CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The *purpose of this study* was to compare a client's experiences of a psychometric feedback from a traditional perspective with one from the perspective of positive psychology. Over the past few years the concept of positive psychology has notably begun to direct the framing of psychological issues and processes, taking a dominant stand in the understanding of, as well as the approach to intervention within the caring professions (Seligman, 2002). Seligman (2002) describes positive psychology as bringing strength building to the fore, as the most potent weapon in the process of therapy. He adds that it has been found that human strengths tend to act as buffers against psychological stress and illness and goes on to remind us that the basis of psychology is not only the study of disease and weakness; rather, it is also about "building what is right", with the focus on human strength and virtue (Seligman, 2002). These statements summarise the essence of positive psychology adequately.

The concept of positive psychology poses as an alternative to the traditional approach (the deficit, disease or needs model as it is commonly referred to) to psychological issues and processes, as it has a strong focus on problems, deficiencies and needs (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006). Positive psychology places great emphasis on *intrinsic* strengths, assets, resources and positive-constructive intrapsychic domains. This is opposed to the underlying premise of the needs-based approach – i.e. "if you can establish everything that is needed or deficient, you can map a plan of intervention from there" (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006:17). Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006) thus conclude that while the needs-based approach focuses on solutions and challenges that are situated *extrinsically*, a focus on assets tends to mandate *intrinsic* power.

My views on this issue are strongly aligned with those of Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006). I draw on the words of Maddux (2002) who regards diagnostic labels and categories not as facts about people, but rather as *social* constructs, developed by members of society over time and which have eventually come to represent a shared view of the world. This view is a reasonable representation of the essence of my personal views and thus my keenness to contemplate the principles of positive psychology in the domain of psychometry, and in particular, to the process of relaying psychometric assessment results.

Throughout this study my focus was on one specific psychological process of conveying psychometric assessment results to the young girls', i.e. the feedback process, but from the unique perspective of employing this psychological process from alternate perspectives, namely the traditional method and that of applying the principles of positive psychology as part of the method of completion of this process. My specific aim in this study was to assess in what way (if any) positive psychology may, or not, influence this psychological process of feedback, in order to compare this positive psychological feedback with feedback done from the more commonly used and traditional form.

Having completed a learnership in psychometry in 2006, I was awarded a unique opportunity to work with a diverse group of learners. My work during this learnership also highlighted a significant trend in learners, to which I attribute my interest in this specific study. During my feedback interviews with learners, I employed the basic principles of positive psychology (albeit in an unsystematic and informal manner), highlighting learners' strengths and illustrating to them how these strengths can be used in everyday life experiences to make efforts more effective. My informal observations of these learners has shown that this form of feedback interview *seemingly* left learners highly motivated, as well as eager to learn and improve on their efforts. This led me to wonder what the differences and similarities between a psychometric feedback based on the principles and concepts of positive psychology and a traditional psychometric feedback would be. Furthermore, from the initial literature survey completed, it seemed that the nature of such possible

impact (as compared with those of traditional feedbacks) is unknown and/or unexplored. As I believe in the ideology of positive psychology, I felt that such a study could generate knowledge that could prove beneficial to practitioners both nationally and internationally. Moreover, the results of this study could have clinical value, as these results possess the potential to inform psychometric or psychological feedback processes.

Upon my further review of available literature, in specific terms of feedback-related studies, it became obvious that although a confined body of knowledge does exist (Koka & Hein, 2003; Kaplan & Sadock, 1998), none of the studied literature relates to the specific experiences of clients of a *positive psychological* feedback experience as this study aims to investigate. Moreover, within a broader context, my attempts to identify literature that focuses on clients' experiences of *psychological intervention* or the specific psychological process of *feedback* in general, proved futile.

The unavailability of literature in the above-described respect of clients' experiences of feedback interviews in the domain of psychological intervention or feedback processes highlighted that the empirical evidence to support my proposed study is limited. Therefore, while this fact may have highlighted one challenge to be overcome during the completion of the study, it (at the same time) highlighted an area of possible theoretical contribution. This implied that this study had the potential to make a theoretical contribution to the existing body of knowledge regarding the elements investigated through this study.

1.2 INTENT AND AIMS

The primary purpose throughout the completion of this study was to *compare* positive psychological psychometric feedback and a traditional feedback interview, as the use of positive psychology in psychometric processes is still mainly a new phenomenon. The secondary purposes of this study were to *explore and describe* this above-described comparison between a positive psychological psychometric feedback and traditional feedback interview. In this regard I conclude that this study

has a combination of comparative, exploratory and descriptive purposes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003; Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2002; Miller & Crabtree, 2005; Stake, 2005), which I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Moreover, this study aimed to answer the following as the primary *research question*:

> *"How can a comparison between experiences of a traditional and a positive psychological psychometric feedback inform Educational Psychological theory and practice?"*

To fully explore and address the aforementioned research question, I explored the following *sub-questions*:

1. What are positive psychology and traditional feedback interviews?
2. What are clients' experiences of a feedback interview done from (a) the traditional perspective (b) the perspective of positive psychology?
3. What is the Educational Psychologist's experience of a feedback interview done from (a) the traditional perspective and (b) the perspective of positive psychology?
4. What are the differences and similarities between experiences of a traditional and a positive psychological feedback interview?

1.3 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVES

In terms of my epistemological position as researcher, my viewpoint coincides with that of Radnor (2002), where he states that people assign personal meaning through the use of the ideas, beliefs, thoughts and experiences that they obtain from their social and cultural environment. This process of creating meaning reflects the *interpretivist paradigm*. Denscombe (2002) defines interpretivism as a study of social phenomena, based on the viewpoint that social reality is a "*social* creation, constructed in the minds of people and reinforced through their interactions with each other."

Likewise the experiences of the young girls in response to both the traditional and the positive psychological psychometric feedbacks, were an integral part of the process of "creating meaning", which, in terms of this study, eventually lead me to the findings of the nature of the comparison between the two alternate forms of psychometric feedbacks. Consequently, this research project was conducted by essentially applying the qualitative approach, anchored in *interpretivism*. Interpretivism is a vast paradigm, with its characteristic principles, ideologies, advantages, as well as, disadvantages. I will discuss this choice at greater length in Chapter 3.

1.4 CONCEPTUALISATION

To explicate this study further, it is essential that the basic operational terms and concepts that I applied be defined. This will facilitate greater understanding of the aims of the study:

1.4.1 Positive psychology

The movement of positive psychology is an effort to move away from the "disease-patient framework of repairing damage: damaged habits, damaged drive, damaged childhood and damaged brains" (Seligman, 2002). Instead of fixing what is wrong (or perceived to be wrong), positive psychology asserts the view that treatment is just as much about building what is right, since it has been found that certain human strengths tend to act as buffers against mental illness. Keyes and Haidt (2003) reiterate this view by noting that the aim of positive psychology is to assist people to flourish in their daily lives, rather than to merely exist.

Snyder and Lopez (2002) aptly define positive psychology as the pursuit of optimal human functioning for the enablement of the building of a field focusing on human strengths and virtue. The fundamental aim of positive psychology is thus to understand and facilitate happiness and subjective well-being (Carr, 2004). To

achieve this though, it becomes necessary to identify what is *right* and *positive* in the individual first (Seligman, 2002).

Seligman, Sheen, Park and Peterson (2005) divide happiness into three subareas, which they believe contribute to a greater sense of meaning in life and more fulfilling social and emotional experiences. Ultimately these experiences lead to a *greater quality of life*. These subareas of happiness are:

1. Positive emotion and pleasure (the pleasant life)
2. Engagement (the engaged life) and
3. Meaning (the meaningful life)

The intent of positive psychology to have a clearer understanding of the human experience, the highs, the lows and everything in-between leads to a greater, more unified goal of identifying *what makes life most worth living?* (Seligman *et al.*, 2005). The overall goal of the movement of positive psychology is to create and enhance the practice of positive human functioning and effective interventions that will contribute to the building of thriving individuals, families and communities.

1.4.2 Positive psychological feedback interview

The process of feedback entails the communication of findings of the assessment process, where the assessment process and consequent results can be clarified, goals can be identified and intervention methods can be discussed (Carr, 2006). The proposed form of feedback interview will be conducted by *incorporating the ideologies of the emerging science of positive psychology* (consult the above sub-section for a basic conceptualization on positive psychology, which I will expand upon in Chapter 2). Seligman (2002) describes positive intervention as that which identifies a set of buffers for the client: i.e. the positive human traits. He emphasizes that prevention of dis-ease in the client's life requires not only the process of identifying, but moreover, *amplifying* the strengths that are in the young girls. In terms of doing a feedback interview from the perspective of positive psychology, I used Seligman's ideology (2002:4) that *"treatment is not just fixing what is wrong; it*

is also about building what is right" as an underlying objective during feedback sessions. He (Seligman, 2002:5) also accentuates the importance of incorporating the concept of "learned optimism", wherein the practitioner helps the client to firstly identify his/her negative and self-impeding thinking, and to skilfully dispute it. Moreover, once clients have learned this skill of identifying their strengths, negative thinking patterns and the ability to correct them, the *positive* in them should be further reinforced. In terms of doing therapy from the perspective of positive psychology, Seligman (2002) identifies two strategies that practitioners can make use of, which prove particularly effective, namely: (i) *tactics* and (ii) *deep strategies*.

The goals of a positive psychological feedback are thus to *build strengths*, which could in turn possibly act as buffers against the development of mental illnesses. Such strengths include courage, future-mindedness, finding purpose, interpersonal skills, rationality, insight, optimism, honesty, perseverance, realism, capacity for pleasure and putting troubles into perspective (Seligman, 2002). To effectively build such strengths and foster positive development, I used the *tactics* and *deep strategies* highlighted above (and discussed comprehensively in Chapter 2) during positive psychological feedback sessions.

Aside from the above factors that relate to the positive psychological aspects of a 'positive psychological' psychometric feedback, other factors that relate to the process of conveying psychometric results per se are still central to this proposed form of positive psychological feedback. These factors are outlined by Grieve in Foxcroft and Roodt (2001), as discussed in the following section.

1.4.3 Traditional feedback interview

Grieve in Foxcroft and Roodt (2001) discuss at length the approach and method of *conveying psychometric assessment results*. They state expressly that psychological assessment results should be conveyed in the context of an interpersonal situation/relationship. These results should also be conveyed in the way that best *serves the original purpose* of each individual test (as well as the collective

assessment battery of tests). In the context of this study, assessment results from the traditional perspective will thus be shared from the perspective of a subject choice assessment, as that was the original format of the assessments.

Results should also be shared in general terms, explaining to the client *what the purpose of the test use was*, and what the results imply about the client based on the context in which it was used. The use of descriptive forms instead of numeric forms, especially scores which can be misunderstood, or lead to the stigmatization/ labelling of individuals should be avoided. This would mostly concern the results of assessment measures such as intelligence test, where results are indicated only in a passive context and only when the situation warrants (Grieve, 2001).

Specific mention is made of the fact that it is not only the content of the assessment results that has an impact on the client's life, but moreover, *the manner in which these results are conveyed that has a greater impact on the client's life*. The process of conveying results plays such an integral role that it should be considered as a form of intervention (Grieve, 2001).

Practitioners are strongly advised to steer clear of any form of labelling or stereotyping during the process of conveying assessment results. To ensure that this is maintained during the feedback process, the use of *language* becomes a very important factor in the process. It is essential that the language used throughout the feedback process should be at a level that is understandable to the client. Furthermore, all information should be phrased from a positive stance[1] to ensure that the process of conveying the results does not let the client see him/herself in a negative light. In addition, voicing of problems, concerns or potential problems should be phrased to make them sound like a separate issue that the client needs to

[1] A distinction must be noted in the difference between the positive stance that I refer to here and the general concept of Positive Psychology. Positive stance refers to an optimistic outlook relating to the manner, vocabulary and general demeanour that is adopted by the practitioner. Further discussion will follow in Chapter 2 regarding the distinction between a general optimistic stance and the realisation of Positive Psychology by a practitioner in psychological processes and professional practice.

address or be aware of, and *not* made to sound like it is part of the client's personality or a permanent impeding factor in his/her life (Human-Vogel, 2005).

Practitioners/individuals who are in the position of conveying results should always be supportive of the *test-taker's emotional reaction* to the assessment results. It also proves helpful to ask the test-taker for his/her knowledge or feelings about the aspect that was assessed, and use that as a starting point for further discussion and elaboration. Overall results should be conveyed within the context of the interpersonal situation or relationship between the practitioner and client (Grieve, 2001).

1.4.4 Clients' or participants' experiences

Understanding clients' or participants' experiences in a psychological process offers a possibility for deeper understanding of the process. According to the relational perspective human experience exists within an experiential world which is formed in a psychological field, and framed by interacting worlds of experience (Richardson, 2002). These interacting worlds are individual systems that are further embedded in and framed by other systems within which the client exists. Each system comprises various configurations of interacting worlds of experience and thus the interaction of these systems allows for a focus on relational understanding of the emergence of new experiences within the framework of the broader social and cultural systems in which all relationships are embedded (Richardson, 2002).

Traditionally the practitioner's point of view has informed the understanding of these processes, resulting in the process and consequently the outcome being determined by the practitioner (Paulson, Truscott and Stuart, 1999). Increasingly the value of the client's view is being recognized, as their views differ from those of the practitioner. According to Rosenfeld and Sykes (1998) it is through learning about the experiences, perceptions and understandings of clients that therapists can learn about what clients' needs are and how they can best be helped. In studies of clients'

perceptions of counselling experiences (Paulson *et al.*, 1999; Elliot & James, 1989), the clients described the positive experiences in counselling as multifaceted.

Five domains of client's experience that have been identified in the existing empirical literature in terms of clients' experiences of their own psychological processes during therapy, are namely *intentions*, *feelings*, *style of self-relatedness*, *style of relating to therapist* and *central concerns*. Clients identified three main interpersonal aspects of therapy such as 1) facilitative therapist characteristics and intentions, 2) the extent of clients' self-expression that is permitted and 3) the experience of a supportive relationship between client and practitioner. The latter includes task-related aspects such as (a) self-understanding/insight and (b) therapists encouraging extra-therapy practice (Paulson *et al.*, 1999).

The role of the practitioner's interpersonal style and the therapeutic relationship are key elements that impact on the clients' experiences in psychological processes. Clients' change processes and the practitioner's ability to detect and process these changes are also important factors in predicting effective and positive client's experiences in psychological processes (Paulson *et al.*, 1999).

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Research design

Considering the nature of this study and its relative components and facets, the design selected is a *clinical case study*, with comparative purposes (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2002, Miller & Crabtree, 2005). To understand the details and relevance of a *clinical case study* design in this study, it is important to note and understand that the "*case*" or the central feature/element in this enquiry is the unique form of *psychometric feedback* being proposed, i.e. to conduct feedback by employing the basic principles and constructs of positive psychology. I deduced from Durrheim and Terre Blanche's work (2002) that the clinical case study design refers to a case study

researched *within a professional environment*. The aspect of research design, with its advantages and disadvantages, is further explored in Chapter 3.

