

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research methods that were utilised during the study. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and background against which the methodology for this study was presented while the literature review in Chapter 2 entails a discussion of other studies that were related to the teachers' understanding, response to and implementation of Life Orientation. Although the focus of those studies is not identical to those in this study, similar methodologies with some variation were adopted. The use of qualitative research is clarified in Chapter 1 and provides a complex perspective in order to explore the topic under study. The participants selected for the study who are secondary school teachers provided their expressions of reality in terms of their experiences and interpretations as primary evidence via the spoken word (Silverman, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

I chose to the data collection tools that I used. The data collection tools I used have corresponded with the research philosophy. In this chapter I described and justify the research philosophy, the methodology, the research instruments, the data collection strategies and the process of data analysis. I begin this chapter by discussing the interpretative nature of the qualitative research.

3.2 INTERPRETATIVE NATURE OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The use of a qualitative research strategy meant that the entire process of research, from the conceptualization of the problem to writing the narrative, formed a range of different perspectives on the world (Smit, 2001:58). Research was conducted in its naturalistic setting, for the discovery of teachers' reality, understanding, response to and implementation of Life Orientation according to policy in their respective schools (De Vos, 2000:273; Mouton, 2001:270, 278). The personal values that teachers place upon their learning area and teaching played a vital role in this qualitative research (Smit, 2001:59).

This study yielded an interpretive discussion (Chapters 4 and 5) of the research by means of the participants' spoken words, using a qualitative process (Creswell, 1998:170; De Vos, 2000:357; Kitchin & Tate, 2000:212). The main aim of the intensive examination was to discover an unbiased description of the manner in which to conceptualise the curriculum and to experience the facilitation of the learning area Life Orientation (Stringer, 2004:26; Rubin & Babbie, 2001:125). Emphasis was placed on variables within the schools' natural setting – hence information-rich data were collected (Silverman, 2004:138; Creswell, 1994:2, 147; De Vos, 2000:273; Mouton, 2001:270, 278). Salient themes, sub-themes and categories were identified from the collected data where participants' descriptions confirmed the depth of the investigation (De Vos, 2000:243; Mouton, 1996:103; Kvale, 1996:32).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative research methods produce useful insight into the world of the research participants, especially within their school contexts (Babbie, 2001:28). The qualitative research that I opted for provided information drawn from the local teachers' experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Interaction within the group members and in relation to their learning area assisted in my gathering the descriptive data in the participants' own words, gestures and feelings (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The process allowed me to function from an interpretivist standpoint in order to attain “holistic” insight into the way in which the teachers relate to the learning area Life Orientation (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:75). As a result the findings made possible a “deeper understanding” of the educational background of Life Orientation and its associated shortcomings within the school situation (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:75).

I was able to exploit the research design and data collection strategies to determine what actually happens in the classroom and at the various schools regarding Life Orientation. Various data collection strategies were employed as part of the research design of the research project (De Vos, 2000:272). I accumulated data from the observation sessions and interviews personally at the allocated schools. During these research sessions I observed and experienced realities that teachers provided in their implementation of Life Orientation.

3.4 DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLING STRATEGIES

3.4.1 SITE SELECTION

The research sites were chosen from schools in the region. These schools also benefited from content-based workshops as a strategy to empower teachers in Life Orientation. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in the Head of Department's offices at each school or other prepared offices that were comfortable and available for use. The specific site locations within the schools varied at the different locations according to availability and personal preferences of the participants.

Two focus group interviews were held in a conference room, one in the deputy principals' offices and one in a school library. Four individual interviews were conducted in the Head of Departments' office and two in the school principal's office. From personal experiences and the preliminary study of the problems teachers encounter with regard to Life Orientation, the selected sites were supposed to provide rich details and maximise the range of specific information.

3.4.2 SAMPLE SIZE

The number of participants suitable for the study was confirmed after the actual process of data collection had taken place, because the logic of the sample size was related to the purpose of the research problem. The sample size was determined by data saturation. Hence, the relevance of the data collected was important. The eventual number of participants was determined by the repetition of themes and categories during the interviews to indicate the detailed and in-depth information which provided evidence of data saturation (Neuman, 2000:200).

3.4.3 PARTICIPANT SELECTION

In this research study participants included Grade 8 to Grade 12 teachers. Gert Sibande Region is divided into three sub-regions and research occurred in two sub-regions. Entry was proposed to both urban, semi urban and rural secondary schools

in different circuits within these two sub-regions. The sample of schools participating in this research included secondary schools. All the sample schools were mainstream schools that taught in both English and Afrikaans although the interviews and the focus group interviews were conducted in English (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The initial motivation for choosing the specific schools as indicated in tables 5.1 and 5.2 depended on whether the learning area Life Orientation was taught by different teachers or by only one teacher as three or more teachers had to be used as a focus group. Schools that had more than two teachers for Life Orientation were chosen.

3.4.4 INFORMED CONSENT

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Pretoria (See attached Appendix 1). The relevant permission to conduct the interviews in the five identified schools, in two sub-regions, was obtained from the Department of Education. Participants were then requested to sign letters of informed consent before participating in the study. The communication was indicative of their voluntary consent to participate in the research.

Informed consent for this study necessitated clearly stipulated terms of participation and justification for the research that was not supposed to be unnecessary or a hindrance to them in any way (Hakim, 2000:143) The participants had to be well-informed about the nature of the study when they signed the letters after making a reasoned decision to provide accurate and complete information of their own free will (De Vos, 2000:65; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:107).

The principals of each school where interviews were conducted as well as the participating Life Orientation teachers had to provide informed consent. The participants were therefore informed of the following in a letter in clear and comprehensible language:

- The aim of the research and the research methods
- The time involved in participation
- The type of participation that is expected of them

- How the results generated from the collected data would be utilised
- The measures to be taken to ensure their anonymity

An example of the letter of consent is enclosed as Appendix A of this study. It clearly indicates the freedom to withdraw without penalties, that there would be no possible benefits to participants and that they would be informed about the scheduled feedback of results.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

It was important for me to take note of inter-subjective personal knowledge in discussion regarding data collection during the course of the study. Inductive reasoning refers to research being executed without personal, pre-conceived ideas (Henning *et al.*, 2004:83). However, I had to accept that as a researcher within the qualitative paradigm it was inevitable that I entered the research with preconceived ideas regarding the theme.

It was imperative for me to consider the language preference of the teachers in the communication sent to the schools. Letters were sent to request permission to conduct focus group interviews and teachers generally indicated that English was to be used for communication. English is a medium of instruction used by all selected schools and a universal language. At times during their responses to the questions, some teachers switched to isiZulu or Sesotho but this was randomly done, especially when they could not quickly find the right word to express themselves in English. I fortunately understand and speak Isizulu and Sesotho fluently and could interpret the answers to the questions. In general, most of the interviews were completed entirely through the medium of English.

3.5.1 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

Various methods and techniques were utilised for data collection (Mouton, 1996:10) which included focus group interviews and phenomenological face-to-face interviews with the application of open-ended questions. The main research question was posed at the beginning of the interviews and other semi-structured sub-questions followed according to the participants' answers (Weiss, 1998:83;

Kitchin & Tate, 2000:213). Data were systematically collected and meanings, themes and general descriptions of the experience were analysed within a specific school context (De Vos, 2000:273). The following data collection strategies were utilised:

3.5.1.1 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews were relevant to this research since the method builds on a group process as a technique, not only increasing validity of the initial interview findings, but also increasing the credibility of the entire study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:360). Participants in the focus group interviews produced more data and valuable insight into the research problem among themselves. This form of group interview provided a range of responses from the free expression of the participants' views. Sensitive issues and personal feelings were raised and controlled because of the confidential nature; however, other participants expressed themselves freely amongst the group members (Seal, Gobo, Gabrium & Silverman, 2004:71).

One session for each of the focus group interviews at four schools was used for data collection and participants were allowed to discuss their views openly according to the questions posed directly to the participants. The format was guided by the research questions mentioned earlier in this thesis.

Table 3.1: Composition of focus groups

Group (Circuits)	Description of the group	Gender	Number
Highveld Ridge East	Life Orientation teachers from Grade 8-12 with one Head of Department	Female	Five (all female)
Highveld Ridge West (T)	Life Orientation teachers from Grade 7-12 with one Head of Department	Male and female	Five (three female and two male)
Highveld Ridge West	Life Orientation teachers from Grade 8-12 with one Head of Department	Female	Eight (all female)
Balfour	Life Orientation teachers from Grade 8-12 with one Head of Department	Female	Four (all female)

The focus groups above (Table 3.1) were composed primarily of female Life Orientation teachers. This seems to indicate that the teaching of the learning area Life Orientation is mainly allocated to female teachers in some schools.

I made special efforts to arrive at least 30 minutes before the scheduled time of the focus group interviews to check on the venue and the functionality of the audio-tape. I made the participants feel comfortable by arranging tea before the interviews; this arrangement gave me the opportunity to acquaint myself with the participants. I introduced myself as a researcher and explained the purpose of the interviews. I assured participants about their anonymity and when I had their attention, I posed the first question. I controlled the discussion to avoid dominance by individuals in the focus group discussion. The focus group interviews were informal and allowed the opportunity for interaction among the participants in the group. Initially it was necessary to ease the participants into the discussions in order to create an amiable atmosphere that was not threatening. The participants did not only interact with me as a researcher, but also with one another. I was able to elicit vital details from the focus groups by presenting questions based on the research questions and aims (Chapter 1) of the topic under study (see Appendix D).

