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## Life orientation teachers' perspectives on a pastoral approach to the topic: "Development of the self in society"

Carmen Joubert 

School of Psycho-Social Education and COMBER Research Entity, Faculty of Education, North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa  
carmen.joubert@nwu.ac.za

Life Orientation (LO) teachers should be prepared to employ a pastoral approach – i.e., emotional support to learners – particularly when facilitating the topic "Development of the self in society" as prescribed in the curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS). Currently, LO teachers have limited knowledge and strategies to develop a pastoral approach due to limited training and resources. The purpose of this article is to present 10 LO teachers' perspectives on employing a pastoral approach. Two unstructured focus-group interviews were conducted, and the data were analysed inductively following a qualitative research design. The analysis indicates that LO teachers are constrained by their lack of access to resources, assistance, expertise and competencies to establish a pastoral approach. To address this, it is recommended that a variety of teaching strategies are applied, attachment relationships are developed, proficiencies akin to those of community counsellors are acquired, cooperative partnerships are set up, and contextually appropriate interventions are tailored. Implementing suggestions that emerged from the findings might support LO teachers to employ a pastoral approach. Recommendations from the findings imply possible LO curriculum reformation and training. This might bring about a change in the attitude of school communities towards the compulsory nature of LO as a subject. It might also provide more nurturing and supportive relationships in schools and a more socially just dispensation for all involved.

**Keywords:** LO curriculum; pastoral role; psychosocial support strategies; self in society

### Introduction

Life orientation (LO) teachers are encouraged to use a pastoral approach by emotionally supporting and referring learners when teaching the topic, "Development of the self in society" (hereafter referred to as the topic) prescribed in the curriculum and assessment policy statement for life orientation (LO CAPS) (cf. Tables 1 and 2). A part of the aim with the topic is to prepare and equip learners to interact and respond optimally to life's responsibilities and to make responsible decisions on all levels. These levels include the "personal, psychological, cognitive, motor, physical, moral, spiritual, cultural and socio-economic" aspects of learners (Department of Basic Education [DBE], Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2011a:8, 2011b:8). However, when teaching the topic, teachers might not be equipped to be emotionally supportive mediators of the content taught and the challenges that learners experience in their everyday lives. The purpose of this article is to investigate the ways in which LO teachers can facilitate, mediate and navigate towards providing psychological support by embracing a pastoral role when teaching the subject matter of the topic.

### Literature Review

The pastoral role of teachers is one of the seven mandated roles outlined in the *Revised policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications* that form part of the "community, citizenship and pastoral role" (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], RSA, 2015:5). This role entails promoting values and justice within the school system, demonstrating an understanding of key community challenges, and providing an empowering environment for learners in the classroom. More specifically, to use a pastoral approach means to support learners on an emotional level by being approachable, open and having skills similar to those of counsellors (Pillay, 2012). This includes having the following necessary competencies to deal with sensitive curriculum content: rational competencies (i.e., problem-solving and knowledge skills), emotional competencies (i.e., self-awareness and awareness of others), and ethical competencies (i.e., values) (Joubert & Hay, 2019). Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary to illustrate the sensitive curriculum content that LO teachers need to mediate within the topic:

**Table 1** An overview of the CAPS topic, "Development of the self in society", in the Senior Phase (DBE, RSA, 2011a:10)

Topic	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
1 Development of the self in society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept: self-image</li> <li>• Changes in boys and girls: puberty</li> <li>• Peer pressure</li> <li>• Concepts: personal diet and nutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concepts: self-concept formation and self-motivation</li> <li>• Concept: sexuality</li> <li>• Relationships and friendships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal-setting skills: personal lifestyle choices</li> <li>• Sexual behaviour and sexual health</li> <li>• Challenging situations: depression, grief, loss, trauma and crisis</li> </ul>

**Table 2** An overview of the CAPS topic, “Development of the self in society”, in the further education and training (FET) Phase (DBE, RSA, 2011b:10)

