

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS & RESULTS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 I discuss the results of the thematic analysis and reveal supporting evidence from the participants' and Educational Psychologist's reflections, interviews and narratives, as well as from my own observations of the feedback interviews. I include extracts of verbatim responses from the transcribed audio-visual recordings and I link themes to current literature in order to expand on identified themes within the context of the research questions and the ultimate findings of the study.

#### 4.2 OUTCOMES OF THE PILOT PHASE OF THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

During the pilot phase one of the prominent themes that became apparent to me was the degree of established rapport between the Educational Psychologist administering the two modes of feedback interviews and the clients receiving feedback of their psychometric assessment for subject choices. In the role of observer during the feedback sessions, I noticed that the degree of rapport between the Educational Psychologist and the participants was limited, which I recorded in my research diary as follows: *"The Educational Psychologist and participant seemed unsure around each other. They came across as two strangers engaging in a conversation"* (Researcher's journal, 19-02-2010, p. 5, lines 17-18). As I know the participants (through my association with them as a result of my relative) I am familiar with their habitual behaviour and based my observation on this knowledge. The clients and the Educational Psychologist had not been through the natural<sup>2</sup> process of establishing a relationship that could have occurred during the assessment phase while administering the

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<sup>2</sup> By the 'natural process' of establishing a relationship I refer to the process that is ordinarily followed, where the role of the Educational Psychologist is fulfilled by one individual. In this study, the role of Educational Psychologist was not filled consistently by a single individual as I completed the assessments and the Educational Psychologist completed the feedback interviews.

psychometric assessment measures. Observing the participants and the Educational Psychologist together, I perceived them as being randomly forced together during the feedback interviews (see transcript of interviews in Appendix G) without the benefit of established rapport. My sentiments were also reflected in the Educational Psychologist's experience of the pilot study: *"I was also anxious as I had not done the initial assessment process with the clients, and was concerned about how they would both feel towards me as we had not gone through the entire process together."* (Educational Psychologist's journal, 19-02-2010, p. 1, lines 6-8).

Therefore, based on the pilot phase post-feedback discussion with the Educational Psychologist regarding the positive psychological feedback interview, we decided to include a brief joint session with participants, the Educational Psychologist and me, prior to the feedback per se. The purpose of the joint session with the participants was to create a space for relationship building with the Educational Psychologist<sup>3</sup> prior to the feedback interview. In this regard I noted in my research diary (see Appendix A): *"They were noticeably more comfortable with (Educational Psychologist) after this session."* (Researcher's journal, 5-03-2010, p. 8, lines 12-13).

The pilot feedback interviews also proved beneficial as they afforded the Educational Psychologist the opportunity to conduct the feedback interviews from a positive psychological perspective prior to data collection. As the positive psychological mode of feedback interviews is yet unexplored and undefined, the Educational Psychologist did not have an existing model or theoretical framework to rely on. She thus felt more confident in administering the positive psychological feedback interviews after having had the opportunity to put into practice the theoretical model posited in Tables 2.4 and 2.5. The Educational Psychologist's ease and confidence in administering the positive psychological feedback in the final feedback interviews (after having had the opportunity to practise this mode of feedback interview during the pilot study) can be

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Table 1.1 where I outline the various roles of the individuals during the completion of this study.

noted in her reflection after the data collection interview session, when she stated: *“This time around, I was less nervous and I knew what was expected of me during a positive psychology feedback...”* (Educational Psychologist’s journal, 5-03-2010, p. 3, lines 3-4).

During the piloting of the two modes of interviews I also noted that, at times, the Educational Psychologist moved through the information with what I perceived as a degree of haste. *“The Educational Psychologist also moved too fast through the feedback at certain times. Again, not to be repeated in data collection interviews; therefore, I will discuss this with her prior to data collection interviews.”* (Researcher’s journal, 19-02-2010, p. 5, lines 19-21). We discussed the *pace at which she worked with the clients* during our post-feedback discussion in order to improve this area in data collection. During the data collection I did not observe any haste in the Educational Psychologist’s pace, as I documented in my observation notes as follows: *“During this feedback the Educational Psychologist did not move too quickly through the information with the participant, as she did in the pilot study...”* (Researcher’s journal, 5-03-2010, p. 9, lines 29-30).

Lastly, the level of *expressiveness* and *willingness to engage* between the client who had received the traditional feedback and the client who had received the positive psychological feedback interview varied appreciably. The personal characteristics of the participants in terms of their engagement with the Educational Psychologist was significant to me as researcher as I was able to observe their experiences of the feedback experience. I document my observations in this regard as follows: *“The level of engagement and sharing with the Educational Psychologist during the 2 modes of feedback differed considerably between the two participants. The participant who experienced the traditional feedback was receptive to feedback and recommendations that the Educational Psychologist had discussed but she did not enquire or engage*

*further. The participant who experienced the positive psychology feedback participated more in the process.”* (Researcher’s journal, 5-03-2010, p. 10, line 6-11).