1.5.2.1 Selection of participants

I used *convenience sampling* to select participants to work with (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). The reason for this is that since I had a family member at the required age and developmental phase of participants, I was easily able to access other participants who were in the same age group and who met the only criteria for selection, i.e. age and developmental appropriateness for the subject choice assessments. I attained informed consent and assent from the participants and their parents directly. The reason for the choice of this sampling technique is that the aim of this research study is to investigate the differences and/or similarities between two modes of feedback interviews. The purpose of this study is not to generalize the findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Patton, 2002) but I will explore this in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.5.2.2 Data collection

Throughout the completion of this study I made use of a combination of data collection methods, namely psychometric data, observations of the young girls, audio-visual recordings (documented as verbatim transcripts), the young girls' written narratives reflecting their expectations and experience of the feedback interview conducted, and a narrative from the Educational Psychologist who administered the feedback interviews based on her experiences of the two modes of feedback. In Table 1.1 I outline the multiple data collection and documentation strategies that I made use of in the completion of this study. These multiple methods added depth and richness to the study, in what Janesick (2000) refers to as *crystallization*. This implies that by means of increased and contrasting methods of data collection with the same object/participant, I highlighted distinct nuances in the data gathered (Knight, 2002; Janesick, 2000). This process will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

No.	PHASE IN RESEARCH PROCESS	DATA COLLECTION METHOD USED TO COMPLETE THIS PHASE	DATA DOCUMENTATION METHOD USED TO FACILITATE THE COMPLETION OF THIS PHASE	PURPOSE OF THE DATA COLLECTION / DOCUMENTATION METHOD IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS	RESEARCH PHASE COMPLETED / FACILITATED BY
1.	Intervention phase begins: psychometric assessment completed using psychometric tests	Psychometric test battery administered included: • Differential Aptitude Test- form L (DAT-L) • Jung Personality Questionnaire (JPQ) • South African Vocational Interest Inventory (SAVII)	Psychometric profiles	To provide content basis for the two modes of feedback interviews in the form of a subject choice assessment	Researcher as Psychometrist
2.	Develop two modes of feedback interviews	Theoretical indicators		To develop a framework for the two modes of feedback interviews	Researcher
3.	Train Educational Psychologist based on framework designed through the literature review	Unstructured face-to-face interview with Educational Psychologist			Researcher trains Educational Psychologist
PILOT PHASE					
4.	Pilot interviews	Feedback interviews (one done in the traditional mode and one done using positive psychology)	Audio-visual recordings of feedback interviews and transcripts of these	To record learners' actions during the two modes of feedback interviews	Educational Psychologist as interviewer
5.	Evaluate pilot	• Educational Psychologist's experience of being interviewer	• Educational Psychologist's field notes • Audio-visual	To evaluate the pilot feedback interviews in terms of their satisfaction in relation to the	Researcher

		• Observations by researcher of pilot feedback interviews • Unstructured face-to-face interview with Educational Psychologist.	recordings of pilot feedback interviews and transcripts of these	framework devised for the feedback interviews (based on my literature review)	
6.	Adapt pilot				
INTERVENTION PHASE (FEEDBACK INTERVIEWS)					
7.	Practice two modes of feedback interviews with Educational Psychologist				
8.	Pre-feedback narratives regarding *expectations* of the feedback process	Narratives written by learners' in the form of a self-report technique, regarding their expectations of (prior to) the feedback interviews	Narratives written in the form of a self-report technique, completed by individual participants	To record learners' expectations of (prior to) the two modes of feedback interviews, in order to compare the experiences of these feedbacks	Researcher as: • Facilitator: (facilitating the writing of narratives) & • Researcher (observing participants in order to record observations in a research diary)
9.	Traditional and positive psychological feedbacks	As per theoretical indicators identified previously			• Educational Psychologist as interviewer • Researcher as observer
10.	Post-feedback narratives regarding *experiences* of feedback process	Narratives written by learners' in the form of a self-report technique,	Narratives written in the form of a self-report technique, completed by	To record learners experiences of (after) the 2 modes of feedback	Researcher as: • Facilitator: (facilitating the

		regarding their experiences of (after) the feedback interviews	individual participants	interviews, in order to compare the experiences of the 2 modes of feedback interviews	writing of narratives) & • Researcher (observing participants in order to record observations in a research diary)
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION PHASE					
11.	Data analysis	• Observations of learners • Administering Educational Psychologist's field notes	• Researchers research diary • Audio-visual recording and transcripts of feedback interviews	To record learners' experiences during the two modes of feedback interviews	Completed by researcher
12.	Participant validation interviews.	Interview with participants	Audio-visual recordings of interviews and transcripts of these	To determine the young girls' views of my analyses of their experiences of the two modes of feedback interviews	Researcher
13.	Recording of results and literature control				Completed by researcher
14.	Concluding of finding and recommendations				Completed by researcher
15.	Answering of research questions				Completed by researcher

Table 1.1 Outline of the various data collection and documentation strategies

1.6 ETHICAL STRATEGIES

Due to the social and personal nature of the study, when undertaking research I did not only have a responsibility to my profession, but also towards the participants involved in the study (Strydom, 1998; Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Being a Psychometrist, it was essential that I firstly adhered to the ethical code of the Health Professions Council of South Africa when working with participants. In conducting the research I aimed to preserve the dignity of participants as human beings. Within the context of this study, I further adhered to certain ethical principles, in order to ensure that the participants were not deceived, knew what was going on during the research process and did not experience any form of harm or distress (physically or otherwise). These principles took effect in an interactive and robust manner, in order to ensure effective research (Miller & Brewer, 2003).

These three principles are outlined here and an extended discussion of them will follow in Chapter 3. Firstly, the principle of *informed consent.* This refers to informing parents and guardians about the facts of the study before obtaining their consent to participate in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2003). The second essential principle in this regard is that of *privacy, confidentiality and anonymity*. This refers to the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants that were protected at all times (Strydom, 1998; Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Sternberg, 2001). Lastly, the principle of protection *from harm*, which refers to recognizing and communicating possible and probable risk to the participants, such as psychological, physical or social harm (Strydom, 1998; Sternberg, 2001).

1.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

Babbie and Mouton (2001) describe the principle of trustworthiness as relating to how researchers can convince their audiences that their research findings are worth paying attention to or worth talking about. When conducting any study, the trustworthiness of

that study is of core relevance and importance as it links directly to issues of validity and reliability of the study (Seale, 2000).

Five main criteria can be linked to trustworthiness, namely 1) Credibility, which aims to provide a true picture of the phenomenon being investigated (Patton, 2002). 2) Transferability, which refers to the extent to which a study can be applied to other respondents or in other contexts. (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). 3) Dependability, which refers to the indication of whether or not the study would yield the same, or similar, results if replicated in the same, or similar context or with the same participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). 4) Confirmability (Seale, 2000), and 5) Authenticity (Seale, 2000). The above highlighted areas relative to the process of ensuring quality criteria and trustworthiness in this study merely provide an outline for the aspects that were taken into consideration during the completion of the study. In Chapter 3 I present strategies I employed to ensure rigour in this enquiry.

1.8 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1: Overview and Rationale

Chapter 1 serves as an overview chapter, commencing with an introductory orientation to the study. The purpose, rationale, paradigmatic perspective and conceptualization of the study will be presented here, as well as a brief outline of the research design and methodology. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the underlying assumptions of how I approached the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework of the study through consultation of the relevant and authoritative literature on the basic concepts of the study, i.e. self-concept; positive psychology; 'traditional' feedback interviews; and positive psychological feedback interviews.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the research design and methodology that will be observed throughout the investigation of the stated research question. Specific attention will be given to the proposed methods of data collection, data analysis and interpretation, which will be outlined and justified.

Chapter 4: Results of the Study, Interpretations and Literature Control

Chapter 4 includes the presentation and discussion of data collected and analyzed, followed by a detailed discussion of the findings and interpretations of results. The findings of the study will be related to the existing literature, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5: Final Conclusions and Recommendations

The last chapter includes the final conclusions of the study. There the findings will be linked to the research question as initially posed in Chapter 1. The contribution to the study, as well as its challenges, will be presented. Recommendations for further research, practice and training will be suggested.

1.9 SUMMARY

This chapter was intended to serve as an introduction and orientation to this study and the subsequent chapters. I briefly outlined the rationale of the study, my aims, epistemological position, conceptual parameters, research design and methodology, ethical considerations and quality criteria. These outlines are intended to serve as an induction to the more in-depth exploration in Chapter 3.

In this chapter I highlighted the framework of my study, specifically in terms of the rationale underpinning my study, the purpose and conceptual parameters of my study, as well as the basic epistemological and methodological assumptions that this study was based on. I then went on to highlight the research design and methodology framework that underpinned this study. I concluded the chapter with a brief introduction of the

ethical considerations concerning myself as researcher, as well as those associated with the research process per se. Lastly, I introduced the quality criteria that contributed to the trustworthiness of my study.

In Chapter 2 I will present an in-depth conceptual framework and literature review, exploring relevant, available and the most updated literature on positive psychology traditional feedback interviews and the concept of the proposed positive psychological feedback interview. This provided a sound basis for the study, from its planning to completion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

"Recognize and amplify strengths rather than repair weaknesses"

(Snyder and Lopez, 2002)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I aim to take a closer look at the theoretical concepts that underpin and inform this study, namely the concept of a feedback in terms of psychometric assessment and the concept of positive psychology in general. As I argued in Chapter 1, my review of available literature has to date provided me with no substantial literature that links directly to the concept of integrating the elements, principles and methodologies of positive psychology, to the act or process of relaying psychometric assessment results (and psychological results in general). My aim throughout this chapter is to illustrate this fact through the analysis and discussion of the available literature on the process of relaying assessment / psychological results and the concept of positive psychology. Furthermore, through my review of literature, I aim to provide a framework from which to develop a positive psychological feedback.

2.2 WHAT DOES THE PROCESS OF PROVIDING PSYCHOMETRIC FEEDBACK ENTAIL?

Before understanding and analysing alternate modes of relaying feedback of psychometric results as the basis of this study, I had to ascertain a thorough understanding of what a feedback interview is. Psychometric feedbacks follow the process of psychometric assessment. Psychometric assessment entails the purposeful collection of information on individuals, groups and processes, with the intention of drawing conclusions and/or making decisions regarding such individuals or groups (Bergh, 2007). In my study these conclusions and/or decisions refer to career facilitation and in particular to the process of subject choices for Grade 10 learners (Lichtenberger, Mather, Kaufman and Kaufman, 2004).

The value of psychometric assessment lies in the interpretation and communication of the results to the client, as it is not the assessment itself that is the objective but rather the *reporting* of the data that it provides (Bergh, 2007). Carr (2006) refers to the feedback process as the *formulation process* as this process includes the clarification of the presenting problem, the identification of goals and the discussion of treatment or intervention. These aspects of the feedback process are dependent on the client's specific needs and the nature of the assessment results. Feedback interviews usually take place after an assessment has been completed and a report has been compiled (Lichtenberger *et al.*, 2004).

According to Bergh (2007) providing feedback of results enhances professionalism, integrity and trust between client and practitioner, while at the same time building on the theoretical and practical knowledge of the discipline. Lichtenberger *et al.,* (2004) share a similar view which they refer to as the formulation or feedback process as the development of 'mini-theory'. In this study it is the *communication and reporting* of the assessment results that we refer to as *feedback*. Feedback is the end product of the assessment procedure and provides closure for the client. The process of providing feedback is aligned with the policy of transparency as feedback informs clients of factors that may be of relevance to the client (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). (Transparency in this study will be further discussed in Chapter 3).

The communicating and reporting of assessment data are the result of interpretation and integration of such data. Interpreting and integrating data incorporate the process of assigning meaning to the assessment findings, bearing in mind a) the purpose of the assessment; b) the target groups involved; c) the rationale and the contents of the methods used; d) the client's circumstances and e) the context of the assessment (i.e. the time, situations involved, the agreement about how the assessment results will be handled) (Bergh, 2007).

The therapist or assessor that is providing feedback to the client should tailor the feedback interview to an appropriate level of the individual or individuals who will be present during the feedback session (Lichtenberger et al., 2004). Individuals present in the feedback interview could include a variety of role-players such as the client himself, the parents, a teacher, a spouse or at times could even include a combination of these role-players as participants during a feedback interview.

Thus, to appropriately convey the assessment results to participants in this study during the feedback interview, the Educational Psychologist facilitating the two modes of feedback interviews has to take into consideration the manner and sensitivity in which the assessment results are conveyed (Lichtenberger et al., 2004). Conveying assessment results in a sensitive manner refers to the consideration of the participant's age and developmental level during the discussion of the feedback results. Consequently, age appropriate terminology was used to explain to the participants what the results of their assessments mean and how these findings were useful to them (Lichtenberger et al., 2004).

Bergh (2007: 20) describes a feedback interview as a verbal discussion between the practitioner and client regarding the "meaning and implications of assessment data for the client". These results must be conveyed with sensitivity and skill to be able to protect the client's dignity and self-worth and thus fulfilling an ethical responsibility as psychological professionals (HPCSA, 2007). Linked to such ethical responsibility are the interpersonal skills that Bergh (2007) outlines as essential during personal feedbacks. These interpersonal skills include a) delivering feedback that is fair and honest; b) feedback must be relevant, specific and applicable to the context in which the assessment measures were administered; c) feedback must be given as soon as possible in order to support the initial purpose of the assessment; and lastly d) feedback must be given in a positive manner and in a positive atmosphere. Even if the assessment results do not indicate optimal performance on the part of the client, the feedback must be

given in such a manner that the client understands the validity of the findings in terms of the aspects of functioning that were assessed and the areas that need improvement. Additional generic principles regarding the provision of feedback during an interview include the following (Bergh, 2007):

- The feedback should start out with the practitioner conveying the *objectives or aims of the feedback*. The client should also understand the extent of the applicability of the assessment results and the context in which the assessment measures were administered in (in the case of this study, the context in which assessment measures were administered is that of a subject choice assessment).
- Assessment results should be conveyed in a *format that has already been interpreted* and not in the exact scores that they achieved as this limits the possibility of misinterpretation. Scores should be explained in categories such as "average".
- *Technical jargon* should be avoided in order to make the interview more understandable to the client, as any psychological constructs and concepts should be avoided. Assessment results should be conveyed in a manner that is clear and concise as this will help the clients to grasp the extent of the implications of their assessment results. By limiting the use of jargon the communication process between client and the assessor is not hindered (Carr, 2009).
- Practitioners should be careful *not to oversimplify or generalise findings* and can instead use real-life examples to enhance the meaning of the results.
- *Integrate all individual test results* so that results conveyed in the interview are a valid reflection of the client. Results should be conveyed in a *simple and logical manner*.
- Encourage *clients to participate and share* opinions during the feedback relating to the results being conveyed.

- Emphasis must be placed on a *client's positive points and their potential*, along with any weaknesses that may have been identified. Any negative aspects identified should be discussed in a constructive manner.
- Clients should be informed about any *ethical and legal aspects* of the assessment.

In addition to the above guidelines, it should be borne in mind that oral or verbal feedback is one of the most effective methods of communicating assessment findings to a client (Bergh, 2007). Thus, when completing interviews verbally, it is important to convey the feedback in the context of the original reason for referral. In this study, conveying feedback in the context of the referring reason for the study would mean that the feedback should be aligned to the context of a subject choice assessment. As verbal feedback is largely dependent on the communication skills of the assessor, the assessor has to be able to communicate effectively during all stages of the process (Egan, 2007). The manner in which information is communicated and shared with clients is a key factor in shaping the helping relationship, which in turn defines the nature of the relationship that will follow during the intervention process (Becvar & Becvar, 2006).

Culturally appropriate language and behaviour should also be considered during feedback interviews and throughout the helping process of engagement with the client in general. Another technique that can improve the effectiveness of a verbal feedback process is non-verbal communication in terms of maintaining an open posture to indicate involvement with the client. To be able to display effective professional engagement the assessor providing feedback should respond adequately and appropriately to a client's thoughts and behaviours and be able to reflect on the context of the assessment results and not only be able to read out the results. Assessors should be attentive to the clients' questions and have an understanding of the significance of their responses in the context of the feedback interview in progress (Egan, 2007).

According to Lichtenberger, *et al.*, (2004, p. 188) the following are essential do's and don'ts in delivering feedback:

Do:	***Don't:***
• Anticipate questions and be prepared for possibilities of difficult questions. • *Areas of competence and strengths should be discussed. (This technique is also common to positive psychological feedback).* • Even if information is difficult to convey, always be honest. • Encourage the asking of questions. • Extract ideas from others about the assessment results. • Allow application of visual aid. • Practise your part in giving feedback. • Adequate time should be scheduled for the feedback session. • *The use of a positive tone is essential during feedback. (This technique is also common to positive psychological feedback).*	• Cover up important findings. • Discourage questions. • Be caught off guard by angry or upset clients. • Make unsupported long-term predictions ("Jane will always struggle with reading…") • Expect all feedback sessions to flow easily without obstacles. • Take on professional tasks beyond your scope of practise. Refer if necessary.