3.5.1.2 Face-to-face interviews

Semi-structured interviews were discussion-based and enabled more interesting lines of enquiry to learn more about the topic under study (Grieves & Hanafin, 2005:31). Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes and was conducted at the schools with the scheduled informant participants who were Life Orientation Grade 8 to 12 teachers and heads of department. The research participants were key informants for in-depth interviews because they shared special knowledge, experience or status (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:351). These individual, face-to-face interviews were conducted to establish a sense of freedom to discuss issues that they would not otherwise talk about in a group. Further probing was conducted following the participants' responses in order to establish greater clarity on pertinent issues. The table below (Table 3.2) explained the individual interviews.

Table 3.2: Composition of individual interviews

Group (Circuits)	Description of the individuals	Gender	Number
Highveld Ridge East	Life Orientation teachers from Grade 8-	Female	One
Highveld Ridge West	Life Orientation teachers from Grade 7-12 with one Head of Department	Female	One
Highveld Ridge West	Life Orientation teachers from Grade 8-12 with one Head of Department	Male	One
Balfour	Life Orientation teachers from Grade 8-12	Female	One
Stan-East	Life Orientation teachers from Grade 8-12	Male and Female	One male and One female

There were participants within the focus group interviews who were more open and informative than others. I decided to get more information from them by arranging face-to-face interviews with them. I took similar introductory procedures as in the focus group interviews. The format was that of informal conversation with questions asked, paraphrasing and follow-up. The open-ended questions were used to ensure that the responses were not restricted or limited. Principals and heads of departments were interviewed individually to gain their understanding of the implementation of Life Orientation as well as information from a managerial point of view.

The face-to-face interviews enabled participants to share their personal experiences, opinions and beliefs (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). The audio-tape recordings assisted me with the flow of the discussions and not to waste time on writing and slowing down the pace of the interview. The tape recorder was always tested before the interviews for proper functioning. After each interview I listened to the audio-tape and compared the recording with my field notes.

3.5.1.3 Field notes (Reflexivity)

Loose notes and informal jottings of ideas were taken during interviews and were then converted into field notes after the interviews had been conducted to aid interpretation during the research process (De Vos, 2000:285). A field journal also reflected values, thoughts and interests and methodological decisions that were

taken together with the reasons for making them during the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:327).

The field journal allowed personal thoughts and feelings about the research process to be recorded. The process prevented to some extent any preconceived assumptions that may unintentionally influence the research process. It also allowed for verification of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:676). It should be kept in mind that in this research situation I was an observer and had to ensure that important observations were noted. Throughout the research the field journal process provided a comprehensive account of the participants themselves, the events that took place, the actual discussions and communication as well as learning area teachers' attitudes, gestures and feelings. These served as a record of the schedule and logistics of the study and were coded to clarify the research settings. The notes served as objective descriptions of the "who", "what", "where" and "how" of a context or situation.

The journal assisted me in being mindful of personal biases and not being subjective when interpreting data. I kept the self-reflexive journal in order to facilitate reflexivity and to be able to examine personal assumptions and goals and to clarify my belief and subjectivity. With the field notes I intended to make visible my thinking and experiences of the interviews. The journal was also used as my source of additional information and guidance during my study (Cohen *et al.*, 2005).

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews were transcribed verbatim from the recordings that were made and analysed by means of the descriptive analysis of Tesch (Creswell, 1994:154-155). Data was organised and broken into measurable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned. Structural coherence integrated the masses of loosely connected data into a logical, holistic picture in the research report. Written field notes also served as material for the subsequent interpretation of meaning and to close the gaps that need to be filled in the process of observations (Kvale, 1996:27).

Consensus discussions with the research supervisor were on-going in order to refine the identified themes (Creswell, 1994:158; Krefting, 1991:216). During the data analysis phase I confirmed and refined the themes and categories which were identified. I analysed data into manageable units in order to synthesise them, searching for patterns and discovering what was important for the topic under study. It was important for me to indicate that the identified themes were supported while the sub-themes and categories were distinguished within the major themes. The verification of data served as an additional method of triangulation.

Transcriptions were analysed according to Tesch's method of data analysis (Creswell, 1994:154-155), which involved the following eight steps:

1. Setting a sense of the whole by carefully reading through all the transcriptions and jotting down ideas as they came to mind.
2. One document, the shortest and most interesting, was chosen and perused to consider the underlying meaning. Thoughts were then written in the margins.
3. Having gone through all the documents, I was able to identify ideas that were listed and I grouped together similar ones into major and unique topics or themes.
4. This list was verified by means of the data collected. Themes were abbreviated as codes and written alongside the appropriate segments of the text.
5. The most descriptive wording for each topic was decided on and then turned into a suitable category. Topics that relate to one another were then grouped together. Lines were also drawn between the categories to show interrelationships.
6. A final decision on the abbreviated categories was made and codes were listed in alphabetical order.
7. Data material belonging to each theme and category was gathered and thereafter a preliminary analysis was completed.
8. All existing data were transcribed. The transcribed data were handed to the supervisor

(See Chapter 4, Table 4.3).

3.7 LITERATURE CONTROL

Literature control confirmed the results of the investigation and described the topic under study. Literature control demonstrated the underlying assumptions behind the general research questions and displayed my knowledge of related research and the intellectual traditions that surround and support the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995:28). The literature control was conducted in conjunction with the theory to promote the confidence of the researcher (Woods & Catanzaro, 1988:136). The concepts were clarified and formulated according to the literature. To verify the findings, the literature control was reviewed only after the data collection and data analysis so that the information from the literature did not influence objectivity (Burns & Grove, 1997:545).

The information from the literature was thus compared to the findings of the study to enhance the scientific trustworthiness of the study. The literature review demonstrated the underlying assumptions behind the general research question. It ensured that the study could be valued as part of a cumulative knowledge-building effort regarding the research inquiry in terms of the topic that was under study (Rubin & Babbie, 2001:121).

3.8 ETHICAL MEASURES

I ensured that the participants were aware that their participation in this research occurred of their own free will and that they knew that their withdrawal from this investigation was possible without penalties and could take place whenever they felt they could not continue. The conditions of their participation included maintaining confidentiality when dealing with the data and respecting privacy and anonymity. Informed consent to conduct the research was obtained from the necessary authorities from the University of Pretoria, the Department of Education and from the participants (Burns & Grove, 1997:209).

For this research, the following ethical issues that could have affected the study were identified:

- Harm to the participants

- Deception of respondents
- Violation of privacy
- Biased actions of the researcher

The participants were fully informed of the potential impact of the investigation before they participated. Such information offered the participants the opportunity to withdraw from the investigation if they so wished, which indicated that the respondents were treated with candour and honesty (Weiss, 1998:93). For this reason discipline was maintained with and among participants, especially when sensitive and personal information was discussed (Babbie, 2001:417; 1990:340-341). The research could also have had positive effects on the participants. In addition, it was important to note that as the researcher I should not be blasé about the possible harm to subjects by stating that the investigation could benefit them in some other way in the future (Bailey, 1994:472).

3.9 MY ROLE AS RESEARCHER

Prior to the commencement of this scientific study, it was imperative for me to fulfil all the prerequisites of the process. It was beneficial that I was also familiar with the learning area of the project and its goals. My task as researcher entailed the construction of suitably phrased questions in view of the participants' culture or frame of reference (De Vos, 2000:292). Furthermore, I am a Life Orientation subject advisor from the Department of Education and was therefore familiar with the necessary qualitative research methods to conduct the interviews during which I had to be observer and interviewer. My experience as an interviewer within my job situation ensured that the participants were comfortable and able to answer questions that were overtly descriptive of their own encounters

During the individual and focus group interviews the main research question was posed as a first question to elicit experiences on the theme of the research (Burgass, 1994:277). Rapport with the participants ensured that I would be able to secure vital information from the participants while I strategized about the manner in which I would handle any probable dilemmas later. I found that there was a comfortable exchange of ideas and a positive, meaningful discussion; thus, the

intensity of the interaction during the interviews provided invaluable details in relation to the questions.

3.10 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE RESEARCH

3.10.1 VALIDITY

According to Henning and Simon (2006:311) validity is an instrument that ensures that research is constructed and conducted to measure effectively what it expects to determine. Validity is an important tool for effective research because it checks, questions, theorizes, discusses, shapes and shares research action (Smith, 2004:148). In addition, Silverman (2001:232-248) states that validity emphasizes the elucidation of observations and responses from the participants' attitudes and values as presented during the interviews.

During the interview process I was a moderator who was required to ascertain that the information provided by the participants was valid. As a result it was my duty to deliberate upon the participants' responses in order to ascertain what was relevant and valid

3.10.2 RELIABILITY

Silverman (2001:227-228) and Leedy and Ormrod (2001:54) are of the opinion that reliability is allied to quality assurance since it is imperative that the information provided by participants does not vary and that the duration of the recording is within reasonable limits. This requirement also includes the proviso that the questions posed to participants ought not to be vague or confusing. Hence, it was also vital for the conditions of reliability that I was able to make available all related documentation that had been gathered during the research whenever it was requested.

3.10.3 NEUTRALITY ENSURED BY THE STRATEGY OF CONFORMABILITY

The concept of "neutrality" relates to the researcher's ability to be impartial in capturing and assimilating the collected data. It was, therefore, a requirement that I

was competent enough as a researcher to extract information from the interviews so that participants could later validate that I had captured their views correctly and without bias (Krefting, 1991:221).

In this particular research neutrality refers to whether the research process was free of any predisposition on my part to include personal notions of the learning area that might have impacted upon the findings and results (Krefting, 1991:216-217). My role, therefore, had to be impartial in order to avoid any tendency that could have manipulated the research responses provided by the participants. The presentation of results had to express what the participants themselves discussed during the interviews. According to the contention of De Vos (2000:331) this study secured neutrality via the policy of confirmability which verifies whether the results of the research can be confirmed by another similar one. Hence, neutrality was accomplished in my study since I had attained truth-value and an audit trail could confirm whether the results are applicable to other research.

