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An Appreciative
Enquiry into the
Life Orientation
Program offered in
High Schools.

An Appreciative Enquiry into the Life Orientation

Program offered in High Schools

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation entitled, *An Appreciative Enquiry into the Life Orientation Program offered in High Schools*, has not been submitted before, for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Christel Khanyisile Slindile Manzini

October 2012

Signed: _____

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late mother, **Duduzile Shabane-Manzini**, who taught me to work hard for everything I want in life – your girl has done it again. I will always love and treasure you in my heart.

To my supportive father, **Petros Themba Manzini**, who always believes in me – I wouldn't have done it without you. I love you too, dad.

To my sister **Zandile** and brothers **Khumbulani, Muzi, & Sfiso** – I love you so much.

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ABSTRACT

An Appreciative Enquiry into the Life Orientation program offered in High Schools.

The National Department of Education, Health and Welfare in South Africa and various helping organizations initiated the process to address some of the serious psychosocial problems that young people in schools are confronted with, like HIV/AIDS, substance and child abuse. This was done by introducing them to skills that can contribute to the development of a healthy lifestyle. The rationale of the life-skills approach was to embed HIV/AIDS education within a broad series of skills relating to self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, citizenship and health. The intervention was implemented in order to facilitate change in the school as a social system. Through involvement of the young people in schools, it was hoped that the intervention would also impact on the parents and the wider community (Visser, Schoeman, & Perold, 2004).

The overall aim of this study was to enquire the effectiveness of the Life Orientation program offered in high schools; i.e. its benefits to its participants. The benefits could be students being able to understand, and accept themselves as unique and worthwhile beings, using skills learnt from the program and display attitudes and values that improve relationships in the family, group, and community. The research question of the study was how effective is the Life Orientation program offered in high schools, i.e. in terms of learner's ability to meet the curriculum's critical development outcomes after completion of the program?

Life Orientation is the subject that was implemented as part of the Outcomes Based Education. It is an inter-disciplinary subject that is embedded in disciplines of Social Science, Arts, and the Humanities. The intention behind the program is promotion of the holistic development of, e.g. interpersonal skills, values, health, environment and religious education. The research was conducted at the University of Zululand in the Northern KwaZulu Natal province. The research design was qualitative in nature, and appreciative enquiry was used as an investigative tool. The study was conducted with the group of first year students that were registered for the academic year of 2009. Sampling was purposeful as the researcher's specific criterion for participants were students who have attended the Life Orientation program in high school. The research was conducted using a pre-designed questionnaire.

Data analysis comprised of descriptive and interpretive analysis. Descriptive analysis involved organizing data into the following categories; gender, age group range, racial group, name of the school that the participant last attended, location of the last attended school, and current degree enrolled for at the University of Zululand. Interpretive analysis involved content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis interpreted the message content from the large data by participants. This information was then organized into themes such as life skills education, health promotion, and guidance. The findings from the study were that most participants benefited from the Life Orientation program. The results of the study indicated that students did not only benefit from the program but they were critical developments that were enhanced in them, namely:

- The Life Orientation program enabled students to be able to demonstrate initiative in identifying and utilising opportunities and taking responsibility for self-development within a dynamic environment. These participants benefitted in the most important areas for the youth “confidence, self-esteem, and loving yourself as human beings”.
- The Life Orientation program enabled the students to identify and solve problems when encountering obstacles to personal development. Understand and accept themselves as unique and worthwhile beings. Two participants stressed the benefits of learning how to cope with challenges, deal with pressure, and most importantly communication.
- The Life Orientation program demonstrated values and respect for human rights as reflected in ubuntu and other similar philosophies, and respect the rights of people to hold personal beliefs and values. Participants reported benefits of respect, which is part of ubuntu as is mostly encouraged in all African countries.
- The Life Orientation program enabled students to practice acquired life and decision making skills. Access career and other opportunities, and set goals that will enable them to make the best use of their potentials and talents.
- The Life Orientation program enabled students to develop positive psychological well-being. Participants reported self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-esteem, positive relations with other people from different

countries and cultures, autonomy (independence, assertiveness, and dealing with peer pressure), and having a purpose in life and how to overcome challenges of the world.

- The Life Orientation program does not specifically recommends participants to be peer educators, but being a peer educator also teaches what is part of life orientation e.g. Respect for others and their confidentiality, which develops trust with people, and helps to maintains relationships with friends. One participant is still a peer educator at the university, and started since high school.

When critical development outcomes were explored, it was evident that most students have acquired skills that were pre-designed by the government and they are applying them at a Higher Institution of Learning (e.g. university).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
DET	Department of Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
FET	Further Education and Training
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
LO	Life Orientation
LTSM	Learner Teacher Support Material
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authorities
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this study is to enquire into the effectiveness of the Life Orientation (LO) program offered in high schools, e.g. its benefits to participants. The benefits could include students being able to understand and accept themselves as unique and worthwhile beings, using skills learnt from the program to display attitudes and values that improve relationships in the family, group and community, thus promoting mental health.

According to the Department of Education (DoE) (2007), it is the responsibility of education and training institutions to prepare their students for the future. The development of holistic individuals with required skills as well as the necessary cognitive processes that enable the application of these skills in a humane and thoughtful manner is the primary motivation for the provision of Life Orientation. The Life Orientation (LO) subject areas form an excellent basis for equipping learners to respond positively to social demands, assume responsibilities, and optimize their life chances (Prinsloo, 2007). Life Orientation is probably one of the most important subject areas of Curriculum 2005, because it has the capacity to provide learners with 'identity and survival kits' for the twenty-first century.

Stead & Watson (1999), noted that South Africa's economic growth is being hampered, in part, by young people having few work-related skills when they leave

formal education. It can therefore be argued that educational reform is necessary to bring school and practical work closer together. School learning needs to be more closely linked to problem solving and various skills that apply to the world of work. There needs to be greater use of the workplace as a learning site. Life orientation provides skills that are core to the development of the self such as personal well-being.

1.2 Background to the study

Research studies e.g. Bhana, Brookes, Makiwane & Naidoo (2005), and Rooth (2005), that have been conducted on Life Orientation focus mostly on teachers. Those that focus on students (Bhana et. al, 2005), only give a certain sub-learning area, for example Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). This research is important because it looks at the program as a whole to determine whether the subject has met the desired outcome and how the students benefited from the program, as opposed to focusing on just one sub-learning area. The 21st century has not only produced upgrades in technology, but has also further developed the educational systems.

Life Orientation guides and prepares learners for life with its responsibilities and possibilities (Department of Education, 2003). Colleges and Universities also require that one masters several important life skills as well as developing new academic skills. Life skills are techniques that enable one to function competently in many aspects of life. One is expected to think, analyze, assess, critique, synthesize what

one reads and hears, and also to express one's opinion efficiently through interpersonal communication (Jenkins, 2005).

1.3 Aim of the Study

- To enquire into the effectiveness of the Life Orientation program in selected schools.
- To explore the effectiveness of the Life Orientation program offered in high schools with regard to its benefits to learners, e.g. the benefits could include enabling learners to understand and accept themselves as unique and worthwhile beings, using skills learnt from the program to display attitudes and values that improve relationships in the family, group and community.

1.4 Objectives of the study

- To interview students on the effectiveness and the benefits of the Life Orientation program.
- To analyse data in order to conclude on the effectiveness of the Life Orientation program.

1.5 Motivation for the study

Many children in South Africa, whether in biological families, reconstituted families, foster-homes, safe-houses, or street children, are at risk because of inadequate opportunities for harmonious socialization in their communities. They are not adequately guided towards positive self-concept formation or the realization of their

potential. Consequently, they grow towards irresponsible and unfulfilled adulthood where they may never experience the joy of harmonious relationships with their fellow men and women. They have little respect for their own dignity, suffer from negative self-concepts, refuse to accept authority and show little respect for the value of others or for their lives and possessions. In adulthood they adopt anti-social attitudes and habits and often lapse into criminal activities. Their lack of emotional stability contributes to the trend of violent crime, rape and murder, as reported daily in the South African press (Prinsloo, 2007).

The content in Life Orientation deals predominantly with life skills development. The subject encourages learners to make informed decisions and choices. It also guides them to take appropriate action based on their decisions and choices. In addition, Life Orientation supports practical application of life skills and an activity-based approach to learning, teaching and assessment. It places particular emphasis on creating opportunities for all learners to realize their full potential as thinking and doing beings, who will contribute to an improved quality of life for themselves and others in society (Department of Education, 2008). It is therefore critical to conduct a research that will reveal the level of success of this program. This program has relevance to psychology because it contributes to the promotion of mental health and prevention of psychological problems.

1.6 Research question

How effective is the Life Orientation program offered in high schools, in terms of learners' ability to meet the curriculum's critical development outcomes after completion of the program?

1.7 Significance of the study

Previous research conducted by Rooth (2005), indicates that evaluation of the Life Orientation program was conducted in Gauteng and Western Cape areas only. This study will thus give some indication of the effectiveness of the program that has been implemented in some high schools selected for this project in KwaZulu-Natal. The result of this study will also reveal the program status in the identified high schools, and can contribute towards its improvement.

1.8 Resumé

It appears that South Africa has a vision of training, developing and empowering learners holistically that will have long-term effects in their lives. The vision for South Africa is that all people should have access to lifelong learning, education and training opportunities which will, in turn, contribute towards improving quality of life and building a peaceful, prosperous and democratic South Africa. This vision comes from the values that the South African government has regarding the education of young people. The Life Orientation program aims to develop young people in many areas including physical, emotional, psychological, physical health, environmental and religious education. The intention is that Life Orientation as a subject will change

learners' lives for the better. The next chapter will look at the literature on this subject area.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is focused on the following areas of discussion: Clarification of concepts, Life Orientation teaching strategies, process, and resources for information transfer. The Life Orientation curriculum and its sub-components are also discussed; the relevance of life orientation in psychology with more emphasis placed on the importance of health promotion. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model as discussed in Shaffer & Kipp (2007), is discussed as a conceptual framework for the study as well as the importance of balance in a person's life. The explanation of Appreciative Enquiry as an investigative approach in this study would be discussed finally.

2.2. Clarification of concepts

The word "Life" encompasses and merges the vocational, spiritual, psychological, health, beliefs and physical dimensions of living beings (Maree & Ebersohn, 2002). "Orientation" refers to an ability to adjust to circumstances such as political, social, psychological or economic. It emphasizes processes used to cope with particular environments through induction, preparation, education, training, assimilation and integration. The combination of Life and Orientation suggests that this subject area involves not only the development of the learner's insights into life knowledge, but

also the development of skills to utilize this knowledge; it guides and prepares learners for life and its possibilities (Maree & Ebersohn, 2002).

Life Orientation aims at equipping learners to engage on personal, psychological, neuro-cognitive, motor, physical, moral, spiritual, cultural, socio-economic and constitutional levels, in order to respond positively to the demands of the world, to assume responsibilities, and to make the most of life's opportunities (Department of Education, 2008). Developing a realistic picture of oneself is the first step in planning one's personal development. In particular, it is important to identify one's strengths, one's areas of development, and one's opportunities for development together with any threats or barriers to achievement (Smale & Fowlie, 2009). Life Orientation is thus concerned about the way in which these dimensions are interrelated and expressed in life.

For the purpose of this study, "self" refers to an individual being able to achieve balance in life. In this study, life can be balanced through achievement of the following:

- Self esteem/confidence and self control.
- Self-knowledge of strengths and weaknesses.
- Good decision making and problem-solving skills.
- Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.
- Good communication skills.
- Good physical, mental and spiritual health.

- Purpose in life.
- Courage and resilience.

All these enhancements of the self rely on an individual's sense of self. There is no doubt that chaos and uncertainty would make it difficult to achieve the balance. An individual can always strive for balance. It is therefore important for Life Orientation to be appreciated for what it can contribute towards the development of young people in this country.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as not merely the absence of disease but a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing (WHO, 1946, as cited by Edwards, 2002). The integration of physical health and mental health promotion strategies, allows us to reach the goal of achieving healthy minds and bodies, and subsequently healthy communities and societies (Edwards, 2002). Reaching these goals can be difficult if programs like Life Orientation are not successful. The Life Orientation program provides relevant information on life skills (Department of Education, 2008). In the absence of life skills, people struggle to cope with life demands (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2003). South Africa as a third world country has very few psychologists, thus making it more difficult for everyone to access psychological services. It is for this reason that psychologists should take interest in life skills programs and any other programs that promote mental health.