Table 2.1 Do's and don'ts during feedback interviews (Lichtenberger et al., 2004, p. 188)

The feedback interview is an important form of professional engagement with the client, and in the helping relationship. Assessors should therefore be well aware of and well trained in the use of therapeutic skills to be able to facilitate the feedback process (Egan, 2007). This will be true for both the traditional and the positive psychological feedback interviews. The communication in the feedback interview goes beyond mere verbal

communication of findings and it is essential to possess the skills necessary to be able to tune in to the communication process (Egan, 2007).

The following giving and receiving styles (Rich, 2003) may be useful to establish a relationship with the client within the context of professional engagement. Employing these strategies may contribute to the effectiveness of such an engagement.

Positive giving style	***Positive receiving style***
• Supportive: delivered in a way which is not threatening but hopeful. • Direct: the aim of the feedback is obviously stated. • Sensitive: delivered with understanding of the wants of the other person. • Considerate: feedback is not intended to offend or humiliate. • Descriptive: focuses on transformation of action, rather than on the persona. • Specific: feedback is focused on exact action or dealings. • Healthy timing: given as close to the actual, preceding event as possible. • Thoughtful: well thought-out rather than reckless. • Helpful: feedback is intended to be significant to the other person.	• Open: listens without frequent intrusion or defences. • Responsive: eager to hear what's being said without blaming. • Accepting: accommodates the feedback, without refutation. • Respectful: recognizes the importance of what is being said and considers the insight of the speaker. • Engaged: interacts fittingly with the speaker, asking for explanation when needed. • Active listening: listens cautiously and tries to recognize the significance of the feedback. • Thoughtful: tries to understand the individual action that has proceeded to the feedback. • Interested: is genuinely paying attention in receiving feedback • Sincere: genuinely wants to make individual changes if fitting.

Table 2.2 Positive styles of giving and receiving feedback (Rich, 2003)

2.3 HOW CAN (TRADITIONAL) PSYCHOLOGY BE CONCEPTUALISED?

Since its origin the field of psychology has been defined as the study of the mind, behaviour and the relationship between them. The study of the field of psychology in this manner was established in order to understand how humans think, feel, learn, perceive, act, interact with others and understand themselves (Sternberg, 2001). The literature considered and outlined in Section 2.2 has led me to the view that a feedback interview based on the premises of traditional psychology is not solely the understanding of the relationship between the human mind and behaviour. Instead, a process such as a traditional feedback interview involves the process of establishing and maintaining an effective helping relationship, while responding adequately and appropriately to the client's needs, thoughts and behaviours (Egan, 2007). Establishing an effective helping relationship in this regard is often the result of successful communication and skills on the part of the assessor (Lichtenberger et al., 2004; Rich, 2003; Egan, 2007).

I also connect the field of psychopathology with that of traditional psychology. Barlow and Durand (2002) define the field of psychopathology as the study of psychological disorders. Psychological disorders include a psychological dysfunction or dyscontrol within an individual that may be associated with distress or impairment, or a response that is atypical or unexpected according to cultural norms and expectations. While this can be deemed an accurate description of psychopathology, they (Barlow and Durand, 2002) go on to describe clinical and counselling psychologists, social workers, marriage and family therapists and mental health counsellors as the trained professionals who are responsible for work within this field. By implication then, according to Barlow and Durand (2002) the field of psychopathology includes the scope of a psychologist who is working within the framework of traditional psychology.

From the above discussion I deduce that traditional psychology exists within a clinical domain of functioning. The term 'clinical' in this context refers to problems or disorders

that can be found in a hospital or clinical setting, as well as to the activities connected with the assessment and treatment of such cases (Barlow & Durand, 2002).

Thus, based on the above viewpoint, other contemporary authors characterise a clinical approach to traditional psychology by what has in recent years become known as the *needs-based model*. It is the opinion of these authors (Seligman, 2002; Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001; Gable & Haidt, 2005) that the traditional approach to psychology places an emphasis on *problems, deficiencies and needs*. Such a view is supported by the exploration of the foundations of traditional psychology provided by Sternberg (2001) and Barlow and Durand (2002). Commonly referred to as the deficit-based model, the needs-based approach or medical model thinking, this paradigm of approaches to psychological assessment and/or intervention is based on the premise that establishing a client's needs or deficiencies can provide a basis for intervention (Eloff, 2002).

To further clarify the existence of traditional psychology within a medical or needs-based perspective, I analysed the various domains of psychological practice and tabulated their description within the bounds of traditional psychology in Table 2.3. I emphasised particular job characteristics of psychologists working in specific domains of psychology. By emphasising a psychologists' job characteristics, it becomes evident that traditional psychology does place greater emphasis on addressing deficits, problems and the needs of clients instead of accessing clients' strengths and assets. Through the process of highlighting client's deficits, needs and problems, psychologists foreground clients' problems – that which is 'wrong'.

DOMAIN OF PSYCHOLOGY	***DESCRIPTION WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF TRADITIONAL PSYCHOLOGY***
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST	• Diagnose and treat patients for psychological ***problems*** (own emphasis). • Understanding and treating of ***abnormal*** behaviour and psychological ***problems*** (own emphasis). • Teaches, trains or conducts research in a ***hospital, clinic*** (own emphasis), college or university.
COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGIST	• Counsels people on their ***problems, conflicts*** or choices (within the context of schools, workplaces, hospitals or clinics (own emphasis).
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST	• Works in a school setting to test or counsel students. • Identifies perceptual or learning ***disabilities*** (own emphasis) and gifted learners. • Uses psychology to diagnose psychologically based ***problems*** (own emphasis) of children in school, and to recommend where possible, means of ***correcting*** or coping with these ***problems***.
ACADEMIC PSYCHOLOGIST	• Works in a tertiary environment. Involved in teaching and conducting research. • Advises students.
INDUSTRIAL OR ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST	• Works in a business or industrial setting to help with hiring or firing, testing, interviewing and placement. • Assists in developing more hospitable and effective workplaces.

Table 2.3 Areas of emphasis under the various domains that psychologists practice under (Adapted from Sternberg, 2001: 24-26)

I concur with Eloff (2002) that one of the consequences of this needs-based approach of traditional psychology is that practitioners are at risk of becoming fixated on problems and deficiencies of clients. This is often evident in the terminology that is used and the making available of resources based on needs while neglecting strengths that may be present. An important factor that may not be part of (or may not be fore-grounded) in such a traditional approach in psychology is a focus on strengths, assets, capacities and

resources that are evident and existent in the client's life, both on an internal and external level (Eloff, 2002). A greater focus on internal and external strengths, assets, capacities and resources during intervention is what has become known as the asset-based approach (Eloff, 2002). The asset-based approach reflects thinking embedded in positive psychology, which is the focus of this study and is discussed in the following section.

2.4 THE CONSTRUCT OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

2.4.1 The history and rationale behind positive psychology

Positive psychology's main purpose is to catalyse a change in the focus of psychology from a preoccupation with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities in life. Seligman (2002) argues that the exclusive attention that was given to pathology neglected the fulfilled individual and the thriving community, and neglected the possibility of building on existing strengths, which has the potential to be the most important weapon that can be used in therapy (Compton, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2002).

However, positive psychology as the *study of positive emotions, positive character and positive institutions* is not a new science altogether (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman *et al.*, 2005). Building on the pioneering work of Rogers (1942), Maslow (1970), Jahoda (1958) and Erikson (1963), positive psychologists have studied mental health and wellbeing, albeit from a unique perspective. Positive psychologists have studied these works on mental health from the perspective of enhancing their understanding of how, why and under what conditions positive emotions, positive character and the institutions that allow them to flourish, exist (Seligman *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, positive psychologists do not claim to have invented the idea of pursuing happiness as a scientific study, but instead suggest that they have unified scattered theory and research into a single construct (Peterson & Park, 2003).

Positive psychology is defined by Sheldon and King (2001:216) as *"the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues*, *which adopts a more open and appreciative perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities*". Positive psychology uses psychological theory, research and intervention techniques to understand the positive, the adaptive, the creative, and the emotionally fulfilling elements of human behaviour. Therefore positive psychology studies what people do right and how they manage to do this. Positive psychology also helps people develop those qualities that lead to greater fulfilment for themselves and for others. It aims to discover and promote factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to thrive and flourish (Compton, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2002). By implication this would mean focusing on *intrinsic* strengths, resources and assets during interventions, rather than solely focusing on pathology. Hence, positive psychology's greatest distinguishing factor from traditional psychology is its focus on inherent strengths, resources and capacities.

The movement of positive psychology has levelled numerous criticisms against traditional, empirical psychology in order to justify a shift in thinking from traditional psychology to positive psychology. Amongst the greater of these criticisms levelled is that traditional psychology renders individuals passive *victims* of life incidents as traditional psychology does not see people as being able to control their own fate or emotions (Centre for Confidence and Well-being, 2006). Positive psychologists see traditional psychology as 'lacking' as traditional psychology has spent a large amount of time researching negative emotions and places an emphasis on trying to *fix* what is wrong with individuals, rather than identifying and fostering the individual's strengths and capacities. This leads to a negative bias towards the perspective of traditional psychology and implies that traditional psychology is not attentive to the entire range of human experiences (Centre for Confidence and Well-being, 2006).

2.4.2 The founding pillars of positive psychology

According to Seligman (2000) positive psychology can be described in more detail by referring to three pillars: First, at the su*bjective level*, positive psychology looks at ***positive subjective states or positive emotions*** such as happiness, joy, satisfaction with life (in the past), relaxation, love, intimacy, hope and optimism for the future), contentment, flow and happiness (in the present). These positive emotions lead to valued subjective states (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive constructive states can also include constructive thoughts such as optimism and hope concerning the self and the future. They can also include feelings of energy, vitality and confidence, or the effect of positive emotions; an example of this is laughter.

Secondly, at the *individual level*, positive psychology focuses on the study of ***positive individual traits,*** or the most enduring persistent behaviour patterns seen in people over time. This might include individual traits such as courage, wisdom, talent, persistence or honesty. Moreover, the capacity for love and vocation, interpersonal skill, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future-mindedness and spirituality can be included in this category. Positive psychology includes the study of positive behaviour and traits that are used to define "character strengths" or virtues. It can also include the ability to develop aesthetic sensibility or the ability to tap into creative potentials and the drive to pursue excellence.

Lastly, at the *group or societal level*, positive psychology focuses on ***development, creation, and maintenance of positive situations*** in the context of civic duties and institutions that lead to better citizenship by individuals. In this area positive psychology focuses on addressing issues such as the development of civic virtues, the creation of healthy families, the study of healthy work environments, and positive communities. Specific characteristics accessed in this category are responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance and work ethic (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Positive psychology may also be involved in investigations that look at how institutions can work better to support and nurture all the citizens they impact upon.

Therefore in many ways positive psychology focuses on the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing on a number of levels, such as the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural and global (Compton, 2005). In terms of this study I understand this to mean that all these levels of functioning are essential to positive growth and wellbeing. Thus when incorporating the principles and constructs of positive psychology during a psychometric feedback, in order to effectively use psychometric results to highlight and/or develop individuals' strengths, a practitioner will consider both internal states and traits, as well as external influences and motivators of behaviour (such as societal influences described above).

2.4.3 The process of flow

The process / concept of *flow* is the result of studies by Csikszentmihalyi that look at what gives people enjoyment and is a key concept in positive psychology (Kelley, 2004). The process of flow is an intrinsically rewarding and motivating activity and its source is free-flowing thinking that results when the mind is clear (Kelley, 2004). It occurs when individuals become so absorbed in an activity that they lose themselves and their sense of time is altered. When activities are enjoyed to such an extent that one becomes so engrossed in them and often has so little sense of oneself that one does not feel anything – not even happiness. However, after engaging in such an activity we have such a strong sense of *gratification* that we understand the activity as enjoyable and satisfying and as a result such experiences contribute substantially to our feelings of happiness and wellbeing. (Centre for Confidence and Well-being, 2006). Such *flow-inducing activities* can be anything from reading to a social interaction.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) believes that it is a natural human process for the brain to tend to negative thoughts and for individuals to direct such negativity towards themselves. The role of positive emotion is not simply to indicate wellbeing or the absence of negative emotion. Instead, positive emotions have the capacity to encourage and foster wellbeing and flourishing (Fredrickson, 2001). Negative emotions tend to limit individuals' perspectives, leaving them focused on problems and deficits only. Positive emotions on the other hand, lead to greater thoughts, actions and behaviours from people. The experience of positive emotions leads to improved health, relationships and intellectual and psychological functioning (Fredrickson, 2001).

Based on the above understanding of the role of emotions, it can be understood that positive emotions allow individuals to develop as individuals. Flow, as a resulting process (of positive emotions), provides individuals with the opportunity to gain control over their conscious being while experiencing events more optimally and developing into more complex and richer individuals. Flow is value-free and is a purely subjective experience. The only ingredient for flow is that the activity being pursued is meaningful to the individual. The idea of flow relates very strongly to what Seligman (2002) refers to as the concept of an *engaged life*. In Section 2.6.1 I discuss Seligman's (2002) views in this regard more in-depth.

2.4.4 Positive prevention and positive therapy

As Positive Psychology is primarily based in the domain of helping professions, it places a clear emphasis on *positive prevention* and *positive therapy* in such helping relationships (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). The two modes of feedback interviews which constitute the core of this study fulfilled the role of *intervention* during the process of subject-choice with the Grade 10 participants. As a form of intervention, the feedback interviews concluded the helping process with regard to the subject-choice assessments.

Positive therapy consists of instilling hope-related strategies and strength-building strategies and focuses on helping clients to assemble their strengths and resources to help them to use these in their everyday lives (Tan, 2006). ***Positive prevention*** concentrates on certain human strengths that have been found to act as buffers against mental illness, namely courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance and the capacity for flow and insight. The task of prevention is to create a science of human strength whose mission will be to understand and learn how to foster these virtues in young people. Therefore, by identifying, amplifying and concentrating on the strengths in people at risk, positive psychology will act as a form of effective prevention. Practitioners need to recognize and ***amplify their clients' strengths rather than repair their weaknesses*** and psychologists need to work with families, schools, communities and corporations to develop a climate that fosters these strengths. Practice that relies on the positive psychology worldview may have the direct effect of preventing many of the major emotional disorders. It may also have two side effects, making the lives of our clients physically healthier (given all we are learning about the effect of mental wellbeing on the body) and reorienting psychology to its neglected missions in making normal people stronger and more productive, as well as making high human potential actual (Snyder & Lopez, 2002).

The relevance of these underpinnings is clear in the context of this study as psychometric testing is generally employed to assess individuals' levels of functioning (cognitive, emotional, social, and developmental domains) and their personal traits. Psychometric results of this nature are employed to understand ability, to assess or aid an individual's development and functioning, career facilitation and selection/placement of employees. Consequently, when interacting within a helping context on an individual level, psychometric results of personal traits and behaviours can easily identify areas of concern or potential concern. Preventing or treating such concerns in a positive manner through the mobilisation of strengths could have an

overlapping impact of a positive nature, allowing for more meaningful experiences and greater quality of life (Tan, 2006).

2.5 THE NATURE OF A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL PSYCHOMETRIC FEEDBACK INTERVIEW

2.5.1 Defining the construct of a positive psychological feedback interview

Positive psychologically based interventions are aimed at understanding people at their best and increasing individual happiness (Tan, 2006). The constructs of positive psychology illustrate that by using positive psychological principles in a therapeutic intervention, strengths and positive human traits and characteristics will be built and measured (these include character strengths and human traits and virtues) which make life worth living as they allow individuals to *flourish* instead of simply surviving. Detecting such strengths in an individual is an important part of good science and practice and thus should be an integral part of the positive psychological feedback interviews (Lopez, Snyder & Rasmussen, 2003).