Topic	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
1 Development of the self in society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness, self-esteem and self-development</li> <li>• Power, power relations and gender roles</li> <li>• Value of participation in exercise programmes</li> <li>• Life roles: nature and responsibilities</li> <li>• Changes towards adulthood</li> <li>• Decision-making regarding sexuality</li> <li>• Recreation and emotional health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and achieve life goals: problem-solving skills</li> <li>• Relationships and their influence on well-being</li> <li>• Healthy lifestyle choices: decision-making skills</li> <li>• Role of nutrition in health and physical activities</li> <li>• Gender roles and their effects on health and well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life skills required to adapt to change as part of ongoing healthy lifestyle choices</li> <li>• Stress management</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> <li>• Human factors that cause ill-health</li> <li>• Action plan for lifelong participation in physical activity</li> </ul>

The sensitive issues listed in the tables above can only be successfully taught by LO teachers who have sufficient rational, emotional, and ethical competencies to provide psychosocial support to learners who are at risk. Psychosocial support implies that the LO teacher forms the necessary relationships and referral networks within ecological systems to enable access to support resources for their school community. Psychosocial support includes the enablement of well-being and holistic health of a school community by mediating access towards resource networks (Van Zyl, Webb & Wolvaardt, 2021).

Learners are at risk when they are not adequately prepared and equipped to optimally respond to life’s challenges such as issues with low self-worth, gender inequality, a lack of cultural identity, a lack of understanding of sexuality, poor decision-making, and poor health choices (Tucker, George, Reardon & Panday, 2017). This can cause depression and anxiety that lead to life disorientation when learners struggle with overcoming life challenges. Life disorientation develops further when access to appropriate support is not available. Sometimes the only access learners have to support is in the LO classroom as resources such as psychological services are a scarcity in developing countries (Joubert & Hay, 2020). Disorientation also exists within the LO curriculum with LO teachers not efficiently trained to execute LO content and to emotionally support at-risk youth.

LO literature focuses on the challenges that LO teachers experience with regard to executing the LO curriculum and on school communities’ responses to the LO curriculum content (Hartell, Mosia & Steyn, 2013). Some LO literature also focuses on the ineffectiveness of the teaching of

sexuality and health education as part of the topic (DBE, RSA, 2011a:10; Jacobs, H & Frantz, 2014; Mturi & Bechuke, 2019:134). An ineffectiveness perspective may also be true for the implementation of other LO content and might not only apply to certain parts of the topic. This is partly the consequence of a lack of support and resources for LO teachers, as the subject is marginalised by the attitude and ignorance of fellow colleagues, learners, and parents (Hay, 2015). More specifically, learners view the LO curriculum as pointless, uninteresting, and unrelated to real-life challenges (Jacobs, A 2011).

Another challenge is a lack of material resources and skilled teachers, especially in underdeveloped countries such as South Africa. Although the Department of Education has made strides in addressing inequality among schools by providing governmental resources such as textbooks, there is still a lack of psychosocial support resources in impoverished schools (Burnett, 2020). Contrary to countries such as South Africa, in developed countries (such as the United States of America) professional communities provide more support in the school system, especially regarding psychosocial support to at-risk learners. Sufficient psychosocial support systems are invaluable, as they meet the needs of school communities and at-risk learners. Additionally, teachers find it challenging when faced with delicate matters such as sexuality, divorce, and human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). Teachers do not possess the psychosocial reinforcement tactics, capabilities, and self-assurance necessary to aid students when teaching these topics (Speizer, Mandal, Xiong, Makina, Hattori & Durno, 2020). Feeling

overworked and experiencing time constraints in managing teaching obligations hinder efforts to teach effectively. The importance of focusing on the psychological well-being and resilience of teachers to improve life disorientation in learners becomes evident (Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012).

In a recent study, a bibliotherapeutic intervention proved to be effective in capacitating teachers to provide psychosocial support for at-risk learners by enhancing an attachment relationship with the learners (Joubert & Hay, 2019). If learners experience a positive attachment relationship, a foundation is laid for the possibility of other positive relationships later in life. Another strategy highlighted in LO literature is the need for appropriate training and reskilling of LO teachers to address the lack of knowledge and skills in the LO subject area (George, Tucker, Panday & Khumalo, 2018). An alternative strategy is the emphasis on social networking and community collaboration to mobilise resources in impoverished school communities (Jimmyns & Meyer-Weitz, 2019).

