

**The Life Orientation teachers' lived experience of courageous
conversations in the independent secondary school classroom**

by

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Declaration

“I declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.”



.....

Christina Catharina de Villiers

29 November 2021

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Ethics Statement

“The author, Christina Catharina de Villiers, whose name also appears on the title page of this dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria’s *Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research*.”

Dedication

I dedicate this research to all those learners who shared themselves with me, who embraced discomfort and realised the value of learning and teaching one another. To all the laughter, discomfort and sometimes tears we shared. You have blessed my life and made me a more caring and wiser person. May my humanity live on in you as long as your authentic influence and acceptance will live on in me.

To every Life Orientation teacher who keeps striving, developing, embracing, and delivering beyond what you deem yourself capable of; your influence and the pedagogic seeds you sow in young minds will continue to flourish long after your names are no longer spoken.

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to determine and describe how Life Orientation (LO) teachers attach meaning to the teaching of critical content they view as controversial and can only be facilitated as courageous conversations. The Independent Education Board (IEB) introduced the formal, structured facilitation of conversations on controversial topics in the LO classroom in February 2016. The LO curriculum covers vital topics such as race, sexuality, mental health, sexual orientation, gender identification, ethnicity, culture, belief systems and privilege that require courage and teacher vulnerability. To explore the phenomenon of LO teachers' lived experiences of courageous conversations, my study had to determine the meaning teachers attach to these controversial conversations. This meaning-making is dependent on the LO teacher's needs, skills and agency to facilitate courageous conversation in an open, trusting, safe and respectful environment. Currently, there is limited support to develop the skills to plan, facilitate and make sense of teachers' lived experience of courageous conversations. Moreover, the lack of recognition of LO offers minimal incentive to facilitate these formative conversations as nation-building narratives. Social constructivism was utilised as a research paradigm in this study to construct meaning from lived courageous conversations. An inductive approach was used to analyse nine LO teachers' individual lived experiences of courageous conversations, followed by a focus group discussion to interpret their collective experiences. Phenomenology was best suited to understanding and describing the complexities of their lived experience, anecdotes and emotions elicited during courageous conversations. A nominalist approach to this study supposed that socially and historically constructed teacher identities influenced the meaning gleaned from the lived experience of courageous conversations. Interpretivist theory was utilised during the critical phenomenological interviews as it allowed the researcher to enter the participants' lifeworld and share their lived experiences within their specific context. A qualitative methodology allowed insight to be gained from exploring and unpacking these lived experiences. These insights clarified the participants' identity and growth as they developed new knowledge and understanding. Positive narratives and meaningful interactions promote skills development regardless of the initial cognitive and emotional dissonance individuals may experience.

Keywords: courageous conversations, lived experience, re-constructed identity, dissonance, ego depletion, self-regulate, vulnerability, racial cognisance, autonomy, critical agency.

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To whom it may concern:

I hereby confirm that I edited the dissertation entitled: “The Life Orientation teachers’ lived experience of courageous conversations in the independent secondary school classroom”. Any amendments introduced by the author hereafter are not covered by this confirmation. The author ultimately decided whether to accept or decline any recommendations I made, and it remains the author’s responsibility at all times to confirm the accuracy and originality of the completed work. Research participants’ verbatim quotes were not grammatically altered or checked for contextual accuracy. The author is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the references and its consistency based on the department’s style guidelines.



Leatitia Romero

Affiliations

PEG: Professional Editors Group (ROM001) – Accredited Text Editor
SATI: South African Translators’ Institute (1003002)
REASA: Research Ethics Committee Association of Southern Africa (104)

List of Abbreviations

BIPOC	Indication of demographic: black, indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC). The current demographic indicators are a far broader spectrum than only Black, Coloured, Indian, White, Asian and Other. Despite the well-intentioned inclusion of 'other', the term indicates an exclusion from the norm and may be perceived as a microaggression. There is an increase in diverse bi-racial (mixed race) learners.
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy statement
CAT	Common Assessment Task: Externally set by IEB, divided into a CAT A and CAT B. CAT A consists of a <i>[20 mark]</i> compulsory theory section and an application task <i>[30 marks]</i> based on approximately four preparatory activities. CAT B consists of <i>[30 marks]</i> source-based short questions and a <i>[40 marks]</i> Discursive Essay. Both are externally set, marked at cluster group level, moderated by IEB moderators.
CDL	Critical Diversity Literacy, described as: "... a framework that provides learners and educators in schools with an analytical orientation towards, power, privilege and difference that is historically aware as well as applying to multiple factors such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, language and (dis)ability among others" (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:69).
DoBE	Department of Basic Education
FET phase	Further Education and Training Phase: Grade 10 to Grade 12. This phase comprises the body of students being prepared in critical reasoning and application skills required for courageous conversations, the Discursive Essay, the ORTO and CAT that will be written in their Grade 12 year.
IEB	Independent Examination Board
ISASA	Independent Schools Association of South Africa
LDC	Literacy Design Collaborative is the website Facing History Facing Ourselves, globally used as a source of broad templates to create teacher resources on their online campus (ldc.org). They serve the USA, Canada, a significant number of international and African countries, including South Africa.
LO	Life Orientation

- ORTO One Research Task Option: entails one extensive research task in either Life Science, Business Studies, Consumer Studies, History or Life Orientation to replace minor research tasks in all of these subjects. The ORTO is optional, and a significant number of IEB-examined schools do not implement this option. There are several options for implementing the ORT; at my school, as preferred by the IEB, only the learners that do not take any of the other subjects may do it in LO. The ORT provided a powerful incentive to increase the academic level of LO as the ORT in LO must meet the same academic rigour as the other subjects (IEB, 2020b:2-4).
- PEG The Pacific Education Group was started by Glen E. Singleton to bring about meaningful racial transformation in school districts, schools, and emphasise the critical importance of conversations about colour, bias and privilege (Singleton, 2014).
- RiSA Reimagine South Africa, founded by Dr Mamphela Ramphele and Dr George Lindique, based on the premise of Ubuntu and focused on nation-wide healing and building of trust. 'Circles of Healing' focuses on sharing individual stories aimed at empowerment and redress (reimaginesa.com).
- SAGs Subject Assessment Guidelines provided by the IEB.
- T-LCP The Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway is a part of the Ontario Leadership Strategy with courageous conversations as a foundation to redress in professional school level communities in Ontario, Canada (Davies, 2013:2).
- UGC The User Group Conference is a formal conference for all subjects examined by the IEB. It is held annually during February by the IEB, alternating between a national conference [*attended by subject heads*] and a regional conference [*attended by all subject-specific teachers*]. Trans-disciplinary teachers attend their main subject's event. Sports teachers who teach LO are rarely able to attend unless they are the subject head.

List of Concepts

Agency:	The capacity, condition, or state of acting or exerting power; an action or intervention producing a particular effect (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018). For this study, 'teacher's agency' refers to their specific vision for their teaching practice. The agency will determine the character of the classroom as an environment that is conducive to free and honest conversations. It should foster respect and recognition of multiple perspectives and the realisation of transformative growth in their classroom practice. This agency will also inform the choice of teaching strategy and the premise of lesson design and assessments.
Cancel Culture:	Cancel culture is a new term and describes an ideological campaign to cancel <i>[identify and remove or punish]</i> an individual or organisation. Cancel culture should meet two principles: factual accuracy and an explicit motivation for the action, as with #metoo. Rauch (in Strossen, 2020:i-ii) described this as a move from critique culture reliant on freedom of speech to a punitive and organised utilisation of social domains to 'isolate, intimidate, deplatform, and demoralise political or social adversaries' and suppress freedom of speech. This definition will be my premise for the analysis of the targeting of high-profile independent and government schools and teachers who allegedly failed BIPOC alumni, learners, and parents with the intent to shame staff and schools in the public domain from June 2020. A common characteristic of these specific campaigns was replacing factual accuracy with lived experiences and historical recall, stripped of context and intent, and often autonomously placing the burden of proof on the targeted staff and schools.
Courageous conversations:	In an atmosphere of trust and respect, open, authentic, truthful dialogue is a key to meaningful change (Davies, 2013:2). There are no specific pre-determined topics in LO that can be described as needing more courage than others. However, CAPS topics may be sensitive, e.g., race, sexuality, addiction, gender identity, and cultural belief systems, requiring a more courageous approach.
Dissonance:	Dissonance is a lack of agreement or harmony, the disparity between people (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d). This disparity is usually experienced when a teacher encounters a situation or opinion that requires them to re-evaluate their own set of constructs and either accept

or reject the new information or situation. In the context of this research, the focus will be placed on cognitive dissonance that can be triggered by a new opinion, perspective or experience that contradicts a pre-existing construct. Emotional dissonance can be triggered by an emotive reaction to, or suppression of, one's personal opinion in contrast to that held by the group or situation. Professional dissonance would indicate a clear difference between the values held by a teacher and their school – professional expectations or boundaries they have to meet.

Ego depletion: The state a teacher experiences in which they are unable to perform optimally. Ego depletion equals the amount of emotional and moral energy expended over an extended or persistent state of failed self-control (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000:249-252; Baumeister, 2018:5). This state of failed self-control is characterised by emotional distress, relying on the familiar, illusory fatigue, low blood sugar, ineffective choices, varying heart rate, hormonal disturbances, and is more noticeable in older people (Cherry, 2020:1,3). Ego depletion manifests as a loss of cognitive, emotive, behavioural and physical resources to exert self-control to suppress natural responses. The teacher will then lack the ability to function optimally, think creatively and implement specific strategies to self-regulate and regain equilibrium (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:249-252; Maruven, 2011:1,2).

Hidden Curriculum: A hidden curriculum refers to the total values, norms and preferred behaviours within a school setting. The boundaries are not stated explicitly and are therefore open to assumptions and interpretation by learners, teachers, management and the parent body. These include the cultural, social and moral standards, beliefs and behaviours favoured by a teacher or a school (Karanhxa, Agosto & Bellara, 2014:39; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018:481). This lack of clarity affects the relationships between the teacher and management, and the relationship between teacher and learner. Inherent impulses, choices or behaviours need to be suppressed to be accepted within a specific educational environment.

Null curriculum: The null curriculum consists of three facets: intellectual processes, subject matter and affect (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:35). In this study, my focus will be on the hierarchical structure of LO subject matter reflected in Addendum 1 and the affective facet of the null curriculum (Flinders,

Noddings & Thornton, 1986:36). A teacher's agency will determine if specific curriculum sections are omitted or clustered to manage the required body of work. The affective facet of the null curriculum would represent aspects of the curriculum that are avoided as it may elicit an undesirable response from learners, their parents or school management (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:35,36; Alsubaie, 2015:125).

Lived experience:	Lived experience indicates the personal knowledge, understanding and meaning a person has gained by living through a specific experience (Oxford Reference, 2020). It is unlikely that lived experiences would be identical even if more than one person experiences a specific situation. One's "being", both personal and professional, informs one's first-hand experience of any situation. Therefore, every LO teacher's lived experience of a conversation that requires courage will be unique.
Professional Courage:	Professional courage indicates "courage as intentional action towards a worthy goal despite risks to the actor" (Ashton, 2017:3). In this study, professional courage indicates the teacher's willingness to facilitate courageous conversations despite the risk of dissonance and ego depletion, regardless of resistance (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:5; Maruven, 2011:1,2). The teacher must accept that open and honest interaction does not happen on demand; it requires a trusting relationship between teachers and learners that takes constant effort. This mutual understanding should provide the will and motivation to self-regulate and embrace growth.
Social Constructs:	Social constructs indicate a collection of ideological perceptions, beliefs and experiences that a teacher may hold that informs their socio-political and socio-historical understanding of the world (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018). This collection of theories determines the meaning teachers attach to their lifeworld and their approach to their pedagogical and social interactions.
Self-regulate:	Self-regulation can be seen as the ability to identify and address the cause of dissonance or ego depletion. The most beneficial way to do this would be to evaluate the new constructs or experiences against one's existing constructs and experiences, boundaries, and agency. Determining the validity and new understanding of change, and accommodating new

constructs, adds meaning to one's evolving lived experiences and worldview (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:305).

Time
collapse

Opperman Lewis (2016:29) refers to the time collapse process, which indicates that "memories of historical humiliation can be as vivid as if they happened yesterday". Time collapse would indicate that the humiliation suffered during apartheid and transferred from one generation to another can be as vivid to the new generation as the day the emotive humiliation was shared with them, keeping the sense of injustice alive, and with it, a distrust in the intentions of others towards them.

Trans-
generational
trauma

This indicates the trauma experienced by one generation transferring the effects of that trauma to their descendants. Their descendants in turn, would pass that trauma on, thus continuing the cycle of trauma and humiliation to future generations. (Opperman Lewis, 2016:13).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Dissertation title:

The Life Orientation teacher's lived experience of courageous conversations in the independent secondary school classroom

The dissertation title reflects the specific phenomenon – the teacher's lived experience – in the context within which it was researched – courageous conversations. Also, the specific subject area it pertains to is Life Orientation (LO). The specific education sector to which the research applies is teachers at independent schools who prescribe to the Independent Education Board (IEB) as an examination body. The teaching praxis is guided by the IEB Subjects Assessment Guidelines (SAGs).

1.1 Introduction

The implementation of LO in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase in 2006 required a paradigm shift in teachers' approaches and skills to implement this subject, according to all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. At the time, there were no specifically trained LO teachers and existing school counsellors, teachers involved in pastoral care, and History and English teachers were tasked with teaching the subject. These teachers embraced the challenge and contributed to the exponential growth of the subject. Despite inherent constraints, such as timetabling, perceptions about the subject and limited teacher-learner contact time, LO proved to be a critical part of learners' development.

As a compulsory subject in the FET phase, LO reaches the whole learner body and provides social sciences exposure to learners who did not elect a social sciences subject for the FET phase. LO is described as an instrument creating meaningful change, addressing past inequalities, and giving all learners a voice regardless of race, socio-economic status, religion, and abilities. LO also fosters learners' interaction with the self and others in preparation for a better future by attaining the skills and knowledge to become valued critical thinkers and future citizens in a democratic country (South Africa, 2011:4-5). LO themes thus include the belief in and goal of implementing social justice through an interrogation of historical and current socio-political issues and belief systems (South Africa, 2011; Oberholzer, 2017). The importance of social transformation, inclusivity and equal education is stressed repeatedly, and the significance of implementing these critical values was reiterated to the IEB cohort of schools by Oberholzer (2017). This emphasis should counter the impression of the independent school system as an unequal education system that only benefits a privileged minority (Oberholzer,

2017). This perception of independent schools negates continuous efforts to instil the values of social justice and equal opportunities for all among learners (South Africa, 2011).

One of the most significant challenges of teaching LO is the lack of set content. The IEB Subject Assessment Guidelines (SAGs) prescribes an application-based approach to the subject, and not a content-based approach (IEB, 2018, 2020a). The structure of assessments thus focuses on rich tasks, including a combination of CAPS topic subsections or an in-depth exploration of a single CAPS topic. In addition, textbooks are discouraged, as set content repeated year after year results in teaching and learning stagnation. Instead, teachers are encouraged to design and create their own content from sound sources, real-life situations, current trending social and political issues, and trending approaches to personal wellness difficulties. The intended focus should thus be on creating current, relevant and specific teaching and learning material reflective of a specific school's context. This specificity ensures a correlation between classroom practice and learners' interests and real-life experiences (IEB, 2019).

In order to accommodate this process, specific teaching and assessment structures have been provided, namely the Common Assessment Task (CAT), a formal national assessment of independent schools completed in Grade 12. These tasks reflect the application methods of source analysis and the LO-specific discursive essay format with a set generic rubric. The CAT is a legitimisation tool, setting the academic bar Grade 12 learners must attain; it serves as an exemplar of the skills that must be developed during the FET phase. In this context, the IEB cluster group structure and regional moderators support teachers by providing mentoring and examples of compliant assessments until they can perform to the required IEB standard and guidelines independently (IEB, 2015). Teachers who find it challenging to master this approach to teaching add to the rapid turnover in teachers. However, teachers who embrace this approach to teaching are more likely to create a dynamic, creative and critical teaching environment and interaction with their learners.

Professional dissonance can develop between the LO teacher and school management if the school culture, religious ethos, codes of conduct, and transformation policy limit open and truthful discussions. Ultimately, a school's values create an explicit and implicit hidden curriculum that determines the subject matter covered in the LO classroom (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986). These resulting grey areas, combined with professional dissonance, can result in a low level of ego depletion that affects teachers' motivation and compromises their professional identity. Therefore, the teacher may avoid specific conversations and aspects of the CAPS topics, creating a null curriculum to accommodate the

school's ethos (Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018:483). These explicit and implicit affective boundaries are especially true of historic independent schools, which could be seen as bastions of euro-centricity and colonialism (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:80-82; Franklin, 2016:359-67). An explicit, hidden curriculum of this nature often results in an artificial sameness to meet expectations and reinforce the existing constructs that determine the school and classroom culture. The existing constructs and implicit curricula flowing from a school's traditional and historical values add additional limitations to LO teachers' autonomy when selecting content for critical discourse in the classroom (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:34-36; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018:482-84).

The lack of set subject content and specific schools' cultures often result in teachers avoiding or minimising subject matter to prevent backlash from parents or the school's management (Dryden-Peterson & Siebörger, 2006:394,395). The resulting null curriculum informs the LO teacher's praxis and critical agency. Therefore, the teacher's sense of vulnerability during the facilitation of courageous conversations and their choice to accommodate spontaneous conversations are initiated by learners (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:34). The LO teacher's aim to facilitate courageous conversations thus relies on their interaction with their learners, professional autonomy, and professional agency. This agency is vital as it also makes the hidden and null curriculum explicit by creating opportunities for teachers to critically and courageously explore their boundaries (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:395-96; Vandeyar, 2008:288,289; Spokazi, 2013:3-5; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018:484).

1.2 Background and context of the study

Education, especially independent education, can no longer be seen as autonomous entities since independent schools are managed according to different business models by increasingly powerful governing bodies representing the parents as clients. Independent schools are governed by the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA) within the boundaries negotiated with the Department of Basic Education (DoBE), representative of the South African government and the different provincial legislators (South Africa, 2011; Franklin, 2016:364-69). The business model and the independent school's religious affiliation (if any) also largely determine the school's culture and management (Randall, 1980; Badat & Sayed, 2014:133-38). The level of transformational redress pursued is reflected in school policies, codes of conduct, and the values and behaviours encouraged by the school (South Africa, 2011; ISASA, 2013). These factors also inform the interaction and expectations of teaching staff, the level of communication and transparency between staff and management, and the boundaries within which teaching and learning occur.

In February 2016, Robyn Mowatt, the IEB assessment specialist for LO, delivered a formal presentation entitled *Teaching Controversial Issues* at the National Life Orientation User Group Conference (Mowatt, 2016). This presentation was preceded by the #rhodesmustfall campaign that started in March 2015 and the #feesmustfall campaign that followed in October 2015 and continued until October 2016 (Pillay, 2015:155-57; Taghavi, 2017:5; Strong, 2018:273-76). Both of these campaigns and the importance of multiple perspectives were the topic of the 2016 Grade 12 CAT. The conversations about race, prevalent at the time, also seemed to increase learners' and parents' discontent with the colonial policy structures and white privilege in the independent school system. This perception was supported by several high-profile racism allegations against historical schools and independent schools. Their discontent gained additional momentum due to social media and the media coverage of expressions of displeasure, as seen during the Pretoria High School for Girls' protest (Pather, 2016). This protest led to discrimination charges against a teacher at St John's College, garnering considerable media and social media coverage (Mabone, 2017; Pather, 2017; Strong, 2018:276,277).

The IEB's initiative to facilitate the teaching of controversial issues in the classroom resulted in an association of this teaching method with race-based youth action against manifestations of privilege. The follow-up IEB workshop in 2017, on the inclusion of dangerous topics in the classroom, resulted in further caution around the facilitation of these conversations (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:81,82; Ally, 2006:32; Soudien, 2010:354-56; Strydom, 2011:1,2; Roddick, 2017). However, discontent should not prevent these conversations altogether, highlighting the need for professional courage to accommodate open discussion between teachers and learners.

Critical and equitable conversations must be facilitated in independent schools, specifically LO classrooms, as soon as learners are ready to start grappling with issues that may challenge them socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Strydom, 2011:25-29; Ferguson & Jain, 2015). Therefore, the skills required to self-regulate in response to the cognitive and emotional dissonance experienced during these conversations are as crucial to learners as it is to teachers (Gorski, 2009:54; Tice *et al.*, 2007:379; Wood, 2020a:23-26,38; Wood, 2020b:40-44). However, the two titles the IEB attached to these conversations, that of teaching controversial issues (2016), and then dangerous classrooms (2017), created a negative and counter-intuitive connotation. I thus decided to adopt the phrase used by Singleton and Hayes (2008:18) 'courageous conversations' for my study because it includes a positive incentive. This change creates a solid motivator to see these conversations as the means to facilitate

open, authentic and truthful dialogue, in an atmosphere of trust and respect, which is vital to meaningful change (Guerra *et al.*, 2013:124; Badat & Sayed, 2014:140-44).

1.3 My position and biographical information as a researcher

In 2001, I embarked on a BEd (Hons) Special Needs Education (SNE). One of the prescribed textbooks was a report to UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century entitled *Learning: The treasures within* (Delors *et al.*, 1998). The commission identified four learning pillars: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together, learning to live with others; and learning to be (Delors *et al.*, 1998:86-97; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018:489). This report had a profound impact on how I viewed teaching and learning. When offered a permanent position at my current school to implement the LO programme in the FET phase from 2006, I accepted this position as I recognised the four pillars of learning in the LO curriculum. My appointment allowed me to use this report as a premise for developing my LO programme.

The absence of a content-based approach required extensive and continuous independent research to create assessment and teaching material. These practical difficulties meant I needed access to as many support structures as possible. A need for mentoring thus resulted in my involvement in the IEB, first as a cluster member, then formalised with my selection as cluster leader, regional moderator, national moderator, and then senior sub-marker for the external marking of the annual CAT. During 2017 and 2018, I became one of two IEB National Subject Forum (NSF) representatives for Gauteng. NSF reps are selected per region and have two separate functions; that of acting together as representatives of the regions in the renegotiation of the Subject Assessment Guidelines (SAGs) for the following two years, and as convenors of the IEB National User Group Conference in Gauteng and Regional Gauteng User Group Conference. I have therefore spent the last 16 years of my professional life involved in the development of LO as a subject, designing teaching and learning material and mentoring LO teachers.

My professional interest has shifted from researching content to create subject matter and assessments to researching and relaying the collective lived experiences of LO teachers. I wanted to conduct this research to explore the more fundamental interaction between the LO teacher and the IEB SAGs, and how this influences classroom practice (IEB, 2020a:1-4,8,9,15,16). Therefore, my study aimed to explore a sample of teachers' lived experiences of one of the potentially most challenging aspects of LO, namely courageous conversations. I wanted to determine how LO teachers attach meaning to their experiences of courageous conversations and their interaction with their learners during these conversations. This

perimeter also includes an interest in the teacher's ability to self-regulate in response to ego depletion due to a single or succession of negative experiences that can be ascribed to professional, cognitive and emotional dissonance (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:1,2; Tice *et al.*, 2007:379).

My experience of LO as a subject area, based on my insight into the specific guidelines and expectations of LO teachers in independent schools, placed me inside the professional lifeworld of the participants during my study (Holmes, 2020:2-4; Dean, Furness & Verrier, 2018:282). My personal, professional context is that of a single-sex girls' school. My experience of other schools is guided by my professional interaction with teachers in my roles in the IEB (Wiederhold, 2015:601). Despite the potential risks associated with courageous conversations, I firmly believe in the critical need to facilitate these conversations to accommodate our learners and teachers, regardless of their different contexts.

1.4 Rationale and motivation

My personal motivation for this dissertation emerged after a critical incident occurred in my school in June 2017, during a Grade 11 LO lesson on diversity. A series of three lessons were designed according to the guidelines provided for teaching controversial issues (Mowatt, 2016). After three learners made certain allegations to the vice-head, a cursory investigation was performed, and it was ascertained that I had not exceeded the moratorium of LO as a subject. However, representatives from the school management team, governing body, and parent association insisted on launching an independent investigation into the incident pending a formal suspension and possible disciplinary action. Ultimately, the incident was found to be "perceived racism, without malicious intent".

Despite the perception that the trust relationship between my learners and me had been restored, during June 2020, a social media campaign – best described as a cancel culture campaign – targeted numerous independent and government schools. The campaign was launched by current learners, alumni and parents of respective schools. Cancel culture is an ideological campaign to identify an individual or organisation deemed unable, unwilling and incapable of reform (Rauch in Strossen, 2020:i-ii). The target was high-profile independent and government schools and teachers alleged to have failed BIPOC alumni, learners, and parents, with the intent to shame specific members of staff and schools in the public domain. The campaign was launched on a range of public domain platforms, national radio stations and television channels from June 2020, continuing into 2021. The impact was catastrophic for me, many academic colleagues at my school, and LO as a subject area. Consequently, by the end of 2021, 19 teachers and six boarding house staff members had resigned from my

school. I also resigned, as did the two other members of my LO department, as LO had been reduced to six generic skills-building days per year, supervised by all staff in one-hour sessions, without any specificity or differentiation between grades or assessable content. The formal teaching of LO was limited to Grade 12 learners.

My professional rationale for turning to academics as a means of attaching meaning to this drastic change in the teacher-learner narrative was, at first, initiated by my critical incident in June 2017. Despite the official finding that there were no grounds for formal charges or disciplinary action, the incident impacted all academic staff and their interaction with the Grade 11 class of 2018 who initiated the allegation. Learners became openly challenging, and teachers openly defensive. I had to face the challenge of teaching my subject, which required a critical interaction with the content and the facilitation of critical conversations when one Grade 11 class group was openly disrespectful and challenging during lessons. Besides the 2016 IEB conference presentation on how to teach controversial topics (Mowatt, 2016) and the 2017 IEB workshop on dangerous topics (Roddick, 2017), which guidelines I followed for my lessons, there were no guidelines on how to proceed. Ultimately, the only criteria for teaching controversial content and facilitating courageous conversations I could not meet was creating an open, trusting, respectful and confidential LO space.

My classroom during 2017 was a secondary school hall where I taught the entire Grade 11 and Grade 12 groups respectively per lesson. This venue was shared with the drama department, the boarding house, and was listed as a pre-bookable event location for the junior and senior schools. The acoustics were not suited to a teaching venue, and depending on its bookings, it resulted in either no furniture or complete rearranged furniture, which wasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes of the allocated 60-minute lessons. The atmosphere in the venue rarely made for an open, trusting, respectful LO space.

Moreover, despite the IEB's presentation (adapted from History to LO), there were far more questions than answers, and the workshop focused on all languages, social sciences, and other subjects (Mowatt, 2016; Roddick, 2017); yet several factors make teaching LO different from teaching other subjects. Besides the allocated 10 credits allocated by the Department of Education and the four one-hour lessons in a two-week cycle prescribed by the CAPS (South Africa, 2011), it is a less formal teaching environment. LO's focus is also application-based rather than content-based, requiring the LO teacher to source and create current and specific content to flesh out the curricula boundaries. The LO IEB SAGs are based on the DoBE CAPS and cover a wide range of topics from personal well-being, critical thinking, decision-making, careers, democracy and citizenship (South Africa, 2011:10,11; IEB, 2020a:10-12). All

application formats in the FET phase rely on ascending mastery of critical reading, analysis and the development of a robust, holistic, fact-based approach to the self, society and an increasingly complex global connectivity. A conducive LO space thus needs to be created based on communal trust, respect, openness, and confidentiality to develop these skills and attitudes.

LO teachers need a broad knowledge base as controversial conversations require content that offers learners a range of perspectives. It is likely to result in cognitive dissonance and may cause discomfort in both teachers and learners as it challenges commonly held beliefs. However, LO teachers understood that these conversations were critical and that narratives had to be promoted. Subverting or ignoring such conversations create resentment, damages the trust relationship and likely become part of a more damaging ongoing discourse that may be far more harmful (Bongwe, 2010:160). As Subject Head: LO; NSC senior marker, regional moderator and mentor to several schools in the greater Pretoria area, I felt compelled to amass valid and reliable information that exceeded a handful of descriptions and PowerPoint presentations, strengthening LO as a subject and empowering LO teachers.

However, other than a conceptual description of controversial topics adapted from the History model for controversial conversations, I could find no specific model focusing on LO content. Academic research held the promise of finding theorists that had a broader application scope and not a singular focus on racial restoration. After my initial incident, Reimagine SA, an organisation founded by Dr Mamphela Ramphele, was contracted to oversee and implement a series of workshops and presentations for teachers, learners and parents (Ramphele, 2012:189). Therefore, the Circles of Healing method created by Reimagine SA was initially presented to the senior school as a voluntary early evening club for Grade 11 and Grade 12 learners, co-presented by the head of school and the transformation and diversity leadership group. However, from 2018, Circles of Healing became part of the compulsory co-curricular clubs and societies programme with 40-minute, fortnightly sessions. I aimed to find a way to bridge the ideological chasm between teachers and learners, create a space in which critical conversations could be had about learners' belonging needs, and include the teachers who were to promote formative discourse and create a bridge-building space. All my efforts to do so were declined, deemed as either risky or, more explicitly, "you know you cannot afford to make another mistake" by a member of school management. The opportunity to find answers and counter-narratives to this thinking made academic research and an additional qualification a viable option. I embraced this opportunity to find a scholarly premise to substantiate and create momentum for more than what was being done at my school and the other independent schools in my area.

1.5 Statement of the research problem

The introduction of structured conversations as a teaching method in LO shifted the focus from an intuitive experience to a scripted formal structure. As a scripted experience, it removed the natural evolving facilitation of conversations used to enhance learning (Mowatt, 2016). The teacher's professional skills and experience became highly relevant to the teacher's confidence and motivation to facilitate and manage these conversations (Brown, 2013:45; Guerra *et al.*, 2013:124; Mowatt, 2016). There is currently no support for teachers in making sense of their lived experience of courageous conversations and little incentive to facilitate these conversations as an open discourse. It would therefore be critical to identify and describe specific skills and the formation of a fluid professional self, needed to enhance not only the scope of this study, but to establish this as a continuous becoming and contextual staple of every Life Orientation praxis.

The first IEB presentation, *Teaching Controversial Issues in the Classroom* (Mowatt, 2016), described the need to teach controversial issues consciously in the LO classroom, using teaching methods reflected in the PowerPoint presentation on a formal basis. The second IEB presentation, *Dangerous Classrooms* (Roddick, 2017), was available to be booked by schools as part of their staff development programme. This presentation did not focus on any specific subject, but on clarifying the role of these open conversations in developing critical thinking. As the IEB is purely an assessment body and its support focuses on ensuring compliance and the standardisation of assessments, they do not have a moratorium on providing training for teachers' development needs. Despite schools encouraging staff development, minimal subject-specific programmes are available. Therefore, the purpose of my research was to establish and describe LO teachers' lived experiences of courageous conversations to bridge the gap between currently available support and the expectation to facilitate conversations that require professional courage.

1.6 Focus and purpose

In order to understand the phenomenon of the LO teacher's lived experience of courageous conversations, the focus of the study included identifying the teacher's needs, skills and agency to facilitate courageous conversations in an environment of trust and inclusivity (Gorski, 2009:54,55; Brown, 2013:61-64; Amin & Vithal, 2015:2). Empathy and knowing one's learners are critical elements in creating an environment where open and truthful conversations can be facilitated as it fosters an understanding of others (Amin & Vithal, 2015:1,2; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:294). The purpose of the study was thus to determine and describe how LO teachers attach meaning to the teaching of topics they experience as sensitive, which can only be accommodated in courageous conversations. Failure to facilitate

courageous conversations would defeat LO's purpose of attaining holistic social reform and developing critical citizenship skills (Badat & Sayed, 2014:145; Ferguson & Jain, 2015).

1.7 Research question

The intent of this study and research design was to enable me to answer the following research question:

How do teachers experience the implementation of courageous conversations in the Life Orientation classroom?

Secondary research question:

How does the lived experience of Life Orientation teachers regarding the facilitation of courageous conversations in the classroom impact the meaning attached to these conversations?

The range of topics described in the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for LO in Grade 10 to Grade 12 can become the focus of courageous conversations (South Africa, 2011). The sensitivity of a specific topic depends on the school culture, the teacher, and the learner body. Therefore, the focus of this research question was not a specific topic that can be seen as sensitive, but how the teacher attaches meaning to their lived experiences of these courageous conversations.

1.8 Literature study

The meaning LO teachers attach to courageous conversations with their learners is influenced by their self-awareness, cultural and religious belief system, and professional lived experiences (Brown, 2013:4). Their professional identity is grounded in their academic background, their lived experiences as teachers, and how they see themselves in relation to their learners. Although personal and professional identities should not be inextricably integrated, they inform one another and determine the agency with which teachers approach their classroom practice (Ally, 2006:32; Vandeyar, 2008:287; Bukor, 2011:38). Additional factors like age, racial demographic, the transference of historical perspectives on society and its influences on teachers' sense of self are inadvertently imprinted on their teaching praxis (Bukor, 2011:40,41; Opperman Lewis, 2016:25,27-30; Botha, 2017:2; Shedrow, 2017:271-72).

In conjunction with their pursuit of knowledge and excellence in their subject area, these factors determine the teacher's confidence in managing the challenges they face professionally (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:81-83; Botha, 2017:2,3). The LO teacher also creates their professional identity, agency and teaching praxis within the context of the school culture in which they find themselves (Strydom, 2011:40,41; Franklin, 2016:361). The professional relationship between teacher and school is ultimately strongly influenced by the specific school's culture and senior management's attitude in recognising the importance of LO as a subject (Ferguson & Jain, 2015). These attitudes also inform the school management's level of support for the teacher concerning IEB expectations and guidelines (Strydom, 2011:35-9; Spokazi, 2013:7-10; Franklin, 2016:356; IEB, 2018:1-18).

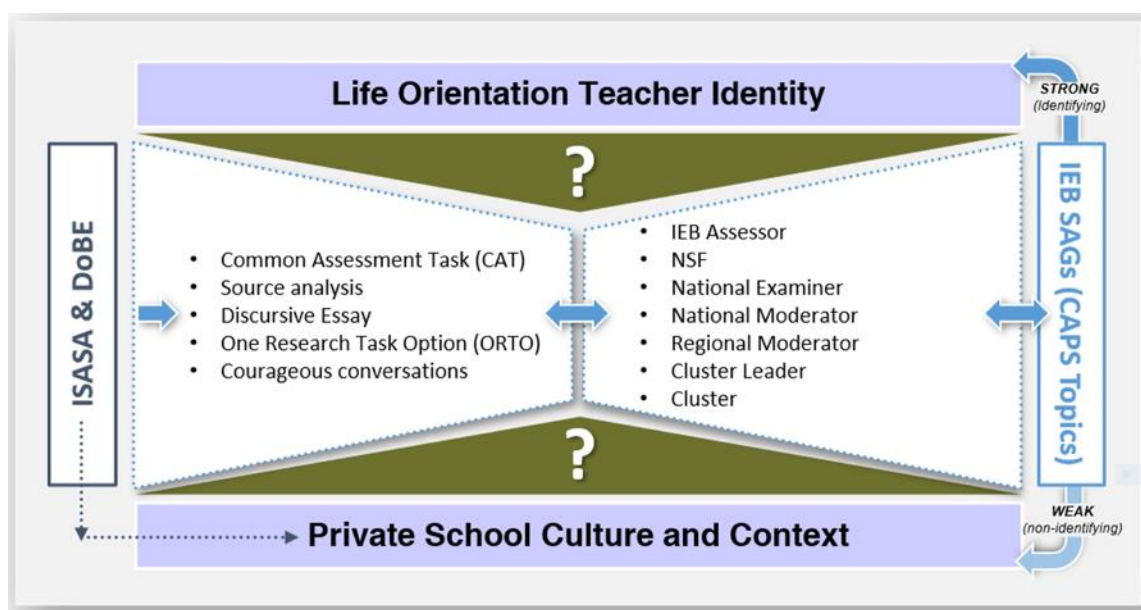


Figure 1: Relationship Between LO Teacher, Independent School Context, IEB as Assessment Body, ISASA and the DoBE.

Independent education, as provided in independent schools, promotes a learning environment reputed to offer a higher standard of education and, to varying degrees, a racially representative demographic in a protected environment (ISASA, 2013). This diversity should result in the development of a racially integrated microcosm of socio-economic equality, far removed from the socio-economic demographic of the majority of South African learners (Badat & Sayed, 2014:140; Veriava, 2015:2; Oberholzer, 2017). The need to create a strong foundation for social justice principles and promote leadership in social change is critical in this environment (Vandeyar, 2008:294-96; Veriava, 2015:2,3). Moreover, to bridge the imbalance between the opportunities offered in the independent school system and the broader South African society, it is also critical to create an experiential learning environment that encourages, inspires and instils pride in learners' responsibility to share and use their

privilege to become advocates for effective social justice programmes (Soudien, 2010:257-63; Tjabane & Pillay, 2011:10; Pillay, 2012:168). This approach will also enable independent schools to become an “important and necessary part of the South African education landscape – eager to contribute to the broader society” (Oberholzer, 2017).

The Independent Schools Association (ISASA) and the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) are peripheral and do not have a direct presence within the LO teachers’ domain, and therefore no direct influence on how LO is taught. The most significant change implemented by the IEB to assist teachers in presenting LO at a higher academic standard is the One Research Task (ORT) option (IEB, 2020b) and the formal discursive essay (IEB, 2020a:16). The guidelines for the ORT promote equal academic rigour across all subjects open to this option as:

‘The single task per learner approach allows for a rich and thorough investigation that educators can effectively monitor and assess. The task must be sufficiently focussed, concise and representative of a Grade 12 standard’ (IEB, 2020b:2).

Also, the discursive essay rubric is provided as part of the SAGs and is a standardisation tool to be implemented from the FET phase in preparation for Grade 12’s CAT B (IEB, 2020a,19:18). These two standardised assessments assisted in increasing the reliability and enhancing the validity of LO marks (Mowatt, 2017:7).

Courageous conversations are complex and result in discomfort as they challenge us to uncover the truth, prejudices, misinformation, and unchallenged historical assumptions. Therefore, they elicit feelings of anger, vulnerability, guilt and shame that need to be explored (Ally, 2006:32-34; Singleton & Hays, 2008:19-21; Huynh, 2018:276,280). The meaning attached to the lived experiences of teachers’ and learners’ interaction is influenced by the teacher’s professional courage and professional identity. A teacher who attaches positive meaning to their lived experience of these interactions is more likely to pursue and develop skills to facilitate courageous conversations, regardless of the initial cognitive and emotional dissonance they may experience. Moreover, increased positive experiences should allow teachers to pre-empt potential adverse reactions from learners.

Singleton and Hayes (2008:19-21) refer to “*Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations*”, namely staying engaged, expecting to experience discomfort, speaking your truth, and expecting a lack of resolution. It is thus imperative to persist in efforts to facilitate conversations 16 to 18-year-olds are adept at on their own but may experience as forced or confrontational

when initiated by a teacher (Singleton & Hays, 2008; Wassermann, 2018:123-24). However, it is vital not to force conversations or expect them to conclude within a single lesson but to allow time for reflection (Singleton & Hays, 2008:1,2). In LO, especially, the contact time between teachers and learners is irregular, and the time-lapse between lessons may disrupt the flow of a courageous conversation. The number of learners per LO class is also higher than other classes, which does not always allow all learners to share their perspectives (Strydom, 2011:39-42). Moreover, non-compliance concerning prescribed contact time between teachers and learners can result in unresolved dissonance from a conversation during an LO lesson, affecting the next lesson. The teaching environment best suited to courageous conversations is a safe space, characterised by a bond of trust between teacher and learner, in which open and truthful communication can occur (Huynh, 2018:267-68).

The learner and teacher demographic and level of transformation that has been achieved in the specific school will also determine the representative perspectives shared during courageous conversations (Howard, 2006:81,82; Singleton & Hays, 2008:21; Vandeyar, 2008:288; Bukor, 2011:41.42;). Close attention should thus be paid to informal conversations between learners to incorporate learner views and interests (Gorski, 2009:54,55; Amin & Vithal, 2015:4,5). Where the demographic of the class does not allow full representative perspectives, the teacher must introduce these additional perspectives to add depth and richness to the conversations.

Conversations resulting in cognitive dissonance in the classroom may spill into the next lesson, break, and be discussed at home. The affluent sector of society, served by independent schools, includes a parent body that represents leaders in the immediate community, greater society, the business world and well-known political figures fully aware of their power position as parent body (Amin & Vithal, 2015:1,2; Oberholzer, 2017). Transferred courageous conversations can thus result in backlash from parents, as they lack insight into the context of the conversation or the teacher's intent. Learners can also record conversations they find uncomfortable or disagree with on their smartphones and share these recorded snips of conversations with parents or on social media. This power imbalance between learners and teachers adds to teachers' lack of motivation to facilitate courageous conversations; they are unsure how these conversations will be received in the classroom or with parents at home (Singleton & Hays, 2008:1,2; Gorski, 2009:54; Pather, 2017).

It is also not unusual for learners to introduce an opinion or commonly held belief or perspective valued at home into a courageous conversation (Wassermann, 2018:127). These meanings and lived experiences created at home and in the classroom determine the meaning

attached to the collective lived experiences by the learners and teacher. It is thus critical for LO teachers to have heightened self-awareness, enabling them to accommodate the needs of their learners with regards to racial and cultural demographics since a lack thereof may limit their effectiveness in the classroom (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:82; Gelderbloem, 2014:58). This professional reflection should assist them in formulating a professional agency, providing them with the personal momentum and motivation to accommodate the holistic needs of their learner body and overcome the effects of ego depletion (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:1,2; Tice *et al.*, 2007:384; Strydom, 2011:43-45).

Social constructivism recognises the importance of seeing the teacher's role and learners' participation as a collaborative learning experience. Collaborative, courageous conversations should also result in new negotiated realities within which truthful communication can occur (Kim *et al.*, 2006:3). Truthful communication relies on the teacher's understanding that, as a facilitator of courageous conversations in the LO classroom, it is not about controlling the narrative but accommodating tolerance for the value in all perspectives of the truth. This acceptance includes the teacher's accommodation of the views held by their learners, as influenced by their respective home life and their own subjective lived experiences (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:309-10; Wassermann, 2018:124).

It is, therefore, necessary for the teacher to channel power and vulnerability to learners and recognise the courage it may take a learner to share their own perspectives. A mutual understanding should be established that the classroom is a safe environment without judgement or prejudice. Enabling teachers to identify and describe their beliefs or environmental barriers to this process will increase the knowledge with which to interpret their lived experiences. This knowledge can assist them in developing the self-awareness they may need to start or continue the facilitation of courageous conversations (Guerra *et al.*, 2013:124; Gelderbloem, 2014:16-17).

1.9 Theoretical and conceptual framework

In order to conduct this study exploring the construction of meaning based on the interaction that takes place during a courageous conversation, social constructivism was utilised as my research paradigm. Social constructivism was most suited to study the world of the teacher and the different social systems – personal, professional and cognitive – within which they find themselves (Kim *et al.*, 2006:2,3; Botha, 2017:2).

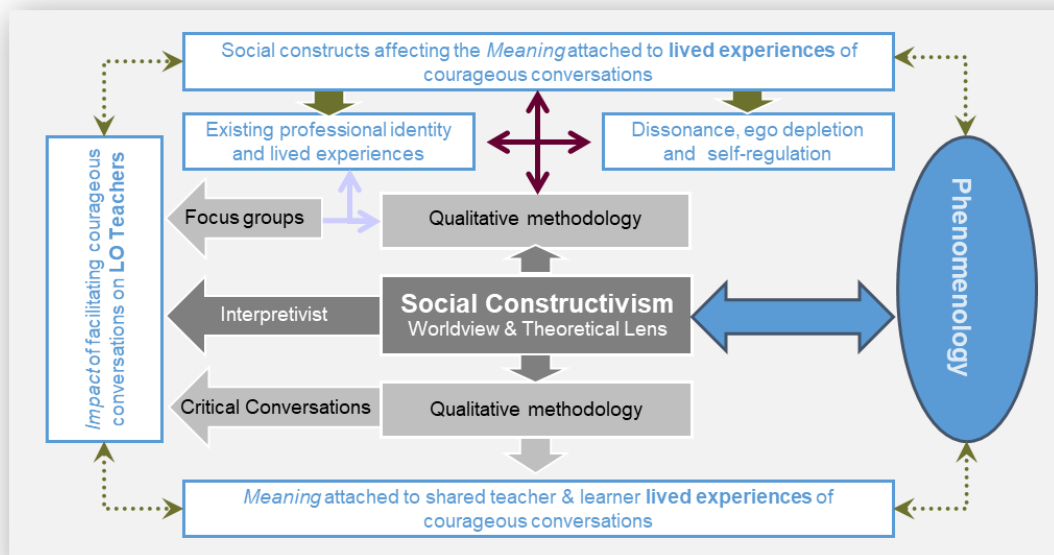


Figure 2: Integrated Conceptual and Theoretical Framework within the Phenomenological Research approach

Knowledge of these systems should allow for a thorough interrogation of the historical, cultural and subjective experiences and exposure with which teachers determine the professional identity and agency with which they implement courageous conversations and from which they intend to create an interdependent learning experience in a diverse educational environment (Howard, 2006:78,79; Francis & Le Roux, 2007:310). To understand these existing social constructs, an interrogation of the teacher's existing views of the world, historical perceptions of the self, society and the curriculum content is required. This entails determining the teacher's courage to embrace the whole truth and not merely the parts of it that may feel safe or justifiable within the boundaries of the implicit, hidden curriculum or the null curriculum (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:36; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018:482-85).

1.10 Research design

My research design aimed to determine the causal relationship between courageous conversations and LO teachers' meaning attached to these conversations (Creswell, 2014:65,66,187). In order to answer both the primary and secondary research questions, an inductive approach was used so that each individual's experiences could be analysed on their own, prior to an explicit theory emerging from the analysis of LO teachers' collective experiences (Kawulich, 2012:6-9).

1.10.1 Research approach

The theoretical lens of social constructivism and interpretivist research paradigm are best suited to a phenomenological research approach and a qualitative research methodology. The phenomenological approach to qualitative research focuses on humans' lived experiences to clarify the meaning attached to these experiences and understand their lived truths (Tuli, 2011:99-100). Therefore, phenomenology helped me understand and describe the complexities of the teachers' lived experiences, anecdotes of, and emotions experienced during courageous conversations. The actively and methodically collected and collated perspectives from each participant's lived experiences gave me a collection of "seamless perspectives" to describe these different realities authentically (Bevan, 2014:137-143).

1.10.2 Research paradigm

Table 1: Research Paradigm

Research Paradigm	Social Constructivism	Social constructivist theoretical lens: Preconstructed identity system > Meaning attached > informed by social interaction > Lived experiences > stereotypes > influences & contexts. <i>(Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002; Ally, 2006; Opperman Lewis, 2016, Botha, 2017)</i>
		Ontological Assumptions: Pre-constructed teacher identities > effective interaction & accommodation > continuous interrogation > new experiences > evolving identity. <i>(Howard, 2006; Kim, B. Jackson, R. Karp, J. Patrick, E & Thrower, 2006; Lemmer and Meier, 2011; Maree, 2012; Gelderbloem, 2014; Opperman Lewis, 2016; Dawood, 2018)</i>
	Interpretivist	Theoretical Paradigm: > each participant > subjective perspective > assumptions Researcher role > participatory & empathetic role > determine subjective contexts > collective perspectives > informs the meaning attached > teachers worldview. <i>(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Tuli, 2011; Pillay, 2012; Taylor and Medina, 2012; Creswell, 2017)</i>
		Epistemological Assumptions: LO teachers' ability to self-regulate Self-awareness > dissonance > ego depletion > Teacher's motivation > professional identity > teacher's life world. <i>(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Tice et al., 2007; Maree, 2012; Pillay, 2012; Taylor & Medina, 2013; Creswell, 2014)</i>

My research paradigm consisted of social constructivism as a worldview and theoretical lens, and interpretivist theory (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:77,81; Kawulich, 2012:7-9). Both teachers and learners construct their individual identity and belief system independently based on a lifetime of beliefs, stereotypes informed by historical influences and contexts (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:80; Ally, 2006:36; Opperman Lewis, 2016:19; Botha, 2017:1,2). Social constructivism thus clarifies the teacher's world and the meanings that construct the professional and personal reality within which they have to implement their teaching praxis (Kim et al., 2006:2-5; Tuli, 2011:104-05). These existing constructs are the most likely

premises used to select the subject matter for courageous conversations and create interdependent learning experiences in their specific teaching environments (Howard, 2006:80-81; Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301; Dawood, 2018:1). Ultimately, the evolving meaning systems and their impact on each individual teacher have a different impact depending on the interaction between each teacher and their specific class or group of learners. Therefore, each participant in this study added a new perspective to the phenomenon (Tuli, 2011:104; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25,26).

My ontological assumptions reflect a nominalist approach to my study that supposes socially and historically constructed teacher identities impact their meaning of the lived experience of courageous conversations in LO. The meaning attached to these lived experiences impacts the effective interaction and successful accommodation of diverse opinions in independent secondary school LO classrooms (Howard, 2006:81-82; Soudien, 2010:364; Lemmer & Meier, 2011:101-03). Moreover, the meaning attached to these lived experiences is based on the teachers' professional lifeworld. Since all learning and meaning is socially constructed and interpreted, each new professional lived experience should result in an evolving professional identity and understanding of their professional reality (Kim *et al.*, 2006:4-5).

Interpretivist theory supports a participatory and empathetic researcher role, enabling the researcher to enter the lifeworld of the participant and share their lived experience within their specific context and reality. In this study, it also allowed a shared interrogation of the teachers' understanding of the concept of courageous conversations and the guidelines provided to them to practice their pedagogy (Tuli, 2011:100; Taylor & Medina, 2013:4-6). This theoretical perspective also helped me reflect on my own views, biases and hidden assumptions with which I approached the research process, and how these were used to understand the context and reality of each participant (Taylor & Medina, 2013:4-6).

My epistemological assumptions are that, how each teacher attaches meaning to their lived experiences of courageous conversations, will determine how they construct their understanding of the process and their willingness to persist with these conversations (Singleton & Hays, 2008:18-19; Gorski, 2009:54). The LO teachers' ability to self-regulate in response to any dissonance experienced will also determine their ability to remain motivated to persist in facilitating courageous conversations. This continuation of self-motivation and self-regulation should hone their ability to embrace new influences and consistently evolving professional identities (Tice *et al.*, 2007:380; Strydom, 2011:35). Sharing each individual's subjective understanding of their context added a new perspective to my understanding of the phenomenon (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:5,6; Pillay, 2012:168,169).

1.11 Research methodology

Interpretivist theory and a social constructivist theoretical lens rely on a qualitative research methodology to provide rich findings. These findings are used to understand the contexts and realities of the social constructs that inform the participants' lived experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:25,26; Tuli, 2011:99; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:24). A qualitative methodology also increases the insight gained from exploring and unpacking participants' lived experiences. These insights should clarify the participants' personal and professional identity and their ability to keep growing and developing new knowledge and understanding, specifically in an independent school context and in the LO classroom (Dryden-Peterson & Siebörger, 2006:396). The value of qualitative methodology is also twofold: it allows the participants to make meaning of their own reality and construct new knowledge of their teaching praxis, and allows the researcher, as an empathetic observer, to do the same. This methodology helps the research uncover the complex and ever-changing socially constructed reality of the participants' specific lived experiences (Tuli, 2011:100,101; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25-26).

In this study, the qualitative research methodological process consisted of two data collection methods: critical conversations on courageous conversations and a focus group discussion. In this sense, critical conversations promoted increasing depth in the interaction between the participant, as the narrator of their lived experiences of courageous conversations, and the researcher as interpreter. This narrator and interpreter-role should create an environment where anecdotes and emotions can be shared truthfully (Walther, Pawley & Sochacka, 2015:6,8,10). These critical conversations also allowed a thorough interrogation of all aspects of the phenomenon of the participants' lived experiences of courageous conversations, increasing the amount of research data collected to comprehensively describe the meaning constructed during these conversations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2009:7-8; Ngulube, 2013:5-9).

1.11.1 Study design

The research methods in a qualitative research methodology and phenomenological approach are open but structured, as the concern is a deeper understanding of the phenomenon within its specific context (Creswell, 2014:197; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:26). As an alternative to semi-structured interviews, the intent with critical conversations is to coax a truthful sharing of the constructs emanating from, and the meaning attached to, the facilitation of courageous conversations (Walther, Pawley & Sochacka, 2015:8). As researcher and observer, I further used my field notes to act as a filter in identifying described triggers, aspects and attitudes to

reaffirm the interpreted narrative and ensure authenticity and trustworthiness (Dryden-Peterson & Siebörger, 2006:401; Bevan, 2014:136).