In the same way I was also able to observe the manner in which the Educational Psychologist experienced the two modes of feedback interviews as a result of the different level of responses she received from the two participants. Regarding my observations of the participants’ levels of expressiveness and willingness to engage with the Educational psychologist I noted in my research diary that: *“The interactional styles of these two girls are different, therefore, their responses and experiences may differ.”* (Researcher’s journal, 5-03-2010, p. 10, line 5-6).

Having noted these factors during the pilot phase, I attempted to swap the participants that I used for the two modes of feedback, based on my perception of their level of expressiveness and willingness to engage with the Educational Psychologist for the data collection phase. I selected Participant C (who was my relative) for the traditional feedback interview as I perceived her to be more expressive than Participant D. However, analysis of the data collected indicates that there was still a difference in the two participants’ engagement with the Educational Psychologist. In Section 5.4, Chapter 5, I discuss possible limitations of my study in this regard.

### **4.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE “CASE”**

#### **4.3.1 Common characteristics**

In Section 3.5.1 I provided a demographic description of the “case” that I refer to in this study. However, during the data collection phase my observations of the learners allowed for a more detailed description of the case.

In Appendix H I include the psychometric reports of clients’ assessments. In these reports I detail the assessment measures that I administered to the girls, the results

thereof and recommendations for each learner in terms of subject and future career choice decisions of the girls.

Reflecting on the clients that participated in this study, a number of defining characteristics can be identified as common to them all. As I noted in Table 3.1, Chapter 3, all the girls were from the same race group. In addition, all the girls are from the same culture (i.e. Indian) and socio-economic groups (i.e. middle-class), reside in the same residential area in Gauteng, attend the same secondary school and both follow the religion of Islam. Analysis of the girls' academic performance during the integration of the psychometric results (see Appendix H for individual psychometric reports) indicated that all four girls maintain a high academic average and want to further their education on a tertiary level. These similarities in terms of the young girls' defining social and personal characteristics delimit the scope of the study. In Section 3.5.1 (a) and 5.4 I highlight these limitations and their consequences for the results of this study.

#### **4.3.2 Traditional feedback interview case**

The participant who completed the traditional feedback interview comes from a warm and stable family environment where she is the youngest of her six biological siblings. Both her parents, as well as four of her older siblings are in service-orientated or caring professions. One of her sisters is completing her Grade 12 at present. This participant is a relative of mine.

Her psychometric assessment results indicate that she has an above-average academic ability and that her career interests include careers in the scientific, social and artistic fields. These interests correlate positively with her personality profile as identified through the Jung Personality Questionnaire (Du Toit, 1996). Her personality profile indicates that she is inclined to behave in a gentle and sensitive manner towards others to achieve goals. Awareness and use of these characteristics could potentially facilitate

her successful performance in the career fields that she indicates an interest in (i.e. the medical and caring professions). Subject choices such as mathematics, physical science, biology, history, and computer sciences were recommended to allow her to actualise her considerate and caring nature (see recommendations provided in psychometric reports in Appendix H).

#### **4.3.3 Positive psychological feedback interview case**

The girl who participated in the positive psychological feedback interview is the eldest of five biological siblings. Her father manages his own business and her mother is the primary caregiver in the family. All her younger siblings are currently completing school.

This young girl's psychometric assessment results revealed that she has an above-average academic ability and her career interests lie in the artistic, social, scientific and enterprising fields. Her responses to the Jung Personality Questionnaire suggest that she is inclined to behave in an innovative, creative and encouraging manner when interacting with others to achieve her goals. Such characteristics may facilitate her successful performance in the occupational fields of interest to her as they may allow her to actualise her considerate and caring nature.

This young girl has indicated an interest in the medical (and related occupations) and the business fields. Based on her results, subjects such as mathematics, physical science, history, information technology and business economics were recommended for this young girl to allow her to actualise her considerate and caring nature while still nurturing her occupational interests to bring about greater life satisfaction (see recommendations provided in psychometric reports that I include in Appendix H).

#### 4.4 THEMES: POST ANALYSIS

I identified two main themes during thematic analysis of the data sources. These themes are indicative of the comparison between a traditional and positive psychological feedback interview in terms of the participants' and the Educational Psychologist's experiences.

##### 4.4.1 Theme 1<sup>4</sup>: Clients' experiences of the two modes of feedback interviews

###### 4.4.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Similarities between the clients' experiences of the two modes of feedback interviews

Similarities identified between the two modes of feedback are that both modes of feedback were experienced as satisfactory, comprehensive and met the expectations of the participants; both modes provided self and career knowledge to the participants and the Educational Psychologist highlighted clients' strengths *and* weaknesses in both modes.

Analysis of the pre and post self-report measure of the two participants who experienced the two modes of the feedback interviews, in conjunction with my observations as researcher, indicates that both the participants experienced the feedback interview situation as **positive**. The participant who experienced the traditional mode of feedback described her experience in the following manner: *"This feedback lived up to my expectations"* (Traditional feedback participant's post-feedback narrative, 5-03-2010, p. 1, line 1). The participant who experienced the positive psychological feedback interview described her experience as follows: *"The feedback did meet my expectations. I was pleased with what I got back"* (Positive psychological feedback participant's post-feedback narrative, 5-03-2010, p.1, lines 5-6).