Authors in recent LO literature challenge the execution of the current LO curriculum, with only a few general suggestions made on improvement strategies and some interventions being implemented to change the current status of LO (Burnett, 2020; Stroebel, Hay & Bloemhoff, 2019). However, there is a gap in the literature with regard to relevant suggestions on strategies to redirect the life disorientation experienced by both learners and teachers when teaching the topic within a school community. In my study, I posed the following research question: What are LO teachers' challenges and suggestions to employ a pastoral approach when facilitating the goals with the topic, "Development of the self in society", within a school community context? In the next section I discuss the theoretical framework on which this research question was based.

#### Theoretical Framework

Some concepts of three theoretical frameworks can be used to explore how a pastoral approach could be employed in teaching the topic. These are the holistic well-being theory (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002), Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of child development (1979), and Bernstein's structural curriculum theory (1977). The first two theories were the foundation for the aim with this research and are interlinked. They support a holistic approach to develop healthy school communities by focusing on the well-being of the entire school community. However, this cannot happen in isolation as school communities need to focus on all levels and systems that have an impact on learners and the school's well-being. A multilevel well-being approach regarding the impact that LO teachers might have on learners in the classroom

needs to be considered at an individual and interpersonal level as well as at the level of the school and the wider community. The relational impact that LO teachers and school communities can have on learners can be positive when using a holistic ecosystemic approach to provide the necessary psychosocial support to apply the necessary resources.

However, the educational system and how changes in the curriculum are perceived by school communities have an impact on how positive the facilitation of LO content is. Thus, the third theory supports the first two theories in that the focus is on how the content within the LO curriculum is structured and changed over time, and on the relational impact that it has on school community members' attitudes (especially teachers' attitudes) towards the LO curriculum (Hartell et al., 2013). Bernstein's structural curriculum theory (1977) focuses on the changes to and implementation of a curriculum and how these affect the formal transmission of educational information. How teachers experience such changes and how accepting they are of the changes affect how educational information is transmitted to learners.

For curriculum implementation to be successful, the focus should be on the strengths rather than the weaknesses thereof. The LO teacher should be able to facilitate the LO curriculum in a way that has a positive impact on both teachers and learners. This would then have an impact on the school community at large and could possibly lead to attitude changes towards the LO curriculum. If learners are supported on a psychosocial level, the positive effect thereof might be transferred to real-life challenges. This would place impoverished schools in a more socially just position to provide the necessary psychological support to learners until professional support becomes available.

#### Research Method

##### Research Design and Paradigm

An interpretivist paradigm was used in this research; this paradigm supports social constructivist research, which assumes that people view the world in their own significant way, and this influences how they make sense of the world (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). In chronicling the challenges and suggestions on how a pastoral approach can be employed to minimise life disorientation experienced by learners when the content of the topic is taught, a qualitative design with a phenomenological strategy of inquiry was used (Jemielniak & Ciesielska, 2018).

##### Participant Selection and Ethics

Participants in this study were purposively selected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All the participants were former LO students at the university where the author was employed at the time of the study

and were, therefore, easily accessible. Although sampling bias could be implied, easy access to the participants was logistically simpler. The criterion for selection was that participants were LO teachers in the Senior and FET Phases in secondary public schools in the Gauteng province. All participants indicated that their schools experienced challenges with at-risk learners, financial constraints and were in need of psychosocial support structures. The research was approved, and ethical clearance was obtained from the North-West University (NWU) Institutional Ethics Committee (approval number 00863-19-A2). Before the focus-group interviews were held, informed consent was obtained from all participants.

#### Data Collection Method and Analysis

Data were collected by means of two unstructured focus-group interviews – one with each group of participants. Focus groups were regarded as being suitable, as the teachers were part of a group with a shared interest in developing a pastoral approach in the teaching of the LO curriculum (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The duration of each interview was one and a half hours. I decided to divide the 10 participants randomly into two groups of five, as five participants in a focus group is ideal for optimal interaction without some individuals dominating the interview. I asked the main research question as stated in the introduction and followed up with probing questions to elicit more elaborate and clarifying responses. Each focus group yielded a set of data. The two data sets were compared, and inductive content analysis was used, as the data determined the set of codes and themes (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). All essential steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness. By following the systematic data analysis process described above, I am confident of the validity of the findings that emerged.

#### Findings and Discussion

The findings were used to support the two themes that emerged from the data. The themes were supported by the participants. Participants 1 to 5 (P1–P5) formed the first focus-group and Participants 6 to 10 (P6–P10) the second focus group. Verbatim narrations are provided as examples of what most participants agreed on.