The aim was thus to encourage the participants to speak freely, fully understanding my purpose as a researcher to allow an authentic reflection on previous lived experiences, anecdotes and emotions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:4-11; Tuli, 2011:102,103). Pawley also refers to the inclusion of open interview techniques to enrich the semi-structured interview by allowing the participant to tell their story – their truth – freely to include their whole experience and range of emotions according to their reality (Walther, Pawley & Sochacka, 2015:8). However, the interviews should remain practical to maintain methodological relevance and consistency (Bevan, 2014:139). Bevan describes the phenomenological approach to the conversation as a three-phased process: contextualisation of the participant’s lifeworld; apprehending the phenomenon or lived experience of the participant; and clarifying the phenomenon to focus on specific aspects of the lived experience (2014:139-141). These three phases should provide practical structure and confirmation that a clear understanding was gained from the data collection process.

1.11.2 Data generation and collection

The phenomenological interview conversation structure was adopted in this study. It was ultimately found that open-ended questions alone would not steer a reflective and authentic description of individual lived experiences to access sufficiently rich data during individual interviews and focus group discussions.

Table 2: Phenomenological Critical Conversation Structure (Adapted: Bevan, 2014:139)

Phenomenological critical conversation structure				
Phenomenological attitude	Researcher approach	Conversation Phases	Method	Researcher purpose
Critical positioning, acceptance of natural attitude and critical stance	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants	Contextualisation	Descriptive Context Questions	- Teacher Identity - School Culture - Teaching Context - Understanding of Guidelines
	Reflexive Critical Dialogue with Self	Apprehending the Phenomenon	Descriptive and Structural Questions	- Main question on lived experiences - Free and open narrative - Identification of anecdotal detail that need clarification
	Active Listening	Clarifying the Phenomenon	Imaginative Variations: Varying Structure Questions	- Allow reflections - Confirms anecdotal details - Examines perspectives further

A phenomenological critical conversation structure was used to generate and collect data. This critical structure combines the use of semi-structured interview questions and open narratives. During the contextualisation phase, a few leading semi-structured questions were posed to determine the participants' specific school culture and their understanding of courageous conversations (Bevan, 2014:139). During the apprehension of the phenomenon phase, the participants were encouraged to share their multi-faceted lived experiences, with minimal prompting questions to retain methodological grounding (Bevan, 2014:140). In the third phase, interpretive and imaginative questions were introduced to provide alternative perspectives to a specific anecdotal experience to be interpreted by the participant. It has been determined that responses should augment additional dynamics and add richness to the data-gathering process, reinforcing the understanding that a critical or courageous conversation should not be considered complete (Tuli, 2011:100; Bevan, 2014:42). Phase three also allowed the participants to self-regulate by addressing any dissonance that may have resulted from the critical conversations. Field notes were taken during each phase to support the analysis of each participant's specific lived experience. The field notes taken during the second phase were utilised to inform the third phase of the conversation (Bevan, 2014:141).

As a secondary data collection technique, focus groups allowed participants to share their lived experiences in an open forum (Walther, Pawley & Sochacka, 2015:26). Focus group interactions between participants may trigger a recollection of additional anecdotal experiences and allow the participants to construct greater insight into the meaning they attached to their lived experience (Tuli, 2011:100,103; Walther, Pawley & Sochacka, 2015:10,11). These insights provide additional means to integrate individually constructed meaning with participants' combined lived experiences.

The joint construction of meaning and professional identity could also create a self-regulatory experience of any residual dissonance participants experienced during the critical conversation (Tuli, 2011:100; Bevan, 2014:42). Bevan (2014:138) also refers to a phenomenological attitude, including critical positioning, acceptance of the participant's natural attitude and critical position-taking. This phenomenological reduction of the participants' narratives maintained the purpose of the interview and ensured trustworthiness. Pedagogical reduction should be maintained during focus group discussions to confirm the authenticity of the participants' narratives, the related individual lived experiences and contexts, and the meaning attached to them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:21-22; Strydom, 2011:67,68; Bevan, 2014:138; Walther, Pawley & Sochacka, 2015:14-7).

1.11.3 Sample selection

Table 3: Purposive Participant Sampling Criteria (Creswell, 2014:189)

Purposive participant sampling criteria	
Experience	Five or more consecutive years' experience in teaching Life Orientation from Grade 10 to Grade 12 in an independent school using the IEB as assessment body. Currently employed at an independent school
Demographic	A diverse sample will be included to ensure a representative range of live experiences of courageous conversations.

Participants were selected based on purposive sampling (Creswell, 2014:189). I intended to draw the initial sample of participants from the teacher pool of the greater Johannesburg area. I chose Johannesburg as I knew the teachers in Pretoria as their cluster leader and regional moderator for the past eight years. However, the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 allowed me to select participants from four different provinces; Gauteng, North West, Eastern Cape and Western Cape.

Interviews took place depending on each participant's online work schedule. The focus group discussion was arranged for an evening to accommodate participants with young children at a time that suited all participants. The focus group was conducted using an online media platform with a video and audio feed.

1.11.4 Data analysis

After completing the critical conversations and the focus group, the recordings were transcribed by an external transcriber and then checked by myself for accuracy and the participants for authenticity. The confirmation of transcripts' accuracy helped me identify prompts to start the focus group discussion with specific contextual and conceptual aspects of the individual interview findings that needed clarification or elaboration. The transcribed interviews and discussions were analysed according to Tesch's eight-step coding process (Creswell, 2014:198). Thematic coding was used to interpret the transcripts until topics could be identified and assimilated to structure a rich, in-depth, and detailed data analysis.

1.11.5 Quality assurance measures

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Pretoria's (UP) Ethical Committee. After obtaining ethical clearance, participants who met the inclusion criteria were approached and presented with a formal consent disclaimer clarifying the research focus, purpose, and methods to be implemented. The participants were approached as independent LO teachers without considering the school where they were employed. Therefore, no permission from any head of school or administrative body was necessary. Upon receiving written consent from the required participants, the data-gathering process started with individual critical conversations. The conversations were recorded, and a research journal was kept. Where any reference was made to a participant, a pseudonym was used to ensure participant anonymity. The sample of nine participants allowed for one withdrawal, as a sample of eight participants was sufficient for providing rich and detailed data. Any participant could therefore withdraw at any time. All information provided by the participants remained confidential and was only seen by me, the participant (to confirm the accuracy of the transcribed conversation) and my supervisor.

1.12 Possible contributions and limitations of the study

Purposive sampling and informed consent are meant to ensure participants are fully informed of the purpose of the research, promoting their understanding of the professional boundaries of the research process (Creswell, 2014:189). Each participant was accommodated according to their specific teaching context, limiting the possibility of an alternative participant agenda. There were some concerns about the timeframe between the first interviews and the focused group discussion, but these were addressed by providing participants with the interview transcript to confirm its authenticity. Purposive sampling of participants also ensured that all participants were aware of the IEB presentation on teaching controversial issues, and participants were active members of a cluster and compliant with the SAG requirements (Creswell, 2014:189). My role in the hierarchical structure provided by the IEB may have increased my profile with the IEB cohort of teachers. However, the nature of the qualitative and interpretive approach that requires an acceptance of the participant's natural attitude minimised any potential of familiarity; this was ensured by employing phenomenological reduction (Bevan, 2014:42).

1.13 Timeframe of the study

The ethical clearance for my study and commencement of the two research methods were obtained in February 2019. Ideally, I intended the individual interview process to occur from mid-August 2019 until the end of October 2019. However, it proved unexpectedly difficult to obtain the full cohort of participants needed for the study in Johannesburg. With the pandemic,

lockdowns, and the move to online teaching, the sample group of nine participants was sourced from provinces outside Gauteng, and all were confirmed by July 2020. The individual interviews started in May 2020 and were completed in October 2020, arranged with each participant according to their online teaching schedule. Transcription followed each interview and was completed by November 2020. The focus group discussion was scheduled after the individual recordings had been confirmed as an accurate reflection of the interview by the individual participants. The focus group discussion was thus conducted on 3 March 2021 and transcribed by myself for participant approval at the end of March 2021. The coding process started in April 2021, and the analysis of findings was completed at the end of June 2021.

1.14 Conclusion

In 2016, the teaching of controversial topics in LO was officially introduced as a requirement presented to the national cohort of LO teachers at the National User Group Conference. Specific teaching methods to facilitate the teaching of controversial topics were presented to promote teachers' skills to meet this new requirement. Controversial issues were previously discussed in the LO classroom, but were not formally structured or endorsed by the IEB until this conference. The potential for a discussion that met the criteria of controversial topics was essentially daunting. Moreover, there was a rise in learner and parental dissatisfaction with the implementation of transformation at independent schools, especially those with colonial school cultures.

This new challenge of formally structuring and facilitating conversations with willful intent to consciously focus on controversial topics coincided with the Fallism campaigns at universities all over the country. There were also many allegations of racism at prominent independent schools that received consistent media coverage from 2016 to 2017, and during 2020 and early 2021. Such controversy related to independent schools and teachers teaching in independent schools, especially the cancel culture model used in 2020, could derail the facilitation of open and truthful conversations (Strossen, 2020:i,ii,2-18). My research aimed to determine the meaning LO teachers attached to their lived experiences of conversations on controversial topics. These discussions were referred to as courageous conversations, as the need for these conversations is critical.

The topics that may require more professional courage cannot be pre-determined as each teacher's context, school culture, learning body, and teaching environment are unique. Ultimately, collaborative learning experiences between the LO teacher and learners have a specific value for the quality of the interaction between teachers and learners, making the hidden and null curriculum that cause controversy explicit. As a researcher, my immersion into

LO teachers' lived experience of these courageous conversations provided me with the most authentic insight into their beliefs and environmental barriers. Insight into the processes that informed the teachers' meaning of their interaction with learners also enabled me to answer my primary and secondary research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The IEB's motivation for LO teachers specifically to incorporate critical narratives in their teaching praxis occurred in response to increased hyper racialisation triggered by the #rhodesmustfall campaign and ensuing national #feesmustfall campaigns at universities throughout South Africa (Taghavi, 2017:2,3; IEB, 2015). With the incorporation of controversial topics in LO during the 2016 IEB UGC, critical discourse and sensitive teachable moments in LO classrooms became a strongly suggested guideline, especially in the FET phase (Mowatt, 2016:5-7). The presentation, *Teaching Controversial Issues in the Classroom*, used the Penny Sparrow social media posts as a premise and introduced the move to openly challenge socio-political events and content in the LO space. The IEB thus made a two-day supporting workshop *Dangerous Classrooms*, aimed at all academic staff, available in 2017. Despite this additional workshop, LO teachers were offered no further specific training (Roddick, 2017:9). The IEB workshop was conducted based on the moratorium provided by the DoBE to include critical thinking and decolonisation in all subjects.

Since the formalisation of LO as a compulsory FET phase subject in 2006, LO has been and may continue to be under scrutiny concerning its usefulness and validity (Ferguson & Jain, 2015; Tlhabi, 2015; Mnchunu, 2017). Opposing views published by respected academics such as Jansen (2011:40,95,108; 2012:1,2) – that LO can be taught at home and its results should be ignored – further undermined the role of the subject and its standing in schools. However, amid the uncertainty surrounding LO, the IEB remained steadfast in the academic standard required for LO. The IEB advocated for the subject's value and necessity in fostering learners who are becoming critically aware and thinking democratic citizens (Gelderbloem, 2014:3,7; Ferguson & Jain, 2015; Tlhabi, 2015). In February 2017, the Minister of Education advised that instead of abolishing LO, it should be strengthened by assuring an increased academic standard (Ferguson & Jain, 2015; Mnchunu, 2017). This decision highlighted the need for LO as a subject that can instil moral values and transformative citizenship, evident in the complex social justice infractions South African society faces (Ferguson & Jain, 2015; Ramphela, 2017:71-72). Therefore, the IEB's stance that accompanied the critical analysis of fact-based multiple perspectives must be used as a premise for critical narratives and uncomfortable discourse, despite the ensuing teacher vulnerability and courage required. It is only in these courageous conversations as a means of openly addressing systemic inequality and its impact on race relationships (relationships based on worth and dignity) that the socio-political intent of LO can be promoted in the classroom (Mowatt, 2016:9,10; Roddick, 2017:15,18). LO has access to all learners, especially those with no social science subjects, making it the only

subject to fulfil this role in teaching and learning (Mowatt, 2016:11,12; Roddick, 2017:23-5). This process did not occur at all schools, resulting in the IEB formally adding these 21st-century skills to LO to ensure its implementation by all teachers to all learners. The IEB LO Common Assessment Task (CAT), written annually during June in the Grade 12 year by all independent schools as a standardisation test, was therefore structured to assess critical analysis, in-depth interrogation of power and respect for multiple perspectives (Mowatt, 2017:3).

The effective facilitation of courageous conversations means learners must be provided with scaffolding in teacher-sourced content. The teacher, in turn, must be comfortable with the content provided and prepared to be challenged. Controversial narratives often cause discomfort and can be expected to trigger cognitive dissonance and controversy in the classroom (Wassermann, 2018:114). The concept of courageous conversations – open, truthful and authentic discourse needed to foster critical thinking, empathy and respect – is currently mainly associated with matters of race (Singleton & Hays, 2008:18,19; Davies, 2013:3; Fowler, 2016:1-5). However, several other topics in the LO Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) compiled by the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) meet the criteria of critical content that can only be accommodated in courageous conversations. In order to address these inconvenient truths, othering narratives, implicit boundaries, and discrimination that resulted in or are a part of critical societal manifestations must be grappled with (Claxton, 2010:1,2; Ramphele, 2012:12-4).

Due to the country's historical past of apartheid and persistent systemic inequality, the effects and impact of disadvantage and privilege are interwoven with a range of curricula guidelines for LO, even if not directly linked to race (Opperman Lewis, 2016:16-9; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:68-71; IEB, 2020a:9-12). Therefore, it is vital to look at the nature and aims of courageous conversations, the moratorium of LO, and the specific agency of the LO teacher in response to their lived experiences of facilitating courageous conversations (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:300). Claxton refers specifically to the following virtues that need to be fostered: curiosity as the starting point of learning; courage to engage with uncertainty; exploration as the seeking and gathering of information; experimentation in not being concerned with mistakes, but learning; imagination as utilising healthy scepticism; sociability in being able to voice and interrogate own views and open-mindedness; and the virtue of reflection in taking a step back and questioning goals and assumptions (Claxton, 2010:3,4). An overview of LO and the skills and knowledge required from LO teachers in a critical LO space were explored. Some critical discourse theorists' premises and guidelines were also evaluated to discuss their potential as models for courageous conversations specific to LO (Fostering Civil Discourse,

2017:4,5). The value of LO, the implementation of critical and courageous conversations and its impact on learners and teachers, is vital and must not be underestimated.

2.2 An overview of the development of LO (2015 to 2020)

During the initial implementation of LO as a compulsory FET subject, LO was initially marketed as an experiential subject to principals heading schools affiliated with the IEB as an assessment body (Prinsloo, 2007:161-2; Paterson, 2019). However, an increase in the academic rigour of LO was systematically introduced from Grade 10. The IEB initially augmented their SAGs with curriculum specific online exemplars during 2007 and 2008 to ensure teachers prepare learners adequately for the Common Assessment Task (CAT) to follow in Grade 12. Despite much criticism levelled at the future relevance of LO, on 14 February 2017, the Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga, defended LO by declaring that: *“We prepare students for life. What we teach we don’t necessarily teach for university. We teach to ensure lifelong learning”* (Mnchunu, 2017). This echoed Ferguson and Jain’s (2015) insistence that LO has a unique and valuable place:

‘There is no other place in the curriculum that directly equips learners with the knowledge, skills and values that enable them to cope with the demands of the “real world” and to take their place successfully as active citizens in a diverse democratic society.’

This call for increased academic rigour in LO was met with resistance by many heads of schools (Paterson, 2019). Their resistance was mainly attributed to their perception that experiential learning would focus on practical tasks such as community service, specifically designed school camps, work experience or internships, and others, and that the write up of these activities would suffice as tasks. The IEB CAT thus became an exemplar of the standard of academic performance goals that needed to be strived towards from Grade 10 in the FET phase. However, despite the confirmation by the Minister of Education that a higher academic focus must be included in LO, the expectation of artificially enhanced distinctions remained, resulting in non-compliance from some teachers or a rapid turnover in LO teachers (Ferguson & Jain, 2015; Thlali, 2015; Mnchunu, 2017; Mowatt, 2017:1-4). Professional stressors also harmed the development and managerial support of LO programmes in schools (Prinsloo, 2007:157). Still, the IEB continued to provide an accessible cluster group system to promote continuous self-development opportunities and support for LO teachers (IEB, 2015). The support provided by cluster leaders, regional moderators, and the annual User Group Conferences (UGC) ensured more stability and confidence in the cohort of LO teachers, resulting in increased compliance with IEB expectations (Mowatt, 2017:9).

To further boost the full academic standard of compliance, the IEB CAT: Section B (written as a formal standardised assessment by all IEB schools) was externally marked from 2014 (Luckay, 2014). The CAT B results were only made available to schools in November each year after final NSC marks had already been uploaded on the IEB system. This curtailed the practice by some schools to inflate final NSC marks from a high 70% mark for LO to a distinction (Mowatt, 2017:2,3). This process was continued until 2018 and proved very successful in elevating academic rigour and compliance with the IEB Subject Assessment Guidelines (SAGS). From 2019, the CAT B was marked and moderated in cluster groups. The IEB then externally moderated a representative random sample of all scripts, and entered and published the final mark attained for LO (Mowatt, 2017:3,5). Still, despite the IEB's effort to ensure a more reliable academic standard, it cannot provide consistency in teacher aptitude, commitment and courage to accommodate and foster a critical and challenging subject. As a subject that must accommodate critical discourse, develop questioning and tolerant learners, LO remains a controversial subject in flux. However, great strides continue to be made to ensure LO evolves into a subject worthy of academic recognition and as a valid and necessary part of South African education.

There are several persistent difficulties that LO, as a learning area, has to overcome, including time allocation and a consistent cohort of dedicated LO-specific teachers (Mowatt, 2017:1-7). In the NSC (2011:7) guidelines, LO is allocated four hours in a two-week cycle, of which two hours should be dedicated to Physical Education (South Africa, 2011:30,31). Prinsloo (2007:157) also reflects an initial inclusion of religious topics in the initial 2003 NSC guidelines as part of the LO programme. However, at monastic schools, this resulted in the continuous practice of one LO lesson in a two-week cycle being allocated to one divinity lesson, and one lesson being allocated to Physical Education (Prinsloo, 2007:157,158). In my tenure as cluster leader, regional moderator, IEB NSC marker and ORTO moderator, files submitted for moderation were regularly accompanied by a letter from the teacher as clarification of non-compliance. The letters often stipulate LO time allocation varied between forty-five minutes to an hour, and the Physical Education time was allocated to the school's sports department. It was also not uncommon for only one teacher to be allocated to LO for the entire senior school, or for a teacher to teach a whole grade at a time (Brown, 2013:64-67). This teaching environment increases the possibility of a teacher not covering the whole curriculum, or lessons being too short to facilitate a comprehensive critical interrogation and level of discourse required of the LO content in the FET phase.

2.2.1 LO as a conduit to critical citizenship education

In the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), LO is tasked with providing quality education to all learners regardless of their specific backgrounds, financial status, ethnic or cultural reality, belief systems, physical or intellectual ability. It aims to promote self-fulfilment and learners' rightful and functional place as citizens of a free, democratic and socially just society (Prinsloo, 2007:156-158; South Africa, 2011:3,4; Roddick, 2017:2-5). This moratorium includes principles such as implementing and pursuing social transformation attempting to equalise past infractions of social justice, access to education, skills development, knowledge creation and attainment, in a manner that ensures the practical empowerment of all learners (South Africa, 2011:3-5; Gelderbloem, 2014:3; Oberholzer, 2017). However, without a critical analysis of the complex dynamics of South Africa as a nation and the concurrent effect on its people, the definition provided in the NCS remains untenable. Ultimately, a challenging attitude towards power systems, persistent discrimination and inequality can be addressed openly, truthfully and respectfully in courageous conversations that create a greater understanding and much-needed redress. Courageous conversations seem the only valid conduit in grappling with critical citizenship and gaining the encompassing worldview described in the NSC (South Africa, 2011:4). Such conversations' intent is an active and critical approach with full cognisance of:

- the need to protect and uphold human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice, while adhering to the principles and practices of social and environmental justice, as defined in the Republic of South Africa Constitution.
- the need for sensitivity in issues of diversity such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability and other factors.
- the importance of valuing indigenous knowledge systems; acknowledging the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution; and
- the need to foster credibility, quality and efficiency, providing an education comparable to that of other countries in terms of quality, breadth and depth.

(South Africa, 2011:4)

LO is further defined as the individual's continuous exploration of the self, society, the greater South African context and the global arena. Mastering critical thinking skills, the interrogation of beliefs, exploration of personal values and social norms are the purview of LO and can only be accommodated in the LO space (Fostering Civil Discourse, 2017:4,5). In the CAPS preamble, LO is defined as the study of the self in relation to others, the development of broad skills needed to make decisions that enable success in life – as a racially cognisant, tax-paying

and responsible citizen (Ally, 2006:31,32; Prinsloo, 2007:157-9; Vandeyar, 2008:288-90; South Africa, 2011:5; Tjabane & Pillay, 2011:11-13). Opportunities to foster an active and critical approach to power, explore social justice, develop sensitivity to diversity and value indigenous knowledge systems must be created (Prinsloo, 2007:157-8; South Africa, 2011:14; Ferguson & Jain, 2015). LO teachers ultimately select content with which to critically and actively explore the personal, physical, political and social environment in which learners have to solve problems, resolve conflict and make critical decisions for their future in a complex world (Delors *et al.*, 1998:86-94).

The IEB CATs are increasingly structured towards honing an agency towards “critical citizenship education” (Ferguson & Jain, 2015). In turn, this motivates LO teachers to meet the subjects increased academic rigour and facilitate a structured approach in dealing with South Africa’s socio-political climate (Ferguson & Jain, 2015; Mnchunu, 2017). The CAT requires a higher cognitive level of discourse, calling for the exploration of power relationships, national identity, and empathy for the plight of others. Such exploration should be accommodated in the classroom through courageous conversations (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:74,75; Roddick, 2017:9).

Successful conversations around critical content, likely to create dissonance or conflict in the classroom, will depend on the LO teachers’ skills, agency, and level of autonomy within their specific school’s culture (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:300,301; Vandeyar, 2010:346). An analysis of the provided content should challenge existing beliefs and opinions held by both learners and teachers. Learners and teachers should thus interrogate the origins of their opinions and beliefs, learn to respect those held by others, and then retain their original opinions depending on their continued validity or adapt their views according to the insight gained. A reluctance to accommodate these discussions, or even suppressing these discussions, could potentially create a closed environment that may seem hostile to the learners (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:34,35; Claxton, 2010:3,4; Alsubaie, 2015:125). However, an LO teacher and school culture that is open and accommodates these discussions create a positive discursive forum where trusting conversations can be facilitated (Singleton & Hays, 2008:19; Davies, 2013:5). This teaching and learning environment assists learners in making sense of past influences, regulating any cognitive dissonance caused by having their beliefs challenged, fostering active and critical learning (Vandeyar, 2008:290,291; South Africa, 2011:25; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:76-79). Personal well-being, human rights, socio-political issues, gender, the state of the nation, power and privilege impact learners’ ability to question, understand and fulfil their citizenship role; thus, LO teachers should prepare their learners to construct a more positive future (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:300; Prinsloo, 2007:163; Vandeyar, 2008:292;

Reygan & Steyn, 2017:75). The development of an authentic self as an autonomous being mindful of all differences, focused on just and responsible social interaction in a personal, national and global arena should be a critical aim of the LO teacher's agency for LO (Ferguson, 2016:3,4; South Africa, 2011:7-9).

LO in the FET phase can thus be described as a teacher-facilitated personal journey during which the learner's identity can be explored from all possible perspectives. Moreover, the impact of choices and decisions can be explored, and a framework can be structured to help learners envision their personal and professional lifeworld. Francis and Le Roux (2011:300) refer to Newman (1997), who attributes identity development to the social group within which we see ourselves, including factors such as racial and ethnic profiles, how we worship, whom we love, financial and social standing, and abilities. Our identity within society is shaped by our understanding of the allocated role in that society. It affects our actions, beliefs, and how we think, express ourselves, and live our lives (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:300; Bukor, 2011:216-217). Moreover, Vandeyar (2008:288) corroborates the view expressed by Francis and le Roux (2007:301,302) who refer specifically to the changing perspectives on racial identity developed by learners as a socio-historical and ideological construct that transcends a mere biological fact. Furthermore, Soudien (2010:354) and Ramphele (2017b:92-94) concur with their view that racial identity may be determined by how learners see themselves in a specific time and place, their social groups, financial means, and social class. An identity in flux is experienced by learners who do not identify with the institutionalised race classifications – neither biologically nor ideologically (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:299-301; Vandeyar, 2008:296).

These combined factors are likely to result in multiple fluid identities, unbound by race classification or developing beliefs (Lemmer & Meier, 2011:103-105). These identities may clash with the ascribed normative identities held by traditional perspectives at home, school and greater society (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:300; Vandeyar, 2008:288,289; Wassermann, 2018:114,115); even more so if one or more of these power systems are restrictive. Moreover, LO teachers can no longer subscribe to tenuous collective identities and perspectives, but should embolden each learner to critically question perceptions, beliefs, power, privilege and complicity (Ramphele, 2012:45; Steyn, 2015:380; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:68,69). This challenging process can be facilitated in courageous conversations to assist learners in knowing themselves and making that 'self' known (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301; Lemmer & Meier, 2011:103; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:141). The LO space creates an empowering environment where respectful discourse and a critical attitude can be honed to establish personal and individual identities (Lemmer & Meier, 2011:105; Davies, 2013:5; Reygan &

Steyn, 2017:79). Bongwe (2010:160) claims the need to facilitate critical conversations that trigger tension, division, and conflict, when suppressed, becomes far more dangerous than addressing them in honest, albeit difficult, conversations.

2.2.2 *Courageous conversations as formal teaching praxis*

Table 4 reflects a selection of CAPS topics from the IEB SAGs. It indicates the lack of content specificity, reducing the guidelines to mere boundaries for the LO teacher to source fact-based content and design assessments and examinations (IEB, 2020a:9-12).

Courageous conversations can be accommodated in the classroom through a formally structured lesson based on pre-selected resources, or an informal, spontaneous discussion initiated in response to a current event or triggered by content covered during an LO lesson (Mowatt, 2016:2,5-7; Roddick, 2017:15). The formally structured lesson allows the teacher to control and steer the narrative, while spontaneous, intuitive lessons require the teacher to guide the learners to steer and control their narrative (Lemmer & Meier, 2011:113; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016; Roddick, 2017:22). The level of dissonance experienced by learners and teacher will be subject to the specific social dynamic within a specific class, the learners' demographic, the teacher's critical agency, and the pedagogic relationship between the teacher and learners (Ally, 2006:32; Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301; Soudien, 2010:354; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:143; Ramphela, 2017:190). For example, the dynamic of a discussion on the #metoo and #menaretrash campaigns against gender-based violence in a girls' school would be very different from such a discussion in a co-ed school or boys' school. Therefore, the teacher's critical agency would also be the deciding factor in the choice of content, selection of resources, and lesson structure used to cover gender-based violence (Lemmer & Meier, 2011:107; Ferguson & Jain, 2015). Their willingness to accommodate critical conversations will determine the role LO can play in the school's transformation and diversification (Ally, 2006:35,36; Steyn, 2015:382,386; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:145; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:68-71).

Table 4: CAPS Topics Requiring Critical Discourse Best Accommodated in Courageous Conversations (IEB, 2020a:9-12)

CAPS TOPICS WITH POTENTIAL TO BECOME CONTROVERSIAL DURING COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS			
Topics	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Development of the self in society	Self-awareness, self-esteem & self-development; Life roles: nature and responsibilities; Power, power relations, and gender roles; Changes towards adulthood Decision-making regarding sexuality.	Plan and achieve life goals & problem-solving; Relationships & their influence on well-being; Lifestyle choices & decision-making skills; Gender roles and their effects on health and well-being.	Stress management, Conflict resolution & factors that influence effective communication; Human factors that cause ill-health; accidents, crises: psychological, social, religious, cultural practices. Contributing factors & intervention strategies; Growth and change are related to the transition between school and post-school.
Social and environmental responsibility	Contemporary social issues that impact negatively on local and global communities; Social skills and responsibilities to participate in civic life.	Environmental issues that cause ill-health; Climate change; Participation in a community service addressing an environmental issue.	Environments and services which promote safe and healthy living; Responsibilities of various levels of government; A personal mission statement for life.
Democracy and human rights	Diversity, discrimination, human rights and violations; National and international instruments and conventions; Ethical traditions and/or religious laws and indigenous belief systems of major religions; Biases and unfair practices in sport.	Democratic participation and democratic structures; Role of sport in nation-building; Contributions of South Africa's diverse religions and belief systems to a harmonious society.	Responsible citizenship; The role of the media in a democratic society; Ideologies, beliefs and worldviews on construction of recreation and physical activity across cultures and genders.
Careers and career choices	Socio-economic factors Diversity of jobs; Opportunities within career fields; Trends and demands in the job market.	Competencies, abilities and ethics required for a career; Personal expectations in relation to job or career of interest; Knowledge about self in relation to the demands of the world of work and socio-economic conditions.	Reasons for and impact of unemployment and innovative solutions to counteract unemployment; Core elements of a job contract; Refinement of portfolio of plans for life after school.
Physical Education	Skills in playground and/ or community and/or indigenous games; Environmentally responsible outdoor recreational activities; Skills in traditional and/or non-traditional sport.	Various leadership roles in a self-designed recreational group activity	Achievement of own personal fitness and health goals.

The Grade 12 CAT (2016) content, introduced at the IEB User Group Conference's presentation on the need to accommodate controversial topics in the classroom, focused on the rise of Fallism (Mowatt, 2016; Taghavi, 2017). The CAT centred on the #RhodesMustFall campaign, which gave way to the #FeesMustFall campaign, spreading to most of South Africa's university campuses in 2016 and continuing into early 2017. This national students' campaign also highlighted persistent racial inequality and systemic discrimination prevalent in South African society, resulting in student activism (Pillay, 2015:157,158). The preparatory sections and discussion focused on learners' and teachers' understanding of social justice, white privilege and poverty within the current South African context. The recurring theme since 2016 was the need for redress, which would entail the re-allocation and redistribution of resources and amenities to reverse political barriers, socio-economic circumstances and a disabling education system (Soudien, 2010:353; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:146). This shift in focus included actively advocating for the need to redress historical disadvantages and promote equal opportunities for all South African youth (Tjabane & Pillay, 2011:10,15,16). However, this formal affirmation of the need to create an agency of change, critical evaluation, and common national unity was met with resistance by a few more conservative religious school groups (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:300,301). Their resistance aligned with Tjabane and Pillay's (2011:12-13) views that, despite several efforts to implement functional social justice in education, it has remained little more than an ideal. The view is also corroborated by Vandeyar and Swart (2016:141) in their call for the implementation of a 'pedagogy of compassion', enabling teachers to dismantle their identities to functional inclusivity.

2.2.3 ISASA's transformation and diversity mandate and the independent school environment as a microcosm of an integrated society

ISASA is one of the leading overarching governing institutions of independent schools in South Africa. All member schools of ISASA are expected to comply with their guidelines, titled the *Toolkit for Transformation and Diversity* (ISASA, 2013:15). Diversity is defined as the complete understanding of unique individual differences within an open environment that transcends mere transformation to celebrate the diversity of each learner. It is stressed that ISASA acknowledges that past ideologies of power and superiority drive the culture of acceptance at its schools, calling for an encompassing change, not merely accepting and assimilating (ISASA, 2013:14-6). The diversity foundation described by ISASA sets a broad requirement and perimeter for inclusivity and diversity. It further reinforces the need to see individuals rather than collectives, which can only occur in an open environment where active and critical learning occurs (ISASA & Department of Basic Education, 2010; South Africa, 2011:25,26). The historic exclusivity strived for by independent schools was to protect the white, English-speaking upper social classes (Randall, 1980:116-117). An initial reluctance to become fully

inclusive after 1994 was thus often attributed to a governing body faced with a very reluctant client base that feared such inclusion would mean the loss of traditional values and standards. Unfortunately, this view is still evident in some independent schools (ISASA, 2013:8; Eliseev, 2015; Kekana, 2016).

Independent education specifically, as provided in independent schools, provides a learning environment reputed to offer a higher standard of education than government schools. According to Jansen (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:7), these schools were also the first to open their doors to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) learners and were perceived as liberal schools. Despite opening their doors, their fee structure, entrance examination, and in many cases, their historical, religious and western values enabled independent schools to artificially control the number of BIPOC learners in their annual intake (Oberholzer, 2017). This practice ensured a white majority in the learner body and the implicit expectation that BIPOC learners assimilate into the school's historical culture. However, with the redress in the socio-economic spheres, an increased number of BIPOC parents moved into formerly exclusive residential areas and income brackets, resulting in schools where the percentage of BIPOC to white learners increased to equal numbers, or where white learners were now in the minority (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:7-8).

Despite the learner demographic becoming increasingly diverse, the demographic of academic staff was less mobile, primarily due to the teaching resources available and a higher income structure (Oberholzer, 2017). In many schools, traditions and religious affiliation did not accommodate the changing demographic to ensure a sense of belonging and accommodation of varied belief systems and values despite the comprehensive *Toolkit for Transformation and Diversity* (ISASA, 2013:4-6). Thus, the racially integrated microcosm was controlled by socio-economic classism. Moreover, students who attended these schools as bursary recipients experienced the added isolation of being removed from their socio-economic and socio-political peers in the broader South African context (ISASA & Department of Basic Education, 2010; Vandeyar, 2010:344).

The excellence associated with the independent schooling system is based on their learners being perceived to have guaranteed success and later prominence as a result of their access to the best teachers and academic resources (Oberholzer, 2017). Regardless of the varied racial demographics in these schools and access to the very best opportunities education offers, most of these liberal schools exclude all those families unable to measure up to the academic standard or steep fees (Franklin, 2016:356). However, there are independent schools that charge lower fees, and some receive a nominal government subsidy, yet these

independent schools still provide ample resources and opportunities, favourable teacher-learner ratios, and a diverse learner demographic (Franklin, 2016:355; Fourie, 2017; Oberholzer, 2017).

According to Oberholzer (2017), this rich and elitist sector of society guarantees a parent body that represents the leaders in the community, greater society, the business world, and political spheres. The learner body, who may claim to be financially and politically aware, often sees educational privilege as the norm. They are largely unaware of the needs of their peers who lack their socio-economic means and access to the same educational privileges and experiences (Soudien, 2010:352). A solid foundation for social justice principles is thus critical in this academic environment (ISASA, 2013:9,10). Therefore, in order to address this perception of independent schools and learners, there has to be an overt anti-racist stance that actively opposes any form of discrimination, systemic inequality and lack of accommodation in the integrated school culture. Learners of all races, abilities, orientations and belief systems will then flourish in an environment that supports, encourages, inspires and instils the need to become an advocate for effective social justice programmes as an “important and necessary part of the South African education landscape - eager to contribute to the broader society” (Oberholzer, 2017).

For BIPOC parents in the middle- to upper-middle class, this increased socio-economic upliftment grants them access to independent education to compensate for the lack of educational reform and resources in many traditionally Black schools (Vandeyar, 2008:292; Soudien, 2010:353). This cohort of BIPOC parents became a desirable market, motivating ISASA (who encouraged their inclusion) and promoting the level of transformation needed to which ISASA aspired (ISASA, 2013:11,12; Paterson, 2018). Still, allegations of impropriety, especially racial discrimination and skewed social justice practices (Eliseev, 2015; Kekana, 2016; Mabone, 2017), ingrained colonialism and systemic discrimination, were widely reported in many historic government and independent schools between 2015 and 2017 (Pather, 2017). In the introduction to *A SCHOOL WHERE I BELONG*, Jansen describes this not as a newfound phenomenon but one that became possible due to the increased BIPOC learner numbers; it provided the impetus to openly state their discontent and frustration at not being seen as equal and equally worthy (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:7).

It is in response to this heightened awareness of potential allegations from learners, parents and the media that the IEB hosted the workshop entitled *Dangerous Classrooms*. The workshop attempted to provide skills training with which the hyper-racialised (Steyn, McEwen & Tsekwa, 2018:1,2) atmosphere between learners, teachers, parents and management staff

could be mediated (Pather, 2017; Roddick, 2017; Steyn, McEwen & Tsekwa, 2018:3). The workshop was intended to provide motivation and guidelines to all teachers to accommodate teachable moments in which learners raised critical and challenging opinions. As Roddick points out, “not responding is an answer in itself” (Roddick, 2017; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:68, 69). However, teachers of content-based, technical and scientific subjects continue to side-track these conversations in favour of their content-based curricula and SAGs. Therefore, LO’s flexibility remains singular in its ability to encompass social justice and identity development as its core, but LO teachers may perceive the associated risks as too great (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301; Bukor, 2011:3,4; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:146; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:69). Despite possible concerns, the onus remains on the LO teacher to develop skills, agency, and a trusting relationship with their learners to allow joint teacher-learner development and mastery of critical skills to accommodate the facilitation of all vital aspects of the LO curriculum (South Africa, 2011:4,5; Ramphela, 2017b:59-62; IEB, 2020a:1-4,8,15).

2.3 The role of courageous conversations in bridging the gaps in effective transformation, acceptance of diversity and critical citizenship

LO courageous conversations are open and authentic discourses to create critical and truthful narratives regarding challenging topics and content. These conversations are likely to be transformative, focused on critically challenging beliefs and convenient truths in line with the need to move away from fitting in as criteria for acceptance (Singleton & Hays, 2008:21; Davies, 2013:6; Huynh, 2013:279; Singleton, 2014:15). Vandeyar (2010:345) indicates that the initial desegregation of schools after 1994 was characterised by assimilation rather than integration. Assimilation required BIPOC learners to shed their cultural identity, favouring the school’s dominant culture, ethos, beliefs, and practices. This indicated a clear need to revisit and question perceptions of the past, redefine and interrogate accepted truths in a space conducive to belonging and authenticity (Bukor, 2011:3-5; Huynh, 2013:277; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:147).

Controversial conversations are a well-known component in the History classroom, but prior to 2016, these conversations were not formally encouraged in the LO classroom (Mowatt, 2016). Wasserman (2018:116-119) describes controversial issues as unavoidably complex, open-ended, and therefore prone to interpretations likely to test individual beliefs and the values of both the learner and educator. Despite this specific reference to History as a learning area, the same characteristics apply to LO (Mowatt, 2016).

The development of the self can never be isolated or compartmentalised into topics. The 'becoming' of each individual is specific to how they identify themselves regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, beliefs, abilities and potential within the South African context (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:309; Vandeyar, 2008:294; Wolhuter, Potgieter & Van der Walt, 2012:2,3; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:76,77). The LO curriculum [Table 4] illustrates the potential of content sensitive to interrogation and critical discussion – any selected topic or a combination of sub-topics need to be facilitated with thorough knowledge of possible triggers resulting in cognitive and emotional dissonance (Applebaum, 2007:453,454; Pillay, 2012:172; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:72,73). As such, the LO curriculum content requires continuous courage and vulnerability from the LO teacher as a facilitator. Possible examples of this could be when a white teacher must accommodate a critical discourse on white complicity, with a majority BIPOC learner body who courageously shares their lifeworld despite possible discomfort and resistance; or a BIPOC teacher who has to accommodate a critical discussion on systemic discrimination while facing a white majority classroom (Applebaum, 2007:459; Vandeyar, 2008:295; Pillay, 2012:168; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:68-72).

2.3.1 Proponents of courageous conversations (1995 to 2018)

Glen E. Singleton, the founder of the Pacific Education Group (PEG), first used the term 'courageous conversations' at a Beyond Diversity seminar in 1995 (Singleton, 2014:xiii). PEG was established to ensure effective cross-racial dialogue and racial equity in American schools and educational organisations (Singleton, 2014:10; Fowler, 2016:14-17). The intent of PEG and the Beyond Diversity seminars is to encourage open and in-depth conversations about race, to bring about greater openness and understanding of race, accommodate the needs of race, and provide BIPOC teachers and learners equal opportunities to attain quality education and academic success (Singleton, 2014:35,36; Fowler, 2016:24,25). The American demographic demarcation stipulates Black [*changed from African American after 2020 #blacklivesmatter*], Indigenous American tribes, Asian American, Latino, and all people from mixed-race ethnicities (Singleton, 2014:36-38; Fowler, 2016:12). Ultimately, PEG's implementation of courageous conversations rests on four key agreements: staying engaged; experiencing discomfort; speaking your truth; and expecting and accepting non-closure (Singleton & Hays, 2008:21; Singleton, 2014:50; Fowler, 2016:18,19). Also, as outlined in *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (2015), the following six conditions for discourse focus on racial discussions: Getting personal right here and now; Keeping the spotlight on race; Engaging multiple racial perspectives; Keeping us all at the table; What do you mean by race?; and Let's talk about whiteness.

Singleton is a strong proponent of sharing one's story of becoming as a means of self-acceptance and forming a holistic identity (Singleton, 2014:62,79,96,112,123,163,185). This need to interrogate one's past is affirmed by Fowler (2016:3-8,124), who describes growing up without ever openly discussing race, and therefore being unprepared for what it would mean to be a Black American in the White American society. According to Singleton, identifying oneself as 'less' carries the added mindset that failure is a greater future reality (Singleton, 2014:233). Singleton's aim seems to be the development of change-makers to create change on a managerial and executive level in schools and school districts across the USA and Canada (Singleton, 2014:236; D'Aunno *et al.*, 2017:1,2). Fowler (2016:22,25), Singleton and Hayes (2008:19) similarly strongly indicate that courageous conversations – as narrative and discourse – must be facilitated with teachers [*management and staff*] before learners are integrated into this complex dialogue, since this would provide the staff with confidence to facilitate courageous conversations.



Figure 3: Singleton's Courageous Conversation Compass (Singleton, 2014:29)

The Courageous Conversations Compass [Figure 3] reflects participants' emotional, moral, cognitive, and relational investment during courageous conversations (Singleton, 2014:29). Singleton's model for racial redress and equality was adapted with excellent specificity for primary school implementation. It is a standard workshop toolkit developed by *The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice* at the University of Iowa School of Social Work (D'Aunno *et al.*, 2017:1-73). The toolkit focuses on setting boundaries for courageous conversations, identifying microaggression, being race-conscious, dealing with privilege,

bystander intervention, ensuring balanced perspectives, developing an awareness of implied bias, and implementing racial equity in facilitated discussions (D'Aunno *et al.*, 2017:11-18).

The toolkit incorporates several lesson exemplars for primary school teachers to provide scaffolded discussions based on Singleton's "Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations" on race. The Courageous Conversations Compass [Figure 3] is used as a guide to focus individual introspection on gauging the moral, intellectual, emotional and social response to matters of race and diversity in open discussions (Singleton, 2014:29,30; D'Aunno *et al.*, 2017:21-31). The same compass is used to analyse the opinions and intent of peers and teachers.

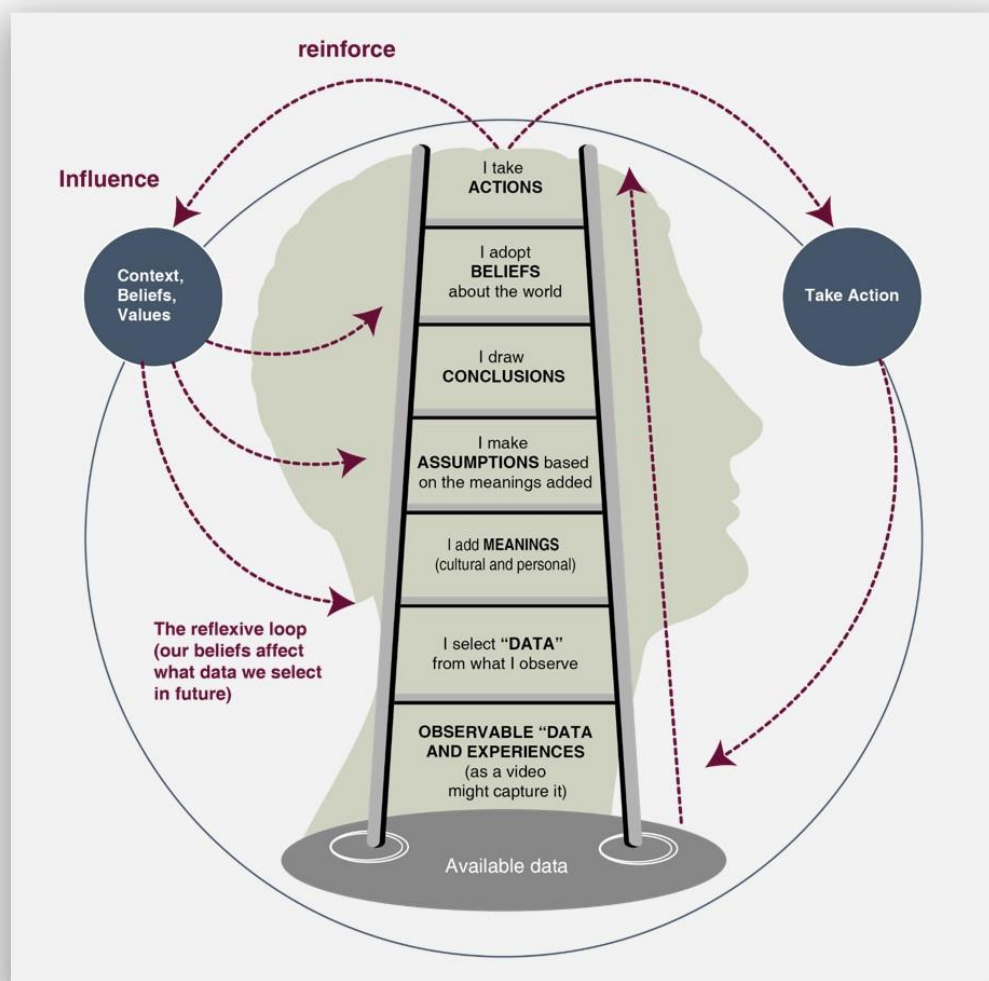


Figure 4: The Ladder of Inference (Adapted from: McArthur, 2014; Nicholls, 2018)

The Ladder of Inference [Figure 4] is a diagrammatical reflection of the communication model that accommodates evolving beliefs. It fosters an active awareness of our thought processes, openness and transparency about our thought processes, and sharing thought processes with

others. Tolerance in this specific context is focused on establishing a critical agency of truth-telling as the impetus for a shared upliftment practice and ethos among educational leaders and management, as supported by Singleton and Hays (2008:18,22) and Fowler (2016:25). Moreover, an adaptation of Singleton's approach is evident in the Ontario Ministry of Education's five critical elements in the Ontario Leadership Framework (Davies, 2013:1). The fostering and facilitation of courageous conversations were identified as a means of building capacity in leadership (Davies, 2013:3). *The Ontario Leadership Framework* uses four key components to bring about change, namely leadership at the school level; a framework for effectiveness; leadership at the school systems level; and a framework for effective district leadership (Davies, 2013:3,4). The Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (T-LCP) strives to create a regional staff development space characterised by taking risks, dealing with challenges creatively, and taking ownership to drive the redress required (Davies, 2013:7,8). Ultimately, a trust relationship (as context) encourages courageous conversations in classrooms, schools and districts to bridge the gap between sound pedagogical knowledge, analytical problem-solving and ownership of teacher culture (Davies, 2013:7). Trust in this context becomes relational as each member depends on, fulfils their role, and participates in a shared process that requires a willingness to be vulnerable as they develop confidence within their respective support structures (Davies, 2013:10,11). The process is reflected in *Figure 4*, illustrating continuous motion in evolving key strategies to develop guiding values: increasing information validity, increasing mutual respect, and increasing ownership and commitment (McArthur, 2014; Davies, 2013:9).

Davies (2013:2) describes courageous conversations as building individuals' ability and willingness to engage in challenging and sensitive social issues that impact our greater societies and schools. There is a powerful indication that courageous conversations should challenge individuals' core beliefs, include all levels of diversity, and identify biases and triggers that need to be addressed before we can move forward towards an authentic reality (Singleton & Hays, 2008:20; Davies, 2013:9,10; Fowler, 2016:125,126). Davies (2013:13) further describes the process of facilitating and participating in courageous conversations as a systematic eradication of all perceptions, beliefs and prejudice to develop an agency based on cognisance and empathy. A focused conviction requires a measured discourse that focuses on intent, openness and context to be effective (Davies, 2013:13).

Facing History and Ourselves is an online campus founded by Margot Stern Strom in 1976 (Goldsborough, 2001; Hough, 2015). The organisation's approach initially provided History teachers with intense week-long training sessions in Boston, USA. However, in 2001, the organisation became an Online University and now serves teachers in the USA, Canada,

Europe, China, the Middle East, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, reaching approximately a million learners a year (Goldsborough, 2001; Hough, 2015). The initial focus of *Facing History and Ourselves* was to address racism, prejudice and antisemitism, bigotry, hatred and genocide (Goldsborough, 2001; Becton, 2014; Hough, 2015). In order to achieve this goal, coaches focused on a detailed and in-depth interrogation of history combined with a study of historical decisions and choices and how this is still reflected in the behaviour of humans in current socio-political events (Hough, 2015; Fostering Civil Discourse, 2017:1-5). The teaching materials develop the thought patterns and skills required to operate on this cognitive level, and create an understanding of race-based hatred, an inability to tolerate religious differences and stereotypical beliefs and value systems. Thus, a greater understanding of how the current manifestation of these social ills can be addressed by empathetic democratic citizenship should be encouraged (Becton, 2014; Hough, 2015; Fostering Civil Discourse, 2017:2-4).

The focused subject areas of *Facing History and Ourselves*, deemed best suited to this critical thinking and analysis approach, is Citizenship [Civics], English Language and Literature, European History, History, Jewish Education, Music, Art and Culture, Philosophy, Psychology, Religion and Social Studies (Becton, 2014; Hough, 2015). Moreover, a key element in understanding behaviour throughout history is Darwinism and Eugenics, and their impact on decision-makers and policies. The role of Eugenics is also emphasised by Opperman Lewis' study of psychology history; she indicates that the effects of colonialisation and the suppression of indigenous people during apartheid manifest as trans-generational trauma among future generations, preventing effective healing (Becton, 2014; Opperman Lewis, 2016:13).

To overcome Singleton and Hays' fourth agreement of courageous conversations, that of not expecting closure, the use of journals in classrooms are suggested to keep the conversation transient. Shared journal entries or discussion forums on protected social media sites allow the conversation to continue beyond the classroom. The *Fostering Civil discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversation* model, as with LO, is continuously focused on examining individual identity formation and national identity formation – without knowing who they are, who makes up a society, and where they fit in, ownership of the difficulties faced cannot take place (Bukor, 2011:3-5; Becton, 2014; Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversation, 2017:4-10, Ramphela, 2017b:78,79). Also, without ownership in re-building an integrated and meaningful national identity, the mistakes of the past are likely to be repeated rather than restored (Opperman Lewis, 2016; Ramphela, 2017b:78; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018).

2.3.2 The South African approach to critical discourse as redress and nation-building

As with Singleton's *Courageous Conversations* (2014), *A SCHOOL WHERE I BELONG* (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018) includes personal testimonies from South African principals, teachers and learners that describe their journey and lived experience in Model C and independent schools (Singleton, 2014:212,230,247-249,273; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:7-11). The anecdotal descriptions and personal stories reflect participants' initial avoidance of open and progressive conversations that challenge the perceptions of whiteness and white standards. Moreover, the traditions set by whiteness remained the ideal, and it also highlights teachers negating their preparation to identify and overcome their own bias (Singleton, 2014:116,117; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:13-15). These personal stories and sharing of lived experiences further illustrate the damage done by assimilation, rather than active transformation and inclusion that is still favoured in many historical and independent schools (Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:148; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:87-89). These personal testimonies also highlight the critical need for encouraging not only active engagement in open and honest self-reflection and conversations amongst teachers and management, but also the need to develop a shared critical agency to go beyond transformation and diversity to offer learners a true sense of belonging (Singleton & Hays, 2008:22; ISASA, 2013:11-13; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:129-132). Merely promoting and rewarding 'fitting in', veiled as desired traditional school culture, undermines belonging. It reduces identify formation and acceptance of individual uniqueness to a null curriculum that perpetuates the affective disassociation between teachers and learners (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:34; Francis & Le Roux, 2007:309; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:43-44).