Once I had collected all the data, I had to transcribe and capture all the audio-taped conversations. Thereafter I listened to the tape recordings and compared the transcriptions to include relevant nuances that I might have missed or found extraneous. Once this was completed I was able to code the relevant extract thematically into the pertinent categories to reinforce my analysis and discussion.

I used the reflexive notes, focus group interviews, face-to-face interviews and audio-taped recording to enable cross-checking and to confirm the accuracy of the collected data. The records are to be submitted to the University of Pretoria for archival record keeping. I also took my data analysis back to the participants to be checked for accuracy and to obtain their approval (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:113).

It was difficult to exercise self-control with regards to the topic of Life Orientation where I serve as a Subject Advisor; therefore had to guard against not moulding my personal impressions to suit any preconceived ideas and bias that I might have had. I was able to overcome my personal preconceptions and asserted that criteria relating to anonymity and confidentiality were adhered to. In my research I had to build and maintain a trustworthy and honest relationship as a researcher and work

within the framework of the University of Pretoria's ethical policies. I needed accurate data that would assist my intervention support programmes.

During an audit trial an external auditor would be able to establish if the research process had been a consequence of the natural progression of events where justified choices were made (Krefting, 1991:221). Such a condition would result in future researchers being able to confirm similar results if they were provided with the same data and context. The research processes, as well as the end product, data, findings, interpretations and recommendations were taken into consideration when confirming the research study. Lincoln and Guba (1985:319-320) have identified the following six categories of records that have to be included in an audit trial:

- Raw data, including audiotape recording and field notes.
- Data reduction and analysis products, including descriptions of the condensed field notes, qualitative summaries and theoretical notes.
- Data reconstruction and synthesis products including themes, categories and sub-categories of interpretations and interferences.
- Process notes, which include procedures and design strategies together with the methodology, trustworthiness of the research and field notes.
- Material related to intentions and disposition including personal notes.
- Information regarding instrument development which incorporates interview schedules.

To ensure reflexivity, field notes were used together with tape recorder transcribes to avoid influencing the study.

3.10.4 DEPENDABILITY

The qualitative research criteria of this study needed to confirm that the research was credible and dependable (Halloway & Wheeler, 1996:56). This study proved to be dependable since it contains compelling reports of contextual information about the research that verifies how transferable the findings are (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:301). The research project began with the face-to-face interviews and focus group interviews. The important aspects regarding the research project were logic,

clarity and usefulness of the information obtained. Field notes were completed after each interview and incorporated as part of the data collection to enhance stability over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:315).

3.11 SUMMARY

Chapter 4 describes the foundation – Benstein’s Structural Curriculum Theory (1977) – upon which this research is based. There is also a description and justification for the research methods. Thus the data collection tools used corresponded with the case study research design which resulted from a qualitative research paradigm. Justification for embarking on the research project was provided in the need for analyzing the participants’ lived experience within the realm of Life Orientation as a learning area at school. As a researcher I placed myself directly in the shoes of the teachers. I created an atmosphere in which I was regarded as one of the participants in the focus group interviews which means that I listened more than I talked to allow them to express their views freely (De Vos, 2000:27). The ethical measures, sampling method, site selection and sample size, role of the researcher, validity, reliability, neutrality, conformability and data analysis techniques were also taken into consideration to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. As a qualitative research project the study engendered rich data that revealed important themes in the course of the focus group and the individual interviews. This investigation into secondary school teachers’ understanding, response to, and implementation of Life Orientation also necessitated that attention was paid to ethical measures during the planning and execution of the research. The data collected during the investigation are presented in Chapter 4.

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PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive discussion of the qualitative research approach, research design and data collection strategies used is presented in this chapter. The participants' responses were documented during the semi-structured individual and focus group interviews with Life Orientation teachers. This chapter presents the validation of the empirical data collected and audio-taped with the participants' permission. Thereafter, data were transcribed, coded and explored within the context of emergent themes, categories and sub-categories relating to the manner in which the participants understood, responded to and implemented Life Orientation education at their schools (Miller & Brewer, 2005). The discussion follows a thematic pattern relevant to details of data but also takes cognizance of the research questions (as indicated in Chapter 5).

In order to maintain the anonymity of the research site as well as of the participants a coding system was devised for the responses that emerged from the transcripts. The following codes were used:

Table 4.1: Coding of individual interviews

CODE	EXPLANATION
ZKT	Teacher Highveld Ridge East
QLT	Head of Department –Staneast
PKS	Head of Department – Highveld Ridge West
KIS	Head of Department – Balfour
SZT	Teacher Stan East
MTS	Teacher Highveld Ridge West

Table 4.2: Coding of focus group interviews

CODE	EXPLANATION
SZW	Highveld Ridge East
TGE	Highveld Ridge West
VQP	Staneast
IBM	Balfour

4.2 ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

The discussion in this chapter clarifies my interpretive approach to data analysis, substantiating the presentation of “meaningful and symbolic data” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:99). In addition, it has to be noted that the qualitative nature of the study dictated that the process of “data collection, processing, analysis and reporting” did not result in distinctive categories and occurred concurrently throughout the research process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:99-100).

Finally, the outcome of the responses analysis provided by the various teachers in terms of Life Orientation as a learning area was the emergence of distinct and significant themes. The interpretation of the data suggested that the findings were trustworthy and relevant to the research questions. Although the collected data was classified into thematic groups, I did encounter situations where it became necessary to adapt the groups or themes as the research progressed.

The subsequent contentions highlight the themes, categories and sub-categories that emerged from the interactions with the participants. It must be noted that discussions pertaining to the data collection strategy of “observation” are included in the ensuing thematic discussion.

Table 4.3: Schematic summary of identified Theme 1 and categories

THEME 1
Teachers’ faced numerous challenges relating to the understanding of Life Orientation at school
Category 1: Teachers’ lacked the appropriate knowledge and skills to implement Life Orientation
Category 2: Teachers’ lacked the necessary resources and support to implement Life Orientation

Table 4.4: Schematic summary of identified Theme 2 and categories

THEME 2
Teachers’ experienced a range of feelings regarding the implementation of Life Orientation in school
Category 1: Teachers experienced frustration with the implementation of Life Orientation in school
Category 2: Teachers experienced feelings of helplessness, “There is no one who is there for (them)”
Category 3: Teachers experienced a lack of confidence when implementing Life Orientation in school
Category 4: Teachers experienced various degrees of uncertainty over aspects in the implementation of Life Orientation

Table 4.5: Schematic summary of identified Theme 3 and categories

THEME 3	
Teachers responded in different ways to the challenges they faced when implementing Life Orientation in schools	
Category	Sub-category
Category 1: Teachers responded to the challenges that they faced with a positive attitude	a) They collaborated with other teachers and schools to meet the challenges they faced when they implemented Life Orientation curriculum needs (collaboration/collegiality)
	b) They became proactive and had a positive attitude in order to overcome the barriers to successful implementation of LO

	c) Teachers adapted to curriculum changes
	d) Teachers adopted curriculum changes
Category 2: Teachers responded to the challenges that they faced with a negative attitude	a) They resisted, procrastinated ignored and found excuses not to implement LO
	b) They lacked initiative and demonstrated a sense of ignorance when faced with challenges in implementing LO
	c) There was a lack of collaboration between teachers at various levels

4.3 THEMATIC DISCUSSION

4.3.1 THEME 1: TEACHERS FACED NUMEROUS CHALLENGES RELATING TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE ORIENTATION IN SCHOOLS

This thematic category acknowledges that teachers of Life Orientation did experience challenges relating to the manner in which they dealt with the policy and curriculum.

4.3.1.1 Category 1: Teachers lacked the appropriate knowledge and skills to implement Life Orientation

Most participants in each of the four focus group interviews indicated that they lacked the appropriate knowledge and relevant skills to implement Life Orientation. They stressed the fact that they were not well informed about content knowledge in the learning area which results in ineffective implementation of the learning area. One of the teachers expressed his lack of understanding as follows:

Because it's a new subject area, we don't have knowledge about it, there are number of challenges that are there and we read without any thorough understanding because we need to know how we should implement this Life Orientation (TGE1, 1508-1515).

This statement was confirmed by some of the participants from the other focus groups when they mentioned that they just kept learners busy with the learning area content but they themselves did not fully understand it. Furthermore, they indicated that they had never had training or attended workshops in Life Orientation (DoE,

2007). This view seemingly contradicted my observations at schools where teachers were work-shopped by the Senior Education Specialist for the learning area. However, it did appear that the number of workshops was inadequate. There were also contradictions among the Life Orientation teachers in relation to learning area knowledge-sharing by different teachers at the same school (Christiaans, 2006:4). There was a lack of uniformity with reference to the understanding of policy regarding the teaching of Life Orientation. The experience of one of the teachers with regard to the teaching of Life Orientation was the following:

I was just teaching, not taking into consideration the policy of the subject area. (SZW4, 1868-1869)

In all the focus group discussions participants indicated that they read policy documents but it was difficult for them to understand and comprehend these. Life Orientation teachers had policies filed, but they did not refer to these for lesson planning. The teachers' lack of understanding policy was further confirmed in the three individual interviews where it became obvious that they find it a complex issue to change policy into practice (Lee, 2005). This was confirmed at one school where teachers displayed copies of policy documents filed in the master file in the principals' office; most teachers did not use it as a source of reference.

Teachers in schools lacked the initiative to centralize curriculum projects to the practical problems of their schools. Implications for curriculum policy understanding, implementation and research into the dilemmas teachers faced in teaching were indicated as follows:

With curriculum issues we are just doing anything for the sake of doing it. We really lack direction. I do not follow what is in the policy because sometimes it is not easy to follow or understand other things we end up doing what we think is right ... really sometimes it is confusing especially if you are also in the leadership position and we are not sure of what we are doing" (SZW4, 1865-1870).

