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BECOMING A PEER SUPPORTER: A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION

BY

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This study is dedicated to all the peer supporters out there who make a difference just by listening to their friends and peers.

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Declaration

I declare that: “Becoming a peer supporter: A narrative exploration” is my own work, that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this dissertation was not previously submitted by me for a degree at another university.

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Summary

Adolescents need to feel loved and cared for and they need to share their feelings with other people in their environment. As the school plays a significant role in the life of the adolescent, emotional support is an important aspect that has to be part of any educational setting. Unfortunately, adolescents do not always feel comfortable talking to a teacher, a person in authority or even a school psychologist. In many instances they are most comfortable talking to a friend or a peer with whom they can identify.

In this study, a literature review explored adolescence as a developmental stage, existing support systems in schools, and the history, key features, definition and nature of peer support groups and supervision of peer supporters. Studies revealed that peer support has potential advantages but also disadvantages for peer supporters but that the former outweigh the latter. The study also looked at research on peer support groups in the South African context.

The aims of this study were to explore, in a qualitative way, the experiences, thoughts and feelings of three adolescent peer supporters and provide rich and thick descriptions of their stories. Postmodernism, social constructionism and narrative psychology were combined and identified as a framework for the research. The research material gathered by means of individual interviews, focus groups and journaling reflected the realities co-constructed by the participants and the researcher. The researcher also made use of reflexivity by including a description of her own experience of the research process.

The strengths and limitations of this study are evaluated and the findings are summarized. Finally, recommendations are made on supervision, constructing roles and boundaries, training, keeping the momentum of peer support groups going and the usefulness of peer support groups.

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Key words

Adolescence
Exploratory research
Narrative psychology
Peer support groups
Postmodernism
Qualitative research
Social constructionism
Supervision

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