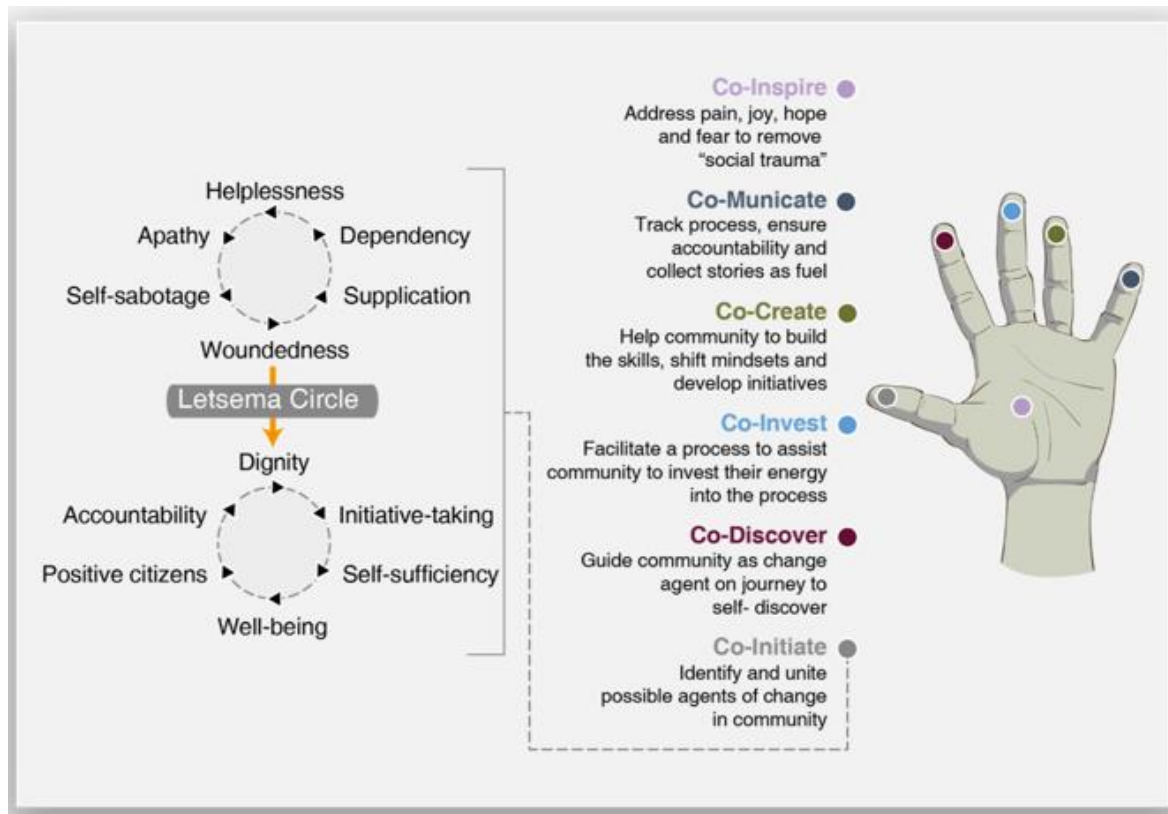


Figure 5: Diagrammatical Reflection of the Restorative Letsema Circle [Circles of Healing] and the Illima Open Hand Approach (Ramphela, 2012:189-194)

Figure 5 reflects the Illima Circle Method, consisting of the Letsema Circles of Healing and Illima Circle Open Hand approach. The Circles of Healing process comprises three phases: making your story known, setting medium-term goals, and setting long-term goals. Sharing personal stories has crucial restorative value in fostering healing and empathy, creating common ground, and identifying strengths and weaknesses. It enables a social microcosm such as a school to structure equal and full cooperative involvement in redress and problem-solving (Ramphela, 2012:189,190; 2017b:108). Despite the Illima method initially being implemented to address reform in rural areas, it is also used to address reform in education, as emphasised by Reimagine SA (RiSA) (Ramphela, 2012:189,190; 2017b:2).

RiSA, as an organisation, was co-founded by Dr Mamphela Ramphela and Dr George Lindeque in 1994, building their vision for a new South Africa on the human rights enshrined in the South African Constitution and the spirit of Ubuntu (*ReimagineSA*, 1994). The organisation strives to heal past divisions to create an integrated and united society based on democratic principles that uplift and empower all citizens in a just and connected society (Ramphela, 2012:189-194, 2017b:59-62,85,86; Clougherty, 2019). RiSA adapted its initial focus in implementing the Circles of Healing process from mediation between corporates and

rural communities to addressing the complete integration and transformation of former Model C and independent schools. RiSA's focus is thus advocacy through courageous conversations during emotionally healing workshops and sustainable action through social initiatives spurred by a system of active participants and activators (Ramphela, 2012:189-192, 2017b:85-87; Clougherty, 2019).

The Illima Circles of Healing method comprises two circles; the first circle encourages sharing stories that express emotions that trap participants' helplessness. The second circle depicts the healing that should occur through the restoration of respect and empathy, which should then foster dignity and accountability for one's actions and ownership of the difficulties in society (Ramphela, 2012:189-194). As the participants work through the two cycles of the healing circles, they become activators who (with the Letsema Open Hand approach) transfer their learned skills and empowerment to another community, continuously circling out and building other healing communities (Ramphela, 2012:194-196). Community, in this sense, refers to a school community – a single subject, a body of teachers, teachers and management – either as a reaction to a traumatic event or pro-actively to foster trust and open, honest communication (Ramphela, 2017b:61-62; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:113,114,116).

The previously discussed proponents of courageous conversations or critical discourse – Facing History and Ourselves (2001), Ramphela (2012, 2017b), Singleton (2014), Davies (2013), and Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen (2018) – each initiated or adapted a model focused on the much-needed redress between racial and cultural groups. However, although this focus on ethnicity and culture is firmly entrenched in the human rights and citizenship topics of LO, several other aspects of diversity are not explicitly included in any of these approaches (South Africa, 2011:10,11; IEB, 2020a:8-12). Critical Diversity Learning (CDL), developed by Melissa Steyn (2015), describes diversity in a broader sense but still as identity formation influenced and shaped by oppression. Steyn (2105:380) describes it as:

“[...] critical multiculturalism, anti-oppressive education or education for social justice, as oppression affects everybody. Understanding the interconnections that exist between race, gender and other forms of identification may prove worthwhile as such understanding shifts quite powerfully away from essentializing identities to an approach that views all forms of oppression as important.”

Steyn (2015:379-389) also identifies and describes the potential and aims of CDL in creating an educational environment where teachers and learners can analyse and challenge current perceptions of how power, privilege, and difference are accommodated within their school.

Table 5 reflects Steyn's ten-point framework for developing an analytical attitude towards diversity in South African classrooms (Steyn, 2015:379-389).

Table 5: Critical Diversity Literacy's Ten-point Framework (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:74,75)

CRITICAL DIVERSITY LITERATURE'S TEN-POINT FRAMEWORK	
1	Understanding the role of power in constructing differences that impact perceptions of difference.
2	Recognising inequality in the material value of social ranking – dominant presumed social contexts and associated identities, e.g., whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity, cisgender, being able-bodied and middle class, and how these dominant normative values disadvantage those who do not conform to these social contexts.
3	Skilled analysis and recognition of the intersection, interlocking and co-construction of these social orders and how they are reframed and resisted.
4	Redefining racism as a current social reality and not only an apartheid legacy.
5	Understanding that social identities and practices are learned and perpetuated by rigid social practices.
6	Developing a diverse vocabulary and grammar to conduct meaningful discussions on oppression and power.
7	The ability to successfully interpret coded hegemonic practices.
8	An analysis of how diversity, hierarchical order, and institutionalised inequality and discrimination perpetuate according to socio-economic standing.
9	Cognisance of the role of emotional attachment, including one's own, in all previous points of the framework.
10	Developing critical agency to engage with the transformation of oppressive systems to ensure meaningful social reforms at all levels of society.

However, these 10 steps [Figure 5] will need to be implemented through staff development and managerial investment before the framework is introduced to learners. The failure of meaningful policies regarding diversity in South African education is ascribed to an unwillingness and hesitance to challenge privilege and power (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:81). Therefore, CDL indicates the need to understand diversity in the broadest sense and promotes the formation of an agency to identify, understand, and address the marginalisation of everyone seen as different (Steyn, 2015:382-386; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:78-80). This approach includes systematically building the skills to identify, describe and address

institutionalised inequality and discrimination regardless of race, ability, religion, financial means, social standing, gender identity, sexual orientation or other topics that may need attention (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:70,71). It is also stressed that CDL implementation should not be reserved for the LO classroom but the whole school, all teachers and all learners (Steyn, 2015:385; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:69).

2.3.4 Implementation of courageous conversations in the LO space

The proponents of courageous conversations stress the importance of facilitating these conversations; ultimately, the value of critically analysing vital narratives cannot be denied. Still, despite its prior focus on racial equity and being formally accommodated in History as a subject area, very few other subjects include these conversations as part of their teaching strategies (Goldborough, 2001; Wassermann, 2018:121,123; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018). Therefore, as a compulsory subject, LO would allow all learners to participate in these conversations (Mowatt, 2016; Roddick, 2017; IEB, 2016). Unfortunately, the potential for allegations of misconduct to be levelled at a specific independent school or specific teacher is likely to harm the pedagogical volition critical to the facilitation of courageous conversations (Vandeyar, 2010:346; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011:648; Pillay, 2015:155,156; Ramphele, 2017b; Dawood, 2018). The premise, boundaries and rules that need to be established for formally structured courageous conversation may need to be re-negotiated in the LO classrooms (Fostering Civil Discourse, 2017:6).

Table 6: Example of Contracted Boundaries for Courageous Conversations (Adapted from *Fostering Civil Discourse*, 2018:6; Wassermann, 2018:124)

EXAMPLE OF A NEGOTIATED CONTRACT AS BOUNDARIES FOR COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS		
1	Listen with respect.	Try to understand what someone is saying before rushing to judgment – employ Singleton Courageous compass (2015) for reflection and empathy
2	Use “I” statements.	It will help others understand the impact of their words on you and are less confrontational than ‘you’ statements
3	Speak from confidence and reflection.	If you feel uncertain about making a comment or asking a question, write it in your journal. If needed, it can then be shared with the teacher first and then shared adapted and introduced.
4	Acknowledge peer contributions	Thank someone who makes a point or idea that enhances your learning.
5	Respect all voiced ideas and opinions	The opinions, values, and beliefs must be respected and tolerated – if someone says something that you experience as hurtful, acknowledge your reaction and explain why it hurt your feelings.
6	Respect your peer’s time to speak	Allow your peers to finish their argument, defend their stance. Do not cut in or disrupt.
7	Freedom of expression without fear of reprisal	Intimidation, rude or derogatory comments, abusive language stereotyping and put-downs will not be tolerated.
8	Time is limited.	No one is allowed to dominate a conversation; time must be shared equally.
9	Verify before you respond	Ask for clarification rather than rushing to an unfounded conclusion, be prepared to listen without interrupting.
10	Act, do not react.	Think before you speak - with your head and your heart.
11	Indicate personal discomfort.	Make others aware if the conversation takes a direction with which you feel uncomfortable.
12	Use your journal	Write thoughts in your journal if you do not have time to voice them during class. Journal responses are private and only shared by choice. (<i>Facing History and Ourselves</i> , 2017; Wassemann, 2018).

These contracted boundaries may also make formally structured discussion controlled by the teacher, in a predictable learning environment, the preferred teaching structure as dissonance should be minimised (Mowatt, 2016; Roddick, 2017; *Fostering Civil Discourse*, 2017:6). Removing and controlling classroom narratives may seem safer to a school’s reputation and a teachers’ vulnerability, but are more likely to create an effective null curriculum (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:37; Vandeyar, 2008:298; Bongwe, 2010, Roddick, 2017). Despite the greater need to critically assess the level of transformation within each specific school and general teachers’ attitude, critical areas of concern, such as white fragility, micro-aggressions, and privilege often remain untouched (Francis and Le Roux, 2007:309; Vandeyar, 2010:345).

Care should thus be taken to gradually introduce the skills required for courageous conversations, first among teachers and only then in the classroom in the same gradual fashion as set out in the Letsema Circles of Healing (Singleton & Hays, 2008:18; Ramphela, 2012:189-191). Alternatively, the staggered step-by-step evolving development reflected in the Ladder of Inference may assist LO teachers in developing greater confidence and

improved transparent communication in the classroom (McArthur, 2014; Nicholls, 2018; Davies, 2013:9). By first enabling the teacher to undertake a process of self-reflection and interrogation of existing bias and beliefs – consciously seeking to integrate with counter-stereotypes and develop an agency to create meaningful change – should ease the process. The Courageous Conversations Compass model [Figure 3] and the Ladder of Inference model [Figure 4] both suggest a tool that depends on intense personal inquiry to ensure a fact-based and not value-based reaction to test one's own beliefs and prejudices, as well as those held by others to circumvent invalid or inaccurate assumptions (Davies, 2013:9; Singleton, 2014:29; MacArthur, 2014; Nicholls, 2018). Implementing both the compass and the ladder of inference relies on constant analysis and checking of one's own emotive attitude, which is also mentioned in Steyn's ten-point framework for CDL. It also requires the identification of personal reactions that must be overcome to ensure meaningful and effective redress (Davies, 2013:3,4; Singleton, 2014:233; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:70,71).

Singleton's four key agreements – staying engaged, experiencing discomfort, speaking your truth, and expecting and accepting non-closure – are also referred to by Becton (2014) and Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen (2018:182-201). *Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations* (2017:7) strongly suggests an approach of incorporating journals into courageous conversations to overcome non-closure, as corroborated in *A SCHOOL WHERE I BELONG* (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:158). Journals allow learners who would typically be too shy or fear ridicule to share their views and opinions. Also, if discussions are conducted online in a shared and private space, the conversation can continue outside the classroom (Becton, 2014; Hough, 2015). This is especially true in LO as the classes are large, timetabling may be limiting, and it is unlikely that a courageous conversation could be conducted to its complete closure. Therefore, being prepared for such eventualities will reduce teacher and learner disappointment or discontent (Singleton & Hays, 2008:19).

2.3.5 Creating an environment conducive to courageous conversations

As a conduit for courageous conversations and CDL, LO requires a pedagogical bond and trust relationship between teacher and learners (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:69,70). This pedagogical bond and trust relationship are integral to facilitating discussions on identity, power and privilege that inform each teacher and learner's lifeworld and worldviews (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301; Pillay, 2012:171; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:150). Therefore, the LO teacher must be self-aware and skilled in reading the learner audience's reactions to identify potential triggers that may cause undue dissonance that could be interpreted as dismissive or disruptive (Karp, 2012:151; Bazzi, 2018:203; Xia *et al.*, 2019:355). The facilitation of CDL as a vibrant debate and group discussions relies on consistent feedback and subtlety to optimise the

benefit of the learning and teaching experience (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:303; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:141; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:71). Ongoing management and involvement of learners and learner groups also allow for the effective utilisation of teachable moments initiated by learners during LO lessons.

2.4 The impact of an evolving teacher identity in the facilitation of courageous conversations

LO is uniquely positioned and expected to actively incorporate Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL) into courageous conversations (Singleton, 2014:254; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:69; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018). The ten-point framework makes it possible to incorporate CDL as scaffolding in the teaching and learning required for most socio-political sub-topics included within the LO CAPS (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:74,75; IEB, 2020a:8-12). However, this focus should not be limited to LO or the LO classroom; teachers across all subjects that relate to human behaviour and how societies engage with one another should be encouraged to foster CDL in their classrooms (Goldborough, 2001:1,2; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:72,73). This approach further emphasises the need for LO and LO teachers to act as agents of change (Pillay, 2012:173). Thus, while the responsibility to implement these changes is tasked to LO due to its unique position to enable learners to change the narratives about race, transformation and diversity in independent schools, it must not be limited to LO (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:69).

Ultimately, the most persistent difficulty experienced in LO is the lack of dedicated LO teachers with the necessary skills, attributes and attitude required to facilitate courageous conversations (Prinsloo, 2007:155; Soudien, 2010:356; Pillay, 2012:168,170). According to Pillay (2012:168,172), LO teachers' skills and characteristics are crucial in making a difference, not only in the subject but within the whole school. These attributes include creating enough distance to allow the student to maintain emotional dissonance, being approachable enough to facilitate the creation of a trust relationship, creating openness to enable discussions on a range of topics without risk of judgement, and an understanding of the cultures, beliefs and boundaries of the students they teach.

These skills and abilities are not explicitly taught, and due to a lack of skilled teachers, schools often allocate any teacher deemed suitable to fulfil the role of LO teacher (Prinsloo, 2007:165; Strydom, 2011:4-5; Woest, 2018:2). However, it stands to reason that teachers with the listed skillset and abilities should be appointed in the role of LO teachers (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:310; Pillay, 2012:170; Brown, 2013:64,65). There is also a need to strive for continuous skills development to make sense of and accommodate the evolving role of LO. In addition to

the need for a new set of skills, actively and critically grappling with courageous conversations is added to the role of the LO teacher. It necessitates acquiring a different range of skills (Mowatt, 2016; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:78,79; Roddick, 2017:22).

Moreover, there is a difference between the dominant racial demographic of the learners and the teachers, which adds a dynamic that the teacher may not fully consider (Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:142,143). Shedrow (2017:275) describes this as a “daunting internal struggle that many faces when presented with situations that conflict with the ingrained practices of their own culture”. However, teachers who are self-aware and have cultivated the emotional intelligence needed in dealing with the human landscape should be able to navigate the LO space. Strydom (2011:5-6) expressed the need for schools and parents to actively support and promote the value of LO and specifically assist LO teachers in developing their skills. However, a challenge is also posed in the LO teacher developing the will and motivation to become a change maker; not just in the LO classroom, but to become the keystone for meaningful change within the whole school (Karp, 2012:152; Pillay, 2012:172; Bazzy, 2018:198).

The LO teacher is constantly faced with the need to acquire critical thinking and teaching skills, support an inclusive student demographic, source current and contextual content, and design tasks and formal assessments that meet the NSC guidelines and incorporate the CAPS topics as described in the IEB SAGs (Brown, 2013:65; Woest, 2018:2; IEB, 2020a:8-12). This can cause frustration and a pervasive sense of being inadequate for the task (Strydom, 2011; Brown, 2013:66,67; Shedrow, 2017:271,272; Woest, 2018:4-6). A consistent sense of inadequacy can result in the LO teacher experiencing difficulty remaining motivated when there is a lack of clarity and specific guidelines to steer their teaching practice (Tice *et al.*, 2007:379; Karp, 2012:153; Bazzy, 2018:199). This professional and emotional dissonance is compounded by a constant demand from school management to give easy distinctions in LO, the need for increased academic rigour and complexity by the DoBE and the IEB (Ferguson & Jain, 2015; Mnchunu, 2017; Mowatt, 2017). Without an ability to self-regulate effectively, the “*ambiguous, uncertain, inconsistent, or conflicting standards make self-regulation difficult*” (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:3). Ultimately, four elements are required to regulate the self in managing the demands faced by the LO teacher: clear standards, self-monitoring, willpower, and motivation. Without these elements, a state of ego depletion is experienced, resulting in the loss of the ability and willingness to perform optimally (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:2-3). LO teachers must therefore have a heightened self-awareness to enable them to accommodate their own needs and the needs of their learners. This heightened sense of the professional self includes an understanding of racial and cultural demographics, complex identity needs, and the development of a critical attitude without succumbing to ego depletion that limits the

LO teacher's effectiveness in the classroom (Job, Dweck & Walton, 2010:1686,1687; Karp, 2014:154-157; Bazzi, 2018:199,200; Baumeister, 2018:1).

Conversations should occur to discuss and investigate the teacher's experience of their professional and personal identity (Bukor, 2011:3). It must also be determined how they attach meaning to their individual and joint lived experiences in a diverse teaching environment. Their lived experiences are often founded in the moral ethos of their school and the school management's willingness to accommodate LO as a subject. This school ethos is also largely dependent on the transformation model pursued by the school. In schools where sameness favours the pressure to conform to an existing, traditional value system, a very explicit set of rules are created that must be followed to meet set criteria. Unfortunately, the hidden curriculum of implied socially and culturally favoured behaviours is often a more significant barrier in attaining lasting acceptance and accommodation among students (Karanxha, Agosto & Bellara, 2014:35; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018:482,483).

In LO, the need to make the implicit explicit by facilitating open discussions may result in the teacher's professional dissonance, since it requires professional courage to question existing policies and boundaries. The need to steer clear of contentious issues that may challenge existing policies, rules or topics that infringe what is deemed desirable by a school's ethos can result in a null curriculum. The teacher will then select content and design assessments that exclude any contentious issues requiring courageous conversations and, therefore, create a safe curriculum that denies learners the opportunity to grapple with and address what they may experience as exclusionary (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:37-41; Alsubaie, 2015:125,127).

Francis and Le Roux point out that the focus may start with pedagogical accommodation without considering the full impact of the professional identities involved (2007:299). The teacher's identity, constructed on lived experiences in their professional and social lifeworld – religious, cultural, ethnic, racial and political – determines how they approach and interact with their learners (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:309). Thus, the teacher's ability to facilitate a courageous conversation with empathy and compassion largely depends on their previous experiences, the beliefs they hold, and their willingness to grow their professional identity and agency (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:309; Bukor, 2011:2-7; Amin & Vithal, 2015:1).

Moreover, regardless of the concerns raised by a small number of marginal schools, the move in LO to progressively facilitate courageous conversations increased exponentially. Opperman Lewis refers to the imprint and scars caused by the persistent humiliation and suppression of

a people over an extended period, which is then shared with the young generations who experience the pain vicariously as trans-generational trauma (2016:13). This stresses the need to be sensitive to the discomfort and difficulty experienced by learners and teachers alike. Added to this is the new assertiveness regarding ethnic and cultural identity, cultural appropriation claims, and the need to bring Africa and the BIPOC lifeworld into the curriculum (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:310; Soudien, 2010:361; Ramphele, 2017:1,3,4). These factors combine to create a new ambiguity and uncertainty of teachers' ability to gauge which narratives they can actively participate in or those they may only facilitate. This uncertainty emphasises the need to be aware of their personal opinions that may result in ego depletion and a loss of the ability to self-regulate in response to their lived experiences of courageous conversations (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Tice *et al.*, 2007:379).

Cognitive dissonance, caused by a situation that challenges the teacher's commonly held views about their subject, may be informed by the emotional dissonance they experience due to the demands made by the school management, IEB and personal beliefs. Teachers thus experience dissonance in pre-empting their learners' reactions to a conversation. It increases the need for the teacher to be constantly self-aware of both their professional lifeworld and their accumulated lived experiences when a challenging experience is encountered in the classroom. Their ability to recognise such challenges should promote the construction of a flexible framework to compensate for ego depletion and promote self-regulation (Janz & Timmers, 2002; Gorski, 2009; Baumeister, 2018:10). Identity is not passive and can therefore change as circumstances change. The necessary support and re-construction of their identity ultimately require willpower and monitoring (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Tice *et al.*, 2007:380; Bukor, 2011:3,4).

2.4.1 The importance of teacher self-awareness in the facilitation of courageous conversations

As emphasised by Singleton (2014:29,30), Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen (2018:13-15), D'Aunno *et al.* (2017:1-4), the teacher's introspection and interrogation of the moral, intellectual, emotional and social response to matters of race and diversity in open discussion is critical to their self-awareness. The teacher must realise the facilitation process does not entail the teacher controlling the situation. It should rather be an opportunity for the teacher to observe, steer and ensure the integrity of the process (Singleton & Hays, 2008:19). Learners are more adept at driving conversations on controversial topics and are more likely to be open and truthful about matters that affect them directly, regardless of how provocative or taboo it may seem. This is especially true in the South African context, where the generation gap or race of the teacher is different from that of the learners (Huynh, 2013:278; Vandeyar & Swart,

2016:143). It could be valuable to allow learners to steer the conversation as they are generally keenly aware of the boundaries and lack of meaningful change they constantly face; in which case, teacher assumptions would not positively impact the conversation (Singleton & Hays, 2008:18,22; Nicholls, 2018). It may also occur that the difference in opinion between learners and teachers results in cognitive dissonance on the teacher's side. Therefore, it may be more valuable for teachers to ensure procedural neutrality and play devil's advocate to include multiple perspectives and add depth to the conversation (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:2,3; D'Aunno *et al.*, 2017:21-24; Wassermann, 2018:124-126). Where possible, the conversation can be brought to a close before the end of the lesson. The teacher may summarise the different perspectives into a representative balanced approach and add impetus to the discussion. Thus, the teacher should not make their views on the topic known until the end of a specific conversation – this will allow the teacher to clarify their opinion as summative closure. Learners should also be encouraged to make notes in their journal of topics to revisit in the following lesson or share with the teacher in confidence (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:189-191; Wasserman, 2018:127,128).

2.4.2 A negative historical legacy as a catalyst to growth in teachers' identity and worldview

The deep-seated and stereotypical beliefs held by all South Africans affect the trust relationship between teachers and learners. Thus, teachers' agency for their respective teaching praxis and idea of historical truths must be addressed (Amin & Vithal, 2015:3,4). This lack of effective change is also described by Fowler (2016:2,3) as one of the reasons for the lack of definitive racial integration and equality in American society.

Most socio-political sub-topics included in the CAPS topics that may be deemed controversial deal with a range of content (IEB, 2020a:9-12). However, the sensitivity and possible contention attached to these topics depend on each specific teacher, class of learners, teacher and the school's culture (Vandeyar, 2008:301; Cabrera, Franklin & Watson, 2017). Creating common ground and a platform for open communication becomes difficult to manage if the beliefs, cultural realities, demographic and lived experiences of the learners and their teachers differ (Strydom, 2011). Shedrow (2017:275) describes this as a:

“daunting internal struggle that many faces when presented with situations that conflict with the ingrained practices of their own culture.”

2.5 Conclusion

The challenges faced by LO teachers and the lack of support from management may result in a constant state of professional dissonance and a clear sense that they are not adequately equipped to add meaning to the lives of their learners (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Gorski, 2009; Strydom, 2011). However, the increasing need to implement structured conversations on controversial topics, first implemented in 2016, has changed the nature of the subject and demands on the LO teacher far beyond what was initially indicated for the subject (Mowatt, 2016; Roddick, 2017; IEB, 2018:1-4). The successes achieved by the IEB in ensuring consistent standardisation of marks and changes in the standard and content of the annual CAT A and CAT B require the teachers to heed the call for increased academic rigour in the subject (Ferguson & Jain, 2015; Mnchunu, 2017; Mowatt, 2017).

The critical importance of courageous conversation in the classroom is undeniable, and a direction was undertaken worldwide to find solutions to the persistent racial conflicts and bigotry evident in so many parts of the world (Singleton & Hays, 2008:18; D'Aunno *et al.*, 2017:39-42; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:9,10). It is clear that meaningful transformation and redress are not possible without fostering mutual respect, empathy and interrogation of past beliefs, values, and social constructs; made possible by courageous conversations in the classroom (Ramphela, 2012, 2017b; Steyn, 2015:382; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018). Regardless of the subject used as the cornerstone to restoring dignity, social justice and social cohesion, teachers, schools, and management teams should rethink how they accommodate learners and their unique diversity realities (Ramphela, 2012; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:81; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018). LO can uniquely implement critical conversations to challenge power and privilege. Moreover, LO is compulsory and therefore has access to all learners, providing the only exposure to learners who did not select a social science subject touching on topics that require rigorous analysis and interrogation.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The introduction of structured conversations as a teaching method in LO shifted the focus from intuitive discourse to a formal, scripted structure. As a scripted experience, the natural evolution from shared narratives employed to enhance learning was removed. Instead, the implied assessment associated with formal teaching structures hinted at the potential of a form of evaluation of the discussion (Ferguson & Jain, 2015; Mowatt, 2017:1,4). However, the LO teacher's professional skills and experience indicated the teacher's confidence and motivation to facilitate and manage difficult conversations and counter the perception of an imminent form of assessment (Brown, 2013:4; Guerra *et al.*, 2013:124; IEB, 2019). Therefore, the purpose of my research was to establish and describe LO teachers' lived experiences of courageous conversations. This determination assisted me in exploring the gaps in current teacher skills development, environmental support, and the expectation to facilitate a conversation that requires singular professional courage (Singleton & Hays, 2008:19; Singleton, 2014:25).

3.2 Research design

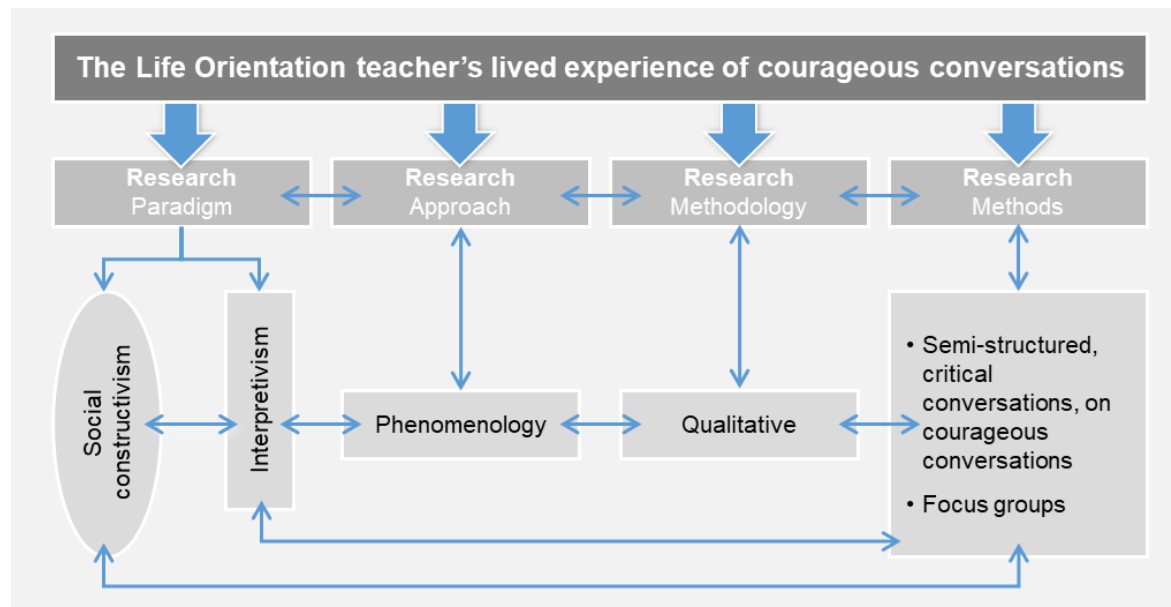


Figure 6: Research Design

Figure 6 provides a diagrammatic clarification of my chosen research design and indicates how each specific design aspect is interlinked to answer my secondary research question. My study's purpose was to investigate how teachers attach meaning to their individual lived experiences during the facilitation of courageous conversations. This meaning-making affects their identity, beliefs, values and prejudices when interacting with their learners in this specific

format of courageous conversations (Kim *et al.* 2006:5-7; Singleton & Hays, 2008:18,19,22; Creswell, 2014:5-21). Specific focus was placed on the meaning teachers attach to LO SAG topics, and how they framed narratives' dissonance when assumptions, knowledge, beliefs and values became barriers to teaching and learning (Janz & Timmers, 2002:79; Gorski, 2009:54).

3.2.1 Research paradigm

Table 1: Research Paradigm [Chapter 1]

Research Paradigm	Social Constructivism	Social constructivist theoretical lens: Preconstructed identity system > meaning attached > informed by social interaction > lived experiences > stereotypes > influences & contexts. (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002; Ally, 2006; Opperman Lewis, 2016; Botha, 2017)
		Ontological assumptions: Pre-constructed teacher identities > effective interaction & accommodation > continuous interrogation > new experiences > evolving identity. (Howard, 2006; Kim <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Lemmer & Meier, 2011; Maree, 2012; Gelderbloem, 2014; Opperman Lewis, 2016; Dawood, 2018)
	Interpretivist	Theoretical paradigm: Each participant > subjective perspective > assumptions researcher role > participatory & empathetic role > determine subjective contexts > collective perspectives > informs the meaning attached > teacher's worldview. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Tuli, 2011; Pillay, 2012; Taylor & Medina, 2012; Creswell, 2017)
		Epistemological assumptions: LO teachers' ability to self-regulate self-awareness > dissonance > ego depletion > teacher's motivation > professional identity > teacher's lifeworld. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Tice <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Maree, 2012; Pillay, 2012; Taylor & Medina, 2013; Creswell, 2014)

Table 1 [Chapter 1] confirms the use of a social constructivist theoretical lens, the ontological assumption that pre-constructed identities should not be static, and motivates my choice of theoretical paradigm. It also reaffirms my epistemological assumption that self-regulation is central to LO teachers' growth (Creswell, 2014:64). The study had to determine how each participating teacher attached meaning to their lived experience of the teacher-learner interaction during a courageous conversation. Social constructivism was thus utilised as a theoretical lens to test the validity of my ontological assumption that teachers' pre-constructed identity is indicative of their ability to maintain self-control, overcome dissonance, and continuously grow their belief system and worldview (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:28).

Therefore, social constructivism was best suited to study the world of the teacher and different social systems – personal, professional, and cognitive – within which teachers find themselves (Kim *et al.*, 2006:5; Botha, 2017:1). The participating teachers' world allowed for an interrogation of the historical, cultural and subjective experiences they used to define their professional identity, and the critical agency they employed to approach the facilitation of courageous conversations in a diverse educational environment (Howard, 2006:78; Francis & Le Roux, 2007:299; Dawood, 2018:2). Understanding these existing social constructs further necessitated an interrogation of the teachers' perceptions of the self, social dynamics, and how they interlink with the SAG's boundaries and content required to recreate this experience in the LO space (IEB, 2020a:1,15,16). Ultimately, the attainment of these skills and abilities requires teachers' courage to make a conscious effort in seeking the whole truth and not merely the parts of it that may feel safe or justifiable within the implicit boundaries of a school's culture and ethos (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:34,35; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018:481).

Both teachers and learners have constructed their individual identity and belief system independently based on a lifetime of beliefs and stereotypes informed by historical influences and contexts (Opperman Lewis, 2016:28; Ally, 2006:32; Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:80). Social constructivism clarified the meaning the participating teachers attached to their lived experiences and how those critical experiences shaped the current constructs with which they approach both their general teaching praxis and, more specifically, the facilitation of controversial conversations (Kim *et al.*, 2006:5-7; Tuli, 2011:99). These evolved constructs shape the LO teacher's premise and steer their selection of content for courageous conversations. It also creates interdependent learning experiences within their specific teaching environment (Howard, 2006:81,82; Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301). The evolving meaning system is specific to each teacher and each specific class or group of learners. Therefore, each participant in the study introduced a new perspective on the phenomenon of teachers' lived experiences of courageous conversations (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:24).

My ontological assumptions required a nominalist perspective to my study (Bukor, 2011:63). It formed a sound base for my premise that socially and historically constructed teacher identities impact the meaning they attach to their lived experience (negative or positive) of courageous conversations facilitated in the LO environment. The meaning attributed to each specific lived experience is likely to impact the effective interaction and successful accommodation of diverse opinions in independent FET phase LO classrooms (Howard, 2006:78; Soudien, 2010:354; Lemmer & Meier, 2011:114). Since all learning and meaning is socially constructed and interpreted, each different lived experience results in an evolving

professional identity and increases teachers' understanding of their professional reality (Kim *et al.*, 2006:5).

Interpretivist theory was employed as this study's research paradigm (Skea, 2016:1136,1137). It allowed me to test the validity of my epistemological assumption that a continuously evolving worldview and increased sharing of ideas between teachers and learners would elevate the quality of the discourse and, as such, the teacher's ability to self-regulate the depletion caused by dissonance (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:80-2). The participatory researcher role encapsulated in interpretivist theory allowed for a mutual understanding of the difficulties LO teachers face and amplified the sharing thereof to assure authentic openness between researcher and participant (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:25).

The empathetic researcher role facilitated an open discourse where experiences were truthfully shared without judgement or critique. Interpretivist theory, and the researcher roles it embodies, gave me entry into the participants' potentially controversial, professional lifeworld (Skea, 2016:1136,1137). Furthermore, it assisted me in creating a trusting and safe space that allowed the participants to openly share their lived experiences within their specific context and reality. Interpretivist theory further promoted a shared interrogation of the participants' understanding of the concept 'courageous conversations' and the guidelines provided to them to practice their pedagogy (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007:23-5; Thahn & Thahn, 2015:24-25). In turn, this theoretical perspective challenged me, as a researcher, to reflect on my views, biases, and the hidden assumptions with which I approached the research process. This perspective provided vital clarity during the analysis of the context and reality of each participant (Taylor & Medina, 2013:4; Creswell, 2014:54).

My epistemological assumption was that the specific process that assisted each teacher in attaching meaning to their collective lived experiences in facilitating courageous conversations would determine how they construct their understanding of the process and their willingness to persist with these conversations (Singleton & Hays, 2008:19; Taylor & Medina, 2013:1). The LO teacher's ability to self-regulate in response to any dissonance or depletion experienced during a critical discussion also determines their likelihood of remaining motivated to integrate courageous conversations and develop learners' critical thinking and freedom of speech (Ashton, 2017:8; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000:250). This continued self-motivation and self-regulation should hone the teacher's ability to embrace new influences and make a challenging outlook a professional norm despite this agency meeting resistance (Botha, 2017:2; Strydom, 2011:27; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:33; Tice *et al.* 2007:379-

80). Each individual's subjective experience of their context added a new perspective to my understanding of the phenomenon of their collective lived experiences (Pillay, 2012:167,168).

3.2.2 Phenomenological research approach

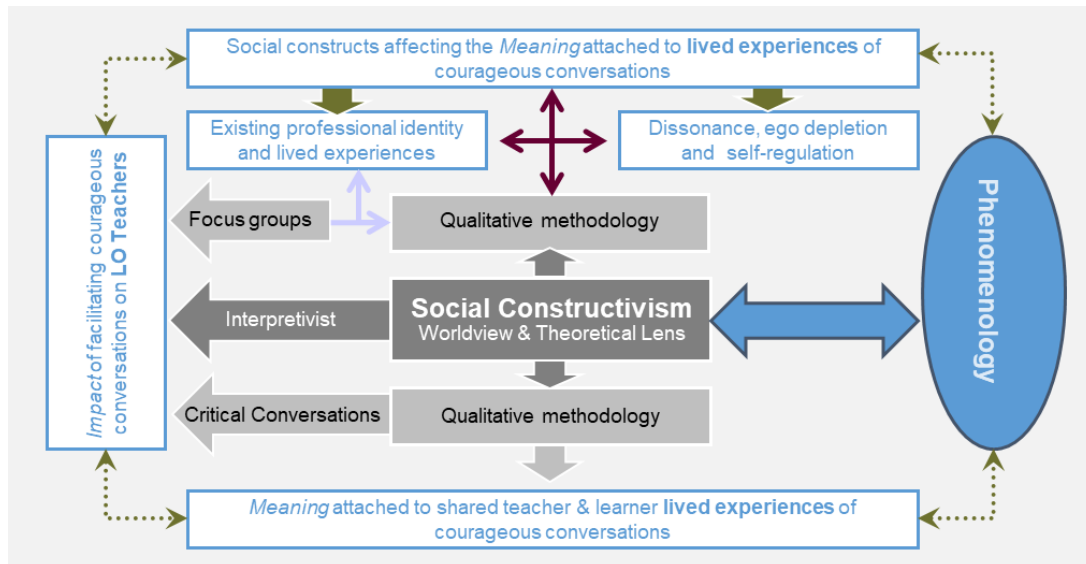


Figure 2: Integrated Conceptual Theoretical Framework within the Phenomenological Research Approach [Chapter 1]

Figure 2 illustrates how the phenomenon of lived experiences encompasses the theoretical framework to identify the totality of the impact of these critical conversations on the LO teacher specifically. My research design aimed to determine current approaches to facilitate courageous conversations and the meaning attached to these conversations by the participating LO teachers (Kawulich, 2012:5; Cabrera, Franklin & Watson, 2017:77-83). In order to answer both the primary and secondary research questions, an inductive approach was followed to ensure each individual's experience could be analysed on its own before it was analysed as part of a collection of experiences. This approach allowed explicit themes and theories to emerge from the LO teachers' collective experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:127; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25,26).

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research focused overtly on the meaning attached to participants' lived experiences, clarifying the impact of these experiences and promoting the understanding of their lived truth (Tuli, 2011:100). Therefore, phenomenology was best suited to understand and describe the complexities of the participants' lived experiences. Furthermore, phenomenology promoted my understanding that participants' lived experiences reflected the impact each successive experience had on their continued

motivation, ability to make sound decisions, and engage in effective self-reflection to attain self-regulation and minimise depletion (Tice *et al.*, 2007:379-80; Baumeister, 2018:1).

The phenomenological approach also uncovered participants' reactive choices to relegate specific topics and content into recreated hidden or null curricula in response to critical incidents. These reactive choices may have been influenced by teachers' lack of self-awareness, their school's culture, and insistence from school management based on fear of the current hypersensitivity regarding race, gender and sexuality.

Table 2: The Phenomenological Critical Conversation Structure [Chapter 1]

Phenomenological critical conversation structure				
Phenomenological attitude	Researcher approach	Conversation Phases	Method	Researcher purpose
Critical positioning, acceptance of natural attitude and critical stance	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants	Contextualisation	Descriptive Context Questions	- Teacher Identity - School Culture - Teaching Context - Understanding of Guidelines
	Reflexive Critical Dialogue with Self	Apprehending the Phenomenon	Descriptive and Structural Questions	- Main question on lived experiences - Free and open narrative - Identification of anecdotal detail that need clarification
	Active Listening	Clarifying the Phenomenon	Imaginative Variations: Varying Structure Questions	- Allow reflections - Confirms anecdotal details - Examines perspectives further

Table 2 [Chapter 1] reflects the phenomenological critical interview style that was sourced to enhance an interview style that consisted primarily of open-ended questions. Since there was no formal critical interview model, one had to be created to pose probing questions and elicit in-depth, authentic and potentially uncomfortable experiences from each participant (Bevan, 2014:139). The desired interview format had to enclose clarifying and structural questions to access the individual lived experiences that had specific meaning to each participant as an LO teacher (Bevan, 2014:137). This study's critical formal interview structure was adapted from a phenomenological interview design by Bevan (2014:139).

The phenomenological critical interview consisted of three phases: Phase 1: Contextualisation, Phase 2: Apprehending the phenomenon, and Phase 3: Clarifying the phenomenon. Bevan (2014:139) attached equal importance to each phase; however, my

study centred primarily on Phase 2. Each participant's anecdotal experiences reflected their emotions while teaching certain topics or facilitating specific conversations that were deemed contentious or socio-politically sensitive. The actively and methodically collected and collated perspectives I gained from each participant's lived experiences gave me a varied collection of meanings that were attached to each experience and method developed by each participant. When collated, participants' lived experiences provided "seamless perspectives" to describe these different realities authentically (Bevan, 2014:137-143).

Participants' individual lived experiences were described in as much detail as they were comfortable sharing. Additional questions served as prompts to clarify or expand on specific experiences or critical incidents. Critical incidents were defined as a troubling reaction during a conversation or backlash from parents or management in response to a specific discussion that resulted in ethical and moral distress (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011:648). Where needed, participants were given time to collect their emotions before the interview was resumed. General questions were posed to reassure the participant before the interview was steered back to the response that triggered their discomfort. It added to the authenticity of each set of results when I focused on what was revealed in participants' shared knowledge and experiences, and approached each interview after setting aside my personal pre-knowledge and responses from previous interviews (Bevan, 2014:138). One participant became emotional when she shared her lived experience of a particularly distressing critical incident. Her distress necessitated a pause. As an empathetic researcher, I shared some personal reflections gained from my own critical incident during 2016, allowing her to self-regulate. We then found a new starting point from which to resume the interview. I conducted a telephonic follow-up with this participant, and no further discomfort was indicated.

3.2.3 Qualitative research methodology

The qualitative methodology helped me gain insight to assist the participants in exploring and unpacking their various lived experiences. These insights reflected participants' personal and professional identity. They also indicated each participant's ability to keep growing and developing new knowledge and understanding in a diverse LO environment within an independent school context (Dryden-Peterson & Siebörger, 2006:394; Gelderbloem, 2014:3). The value of the qualitative methodology was also twofold: it allowed participants to attach meaning to their reality and construct new knowledge of their teaching praxis, and allowed me as an empathetic observer to do the same. This helped me uncover the complex and ever-changing socially constructed reality within which the participants' specific lived experiences occurred (Kim *et al.*, 2006:2-4,7; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:1).

The research process consisted of two data collection methods. Initially, a phenomenological critical individual interview was conducted, consisting of a critical discussion on courageous conversations, followed by a focus group discussion (Bevan, 2014:139; Creswell, 2014:103,121). The critical discussion increased the depth of interaction between participants, as narrators of their specific context and lived experiences of courageous conversations, and me, as the interpreter of each participant's context and experience. This interaction created a symbiotic relationship in which truthfully shared anecdotes and emotions could accommodate all aspects of the phenomenon (Walther, Pawley & Sochacka, 2015:1-3). Furthermore, the symbiotic relationship between the participants and me increased the amount of research data I collected to comprehensively describe the meaning constructed during these conversations.

3.3 Data generation and collection

Table 7: Final Research Methods' Structure

Participants	Activities	Venue	Duration
9 LO teachers (FET Phase)	Individual semi-structured critical interviews, audio recorded, augmented with participant field notes according to the interview protocol.	Due to the safety protocols required for Covid 19, all interviews were recorded electronically using Microsoft Teams, Zoom or Skype.	35 to 45 minutes
9 LO teachers (FET Phase)	Focus group discussion, consisting of joint interactive narratives on the participants' lived experiences of courageous conversations. Audio recorded and augmented with participant field notes according to research protocol.	Due to the continued safety protocols required for Covid 19, all interviews were recorded electronically using Zoom.	60 to 90 minutes

3.3.1 Sampling

Table 3 [Chapter 1] reflects the purposive sampling criteria for the study participants. The initial sampling focused on LO teachers within the greater Johannesburg area, as I was known as cluster leader and regional moderator for the teachers in my base, Pretoria. However, this proved quite problematic since I was largely unknown in the Johannesburg area. The outbreak of Covid-19 and the ensuing national lockdown opened up a far larger area from which participants could be sourced and accessed with online platforms. The final sample consisted of nine LO teachers from independent schools that spanned four provinces: Gauteng, North

West, Eastern Cape and Western Cape. Each participant was identified for specific selection employing purposive sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:114; Creswell, 2014:189). All participants in the sample were teachers who had been involved in teaching LO in the FET phase, Grade 10 to Grade 12, for a minimum of five years and were employed at independent schools for five years or longer. A measure of seniority was required; the final sample consisted of LO teachers with various levels of authority in LO or roles within the IEB support systems. The sample, therefore, contained decision-makers who advised and mentored other teachers in their subject area, their clusters, allocated regions and nationally. These participants all made decisions regarding the format and application of the LO SAGs selected contents and teaching strategies for the subject area. They had the highest accountability to management, parents and learners.

Furthermore, it was expected that each participating teacher had a considerable amount of professional confidence and autonomy. This diverse demographic sample ensured a representative range of teachers who regularly facilitated courageous conversations. The participants were selected on individual merit alone and not affiliated with any specific school or the IEB. Only teachers from independent schools affiliated with ISASA and who use the IEB as an examination body were included in the study. Therefore, it was unnecessary to obtain formal permission from the DoBE or any other body to conduct this study. All participants were presented with a clear outline of the research focus; I thus clarified the specific concepts and assured the confidentiality of the research process. Each participant accepted the invitation to participate based on informed, voluntary consent and was notified that they could withdraw from the research process at any time. *Table 8* reflects the questions developed for each of the three phases of the critical phenomenological interview.

Table 8: Individual Interview Questions

Phase 1: Contextualisation (<i>Descriptive Context Questions</i>)	
1.	Briefly describe your own identity as a South African and a Life Orientation (LO) teacher.
2.	How would you describe your school culture – for example, does your school have a strong colonial, western traditional, religious, historical, liberal school culture?
3.	<i>What is the racial and gender demographic of your LO staff?</i>
4.	How supportive is your school of LO as a subject?
5.	How much freedom do you have within the school's ethos to select content, teaching resources, and design assessments?
6.	<i>Which of the CAPS Topics, reflected in the IEB SAGs, do you focus on more than others? Briefly describe why you prefer these sections.</i>
7.	<i>Which, if any, of the sections of the CAPS Topics, reflected in the IEB SAGs do you avoid? Briefly describe why do you avoid these sections.</i>
8.	<i>How do you view the IEB's requirement to initiate and facilitate lessons on controversial topics?</i>

9. There are two approaches to these conversations: a formal structural and prepared lesson, or an open discussion initiated by the teacher/learners, triggered by a current event, and then driven by the learners. Which one do you prefer and why? 10. What is the approximate racial demographic of your learners? 11. Do you allow learners to initiate a spontaneous open discussion on a potentially controversial or potentially dangerous topic? 12. During courageous conversations: 12.1 which, if any, learner demographic tends to drive the conversation? 12.2 which, if any, learner demographic withdraws or does not actively participate in the conversation? 12.3 what attempts did you make to incorporate the perspective of a demographic group not represented in your class or your school? 12.4 how do you ensure that respect, empathy, openness, and trust is fostered during these conversations? 13. When you facilitate these conversations: 13.1 which topics/issues tend to trigger an adverse reaction? 13.2 which topics/issues tend to trigger a positive reaction?
Phase 2: Apprehending the Phenomenon (Descriptive and Structural Questions) <i>This Phase allows the participant to openly share their lived experiences, anecdotes, and emotions during these conversations.</i>
14. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, your personal experience with facilitating courageous conversations. You may focus on one specific conversation or a combination of different conversations. 15. Was there a specific event or occurrence that led to the choice of topic for this conversation? 11.1 On which CAPS topic did you base the conversation(s)? 11.2 Was it a formally structured conversation or a spontaneous conversation initiated by the learners?
Phase 3: Clarifying the Phenomenon (Varying Imaginative and Structural Questions) <i>Allow reflection, confirmation of anecdotal details, examine perspectives further</i>
16. What did you want to achieve with the specific conversation? 17. Considering the list of clarified concepts: 13.1 How did the conversation affect your experience of yourself as a professional? 13.2 How did the conversation impact you approach your learners? 18. Would you facilitate that specific conversation again? What do you think could happen differently for an improved outcome?

There may seem to be an imbalance between the number of questions reflected – 13 questions in Phase 1: Descriptive context questions, two in Phase 2: Apprehending the phenomena, and three in Phase 3: Clarifying the phenomena. However, the focus during Phase 1 was questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 10 and 11. It clarified the specific context and school culture within which each participant facilitated courageous conversations and the perspective of, and support for, LO received within their unique teaching environments. Questions 3 to 9 intended to re-introduce a participant who exhibited emotional dissonance during the interview process to promote self-regulation and ease them back into the interview section that was experienced

as problematic. Questions 12 and 13 were used as prompting questions during Phase 2. Several participants' responses to the earlier questions pre-empted information required for a later question or phase, which required flexibility and adjustment during the interview process. Therefore, the questions' specific order or wording had to be adjusted for each participant, as evident in the individual interview transcripts. This additional flexibility and support were within the boundaries of the empathetic researcher role and interpretivist theory (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25,26).

No questions were included regarding the participants' various roles within the IEB support and moderation system. However, one participant briefly referred to their role as cluster leader and the regularity with which they had to mentor and guide new teachers with little training or experience to teach LO. This comment substantiated the stated lack of longevity among new or young teachers tasked with teaching LO. However, the overriding focus of the individual interviews was the teacher within their professional classroom environment.

Due to the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, all individual interviews were conducted on electronic media platforms, including Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Skype. Ineffective internet connections sometimes hampered the process. Moreover, the sound of some participants' recordings was negatively affected if they moved around. Two Zoom participants used an electronically generated background image, which caused visual distortions and some sound difficulties; I used my notes taken during the interview to augment the recording in both cases. Where connection difficulties caused problems with the video feed, the backup audio recordings generated by the platform were used instead of the video recording.

Setting a convenient date and time for the focus group discussion was challenging as each participant had a very tight schedule to accommodate online teaching, prepare to move to hybrid teaching, and fulfil after-hour family responsibilities. There was a significant potential difficulty with the focus group recordings that each participant's private or professional email address and face would be visible. Zoom was thus selected as a suitable platform, as it allowed the participants to sign in with their allocated pseudonyms. It was further suggested that the participants were free to switch off their video feed, offering an additional measure to protect their confidentiality and minimise visual and auditory lag in reception.

Table 9 reflects the questions prepared for the focus group discussion. As with the individual interviews, flexibility was required to adjust questions based on participants' responses and discourse between multiple participants in response to a question.

Table 9: Focus Group Discussion Questions

Focus Group Discussion Questionnaire <i>(Possible discussion points)</i>	
1.	How important is support from colleagues and school management of LO as a subject to your professional motivation and success in the classroom?
2.	How much of the professional and emotional dissonance caused by organisational, managerial, and administrative expectations directly impact your teaching experience?
3.	How often do you experience dissonance or ego depletion that needs focused self-regulation?
4.	How important do you think self-awareness is in assisting you in analysing: • Difficulties you may experience in your teaching practice. • Your response to specific perspectives and beliefs expressed by your learners? • The role of your personal beliefs, and understanding of the world, in triggering dissonance and ego depletion?
5.	How important do you think self-reflection is to your continuous self-development and success as an educator?
6.	Which recurring concerns are raised in your classroom that can be directly linked to a hidden or implied curriculum in your school's culture?
7.	Considering the definitions of dissonance and depletion, how do you self-regulate in response to negative experiences with your learners in your classroom?
8.	Do you have someone on staff: line manager, academic head, or colleague with whom you can openly and respectfully share any negative teaching experiences?
9.	Which form does this sharing take, e.g. systematic analysis and joint self-reflection, or just venting?
10.	How important do you believe courageous conversations create an open platform for learners to develop practical citizenship skills?
11.	How do you create an open, trusting, respectful class environment in which to conduct these conversations?
Additional questions if needed:	
1.	<i>When you have courageous conversations: initiated by your learners or teacher structured:</i> • Which topics/issues tend to trigger an adverse reaction? • Which topics/issues tend to trigger a positive reaction?
2.	<i>How do you deal with controversial topics or questions that seem confrontational, e.g. male teachers in a single-sex girls school on #menaretrash, white teachers on white privilege?</i>

The focus group discussion started with the first three questions in the indicated order. However, as with the individual interview, some answers preceded the planned question, or a question had to be adapted based on the responses provided. Therefore, the actual discussion was steered by the participants' feedback and, where necessary, new questions were formulated, while other questions became obsolete. The focus group interaction was dynamic, and despite the differences between the participants' lived experiences within their school and LO spaces, there were many shared concerns and similarities in their coping mechanisms.