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<sup>4</sup> The exploration of this theme also provides an answer to research Subquestion 2 (as stated in Section 1.2, Chapter 1).

My observations, recorded in my research diary (see Appendix A) during the administration of the two modes of feedback interviews indicate that the Educational Psychologist completed both the feedback interviews in a thorough manner. The following abstract from my research diary illustrates this observation that I made: *“She shared the information in a slow and relaxed manner, very thorough and with a reassuring manner.”* (Researcher’s diary, 5-03-2010, p. 10, lines 12-13). The Educational Psychologist’s thoroughness in this regard may have contributed to the common positive experiences of the two participants, as my observation suggests: *“The participant displayed satisfaction through her facial expressions such as smiling and showing content as the Educational Psychologist progressed through the feedback. The traditional feedback participant displayed similar gestures during her feedback as well.”* (Researcher’s diary, 5-30-2010, p. 11, lines 9-11). Also, *“The manner and tone in which the Educational Psychologist conveys the information to the participant throughout the feedback creates a very authentic feel, and enhances the trust relationship.”* (Researcher’s diary, 5-03-2010, p. 9, lines 26-28).

The Educational Psychologist accomplished a meticulous and comprehensive explanation of the client’s psychometric results. She detailed the purpose of administering each psychometric measure, the client’s results according to each measure and the implications of those results for the client in her everyday life. The following quotation from my research diary emphasises this observation: *“The Educational Psychologist linked the SAVII results to potential careers. She also drew a pattern between the different test results and brought them together into a holistic and easy-to-understand ‘package’. This put the information that was being conveyed into context for the participant and helped her to understand what it all meant for her on a practical level.”* (Researcher’s diary, 5-03-2010, p. 9, lines 21-25).

As the feedback sessions progressed, the Educational Psychologist built a holistic picture of the participants by linking the participants’ results on the various psychometric



measures to create a portrait of the participant, based on the knowledge and information she gained about them as unique individuals. I document this observation through the following quotations:

*“Also, when explaining her personality profile, the Educational Psychologist gave examples to help her understand the concepts, as she had done in the traditional feedback previously as well.”* (Researcher’s diary, 5-03-2010, p. 10, lines 17-18).

*“The Educational Psychologist related the participant’s most recent academic results to the results that she obtained on the DAT (as she had done in the traditional feedback). This helped the participant to understand the meaning of her assessment results on a practical level.”* (Researcher’s diary, 5-03-2010, p. 10, lines 14-16).

Another theme that emerged is that both participants’ gained information regarding their personal characteristics and traits, and how these related to career choices and knowledge. The participant who experienced the traditional feedback explained that she gained awareness and understanding of her strengths and areas of self-efficacy. This theme was identified from the following extract from her post-feedback narrative: *“I learnt about how I could express myself and what career choices would suit me other than the few that I had in mind. I also learnt that I have a potential to do better in English, which I didn’t know before.”* (Traditional feedback participants’ post-feedback narrative, 5-03-2010, p. 1, line 1-6). The participant who experienced the positive psychological feedback interview can be quoted in this regard as follows: *“My experience today was informative and also gave me a sense of direction that will influence the choices I will have to make later in life.”* (Positive psychological feedback participant’s post-feedback narrative, 5-03-2010, p. 1, lines 1-3).

As indicated in my discussion of current literature in Chapter 2, the purpose of a feedback interview is to provide the client with a meaningful interpretation and outline the implications of the assessment findings for the client (Bergh, 2007). The feedback interview should be conveyed in a context that fulfils the aims and objectives of

administering the psychometric assessment itself, which in the context of this study refers to providing information relative to subject choices and career choices (Bergh, 2007). From my discussion here it is evident that both modes of feedback fulfil the basic aims of a psychometric feedback.

#### **4.4.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Experiences of the participants unique to the positive psychological feedback interview<sup>5</sup>**

The positive psychological feedback interview participant expressed appreciation for the focused discussion regarding her strengths and weaknesses and *the process of mobilising her strengths to overcome the challenges/weaknesses that she encounters* in her life. The process of strength-building that the positive psychological feedback participant experienced is the result of Step 4 and 5 of the positive psychological feedback framework which is not included in the traditional feedback process (see Section 2.6.1, Chapter 2 for outline of steps of the positive psychological feedback interview).

The discussion of strength-building in the positive psychological feedback interview opened up a platform for the *participant* to engage in a discussion of her strengths and weaknesses in a more *reflective manner* than the traditional feedback allowed. This can be noted from the participant's words: *"It opened up a platform for me to discuss my strengths as well as my weaknesses"* (Positive psychological feedback participant's post-feedback narrative, 5-03-2010, p.1, lines 8-9).

