative assessment programme*, which the participants are part of, involves the identification of learners who might benefit from participation in the *alternative assessment programme*. Following identification, learners are assessed at the resource centre - a local school specialising in special needs education - or parents may choose to have their children assessed by professionals in private practice. The GAP Reading Comprehension Test, Spelling test and Burt rearranged graded reading test are used to assess learners' ability. Co-ordination and implementation of the *alternative assessment programme* is the responsibility of the social worker at the school.

The three methods of alternative assessments, which participants in this study participated in, are extended time, and amanuensis, as well as mobile digital audio players (MP3 players). Extended time is afforded to learners who are unable to complete the test or examination (assessment) within the prescribed time limit (Department of Education, 2010:7). Amanuensis refers to the process where a person, known as a scribe, reads the examination paper to the learner, who also has a copy of the question paper in their possession and the scribe writes down the answers verbatim (Department of Education, 2010:5).

The writing ability of learners using amanuensis typically prevents them from "giving a true portrayal of their knowledge and/or competence" (Department of Education, 2010:5). MP3 players are therefore also used, mostly with learners experiencing reading challenges. Using a computer programme, Cool Edit Pro, the question papers are recorded on a computer and downloaded onto MP3 players. During formal assessments, the participants making use of MP3 players would have listened to the recorded question paper with headphones, while they also have a hard copy of the question paper to read. In contrast to learners using amanuensis as an alternative assessment method, learners writing with the MP3 players write their own responses to the question paper. Learners using MP3 players, as well as those using additional time, write together, in a class separate from mainstream learners.

The central focus of the research was the lived experience of the participants in the *alternative assessment programme* because the influence of participation in the programme is unknown. The lived experience refers to the practical activities and the manner in which a phenomenon, in this case *alternative assessment*, is experienced in the immediacy of the experience (Clandinin, 2006:51; Grassley & Deal, 2012:473; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011:182). By exploring their subjective meaning, the researcher was able to understand the needs of participants (Finlay, 2009). Focusing on the participants' immediate experience of the *alternative assessment programme*, provided new insights into the participants' experience of the programme since a great deal of

participants' time is spent at school. Academic success, therefore, plays a major role in self-evaluation (Lakaye & Margalit, 2006), which is an additional motivation to understand the lived experience of the *alternative assessment programme* participants (Dahlberg, 2006:16). The participants in the alternative assessment programme were all adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 years old.

Developmental theory guided the research, concerning the participants' meaning making of the *alternative assessment programme*, in view of the adolescent developmental stage. Adolescents with barriers to learning, who experience failure in academic work, potentially can experience low academic self-efficacy (Schunk & Meece, 2005:11). Adolescents, in view of increased self-understanding during the adolescent development phase, could thus determine which *alternative assessment* methods or programmes could best address their academic barriers to learning (Toman & Bauer, 2005:188; Meece & Daniel, 2008:360).

Gestalt field theory allowing one to include all role players, in addition to the Strength- Based approach, forms the theoretical grounding of the study. The Field Theory, which is central to Gestalt theory, suggests that adolescent participants, their peers, scribes, school staff and parents are inseparable from the environment, and are consistently connected to, or in contact with, everything while also maintaining a separate identity (Joyce & Sills, 2010:27; Parlett & Lee, 2005:43,46; Senreich, 2014). Part of the field of the participants is their peers because of their need for belonging. Toman and Bauer, (2005:189) and Blake (2008:144) emphasise the importance adolescents attach to their peers' views. Educators who also form part of the field of the participants often revert to the medical model suggesting separate education for learners with barriers to learning. Educators revert to the medical model due to their lack of skills in identifying and dealing with *barriers to learning* (Donahue & Bornman, 2014).

The strengths-based approach was used to guide this research, as it enabled the researcher to focus on the adolescents' academic capabilities and potential (Gray, 2011), as opposed to the challenges created by *barriers to learning*. The strengths-based approach is based on the principle of identifying, recognising and engaging the strengths of learners (Gleason, 2007). When educators adopt the strengths-based approach towards *barriers to learning*, the focus is on capabilities, rather than deficits of adolescents participating in the *alternative assessment programme* (Jimerson, 2004).

Empirical investigation

The aim of this research study was to explore the lived experience of adolescent learners experiencing *barriers to learning*, when participating in an *alternative assessment programme* in a mainstream high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town.

Therefore, the research question was formulated as: *What is the lived experience of adolescent learners with barriers to learning when participating in an alternative assessment programme in a mainstream high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town*?

The qualitative research approach guided the study to explore the lived experience of learners in the context of the *alternative assessment programme*, within the social structure of the school (Hays & Sing, 2012:4). Furthermore, the qualitative approach required describing and understanding the phenomenon of the participants' lived experience of the *alternative assessment programme*, from the participants' perspective (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:94-97). A qualitative, phenomenological design was followed, to explore the "complexities and different aspects" of the lived experience of a common phenomenon, experienced by several people (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:94). The phenomenological design enabled the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' experience and the meaning participants attached to their experience of the *alternative assessment programme*, rather than relying on educational policies (Hays & Singh, 2012:50). Making sense of the reality of the situation, their feelings and lived experiences, assisted with the rich description of data obtained (Greeff, 2011:342). The descriptions of the participants' experience and the meanings derived from their experience, could inform implementation of the *alternative assessment programme* within the school setting in future (Hays & Singh, 2012:4).

A phenomenological design was the most suitable to reach the aim of the study, as phenomenology "captures the richness, poignancy, resonance and ambiguity" of the participants' lived experience, to view their experience "in new and deeper ways" (Finlay, 2009). The important aspect is to study the experience of the participants as users of a service, in this instance, the *alternative assessment programme* (Finlay, 2009).

Data collection

Data was gathered through collage making in a group setting, followed by, unstructured interviews. The group setting was chosen as it provided a relaxed atmosphere (Marshall & Rossman, 2010:149), where participants could express their feelings and ideas in the creation of their collages in an uninhibited and unrestrained manner (Colucci, 2007:1424-1431). Collage making allows for deeper understanding of the participant's own experiences, while the researcher gains insight into

the meaning the participants' attach to the collages, allowing for rich explanations (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2010:156; Coad, 2007; De Kock & Hatting, 2008).

The individual interviews were of a phenomenological nature, to determine the lived meaning of the adolescents' experience of the *alternative assessment programme*, a phenomenon they have in common (Cresswell, 2007:140; Marshall & Rossman, 2010:149; Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320-323). Open-ended questions such as "*What do you mean if you say you experienced pressure…can you describe it*?" gave the participants an opportunity to expand on their responses, as it requested elaboration and clarification in order to obtain a "richer interview" (Hays & Singh, 2012:242; Marshall & Rossman, 2010:145). The collages created by the participants were used to engage participants at the start of the interviews, as well as when participants had trouble to verbalise responses to interview questions.

Participants

Non-probability, purposive sampling was used in the study, as 8 consenting participants were interviewed from a population of 13 adolescents who participated in the *alternative assessment programme* during the March 2013 test series, at the selected mainstream high school in Cape Town. The subsequent table shows sex, age, grade and length of time spent in the programme. The *alternative assessment* methods, as well as specific *barriers to learning*, are also included in the table.

Table 1: Participant profiles

Participant	Sex	Age	Grade	Alternative Assessment	Period involved	Barriers to learning
228	M	16	9	MP3 additional (add.) time scribe	June 2011 8 tests and examinations	reading, writing and spelling challenges reading comprehension challenges
229	M	14	9	amanuensis add. time	June 2012 4 test and examinations	slow reading, speed, language and spelling challenges reading comprehension challenges
230	F	15	9	add. time	June 2011 8 tests and examinations	slow reading, speed reading, and comprehension challenges
231	M	14	9	MP3 add. time	June 2012 4 tests and	slow reading, speed, language and spelling challenges

					examinations	reading comprehension challenges
236	F	15	10	amanuensis add. time	Dec. 2012 2 tests and examinations	slow reading speed challenges with concentration and focus
238	M	16	10	MP3	June 2012 4 tests and examinations	reading and spelling challenges
240	F	17	10	amanuensis	June 2012 4 test and examinations	reading and spelling challenges, and challenges with written language
243	M	15	10	amanuensis add. time	Sep. 2012 3 Tests and examinations	reading comprehension challenges

The interviewees met the following specific selection criteria:

- adolescents from Grade 8 to 11 aged 14 to 17 years, attending a specific high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town;
- who participated in the *alternative assessment programme;*
- English and Afrikaans speaking;
- and whose parents provided written consent.

  The participants who volunteered were Grade 9 and 10 learners who were English and/or Afrikaans speaking. These learners were participants in the March 2013 *alternative assessment programme*. Participants provided written assent and their parents provided written consent. Parents' permission was required due to the age of the learners.