3.3.2 Data analysis and trustworthiness

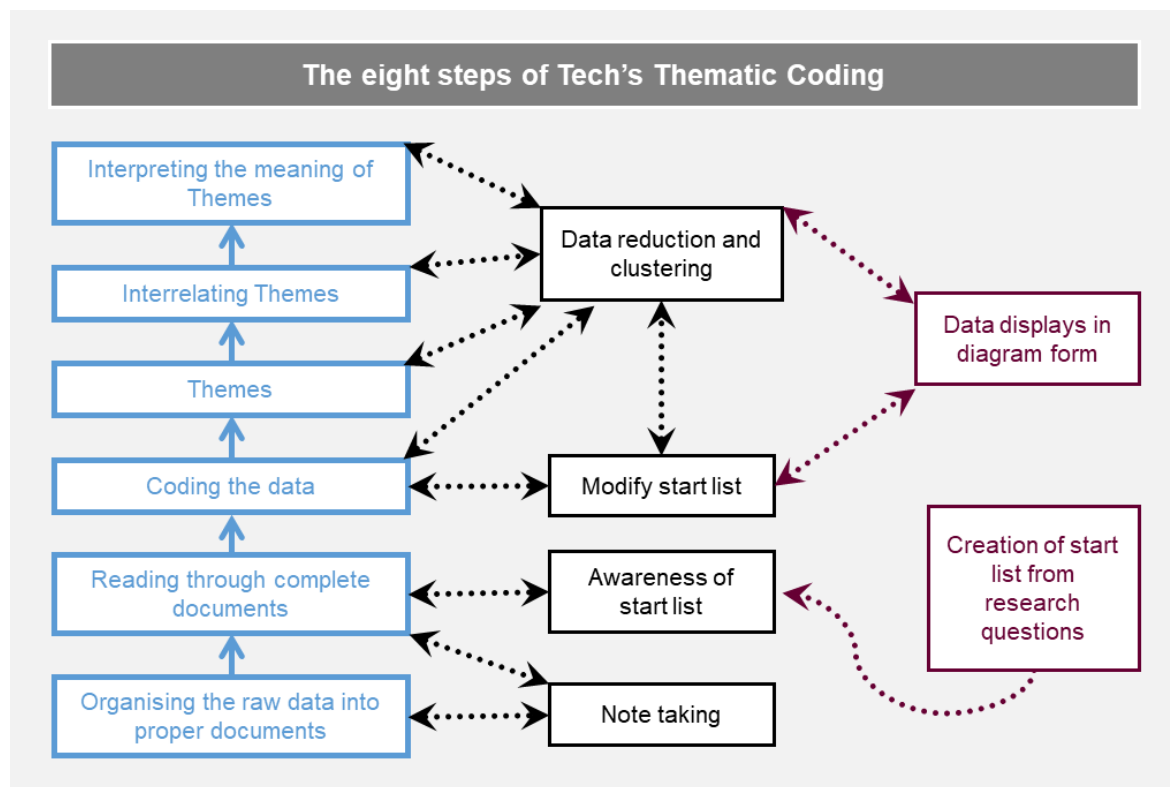


Figure 7: Data Analysis According to Tesch's Thematic Coding Process (Creswell, 2014:198; Adapted by Kee, 2020:21)

Tesch's eight-step thematic coding process, which was used to code the data collected from the transcripts, provides a clarification of the to-and-fro nature of this analytical process (Creswell, 2014:198 in Kee, 2020:21). Furthermore, Kee's diagram [Figure 7] helped me clarify additional mid-step decision-making that characterises the collation and integration of themes to structure a rich, in-depth, and detailed data analysis.

Upon completing the individual phenomenological critical interviews, the recordings were uploaded onto a specifically created Microsoft Teams group, to which I had access on my OneDrive account. The group could also be accessed by the external transcriber. The transcripts were then compared to the original recordings, and adjustments or corrections were made where needed. If additional clarification was required, the participant was contacted to ensure the transcript's accuracy. The interviews were then transferred into a tabular format, and the participants' pseudonyms were added. This process enriched my understanding of the data in preparation for the formal coding process.

Key elements of the responses were summarised in a separate column to the right of each response to indicate the initially identified themes. The identified themes were then colour-

coded and numbered, the interrelated themes were indicated alphabetically, and the themes' interpretation was organised according to roman numerals. The thematic analyses were then arranged into a two-page diagram.

The focus group discussion was researcher-transcribed. The same process was followed as with the individual interviews, with confirmation, corrections and clarifications where needed and then tabulated. However, as the amount of collected data was less than that of the individual interviews, initial themes were added using electronic comment boxes and then organised, collated and integrated with further use of comment boxes. These were coded into numbered themes, interrelated themes were alphabetically indicated, and the interpretation of the themes was reflected with roman numerals. The thematic analyses were then transferred into a one-page diagram.

3.4 Consideration of ethical principles

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Education ethical committee at the end of February 2019 [HU 19/02/01]. The ethical clearance documentation set clear boundaries for this study and how to approach participants.

Three sets of invitations were sent out to prospective participants, including a clarification of the research process and a voluntary participation document before a final sample group of nine participants was obtained. The participants had to agree to participate in both the individual interviews and the focus group discussion. Each participant was assured that thorough debriefing would be available to them after the interviews and after the focus group discussion. An educational psychologist, with no links to the IEB, ISASA, or any of the participants' schools, was available to provide online debriefing to any participant who may have needed it.

The individual interview recordings were shared with an external transcriber during the dissemination phase, reflecting only participants' initials. A few platforms recorded both a visual and audio version of the conversation; however, only the audio recordings were shared with the transcriber. The interview recordings were organised according to a unique pseudonym (study ID) as soon as they were transcribed and then removed from the Microsoft Teams group shared with the transcriber; the Teams Group was deleted.

The Zoom online platform was used to conduct the focus group discussion. Participants received their pseudonyms three days before the event using WhatsApp so I could confirm the message was received. The focus group discussion recordings were researcher-

transcribed, and the content was only shared between researcher and supervisor using pseudonyms. Some participants asked if the focus group discussion questions could be shared with them in advance; the questionnaires and concepts I would focus on were sent to those participants the evening before the discussion, with a reminder that the content may not be shared with anyone not part of the study. This sharing did not represent a risk to the integrity or authenticity of the data since the other participants' identities were unknown. Moreover, the responses provided by the participants often resulted in a change of direction – questions were ultimately pre-empted, and some became obsolete.

After each of the two data-gathering methods, participants were contacted and assured that any additional information they felt would clarify a claim they made or answer given would be welcomed – none of the participants made use of the offer. My supervisor monitored the research study closely, ensuring the ethical handling of participants, the confidentiality of collected data, and all ethical boundaries were maintained.

3.4.1 *Voluntary participation*

After obtaining ethical clearance, participants who met the inclusion criteria were approached and presented with a formal letter of invitation to participate in my study. Invitations were sent out over several phases to LO teachers in the Gauteng area with an initial limited response and several withdrawals. The move to online interviews allowed me to send invitations to teachers in various provinces with far more success.

Informed consent was ensured by clarifying the research focus, purpose, and the research process to be implemented. The participants were selected as autonomous professionals, independent of their school of employment. As such, no permission from any head of school or administrative body was necessary. Upon receiving voluntary written informed consent from the required number of participants, the data collection process commenced with individual interviews.

3.4.2 *Confidentiality and forgoing the right to privacy*

All participants understood their consent to participate in the individual interviews included their consent to participate in the focus group discussion. Participants were also aware they were forgoing their right to privacy when they participated in the focus group discussion. Therefore, participants had to agree to protect the privacy of the other participants and maintain the confidentiality of the focus group discussion with the same level of integrity with which I would uphold and protect their right to privacy. The participants received a transcribed

copy of their contributions to the focus group discussion so they could confirm the authenticity of the transcript and indicate any comments they would like to add.

The interviews and focus group discussion recordings and transcripts are in my possession. The transcriptions were accessed by sharing the data recorded in a Microsoft Teams group created explicitly for this purpose; only the transcriber and I had access. The two Zoom and Skype interview recordings were transferred to the same Microsoft Teams group, only accessible to the transcriber and me. These transcripts and recordings were made accessible to the supervisor. The original recordings and all phases of the transcribed data were downloaded for processing onto my personal laptop and an external hard drive. The recorded interviews and transcriptions were deleted from Microsoft Teams and the group itself to ensure future access is limited to only me and my supervisor. All backups were stored in my home safe. After completing the research, all materials will be stored in the Science, Mathematics and Technology Education (SMTE) department for the required 15-year period stipulated by the University of Pretoria.

3.4.3 Researcher role

Purposive sampling enabled me to select participants with experience and a level of seniority similar to mine as cluster leader, regional moderator, senior marker, ORTO moderator, NSC moderator, conference convenor and NSF member. This sampling method ensured participants were confident in their abilities and teaching skills and would not be intimidated by my role in the IEB [Table 3]. However, participants in the study still required additional professional courage to openly share their emotions when they related a specifically negative experience. Since recounting a negative lived experience elicited a sense of professional failure in the participant, Phase 2 of the interview started by discussing the value of negative and positive experiences for personal growth and the study. Despite this reassurance, one participant still experienced significant discomfort and extreme vulnerability during the second phase of the interview, when she discussed her lived experience of a critical incident.

Phenomenological reduction was used to address any concerns or perceptions the participants may have had that their role in the lived experience of the courageous conversations will be judged (Bevan, 2014:138). Phase 1 (the contextualisation phase) allowed me to create rapport with each participant; Phase 2 (the apprehension of the phenomenon phase) allowed the participants to relate their lived experience with minimal prompts and at their own pace; and Phase 3 (clarification of the phenomenon phase) allowed for my specific observations to be clarified. I could thus address any affective discomfort or dissonance observed or indicated by the participant (Bevan, 2014:139-43).

I started each interview by stressing my aim of understanding teachers' needs in facilitating courageous conversations. I assured each participant there would be no judgement of them as a person or educator during the research process (Bevan, 2014:139). I started Phase 2 by asking each participating teacher to share a specific positive or negative reaction to a courageous conversation on a sensitive topic (Bevan, 2014:140). I also related my personal growth in response to that experience. If any difficulty was noted in the participant's behaviour or mannerism, a break was taken until the participant indicated they were ready to resume the interview. The interview was then resumed by exploring additional contextual questions before going back to the participant's lived experience (Bevan, 2014:141).

Phase 3 of the interview was used as a structured debriefing of the specific lived experience and as confirmation of sections of the disclosed conversation that needed clarification (Bevan, 2014:138). Each participant was assured that a follow-up discussion would be provided after the interview, if required. I conducted a telephonic follow-up with the participant who experienced emotional discomfort three days after the interview to address any residual trauma.

Assurances given to each participant regarding the study's aims and the absence of judgement were repeated before starting the focus group discussion. The need for mutual respect and the confidentiality of the focus group discussion was stressed. None of the details disclosed during Phase 2 of the individual interviews were included in the focus group discussion.

3.5 Conclusion

Two different contextual perspectives were evident during the individual interviews and the focus group discussion. The individual aspect of the interviews and the group aspect of the discussion may have been the deciding factor between these two contextual perspectives, but it also validates the chosen research design (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:5-7). The individual interviews focused firmly on the participant's lived reality of classroom interactions with learners. The participants benefitted from Phase 1's questions by discussing their individual contexts; it gave them the confidence to navigate Phase 2: Apprehending the phenomenon. This was the crux of the interview and required a reflective critique to analyse successes or failures presented in their shared lived experience and meaning-making of the facilitation of conversations about critical or controversial content. My research design proved useful in accessing and accompanying the participants' sharing of their meaning-making process and their specific realities when they facilitate courageous conversations.

The focus group discussion moved the teacher outside the classroom context and focused on how they attach meaning to the role of LO in their professional life, how they evolve, and the impact being a LO teacher has on their level of self-reflection and self-development. Some powerful voices drove the narrative, but insights were often supported by mumbled agreement or a specific comment. Only one of the participants did not participate verbally; they did have their video feed on, and their body language indicated they were listening intently, despite not adding anything specific other than what was shared during the individual interview. Each participant's passion for LO was evident in their verbal and non-verbal expressions; there is a sense of loyalty and a professional need to protect the integrity of the subject, which often led to expressions of frustration, resentment and vulnerability among participants.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

The participants seemed eager to participate in a forum that allowed them to air their concerns and give them the voice they often lack as LO teachers. Seven of the nine participants were white females, one was a white male, and one was a female teacher of Kenyan descent. The diverse learner body represented by the participants ranged from approximately 80:20 percent BIPOC to white learners, to approximately 90:10 percent white to BIPOC learners; the average demographic was 60:40 percent white learners to BIPOC learners. Participants' approximate ages ranged from the early thirties to late fifties. Although sex and age were not significant to the study, seven participants indicated they used their own life experiences as teaching material, since it increased the likelihood that their learners will open up to them in the LO space.

The opening question to the participants asked them to describe their identity. The following quotes were the participants' individual first responses: *'This is an interesting question'*. *'Passionate and proudly South African'*; *'In general, I see myself as a South African citizen'*; *'I was always rough and not like the other girls [...] so professionally that set me apart in terms of what I offer'*; *'Personally, for me, it [private versus professional] is more or less the same'*; *'Maybe off the bat, I would say the only difference is that the vulnerability sensors in the classroom are on the alert'*; *'Well, I was born here, but I have other links as well - it is a difficult one for a white South African to say who you are really'*; *'Well, having been an English teacher before and then switching to Life Orientation, that was a learning curve for me, and I think I am a better South African if you can call it that since I have become a Life Orientation teacher'*; *'I am a proud [province] and love SA, its people, the different cultures and its beauty.'*

The question of identity (a fully inclusive identity) was part of the 2019 and 2020 Grade 12 CAT-A preparatory tasks. Participants' first reactive responses thus set the tone for the interviews as learner-focused, whereas the focus group discussion focused on the participants' personal lived experiences as teachers within the LO space.

4.2 The LO teacher's lived experience in preparation for and the facilitation of courageous conversations in the classroom

Table 8 [Chapter 3] reflects the questions used during the individual interviews conducted between April and August 2020.

Table 10: Diagram of Emergent Themes From the Individual Interviews

Thematic Coding of Individual Participant's Interviews		
4.2.1 THE LO TEACHERS IDENTITY AS A FOUNDATION FOR THEIR TEACHING PRACTICE	a) The LO teacher's personal and professional identity	i. Greater awareness of South African culture and ethnicity as the foundation for complex socio-political dynamics. ii. Knowing yourself is the key to knowing your learners. iii. Highlight the commonalities and goals we share.
	b) Courageous conversations are catalysts to an evolving worldview	i. An evolving personal belief system broadens the LO teacher's worldview ii. Constantly evolving worldview due to interaction with learners and content iii. Increasing life roles help strive towards unconditional acceptance
	c) Critical agency as the product of teacher identity	i. Fostering individual thought processes: openness, trust and mutual respect. ii. Challenges of perpetuated conformity and hiding unwelcome truths iii. Acceptance must be reinforced by developing realistic skills and values
4.2.2 THE SUPPORT NEEDS AND BARRIERS FACED BY THE LO TEACHER	a) LO as an experiential learning environment	i. The definition of experiential learning is mistaken in its literal, practical level ii. Teaching LO at a higher cognition and recreation level is not supported. iii. Trans-generational trauma and demographics may result in difficulties with perceptions about LO teacher's worldview
	b) Managerial insight and support for LO as subject	i. Heads of academics and parents continue to demand high marks [an easy distinction] for LO. ii. There is an imbalance in the allocated time and effective use of LO lessons. iii. Lack of subject specialists results in unskilled and unmotivated LO staff or overworked transdisciplinary staff.
	c) Perceptions of LO and LO teachers	i. There is little insight into the disparity between LO preparation time and contact time. ii. Colleagues tend to see LO as an easy subject with more free time and LO teachers as lesser academics. iii. The responsibility and accountability of dealing with soft skills and inconvenient truths are passed on to the LO teacher.

Thematic Coding of Individual Participant's Interviews		
4.2.3 THE ROLE OF DISSONANCE IN THE EFFECTIVE FACILITATION OF COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS	d) Profile of an effective, transformative LO teacher	i. Knowing yourself and knowing your learners are vital. ii. Critical need for lifelong learning, rigorous debate, knowledge of current narratives and emotional intelligence. iii. Ability to self-regulate, restore self-control, self-motivate and set clear personal and professional boundaries.
	a) Preparation demands on the LO teacher for the facilitation of courageous conversations	i. The best LO textbook is real life as it is unfolding ii. Be critical when selecting sources – it has to be authentic, current, factually sound and within the learners' academic and maturity level. iii. Be able to gauge your own and your learners' triggers to pre-empt the strong voices' reactions.
	b) Dissonance as a precursor to the facilitation of courageous conversations	i. Persistent professional and emotional dissonance due to school culture and systemic boundaries creates a depletion default. ii. Lack of confidence in making the null and hidden known despite it being unpopular. iii. Challenging archaic ideas and beliefs may be viewed as instigating negativity.
	c) Autonomy as a motivator for facilitating courageous conversations	i. LO teachers need to be trusted to boost the courage needed to open up uncomfortable topics. ii. The LO teacher's moral fibre and authenticity should always be in the learner's interest, be critical and non-conforming. iii. Figures of authority need to support the LO teacher in this role, and dynamic narratives are vital to transformation.
4.2.4 LO TEACHERS' BEHAVIOURAL COPING MECHANISMS IN FACILITATING COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS	a) Setting boundaries to facilitate courageous conversations	i. There is significant security for the LO teacher in controlled and structured courageous conversation but little self-development. ii. Set specific boundaries for the learners to maintain during courageous conversations and be consistent in their implementation. iii. Sharing of the self can open up trust, but it has to be carefully thought through.
	b) Unlocking topics for courageous conversations	i. Do not cross the line between challenging and being confrontational. ii. Scaffold conversation topics according to learner maturity iii. Know when to channel power to the strong voices, empower the minority voices, and know when to refocus or step in and refocus the discourse.

Thematic Coding of Individual Participant's Interviews		
	c) Topics likely to trigger dissonance during courageous conversations	i. Identity: self, racial, gender and sexual fluidity must be considered a foundation that embodies all aspects of learner becoming. ii. Political: An LO teacher in the minority demographic has to listen and observe more – deferring to a learner role rather than prescriptive teacher role. iii. Challenging the status quo: white fragility, white supremacy, black lives matter, micro-aggressions; know your learners.
	d) Providing closure to a courageous conversation	i. Keenly observe the time and atmosphere in the conversation, tone down the fervour of the discourse before the end. ii. Closure is necessary but not always possible - settle for calm to end. iii. Note links for next or future lessons – revisit what is necessary or what was agreed.
4.2.5 THE LO TEACHERS PROCESS DURING THE FACILITATION OF COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS	a) The facilitation process	i. Be flexible, but maintain the agreed boundaries ii. Do not underestimate views from home, role models or current socio-political influencers. iii. Create opportunities for all voices to be heard, if needed, become the unrepresented voices.
	b) Supporting learners who experience dissonance	i. Should the behaviour be aggressive and rigid, the learner may benefit from some time alone to regain composure. ii. Address behaviour, not the learner. iii. Provide one-on-one support to the learner(s) to assist them in positively expressing their views.
	c) Critical incidents: impact on teacher motivation and future conversations	i. Learner maturity, teacher's skill, knowledge and self-awareness are critical to an effective, holistic conversation. ii. Know, do not assume, ask for clarification, listen and observe. iii. Do not fear failure; courage takes practice. Introduce your topic by clarifying your choice of content. iv. Take time for positive self-reflection and analysis of the critical moments or incidents.
	d) Meaning attached to the shared and mutual experience of courageous conversations	i. Increased skills and knowledge base – it is a shared experience ii. Broader worldview, be open to all views and voices, expect negative feedback, but clarify rather than defend. iii. Successful courageous conversations are liberating – share learners' breakthroughs and praise their courage. iv. Use the experience to evaluate and adapt personal beliefs and reframe perceptions.

4.2.1 *The LO teacher's identity as the foundation of their teaching praxis*

The first topic focused on *the LO teacher's personal and professional identity (a)*. Several participants indicated that a professional preparedness and cognition of our complex society in constant transition requires a *greater awareness of South African culture and ethnicity as the foundation for complex socio-political dynamics (i)*. The following skills were emphasised as critical to this process: emotional intelligence; a willingness to interrogate one's beliefs, values, and prejudices continuously; how you see yourself within the context of LO, content development, and critical discourse.

Wayde described the need to distance yourself from your own opinion in the LO space:

'Sometimes, it is difficult for me to disconnect from my personal opinion. As the authority figure in the class, learners will tend to feel that if that is my opinion, [...] they need to share that opinion. [...] so you need to disconnect your opinion from the conversation. However, obviously, on specific topics, suppressing my views does become very difficult.'

Later in the interview, Wayde also stated his current Grade 12 learner group was labelled as problematic early in their senior school career due to being overtly politicised. As a result, they were more controlled and not allowed a fully representative voice by previous LO teachers.

Knowing yourself is the key to knowing your learners (ii). There seems to be a general consensus that LO teachers should interrogate their own moral and ethical values and roots, and then measure these against what they need to achieve to offer grounded and just education.

Thea described the growth in self-development taking place in the LO environment:

'I have learned more in the last eight years of teaching than all the preceding years of teaching due to Life Orientation and the content that I cover, the things that I learn. There was so much I did not know, and there is still so much I do not know. So, I get the bigger picture a lot more comprehensively than I ever did before. I think it also comes with age and wisdom, but I do give LO credit for it.'

Mignon also explained the growth possible once you willfully open up to critical discourse:

'I have always been someone who was most comfortable with comfortable, familiar topics. It is easy to form an opinion, but when you must present and grapple with these topics, your personal opinions must be set aside or adapted. Therefore, I was almost forced to broaden my perspectives and educate myself far more during

those narratives in these conversations and discussions. So yes, I will say that in that way, I had to grow in those instances. I never used to, but now, in general, I am far more open to diverse perspectives. I no longer have that tunnel vision I had when I started teaching.'

Participants said it is important to *highlight the commonalities and goals we share (iii)*. Openly challenging historical and cultural effects and how it is linked to other LO topics – including self-esteem, body image and gender politics – are vital but deemed controversial by management structures. Nelia described the value of embracing the complex role of the LO teacher:

'You have to love this subject; the interaction with the learners, mentoring them until they have those "Aha-moments". Providing well-placed scaffolding until they are ready to embrace the challenge and extend themselves while learning to listen and learn with others equally.'

Jeanette also described the common bonds to be found in the relationships between LO teachers and learners:

'I think we do have enormous amounts of empathy for each other. We have a complex and challenging socio-political order in our country, making us resilient. We know what perseverance [*vasbyt*] and constantly striving to overcome challenges require. We know what it feels like to be overwhelmed. We have to find commonalities, we live in that shared history, and I hope that, as a LO teacher, I can bring that across to all the learners'.

Courageous conversations are catalysts for an evolving worldview (b), creating a solid foundation for *an evolving personal belief system that broadens the LO teacher's worldview (i)*. Several participants indicated they experienced positive insight and acceptance in their diverse learner body's views and the resulting will to develop the skills required to become questioning citizens of the world beyond the boundaries of their classroom and school.

Mignon further defined some necessary perspectives to develop under the guidance of the IEB:

'I have always been someone who was most comfortable to the point of tunnel vision. But personally, with the IEB, when you are required to present and grapple with these critical topics, it almost forced me into these conversations and discussions to broaden my perspectives and educate myself far more during those narratives'.

Nelia described the observation and learning potential provided by stepping into a learner role during the facilitation of critical conversations:

‘It is a constant questioning about myself, what I believe, what I think, what I value, and constantly trying to understand everyone else, so it is absorbing all those social ques, and doing the research, listening, listening and more listening. So, I think we do grow as human beings, but I do not think everybody would.’

She further shared what she considered as crucial to success in the LO space:

‘[...] you have to love the ability of LO to empower learners to find their voice, create cognitive scaffolding for their personal growth and create opportunities to interact with everyone in the class, or in the grade, about their concerns and experiences’.

These evaluated and adjusted beliefs are expressed as allowing the learners to explore and accommodate the views of their peers and teacher, broadening their worldview (Jeanette). Interactively challenging ideas between teachers and learners does not always succeed immediately, but the ‘Aha-moments’ the learners seem to experience, as described by Nelia, inspired her persistence in courageous conversations. She anticipated those moments as they outweigh the moments experienced as failures.

A constantly evolving worldview is attributed to interaction with learners and LO content (ii). The participants seemed to interpret the term ‘worldview’ as holistic meaning-making.

Jeanette thus described her South African identity as an:

“endless, burning passion” and expresses her concerns about the number of people who remain pessimistic about a South African future based on untruths due to a lack of factual substantiation and sound knowledge.’

Megan mentioned the inevitable growth that takes place as soon as a teacher allows themselves to let go of the need to control:

‘I have also had to learn, in many instances, and grow. I was almost forced to broaden my perspectives and educate myself far more. I never used to, but now, in general, I am far more open to diverse perspectives. I no longer have that tunnel vision I had when I started teaching LO.’

Louise also described the increased need for a willful decision to keep evolving:

‘After years of being mainly sensitive to where the learners are, courageous conversations require that I now have to be sensitive to where I am, and what is happening in our country and the world.’

Thea described LO’s impact on her worldview as follows:

‘I am an English graduate, I love poetry and literature, and that is who I was, and I feel that since about 2012, I have fully realized what is going on around me for the first time. I have learned more in the last eight years of teaching than all the preceding years of teaching due to Life Orientation and the content that I cover, the things that I learn. There was so much I did not know, and there is still so much I do not know. So, I get the bigger picture a lot more comprehensively than I ever did before. I think it also comes with age and wisdom, but I give LO credit for it.’

According to Jeanette, having multiple perspectives as academic substantiation provided content for critical analyses and removed bias from the discussion. The learners could then have the freedom to evaluate and select the perspective they can identify with to structure their stance and be better able to make sense of the perspectives held by others (Jeanette & Harriet). Harriet further indicated what she deems critical. She claimed it is up to the LO teacher to ensure their mastery and knowledge of the topic. Teachers should compile sufficient and reliable sources to provide learners with grounding, enhancing their acceptance towards positive and driven citizenship (Harriet).

Increasing life roles help teachers and their learners strive towards unconditional acceptance (iii). Mignon and Harriet said sharing their life with their learners is a proven method to open conversations and encourage openness from learners. However, Nelia, Wayde and Amahle’s responses reflected their reluctance – despite being aware of the benefits – in sharing their life with learners. Findings indicated they are more reserved in openly sharing their life experiences.

Louise described how her personal roles interlinked with her role as LO teacher:

‘Who I am as a mother and as a wife, you carry that into your classroom, you cannot put that package deal outside the classroom door and be this robot teacher. It is impossible, in our subject you must not be, and if you do, the essence of the subject is lost because every single LO teacher comes with her identity and makes the content come alive.’

Amahle also explained how a mutual opening-up is an inherent aspect of LO:

‘as an LO teacher, I am sharing a lot of myself because of the nature of the subject and what we discuss, and as an LO teacher, you are an example to the learners, and they open up to you a lot, and you share a lot of your person. So, I do not share everything with them, as there are boundaries. LO is just unique in that aspect.’

Sasha made it clear that she used explicitly structured group activities that require learners to assume perspectives different from their own, enabling them to develop the skills to acknowledge and defend the perspectives they would generally oppose.

Critical agency is developed *as the product of the teacher identity (c)*. Therefore, as participants described an LO teacher’s understanding of the need to interrogate their own historical beliefs, values, and lived experiences allows ongoing and effective change.

Amahle described the value of learners’ personal well-being, stating teacher agency catalyses success beyond school:

‘I want to make learners grounded, anchored, to know themselves. They must accept that there are many different beliefs, opinions, and values out there. They have to embrace that and accept who they are and that other people are different. So, them being anchored and them being able to accept different views and different beliefs and being critical thinkers – I think that is vitally important. The nature of LO as a subject covers being able to fail and to keep going. So not fearing to fail and move forward because they will enter competitive and academically driven working environments. They might go out into the world and not do great and then have to choose a different path - they need to know that even if they do not do so great, it is OK - they can pick themselves up and go again.’

Wayde described the importance of mutual growth in opening learners’ perspectives of the world:

‘... if we are closing opinions and only allowing a specific opinion or a particular worldview to be expressed, we create a bubble around the learners - a thought bubble, so we hear the opinions of the people we believe and who agree with us, and we keep reinforcing that opinion. When we go into the bigger world and are exposed to people with differing opinions, we do not allow those opinions, and we become intolerant. We do not know how to deal with shaken perceptions. The freedom we currently have with these conversations and these topics we prepare

them [*learners*] because they are learning how to be challenged and how to challenge - that is the point of these conversations’.

Fostering individual thought processes: openness, trust and mutual respect (i) was identified by many participants. They seemed to concur that learners who are encouraged to express their views openly often have an increased ability to formulate an argument with confidence and an attitude of reciprocity.

Louise described the value of creative discomfort in broadening learners’ views:

‘I would hope that they would leave with more than just their Christian worldview. I believe we are making little kiddies with tiny shells around them that crack when they leave [school]. [...] from Grade 10 already, I will start chipping away at those shells creating small cracks, allow them a broader view of the world, not this sheltered view consisting of only right and wrong.’

Nelia highlighted the importance of learners developing personally and academically:

‘I want learners to be eager and keen to learn. Not only focused on what they need to learn at school, but about themselves, who they are as human beings, and love and be empathetic. They have to become, and be all the things we need to be as human beings, otherwise, they will not survive out in the world.’

Jeanette also shared the value of applying multiple perspectives as a basis for critical conversations:

‘When they covered Multiple perspectives at the IEB User Group Conference, it was the only presentation I have ever liked, and I loved it. I literally went mad for it, and I still use it’.

Challenges of perpetuated conformity and hiding unwelcome truths (ii) were reported. When learners openly discuss their concerns with teachers, especially at schools with borders where the teacher is the adult they rely on for guidance, their opinions must not be invalidated for the sake of teacher comfort or school culture (Thea & Louise).

Nelia emphasised that the created LO space:

‘has to offer the learner the opportunity to be accommodated without judgement, even in a private conversation with a single learner and regardless of the challenge it may pose to the teacher’s beliefs’.

As Wayde (2020) described:

‘sometimes the learners just want to be treated like adults – they want to be heard, regardless of the topic.’

Thea, who taught at a denominational school for boys, described the importance of challenging beliefs:

‘we talked about abortion, pro-choice versus pro-life [...] deep down inside, I know how I feel about it, but until you are in that position, you cannot predict your reaction. I knew some of the boys in the class were utterly horrified – how could anyone even say that, so I tried to steer the discussion and said: I can understand why people think that because it [*pregnancy*] comes at the wrong time; however, have you considered the following factors...’

Nelia further clearly indicated the importance of observation and following up as part of the LO teacher’s responsibility in caring for their learners:

‘race has become an issue and, listening to the learners talking about teachers they believe are racist in some ways. I think there may be one or two teachers whom I know who may be [*discriminating*] even if they would disagree, but the things the learners said, little things and little ways in which they felt they were not being heard. I still want to get into that when we get back to school.’

Wayde emphasised the vital importance of all teachers developing the skills to accommodate critical discussions:

‘Some teachers [*not LO*] still harbour the belief that race is not a part of their curriculum. They are not required to teach this, so they are not going to discuss it. Whereas my opinion is that all teachers must learn how to discuss race-related issues maturely. Obviously, there are triggers, and discussions can get heated, but we also need to learn the mechanisms of how to diffuse and mediate those sorts of situations.’

Mignon stressed the importance of modelling the attitudes and behaviours encouraged in the LO space wherever teachers are functioning. In this way, LO teachers can thus be seen as accommodating uncomfortable challenges outside the classroom.

Acceptance must be reinforced by developing practical skills and values (iii). The participants all seemed to agree on the critical agency of ensuring change within learners and not shying away from views that cause discomfort.

Amahle stressed the importance of independent schools' LO teachers reminding learners of the realities they will encounter beyond school:

'The first thing is to be open-minded because I think the learners are so shielded in our schools and have this life where they are so protected. When you enter the world, even university, you encounter many schools of thought and different life experiences. [...] and the world is just vast [...] them being anchored and them being able to accept different views and different beliefs and being critical thinkers – I think that is vitally important.'

Thea further mentioned experiential development in the LO space to manage ideological differences in society:

'I remind them that LO is meant to be a safe space and that we will be talking about things that they do disagree with each other about, and that is life, so if we learn to manage it in the classroom, we will be better equipped to manage it outside in society.'

Sasha, Amahle and Harriet emphasised the impact of loud majority voices and the resulting withdrawal of the minority voices:

'It [*discussions*] used to be quite balanced, but now there are far louder, sometimes angry, black voices and the confident white voices that used to be prominent are fading as they do not want to risk being offensive or have what they say misconstrued.' (Sasha)

'I think in most cases, it [*the strongest voices*] is the majority BIPOC learners. The white learners usually do not participate, and then you have to pull it out of them, and even if you do, it [*the response*] is not that much.' (Amahle)

'I often have to ask why there are only white voices. Where are my strong black voices? There will usually be a couple who take up the challenge then and respond.' (Harriet)

4.2.2 The support needs and barriers faced by the LO teacher

The definition of **LO as an experiential learning environment (a)** is *mistakenly evaluated for implementation as a literal practical definition alone (i)* rather than the recreation of cognitive life-based experiences.

Mignon stressed the importance of exposing learners to perspectives that differ from their own:

‘Most of the time, I allow the learners to drive the conversation, I then only facilitate, and I might add a different idea or perspective in line with their narrative to widen or broaden their discussions’.

Louise also pointed to the value of LO opening learners up to shared views with their peers:

‘[...] as a matric LO class were leaving - we had run over their time as we had a gorgeous discussion, some learners were continuing the discussion with learners they were not grouped with during class, and I thought “this is what I love about LO”. They leave your class and want to talk more about the content with learners they never talked to before as they realised they share an opinion or the topic is close to their hearts – that is the most satisfying aspect for me.’

Several participants (Amahle, Wayde, Nelia, Louise & Jeanette) described a fluid moral and ethical base as the goal they want their learners to develop. This could help learners attain the necessary skills and master knowledge in their own lives, and in their attitude towards others as they move into the world.

Teaching LO at a higher cognition and recreation level is not supported (ii), primarily by academic management, parents and learners. Harriet seemed to believe her role in management gives her an advantage when discussions and decisions are made around LO.

According to Thea:

‘Sometimes the parents are the ones you have to win over because they believe it [LO] is not an important subject – “you have to learn how to open a bank account or something”, which they consider equally irrelevant.’

Mignon expressed concerns regarding the academic perception of LO as follows:

‘There are many life choices with which we assist learners, e.g., career guidance, which is a big chunk of what makes LO unique, but I find it difficult to justify that LO does not earn Application Placement Score points at many universities, affecting university admission.’

Jeanette also shared the importance of winning strong voices in the staffroom over in support of LO:

‘One of our teachers was a harsh person and teacher, but academically brilliant - never neutral, and she came to me one day, and she said: “you know, I have read

through a number of your exams and a number of your tests, and I see what you do. Now you can say whatever you like because I know you know what you are talking about". I think those kinds of colleagues - if you can get them on your side, are extremely helpful.'

Several participants (Louise, Thea & Amahle) emphasised actively marketing what takes place in LO to elevate their colleagues' perception of LO and create change in the school's attitude towards the subject. According to Thea, persistence will be needed, but the effort should be weighed against the value attained from positive colleagues, learners, parents and, ultimately, the school.

Trans-generational trauma and demographics may result in difficulties with perceptions about LO teachers' worldview regarding minority ethnic groups (iii). Whichever majority has the loudest voice may cause the minority to find certain topics insensitive, withdrawing from the conversation (Amahle, Nelia & Louise). It is then up to the LO teacher to facilitate a challenging ideological discourse that is mindful of all racial groupings, regardless of whether they fit into the minority or majority demographic (Harriet).

Sasha described the long-term effect a critical incident with disciplinary consequences can have on an LO teacher's personal and professional identity and motivation:

'I stay in safe spaces, I keep up, more so than many people in general and other academic staff, it becomes part of you - to always see the teachable potential in a current event, but I keep my personal opinions and views out of the classroom. You have to prove yourself to each new class you teach and constantly strive to win the learner's respect. If you can refer to another learner, a source, a staff member, bounce the ball back to the learner immediately. It is not personal – it cannot be, "Mrs [...] said" again. I am now far more careful and sensitive about possible triggers than any other staff – rather safe than sorry. As necessary for teaching LO, my worldview is still broader than most, but I am not sure it is always balanced or focused on serving the minority groups in the class'.

Managerial insight and support for LO as subject (b) was mentioned by participants; four stated they receive little consistent support at their schools, while three participants spoke about managerial support based on their perceived level of autonomy. One participant specifically based their evaluation of managerial insight on their school employing only specialist LO teachers.

Louise described her school's 'awakening' after the 2020 cancel culture campaign:

'[...] coming from the school's worldview, they are only now working on how we will discuss taboo topics – they realize that they cannot keep this quiet. Questions are raised about gender and sexuality, and the learners want to talk about it *[in class]*, and then I allow them to discuss it.'

Jeanette also highlighted the importance of having a compliant and active LO department:

'[...] when I arrived at *[current school]*, LO was shocking. It was shocking. Anybody was running it, there was no curriculum, there was no focus, and so because I have managed to bring it back a little bit - that has given me a bit of recognition. It is not that they do not give it time, but if I were not there, and if someone else took over LO and did not stand up for the subject, I do not think the executive team would stand up for it. I think it would be left to waste, which is a bit scary because if I did leave, then all of that *[efforts made]* is for nothing.'

Mignon was insistent that LO's emphasis must focus on equipping learners to critically analyse and think for themselves despite resistance from others. Wayde seemed confident in his appraisal that focusing on inequality and nation-building creates the perception of a disciplinary threat to behavioural codes and managerial comfort.

It was also found that *heads of academics and parents continue to demand high marks and an easy distinction for LO (i)*. Two participants identified specific incidents where they experienced this attitude from management, whose primary interest seems to be appeasing discontented parents.

Sasha described her experiences with difficult parents and a lack of recognition of the academic standard of LO as follows:

'Initially, support was not what it should have been, especially from parents. Learners expect a high grade for LO despite not performing to the mark expected by their parents, and *[the learners]* assumed they would receive. This attitude makes for very frustrating meetings with parents, sometimes extending into more than one meeting, which increases the level of stress I feel and observe in the attitude of the specific learners to the subject.'

Jeanette described her practice of factually substantiating the statements made in the LO classroom as a potential solution to having the academic rigour of LO recognised:

‘I feel that it is vital that when I say something, that I can show that this is the information that I have used to generate this particular opinion. The academic substance takes the bias out of it, and then it is up to the learners to evaluate the content from a perspective they can identify. I feel like that keeps me on a much safer footing, even if it is a complex topic.’

Thea described the positive attitude she experienced from management and parents towards her LO team working extremely hard to develop trust and proving LO’s value with their professionalism and enthusiasm for the subject. However, she stressed that it is an ongoing effort and that ‘you have got to keep winning them over all the time’.

There is an *imbalance in the allocated time and effective use of LO lessons (ii)*. LO teachers have to share their allocated four lessons in a two-week cycle with either Physical Education and Religious studies, or only Religious studies if Physical Education is no longer timetabled (Thea, Louise & Jeanette).

Thea explained the impact on LO at a denominational school sharing LO time:

‘It is tricky because you have got Religious Education (RE), which is expected from the *[name of the religious body]* they prescribe that we do RE and it is their RE syllabus, but you have to bear in mind that the majority of learners in your class are not congregants. So, you have to talk about *[their prescribed content]*, but you have to talk about all the other religions, so we are pretty flexible.’

Amahle, Mignon and Jeanette described the impact of the limited contact time available to LO teachers and their frustration with allocated time being rescheduled for other events:

‘There is never enough time, ever, and even if you have a small class, some learners are slower. You might introduce a topic and get going, some learners take time to process things, and at the moment they are confident to engage, you do not have time left, so I feel there is never enough time to get closure on most topics.’ (Amahle)

‘I do experience that if time has to be found for other events, the overall perception of LO is affected as it is always the first subject that has to compromise for these events or presentations. In that way, I do find it challenging to keep all the learners and teachers motivated.’ (Mignon)

'I have had to fight off many other teachers over the years who want to use LO lessons to the point of full-on arguments outside my class.' (Jeanette)

Wayde, Sasha and Nelia agreed with these claims, especially since LO is the subject most likely to lose lesson time when additional time is required for an event of value to the whole school.

It was reported that a *lack of subject specialists results in unskilled and unmotivated LO teachers or overworked transdisciplinary staff (iii)*. Many participants appeared insistent that teachers who lack confidence and experience in facilitating courageous conversations not only seem to experience difficulty fostering respect, trust, and safety between themselves and their learners, but their lack of skills may also be damaging to LO as a subject (Nelia, Jeanette & Harriet).

Thea described a lack of open-minded focus among teachers unfamiliar with the focus of LO:

'Other subject teachers come from a completely different frame of reference - to walk into my class, boys only, and confidently discuss difficult topics [...] LO has moments you walk into without considering the taboos or discomfort about something like sex-ed [*sonder om te blik of bloos*]- eventually, nothing surprises you. I have heard it all before, if I am hearing it for the first time, well, hey, I can deal with it – I am a LO teacher.'

Jeanette also mentioned the impact of a lack of expertise and commitment as:

'Before me - learners did not hand in their work, and nobody really cared, and there was no work ethic, and the learners would cut class, and it has been an uphill battle, which makes me think that if it [*LO*] were left to someone else who was not an LO specific teacher, they might not have the clout to stand up for the subject.'

She later added that:

'those topics [*socio-political*] need to be taught by teachers who know how to deal with courageous conversations. I have had to cut specific lessons out as my teachers were unable to deal with the backlash - you cannot give it to just anyone to teach. You are just going to end up in a harmful space.'

Harriet and Nelia also linked a lack of willpower and motivation to the lack of teacher longevity:

‘Undoubtedly, you always get some teachers who do not stray beyond their comfort zone. However, fortunately, they usually do not have longevity as LO teachers.’ (Harriet)

‘You have to have an inherent love and fascination with people, observing and listening to them.’ (Nelia)

Participants shared that **perceptions of LO and LO teachers (c)** are skewed as *there is little insight into the disparity between LO preparation time and contact time (i)*. Teachers of other subjects consider their timetable hours as reflective of their preparation and planning time. However, with LO, the timetabled hours merely reflect teachers’ contact time with learners; the many hours of lesson planning and source selection are known only to the individual LO teacher (Thea).

Jeanette suggested the possible contracting of subject specialists should be made available to LO teachers who lack specific expertise or skills, such as counselling skills:

‘If you could do it [*develop LO content*] in such a way that it is instead based on a collection of skill sets rather than on hoping that one particular teacher can cover all of those topics ranging from soft skills to careers to democratic citizenship - the scope is vast. There are so many aspects that we have to master. To teach all of it, I think it requires a complex skillset, and I do not think there are enough teachers who have it all, and to get those that do is rare.’

Sasha, Thea, and Wayde made specific reference to utilising the AchieveCareers LO programme:

‘As far as determining content used to teach LO, I work very closely with Joanne Wood’s AchieveCareers manuals and teaching resources – they are willing to assist in creating content to use if I deviate from sections of their manuals. I find the strategies and standard of their programme very dynamic and suited to the rigour and skills we incorporate in LO. The manuals are also updated each year to ensure currency.’ (Sasha)

‘I do use Joanne Woods’ material, and I select from that what I want to use, and I bring in my own additions when I want to, so I have never had anybody say, “do not teach this” or “teach it like this” or “be careful when you do that”.’ (Thea)

'I find that pre-empting the discussion is good because, as I stated, when the learners come in, they have the mindset of "I am here to share my opinion, I am here to welcome other opinions." So I do much groundwork for teaching a topic or content to accommodate the learner's opinions. I utilise a lot from the AchieveCareers programme – especially Joanne Wood's manuals about cognitive dissonance and self-analysis strategies before moving into controversial conversations.' (Wayde)

However, these participants indicated that they augment the manuals with individually sourced content to add depth and additional perspectives for an enriched context.

Colleagues tend to see LO as an easy subject with more free time and LO teachers as lesser academics (ii). Amahle specifically mentioned her experienced disregard for LO as a valid and valuable subject as being more 'prominent with the older academic teachers' because LO is more nuanced between-the-lines teaching and not content-limited. She said: 'I have just learned to cope with that and accept it' (Amahle).

Nelia, Thea and Amahle described their experiences regarding staff's attitude to LO as follows:

'[...] perceptions still are that the LO teachers are the teachers that could not teach or do anything else, so they were just stuck into LO, which is wrong because those are the last people, we want in the position of a LO teacher.' (Nelia)

'I found much ignorance around LO as a subject, so when I moved from English to LO, many of my colleagues thought that I am having a holiday now, that LO is not a proper subject and half my brain stopped working when I switched subjects.' (Thea)

'[...] sometimes I feel misunderstood by other teachers or my peers because it is a different experience in the classroom, it is just a totally different experience, and I find that a lot of the time you are dealing with the issues raised *[triggered]* in other subjects as well.' (Amahle)

Nelia also emphasised her professional identity as follows:

'I do not want to identify as an LO teacher. When people ask me, I say I am a teacher, but I also do this, and I also do that. I am not "just an LO teacher" because I think perceptions still are that the LO teachers are the teachers that could not

teach or do anything else, so they were just stuck into LO, which is wrong because those are the last people we want in the position of a LO teacher.'

According to participants, *the responsibility and accountability of dealing with soft skills and inconvenient truths are passed to the LO teacher (iii)*. Jeanette explained that she believes it is critical to be aware of what is happening around you, since people often live with blinkers on; consequently, LO is crucial.

Nelia and Harriet also described the importance of the value-based and non-academic side of LO:

'I have had some trouble with this [*LGBTQ+ discussions*] in the past. I know that some parents initially raised concerns that we were pushing learners to be gay. The sex-ed concerns – that is not our learners – the learners love it, but the parents do not!' (Nelia).

'Although I never teach from a single topic as I want the learners to see everything you do, all choices have a ripple effect – you always have to consider that bigger picture - that is how I teach. The learners are very open about their gender identities, sexual orientation, and socio-political stance. The challenge is for them to understand the gap between life in Khayelitsha, the Cape Flats and their own lives - financial contributions and one-off visits to charity programmes are not social upliftment, so we encourage inter-racial friendships, especially with our bursary students, to provide that exposure.' (Harriet)

LO teachers are the only teachers to formerly prepare learners for the myriad of challenges they will encounter on their journey to becoming independent adults. 'LO is the only subject that offers soft skills formally, so I think it is imperative.' (Jeanette)

The **profile of an effective, transformative LO teacher (d)**: Nelia's responses reflected her conviction that the facilitation of courageous conversations within thwarting boundaries (determined by prevailing idealised traditions) may become overwhelming, even for the expert LO teacher.

Participants claimed *knowing yourself and knowing your learners are vital (i)*. They expressed the immense importance of laying the groundwork and preparing for learners voicing their interpretation of the world at the start of the FET phase.

Thea referred to specific discourse she prepared for, as she could pre-empt a specific learner's reaction. However, she also allowed him to defend his stance, even if controversial:

'[...] when we talk about steroids or pornography, we also have very energetic discussions. You will have guys [*single-sex male school*] violently opposed, or you will have guys passionately fighting for something, e.g. I have a guy in matric who is heavily into bodybuilding. When we spoke about steroids, he was pro-steroids, and he did all the research, and he gave all the reasons why and how it should be used so it will not be harmful. Before we had this discussion, I knew that he would come in with that kind of response, so I was prepared for it, and I did not want to shoot him down because that is his opinion. We could still look at all the other sides of the argument, but by pre-empting what he was going to bring into it, I was far better prepared to accommodate opposing perspectives on the topic. You know, sometimes you prepare a fantastic lesson, and you are all excited about it, and it falls completely flat, and other times you have a brilliant lesson, but you went into it without any specific expectations. You have to be open to the response you do get.'

Amahle described the phenomenon of learners living in the now, without regard for the bigger picture:

'[...] sometimes, I wonder if the learners are always sensitive to other people, and I do not know if they always consider where socio-political issues originated from and how it has progressed, so I sometimes find the learners to be very entitled. However, I am a grounded person, so it does not change me.'

Louise also explained the importance of understanding the collective differences between classes:

'Each grade comes with a label: one grade will be more compassionate, and another not so much, and you know, with this class, I can share this, and they will understand, but when the next class walks in, I know the same approach will not work.'

Jeanette specifically shared her experiences with her current learners, who are quick to respond during courageous conversations:

'I think it [*assumptions*] can land you in some trouble, especially with learners who are not always clued up on the information or the knowledge behind things [*socio-political events*] as much as they think they are, I do not think learners are as knowledgeable as they believe. When they say someone said this, they cannot identify the person or the context in which it was said.'

Ultimately, the foundation for a strong teacher and learner relationship should start from Grade 10, with scaffolded strategies to analyse individuals' triggers and origins with generic content (Sasha, Wayde).

There is a *critical need* for LO teachers to strive for *lifelong learning, rigorous debate, knowledge of current narratives and emotional intelligence (ii)*. Nelia and Harriet shared their goals of developing prompts to ensure grounded and successful critical discourse and lifelong learning.

Mignon, Nelia and Harriet illustrated the importance of an open mind and a fascination with societal evolution:

'It is easy to form an opinion, but when you must present and grapple with these topics, your personal opinions must be set aside or adapted.' (Mignon)

'I do not think an education degree fully prepares you for teaching learners, but if you come in there and you have no other background dealing with human beings, the human mind, human behaviour, and all of that, I think it is incredibly difficult especially in LO.' (Nelia)

'If you are not fascinated by the interaction and impact people have on each other, sociology, basic philosophy, the fundamentals of belief systems, and constantly learning and enhancing your skills, you should have no place in a FET Phase LO classroom.' (Harriet)

The *ability to self-regulate, restore self-control, self-motivate and set clear personal and professional boundaries (iii)* was also mentioned. Attaching meaning to previous lived experiences of critical narratives impacts the LO teachers during their pre-planning, critical conversation facilitation, and self-reflection after the discussion (Harriet).

Wayde clarified that dissociation from his personal views requires a self-regulating attitude at the onset of opening a controversial topic:

'You need to leave your opinions at the door. You must be able to disconnect your opinion from the conversation. I cannot think of a specific situation where I was pushed to the point where I felt like I had to suppress my emotional feelings on content or topic in front of the class. However, obviously, on specific topics, suppressing my views does become very difficult.'

Sasha also explained her choice of deflection as a means of self-regulation and maintaining self-control:

‘I had an extremely unpleasant experience in 2017 with a response to an open, unstructured conversation in LO. A comment I made was entirely taken out of context and resulted in a disciplinary hearing. It was a tough time for me with personal and professional repercussions. I, therefore, specifically focus on a formal structured approach and the discussion and analysis of specifically selected resources. Any sensitive topics are limited to controlled group work only – I do not risk exposing myself in any way.’

Nelia shared her experience of an ongoing negative interaction with a difficult parent as follows:

‘Whatever I did, his *[parent’s]* dispute was that I had some agenda, so it affected me emotionally for about a year, and I did not teach those topics for a while.’

4.2.3 The role of dissonance in the effective facilitation of courageous conversations

According to the participants, there are various ***preparation demands on the LO teacher for the facilitation of courageous conversations (a)***. They mentioned *the best textbook is real life, as it is unfolding (i)*. Jeanette shared her opinion that very few teachers she knows use textbooks for teaching LO.

Harriet also described her agreed support for the IEB declining to endorse any LO textbooks:

‘I mean, come on, our LO syllabus is written for us in the news, on social media, on the streets, but if you make no effort to be a part of that, well, rethink what you do. Criticising and judging others is not teaching. It is not the purpose of LO. Working so hard to get everything *[sources, discourse, critical analyses skills]* the best it can be, make it exceedingly frustrating that there are still schools where teachers are not invested.’

Sasha explained intuitive knowing is a tool in recognising LO content:

‘I still automatically recognise sources or issues suited to LO topics, but I now automatically look for content that will not offend – so appeasing rather than challenging. That instinct to inform and enrich is still there, but I make sure the sources I provide myself are from journalists of colour.’

Participants said LO teachers must *be critical when selecting sources – it has to be authentic, current, factually sound and within the learners’ academic and maturity level (ii)*. Several

participants indicated the importance of LO teachers reinforcing these parameters by ensuring the sources they provide set a clear example.