In this regard the Educational Psychologist can be quoted from her reflection diary as saying: *"She seemed to understand how to use strengths to overcome challenges after we had completed this exercise. This session felt more like a therapy session, but a good session"* (Educational Psychologist's diary, 5-03-2010, p. 4, lines 10-13). Moreover, she

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<sup>5</sup> The exploration of this theme links contributes to the response to the research Sub-question 2 and Sub-question 4 (as stated in section 1.2, Chapter 1). In Section 5.2.2 I discuss Sub-question 4 in greater detail.

reflects that: *“It was more interactive than the traditional feedback”* (Educational Psychologist’s diary, 5-03-2010, p. 4, lines 23-24). In Section 5.3.2, Chapter 5, I discuss the similarities and differences between the two modes of feedback more in-depth.

My observation of the participant’s opportunity to attain confidence in terms of problem-solving is reflected in my observation in my research diary: *“A distinct improvement in the participant’s confidence and self-assurance was observed as she went through the positive psychological steps of the feedback. I refer to the process of plotting her strengths and learning to use them to overcome her weaknesses (those that the psychologist had identified from the assessment results and the feedback discussion) and challenges that she may encounter in her life – with the psychologist”* (Researcher’s diary, 5-30-2010, p. 10, lines 24-29). The Educational Psychologist reflected on her observation of the participant’s self-development during the positive psychological feedback as well: *“She also seemed much more relaxed and **at peace with herself** (own emphasis) by the end of the feedback.”* (Educational Psychologist’s diary, 5-3-2010, p. 4, lines 22-23).

According to Bergh (2007), the experiences of this participant who received the positive psychological feedback interview, can be placed into a context of expected etiquette of a feedback interview in general where the emphasis must be placed on *clients’ positive points and their potential*, along with any weaknesses that have been identified during the assessment phase. The Educational Psychologist is expected to discuss any such weaknesses that may have been identified in a constructive manner that promotes self-development. In the positive psychological feedback interview the Educational Psychologist seems to have accomplished this task as she illustrates from the following reflection in her research diary: *“She mentioned that she always tried to have a positive outlook on life. So this positive individual trait of hers was used during the feedback. I used this asset of hers to show her, how to overcome several challenges in her life”*. (Educational Psychologist’s diary, 5-03-2010, p. 4, lines 6-8).

Hence, by not simply outlining the client's strengths, but moreover progressing to *using* these strengths, the Educational Psychologist employed the principle of *strength building* which is one of the core elements of positive psychology. The building of strengths in the positive psychological feedback interview focused on *specific* strengths (such as talents, skills, knowledge, interests, goals and passions) that were identified in the participant through her psychometric assessment results (Saleebey, 1992). Strength building in this context could potentially lead to the occurrence of the positive psychological construct of *flourishing* (Keyes and Haidt, 2003).

The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) can be used to further explain the strength-building process that I observed in the positive psychological feedback. According to the broaden-and-build theory certain discrete positive emotions share the ability to broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring physical, social and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001).

The strength-building process allowed the positive psychological feedback participant to be an active participant in the process. The participant had to actively plot her own strengths and brainstorm ideas with the Educational Psychologist on how to use her signature strengths in new ways to overcome her weaknesses or potential challenges (Tan, 2006). The traditional feedback participant on the other hand seemed to be more of a passive observer *receiving* feedback of psychometric results, as the nature of the traditional feedback did not allow for discussion of problem-solving in the process of career planning (as the positive psychological feedback did). This observation can be substantiated with the following extract from the Educational Psychologist's research diary: *"In this feedback I explained the assessment measures that were administered, the results that she received, the strengths and weaknesses that the results highlighted and the implications of those results in terms of career-related recommendations."* (Educational Psychologist's diary, 5-3-2010, p. 3, lines 27-30).

#### 4.4.2 Theme 2<sup>6</sup>: The educational psychologist's experiences of the two modes of feedback interviews

The main theme that arose in terms of the Educational Psychologist's experience of the two modes of feedback is that she felt that due to the nature of the traditional feedback she was not able to provide as thorough a discussion as she had done in the positive psychological feedback interview. I quote an extract from the Educational Psychologist's research diary in terms of the traditional feedback to substantiate this idea: *"I would have wanted to look at her positive individual traits and assets in her system, so as to possibly give her life skills to assist in overcoming challenge... Again, I felt that she was denied of a positive feedback experience."* (Educational Psychologist's diary, 5-3-2010, p. 3, lines 25-31).

Her reflections in her diary indicate that she observed the positive psychological feedback client engaging in strength-building during the interview, which she felt was denied to the traditional feedback client. She describes her observation of the positive psychological feedback client's self-development as: *"At the beginning of the feedback, she felt that she was not reaching her potential and not working hard enough and yet she is an A student, by the end of the feedback, I could sense that she was realising that at times she was being hard on herself and actually achieving a lot in her life already. I think that this experience made her realise that she was actually realising her potential in life."* (Educational Psychologist's diary, 5-3-2010, p. 4, lines 15-19). The participant's awareness of the extent and level of her potential was something that she did not seem conscious of prior to the feedback interview. Such awareness seems apparent in the process of strength building as related during the positive psychological feedback interview (as I discuss in 4.4.1.2 above).

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<sup>6</sup> Through the exploration of this theme I also provide an answer to research Subquestion 3 (as stated in Section 1.2, Chapter 1).