Data analysis

The data was analysed in a cyclical manner, as described by Creswell (2007:150-154). Firstly, data was managed by organising data in files. The researcher engaged with the data, by reading the data several times and identifying key concepts, such as stress levels, self-belief and comprehension of academic work. Through a process of classifying where the information identified as key concepts was analysed and interpreted, codes were identified. The codes included better marks, better concentration and less anxiety. Following coding, two main themes, namely experience of formal assessment and psychosocial aspects of experiences in an *alternative assessment programme*, were developed with subthemes under each main theme. Examples of the subthemes were preparation and self-motivation during formal assessments (formal assessment aspects), and self-confidence and self-esteem (psycho-social aspects). In the case of

phenomenological studies, the mentioned themes refer to “individual experiences and the context of those experiences” (Creswell, 2007:153). Literature control in support of the identified themes and findings was done.

Ethical approval for the study (ethics number: NWU-00060-12-A1), was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the North-West University, under whose auspices the research was conducted. Written consent was given by the WCED to conduct the research at the selected school. The school principal also agreed, in writing, to the study being conducted at the selected school. Participants and their parents were assured that the information would be treated confidentially and that their anonymity would be guaranteed. The principles of privacy, and beneficence described by Marshall and Rossman (2010:47) as ethical research practice, were upheld. Further ethical considerations prescribed to, were avoidance of harm and acknowledging the voluntary nature of participation (Hays & Singh, 2012:79). All the participants provided written informed assent and their parents provided written informed consent to participate in the study. Trustworthiness of the study was ensured with the implementation of crystallisation.

In order to achieve crystallisation, as suggested by Ellingson (2008:10) and Tracey (2010), data was interpreted using three different theories, namely, developmental theory, Strengths-Based theory and Gestalt Field Theory. Transcribing audio recordings of interviews, listening to the recordings several times, reading through field notes to correlate findings, and providing context for specific meanings, patterns or themes that emerged were applied, to implement crystallisation and increase trustworthiness (Suther, 2003:96). Credibility, dependability, confirmability and member checks were used as guidelines as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (cited in Creswell, 2007:204; Marshall & Rossman, 2010:40) to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the study.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study will be discussed in terms of the identified themes. Verbatim quotations from the interviews of participating learners are provided as evidence of the findings. The first main theme identified was the experience of alternative assessments and the subthemes were as follows: concentration, retrieval of knowledge and lastly, examination results

Experience of alternative assessment.

Concentration

The participants in the study expressed comments about the relaxed atmosphere in the alternative assessment venue. The meaning they attached to the relaxed atmosphere was that it improved their concentration during formal assessments, as stated by a participant:

> *"always quiet, good to concentrate".*

Another participant, making use of amanuensis, also commented:

> "…*when I came to her [scribe] I just like throw everything - all obstacles out my head and I just focus".*

The comments from the participants refer to their ability to concentrate and focus, in a quiet, relaxed atmosphere, which is not possible within a mainstream class. Within the mainstream class, participants experience distractions, especially in view of the difficulty to focus as a *barrier to learning*. A study by Heiman and Precel (2003), found that learners with *barriers to learning* experienced more difficulty in concentrating, especially with time constraints implemented during formal assessments, than those learners without *barriers to learning*. Evidence of concentration difficulties were stated by a learner when *alternative assessment* is not practised, as follows:

> "*When I …have to write on my own…my thoughts go…and my attention is diverted".*

However, the *alternative assessment programme* offers learners a quiet setting with fewer learners present, and, in some instances, scribes. The scribes, who could be viewed as resources at the schools' disposal, assist the participants in amanuensis, in concentrating on the task at hand and completing the examination paper in the allocated time limit. Mastery or the sense of having control over the ability to concentrate, gives participants a sense of achievement. A sense of achievement is important for academic self-efficacy during the adolescent developmental phase (Sousa, Ribeiro & Rodriques, 2006; Mirowsky & Ross, 1999; Pearlin *et al*., 1981, Shonahon & Bauer, 2004; Thaits, 1995, cited in Congo, Williams, Little, Masyn & Shebloski, 2009:99).

It is apparent, from the above information that, due to fewer learners present in the class where *alternative assessments* are conducted, learners' attention was less likely to be diverted.

Retrieval of knowledge

The experience of recalling learned material was described by a participant in the *alternative assessment programme*, when it was stated that:

> *"When I learn, I say the work out loud to myself and then when I hear the question [*on the MP3] *then it's, yo, but that is what I learned. Then it sounds the same. Then I write my answer down…wonderful".*

The meaning the above participant attached to using the MP3 was that it excited and encouraged the participant to discover that it was possible to remember the studied material. Being able to recall the work increases confidence in the answers provided in the test or examination. Participants become aware of the strength to recall what they learned. Before participation in the *alternative assessment programme*, *barriers to learning* impeded learners' ability to comprehend what they were reading or learning, resulting in difficulty recalling learned material (Montgomery, 2007:70; Williams, 2005). A quote from a participant in the *alternative assessment programme* illustrated the difficulty as follows:

> *"Before,* (participation in the alternative assessment programme) *it was like, did I really learn or did I not and then I doubt my answers".*

It is evident, from the quote, that the participant experienced disappointment and was disheartened, as doubt of the correctness of the answers provided in the examination was experienced.

Another participant described the freedom to use assistive ways to enable recall of the learned material:

> *"Because I have a scribe and am in my own classroom, while no one else sits with me, I can walk up and down, make hand gestures, everything so that I can remember what the answers to the question are".*

The above quote emphasises the importance of providing the learners participating in the programme the opportunity to use the service in a manner that uniquely addresses their specific need (Manion & Nixon, 2012). This participant has a need to move around and use hand gestures in order to remember studied material. In a mainstream exam situation, such behaviour would not be tolerated. Non-participating learners could potentially be distracted if a learner needed to recall learned material in the manner described above. Amanuensis, in this instance, achieved what it is intended to, namely assisting learners with *barriers to learning* to impart their knowledge (Bolt &

Roach, 2009:42). The above quotes also allude to the learners' creative adjustment in recalling learned material, indicating resilience in the face of the *barriers to learning* they experience (Melnick & Nevis, 2005:103). Faced with *barriers to learning*, participants have adapted the manner in which they study, in order to explore coping mechanisms to accommodate learning difficulties (Senreich, 2014). It is important that educators be aware of learners' creative adjustments, and to accommodate these adjustments in the class setting. Inclusive education refers to the educational setting adjusting to the needs of the learners, and not the other way around (Gardner & Toope, 2011).

Examination results

Improved examination and test results were part of the experiences of participants, since joining the *alternative assessment programme*. The participants described what having better results meant to them:

> *"My heart is jumping up and down, that's how it is to have better marks".*
>
> *"It is better* (referring to results) *when I write with extended time. I make my parents proud".*
>
> *"…I did very good this term".*

The quotes indicate excitement and obtaining approval from parents and pride because of improved results. The ability to produce good results can be experienced as affirmation of their academic ability (Rapp *et al.,* 2005:85). The quote that is related to parents is indicative of the need of this participant to obtain approval of parents, which can be related to academic mastery. Being able to produce results that parents approve of is important for participants, as academic mastery holds a high premium in that, while attending school; good academic results are an expectation. Improved results reflect mastery in an area where participants previously experienced difficulty in succeeding (Pickens, 2007).

All people in the learners' environment are interconnected and plays a role, thus improved results not only strengthen the learners academic self-belief, but parents and educators, peers and others in the participants' life are given an opportunity to affirm and validate the participants' efforts and achievements (McCammon, 2007:96). Experiencing academic success enhances the participants' sense of control, especially in view of previous failures experienced by most participants (Santrock, 2008:323). The views of the learners experiencing the improved marks should also be taken into consideration in a wider field. The *alternative assessment programme* is the only programme taking *barriers to learning* into account and affording participants a fair opportunity to impart their

knowledge in the mainstream school where the study was conducted. A mainstream class setting does not accommodate *barriers to learning*. Therefore, learners with *barriers to learning* are allowed to attend mainstream school, but their needs are not attended to (Graham & Slee, 2008).

Psychological experience of alternative assessment

The second theme that emerged was of a psychosocial nature and has the following subthemes: anxiety, self-confidence and self-esteem, self-motivation and acceptance and emotional experience, which formed part of the lived experience of participants.

Anxiety

The following comments from participants in the programme related to reduced anxiety as well as writing tests and examinations no longer being feared.

> *"…I am no more anxious while I* [write] *or before exams".*
>
> *"…I don't stress so much".*
>
> *"…it's just easy and I don't stress".*
>
> *"I don't feel nervous anymore"*.

Participants are experiencing relief as they do not have to be anxious regarding misreading or misspelling words, or not completing examinations in time. Reduced anxiety improves participants' focus and provides them with a sense of control. Realising that assistance is available, reduces the level of anxiety as participants have the assurance that the *barriers to learning*, preventing them from providing the correct answers in the examination, will be minimised.