Examples of such strengths that could potentially be developed in such therapeutic situations are courage, interpersonal skill, rationality, insight, optimism, honesty, perseverance, realism, capacity for pleasure, putting challenges into perspective, future mindedness, optimism, hope, and the ability to find purpose (Tan, 2006). To conduct a positive psychological psychometric feedback interview, it is necessary to be able to identify such strengths and weaknesses and the associations that exist between them. Once these associations have been identified, their *existence* and *relevance/meaning* in a client's life can be communicated to the client, and they can be used as a basis for recommendations for care (Lopez *et al*, 2003).

The aim of a positive psychological feedback interview is to understand people at their best and this entails accessing individuals' strengths. The Centre for Confidence and

Wellbeing (2006) defines *strength* as an individual's capacity to behave, think and feel in a way that allows them to actualise their optimal levels of functioning and performance. Achieving these levels of optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of positive outcomes that will have value for clients as a result of these strengths lend deeper meaning to clients' lives. Strengths identified in this manner can be linked to intellectual or cognitive strengths, social intelligence, virtues or strengths of character (Centre for Confidence and Well-being, 2006).

Strategies of positive psychology and positive therapy such as *tactics* and *deep strategies* (as mentioned in Chapter 1) can be helpful in facilitating such strength building in a positive psychological feedback interview. These are outlined by Seligman (2002) as non-specific techniques. In terms of *deep strategies,* these are more intense and powerful strategies that are associated with the positive psychological methodology (Seligman, 2002). Seligman (2002:6) describes *deep strategies* as "techniques of positive psychology" that can lead to the creation and use of additional techniques that build upon these positive psychological techniques, such as the instilling of hope and the building of buffering strengths that exist within the client. The eventual goal of positive psychological intervention (such as what I propose in the alternate form of feedbacks) is the inspiration of *happiness* as a long-term factor for improved quality of life (Seligman *et al.*, 2005).

Tan (2006) describes deep strategies as those that build strengths through effective psychotherapy. Deep strategies lead to the development of strengths such as courage, interpersonal skill, insight, optimism, honesty, capacity for pleasure, future-mindedness, perseverance and finding purpose.

Thus positive psychology's deep strategies can be understood as the process of understanding and building on individuals' strengths throughout the course of the therapy process, in order to develop clients' individual strengths. Employing the

technique of deep strategies in the positive psychological feedback interviews illustrates that this mode of feedback interview possesses similar qualities to psychological intervention as it offers therapeutic benefits such as that of increasing hope, optimism, interpersonal skills, insight into one's life and finding purpose as outlined above (Tan, 2006).

In practice deep strategies may appear in the form of techniques that therapists are trained to employ regularly. One such example is the technique of 'narration', when therapists encourage clients to tell their life stories, thus making sense of what would otherwise be meaningless and enabling the clients with knowledge of themselves (Duckworth, Steen and Seligman, 2005). Encouraging clients to 'narrate' their life stories may occur in the form of using non-verbal prompts (such as "Tell me more" or "uh huh") (Egan, 2007). All psychotherapy techniques (such as narration) help to buffer against mental disorder in just the same way as *hope* does (Duckworth *et al.*, 2005).

2.5.2 Strength building in a positive psychological feedback interview

In order to increase happiness through the use of a positive psychological feedback interview, it helps to understand how the term "happiness" is defined within the confines of positive psychology. Seligman (2002) defines happiness in terms of three more distinct routes of happiness. According to Seligman (2002) the most satisfied people are those who orientate their pursuits to all three, with the greatest emphasis placed on engagement and meaning. These three pursuits are:

- Positive emotion and pleasure (the pleasant life). This refers to having as many positive emotions as one can and learning the skills to amplify them. This form of happiness examines how people optimally experience, forecast and savour the positive feelings and emotions that are part of normal and healthy living (such as relationships, hobbies, interests and entertainment) (Seligman, 2004).

- Engagement (the engaged life) investigates the beneficial effect of immersion, absorption, and flow that individuals feel when they are optimally engaged in their primary activities. These states are experienced when there is a positive match between a person's strength and the task they are doing, i.e. when they feel confident that they can accomplish the tasks they face. This refers to a state when one feels like time has stopped, when self-consciousness is blocked and when one is completely comfortable with oneself and the activity being pursued (Seligman, 2004).
- Meaning (the meaningful life or life of affiliation). To achieve this form of happiness, individuals need to explore how they derive a sense of positive wellbeing, belonging, meaning, and purpose from being part of and contributing to something greater, larger and more permanent than the individual themselves (Seligman, 2004). By the term *something greater than the individual* itself, Seligman (2004) refers to being part of a social or religious group, a specific tradition, a nature, an organisation or a belief system). Moreover, aside from merely being part of a greater system or organisation, to attain happiness in the form of *meaning* as described here by Seligman (2004), it is important to know one's greatest strengths and then to utilise such strengths in the service of the greater existence to which the individual assigns meaning. This will lead to deeper life satisfaction, greater pleasure and positive emotion.

The building of strengths which I aim to achieve (in this case) through a positive psychological feedback interview will therefore focus on specific strengths. Specific strengths include talents, skills, knowledge, interests, dreams/hopes/goals, creativity, culture, passion and connections (Saleebey, 1992). The process of strength building should allow the client to be an active participant in the process, using activities in which the client has to brainstorm ideas on how to use signature strengths that have been identified in new ways. Involvement of this nature will foster motivation for

growth (Tan, 2006). Specific strategies that were developed based on this literature review in terms of administering a positive psychological feedback interview will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Such development and strength building in individuals allows for another key positive psychological construct to potentially come into effect, namely that of *flourishing.* Keyes and Haidt (2003) refer to flourishing as that experience when individuals experience high levels of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing due to vigour and vitality, self-determination, continuous self-growth, close relationships and meaningful and purposeful life.

Thus the above reasoning creates a logical argument to affirm that of Duckworth *et al.* (2005), where the authors argue that positive psychological interventions indicate a high positive prognosis to work for two main reasons:

1. Positive interventions by definition build pleasure, engagement and meaning, and can thus be easily justifiable in their own right.
2. Building positive emotion, engagement and meaning may actually counter disorder itself.

Research has indicated that individuals who experience positive emotions are more likely to find meaning in negative events. Such a process of meaning-making in turn leads to greater positive emotions and growth. Such individuals also tend to indicate higher levels of resilience (Duckworth *et al.*, 2005).

However, the development of such positive traits and virtues, accompanied by feelings of wellbeing and optimism are not solely intrinsically motivated processes. Scientific evidence shows that the absence of psychological wellbeing in adolescents is due to certain missing external factors. By external factors Kelley (2004) refers to teaching cognitive techniques, altering negative attributions, engaging meaningful activities,

satisfying lower need states, or the process of changing attitude or perceptual styles that can allow the restructuring of adolescents' goals, and subsequently improve the quality of their personal experience.

Careful analysis of the above statements highlight that a majority of these key external factors are factors that could be addressed during a feedback interview regarding a career facilitation session. The strengths-based approach identifies key strengths as talents, skills, knowledge, interests, dreams/hopes or goals, creativity, culture, passion and connections (Saleebey, 1992). Once again these key strengths are all naturally linked to the process of career facilitation.

2.5.3 Addressing and overcoming the challenges posed in the process of administering a positive psychological feedback interview

During the development of the positive psychology movement there has been much criticism levelled against it, which is relevant to the process of undertaking a positive psychological feedback interview.

Firstly, one of the greater criticisms levelled against the movement of positive psychology is that in studying and practising it, practitioners tend to fail to recognise and ignore the existing negative aspects of life such as problems, needs and deficiencies (Eloff, 2006; Gable and Haidt, 2005). However, this criticism is often a result of a grave misunderstanding since positive psychology does in fact deal with the problems, needs and deficiencies of clients, albeit in a different way (Eloff, 2006). Instead of denying clients' needs and problems as positive psychology implies, it rather builds on the work of pathology, distress and dysfunction that characterise traditional psychology by accessing the human resilience, strength and growth. These latter characteristics are the flip side of the coin of negative aspects such as distress, dysfunction and pathology (Gable and Haidt, 2005).

In the positive psychological feedback interviews completed as part of the data collection process for this study, the intention is not simply to identify the participant's strengths, assets and positive characteristics from the psychometric assessment results and highlight these for the participant. Rather, the intention is to identify such positive aspects in the participant and highlight means in which these positive aspects can be used to overcome and be a buffer against weaknesses and challenges that are evident and may be inevitably based on the participants' inherent characteristics that can be identified through the psychometric assessments. Hence, the positive psychological feedback interview that defines this study involves *engaging problems through accessing assets* (Eloff, 2006).

Secondly, the complexity assigned to positive constructs varies in contexts as characteristics that may be viewed as strengths in one context but not in another context. Similarly, what is viewed as positive may become a weakness as contexts change and time progresses. Therefore calls for increasing the levels of conceptual understanding in positive psychology have been made (Eloff, 2006).

In response to this criticism, as was the case in the positive psychological feedback interviews conducted for this study, the assigning of meaning in this sense with regard to the value of characteristics that constitute strengths or weaknesses, cannot be predetermined and generalised to entire groups of people (Gable & Haidt, 2005). To determine what constitutes a strength for a specific participant and what does not, a guiding factor is the choices that the participants make for themselves. These choices are indicative of the value that participants assign to specific characteristics and to what has contributed to the individual's processes of constructing meaning. Such decisions regarding what is good, right and positive are often linked to a greater set of values such as culture or religion. These decisions may inform what aspects bring satisfaction to a client and in turn, may inform what aims to pursue in order to bring satisfaction for clients. Therefore it can be deduced that clients are the masters of their own destiny

and practitioners are simply there to facilitate the process of clients' meaning making (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

2.6 INTEGRATING READINGS ON FEEDBACK INTERVIEWS

In terms of this study, in which clients' experiences of the two modes of feedback interviews are compared, I analysed the literature to identify potential common areas in the process of providing feedback from the two different modes. Analysis of the literature indicated many aspects of employing a traditional feedback interview that will be similar (or at times even unchanged) during the process of feedback from the perspective of positive psychology. These common aspects between the two modes of feedback include conveying the assessment results and findings in a meaningful manner after integrating the individual test results into an individual profile for each participant, and consideration of the ethical and professional obligations of the assessor or the administering Educational Psychologist in the context of this study. Furthermore the interpersonal skills such as mannerisms of professional engagement, verbal and non-verbal communication skills and the general guidelines (see Table 2.1 and 2.2 above) are all common to both the traditional and the positive psychological feedback interviews.

One major *difference* that can be identified between the traditional and the positive psychological modes of feedback is that the positive psychological feedback interview places emphasis on the process of foregrounding strengths and mobilising environmental support to help enable the client to achieve greater quality of life. In the traditional feedback interviews, according to Bergh (2007) weaknesses are discussed in a ***constructive*** manner.

Tactics are basic strategies that are *common to both* the traditional and the positive psychological domains and will thus be used in both modes of feedback interviews. Amongst these *tactics* Seligman (2002) includes methods such as attention, authority figure, rapport, trust, opening up, naming the problem, tricks of the trade (e.g.: "Let's

pause here" instead of "Let's stop here"). These tactics can be better understood in terms of person-centred interviews of the Rogerian school of thought, where focus lies on the self and an individual's perception of him/herself. The clients' construction of reality thus provides the basis for the understanding of the clients' own reality, and the client creates his own meaning (Sternberg, 2001).

Tactics (as described here by Seligman, 2002) can be better understood in terms of the communication skills of the helper dealt with in Section 2.5. As explored in Section 2.5 above, the helper (be it an Educational Psychologist or assessor) must employ effective communication strategies to create a therapeutic environment where the client feels comfortable and at ease (Egan, 2007). Under such circumstances the client will be able to benefit most from the feedback process.

In Table 2.4 below I outline the most prominent characteristics and principles of positive psychology and detail the manner in which these were implemented in the positive psychological mode of feedback interviews by the administering Educational Psychologist.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTIC	***MANNER IN WHICH INCORPORATED INTO POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL FEEDBACK SESSION***
Assigning Meaning	• Assigning meaning to assessment results by identifying strengths and placing them in the context of the participant's life and daily experiences. In so doing she will obtain an understanding of how her strengths can be mobilised to address change and used effectively in her everyday life.
Positive Emotions And Positive Subjective States **Positive Individual Traits** **Development, Creation And Maintenance Of Positive Situations**	• Through the analysis of personality and interest questionnaires, identify positive subjective states; positive individual traits and how to maintain positive situations that the participant may experience. These positive emotional states, traits and situations have the *potential to act as buffers* against weaknesses (negative events possibly) and are thus *strengths* that can be mobilised. Strengths can be mobilised by assigning meaning to them as stated above.
The Process Of Flow	• Flow-inducing activities can be identified from the psychometric media administered, particularly the interests, what he/she values and personality questionnaire. Flow-inducing activities relate strongly to positive emotions and lead to the creation of meaning-making processes for the individual. This renders flow-inducing activity strengths which can be mobilised through the knowledge of their existence and knowledge of how to access these strengths. To create this type of awareness of these strengths the feedback process should provide insight into these meaning-

	making processes.
Positive Preventions	• Positive prevention entails instilling hope-related strategies and developing strength-building strategies to help clients to learn to use strengths on a daily basis. This can be done by following the process described above which will lead to more intense meaning-making processes, and (potentially) greater happiness. Mobilising these potential strengths could act as buffers against negative events and weaknesses for participants in the future.
Positive Therapy	• This entails identifying characteristics and traits (possibly from the personality and interest questionnaires) that have the potential to act as buffers against future negative events or even mental illness. Once these characteristics have been identified they can be mobilised through the attachment of meaning (and thus value) to each of these character strengths and traits, based on the context of the participant's life.
Deep Strategies	• The use of basic counselling techniques to encourage clients to share their stories which eventually could lead to the identification of strengths, assets and capacities. These strengths, assets and capacities could in turn be mobilised to overcome negative life events and mental illness through the process of meaning-making as described above.
Regulating External Factors	• The identification of external factors that contribute to positive wellbeing, flow and overall happiness can be equated with the identification of internal strengths as they have the same potential to be a buffer against strengths and to foster happiness. Once such external factors have been identified, they can be mobilised through the same

	meaning-making process that is described above, where the client is encouraged to use the newly identified strengths in new ways to increase their happiness and create buffers against mental stressors.

Table 2.4 Framework for developing a positive psychological feedback framework

In Table 2.5 below I outline the defining characteristics of a traditional psychological feedback interview and describe the manner in which characteristics were implemented in the traditional feedback interviews by the administering Educational Psychologist.

Table 2.5 Framework for developing a traditional feedback interview

TRADITIONAL PSYCHOLOGY CHARACTERISTIC	***MANNER IN WHICH INCORPORATED INTO TRADITIONAL PSYCHOLOGY FEEDBACK SESSION***
Establishing And Maintaining An Effective Helping Relationship To Respond To The Client's *Needs*, *Thoughts* And *Behaviours.*	• Fostering an effective helping relationship in order to enable the therapist to respond to the client's ***needs***, ***thoughts*** and ***behaviours***. Hence an emphasis is placed on the identification of the client's needs, thoughts and behaviours that may require attention in terms of the client's development.
Responding To *Distress*, *Impairment* Or A *Response That Is Atypical According To Social Norms And Expectations*.	• Responding to clients' needs in terms of dysfunction and dyscontrol, by accessing their needs and providing feedback in terms of clients' needs, barriers and weaknesses.
This Approach To Psychological Assessment /Intervention Is Based On The Premise That Establishing A Client's Needs Or Deficiencies Can Provide A Basis For Intervention.	• Conducting an assessment in terms of clients' weaknesses, challenges, barriers and needs, in order to ascertain a path for further intervention based on these identified weaknesses and needs.