Harriet's description of this process indicated her belief that authentic source selection is a willful combination of a teacher's personal and professional self:

'South Africa's diversity is the base from which I go out and meet the rest of the world. I love to travel and discover very different cultures from ours. I have a very philosophical and open attitude to the world. My definition of LO has always been that the learners have to understand that every decision does not only affect them. Your *[Teacher's and learners']* choices have a ripple effect – you have to consider that bigger picture - it has a significant impact on societies you never consider. Learners have to understand their role in this social system. That is how I source information to share with my learners. When you facilitate such lessons *[critical discourse]*, you pick up on their conversations and use that as inspiration for future lessons.'

Thea indicated a more controlled approach but also seemed to share the view that a broad spectrum of sources should be selected to ensure some aspects interest all learners:

'I have had boys who have not said a word in goodness knows how many lessons, and then all of a sudden, you cover content that interests them, and then they become a lot more vocal. So, the response to sources varies greatly – but because we have such diverse topics and teach to such different strengths, and then surprisingly, they come up with a solid opinion. I try to cater to everybody's interests, but once you start knowing the boys, you also know that when some seem disinterested, not to pressure them or ask them direct questions. It may be a sensitive, touchy topic.'

LO teachers should *be able to gauge your own and your learners' triggers to pre-empt the strong voices' reactions (iii)*. Both Jeanette and Wayde referred to troublesome and challenging conversations touching on farm murders and the appropriation of land without compensation, causing intense push-back from learners. They (Jeanette & Wayde) seemed to respectively share lived experiences with similar outcomes. They reported on the critical incidents during lessons on controversial socio-political content:

'I did a topic on xenophobia and farm murders as prep for an essay. I did not mind the topic, but I knew it might be problematic for the other two teachers. We each teach one LO class per grade, and I generated the lesson plans and content.'

Lacking necessary LO experience and skills, the two teachers were ripped apart by their learners and did not know how to deal with the situation. I also had some issues because we have many farming community learners from Botswana in boarding.’ (Jeanette)

‘I did a couple of lessons on the different political parties and their manifests. That caused heated debate, especially when discussing the EFF and land expropriation and those ideological political policies. It was problematic because, as I said earlier, sometimes it is difficult for me to disconnect from my personal opinion.’ (Wayde)

Unresolved ***dissonance as a precursor to the facilitation of courageous conversations (b)*** was mentioned by participants. They also reported *persistent professional and emotional dissonance due to school culture and systemic boundaries create a depletion default (i)*.

Wayde described his impression of his learners’ responses to individual triggers to prescribed content for the 2018 IEB CAT A:

‘One conversation that stands out was facilitated from the CAT A content last year, and that was the idea of what an African identity entails. There were risks with the entire scope of those concepts, specifically a single joint South African identity, and some learners had extreme opinions on this idea. Who and what qualifies one as African remains a critical issue to deal with as it elicited many oppositional views, and it was tricky to facilitate all the opinions with equality and fairness - that was quite difficult.’

Wayde also emphasised the importance of understanding that learners’ socio-economic background has a significant impact as a socio-economic and socio-political trigger in his classroom:

‘Because we have many learners who come on a scholarship basis or from outside funding, class [*socio-economic*] issues often come into play and privilege issues. Those are very often triggering. I have to be very mindful of how these topics are presented, how the conversation develops, and how I can de-escalate some of the more controversial topics that came up.’

Lack of confidence in making the null and hidden curricula known despite it being unpopular (ii) was described by participants. Several participants indicated they experience being held

to higher accountability. They described that they are perceived as instigating strife when challenging hidden and null curricula and uncomfortable truths in the LO classroom.

Sasha, after a critical incident in 2016, deemed it necessary to implement a very formal group work structure when addressing potentially triggering content:

‘The learners are generally very respectful and well-mannered in their interaction in all classes. Nevertheless, in LO, far more topics cause discomfort, but I rely strongly on the Harvard thinking theories included in the AchieveCareers manuals and focus on group discussions and feedback when these topics are discussed.’

Louise described her school’s prescribed method of handling learners’ reaction to content entails ‘taking the conversation into a whole grade discussion’ when it becomes a concern:

‘If I see distress around the topic and it pops up, I will allow a little conversation. Last year, femicide dominated the news media, and the #menaretrash and #metoo movement started. My class started with this topic as a buzz which I allowed, but I did not allow the topic to take over the lesson. Then the topic migrated to another lesson, and then a different lesson. The boys became unhappy with the comments from the girls, and then we had to have a whole process of getting everybody to chat.’

Wayde seemed to feel very strongly that it is vital not to accept being bound by pre-determined and safe boundaries:

‘Prompts are good in terms of scaffolding; it helps us as facilitators to guide where the conversation is going, but at the same time, we cannot be restricted into what is pigeonholed for us. We need to have the liberty to open up the risk of having a completely unsolicited informal, critical conversation. Sometimes it goes really well, and sometimes you have one or two learners who throw curveballs into the conversation that you could not have prepared for, and sometimes you feel like the conversation can quite quickly get out of control. Then I stop and remind them of the ground rules.’

Challenging archaic ideas and beliefs may be viewed as instigating negativity (iii). Many participants appeared to have had experiences with learner-initiated conversations that they believed could have resulted in adverse reactions from colleagues. Consequently, they had to suppress specific topics.

Mignon further described reassessed professional goals and openness in accommodating learners' views:

'In these conversations, I had to grow. I will give an example - sexual orientation was a big topic, especially this year [2020], it surprised me how open learners were about sexual orientation and how fluid their opinions were considering some of their conservative homes. Initially, I was surprised, as I did not necessarily expect them to discuss it so openly. I wondered if their parents share their children's insights and views given the significant gender gap, especially their opinions on fluidity.'

However, participants seemed to actively pursue personal extension; a necessity, according to Nelia, who described her lived experiences as:

'When it comes to learners and in the classroom, I am only uplifted by what happens. I have never walked away from a lesson with learners and felt "That was dreadful" or felt upset or whatever – never! However, once they go home and the parents start unravelling and addressing the content, the reaction from select parents may not be favourable at all. So, it is only adults!'

Teacher ***autonomy is a motivator for facilitating courageous conversations (c)***. Wayde, Thea, Nelia and Harriet stressed the need for LO teachers to be trusted in developing the courage needed to facilitate courageous conversations. Ultimately, *LO teachers need to be trusted to boost the courage needed to open up uncomfortable topics (i)*.

Wayde provided the following example as a substantiation of conflicting moral boundaries between teacher autonomy, subject expectations and the school:

'[...] at my previous school, the content was far more restricted. In the 2017 CAT, one of the questions was based on the different perspectives [*the plight*] of being transgender, which I was hard-pressed to cover despite being a formal IEB assessment. I had to discuss it with the principal, and my approach was that the school's stance on such topics had to be considered and content negotiated. So, I was very confined there.'

Nelia gave an example of eroding parental involvement, which is perceived as implicit boundaries and a lack of clear guidance and support from her school:

'I had an issue with the one parent who just ripped everything [*curriculum and content*] to shreds. Whatever I did in class, he turned into a battle at school, and I said to the school that "the school needs actually to say, do not teach that" if that

is what they want. If they say do not teach it, I will not teach it because I do not have to teach anything. So that was not fun.'

Louise taught at a school with a strict religious culture, despite it not being formally managed by the church, which name and grounds it shares:

'He [*the pastor*] requested a LO learner manual from each grade, went through them and then called me in for a meeting. I now have post-its that he inserted into sections of the manuals that I have to discuss with him first, e.g., sexting, before I am allowed to proceed with teaching the content in my class'.

The LO teacher's moral fibre and authenticity should always be in the learners' interest, be critical and non-conforming (ii). Wayde and Thea seemed firm in their resolve that the teacher must ensure respectful exchanges and learners may not be allowed to discriminate, disrespect, or exceed personal space.

Mignon shared her experience of the unique bond that develops between her and her learners in the trust-based LO space:

'When you are in the class with the learner yourself, you share those experiences with them. People out there do not have those personal experiences or the connection you have. It is, therefore, unlikely that they will experience the same level of joint development that takes place. That growth will not just be possible with others who do not share this space and atmosphere. It is the same with any experience on earth. No matter how well someone explains a concert, you can never share that authentic experience if you were not there yourself.'

Wayde also described his need for non-conforming authenticity, despite its discomfort:

'If I talk to learners about this idea of cognitive dissonance, I need to be willing to experience the same. I need to show that I will allow my learners to challenge those beliefs and opinions despite my beliefs and opinions on a matter. I must model that [*self-regulation of dissonance*] within the boundaries set for this conversation. Even if I disagree with the idea, I am willing to hear what the learners have to say on the topic. I feel I can do that despite my own opinion. I may still leave the classroom with my specific opinion intact, but I feel my role as a facilitator in these conversations is to lead by example. So, if a learner questions my opinion on a matter, I will share my opinion and allow them to challenge it. I need to be able to deal with it maturely enough to model how one should deal with situations like this [*cognitive dissonance*].'

Amahle referred explicitly to the importance she attaches to the learner's interest. She stated that what is of value to the learners should always come first, even if it is deemed controversial content.

Therefore, *figures of authority need to support the LO teacher in this role, and dynamic narratives are vital to transformation (iii)*. Several participants indicated that LO was not receiving the expected level of support; consequently, they felt necessary as external motivation. Participants were clear in their opinion of the value of LO and its importance in developing learners' critical reasoning skills and promoting nation-building (Jeanette, Mignon, Harriet, Thea & Wayde).

Wayde, Amahle and Thea described the support and autonomy they received from their respective management bodies:

'As a school, we are very stringent in terms of specialisation, so you only teach the subject you are qualified in, so even though we are a small school of just over 200 learners, I was employed only to teach Life Orientation, and there is a separate teacher who is employed only to teach Physical Education. It is a case of "anything goes" at the end of the day. We need to keep ourselves in line with the IEB SAGs, but we are mindful that as an independent school, we do not necessarily need to follow every part of the government LO CAPS curriculum strictly. So, it is entirely at my discretion.' (Wayde)

'I would say that my current school is very supportive. LO is a crucial subject in the curriculum. LO is invaluable, despite it being a denominational school, and LO usually goes hand in hand with religious education. The Principal is very supportive, and the subject is given time, which is also important. I feel that I have much freedom - I will give you an example of sex education and sexuality. It is no longer difficult to have those discussions. I know that issues of sexuality are complex and were previously somewhat shunned. Since I started teaching with such openness, I have seen effective change as the content benefits the learner.' (Amahle)

'I have complete and absolute and utter freedom. No one is concerned with what I do. A couple of years ago, when the new headmaster was interested in seeing my year plan and syllabus for each grade for the year, he took one look at it and thought that it was fine, and he could live with it. So, there is no prescription as to

if I should teach Sex Ed, can I talk about religion, can I talk about abortion – there has never been anything like that. I have never had anybody say, “do not teach this,” or “teach it like this”, or “be careful when you do that”.’ (Thea)

4.2.4 LO teachers’ behavioural coping mechanisms in the facilitation of courageous conversations

Many factors are involved in **setting boundaries to facilitate courageous conversations**

(a). There is significant security for the LO teacher in controlled and structured courageous conversations but limited self-development (i). Four participants indicated they prefer facilitating courageous conversations using a formally structured format with room for open group discussions. Four participants described their preference for a less formal structure with room for learner-initiated discussions and the accommodation of spontaneous teachable moments. One participant indicated her need only to use the formal structure during the group-work format.

Mignon described her preference for the informal structure:

‘I like open conversations, and a learner often introduces a topic, and I want to allow the learners to have these types of conversations. I also enjoy these much more myself, and it is far more interesting than just going from point a) to point b).’

Wayde clarified his need to, as much as possible, marry the two options:

‘We need to be able to have the freedom to open up the risk of having a completely unsolicited informal, structured conversation where a lot can be said, we can be taken off guard during it, so it is always easier to guide these conversations where there is an element of preparedness. However, you want learners to express what they want to in our classrooms.’

Jeanette was also the subject head of History and seemed to prefer the familiarity of this formally structured format for LO:

‘I do much research in terms of the topics before I release it, so I stick to factual and try to release it in a very structured way. I expect learners to develop, which is vital in LO: perspective and empathy. I always caution the learners to have the background to make those any kinds of claim, and because I say that to them, I feel that it is vital that I can show that this is the information that I have used to generate a particular opinion. I feel like that keeps me on a much safer footing, even if it is a complex topic.’

Amahle preferred to keep discussions formal but also did not want to curb the learners' enthusiasm:

'It depends on if we need to stick to the plan, which is sometimes the case, or if we can, if there is room for us, to make those changes. So, it is not always that I allow them to do that, or maybe I will allow them, just for a few minutes, to have that discussion, and then we will have it later on, and maybe I will have to make time for it, but I cannot always allow them to do that.'

Nelia used a more flexible format, which she deemed more adaptable according to the content covered:

'When we are dealing with specific subject matters, I also try to bring in things that I know will be different ideas in the classroom because that is what it is all about – the discussion, understanding each other, and understanding those different perspectives. I think that is very important, but at the same time, if a child wants to discuss a particular thing, we will plan to do that. It might not be immediately.'

Thea also indicated her preference for a more formal structure according to a pre-determined term plan, but she did make room for learner-driven suggestions, if relevant to the lesson:

'I try to do it in such a way that sometimes I say, "that is a great idea, but hold that thought, I am going to come back to you", and then I make a point of doing that. Because sometimes you have to work with the moment – it is lost if you say, "oh, we will deal with that in the next lesson". Then it has gone so you need to manage that, but if you can bring it into what you are doing, find some common point, then I work with that because with LO, you have to think on your feet all the time, you can never predict what is going to come up, ever.'

Harriet, like Jeanette, was particular in her reasons for using a structured and factual-driven format, but preferred the actual discussions to be freely conducted in groups:

'I will choose the structured, formal, source driven format. If a current event is brought up in class and has merit, I will allow a discussion if we have time. I will then follow up with a formal, multiple perspective source-based lesson as soon as possible, followed by an informal conversation. Unless I am fully informed about an event or issue, I cannot give the learners a grounded experience, which is very important.'

LO teachers should *set specific boundaries for the learners to maintain during courageous conversations and be consistent in their implementation (ii)*. The sample group all described

the importance of setting varying boundaries that some implemented in Grade 9, but most focused on Grade 10 as soon as the learners enter the FET phase.

The boundaries identified by the participants can be collated as follows:

‘The LO space is based on mutual trust and confidentiality,
Stay focused on the stated aim of the conversation,
Be wary of narratives that may harm or be experienced as discriminatory,
Be sensitive to the views of others, acknowledge peers who use their voice,
Allow peers to finish what they have to say before you respond,
Be aware of your tone while speaking,
Make sure of how you structure your views or response,
This is a conversation, not a debate - there is no winner,
Reason always trumps emotion, and lastly
Respect the views of others even if you disagree.’

The majority of participants suggested there should be a clear indication to learners that if they react in a manner breaching these boundaries, they will be asked to take some time to collect themselves. However, it is critical to clarify that this is not done as a form of humiliation, punishment, or because their opinion is offensive or incorrect, but gives them time to regain self-control (Mignon, Louise, Thea & Wayde).

According to participants, *sharing of the self can open up trust, but it has to be carefully thought through (iii)*. It seemed to be a common practice of at least six participants to use their own life experiences, behaviours, or the experiences of friends, siblings, or family members to illustrate a specific point about human behaviour or open a conversation.

Harriet and Mignon described the positive potential of this intuitive practice:

‘I share a lot of myself, my own experiences as that becomes the baseline, most LO teachers I know do the same. Of course, that is sometimes risky, but if you are unwilling to open up and share, you cannot expect that from your learners. We expose ourselves in so many ways. I have often thought after a lesson, maybe I overshared.’ (Harriet)

‘If there is one thing that I learned specifically with the difficult conversations, it is when I make it more personal for the learners, e.g., from a personal story of a personal experience, that sharing opens them [*learners*] up to me.’ (Mignon)

Louise described her choice – seeming emotional detachment – as a possible defence mechanism:

‘I close myself off from my emotions when I feel that there is something close to my heart. I have thought to myself, “You were a bit cold there”. When I feel I have no links with the learner’s narrative, I will do some more research to ensure that I can return, and I can say, “Guys, what about this?”. In the last three, maybe four years, that has changed a lot. It is also a defence mechanism – to look after myself, to protect myself, so that they cannot say, “Oh, but Ma’am said [...]”.’

Unlocking topics for courageous conversation (b) is an untrained skill. Harriet expanded on her earlier preference of grounding her learners since ‘the teacher must be prepared for all potential questions’; without which learners have little direction to frame their arguments. However, *do not cross the line between challenging and being confrontational (i)*. In LO, challenging seems reserved for addressing humanness and the human experience of power structures. Still, the participants seemed to feel quite strongly it should be phrased as “[...] said the following, what do you think?” or “What if?” scenarios (Thea, Nadia & Harriet).

Jeanette explained her approach as aiming for neutral, and she described her professional persona as non-provocational. She relied on opening content with a very fact-based opening statement:

‘I am not into trigger comments. I think it can land you in some trouble, especially with learners who are not always as well informed on the information or the knowledge behind things – as much as they think they are.’

Nelia initially indicated that she ‘likes to stir’. However, she later clarified this as using questions that may be perceived as challenging, while ensuring it is directed at a learner known for moderate views:

‘I am a bit of a stirrer! I want learners to engage, and I want them to question, so what I try to do is say, “This is the topic”. We usually would watch a video clip, or we would read an article and then open up the discussion with a ‘somebody said’, and sometimes learners are not very quick to start, but I am lucky because I have usually got at least one person in each class who is always keen to speak first, so I will even pick that learner and say, “What do you have to say?”. After that first response, I proceed with ‘What if?’ questions.’

Scaffold conversation topics according to learner maturity (ii). The participants who indicated they use the AchieveCareers programme seemed to rely on the materials provided for Grade

10, focusing on cognitive dissonance as part of the critical thinking section (Sharon, Thea, Louise & Wade).

Sasha described her views of the importance of focusing on the skills required for critical discourse as follows:

'The learners benefit from scaffolding conversations and discussions based on the resources provided and minimise personal risk. My Grade 10 teacher also incorporates IB aspects focused on developing critical analysis and reasoning skills in LO. This approach is also helpful with the preparatory activities for a LO discursive essay format and the annual IEB CAT done in Grade 12.'

Mignon also shared her preferred approach as focusing on systematically increasing the sensitivity from Grade 10 onward, and then opening more controversial topics and content selected for critical conversation in the Grade 12 year:

'I am far more open with my Grade 12 classes because I know they are more mature about these conversations. I hold back with the younger grades. There is an increased maturity and growth in terms of their worldviews and observing how their perspectives have changed. I also find that the most challenging conversations facilitation then takes less effort - it is almost as if they are invested and comfortable with the process of difficult conversations.'

Wayde described his approach and reasoning of the importance of starting the process in Grade 10 by focusing on mastering the skills of critical reasoning:

'I prepare a lot from the manual [*AchieveCareers*] about cognitive dissonance and self-analysis strategies before moving into controversial conversations. So as much as possible, I try to scaffold the content and talking points to ensure that when we are having these conversations, as difficult as possible, we are doing it maturely. Prompts are good in terms of scaffolding; it helps us as facilitators to guide where the conversation is going.'

It was mentioned that LO teachers must *know when to channel power to the strong voices, empower the minority voices, and know when to step in and refocus the discourse (iii)*. It is generally relatively easy to differentiate between the emotive, informed, and reflective voices and learners who prefer to observe and rarely offer their opinions (Mignon, Wayde, Nelia & Thea).

Harriet's school starts teaching LO from Grade 10, while she teaches Grade 12 LO. She described her approach to channelling voices as follows:

'The demography is so skewed towards white learners. I often have to ask why there are only white voices. Where are my strong black voices? A lot of what I do for prep is to source alternative narratives to add to our conversations. Despite the learners being mature in their understanding of ethics and confidentiality, I constantly reinforce it, but as I said, our school is very liberal-minded, and therefore learners have greater confidence in their "voice". However, it is never guaranteed that what is said in the class stays in the class. Furthermore, you have to be crazy prepared, and the learners cannot catch you unprepared or ignorant.'

Thea seemed to have great faith in LO teachers' ability to be prepared for the unexpected. She stressed that:

'When a learner's response to a topic makes the conversation stall – acknowledge that you are not aware of that [*content*], especially if it is on content deemed taboo. Allow that learner to explain their view and knowledge, or ask for time to research it and return to the class at a set time.'

Mignon, who taught at a parallel-medium school, experienced that combining Afrikaans and English-speaking learners from Grade 10 onward reduces bias towards diverse opinions and views – systematically getting to know all their peers seems to make for respectful discussions:

'[...] it could be that there is a balance created by the combination of English and Afrikaans learners that are now suddenly together for LO and their beliefs differ. This language dynamic may prevent the learners from acting out negatively. In addition, we have such diversity in our classes that I think it aids in the discussions. The learners have so many varied opinions and perspectives to introduce and share that the learners have much to consider.'

Wayde leaned towards a pre-determined stance as part of his boundaries to prevent conversations from turning into confrontations:

'When I become aware of it, hopefully, at an early point, I will stop the conversation, remind the class of the ground rules, what the objective of the conversation is, and then try to start again. If I identify a student who is being particularly difficult, not in terms of their opinion, but in how they express their opinion or how they talk to others. I will warn them. In extreme situations, I have had to ask a learner to remove themselves from the class. However, it is vital to ensure that they

understand it is not done to belittle them or their opinion, but they lost self-control and need space to regain it.'

Topics likely to trigger dissonance during a courageous conversation (c) were also described; participants identified a range of topics likely to cause cognitive dissonance in their learners. The topics can be categorised into three main groups: identity, socio-political differences, and the prevalent status quo. A discussion of each topic follows.

Identity: the self, racial and cultural environment, gender, and sexual fluidity must be considered a foundation that embodies all aspects of learner becoming (i). Transgender personal pronouns demanded by a learner may be fiercely opposed by their parent(s) or the school (Wayde). Some LGBTQ+ learners are more likely to disclose to their friends at school, while others may have the full support of their families (Mignon & Nelia).

Sasha attempted to describe the fluidity of demographics where race loyalty seems an obstacle:

'It is tough to pinpoint demographics other than the statistical indications of demography, as this also depends on how the mixed-race or bi-racial learners identify themselves. Some identify very strongly as black, whereas others see themselves as a racial grouping outside the traditional white or black ethnic groupings.'

Wayde described the seeming accommodation of religious cultural practises, based on prearranged permission:

'We are a traditional denominational school, but we have a large contingent of non-Christian learners, quite a large Muslim and Hindu group but mainly from a Muslim background. We are open to Muslim girls when they need to wear a hijab for religious purposes – as pre-arranged with the school. Our Chaplain is also open to discussions of other religions and opinions.'

On occasion, learners' religious beliefs and respective moral stances seem to be oppositional when combined with current opinions on sexuality, as highlighted by Mignon:

'If you ask challenging questions about religion, it can become quite controversial as many of the learners in our school have strong links to their faith. It can become an extremely challenging conversation if the discussion turns into a combination of faith and sexual topics.'

Nelia indicated an easing up of the controversy with having open discussions on LGBTQ+ topics:

‘With the LGBTQ movement, I have had trouble with this in the past, and although there are now more openly LGBTQ+ learners in class than in previous years, it seems to get better. I know that some parents and learners initially raised concerns that we were pushing learners to be gay – but that is not our learners – the learners love it, but the parents do not! The learners ask questions; they want to know and understand.’

Thea described the impact of the #menaretrash campaign on her male learners:

‘The boys are very susceptible to the #menaretrash campaign and the feminists who hate men, and they are sensitive to that. The boys do not want to feel that being male means they are predisposed to rape, disrespect women, or become abusers. Some of their interactions with female colleagues or women, in general, made them very sensitive to that. In his CAT A: Question 4, one of the boys wrote about an atmosphere similar to reverse sexism and how they feel targeted solely because they are male. So that is quite a sensitive topic.’

Political: an LO teacher in the minority demographic has to listen and observe more, deferring to a learner role rather than a prescriptive teacher role (ii). In terms of political discourse, many participants specifically referred to the importance of having sound factual substantiation and critical multiple perspectives from renowned BIPOC journalists (Amahle, Thea, Sasha, Jeanette, Harriet & Wayde).

Sasha described her experience with controversial topics as follows:

‘A significant number of learners across the board tie every topic back to race or gender issues. It used to be quite balanced, but now there are far louder, sometimes angry, black voices, and the confident white voices that used to be prominent are fading - they do not want to risk seeming offensive or having their opinions misconstrued. The voices who refrain from verbalising their opinions tend to do so in written work they know will not be shared with the class’.

Wayde also shared this experience in facilitating and presenting compulsory political content and questions:

‘Being in the country that we are in, racial issues is always a trigger. So, we have to be very mindful of how that plays out, discussion of what it means to be African, that was a very controversial conversation, and I had to be very mindful of how

that content was presented and how things [*discussion points*] were worded during the discourse.'

Amahle summarised what seems to be her learners' most significant triggers as:

'Some classes consist of only black learners, where there are white learners present, they usually do not participate. I would say gender issues, and gender-based violence, and gender stereotypes and the issues of racism, but you still get issues of sexuality as well. I find that girls are more into women empowerment. They are very passionate about women empowerment. Gender equality, equity and gender-based discrimination prevent them from being treated right [*gender discrimination, femicide, gender equality in society and the workplace*] - currently, that is a big thing for the older grades, but not xenophobia.'

Thea described her experiences regarding varying demographics and its impact at a single-sex school for boys as follows:

'You have got the whole boys' school's mentality. We do not have girls to temper the testosterone - they are relatively competitive and incredibly loyal to each other. At the moment, with all the race issues popping up, learners are becoming a little bit more cautious as to what they say, what they do, but we have always had this boys' school code – you do not split on your brother, and you bleed for your brother. Going back to school for the past two or three weeks, it was noticeable how they missed each other and how they have rebounded'.

Topics that could be perceived as *challenging the status quo* include *white fragility, white supremacy, black lives matter, micro-aggressions; know your learners (iii)*.

Sasha described alternative deflection decisions by her school that she feels minimise the risk to teachers and may serve the learner better:

'Due to social media activism against several independent schools in 2020, a Diversity Specialist and a Gender Specialist were appointed to the staff. Any indication of strain regarding these matters, the learner or learners are referred to one of these counsellors for specific support.'

Wayde referred to identified behaviour from non-LO teachers regarding race, which was also hinted at by several other participants:

‘Some teachers still harbour an approach that race is not a part of their curriculum.

They are not required to teach this, so they will not discuss it.’

These sentiments echoed strongly what Ally (2006:32) describes as ‘race evasiveness’.

Thea shared what she experienced as the difference between racial cognisance and experiential worldview development among non-LO teachers:

‘I do sometimes, and it is a very nasty thing, get the feeling, and I do not mean it in a wrong way, that some of the people [*staff members & social circle*] I interact with are ignorant in their view of the world. I often think: Why don’t you also see it this way? Why don’t you have this connection and understanding?’

Amahle, who taught at a ninety percent BIPOC learner demographic school, seemed to identify strongly with elements specific to her BIPOC learners’ experiences. This openness may be created due to the BIPOC learners feeling more comfortable with their BIPOC teacher:

‘Gender-based violence is the biggest issue, and I feel that it triggers a lot of what they see at home or in their lives, so they get very emotional, and they also get very defensive. Furthermore, I also worry because I do not know how to balance girls being so, you know, “women empowerment”, and then also being women, women who are so vulnerable, and that is also the power, that is also the positive thing.’

In contrast, Louise commented about her majority white learners’ initiative to intercede on behalf of their BIPOC peers in what they may have felt would elicit a more favourable exchange with their white teacher about gender-based violence:

‘Last year, for example, white girls started the conversation about gender-based violence, and then everybody got involved, even though it was black girls being murdered by their boyfriends at that stage.’

Despite the LO teacher’s best efforts, ***providing closure to a courageous conversation (d)*** may be untenable. The teacher should *keenly observe the time and atmosphere in the conversation, tone down the fervour of the discourse before the end of the lesson (i)*. Group work may be a better-suited choice to close critical discourse, as the groups are allocated a set time for discussion, collating and feedback (Sasha).

Harriet experienced it as critical to proceed as follows:

'I set a timer to go off before the last 10 minutes of class. We then sit in the circle, and I ask each learner if they felt their opinion/question/challenge was met and they feel satisfied with the outcome. I would rather split a discussion over two lessons than miss out on those ten minutes.'

Mignon seemed to find it practical to have a summative recap of the discourse at regular intervals, especially if the narratives lean into a more robust tone:

'I always try [*when conflict is brewing*] to stop and summarise the conversation up to that point. I also reiterate that ultimately there will always be different perspectives, and I then try to calm the group to explain the objective of the topic, and they have to refer to the material [*sources*] provided. It is always important to return them [*in closing*] to the discussion's aim because eventually, they have to show those perspectives in their assignment. I also find that [*with maturity*] facilitation of challenging conversations takes less effort. It is almost as if the learners have become invested and comfortable with the process of difficult conversations.'

Ultimately, *closure is necessary but not always possible - settle for calm to end (ii)* the lesson. According to Harriet, splitting a lesson and including a debriefing during the pre-planning phase for all courageous conversations may prevent a lack of closure.

Amahle described experiences where learners' views may be so firm that they will not consider other perspectives, causing the discussion to stall:

'So currently, I am still struggling in that area because I find the girls to be unwavering – they have already made their decision because of what is happening in South Africa and what is happening in the world around us when it comes to gender-based violence. So that is always a big thing, and we can never actually finish it [*a critical conversation*].'

Wayde suggested the need to be allowed to talk is often greater than the topic itself:

'You know, often teenagers want to be treated as young adults, and once they have their opinions heard [*that need is met*], and I think in many situations when they are in other subjects or with their families, they often feel like they are still treated like children and so they need to have their opinions heard.'

Participants mentioned it is important to *note links for next or future lessons, and revisit what is necessary or what was agreed (iii)*. Nelia stressed the significance of listening and more

listening during learner discussions, and Harriet mentioned the importance of noting aspects raised or introduced as scaffolding or prompts for future lessons.

Wayde emphasised the importance of maintaining a regulated LO space:

‘Sometimes you have got one or two learners who throw curveballs into the conversation that you could not have prepared for, and sometimes you sense the conversation could get out of control. Buying time to prepare and plan for these discussions is better because you can start getting different opinions on the content before facing those challenging, often emotively driven, opinions brought up in the classroom.’

Harriet described another facet of importance when facilitating courageous conversations:

‘When you facilitate such lessons [*critical discourse*], you pick up on their conversations and use that as inspiration for future lessons.’

4.2.5 The LO teacher’s process during the facilitation of courageous conversations

The facilitation process of courageous conversations **(a)** requires LO teachers to *be flexible, but maintain the agreed boundaries (i)*. Thea expressed that it is vital to manage learners who dominate at the start of the conversation to allow more voices to be heard.

Mignon described her process with challenging topics as follows:

‘Usually, with the tricky and really sensitive topics, if only one learner starts speaking or sharing, then, especially in my classes, usually other learners join and then it becomes an insightful discussion. Most of the time, I allow the learners to drive the conversation. I might add a different idea or perspective in line with their narrative to widen or broaden their discussions.’

Wayde seemed insistent that LO teachers must enable all learners to have the opportunity to be heard:

‘These conversations are necessary. Many people are not willing to hear teenagers’ opinions, and unless we teach them how to share their opinions and have these discussions when they are adults, they are not going to know how to conduct these discussions. So, for me, the first point is not necessarily their opinion on the subject matter but the underpinning of the skills needed to have a controversial conversation.’

Do not underestimate views from home, role models or current socio-political influencers (ii). Amahle and Mignon indicated that they shared the opinion, based on respective experiences, that parents' role, home life and influences at home [*parent, family, friends, social media influencers*] become the premise for opinions and arguments raised in the classroom.

Sharon suggested the greater danger of retaliation from parents is due to:

'You have to prove yourself to each new class you teach, and you constantly have to win the learner's respect. They [*parents & disciplinary committee*] did not care about the context of what was said, the greater narrative that took place, or the trusting environment we try to create in LO. It took my soul and my love for my subject, and at the time, my love for my school.'

Jeanette experienced what seemed a clear indication of a lack of validity and reliability of learners' views:

'You can land in trouble, especially with learners who are not clued up on the information or the knowledge behind news events – as much as they think they are, learners are not as knowledgeable as they believe. When they say "someone said", they cannot identify the person or the context in which it was said.'

Amahle further added that she encountered a lack of sensitivity to socio-political progress already made:

'However, as time goes on, I am finding learners increasingly vocal and not afraid to tackle issues and sensitive topics. I wonder if the learners – I do not know if they are always sensitive to other people, I do not know if they always consider where socio-political issues originate from and how they have progressed, so I sometimes find the learners to be very entitled.'

Participants shared it is essential for LO teachers to *create opportunities for all voices to be heard; if needed, become the unrepresented voices (iii)*. As Harriet experienced, there is a clear need for the teacher to speak up in support of minorities and provide sound sources to empower that minority voice.

Mignon indicated her sense that not all learners have opportunities for free and fluid opinions at home:

'I have often wondered if they have the opportunities to express their views and opinions at home. The learners are given an open invitation, and Life Orientation opens up someone interested in what they have to say and feel this. Therefore,

they share their opinions more openly in an environment created for this purpose. I doubt that they are all always able to do this at home.'

Sasha also mentioned her view that it is important not to underestimate the power of the written voice:

'However, the voices who now choose not to share still express their opinions with specificity in their discursive essays and task that will not be shared. I am still passionate about LO and our teaching skills, but I am more cautious about engaging with learners.'

Wayde seemed to stress the value to both learners and teachers if all voices are accommodated:

'I think it changes opinions regarding both the teacher and the learners. It affects what their opinion on a matter is - as an example, discussing privilege. It shapes my ideas of what privilege is and how it affects them [*my learners*] and shapes all learners' understanding of what that [*privilege*] means.'

Supporting learners who experience dissonance is a vital teacher role **(b)**. *Should the behaviour be aggressive and rigid, the learner may benefit from alone time to regain composure (i)*. Wayde shared his experiences of the dangers of a completely unsolicited, informal, unstructured conversation driven by emotion. Harriet also referred to her experience with testosterone-driven arguments. Moreover, Louise mentioned a specific incident where a female learner burst into tears during a robust interaction with a male learner regarding the #menaretrash campaign.

Sasha shared the following as her process to defuse an adverse turn in the conversation:

'I stop the conversation by stating that it is taking a turn that may offend others, and instead, we will get back to it later. If anyone insists on continuing, I ask them to find factual substantiation and present it in the next lesson.'

Ultimately, *address behaviour, not the learner (ii)*. Both Wayde and Louise appeared convinced that the only recourse in their respective indicated experiences was to ask the specific learners to remove themselves from the conversation, accompanied by a supportive peer or teacher.

Louise appeared insistent on stressing the critical need for teacher mediation:

‘[...] an accompanied exit for both the male and female learner, who was shaking and sobbing, were possible. The boy’s behaviour was addressed with him apart from the rest of the grade.’

However, her main concern seemed focused on the respective learners’ reactions, which she experienced as:

‘not productive to the broader conversation. I made time to have a supportive discussion with the learners involved at a later time.’

Wayde concurred with Louise’s view and specified that:

‘[...] in extreme situations, I have had to ask a learner to remove themselves from the class. However, it must be clear that you are not belittling them or their opinion.’

The teacher must *provide* the learners with *one-on-one support* to assist *the learners in positively expressing their views (iii)*. Thea explained her experiences with some learners with low EQ and the need to closely monitor them to ensure a mindful manner and tone when sharing, opening up, or responding to a critical topic. Thea, Sasha and Nelia also strongly felt learners should be allowed to respond when they are ready or alternatively recognise specific minority learners’ written responses as the preferred safe space in which they share their voices.

Critical incidents and their impact on teacher motivation and future facilitation of courageous ***conversations (c)*** were described. Any incident where morals, ethics and ideologies clash or cause a sense of malicious intent, discrimination or rigidity by either learner or teacher can be described as a critical incident.

Sasha had the most significant adverse critical incidents, which resulted in a formal charge and disciplinary action:

‘Each of my responses to their questions [*in the 2017 disciplinary*] was turned on me, and I felt intimidated, insulted, and exposed, you know. After a week or so, we had a conversation, three out of the four learners said quite honestly, “Ma’am, this got out of hand. We apologise because we honestly do not think of you like that [*as a racist*]. The one girl said: “Yes, I think you are a racist”, straight out like that. I said: “Well, I am sorry that you can even think that of me, and I hope and pray that as you go forward, you will find it in your heart to forgive me” [*netso*]. To me, she seemed closed off to anything that would open up the matter to

further discussions. Even two parents said to me, “We are so sorry to have put you through this”. It took me a long time to recover. However, you know the damage was done - the damage was done. Such a thing follows you around.’

She later added the following regarding the June 2020 cancel culture campaign:

‘The social media campaigns and the accusations made in mid-2020 came as a massive surprise to us. None of the concerns and claims made were ever raised in an LO class or anywhere else. My whole 2017 incident and some other minor allegations about me were all over Facebook and Instagram. So, the trust and respect you think you have instilled – is not as strong as you thought. Ja, but we go on the best we can.’ (Sasha)

Harriet also referred to the cancel culture campaign of June 2020:

‘We were also affected by the social media criticisms and allegations in June of 2020 – that was scary. Every time you go through what is newly posted, check if you see if your name, your staff’s name, or if LO is mentioned. When such events occur, we lack strong leadership and focus on what needs to be done and not what was done [...] I felt there was not strong enough leadership. Open conversation needs to be had, strengths and weaknesses must be identified [...] be wise, giving learners everything they want is not sustainable [...] I am not saying LO should set the pace. So many good LO teachers at many schools were ripped apart, and much damage was done. We expose ourselves in so many ways. When such events occur, we lack strong leadership and a focus on what needs to be done, not what was done. Open conversations should have been had, strengths and weaknesses identified - with wisdom, focused on sustainability, much damage was done.’

Learner maturity, teachers’ skill, knowledge, and self-awareness are critical to an effective, holistic conversation (i). Nelia seemed convinced her self-knowledge aids the learners in being self-aware. She explained to her learners that they have developed ideas, opinions, beliefs and values, but not everyone they encounter shares them. ‘I am not you, and you are not me’ (Nelia).

Thea appeared resolute about the significance of constantly reminding learners of the importance of the LO space as a safe space:

‘One of the first things I stress, in Grade 10, is that LO needs to be a safe space. We need to feel that we can trust others in the class. Initially, we do not know each

other, we take it slowly, and towards the end, when we are more comfortable with each other, I try to get everybody involved. Once you start knowing the boys, you also know when some would prefer to keep quiet - do not pressure them or directly ask them something. It might be a bit touchy if it is a sensitive topic.'

Harriet described the importance of a whole school focusing on instilling learners with confidence in their voice. It is then up to each teacher to mould the expression of the learners' voices:

'Per our verbal agreement [*with management*], learners only start LO in Grade 10 at my school. Therefore, the learners are more mature in their understanding of ethics and confidentiality. I constantly reinforce this, but as I said, our school is very liberal-minded, and therefore learners have greater confidence in their "voice".'

Mignon seemed confident in her praxis of honing an awareness and knowing when to step back and allow the learners to drive their narrative; in such cases, the teacher's role is to ensure mutual respect:

'I have also had to learn and grow - I had to learn that I have to stand back in these discussions and allow the learners to form their own opinions and shape their worldview by trial and error. However, there were specific views and topics when I felt the opinion veered into discriminating, and I reacted decisively. These [*critical conversations*] reached a level with the senior classes, Grade 11 and 12, where we are in a place where it is rarely needed for me to react, the learners will draw the line independently because they are comfortable with these conversations'.

Regardless of their expertise in LO, teachers have to know – do not assume; ask for clarification, listen, and observe (ii). Louise clarified her experience that the LO teacher's approach to a topic must be adapted to the dynamic in each class, since it differs.

Nelia described her position regarding the need to know rather than assume as:

'it is crucial to know the learners because some learners I know would never say anything - others will come up with amazing opinions. I have got one youngster in matric who has finally realized that he does have a voice and has this wealth of knowledge as a young black man is so beneficial for the rest of the learners. He is the one at the end of our discussion the other day who said, "I just want to say, if any of you are feeling uncomfortable after this, that is OK, you are on the road to recovery." How sweet is that – "you are on the road to recovery".'

Sasha defended her preference for negotiating the risks in the LO space and fostering peer understanding and 'knowing' that enriches her knowing vicariously:

'Some of the older learners, Grade 11 & Grade 12, make excellent and valid points that are informative and enrich the general LO experience. These learners usually also seem to have much peer influence and set an excellent example - and, you know, it is accepted more positively if it is dealt with on a peer level before being shared with the class as feedback. There is also less chance of it [views/opinions] becoming a personal attack on anyone else if it is a collated response.'

Do not fear failure; courage takes practice. Introduce your topic by clarifying your choice of content (iii). The participants indicated that specific topics continue to present a challenge. Deferring contentious topics may present a reprieve to the teacher, but it must be addressed at a predetermined date.

Jeanette described her frustration at being limited to a 40-minute lesson in a classroom environment:

'The best way to deal with conflict is to be in a safe space for something you may not like to allow understanding and perspective. You will not achieve that in a 40-minute lesson in your classroom, which is why I challenge the learners to organise outdoor activities. I do not help them; I facilitate and assist them with crisis management, but for me, that is where the growth is and that has been the spark for LO at [school] - we try not to be limited to the physical classroom. I think that is critical.'

Amahle motivated her process of deferring spontaneous learner interjections to a planned lesson by stating:

'Current issues, things like race, I do not think it is easy to have that kind of discussion without giving them [learners] different perspectives and useful content - not just my experiences and knowledge. I usually prefer to wait and then really prepare something solid and with academic standing because, with only girls, some responses become very emotive.'

The LO teacher should *take time for positive self-reflection and analysis of the critical moments or incidents (iv)*. It is rarely possible to do self-reflection or an analysis of a critical conversation directly following an incident. However, if this is planned explicitly as a joint exercise, it becomes possible (Jeanette & Harriet).

Harriet seemed to have achieved success by including a ten-minute debrief to conclude the conversation and allow for reflection:

‘Were you heard? Are you satisfied with how your views were treated? What were your opposing views? Consider if you are still satisfied with your opinion? How are you going to react; reconsider, adjust or dismiss?’

Jeanette also planned the following specific aspect of her factually based critical conversations:

‘I try to keep it structured, but at the end of a section, I will have a couple of discussion questions, where I ask the learners to share their perspectives or discuss if their views have changed? I think that is a better way of encouraging closure at the end of a discussion on difficult questions.’

The ***meaning attached to the shared and mutual learning experience of a courageous conversation (d)*** was referred to in terms of *increased skills and knowledge base – it is a shared experience (i)*. Thea claimed to experience merit in embracing situations in which LO teachers cannot provide all the answers, accepting there is no failure in admitting that, and asking for time to research the topic and get back to the class.

Louise seemed slightly uncertain of the effectiveness of her defence mechanism to keep her emotions out of courageous conversations:

‘I can be a bit cold when I feel that there is something close to my heart. However, that does not mean I do not let them know how I feel, but I feel it is their narrative - their opportunity. It is not my opportunity to bring my opinion - it is to grant them the opportunity to grapple with this content, obviously with my guidance.’

Nelia shared an insight she gained during her lived experience of grappling with a collective South African identity:

‘An inclusive national identity is one of the discussions we had around the contents of the 2018 and 2019 CATs. Interestingly, Afrikaans learners discovered that they have a greater South African identity than the English-speaking learners. Because English-speaking South Africans do not seem to have anything cultural to cling to that binds us to South Africa.’

To attain a *broader worldview*, one must *be open to all views and voices, expect negative feedback, but clarify rather than defend (ii)*. When content or comments trigger cognitive

dissonance, learner behaviours and reactions are likely to be emotive first and then slowly return to cognitive (Amahle, Thea & Harriet).

Nelia highlighted the insight she gained from identifying the importance of specifically ensuring all learners know they have a voice:

‘When we have these discussions, according to the rules, we have wonderful discussions. With other classes where only a few people of colour do not want to talk, they feel they will not be heard. With the “Black Lives Matter” campaign, we had a whole conversation with our learners, and we have got many learners who are saying that in the past they did not feel they had a voice – they could not speak out even if they wanted to.’

She added that unpopular realities seem to be continuously brought into LO discussions:

‘With the race thing [*systemic inequalities*], what always comes in is the issues around affirmative action, black economic empowerment, with white learners feeling it is so unfair, and it is time that things changed - the learners want to know, listen, and they want to learn. Always be ready to listen, always be ready to change where change is necessary.’

Thea similarly stressed what Wayde referred to as ‘curveballs’:

‘I try to include it - sometimes I say, “that is a great idea, but hold that thought, I will come back to you”, and then I make a point of doing that. Because sometimes you have to work with the moment – it is lost if you say, “oh, we will deal with that in the next lesson”. Then it has gone.’

Negativity, inflexibility, or seeming insolence have to be approached with patience (Wayde). It is preferable to deal with it privately rather than allowing a situation to regress into oppositional behaviour, potentially causing the teacher’s self-control to fail (Louise).

Successful courageous conversations are liberating – share learners’ breakthroughs and praise their courage (iii). In courageous conversations, teachers critically grapple with socio-emotional, socio-political, and identity development difficulties (Harriet).

Nelia thus shared her perspectives of using critical discourse to extend the learners’ worldview:

‘When we are dealing with specific subject matters, I also try to bring in things that I know will be different ideas in the classroom because that is what it is all about –

the discussion, understanding each other, and understanding those different perspectives. I think that is very important, but at the same time, if a learner wants to discuss a particular thing, we will plan to do that.'

Thea also clarified her impressions of the June 2020 cancel culture campaign based on the open discourse between her learners:

'The race issue has been very touchy – the boys have been very cautious – I do not think anybody wanted to get stuck into an "us and them" scenario. Many of the boys are close friends. They have been meticulous about what they say and what unguarded comments may imply - they do not want to ruin a tight friendship. I am aware of it, but I cannot put my finger on the hidden undercurrent at present with all the racial allegations on social media platforms and everything around us'.

Use the experience to evaluate and adapt personal beliefs and reframe perceptions (iv). Both teachers and learners must understand that it is vital for mutual growth to be attached to personal beliefs and perceptions.

Mignon described the importance of the joint growth in beliefs and perceptions that is exclusive to LO as follows:

'Colleagues friends and family cannot share the same space and atmosphere that we have with the learners and, therefore, they cannot have the same level of growth.'

Wayde also felt strongly that the teacher and learner can only make sense of the meaning attached to any interaction if it is shared:

'to model the correct response to dissonance experienced by a learner, the teacher must share the trigger and assist the learner in clarifying the origin of that trigger with respect and empathy.'

Louise made a very valid point that learners do not often get enough time to grapple with new ideas or perspectives before they can accept or discard new views:

'One should remind oneself that the learner also needs to grapple with this content, but critically and with guidance, to evaluate the new content fully.'

Nelia similarly found it essential that any teacher should explain to their learners that:

'We all have these ideas; we were brought up in different families, which affects who we are as adults. We bring all that with us - I am not you, and you are not me.'

Some things will make us uncomfortable, but that is life. We do not all agree. We are all extremely different. Keep what you find valuable and leave what you disagree with – that is how we keep our minds and opinions growing.'

LO is based on all aspects of being human. Opinions and views give us the volition and drive to continue evolving and attach meaning to every new experience. Every situation in the LO space is filled with many perspectives that should potentially create insight and acceptance of learners' opinions and well-being.

4.3 The role of depletion, lack of support, and dissonance in the lived experience of the LO teacher as the facilitator of courageous conversations

Table 9 [Chapter 3] reflects the questions used during the focus group discussion conducted on 3 March 2021.

Table 11: Diagram of Emergent Themes from the Focus Group Discussion

Thematic Coding of the Focus Group Discussion		
4.3.1 UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND A LACK OF RECOGNITION	a) LO associated with topics to be avoided	i. Disengaged colleagues ii. Value as mediator and facilitator versus instigator
	b) High risk and high accountability	iii. LO needs, content and context ignored
	c) Expertise on all LO-related topics is assumed	iv. Demands made on LO teachers are not equal to their perceived value of LO
	d) Demands exceed the perceived value of LO	v. Teachers are conflicted between the need for value-adding and the external dismissal of LO vi. Struggle for internal motivation
	e) Unseen and undervalued	vii. Performance levels for LO are equal to all other subjects viii. Teachers develop negative coping skills
	f) Suppressed resentment	ix. Resentment at lack of recognition x. Fearful of judgement if failing to perform to demands
4.3.2 CHALLENGES PREVENTING TEACHER MOTIVATION AND	a) Professional exhaustion	i. LO content and context add to teachers' lack of motivation ii. No opportunities for self-regulation after a difficult lesson
	b) Lack of control in the teaching environment	iii. Constant risk of allegations in the LO environment is much higher
	c) Responsibilities too broad and diverse	iv. Trans-disciplinary teaching/sports roles create an inability to manage time

Thematic Coding of the Focus Group Discussion		
	d) Dissonance and depletion become the norm	v. Lack of self-reflection and self-regulation results in the inability to effectively address the failure of self-control vi. Professional and emotional dissonance becomes the teacher's default setting
	e) Lack of set content and guidelines	vii. Immense responsibility to know what is happening in the world viii. The innate need to perform beyond the minimum is deemed critical
	f) Need for empowering mentors to set the pace	ix. Inexperienced teachers need assertive mentors to set clear boundaries x. More opportunities and specialised forums are needed for skills development
4.3.3 STRATEGIST AND FACILITATOR AS SET TEACHER BEHAVIOUR	a) Strategising for potential failure	i. Negative proactivity is mentally exhausting ii. Frustration at the ambivalence of colleagues regarding learners' concerns
	b) Learner response cannot be predicted	iii. Vulnerability: LO Teachers become the null or hidden curriculum by association iv. LO teachers deal with opinions, views and perceptions, not set content
	c) Role of learner maturity levels	v. A trust relationship between teacher and learners is critical Gauging maturity levels, knowing learners' triggers, agendas and boundaries
	d) Authentic teacher as subject content	vii. Authenticity is vital to foster openness
	e) Self-protection replaces courage as a coping mechanism	viii. Teachers should embrace opportunities to be the learner, acknowledge areas of inexperience
4.3.4 IMPACT OF LEARNED TEACHER BEHAVIOUR	a) Self-reflection as restorative self-care	i. Fear of judgement prevents LO teachers from seeking support ii. Loyalty and single staff departments add to self-isolation
		iii. Need to build on commonalities to create a support network
	b) Internal versus external support systems	iv. LO departments must have shared critical agencies and equal commitment

4.3.1 Unrealistic expectations and a lack of recognition as a specific barrier to the LO teacher

LO is **associated** mainly **with topics to be avoided (a)**, especially by *disengaged colleagues (i)* who prefer circumventing learner narratives with prescribed content.

Jeanette referred specifically to LO teachers as seeming to have the sole responsibility of addressing these contentious conversations:

‘Everybody would just rather leave these topics alone and pretend it did not happen. They discuss topics based on prescribed literature and poems in English, which has changed with calls to de-colonialise and incorporate more African content. These LO questions are pertinent issues in the world today. Why is it only us?’

Harriet responded to Jeanette’s explanation, substantiating the difficulties she faced in LO:

‘I think it is also intriguing, and part of the reason it is so hard in LO is precisely what you were saying. My school is quite different in that all subjects and all teachers must actively include de-colonialism elements in their curriculums, and we are sensitive to equity in classrooms. However, the difference is between set curricula, say in Mathematics Literacy. Even English classroom discussions are different - prescribed literature is someone else’s words.’

Wayde appeared firm in his evaluation of the palpable difference in the perceptions of LO duties and the recognition it receives. He claimed to experience:

‘There is always that conflict between your job is extremely important, and you have so much value, but you also see another side where you face the attitude of its just the LO department, and it is not a real *[20 credit]* subject, and there is no real academic value - and so there is that struggle.’

Value as mediator and facilitator versus instigator (ii); whether it is hypersensitivity regarding mental health, gender or sexual difficulties, the topic is deferred to LO. Harriet pointed out that courageous conversations may continue beyond the classroom, despite the explicit boundary of confidentiality.

Jeanette also mentioned that discussions in the LO space may cause a seeming flare-up around the content:

'We often get chunked under the rug because nobody wants to have those conversations that LO teachers have, and so often when we, as staff meet, and these matters come up, the attitude is "leave it to the LO teachers". However, we also face being seen as the teachers who may have instigated the hypersensitivity around these matters rather than seeing us as doing an excellent job by actively discussing these controversial topics.'

Harriet highlighted the need for LO teachers to be prepared to address matters without preparation time, since the timeous mentoring of learners is vital in maintaining equilibrium:

'If you have to be constantly able to be thrown into questions - I mean, you know, you have to take on your uber strong feminist girls when they are shutting down other learner's voices, you have to take on *[reign in]* individuals – you know what I mean, learners who are overtly angry in your classroom because of their own narratives'.

The need for an LO teacher to be adaptable to any conversation and spontaneously evolving context was also referred to by Thea as an intuitive skill acquired with experience.

High risk and high accountability (b) are associated with recognising and meeting the SAGs for *LO needs*, despite *content and context* being *ignored (iii)*. Five participants indicated that, despite the formal accommodation of LO as a compulsory subject, they feel they receive minimal recognition and affirmation:

'Recognition and affirmation are crucially important, and it does motivate me. I am not going to lie - it is definitely a motivator.' (Mignon)

Jeanette also stated that LO teachers do not often get praised, with which Wayde agreed.