Anxiety can be caused by the risk of failure, being a real fear in view of experiences, where participants in the programme were unable to achieve academically (Peleg, 2009:16). Therefore, the alternatives that reduce anxiety are helpful, because participants' experiences of mainstream exams were filled with anxiety, as explained by a participant:

> *Like before, it like, you are so scared to write, cause you don't understand it properly and stuff".*

Findings from other studies confirmed that *alternative assessment* reduced stress in learners and made them feel more comfortable and relaxed in test situations (Lovett & Leja, 2013; Heiman & Precel, 2003, Peleg, 2009). Increased anxiety levels have been related to parental and scholastic

pressure to perform at higher levels of academic competency. Parents and educators should therefore be mindful of their contribution to the anxiety level of the participants, as the pressure they exert on participants is likely to increase anxiety levels during formal assessments (Deruyck, 2006).

According to Clegg (2010), any change in the field shifts the field and, therefore, the reaction of others has the potential to decrease anxiety, by focussing on what the participants are capable of achieving. Furthermore, anxiety has a negative influence on test results. Adolescents experiencing *barriers to learning* are more likely to experience anxiety in examination situations, and when they are being evaluated, than those adolescents without *barriers to learning* (Peleg, 2009; Nelson & Harwood, 2011). The findings of this study indicate that the *alternative assessment programme* may help in reducing the anxiety experienced by learners with *barriers to learning*. Additionally, findings indicate increased self-confidence and self-esteem.

Self-confidence and self-esteem

The findings indicate that participants experienced improved self-confidence and self-esteem, as described by the participants below:

> *"I started believing in myself more…".*
>
> *"When I came here* [joining the alternative assessment programme] *I realised I am capable of so much more…".*
>
> *"I have more self-confidence after each question paper".*

Believing in themselves and increased self-confidence became possible, as participants realised their capabilities. Confidence in their academic abilities enhanced their self-esteem, embracing themselves, inclusive of their barriers to learning and being confident in their own identity. Literature confirms the link between academic achievement and self-esteem (Armstrong *et al*., 2010:10; Bear *et al*., 2002; Pattison, 2006; Zeleke, 2004). Furthermore, the connection between a positive school experience and positive self-image is confirmed by Santrock (2008:143), Meece and Daniels (2008:357), Gouws *et al*. (2008:101), Armstrong *et al.* (2010:10), Pattison (2006), Zeleke (2004) and Rice and Dolgin (2008:163). Learners with *barriers to learning* were found to experience support when their *barriers to learning* were addressed, and this resulted in improved academic results, as well as emotional and social benefits as is evident from the experience of improved self-esteem (Bujuwoye *et al*., 2014). Self-confidence, as strength, has been found to be bolstered by participation in alternative assessment programmes and led to participants feeling more competent (Elliot & Marquart, 2004).

Self-motivation

Participants in the *alternative assessment programme* explained that the assistance they receive with formal assessments motivated them to study.

> *"Then I said to myself, yes, but I am basically receiving this assistance, I have to study a little harder and then I started studying harder and then this also basically inspired me and then my marks also became better".*

> *"She [scribe] … gives me lots of motivation, ma'am like my work and stuff".*

The above quote implies that the participant started believing in the ability to accomplish academically, which motivated greater effort and perseverance (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006:18). Motivation refers to participants' beliefs about their academic ability and the processes that develop cognitively, based on previous experiences, and are based on current learning experiences (Meece & Daniels, 2008:384). The participants' perception about their academic ability thus influenced their motivation to study and enhanced their school performance (Meece & Daniels, 2008:356). The quote related to the scribe demonstrated that, apart from the practical assistance from scribes, their encouragement of the participants serves as extrinsic motivation (Gouws *et al.*, 2008:72-73), thereby encouraging participants to work hard (Hamacheck, cited in Gouws *et al.*, 2008:74).

Support from scribes develops the participants' inner strengths, which, in turn, also results in increased effort (Rapp *et al*., 2005). Acknowledgement of the participants' effort, from educators and parents, could add to learners' motivation and could have a reciprocal effect (Pickens, 2007). According to Adelman and Taylor (2006:55), without motivation, *barriers to learning* will not be addressed. *Barriers to learning* are bound to be experienced in the class setting, as it is intrinsic to the participants. Educators should be aware of learners' barriers to learning, as well as the motivational aspect of acknowledging effort. The researcher contends that educators who are supportive and understanding of participants experiencing *barriers to learning* and making an effort to accommodate the participants experiencing *barriers to learning*, are likely to encourage participants to increase their effort (Armstrong *et al*., 2010:140). Retrieval of knowledge was another subtheme identified.

Acceptance

Being in an environment with other learners experiencing similar challenges was comforting to some learners. They did not feel judged or that they had to compete with their peers, which led to feelings of acceptance:

"… everybody in the class [alternative assessment programme] *tries and has more or less the same problem as you… they will not have a reaction when they see me for example leave the class earlier, because they experience what I experience more or less".*

"The other children want to compete with each other the whole time, but in that class [alternative assessment programme] *it is not like that".*

The first quote was in reference to the acceptance experienced by a participant when having to leave the class, where other participants in the alternative assessment programme were present, to write with a scribe and being allowed extended time. A judgemental reaction from learners not participating in the *alternative assessment programme* was anticipated by the learners in the *alternative assessment programme*. The need for belonging and acceptance to a group is prominent during the adolescent development phase, and it seems that this need is, at least in part, being met in the *alternative assessment programme* (Toman & Bauer, 2005:189; Wentzel *et al*., 2009:534; Blake, 2008:144).

Separating participants in the *alternative assessment programme*, from learners who do not participate, could be construed as non-acceptance of participants and their barriers to learning. Experiencing acceptance in the *alternative assessment programme* refers to one aspect of the participants' school experience. Inclusivity demands acceptance in all areas of the educational situation, including classrooms where teaching takes place (Graham & Slee, 2008).

Emotional experience

Positive emotions, related to the experience of participation in the *alternative assessment programme* were expressed.

"I am so half excited, because I know I did not study in vain".

"… get happy inside. It feels happy, kwaai, awesome. Great".

"people care for you like how you are and stuff".

"…I always feel good when she [*scribe*] *comes, because then I am actually excited for my paper, because I know I'll do good".*

The excitement was related to the knowledge that studying was worthwhile and held the prospect of better academic results. The *alternative assessment programme* provides an environment where adolescents with *barriers to learning* are encouraged and supported, valuing their individuality and acknowledging their achievements (Armstrong *et al*., 2010:140). The positive emotions, depicted in

the above quotes, relate to motivation and better performance, and are similar to findings in other studies of learners participating in *alternative assessment programmes* (Elliot & Marquardt, 2004). The positive emotions will build on their confidence and self-esteem, and motivate them to live up to the beliefs about themselves, possibly resulting in better scholastic performance (Rice & Dolgin, 2008:161; Gouws *et al.,* 2008:101; Meece & Daniels, 2008:357). Educators should harness positive emotions to acknowledge the mastery and resilience of learners making use of the *alternative assessment* opportunity (Boyuwuje *et al*., 2014). The experience should not be just in relation to the *alternative assessment programme*, but needs to extend to other settings, such as classroom teaching and class tests (Culham & Nind, 2003).

CONCLUSION

In 2010, the Department of Education published policy outlining specific guidelines to implement the mentioned methods of *alternative assessment* to assist learners with barriers to learning. However, implementation of *alternative assessment* as inclusive practice has not been fully realised, due to lack of educator skills, funding, structure, support and directives from the Department of Education. This article represented the lived experience of adolescents with *barriers to learning* in an *alternative assessment programme*, in a mainstream high school. The findings of this study highlighted participants' lived experiences, when participating in the *alternative assessment programme*. Participants described their experiences and meanings such as improved concentration, examination preparation and self-motivation. While the school setting is primarily concerned with academic work and the mastery thereof, the findings of the study highlighted the impact on psychosocial and relational aspects of the participants' lives. The experience of the *alternative assessment programme* contributed to feelings of acceptance and enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem.

The findings indicated that within the *alternative assessment programme*, scribes, especially, contribute to the positive experience of participants. Learners experienced the scribes as motivational, supportive and caring.

By using the strengths-based approach, findings indicated that participants experienced mastery in the *alternative assessments*. Previously participants had had trouble in formal assessments before joining the *alternative assessment programme*. Participants related experiences of being able to retrieve knowledge in a manner that suited their individual needs, enabling them to experience success that may not have been possible without the *alternative assessment programme*.

The fact that learners with *barriers to learning* must be accommodated separately from learners not using *alternative assessments*, is indicative of the continued exclusion, however the findings indicate that learners with *barriers to learning* can benefit from a separate environment where their *barriers to learning* are addressed. The *alternative assessment programme* in this study provided a separate venue where the participants' barriers to learning were addressed. In addition, the findings show that despite the separation from mainstream learners the participants found a sense of belonging being in the *alternative assessment programme*. The *alternative assessment programme* in this study is a good start to inclusive practice. However, it is limited to formal assessments. To be completely inclusive, *barriers to learning* need to be addressed in all areas of academic learning.