2.6.1 Defining the procedure of a positive psychological feedback interview

Based on the integrated readings that I discussed in Section 2.6 above, the procedure to complete a feedback interview from the perspective of positive psychology can be described and understood through the steps that I outline below. In Figure 2.1 I provide a visual representation of the process of completing a feedback interview from the perspective of positive psychology.

Step 1: This step entailed the process of outlining and explaining the clients' psychometric results based on the subject choice assessment that they completed, as well as the conclusions and the recommendations that the Educational Psychologist derived based on the psychometric results of the clients. This step shares strategies and principles that are common to both the traditional and the positive psychological feedback interview (as discussed in Section 2.2 above).

Step 2: From this step onwards, the Educational Psychologist moves beyond the basic process of conveying psychometric results and begins to employ the principles of positive psychology per se. In order to effectively employ the positive psychological principles that I identified in current literature (as outlined in Section 2.5 above), the Educational Psychologist based her discussion with the client on the process of identifying strengths and weaknesses, both on an individual and an environmental level, plotted on a quadrant map (see Figure 2.1 for illustration of the quadrant map). During step 2 of the positive psychological feedback interview the Educational Psychologist facilitates the process of the client's identification of individual and environmental strengths.

Step 3: This step centres on the identification of the clients' weaknesses on the individual and environmental level. These weaknesses were also plotted on the Quadrant map (see Figure 2.1 below). Both the clients' strengths (identified with the client in Step 2) and their weaknesses (identified in this step) are established based on the results provided by the assessment.

Step 4: The identification of strengths and weaknesses in Steps 2 and 3 constitute the basis of the continued discussion of the positive psychological interview. Step 4 of this process can be described as the core aspect of this mode of interview as it focuses on amplifying clients' strengths in order to enhance their ability to overcome weaknesses, thus enabling them to flourish in their environments. The Educational Psychologist thus illustrated for the client what his/her strengths are (on the individual and the environmental level) and thereafter illustrates how these strengths can be used to overcome the client's weaknesses. For example, if the client's organisational ability is identified as a personal strength, it can be used to overcome an environmental weakness such as having to study in an environment that has limited resources. By mobilising the organisational skills, the client may be able to attain maximum benefit from the sparse resources available in his/her environment.

Step 5: In the final step of the positive psychological feedback interview the Educational Psychologist focuses on formulating coping strategies and defining career outcomes, based on the discussion that ensued during Step 2, 3 and 4. In so doing the Educational Psychologist closes the feedback session.

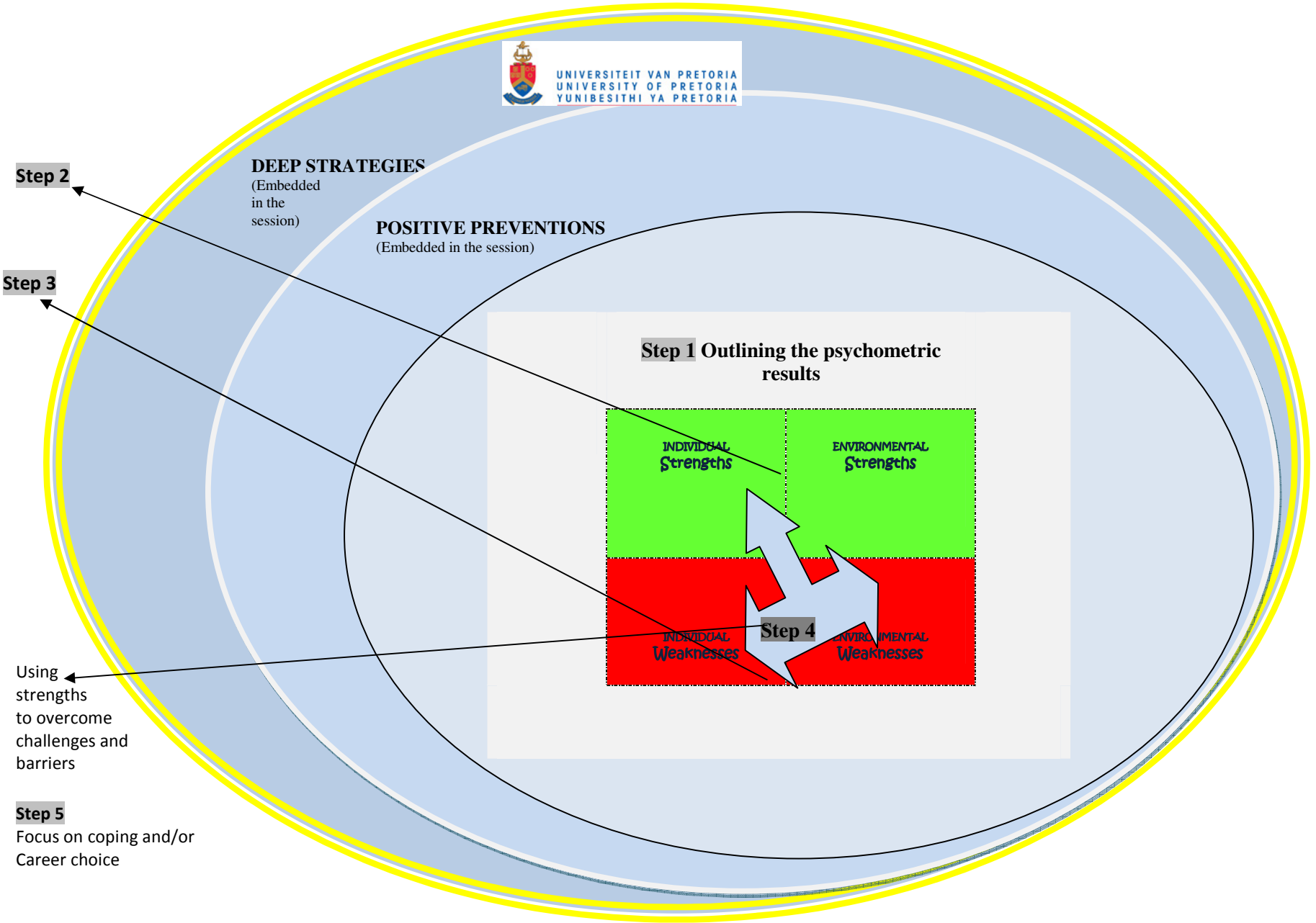


Figure 2.1 Visual representation of the procedure of a positive psychological feedback interview

2.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I aimed to build on the brief literature review that I provided in Chapter 1, with a focus on the defining concepts of this study. I provided a brief overview of the actual process of feedback of results and what it aims to provide for the client in general. I also explored the constructs of the concept of traditional psychology and that of positive psychology more intensely, and then looked at what the process of a traditional feedback entails as well as what the framework for a positive psychological feedback should be, based on the available literature to date.

This chapter focuses on exploring the conceptual and theoretical aspects of the traditional and positive psychological modes of feedback as these two modes of feedback are juxtaposed in this study. Nevertheless, it must be clearly emphasised that there does exist a continuum of *alternate modes of conducting feedback*, each relative to particular paradigmatic beliefs. Thus, the two modes of feedback compared in this study are simply two of the numerous options of modes of feedback that may be employed when providing clients' with feedback.

In Chapter 3 I will go on to elaborate on the methodological considerations of this study that I briefly outlined in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

In Chapter 2 I presented a literature review where I explored the available literature relative to the key concepts underlying the study. That is, a (traditional) psychometric feedback interview, the general concept of positive psychology and the concept of employing the principles of positive psychology within the bounds of psychometric feedbacks.

In this chapter I discuss and explore more thoroughly the underlying methodology that formed the groundwork for this study. More specifically, I intend to define, describe and clarify the epistemology, research methodology and data analysis and interpretation procedures which I followed to conclude this study. These methodological choices were presented in Chapter 1, and I explain my research decisions in this chapter.

3.1.1 Comparative purpose of the study

As clearly illustrated by the title of this study, it has a comparative purpose. I will draw comparisons between participants' experiences of a traditional psychometric feedback interview and a positive psychological feedback interview.

The logic underpinning the comparative purpose of this study is that through the process of comparing the experiences of clients of the two modes of feedback interviews in a meaningful manner, they can be better understood (Bryman, 2006). Comparative studies by their very nature imply a systematic search for similarities and differences in the case under study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). By comparing the two modes of intervention (i.e. the feedback interviews) I had the advantage of being able to

understand the fine distinctions of the two modes of intervention and was able to understand each mode and client's experiences thereof in greater detail (Bryman, 2001).

One of the major aims of this study (as discussed in Section 1.1 in Chapter 1) is to present a theoretical contribution to the growing body of literature in the field of Positive Psychology by using positive psychology to inform the process of providing feedback on psychometric results. My ability to gain deep insight into and understanding of clients' experiences of such a feedback interview was based on the comparative nature of this study and ultimately allowed me to fulfil my goal of informing theory and practice regarding feedback interviews based on the findings of this study.

3.2 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

In the following section I will discuss my selected epistemological and methodological paradigms.

3.2.1 An interpretivist epistemology

As I outlined in Chapter 1, I undertook this study from an *interpretivist* paradigmatic stance. Through the application of this lens I aimed to understand the personal experiences, meanings, intentions and general subjective worlds of the participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Schurink, 1998). This, in turn, has allowed me to identify unique characteristics of the two modes of feedback interviews completed.

Working from within the interpretivist epistemological perspective implies that knowledge was acquired by means of observations and the interpretation of results. The implementation of this epistemological perspective thus infers that whereas events and situations could be understood and interpreted, it was not possible to predict or control

them in any way (Schurink, 1998). Working from within this epistemological paradigm posed certain distinct advantages as well as disadvantages for the overall study. These advantages and disadvantages will subsequently be discussed in terms of their implications for the study.

Interpretivism advocates the view that its central endeavour is to understand the subjective world of human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get *inside* the person and understand participants from within (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). This proved a definite advantage for this study, as the aim of this study was to focus on the intrapersonal effects of the positive psychological feedback interview. To do this I used written narratives from the participants themselves (both prior and subsequent to the feedback interview) to gain access to the participants' lifeworlds and understand how they experienced the respective feedback interviews. Accessing participants' internal experiences allowed me to assess whether or not these alternate forms of feedback interviews (i.e. the traditional and the positive psychological feedback processes) produced varied effects or similarities.

Amongst the greatest criticisms levelled against the interpretivist paradigm is that it tends to overemphasis the participants' inside world, neglecting the power of external influences that shape behaviour and thought (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). In terms of this study, such an overemphasis of the internal world could have led me to overlook external factors that might have had an influence on the participants' experience of the respective feedback interviews, thus impacting on the final results of the study. This fact thereby highlights one issue that posed a challenge to me as researcher. I strove to overcome this barrier by my attentiveness to the external factors that surround the participants and myself during the data collection process, specifically during observation-as-context of interaction (Angrosino & Mays De Perez, 2000). In order to realise my goal in this regard and be attentive to external factors in the environment, I maintained a research diary (Patton, 2002) in which I documented (and was thus able to

account for) external factors that I observed during the data collection process (see Appendix A).

3.2.2 A mixed-method approach

In order to fully explore, describe and differentiate between a traditional psychometric feedback interview and a positive psychological psychometric interview, I employed both quantitative, as well as qualitative methods of data collection, signalling a mixed-method approach. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003:29) describe mixed-method designs as those that "combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches into the research methodology of a single study." I chose such a combined design because the end product of the research is 'usable' in practice (Brannen, 2004). I concur with Brannen (2004) that at a time when we see the importance of theoretical concerns declining, along with the waning of methodological concerns, such practices facilitate theoretical contribution.

More specifically the mixed-method design that was applied in this study can be defined as the *embedded mixed-method design* (Creswell, 2007; Ivankova, Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007), as represented in Figure 3.1 below. The embedded mixed-method design is utilised when a researcher has to draw secondary data that is related to, but different from the primary data, to answer research questions. To achieve this, the researcher will embed one type of data within another type of data method (Ivankova *et al.*, 2007). In my study it was imperative to identify the psychometric profiles of the young girls (in the context of a subject choice assessment) in order to complete those two modes of feedback interviews (see Section 1.2 in Chapter 1 for related research questions).

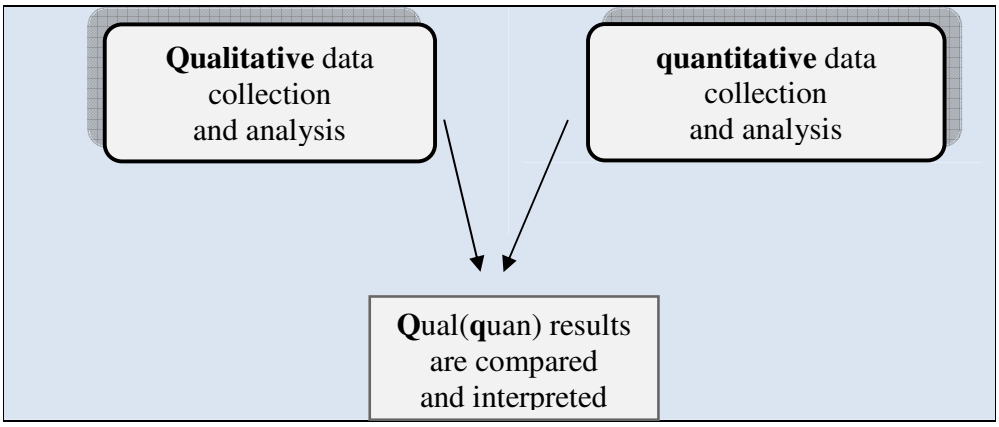


Figure 3.1 Embedded mixed-method design – flow diagram presentation

In the context of this study the use of the embedded design can be identified in the manner in which I used the psychometric profiles as secondary data in order to collect the primary data in the form of the feedback interviews (which formed the intervention). Without the secondary data source of the psychometric profiles, I would have had no data on which to base the context of the feedback interviews, and thus been unable to collect the primary data and therefore could not attain the aims of this study.

I used *qualitative* data collection and analysis techniques in this study as preliminary grounding for the study. I supplemented *qualitative* data with *quantitative* data collection measures, which played a comparatively smaller role in the overall study. Based on this framework for the study, the methodological paradigm could thus be referred to as ***QUALquan***, highlighting the dominance of the qualitative components of this study, as compared to its quantitative component (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003).

In Figure 3.2 below I summarize the range of qualitative and quantitative data strategies that I used in the various phases of this study. Through the outline provided in Figure 3.2 the significance of combining qualitative and quantitative data in order to compare the experiences of a traditional and a positive psychological feedback interview becomes clear.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">INTERVENTION PHASE BEGINS:
Subject-choice assessments completed by researcher (in the role of Psychometrist)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Quantitative Data:
Psychometric assessment data, namely:
• The Differential Aptitude Test - DAT (Form L) (Owen, 2000)
• The Jung Personality Questionnaire (JPQ) (Du Toit, 1996) &
• The South African Vocational Interest Inventory (SAVII) (Du Toit, Prinsloo, Gevers & Harillal, 1993)</td><td>Qualitative Data:
• Observation as context-of-interaction
• Researcher’s diary/reflective journal
• Researcher’s field notes</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">FEEDBACK INTERVIEWS – PILOT PHASE:
Piloted feedback interviews with 1 client (traditional interview) & 1 client (positive psychological interview)
Pilot analysed and adapted where necessary</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">FEEDBACK INTERVIEWS – FINAL INTERVENTION PHASE

Quantitative Data:
Scores and interpreted psychometric profiles based on results of:

♦ The Differential Aptitude Test - DAT (Form L) (Owen, 2000)
♦ The Jung Personality Questionnaire (JPQ) (Du Toit, 1996) &
♦ The South African Vocational Interest Inventory (SAVII) (Du Toit et al., 1993)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Traditional interview
(with 1 final client)</td><td>Positive psychological interview
(with 1 final client)</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Qualitative data:
• Audio-visual recordings of interviews
• Transcripts of recorded interviews
• Researcher’s field notes
• Researcher’s diary
• Participants’ pre- and post- interview written narratives</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">DATA ANALYSIS PHASE – ANALYSIS OF:</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Qualitative data:
• Audio-visual recordings of interviews
• Transcripts of recorded interviews
• Researcher’s field notes
• Researchers’ diary
• Participant’s pre- and post- interview written narratives

All qualitative data sources analysed using thematic analysis technique (Cohen et al., 2003)</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 3.2 Use of quantitative and qualitative data sources in various phases of the mixed-method study

During the course of this study the qualitative component included a selection of data collection strategies (namely the feedback interviews, the girls' written narratives regarding their expectations and experience of the feedback interviews, and my observations). These combined strategies constituted the greater part of the final research product. The supplementary component of the study (i.e. the quantitative component) consisted of psychometric profiles (see Figure 3.2 above). These psychometric profiles (which I will fully describe in Chapter 4) are based on psychometric assessment data collected by means of subject-choice assessments. These psychometric profiles provided the basis of the feedback interviews (the focus of this study).