#### Challenges that Influence Employing a Pastoral Approach

The participating teachers reported that the challenges that influenced the development of a pastoral approach included a lack of support and resources in schools as well as a lack of an understanding of and experience in psychosocial support.

#### *Lack of support and resources in schools*

As was mentioned in the introduction, various challenges arise when there is a lack of support and resources for LO teachers in schools. A lack of support and inadequate school infrastructure are challenges that might hinder LO teachers to provide psychosocial support. This is particularly true if learners are left to their own devices due to a lack of contextual support:

*It affects you in a negative way because even though sometimes you can see learners are struggling, but due to lack of support from the school-based support teams and school management teams, there is no system that you can follow to help those learners; you just have to watch them being labelled as troubled learners (P6).*

Participants reported the non-involvement and non-compliance of parents and teachers as their biggest challenges to providing support to learners. For example, Participant 7 explained: “*We have a challenge when the parents they don’t give their consent for us to help the learners, and then there is also a lack of support from my colleagues.*” Participant 9 concurred, expressing frustration: “*... and the other challenge is the one that you will keep on calling parents to school, they never come to school, some are in denial about their children.*”

Participants also felt that they did not get support from their colleagues, as the role of pastoral carer is regarded as that of the LO teachers: “*... lack of cooperation from colleagues, as they feel that they are not responsible for any counselling of learners, it is not their job*” (P6). However, the role of pastoral career is mandated as one of the seven roles of all teachers (DHET, RSA, 2015). Moreover, learners’ negative attitudes towards the LO curriculum, their disruptive behaviour and the personal challenges that they faced heightened learners’ feelings of not being supported:

*The learners are sometimes too much to deal with, and that causes frustration in teaching the contents. Their behaviour in class show that they don’t like what I’m teaching, and I am experiencing learners’ behavioural problems due to a lack of psychological well-being due to their own challenges. (P3)*

When there was a lack of support, participants experienced emotional strain and a feeling of not belonging. Time constraints to fulfil the seven roles required of all teachers lead to emotional distress. This exacerbated feelings of being overwhelmed in the application of the pastoral approach to enable psychosocial support:

*It affects you emotionally, and you feel stressed about the fact that you don’t feel supported, and that takes a strain on your mental health, making you feel that you don’t fit in with the school. In my opinion, teachers who need to employ a pastoral*

*role struggle to give their all to all the learners in their classroom. Now, remember I am a teacher, and when I am at work, I am not only a teacher, but I am a mother, I am a police investigator, I am a doctor because I have to facilitate wounds and to do all these things.* (P8)

The participants also identified limited financial resources, the scarcity of specialised professionals, poverty, and other political agendas as factors hindering the execution of a pastoral approach. In one example, Participant 10 explained:

*Most learners at these schools experience extrinsic barriers to learning, which is poverty, they are learners that come from unprivileged homes. Our schools cannot employ full-time professional psychologists and occupational therapists. We do not even have resources to teach, never mind being able to provide counselling for learners. Some principals feel there is no need to get emotional support for learners – it is all about the image of the school. They would rather let the learners suffer than get help.*

#### *Teachers lack understanding of and experience in psychosocial support*

LO teachers need knowledge and experience on how to provide psychosocial support in order to develop a pastoral approach within their school communities. Most of the participants did not feel equipped to develop a pastoral approach within their school community because of their lack of understanding of and experience in psychosocial support:

*Experience and knowledge are elements that will also help a teacher who will employ a pastoral role in a school community to gain the necessary confidence. Sometimes you don't have the necessary tools or experience that can help you; that makes it sometimes difficult for a person to be fully confident.* (P2)

Participating teachers reported having some knowledge of basic supportive strategies but not having experience in executing them:

*I feel that I have the necessary theoretically based knowledge to support learners that I gained while at university. However, I feel that the curriculum at university is theoretically based without enough practical application. Students need to be exposed to real-life scenarios of how they need to apply basic counselling skills so that when they enter the school environment, they are able to identify when they are needed and how they should help.* (P8)

Teachers reported that they did not need understanding of or experience in supporting learners, as they supported learners' professionally full time. This revealed the ignorance of some LO teachers with regard to the necessity of basic counselling competency skills required to teach LO content: *"No, I do not currently practise the role as a pastoral carer; the reason is that there is already a psychologist and life coach at the school where I am currently working"* (P7). Other participants felt that they did, to some extent, provide psychosocial support through practising sufficient listening

skills. However, their experience seemed to be limited to only a few competencies: *"I do provide support by listening and referring learners. I am able to provide learners with informal advice and a shoulder to lean on but not any form of counselling as outlined in literature"* (P1).