Learners will have more positive experiences when the education methods at school are adapted to meet the needs of those learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme* instead of expecting that learners with *barriers to learning* have to fit into a system not addressing their needs.

This study provides evidence that, when learners are consulted on the implementation and design of the *alternative assessment programme* they can provide valuable input. Cognisance should therefore be taken of the views of learners with *barriers to learning*, before embarking on implementation of *alternative educational methods* towards an inclusive educational model.

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SECTION C: CLOSING CHAPTER – SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

This section of the report provides a summary of the research problem, followed by a summary of the methodology that was used in the study, as well as the conclusions of the study and the recommendations of the study. Limitations of the study will then be discussed, followed by a reflection. This section will then end with a general conclusion.

2. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In education, the focus nationally and internationally is on the practice of inclusive education and thus requiring education for all children through implementation of policies (Rieser, 2012; Polat, 2011). Consequently, the implication of the inclusive educational policies is that learners with *barriers to learning* are accommodated in mainstream schools. Furthermore, accommodation in mainstream schools is necessary, as the number of learners with *barriers to learning* is increasing worldwide (Tomlinson, 2012). Social workers in a school setting have to ensure inclusive education for all learners, especially those learners with *barriers to learning* (Baffoe & Dako-Gyeke, 2014:126). The high school where the study was conducted accommodates learners with *barriers to learning* in an *alternative assessment programme* during formal assessments.

Learners' experience of the *alternative assessment programme* was not known. Because learners with *barriers to learning* are the target of the *alternative assessment programme*, it is important to determine their view and perception of the programme (Lovett & Leja, 2013; Lang *et al*., 2008). The literature review revealed that, both internationally and nationally, there is a lack of research on learners' lived experience of *alternative assessment programmes*, including learners as participants. Decisions regarding learner participation in, and implementation of, the *alternative assessment programme* are largely left to parents and the school staff team. School social workers as part of the school staff team play an important role in the implementation of interventions and programmes and have to assist learners in accessing services that meet their academic needs. . . Knowledge of the learners' experience of the *alternative assessment programme* is important to inform the service of the school social worker in order to effectively meet the needs of the learners accessing the *alternative assessment programme*.

Barriers to learning present different challenges to learners, which include academic and psychosocial elements. There are links between *barriers to learning* and school dropout, self-efficacy, motivation, self-belief and relationship challenges. In order to understand the challenges faced by learners with *barriers to learning* in high school, one also has to take into account their

developmental phase. Academic and psychosocial challenges experienced because of *barriers to learning* impacts on learners during the adolescent phase. Additional time, amanuensis and the use of MP3 players are *alternative assessment* methods used by participants in the study. Participants in the *alternative assessment programme* conduct formal assessments separate from learners not participating in the programme.

The aim of the research study was to explore the lived experience of learners experiencing *barriers to learning*, when participating in an *alternative assessment programme* in a mainstream high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town. Therefore, the research question was as follows: *What is the lived experience of adolescent learners with barriers to learning when participating in an alternative assessment programme in a mainstream high school in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town*?

The context of the current research study was a mainstream high school in the Western Cape, South Africa. The reason for choosing the specific mainstream high school as the research context was to gain insight into the experience of participants in the alternative assessment programme in this setting.

3. SUMMARY OF THE METHODOLOGY

The empirical investigation appeared to be successful in terms of ensuring that the specific aims and objectives of the research were achieved. The general aim of the study was to qualitatively, through the use of the phenomenological design, explore and describe the lived experiences of adolescents with *barriers to learning* participating in the *alternative assessment programme* in a mainstream high school in the Western Cape. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to select the participants in the study.

The learners were all participants in the March 2013 test series, who agreed to participate in the research study. Learners had been participating in the *alternative assessment programme* for at least two test- or examination series or, at most, eight test or examination series. The participants were requested to make collages in a group setting, to depict their experience of the *alternative assessment programme* through the collages. This was followed by individual, unstructured interviews used for data collection. The interviews were audio recorded, with the written consent of participants and their parents, and then transcribed.

The data was analysed, as described by Creswell (2007:150-154): organising the data in files, immersing in the data, identifying key concepts, detailed descriptions, classification and interpreting data, coding and identifying themes and sub themes. Trustworthiness was achieved through

specific procedure in the implementation of crystallisation. The literature used in the study included research from interdisciplinary fields to obtain a broader understanding of participants' experience of the *alternative assessment programme*, in the context of a mainstream high school environment. Learners with barriers to learning are bound to have a history of difficulty with academic work, influencing psychosocial aspects of their lives (Montgomery, 2007:20; Lakaye & Margalit, 2009:443). These learners with *barriers to learning* could be considered "experts" of the *barriers to learning* they experience, as well as of participation in the *alternative assessment programme* (Manion & Nixon, 2012).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The general aim of this study was to explore the lived experience of learners with *barriers to learning*, participating in an *alternative assessment programme* in a mainstream high school. The information gained from the participants, provided insight into the participants' experience of the programme they participate in. It was also significant information that can inform social work practice related to addressing the needs of learners with *barriers to learning* in a school setting. Most findings were confirmed by existing literature.

The literature and the findings of the study indicated the need to take the experience of participants in the *alternative assessment programme* into account. In order to meet the needs of the participants, their experience of the programme needs to be taken into account, in decisions on implementing the programme. The findings also indicate that the participants with *barriers to learning* have to be accommodated and their needs met in classroom teaching and other academic assessments.

In the context of the mainstream high school, the participants related positive experiences in the *alternative assessment programme*. Participants experienced improved academic results, ability to recall learned material, increased motivation to prepare for assessments and improved concentration. Furthermore, they experienced reduced anxiety, positive influence on their self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as positive emotional experience and acceptance. The findings are limited to the *alternative assessment programme* and cannot be generalised to other school settings or experiences. For the experiences to be generalised to all aspects of school life for the participants in the *alternative assessment programme*, adjustments will have to be made to the school environment. The researcher has included the suggested adjustments under the recommendations of this report.

Field theory provided insight into the impact of role-players in the school setting, as well as the community, on the experience of the participants. The scribes, learners not participating in the programme and parents as well as the school culture impacted on the participants in the *alternative assessment programme*. In respect of using the strengths in the community, the resource centre provided guidance in terms of the *alternative assessment* methods most suited to meet the needs of the participants. The developmental theory guided the study in relation to the experience of participants in the adolescent developmental phase. The strengths-based approach highlighted the strengths of the participants when participating in the *alternative assessment programme*. It became apparent that the resources such as scribes and educators within the school setting could be utilised to enhance the strengths of the participants in all academic learning.

Although the *alternative assessment programme* is a step in the direction of inclusive education, it can still be viewed as discriminating against participants, as they are isolated from the rest of the learners. Despite this view, participants preferred the *alternative assessments* to be conducted separate from the rest of the class. The *alternative assessment* in a separate location provided them with the opportunity to impart their knowledge in a manner best suited to their needs. The programme is merely an add-on, and does not constitute inclusive education as it is intended to be practised due to the needs of the learners with barriers to learning not being addressed in the classrooms. Pedagogy largely still focuses on deficits of learners with *barriers to learning*, rather than their strengths. Participants in the *alternative assessment programme* expressed their experiences and this must be taken into account, not only in the programme, but also, especially, in classrooms where they spend most of their academic time. Social workers in schools are in a unique position to advocate for the needs of the learners participating in the *alternative assessment programme* to be recognised and met in the school setting as a whole.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above conclusions, the following recommendations, with regard to educators, school support teams, and further research, are made:

5.1 Recommendations for educators

The following recommendations for educators should be considered:

- Educators should be trained to identify *barriers to learning* and familiarise themselves with manners in which to accommodate learners with *barriers to learning* in the classroom.

- Identifying the strengths of learners with *barriers to learning* will provide educators with the chance to make learners aware of their strengths and to praise mastery, rather than focus on deficits.
- Learners need to be afforded a platform where they can make their needs known in a safe environment, where their needs will be heard.
- Learners without *barriers to learning* have to be educated to understand what *barriers to learning* entail, in an attempt to reduce stigmatisation of learners with *barriers to learning*.
- Ensure that learners in need of *alternative assessment* are afforded this opportunity in class tests as well.
- Implement inclusive education policies to ensure that all learners are afforded a fair chance to impart their knowledge in a manner suited to their needs.
- Educators should value and respect the views of learners with *barriers to learning* when they discuss their educational needs.

5.2 Recommendations for social workers and school support teams

The following recommendations for school support teams should be considered:

- Arrange continuous training, pertaining to *barriers to learning*, and the use of the strength-based approach in education.
- Arrange meetings with all role-players where participants are afforded the opportunity to relate their experience of the *alternative assessment programme* after each examination or test series. Based on the experience and feedback from the participants, adjustments should be made to accommodate the needs of the participants, where possible.
- Inform educators of *barriers to learning* experienced by learners, as well as the results of assessments performed by the resource centre.
- Provide guidance to parents in relation to accepting the *barriers to learning* of their children and acknowledging their efforts.
- Continue to access community resources that could assist in meeting the needs of the learners.
- Acknowledge the scribes and relate the positive influence they have on the participants to them.