Regarding the choice of using quantitative data (psychometric data) within an essentially qualitative study, Arsenault and Anderson (1998) are of the opinion that it is a rather useful (as in the case of this study) and an often unavoidable technique of data collection, as it provides a unique perspective. In the context of this study, quantitative psychometric data were not manipulated. Instead, it was used for its general descriptive properties, adding to the richness of the final research product (Arsenault and Anderson, 1998).

Facilitation and complementation are defining features of this study, meaning that the collection of one data source 'facilitates' the collection of another data source, as the psychometric assessments facilitated the collection of the feedback interviews as another data source, which eventually allowed for the assessment of differences and similarities between the two forms of feedback interview (i.e. the traditional and the positive psychological (Brannen, 2004). The quantitative psychometric data complemented the understanding of the comparison between the positive psychological feedback and the 'traditional' feedback (Brannen, 2004). These features of the mixed method approach highlight advantages of combining quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study such as this one.

Morse (2003) describes the goal of social science research as that which enables the understanding of the complexity of human behaviour and experience. Increasing and combining the number of research strategies used within a study not only broadens the *dimensions* of the study, but also causes the *scope* of the study to broaden. Increased methods within a study allow for a more complete picture of human behaviour and experience (Morse, 2003). In the context of this study, such capacity for greater understanding of human experience resulted in a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation (i.e. the difference between the alternate forms of feedback interviews and the participants' experiences of these psychometric feedback interviews). Thus we can conclude that such mixed method strategies resulted in the prompt and adept attainment of the stated research goals (Morse, 2003).

To consider the other end of the spectrum, it is important to acknowledge that a mixed-method approach to research may have particular disadvantages as well. In this regard Brannen (2004) points out that different types of data (i.e. quantitative and qualitative data) cannot be combined to constitute a single rounded reality without encountering problems. For my study this meant that I had to overcome the challenge of integrating the quantitative data into the two modes of the qualitative feedback interviews to complete the data collection process effectively.

Another disadvantage caused by the use of a mixed-method design in this study relates to the incorporation of qualitative analysis techniques of the psychometric results (which became necessary to complete the two modes of feedback interviews) (Bryman, 2001). During this process my personal opinion and judgement may easily have become infused in the interpretation of this quantitative psychometric data, creating a somewhat subjective interpretation of the psychometric data (Bryman, 2001).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.3.1 A clinical case study design

I selected a *clinical case study* design with *comparative purposes* (Durrheim and Terre Blanche, 1999, Miller and Crabtree, 2005). This design alludes to three distinct methodological issues, namely 1) the case study per se 2) the *clinical* case study design and 3) the comparative nature of this study. I discussed the latter under Section 3.1.1, in which I highlighted the comparative *purpose* of this study.

With specific reference to the *clinical case study* design which I utilized, Durrheim and Terre Blanche (1999: 256) illustrate that the term "clinical" in this context *does not refer to medical or clinically related studies expressly.* This view is supported by Miller and Crabtree, who include the *educational arena* as a *clinical* context (Miller and Crabtree, 2005). As illustrated in their cited representative study, this form of case study design can be used to analyse responses to an attitude, an experience, a phenomenon, a set of circumstances, an episode or incident, or a reaction to an occurrence or event. I also deduced from Durrheim and Terre Blanche's work (1999) that the clinical case study design refers to a case study researched *within a professional environment* (such as educational psychology).

The case in my study constituted a *professional environment*, that of educational psychology, (and more specifically the psychometric feedback following the subject-choice assessments). Thus, in line with a clinical case study design, I investigated young girls' *experiences* (of the two modes of feedback interviews) and a phenomenon (the two modes of feedback interviews) was studied. According to the above criteria identified in the work of Durrheim and Terre Blanche (1999) and Miller and Crabtree (2005), I selected a clinical case study design.

The two modes of psychometric feedbacks administered under this study were based on a subject-choice assessment which falls in the career psychology domain of education psychology. Characteristically subject-choice assessments centre predominantly on the areas of ability, personality and interests. To access strengths and weaknesses from the three psychometric measures that were administered to the participants in this study, I analysed the three areas of ability, interest and personality in terms of strength identification. More specifically, in terms of ability, I analysed the Differential Aptitude Test (DAT-L) that was administered to the participants in order to identify their areas of high functioning ability, rather than trying to identify whether a participant had a low aptitude or a high aptitude (Centre for confidence and Well-being, 2006). The ideology behind analysing psychometric test results in this manner follows on Gardner's model of multiple-intelligence (Gardner and Hatch, 1989). Gardner argued that intelligence is not a single entity that can be measured only by a single IQ test. He also argued that different types of intelligence exist independently of one another and that people can have varying levels of intelligence in the various domains of intelligence (Centre for confidence and Well-being, 2006). Similarly I analysed the participants' aptitude results to identify areas in which they indicate high aptitude or ability.

In terms of personality and interest assessment, personality has been defined as a dynamic system within an individual that helps to determine his/her unique patterns of adjustments within a given environment. This definition combined with the definition of strengths I noted above will allow me to identify character strengths and thus provide feedback on these during the two modes of feedback interviews.

To effectively pursue and achieve such happiness, Seligman (2004) suggests a specific process to be followed. This process is applicable to the positive psychological feedback interviews that I proposed in this study, as it follows a similar process of assessment and the intervention that I will follow when completing the psychometric assessment and then the feedback interviews (as a form of intervention). The proposed process is:

a) The first step entails the actual measurement of positive emotion and positive traits. This was achieved by using a set of incomplete sentences based on the constructs of positive psychology, adapted to suit the specific age group and developmental level of the participants (See Appendix B).

b) The second step in this process is to identify positive traits from the assessment measures, and categorise them into themes (as was done during the data analysis process using the technique of thematic analysis).

c) The third step is intervention that will work to increase positive emotion and strengths. In this study the positive psychological feedback interview will act as the intervention process that is being applied to the client. Seligman (2004) further explains that the practical application of positive psychological intervention has the potential to increase the effects of lasting happiness. In the context of this study, encouraging participants to use signature strengths each day in a new way has the potential to provide them with such lasting effects.

The above points illustrate that any kind of results or feedback process should follow a specific structure which should be based on context-specific principles and practices (Bergh, 2007). In the context of the study in question, the feedback interviews should be orientated in the direction of subject-choice processes. The uniqueness of this study relates to the two different modes of conducting feedback interviews that will be explored through the comparison of a client's experience of a positive psychological feedback interview with one done from the traditional perspective.

My selection of the research design allowed me a unique vantage point with regard to accessing data necessary to answer research questions. The case study design required that I described the case in sufficient detail to provide information for thorough comparison (Stake, 2005). In Section 3.5.1, as well as in Section 4.3 I provide a rich description of the case.

3.3.2 Advantages and disadvantages of implementing a clinical case study design

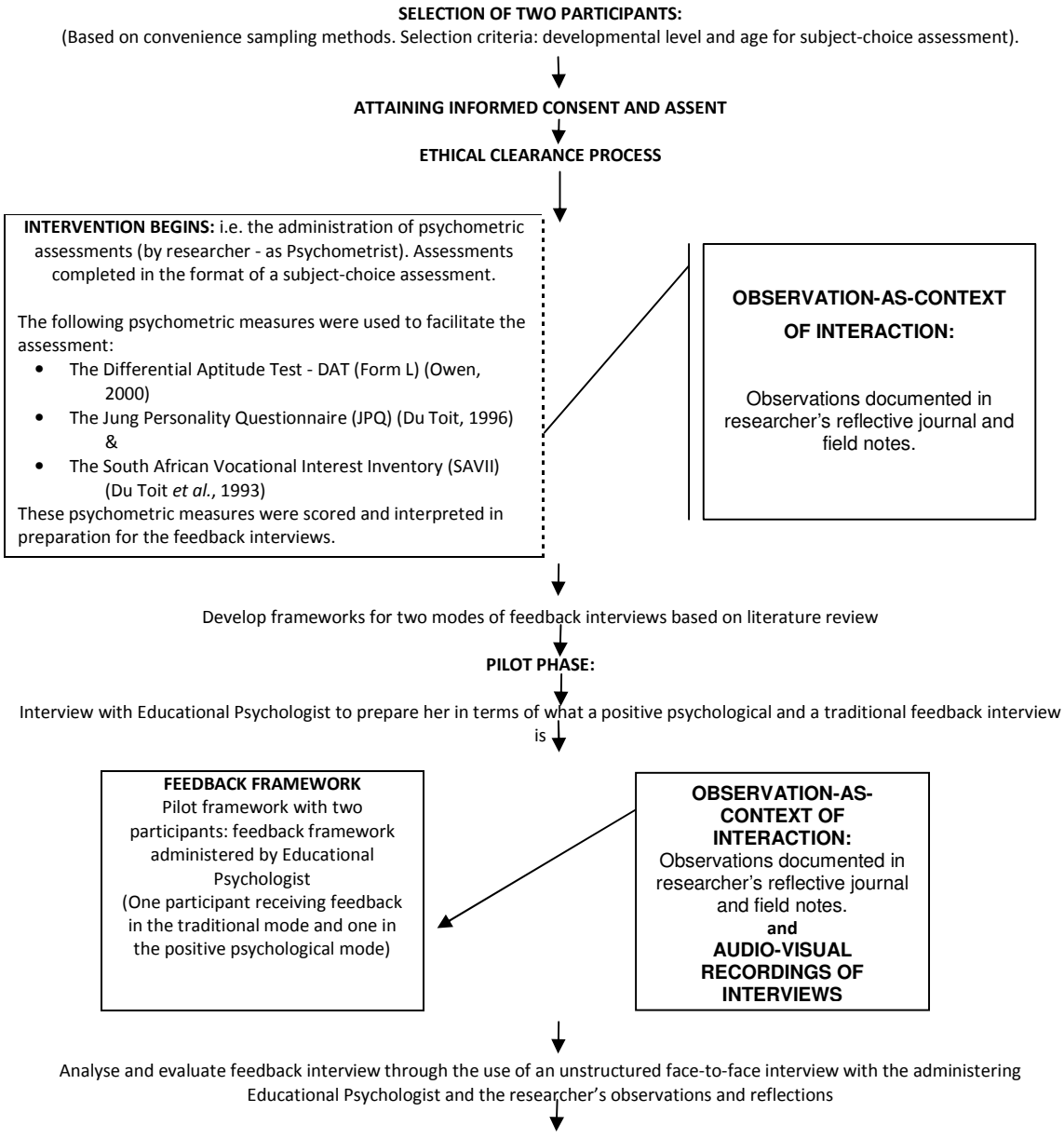
A case study design afforded me advantages such as the opportunity to establish rapport with participants (Mouton, 2001). I spent a significant amount of time with each participant on a one-to-one basis, during the psychometric assessment phase, and during the self-report writing sessions (see Table 1.1 in Chapter 1 for an explanation of my various roles as researcher). A schedule of dates, times and goals for each session with individual participants is provided in Appendix A (included in my research diary).

Mouton (2001) highlights another advantage of case study designs, namely *in-depth insights.* In-depth insights were made possible for me (as researcher) through the close interaction between myself and the participants. These in-depth insights also improved the quality of the data I collected, rendering it richer and thus more meaningful. The improved quality of data is reflected in my field notes (see Appendix A for my field notes included in my research diary).

However, the case study design however, also poses certain disadvantages for research studies. Due to the limited size of the sample selected in case study designs (as in this study with two participants), it becomes difficult to generalize to an entire population, as was the case in my study (Miller & Brewer, 2003). With reference to my interpretivist stance, my goal was not to generalise findings (see Section 3.2.1). Instead, my intent was to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon of the experience of the two modes of feedback interviews. At the same time, I aimed to achieve transferability (see Section 3.7.2). The results of this study can be applied or transferred to similar settings by readers because of the rich descriptions of cases that I provided. As such the use of case studies allow for “generalization to theory” (Miller and Brewer, 2003). This allowed me to hypothesize regarding the effects of a positive psychological psychometric feedback as compared with a traditional one. See Section 5.5 in Chapter 5 for recommendations for future research.

3.4 RESEARCH PROCESS

In this section I present a schematic overview of the research process that I employed in my study (see Figure 3.3 below). Initially I gained consent from the participants' parents/guardians and the participants themselves (assent), as well as ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria. (Refer to ethical clearance certificate bound to this dissertation and Appendix D for consent and accent forms that participants' and their parents/guardians were required to complete).



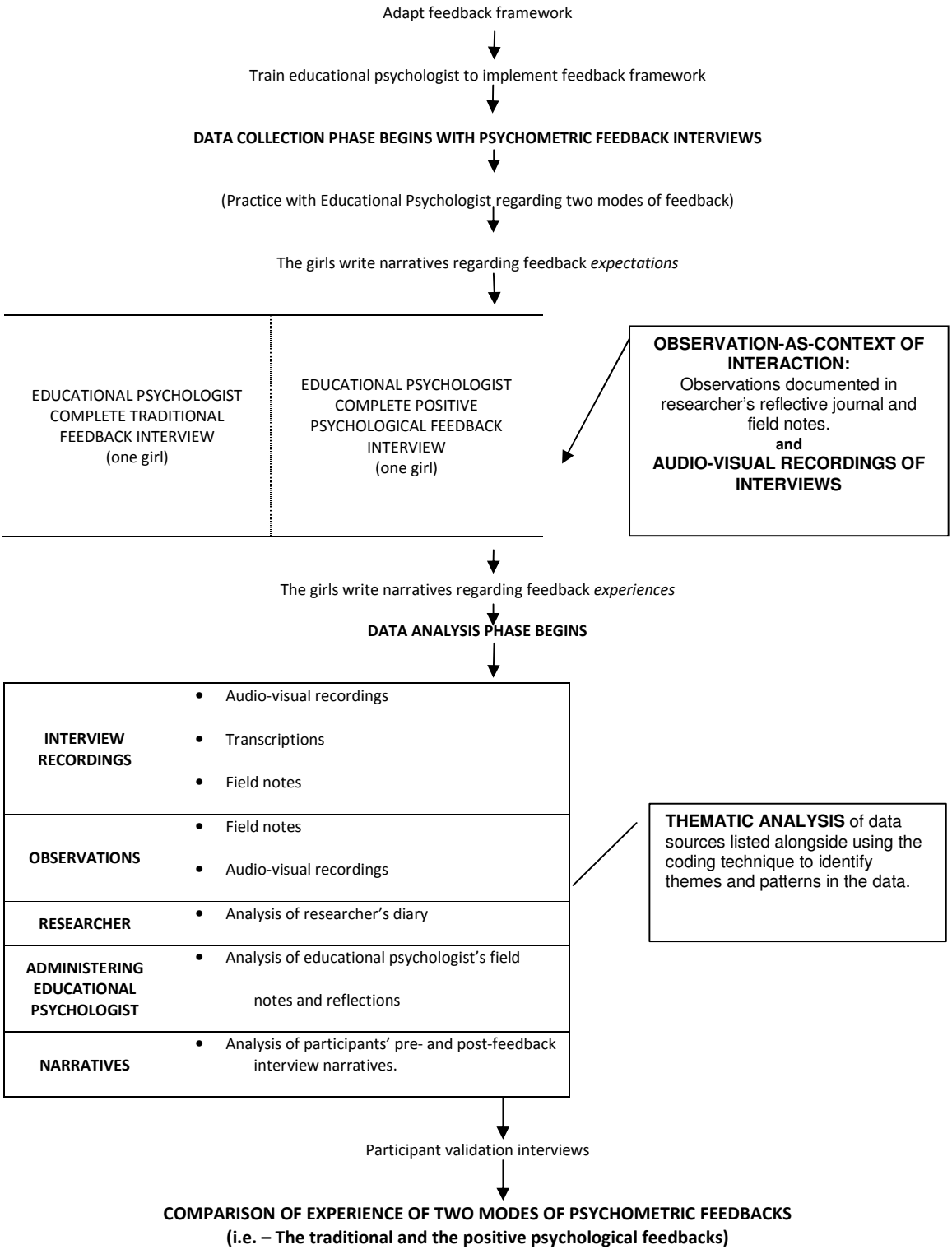


Figure 3.3 Research process: flow chart representation

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.5.1 Selection of participants

a) The young girls

The young girls who participated in this study needed to be a specific age to be eligible for participation study. In order to be eligible for participation the participants had to be at the stage when they were required to select subjects for the final phase of their schooling careers (Savickas, 2005).