2.3 The Introduction of Life Orientation in schools

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) provides the basis for curriculum transformation and development in South Africa. The Constitution aims to heal the divisions of the past by establishing democratic values, social justice, human rights, improve the quality of life, and ensure that every citizen is equally protected by law. Education has an important role to play in realizing these aims. The curriculum aims to develop the full potential of each learner as a citizen of a democratic South Africa (Department of Education, 2002). In 1995 the South African government began the process of developing a new curriculum for the school system, the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) (Horn, 2005). There were two imperatives for this, namely: the scale of change in the world; and the growth and development of knowledge and technology. The demands of the 21st century required learners to be exposed to different as well as higher level skills and knowledge, compared to those required by the existing South African curricular at the time. Secondly, South Africa had changed. The curricular for schools therefore required revision to reflect new values and principles, especially those of the Constitution of South Africa (Department of Education, 2008).

The very term 'Outcomes Based Education' (OBE) suggests purposeful, goal directed education which avoids meaningless rote learning and strives to meet praiseworthy ideals such as protection and enhancement of individual freedom, the development of critical thought, and scientific literacy (Horn, 2005). According to Spady and Marshall (1994, as cited by Pretorius, 1999), the well known authors on

the subject of Life Orientation, outcomes-based education is nothing new. It has always been with us. One is outcomes-based when one teaches a child to cross a road safely. We go to great lengths to teach the skill correctly to the child and insist that he or she practice it until we are convinced that he or she can do it safely (Pretorius, 1999).

An outcome is a demonstration of “learning”. It is what the student is to know or do. Spady (1994, as cited by Pretorius, 1999), defines outcomes as “high quality” demonstrations of learning culminating at the end of a learning experience (Pretorius, 1999). As with all other subjects in the National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12 (General), (DoE, 2008), Life Orientation makes use of Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards to describe what a learner should know and be able to demonstrate for example the skills, knowledge and values that are the results of learning.

2.4 The Life Orientation Curriculum

Life Orientation acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of the human being and the related issues such as human rights, gender, the environment, all forms of violence, abuse, sexuality and HIV and AIDS. These issues are located in any one of the four areas of the Life Orientation program and integrated across the Assessment Standards. The four focus areas are:

- Personal Well-being;
- Citizenship Education;

- Physical Education;
- Careers and Career Choices.

These learning areas are all aligned with the promotion of mental health and prevention of psychological problems as discussed in the following section.

2.4.1 Sub-components of Life Orientation

2.4.1.1 Personal Well-being

Personal well-being is central to fulfilling one's potential; it also enables learners to engage effectively in interpersonal relationships, community life and society. Many personal and social problems associated with lifestyle choices persist in the Further Education and Training phase (FET). This area focuses on self-concept, emotional literacy, social competency, and life skills. It seeks to deal with the realities of peer pressure, factors influencing quality of life, the dynamics of relationships, as well as preparing learners for a variety of roles such as being an employee and employer, being a leader and following a leader, heading and participating in a household, as well as being a parent. This focus area also addresses issues related to the prevention of substance abuse, diseases of lifestyle, sexuality, teenage pregnancy, sexually-transmitted infections including HIV and AIDS, and the promotion of personal, community, and environmental health. The inclusion of various perspectives (such as indigenous knowledge systems), could assist in problem solving on issues of personal and community wellbeing (Department of Education, 2003).

Learning Outcome: The learner is able to achieve and maintain personal well-being.

In this phase, learners are expected to consolidate their own identities. The emphasis is on building self-esteem and confidence, and applying various life skills in everyday life. Learners are made aware of their own development, a variety of risks (especially sexual risks), and substance use and abuse. Because learners of this age are vulnerable, these issues are explored in greater depth. Other influences in society and the environment that impact on well-being are also studied. As learners in this phase are becoming more independent, preparation for effective life management becomes essential. Other influences in society that impact on well-being, such as indigenous knowledge systems, religion and the environment are also studied (Department of Education, 2003).

2.4.1.2 Citizenship Education

In a transforming and democratic society, personal and individual needs have to be placed in a social context to encourage acceptance of diversity and to foster commitment to the values and principles espoused in the Constitution. Discrimination on the basis of race, religion, culture, gender, age, ability and language, as well as issues such as xenophobia and other forms of discrimination, are addressed. This learning area also deals with social relationships and other human rights and responsibilities issues. It is important for learners to be politically literate, that is, to know and understand the democratic processes. The importance of volunteerism, social service and involvement in a democratic society are emphasized, and the

causes, consequences and prevention of pervasive social ills, such as all forms of violence and abuse, are addressed. Particular attention is paid to social and environmental issues (including HIV and AIDS). Knowledge of diverse religions will contribute to the development of responsible citizenship and social justice (Department of Education, 2003).

Learning Outcome: The learner is able to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the values and rights that underpin the Constitution in order to practice responsible citizenship, and to enhance social justice and environmentally sustainable living. In this phase, learners are being prepared for the role of informed, active participants in community life and of responsible citizens. Competencies and abilities in addressing discrimination, awareness of economic and social justice, and environmentally sustainable living (thinking globally and acting locally) are further developed. Learners are also exposed to diverse religions in order to foster peaceful co-existence in a multi-religious society. They are required to clarify their own values and beliefs as these will influence their decisions throughout life (Department of Education, 2003).

2.4.1.3 Physical Education

Knowledge of healthy practices and nutrition, participation in diverse games, sport, recreational and leisure time activities, and an understanding of the relationship between health, physical activities and the environment can improve the quality of life and the well-being of all learners. This area also focuses on the role that sport

can play in redressing biases and building a nation. The knowledge of, and participation in, recreational and fitness activities can open doors to various careers, community projects and lifelong well-being. Life Orientation acknowledges that participation in recreational and physical activities is influenced by ideology, beliefs and worldviews (Department of Education, 2003).

Learning Outcome: The learner is able to explore and engage responsibly in recreational and physical activities to promote wellbeing. In this phase, learners are in transition to adulthood. The importance of nutrition, physical activity, recreation, and their contribution to personal health and fitness are emphasized. Opportunities are created for the expression of creativity and initiative. Learners will be encouraged to participate continuously in recreational activities, physical exercise and sport for lifelong well-being (Department of Education, 2003).

2.4.1.4 Careers and Career Choices

The nature of the Further Education and Training (FET) band means that learners must make critical decisions regarding career fields and further study. In order to help learners to make these decisions, they will be exposed to study methods and skills pertaining to assessment processes, information about institutions of higher and further education, and preparation for job applications and interviews. Self-knowledge and knowledge of labour laws, the job market, work ethics, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), learnerships and Sector Education and

Training Authorities (SETAs), and unemployment are critical. Principles such as equity and redress are also addressed (Department of Education, 2003).

Learning Outcome: The learner is able to demonstrate self-knowledge and the ability to make informed decisions regarding further study, career fields and career paths.

In this phase, learners are expected to reflect continuously on their own interests and abilities as well as career and entrepreneurial options as they move towards finalizing their choice of a career. They have to critically evaluate socio-economic factors, additional and higher education options, and have access to financial assistance to finalize a career choice. As learners at this stage are about to enter the world of work, relevant employment legislation, how to access it, and dealing with unemployment are studied (Department of Education, 2003).

2.4.2 The recommended Life Orientation teaching strategies

According to The Department of Education (2008), successful teaching of Life Orientation relies heavily on the teaching approach chosen by the teacher. The greatest challenge is to ensure that learners apply the knowledge gained. The Life Orientation teacher must be willing to experiment and be flexible in the teaching methods to engage learners actively in their own learning. Teachers can engage learners more actively by facilitating learning, using group work, getting learners to talk and accommodating individual learner needs. Activities need to be practical and allow learners the opportunity to experience life skills in a hands-on manner. In

addition, the classroom layout needs to accommodate active learning (Department of Education, 2008).

Besides individual work, the use of experiential learning such as active learning, facilitation, group work and continuity, supports the teaching of Life Orientation. Individual work allows learners to explore a variety of lifestyle options from a personal perspective before committing to a decision. In experiential learning, learners practice life skills in the classroom and reflect on these experiences. Facilitation allows the voices of the learners to be heard and allows learners to participate in their own learning. Group work allows learners to assist and be assisted by others and encourages the practice of different roles. Continuity is vital to ensure that there is a logical and coherent flow between the activities presented in Life Orientation. It is therefore important to link that which was done before to that which is being done presently to consolidate the learning and application of life skills (Department of Education, 2008).

Various methods are suitable for the teaching of Life Orientation and are chosen by considering the content to be covered as explained by the learning outcomes and assessment standards; the number of learners in the class; the level of the learners in the class; the individual needs of the learners; and the time available. Examples of methods suitable for the teaching of Life Orientation are provided below. A method need not be used in isolation to other methods but can be combined with others or

adapted to meet the desired learning outcome(s) of the activity (Department of Education, 2008).

The following are the activities that students should be doing for the Life Orientation program:

- Group discussions (brainstorming, buzz groups, fish bowls, debates, panels).
- Case studies, scenarios and outings (field trips, workplace visits, games).
- Ice-breaker performances (role-plays, dialogues, interviews, dramatizations).
- Physical movement activities and journal writing (portfolios, individual record keeping, exercise log for fitness program, worksheets, group work projects, sport and games).
- Designing and producing (collages, music, brochures, videos).
- Demonstrations research (interview, literature review, field study, action research, etc). (Department of Education, 2008).

Equal access to education signifies equal societies, holistic equity in all spheres of life. Resources that can be used to achieve the desired outcomes, and which are essential for teaching and learning in schools, are textbooks, furniture, laboratories, references and classrooms, whilst Learner-Teacher-Support-Materials (LTSM) refers to any tools or resources used to enhance teaching and the understanding of the subject content. Sedibe (2011), emphasizes the importance of adequate LTSM, in order to meet the desired learning outcomes in schools. Mwamwenda (1996, as cited by Sedibe, 2011), stated that learners in developing countries perform below

those in developed countries simply because of inadequate and poor facilities. This means that disadvantaged schools cannot function as effectively with inadequate and unequal access to resources.

2.4.3 The Teaching Process

Teachers can organize information in the learning environment by taking into account how people process information, and by linking learning to prior experience and prior knowledge. Learning with understanding is more likely to occur when students are provided with categories of understanding, or concepts, as opposed to an unrelated body of facts. By using advanced organizers, teachers can help students to structure knowledge and information so that the big ideas within a content area are clear. An understanding of the structure of the discipline they are teaching can provide teachers with cognitive maps of the terrain to be learned, along with content-specific strategies, examples, analogies, and diagrams to make material meaningful to students and to address common misconceptions (Hammond, Austin, Orcutt, & Rosso, 2001).

They can also teach students how to think about and monitor their own learning and performance by providing opportunities to practice metacognitive strategies. Teachers can foster students' understanding and capacity to undertake complex performances by organizing a systematic process of modelling and demonstrating how experts approach the task, scaffolding steps in the learning process, coaching

learners, and providing feedback. These roles and strategies can change over time in response to how learners develop and change (Hammond et. al, 2001).

2.4.4 The Learning Resources

Mabogoane (2005, as cited by Sedibe, 2011), states that the differences in how learners learn in the classroom are not only a result of differing teaching abilities but also of resources available for teaching. Colgough et al. (2003, as cited by Sedibe, 2011), argue that the availability of adequate learning materials is an extremely important condition for the achievement of good quality education. On this note one can say that where resources are inadequate and unequally distributed, the culture of teaching and learning may decline because of lack of reference, as the only source of information will be the teacher, which is not enough for learners (Sedibe, 2011).

When programs are designed, there are certain factors that contribute to whether the program is successful or a failure. These factors enable the creator to assess if they are achieving what they had intended when the program was still in the developing stages. Life Orientation appears to focus on the teachers, since they will be co-ordinating the program. The Department of Education (2007), mentioned the environment and resources as some of the factors that enhance successful deliverance of this program. It is important that Life Orientation is presented within a context of honest enquiry and respect and with adequate resources.

Effective teachers can organize the environment to provide students with active, hands-on learning, authentic tasks and audiences. Opportunities for “active” learning experiences, in which students are asked to use ideas by writing and talking about them, creating models and demonstrations, applying these ideas to more complex problems and constructing projects that require the integration of many ideas, have been found to promote deeper learning especially when they are combined with reflective learning experiences. Teachers can develop learning activities with real purposes, audiences and activity structures that mirror those outside of school settings (Hammond et. al, 2001).

By encouraging discourse among students about ideas, concepts and relationships, they can create environments where the teacher is not the only source of knowledge. Teachers can also organize reflection on activity and analysis of ideas and products that enable learners to transform activity into broader understandings (Hammond et. al, 2001). The enabling environment and resources are not independent – other factors like exposure to particular experiences and having suitably qualified teachers, will enable their program to be delivered successfully to the students. Exposure to particular experiences helps the student to understand real community and social issues, which will create a realistic context within which the mini-research project can unfold. Suitably qualified teachers must be well informed about legislation, community issues, accessing community structures and should possess basic research skills, so that they are able to teach the skills to students (Department of Education, 2007).