Most participating teachers reported having a lack of confidence to apply the knowledge they had of providing emotional support. This can be ascribed to a lack of experience and training to execute a pastoral approach. Furthermore, participants struggled clarifying a pastoral approach, as the tasks in employing a pastoral approach are not formally prescribed.

#### *Suggestions on Expanding a Pastoral Approach*

Various suggestions were made on expanding a pastoral approach for LO teachers, not only in the classroom but also to provide psychosocial support in the wider school community. These included the following:

##### *Using various teaching strategies in the classroom*

Participants realised the importance of using different teaching strategies in the classroom, taking into consideration the contextual influences of learners:

*Every individual is unique and lives in different environments. As a teacher, you will have to use different teaching methods to accommodate every learner in the classroom because every learner learns differently and could maybe only have limited resources available.* (P9)

Participating teachers suggested to move away from mainstream learning, especially in the LO class. The focus should rather be on a variation of teaching strategies to find new, innovative ways for learners to actively participate and elicit discussions with teachers to navigate problem-solving strategies:

*The other challenge is that educators apply mainstream learning and not accommodating curriculum differentiation for learners that have learning difficulties or psychosocial challenges. If we can use different strategies such as role play and collages instead of just teaching, then maybe we will be able to elicit discussions using these activities as tools to identify and resolve some of the learners' issues.* (P10)

Using a variation of teaching strategies and activities might provide LO teachers with the necessary tools to form strong attachment relationships with learners. Even though LO teachers are not allowed to provide specialised therapy to learners, they must be able to support learners emotionally by using various teaching strategies in LO lessons. Nel (2018) supports the importance of LO teachers using various strategies and activities that are applicable to specific contexts of learners and the school. Some of these strategies include the LO teacher facilitating guided discovery by probing questions and statements to

learners that would elicit discussions and reflections and would integrate new knowledge to resolve real-life situations that learners need to overcome. A variety of activities also allow LO teachers to mediate between LO content and the real-life challenges that learners experience, promoting an empathetic connection with the learners. Such activities might include group discussions, role play, dancing, collages, and storytelling.

#### *Forming attachment relationships with learners*

Teachers who form attachment relationships with learners can be effective role models and mentors who give guidance in dealing with life challenges. In this research, participating teachers reported learners' lack of trust hindering them to open up when teachers are trying to support. This might be as a result previous incidences where confidential information was shared or learners were reprimanded for their behaviour: "*The attitude of the learner towards the LO teacher is sometimes that they are afraid to talk with the teachers. Learners feel like they will be judged, or the teacher will disclose their information*" (P5).

The participants reiterated the importance of an attachment relationship to foster trust. Participant 9 explained referring to the advantages of a positive relationship between the LO teacher and learner:

*I think that learners can benefit from a good relationship with their LO teachers. They feel that they can share information with the teacher because they are comfortable with a certain teacher because they have a bond with that certain teacher. Learners will have an improved sense of communication- and interpersonal skills, greater self-acceptance and self-esteem, an ability to change self-defeating behaviour or habits, as well as a better expression of management of emotions, including their anger.*

Participants also recognised that not all learners experienced positive attachment relationship at home, thus making the attachment relationship with the LO teacher the only real positive influence in such a learner's life:

*LO teachers can provide children with additional emotional support they require and which they otherwise do not have access to. Many of our learners come from various socio-economic backgrounds without support, influencing the way they experience school and need emotional support to achieve academic objectives.* (P2)

The findings above suggest that participating teachers reflected on the importance of having positive teacher-learner interactions to form trusting bonds between them and learners to provide learners with an attachment relationship which they might have lacked in their lives, especially in an underdeveloped country such as South Africa where they need to deal with poverty,

HIV/AIDS, trauma, and other issues affecting health and well-being (Speizer et al., 2020).