This discrepancy was also apparent in knowledge-sharing sessions on the design and execution of activities carried out with learners. Such shortcomings suggest that

Life Orientation implementation at school level poses challenges and is not executed according to the Department of Education's guidelines (DoE, 2002a).

I do not know what is right or wrong. You can read Life Orientation objectives and assessment standards but they are sometimes not easy to understand (KIS4, 1479-1481).

Knowledge of the learning area content influenced how teachers implemented the curriculum. The learning area teachers' history with Life Orientation influenced the notions they have about the Life Orientation curriculum. The experience of one of the teachers with regard to the teaching of Life Orientation is summarised as follows:

I do not have proper knowledge and skills to effectively teach the subject area I was just allocated the subject area. I am involved in Life skills programme. I don't know if they are related to each other (QLT2, 678-681).

The above extract indicated that at some schools there were no effective management and control measures to ensure proper planning of the learning area content. Hence, teachers did not know whether they were on the right track. As a consequence, they believed that departmental officials merely want to give them more work to do:

We are given too much work to do by different officials from the region(district) for Life Orientation and Life Skills at the same time, they all monitor those different thing at the same (SZW1, 1750-1755).

It became apparent from the discussions of the individual and focus group interviews that the process of supervision was not uniform and sometimes results in conflicting messages to the teachers. The dialogue disclosed an element of reluctance on the part of the teachers to teach without supervision. While they admitted that workshops had been presented departmental officials, the teachers were disappointed since they maintained that they did not gain much from these meetings. Concern about the way in which the workshops were conducted was articulated by a teacher as follows:

The workshop they arranged for us was not up to standard. They took few days and we were work shopped about a number of things at the same time and it was not easy to understand (MTS4, 1697-1700 and SZW1, 1741-1748).

The Heads of Department in some schools were supposed to supervise a learning area that they chose to ignore. The Life Orientation teachers' frustrations became apparent during the presentation of two individual interviews carried out in the schools. One Head of Department stated the following:

For me the challenge was that of teachers who are not interested to teach Life Orientation, they were just allocated the subject area... since I am responsible for Life Orientation.... that was a challenge in terms of the teaching the subject area (MTS4, 1695-1698.)

It seemed that some schools did not monitor the planning of lessons in the learning area. The extract above indicates that participants teach Life Orientation without enthusiasm or a sense of responsibility (DoE, 2000a:21-22). According to one Head of Department some teachers did not take the subject seriously and taught Life Orientation for the sake of compliance and ignore the learning area policy. The teachers mentioned that they were allocated to teach Life Orientation without any training inductions in the learning area and were left to implement the curriculum without thorough instruction (DoE, 2000a:9). Participants found it difficult to plan the lessons effectively because they lacked insight into the learning area. Planning lessons according to curriculum expectations is another challenge that teachers experience. One of the participants expressed his dissatisfaction as follows:

Yes! Although proper planning is a very big challenge in this school because there is no planning. I had to come here and come up with lesson plans from where I do not even...know where I get those lesson plans (KIS3, 1284-1287).

The general comment was that instead of following what was expected by policy makers, teachers were unaware that they could refer to the departmental guidelines that provided examples of teaching strategies. In essence, the teachers' lack of information of policy and guidelines prevented them from effective learning

facilitation in Life Orientation (Christiaans, 2006). This was an indication that the implementation effort was, in fact, untenable in practice, because of the lack of understanding of how to use the Life Orientation policies and curriculum in school.

I am not sure of the lesson plan and that thing made me to be insecure because I am not sure of what I am doing, and what should I teach learners even though I do not talk about it (SZW4, 1913-1916).

During the individual interviews two of the five teachers acknowledged that planning was important in terms of structure and logic. They substantiated their responses as follows:

Planning is important ... Eya (yes) to me it is important to give me direction on what to do and when according to terms. You know that this term, I have to cover may be ... Learning Outcomes ... yes it gives direction to me and relieves stress (MTS4, 1819-1822).

The teachers were of the opinion that even if the learning outcomes were clearly outlined, they did not assist teachers in designing the learning activities. It meant that they were doubtful about imparting the relevant knowledge and skills to learners in a specific grade. Knowledge of the learning area was of great importance for the teachers; they had to select meaningful learning area content for their learning activities (Lee, 1985:2). Learning area teachers should have known how to organize knowledge within the learning area curriculum to identify and transform knowledge. It seemed that teachers did not know how to choose relevant content for learners.

Some respondents pointed out that the time allocated to the learning area was another limiting factor. Participants commented as follows:

The time allocated for Life Orientation is also a limiting factor; the subject area is allocated only two hour per week. We have to try our level best to cover more work within the allocated short period of time (SZW4, 1608-1612).

In three schools teachers mentioned that Life Orientation was allocated little time in the school timetable resulting in teacher-frustration because they had to rush through their lessons (Datnow & Castellano, 2000). Consequently some aspects of the Life Orientation curriculum could not be completed.

4.3.1.2 Category 2: Teachers lacked the necessary resources and support to implement Life Orientation

Life Orientation teachers were disillusioned by the lack of important resources and support intended to raise the standard of delivery in the learning area. The absence of textbooks and other learning aids that ought to have been supplied by the Department of Education seemed to be a major problem that participants highlighted. They alleged that many laudable educational programmes and curriculum projects failed because of the unavailability of the relevant books and other support material (LTSM):

The other thing is that, we do not have enough textbooks and policies for Life Orientation (MST1, 1617-1618).

During the course of the five individual interviews and the four focus group interviews teachers proclaimed that they did not have the acceptable number of textbooks per class to implement Life Orientation effectively. This state of affairs was detrimental to the effective implementation of Life Orientation:

It is sometimes difficult to teach learners without textbooks to refer to even if you want to give them homework (VQP2, 329-330).

Another objection raised by members of one of the focus group interviews was that projects might have required surfing the Internet but the schools did not have access to this facility due to the fact that most learners come from disadvantaged communities. Research participants responded as follows:

That is a problem of our learners here in townships, because there are some projects expecting learners to search the Internet. They do not have money to access the Internet. We do not have access to the Internet (SZW4, 1636-1638).

The above extract confirms that teachers did give learners projects that entailed Internet searches despite the fact that the school did not have Internet access. Some teachers stated that they were also aware that the access was provided by the Department of Education but was not made available to the teachers.

With respect to the support from the Department of Education, the research participants from all focus groups and individual interviews drew attention to the fact that there were too few officials who could have supported them with the curriculum implementation of Life Orientation. Teachers were of the view that since they did not understand the learning area content they required guidance from the Department of Education district officials. They pointed out that they found it difficult to interpret the learning area content and were therefore unable to select appropriate instructional strategies (Datnow & Castellano, 2000). One teacher outlined the lack of support in the s learning area as follows:

Ya ... other challenges are that we not well developed. We do have senior education specialists but ah... they are not enough in the province and then we do things on our own we have to do or implement whatever we think is right (VQP1, 17-20).

Discussions relating to policy implementation indicated that Life Orientation teachers and the Heads of Department at school were unable to demonstrate their ability to lead. Teachers in leadership positions experienced exasperation because they could not confidently provide leadership for facilitating Life Orientation (Fullan, 1991). As a consequence teachers in charge Life Orientation become frustrated due to a lack of guidance which seemed to lead to low self-esteem and insecurity.

An additional problem at school level was that effective learning area teaching was not taken into consideration when work was allocated. This indicated that planning was not taken into consideration by the school management team. At some stage during the four individual interviews, participants also indicated that they did not

understand anything about Life Orientation and seemed to be just “babysitting” the learning area:

I am given the learning area to take care of because there is no one to take care of it within the school. I am just baby-sitting and keeping learners busy because it does not have a specific Department it belongs to (KIS, 1155-1156).

The participants were qualified to teach other learning areas or subjects such as Geography, Home Economics, History or English. The low self-esteem and insecurity of the learning area teachers seemed to overpower them as they struggled to find their footing in teaching Life Orientation. This finding emerged when four individual participants expressed their unbearable disappointment about the teaching of the learning area.

The participants acknowledged that at their schools no meetings were organised by the Head of Department to share content knowledge. One of the individual participants outlined the following situation:

We have to understand. We can administer such areas alone that is why you find ourselves quarrelling with teachers you see the teacher will come and say let me take may be my Life Orientation portfolio to my Head of Department but any way what does he knows about this so we get all those negative comments sometimes things that will also humiliate you ... see ... but you still have to work all about that (PKS4, 1885-1889).

Teachers were perturbed about being left on their own with little or no assistance to handle the facilitation in the learning area. They were eager to express their feelings indicative of the tension and frustration among them. The extract from the discussions confirmed that the workload in the learning area placed on most Heads of Department was a worrying factor. They were aware that they were not knowledgeable about the learning area content and felt inferior for occupying executive roles that they could not handle. The following response is indicative of this point of view:

There is no one who is there for you to supervise you or to give you the correct direction. Whenever we experience problems there is no one to assist. We are just left alone to do whatever we do on our own. We just interpret everything on our own (MTS4, 1657-1662 and KIS3, 1105-1107)

Interviews revealed that these stressful situations emanated from poor working conditions, strained relationships with colleagues, taxing workloads, inadequate content knowledge and poor school ethos which constituted the major causes of teacher frustrations within Life Orientation. The exchange of ideas indicated that teachers in leadership positions needed support with the mediation of policy.

In exchanges during the four individual interviews it was found that the extreme workload-allocations at schools could place Heads of Department on a collision course with teachers. Some Heads of Department said that due to frustrations they preferred to avoid contact with teachers by not scheduling the meetings. One of the individual participants indicated the following:

I do not understand what we are supposed to do even to assist teachers to implement in Life Orientation. I don't really know how to implement it completely in classes. I am just allocated the subject area I don't know how to teach it, and even how to control its assessment (VQP1, 1505-1506).