2.5 Life Orientation and Mental Health

The Life Orientation program teaches students about personal development, and it helps students to be able to organise and manage themselves using strategies to deal with personal issues and to develop a plan to achieve goals (Department of Education, 2008). This increases a student's psychological well-being on a primary level. The ability to deal with problems is advisable in primary prevention of mental health problems. Mental health promotion is imperative for all learners/children at the adolescent phase. The learning outcome in this program, like personal well-being, is to teach learners communication skills, good decision making, self-esteem and self control, which are crucial for mental health promotion. These learning areas equip learners with skills for dealing with problems of a psychological nature. Learners also get to know the available community resources in case they require them.

Ka He, Kramer, Houser, Chomitz and Hacker (2004, as cited by Rooth, 2005), indicated that adolescence is a time of risk taking and experimentation. Increased rates of drug and alcohol experimentation, sexual activity, delinquency, suicide attempts, anti-social activities, physical aggression and fighting, further characterize adolescence. The leading cause of morbidity and mortality during this period is behaviourally mediated (Rooth, 2005).

Mashimbye (2000, as cited by Rooth, 2005), identified the following as pertinent to learners in the Limpopo Province; problems with parents regarding sexuality education, absence of parents from the home, parental alcoholism, passive entertainment, unemployment, peer group pressure, substance abuse, teenage

suicide and teenage pregnancy (Rooth, 2005). Children at high school are at the adolescent phase, a challenging and a demanding phase. It is a period characterized by confusion, conflict and experimentation. The socio-economic environment in which the Grade 10-12 learners exist, affects their health and safety (Department of Education, 2008).

Choices need to be made about careers. Peer pressure now takes on a different dimension as learners find themselves making crucial decisions about contentious issues such as sexual behaviour. Their awareness and involvement in civic and human rights issues also becomes more profound. Personal decisions and viewpoints or values regarding social and moral issues become crucial. It is therefore necessary to focus on areas such as self-awareness and self-esteem, emotional literacy, social competency, moral behaviour and life skills (Department of Education, 2008). Students can guide their own lives when given an opportunity to learn life skills that can help them cope more capably with the increasing demands of life (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2003).

According to Edwards (2002), primary promotion is an intervention to promote and improve mental health by providing children with life skills enrichment as part of the school curriculum. Secondary prevention is selective prevention, in school based educational programs, to reduce the prevalence and/or duration of illness, and to assist teachers in the early identification and referral of abused or learning disordered children. Secondary promotion refers to interventions to improve human

rights, empowerment and health promotion advocacy for all persons, particularly in cases of disempowerment. Tertiary prevention helps to reduce illness and disability in persons at high risk such as in halfway houses, and to reintroduce psychiatric patients into the community, while tertiary promotion refers to interventions to improve meaning, self and social realization and actualization, and other higher level survival needs as demonstrated by Maslow (Edwards, 2002).

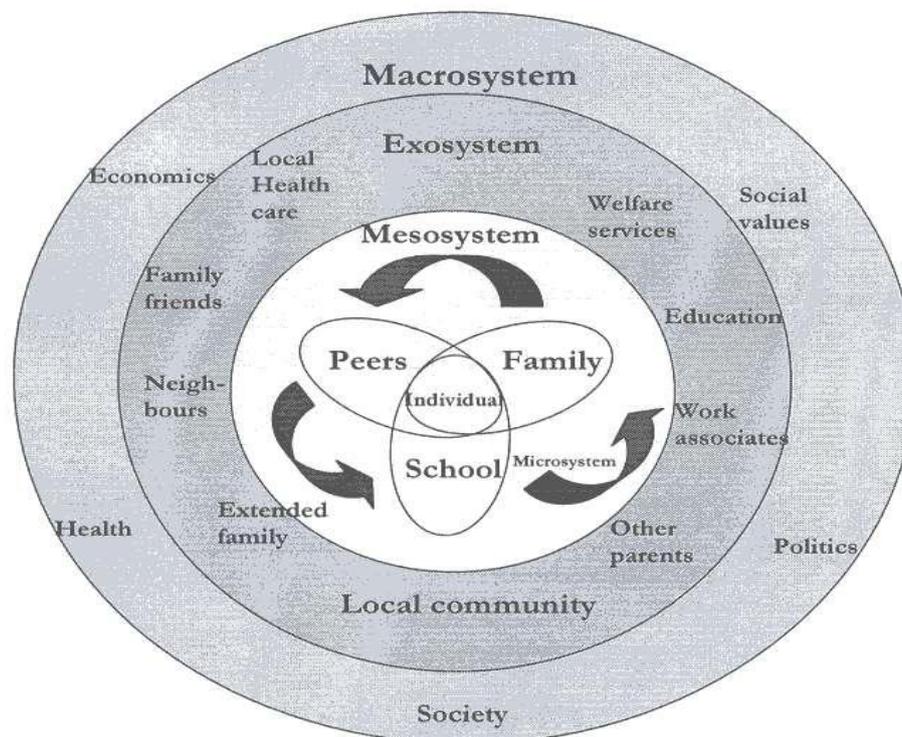
The Department of Education (2003), has realized the scope and intensity of mental health problems and has endeavoured, through the introduction of OBE and in particular through the Life Orientation (LO) learning area, to make a difference in the lives of a new generation of learners. The development of Life Orientation programs has brought teachers and educational planners to the realization that the only hope of reaching children at risk lies in a holistic support system (Prinsloo, 2007).

Why is an educational system of such interest to a psychologist? Mental health is the priority in this field, not only for the service seeker (client), but also the service provider (professionals). Previously one had to learn or consider establishing life skills in the university or work place. The skills provided by the Life Orientation program rely heavily on the teaching approach chosen by the teacher. The greatest challenge is to ensure that learners apply the knowledge gained throughout the program. The introduction of Curriculum 2005 promised high-quality education aimed at preparing learners fully for life (Horn, 2005). It has been five years since the curriculum was introduced, therefore it is imperative to evaluate its success. It is the

responsibility of all South African citizens to monitor the success of government initiated programs, in order for the country to prosper. The first step is usually to conduct research in order to find out whether the program has been successful or not. If not, weaknesses will be identified and relevant recommendations will be made in order to improve the program.

2.6 The Conceptual Framework guiding the study: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Diagram 1: The Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model (Shaffer & Kipp, 2007)



The ecological systems theory was originated by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005) who believed that children developed “within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the environment” (Berk, 2000, as cited by Grisham-Brown, 2012). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of development has proven

beneficial in providing insight into all the factors that play a role in the growth and development of individuals. It shows how all the factors are intertwined and impact on the developmental cycle. This model allows for recognition of all stakeholders for the balanced development of an individual. It recognizes the importance of structures that impact the child's development including those outside the family at different levels, for example: **microsystem** (family, peer group and classmates), which is the primary unit influencing a child's development directly from these sources; **mesosystem** (parent and teacher), where the teacher and parent work together in order to educate the child; **exosystem** (the parent's workplace), an environment in which an individual is indirectly involved and is external to his experience, yet it affects him anyway; **macrosystem** where the society and culture in which children are raised, influence all systems (Ahuja, 2010).

According to Bronfenbrenner, as cited by Ahuja (2010), primary relationships must be those that last a lifetime such as with parents. Deficiencies in these relationships cannot be replaced with others. Supporting the primary relationship is the key to better development of children. Teachers must work to support these primary relationships by creating an environment that welcomes and nurtures families. According to Seedat, Duncan & Lazarus (2001), community psychology regards whole communities and not only individuals, as possible clients. There is an awareness of the importance of the interaction between individuals and their environment in terms of causing and alleviating problems (Seedat et al, 2001).

There has been a dramatic growth of single-parent families, whether through divorce or having a child without ever being married. The critical problem here is whether there is a second parent figure present on a regular basis who not only cares for and engages in activities with the child, but also provides support, both material and emotional, to the single-parent mother. With more and more parents working full time, there has been a decline in the involvement of parents as active participants in, and mentors of, activities with children and youth; there is growing conflict between the demands of work and family. At the same time, the teenage and adult models widely watched by children and youth through the media (TV, films, video games, CDs, and the internet) continue to emphasize commercialism, sexuality, substance abuse, and violence (Bronfenbrenner, 1999).

The end result is a lack of positive adult models for internalizing standards of behaviour and longer-term goals of achievement, and thereby an increasing number of autonomous peer groups bereft of adult guidance. Neighbourhood ties among families have been eroding. More and more of these trends are occurring at the same time, thereby increasing the pace, the scope, and the power of their developmentally disruptive effects (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Ahuja (2010), states that the model also allows for treatment of various emotional and behavioural problems because the model places treatment externally; changing environmental factors can provide healing and strength. Teachers can use this model to assess problems in a child's life. It also aids in rebalancing the child's environment in order for healing to occur. Most people fail to realize that their actions toward their children have a

lasting impact on future relationships and the adjustment of their children. Using the Bronfenbrenner model, it is easy to see that we as a society are influencing the lives of all people we interact with and knowing this, hopefully we can try to become a better society at least for the sake of our children.

The emotional health and well-being of the child contributes significantly to the quality of his or her life. Emotional and behavioural difficulties in childhood have been linked with physical illness, mental health difficulties and impaired relationships with partners in adulthood. The community and neighbourhood context in which children are growing up is known to influence their development. Direct effects include the physical condition of the area, perceived safety and community support structures. Indirect effects include the impact which the neighbourhood may have on family functioning and parenting style. For example, some parents may change their parenting style in an attempt to prevent their children from following what are perceived to be undesirable influences in their local community (Williams et al, 2009).

One of the motivating factors to undertake this study is the realization of the fact that we, as a society, can collaboratively raise children. Ahuja stated that if we worked in harmony, and provided our children with a community that supported each other, the outcome on our children would be profound. If our next generation fails, if our future citizens are weak, and if mental disorders and illness are on the rise, then it is because we all failed. Before we are swept away in our rushed, highly stressed lives,

let us use the ecological model to put the pieces together where our children can experience their lives in harmony. Our goal is to grow our children to follow in the direction of love, respect and care for one another (Ahuja, 2010).

The introduction of Outcomes Based Education by the Government, of which Life Orientation is a sub-component, is an attempt to achieve just this goal. In the current educational context, more and more teachers have to deal with students with social and emotional needs. With the rise in demand for mental health services and the limited availability of these services, school counsellors are becoming one of the main sources of support for many families. As the ecological model emphasizes the importance of external influences, it is better able to incorporate the student's school, family, community and culture to provide a better understanding of all the factors that contribute to a person's functioning.

The aim of the study as mentioned in the preceding section is to enquire into the effectiveness of the Life Orientation program in selected schools. The success of this program is of interest to all stakeholders because it contributes to the success of the nation.

2.7 Appreciative Enquiry as an Investigative Approach in this study

Cooperrider and Whitney (2003), state that to appreciate is "valuing; the act of recognising the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems". Inquire, on the other hand, is described as "the

act of exploration and discovery; to ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities”, (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2003). Reed, Pearson, Douglas, Swinburne and Wilding (2002), explained that “Appreciative Enquiry, as the term indicates, the researcher is directed towards appreciating what it is about the social world that is positive and exploring it”.

Mayeza (2004, as cited by Meyer, 2007), adds that appreciative enquiry gives us a structure for searching the ‘goodness’ in a system allowing researchers to appreciate ‘what is’ and use that as inspiration for what ‘could be’. It is important to note, however, that appreciative enquiry is not simply about focusing on the positive and denying the negative. As Watkins and Mohr (2001, as cited by Meyer, 2007), point out, it is about seeking the life-giving forces in any situation. This corresponds to Hammond and Royal's (1998, as cited by Meyer, 2007), postulation about society and change, that: "If we were to carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past." Mayeza (2004, as cited by Meyer, 2007), advises community psychologists to adopt the principles of appreciative enquiry by moving away from problem focused intervention to appreciating and valuing (Meyer, 2007).

One of the appreciative enquiry competencies is affirmative competency, which focuses on what the organization has done well in the past and is doing well in the present. This competency focuses on the successes and will install a sense of pride and self-worth in all relevant partners. Apart from finding joy in knowing that personally, one has made a difference, it also allows the researcher to appreciate

the benefits of collaborative work. This creates an environment of co-operation, trust, sharing and safety, and can open up channels of communication (Cherney, 2003).

Appreciative enquiry does not refuse to acknowledge that “negative” emotions, thoughts and comments are present, and even tolerates this negativity in interviews. However, once these have been acknowledged and validated, it is important to move on to what works. What we focus on expands, so we should not dwell on the negative (Cherney, 2003).