#### *Learning skills similar to those of community counsellors*

To be equipped for a pastoral approach, it is advisable that LO teachers gain skills similar to those of community counsellors as mentioned in the introduction. LO teachers need to be a resource in their school communities to intervene, using both preventative and developmental interventions. The findings show that participants considered their role as pastoral carer as similar to that of a community counsellor:

*A pastoral carer, in my opinion, is when a person talks about something in his/her life that is bothering them or causing them to feel inadequate to handle everyday problems. They further provide support and guidance to individuals who experience emotional problems and difficulties and have a direct impact on their lives. My role as pastoral carer is to be able to demonstrate a good intellectual, emotional and social development and be able to promote the same among learners and understand the diverse needs of all learners and provide an enriched environment for their growth.* (P4)

Most participants reflected on the importance of LO teachers equipping themselves by participating in training courses to learn basic counselling skills, especially those in impoverished schools. Shared challenges and possible problem-solving strategies might also support LO teachers by collaborating with one another in workshops:

*I think I might be able to improve my skills and feel more positive and confident about my role as pastoral carer if we get more training. This holds especially true in low resource schools that can't afford full-time professional therapists. I further suggest that LO teachers have a workshop where they can meet and talk about the difficulties or challenges they face each every day at school and also give each other solutions on how they can tackle or rather overcome the challenges they face.* (P5)

To learn skills similar to those of community counsellors would enable LO teachers to be more proactively involved in supporting learners. Negotiations with the SBST and the principal to allocate time for LO teachers to be more involved with learners need to be considered. LO teachers need time to support learners after school hours, as there is no time to engage with learners during school hours.

#### *Developing collaborative partnerships*

Most participants suggested that LO teachers should develop collaborative partnerships using an ecosystemic approach. Such an approach would allow them to have access to provide learners with much needed psychosocial and material support. One such collaborative partnership could be

collaborating with other schools to lessen the burden on underprivileged schools. Shared resources could be a possible virtue. Participant 3 explained:

*I would say by being able to have access to more resources, even if the school doesn't own the resources, having a school in a specific area with the resources and then saying that it is open for anybody to use will already help because then there are more resources available for teachers to use.*

Participants focused on the importance of providing material resources to learners by collaborating with other external stakeholders:

*There is a feeding scheme at our school, provided by a local church in our community. That helps us a lot with learners going hungry. I think it will be a good idea if all LO teachers could work together with members of organisations and communities to support their learners in their schools. Some of our learners need clothes and housing. If we can get social workers involved most of the time to assist, then maybe we as LO teachers can make a difference.* (P1)

Other participants suggested the importance of collaborating with internal stakeholders for possible psychosocial support strategies and to inform others of the importance of a pastoral approach:

*What I think could help is we could maybe have meetings with parents, other teachers and the school management team to come up with ideas on how we can collaborate to support the learners, this can also be done in a workshop setting to educate others of what a pastoral role entails. I think it is important that people are made aware of the importance of a pastoral role the LO teacher needs to employ, especially with the other teachers in the school, because the other teachers might already have a background-understanding of the problem or barrier that can be linked to the learner in the class. It is important to communicate with each other because one person might have a better relationship with that learner than you to guide and support the learner in the right direction.* (P6)

Participants also highlighted how collaboration with stakeholders can eliminate the stigma associated with LO as a subject area, namely that LO is a waste of time and not important:

*I believe the school staff, learners and parents can be made aware of the importance of LO and the teacher supporting learners through the contents of the LO curriculum by a registered psychologist or some other professionals. LO teachers could arrange a meeting with these individuals to inform them of what the contents of LO is and why it is important. Pamphlets and infographics can also be made available from the school to better explain the benefits of LO as subject area.* (P2)

#### **Adjusting contextually relevant interventions**

Participants reiterated the importance of adjusting contextually relevant interventions. Participants confirmed that they were working in schools with limited referral networks and had to identify

possible interventions themselves to support learners:

*I think the challenge is a lack of resources for programmes and implementation of interventions. Learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds; I must find ways to give them hope. I can't refer them as the system is broken. It definitely does help to provide support to them, but I must find ways to intervene myself as there are no other resources.* (P9)

Participants agreed that the LO teacher must access current programmes and adjust them according to the needs of their school context:

*LO teachers can positively contribute in that they are the ones who spend time with learners, and they are able to notice changes in behaviour of a learner that signals a problem. In this sense, they are able to focus on adjusting current programmes and implementing programmes which promote academic and personal success for learners.* (P4)