My selection of participants was done according to the *convenience sampling* method (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). The reason for this choice (as mentioned in chapter 1) is that I had a relative at the age and developmental phase required for a subject-choice assessment (i.e. at Grade 10 level) (Savickas, 2005). She was thus able to access other participants in the same age and developmental group who met the criteria for selection, i.e. age and developmental appropriateness. Arsenault and Anderson (1998) point out that when entering an unfamiliar/new field it is often the concern of qualitative researchers to eliminate participant's uncertainty. In this case the uncertainty may have been limited as rapport was built on participant's relation to me via my sibling.

The reason for the choice of this sampling technique is that the aim of this research study was to investigate the differences and/or similarities between the two opposing forms of feedback methods. Furthermore, from a first selected case, further cases were selected based on the snowball selection technique (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2003) the first participant was associated with other peers who fit the same criteria of selection.

Four girls participated in this study. All the girls were first language English speakers, and school in English. These participants were split in two groups (of two participants each) to receive the traditional and positive-psychological feedback interviews. In Table 3.1

below I outline the participants' demographic details, which indicate that the participants were all selected from the same race group (i.e. Indian), they were all females and first language English speakers and were all within the appropriate age range to receive subject-choice assessments.

One limitation with regard to selecting participants for my study through the convenience sampling method is the inability to generalise my findings (based on a convenience sample) to the general population (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). As all the participants in this study shared similar demographic characteristics, the sample group was representative of itself only and the results cannot be generalised to a wider population (refer to Table 3.1 below for participants' demographic details). The implication for my study is thus that the experiences of participants of the two modes of feedbacks cannot necessarily be generalised as a typical experience that other persons in the greater population may experience.

PARTICIPANT No.	AGE (Years)	GENDER	RACE	LANGUAGE	LOCATION (Residence)	GRADE	REFERRED TO IN THIS STUDY AS	PHASE OF STUDY PARTICIPATED IN	MODE OF FEEDBACK EXPERIENCED
1.	15	Female	Indian	English (1st Language)	Pretoria (Urban)	10	Participant **A**	Pilot study	Traditional
2.	15	Female	Indian	English (1st Language)	Pretoria (Urban)	10	Participant **B**	Pilot study	Positive psychological
3.	14	Female	Indian	English (1st Language)	Pretoria (Urban)	10	Participant **C**	Data collection	Traditional
4.	15	Female	Indian	English (1st Language)	Pretoria (Urban)	10	Participant **D**	Data collection	Positive psychological

Table 3.1 Summary of identifying details of participants

b) The Educational Psychologist

The convenience sampling method was used to select an Educational Psychologist. She completed the two modes of feedback interviews during the data collection process (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). She was thus selected from within my range of networks as she fit the following selection criteria: 1) She had a thorough knowledge of positive psychology on a theoretical and practical level. 2) She was competent in the field of educational psychology. 3) She had already acquired her registration with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) in the category of Educational Psychologist. Her registration with the HPCSA as an Educational Psychologist endorses her skills with regard to the administration of the feedback interviews. In Chapter 2, Section 2.2, I detail the basic skills that the Educational Psychologist had to be proficient in, in order to be able to adequately administer the two modes of feedback interviews for this study.

As in the case of my own familiarity with the group of young girls, the Educational Psychologist was able to easily establish rapport with the young girls. Reflections in both the Educational Psychologist's and my research diary highlight this relationship formed between the role-players of the study during its data collection phase (See Appendix A for my research diary and Appendix E for the Educational Psychologist's reflections).

3.5.1.1 Developing a framework for the two modes of feedback interviews

To effectively administer a feedback interview from the perspective of Positive Psychology, I drafted a theoretical framework on which such a feedback interview could be developed. The feedback interview was based on the framework. Without a framework, the details of an instrument cannot be refined which would create room for errors, reinforcing the necessity of a pilot study (Oppenheim, 2003). Based on the literature review in Chapter 2, I identified the essential elements of each perspective (see Section 2.5 and 2.6). I drew conclusions on what could reasonably be expected in

each mode of feedback in order to fulfil the basic tenets of the traditional and the Positive Psychological domains. Identifying the essential elements of these two domains provided indicators for strategies to facilitate the two modes of feedback interviews.

As apparent in Figure 3.3, once the frameworks were developed I briefed the Educational Psychologist on the process of completing each mode of feedback interview. During the briefing, the administering Educational Psychologist, my research supervisor and I were present. Particular emphasis was placed on briefing the Educational Psychologist in terms of 1) how the participants were assessed in preparation for the two modes of feedback interviews; 2) what distinguished the two modes of feedback interviews, and 3) the theoretical frameworks that grounded the two modes of feedback interviews (refer to Figure 2.1 and Table 2.5 for frameworks on administering traditional and positive psychological feedback interviews).

3.5.2 Piloting of the interview frameworks

To develop frameworks for the two modes of feedback interviews (i.e. in terms of directing them in their specific directions of the traditional and a positive-psychological feedback courses), the first feedback interviews conducted from both perspectives served as pilot studies (see Appendix F for transcripts of pilot study interviews). Pilot studies are essential in the process of ascertaining that the data gathering instrument in question (in this case, the positive psychological feedback) is as effective as it is intended to be, thus improving the reliability and validity of the data gathering instrument (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). Pilot studies allow the researcher the opportunity to create, adapt and then further develop an instrument (the positive psychological feedback interview) to maturity through the process of implementing the measure on a pilot group (Oppenheim, 2003). The use of a pilot study allows for the revision of techniques and/or errors and refining of methods before most data are collected (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003). The use of a pilot study allows researchers the advantage of

improving their practice and producing greater dependability and transferability in their research results (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003).

The administering Educational Psychologist piloted the two modes of feedback interviews with the pilot group (see Section 3.5.1 for discussion on selection of participants and research schedule of pilot sessions included in Appendix (A). The feedback interviews (completed as part of the pilot phase of the study) were collected through observations (documented as *field notes*, *reflections* and *transcriptions of the interview* with the administering Educational Psychologist). The documented data were discussed by me, the Educational Psychologist and my research supervisor in order to refine the two modes of interviews. The purpose of conducting this interview was to elicit views regarding the methods used in administering the two modes of interviews. Together with my research supervisor and the Educational Psychologist, I analysed the pilot interview process based on both my and the Educational Psychologist's reflections of the pilot interviews. The two modes of the feedback interviews completed in the pilot phase of the study were completed based on a list of criteria which I developed as part of the theoretical frameworks that were formed as part of the literature study (refer to Figure 2.1 and Table 2.5 for frameworks on administering traditional and positive psychological feedback interviews). I adapted the interview frameworks which I discuss in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.2). I documented the process in a research diary, which allowed for transparency and accountability (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). (See Appendix A for research diary).

3.5.3 Data collection and documentation

As stated, I made use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection and documentation methods. These multiple methods added depth and richness to the study in what Janesick (2000) refers to as *crystallization*. I therefore used increased and contrasting methods of data collection with participants to highlight distinct nuances in

the data gathered (Knight, 2002; Janesick, 2000). One major advantage of utilizing the process of crystallization is that the strengths of each contrasting approach more than simply cancel out the weaknesses of each other. Instead they create a "net gain" effect (Miller and Brewer, 2003). In addition, the complexity of the view of the phenomena being studied was enhanced, i.e. the comparison of the effects of a traditional and a positive psychological psychometric feedback interview (Janesick, 2000). Refer to Table 3.2 below which outlines the qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies employed during the various phases of the research process. Following Figure 3.2, I discuss the quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies.

	DATA COLLECTION	**DATA DOCUMENTATION**	**CORRELATING RESEARCH QUESTION**
PHASE: SUBJECT-CHOICE ASSESSMENTS			
Quantitative	**1.** Psychometric assessment data, namely: • The Differential Aptitude Test - DAT (Form L) (Owen, 2000) • The Jung Personality Questionnaire (JPQ) (Du Toit, 1996) and • The South African Vocational Interest Inventory (SAVII) (Du Toit et al, 1993)	1. Psychometric profiles	
PHASE: PILOT OF STUDY			
Qualitative	• Interview with facilitator • Observation	• Unstructured face-to-face interview with Educational Psychologist	• What are positive psychology and traditional feedback interviews?
PHASE: DATA COLLECTION **1. INTERVENTION (FEEDBACK INTERVIEWS)**			
Qualitative	• Researcher's observations • Audio-visual recordings	• Field-notes and reflections in research diary • Verbatim transcripts of recordings	• What are the differences and similarities between a traditional and a positive psychological feedback interview?
	2. ESTABLISHING CLIENTS' EXPERIENCES OF THE TWO MODES OF FEEDBACK INTERVIEWS		

	• Narratives of girls • Educational Psychologist's narrative	• Written self-report of expectations (prior to) and of feedback experience (after) the interview by participants • Reflection and field notes of educational psychologist regarding her experience of the two modes of feedback interviews	• What are clients' experiences of a feedback interview done from (a) the traditional perspective and (b) the perspective of positive psychology? • What is the Educational Psychologist's experience of a feedback interview done from (a) the traditional perspective and (b) the perspective of positive psychology? • What are the researcher's observations of a feedback interview done from (a) the traditional perspective and (b) the perspective of positive psychology? • What are the differences and similarities between the traditional- and the positive psychological- feedback interview?
	PHASE: INTERVENTION (INTERVIEWS)		
	• Participant Validation interviews	• Audio-visual recordings and transcripts of these	• What are clients 'experiences of a feedback interview done from (a) the traditional perspective and (b) the perspective of positive psychology? • What is the Educational Psychologist's experience of a feedback interview done from (a) the traditional perspective and (b) the perspective of positive psychology? • What are the researcher's observations of a feedback interview done from (a) the traditional perspective and (b) the perspective of positive psychology? • What are the differences and similarities between the traditional- and the positive psychological- feedback interview?

Table 3.2 Qualitative and quantitative data strategies

3.5.3.1 Quantitative data sources

The psychometric data served as secondary data source in this study. The aim of utilizing these psychometric assessment measures was to provide a basis, and content for both the modes of feedback interviews which formed part of a career assessment. To facilitate this career assessment, I identified three basic psychometric measures relevant to subject choice assessments, namely:

- The Differential Aptitude Test - DAT (Form L) (Owen, 2000) ,
- The Jung Personality Questionnaire (JPQ) (Du Toit, 1996) , and
- The South African Vocational Interest Inventory (SAVII) (Du Toit *et al.*, 1993).

All of the above psychometric measures are standardized. These questionnaires are also standardized for use with the specific age group in question (for this study) and are basic and easy to answer (Jooste, 2001). The documentation of the girls' psychometric profiles provided the key quantitative documentation source as the intervention process (the two modes of feedback interviews) were conducted based on these psychometric profiles. Without the psychometric profiles, there would have been no content to provide feedback on. The psychometric profiles made the feedback interviews (in the two modes) possible. (See Appendix H for psychometric assessment reports completed in for the young girls).

3.5.3.2 Qualitative data sources

a) Adapted unstructured face-to-face feedback interview with participants

For the purposes of this study, the feedback interviews were *unstructured face-to-face interviews*. This form of interview is characterized by open-ended and responsive approaches, which focus on individuality, uniqueness and subjective facts (Cohen *et al.*, 2003).

A major advantage of employing the unstructured face-to-face method of interviewing was that the interviewer has only a specific list of topics or issues to be discussed, based on the purpose of the interview and the interviewee's individual circumstances. The Educational Psychologist acting as interviewer in this study only worked from a list of issues to be covered in the interview that served as an interview guide. The sequencing and the outcomes of each individual interview hence differed (Bryman, 2001).

With regard to the documentation of the (unstructured face-to-face) feedback interview as a data source, audio-visual recordings were made. This method is common in qualitative research and in this study provides a visual record of the feedback sessions held with the young girls. This greatly increased the richness and depth of the data, and thus, the results of the study. Much of this data would otherwise be difficult to obtain, as they can easily be missed during the interview itself (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Creswell, 2003). This leads to greater understanding of the young girls' experiences of the feedback interviews and reduced the possibility of focusing on only the frequently occurring events (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). To further improve the richness of the data, I documented my observations of participants during the feedback interviews through the field notes and reflections that I documented in my research diary.

b) Unstructured face-to-face interview with the Educational Psychologist

Amongst the interviews that were conducted during this study were two face-to-face interviews with the Educational Psychologist who facilitated the two modes of feedback interviews. The first of these interviews with the Educational Psychologist was completed during the piloting phase of the study in the form of a face-to-face interview (Bryman, 2001). The purpose of this face-to-face interview was to clearly outline what a positive psychological and a traditional feedback interview was. Outlining the frameworks of the two modes of feedback interviews assisted in creating a framework from which the facilitator could understand the two modes and thus administer the feedback interviews accordingly. This part of the data collection was guided by the

research questions of the study (See Appendix I for interview schedule of interview conducted with the Educational Psychologist).

At the end of the research process a second face-to-face interview was conducted with the Educational Psychologist. The purpose of this second interview with her was to validate the findings that I had concluded based on her experiences during the facilitation of the two modes of feedback interviews.

c) Observation-as-context of interaction

Within the context of research studies, numerous distinctive forms of observations exist, each one selected was based on the aims and methods of the research. This case study design characteristically involved extensive use of observations in naturally occurring situations (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). Based on the aims and methodology of this study, I used *observation as a context of interaction* (Angrosino & Mays De Perez, 2000). This form of observation results in observation being used as more than merely a method of recording data from the environment. Instead, it involves active engagement by the researcher within the context of the research with others involved in the collaboration of the research study (Angrosino & Mays De Perez, 2000). This shifted my focus to the manner in which the Educational Psychologist who completed the feedback interviews interacted with the research participants (Angrosino & Mays De Perez, 2000). One of the benefits of using this data collection technique is that my observations obtained from these sessions allowed me to increase the credibility of the study immensely due to the rich descriptions that I was able to provide. Engaging with the participants also allowed me to establish rapport with them and thus led to them being very at ease with me, which in turn made it easier for them to share their thoughts and feelings and expectations during the narrative writing activity.

My observation role during the various stages of the data collection phase of this study varied. During the initial phase of the data collection where the psychometric

assessments were administered and psychometric profiles drawn up, I fulfilled the role of both psychometrist and researcher. During this phase, while fulfilling the dual role of psychometrist and researcher, I utilised observation as context-of-interaction as I interacted intensely with participants. The same situation, in which I played a dual role with the participants, was evident during the pre-feedback and post-feedback narrative writing sessions when I interacted with the participants as a researcher to facilitate the writing of the narratives (but also as a researcher to elicit their experiences of the psychometric components of the intervention phase).