Although the life skills based program that has been implemented in schools has filled a void, emphasis needs to be placed on the future of the program. There is a need to ensure that the program grows in the right direction, therefore we need to pose positive questions so that it grows in a positive direction and appreciative enquiry allows the researcher this luxury (Govender, 2004).

2.8 Previous Research on Life Orientation

Previous research done on Life Orientation by Rooth (2005), revealed the following:

- Life Orientation, as a fledgling learning area within a restorative educational transitional phase, still requires clear definition, interpretation and comprehension.
- The constituents of this learning area are fragmented as they are not yet integrated holistically within Life Orientation.
- Life Orientation is not allocated the prescribed time in many schools; its time-slots are usurped for other learning areas.

- A comprehensive core of specially trained Life Orientation teachers is not available.
- The allocation of teachers to this learning area is somewhat arbitrary.
- Life Orientation teaching methodologies disclose an overuse of transmission teaching, with minimal use of group and experiential methods.
- Large classes, the newness of assessment and a scarcity of suitable learning support materials further add to the challenges faced by Life Orientation teachers (Rooth, 2005).

It is important that teachers respect the Life Orientation subject as they do any other subject. Usurping the prescribed time or allocating less time for this subject may hinder students from acquiring the necessary skills they need in order to survive in a world that is full of challenges.

The results obtained by Bhana, Brookes, Makiwane and Naidoo (2005), revealed the success of the Life Orientation learning program. When students were questioned on their knowledge of HIV and AIDS, the results showed that:

- “There was a significant relationship between higher levels of knowledge and greater exposure to Life Orientation lessons on HIV and AIDS.” This may indicate that the emerging generation is more likely to be an HIV-free generation, because of the knowledge they have acquired and which they apply to their daily lives. As one of the quotations states, “Knowledge is Power”.

- When students were asked for their opinions regarding the life orientation programme on sex, sexuality and HIV and AIDS, the results suggested that: “Over 90% of learners felt that the Life Orientation programme on sex, sexuality and HIV and AIDS had helped them to protect themselves from acquiring HIV and AIDS, understand more about HIV and AIDS, want to know more about HIV and AIDS, and accept people living with HIV and AIDS. Overall, learners revealed positive attitudes towards Life Orientation materials on sex, sexuality and HIV and AIDS. The majority of learners felt that the materials give useful information, are interesting and easy to understand.”
- Sex, sexuality and HIV and AIDS are very sensitive issues in South Africa where often, in the home environment, these discussions are not allowed or cause tension when a guardian has to address them. Implementation of the Life Orientation programme is, therefore, more likely to provide answers for those individuals who are not exposed to the facts.
- When students were asked about their perceptions of personal risk to HIV and AIDS, the results suggested that: “Forty percent of learners regard themselves as being at low risk for HIV and AIDS. Higher levels of risk perception were associated with greater exposure to Life Orientation lessons on HIV and AIDS, significantly associated with higher knowledge about HIV and moderately associated with communication with mothers.”

The preceding discussion appears to indicate that Life Orientation is effective in the lives of students. However, in terms of the sub-learning areas it only focused on one

component, namely HIV and AIDS. The studies were also not focused on the psychological benefits but on delivery.

2.9 Resumé

In this chapter the researcher reviewed literature and theoretical approaches relevant to the Life Orientation subject. Ecological theory understands how interrelated systems can play a role in children's lives. The literature reviewed demonstrated the importance and benefits of the Life Orientation program. The literature reviewed also explained appreciative enquiry as an investigative approach, which was used in this study. The following chapter discusses research methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research approach used, gives an overview of the research design, outlines the data collection and sampling procedure, and discusses ethics followed in this research.

3.2 Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design. Appreciative enquiry as an investigative approach was applied. Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding, where a researcher develops a complex, holistic picture through analyses of words, and reports detailed views of informants. The goal of qualitative research is to explore and understand a central phenomenon. The research questions are general and broad, and seek to understand participants' experience with the central phenomenon (Cresswell, 2005, as cited by Maree, 2007). In this study, participants were thus asked questions without being limited in their responses. They were questioned about the subject area's contribution to their lifestyle, what the significant outcomes were for the participants and if they are still applicable in their lives. Common themes and contents were identified from what participants reported, which gave an understanding of the contribution made through the Life Orientation subject area.

3.3 The sampling process and technique used

The sample consisted of University of Zululand first year students that had enrolled in 2009 and had attended the Life Orientation program in high school. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used when researchers wish to study a clearly defined sample (Clark-Carter, 2004). Frequently, researchers will base a survey on a sample that is chosen to meet some particular definition (McBurney & White, 2007), through snow ball sampling whereby participants with whom contact has already been made are used to penetrate their social network to refer the researcher to other participants who could potentially take part in or contribute to the study (Maree, 2007).

The sample consisted of five groups. Group A was comprised of psychology students. The researcher knew one student in psychology, who had attended Life Orientation in high school, and the researcher asked the student to find other students that had also attended Life Orientation. Group B participants were students who had recently enrolled into the peer education program. The executive committee of the peer education program was approached and informed about the study. An announcement was made for all the first year students to come to the researcher after the peer education meeting.

In group C, a first year science student known to the researcher was asked to contact other students in the faculty who had also attended in the Life Orientation program in high school. In group D, a third year social work student recruited first year students that he tutored, to be part of the research. The tutorial time slot was

used to conduct the study for group D, since it was a convenient time for the group to be together. Group E was invited at church. During the announcement period of the church itinerary, it was announced that all the first year students should remain behind. When the researcher met with the students, the researcher asked if there were any students who had attended the Life Orientation program in high school that would like to voluntarily participate in the study.

The final sample consisted of students from the following different faculties: Arts, forty four (44) students; Science and Agriculture, twenty (20) students; Commerce and Law, twelve (12) students; Education, one (1) student. Three (3) students did not indicate their faculties.

3.4 The sample size

The researcher initially had one hundred (100) participants. Twenty (20) questionnaires were spoilt and eighty (80) questionnaires were retained. The sample size was made up of fifty two (52) female and twenty eight (28) male participants.

3.5 Data Collection

A pre-designed, open-ended questionnaire was used for data collection. An open-ended questionnaire allows respondents to communicate their experiences or opinions about a specific issue in their own words, without any restrictions (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006), (see Annexure D).

3.5.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two sections, namely, Section A and Section B. Section A consisted of closed-ended questions which do not allow respondents to provide answers in their own words, but force respondents to select one or more choices from a fixed list of answers provided. This allows easier comparative data analysis (Blanche et al, 2006). It was aimed at collecting biographical data of the participants (see Annexure C). Section B consisted of open-ended questions which allow the respondents to answer freely in their own words and to express any ideas they think are applicable. No choices or alternatives are offered. These questions are appropriate for opening since they introduce the subject and elicit general reactions. They are also useful when the researcher requires further clarification (Struwig & Stead, 2001), and they focused on participants' experiences of the Life Orientation program (see Annexure D). Each participant had to answer questions by ticking a box and responding in writing where applicable (see the Annexures C and D).

3.5.2 Duration

Questionnaires were distributed to students by hand. The distribution took place from the month of July 2009 until September 2009. Groups A and B participated in the month of July, groups C and D participated in the month of August, and group E participated in the month of September.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

Ethics in research provides guidelines for the responsible conduct of biomedical research. In addition, research ethics educates and monitors scientists conducting research to ensure a high ethical standard, to prevent sloppy or irresponsible research, and to protect the rights of the participants (University of Minnesota, 2003). Participation was voluntary. Participants were made aware of their right to terminate at any time without penalty if they became uncomfortable, and were treated with respect. Permission was granted from the Higher Degrees Committee at the University of Zululand. On the first page of the questionnaire there was a consent form (see Annexure A), which the participants were requested to sign in order to demonstrate their consent for the study.

3.7 Resumé

This chapter explained the processes followed to select the sample and collect data for this study. The sample size and ethical considerations were also described. The next chapter will look at the analysis of the data gathered from the participants.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Data analysis and results are detailed in this chapter. The study investigates the effectiveness of the Life Orientation program offered in high schools. The final sample consisted of eighty (80) first year students from the University of Zululand. Data was collected through the use of a standard, pre-designed and open-ended questionnaire. This chapter describes how data was analysed and interpreted.

4.2 Data Analysis

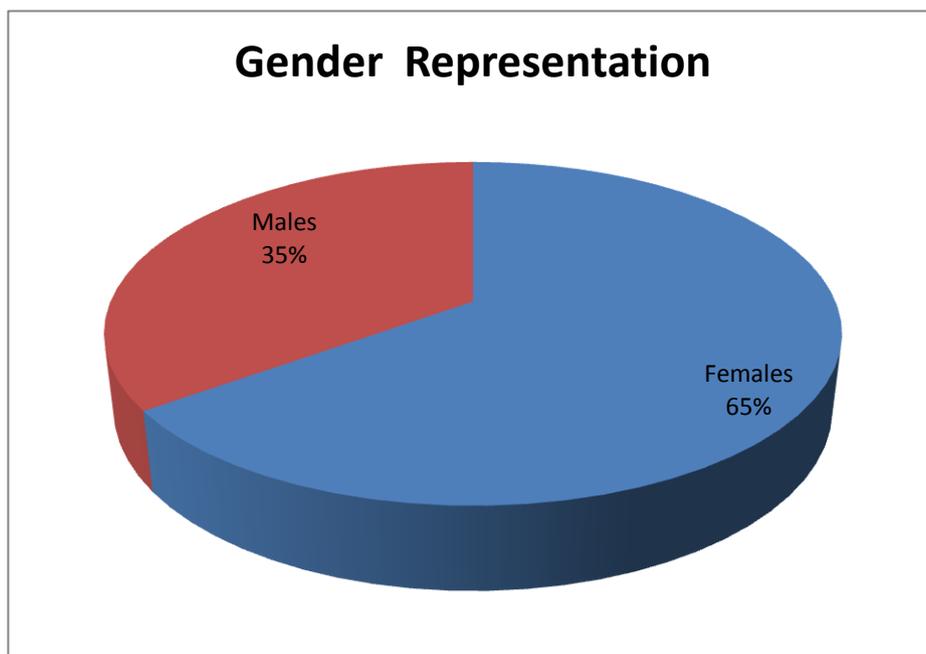
Data analysis was conducted through descriptive and interpretive analysis. Descriptive analysis involved organising data into the following categories: gender, age group range, racial group, name of the school that the participant last attended, location of the last attended school, and current degree enrolled for at the University of Zululand. Interpretive analysis involved content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis provided information on the effectiveness and benefits of the Life Orientation program as reported by participants. This information was then organised into themes such as life skills education, health promotion, and guidance.

4.2.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.2.1.1 Sample Demographics

(a) Gender

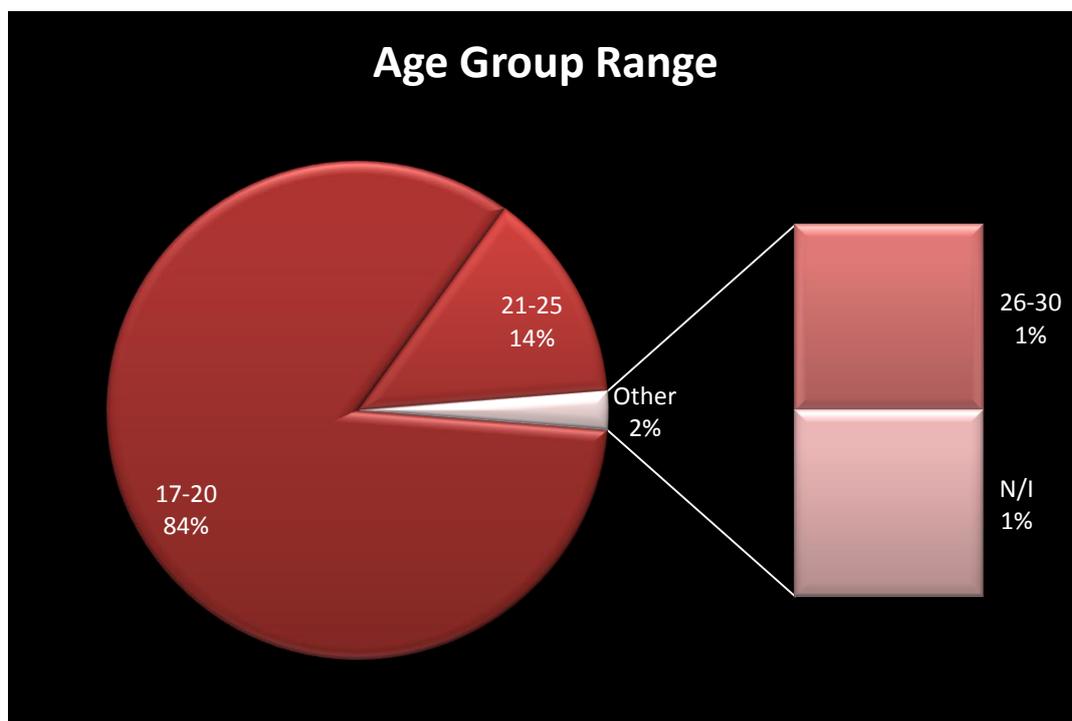
Figure 1



The sample size was made up of fifty two (52) female and twenty eight (28) male participants. Data analysis of the study included comparisons between the females' and the males' responses. Comparisons were also made between the activities that they participated in which were offered in the Life Orientation program. Females mostly reported engaging in exercise, soccer, sports (aerobics, jogging), drama, and debate, while males engaged mostly in soccer, debating, sports (jogging, high jump, javelin), and indigenous games. Both females and males had common activities that they were exposed to, but they were also involved in different kinds of sports.