Evidence presented by five individual participants and all the focus group participants' illustrated their feelings of frustration that had led to the adoption of a *laissez-faire* attitude towards the implementation of the learning area. Ill-feelings and anger were the consequence of excessive frustration with the understanding and the implementation of Life Orientation in schools (Datnow & Castellano, 2000:777). Despite their feelings of disenchantment with their profession they were also perturbed about their personal lack of confidence to teach learners in the learning area. In their discussions teachers indicated that their frustrations were aggravated when officials from the Department of Education presented contradictory interpretations of the curriculum policy during support sessions at schools. The participants in all four focus groups revealed the following situation:

We got support from different people who are not sure what they are doing in the subject area and we have to do according to our understanding. They do not give us same explanation of information, always they differ. (ZKT1, 475-478).

It was clear from the extract above that teachers needed support on a personal as well as on a professional level. The complexity of the situation had given rise to their uncertainty about the body of knowledge; hence, the intended learning outcomes become vague, feedback to learners is general and they revert to social and managerial aspects.

4.3.2 THEME 2: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCED A RANGE OF FEELINGS REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LIFE ORIENTATION IN SCHOOL

Teaching Life Orientation needed a more transmission-oriented approach which would assist teachers to deal with their frustrations, feelings of helplessness, sense of disempowerment and various degrees of uncertainty about implementation. This range of feelings experienced by teachers is discussed hereafter.

4.3.2.1 Category 1: Teachers' experienced frustration with the implementation of Life Orientation in schools

The interviewed teachers were emphatic that if they did not have adequate content knowledge there could not be effective teaching. As a result they became frustrated when it was necessary to produce evidence of work done in the learning area (Kennedy, 2005). Contrary to what prevailed in the discussions, teachers acknowledged that lesson-planning was important and had to be structured and logical so that there would be less dissatisfaction with the learning area content; one of the participants stated the following:

I sometimes become frustrated about what kind of activities must I give the learners (MTS4, 1729-1730)?

It was apparent that although the teachers were aware that there were clear step-by-step approaches to skills to be taught and examples of activities for specific

grades, they did not read the documents for implementation. One of the participants expressed his view regarding this aspect as follows:

What task must we give to learners? What activities?" (TGE5, 1729-1730, ZKT3, 167-168).

Participants acknowledged that teaching was unpleasant and progress was hindered by their limited knowledge and experience to design appropriate learning activities in Life Orientation. They were challenged by their inability to acquire the necessary skills and content knowledge to teach Life Orientation. As a result of these limitations the research participants admitted that some of them did not take their work seriously and taught simply in order to comply with regulations (Black & William, 2005:259). Besides, participants argued that their frustrations were due to their personal lack of skills in the implementation of the Life Orientation curriculum. The inference is that these drawbacks result in mental pressures that contribute to the teachers' fatigue:

I came here during the third term there was nothing I could refer to there was nothing that will tell me that this was done with these learners and this has been done with the learners. There was nothing indicating to me. That was real frustrating ... I would not know ... what the reason was because I just joined the school in August(ZKT1,427-432)

The interviews demonstrated that a lack of knowledge, uncertainty about the curriculum and low self-esteem of teachers to teach the learning culminate in ineffective learning facilitation. They agreed that the learning area was not given the type of respect it deserves; as a result inferior work was done with the learners (uMalusi Report, 2009). It was outlined that most teachers teach the subject for the sake of compliance to the subject allocation done by the school (Black & William, 2005:259). The teachers' views were outlined as follows:

... No Madam, you see with Life Orientation sometimes it is difficult because what normally happens is in our school is this thinking that let everybody develop himself or herself in the certain learning area as you would understand we have never did this things in the universities and colleges so it's a question of passion from somebody to... because

teachers will be saying I 'm just doing it because the authorities said I must do it (PKS5, 1651-1656)

Participants mentioned that the subject presented further dilemmas for some teachers who were less committed to their work and absent from school most of the time. Participants indicated this as follows:

The subjects they (educators) used to teach are no more offered by the school. We do not have any subject to offer; hence we allocate them Life Orientation. They are most of them frustrated and justice is not given to learners (MST1-1554-1559).

The discussions clearly indicate that teachers were not prepared for curriculum change. They were not informed that changes would take place and the learning areas that they wished to be involved in were no longer offered. Participants indicated that the Life Orientation content was difficult to identify, especially if teachers lacked expertise in the learning area. Hence it was not properly presented and experienced as an unpleasant challenge by teachers:

It is not easy to identify knowledge to teach to learners from the subject area policy document, because it is not clearly indicated although we try to look in the key words as we were told (KIS4, 1519-1521).

They declared that the changes brought about by the Department of Education in the curriculum introduced more uncertainty, insecurity regarding content knowledge and frustration and anger for both teachers and Heads of Department:

We just keep the learners busy something we do not understand and both the teachers and learners do not regard Life Orientation as a serious subject”(PKS5, 1566-1569)

The focus group interviews revealed that teachers were dissatisfied and unhappy with the support provided by the Department of Education. They expressed feelings of frustration and incompetence because they were not properly trained to design different activities in the learning area even though in-service training sessions had

been scheduled. Participants indicated their views on teacher development as follows:

When we started this new curriculum teachers went for the workshops. Workshops were no well planed and enough, how you can grasp everything for two days or for two hours you see that problem ... (PKS1, 1982-1984)

Teachers were perturbed because they did not have sufficient time to grasp much in the scheduled workshops. Activities executed in the workshop were unproductive as the teachers found them difficult to comprehend. During the school support visits teachers were expected to perform the same activities while officials were supposed to make value judgements from a professional perspective.

Participants were ambivalent about Life Orientation programmes in the schools and experienced some frustration at having to relinquish their fields of specialisation. In addition, teachers were aware that a number of them were not qualified to teach Life Orientation. Nevertheless, they are expected to teach Life Orientation since they were regarded as individuals who have to comply with school regulations:

I am not sure you know I was not work shopped myself about Life Orientation I am just thinking of it from English perspective as I went for English workshop for NCS. I do not know anything about Life Orientation (PKS5,1853-1856)

4.3.2.2 Category 2: Teachers experienced feelings of helplessness, “There is no one who is there for (them)”

The participants expressed feelings of helplessness in the face of what they considered their personal incompetence within the classroom. This sense of vulnerability was reflected when the participants reported on their efforts to assist learners in social, emotional or academic discourse. The teachers described particular incidents in which their specific actions were ineffective or when they felt at a loss about how to work with the target group. It became evident that Life Orientation teachers were overwhelmed as a result of the inadequate way in which they implemented Life Orientation. There was a tendency for them to view

themselves as passive victims of the learning area implementation. As a consequence, teachers experienced dejection and a sense of hopelessness, often finding themselves in a downward emotional spiral. Participants indicated their point of reference when teaching the learning area as follows:

As I have just said we don't know may be if we can get orientation in Life Orientation which is what I did just with English. I go to other teacher who teaches English to assist. May be it's because number of us do not qualify in Life Orientation and we have to do subject allocation according to subject teachers' choice and we look at those who are interested (VQP2, 991-995).

The extract above indicates that teachers expected to be supported in order to gain the necessary knowledge to teach Life Orientation. Their lack of assertiveness to face the authorities and to express their feelings about the implementation of the learning area results in strategies to avoid confrontation. Furthermore, there was dissatisfaction with their lack of personal work satisfaction. Some felt worried, confused and disappointed with their incompetence. They were insecure and unhappy as a result of the prevailing circumstances. The following response indicates this mental state:

I sometimes wonder if learners are aware that we are not doing justice to them and we are also held accountable of their weak performance (ZKT1, 475-478).

The teachers believed that although Life Orientation was regarded as a core learning area by the Department of Education, they taught an inferior field of specialisation. There was a sense of low morale as teachers articulated that they lacked adequate departmental support:

The Department of Education once stated that Life Orientation is a core learning area, but they allocate it less time compared to other core subject areas, they have national programmes driven in the core subject areas such as Languages, Maths, Science and Technology. They forgot about Life Orientation and its importance; they are careless of what we implement in the learning area (MST1, 133-140).

Life Orientation teachers proposed different solutions to address the many needs and challenges that learner's encountered. Their deliberations exposed that Life Orientation did not fulfil its potential to make a vital contribution to learners' successful living, learning and well-being (Datnow & Castellano, 2000:779). They countered that as a consequence there were signs that there was a devastating loss of educationally sound opportunities. By their own admission they were frustrated since they were placed in teaching and learning situations where they lacked expertise or found themselves ignored by Heads of Department and advisors from the Department of Education. Such a state of affairs not only created stress and feelings of hopelessness but resulted in low morale among teachers.

We are just left alone, without supervision from the school and the Department of Education. We are not valuable teachers in the school. We even wonder why the Department of Education is not providing assistance to us and make awareness that the subject area is important for holistic development of learners (TGE3, 1120-1130).

One Head of Department felt that secondary school teachers were able to sense their "incompetence" because of the poor implementation of Life Orientation; teachers held the learning area in contempt. There was an attitude amongst them that being a Life Orientation teacher seemed to encouraged others to label them as being ineffective teacher. One of the Heads of Department expressed his concerns about incompetence in the following way:

I do not even have confidence to check the teachers' portfolios because I am not sure of what is expected and they will even get a different expectation from the Senior Education Specialist when they go for moderation (PKS5, 1806-1809).

With regard to the assessment of learners, the participants indicated that they were ignorant of strategies of continuous assessment as required by the national curriculum. One Head of Department moderated assured participants that fair learners were assessed fairly. When participants were asked about the learners' progress, one replied as follows:

We do not know what is right, we do not know what is wrong, we just interpret everything on our own and there is no one who is there for you to supervise you or to give you the correct direction so whatever we are doing we think it is the correct thing and whenever we experience problems there is no one to assist, we assess learners anyhow as long as there is a formal assessment (IBM4, 1658-1663).