'I just feel that support is lacking considerably at the moment.' (Sasha)

'I do not know if anyone else feels this, but that lack of acknowledgement undoubtedly is a massive thing for me in terms of my professional motivation and gratification.' (Harriet)

Jeanette and Sasha claimed that support for LO teachers' staff development, such as basic counselling techniques, are often deemed excessive when weighed against LO's ten-credit status:

'There is so much that I can learn, but I am stuck in a more rural school where I am it – I must know everything.' (Jeanette)

'It is not just about bringing in dieticians [*contentious topic seen as body-shaming*] - it is also about presenters for substance abuse. It costs extra money, and they [*school*] do not want to pay that, and suddenly - no more budget is available.' (Sasha)

Due to the number of learners and transport costs, off-campus opportunities are thus discouraged, except for work experience days when learners are responsible for their own transport.

Expertise on all LO-related topics is assumed (c). However, the *demands made on LO teachers are not equal to their colleagues' general perceived value (iv)* of the subject. Wayde, Amahle, Jeanette and Sasha emphasised that the lack of affirmation they received contradicts the increased demand for expertise and learner performance:

'I feel like we have had to become experts almost in everything – many different fields, and obviously, we cannot be experts in absolutely everything.' (Wayde)

'Yes, I am the LO specialist, but everyone just expects me to be a Jack of all trades, and I cannot do everything [*Laughs*] - I just cannot. I will do the best that I can.' (Amahle)

'I do not have the skills for that [*general murmurs of agreement*]. I will try, I do not do career counselling, but I will not do any other kind of counselling. I cannot, and I do not have the training or the ability. I can catch a ball, but I cannot help a learner who is suicidal. It is crucial to discern what we are and what we need as LO teachers.' (Jeanette)

'I also want to say that the pressures put on the kids today, coming from our superiors and parents for results, despite LO not counting as much, which kills me because they still demand A's. That intense pressure on us is, in some cases, beyond realistic. I am never called into a meeting at any other time to hear how I

am or how LO is going - it is just: "Why do you not have more distinctions?"
(Sasha)

Participants claimed ***demands exceed the perceived value of LO (d)***, resulting in *teachers being conflicted between the need for value-adding and the external dismissal of LO (v)*. LO SAGs provide a skeletal structure as guidelines, which the participants indicated creates difficulty in sourcing content to elevate, make current and enrich students' learning.

Wayde shared his opinion that access to resources seems to be contributing to the expertise expected of LO teachers. He claimed LO teachers are expected to offer the same standard in a very competitive educational market:

'In a small school, the expectation is that you are a counsellor on top of dealing with all the critical issues in LO, and you know it just that sort of pressure and that idea of everything you have to deal with sort of piles on, but then there is what was first said is oh, but you are just an LO teacher.'

Harriet highlighted the increased need LO teachers experienced, especially at affluent urban schools, to deliver content in the classroom that reflects their competitive edge:

'You constantly have to be working on developing content, and you constantly have to be abreast of current events. You constantly have to respond to what is going on globally, and you have to add to the LO guidelines to increase its value. I spent hours and hours reading, more, and absorbing content, whether on Twitter or international news articles, watching quality programmes with LO potential.'

Due to limited acknowledgement and support, the LO teacher has to rely on internal motivation. However, this *struggle for internal motivation (vi)* is often determined by the teacher's lived experiences in the LO space.

Following Sasha's critical incident in 2017, her focus moved to deflection, which expends more energy and results in higher depletion levels:

'It has been challenging to keep myself motivated in the last two to three years'.

Louise and Mignon also described the vulnerability they faced with the difference in grades from one lesson to another, learner maturity and content:

'At times, I need to adapt from a Grade 12 class followed directly by a Grade 7 class, and just that shift already caused a complete lack of motivation depending

on what happened in the Grade 12 class. So, my dissonance and level of ego depletion entirely depend on the content I am teaching.’ (Louise)

‘It feels like I am on a roller coaster - up and down, up and down - you have to be self-aware and check everything. I find that very challenging.’ (Mignon)

The specific challenges faced during 2020, online teaching and race allegations, seem to have resulted in an increased vulnerability and emotional dissonance among teachers, causing depletion:

‘I have never felt this exhausted, so early in the year in all my years of teaching – at the moment, yes, very much running on empty. However, I can look to last year, the specific challenges surrounding online teaching, and the racial allegations, which assuredly brought it on.’ (Thea)

‘Trusting is a huge thing, and I wanted to say earlier that was part of the massive ego depletion I experienced last year, translating that relationship building and retaining trust with online teaching. That difficulty continues even now, with a mask on, having to teach kids in a larger venue when you cannot be in your circle.’ (Wayde)

The participants also indicated that, as LO teachers, they are, at best, ***unseen and undervalued (e)*** despite the *performance levels in LO being equal to all other subjects (vii)*.

Jeanette emphasised that despite LO teachers’ efforts and expertise, the subject still seems to be staffed as if it is unequal to other subjects:

‘A growing number of youngsters are tasked with LO due to a high turnover rate or teachers stepping away from LO, and LO is just allocated to the new arrivals. Moreover, it is often given to young [*inexperienced*] teachers, which is dangerous, as they lack the maturity to grasp LO’s complexity and assertiveness that is required, which I had learned. Only now, with maturity, can I assertively say that I am the Sports LO teacher.’

She further highlighted LO teachers’ tendency to self-isolate, which adds to depletion levels:

‘I feel that as LO teachers, we live in these tiny islands, these little pockets, we all struggle with the same difficulties [*Amahle agrees*] – every day, every year, every task I am trying to adapt, I am trying to update existing tasks. How does this apply

to something new, something that is current? I am re-inventing my tasks all the time.'

Harriet mentioned her concern for schools' tendency to re-deploy teachers from other subjects rather than employing an additional expert LO teacher full-time:

'The inclusion of trans-disciplinary teachers that take some LO classes has been counter-productive to my subject. LO is now an add-on for teachers who, when they walk into that classroom, and LO is not their focus, their attitude is: "I did not prep it properly, I will just wing it – it is just a conversation". I think that has been so damaging, and it has become increasingly infuriating to me. So, when I get the learners in Grade 12, I start the work from scratch.'

Moreover, the online and then hybrid teaching strategy have created specific barriers in transferring LO to online teaching. According to Thea, Wayde and Harriet:

'I think the after-effects of last year is hitting us now, and we had to adapt. We needed to adjust, and we needed to cope with so much during the demands of last year. I am finding re-adjustment a challenge at the moment, but I think that is across the board, not specifically in LO only.' (Thea)

'Online and hybrid teaching, with safe-distance teaching and masks, you cannot build that trust with the kids, and so much of what we discuss is based on trust, and now we cannot do that. That, for me, is more exhausting than many things, as you are forever thinking about how I can change this narrative so I can start building trust with these kids again.' (Wayde)

'[...] it made it so difficult to hear, and learners had to be constantly asked to repeat what they had said as you could not hear them. Therefore, it was relevant to the need for affirmation needed by learners who shared their voice and their courage to open up. The masks and new environment completely ruins that free, open and trusting, safe space.' (Harriet)

LO teachers often *develop negative coping skills (viii)*. The participants indicated that their role as LO teacher includes being curriculum developers, mentors and mastering a range of controversial topics. At times, this may necessitate avoiding parts of the curriculum.

Sasha described her department members' seeming reluctance and eventual decision to steer clear of topics that may result in negative feedback:

'In some instances, my department feels they just will not touch that topic or content [*healthy lifestyle, sexual education, and substance abuse*]'.

Harriet also described what she believes is a primary barrier in facilitating courageous conversations:

'There is nothing else to blame in LO, especially since the content is our own so clearly. In terms of having someone to talk to, that is where I do my self-reflection. If things have not gone well, that is when I sit, and it plays over and over in my mind: Why? What was going on? How can I avoid this? How can I adjust this? What am I going to do next time in my classroom? Yeah, I do not know. That is the only way that I deal with it.'

Suppressed resentment (f) seemed to be implied when discussing the professional dissonance, the participants experienced. Moreover, *resentment at the lack of recognition (ix)* was strongly indicated as the conflict between specific expectations and a lack of academic acknowledgement.

Harriet described the difference between what she was able to add to LO before motherhood and no longer seems to have time for:

'I can see the disjunct between being just so on top of things and the level where my learners were and now, being the mother of a young child and now not managing that intense amount of work, which was not then and is not now acknowledged.'

Jeanette also claimed to feel that an inordinate amount of time is spent by LO teachers pre-empting possible failure. She described her frustration with the other academic staff:

'I feel I have to have this backup plan all the time, and what makes me angry is that I feel I work so hard to have valid and reliable substantiation all the time. I do not want to say it is only us [*LO teachers*], but that is how it feels, but in the History department, it is also my job to teach oppression. [*Harriet agrees and several murmurs of agreement*] I just feel like ... what do the rest of you do?'

Several participants further described their lived experience of their increased vulnerability in the LO space where learners freely use their voice in critical discourse. It results in teachers constantly being *fearful of judgement if failing to perform to demands (x)*.

Sasha indicated being fearful of the consequences of facilitating content that could be deemed insensitive:

‘If anything does go wrong there, you know if you said something in that hall, you know just something that is just a little bit risqué or something not deemed socio-politically mindful, the fingers are pointed at you.’

Wayde and Harriet also described their respective sense of the dissonance they experienced as LO teachers who persist with open discussions of uncomfortable truths:

‘We cannot be experts in absolutely everything. That is the expectation, and you become concerned about being seen as this expert in every field related to LO and shouldering that accountability. That sort of pressure just piles on, and then you face the attitude of “it is just the LO department”, “it is not a real subject”, and “it has no real academic value”’ (Wayde).

‘LO content is that kind of thing, you just are fearful because of that lack of a guidebook, or there is no set content again. There is that fear of judgment, and I see it whether we are talking about our political perspectives, talking about our lived perspectives, talking about institutional racism, whatever - you know, the reality is that I have to point out to my class that only white kids have spoken, where are our black voices?’ (Harriet).

4.3.2 Challenges preventing teacher motivation and longevity

Participants identified **professional exhaustion (a)** as compounding the need to develop *LO content and context*, which *add to the LO teachers’ lack of motivation (i)*. In addition, their changing life roles were identified as a factor that increases their ego depletion, which lowers their motivation (Louise; Jeanette & Harriet).

Harriet described the impact that becoming a mother had on her need for specific structure:

‘I want to add in there that I have a young child, two and a half. So, it has been an adjustment for me from being in LO for a long time before having a child and then afterwards, but around the ego depletion and just you know, being responsive to my life-change as a mother - one of the things that impact it [*my motivation*] so massively is that LO does not have a set curriculum.’

Amahle, lacking the specific terminology to describe her sense of depletion, claimed to experience it as:

‘I suffered from ego depletion even before Covid, and I did not even know. You just focus so intently on getting everything right.’

There are *no opportunities for self-regulation* between lessons, which is particularly important *after a difficult lesson (ii)*. Consequently, teachers have no option but to internalise the negative experience of a problematic lesson and prepare for the following class of learners.

Louise and Mignon both described the worldview and adjustment in approach that must be made when a Grade 12 class is directly followed by a GET phase class, without time to self-regulate and span the differences in maturity levels and ability:

‘At times I need to adapt from a Grade 12 class followed directly by a Grade 7 class, and just that shift already caused a complete lack of motivation depending on what happened in the Grade 12 class.’ (Louise)

‘Then a Grade 8 group walks in [*directly after a Grade 12 group*], and I have to check everything I say because I just do not know where their baseline is and if they will have the maturity to have even entry-level discussions similar to that [*Grade 12’s*] and how they will respond.’ (Mignon)

Sasha highlighted her difficulty with a mainly unattainable need to set boundaries that would assist with self-regulation:

‘I think boundaries are vital, but saying that do I do it, not always no. I think we all try to set some boundaries. At the beginning of the year, I say to myself, I am not doing this or not doing that, but you are almost too scared to say no, especially in this climate of uncertainty. You sit in a staff meeting and feel we are so lucky still to have jobs [*Murmurs of agreement*] And so yes, I do believe boundaries are essential to have for our self-preservation, but I know I do not.’

Lack of control in the teaching environment (b) need not be a concern if it was the teacher’s pedagogical choice to assume the role of the learner in a specific narrative. However, *the constant risk of allegations in the LO environment is much higher* due to the content covered (*iii*), resulting in a need to deflect.

Wayde was concerned about what he described as the weight of being seen as an expert and the corresponding level of blame:

'I feel like we have had to become experts almost in everything – many different fields, and obviously, we cannot be experts in absolutely everything. However, that is the expectation, and as just said, you become concerned as you are seen as the expert in every field. Therefore, you are the authority and are held accountable for what is deemed sensitive or contentious if you say something.'

Jeanette described her pre-planning for LO being divided between factual content and strategising for potential failure or allegations:

'Is it worth all this continuous unsupported commitment to make ourselves valuable because no one else thinks we are valuable? I do not make sweeping statements about any topics, rely on facts, and work like that all the time, but nobody talks about these issues in Mathematics.'

Harriet similarly highlighted the difference she experienced between being solely responsible for what is said in the LO context compared to the seeming benefit of having set formulae or prescribed authors whose words provide some protection:

'It is different when the narrative is based on someone else's printed words, somebody else's story that you are reviewing and facts you are looking at as in English or History, but in LO, you do not know how learners will react because - you cannot hide, historically this may be fact, but you cannot predict the learners family's, and therefore, their experience of these historical facts'.

Sasha also emphasised the value of no longer having to bear the responsibility for gender and transformation issues:

'I have been fortunate this year [2021] because with all the race issues last year with the alumni, the Head of School has employed a teacher trained in diversity issues, and she takes those difficult conversations for me now. The other person he has also employed is a transgender psychologist because we have a large community of children that are either exploring their non-binary gender identities, and we have a big LGBTQ+ learner community within our learner body.'

The **responsibilities** LO teachers should meet are **too broad and diverse (c)**. Moreover, *trans-disciplinary teaching and sports roles create an inability to manage time (iv)* effectively, negatively impacting content depth and teaching performance.

Sasha identified apparent misleading gaps in LO teachers' timetables are creating additional trans-disciplinary responsibilities:

'That is also why LO teachers are often expected to be trans-disciplinary teachers and teach across subjects. For the first time in twelve years, I have gone back to teaching Afrikaans. Yoh, I am learning to teach Afrikaans from scratch again. I have also been given a module of the International Baccalaureate, so in total, I am teaching twelve classes.'

Jeanette qualified with two majors, History and Life Orientation. She was mostly employed at schools that required her to teach both majors as well as sports. However, at her current, smaller rural school, English Home Language was also added to her responsibilities:

'I have two LO classes per grade up to Grade 12, including Physical Education, and I am also a transdisciplinary teacher: English, History, and Head of Netball & Adventure Sport.'

Mignon had no transdisciplinary responsibilities but taught LO in two languages, had many sporting responsibilities that fill up her afternoons, weekends and often holidays, from which she had a much-needed reprieve during the Covid-19 lockdown:

'Online teaching and the resulting suspension of sports training curtailed weekly sports practices and weekend sports matches. There were no provincial trials or sports tours during holidays. It is refreshing to have so much more time, and that has given me almost a new energy in my online and physical classrooms because I can spend more time preparing for my classes'.

Jeanette agreed with Mignon about the much-needed reprieve they experienced as sports staff during the Covid-19 lockdown:

'I have had time to go back and think about what I am actually trying to teach rather than just stop a ball from dropping. I have had time to spend with my family, which is so unusual, especially in the winter terms, where it becomes very taxing, and that for me has been phenomenal.'

Dissonance and depletion become the norm (d) and then exacerbated manifestations of unresolved cognitive, emotional or ideological differences. Moreover, *a lack of self-reflection and self-regulation* of these unresolved differences *result in* LO teachers' *inability to effectively address their failure of self-control (v)*.

Jeanette added that her broad academic roles, despite shared similarities, exacerbate her depletion levels:

‘I have a double-major degree: History and LO, and as both subjects deal with very similar content, I am usually tasked with teaching both subjects. It can sometimes be very onerous, and it [*academic accountability*] is with you all the time.’

Harriet stressed the vulnerability she experienced during the facilitation of courageous conversations:

‘As learner responses to unknown perspectives cannot be predicted, so the whole time part of what you are doing is getting learners to engage with opinions openly and honestly having those courageous discussions. However, at the same time, it is uncharted territory, and that is scary, and you never know what side you are going to get, and even when this learning attitude is brought across, I still feel that fear in the classroom.’

Professional and emotional dissonance becomes the teacher’s default setting (vi). The participants thus mentioned they tend to spend their professional role expecting less from others, less support, less effort, more moral risk-taking, and constant frustration at traditional boundaries.

Mignon, Jeanette, Harriet and Wayde identified the following factors as resulting in dissonance and ego depletion:

‘I experience ego depletion every first term of the year. I mean, I [...] just want to get out of everything [*teaching and sporting responsibilities*]. I have always felt that my depletion comes from extra-murals and just not having time to juggle all my responsibilities.’ (Mignon)

‘I agree with other participants and ego depletion - we do not even realise that we have it, we run on empty and just look forward to the holidays.’ (Jeanette)

‘You know, and I think part of what also adds to the depletion so massively is that you need to be working all the time. If something did not run well, or you have not designed a brand-new task around this – I am hard on myself around it.’ (Harriet)

Wayde supported the idea of collaboration. However, the challenge with collaboration that became evident to him during his tenure as a national marker and as moderator was that not all LO teachers perform to the same standard. Reciprocity thus becomes problematic if

superior tasks are replaced with an inferior task in return. Moreover, an increasing number of schools now deem all work generated at the school as the school's academic property.

The participants indicated the ***lack of set content and guidelines (e)*** is making the LO space one that has to be constantly negotiated, placing an *immense responsibility* on the LO teacher *to know what is happening in the world (vii)*.

Harriet highlighted some difficulties she experienced due to a lack of commitment and inexperienced part-time members of her LO department:

'Your role as an LO teacher is to know what is going on in your community at different times. I have different strengths in my LO department, a very politically aware, skilled older black man and a young indigenous woman with an education in social work – very different backgrounds and teaching styles. So, once again, it is not just content here that we are teaching.'

Jeanette confirmed Harriet's experiences with teachers who are unable to teach to their strengths:

'I have always been an advocate of people teaching to their strengths. I have no problems teaching gender and sexuality, but I know many teachers are uncomfortable and dread doing that, which is critical.'

The innate need to perform beyond the minimum is deemed critical (viii). The participants claimed content must reflect a range of perspectives that are factually sound and will enable learners to expand their worldview and refine the LO discourse.

Louise, Jeanette, and Harriet emphasised the impact of meeting best practice compliance regarding content, assessment design, and rising to increased expectations:

'Furthermore, it is that expectation of being an expert in anything – to seamlessly go from goal setting to dealing with critical narratives to peer pressure. Ja, I think the ridiculous lies in that we do, in fact, already do so much.' (Louise)

'I do not think there are many teachers around who actually use LO textbooks. Maybe some of us use AchieveCareers or some kind of workbook, but we create our content for many of us and distribute that content. So, we try to make ourselves valuable, and we try and meet this plethora of expectations, and we are not doing ourselves or our subject any favours.' (Jeanette)

‘There is this added pressure of almost being stuck in a constant test. Was I a good LO teacher in that lesson? Did the learners gain insight and grounding with the conversation? Have the content included all perspectives in the prominent discourse?’ (Harriet)

There is a vital ***need for empowering mentors to set the pace (f)*** and assist *inexperienced LO teachers who need assertive guidance from experienced subject mentors to set clear boundaries (ix)*.

Jeanette described the changes she developed after gaining experience and maturity in the goals she set herself:

‘I think my time has gone in reverse. I want to say that when I was younger as a LO teacher, it was worse than it is now. I feel I tried so hard, and I had so much to prove when I was younger, and I wanted to try to be this fantastic LO teacher and cover all these bases and do all these things, and I also think I have since realised as well, that I cannot be that. I think maturity is critical, and I feel desperately sorry for young start-up teachers.’

Wayde shared the need for mature and experienced mentoring of inexperienced LO teachers. However, he also highlighted the minimal time available to do more than cover the basics with inexperienced teachers:

‘We have teachers coming and going, so as Cluster leader of the ten schools in my area, you have a fifty percent teacher turnover yearly, you have novices coming in year on year, and the focus always seems on getting them up to speed, making sure they have the know-how to teach, write, and mark a discursive essay – teach and prepare learners for the IEB CAT, which is a challenge.’

These participants’ views seem to reflect the professional dissonance being experienced by LO subject heads faced with LO colleagues who lack the skills and discernment for the critical knowledge required in LO. This difficulty was explained by Harriet in response to her experience with trans-disciplinary teachers allocated to LO due to increased learner numbers. Jeanette also described a specific incident resulting from teachers’ lack of LO-specific skills that necessitated an assessment to be cancelled and content to be made redundant.

More opportunities and specialised forums are needed for skills development (x). However, the growing areas of expertise and the implicit expectation to master these are not necessarily realistic for all LO teachers.

Amahle thus described the value she found during the Covid-19 lockdown in her ability to self-regulate, self-reflect and have the time to refocus her professional boundaries and goals:

‘I just came back to classroom teaching with a different perspective. I just look at what do the learners need the most right now. What we need the most now is a school, and where can I pour out that focus right now. I do not know what happened - if it is what I say, I do not know, but the learners just seem to be so much more effective.’

Harriet identified the need to share of yourself and be neutral, which is not a skill that is part of teacher training:

‘Knowing how to share ourselves and then switching to being impartial is what we lack in training as LO teachers. We as teachers are not adequately trained [*multiple murmurs of agreement*] on how to open up discourse and empower the minority voices.’

Jeanette clarified her sense that knowing your weaknesses does not necessarily bridge the lack of skills effectively enough to promote confidence:

‘I know that there are specific topics that I am not good at, and it becomes the hidden curriculum from which you stay away. I realise there is an element of trust, a deep-seated trust that has to be developed in LO to get the desired results. We are not equipped equally to deal with issues like relationship-building. However, I also understand the one-on-one issues around the need for trust [*Wayde agrees*], and relationships are vital. However, why do we struggle to make ourselves so diverse?’

4.3.3 Strategist and facilitator as set teacher behaviour

The lack of boundaries to manage teacher vulnerability reflects participants’ **strategising for potential failure (a)**. The result would seem to be *negative proactivity*, which is *mentally exhausting (i)*.

Sasha mentioned the impact she, as Subject Head: LO and trans-disciplinary teacher, experienced with the need to maintain the level of focus and preparation needed for FET phase LO:

‘There is no time for that extra reading to develop content for a new LO task. I am constantly grappling, and I think that is why I started the year off so badly – I never felt I was on top of things despite how well I was prepared. I think that is also what happens to LO teachers. We are put into too many faculties [*Wayde agreed*].’

Jeanette described the proactive planning strategies she focused on implementing in case of possible failure:

‘I literally think I have a backup plan for every statement I make in class. *[All round laughter]* I feel like it is a continual problem. I always [...] every time I say something, I review it. I am considering what would happen if a learner leaves the room and says that this happened, will there be kids that will back me up *[establish context and intent]*, and I do not think this is a LO specific problem, but because we have to have those courageous conversations we probably end up in that situations more, and this is what blows my mind.’

It was also found that *frustration at colleagues’ ambivalence regarding learners’ concerns (ii)* can ultimately be harmful to relationships in the department.

Harriet described her lived experience with the trans-disciplinary teachers in her LO department and the impact of pre-existing dissonance about topics even before the teacher enters the classroom:

‘If I ask the older man to talk about sexual education, I can see he dies inside, as does the young lady when asked to teach socio-political content, and what is the value in that? *[Mignon agrees]*. It is about negotiating awkward spaces and opening up difficult conversations, despite our fears’.

Jeanette shared what she deemed an underlying cause for the lack of teacher longevity:

‘We are so scared that we will not be able to increase our value or not be able to perform to all these expectations that we sometimes wonder [...] Is our subject worth this?’

Learner response cannot be predicted (b). A courageous conversation can be derailed if learners cannot overcome dissonance and emotively pursue their opinions (Wayde). Teacher *vulnerability* increases at the potential failed discourse, resulting in the LO teacher’s intent *becoming the null or hidden curriculum by association (iii)*.

Jeanette emphasised her assessment of the importance of controlling expectations and what she deemed her strengths and her learners’ well-being:

‘We try and meet this plethora of expectations, and we are not doing ourselves or our subject any favours. So, I have got better and more discerning for making choices for me, and my learners are better for it.’

Harriet mentioned her need for a verbal release of dissonance and the lack of a support system:

‘I mouth off a lot, I know our secretary in the front office, and I just go in there and blow off steam, but it is a different kind of thing – it is not an engaging conversation. There is a certain hesitancy because you feel an element of judgment may be thrown at you.’

LO teachers deal with opinions, views, and perceptions, not set content (iv). This results in no specific correct or incorrect opinion in the FET phase, since discussions are guided by how factually sound and well substantiated (with multiple perspectives) their argument is presented.

Harriet stressed what she identified as a contributing factor to the impact of a lack of guidelines in ensuring a lifeline in the LO space:

‘In LO, you are talking about feelings, you are talking about perceptions, and there is no guidebook to that, and that is why you are so nervous all the time because what you are doing is you are negotiating the space and discourse.’

Nadia indicated her belief that LO teachers have to be willing to constantly learn and strive for best practice:

‘[...] if LO is done right, is SAGs compliant, is challenging, is fact-based, and the teacher is willing to be a life-long learner with the learners, it is inspiring. However, not all LO teachers are willing to do that.’

The **role of learner maturity levels (c)** is a vital indicator in providing the scaffolding needed to facilitate courageous conversations for a meaningful experience. Therefore, *a trust relationship between teacher and learner is critical (v)* in creating a space that recognises the individual learner and the teacher.

Harriet clarified her observations of the importance of modelling cognitive equilibrium:

‘Part of our role as LO teachers are to challenge learners on statements that are made, and in that challenging learners, they are not going to like it, so there has got to be an element of trust in a teacher and a teacher’s capabilities. If there is no trust in the LO teacher’s capability to do that, that is part of the learning in LO classroom [*murmurs of agreement*], is being challenged. If teachers and learners cannot be challenged without getting angry, then what are we doing?’

Jeanette also stressed her sense of the importance of the teacher's authenticity being a constant in the LO space:

'I think that *[self-reflection]* is enormous. I arrive in a class – I am very open from the beginning. I have to be authentic; this is who I am, this is what I know. I think being authentic is so daunting because it makes us vulnerable, and not many people are prepared to be vulnerable, and that is again what differentiates us from other subjects because we are the subject matter. It is me. It is not a source or anything, and it is me.'

Gauging maturity levels, knowing learners' triggers, agendas and boundaries (vi) is a continuous growth process. Mignon thus shared the benefits she experienced with an accompanied five-year growth period with her learners:

'I teach across Grade 8 to Grade 12. I feel that it is also about the maturity of the group of kids that sit in front of you *[loud murmurs of agreement]*; you have this openness, you know with the Grade 12s, I have these incredible discussions, and I feel such gratification.'

Sasha highlighted the possible impact of performance demands on the teacher and learner relationship:

'I believe that specific pressure for performance in LO, coming from the top, is internalised by us and projected onto the learners, and the learners are under a tremendous amount of pressure to perform these days *[Murmurs of agreement]*.'

Jeanette emphasised that she feels inadequate (which may reflect other teachers' experience) to overcome the fear of fostering trust relationships:

'In the individual interviews, I said that I would prefer to outsource LO to make it worthwhile, and I realise there is an element of trust, a deep-seated trust that has to be developed in LO to get the desired results. We are not equipped equally to deal with some of those issues *[relationship-building]*, and I know that there are specific topics that I am not good at, developing that trust, and it becomes your hidden curriculum from which you stay away.'

An ***authentic teacher as subject content (d)*** entails the teacher sharing their story and their lived experiences with their learners. That level of authenticity should provide learners with the courage to share their own life stories. *Authenticity is vital to foster openness (vii)* and trust.

Jeanette highlighted the boundaries of whiteness as experienced in a diverse teaching environment:

'I spend much time talking about my own life in class, which also makes you vulnerable – this is who I am. I am white, and we need to deal with that fact. I can try and empathise. I can try and see it from a historical perspective, but I do not walk in your shoes, so that means that sometimes I also have to take a step back.'

Harriet further corroborated LO teachers' reliance on themselves as subject matter in what she assumes is a safe space:

'We are constantly jumping about using our own lives as a source - one thing that you can commonly draw on without offending anyone because it is yourself. The number of times my brother and my mother has been brought into conversations because the LO space is an assumed safe space. You are jumping between being open and exposing elements that you would not necessarily tell other people, hiding your personality or hanging your personality on a hook, or opening a conversation where you have to be completely impartial. It is a challenging thing - jumping between those three.'

Self-protection replaces courage as a coping mechanism (e) since not all teachers have the same strengths. However, teachers' fear of judgement was indicative of the lack of support they received. *Teachers should embrace opportunities to be the learner and acknowledge areas of inexperience (viii)*, both in skills and critical narratives.

Jeanette described the frustration she experienced at the lack of a support network:

'I do not even know where to go for support, and I would love to have someone on hand. Anybody, even if it is just another LO teacher that I know is skilled in dealing with this aspect, and I would happily go on loan to another school for four lessons a week, OK, where I know I can teach to my strengths, whatever they need, really well, and at the same time for those four lessons I have that expertise for my learners, and in this digital era, I do not see why that is not possible. If I can call on those resources, the learners can listen to an exceptional person on the topic. I can be in those classes, learn from them. Usually, I have to facilitate the training of new teachers all the time.'

Mignon also shared her concern regarding the suitability of the CAT, which seems to favour learners with solid theoretical and semantic skills:

'[...] with boys specifically, and I will put it out there that a CAT A project like we have now [*Harriet, LM agrees*] we have to constantly make sure that we present the preparatory activities to relate to the boys as well. Because as they [*IEB National Examiner and National Moderator*] do it, I am worried about this CAT A, and I am not saying the boys are limited. They are brilliant at specific content; give them that task-orientation they will achieve 90's for you [*murmured agreement*]. But Ja, definitely one of my challenges was to ensure that we knock the tasks out there, that both sexes will be able to relate, get excited about it, and feel this is something that adds value to their lives'.

4.3.4 The impact of learned teacher behaviour

Self-reflection as restorative self-care (a) should address any learned behaviour that becomes a defence mechanism. Self-regulating is vital as the *fear of judgement prevents LO teachers from seeking support (i)*.

Jeanette described self-interrogation, which seems more negative than positive self-reflection, as a means of self-regulating:

'I am often my own subject of interrogation, and I hope to encourage learners to interrogate themselves by doing that. I need to know that I have blind spots and big ones and just accept that, and I do not know where this fits in.'

Harriet expressed her views about the role the IEB UGC should fulfil in providing teachers with skills training:

'I think that exactly what we are saying here is there is training that we lack, and I feel that is what we should be doing and that is what our conferences should be about, you know because it can be one of those kinds of spaces'.

In addition, *loyalty and single staff departments add to self-isolation (ii)* among LO teachers who seem protective of the perceptions of LO as a subject.

Sasha described her reasons for self-reflection rather than risking being seen as disloyal to LO:

'... to go and speak to somebody about LO – I almost feel I am betraying the subject; I do not want anyone to think negatively about the subject [*all round*]

agreement and laughter]. It is a bloody good subject. I seldom share concerns about my subject with anybody, not even my best friend on the staff. So, do I self-reflect? Yeah, but I do not vent about the subject.'

Amahle also shared her lack of conversation about LO with academic staff, other than shared concern about learners:

'I do much self-reflection. However, if I have to vent, I will probably find myself in the school gym, talking to the gym manager or the sports coaches because they will not judge me and see me differently from the rest of the academic teaching staff. I will speak to teachers who also know the learners, and they may know other information about the learners, and you feel like you are betraying your subject, belittling it, or undervaluing it.'

Internal versus external support systems (b) seemed to be the primary self-reflective tool relied on by LO teachers, rather than engaging in a deliberate strategy to access support from LO peers, even from another school. Despite the majority of participants indicating a clear need for external support and the *need to build on commonalities to create a support network (iii)*, there was some reluctance to create an open professional network.

Jeanette reflected on the need for forums on which to share ideas and content as possible means to lighten the workload:

'Where is a space for us as people, in talking about self-reflection, to attempt to go to a kind of forums and say, "Listen, I found this amazing source – you have to give this to your class" [*Louise murmurs in agreement*]. It makes no sense that we have the attitude that "this is my work, and it was so hard to produce this task, and it has taken me so long to do". We make it worse for ourselves [*Harriet & Mignon agree*]. We just make our own lives a nightmare [*Amahle agrees*]. I do not know if we just do not want to share, or I just do not know where to go.'

Thea also mentioned the importance she attaches to supportive LO staff who share her goals for LO:

'It is just to have someone who has the same challenges, carries the same burdens, and is also fighting that battle to get LO out there, get it recognised, and treat it with the dignity it deserves'.

LO departments must have a joint agency and equal commitment (iv); participants in a supportive department seemed to have greater motivation and support (Mignon & Thea). The common goals and agency they described appeared to increase their confidence levels.

Thea mentioned the restorative effect of single-minded colleagues:

‘I have two great colleagues in my department, and we use each other as sounding boards. So, we can stay loyal to our subject because we keep it within the subject, but if we did not have each other, I think all three of us would have gone crazy long ago. Moreover, it is sometimes all I need to get me back on track.’

Mignon also indicated the seeming lack of insight among other subject teachers of LO and the value of a supportive LO department:

‘Very few subject teachers can understand LO, so if you vent, they are just like, “Huh, just get over it” [*lots of laughter*]. However, what is also great is that we have a friendly big LO department, we have been together for years, so we also vent within the department because we just know no one else will understand it.’

Harriet further shared that being a single LO-teacher department committed to LO can be more effective than a transient department where the trans-disciplinary support staff lack commitment:

‘I used to teach the whole school LO, and I loved it because I set the tone for LO. So, in terms of the teacher and learner relationship, this is life in terms of seriousness. You have to pull yourself together because if you cannot do this, what are you doing kind of thing. Reflectively, what has been so difficult for me, is that I now have a LO department, and obviously, the teachers filter in from all over the place, or it is trans-disciplinary teachers. I have a Life Sciences teacher who teaches some grades and a Drama teacher who teach some grades’.

4.4 The future of LO and the LO teacher as an innovator

When asked how they foresee the future of LO during the individual interviews, participants were assertive in their responses that no other subject would be able to replace LO in scope, diversity, depth, and meaningful, transformative conversations. They could not definitively identify any other learning area that would prepare learners for life beyond school, promote integration into diverse and complex adult society, or utilise their fear of failure in pursuit of success as LO does. The participants relayed many factors that need to be addressed in future to promote LO, such as respecting teacher autonomy, providing managerial support, skill development, additional networking and training opportunities, and realistic expectations of the role of the LO teacher. However, the participants also indicated a persistent lack of

compliance from too many teachers in the LO cohort regarding mark leniency and academic standardisation, constant teacher turnover, and assessment models in LO given the application versus content-based approach favoured by the IEB. Several participants raised concerns regarding the assessments of courageous conversations, fostering a preference among some LO teachers to use less critical content in a more structured group format to open critical discourse.

Several participants mentioned links between aspects of English and History with LO. However, they seemed convinced that both subjects lack LO's focus to accompany and hone learner growth, establish a critical attitude and encourage learners to find an independent worldview and voice. Participants also suggested that History discourse cannot offer the same experiences as a formative LO space.

Thea described the main difference between LO and History as follows:

'History deals with the study of factual events, but in LO, the focus moves to holistic perspectives of human experiences, the far-reaching role of choice and impact on global events, and specifically, apartheid becomes a series of recollected lived experiences that has a very different context in the LO space.'

The participants' responses seemed to reflect their uniform trust in the process of courageous conversations as a form of restorative nation-building and developing the skills to become accommodating and evolving citizens. However, many participants mentioned the increased risk in facilitating courageous conversations and increased teacher vulnerability after the 2020 cancel culture social media campaigns.

Harriet described it as:

'I mean, like last year when all those negative racial discussions were going on, I was just reading through the list of the email that our school got going: God, where is my name? Is my name here? What have I done? You know, it is just like a constant, it is LO it must be here? There is no way that I got the conversations I have in my classroom right, you know. LO content is that kind of thing, you just are fearful because of that lack of a guidebook, or there is no set curriculum again.'

4.5 Conclusion

LO teachers have faced many obstacles in striving for the value of LO to be recognised. However, some LO teachers have damaged the subject with undue leniency and compliance to meet their school's demands for distinctions. A dependence on stock content and

assessments provided by inadequate textbooks to overcome a lack of motivation or ability to design original and contextual content is also at fault. The most far-reaching damage is caused by a lack of training, skills development, a minimal interest in the pursuit of global knowledge, and a lack of interest in people's social development. These factors that are damaging to LO results in a lack of academic consistency, teacher longevity and inadequate commitment to mentoring and in-service training. Despite these barriers, it is vital that the value of LO must never be underestimated. It is critical that the personal growth, identity formation, and drive to challenge the status quo honed in LO are acknowledged and promoted despite the risk of failure.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

It has never been more critical to guide, listen, observe, question and actively engage with what teachers do not understand to create a continuously adjusting worldview (Harriet). This worldview entails addressing the lack of belonging experienced by BIPOC learners, learners of alternative gender identities, and learners who identify with non-traditional sexual orientations. These learners are persistently forced to assimilate into traditions and behavioural codes while being reminded of their privileged education (Oberholzer, 2017:1-2; Steyn, Burnett & Ndzwayiba, 2018:7-17). Ideally, an autonomous LO team is well-suited to serve as a school's moral compass – to lead and bring about just and tangible change. However, factors that must be challenged in the LO space, including the implicit curriculum, unwelcome truths and archaic traditions, are all topics likely to be deemed a threat to the school's marketability (ISASA, 2013:7-11; Paterson, 2018; Steyn, Burnett & Ndzwayiba, 2018:2-4). Independent schools increasingly operate as business brands in a competitive field. Moreover, parents' (as clients) concerns are typically addressed swiftly, demanding that the teacher avoid the content that resulted in the complaint and change their professional approach or teaching methods.

My sample group strongly indicated that very few non-LO teachers at schools are willing to grapple with the critical challenges raised by learners. It also appears to be common practice among non-LO teachers not to respond to learners raising 'othering narratives' such as racial equality, sexuality curiosity, the use of gender-neutral personal pronouns, and challenging the validity of socio-political ideologies. These conversations are generally steered to the LO department to be addressed. When learners raise these topics again, the LO teachers are held accountable. Consequently, LO teachers are seen as instigators when the added awareness of any othering narratives increases after a courageous conversation. However, the referring teachers (non-LO) offer minimal support or empathy to their beleaguered LO colleagues when negative feedback from parents, the management or religious leaders surface. In this out of kilter status quo, the LO teacher must become, challenge, empower, and transform (Davis & Steyn, 2012:31).

5.2 The research questions

The first research question that had to be answered by the study was:

How do teachers experience the implementation of courageous conversations in the Life Orientation classroom?

My sample group described their experiences implementing courageous conversation as a necessary but daunting task. Each participant's experiences were specific to them. However, there was a consensus that insufficient training is available to assist teachers in overcoming stumbling blocks, such as negotiating an encompassing LO space within which to facilitate courageous conversations. There is also persistent resistance from schools for LO to challenge hidden and implicit western traditions and culture. The nature of LO provides the flexibility to have open critical conversations that require teachers' courage and a deliberate choice to be vulnerable. In addition, the lack of set content to augment the current guidelines can be problematic, and the facilitation of these conversations does not always remain inside the confidential LO space. LO teachers thus risk being perceived as instigators of dissent rather than courageous educators dealing with critical conversations, despite their professional risks and personal vulnerability.

The second research question that had to be answered by the study was:

How does the lived experience of Life Orientation teachers regarding the facilitation of courageous conversations in the classroom impact the meaning attached to these conversations?

Meaning-making is a complex process reliant on the teacher's identity development, worldview, and the level of effort they want to invest in constantly evolving, interrogating, and developing diversity and racial cognisance (Ally, 2006:34). Challenging their own beliefs of their historical past and the impact of uncomfortable historical truths on their self-concept can be daunting in what can currently be described as a hyper-racialised school environment (Steyn, McEwen & Tsekwa, 2018:1,2). However, this process affects both BIPOC and white learners, and withdrawal from a conversation should not become an acceptable norm because the learner's narrative is either resisted or dismissed as part of a hidden curriculum. The majority of my participants accepted the discomfort, uncertainty, and stressful aspects of courageous conversations. Still, the reality of cognitive dissonance between the teacher and their learners – due to difficulty predicting learners' reactions to content – minimises growth and joint learning and teaching. Moreover, the lack of support from management, parents and colleagues is a constant drain on teachers' motivation.

5.3 The LO teacher's identity as a foundation for their teaching praxis

Change in LO as subject starts within the LO teachers' self-awareness before engaging learners in this complex process (Singleton & Hays, 2008:19). Singleton and Hays (2008:20) further state that:

"A courageous conversation requires that we [*all teachers*] grow accustomed to the discomfort of abandoning old habits."

5.3.1 The LO teacher's personal and professional identity

Most of my participants recognised that broadening their worldview, their personal and professional identity, was facilitated by LO as a subject area. The LO teacher's personal and professional identity requires a greater awareness of South African culture and ethnicity as the foundation for the complex socio-political dynamics we face. The teacher must know themselves as it is the key to knowing their learners. LO teachers should also highlight and assist learners in identifying the commonalities and goals they share, actively pursuing nation-building.

Francis and Le Roux (2007:303) indicate identity should be seen according to three levels: Firstly, identity (both socio-historical and professional) impacts teachers' professional courage to facilitate discourse based on critical content. Secondly, identifying dissonance triggers (professional, cognitive, and emotional) determines the LO teacher's ability to self-regulate to prevent ego depletion or counter depletion in response to utilising critical content in open discourse. Thirdly, the LO teacher's meaning-making process is based on their lived experience facilitating a courageous conversation about critical content, reliant on teacher vulnerability. This meaning-making and the quality of the lived experience should, in turn, increase the teacher's motivation to persist with courageous conversations and determine the teacher's critical agency for their teaching space (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:300).

The LO teacher's personal and professional identity should constantly evolve to incorporate current socio-emotional values, fluid norms, and socio-political beliefs to meet the challenges encountered in the LO space (Milazzo, 2017:568,569). Oyserman (2019:338) refers to the importance of recognising and developing an "*essentialised identity*", which informs the willful intent the LO teacher decides to aim for and the type of LO space they want. Reaching self-determined goals enables the development of a transient professional identity that can shift in line with fluid social contexts. In turn, this process allows for a similar personal identity that enables clear boundaries between a personal essentialised identity and a professional essentialised identity (Oyserman, 2019:338,339). According to Francis and Le Roux (2007:299), the interconnection between a range of social identities, their impact as the

premise for and the development of explicit critical agencies that ensure a socially diverse, critical and just education praxis, is a goal in itself.

5.3.2 *Courageous conversations as a catalyst to an evolving worldview*

My findings indicate that all nine participants recognised the potential and value of open critical discourse; however, their ability to completely master their fear of potential reprisal tended to hamper their confidence. Ultimately, courageous conversations should be recognised as a catalyst to a racially cognisant worldview. A constantly evolving belief system is thus vital in broadening the LO teacher's worldview due to the diversity of joint discourse and narratives with their learners on the selected content. The increasing life roles *[perspectives]* explored by implementing specific teaching methods assist learners in striving for unconditional acceptance.

Bukor (2011:107) views identity as an individualised self-image that impacts teachers' evolving worldview. Teachers who grow their worldview to encompass their learners' complete and diverse needs during courageous conversations set the tone for empathetic and mindful democratic citizens (Reygan & Steyn, 2017; Steyn, Burnett & Ndzwayiba, 2018:3). Vandeyar and Swart (2016:143) refer to the teacher as a *"transformative intellectual"* who can constantly reflect on whom they believe themselves to be. Steyn's framework *[Table 5]* for critical diversity literacy and the need to acknowledge and understand the historical damage done to all South Africans should provide clear guidelines for channelling teachers' meaning-making of their lived experiences in response to dissonance and assist in developing vital diversity awareness (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:7,8). Also, Oyserman's (2019:338) concept of a redetermined *"essentialised identity"* resonates here, as it requires setting clear goals for a separate professional and personal identity. This enables the teacher to create an LO space where their learners can become the autonomous adults they envision for themselves. Therefore, the LO space is not just a physical environment; it is a value and moral-based environment that relies on that grey essentialised identity where the teacher chooses to make room for their own and their learners' growth and becoming (Oyserman, 2019:338,339).

5.3.3 *Critical agency as the product of teacher identity*

The phrase 'expected outcome' was familiar to many of my participants. However, they all described a goal of aiming for young adults who know failure can be overcome. Who know views and opinions may not be shared by others, and having an open mind and a willingness to listen and reflect is vital in braving the world beyond school. This goal of critical agency is the product of their evolving identity and worldview that was not necessarily shared by the rest of their colleagues or social circle. In addition, the fostering of individual thought processes,

openness, trust and mutual respect are strived for in an LO space. This LO space enables the teacher to challenge perpetual conformity, protect unwelcome truths and make the implied explicit. The contracted boundaries must therefore be reinforced by developing practical skills and values. A critical agency can only be formulated when there is total commitment from the LO teacher to create an LO space with respect and growth as the overriding goal.

It remains LO's purview to assist learners in understanding their roles, choices and future as democratic citizens (Claxton, 2010:1; Ramphela, 2017:1-3). Therefore, we have to ask ourselves who we want our youth to become and the principles of character we want the next generation of adults to have. The response cannot be reduced to merely teaching learners to strive to accept archaic norms within their school community (Claxton, 2010:1,2). This process of learners becoming individuals fits within the scope of LO curriculum topics (Ramphela, 2012:117-119, 2017:5). Ally (2006:34,35) refers to the need for teachers to develop a cognisance of diversity by fully grasping the opportunities created by white privilege without any attempts to rationalise the benefits of whiteness and the inequality that manifested in an unjust social dispensation. As stated by Soudien (2010:364), *"it is important to recognise the unavoidably complex way in which race and class are being re-articulated in the space of privilege"*. This view is corroborated by Ramphela (2012:76,77), suggesting that the question should constantly be asked whether accumulated wealth and *"having"* is a stumbling block to building a just society in which humanity is valued.

5.3.4 Recommendations

A static teacher identity that lacks flexibility and accommodation for learners' needs will fail both the teacher and learners. Therefore, it is critical that teachers subject themselves to intense self-reflection to establish the third level of identity – the intersection or grey area, referred to by Francis and Le Roux (2007:303) – where aspects of a personal and private identity merge and from which the teacher can manage their level of vulnerability, and a critical agency can be formulated. Vandeyar (2010:355) refers to teachers recognising *"cultural hybridity"* by willfully creating a fully integrated *"third space of enunciation"* where traditional ethnicity, beliefs and values intersect, and all beliefs, cultures and lifestyle choices are respectfully explored. LO teachers need to incorporate Oyserman's (2019:338,339) description of an essentialised identity that should assist them in setting those specific personalised goals to strive towards. An agency focused on evolving worldviews enables a self-aware LO teacher to become an empowered facilitator.

5.4 The support needs and barriers faced by the LO teacher

5.4.1 LO as an experiential learning environment

Participants' interpretation of the experiential learning environment were dichotomous; most applied the applicable pedagogy without linking it to this particular philosophical theory. However, one participant vehemently defended her perspective that more could be done to foster conflict resolution, problem-solving and respectful citizenship, with a strong focus on Physical Education. More must be done to move LO teaching and learning outside the classroom as a primary environment. As an experiential learning environment, LO requires society's experiences to be recreated in the classroom to prepare learners for life beyond school. This theoretical approach of LO is mistaken at its practical level, primarily when related to academic rigour. Therefore, many heads of schools do not support LO as higher cognition and as a real-life recreation situation. Moreover, the LO teacher must be cognisant of generational transferred trauma and demographics, resulting in difficulties with their worldview and approach in the LO space. BIPOC learners need to have their voices recognised, and white learners must be supported in reliving their historical legacy of privilege and complicity until they are comfortable openly challenging the impact of this legacy.

Wray (Fostering Civil Discourse, 2017:4) describes the professional praxis as a 'microcosm of democracy', characterised as a space with explicit and implicit norms protecting freedom of speech. The space also promotes openness to many perspectives, where accountability for 'the self and others' thrive, and where everyone in the space has a voice and is focused on creating a discourse with joint decisions as its central goal. Hodgkinson, Langan-Fox and Sadler-Smith (2008:2,4) describe the first intuitive response from a teacher and learner as "*implicit learning and implicit knowledge*" that precedes the insight that is only gained after a period of cognitively grappling with the presented content or opinions. Therefore, the curriculum content selected for critical conversations from Grade 10 are typically more generic and focus on structured conversations to master the visual thinking theory strategies, develop the learners' self-regulation skills, and reach a level of competency (Oyserman, 2019:336).

The FET phase represents a significant cognitive shift from Grade 9 LO into Grade 10, as no curricula are provided for Grades 8 and 9 by the IEB (2019). Due to the staggering of the content and skills taught in the FET phase, it is critical that the same teacher presents LO to Grade 11 and Grade 12 learners since the approach from the beginning of Grade 11 is to prepare learners for the Grade 12 ORT and CAT. However, without managerial support, this may not be a given. The LO teacher must facilitate the challenging of the accepted normative views of the school's culture and ethos, which often differs markedly from the learners' own

moral and ethical sense of the acceptable or unacceptable that should be accommodated - if indeed there still is a given right or wrong other than social constructs and a legal definition (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:3). Moreover, learners' critical attitude relies on a trust relationship that cannot be developed if teachers change each year.

5.4.2 Managerial insight and support for LO as subject

The participants indicated the primary concerns they persistently experienced related to managerial insight and support for LO as a subject. Heads of academics and parents continue to demand high marks and easy distinctions for LO. However, the imbalance in the allocated time and practical use of LO time is often overlooked, resulting in LO time being used for other subjects or presentations. Moreover, the LO subject head is rarely consulted regarding LO time being lost to another event, or the changes are made and diarised a term ahead of the actual lesson. This loss of LO lesson time is often attributed to day outings for other subjects. In other instances, the entire grade has consecutive LO lessons to engage in workshops or presentations for other subjects – the justification is often that the learners will then not lose valuable academic time. Strong leadership from management is thus needed to provide LO teachers with the support they need to feel motivated and confident in what they do (Zacher *et al.*, 2018:38). The possibility of not delivering the number of expected distinctions becomes a heavy burden when compounded by a lack of managerial support (Mowatt, 2016:5-7).

LO assignments are planned in one of two ways. The first is to focus on one topic and then incorporate as many sub-sections as possible from the CAPS topic to create a task to the prescribed academic rigour. The second way is to incorporate a set of sub-sections from different CAPS topics to create a task to the prescribed academic rigour (IEB, 2019). Furthermore, LO's 10 NSC credits, as opposed to 20 credits for other subjects, reflect minimal importance for tertiary study despite the 50 percent minimum required by most tertiary institutions. LO also has no Application Placement Score (APS) value; two academic universities award one additional point to the APS for an LO pass of 60 percent. Moreover, the APS score that would be attained for a 20-credit subject is halved for LO (i.e., 6=3, 4=2) at one top academic university. This raises the ire of management, parents and learners regarding the value and workload of LO as a compulsory subject.

5.4.3 Perceptions of LO and LO teachers

The findings from the participants indicated there is a great need for well-trained LO teachers willing to be mentored to create a skilled, resilient core of young LO teachers intent on remaining with the subject. However, school management's reluctance to employ specialist LO teachers results in unskilled and unmotivated LO staff or overworked transdisciplinary staff

(Woest, 2018:4). The perceptions of LO and LO teachers thus remain a concern due to the lack of insight into the disparity between LO preparation time and teacher-learner contact time. Colleagues tend to view LO as an easy subject where teachers have increased free time, and LO teachers have less academic standing. LO is rarely perceived as a priority by non-LO academics. However, LO teachers have the sole responsibility of dealing with soft skills and inconvenient truths, which other teachers refuse to address as it is not part of their curricula; therefore, the accountability for an adverse reaction is also placed on the LO teacher.

The relationship of trust and increased teacher awareness in the LO space may result in many questions about observed teacher behaviour (from non-LO teachers) that learners deem human rights violations. As such, any alleged or observed human rights offence must be investigated and addressed firmly. These allegations may be minor and easily clarified, but may also include a colleague's behaviour or words experienced as offensive; this is challenging to look into and address. However, if the complaint is formally disclosed to the LO teacher, it should be followed up with the learner or group of learners (privately). It is discouraged to identify any specific teacher about whom the allegations are made until context and intent can be determined. It may also be necessary for the LO teacher to mediate between the learners and the teacher, or mediate with other teachers or the school management to bring about small changes in policy on behalf of the learners.