(b) Age group range

Figure 2

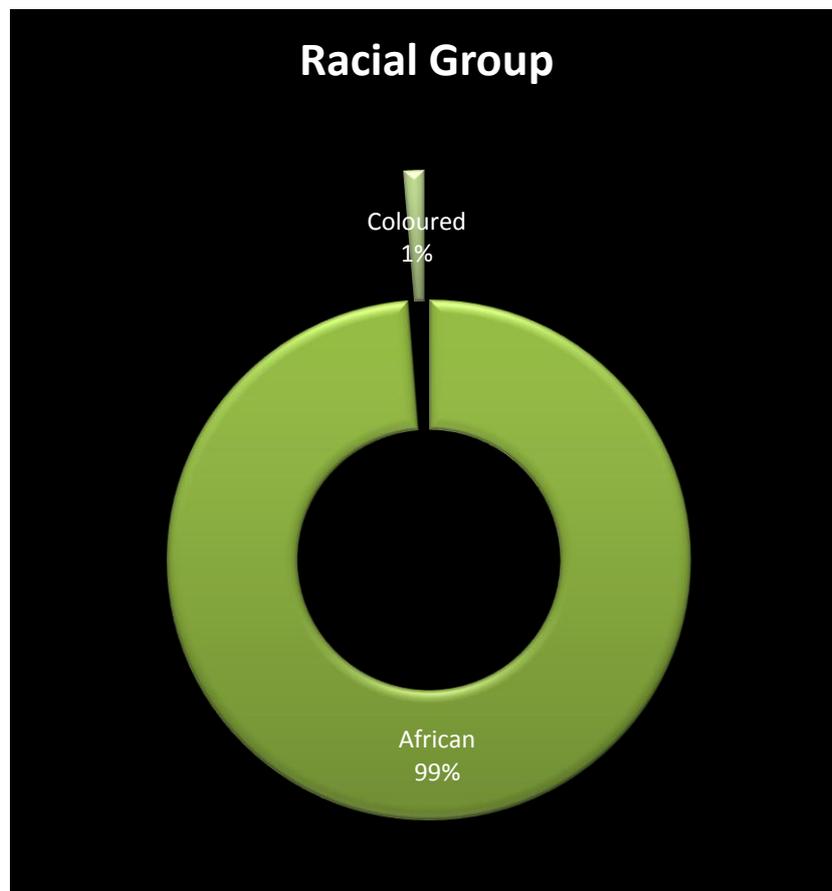


N/I = No indication

Sixty seven (67) participants were in the 17-20 age group range, eleven (11) participants were in the 21-25 age group range, one (1) participant was in the 26-30 age group range, and one (1) other participant did not indicate his age group range. The average age of the participants ranged between 17 years to 25 years, with one participant in the age group range of 26 years to 30 years. Comparison was made between the sources of information used in the Life Orientation program. Participants in the 17-20 age group mostly used internet, media, library, community, peers and parents. Participants in the 21-25 age group mostly used library, internet and community. It is interesting to observe how participants were able to interact with the community and parents in their respective age groups.

(c) Racial group

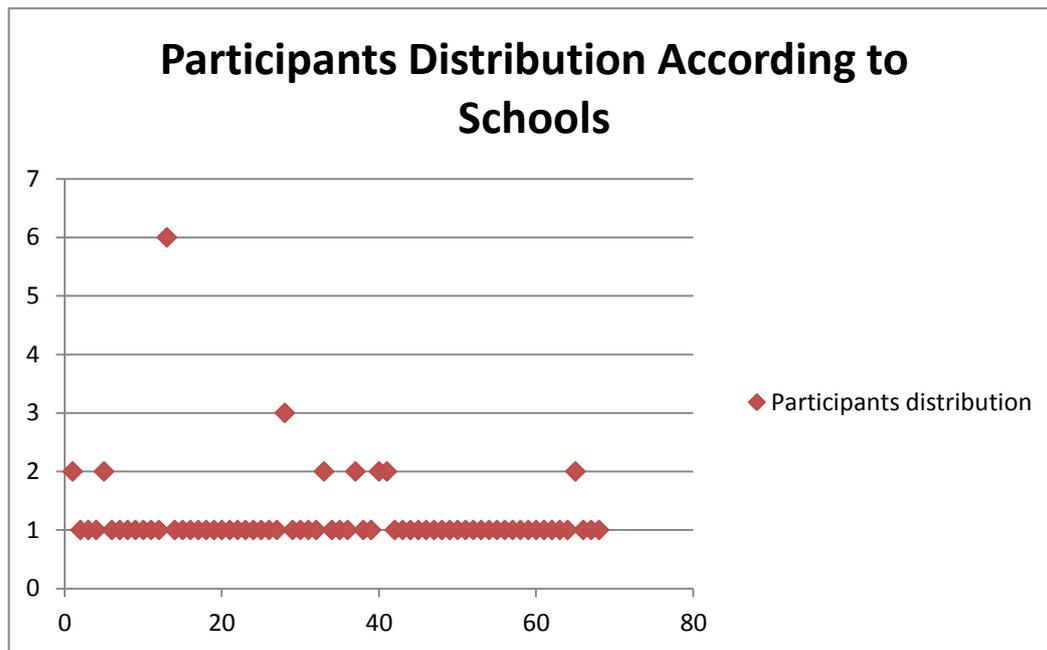
Figure 3



Seventy nine (79) participants belonged to the African racial group and one (1) participant belonged to the coloured racial group. The University of Zululand is mostly populated with African students.

(d) Schools attended by participants

Figure 4



Reflecting from the above description of the participants' schools, students selected were from various schools. Six (6) participants were from Khula High School, three (3) participants were from Greytown High School, and the following schools had two (2) participants each: Ekudubekeni High School, Mthwalume High School, Star of the Sea High School, Kufezekile High School, Siyamukela High School, and Masibumbane High School. Out of sixty eight (68) schools only eight (8) schools were represented more than once. Some schools were not properly represented because the focus was not on schools but on the beneficiaries of the life orientation program. Response comparison to question 5 was made on participants coming from the same school. The schools are widely distributed in the KwaZulu-Natal province, therefore participants' responses provide some information on how this program is offered in terms of the schools.

(e) Locations of the Schools

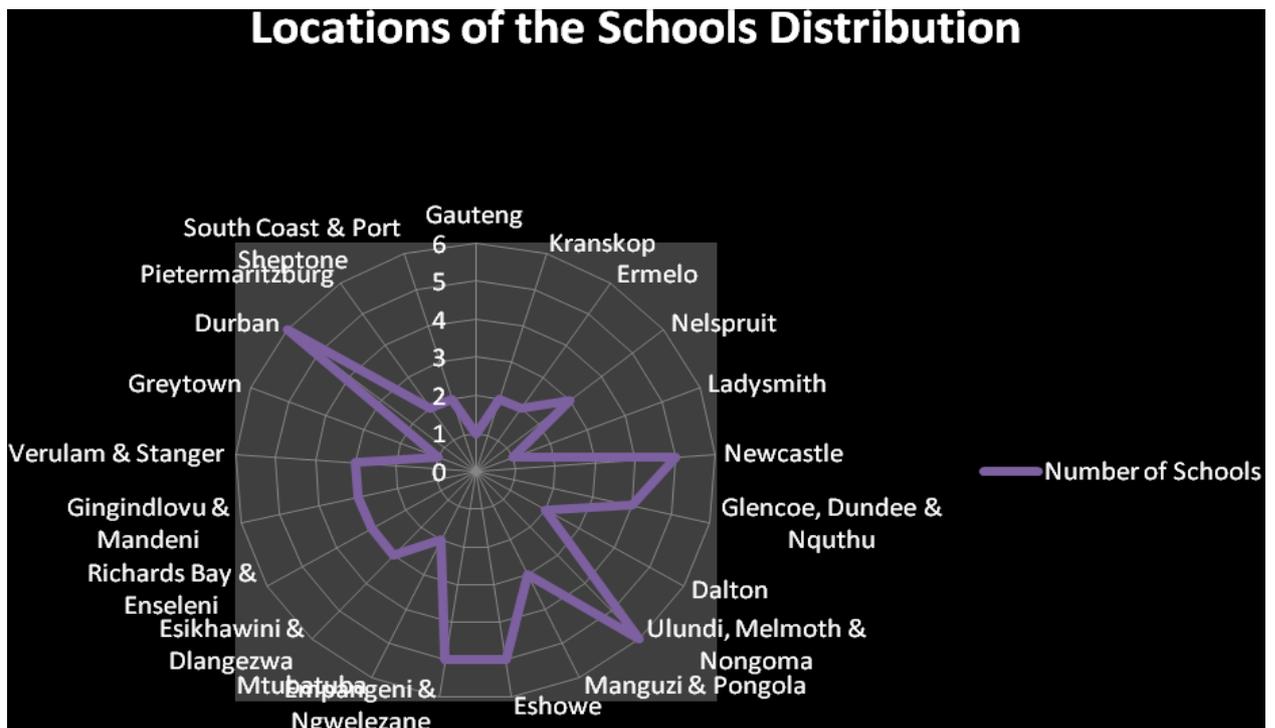
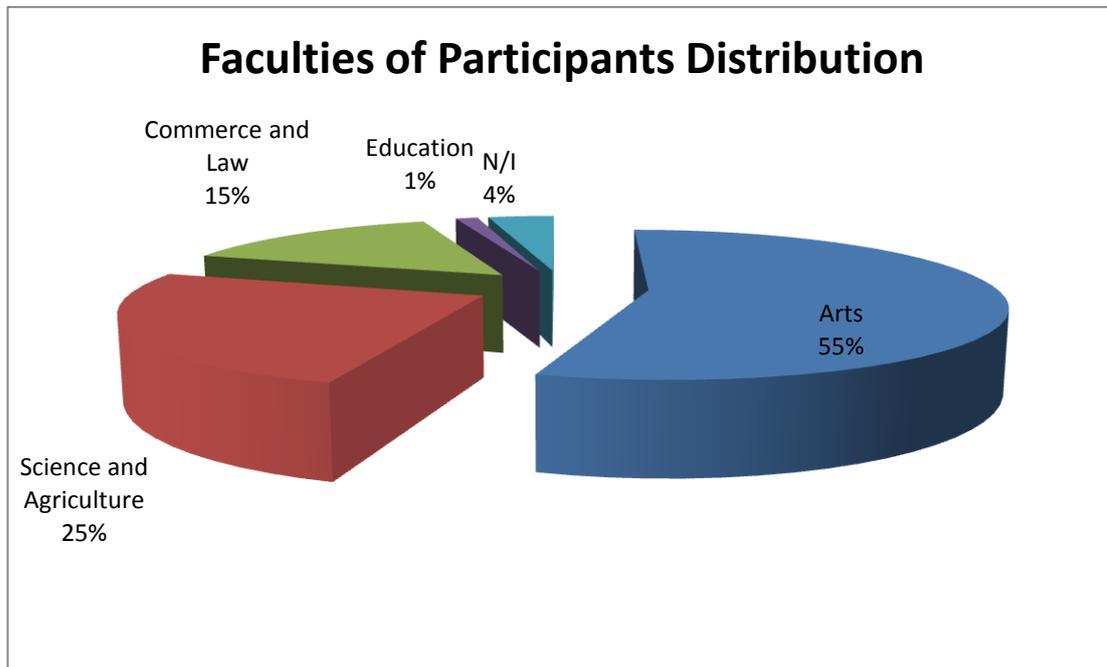


Figure 5

Participants selected were from different parts of KwaZulu-Natal with one participant from Gauteng. The vertical numbers indicate the number of schools located in that area. Ulundi, Melmoth and Nongoma were grouped together with six (6) schools representing those areas. Durban also had six (6) schools representing the area. Empangeni and Ngwelezane were grouped together with five (5) schools from that area, while Newcastle and Eshowe also had five (5) schools from the area. Glencoe, Dundee and Nquthu were grouped together with four (4) schools from these areas. The rest of the areas were represented by three (3) or less schools.