4.3.2.3 Category 3: Teachers experienced a lack of confidence when implementing Life Orientation in schools

In the introduction to the policy of Life Orientation as a learning area the Department of Education indicated that every teacher could teach Life Orientation. It was the perception of the interviewed teachers that the qualifications of teachers regarding the learning area were not considered. Teachers saw curriculum change as being inflicted upon them from a top-down hierarchy; as a result the reaction was to reject the change and carry on as they used to do. The impression was created that Life Orientation had low academic status. Hence, the learning area teachers at school believed that they did not get sufficient support from the authorities to instil confidence for teaching the learning area. The following excerpt is an indication of the way in which participants regard the support they receive:

We are not supported fully by the Department of Education. We are really faced with the challenge and I think the Department of Education does not regard Life Orientation as a serious subject (MST1, 231-233)

The general consensus among participants was that the Department of Education did not consider Life Orientation a valuable learning area. Teachers therefore inflicted their frustrations on learners. The teachers also noted that the lack of qualified human resources to present Life Orientation had resulted in a breakdown of education in general. This was more detrimental to learners who suffer the consequences of the authorities' decision to appoint teachers who had not been properly trained to teach Life Orientation.

It was brought to the attention of the researcher that in some schools the learning area Life Orientation was not presented. Teachers emphasised that they did not have the authority to negotiate the reintroduction of this learning area. According to

the participants inadequate induction and mentoring in the learning area posed a challenge that threatened the values, attitudes and beliefs of teachers. Heads of Department of Life Orientation in schools felt disempowered because they could not moderate the teachers' work as they did not have confidence to do so; thus they created uncertainty and instilled low morale in the teaching of the learning area. Three individuals made mention of the conditions; the following serves as an example:

The thing is you are given the subject to teach but you do not have a clue yourself and there is nobody to empower you, you have this problem that you do not know what to do with it and how to solve it. You are not even empowered in doing demonstrations. (VQP3 1794-1797; 1739-1740).

At some schools it seemed as if Life Orientation had been allocated to teachers to fill up gaps in the timetable. Sometimes ineffective teachers had to teach Life Orientation. In four schools the Heads of Department disclosed that Life Orientation was allocated to them without their having any training and they also had other subject areas to teach. The interviews revealed that, as a result, teachers and school leaders alike were not able to instil confidence and efficiency in the implementation of the learning area in schools. There was agreement among the research participants from three individual interviews who responded as follows:

I am not confident about the implementation of the learning area. I am just trying my level best. Whatever I am doing is just for the sake of teaching learners something even if it is not worthwhile (KIS4, 1282-1284).

Responses during the research accentuated the fact that the learning area was implemented without the knowledge of how it should be implemented. It was a common practice that teachers did not call for assistance if they did not understand the learning area content. This state of affairs was identified when they discussed the expectations of the officials from the Department of Education. In the course of the five individual interviews research participants confirmed that the leadership was often ineffective in assisting teachers in terms of the teaching requirements. This accentuated an absence of leadership and even if a leader is present, there still was

no evidence that leaders capably support the teachers of Life Orientation. Leadership shortcomings were also evident in the failure of the Heads of Department to give direction and assistance in the implementation of the learning area as suggested below:

The knowledge of the content itself is a challenge because if we were trained to do that today as an ... because as a Head of Department (H.O.D) there is nothing arranged for me ... you just do it the way you think it's right, there is no mentoring for me. Sometimes I fail to understand some of the things and as an H.O. D I do not want to be seen otherwise. I make sure and try my best to improvise but I do not have confidence in what I am doing (KIS4, 1446-1451).

The lack of guidance and support from the ignorant Heads of Department could have contributed to the existent *laissez-faire* attitude due to lack of monitoring. It was confirmed in the discussions within the focus groups and the individual discussions that teachers were perplexed by the Life Orientation learning area. Participants admitted that they lacked accurate information with regard to Life Orientation, especially with regard to policy and assessment – a point of interest expressed in this extract:

I lack confidence and feel confused because I haven't got enough information I haven't undergone any training or any workshop so I was hoping that from this year we would have more workshops on how to go about teaching and assessing this Life Orientation... (VQP2, 512-515).

It was also revealed that although teachers lacked knowledge, they did not attempt to seek information on the learning area but relied on workshops to be conducted by the regional (district) Department of Education officials to clarify the learning area issues for implementation purposes. Participants from focus groups indicated their frustration in the teaching of the learning area as follow:

Life Orientation is broad and we just touch here and there, we don't have specific things to deal with on day-to-day presentations; we just fumble (MST1, 47-50).

It became apparent that teachers did not position themselves to be up to date with curriculum changes that could assist them with issues such as the objectives or focus areas to be taught to particular grades. The discussions indicated that the challenges that teachers experienced with regard to the understanding, interpretation and implementation of the policy have resulted in an inferior quality of teaching in the learning area (Datnow & Castellano, 2000:779). It also emerged that the subject teachers did not have equal access to learning content, methods, cultural ideologies or ideological values and procedures for implementation. Besides, teachers did not use the work schedule that they were provided with to assist them in pacing the content to be taught per term; this was an indication of a lack of monitoring at school level. The participants insisted that their work was uncoordinated and without proper direction:

We are working without the work schedule; we are not sure on how to design it, the content we teach is haphazard not well coordinated or sequenced to be integrated in to make meaning to learners. We just decide what to teach in the classroom, as long as learners are seen working (PKS5, 1847-1851).

Despite teachers' lack of implementation skills and poor delivery, some of them conceded that they had an appreciation of Life Skills. Three individuals from focus groups indicated that they "love" the learning area:

I think we should be ... some ... good edu ... edu ... good teachers or experts in this learning area because we love it, we love it we love this learning area because it tells us about everything in life (MST1, 45-49).

The discussions highlighted that teachers would prefer to teach this learning area if they could do so effectively. They admitted that they would try to make complex issues understandable, listen to the learners and thereby avoid too much 'chalk and talk' and set realistic work for learners to handle. In the focus group discussions some teachers showed understanding of the nature of the learning content. Teachers understood that they should shape their view of how teaching should take place in the classroom. However, one of them expressed the following:

At the end of the lesson I must know that the learner ... what did the learner learn at the end of the lesson, must know that ... does the learner have the knowledge of what he had to learn, does the learner have the skills or the values that he or she is supposed to acquire. After every lesson the learner must have the skills, knowledge and values (MST1, 133-138).

Teachers indicated that they were aware that they have to develop new knowledge, skills, approaches and dispositions to improve their effectiveness in classrooms. They were also aware that their knowledge served as a bridge between where they were and where they will be in the future in order to meet new challenges in guiding learners to achieve higher standards of learning and development (Drake & Sherine, 2006:1830). Teachers were conscious that they have to improve their professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour to boost their ability to function effectively in their classrooms.

4.3.2.4 Category 4: Teachers experienced varying degrees of uncertainty in implementing Life Orientation

The interviews revealed that teachers and school leaders alike were not able to promote and efficiently put into operation the curriculum for the learning area in schools (Leander & Osborne, 2008:44). Therefore, there was agreement among the research participants from three individual interviews that the levels of teaching and learning were not acceptable in the learning area as the following statement points out:

I am not sure if I am correct. We just try but we are not sure. Whatever we are doing we think it is the correct thing. It seems as if I am not sure. We are not sure” (IBM4, 1729-1731).

Responses during the research accentuated that the learning area was taught without assurance of how it should be implemented. It was common practice that teachers did not call for assistance if they did not understand the learning content. This was identified when they discussed the Department of Educations' expectations. Teachers' feelings of alienation, isolation, and anxiety and uncertainty appeared to be common and were exacerbated when they were confronted with

more information than they could handle. The feeling of uncertainty, lack of guidance and support from the ignorant Heads of Department contributed to their lack of faith and poor delivery. Participants contended that they were unable to cope, have a sense of loss, anxiety, struggle, uncertainty and ambivalence on a personal level. Leadership shortcomings were evident in the failure of the Heads of Department to give direction and assistance in the implementation of the learning area as suggested below:

I was just allocated the subject area and I am confused about the everyday teacher support and what to monitor in the subject area (KIS4, 1446-1451).

The lack of confidence in teaching the learning area was explicitly mentioned by teachers. They appeared to be confused, and depended on workshops to educate and train them in the learning area. They declared that some teachers did not care about the content being taught because they were uncertain about the implementation of the learning area. Participants admitted that they lacked accurate information with regard to Life Orientation. One of the participants expressed herself as follows:

I find myself uncertain and confused because I haven't got enough information about the learning area. I haven't undergone any training or any workshop so I was hoping that from this year we would have more workshops on how to go about teaching and assessing this Life Orientation (VQP2, 512-515).

It was also a point of contention that teachers did not attempt to seek information for the learning area but relied on workshops to be conducted by the regional (district) Department of Education officials to clarify content issues for implementation purposes. Teachers experienced feelings of uncertainty and insecurity when they doubted their capability to keep up with the learning area curriculum change displaying that the rhetoric of change does not match the realities of their experiences (Sayed & Jansen, 2001:2).

4.3.3 THEME 3: TEACHERS RESPOND IN DIFFERENT WAYS TO THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE WHEN IMPLEMENTING LIFE ORIENTATION IN SCHOOLS

Some teachers responded positively to the implementation of the Life Orientation learning area in school. There were teachers who reacted differently in that they procrastinated and found excuses for not putting into action the curriculum for the learning area. They lacked initiative and demonstrated a sense of ignorance when faced by challenges of implementation.