- Promote the strengths-based approach amongst all staff members. In strengthening each other, staff is likely to experience acknowledgement and to also implement the approach.
- Advocate for *alternative assessment programmes* to be continued separate from learners not using *alternative assessments.*

5.3 Recommendations for further research

The following recommendations for further research should be considered:

- A similar study to be conducted with a larger group of learners, including all grades.
- A similar study including learners who initially made use of the *alternative assessment programme* and then decided to leave.
- Research of the needs of learners with *barriers to learning* in the classroom setting, making use of the participatory action research approach, involving learners from the start.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The following limitations were identified in the study:

- Role of the researcher

The participants were known to the researcher in her role as co-ordinator of the *alternative assessment programme* and social worker at the school where the research was conducted. Familiarity with the researcher could have influenced responses from the participants.

- Sample size

The sample consisted of eight consenting participants, which is rather limited. The researcher acknowledges that different findings might have been possible with a larger sample. During the March 2013 test series only 13 learners participated in the *alternative assessment programme*, of whom 8 consented or arrived for the study.

- Grade

Participants were all in grade 9 and 10, respectively. Learners from lower or higher grades might have different experiences of their participation in the *alternative assessment programme*.

- Length of participation in the *alternative assessment programme*

The study included learners who had participated in the *alternative assessment programme* for at least two test or examination series. The experiences of learners who decided to not continue

participating in the programme are not known. Additionally the view of first time users of the programme has not been explored.

- Language

The participants were mainly Afrikaans speaking. Some of the transcribed interviews thus had to be translated into English as the study was presented in English. Direct translation into English was challenging, due to the possibility of the meaning in responses not being portrayed accurately.

- Demographic area

The study included one mainstream high school in the Western Cape, South Africa and the findings could, therefore, not necessarily be generalised to other mainstream high schools. Learner profiles, staff profiles and school culture differ at each school; thereby further complicating generalisation of the findings.

7. REFLECTION

The researcher initiated, and is the co-ordinator, of the *alternative assessment programme* at the mainstream high school where the study was undertaken. In this capacity, there were relationships in place with the participants. Due to the researcher's close connection with the *alternative assessment programme* since the inception, she had to guard against bias. Personal feelings regarding the programme had to be bracketed. Due to prior knowledge of the participants and the logistics of the programme, the researcher had to be mindful to explore the responses of participants fully, in order to gain as much deep information as possible. Despite the researcher's assurance to participants that they can feel free to share any experience related to the programme, it is possible that their responses could be influenced due to loyalty to the researcher, or fear of retribution. Every effort was made to set participants' minds at ease in this regard. The researcher experienced difficulty in exploring the deeper meaning of some responses from participants, possibly as a result of the participants' difficulty in the use of language, as a result of the *barriers to learning* they are experiencing.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

From the findings, it is clear that the inclusive educational policy is not implemented at the mainstream school where the study was conducted. The needs of the participants are thus met mainly in the *alternative assessment programme*, but not in the general educational settings, where most of their time is spent.

It should be noted also that educators have not been sufficiently trained to implement inclusive education in the true sense of the word. The findings of the lived experience of learners participating, in the *alternative assessment programme*, could raise awareness amongst educators to enable them to meet the needs of learners in other educational settings in the school. This study has revealed the importance of obtaining the views and perceptions of the participants regarding the programmes they are involved in. Merely implementing programmes in the name of inclusive education, while refraining from inclusive educational practices in all school settings, still amounts to exclusion of learners.

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SECTION D: ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE 1: Participant profiles

Table 2: Participant profiles

Partici-pant	Sex	Age	Gr	Alternative Assessment	Period Involved	Barriers to learning
228	M	16	9	MP3 additional (add.) time scribe	June 2011 8 tests and examinations	reading, writing and spelling challenges reading comprehension challenges
229	M	14	9	amanuensis add. time	June 2012 4 test and examinations	slow reading speed language and spelling challenges reading comprehension challenges
230	F	15	9	add. time	June 2011 8 tests and examinations	slow reading speed Reading comprehension challenges
231	M	14	9	MP3 add. time	June 2012 4 tests and examinations	slow reading speed language and spelling challenges reading comprehension challenges
236	F	15	10	amanuensis add. time	Dec. 2012 2 tests and examinations	slow reading speed challenges with concentration and focus
238	M	16	10	MP3	June 2012 4 tests and examinations	reading and spelling challenges
240	F	17	10	amanuensis	June 2012 4 test and examinations	reading and spelling challenges with written language
243	M	15	10	Amanuensis add. time	Sep. 2012 3 Tests and examinations	reading comprehension challenges

ANNEXURE 2: Ethical approval

ETHICS APPROVAL OF PROJECT
Ethics Committee
Tel: +27 18 299 4850
Fax: +27 18 293 5329
Email: Ethics@nwu.ac.za
2012/08/3**1**

North-West University
Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520
Tel: (018) 299-4900
Faks: (018) 299-4910
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

This is to certify that the next project was approved by the NWU Ethics Committee:

Project title:*DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE AND WELLBEING FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: A TRANS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH.*
Project leader: Dr. H. Grobler & Prof V. Roos
Ethics number: **NWU-00060-12-A1**
Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation:
Expiry date: 2017/08/30

The Ethics Committee would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Committee for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

The formal Ethics approval certificate will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



Me.Marietjie Halgryn
NWU Ethics Secretariate

ANNEXURE 3: Approval of study from WCED

REFERENCE: 20130408-9073
ENQUIRIES: Dr A.T. Wyngaard

Mrs Karin Bursey
2 Fourth Avenue
Bosonia, Kuilsrivier
7580

Dear Mrs Karin Bursey

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENTS WITH BARRIERS TO LEARNING WHO PARTICIPATE IN AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Approval for projects should be conveyed to the District Director of the schools where the project will be conducted.
5. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
6. The Study is to be conducted from **08 April 2013 till 28 May 2013**
7. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalising syllabi for examinations (October to December).
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T. Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
9. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.

10. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
11. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
12. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards
Signed: Dr Audrey T. Wyngaard
Directorate: Research
DATE: 08 April 2013

ANNEXURE 4: Approval of study from principal

Visie gebou op tradisie ● Vision built on tradition

18 April 2013
Mrs KarinBursey
2 Fourth Ave
Kuilsrivier
7580
Dear Mrs Bursey

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT

Your application to conduct research at the school has been approved, provided that you adhere to the conditions determined by the Department of Education: Research Services.

We wish you success in your research.
Kind regards

Principal

ANNEXURE 5: Consent form from parents

FORM FOR PARENTS' CONSENT

Research on the lived experience of adolescents with barriers to learning who participate in an alternative assessment programme

---

You child _____ (name of learner) has been invited to participate in a research project at the school. Please read through the following information carefully to know and understand what it is all about.

About the research: The researcher intends to find out what the lived experience is of adolescents with barriers to learning who participate in an alternative assessment programme, that is: giving extra time, use of the MP3-players or using a scribe when writing examinations at the high school. The Western Cape Department of Education and the principal have given permission to conduct this research.

Invitation to participate: Your child is requested to participate in the research study. This will entail the researcher requesting learners to make a collage and conducting an interview with your child. The interviews will possibly take up 45 to 90 minutes of your child's time. The researcher will make an appointment with him/her at a mutually convenient time. Your permission is requested to interview your child, which interview will be video recorded to ensure that thorough information is obtained. Each child has to give written permission to participate in the study.

Confidentiality: Names will be recorded for tracking and administrative purposes, but will not be made public, nor will anything spoken about be repeated to anybody in a way that you will be linked to it. Your child could refuse to answer questions, should he/she wish to do so. He/she can choose to end the interview at any time. Information will not be disclosed to anybody. The information will be kept in a safe place that only the researcher will have access to. The researcher is bound by oath to uphold confidentiality and could be reported to the Council for Social Work and associated professions if this commitment is broken.

Risks: Some of the questions might make your child feel uncomfortable, because it asks about sensitive issues such as your child's possible difficulty with schoolwork and associated emotions.

Benefits: Your child may not benefit directly, but information given to the researcher will assist in making recommendations to the school staff in manners in which learners participating in the alternative assessment programme could be supported. The findings will be shared with all involved at a joint meeting when the research is completed.

Remember:

- You can ask any question any time about the study
- Your child can withdraw from the study at any point and will not be disadvantaged in any way due to such a decision.
- The study will be written up and might be published in an academic journal

By signing your name below, you are indicating that you read and understood the consent form and that you agree your child will participate in this research study.

_____ Date: _____

Parent

_____ Date: _____

Researcher

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

ANNEXURE 6: Assent form from learners

CONSENT FORM FOR LEARNERS

Research on the lived experience of adolescents with barriers to learning who participate in an alternative assessment programme

---

You are invited to participate in a research project at your school. Please read through the following information carefully to know and understand what it is all about.