(f) Faculties of the participants

Figure 6



N/I = No Indication

The final sample consisted of participants from the following different faculties: Arts had forty four (44) participants, Science and Agriculture had twenty (20), Commerce and Law had twelve (12), Education had one (1), and three (3) participants did not indicate their faculties.

4.2.2 Interpretive Analysis

This section deals with interpretive analyses of learners' responses according to the questionnaire.

Question 1: Did you do Life Orientation at your school?

All the participants indicated that they did Life Orientation at high school.

Question 2: In which grade did you start doing Life Orientation?

Forty six (46) participants started doing Life Orientation below grade 8, twenty two (22) participants started in grade 8, two (2) participants started in grade 9, five (5) participants started in grade 10, two (2) participants started in grade 11, and none started the Life Orientation program in grade 12. The participants included both males and females. Out of seventy seven (77) participants, sixty eight (68) participants started doing Life Orientation below grade 8 and in grade 8. These participants had more exposure to the program, since they have attended it for a period of more than five years.

Question 3: How many minutes were there for a Life Orientation period?

Forty eight (48) participants reported that they had 60 minutes for the period of Life Orientation; twelve (12) participants reported that they had 45 minutes for the period of Life Orientation, and ten (10) participants reported between 45 minutes and 60 minutes. Five (5) participants had 40 minutes and less for the period of Life Orientation, and five (5) participants did not indicate the period for Life Orientation. It appears that seventy (70) out of eighty (80) participants were exposed to sufficient time for the Life Orientation program as the recommended time for this subject

period is 45 minutes to 60 minutes, as stated by the Department of Education in the curriculum that learners should spend approximately an hour per subject.

Question 4: How many teachers did you have at school who taught Life Orientation?

Fourteen (14) participants reported that they had one Life Orientation teacher, while another fourteen (14) participants reported that they had two Life Orientation teachers. Nineteen (19) participants reported that they had three teachers and eighteen (18) had four teachers who taught the subject. Seven (7) participants reported that they had five teachers and two (2) participants reported that they had six teachers who taught the subject. One (1) participant had fourteen teachers and another one (1) had eleven teachers. The participants had a lot of Life Orientation teachers. Seventy four (74) participants averaged between a minimum of one and a maximum of six teachers for the program. Four participants did not indicate how many teachers they had for the Life Orientation program. The number of teachers who taught Life Orientation was reported to be more than one. The Department of Education (2008), recommended that Life Orientation is taught using a team-teaching approach so that the responsibility of assessing all grade 10, 11 and 12 learners would not fall on the shoulders of one individual.

Question 5: What is Life Orientation?

Life Orientation was described differently. Participants' descriptions were organized into three themes that emerged.

Theme One: Life skills and issues education

Fourteen (14) participants reported Life Orientation as being a study of life skills. These fourteen (14) participants are all from different schools and they explained life orientation as a study of life skills. Their understanding of life skills included: dealing with peer pressure, decision making skills, self-control, communication skills, self-esteem, and life awareness especially about diseases. One participant said “Life Orientation is a subject where it aims at helping young people to understand life skills such as good decision making and enhance better relationships with other people in our communities”. This participant’s understanding reflects that it also enriches the youth with skills that they apply in their daily lives. Other participants explained Life Orientation as an art and a skill that allows people or learners to know themselves much more, what their role is in other people’s lives, and to understand others by knowing that we are all different and unique. The study of life skills reflects that it teaches individuals about life and what the youth have to expect in life in order to achieve their goals.

Thirty (30) participants reported Life Orientation as a study of life. Their explanations for the study of life included: values of life, human life, enlightenment of life and its problems, dealing with life situations, sport activities, how to live life and have a better future, life needs, life span, behaviour maintenance, life challenges, diversity in our country, and the life of teenagers and how teenagers should protect themselves against sexual diseases. These thirty (30) participants are also from different schools and they all had a minimum of 30 minutes up to a maximum of 60

minutes per period for the program. Out of these thirty (30) participants, twenty eight (28) participants started doing Life Orientation below grade 8 and in grade 8, while two (2) participants started Life Orientation in grades 9 and 10.

Three (3) participants who started Life Orientation in grade 8 reported the program as effective; it taught them how to be responsible, independent individuals, while learning to make their own decisions regarding situations they might face in the future. Another participant reported: "Life Orientation benefited me, because there are difficulties here in the University so I use the same information from Life Orientation to deal with those problems." One participant offered the following explanation: "life as inclusive of biological things for example HIV and AIDS and other diseases and how to look after yourself". Another participant stated "life which included health and well-being and reported herself as a responsible individual because of the Life Orientation program". Both these participants had three teachers who taught them Life Orientation although they started Life Orientation in different grades, one participant below grade 8 and the other participant in grade 8. It appears that Life Orientation equipped learners with skills that most people who did not do Life Orientation have to learn in a tertiary environment or workplace.

Theme Two: Health Promotion

Thirteen (13) of the participants reported Life Orientation as a study of health promotion. When participants defined health promotion they related it to well-being, healthy living, HIV and AIDS, early pregnancy and risks, and sex. One participant

reported: “It teaches us how to behave, communicate with others, and treat others fair. Life Orientation aims to teach youth of today about sex, pregnancy, abstinence, and the risk of unsafe sex and having many sexual partners.”

Six (6) participants who started the Life Orientation program below grade 8 explained health promotion as sports, physical health, studying of behaviour, sexuality and different diseases. Out of the six (6) participants, three (3) participants stated that benefits of health promotion include: continuation of participation in sports at the university, being able to control their diet, and avoiding unhealthy eating patterns. The other three (3) participants stated that they benefited in life skills in the following ways: problem-solving skills, respecting people especially those who are not South African citizens, and learning to cope with life’s challenges and not focusing on pleasing friends. Six (6) participants who started Life Orientation in grade 8 explained health promotion as healthy living, life style, learning about various diseases like HIV, and well-being.

One (1) participant who started Life Orientation in grade 11 explained health promotion as “inclusive of the life of the environment and keeping it healthy”. This participant reported that she benefited by learning to exercise self-control, and being able to socialise and communicate with her peers at the University. Four (4) participants attempted to explain health promotion, but they benefited in other areas that were not part of their explanation of health promotion. Health promotion is a fundamental aspect especially with the youth, aiming to eliminate the HIV prevalence

among youth by promoting safe sex and a healthy lifestyle. It is inspiring to hear reports from the youth that they are applying a healthy lifestyle.

Theme Three: Guidance

One (1) participant reported: "Life Orientation deals with life style, it prepares an individual for the future by teaching us about life skills and different career choices."

It was also viewed by another participant as a subject that "aims to equip children in schools with the basic tools to manage and live life correctly, and also be able to manage themselves in society". For this participant the subject teaches learners about life, prepares them for the adult world, helps make them better citizens and accomplish all they want in life. Nine (9) participants defined Life Orientation as guidance which included: how to deal with problems, everything that a person does in life, human orientation, preparation for the adult world, how humans or teenagers should behave, bodily changes that take place as one grows, and guidelines for dealing with change in life. These participants had a minimum of one teacher and a maximum of five teachers who taught the Life Orientation program.

The participants who defined Life Orientation as guidance included five (5) females and four (4) males. The female participants reported the benefits of guidance as: having a study plan, dealing with life challenges, loving oneself when no one else will, not allowing anyone to attack their confidence, having a goal in life, and knowing how to behave in public (not doing things that are unacceptable in the community). The male participants reported the benefits of guidance as: learning to think before

taking action, having study plans, awareness of certain dangers and how to deal with them, and understanding male puberty. Having a study plan was the common outcome in theme three.

Question 6: What do you think is the purpose of Life Orientation?

Thirty five (35) participants reported that the purpose of Life Orientation is to teach about life. Of these thirty five (35), there were twenty two (22) females, whose explanation of life included: dealing with stress, career choices, living life as teenagers, behaviour, having a knowledge of HIV and AIDS, sex education, dealing with life challenges, human development, awareness about life, healthy living, dealing with peer pressure, having goals in life, physical health, and dealing with relationship challenges. The thirteen (13) males explained life as: being educated about healthy living, exposing youth to the outside world, preparing youth for life problems and challenges, empowering and developing people in different positions in life, developing youth mentally to cope with peer pressure, human development, HIV and AIDS, the importance of sports, guidance for the youth, understanding of values, and knowledge of rights. In question 6, HIV and AIDS, peer pressure, healthy living, and life challenges were the common purposes of Life Orientation mentioned by participants.

Eight (8) participants reported HIV and AIDS education as the purpose of Life Orientation. Their explanation of HIV and AIDS education included: awareness of teenage pregnancy, how to take care of an HIV infected family member, Sexually

Transmitted Infection (STI) or Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), and the dangers of using drugs and drug abuse. Two (2) participants who reported HIV and AIDS as a purpose of Life Orientation, further benefited from learning of different diseases and how to protect themselves. Another participant reported that “she is still a peer educator at the university”. Five (5) participants reported developing their self-esteem as part of the purpose of the Life Orientation program. These participants gained self-esteem through playing indigenous games and sports in school, performing individual oral tasks in front of the class, group activities, and believing in themselves when doing an activity. Five (5) participants reported education in behaviour as part of the purpose of the Life Orientation program. Education in behaviour included: how to behave yourself, how to communicate with others, good manners, and awareness of bad behaviour. These participants engaged in activities that involved exercise, case studies, group discussions, sports, dancing, and essay writing in high school. All these participants were from different schools and had started doing Life Orientation at different levels, yet they had reported similar views on what the purposes of the Life Orientation program were.

Question 7: What were the activities done within the Life Orientation period?

Table 1: Life Orientation Activities

Number of Participants	Activities
79	Physical movement e.g. netball, soccer, exercise, sports, and indigenous games
38	Group discussions e.g. HIV & AIDS, first aid, talk shows, sex education, constitution, and debates.
18	Ice-breaker and Artistic performances e.g. cultural dancing, poetry, singing, drama, and interviews.
5	Case studies, scenarios, survival skills e.g. camping, and touring workplaces.
2	Career guidance e.g. doing research on different careers.
1	Journal writing e.g. recording the fitness program.

Activities covered within this program are important for life-long learning as stated by the Department of Education. Most activities were common across the schools that were represented by the participants. These results are indicative that the teachers do follow the pre-designed activities by the Department of Education.

Question 8: Please explain more about the activities that were done and what did you learn from them?

Different participants learnt different things from the activities that were covered during the Life Orientation period. Responses were summarized into six categories according to descriptions given by participants.

Communication Skills

Participant 11 said that: "In presentation, I learnt that if you are presenting something to people speak loud so that everyone can hear you, your dress code should not make people look at you with that "look" and be prepared. You must make sure that you do your research interview, be nice and believe in what you are saying."

Participant 50 said: "I learnt to be confident and to be fluent when speaking English and also how to answer questions in an interview and writing a C.V." Participant 32 said: "Debate helped me to learn how to communicate with other people and to actually hear their different views. Drama helped to boost my confidence towards people and music made me feel relaxed and very good about myself because it sometimes evoke emotions".

Life Skill

Participant 18 said: "We were taught how to counsel each other especially if someone comes to you and confided, how to protect ourselves from HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, I also learnt how to live a stress free life." Participant 44 said: "I learned different cultures, indigenous games, and cultural behaviours."

Participant 56 said: “When we tackled life problems, I learnt that violence is not a solution, we also learnt how to communicate with others in a group. We learnt to keep fit by playing sport.” Participant 57 said: “I have learnt that there is no need to stress yourself if you face a problem and you not the only one experiencing those problems.”

Healthy Living

Participant 37 said: “I learnt how to be healthy and live a balanced life, I also learnt that there is more to me than being just a teenager, and that I have the responsibility to make something good of myself.” Participant 15 said: “Our teacher used to take us outside and play games; this helped me to gain confidence in myself and to love my body, I also learnt some exercises that would keep my body in shape.” The experience of these participants demonstrates that, through Life Orientation, learners can develop more than just an understanding of physical fitness, they get an opportunity to engage in activities that keep them fit and healthy as well.

HIV and AIDS

Participant 12 said: “Activities we did were about teaching us to be healthy and how to live a healthy lifestyle. They also revolved around how we are so prejudiced on gender issues, but when we went outside our school, visiting orphans, we learnt how people became orphans through HIV and AIDS pandemic.” Participant 66 said: “I learnt to understand more about HIV and AIDS and to treat people with HIV and AIDS like normal people.” Participant 9 said: “I learnt a lot because now I know that

you must have one partner and be faithful to him and respect each other, use a condom if you have sex or otherwise abstain at all.” Participants engaged in activities that provided enlightenment on the issues of HIV and AIDS. Important points stressed to the youth are abstinence from sex and alcohol. Acquiring knowledge about HIV and AIDS can help reduce the spread of it, as they are taught to avoid having multiple sexual partners.