Despite LO's flexible context and its informal teacher and learner dynamic, face-to-face interaction is vital. Therefore, if the limited LO time is given to others, it creates gaps in the learning and knowledge needed in the trust relationship. Furthermore, LO is a 10-credit subject resulting in the assumption that LO should have half the academic standards and criteria of a 20-credit subject. However, the reality is that LO has half the contact time and half the NSC portfolio requirements, but those portfolio tasks must be set and assessed based on all seven of Bloom's Taxonomy levels (IEB, 2020a:15). The increased workload and dissonance among inexperienced or indifferent teachers in a specialised LO space negates the mentoring teacher role and increases the level of expended energy; therefore, ego depletion may set in (Muraven, 2011:1,2; Baumeister, 2018:1,2). Furthermore, despite ISASA's (2013:3-5) clear statement regarding the need to move beyond transformation and their emphasis on the need for fluid spaces in which joint discourse can be had, the majority of non-LO teachers do not view this as pertaining to their teaching praxis as it is not reflected in their curricula.

5.4.4 Profile of an effective LO teacher

The participants revealed a concerning array of complex skills and abilities needed to fulfil the definition of a skilled LO teacher. The profile of an effective LO teacher is multifaceted, and the teacher must know their own triggers and shortcomings as it is vital to connect and come to know their learners. There is a critical need for the LO teacher to be a lifelong learner, develop skills and maturity in rigorous debate, be knowledgeable about current and global events, and be in command of emotional intelligence. These teacher skills include maintaining self-control and the ability to self-motivate, self-regulate, implement, and enforce clear personal and professional boundaries.

Prinsloo (2007:159) describes the foreseen character of the LO teacher as someone with “*self-discipline, diligence and high moral standards*” to provide learners with a lived example of right and wrong behaviour. However, the high moral standing described by Prinsloo (2007:159) must make way for Vandeyar and Swart’s (2016:145) more current description; they refer to a transformational intellectual with the explicit qualities of “*humility, love, courage, tolerance, decisiveness, security, patience and a joy for living*”. They further refer to Jansen’s (2009:153) post-conflict pedagogy that requires “*confronting each other*” [teacher and learner] with the lived experiences and trans-generational trauma in the classroom (Opperman Lewis, 2016:13). Vandeyar and Swart (2016:147) further refer to Zemnyla’s (2010:703) description of the “*proactive and transformative potential of discomfort*” that allows dissonance to erode uncomfortable truths. Being overly politically correct in academic classes may be conducive to learning and teaching set curricula content, but those teachers then suppress teachable moments, which, in itself, creates a hidden or null curriculum (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:36; Alsubaie, 2015:125-6). LO teachers do not have that academic content to hide behind. Thus, even more so than other teaching staff, the LO teacher does not suppress challenging questions from learners despite a lack of managerial support and autonomy (Zacher *et al.*, 2018:43). Teachers’ resistance in this context therefore has to be re-conceptualised as meaning-making, to make room for powerful teaching moments that enrich the relationship between teacher and learners (Davis & Steyn, 2012:31). In the current hyper-racialised environment, LO’s range of controversial topics further relies heavily on the teacher’s cognisance of race and diversity, a broad worldview and self-awareness. Ally (2006:34) describes racial cognisance as:

“... to have stepped outside the mainstream in conscious, even if accidental ways, in order to have developed a critical perspective on the discursive status quo [...] to identify at least some of how an unequal power relational social structure shapes them.”

In their *Toolkit To Diversity and Transformation*, ISASA recognised that effective change challenges us to create a dynamic catalyst for recognising all ideas and embracing an infinite managerial mindset with tangible change (ISASA, 2013:4).

5.4.5 Recommendations

Management teams, governing bodies, and, where applicable, religious custodians seem unsupportive towards an LO department compliant to the IEB's directive scope. Furthermore, a compliant LO department is often viewed as more likely to increase the body of learners openly challenging the school culture. This persistent cynicism regarding the value and positive influence of LO is underestimated, despite the clear need for recognition and acknowledgement of LO teachers, as expressed by my sample group. However, a well-organised LO team that works on building trusting professional communication with parents may promote their acceptance of the efforts made by LO teachers and the reliability of academic marks for the subject. Unfortunately, neither ISASA nor the IEB are able to enforce the accommodation of LO as a priority in independent schools, as neither of them has a moratorium on doing so.

5.5 The role of dissonance in the effective facilitation of courageous conversations

The LO teacher's sense of their professional identity and who they are in their praxis guide their sense of the success or failure of a specific lived experience. Moreover, the ability to function based on internal motivation is vital to the courage and vulnerability needed to facilitate a courageous conversation.

5.5.1 LO teachers' preparation demands for the facilitation of courageous conversations

Findings from my sample group indicated that content sourcing and responsibilities expected of an LO teacher far exceed that of other subjects but are discounted by colleagues and management. Preparation demands on the LO teacher to facilitate courageous conversations are challenging, but the LO textbook is written in the daily news media – the LO textbook is unfolding daily. However, the teacher must be critical when selecting sources – it has to be authentic, current, factually sound and adhere to the learners' academic and maturity level. It is also important to reflect on aspects or perspectives that may affect the teacher's or learners' cognitive dissonance. The LO teacher's pre-knowledge of their learners should assist in identifying the best approach; group work, open discourse or structured source analysis, followed by open discussion.

The IEB's position has always been that teachers who rely on textbooks fail to prepare their learners adequately with enriched and current content, and fail to prepare their learners for life beyond school. However, they agree that textbooks may be used as supplementary material. The Harvard Visible Thinking Theories, available online or incorporated into the AchieveCareer Learner manuals, were specifically indicated as a valuable source by many participants (Wood, 2020a:36-58; Wood, 2020b:20-23,26-31). The visual thinking theories exercises focus on assisting learners in identifying their dissonance triggers and the roots of those triggers. However, with the Grade 12 IEB CAT, section B is unseen and unavailable to teachers before it is written. This leaves the teacher insecure about the relevance of the teaching methods utilised, additional content sourced, and the rigour with which learners are prepared during the CAT-A section (Mowatt, 2016:5-7). CAT B primarily becomes a test of the teacher's success in preparing learners to self-regulate when experiencing dissonance, critically analyse questions, and adapt their knowledge to the context of the discursive essay (Roddick, 2017:9,15,20). Therefore, it is up to the teacher to generate and source content for LO lessons, but without set content, there is a definite need for an elaborated structure despite LO's application-based approach.

Thus, in the personal and professional lifeworld of the LO teacher, active transformation can only happen if the teacher leads the way by dismantling their inherent, even archaic beliefs, deconstructing their identity and adjusting their meaning-making (Davis & Steyn, 2012:31,32). Modelling this dismantling of the self should ensure the authenticity of an open LO space for learners and other teachers (Conradie, 2019:12). Developing an intuitive knowing to identify an event or article and then expanding it into LO content with a rationally scaffolded grounding – described by Hodgkinson, Langan-Fox and Sadler-Smith (2008:8) – promote experiential teaching and learning (Thomson, Thomson & Greenwood, 2010:2). It is advantageous when well-planned goals are created to motivate a choice of content or draw a link between self-development and the agency for LO. Ultimately, learners must receive the correct interpretation and perspective, and topics' intent and context should be made explicit.

A diverse classroom often means both white and BIPOC teachers and learners are not teaching and learning in their home language. Small conversational nuances and social cues may then result in incorrect associations that undermine the trust created in the LO space, with grave consequences (Vandeyar, 2010:344-5). Democracy, citizenship, and identity formation should become the golden thread of teaching and learning in the LO classroom, intertwined with as many combinations of sub-topics to cover the CAPS aims and IEB SAGs in meaningful assignments and authentic, courageous conversations (South Africa, 2011:4; IEB, 2020a:8). The SA Constitution and Bill of Rights is a foundational topic in Grade 10, and

this is where the grey areas between the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [under 18], the South African Human Rights Charter, legal rights and criminal law can be opened to critical analysis and courageous conversations (Bäckström, 1989; South Africa, 1998).

5.5.2 Dissonance as a precursor to the facilitation of courageous conversations

It was evident from the findings provided by my participants that, as LO teachers, they experience a level of dissonance even before an actual LO lesson commences, regardless of the planned content. There may be a persistent sense of emotional dissonance due to ideological differences between their values and that of the school. Possible professional dissonance may also be experienced due to the limiting boundaries within which they may facilitate critical discourse determined by the school's culture. Therefore, they may already be experiencing various levels of ego depletion as default. The teacher who facilitates from this default is less likely to make effective decisions and is far more vulnerable in a critical discourse. A lack of confidence in teaching specific content may also promote further cognitive dissonance in a challenging lesson, making teachers more likely to view a hidden or null curriculum as a future defence mechanism. Content that is deemed too challenging is then avoided and deflected when raised by learners in future lessons. In turn, a teacher allowing open criticism and challenging ideas and beliefs is often seen as a troublemaker, and the fear of being called out may again result in deflection and self-protection in line with the status quo.

The skills to self-reflect and accommodate self-regulation are thus vital. They provide the required motivation and confidence to persist in pushing the boundaries to the benefit of learners. The values of a fluid moral and ethical base participants said they want their learners to develop are required to demonstrate the skills learned and knowledge mastered. This professional attitude inspires teachers to share their processes with their own community or the greater community to manifest the learners' values into their own lives. It reflects LO teachers' attitude towards others and enables them to provide their learners with the "compass with which to navigate their world" (Delors *et al.*, 1998:46).

Delors's (1998) four pillars of learning, also referred to by Smith (2018:266) (learning to know; learning to be; learning to do; and living together within an increasingly diverse society) are critical values represented and closely integrated into the LO domain. Therefore, the skills needed to address anti-oppressive challenges should not be shrugged off. Instead, the skills to openly discuss such challenges should be shared with all teachers dealing with curriculum content that trigger cognitive or emotive dissonance until they are confident enough to accommodate learners' needs (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:307; Singleton & Hays, 2008:18,19). Moreover, complex discussions regarding the full scope of diversity issues must not be

relegated to LO alone (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:2). If the freedom to challenge and make the implicit explicit is shared in all subjects, it could become a normalised critical approach to teaching and learning.

There are definitive socio-political moments that are difficult to initiate as a white teacher, and this is when the BIPOC learners should be allowed to take the lead in what they experienced. The same can be said for a BIPOC teacher and white learners. When the teacher willfully becomes the learner, it increases their professional becoming and adds the authenticity needed in a transformative teaching space (Davis & Steyn, 2012:30,31; Conradie, 2019:11). The teacher as learner should use this experience to evaluate and adapt their personal beliefs. This will help them reframe their perceptions of counter-intuitive teacher resistance behaviour likely to manifest when depleted, especially if challenged by a strong-minded learner (Baumeister, 2018:10,11).

This disparity between what is expected in LO and what is allowed by school culture, combined with the fear of potential reprisal, may cause a persistent state of dissonance for the LO teacher. This insistent unease may be attributed to the LO teacher having to suppress their critical agency for their LO praxis to promote the school's culture and policies, therefore clashing in ideologies (Bazzy, 2018:198). A constant state of ego depletion could manifest as emotional distress, a lack of energy, illusory fatigue, low blood sugar, an inability to make positive choices when forced, cognitive dissonance, self-control failure, heart rate and hormonal fluctuations (Cherry, 2020:2,3).

5.5.3 *Autonomy as a motivator to the facilitation of courageous conversations*

My findings revealed that only one of the nine participants had full autonomy in the management of her LO department. Despite two participants indicating they believed they had a modicum of freedom, it was later revealed to be conditional. Ultimately, the critical need to be awarded professional autonomy is a great motivator in the facilitation of courageous conversations. LO teachers need to be trusted to boost the courage needed to open controversial topics in the LO space. The LO teacher's volition, moral fibre and authenticity should always be in the learners' interest, be critical and not conforming (Tice *et al.*, 2007:379). Figures of authority should thus recognise the nature of LO as a subject and the LO teacher based on their role in implementing dynamic narratives vital to transformation and acceptance. If LGBTQ+ is considered taboo in Chapel, it must be understood that it cannot be taboo in the LO space. Therefore, these topics are indicated as a commonly shared concern, but the ethnicity and cultural difference between the lived experience of white and BIPOC learners may differ drastically. This finding indicates that identity is continuously adjusted according to

the holistic social dynamic one encounters and adopts (Francis & Le Roux 2007:300,301). It has never been more critical to guide, listen, observe, question, and actively engage with what white teachers do not yet understand about their BIPOC learners' accommodation needs, and by BIPOC teachers about their white learners (Ally, 2006:31).

This willful self-growth helps the teacher continuously adjust their critical agency and worldview (Cabrera, Franklin & Watson, 2017:11). This continuous evolving includes addressing a lack of belonging experienced by BIPOC learners who are forced to assimilate into traditional white behavioural codes while being reminded of their privileged education (Oberholzer, 2017). A specific single-minded commitment is needed to become a mindful, flexible and forward-thinking LO teacher (Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:147). The LO teacher needs to ensure no learners are left behind during critical narratives; not the white learners whose voices are slowly being withdrawn as they have not been taught to critically assess the impact of apartheid on their lifeworld and meaning-making, and not the BIPOC learners who have only just discovered their voices and a platform to discuss their lifeworld and meaning-making (Ally, 2006:36; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:2,7-8). However, to succeed in either one or a combination of teaching approaches – the formal structures, source-based approach, or the facilitation of critical content in a conversation – the teacher must take the initiative and be future-orientated (Strydom, 2011:77). Teachers should also be able to build rapport with a supportive line manager or other LO colleagues not at their school with whom they share a close professional bond or the IEB cluster group (IEB, 2015; Zacher *et al.*, 2018:40-1).

5.5.4 Recommendation

The ability to measure one's views and opinions against a constitution decided by the people becomes the yardstick for controversial topics that rely on teachers' diversity cognisance, a broad worldview, and self-awareness. Despite a lack of organisational support, the LO teacher must be proactive and assume professional independence until the lack thereof is explicitly denied. As one participant described, teachers need to steer away from the route pigeonholed for LO by management and colleagues. Showcasing what is done in LO may motivate teachers and learners to grasp autonomy. This includes creating consistent opportunities for learners to utilise their knowledge of human rights violations, creating awareness campaigns that can be shared and distributed, creating platforms for NGOs and charities as community service (IEB, 2018:2,3; 2020:3,4). This involvement makes for a marketable LO praxis as a positive influence.

5.6 LO teachers' behavioural coping mechanisms in the facilitation of courageous conversations

Wassermann (2018:114) referred to “*controversial issues*” associated with History, and which format was adapted by Mowatt (2016:1) for LO, as:

“... invariably complex, have no fixed point of view, and have competing interpretations which will challenge the personal beliefs and values of ... teachers and learners alike.”

5.6.1 Setting boundaries to facilitate courageous conversations

According to participants' responses to this specific section of the interviews and group discussion, it is vital to contract boundaries with the learners before facilitating courageous conversations in the FET phase to maintain the balance of voices during a critical discourse. Open and informally structured critical discourse is a risk even with a skilled, confident teacher. There is more self-protection and room for deflection in controlled and formally structured conversations. However, if this is the only method followed, it leaves very little room for joint learning and teaching and limits self-development. Instead, implementing contracted and specific boundaries [Table 6, Chapter 2:47] between the teacher and learners assist in maintaining balance during courageous conversations. The consistent implementation of boundaries encourages teacher involvement and confidence. In addition, sharing of the self and one's story of becoming can promote trust, but it must be carefully thought through, as stories can be misinterpreted. The participants all seemed to agree that a contracted behavioural boundary between the teacher and learners is critical and must be maintained during a facilitated critical conversation. Learners should be allowed to develop an individual set of norms and values when developing critical thinking. Moreover, possible consequences of a learner's inability to adhere to these boundaries must be clarified when contracting the boundaries to ensure the learners understand it is part of the developmental process.

Avoiding judgement and unconditional acceptance should go both ways to create an equal sub-society encompassing all levels of diversity within the LO space as a catalyst to holistic school restitution (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:12; Tawa, 2018:150). Meaning-making can be initiated as a formal reflection activity when debriefing the learners' lived experience of the lesson and the content's impact on them. This debriefing expedites the foundation between teacher and learners preceding Grade 11 and Grade 12 (Oyserman, 2019:337). No learner may be made to feel their views are inferior or judged right or wrong, and therefore dismissed (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:188,189). Furthermore, the trust relationship between the

learners and their LO teacher is unlike the relationships between learners and teachers in other subjects. Wassermann (2018:124) thus stresses the importance of rules or boundaries that need to be explicitly taught to assist teachers and learners in conducting conversations on controversial content. Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen (2018:188) also suggest a norm-based contract with learners at termly intervals to emphasise the importance of these conversations and the boundaries that form the foundations of a democratic microcosm. Should a learner single-mindedly persist in defending their opinion above any other, they should be asked to substantiate that view in the next lesson. Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen (2018:189) also suggest learners keep a private journal to write down the thoughts they may not have been able to express during the lesson.

Once the boundaries and physical environment have been decided, these narratives must remain limited to the LO space for practical critical content discussions. The role of the teacher, regardless of how open and trusting, must remain within professional boundaries. Moreover, an evolving personal belief system and broadened worldview should be encouraged, and its impact on developing a transient identity is not restricted to the LO teacher but sets the tone for mutual interaction in the LO space; it allows learners to explore the differing opinions of others (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:34; Shedrow, 2017:281). For example, learners can take the role of parents to argue parents' perspective regarding their responsibility to monitor their teenager's online presence and internet search history, rather than teachers attempting to control an emotional outcry of learners' opinions about violations on their right to privacy.

5.6.2 *Unlocking topics for courageous conversations*

The following findings became apparent during the individual interviews. Unlocking topics for courageous conversation is a skill that needs to be developed and may cause a conversation to fail before it starts. Thus, it is a skill that needs specific training for teachers to feel comfortable in the LO space when a particularly problematic topic is going to be the focus of the discourse. Multiple perspectives on topics must also be included when introducing the content. Unlocking topics for courageous conversations entails a negotiation of content and space, and one should never cross the line between challenging and being confrontational. Opening up should be objective and neutral; therefore, scaffolding topics according to the learners' maturity level is important to encourage learners' participation. The teacher should also know when to channel power to the strong voices, empower the minority voices, and refocus the discourse on the intended perspectives. They should step in and draw the conversation to a close with a debriefing session to ensure equilibrium is restored before the next lesson.

Adverse experiences that limit courageous conversations to group work may work as a form of self-protection from dissonance and proactive strategising as a form of self-regulation. However, there is also great benefit in grappling with these aspects in open discourse. In *Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations* (2017:9), Wray stresses the value of starting by acknowledging the possible cognitive dissonance triggers one's learners may experience. Roddick (2017:12,22) also suggests that framing the opening statement as a question is a reasonably safe option to open what he refers to as 'dangerous topics in the classroom'. The imbalance between a white and a BIPOC perspective on interracial topics and content trigger very different reactions during these narratives; however, all voices must be heard to ensure awareness of the opinions of others regardless of whether you agree or not. Often, sacrificing a planned lesson to a teachable moment can be immensely insightful and meaningful in getting to know the learners. An understanding of learners is lost if the teacher limits themselves and their learners to structured and formal conversations on controversial topics. All teachable moments should thus be facilitated as a critical teaching and learning experience. Deflecting these moments creates a null curriculum that affectively rejects the learner's views and concerns (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:34).

Those teachers who incorporate the sharing of their identity and worldview – the self as content – model self-contexts and identity constructions that take a great deal of courage, but it is worth the effort (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301). It is this professional courage that Ashton (2017:3) describes as:

“a wilful and intentional act, executed with mindful deliberation, involving a substantial risk to the teacher, is primarily motivated to bring about a worthy end, and despite the presence of the emotion of fear.”

It does not negate teacher control or diminish the teacher or their authority in the LO space, since power should be shared and channelled (Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:141). However, there is a need for a grey area between the professional and personal identities of the LO teacher. Specific life experiences must be selected from this grey area as the 'transformative identity' enables mutual sharing to create a relatable LO space within which teacher and learner vulnerability can become respected (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:300; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:143-4). Ramphela (2012:189-95) and Singleton (2014:70-76) agree that sharing personal stories and analytical listening skills should enable each race group to voice their opinions and explore the applicable historical premise without judgement or defending political ideologies; this becomes the goal of the conversation.

5.6.3 Topics likely to trigger dissonance during courageous conversations

The following topics were identified by my participants as likely to trigger dissonance during courageous conversations. These topics can be divided into three main categories. Firstly, the identity of the self, race, gender, and sexual fluidity must be considered as a foundation that embodies all aspects of learner becoming. Secondly, political topics: an LO teacher in the minority demographic has to listen and observe more, following a teacher as learner role rather than a prescriptive teacher role. Thirdly, challenging the status quo: focusing on white fragility, white supremacy, black lives matter, micro-aggressions, and being aware of the dynamics among one's learners. Providing closure to a courageous conversation is ultimately vital to learners' frame of mind as they leave the LO space. The teacher must therefore be keenly aware of the time available and observe the direction of the conversation, and tone down the atmosphere before the end of the lesson. Closure is necessary during a courageous conversation, but not always possible – teachers should thus settle for calm to end the narrative and allow for some reflection before the lesson ends.

Kelly and Roedder (2008:523-525) refer to implicit racial bias that manifests as micro-aggressions. For instance, the common practice to shorten difficult BIPOC names into nicknames that are easier to pronounce, and the use of 'they' and 'them' reduces BIPOC learners to a single manageable collective rather than valued individuals. Assuming an ethnicity based on appearance, assuming ability due to race, not considering dietary requirements, and body-shaming could all be interpreted as implicit racial bias and, therefore, micro-aggressions (Kelly & Roedder, 2008:527-8). Many micro-aggressions around identity are overlooked, such as 'not seeing colour' which denies the humanity, dignity and identity of the rich diversity and lived experiences of individuals to provide the multiple perspectives critical to developing a broad worldview and rich narratives. Therefore, both LO teachers and learners who openly share their stories of personal becoming reflect the courage markers described by Ashton (2017:3). This method is reflected in the personal testimonies used by Singleton in *COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE* (2014), and the personal testimonies included in *A SCHOOL WHERE I BELONG* (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018). This mutual sharing of stories of becoming is similarly the premise for the *Letsema Circles of Healing* developed by Ramphele (2012:189).

Discounting the value of mutually sharing stories and opinions indicates a distancing from the responsibility of our racial past and a refusal to accept white complicity in the systematic discrimination against BIPOC ethnicities. It is vital to acknowledge the resulting lack of quality education and poverty for BIPOC South Africans as opposed to the self-serving white privilege of white South Africans (Applebaum, 2007:454, 458). Evans (2017:126) refers to Steve Biko's

1971 speech entitled '*White Racism, Black Consciousness*', in which Biko expressed his disdain for white liberals. He referred to attempts at restitution as aimed at deflecting from their protection of the status quo, and cautioned against acting from a premise nullifying white guilt from the comfort of white privilege. The aim should therefore not be limited to nullifying white guilt and white shame, but complete redress of one's own barriers and a focus on healing redress of all citizens (Ally, 2006:34-5).

5.6.4 Providing closure to a courageous conversation

In this section of the interviews and group discussion, participants reported a lack of guidelines and effectively defined roles during the facilitation of critical discourse. The teacher's role during a learner-driven critical discourse is twofold. At first, while observing learners' interactions, links should be noted for future lessons. Secondly, during the closing reflection, the teacher should identify aspects of the narrative that may need a follow-up in a future lesson and reaffirm commonalities that were resolved. Therefore, the teacher must be time conscious. It may be more effective and have more learning value to split a topic into manageable sections, consider how much time the learners usually take to settle, and double-check the amount and complexity of reading matter they need to go through before the discussion starts. During facilitation, the teacher's role is to enable critical thinking, oversee open discourse, identify dissonance, support learners in formulating their argument, provide prompts to manage the flow of the narrative, and maintain a semblance of emotional equilibrium within a limited time. There may not be time to finish a specific conversation, and losing momentum and context make it difficult to control the continuation of the conversation in other classes. The conversation may also be taken home, where the context and intent are open to multiple interpretations.

For a white teacher and white learners, discussions about socio-political content may perpetuate their humiliation and shame associated with white privilege and white complicity. Moreover, the BIPOC learners and a BIPOC teacher may relive their transferred experiences of humiliation, poverty, and a loss of dignity during conversations on specific topics, particularly when the current government's failures are at the centre of the discourse (Ally, 2006:36; Opperman Lewis, 2016:24-6; Cabrera, Franklin & Watson, 2017:77-9). Smith's (2018:268-270) emphasis on communication and respect versus disrespect is vital, as intent and attitude must be explicit to ensure clear communication between teachers and learners from different races, cultures and diverse value systems.

In a study conducted by Francis and Le Roux (2007:306), the premise was that the teacher is perceived as an active agent of change, and the responsibility to implement critical agency

(the moral, ethical and professional compass for restitution) specifically shifted to subjects similar to LO. One of the participants in a study conducted by Francis and Le Roux (2007:307) described the teacher's role in "*breaking the cycle of oppression as an interactive, multi-layered process determined by communication*". The participant further indicated that, in her opinion, the responsibility for redress should inform half the context of one's teaching (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:307). Meanwhile, Singleton and Hays (2008:19-21) state that, as the second and fourth guideline of their "Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations", both teacher and learner should experience discomfort and intense arguments. They should encounter new levels of dissonance, but this should always be weighed against the potential of a lack of closure.

5.6.5 Recommendation

As South Africans, our moral, religious, racial, ethnic, and cultural roots are inextricably connected to our identities. Lesson content and opinions may need to be jointly analysed for validity and reliability to prevent it ultimately being discarded if it differs from teachers' values despite being relevant to learners. The specific recognition of experiencing difficulty or discomfort does not indicate failure by the teacher or learner. Furthermore, learners who have the courage to contribute or challenge what makes them experience discomfort deserve recognition and validation. Learner journals, as suggested by Wray (2018:189), could be of benefit to learners to write their contributions or questions down for a future lesson or leave their journal in a predetermined space for the teacher to note and respond to privately (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018). Regardless of the term used to describe these vital conversations (courageous, critical, dangerous, difficult, or even fierce), they are critical to nation-building and the development of thinking, challenging and proactive future citizens.

5.7 The LO teacher's lived experience of courageous conversations

LO is the only space where learners can discuss concepts of democracy, find a niche for themselves, explore who they are and their expectations of themselves as they move into adulthood.

5.7.1 The facilitation process

Participant feedback indicated that the teacher should allow a measure of flexibility during the facilitation process, but the agreed boundaries must remain. Learners will introduce views from home, their role models, or current socio-political influencers during conversations. A teacher being dismissive of these opinions may cause learners to perceive such a reaction as the teacher being confrontational and insensitive. However, where possible, learners should be encouraged to provide factual substantiation of their views. Opportunities must be created

for all learners' voices to be heard, and if needed, the teacher should become the unrepresented voice or introduce perspectives that would represent an absent minority. Therefore, the scope and levels of expertise required of the LO teacher are extensive, and it may even be unrealistic; still, expert LO teachers acknowledge the challenges associated with these conversations and the need for them.

LO also explores the pitfalls that can be avoided by understanding emotional development and making informed choices. LO teachers often openly discuss the othering narratives still abounding in society, specifically mental health, which remains stigmatised. During facilitation, the teacher's role thus includes enabling critical thinking, overseeing open discourse, identifying dissonance, supporting learners in formulating their opinions, providing prompts to manage the flow of the narrative, and maintaining a semblance of emotional equilibrium within a limited timeframe. Therefore, the LO space is viewed as more than just a physical environment – it is a social aptitude model. The active development and preparation of the learners, not only to be mindful of others but to embrace the unknown societal and professional complexities they may face, is important. It is also possible, and necessary, for the LO teacher to educate another adult (non-LO teacher) empathetically but firmly despite the risk of offending them to help them incorporate self-reflection in how they relate to their learners.

However, this is where the unskilled and unmotivated LO teacher can turn the LO space into a very volatile environment. Despite the LO space not being considered pertinent among teachers from other subjects (it is currently only focused on by the LO teacher and learners), the role of this space includes the responsibility to address colleagues if necessary (Pillay, 2012:168). Moreover, the lines of communication must be kept open between teachers and learners to increase the chance of success; small changes in each classroom should improve the relationship between teachers and learners (Pillay, 2012:170). In addition, Singleton and Hayes (2008:18) state that it is much easier for learners to conduct mutual discourses about racial and other complex topics, as they view the teacher's presence as awkward and forced. The teacher thus needs to gauge when to move away from playing an active role and adopt an observer role to create a productive flow of opinions. It is then more likely that the learners will express their views freely and resolve minor disagreements among their peer groups within the LO space. The trust relationship here entails trusting the learners to become the teachers. Ultimately, despite the discomfort and challenges the teacher and learners face, the LO teacher can create a space that prepares learners to be reflective and accommodating of whatever changes must be faced (Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations, 2017:4).

5.7.2 *Supporting learners who experience dissonance*

The following findings were inferred from my participants' responses to this specific section of the individual interviews. They claimed it is critical to support learners who experience dissonance. Should the learner's behaviour become aggressive and rigid, they may benefit from some time alone to regain composure. The learner asked to regain control must be assured that the teacher is addressing the negative behaviour, not the learner themselves. When a learner finds it difficult to express their opinion effectively and respectfully, the teacher must also provide one-on-one support to assist the learner(s) in positively expressing their views. Teacher awareness of the origins of their views of what is moral and ethical is inseparable from their cultural roots as it affects every facet of our humanity. Therefore, it stands to reason that the individual identity of each learner needs to be respected and acknowledged. However, the ensuing affective discomfort, which the learner may find challenging to verbalise, creates a slower cognitive struggle that may evolve into knowledge and tolerance of others' opinions that can be verbalised in a controlled manner (Hodgkinson, Langan-Fox & Sadler-Smith, 2008:4).

Opperman Lewis (2016:16-9) refers to the humiliation and shame triggered by trans-generational trauma, which is re-ignited during re-experiences by survivors of a traumatic past. The humiliation and hardship faced live on in the stories shared generationally by parents and grandparents (Opperman Lewis, 2016:30; Wassermann, 2018:124). These stories and recollections often cannot be academically substantiated, which increases the humiliation, shame, and learners' voices not being deemed worthy without factual substance. Reliving this trauma in the LO space is likely to give rise to reactions of anger, aggression, and a need to project the hurt and humiliation onto someone else. Therefore, Gorski (2009:54-55) stresses that these reactions must be expected by the teacher and seen for the dissonance it is and not insolence, disrespect, or a verbal assault. According to Opperman Lewis (2016:18,19), this:

“humiliation cycle will continue in South Africa if we [*Afrikaners*] do not understand our suffering and shame – and [*the English*] do not acknowledge their huge part in it as they were prepared to use the 'vilification of Afrikaner apartheid' while continuing to enjoy the benefits of white supremacy. The same can be said for the current leaders' obsession with the past which condemns us to repeat it in new forms [...].”

The call for all white South Africans to come to terms with the trauma they suffered vicariously due to the inherited legacy of apartheid is supported by Steyn *et al.* (2018:4). An intuitive

reaction from learners, especially those expecting implicit bias from teachers, results in dissonance manifestations that may impact the teacher's meaning-making. Instead of the teacher recognising the learners' robust critical discourse as a defence mechanism and viewing their facilitation as a joint positive, even cathartic experience, the teacher perceives the specific conversation as a failure (Hodgkinson, Langan-Fox & Sadler-Smith, 2008:6).

5.7.3 Critical incidents impact on teacher motivation and future facilitation of courageous conversations

According to my participants, critical incidents that may result in formal allegations, regardless of whether they resulted in verbal or even disciplinary action, have a dire impact on teacher motivation and the facilitation of future conversations on critical discourse. They emphasised the learner's maturity level must be considered. A teacher's skill, knowledge and self-awareness are critical to an effective, holistic conversation. Complete knowing of learners is rarely possible, but the teacher should never assume; instead, they should ask the learners for clarification, become the learner, and observe whenever possible.

It is also critical to read the dynamics in the classroom and tone the emotive voices down to ensure learners have time to collect themselves before the end of the lesson. The ideal would be to contain the entire conversation and content in the LO space, but that is unlikely – often because a consensus might not be reached in time for feedback. However, despite this likely lack of resolution to a critical discussion, LO teachers need to be accessible to the learners to ensure they are fully involved in the conversation (Singleton & Hays, 2008:22; Karp, 2012:152). The teacher should ensure learners are honest and open in sharing their truths. The learners should also be assured that they will have enough time and may add or continue the conversation in a subsequent lesson – a clear timeframe as a leadership incentive will add urgency to the discourse and diminish the possibility of a rushed narrative that can be misconstrued (Karp, 2012:152) .

Despite the current uncertainty and troubling atmosphere in schools, some participants indicated they would continue to facilitate courageous conversations within the contracted boundaries. The differences in demographic, culture, gender, abilities, home languages, values and norms in the LO space can be very skewed when viewed as a white teacher favouring whiteness and white opinions by BIPOC learners, or a BIPOC teacher seen as disinterested in their white learners' views and opinions. The more balanced the diversity, the more inclusive the courageous conversations. Teachers with no demographic balance in their learner body should thus argue on behalf of the diversities not represented in the specific LO

space. No learners should believe that a voice is irrelevant, not urgent, or not applicable for inclusion in the LO space.

Even unintended exclusion may prevent a sensitive learner from gathering the courage to use their voice at the risk of affective rejection, which may curb peer acceptance and belonging (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:35). Gorski (2009:54) thus highlights the importance of identifying the defensive mechanisms learners may display. This body language should be seen as a manifestation of cognitive dissonance rather than resistance or disinterest in the conversation. Davies (2013:13) lists seven principles of what he terms “*fierce conversations*”: master the courage to interrogate reality; come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real; be here, prepared to be nowhere else; tackle your toughest challenge today; obey your instincts; take responsibility for your emotional wake; and let silence do the heavy lifting. These guidelines may be better suited to critical conversations with colleagues, parents and Grade 12 learners, but the focus of what is described as fierce conversations includes passion, integrity, authenticity and collaboration, which links closely to the approach followed with the three steps of the Letsema Circles of Healing (Ramphele, 2012:189; Davies, 2013:13).

Despite the 2020 cancel culture campaign’s negative impact on the trust relationship between affected teachers and learners, this campaign highlighted that a transformation complacency had set in (Rauch in Strossen, 2020:i-iii; Conradie, 2019:10). Many allegations had a sound premise and stressed the disparity in learner diversity needs being described as acknowledged when it is still experienced as neither heard nor resulting in actionable change (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:25-6). The strategies in place for effective transformation and belonging in a school, likely reflective of a dominantly traditional white perspective, did not create belonging or meet the needs of learners despite the transformative steps initially implemented (Smith, 2018:264-66). Independent schools and staff should therefore move beyond transformation to recognise that effective change challenges us to create more fluid spaces in which joint discourse becomes a dynamic catalyst for recognising all ideas and embracing an infinite managerial mindset with tangible change (ISASA, 2013:4). Unfortunately, the 2020 choice of campaign thwarted the accommodation of a “*free expression culture*”, which is vital to critical discourse and a cornerstone of LO and courageous conversations:

“... a free expression culture seeks to further debate and discussion. The opposite is true of cancel culture, which instead seeks to end discussion, or at least to truncate it, by summarily dismissing certain ideas — or even certain speakers — as ineligible for inclusion in the exchange” (Strossen, 2020:1).

Moreover, the possibility of multiple perspectives was refuted, and the need for substantiation was circumvented by a broad assurance of autonomy that created an unprecedented lack of boundaries for the accusing parties – opposed to the extremely restricted boundaries set for the publicly exposed accused parties (Strossen, 2020:3-5).

5.7.4 *Meaning attached to the lived experience of courageous conversations*

The following feedback was gleaned from my participants’ reflections on their lived experiences of courageous conversations. Meaning-making is becoming a continuous process of the teacher’s and learner’s accumulated lived experiences. It affects the teacher’s choice to facilitate controversial topics and pre-facilitation expectations.

Despite the literature focusing on race during courageous conversations, there are many levels of becoming. Controversial issues of race – for example, a white LGBTQ+ white learner’s journey to acceptance may be very different from that of a BIPOC learner’s journey – were mentioned by the participants. BBEE can also result in BIPOC learners’ aptitude and appointment being dismissed as a quota appointment. The same happens in school sports, where BIPOC learners may be dismissed as a quota selection. Moreover, white learners may feel aggrieved when facing quota systems during university admission applications. Learner frustrations at all these methods of redress of apartheid inequality are raised in the LO space, and the LO teacher needs to facilitate those narratives. The LO teacher must therefore meet the needs of their learner body morally, ethically and ethnically. In this sense, the LO teacher’s generational age may play a role as learners may be more likely to view an older teacher’s opinion as prejudiced and offensive. This expectation may stem from the impact of learners’ exposure to the lived experiences of discrimination shared by family members from the same generation as the teacher. The introduction of multiple perspectives, not just as a Grade 12 CAT theme but as the consistent premise of all LO teaching, allows the teacher to introduce unrepresented opinions and perspectives into the LO space with a range of age-appropriate sources. These include video clips, vlogs, websites, awareness campaigns, interviews, podcasts and not merely static factually based academic articles that omit the empathetic judgement-free understanding of a voice learners will not be exposed to in any other way. The contracted boundaries promote a given set of behavioural markers to ensure a fair and respectful engagement with each other and the content as modelled by the teacher.

Teachers and learners share an increasingly complex society, and the LO teacher must focus on providing guidance and support to help learners navigate this complex world; this cannot be done if the teacher is resistant to change and stagnant in their beliefs (Davis & Steyn, 2012:31). The teachers' sense of failure is likely to result in extrapolating historical shame as the meaning of their specific lived experience, exacerbated by the white privilege surrounding them in independent schools (Opperman Lewis, 2016:37; Oberholzer, 2017:1-2). Applebaum (2007:453) refers explicitly to the habit of some white teachers referring to themselves as not seeing race. However, Applebaum (2007:453-5) indicates that this is mainly an attempt to be seen as a white ally, and the lack of recognition of colour, ethnicity and identity hampers the respect and acceptance of BIPOC learners. Furthermore, such a teacher's approach negates the evolving identity referred to by Francis and Le Roux (2007:299,303) and Oyserman's essentialised professional identity (2019:338,339), which prevents the successful engagement in courageous conversations.

5.7.5 Recommendations

An open, trusting, and respectful LO space should not be crowded; ideally, the teacher must focus on a single class at a time. Each class has an individual dynamic and unique authenticity. A crowded space becomes complicated to manage, and unintended humiliation is more intensely experienced if a learner's or teacher's self-control fails in front of a crowd of learners. Moreover, the teacher's need to deflect and self-protect is understandable; however, this attitude may also result in learners forming a perception that the teacher no longer attaches the same importance to their opinions. This context results in the LO space's focus on redress becoming tenuous and regressing to lend validity to historical beliefs of stereotypical behaviour associated with white teachers. The mutual understanding of potential failures in the teacher-learner trust relationship needs to be included in the contracting of boundaries. Learners should be informed that, while there is assurance that the trust relationship may suffer (like any other relationship), its sporadic failure must be mediated and restored as this critical skill and persistence to restore the relationship will undoubtedly be a part of professional life beyond school.

5.8 Unrealistic expectations and a lack of recognition

LO teachers face topics that their non-LO colleagues avoid due to the content causing discomfort or not being part of their curricula, resulting in generally disengaged colleagues.

5.8.1 *LO is associated with topics to be avoided due to high risk and high accountability*

The following feedback was revealed by my participants reflecting their lived experience of courageous conversations. The LO teacher's value as transformative memory maker and mediator, when needed between learners and colleagues, may result in them being seen as instigators rather than facilitators of critical conversations (Dryden-Peterson & Siebörger, 2006:394). LO teachers are expected to take high risks despite LO subject-needs, the sensitivity of their subject content, and the context of LO persistently being dismissed. The LO teacher must have a keen interest in LO as a subject area. An intuitive connection between the content and the learners is further required in the teacher's mentoring and role-modelling capacity. Moreover, the teacher's expertise in gauging their learners' readiness should be decisive in their choice of facilitation; unstructured, informal, or structured formal models should be chosen. Regardless of the model used, the timing to refocus the conversation is critical, as is the method used to defuse individual opinions, attitudes, or behaviour towards peers. A teacher already experiencing dissonance or depletion may perceive a learner attempting to make sense of cognitive dissonance as challenging authority or even as insolent. This may create the view that the teacher has limited knowledge of the learner and how they would react to a specific topic. Furthermore, teachers fear perceived insensitivity, especially if trust has to be re-established. Focusing on creating a risk-free environment may have its benefits but can still be very stressful and hamper the ultimate goal of mutual growth between learner and teacher if the teacher is unable to let go of the need to control.

Should a teacher act with autonomy and discuss learner questions and views openly in the LO space (despite the risk of professional dissonance) to benefit their learners, the teacher will be breaching an implicit boundary set by the school (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:81). When the challenging of power and the hidden and null curriculum is deflected, learners do not have a space in which their concerns can be openly and critically challenged, and both their intellectual and affective becoming is limited (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986:35; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:2). It is thus vital that learners have a sound foundation for courageous conversations and that both learners and teachers work towards becoming accustomed to self-interrogations and question existing beliefs, values, and the multiple perspectives of each topic (Milazzo, 2017:557). It is only in channelling control and power that the teacher is empowered (Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:141).

5.8.2 *The expertise demanded from LO teachers exceeds the indicated perceptions of LO*

The following were inferred from responses to this specific section of the focus group discussion. According to my participants, expertise on all LO-related topics is expected despite the demands made on LO teachers exceeding their perceived value or that of LO as subject area. At times, the expertise demanded, such as offering counselling for mental health, career counselling, building a trust relationship, an interest in socio-political affairs, or consistent self-development may not be within the scope of a specific teacher. Should learners and parents take offence at advice that was shared with learners, it may have legal repercussions (specifically when facing mental health difficulties), or there is a risk of disciplinary action when advice is deemed discriminatory in any way.

The demands of LO teachers transcend the value attached to the subject. As a result, LO teachers are conflicted between the need to add value to LO and the external dismissal of LO that constantly erodes their professional motivation. Thus, LO teachers experience themselves as generally unseen, unheard, and undervalued. As fluidity increases at all levels of the teacher's identity development, the importance of a non-judgement space where learners can openly discuss and question the role of religion, culture, ethnicity, and tradition increases in value. Topics concerning personal identity, emotion, anxiety and depression, mixed-race relationships, sexual and gender fluidity, and monogamy versus polygamy can be challenged in an open and integrated discussion.

Teachers who grow their worldview to encompass their learners' complete and diverse needs during courageous conversations set the tone for empathetic and mindful democratic citizens (Reygan & Steyn, 2017; Steyn, Burnett & Ndzwayiba, 2018:3). Vandeyar and Swart (2016:143) refer to the teacher as a 'transformative intellectual' who can constantly reflect on whom they believe themselves to be. This continuous self-awareness and change process relies not only on independence but on 'humility, love, courage, decisiveness, security and joy', and a teacher who is not bound by a set content and a static curriculum (Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:145). Furthermore, LO teachers who are supported and encouraged to continuously add to their training and abilities, especially counselling skills, become keystone LO teachers and multi-skilled professionals (Pillay, 2012:167).

5.8.3 *Persistent resistance to the academic standard of LO may result in suppressed resentment from LO teachers*

The following findings emerged from my participants' responses during the focus group discussion. There is a constant demand for increased distinctions in LO, which may result in

LO teachers developing negative coping skills, such as teaching to specific assessments, creating null curricula to appease parents, setting tasks that do not meet the full scope of Blooms' Taxonomy, or lenient marking. The habit of employing unskilled staff or adding LO to the workload of non-LO trained staff defeats the need to recognise the specialised skills needed to teach LO effectively. Thus, the suppressed resentment expressed by participants was twofold: it included the lack of recognition of the professional excellence and the academic standard achieved, and the avoidance by staff, other than History teachers, to accept their responsibility in accommodating courageous conversation regardless of their curricula descriptors. Moreover, LO teachers place pressure on themselves, mainly due to a fear of judgement should they fail to deliver the disproportional number of distinctions to meet learners', parents', and school management's expectations.

Singleton and Hays (2008:22), Davies (2013:1-3), Fowler (2016:127,128), as well as Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen (2018:169) all make it clear the much-needed redress and critical discourse starts with management and in the staffroom. However, the current, ever-present resistance to the IEB and DoBE's demand that LO's academic performance levels be equal to all other subjects limits the LO teachers' ability to become that transformative keystone (Pillay, 2012:1; Ferguson & Jain, 2015:1,2; Mnchunu, 2017:1,2). The inclusion of current well-being and socio-political realities that occur in the national and global arena should, in addition, allow learners to attain critical reasoning skills, engage with analytical interrogation of the content, and gain self-awareness to apply these skills in life beyond school (Thomson, Thomson & Greenwood, 2010:3). Therefore, the ability to function successfully based on internal motivation is vital to the courageous and effective facilitation of critical analysis and objectivity required during conversations that rely on teachers' courage and willingness to embrace vulnerability and discomfort (Brown, 2016:4).

5.8.4 Recommendations

The literature specifically on managerial perceptions of LO as subject and managerial attitudes towards LO teachers is very limited. Prinsloo's study (2007:161) reflects early opinions from principals that LO teachers tasked with teaching LO lack the skills to be role models to the teaching staff, and lack the moral grounding and values the principals deem important. Paterson (2019) clearly states his dissatisfaction and great concern as head of school that LO is increasingly moving towards an academic standard rather than life experiences (personal communication). Moreover, Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen (2018:169) specifically claim that the "leading for change" process starts with the principals and school leaders subjecting themselves to self-interrogation and self-development to bridge their lack of preparation and efforts in leading their schools to visible and encompassing transformation. Although their

book *A SCHOOL WHERE I BELONG* was published in 2018, these guidelines are even more critical after the 2020 cancel culture campaign, and not merely in the LO classroom, but as an unavoidable and vital whole school reality regardless of job descriptions (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:169-173).

5.9 Challenges preventing teacher motivation and longevity

Open narratives regarding race become a daunting experience for a white teacher in a majority BIPOC learner body and a BIPOC teacher in a majority white learner body. A white teacher openly criticising BIPOC political parties or issues of corruption is easily seen as insensitive, judgemental, or even racist by their BIPOC learners. The same could be true if a BIPOC teacher discusses whiteness with white learners.

5.9.1 *Professional exhaustion increases the risk of a loss of control of the LO space as a teaching environment*

The following findings emerged from my participants' responses during the focus group discussion. Professional exhaustion is strongly indicated as the LO content and context increase in complexity, which adds to the teacher's lack of motivation. This inability to self-regulate dissonance is progressively noticed when there is a persistent flow of lessons with different grades, preventing the teacher from restoring possible dissonance after a problematic lesson during that section of the teaching timetable. The increased lack of control in the LO classroom is more pronounced since the potential of offending a learner, or resulting allegations of racism, xenophobia, or homophobia is a greater possibility. Ultimately, facilitation is not about control. It is about channelling power, focusing on allowing learners to verbalise their views, and respectfully being open to the views of their peers. Moreover, there might not be time to finish a specific conversation, and losing momentum and context makes it difficult to continue the conversation in the following lesson if it was not a planned possibility. This action further highlights the need for controversial topics to be discussed openly.

Despite 27 years passing since school demographics changed, BIPOC learners' acceptance remains based on their success, conforming to the majority group and archaic traditional image of a successful learner (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:28). Learners' belonging is not merely indicative of a safe space or the standard of education; it requires the unbiased accommodation of all learners' historical life-worlds, the teacher's historical lifeworld, and the recognition of how that impacts the teachers' and learners' complex sense of self, character formation and approach to their respective past, present and future (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:50). The entire school is responsible for dismantling personal discomfort around race discussions and addressing implicit institutional racism (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301;

Milazzo, 2017:559). Moreover, it stands to reason that a teacher who relies mainly on internal motivation due to an absence of recognition and support by their employer would seek external motivation elsewhere. This support may result in a shift of loyalty but provide much-needed room for teachers' self-regulation and self-confidence to succeed and gain intent and momentum despite resistance and a lack of autonomy (Muraven, 2011:1,2; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:1-3). A teacher who cannot be open to accommodate all learners' views and individuality cannot meet "*the core human values of respect, compassion, just treatment, fairness, peace, truthfulness and freedom*" that would lead to social justice in action (Tjabane & Pillay, 2011:15).

Furthermore, the number of learners enrolled in English Home Language tuition independent schools but who do not speak English at first additional or second additional level is also increasing (Vandeyar, 2010:344). This language barrier results in vital gaps in the learning and teaching of affected learners, not merely in written tasks or the reading of sources, but in a socio-political context and the mastery of content and skills. This specific difficulty also impacts the interpretation of social cues and communication with peers and teachers, resulting in unnecessary miscommunication. Formulating opinions to participate in a language not your own during critical conversation creates barriers that limit the learner's participation in the LO space.

5.9.2 *The responsibilities in teaching LO are too broad and diverse, resulting in dissonance and depletion becoming the norm*

The following were inferred from responses to this specific section of the interviews and group discussion. LO, as a subject, covers a wide range of skills and there are very broad expectations of LO teachers. These factors prevent the LO teacher from feeling supported, in control of their subject, and masters in content sourcing, resulting in dissonance and depletion becoming the norm. Without the necessary self-reflection, equilibrium cannot be achieved. The boundaries of the school culture and traditional beliefs particularly result in a persistent emotional and professional default setting. The lack of set content and expansive guidelines for the sourcing of content further causes an immense responsibility for the LO teacher to stay abreast of what is happening in the world around them. This innate, learned need to perform beyond the minimum is experienced as critical by experienced teachers. LO is the only subject in which the level of curriculum flexibility can drive the main focus of context and scope if the teacher has the expertise, racial cognisance, and confidence to choose to do so willfully. LO teachers should thus regularly reiterate that the learners will face initial discomfort and challenges with courageous conversations and in critically analysing content, especially as there is no right or wrong answer. The learners should develop faith in the process of critical

discourse rather than being correct or incorrect, as in other subjects – an argument can be shaped and given depth during this process of identifying multiple perspectives (Harriet).

Teachers must be aware of how they respond when they are depleted and no longer able to maintain their self-control to minimise the impact of depletion on decision-making and motivation (Muraven, 2011:1,2; Baumeister, 2018:2,5). To experience tangible change is very important as it strengthens the bond between teacher and learners and creates a culture of measurable redress to promote the value of LO and develop active citizenship (Wood, 2020a:23-26,38; Wood, 2020b:40-44). However, being forced to conform to values, morals, and ethical boundaries that clash with the teacher's personal moral and ethical code impacts the teacher's ability to teach LO. It also results in depletion if it becomes a constant state of emotional dissonance experienced as a threat to the teacher's professional identity (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:79-81; Baumeister, 2018:8-10). Thus, in teaching LO, the expectations and skills are too broad and diverse to master to the level of expertise required, especially for new teachers or trans-disciplinary teachers who do not have the time to become masters in more than one teaching area (Woest, 2018:3).

Moreover, it would be reasonable to assume that a constant need to defend one's subject's academic standing, defend the choices one made, or skills one does not have adds professional dissonance to the LO teacher's emotional state (Tice *et al.*, 2007:379-81). The depleted teacher is more likely to deflect and nullify content to prevent the risk of failure by withdrawing from an active role or focusing on static teaching methods and group work with collated feedback. Developing the skills for positive self-reflection, self-regulation and regaining self-control is thus vital (Bazzy, 2018:198).

5.9.3 Empowering mentors are needed to assist in navigating the lack of set content and guidelines

In this section of the group discussion, my participants focused on the lack of guidelines and an effectively defined role during the facilitation of critical discourse. LO has no step-by-step guidelines to assist new teachers when starting as LO teachers, and this lack of guidance is incredibly impactful for teachers who are a one-member LO department (Woest, 2018:1,3). There is thus a great need for experienced and empowering mentorship in LO to set the pace for the teachers, as inexperienced teachers need mentoring to create clear professional boundaries. Mentors may also create a support network for mutual growth in specialised forums that the teachers need to access. Moreover, there are definitive socio-political moments that are difficult to initiate as a white or a BIPOC teacher, meaning the white or BIPOC learners should take the lead, so those critical aspects add authenticity to the

discourse. Observing an experienced teacher facilitate a courageous conversation could thus assist the teacher in gaining confidence. The teacher should use this experience to evaluate and adapt their personal beliefs and reframe perceptions. Even with group work, teaching LO requires circulating and hearing learners' opinions, which is a vital training opportunity. Patience, combined with the constant presence of the teacher as a supportive facilitator, allows for growth.

Unfortunately, the lack of set content becomes an unsurmountable burden or a steppingstone to other possibilities for teachers unwilling to commit fully to LO, resulting in consistent teacher migration from LO (IEB, 2019). Common goals should be set for LO in the same manner as boundaries have to be set for courageous conversations. It should be practical to prevent unrealistic expectations, sustainable to ensure longevity, and realistic to ensure these goals are within the means of learners and the teacher (Oyserman, 2019:338,339). The more consecutive years an LO teacher spent building a solid bond, at least from Grade 11 and Grade 12, the easier it becomes to develop a sense of the learners' emotional wellness and levels of academic stress.

5.9.4 Recommendations

LO's less formal structure allows the teacher to accommodate learners who enter the room in distress from a previous lesson. The potential of such teachable moments should be embraced, as open critical discourse will have far more value than structured and factual substance-driven narratives. Should the teacher be fearful of either losing control of the discourse or repercussions at a later stage, this is an ideal opportunity to be a teacher observer facilitating adherence to the contracted boundaries. Without managerial support, the LO teacher cannot prove courageous conversations have sustainable success. Should any LO teacher persist in implementing a critical agency and facilitating courageous conversations despite explicit professional boundaries, reform will likely remain theoretical without tangible change, bound to trigger resentment from learners.