About the research: The researcher intends to find out what the lived experience is of adolescents with barriers to learning who participate in an alternative assessment programme, that is: giving extra time, use of the MP3-players or using a scribe when writing examinations at the high school. The Western Cape Department of Education and the principal have given permission to do this research.

What will you be asked to do if you agree to be part of this study? The researcher will request you to make a collage about your experience of alternative accommodation and conduct an interview with you. The interview will possibly take up 45- to 90 minutes of your time. The researcher will make an appointment with you at a time convenient for you. Your permission will be requested to record the interview on video to ensure that thorough information is gained.

Will my answers be kept confidential (private)? Although your name will be written down in order to assist in tracking who said what, your name will not be made public, nor will anything spoken about be repeated to anybody in a way that you will be linked to it. You will not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. You can choose to stop talking to the researcher at any time. What is spoken about will not be told to anybody else, including your parents and teachers. The information will be kept in a safe place that only the researcher will have access to. You need to know that the researcher has made a commitment to never talk about confidential information and that if this commitment is broken, can be reported.

Risks if you participate in the study: Some of the questions might make you feel uncomfortable, because it asks about sensitive issues such as struggling with schoolwork and your feelings about schoolwork. Nobody will know your answers, unless you want to hurt yourself or someone else, or you have been hurt by an adult. If this is the case, the researcher will talk to you about reporting it first. You need to know that the law forces the researcher to report such incidents.

Benefits if you take part in the study: You may not benefit directly, but information given to the researcher will help to make recommendations to the principal and other schools about supporting learners participating in the alternative assessment programme. The findings will be shared with al involved at a joint meeting when the research is completed.

Remember:

- You can ask any question any time about the study
- You only have to answer the questions you want to
- You can pull out of the study if you feel it is too uncomfortable
- Your parents need to also give consent for you to participate
- The results of the study will be explained to you
- The study will be written up and might be published in an academic journal

Please write your name, date and signature below **to indicate that you agree to participate in this project:**

I, _____ (name and surname) agree/disagree to take part in this study, which I fully understand.

Grade: _____

Age: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

ANNEXURE 7: Collages

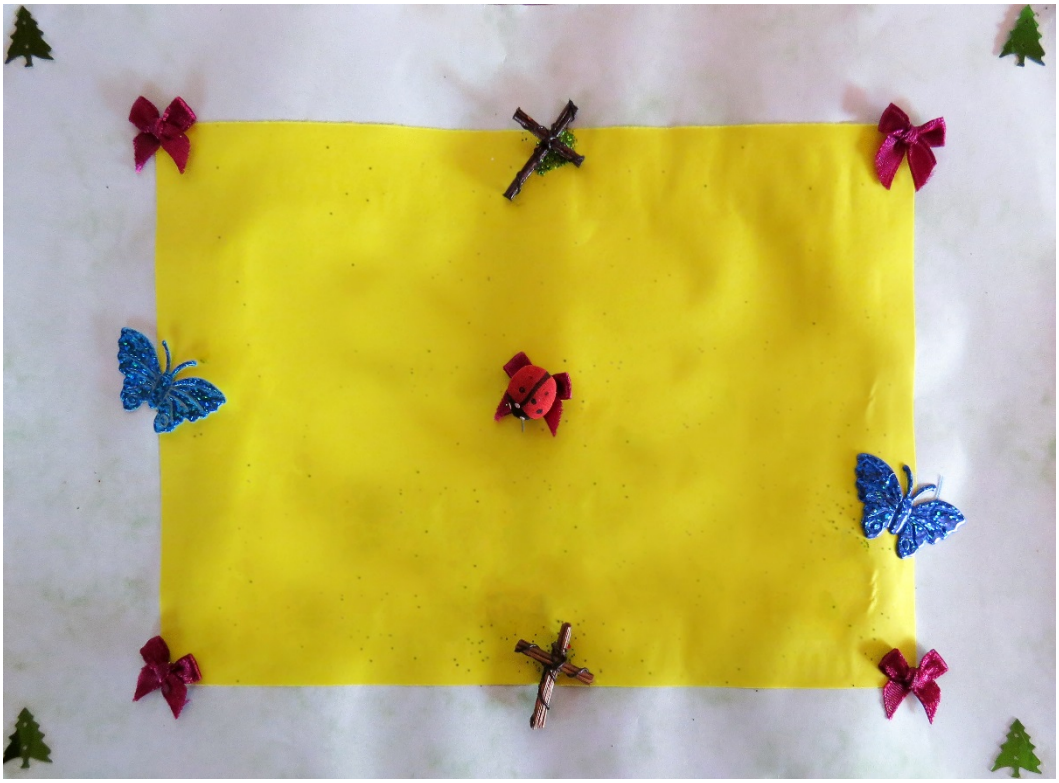


Figure 1: Collage



Figure 2: Collage



Figure 3: Collage



Figure 4: Collage



Figure 5: Collage



Figure 6: Collage



Figure 7: Collage



Figure 8: Collage

ANNEXURE 8: Field notes on group collages

I was very nervous, as I was afraid that I might not use the correct words. The girls were excited about the activity, but the boys were more tentative. This made me anxious as I was wondering if enough rich data would be forthcoming to work with. Initially, I felt insecure regarding everything I said; for fear that, one might see it as influencing the learners. I felt out of my depth. The learners started relaxing more and enjoying the activity. One respondent finished quickly and I interpreted this as lack of interest, although he also has flu that might have had an influence. I also started relaxing and interacting with the learners. The pre-existing relationship assisted in this regard. The learners were really engaged in the activity. Some learners even assisted with cleaning the class when the activity was finished without me asking them. Respondent 236 was immersed fully in the activity. This respondent sat apart from the others and did not engage with the others much. It was not isolation - I rather had the impression that she wanted the space to busy herself with the collage activity. The respondent, whom I initially experienced as reluctant, surprised me with the manner in which he participated. Respondent 228 was talking and joking, while busy with the activity and engaging with the other respondents. Respondents 238 and 230 enjoyed the creative activity and interacted mostly with each other, but also with the others. Respondent 240 seemed to put some thought into the making of the collage and requested the assistance of one of the other respondents, asking for advice. Respondent 231 was very quiet initially, but engaged with the other participants eventually. The learners appeared to be enthusiastic. The ease of the communication between them could be indicative of them feeling comfortable in each other’s company.

ANNEXURE: 9

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT 238

NAVORSER: Ok, (respondent). Ek het, het jy daai briefie gelees wat ek vir julle gegee het in die begin om te sê waaroor dit gaan en waaroor die navorsing gaan?

RESPONDENT: Ja.

NAVORSER: Ok, so basies eintlik maar waaroor dit gaan, is dat, net om te recap'n bietjie. Ek wil rêrig vasstel wat is, wat is, julle belewenis. Hoe voel dit regtig van diep binne-in julle in. Hoe is dit om deel van hierdie programme te wees?

RESPONDENT: My punte het drasties verbeter. My ma-hulle het dadelik 'n verskil gesien.

NAVORSER: Ok, dis ongelooflik. Ek is baie bly daaroor.

RESPONDENT: Ek het ook vir haar gesê die eerste dag toe ek hier geskryf het, toe gaan ek huis toe. Toe sê ek vir haar, ek het actually baie lekker geskryf vir 'n slag, want ek hoef nie te gesukkel het om te lees nie, want ek lees mos my woorde verkeerd en goed en dit was vir my soveel makliker. En toe my rapport die einde van die kwartaal kom, toe sien my ma-hulle ook 'n verbetering in my punte.

NAVORSER: Ok, maar dis amazing. Maar hoe is dit vir jou en kan jy vir my bietjie verduidelik. Ek het so 'n gevoelskaartjie gebring, want partykeer is dit moeilik om iets uit te druk, so jy kan kyk daar as daar enige, wanneer dit by so 'n vragie kom, kan jy self kyk daarso, of daar iets is wat…Ek het dit nou ongelukkig net in Engels, maar jy verstaan mos Engels.

RESPONDENT: Ja

NAVORSER: Ok, ek gaan dit hierso neersit as jy daarvan gebruik wil maak. So, as jy dit was vir jou…het ek jou reg gehoor? Jy het gesê dit is makliker. Hoe is dit vir jou? Kan jy vir my meer omskryf wat gebeur binne-in jou?

RESPONDENT: Hoor ek die vraag oor die MP3- dan is dit…As ek leer dan sê ek dit vir hardop vir myself en dan hoor ek die vraag dan's dit, yo,maar dis wat ek geleer het. Dan klink dit vir my dieselfde. Dan skryf ek my antwoorde neer…wonderlik.

NAVORSER: Ok en hoe is dit vir jou binne-in. Watter ervaring kry jy binne-in? O, ja. Ok dit klink vir my jy sê asof jy die goed herken. Is dit wat jy….?

RESPONDENT: Ja

NAVORSER: Watter emosie bring dit by jou op of hoe laat dit jou binne-in voel, ook?