Human Rights and The Constitution

Participant 55 said: “Analysing the Constitution (Bill of Rights) about human rights made us aware of our rights.” The participant reported being enriched in human rights and the Constitution. Knowledge of one’s rights and obligations is very important for the protection of these rights and respect for the rights of others. If a person is ignorant of their rights, they are denying themselves these rights, therefore they should take action for their protection and advancement.

Question 9: Besides the Life Orientation periods, Life Orientation prescribed books and teachers, what other sources of information did you use?

Table 2: Sources of Information used

Sources of Information used	Number of times mentioned
Magazine (Soul City)	Twelve
Library	Thirteen
Community members	Twelve

Internet	Twenty
Heart line “short stories”	Two
Parents	Two
Friends	Two
Clinics	Seven
Pamphlets	Five
Newspapers	Twelve
Television	Eleven
Sport centers	Two
Peer education	Two
Church	One
Radio	One
Counselors	One

Twenty (20) participants mentioned that they use the internet as their source of information. Thirteen (13) participants are still using the library as their source of information. Most schools have their own library or students use the municipal library as there is no cost involved, as opposed to an internet café which carries a cost. Twelve (12) participants preferred to use magazines, newspapers and television which are the most common sources of information for communicating with the public. Another twelve (12) participants preferred to use the community or ‘informants’ as their source of information. The internet, library, media (newspaper

and television), and community were the most popular sources of information. Participants in the 17-20 age group mostly used the internet, media, library, community, peers and parents. Participants in the 21-25 age group mostly used the library, the internet, and the community. It was interesting how participants, in their respective age groups, were able to interact with the community and parents, since the assumption is that teenagers 'hardly' communicate with parents and community members, especially with a program that involves 'sensitive' topics. The participants' ability to engage with the community fulfills the Department of Education's critical development stipulation that 'students should be able to investigate within the community' (Department of Education, 2003). It is also interesting to see an increased use of the library from high school students, since students usually prefer to research using technology for convenience.

Question 10: Do you think you benefited from the Life Orientation program from your high school?

Seventy eight (78) participants reported that they benefited from the Life Orientation program and only one (1) participant reported that he did not benefit from it, and the other one (1) participant did not respond to the question. He stated that he did not benefit because he was told to eat healthily but the food provided in school was not healthy. It appears that the participant's judgment was not substantive enough to conclude that he did not benefit from the Life Orientation program.

Question 11: (a) If yes, how did it benefit you and does it still benefit you at the University of Zululand?

The participants listed the benefits from the Life Orientation program as follows: Personal Development, Skills Development, Respect, Careers, HIV and AIDS Awareness, Bad Behaviour Awareness e.g. using drugs and drinking alcohol, Peer Education, and Life after school (e.g. equipping for tertiary life). The reported benefits are concurrent with the Department of Education (2003), outcomes which the students should be benefiting from and applying in their lives, especially regarding awareness of the HIV and AIDS pandemic and drug usage that is increasingly affecting the youth and destroying family ties in South Africa.

Question 12: Comments: please add more information regarding Life Orientation which was not covered in the questionnaire and that you think is important.

Life Orientation as a module at University

Participants explored the effectiveness and benefits of the Life Orientation program and they recommended the continuation of the Life Orientation program in the Higher Educational level. Participant 32 said: "Life Orientation should not be stopped. Many children especially teenagers still struggle with life. They are not coping and there are many things that they need to know about teenage pregnancy, human development, HIV and AIDS. It should still continue even at the university." Participant 40 said: "I think Life Orientation should be made a module in university as well, because some young people do things that they regret later because of lack of

guidance.” These two participants reported that it would be effective and beneficial to continue with the subject as a form of guidance for other students as well as for themselves.

Subject Delivery

Five participants gave feedback on subject delivery.

- Participant 14 said: “This depends on a teacher who is teaching Life Orientation, like ours she was shy and hide other information on sex. I will recommend that they assign someone who can be able to talk about everything.”
- Participant 16 said: “We did benefit but not much because Life Orientation periods were only fewer than other subjects.”
- Participant 62 said: “The HIV and AIDS program was not fully explained during my school time.”
- Participant 23 said: “It is important to learners to be taught that they must not rely on their teachers and the books they have been given. They must go out to other resources like libraries, clinics, hospitals, and elders, to search for information.”
- Participant 52 said: “The subject of Life Orientation must be taught by a teacher who doesn’t rely on the text book but must also have background information and must also have gone through or have heard about someone who has the experience in those certain experiences, so he can give common examples of the text, so the learners can understand it more clearly.

The teacher must also use modern examples so the learners can be taught about things they familiar with.”

Although most of the participants previously attended different schools, they reported concerns regarding the subject delivery. Participants felt that the teachers were shy when talking about certain issues, had inadequate experience when discussing some issues, and there was insufficient scheduled time for the Life Orientation program. It is important that teachers are adequately prepared for the Life Orientation program, since it also involves “sensitive” or “uneasy” topics. The preparation would be on a suitably higher level if the teachers had majored in psychology or had a background in psychology. A background in psychology enhances skills of discretion, being non-judgmental, social skills, patience, active-listening, acceptance, and learning to engage with people of all age levels without being shy or controlling.

Parental Assistance

Participants expressed their appreciation at how Life Orientation has taught them what parents are afraid to teach them.

- Participant 35 said: “Life Orientation is important more especially at schools because other students get abused but they don’t know how to get help. It also encourage youth about different activities to do in order to keep you healthy and safe from other things like drugs and alcohol.”

- Participant 8 said: “Life Orientation is important; there are things that some of our parents are shy to tell us but through Life Orientation we are able to know things.”
- Participant 15 said: “Life Orientation is the most important subject than any practiced at school, because without self perseverance you will not achieve anything. Most of our parents are afraid to talk to their children. This leads to one committing suicide. Studying Life Orientation helps a lot, and it has helped me.”
- Participant 18 said: “Life Orientation is a very important subject, as it informs us about different issues that we will come across one day. We also learnt and discovered who we are and what our potential is. We also learn about sex and most of our questions were answered because it is not easy to talk about sex, AIDS or death with your friends and family members especially your parents.”

These participants appreciated what the subject had to offer as most parents or guardians avoid or do not speak about certain issues at home, for example issues around sex and HIV.

Life skills development

Participants learnt different life skills in the Life Orientation subject, and they voiced their appreciation on specific life skills acquired in the following comments:

- Participant 24 said: “Life Orientation is a study that teaches us a lot because it has helped me a lot today; maybe I was going to become an alcoholic and use drugs.”
- Participant 61 said: “If you have studied Life Orientation you will not use alcohol, drugs, and do unsafe sex. You are able to solve stress in a good way. You portray good communication, and you understand other people.”

Areas of Exploration

The following participant commented on possible areas of exploration with regard to the subject.

- Participant 39 said: “How Life Orientation helped those who had no information about their careers? How Life Orientation assist the ones who had been in an abusive background? Shall government provide special social assistance to the learners who have learnt more in Life Orientation?”

4.3 Resumé

This chapter presented data analysis and results of the study. Life skills most commonly reported included: communication; health promotion such as healthy living or eating, HIV and AIDS; and guidance. Participants’ responses demonstrated appreciation for what the program has offered them. The following chapter will focus on the discussion of results, conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This section discusses the results, draws conclusions and makes recommendations on the data collected. The study sought to answer the research question: “How effective is the Life Orientation program that is offered in high school in terms of learners’ ability to meet the curriculum’s critical development outcomes after completion of the program?”

5.2 Discussion of Results

Life Orientation has four learning outcomes in the FET phase program, namely: Personal Well-being; Citizenship Education; Physical Education; and Careers and Career Choices. All four learning outcomes are equally important and must be achieved, although some skills and values take longer to develop (Learning outcomes 1 and 3). This influences the amount of time spent on the various skills in the Life Orientation classroom. The Department of Education (2008), states that 72 hours should be made available for the teaching of Life Orientation in grades 10 and 11, and 60 hours in grade 12. This excludes internal examination periods. In grades 10 and 11, sixteen hours a year should be spent on activities related to learning outcome 1 (responsible decision-making), and 60 minutes per week (36 hours in total, i.e. 50% of contact time) should be spent on learning outcome 3 (Physical

Education). The remaining 20 hours should be split between learning outcomes 2 (Citizenship) and 4 (Careers and career choice). In grade 12, sixty minutes per week (30 hours in total, i.e. 50% of contact time) should be dedicated to learning outcome 3 (Physical Education). The remaining 30 hours should be split among learning outcomes 1, 2 and 4. Sixty (60) out of eighty (80) students, who started doing Life Orientation below grade 8 to grade 10, reported attending the Life Orientation program from 45 to 60 minutes per day. The Department of Education's suggested time allocation for the program corresponded with the reported time of the participants. It appears that participants were exposed to sufficient time for the program, even though there was no detailed specification of which learning outcome received more amount of time due to skills that needed more emphasis.

Effective teaching of the Life Orientation program also depends on the number of teachers involved in the program. Seventy four (74) participants out of eighty (80) reported having a minimum of one (1) to a maximum of six (6) teachers for the program. The Department of Education (2008), recommended that Life Orientation should be taught using a team-teaching approach so that the responsibility of assessing all grade 10, 11 and 12 learners does not fall on the shoulders of one individual. Schools could allocate one teacher per grade, that is, three teachers to teach Life Orientation. Alternatively, a school could allocate one teacher to teach the Physical Education period per grade or across the grades, while other teachers focused on the other content. This would help to spread the assessment load and allow teachers to develop expertise in their specific area(s) of responsibility.

Participants reported having more than one teacher presenting the Life Orientation program, which indicates that participants experienced the team-teaching approach. The team-teaching approach is expected to make it easier for the implementation of the program, while students are not overwhelmed with work (DoE, 2008). Most importantly, students should be able to learn, understand and feel comfortable with the Life Orientation teacher, i.e. students should be able to ask questions which are regarded as 'awkward' when put to other adults, for example questions regarding sexual education.

Life Orientation participants reported engaging in more practical activities and what they had learnt from those activities. Students were expected to learn from the areas of personal well-being, citizenship education, physical education, and careers and career choice. The teaching of the Life Orientation program was described by participants as active, experimental, and flexible. They participated in different activities during the Life Orientation program. The Department of Education (2008), states that activities need to be practical, allowing learners the opportunity to experience life skills in a hands-on manner. In addition, the classroom layout needs to accommodate active learning. Besides individual work, the use of experiential learning, facilitation, group work and continuity, support the teaching of Life Orientation. Individual work allows learners to explore a variety of lifestyle options from a personal perspective before committing to a decision. In experiential learning, learners practice life skills in the classroom and reflect on these experiences (Department of Education, 2008).

The activities involved mostly physical movements, group discussions, artistic performances, career guidance, case studies and survival skills. These activities within the Life Orientation program enhanced the participants' communication skills, healthy living, education on HIV and AIDS, life skills, human rights and the Constitution (Bill of Rights). Communication skills are vital for an individual. Communication can be verbal or non-verbal. Verbally, an individual would express themselves by saying something, and non-verbally, an individual may express themselves through body language or through activities like music and drama. It is important that when a person communicates, they have confidence, self esteem, active listening, and understanding. From these activities the Department of Education expects certain critical developments in the lives of participants (critical developments will be further explained in benefits of the Life Orientation program).

The participants accessed different sources of information besides the teacher and the books prescribed by the Department of Education. The common sources were the library, internet, clinics, television, newspapers, and the community. Internet is the preferred medium of communication for the youth of today, not only for assignments but for social networking. Participants prefer to use the internet as it is faster and easier than looking for a book in the library. Alternatively, most schools have their own library, or the students use the municipal library, where access to information does not carry any cost, as opposed to an internet café.

A library is usually the recommended source of information because it contains books that have been reviewed, authorized and approved by the academic publishing companies. Also of interest were the attempts by participants to approach community members as a source of academic information in the Life Orientation program. It appears that the community still avails itself for the academic development of the youth (one would assume the opposite because of increased usage of technology). The participants' responses also demonstrated improvements in most shortcomings that were identified in previous research by Rooth (2005).

When participants attempted to explain Life Orientation, three themes emerged from their understanding, namely; life skills education, health promotion, and guidance.

Life skills education

Their understanding of life skills included being able to deal with pressure, decision-making skills, self-control, communication skills, self-esteem, life awareness about diseases, value of life, human life, enlightenment of life and its problems, dealing with life situations, life needs and lifespan, behaviour maintenance, life challenges, diversity in our country, protection from diseases as teenagers, responsibility, independence, health and well-being.