4.3.3.1 Category 1: Teachers responded to the challenges they faced with positive attitudes

From all the schools that participated in the interviews only one school showed a positive approach to the implementation of Life Orientation. It seemed that at that school learning area teachers influenced one another positively with regard to Life Orientation curriculum implementation and responsibilities. It was found that they viewed the learning area as being valuable in terms of teaching and learning. However, despite their willingness to teach the learning area to the best of their ability, they were uncertain about what to teach and what to assess in the learning area.

The learning area teachers were willing to admit that although there were tensions with regard to the learning area expectations and implementation due to the lack of assistance from the School Management Team, successful execution of the curriculum was still possible. There was a clear intention on the part of these teachers to pursue a collaborative approach for the implementation of the learning area. This was the required approach of the Department of Education for successful implementation (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.6) of the learning area:

a) Teachers collaborated with other teachers and schools to meet the challenges they faced when they implemented Life Orientation curriculum needs (collaboration/collegiality)

It became apparent that curriculum changes brought about new teaching methodologies that required teachers to reflect on the creativity within their work, or

on the pedagogical assumptions of their practices. For this reason it was important to realise that the process of curriculum-innovation relied on the competence of learning area teachers to translate constructive concepts into practice. They therefore came together to better understand the relation between theory and practice:

If we can sit down as colleagues and look at the Assessment Standards (focus area) and associate with this Learning Outcomes I think we will come right (MST1, 291-294).

Teachers from three focus groups conceded that they could not collaborate to transform curriculum content and ideas into practice. Collaboration in terms of their discussions would assist in the sharing of ideas to improve their low confidence levels and uncertainty with regard to the interpretation and implementation of the curriculum.

b) Teachers who became proactive and had a positive attitude in order to overcome the barriers to successful implementation of LO were conscientious with regard to the implementation of the learning area

I found that there were participants who were optimistic about the teaching of Life Orientation and were conscientious with regard to the implementation of the learning area. The teachers revealed that they were committed to do what was right for the development and provision of guidance for the good of the learners. Three teachers at one school said that Life Orientation was important for the spiritual, social, personal and academic development of learners and they were therefore trying their best to understand the curriculum and to teach Life Orientation to the best of their ability.

Their concerns indicated that there existed a dynamic interplay between forms of commitment and the manner in which they appear to be linked:

"We have just discussed with my other two colleagues how we are going to approach this. We are new the two of us in the grade" (VQP2, 791-794)

The responses of participants demonstrated that Life Orientation teachers realized the importance of collaboration to alleviate their areas of concern and to help them assimilate the new system. They acknowledged that together they could give meaning to the learning area and use their abilities as sources of information to interpret the learning area content:

I have also approached my Head of Department to help me so I am still waiting for colleagues so that we can sit down and do this planning because as I have said it (VQP2, 915-917).

Teachers' who collaborated and sought means to understand the learning area acknowledged that they could overcome the barriers to successful implementation. This view was understandable, especially in contexts where the school management team ought to give guidance and direction. The discussions verified that the School Management Team lacked confidence to be of assistance to clarify content-based issues for subject teachers. Learning area teachers awaited the approval from authorities to give them direction to implement the learning area improvements that they have identified (Leander & Osborne, 2008:44).

I will say we are still waiting for the Head of Department concerned as well as the subject head to get us together so that we can do the planning right now. I would not lie to you to say we have done any planning, But with the colleagues I have spoken with we are busy (TGE3, 1107-1110).

They also identified factors within themselves that were innovative to assist the implementation process of the learning area context. Although the teachers' attitudes were positive, they were still not sure whether the learning area had been effectively implemented (Black & William, 2005:260). The curriculum was just a broad framework and not content specific as it ought to have been to contextualise the lessons in an innovative way. It therefore required ground-breaking innovation from teachers.

c) Teachers adapted to curriculum changes

Findings display that in certain schools there was adaptation to the learning area curriculum change since it was seen as vital to curriculum implementation. From the discussions it was evident that a series of imposed curriculum changes created a culture of compliance leading teachers to want to know how to implement the required change as painlessly as possible (Fullan, 2001; Van Driel, Beijaard & Verloop, 2001). The learning area curriculum implementation needed to adapt to curriculum change to develop situations with high learning potential in the school context with regard to the learning area. An adaptive curriculum change approach was a test for the teachers' innovation against a set of objectives that needed to be achieved by learners.

In the adaptive change approach to the learning area teachers acknowledged that they adapted innovation to situational characteristics. Complex changes necessitated relearning and invited participants to take actively part in the process of implementation which was seen as a prime opportunity for internalizing the main characteristics of the innovation. It was clear from the discussions that subject teachers need support, frequent communication and open discussion of the curriculum's values to cope with learning area curriculum implementation and to be aware of its goals. In the process of implementing the learning area content, the following was observed:

I am trying to help myself even when going to other Life Orientation teachers for advice, looking for some planning from other schools but here at school we do not have, sometimes I go to other schools. We use the textbooks but are not sure if they are relevant to teach Life Orientation" (ZKT1, 568-572).

The interviews depicted what change meant for the teachers of Life Orientation in the implementation phases where a more flexible approach to implementation had strengthened their feeling of competence with respect to implementation. Teachers' who adapted policies to their environment were innovative and able to use the teaching strategies that suited the learners in the classroom context (Fullan, 2001; Van Driel *et al.*, 2001). It was also found from the discussions that learning area

teachers adapted to curriculum changes at times as they needed to modify and implement the policies accordingly. The steps of initiation to request assistance from other schools are an indication of the gradual enactment process. Teachers believed knowledge and skills could assist them to adapt to change so they mediated change by working with a complex, conceptually-rich curriculum and made different choices and adaptations. Learning area teachers accepted that they had to balance multiple issues, including their own ideologies and past pedagogical practices, with a host of demands as they attempted to incorporate curriculum change.

d) Teachers adopted curriculum changes

Certain schools allocated Life Orientation to teachers without assistance to cope with the learning area content. These learning area teachers were expected to demonstrate an initial improvement pattern to adopt curriculum change. Observations indicated that the learning area implementation was supposed to be managed within the security of the well-established learning area boundaries and familiar curriculum content. Teachers were expected to adopt both a formal and informal approach to curriculum implementation although they had not been conceptually grounded in an interdisciplinary framework (Fullan, 2001; Van Driel *et al.*, 2001). From the discussions it became clear that for successful Life Orientation curriculum implementation, teachers had to adopt a new discourse to make the strange familiar and to increase motivation. Life Orientation needed to move beyond the existing curricula discourses grounded in learning area thinking to a discourse of negotiation. One participant commented as follows:

Somewhere somehow we also get confused but through the for example I am trying to help myself even ... when going to other Life Orientation teachers for advice most of them are not clear most of the time. I try to sit down as an individual and try to understand (IBM4, 1786-1790).

From the extract above it was clear that the teachers were appointed to teach the learning area without any induction or support from colleagues who left them without any option but to adopt their own ways of teaching the learning area.

Teachers made reference to different sources in order to implement the learning area but were not able to distinguish between good and mediocre Life Orientation teaching. They were thus at a loss about the amount of content to be taught, how to teach it and the amount of time they had to teach it. The learning area teacher's compliance depended on his or her behaviour and attitude change. The learning area teachers' values and attitudes were important components of motivation and performance.

4.3.3.2 Category 2: Teachers respond to the challenges that they face with a negative attitude

The lack of induction, training and leadership as well as the change in curriculum de-motivated the participants resulting in negative attitudes, thus intensifying participants' apathy (Kennedy, 2005:15). In some situations, certain learning area teachers felt that change was difficult as Life Orientation appears to have a low standing when compared to other learning areas. They were of the view that they were unable to cope since they experienced a sense of loss, anxiety and uncertainty as a result of curriculum change. The observations carried out during the research produced evidence that teachers did not want to be confronted with abstract goals. Feelings of frustration, anxiety and abandonment were experienced by such teachers and this triggered anger demonstrated in their gestures and tone of the voice. As a result of such frustrations the learning area teachers acted out their negative feelings by procrastinating and finding excuses not to implement Life Orientation. They also experienced a lack of initiative when they were faced by challenges in the implementation of the learning area.

The learning area teachers' negative attitudes were brought about by curriculum change that produced burn-out as a stress response to the learning area implementation. The changes in the conditions of teaching brought about by curriculum implementation intensified job stress. Teachers developed negative feelings and appeared to have lost their optimism and enthusiasm for learning area implementation (Stone, 2002:579). They revealed characteristics such as exhaustion, depersonalization, depression, low morale and withdrawal. They did not realize that collaboration between teachers at various levels could decrease the

teacher's sense of isolation; frustration and stress with regard to curriculum change (Kennedy, 2005:15).

Research findings indicated that some teachers were reluctant to teach Life Orientation at other schools. The Life Orientation teachers' position of authority and leadership in the classroom magnified the importance of their actions and their attitudes towards teaching the learning area. Participants pointed out the following:

Teachers also take for granted that other teachers who are teaching Life Orientation are not doing a thing in Life Orientation although we know that they are working very hard in classes but then it is not difficult and they like it because it is not difficult. Others also joke and say to others if you want to play go to Life Orientation (KIS4, 1344-1349).

The extract above confirms that Life Orientation was not regarded as a core learning area at school level. During the six individual and four focus group discussions the negative attitude of teachers towards the learning area was apparent. When the teacher's needs in the learning area were not met they become frustrated and experience intense emotional pain which manifested negatively (Stone, 2002:579). The learning area teachers' awareness that others at the same school regarded them as insignificant in terms of quality education resulted in low self esteem. This attitude was also evident since tertiary institutions did not take Life Orientation results seriously. One participant from a focus group provided the following explanation:

Because to me most schools look allocate Life Orientation to those most redundant teacher; we don't know what we can we give them; just give them Life Orientation (TGE3, 1009-1012).