RESPONDENT: Ek is so half excited, want dan weet ek, ek het nie verniet geleer nie en die werk wat ek actually geleer het, kan ek gebruik en neerskryf. Dis nie soos nutteloos nie.

NAVORSER: Ok, ek gaan ook vir jou…Toe julle die collages gemaak het…Ek weet nie of daar enigiets is wat jy, want dis hoekom ek jou collage saamgebring het, sodat jy bietjie kan kyk na die collage, sodat jy wat jy in jou collage kan kyk…is daar enigiets wat jy in jou collage gemaak het, wat vir jou…wat ook uitdruk wat jy beleef as jy deel is van die programme…as jy met die MP3 skryf?

RESPONDENT: Die kleurvolheid. Dis soos eers was my lewe half swart kan ek sê, want ek, ek wou nie eksamen geskryf het nie, want ek het dit gehaat vir die leeswerk en als. En toe kom ek nou hiernatoe en toe is als net soveel makliker en dis vir my beter. Dis soos als raak toe meer kleurvol. My donker prentjie is toe ingekleur of het kleurvol geraak.

NAVORSER: Ok

RESPONDENT: Dis hoekom ek soos die die glitter en die geel papier gevat het en als, om die kleur uit te bring.

NAVORSER: So hoe is daai kleurvolheid? Hoe is dit dan anders as jy moet sê hoe dit in jou liggaam, of hoe dit jou…as jy dit in ander woorde moet omskryf…kanjy?

RESPONDENT: Nee

NAVORSER: Ok, so die kleurvolheid. Is daar enigiets anders op jou prentjie wat jy kan…wat uitbeeld hoe dit vir jou is?

RESPONDENT: Uh-um, dalk net die glitter. Kleurvol is mos soos vrolike kleure wat ek probeer gebruik het en als. Dan soos eksamen meer vroliker is vir my.

NAVORSER: Hoe was dit voorheen?

RESPONDENT: Soos ek wou nie eksamen skryf nie. Dan kom ek skool toe – oh, eksamen, wow. Ek sien nie uit vir ‘n vraestel nie, want ek weet dis leeswerk en, ja…En soos lees ek dit self, dink ek: ek weet dis leeswerk ek weet dis leeswerk. Wat het ek nou gelees? Dan verstaan ek basies nie wat ek gelees het nie.

NAVORSER: Verwys jy nou na die eksamenlokaal of as jy leer?

RESPONDENT: Nee, as ek by die eksamenlokaal…as ek moet skryf…En toe ek hiernatoe moet kom, toe’s dit soos…ek hoor die vraag en ek kan die papier voor my sien. En toe’s dit soos: ja, maar ek het dit geleer. Voorheen was dit soos: Het ek dit regtig geleer, of het ek nie? En dan twyfel ek in my antwoorde en nou is dit soos…ek het dit geleer, so dit moet die antwoord wees.

NAVORSER: Ok

RESPONDENT: Is daar enigiets anders van die klas – ek praat nou van die klas, van die hele program. Kyk, die hele program is mos dat jy apart skryf met die MP3’s en jy weet dat julle almal saam skryf hier. Is daar enigiets anders wat jy kan sê?

RESPONDENT: Dis soos.

NAVORSER: Hoe dit vir jou is?

RESPONDENT: Die program is mos nou die paar kinders en ek het van die kinders beter leer ken en dis soos ’n spesiale skool. Dan sê hulle ja…die kind is in ’n spesiale skool. Ek verstaan beter dit, want dis nie sy…dis nie die kind se skuld dat hy daar is nie. En ek sou partykeer ander kinders gejudge het as hulle soos half suspicious…omdat hulle in ’n spesiale skool is, maar vandat ek hier is doen ek dit nie meer nie. Want dis net, ek val ook nou onder daai kategorie basies. En wie is ek nou om te judge? Dis net sowel die res van die skool kan my nou, sê nou maar, judge, omdat ek hier skryf. En dis nie eg nie.

NAVORSER: Ok. Gebeur dit?

RESPONDENT: Nie regtig nie. In die begin het soos almal in my klas my gevra: waar is ek? Ek is soos nee, ek skryf hier. Dis soos half weird gewees daaroor, maar nou worry ek nie wat hulle dink nie.

NAVORSER: En in die begin? Hoe was…wat het met jou gebeur in die begin? As jy sê “weird”? Kan jy vir my “weird” beskryf?

RESPONDENT: Hulle was soos, basies, hulle het my op ’n manier weggestoot en was soos baie anders met my, veral in die eksamen en als. En toe het ek net besluit…veral onder my vriende was dit so… as hulle my nie kan aanvaar nie, is dit hulle probleem. En op die ou einde het ek- het hulle my so gejudge en als – en toe gaan kry ek vir my ander vriende as gevolg van dit, want ek was net nooit goed genoeg vir hulle nie. En toe ek nou hier begin skryf, toe is ek niks vir hulle nie. En dis toe ek besluit het; ja, maar ek gaan vir my ander vriende kry, en my vriende nou is soos… sy’s saam met my opgewonde oor dit, want sy weet dit help my en ek kan beter skryf…En dat dit beter was.

NAVORSER: Ok, so dit het eintlik ’n hele nuwe vriendekring…is dit wat jy sê?

RESPONDENT: Ja, ’n hele vriendekring. Dit het als verander.

NAVORSER: Wow.

RESPONDENT: En dit het my houding oor eksamen ook verander, want nou wil ek skool toe kom en ek wil dit skryf en net soos nie net verby kry nie, maar soos net dit doen, want dis lekker eintlik vir my nou.

NAVORSER: Ok, en wat is die ander kinders se reaksie as hulle sien dat jou punte soveel verbeter het?

RESPONDENT: Hulle kyk nie regtig na my punte nie, maar ek het net nou die dag vir my vriendin, [naam],…toe sê ek vir haar: ja maar ek het net 60’s laas kwartaal op my rapport gehad, behalwe vir Verbruikers. Toe’s sy so excited saam met my daaroor. Toe sê sy: ja, maar…Toe sê ek vir haar van laas jaar toe ek so gesukkel het in die begin en als, en toe my punte so verbeter het. Toe sê sy: ja, maar sy’s bly dit help my, want wat help dit ek het in die normale klas gesit en ek sukkel en my punte lei daaronder. Sy sê ook vir my: ja, ek moenie worry wat ander mense van my sê nie.

NAVORSER: Is daar nog steeds, het jy nog steeds daai gevoel? Is daar nog kinders wat jou… wat jy voel wat weird is teenoor jou?

RESPONDENT: Bietjie, so ’n klein bietjie. Veral seuns in ons klas. Dan, veral as ek en [ander respondent] moet uitgaan om hiernatoe te kom, soos laas kwartaal; dan kyk hulle jou so snaaks aan.En toe besluit ek ook net laas kwartaal, ek gaan dit net ignoreer. Want dis nie vir hulle wat ek dit doen nie, ek doen dit vir myself.

NAVORSER: Ok. Dis eintlik ongelooflik dat jy so daarna kan kyk. Dit wys dat jy glo in jouself en dit is die persoon wat die belangrikste is.

RESPONDENT: Maar dis eintlik vir my iets baie moeilik om te doen; om in myself te glo en ek het net Desember-vakansie besluit. Die jaar gaan ek in myself begin glo en ek gaan nie worry wat ander mense van my sê nie.

NAVORSER: Good for you. Dis ongelooflik; en kon jy dit inbring by die progam? Jy sê jy het besluit in Desember jy gaan glo in jouself; en kan jy dit Koppel aan die programme op ‘n manier…of wat…hoe glo jy in jouself hier?

RESPONDENT: Ek het meer in myself begin glo toe ek hiernatoe gekom het, want ek het ook gesien my punte verbeter en toe sê ek vir myself: ja, maar ek kry nou basies hierdie hulp- ek moet harder bietjie leer- en toe ek begin harder leer ook, het dit my soos basies geïnspireer en toe raak my punte ook beter. En toe laas kwartaal, toe ek sien ek het amper als in die 60’s…Ek is soos: ja, sonder die programme sou ek dit nie kon doen nie, want anders sou ek baie punte verloor het, nie geweet het nie, getwyfel het en myself gesê het: ja, maar dis nie die antwoord nie. Dan ís dit eintlik die antwoord. Dan sou ek net ‘n klomp gemors neergeskryf het. En dis nie wat ek deesdae meer doen nie. Deesdae weet ek wat ek geleer het, want ek hoor mos nou die vraag en dan weet ek wat ek geleer het, en dan skryf ek dit neer en dan kom dit basies terug na my toe, wat ek geleer het en, ja…Ek het ook soos toe ek vir myself gesê het: ja, maar, ek gaan soos nie meer worry wat ander mense van my dink nie; toe maak dit ook in ’n manier vir my makliker om hiernatoe te kom en, ja…ek het nie geworry nie, want…As hulle my moet judge, moet hulle dit maar doen. Want, soos as dit hulle satisfaksie gaan gee, dan doen hulle dit maar, ek gaan nie worry nie, want die programme help my. Dis nie hulle wat vir my eksamne skryf basies nie, want ek moet dit self doen; en ja…dit het dit vir my makliker gemaak.