As a result of the engagement and strength-building process that was evident in the positive psychological feedback, the Educational Psychologist expresses her experience of this feedback session as: *“This session felt more like a therapy session, but a good session.”* (Educational Psychologist’s diary, 5-3-2010, p. 4, lines 12-13). She reflects further on the positive psychological feedback interview that: *“...it was also a reminder to me how the positive psychology and asset-based approaches are so beneficial in my interactions with people... and how it can change your perspective on life.”* (Educational Psychologist’s diary, 5-3-2010, p. 4, lines 26-28).

My observations of the positive psychological feedback support the view of the Educational Psychologist, which is evident in the following abstract from my research journal: *“The interactive examples that the Educational Psychologist used where the participant had to list things about herself or give examples seemed really effective as they made the participant understand how she could reapply these same principles to her life later on, on her own. Thus making it sustainable.”* (Researcher’s diary, 5-03-2010, p. 11, lines 5-8).

In Section 4.4.2 I discuss the Educational Psychologist’s experience of the two modes of feedback interviews in relation to literature on the topic. The discussion of the Educational Psychologist’s experience of the two modes of feedback interviews that I present here indicates that the prominent difference between her experience of the two modes of feedback interviews is that she felt that she was disadvantaging the traditional feedback client by providing her with a less intense discussion. The Educational Psychologist experienced the traditional feedback as lacking in terms of the limited engagement with the participant, the participant’s insight into her strengths and the strength-building process in general.

#### 4.5 CONCLUSION

From the experiences and observations of the participants, the educational psychologist and myself as researcher, it can be deduced that while the experiences of the two modes of feedback interviews do indicate some differences, many similarities do exist as well. These similarities and differences will be explored in greater detail in Section 5.3.2, Chapter 5.

In Chapter 5 I detail the conclusions of this study and provide answers to the research questions that served as a guide in the completion of this research. Furthermore, I will explore possible contributions, limitations and recommendations of this study.

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## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Having addressed the research subquestions of this study in this chapter I will focus on answering the main research question of this study. I will further discuss the contribution that this study has made in general, as well as the limitations of the study. Lastly, I make recommendations for further research, as well as training and the practical application of the positive psychological mode of feedback interviews.

#### 5.2 FINDINGS THROUGH THE LENS OF THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE

The findings of this study (in terms of the similarities and differences between the two modes of feedback interviews) indicate no significant theoretical difference between the two modes of feedback. A lack of differentiation between the two modes of feedback interviews may be understood in terms of the theory of therapeutic alliance (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003).

The theory of therapeutic alliance is based on Bordin's theory of the working alliance (Johnson and Wright, 2002) and entails the notion that all psychotherapies require an alliance between therapist and client. The theory holds that the effectiveness of a therapy process is to some extent a reflection of the strength of the therapeutic alliance. While the theory recognises that alternate forms of therapeutic approaches make different demands on the therapist and client, it emphasises that the strength of the therapeutic alliance is determined by the compatibility of the characteristics of the client and therapist (Johnson and Wright, 2002). Based on therapeutic alliance principles, I thus argue that in terms of the two modes of psychometric feedback interviews, *the therapeutic alliance between the client and therapist impacts more*



*strongly on the client's experience of the interview rather than the mode that the feedback is delivered in.*

Therapeutic alliance theory has in recent studies proved to be an important variable in the therapeutic relationship. The definition of a therapeutic alliance has accordingly evolved and developed over the years as well. Starting out as a belief that the therapeutic alliance was simply a positive transference from client to therapist, it then evolved into an active collaboration between therapist and client. Most recently therapeutic alliance theory is believed to include three main features: 1) an agreement of goals (which, in this study was reached in both modes of feedback); 2) the assigning of task/s to the intervention process tasks (see Table 5.1 for summary of tasks assigned to the two modes of feedback) and 3) the development of bonds (which, as discussed in Chapter 4, occurred to varying degrees in both modes of feedback) (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003).

<b>TASKS ASSIGNED TO THE:</b>	
<b>TRADITIONAL FEEDBACK</b>	<b>POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL FEEDBACK</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Listens to the Educational Psychologist</li> <li>* Advice and information provided to the client by the Educational Psychologist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Engagement from client required (listen, talk, think, transfer and plan)</li> <li>* Advice and information provided to the client by the Educational Psychologist</li> <li>* Strength-building discussion/therapy provided by the Educational Psychologist</li> <li>* Client's confidence observed</li> </ul>

**Table 5.1 Summary of tasks assigned to the two modes of feedback interviews**

Recent studies have found that a psychological assessment process may impact on the patient's experience of assessment feedback and thus aid in the development of a

therapeutic alliance (Ackerman, Hilsenroth, Baity and Blagys, 2000). In this regard, Ackerman *et al.* (2000) illustrate that while clients' experiences of psychological assessment can be measured reliably, the psychological *assessment* phase can strongly influence the clients' experiences of assessment feedback and in so doing, aid the development and maintenance of the therapeutic alliance. Thus the joint session that I refer to in Section 4.3 between the participants of the final data collection interviews and the Educational Psychologist may have impacted the therapeutic alliance between the clients and Educational Psychologist positively in the final data collection phase of the study (as I intended post-pilot). As I note in Section 4.3, I observed the participants to be "noticeably more comfortable" with the Educational Psychologist after the joint introductory session that we had with them, as compared to the participants from the pilot group.