It was confirmed during the discussions that principals and teachers had a negative attitude towards Life Orientation and regarded it as a less valuable learning area. The extract from the discussions confirmed that even the school management teams did not consider that the learning area added value to learners. As a result, teachers had a negative attitude towards the learning area and disregarded the content. Observations during the research monitoring and support visits to the

schools verified that teachers in different learning areas displayed a negative attitude towards Life Orientation and did not show an interest in the subject. In addition, the school support visits undertaken indicated that the teachers suffered exhaustion and reacted in unconstructive ways towards curriculum, learners and colleagues (Stone, 2002:579). Research participants substantiated that the negative responses of their fellow teachers as well as the continual changes to the curriculum led to frustration. Detrimental aspects also included the fact that before teachers had an opportunity to come to terms with existing characteristics of the curriculum, the Department of Education changed it. The research revealed that the low self-esteem that teachers experienced often culminated in a lack of personal accomplishment. Teaching involved mental and emotional demands; thus their diminished levels of self-esteem negatively impacted on their interpersonal relationships.

a) Life Orientation teachers procrastinated and found excuses not to implement Life Orientation

Teachers delayed implementation of the learning area by acknowledging their ignorance with regard to innovation. The interviews and observations conducted during the support and monitoring programmes displayed that teachers delayed the teaching of the learning area by blaming the lack of support from Heads of Department, the Department of Education and learners for not attending classes regularly. Observations effected during the school support and monitoring programmes show that teachers were frustrated by the learning area curriculum expectations. Direct expressions of anger or hostility were expressed which result in anger or hostility toward the learners even in response to more neutral or positive questions (Rowan & Miller, 2007:256). The teachers displayed a tendency to communicate feelings of blame toward the learners. Two participants from individual interviews discussed the concept of “blame” as outlined in the following extract:

Sometimes the learners do not come to school ... it might be due to weather conditions it might be raining or the buses are late or something like that so it is difficult to put that into practice. Let's say learners are not attending that particular day so there is nothing you can do nothing ... so that is why we do other things late (QLT2, 707-711).

The extract is an indication how teachers expressed their annoyance with the learners' casual attitude to school in general. In addition, teachers used deprecatory statements or long sentences and explanations describing the faults of the learners. I further observed that teachers did not have evidence of work done. During the five individual interviews teachers appeared to embrace anger from past events. As a result they described their relationships with the learners or with the school in more hostile ways (Rowan & Miller, 2007:256). In the discussion it was evident that teachers suffered from avoidance syndrome and defended themselves by stating that they were new to the learning area:

We are both new we do not know what we are doing there. I think now we just talk we are not sure we just teach. I do not know if they are doing what is expected from them according to policy (VQP4- 1603-1604; 1641-1642).

The extract is representative of avoidance-attitude, anger, self defence mechanisms and hostility which were acted out (Hargreaves, 2005:11; McLaughlin, 1987:173). Such feelings of inadequacy were persistent throughout the four individual interviews. Feelings of anger and hostility appeared less strongly and were communicated as “frustration” as illustrated in the next excerpt:

I have a challenge in my department and I do not know who will assist me about it. ... We just keep the learners busy with something we do not understand (VQP4, 1643-1644).

The strategy of observation during some discussions with teachers illustrated that their feelings impacted on their emotional stability in the school or in their relationship with their learners. However, other teachers displayed annoyance, anger or hostility especially in response to the “not click,” “misbehaviour,” or “doubts” questions which confirmed their psychological instability. It was evident that teachers tried to conceal their negative feelings and moved the blame for failure in the learning area to learners. Teachers included vague references that implied aggression, such as one occasion when they felt the learners or a situation at school was challenging or difficult but they did not immediately express hostility in response to those challenges.

Teachers resisted change due to their lack of skills and knowledge (Hargreaves, 2005:11; McLaughlin, 1987:173). Hence, they became fearful and resistant to curriculum change because they felt helpless and hopeless, which led to low personal self-esteem and loss of motivation. As a result they taught Life Orientation with self-doubt. The teachers' resistance to curriculum change often meant that they had insufficient time or energy; hence, they used the Life Orientation period to catch up with other teaching demands.

The teachers resisted change because they were not sure about their own future within the learning area; they articulated their fear of the unknown and their unwillingness to learn new skills. The teachers' resistance was a negative reaction that normally occurred when people felt that their personal freedom was being threatened. Their resistance to implement change was due to their low morale, negative energy, lack of commitment and lack of research.

b) They lacked initiative and displayed a sense of ignorance when faced with challenges in implementing Life Orientation

Teachers' lacked of initiative to implement the learning area correctly was a challenge. It was obvious that some teachers could assist others with curriculum implementation. The learning area teachers were ignorant due to misunderstandings. They were found to be passive, lacking initiative and doing nothing to ask other teachers for assistance. The learning area teachers who lacked knowledge as well as support in teaching Life Orientation invariably displayed a lack of initiative. They expressed their inner feelings by being critical of the authorities. Life Orientation teachers knew that they were supposed to be knowledgeable, caring, nurturing, fair, trustworthy and ethical in their interaction with the learners in the learning area but prefer to ignore this. As a consequence, the teachers' external *locus* of control, preoccupation with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and a sense of worthlessness gave rise to the problem of subject learning area comprehension.

The teachers' ignorance gave rise to their refusal to commit to the delivery of knowledge (Sirotnik, 1991:300). Ignorant teachers were always in the dark, as they

were confused by the learning area and unable to see beyond their defences and to reflect on their own norms and standards. The teachers' lacked of initiative ended in frustration and results in their not attending classes and not cooperating with the Heads of Department:

We don't know how to put their programmes into practice and how to put them into practice is a real challenge (VQP4, 1662-1664).

We normally listen to them as they give us more work to do and not coming with the solution to the challenges we face (VQP4, 1660-1661)

From the above discussions it is obvious that the participants admitted that they require learning area skills that they could use to put into practice theoretically sound programmes. Learners were disadvantaged due to administrative difficulties, the teachers' lack of knowledge of the programme design or the lack of commitment. The outcome was that the teachers' failures within the context of Life Orientation were blamed on the school or district for not providing any assistance, including proper training in curriculum matters. This was an indication that teachers paid attention to some learning content only. Learning area teachers were of the opinion that Life Orientation was unfairly allocated to them.

A common occurrence was that teachers became defensive or shift blame to others when times became difficult. As a result they resisted silently by not implementing issues and disown the curriculum. Participants from the four focus group discussions expressed themselves correspondingly:

We just follow it as it is; we did not sit down and draw one for ourselves or draft. We follow the example as it is and that is the instruction we got from our Senior Education Specialist written there because we did not undergo any workshop for Life Orientation. We are still waiting for that work schedule until today. We requested our Senior Education Specialist to come and assist us in that regard and give us practical examples of what she is talking about but she never come back until now to assist in that regard. She (the Senior Education Specialist) never came with the practical examples. We are doing one and the something for all the grades in our schools .I was just teaching not taking into

consideration the real content for the grade. We just got the guide from the Department of Education we just follow whatever is policy and the assessment standards (SZW1, 1795).

Additionally, when teachers showed no diligence but were dishonest about their feelings with regard to the learning area there were feelings of uncertainty and doubt about their capacity to keep up with change.

c) There was a lack of collaboration between teachers at various levels

Collaboration as a requirement for better understanding of the implementation of Life Orientation was not practised in four of the schools. Teachers indicated that they worked individually. Observation performed in the course of research at schools verified that teachers felt separated from one another. Such isolation was perceived as normal as a result of the busy schedules, course loads and additional duties that made it difficult to talk and work together. Opportunities to make work more meaningful and transform schooling into a worthwhile experience were limited. One of the participants had this to say to voice his frustration caused by lack of collaboration:

Most of the time I try to sit down as an individual and try to understand because we are not sharing anything everyone is for himself. We are not supported fully by the Department of Education (SZW, 1697-1700).

Since the learning area teachers lacked opportunities to collaborate there were no opportunities for mutual benefit. It seemed that it was even rarer for teachers with busy schedules, too many classes and high educator-learner ratios take the time to work formally in partnership with colleagues. This was evident from the discussions that indicate that, while teachers might meet informally, their interactions are often superficial as they were not coordinated.

Observations further indicated that the learning area teachers did not share knowledge and skills acquired to assist the implementation of curriculum change. Life Orientation teachers did not translate their abstract pedagogical ideals into the complex realities of practice. It was demonstrated by the research that teachers did

not demonstrate an understanding of the process of collaboration. They were unable to use the different steps in the problem-solving and intervention processes in order to learn from one another.

Participants indicated that they were daunted by the challenge of collaboration to assist them in implementing change in curriculum policy after a long season of curriculum stability. Subject teachers did not encourage one another to implement new ideas or to support the processes of individual change in Life Orientation teaching.

4.4 SUMMARY

The discussions in this chapter explore the actual perceptions and responses of all the participants within the context of the different research methods employed. These strategies were focus group discussions and semi-structured individual interviews together with observation techniques. The Structural Curriculum Theory and conceptual framework were used as a foundation to sustain the research process and facilitate discourse in this chapter. Findings of this study indicated that there were implementation gaps that were caused by a lack of understanding in the interpretation of the subject policy and lack of mediation by the Department of Education. Teachers explained that Life Orientation was an important learning area that prepared learners to become active and responsible citizens who should be able to compete internationally. There were teachers who were proactive and who seek help to implement curriculum change in Life Orientation. However, there were others who refused to approach their Heads of Department and fellow colleagues for support as they had negative attitudes towards the learning area (Breier, 2001:144). The final finding is that Life Orientation has a low status among teachers resulting in their reluctance to teach it. Teachers were allocated to teaching Life Orientation without mentoring or support. Lack of proper monitoring results in the learning area teachers' disillusionment and low morale. Discussions with participants revealed that they were interested in teaching Life Orientation although they lacked clarity and direction in its presentation.

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