Health promotion

Participants' understanding of health promotion included sports participation, physical health, studying of behaviour, sexuality and different diseases, healthy

living, learning about various diseases like HIV and well-being, life of the environment and keeping it healthy.

Guidance

Guidance included gaining the basic tools to manage and live life correctly, managing themselves in society, dealing with problems, human orientation, preparation for the adult world, understanding human development (puberty), study plans, self-confidence and self-love.

Previous discussion indicates that the participants' understanding of the term 'Life Orientation' was concurrent with the Department of Education's formal definition in the Life Orientation Curriculum (2003). This demonstrates teachers' understanding of the subject. The Department of Education (2003), explained Life Orientation as the study of the self in relation to others and to society. It applies a holistic approach. It is concerned with the personal, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, motor and physical growth and development of learners, and the way in which these dimensions are interrelated and expressed in life. The focus is the development of the self in society, and the development of balanced and confident learners who will contribute to a just and democratic society, a productive economy, and an improved quality of life for all.

Life Orientation guides and prepares learners for life, and for its responsibilities and possibilities. This subject addresses knowledge, values, attitudes and skills about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, healthy and productive living, social

engagement, recreational and physical activity, and career choices. It equips learners with the skills to solve problems, to make informed decisions and choices, and to take appropriate action to enable them to live meaningfully and successfully in a rapidly-changing society (Department of Education, 2003).

Criticism of Life Orientation

Life Orientation (LO) has received some criticisms; either the teachers are not competent to teach the subject, or the subject is not taken seriously by students. Jansen (Times Live, 2011), stated that the subject should be taught in general to young people. This appears to indicate that LO should not form part of the school curriculum. He goes on to state that he wonders whether a high school education speaks to the choices that learners make which have life-altering consequences. Whilst one may agree that most of the subject matter covered in LO should be taught by parents at home, one cannot ignore the fact that there are quite a number of young people that come from dysfunctional families and that children often have to make their own decisions with regard to life situations. The Life Orientation subject is intended to fill this gap. Therefore, this subject cannot be dismissed as another attempt by the government to lower the standards in order to increase the pass rate of matriculants. It should be taken seriously as an outreach program to facilitate the development of young people into responsible adulthood. If there are any concerns with regard to subject content and delivery, these should be brought forward for discussion and improvement rather than critical dismissal.

Regarding the question of the Life Orientation teacher being the one vested with sole responsibility for preparing young people to lead a responsible and compassionate life, the government's recommendation was that Life Orientation should be taught using a team-teaching approach. Also, the existence of such a subject does not absolve parents of their responsibility to guide young people in life, but life demands currently are such that extra efforts are required in order to guide young people. Learning the necessary skills to succeed in the world as an adult is imperative for children. Children who fail to learn basic life skills may have a harder time adapting to adulthood and coping with the stresses and challenges that occur once they are on their own. Teaching life skills to children can better prepare them for college, the workplace, and raising a family. This study approaches the Life Orientation program from the social, health, economic, and cultural aspects of the learners' needs, and it appears that keeping Life Orientation in the curriculum is still vital. In societies where life skills education is well developed and practiced, the well-being of the society is enhanced, and a positive outlook and healthy behaviour is promoted. In particular, it enables the individual to translate knowledge, attitude, skills and values into action.

This leads to healthy living, developing a positive attitude towards themselves and others, promoting a state of mental well being, promoting risk free behaviour, and improving self-perception. It also improves the socialization process among learners, for instance, how to relate to others in a friendly way. It enables learners to choose good, reliable friends and encourages learners to use their leisure time properly, assisting them to recognize and avoid risky situations. It brings about meaningful

interaction among learners, teachers and the school community, and assists in character building.

Critical development outcomes by the Department of Education

The Department of Education (2008), listed the following critical developments which are expected from the students after finishing the program:

- The student *should* be able to organise and manage him or herself using strategies to deal with personal issues and developing a plan to achieve his or her goals.
- The student *should* be able to demonstrate initiative in identifying and utilising opportunities and taking responsibility for self-development within a dynamic environment.
- The student *should* be able to demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising habit-forming drugs and their impact on society.
- The student *should* be able to communicate effectively in presenting relevant information by investigating different types of work environments and discussing available training opportunities.
- The student *should* be able to identify and solve problems when encountering obstacles to personal development.
- The student *should* be able to use science and technology effectively when using the computer.

- The student *should* be able to work effectively with others as a member of a team discussing matters relating to Life Orientation.
- The student *should* be able to participate as a responsible citizen in the life of the local, national and global communities by identifying and learning about values and norms of behaviour and how this impacts on the above.
- The student *should* be able to collect, organise and evaluate information by investigating issues in the community (Department of Education, 2008).

The students reported the following benefits and critical developments from the Life Orientation program:

- The Life Orientation program enabled students to demonstrate initiative in identifying and utilising opportunities, and taking responsibility for self-development within a dynamic environment. These participants benefited in the most important areas for the youth: confidence, self-esteem, and loving oneself as a human being.
- The Life Orientation program enabled the students to identify and solve problems when encountering obstacles to personal development. The program also enabled the students to understand and accept themselves as unique and worthwhile beings. Two participants stressed the benefits of learning how to cope with challenges, dealing with pressure, and most importantly, communication. Acquiring these skills enables a person to take risks and set challenging goals, encourages trying again if at first you don't

succeed, and assists in controlling emotions and fears when situations get rough.

- The Life Orientation program demonstrated the value of and encouraged respect for human rights, as reflected in ubuntu and other similar philosophies, as well as respecting the rights of people to hold personal beliefs and values. Participants reported acquiring the benefits of respect, which is part of ubuntu and is encouraged in most African countries. Ubuntu promotes cohabitation – tolerance, peace, understanding and acceptance of all races and creeds in the human household. Ubuntu reminds people in the household that they are all part of the greater human family and that all depend on each other. It promotes peace and understanding.
- The Life Orientation program enabled students to practice acquired life and decision making skills. It also enabled them to access career and other opportunities, and to set goals that will allow them to make the best use of their potential and talent.
- The Life Orientation program enabled students to develop positive psychological well-being. Participants reported gaining self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-esteem, autonomy (independence, assertiveness, and dealing with peer pressure), forming positive relations with people from different countries and cultures, having a purpose in life and learning how to overcome challenges in the world.

- One participant continued to be a peer educator at university, having started this in high school. The Life Orientation program does not specifically recommend becoming a peer educator, although being a peer educator encourages certain aspects of Life Orientation, e.g. respect for others and their confidentiality, which develops trust with people and helps to maintain relationships with friends.

It appears that the participants were able to meet the curriculum's critical development outcomes as pre-designed by the Department of Education (2008).

The conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model was identified as relevant for the study. This framework is based on the systems theory which explains mutual relationships between people, communities and institutions working together to establish a balance in a person's life. It states that the whole is totally dependent on the interaction between the various parts, and vice versa (Bronfenbrenner, 1999).

The Bronfenbrenner Ecological Diagram on page 36 indicates how the varied lives of human beings (specifically of children and youth), interact with other systems. The Life Orientation program is designed for schools and is the learning subject area that provides individuals with the ability to understand and know themselves. It promotes relationships between peers, families, and the community. When students achieve the curriculum's critical developments, they develop the self. If personal development together with the acquisition of life skills is promoted in more individuals through the Life Orientation program, we could live in a less chaotic environment. Psychologists

could play an important role in facilitating the development of the curriculum. Life Orientation may appear to be a program that does not need much attention, but it is vital in promoting a balanced society.

It appears that much effort was applied by the teachers and students alike, to make the program a success. As much as the Outcomes Based Education system was criticized for not being good for the children, the researcher hopes that this research will create a different view of this system, as it explores the positive aspects while working on improving shortcomings. This study shows that Life Orientation has growth potential and sustainability, not only for students but also the program itself.

5.3 Research Paradigm

The study lies within the interpretive research paradigm. An interpretive paradigm is based on the assumption that all human action is meaningful and has to be interpreted and understood in the context of social practice (Seedat, Duncan & Lazarus, 2001). Interpretive studies generally attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them. The approach in this study was the use of open-ended, pre-designed questions so that participants were able to express themselves in writing. Questions were broad and general to allow participants an opportunity to explore their experiences. Reported subjective meanings were negotiated socially, they were not simply imprinted on individuals. They were formed through interaction with others and through norms that operate in individuals' lives (Creswell, 2003). Often in interpretivism, researchers are used as

analytical instruments (Seedat et al, 2001). The researcher used content and thematic analysis to extract meaning from the participants' responses. It has often been stated that findings from interpretive studies cannot be generalized, because of the subjectivity of meaning. In this study participants' responses, subjective as they were, expressed meanings that were congruent to the Department of Education's pre-designed objectives and critical development outcomes.

5.4 Limitations of the study

- The research topic solely focused on those students that have gained entry into the university and who probably had done well in the subject, and excluded those that had failed the subject or were not enrolled at the university. These students may have stable family backgrounds as opposed to the ones that never made it to the university.
- A comparative analysis between students who attended Life Orientation and those who did not would yield even more information on the effectiveness of the program.
- School representation was limited.
- The spoilt data of twenty participants could have enriched the information gathered.

5.5 Recommendations

A similar research study could be conducted in a more systematic manner within the province, as well as in other provinces, in order to establish if all students who

attended the Life Orientation program benefited in the same manner as the participants in this study. Further research could be done for the purpose of examining differences in the curriculum's critical development outcome between learners who began Life Orientation in grade 8 and those who began the program in grade 10. This might speak to the possible longitudinal effects of the Life Orientation program. Another study needs to be done to investigate the preparation of teachers in the delivery of this program in schools, as the Department of Education relies heavily on the teaching approach chosen by the teacher.

5.6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to enquire into the effectiveness of the Life Orientation program offered in schools. The research was motivated by the subject's contribution in mental health. The effectiveness was investigated through learners that were exposed to this program. The results of the study indicate positive gains from the subject. South Africa is a third world country and the number of mental health professionals is limited. Mental health delivery is therefore beyond the reach of many people. The skills learnt in this program are valuable in the prevention of ill-health and psychological problems.

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Annexure A

INFORMED CONSENT

I am **Christel Khanyisile Manzini**, a Master's student in Counselling Psychology. You are being asked to participate in research studies that use "An Appreciative Enquiry into the Life Orientation program that is offered at high school." Life Orientation has recently been introduced to schools and it is of interest to find out the opinions of people who have participated in it. This study will serve as my academic requirement in the master's program.

If you agree to participate in this study, please take note of the following before giving your consent (by signing this form):

- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent to participate at any time, without any consequences to me.
- I understand that this study will contribute to scientific knowledge that will be used to help others.
- I understand that all information collected will be confidential.
- In all probability, there will be publications or other educational uses based on the information collected from me. These publications will present data (information) anonymously and they will not include any material that is identified with me or my name.

I have read the above and give my consent to participate in this study and also agree that I will fill in the questionnaire and hand it over to the researcher.

.....

Signature of the participant

.....

Date

.....

Place

Annexure B

AN APPRECIATIVE ENQUIRY INTO THE LIFE ORIENTATION PROGRAM THAT IS OFFERED IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Instructions to participants

1. Please read through each statement carefully before giving your opinion.
2. Please make sure you do not omit a question or skip a page.
3. Please be honest when giving your opinion.
4. Please return the questionnaire after completion.

Kindly answer all the questions by supplying the requested information in writing or by marking with this sign [(x)] in the appropriate block in that question.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Annexure C

Section A - Demographics of the participants

1. Please indicate your gender

Female

Male

2. Please indicate your age range

17-20

21-25

26-30

Above 30

3. Please indicate your race

African

White

Colored

Indian

Other

4. Please indicate the name of the high school you last attended:

.....
.....

5. Please indicate the location of your school:

.....
.....

6. Please indicate the degree you are doing at the University of Zululand:

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.....

Annexure D

Section B – Open-ended questionnaire

1. Did you do Life Orientation at your school?

Yes

No

2. In which grade did you start doing Life Orientation?

Below Grade 8

Grade 8

Grade 9

Grade 10

Grade 11

Grade 12

3. How many minutes were there for a Life Orientation period?

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4. How many educators did you have at school who taught Life Orientation?

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5. What is Life Orientation?

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6. What do you think is the purpose of Life Orientation?

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7. What were activities done within the Life Orientation period?

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8. Please explain more about the activities that were done and what did you learn from them.

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9. Besides the Life Orientation periods, Life Orientation prescribed books and Life Orientation teachers, what other sources of information did you use regarding the activity given to you?

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10. Do you think you benefited from the Life Orientation program in your high school?

Yes

No

11. Please answer one of the following (depending on your answer to no. 10 above):

(a) If yes, how did it benefit you and is it still benefiting you at the University of Zululand?

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(b) If no, why it did not benefit you and what are you doing differently to benefit at the University of Zululand, academically?

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