NAVORSER: Jy besef natuurlik dat al wat hier anders is, is dat dit vir jou gelees word en dat dit jou kennis is. Hier word nie vir jou kennis gegee nie. Dat, dit is goed wat jy binne-

in jouself het. Jy weet daar is baie kinder swat kan deel wees, maar kies om nie deel te wees nie. So, jy het daai stap gevat. Jy is die persoon wat dit gedoen het. Dit is nie…Verstaan jy wat ek vir jou probeer sê, is dat dis ’n sterkte wat jy in jouself het.

RESPONDENT: Maar ek het dit net nooit besef nie, omdat ek in die eksamen gekom het. Basies sê ek vir myself, ek weet nie wat daar aangaan nie. Ek moet begin lees en soos, as dit vir my gelees word, is dit net vir my soveel beter, want ek sal in die oggende of in die aande sê: nou moet ek leer: “how do you feel right now?” sou ek dit lees en dan dan sal ek soos basies vir myself opsê; basies soos ‘n papegaai. En dan hoor ek nou in die klas die vraag, maar dan dink ek terug: dis wat ek gisteraand vir myself gesê het. So, dis dis beter om vir my, soos dit basies te hoor.

NAVORSER: En al wat dit beteken, is jy is ‘n kind wat met jou ore leer.

RESONDENT: Ja.

NAVORSER: Ons almal leer mos op verskilende maniers, né? Party mense leer met hul oë, party mense met hull ore…

RESPONDENT: ..Party met hul vingers…

NAVORSER: …Party met bewegings. Jy leer met jou ore. Is daar enigiets anders wat jy kan dink; wat…om hier te skryf; enige iets anders hoe dit nog is?

RESPONDENT: Innie… soos die eerste keer toe ek hier kom skryf het, was ek op my senuwees en half bang, want ek het nie geweet wat om te verwag nie. En soos die tweede en die derde keer, toe besef ek, ja, maar dit help my. En hoekom het ek altyd so gesukkel, en ek…soos ek kan dit doen. Ek het nooit geweet daarvan nie, en dis toe ek hiernatoe kom, toe besef ek, ja, maar ek is tot soveel meer in staat om te doen. En toe, soos ek sê, het dit my lewe baie makliker gemaak met skool.

NAVORSER: Enigiets anders van die kinders hierso, van die atmosfeer hierso, van- nog iets waaroor jy iets wil sê?

RESPONDENT: Hierdie kwartaal is ek nie vreeslik happy met iemand in die klas nie, maar dit kom al van ‘n lang ruk af, wat dinge net…en soos goed in my persoonlike lewe gebeur

het, maar ek sluit my net af van die persoon af. Ek worry nie oor hom nie. Ek doen my eie ding. En soos ek het, soos ek en [ander respondent] het ook baie nader aan mekaar geraak hier en ek het altyd toe sy in graad agt hier begin skryf het, toe's dit soos: Hoekom skryf jy daar? Soos ek was self, soos anders met haar. En toe ek nou hier begin skryf, besef ek, maar dis nie reg van my nie, want kyk nou is ek ook hier. En toe sê ek vir haar op 'n stadium, ek is jammer daaroor, want hoe kan ek nou haar soos gejudge het, maar kyk waar's ek. En toe sê sy vir my: ja-nee, maar mense doen dit. Hulle judge jou ook verskriklik daaroor. Toe sê ek vir haar, moet jou nie steur aan dit nie. Ja, ek en sy het baie nader geraak aan mekaar in die klas en ek verstaan haar ook beter.

NAVORSER: Is daar enigiets wat sleg is?

RESPONDENT: Uh-uh, net as die batterye van my MP3 pap is.

NAVORSER: Ok, wat gebeur dan met jou?

RESPONDENT: Dan is dit soos- gmph, wat nou? Dans dit sommer my lus vir die eksamen ook weg. Dan wil ek nie eers meer skryf nie, maar as ek weer vir my batterye gee, is dit soos; ok, ek skryf aan.

NAVORSER: as jy sê jy't nie lus nie…jy sê…

RESPONDENT: Ek's nie lus vir eksamen skryf nie. Dan't ek so half van 'n down gevoel van: aggenee, terug soos hoe dit was. Boring, soos dan weet ek niks wat daar aangaan nie. Maar dan soos hoor ek weer die vraestel op die MP3 – dan kom als terug.

NAVORSER: En wat van soos die kere wat dit nie op was nie, wat ek dit vir jou gelees het?

RESPONDENT: Dit het ook baie gehelp. Dis soos dieselfde met die MP3. Enigiets ander? Baie dankie {respondent], ek waardeer dit.

ANNEXURE 10: Reflective notes

REFLECTIVE NOTES: RESPONDENT 228

I felt very insecure during the interview, possibly due to this being the first one. Despite all the preparation, my biggest challenge was where to draw the line between interviewing for research purposes as opposed to therapeutic purposes. This left me with a feeling of frustration. I will have to discuss with my study leader about how much probing is allowed. In order to obtain information, I had to engage in much probing, as the respondent appeared to have trouble verbalising his experiences. He is however a willing participant. He was very aware of the camera and therefore with the next interview, one should be careful about reconsidering the use of video recordings. Some of the possible themes that already emerged, were that the exams are easier, better marks, better understanding, the difference the scribe has made, the support and care experienced, self-belief, relaxed atmosphere as well as motivation. In looking back at the interview, it seems that despite the feeling of not obtaining much information, the content was not as “shallow” as thought at first. Despite the existing relationship with the respondent, I experienced that there was tension during the interview. The respondent seemed to be nervous. This might have been in reaction to me being nervous, as well as the pressure experienced by the interview being recorded.

ANNEXURE 11: Publication guidelines for the journal, The South African Journal of Education / Die Suid-Afrikaanse Joernaal vir Onderwys

Author Guidelines

Guidelines for Contributors

Editorial policy

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

Indicate the relevance of the study for education research where the education system is characterised by transformation, and/or an emerging economy/development state, and/or scarce resources.
Research articles of localised content, i.e. of interest only to specific areas or specialists and which would not appeal to the broader readership of the Journal,
should preferably not be submitted for consideration by the Editorial Committee.

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

All articles will be submitted to referees (national and/or international). The 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.

Plagiarism entails the use of ideas that have been published previously and is prohibited. Word-for-word copying of the work of others should be indicated by means of double quotation marks. When quoting, always provide the author's surname, year of publication and the page number e.g. (Brown, 1997:40-48).

Redundancy/self-plagiarism is unacceptable. It may occur in the following ways:
1) Authors reproduce sections of their previously published papers without quotation.
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In cases where redundancy is suspected, the Editor in collaboration with the Editorial Board, will investigate the matter. Plagiarism and redundancy/self-plagiarism will be dealt with as follows:
1) With regards to papers already published - a formal notice of redundant publication will be issued to readers as part of the next edition. The Editor has the right to refuse accepting submissions of those authors for a certain period of time (Information adapted from Redundant Publication: The Editorial Policy Committee of the Council of Science Editors (n.d.). Available at *http://natajournals.org/userimages/ContentEditor/1256771128861/redundant_pub.pdf*. (Accessed 20 March 2013).
2) In cases of major concerns authors will be denied the privilege of publishing the particular paper in the South African Journal of Education.
3) In cases of minor concern authors will be asked to rephrase the duplicated sentences. It is expected of authors to cite materials which overlap with their work within the manuscript. Upon request of the Editor, the information should be made available where necessary (Information adapted from Code of Ethics for the Journal of International Business Studies (n.d.). Available at *http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/author_instructions.html#Ethical-guidelines*. Accessed 20 March 2013). The author(s) must ensure that the language in the manuscript is suitably edited and thename and address of the language editor must be supplied.
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Page charges

ZAR190 per page (from the second issue of 2013 onwards). Authors will be invoiced for the required page charges. Total number of pages should preferably not exceed 15 pages (± 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. Manuscripts should be in Microsoft Word format. 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. 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

References are cited in the text by the author(s) name(s) and the year of publication in brackets

(Harvard method), separated by a comma, e.g. (Brown, 1997).
If several articles by the same author and from the same year are cited, the letters a, b, c, etc. should be added after the year of publication, e.g. (Brown, 1977a).
Page references in the text should follow a colon after the date, e.g. (Brown, 1997:40-48).
In works by three or more authors the surnames of all authors should be given in the first reference to such a work. In subsequent references to this work only the name of the first author is given, followed by the abbreviation *et al*., e.g. (Ziv *et al*., 1995).
If reference is made to an anonymous item in a newspaper, the name of the newspaper is given in brackets, e.g. (Daily News, 1999).
For personal communications (oral or written) identify the person and indicate in brackets that it is a personal communication, e.g. (M Smith, pers. comm.).

List of references

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

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