Some intervention strategies that the participants were already implementing were specifically focused on learners with physical learning barriers. Participants acknowledged the gap that existed in employing culturally and contextually relevant intervention strategies to support learners on a psychosocial level:

*Learners with barriers that are not able to hear, we know that we must bring them in the front seats and then there are those that cannot see, we bring them in front also. Some learners struggle with the academic work, for those learners I give a lot more personal assistance. However, I'm not sure how to approach learners with emotional problems and how to support them. I definitely need to see what kind of interventions are out there that I can use. Most of my learners are diverse in their cultures and upbringing. I will have to adjust those programmes to work with my learners' particular background and problem they might have.* (P8)

An intervention should address specific challenges in a school or prevent identified challenges from intensifying (Pillay, 2011). Contextually relevant interventions should comprise life skills teaching programmes that address academic achievement and personal and social development, for example, self-esteem, bullying behaviour, academic challenges, and goal setting.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the findings it is clear that the participating LO teachers did not feel competent in executing pastoral tasks if not supported through various systems within an ecosystemic framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). LO teachers would benefit from collaborative partnerships to intervene more effectively with at-risk learners identified in the classroom as advocated by a holistic ecosystemic approach.

Social networking could benefit the whole school community if stakeholders support the implementation of relevant life skills programmes and talks, if referral resources are available for

at-risk learners, and if teaching and materials are provided. To form partnerships with community members, LO teachers must be innovative and take charge as advocates for change by being mediators between stakeholders and school communities (Forbes, 2004).

Furthermore, through community partnerships, LO teachers can better incorporate topics of social concern within the LO curriculum and fulfil learners' educational, personal and social potential. Collaborative partnerships would benefit the whole school community in developing the well-being of school communities, especially if such partnerships run in the long term.

Resources such as psychological services that are not equally available within impoverished schools prevent South African school communities to recognise the importance of providing learners with psychosocial support structures. Although well-documented plans exist for district-based support teams (DBST) to offer psychosocial support, they have not realised (Van Zyl et al., 2021).

However, LO teachers do possess the ability to change the points of view of all stakeholders, affecting how a pastoral approach is perceived within the LO subject area as well as how troubled learners in the school context are perceived (Hartell et al., 2013). This can be accomplished by focusing on the strengths of learners (i.e., pro-social attachments and intrinsic behaviour) rather than on their disruptive behaviour or poor academic performance.

The many roles and tasks of teachers are evident when considering the seven roles of a teacher prescribed by the DHET, RSA (2015). Insufficient training, knowledge, and resources to juggle all of the requirements of teachers may lead to burnout. This might place teachers at risk of not functioning well themselves, not to mention not being able to support learners' needs. The importance of well-functioning teachers to enable support for learners are reflected within the holistic well-being theory (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

If LO teachers could develop a better understanding of their pastoral role they would be better able to facilitate "Development of the self in society", which might nurture better relationships and psychosocial support in the school context. This might further enable learners to have access to resources that teachers might provide and enhance constructive, life-changing experiences in the classroom that might influence future relationships.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of child development (1979) supports the notion of positive interaction and influences in the learners' environment. One of those is an emphasis on learners' attachment relationships with teachers creating a caring climate in the classroom that motivates learners to reach their potential. A caring

climate implies care for learners rather than care about learners. To care for learners means to include them so that they can be accountable for the attachment relationship that develops with the LO teacher (Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012).

Recommendations from the findings imply a possible LO curriculum reformation. This might help LO teachers to focus on the positive impact that the LO curriculum might have. A curriculum reformation must enable LO teachers to focus on the strengths of the curriculum in collaboration with a variety of techniques/activities and teaching methods (Bernstein, 1977). The implications of a curriculum reformation might necessitate a re-evaluation of the current LO curriculum together with LO teachers in terms of its content and pedagogical approaches. This could potentially alter the perspectives of learners, parents and colleagues with respect to the compulsory nature of LO as a subject and may foster a more nurturing and supportive atmosphere within schools with limited resources.

It is also recommended that LO training programmes for teachers should be adjusted to cultivate skills and abilities such as those of community counsellors in a cooperative environment. These skills should also encompass the capability to create and modify contextually pertinent interventions while forming positive attachment relationships. Empowering LO teachers with the necessary skills and competencies might encourage these teachers to create their own social capital and resources for the classroom and school environment.

## Notes

- i. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
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