It is only when learning about the experiences, perceptions and understandings of clients in therapeutic situations that researchers and therapists alike can learn what clients like and truly need in therapeutic situations (Ribner and Knei-Paz, 2002). Since the purpose of this study was to provide insight into the experiences of clients and the Educational Psychologist in the two modes of feedback interviews, theory and practice are informed by the similarities and differences between the two modes that I have highlighted in the findings of this study. Similarly, it is also important to understand the perspective of clients concerning the therapeutic experience as they often differ from that of the therapist as the findings of this study highlight (see Section 4.4) (Paulson, Truscott and Stuart, 1999).

Prior research relating to the therapeutic alliance indicates that helpful aspects of the therapeutic experience identified from clients include: 1) facilitative therapist characteristics; 2) clients' self-expression permitted; 3) experiencing a supportive relationship; 4) self-understanding and insight; 5) therapists encouraging extra therapy practice; 6) client resolutions; 7) gaining knowledge; 8) emotional relief and accessibility

(Paulson *et al.*, 1999). Through the various data sources collected and analysed in this study, I found that the following five variables were apparent in the experiences of clients in both modes of the feedback interviews.

1. **Facilitative therapist characteristics:** where the Educational Psychologist's interpersonal characteristics allowed for effective facilitation of both modes of feedback sessions.
2. **Self-understanding and insight:** the Educational Psychologist's facilitative characteristics created a sense of self-awareness and understanding in both participants which plausibly led to increased insight into their own lives and career planning processes.
3. **Therapist encouraging extra therapy practice:** as a result of Step 4 and 5 of the positive psychological feedback interview, the Educational Psychologist was able to create an opportunity for the client to develop problem-solving and strength-building skills.
4. **Client resolutions:** the self-knowledge and career planning information that the participants received from the two modes of feedback assisted them in forming resolutions on their abilities, giving them career options.
5. **Gaining knowledge:** the participants gained knowledge about themselves and their career-planning processes through both modes of feedback interviews.

From the above we can see that experiences of feedback interviews are influenced by sources outside the feedback content itself. The fact that a therapeutic alliance has an impact on the process of feedback per se has direct implications for this study. The direct implications referred to here relate to *therapists' characteristics* that impact on the nature of the therapeutic relationship, a factor which is independent of the mode of feedback being conducted (be it a traditional or a positive psychological feedback). If the overall goal of the positive psychological feedback interviews was to encourage and foster the development of happiness and a positive outlook (Seligman, 2002), then

therapist personal characteristics such as trustworthiness, warmth, confidence, displaying an interest in the client and openness all have the potential to influence the impact and effectiveness of both the traditional and positive psychological feedback interviews. In Table 5.2 the similarities in terms of the experiences of the two modes of feedback interviews highlighted indicate that the therapist characteristics in the two modes of feedback interviews were consistent and this consistency led to a positive experience and similar benefits for *both clients who had experienced the alternate modes* of feedback.

Ackerman and Hilsenroth (2003) explain that studies have consistently proved that in order to achieve therapeutic success it is essential that the therapist instil *confidence* (as I particularly observed in the positive psychological feedback) and *trust* into the therapeutic frame. Effectively instilling confidence and trust into the therapeutic frame is directly linked to a therapist's ability to display attributes such as dependability, benevolence and responsiveness which may lead to the therapist effectively helping the client under distress. Factors such as therapist's training; consistency; effectively utilising non-verbal gestures (such as eye contact and leaning toward the client); verbal behaviours (such as interpretation); display characteristics such as empathy; congruence and positive regard; and the maintenance of the therapeutic frame in general all promote the development of feelings of connectedness between the therapist and client.

Thus, based on the findings outlined by Ackerman and Hilsenroth (2003) above, I deduced that the therapeutic alliance may be responsible for a significant degree of the therapeutic outcomes. In the context of the data collected in this study (i.e. - the two modes of feedback interviews) I conclude that a strong relationship between the Educational Psychologist and the participants leads to a positive and beneficial career-planning experience of the feedback interviews, regardless of the mode of feedback experienced.

### **5.3 CONCLUSIONS IN TERMS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In this section I outline the conclusions that I have come to in terms of research sub-questions that have guided this study, as stated in Section 1.2 in Chapter 1.

#### **5.3.1 What is the nature of a traditional and positive psychological feedback interview?**

The first research subquestion investigates the nature of a traditional and positive psychological feedback interview. This question was answered thoroughly through the literature review that I provided in Chapter 2. Table 2.4 and 2.5 reflect a direct summary of the literature reviewed, in terms of the core elements comprising a traditional and a positive psychological feedback interview respectively. Furthermore in Section 2.2 of Chapter 2 I outline essential elements and characteristics of feedback interviews in general, which are common to both the traditional and the positive psychological feedback interview modes.