During the actual feedback sessions the role I played was expressly that of researcher as I did not interact personally with participants. Rather, I acted as an observer of the Educational Psychologist's feedback interviews. I observed the feedback interviews from behind a one-way mirror and made notes (see Appendix A for my field notes included in my research diary). Participants were aware that I was observing the feedback interview, as I shared this information with them during the (process) briefing on the first day of the psychometric assessments. During the initial stages of the data collection process participants were also asked to consent to my observations during the feedback interviews.

In terms of the documentation per se of this specific strategy of the data collection process, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the process (Bogdan & Biklen, in Cohen *et al.*, 2003) of my own experiences, perceptions and interpretations of events that had occurred (see Appendix A for observations, reflective journal notes and interview schedule according to research questions). These reflections served as a documentation of the methods I used during the completion of the study, my own reaction and understanding of events that I observed, as well as any difficulties, challenges or ethical issues that could have arose during the research process (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). In Section 3.7.6 I discuss the quality criteria of reflexivity that came into play during the observation-as-context of interaction, as part of the data collection process.

As alluded to earlier, I also kept *field notes* in this regard, to document my observations of participants in terms of their behaviour, the events that occur, the physical settings that surrounded us during data collection process, and the interpersonal exchanges and atmosphere between myself (as researcher) and the participants, as this played a significant role in this research study (Angrosino & Mays De Perez, 2000; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). In addition I documented my observations in terms of the audiovisual recordings which I later transcribed verbally (See Appendix F and G for transcriptions of recordings)**.**

One of the main challenges encountered as a result of using observations in this study as a core data collection method is that the data collection sessions became time-consuming and spanned a long period (as compared to regular time frames for such an assessment, from start to completion - with the feedback) (Mouton, 2001). During the first session when I met participants to complete the psychometric assessments, I briefed them on the research process that I would follow and made them aware of the time frames that I would be working under. Consequently, they were aware of the research process that they were engaged in.

d) Learners' narrative regarding feedback

As another key qualitative data collection strategy in this research study, the participants were required to write a *personal narrative* of their expectations of and (subsequent to the feedback interview) their experience of the feedback interview (Patton, 2002). These pre- and post-feedback narrative writing sessions are a core element of this study and thus served as the source of primary data (refer to Appendix C for an example of a participant's narrative). Narratives such as these are self-report measures which provide an additional source to create a *multiple perspective* by means of crystallisation (Janesick, 2000).

The intent behind utilizing this specific method (i.e. the use of participants' narratives) was to create an interpretivist opportunity for participants to voice how they experienced the feedback interview since this method highlights patterns through the lens of individual experience. Such narrative data formed an integral part of the qualitative data of this study, as it honoured the girls' experiences as pure data that were worthy of documentation and analysis, and that would provide translucent meaning of their experience (Patton, 2002).

The use of a self-report data collection strategy has advantages and disadvantages associated with it. Some of the strongest criticisms levelled at this data collection instrument are that they may be inaccurate due to the subjective nature of the instrument (Kain, 2004). Other criticisms against self-report measures are that important nuances may at times be forgotten by participants, while at the same time participants' responses can be biased in the direction of pre-existing beliefs and an individual's personal style (Paulson *et al.*, 1999). Kain (2004) is of the opinion that the use of multiple sources of data to generate multiple perspectives is a key method to overcoming singular perspectives. Thus, the crystallisation technique employed in the data collection process proved valuable.

Moreover, Kain (2004) is of the opinion that when administering self-report measures, the researcher should ask specific questions, and probe responses in instances when the participant does not adequately respond to the specified questions. This should be done to position the participant's frame of mind in the correct direction to illicit information that is appropriate to the study. The purpose of providing such direction for the participant is not to guide (or in any way influence) the participant's response, but merely to illuminate the possibility of participants providing information in an irrelevant direction in the context of the specific study. To elicit the *expectations* of participants in the form of the written narratives, I prompted them by asking them to "*describe, in their words, what they would like to get out of this assessment and in what way do they*

suppose this assessment may be of benefit to them". To elicit their *experiences* of the feedback interviews subsequent to the interviews, I prompted them by asking them to "*describe their experience of the feedback interview that they had in terms of what they had anticipated (as documented in their first narrative")*. Obtaining narrative data from the girls gave me a unique perspective on their viewpoints that would otherwise be inaccessible. Moreover this data source provides rich insights that can be used comparatively with other data, such as my observations-as-context of interaction. (Angrosino & Mays De Perez, 2000; Cohen *et al.*, 2003).

Therefore, the documentation of these narratives served a similar purpose as my reflective journal. In terms of the latter, I was able to explore my observations of the girls and of the progression of the research process, my thoughts and feelings regarding the research process and also my experiences and meaning-making processes (see Section 3.7.6 on employing reflexivity in order to ensure quality criteria during this study). In the same way as my perspective as researcher was documented in a reflective journal, participants' written narratives provided them with the opportunity to document their meaning-making processes.

e) The Educational Psychologist's narrative regarding feedback

As in the case of the participants, the Educational Psychologist who administered the two modes of the feedback interviews also completed a written narrative of her experiences of the feedback interview (included in the Educational Psychologist's reflections in Appendix E). The Educational Psychologist's narratives enhance the significance of the participants' narratives as a core data source to access participants' experiences of the two modes of feedback interviews. Being the same data collection technique, the Educational Psychologist's self-report narrative held similar advantages and disadvantages as the participants' narratives did. I prompted her response in this regard using the statement: "*Describe your experience of facilitating the feedback interview."* Refer to Section d) above for a thorough discussion in this regard.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis in my study relied on the process of crystallisation as multiple data sources and methods lead to rich findings from various perspectives (Arsenault and Anderson, 1998).

a) Data analysis and interpretation of quantitative data

In terms of the data analysis and interpretation of the quantitative data, I scored and interpreted the quantitative data (the psychometric data) psychometrically in terms of standardised procedures stipulated in the relevant test manuals (Owen, 2000; Du Toit, 1996; Du Toit *et al.*, 1993; Elkonin, Foxcroft, Roodt and Astbury, 2001). I then analysed the psychometric interpretation for research purposes using the thematic analysis methods described above. The purpose of the analysis of the psychometric data was to generate psychometric profiles which served as a secondary data source since these profiles provided a basis from which feedback was provided in the two different modes of feedback interviews.

b) Data analysis and interpretation of qualitative data

Due to the nature of this mixed-method study, it is impossible to completely separate the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study during the data analysis process. For the purposes of this study, the data sources (participants written pre- and post-feedback narratives, researcher's journal and field notes of observations, administering Educational Psychologist's field notes and reflections, transcripts of audio-visual recordings of feedback sessions) were analysed separately by means of *thematic analysis*, with specific use of the coding technique (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Each data source was analysed separately at first and thus themes were identified from these sources (refer to Appendix J for an example of thematic analysis). Later on, the combined themes were analysed and synthesised, when I combined themes that were related to one another to conclude the finding that I

derived from the data collection process. Thereafter themes from various data sources were integrated and synthesised in order to derive logical conclusions and explanations from the data collected. The process of the data analysis and synthesis was guided by the context of the research questions. The themes that were identified through the thematic analysis process allowed me to interpret the findings in the context of the research questions that I had outlined for this study (Mouton, 1996; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). This process of thematic analysis is well suited to qualitative data sources (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). Thus, as this study is based on a mixed-method approach that has a stronger emphasis on its qualitative components, the use of thematic analysis is well founded.

The process of thematic analysis allowed me to identify and evaluate prominent themes, patterns and meanings from the combined data collected (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). This allowed me to identify whether or not the positive psychological feedbacks are different from the traditional feedbacks in any way. This comparison provided the basis for the answer to the research question of the study. In this regard the transcription of data was a valuable data analysis technique (see Appendix G) (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

The collective Qualquan data analysis process was subsequently supported by literature control in terms of the conceptual framework (as provided in Chapter 2). Throughout the process of interpretation, “segments of data” such as relevant quotes of participants or prominently reoccurring themes were noted and coded, as suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2004).

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

In Chapter 1 I briefly mentioned the principle of trustworthiness, its relevance to me as researcher and its impact on the research process (Seale, 2000). The main quality criteria that can be linked to trustworthiness in this study are discussed here.

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility aims to provide a true picture of the phenomenon being investigated (Patton, 2002). The main ways in which credibility can be achieved in a study, as outlined by Seale (2000), are by engaging intensely in the field; persistent observation during data collection; using multiple methods of data collection, referred to as crystallization in Janesick (2000); and allowing the research to be intensely scrutinized by a disinterested peer reviewer.

These credibility measures were realised in my study through the use of *observation-of-context of interaction*, the use of *my research journal to reflect on the process and make field notes* and the use of *multiple methods of data-collection* such as psychometric data, participants pre- and post-feedback narratives, the Educational Psychologist's field notes and reflections and the audio-visual records and transcripts of the interviews. These techniques allow for the development of credibility in a study and were all easily practised in this study.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which a study can be applied to other respondents or in other contexts (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The criterion of transferability was achieved in this study by providing a rich and detailed description of each participant in Section 4.3, Chapter 4. Such detailed descriptions provide information from which the

applicability of the findings can be judged and compared to other known settings (Seale, 2000).

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the indication of whether or not the study would yield the same or similar results if replicated in the same or similar context or with the same participants (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). According to Seale (2000), dependability in a study can be achieved through a procedure called 'auditing', which consists of auditing for adequacy. This consists of researchers documenting their data, methods, decisions and end products (Seale, 2000). I employed the quality criteria of dependability throughout this study, which enhanced my field notes and observations and documents in this writing (see Appendix A for evidence).

3.7.4 Confirmability

To ensure confirmability for the results of this study, the main source of data collection (i.e. the facilitation of the two modes of feedback interviews) was conducted by another method (the Educational Psychologist). By allowing the Educational Psychologist to facilitate the feedback interviews I was able to gain an objective view of the experiences of the participants during the two modes of feedback interviews, which enabled me to derive findings that were unbiased by my opinion, theoretical inclinations and personal values (Bryman, 2001).

3.7.5 Authenticity

The broader impact of this research was monitored by me through the assurance that the research had been conducted *fairly*, as I had used reflexive strategies during the data collection and ensured confirmability of the research results (Bryman, 2001). The feedback interviews that were facilitated with participants allowed for *educational*

authenticity (as the results of the subject choice assessments raised an awareness of the perspectives of others in the participants' social settings) and catalytic authenticity (as the feedback on the subject-choice assessments had the potential to impact on the participants' motivation to change their circumstances) (Bryman, 2001).

3.7.6 Reflexivity

To ensure reflexivity in this study I maintained detailed field notes and reflections in my research diary, accounting for aspects of the social setting in which the data collection took place (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). My field notes included descriptions, analyses and criticisms of the social environment within which the data collection was located, thus increasing the authenticity of the research as well (see Appendix A for my field notes and reflection diary) (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). I discuss reflexivity more comprehensively in Section 3.8.

3.7.7 Validation

Validation was also carried out during a subsequent meeting with participants where my understanding of their experiences of the two modes of interviews was verified. Rephrasing and exploring issues that arose facilitated this accomplishment, and eventually led to the attainment of more comprehensive meanings and data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

3.8 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

I had dual roles in this study (as various points in the study) which included the roles of Psychometrist initially (where I administered the psychometric media and drew up psychometric profiles) and that of researcher (where I observed the research process and conceptualised my findings). My role as Psychometrist was from the *emic* perspective, while my role as researcher and observer was from the *etic* perspective

(Cohen *et al.*, 2003). Cohen *et al.* (2003:139) describe the *emic* perspective as the concern with "the subjective meanings placed on situations by participants" and the *etic* perspective as the intention to "identify and understand the objective…constructions of a situation". This implies that as researcher, I considered both the perspective of the participants, as well as the customary perspective of the researcher. I aimed to negotiate these two roles by maintaining a research diary and reflexivity during the study. To achieve trustworthiness in the context of multiple researcher roles and integrity and consistency within each individual data collection and documentation method, I used a research diary (Patton, 2002; Cohen *et al.*, 2003). Reflexivity refers to the notion that all activities occur simultaneously in the social settings in which we exist and the manner in which we account for such settings (Roulston, 2004; Cohen *et al.*, 2003). Thus, to adequately account for the social settings in which this research process took place, I included descriptions, analyses and criticisms of each setting (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). As reflexivity is often a feature that is taken for granted since it is a constant variable in social situations (and thus a part of reality), making use of reflexivity in this study allowed me the advantage of recognising, demonstrating and producing a practical account of the procedures of this study, which eventually informed my findings (Roulston, 2004).

I made participants aware of the dual roles that I played in this study. At the commencement of the data collection phase (i.e. the facilitation of psychometric tests during the subject choice assessments), participants were briefed on the process that they were to complete as participants in this research. As part of the briefing process, I outlined the purpose of the study, their rights as participants as well as the role players in the study. Furthermore, I clearly outlined the phases of the research process that they would be involved in and at what stage in the process they would meet each role player (namely the Educational Psychologist administering the feedback interviews and I).

3.9 ETHICAL STRATEGIES

As mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section 1.6)in order to fulfil my ethical responsibilities to my profession – as a Psychometrist, and also to the participants involved in this study, I had to adhere to the ethical code of the Health Professions Council of South Africa when working with participants, while at the same time adhering to general ethical principles of research practice (Strydom, 1998; Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The general ethical principles aligned to research practice that I established when completing this study were conducting research in a manner that preserved the dignity of participants as human beings: I ensured that participants were not deceived and that they knew what was going on during the research process and that they did not experience any form of harm or distress (physically or otherwise) (Miller and Brewer, 2003). These principles will now be discussed further on.

3.9.1 Informed consent

Before the commencement of the study I ensured that written informed consent was obtained from the parents/guardians of the selected girls who participated in the study, as well as informed *assent* from the participating girls themselves, prior to the commencement of the data collection for this study (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). This implies that *no girls were forced to participate*; rather, they had the opportunity to choose whether or not they wanted to participate in the study, after being informed of the facts that would have influenced their decisions (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2003). An example of such consent and assent forms can be found in Appendix D.

These participants were furthermore given adequate information in order to make an informed decision on whether or not they wanted to participate. This information included the purpose of the study, the specific procedures that would be followed, as well as the possible advantages of the outcome of the study (Sternberg, 2001). As part

of this information that was shared with the participants when I explained the process that the study would follow, I outlined the *roles* that the Educational Psychologist and I would play and *where in the process* each of our roles would fit in, so that they could understand and be aware of what was to be expected in this research process. The participants' right to withdraw at any time from the study was emphasized.

3.9.2 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

The principle of privacy was applied, implying that the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was protected at all times (Strydom, 1998; Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Sternberg, 2001). The identities of the participants were not disclosed during the study and all information obtained during the research process was dealt with in a confidential manner. Furthermore I made certain that any field notes, audio-visual material, transcripts and other data were preserved in a safe environment and would be destroyed after 15 years (as required by the University of Pretoria).

Preserving data records in a safe environment (as described above) will be necessary in order to assure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants' *voices* in the audio-visual data. Participants' demographic and identifying details were recorded as ambiguously as possible to reduce the possibility of participants being identified (White, Woodfield & Ritchie, 2003).

3.9.3 Protection from harm

During the course of this study I focused on avoiding (or at least recognizing and communicating) possible or probable risk to the participants such as psychological, physical and/or social harm (Strydom, 1998; Sternberg, 2001). An example of such a measure is when I implemented a short bridging session prior to the final interviews in the two modes being completed to allow the Educational Psychologist and the participants to establish a strong relationship (see Section 4.2 in Chapter 4 for a

thorough discussion in this regard). *Caring* and *fairness* were instituted at all times to protect the participants in the study from harm (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

3.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I presented a detailed description of the paradigmatic perspective, research design and methodology, as well as the data analysis and interpretation procedures that I followed. Furthermore I discussed the ethical strategies that I considered during the undertaking of this study, and the quality criteria relevant to the research process.

In the subsequent chapter I will present and deliberate on the raw data that I collected in its various forms during the data collection process, present an analysis and interpretation of the data, and thus provide comprehensive and clear findings.