The thorough framework for the completion of both modes of feedback interviews as well as a step-by-step procedure to follow when completing a positive psychological feedback interview that this study provides, is therefore one of the defining contributions of this study. These frameworks for completing the two modes of feedback interviews are now available to other practitioners for reference through this study.

#### **5.3.2 What are the differences and similarities between experiences of a traditional and a positive psychological feedback interview?**

The final subquestion of this study aimed to solicit similarities and differences between the two modes of feedback interviews. From the findings of this study analysed above in Section 4.4 in terms of the experiences of the young girls, the Educational Psychologist

and my observations as researcher, similarities and differences were identified between the two modes of feedback interviews, which I discuss in this section. Consequently the availability of this detailed comparison of the similarities and differences between the two modes of feedback is one of the defining contributions of this study. This comparison between the two modes of feedback interviews provides theoretical and practical knowledge and understanding of the application of the two feedback modes. In Table 5.2 below I tabulate the similarities and differences between the two feedback modes that I have identified.

SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ Both modes of feedback were perceived as satisfactory and positive experiences by participants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ The positive psychological feedback interview provided more opportunity for engagement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ Both modes of feedback provided the participants with self- and career knowledge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ Client had strength-building opportunity during positive psychological feedback interview.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ Both modes of feedback were experienced as meeting clients' expectations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ The Educational Psychologist experienced the traditional feedback interview as tiring and limiting.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✳ The Educational Psychologist highlighted clients' strengths and weaknesses in both modes of feedback interviews.</li> </ul>	

**Table 5.2 Similarities and differences identified between the two modes of feedback interviews**

### 5.3.2.1 Similarities between the two modes of feedback interviews

In terms of the *similarities* between the two modes of feedback interviews, the *first similarity* identified is that the participants of both the traditional and the positive psychological modes of feedback described their feedback experiences in a *positive light*.

*Secondly*, according to the young girls' post-feedback self-report narratives, both the girls stated that the feedback provided them with knowledge about themselves and career knowledge.

*Thirdly*, the participants experienced both the modes of feedback as thorough. The girls reported that both the modes of feedback led to the development of life skills and an increased ability to utilise their potential.

*Lastly*, during *both* the traditional and the positive psychological modes of feedback interviews, the Educational Psychologist highlighted and discussed the young girls' strengths and weaknesses within them. Thus, we can deduce that the traditional mode of feedback is not without asset and strength-building of clients during a feedback interview.

### **5.3.2.2 Differences between the two modes of feedback interviews**

Regarding *differences* identified between the two modes of feedback interviews, the analysis of the data sources indicates that the positive psychological feedback interview provided more opportunity for the *engagement* between the Educational Psychologist and client through the discussion of assessment results. Engagement occurred particularly in terms of understanding and using clients' strengths and weaknesses for problem-solving and career planning. It appeared as if the client demonstrated confidence by discussing positive psychology principles (such as strength building) due to the nature and process of the positive psychological feedback interview. This finding can be explored further in future studies.

The positive psychological feedback participant was thus afforded the opportunity to develop her problem-solving skills (from a strengths-based perspective) under the guidance of the Educational Psychologist. The traditional feedback client did not

experience a strength-building discussion due to the nature of the mode of the traditional feedback interview. In particular, the strength-based problem-solving skill is potentially a benefit that can be attributed to 'Step 4' of the positive psychological feedback interview (see Section 2.6.1 for a step-by-step framework for completing a positive psychological feedback interview). However, participants of both modes of feedback reported that the feedback interviews met their expectations and that it was a positive experience. Their positive experiences may be attributed to factors related to the therapeutic relationship such as facilitative characteristics that the Educational Psychologist employed.

*Secondly*, the Educational Psychologist reported that she had experienced the traditional feedback interview as tiring as a result of the participants' limited engagement during the feedback process. The participants' lack of engaging behaviour is discussed in Section 5.5 where I sum up the limitations of the study. The Educational Psychologist also felt constrained during the traditional feedback as she was not able to engage and discuss the clients' strengths and weaknesses extensively as she had done in the positive psychological feedback interview. However, despite reporting that she did not feel like she was giving the traditional feedback client as thorough a feedback as the positive psychological feedback client had received, the Educational Psychologist did fulfil all the stipulations and requirements of a traditional feedback interview as outlined in Section 2.2 and Table 2.5 of my literature review. Furthermore, the traditional feedback client reported that the feedback that she experienced had met her expectations.



### 5.3.3 How can a comparison between experiences of a traditional and a positive psychological psychometric feedback interview inform educational psychological theory and practice?

The outcomes and results of this study offer a valuable contribution to the field of Educational Psychology theory and practice in terms of this *primary research question* which directed the study. Findings confirm that the therapist's personal characteristics and techniques are central to a successful feedback experience which was evident in both modes of the feedback interviews. The positive psychological feedback did seem to provide an alliance opportunity for the client to on the one hand engage more with the therapist, and on the other hand, participate in strength-building discussions, possibly building confidence for future problem-solving capacity.

Whereas the similarities and differences between the two modes of feedback *did not* prove to be extensive, the limited similarities between the two modes of feedback in question **highlighted the significance that the therapeutic alliance** between client and practitioner plays in process of the client's development and wellbeing, as compared with the mode of feedback being employed. Thus, the findings of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Johnson and Wright, 2002; Ribner and Knei-Paz, 2002; Ackerman *et al.*, 2000; Paulson *et al.*, 1999) surrounding the significance and value of the therapeutic alliance between therapist and client as I discussed in detail in Section 5.2 above. Findings in terms of the significance of the therapeutic alliance constitute one of the core contributions of this study.

Further theoretical contributions of this study to the field of positive psychology are directive in terms of placing a *specific focus on implementing the principles of positive psychology in the domain of psychometry*, particularly during the process of conveying feedback of psychometric results.

The literature review mentioned in Chapter 2 allowed me to formulate a thorough framework for the completion of both modes of feedback interviews and forms the basis of the theoretical contribution of this study to the field of Educational Psychology. In Chapter 2 I provide a summary of the framework for developing and completing a **traditional feedback interview** in Table 2.5. In Section 2.2 of the same chapter I outline **elements and techniques that are common to both modes** of feedback interviews.

In terms of a practical contribution of this study, under Section 2.5 and Section 2.6.1 in Chapter 2, I define the *construct* of a **positive psychological feedback interview** and detail a *step-by-step procedure* for practitioners to follow when completing a positive psychological feedback interview themselves. In the accompanying Figure 2.1 I also provide a visual representation of the procedure of a positive psychological feedback interview.

#### 5.4 POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The first limitation encountered in this study relates to the methodology of the study. This study was conducted with a **limited number of participants** (see Section 3.5.1 where I discuss selection of participants). The final data collection feedback interviews were conducted using only one participant per mode of feedback (two participants in all). This followed the pilot study which was also completed using one participant per mode of feedback. Thus, a total number of four girls participated in the piloting and final data collection phases of this study. A mere four participants cannot be considered a representative sample of the South African population of students assessed in the Educational Psychology domain. However, since I employed an interpretivist paradigm (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Schurink, 1998), my intent was not to be able to generalise the findings of this study (see Section 3.2 in Chapter 3 for discussion on the paradigmatic perspective of this study). Instead, my objective in this study was to provide a detailed description of the *experiences* of the participants, the Educational Psychologist and

myself (as researcher in the role of observer) during the completion of the two modes of feedback interviews.

Secondly, the groups of participants that experienced the two modes of feedback interviews ***did not reflect a diverse population or gender sample*** and were not representative of the variety of individuals, races, cultures and genders existing in the South African population (see Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 for summary of participants' demographic details). The experiences of these participants may thus be case/culture specific and once again cannot be generalised to a greater population.

Thirdly, the differences between the participants' characteristics and personalities in terms of their levels of expressiveness and engagement with the Educational Psychologist during the two modes of feedback interviews may have impacted on the findings of this study through my observations (recorded during my role as observer).

Finally, the last limiting factor during this study relates to the experiences of my family member who participated in the final data collection interviews. As the findings of the study indicate in Section 4.4.1.1, she expressed some apprehension that she had felt as a result of having a relative watching her feedback interview. This may have inhibited her levels of engagement and her willingness to express herself freely during my presence behind the two-way glass. The Educational Psychologist also observed the participant's anxiety in this regard and recorded her observation as follows: *"I could see that she was not comfortable during the feedback"* (Educational Psychologist's diary, 5-03-2010, p. 3, lines 6-7).

## 5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

As I stated in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.1) the purpose of this study was not to be able to generalise findings to a greater population (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Patton, 2002). Evidently, due to the nature and outcome of this study I was

not able to generalize my findings to the greater population. However, this fact highlights a possible area for *future studies*, emanating from the results of *this* study. Therefore, in order to be able to generalise findings of a study of this nature, I recommend that similar research be completed with a larger sample of participants who represent a wider variety of the cultural/social groups in South Africa, as well as a variety of age groups. Such a study may explore whether factors such as strength-building, engagement and confidence do in fact arise from a larger positive psychological feedback sample. A study of this nature may also explore the experience of a positive psychological feedback if the assessment and feedback were to be completed by one individual (unlike in this study), as well as to investigate the occurrence of strength-building, and increased self-confidence and problem-solving skills in the participants.

## 5.6 CLOSING REMARKS

On a closing note I would like to reiterate the idea that while the traditional and positive psychological modes of feedback were used as a basis for comparison in this study they are not necessarily the only two modes of conducting feedback that exist. Findings of this study allude to the fact that the positive psychological mode of feedback exists *in addition to, rather than in place of the traditional mode* of feedback.

The results of this study yielded proof that the therapeutic alliance between the client and therapist is a greater defining factor in terms of the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship, than the mode of feedback being employed. I have thus had the opportunity to witness the significance of the therapeutic alliance during the administration of the two modes of feedback interviews and provide a comparison of the two modes through the findings of this study.