5.10 Strategist and facilitator as set teacher behaviour

LO teachers may deal with factual substantiation in the form of sourced content presenting multiple perspectives to establish different perceptions on the topic; however, they deal mainly with opinions, fluid views and perceptions, not set content.

5.10.1 Strategising for potential failure as learners' responses cannot be predicted

The following were inferred from responses to this specific section of the focus group discussion. The prevailing unrest experienced by LO teachers that they will not live up to

expectations and mastery result in teachers strategising for failure as much as success. However, this proactive negativity adds to their mental exhaustion. As their frustration increases, LO teachers further experience the ambivalence of their colleagues who deflect learners' concerns, deferring them to the LO department. Despite the levels of planning and strategising teachers engage in while preparing for a critical discourse as part of a LO courageous conversation, learners' responses cannot be predicted. This unknown increases the teachers' vulnerability and may result in content previously deemed suitable now becoming hidden curricula. The teacher may also experience their attempts as rejected and steer clear of specific content or topics to avoid a repeated sense of failure from their learners.

Vandeyar and Swart (2016:146) refer to Zemnylas' (2010:703) description of the intense discomfort teachers face when dealing with increased diversity and multiculturalism, further reflecting the critical value of LO's domain in dealing formally with practical and sustainable redress (Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:147). The need for discomfort is viewed in conjunction with Reygan and Steyn's (2017:1) call for teacher training programmes to prepare teachers to engage with their learners confidently and sustainably in vital narratives about oppression, discrimination, covering the full scope of diversity, including physical, mental health and gender. The impact will potentially create a professional barrier for teachers who lack commitment and expertise in these levels of involvement. However, the literature focuses on the critical need for all teachers to strive towards these goals and continually enhance their internalised self-concept, not only LO teachers (Bukor, 2011:107; Reygan & Steyn, 2017:8).

Amin (2015:3) refers to three ways in which 'knowing learners' can be viewed; "solicited knowing, unsolicited knowing and professional knowing". The first is knowledge gained during casual interactions with the learner without expectation of performance; however, such opportunities are limited, and the knowledge gained is incomplete. The second is knowledge the learner shares or discloses that is personal and must be held in confidence; confirmation of the factual accuracy is problematic. The third is the knowledge gained between teacher and learner interaction; it is assimilated by the teacher based on professional experience. However, as none of these three methods provides complete learner knowledge, it is unlikely to result in a complete understanding (Amin & Vithal, 2015:3).

5.10.2 Learner maturity levels determine the content and the teachers' attempt at creating an authentic learning experience

The following feedback was received from participants reflecting their experiences of courageous conversations. The role of learner maturity levels becomes vital in building a trust relationship between the teacher and learner. Gauging learners' maturity levels, knowing the

signs that indicate distress or likely triggers, even identifying learners likely to drive their personal agendas are as critical as the negotiated behavioural boundaries essential to these narratives. There is also an accepted practice for teachers to use their own lives or lived experiences as subject content to foster openness between them and their learners. Despite successes experienced by the teachers using this strategy, it may provide more than mere authenticity, as it increases the teacher's vulnerability.

Teachers' and learners' life stories reflect their lived experiences and the collective experiences in their social world, historical background and families' beliefs and values; however, the identity formulated during these experiences is fluid (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:300). Huynh (2018:277-80) recommends creating counter-narratives to replace commonly held prejudices guided by misconceptions or rigid beliefs to reveal the uncovered truths, especially the dichotomy between white and BIPOC historical experiences. As learners become more trusting and emotionally mature, the LO teacher should work with them to broaden their understanding of BIPOC socio-political history compared to white socio-political history (Tawa, 2018:151). Courageous conversations, and with that, honing learners' confidence in their own voice and opinions, must be normalised. However, the limited contact time and opportunities in LO for these conversations may not be sufficient to achieve this goal, corroborating Steyn's insistence that CDL and critical discourse must not be limited to the LO classroom (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:2).

Despite this ideal of involving all teachers in schoolwide implementation, enough should be done in LO to prove its value. Therefore, a visible, open teacher presence is vital to monitor learners' dissonance and identify the critical areas on which the learners are focused. It is also important to conclude the lesson with a reflection on how the content and perspectives will affect each learner individually, should they face a similar situation in their own lives.

Roddick (2017:9) refers to the 'moral purpose of education'. Teachers cannot broaden learners' understanding and prepare them to be civic-minded young adults striving towards redress if they are ill-equipped with the vital critical reasoning skills to look beyond their privilege and gain an expanded worldview (Oberholzer, 2017). The habits of sharing, listening, respecting, reflecting, maintaining confidentiality, empathy and self-control are vital skills – not merely for critical discourse, but in all terrains of life beyond school (Karp, 2012:150,152). It is also possible for a learner's self-control to fail while participating in the conversation. Therefore, the teacher must look for signs of distress and intervene before the learner loses self-control (Claxton, 2010:1-3). Therefore, enabling the BIPOC learners to teach their white LO teachers and white peers may create a more authentic relationship among all learners.

5.10.3 Self-protection replaces courage as a coping mechanism

The following were inferred from responses to this specific section of the focus group discussion. Participants claimed teachers are unable to control how learners perceive information once outside the context of the LO space. This increased need for manageable vulnerability and the increase in realisation of their inability to control learners' reactions may result in self-protection becoming a coping mechanism to replace courage. This insecurity can be overcome if the teacher uses their pedagogical intuition to withdraw from the conversation and allow learners to steer the discourse when it falls outside the teacher's experience.

There is no means to foresee the future socio-political challenges in our societies or countries around the world, and no amount of pre-strategising to predict what will trigger dissonance during critical conversations (Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations, 2017:4). However, it is only in building the trust relationship required for courageous conversations and in having critical discourse that the teacher can truly come to know their learners; even then, it is not complete knowledge. Knowing one's learners is vital in establishing intent and ensuring no learner leaves the LO space without their dignity and worth intact. Therefore, the same form of intuition LO teachers use to recognise potential LO content from media headlines could be employed to recognise patterns in learners' behaviour and reaction, assisting the LO teacher in memorising the significance of those repeated behaviours. This should result in increased knowledge and a level of predictability (Hodgkinson, Langan-Fox & Sadler-Smith, 2008:7).

As a teacher's experience and familiarity with LO grows, they are more likely to move to mainly the second form of planning (combining and selecting combinations of sub-topics) but maintain the core goals set out in the critical agency (Francis & Le Roux, 2007:301). This method offers far more options, and lessons can be designed to the teacher and learners' strengths (Zacher *et al.*, 2018:38). However, with a sense of autonomy, the teacher is more likely to pursue goals as a transformational agent, placing the teacher at risk of breaching professional policies, protocols, and codes while suppressing their own opinions. They are thus more likely to experience professional dissonance (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002:79). Still, the gratification experienced by the teacher in meeting their own goals and shaping learning and teaching according to their own values should help them make targeted choices to achieve a state of emotional equilibrium and professional independence (Zacher *et al.*, 2018:38-40).

Unfortunately, the impact of the 2020 cancel culture campaign introduced an uncomfortable dynamic in teacher-learner interactions. As stated, with courageous conversations, the LO

teacher must determine learners' maturity to self-regulate after dissonance and incorporate multiple perspectives. However, with such diffusion of the learners' and teachers' roles when the power dynamic is out of kilter, the restoration process significantly damages the respectful mutual trust relationship. Moreover, the courage and vulnerability within the LO space may create challenges that seem insurmountable. Both teachers and learners must therefore find the emotional maturity and empathy to re-build bridges towards effective redress.

5.11 Impact of learned teacher behaviour

The importance of self-reflection as restorative self-care should not be underestimated, as it is essential to the analysis and interpretation of lived experiences.

5.11.1 Self-reflection as restorative self-care

My findings revealed the discomfort participants experienced due to a lack of clear guidelines that effectively define their role during the facilitation of critical discourse. Teachers are fearful of failure, effectively preventing them from seeking support from their peers. The loyalty they have towards LO as a subject, in contrast with the dismissal of LO with which they live, results in self-isolation that is detrimental to their successful self-regulation of depletion. This self-isolation and fear of judgement are especially true in single staff LO departments, as opposed to well-staffed LO departments where concerns are shared among peers. The internal versus external support system is also vital in the teacher's motivation to act on their need for support and share commonalities to create a support network in their immediate area or the LO cluster group. Also, the need to identify and cultivate supportive peers is critical, and LO departments should create a shared critical agency and commitment to teaching LO. However, self-care, self-reflection, and self-regulation must be maintained in enabling the teacher to employ positive self-reflection and make sense of negative experiences. It can, therefore, be seen that positive lived experiences and meaning-making of critical conversations assist the teacher in retaining self-control and self-regulation when negative feedback is received. This is important as the teacher's internal motivation to challenge and be challenged increases.

A structured and formal courageous conversation is a safer option during courageous conversations, but vital aspects are lost in challenging power with orchestrated trigger-controlled dissonance (Gorski, 2009:18; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016:147). Delors' four pillars of learning (Delors *et al.*, 1998:85-97 in Orón Semper & Blasco 2018:486) are still valid and interlinked, but learning to live together is the critical foundation of the other three pillars and learning. However, Smith (2018:268,269) groups "learning to know and learning to do" together and highlights communication's importance. Smith (2018:270) further groups "learning to be and learning to live together" as his second double-pillar. He focuses

specifically on its impact on teachers continuously addressing the inherent conditioning to which they were exposed and the unintended conditioning they may be implementing. Both sources highlight the vital importance of the critical analysis of the self and the critical discourse facilitated in the LO space, reinforcing the importance of an integrated and holistic worldview and developing vital citizenship and nation-building skills (Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018:486; Smith, 2018:268-270).

5.11.2 Internal versus external support systems

During the focus group discussion, participants reflected that building a supportive network is very important for sharing ideas, exchanging tasks or setting joint examinations. To create an awareness of the value of LO, learners' work can be uploaded as electronic presentations on the school's social media accounts or displayed in a public venue. LO teachers should share exciting views and conversations, with learners' permission, with the rest of the staff. They should also discuss LO examinations with the teachers who invigilated the examinations to gauge the academic standard of the paper and ensure that the invigilator noticed the content dealt with in LO. The in-house marketing of LO requires hard work and persistence, but the benefits of promoting awareness of current events such as #metoo and other social campaigns in the school provide teachers and learners with a sense of gratification. These campaigns can also become joint projects with teachers from other subjects. LO teachers who have achieved success and are confident in their expertise in this process should be encouraged to open their classrooms and invite LO teachers who feel insecure, or academic teachers who express interest, to observe the facilitation of a courageous conversation.

If self-regulation to minimise dissonance cannot be achieved, the teacher's self-control may fail during the facilitation process, and they may not have the confidence to model personal and professional boundaries to maintain balance and respect in the LO space (Tice *et al.*, 2007:379). Should the negative meaning-making be compounded by professional dissonance due to opposing normative values between teacher and school, emotional dissonance due to a lack of support, and cognitive dissonance due to clashing views, the teacher becomes ego depleted (Muraven, 2011:1,2; Baumeister, 2018:10-13). The futility of dismissing learners' concerns and detaching oneself from uncomfortable truths is thus undeniable. Regardless of the challenge, whether these truths are related to gender identities or sexual orientations, socio-political aspects or the status quo, they are aimed at the teacher and their opinions; these questions thus require critical discussions.

As Bongwe (2010:160) describes:

“The more serious and frightening things that would tend to cause tension, division and ultimately conflict, between and amongst us, are the very ones that would require us to have urgent, honest and sometimes difficult conversations about, in order to save ourselves from more severe pain in future. When we suppress them, they would go underground, just like guerrilla warfare. That is where and when they become more dangerous.” (Bongwe, 2010)

Ashton (2017:4) differentiates between psychological courage and moral courage. With psychological courage, a person [*teacher*] undertakes an action that would benefit them, which may seem selfish. However, it could be argued that the courage that represents attaining a higher goal is not entirely self-serving. Moral courage is built on the premise that the action taken will be met with disapproval and resistance, and the person [*teacher*] is being selfless in pursuing the goals of LO rather than being submissive to the boundaries set by a school that offers no benefit to their learners (Ashton, 2017:4). Courageous conversations require both forms of courage; if autonomy is not explicitly refused, it may be assumed as implied (Zacher *et al.*, 2018:40). Teachers who allow learners to challenge what is deemed best hidden or unwelcome will ultimately allow that open and honest discourse to be met with resistance and possible disciplinary action from the school (Steyn, 2015:380).

5.11.3 Recommendations

If a learner raises a view or topic for discussion that cannot be accommodated due to new boundaries in response to the 2020 campaign, the LO teacher should explain why the specific narrative cannot be included. Parents' allegations and beliefs regarding transformative morals, ethics and values may influence the views and opinions of the learners and are likely to cause vulnerability and discomfort among many teachers. In such an emotion-driven situation, maintaining a respectful, open, and truthful discourse will create discomfort that cannot be transformative. Therefore, much work will need to be done to restore the trust relationships in schools.

5.12 Conclusion

Participants provided rich findings and unique insight into the lifeworld of the LO teacher. The inductive approach to my findings assisted me in analysing the individual interviews and the focus group discussion to reveal the presented themes as emergent from the participants' lived experiences and meaning-making of courageous conversations. Ultimately, the answers I sought elicited even more complex questions – specifically regarding support needs for the LO teachers and LO as subject areas. One of my learners called out in a loud, frustrated

reaction to a self-reflective task that *“LO is like, ... like the science of being a human, and that’s hard!”* As in life, very little in LO can be neatly compartmentalised and exist as an independent body of work or set of guidelines. Who we are as people, our historical truths, deflecting to circumvent complicity, privilege and fragility must be confronted and interrogated to provide us with a roadmap of goals to strive for in promoting healing transformation, not merely marketed lip-service to be gradually side-lined to a non-entity. It also enables us to set clear goals and critical agencies to provide redress and tangible change for our learners.

There is a significant gap in the current literature regarding social justice education models that meet academic criteria for the South African context. I was unable to locate any current literature that studied or reflected the current problematic relationship between heads of school and LO as subject area. Even the Letsema Circles of Healing and the Ilima Open Hand method will need to be adapted and remodelled to meet the independent school context (Ramphela, 2012:189,194). Steyn’s CDL has the broadest definition of diversity and is better suited to the LO context, and it is stressed that implementation must be a whole school effort and not restricted to LO (Steyn, 2015:380-5). However, there is less current literature detailing transformation in the South African context and much to be learned from global sources, despite the differences in academic subject areas. Even though the literature concerning social justice education focused on race, it does provide guidelines on accommodating critical discourse. Despite this, few implementation strategies seem transferable to the South African context due to their top-to-bottom implementation approach. Singleton (2014) and Davies (2013) start their implementation strategy with the district managers, then the staff at the district’s schools, only then moving to learners.

The value and impact that LO can have are significant and critical when appropriately executed. However, LO teachers’ skills training and development are unlikely to happen unless they actively pursue it. It is disheartening that the teachers of such a necessary subject still seem to be perceived as academically lacking. Moreover, when academic depth is discussed, there is strong resistance from school management, governing bodies, parents, and learners. This is especially evident when transformation and diversity policy documents seem to be little more than a prescribed document on the schools’ website, and if the attitude of the majority of the non-LO staff seem to reflect a ‘not in my syllabus, not my job’ approach, as evident in my study findings.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate LO teachers' lived experience in the facilitation of courageous conversations. The study focused on the impact that the lived experience of facilitating courageous conversations had on the LO teacher as a professional educator. The purpose was to determine and describe how these teachers attached meaning to the teaching of topics they experience as sensitive, which can only be accommodated in courageous conversations. Ultimately, the study aimed to answer the following two questions:

How do teachers experience the implementation of courageous conversations in the Life Orientation classroom?

and

How does the lived experience of Life Orientation teachers regarding the facilitation of courageous conversations in the classroom impact the meaning attached to these conversations?

In Chapter 5, I analysed and discussed the findings I gathered from participants by employing individual interviews and a focus group discussion. The findings were reflected in Chapter 4 after a three-tiered coding method was followed, guided by Tesch's eight-step coding process (Creswell, 2014:198). Four clear roles of the LO teacher became evident from the findings: firstly, the LO teacher is a professional constantly becoming in response to their lived experiences. Secondly, the LO teacher continually striving to know themselves, their learners, and their subject matter. Thirdly, the LO teacher is a facilitator and negotiator in a transient space with human perceptions of subjective realities; and fourthly, the LO teacher is a nation builder striving to develop thinking, questioning, just and accommodating young adults as civic-minded democratic citizens. In this chapter, I reflect on my conclusions and suggest recommendations to indicate the dissertation's value.

6.2 Review of the study

In this section of Chapter 6, I provide a review of each chapter and the knowledge gained on existing theories. The value added to my understanding of the phenomenon of LO teachers' lived experience and the meaning-making from courageous conversations were also explored.

Chapter 1

In Chapter 1, I described the LO teacher in the context of independent schools, the influence of the IEB as an examination body, and briefly focused on ISASA as an administrative body for the independent school system. I clarified the differences in LO's approach as an application-based rather than a content-based subject. I also focused on the general barriers to LO as a subject area in terms of recognition and perspectives about the subject. I highlighted the purpose of LO accompanying learners in developing the skills required to become challenging and cognisant young adults able to contribute to the economy, the country, and find their role in a global arena. This chapter also formulated my research questions, the theoretical and conceptual framework for my study, and described my research design to determine the causal relationship between lived experience and meaning-making. My research approach included phenomenology (Tuli, 2011:99-100), the social constructivism theoretical lens and interpretivist research paradigm (Kim *et al.*, 2006:3), and an inductive approach (Kawulich, 2012:6-9) was employed. My qualitative research methodology (Creswell, 2014:183) with two data collection methods – individual phenomenological critical interview and a focus group discussion – was also described (Bevan, 2014:139).

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature deemed suited to my research questions and the focus of my study. I focused on three main theoretical concepts: the development of LO; the role of courageous conversations in bridging the gap in effective transformation, acceptance of diversity and critical citizenship; and the impact of teacher identity in the facilitation of courageous conversations. I focused on proponents of courageous conversations such as Singleton (Singleton & Hays, 2008; Singleton, 2014), The Ontario Education Group (Davies, 2013), Ramphela (Ramphela, 2012, 2017a, 2017b), Wray in *Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations* (2017:5-12) and Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen in *A School where I Belong* (2018) and Steyn (Davis & Steyn, 2012; Reygan & Steyn, 2017; Steyn, Burnett & Ndzwayiba, 2018; Steyn, McEwen & Tsekwa, 2018b). Each of the proponents in the global north, as well as Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen, focus on race, with the latter authors also contributing to the website *Facing History Facing Ourselves*. They also use History as an arena for courageous conversations (Gorski, 2009; Davies, 2013; Singleton, 2014; *Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations*, 2017; Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018). However, Ramphela's *Letsema Circles of Healing* and *Illima Open Hand methods* and Steyn's *Critical Diversity Literacy* focus on application methods that include the whole experience of wounded humanness in transition. They concentrate on the complete accommodation of all levels of diversity, which is a very contextual and current fit for LO as a subject (Ramphela, 2012; Steyn, 2015; Opperman Lewis, 2016).

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, I discussed the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks according to the literature. Social constructivism was chosen; it recognises the importance of the participatory teacher-learner role as a collaborative learning experience conducive to truthful and authentic communication (Kim *et al.*, 2006:3). An inductive research approach was selected to allow the individual participants' contributions to be analysed before theories could be extrapolated while decoding their individual and collective experiences (Kawulich, 2012:6-9). The phenomenological research approach required my role (as the researcher) to be one of participation in the research process, allowing for rich and detailed findings (Tuli, 2011:99-100). As a theoretical lens, social constructivism provided the means to understand each participant's lived experience of their individual life-worlds and their respective lived truths within their teaching praxis and their view of the world (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:25,26; Tuli, 2011:99; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:24). Due to the richness and authenticity needed from the two research methods, an alternative, more critical interview model than open-ended interview protocol had to be employed (Creswell, 2014:194). Bevan's (2014:139) Phenomenological Critical Conversation method was therefore employed to create a questionnaire that could be adapted according to each participant's response to the questions.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, I implemented my two research methods. Each individual participant's interview was transcribed and then coded according to Tesch's eight-step coding process (Creswell, 2014:198). The thematic analysis was done in a three-tiered format and diagrammatically reflected to determine the interconnected themes identified during the coding process. The same method was followed with the focus group discussion's findings. The findings from each participant were then reflected under the thematic headings to represent the individual participant's identity, worldview, teaching praxis, meaning-making of their lived experiences, and the impact of the facilitation of courageous conversations on their personal perceptions of their role as professionals in their respective teaching environments. The impact of emotional, cognitive and professional dissonance and resulting depletion was also identified. However, due to their lack of the correct conceptual vocabulary, they did not always have the means to verbalise the exact nature of their stressors and instead referred to "running on empty" (Jeanette).

Chapter 5

Tentative responses to the two research questions were used to introduce Chapter 5 before discussing the findings. The findings that emerged from my participants' responses were first discussed, followed by references to the findings situated in available literature; this addressed

the inferences made from the data sources from my sample group specific to the set of findings. Each section was followed by recommendations specific to the section of the research discussed. The chapter was concluded with a conversed impression highlighting my understanding of the participants' respective lived realities. My research findings were Framed within the first-tier coded headings and the second-tier coded subheadings as it enabled the most relevant reflection of participants' lived experiences.

Chapter 6 concludes this study.

Research Questions

The first research question that had to be answered by the study was:

How do teachers experience the implementation of courageous conversations in the Life Orientation classroom?

The value and need for courageous conversations on critical content appeared to be a constant in the LO teaching praxis among my sample group. There seemed to be a significant growth in the teachers' worldview, despite the discomfort to be expected during courageous conversations and a small number of negative experiences. This broadening of their worldview seemed to have slowly evolved teacher identities, giving the teachers the confidence to step back and reverse the teacher-learner role. It was determined that the trust relationships required for learners to openly share their opinions enrich the joint becoming of the teachers and their learners.

The second research question that had to be answered by the study was:

How does the lived experience of Life Orientation teachers regarding the facilitation of courageous conversations in the classroom impact the meaning attached to these conversations?

There were diverse responses regarding the meaning participants attached to their lived experiences of courageous conversations. Some participants preferred a very structured and fact-based approach to these conversations, where the focus is not strictly on what the teacher said, but on a collection of diverse sources. Other participants preferred the safety of group work that allows the learners to steer the narratives and then include a feedback opportunity at the end of the lesson. A few participants preferred an open and informal structure, since it

allows more flexibility in the conversations despite having less control. A few participants combined the two approaches depending on the content of the specific conversation.

The meaning participants attached to these lived experiences of courageous conversations is a complex process and relies on each participant's goals and critical agency. The majority of the participants accepted the discomfort, uncertainty and stressful aspects of the courageous conversation. However, some participants mentioned they are held to higher accountability than other teachers, and risk being perceived as instigators of discontent. The dissonance experienced by the participants due to their lack of autonomy and the limitation of the school culture seemed to result in a self-protective stance during these conversations. This stance may increase the level of discomfort experienced and affect the teacher's attempts to self-regulate their own dissonance or ego depletion.

6.3 Methodological reflection on the study

Social constructivism provided a clear view of the social and professional systems within which the LO teacher manages their teaching praxis (Kim *et al.*, 2006:5; Botha, 2017:1). My nominalist approach formed a sound foundation for identifying my participants' specific socially and historically constructed identities (Howard, 2006:78; Soudien, 2010:354; Lemmer & Meier, 2011:114). The participatory researcher role ensured by the interpretivist theory allowed for a mutual understanding and openness between the participants and me, and assured authentic responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:25). The phenomenological approach to qualitative research enabled my identification of preferred approaches to facilitate courageous conversations and the participants' meaning-making of these lived experiences (Kawulich, 2012:5; Cabrera, Franklin & Watson, 2017:77-83). An inductive approach allowed explicit themes and theories to emerge from participants' responses to my two research questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:127; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25,26). Phenomenology clarified the impact of collective lived experiences, the dissonance experienced and the impact thereof on the participants' motivation, decision-making, self-reflection and ability to self-regulate in response to depletion (Tice *et al.*, 2007:379-80; Baumeister, 2018:1).

6.4 Personal-professional reflection on the study

In her book, *DREAMS, BETRAYAL and HOPE* (2017), Ramphele draws an analogy between the seeming futility of continuing to fight to save the South African dream of hope and freedom with the futility of attempting to save grains of sand from the waves (Ramphele, 2017a:188):

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand –
How few! Yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep – while I weep!
O God! Can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! Can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is *all* that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

'A Dream Within a Dream', Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) (Ramphela, 2017a)

I embarked on this dissertation after 16 months of personal interrogation at the seeming futility of overcoming the legacy of my whiteness, complicity, and privilege. I hoped a degree would provide tangible and visual proof that I am showing up and doing my best. That I know I will probably continue to get it wrong at times, but that I am indeed making a conscious effort to be better. For weeks during the aftermath of the 2017 allegation that was referred to as a perceived racial incident without malice, I felt overwhelmed and powerless at continuing to teach LO when I was told that my whiteness made me an affront to BIPOC learners and parents. Despite no formal charges being laid and no disciplinary action taken, the hostility remained from the learners who made the allegations. For weeks I was at a loss and did not know how to continue teaching LO. By choice I had practiced my professional life in English for 24 years. I have become someone who was too Afrikaans to be English, and two English to be Afrikaans. An anomaly in both my Afrikaans and English social circles. I was still mainly Afrikaans speaking in my home.

A few years before the 2017 event, during an intuitive discussion in response to a teachable moment with my tutor group, one of my students (Black American father and Black South African mother) told me that whenever her mother hears Afrikaans, she smells tear gas and can hear the slap of police browns [*lace-up shoes*] running down the street where she lived as a girl. This reflects Opperman Lewis' (2016:13,29) theoretical concepts of trans-generational trauma and time collapse. However, Afrikaans remains the language in which I learned to describe my world, to love, to worship, to dream, to hope and in which I taught my children to do the same. During 2017, many BIPOC learners and parents openly supported

me and kept me going back each day. I started to slowly heal, but I continued to interrogate every choice I made, every opinion I raised, every communication sent out to parents or learners, and every bit of negative feedback I received. I also chose to open myself up far more, especially with my Grade 12 learners, I also listened and learned far more.

However, in stark contrast with the 2017 incident, the 2020 cancel culture campaign, as described in Strossen, also curtailed the freedom of speech and freedom of choice (Rauch in Strossen, 2020:i,ii). The learners who did not align themselves with the campaign were subjected to such intense scrutiny and cyberbullying that a legal firm had to be appointed to investigate these incidents. Learners were openly attempting to entrap teachers during online lessons, and formal allegations, of which the majority was anonymous, were made against 15 teachers identified on the first list of demands to be dismissed and blacklisted – this became 9 teachers on the second list of demands. My entire LO department was on the list of teachers that the learners, alumni and parents demanded to be dismissed and have blacklisted immediately. On the day of the protest, which was televised and live-streamed – with marshals to ensure social distancing was maintained and hands were sterilised at regular intervals – one of my Grade 12 learners told me they could see I had worked very hard to change, but that I was not sufficiently punished for the 2017 incident and “actions have consequences”. I had no answer to that, I was confronted with the seventh principle of fierce conversations: ‘*Take responsibility for your emotional wake*’ (Davies, 2013:13). Jansen (2018:7-11) ascribed the timing of the increase and ferocity of learner campaigns against privileged schools to the steady increase of BIPOC students to a critical mass within formerly white schools. This confidence boosted by the numbers’ confidence was then gained to openly air grievances within the school environment. Jansen further referred to the “*long-established resistance culture*” prevalent at well-established English schools across the country waiting for strength in numbers to take action (Wray, Hellenberg & Jansen, 2018:7-11).

In July 2020, when it became apparent that the possibility to re-charge me with the 2017 allegations had legally lapsed, I was formally charged with a minor disciplinary matter given a discriminatory angle due to three Afrikaans-learner girls being present at the time of the incident. I was found not guilty of the charge of racial discrimination, but found guilty of damaging the name of the school. The school then set aside the guilty charge and clear my service record with the condition that a non-disclosure agreement had to be signed. During my provisional suspension the decision was taken by the incoming head of school that my LO department would be reduced to six life-skills days per year for Grade 8 to Grade 11, and formal LO teaching to be limited to the Grade 12 learners, effectively cancelling a 16-year career in LO. A 16-year period that was an uphill battle of continuous attempts to erode the

expected academic standard of LO, open disdain from the vice-head of academics and the head of school, a steady stream of short-lived teachers that had no training or intent to become effective LO teachers.

My professional reflection during the study was gratifying and fulfilling. The literature available specific to LO in the South African context were limited; there was a phase of academic publications on social justice education between 1992 and 1998, followed by a second phase of academic publications on transformation and LO between 2008 and 2012. There were academic publications on dissonance and depletion, all aspects of whiteness, hidden and null curricula, identity formation, autonomy and motivation. Due to the lack of academic publications specific to the South African context, international publications were sourced. However, their focus was on a broader whole school application, History and social science areas not available to learners in South Africa. My intent in including these international publications was the possibility of adapting the described models or create a model suited to an LO context. The majority of articles were from the global north, some articles from Australia and South America. In South Africa I was familiar with Reimagine SA, founded by Dr Mamphela Ramphele; “Letsema: Circles of Healing” was implemented at my school in 2018. In reading Ramphele’s book *CONVERSATIONS with My Sons and Daughters*, I came to realise its scope as a transformative tool that would open the challenging of a protected school culture resistant to meaningful change (Ramphele, 2012:189-194). The Circles of Healing process of creating a specific space conducive to controversial content in which teachers and learners openly and jointly discuss historical realities, face unwelcome truths and make joint restitution is a critical goal in building a trust relationship matched the character of a LO space. However, my aim was not to promote LO as the only conduit for this space, but to create a transient arena into which the principles of the LO space could be transferred. Discovering Steyn’s CDL approach was a break-through as its goal was a general space within which a much wider definition of diversity was included into aspects that had to be challenged. The ten criteria framework [Table 5] promotes a challenging and analytical orientation that encompasses all aspects of diversity aimed at education settings – not limited to LO (Reygan & Steyn, 2017:7). The changes indicated in the literature, both from South Africa (Ramphele; Steyn; Wray, Hellenberg and Jansen) and global sources, relied on white teachers’ willingness to confront the damage, humiliation and shame they experienced due to their inherited past before effective racial cognizance can become the critical goal to holistic redress (Ally, 2006:32; Applebaum, 2007:465).

Ultimately, two persistent practices undermine the academic standing of LO; firstly, the perceptions that LO is not a valid academic subject and therefore dismissible; secondly, there

is a lack of expert LO teachers fully committed to the subject and passionate about the subject matter. Due to the persistent lack of recognition and support for LO, the demand for ‘easy’ distinctions, not all LO teachers teach at the same level. Moreover, there is resistance from the school to allow LO teachers to engage in critical conversations that cause discomfort and dissonance. The constant clash in boundaries between the school culture, the teachers, and the need to accommodate controversial narratives in the LO classroom result in negative coping habits such as self-isolation, pre-planning for failure as much as success, and pervasive and high levels of professional and emotional dissonance, causing depletion (Janz, Jeroen & Timmers, 2002; Baumeister, 2018). Regardless of these obstacles and resistance, a steady cohort of LO teachers persist in facilitating these critical narratives, despite the discomfort and vulnerability it requires of them (Singleton & Hays, 2008:20; Huynh, 2018:277). It would seem that the gratification and growth experienced by the teacher during this facilitation promote their internal motivation to create an LO space in which a trust relationship can be established. In this space, teachers develop the openness, truthfulness, respect and confidentiality to give learners a voice to question, challenge and reflect.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase 'each other'
doesn't make any sense.

'Out Beyond Ideas', Rumi, 13th century Persian poet (nationalpoetryday.co.uk)

6.5 Recommendations

The level of ownership participants exhibited of their expertise and self-developed skills was surprising, as it seemed to compensate for the lack of support and recognition they received. If I could isolate areas of greatest need indicated by my participants, it would be:

In-service training – even if only through a series of school visits to observe how other LO teachers are dealing with the discomfort and dissonance encountered or experienced in the LO space.

Focused training – in the finer nuances of opening up a critical conversation and negotiating the teaching of content during times when the atmosphere is not conducive to a respectful narrative.

Subject specific marketing – the active promotion of LO as a conduit to critical citizenship development, critical thinking and acting as a change agent within schools.

Providing support and recognition – the scope of expertise required of LO teachers and a more significant effort by higher education institutions to provide LO students with the intent and attitude needed to become self-motivated specialist LO teachers.

There are three recommendations for additional research or further study on this topic that I would like to make: firstly, determining the link between ownership and success in the LO praxis, secondly an investigation on current training scope of LO teachers' training in relation to the skills identified in this study, and thirdly a study to establish the impact of the generational age gap between teachers and learners, on the trust relationship vital to LO.

6.6 Conclusion

It is a great concern that 15 years after the formal implementation of LO during 2006 in the FET phase, there is still so much resistance against the subject. Moreover, LO teachers still face demands for elevated marks, the need to employ specialised LO staff is ignored, and there is still a perception that LO is not academically valid. The anxiety caused by the need to perform at a level beyond what may be expected of other subject teachers is undermining the professional integrity of these teachers, making it increasingly difficult to maintain that level of commitment indefinitely. I often felt that if I were teaching Mathematics or Accounting with the same passion and commitment that I was teaching LO, I would be celebrated. However, that same dedication and commitment in an LO teacher is seen as a liability.

It would be naïve not to recognise the uncertainty and anxiety LO teachers face after the 2020 cancel culture campaign. However, the courage to facilitate open discourse on critical content would be a significant loss and another academic dream not realised. Of my nine participants, two no longer teach LO at the level required, and one has moved to teaching English full-time. It would seem that the constant need to generate content in this current climate in LO is not worth the risk to one's professional integrity. However, I applaud all those LO stalwarts who have become the heart and soul of LO over the years.

I hope that some of my study findings will be of use to a new generation of LO teachers.

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ANNEXURE A – RED FLAGS CHECKLIST

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA FACULTY OF EDUCATION CHECKLIST FOR SUPERVISOR

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Please check the **additional documents listed below** before submitting the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis. Kindly sign the form indicating satisfaction. The declaration with regard to the draft article is a prerequisite for the approval of the results and must be submitted with a **copy of the article** (MEd) or **acknowledgement of receipt of the draft article**, issued by an accredited journal (PhD), prior to or during submission of the examination copies.

Masters and doctoral students:

- ☒ **1. PAGE NUMBERING**
 Are the pages preceding Chapter One in Roman numerals?
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- ☒ **2. TURNITIN REPORT**
 Has the Turnitin report been signed by the supervisor?
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Masters:
 Is there an abstract of 250 words after the Ethics documents followed by a list of key terms?
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- ☒ **5. LANGUAGE EDITOR DISCLAIMER**
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Doctoral:
 Has the form and proof of submission by an accredited journal been submitted?

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7. DATA IN DIGITAL FORMAT

Has all data, in digital format, been submitted for storage to the supervisor?

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DATE: 2022/01/07

ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
 UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
 YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
 Faculty of Education

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Individual Interviews	Jeanette	8 March 2020
	Mignon	21 April 2020
	Wayde	6 May 2020
	Thea	14 July 2020
	Amahle	28 September 2020
	Louise	2 October 2020
	Sasha	3 October 2020
	Nelia	4 October 2020
	Harriet	8 October 2020
Focus Group Discussion		3 March 2021

Duration of the Individual Interviews were between 49 and 63 minutes.

Duration of the Focus Group Discussion was 97 minutes.



Christa de Villiers (Ms)
 Student No.: 80431501

ANNEXURE C: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE, INFORMED PARTICIPATION, AND CONCEPT CLARIFICATION



UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Pretoria 0002 Republic of South Africa t Tel 012 420 4111

e-mail: <http://www.up.ac.za>

Faculty of Education

Department of Humanities Education

Dear Life Orientation teacher

I, Christa de Villiers, would appreciate it greatly if you would participate in my research project. This project is for a Master's degree in Humanities Education at the University of Pretoria. The study is entitled *The Life Orientation teachers' lived experience of courageous conversations in the independent secondary school classroom*. The aim of the study is to determine the specific lived experiences that Life Orientation teachers have with topics that may be experienced as confrontational or requiring additional professional courage to facilitate. The study further aims to find out how the LO teacher attaches meaning to the interaction with their learners during these courageous conversations. Please refer to the attached document for a clarification of the concepts used to ensure your full understanding of the focus of the study. Your specific school or role in the IEB, if any, will not be the focus of the study. Your participation in the study is therefore voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any stage.

The study will be conducted by means of an individual semi-structured critical interview and then followed by a focus group discussion. The individual interview aims to determine your specific lived experiences of these conversations in your specific context. The focus of the interview will be to describe your individual experience and not your skills or ability in facilitating courageous conversations. The individual interview will be held at a time and venue in which you feel comfortable. The interview should not take more than 45-60 minutes of your time. The interview will be audio recorded and field notes will be taken during the interview. You will be provided with a transcribed copy of your interview to ensure authenticity and allow you to opportunity to clarify or comment on the transcript.

The focus group discussion aims to allow all participants in the study to share your collective experiences of courageous conversations in an open discussion. The focus group discussion will be held in a neutral venue conducive to private and open discussion, outside academic time. The focus group discussion will require more time than the interview, but should not take more than 60 to 90 minutes of your time. The focus group discussion will be audio recorded and field notes will be taken

during the interview. The transcribed copy of the focus group discussion will only be made available on request and you will only have access to the information you shared during the discussion.

Your anonymity and the confidentiality of the interview will be ensured. You need to be aware that you will be required to relinquish your right to privacy during the focus group discussion. However, all participants will be required to sign a declaration of integrity to ensure the privacy rights of all participants, and the confidentiality of the discussion, to protect your collective identities and all information shared during the discussion.

Data collected will be used for academic research purposes only and the information will be safely stored at the University of Pretoria Department of Humanities Education for a period of 15 years, in compliance with the ethical guidelines of the university. Final copies of the research study will be available on request.

No financial benefits will be involved in any phase of the study.

Should you agree to take part in the study, please complete the informed consent form attached.

Many thanks



Christa de Villiers

Master of Education: Humanities Education Candidate



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Faculty of Education

Department of Humanities Education

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I hereby agree to participate in the MEd Humanities Education study by Christa de Villiers, consisting of a semi-structured interview and a focus group discussion. I also give my consent to have the interviews recorded and for the data be used in the completion of the research study and for later research that may be conducted. I have also been informed that my anonymity and the confidentiality of the data will be ensured.

I am cognisant of the need to wave my privacy rights for the focus discussion, with regard to the other participants in the focus group discussion. I therefore agree to protect the privacy of the other participants in the focus group discussion and the content of the focus group discussion in order to ensure mutual anonymity of all participants. I agree to the focus group discussion being recorded and for the data to be used in the completion of the research study and later research that may be conducted.

I understand that I am free to withdraw at any stage of the study should I so choose and understand that there is no reward or other incentive to participate in the study.

Signature of participant



Signature of researcher

Date

Clarification of concepts

Agency:	The capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power; an action or intervention producing a particular effect (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018). For the purposes of this research, the “teacher’s agency” refers to the specific vision the teacher has for their teaching practice. This will determine the character of the classroom as an environment which is conducive for free and honest conversation; fostering respect; recognising multiple perspectives; and for the realisation of transformative growth in their classroom practice. This agency will also inform the choice of teaching strategy and the premise of lesson design and assessments.
Courageous conversations:	Open, authentic, truthful dialogue, in an atmosphere of trust and respect, as a key to meaningful change (Davies, 2013). While there are no specific topics in LO that have been defined as courageous conversations, there are CAPS topics that may require a more sensitive approach and as such may be considered as courageous conversations. Examples are race, sexuality, addiction, gender-identity, cultural belief-systems <i>etc.</i>
Dissonance:	Dissonance is a lack of agreement or harmony, or a disparity, between people (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018). This disparity is usually experienced when a teacher encounters a situation or opinion that requires them to re-evaluate their own set of constructs and then either to accept or reject the new information or situation. In the context of this research, focus will be placed on <u>Cognitive dissonance</u> that can be triggered by a new opinion, perspective or experience that contradicts a pre-existing construct. <u>Emotional dissonance</u> can be triggered by an emotive reaction to, or suppression of, one’s personal opinion in contrast to that held by the group or situation. <u>Professional dissonance</u> would indicate a clear difference between the values that are held by a teacher and their school: professional expectation or boundaries that they have to meet.
Ego depletion:	This describes the loss of cognitive, emotive, behavioural and physical resources required to exert self-control in order to suppress natural responses or behaviours that may occur as a result of an extended period of dissonance (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Maruven, 2011). A teacher experiencing ego

depletion may lack the ability to function optimally, think creatively and implement specific strategies to self-regulate and regain equilibrium (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Maruven, 2011).

Hidden Curriculum:	The unqualified values, norms and preferred behaviours that exist within a school setting when boundaries and expectations are not stated explicitly and are therefore open to assumption and interpretation by learners, teachers, management and the parent body. (Karanhya, Agosto & Bellara, 2014; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018). The hidden curriculum affects the relationships between parties and leads to inherent impulses, choices or behaviours being suppressed in order to be accepted within an educational environment.
Null curriculum	This consists of three possible facets: intellectual processes, subject matter and affect (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986: 35). For the purpose of this research, the focus will be on hierarchical structure of LO subject matter reflected in Addendum 1, and the affective facet of the null curriculum (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986). A teacher's personal agency will determine if specific sections of the curriculum [subject matter] may be left out or clustered to manage the required body of work. The affective facet of the null curriculum would represent aspects of the curriculum that are avoided as it may illicit an unwanted response from the learners, their parents or school management (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986; Alsubaie, 2015).
Lived experience:	The personal knowledge, understanding and meaning a person has gained by living through a specific experience (Oxford Dictionary, 2011). Who one is as a "being", both personal and professional, informs one's first-hand experience of any situation. Therefore, every LO teacher's lived experience of a conversation that required or may require courage will be unique.
Professional Courage:	"Courage as intentional action towards a worthy goal despite risks to the actor"(Ashton 2017). In this research, professional courage indicates the willingness of a teacher to facilitate courageous conversations despite the risk of dissonance, ego-depletion and strain on self-control (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Maruven, 2011). It is critical to accept that open and honest interaction does not happen on demand. It requires a trust relationship between teacher and learners that require constant effort. This mutual understanding should provide the will and motivation to self-regulate and embrace growth.

- Social
Constructs: The collection of ideological perceptions, beliefs and experiences that an individual may hold that informs their socio-political and socio-historical understanding of the world as well as their approach to pedagogical and social interactions. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018). This collection of theories determines the meaning that teachers attach to their life-world and their approach to their pedagogical and social interactions.
- Self-regulate: The ability to strive to identify and address the cause of dissonance or ego depletion. The most beneficial way to do this would be to measure the new constructs or experiences against one's existing constructs and experiences, professional boundaries and one's own agency. This includes the determination and motivation to seek and gain understanding of one's need to accommodate new meaning to one's evolving lived experiences (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007).

Christa de Villiers

Candidate: Master of Education: Humanities Education

ANNEXURE D: PUBLISHED ARTICLE

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Page 1 of 6 Original Research

Courageous conversations in the Life Orientation classroom and teacher vulnerability



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The Independent Education Board (IEB) introduced the need to facilitate critical conversations on controversial topics in the Life Orientation (LO) classroom at the National Conference in 2016. This shifted the focus of discussions to a facilitated critical narrative within IEB Subject Assessment Guidelines (SAGs) topics. This push followed youth activism against systemic racism at educational institutes, which initially created the perception that these conversations related to the socio-political status quo alone. However, the LO curriculum includes a range of topics that require critical narratives. Courageous conversations may trigger cognitive and emotional dissonance in both the teacher and learner. It is, therefore, crucial to interrogate the LO teachers' lived experiences in facilitating courageous conversations. This study employed individual phenomenological interviews and a focus group discussion. The participants consisted of nine LO teachers from Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and North West province. Each individual interview focused on determining the contexts and the phenomenon of their lived experience of courageous conversations and each participant's agency in their private capacity as professional educators. The focus group discussion centred around establishing gaps in the motivation, training and skill development of LO teachers to facilitate these conversations. The findings indicate that the courage required of teachers to challenge and be challenged, albeit in a safe environment, results in teacher vulnerability.

Keywords: courageous conversations; vulnerability; Life Orientation; critical agency, dissonance triggers, autonomy, lived experience, negotiated space.

Introduction

Life Orientation (LO) teachers are encouraged to provide their learners with exposure to multiple perspectives and academically sound knowledge. The content must allow them to critically analyse opinions, views and beliefs that manifest in democracy, human rights, gender and sexuality, mental health and identity development.^{1,2} These courageous conversations occur in LO classrooms where teachers need to develop an agency to negotiate the trust relationship with their learners that make the possible vulnerability of the teacher meaningful, despite the professional dissonance that the conflicting values between school and subject may trigger.^{3,4,5} During this study, the LO teacher's lived experience of courageous conversations in the LO classroom was explored. Both teacher and learner share this space within which the courageous conversation occurs with openness, honesty, trust and safety.^{6,7,8} This integrated sharing of learning and teaching could enrich identity development and the meaning attached to the courageous conversation as a learning process. The facilitation of courageous conversations depends on the teacher's ability to reflect and grow their personal beliefs, develop high professional courage, re-frame their critical agency and remain motivated to facilitate these conversations.^{9,10,11} It is crucial that the teachers' model of facilitation, self-regulation and growth determine the trust relationship between the teacher and learners.^{5,12,13}

Background to the study

The informal directive from the Independent Education Board (IEB) in 2016 to facilitate courageous conversations as a LO teaching practice shifted the focus from an informal approach to critically analysing selected content, seen as potentially controversial, to utilise in an open formal conversation. This shift in teaching methodology presented a challenge to LO teachers.¹⁴ The teacher's level of professional skill and experience directly correlated with their confidence and motivation to select specific content that learners may experience as sensitive, to enhance the LO curriculum.¹⁵ Perceptions held about LO since its implementation as a compulsory subject have been and continue to be tenuous.¹⁶ The support for both LO as a subject and the LO

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teacher as an academic is often limited, resulting in greater rates of teacher turnover and a compounded lack of specialised LO teachers to meet the increased demand for a higher academic standard in this subject.¹⁷ In independent schools, there is more flexibility in applying subject curricula and structured timetables.¹⁸ In LO, the battle for sufficient time allocation continues. Consequently, in smaller schools, it is likely that the entire LO department will consist of only one teacher.¹⁹ Few LO teachers can teach their subject with complete autonomy, managerial support and with respect for the value of the subject they teach and for the challenges integral to the context and nature of the LO curriculum.²⁰ The LO teacher has a significant need for professional courage when negotiating a safe space within which courageous conversations can be facilitated with their learners truthfully, openly, safely and honestly.^{21,22}

Aim and objectives

The study's objective is to describe how LO teachers attach meaning to teaching topics they deem sensitive, and that need to be facilitated through courageous conversations to develop critical citizenship skills.^{17,23} Empathy and knowledge of one's learners are vital in enabling the teacher to create an environment where these open and truthful conversations can occur and foster trust and understanding.^{24,25} Furthermore, the study aimed to provide insight into the existing gaps in skills development, dissonance and motivation to facilitate the conversations that require professional courage.^{26,27} Identifying factors contributing to the LO teachers' sense of vulnerability is vital in understanding their choices of content, the boundaries of the school culture, the availability of a support system and the level of respect and trust that exist in the space where they need to implement these difficult conversations.²⁸

Research methodology

This qualitative study implemented a phenomenological approach to focus on the lived experiences of LO teachers. Phenomenology was a suitable approach to understand and describe the complexities of the teachers' lived experiences, anecdotes thereof, and emotions experienced during courageous conversations. The data obtained from the in-depth phenomenological interviews of the participants' lived experiences and the focus group discussion enabled the development of 'seamless perspectives' to describe these different experiential realities authentically.^{29,30} In-depth phenomenological interviews with nine teachers and a focus group discussion were utilised.

Bevan describes the phenomenological approach as a three-phase process: contextualisation of the participant's lifeworld, apprehension of the phenomena or lived experience of the participant and clarifying the phenomenon to focus on specific aspects of the lived experience.³¹ These three phases provided a practical structure and confirmation that ensured that the phenomena were fully clarified from the data collection process.

Data collection

Nine teachers were selected based on their experience as subject heads of LO, as cluster leaders or regional moderators or both. Furthermore, the participants have experience as either NSC Portfolio moderators or national Common Assessment Task (CAT) examiners. The implementation of online teaching in March 2020 allowed for the inclusion of participants from Cape Town, Eastern Cape, North West province and Gauteng. This inclusion ensured a more diverse group of participants, who included teachers from religious schools, a dual-medium school, transdisciplinary teachers, teachers who are mainly sports specialists and teachers who are dedicated LO specialists.

The individual interviews consisted of a set of leading semi-structured questions used to design a critical questioning approach. The main question posed to participants were *What are your experiences of courageous conversations in the LO classroom?* The interpretivist researcher role allowed the questions to evolve according to participant responses.³² The structure consisted of three phases: Phase 1 – contextualisation, Phase 2 – apprehension of the phenomenon and Phase 3 – interpretive and imaginative questions.^{31,33} The interaction included opportunities to self-regulate any dissonance that resulted from the critical conversations.^{34,35,36} The focus group discussion consisted of a further set of semi-structured conversations to authenticate responses during the individual interviews or address gaps in the data gathered.^{33,37}

The transcribed interviews and discussions were analysed according to Tesch's Eight Step Coding process.³⁸ Each interview was read to identify key phrases to structure the data; commonalities between these key phrases were identified to create main thematic headings; the supporting themes were resorted under each main thematic heading. The third tier of thematic subheadings that enable the interpretation of the data was identified and assimilated to structure a rich, in-depth and detailed analysis of the findings.³⁸

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Pretoria's Research Ethics Committee. Thereafter, participants who met the criteria were approached and presented with informed consent. Participants were notified that they could withdraw at any stage of the study.

Findings

The three main emerging themes will form the focus of this article. The participants indicated the following themes as consistent contributing factors to their motivation to develop dynamic content for courageous conversations: (1) vulnerability, (2) teacher's experience of a lack of autonomy and (3) fostering mutual respect in the LO space.

The nine schools represented by the participants were found to have a demographic that ranged from 90% black learners, indigenous learners and learners of colour (BIPOC) learners to 90% white learners. The approximate average learner

demographic was 45% – 65% white learners approximately 25% – 35% black learners (here referring to African individuals), 10% bi-racial learners approximately 5% coloured learners and 10% – 15% Indian learners. The majority of schools are situated in urban middle to upper middle-class areas. One of the schools were situated in a rural farming area and therefore found access to resources, which were easily accessible by urban schools, a challenge. The teaching environments consisted of historical schools, religious schools serving a specific denomination, religious schools that do not serve a particular denomination and a very liberal school.

Vulnerability

Participant C mentioned that:

'I think I do this [refers to strategising according to potential triggers] all the time; I literally think I have a back-up plan for every statement I make in class. [All round laughter] I feel like it is a continual problem, I always ... every time I say something I review it, and I'm like what happened, if this child leaves the room and say that this happened, will there be kids that will back me up.' (Participant C, LO teacher)

Further feelings of vulnerability are expressed by Participant I when she says:

'... in LO you are talking about feelings, you are talking about perceptions and there is no guidebook to that and that is why you are so nervous all the time because what you are doing is you are negotiating the space, you don't know how learners are going to react to things [specific current content to augment the curriculum] because you cannot hide behind this is fact ...' (Participant I, LO teacher)

This participant further added that:

'... what you [the LO teacher] are doing is getting learners to engage with opinions openly and honestly having those courageous discussions, but at the same time it is uncharted territory and that is scary and you never know what side you are going to get, and even in a school like mine [liberal, upper-middle-class] that tries to bring this critical learning attitude across I still feel that fear in the classroom.' (Participant I, LO teacher)

Participant B described the following:

'I am constantly grappling ... and I think that is why I started the year off so badly – I never felt I was on top of things despite how well I was prepared.' (Participant B, LO teacher)

Life Orientation teachers experience a lack of autonomy

Participant C described that:

'We are also almost seen as people who may have instigated problems rather than actually seeing us as doing a good job by actively discussing these problematic issues with the learners.' (Participant C, LO teacher)

Participant E illustrated the impact of current unease:

'... for the first time in all the years that I've been here, management wanted my LO books, for each and every single grade, he went through them and then called me in for a meeting

and now I've got purple dog tags that he put into topics that I have to chat to him about first, before I'm allowed to tackle it in class.' (Participant E, LO teacher)

Participant A stated that the demands made of LO teachers are often unrealistic and stand in stark contrast to the dismissal of LO as having poor educational value and of LO as a non-academic subject.

Academically the initial description of LO as a compulsory subject was as experiential, and the allocation of only 10 credits led to the assumption that the subject would have a lower academic standard. Therefore, the expectation was for LO to account for exponentially greater numbers of subject distinctions. This, despite the requirement, stipulated in the LO Subject Assessment Guidelines (SAGs) for LO to be taught and assessed using the same Bloom's taxonomy levels as all other subjects.²⁰ Participant C illustrated the lack of managerial support as:

'You know I am never called into a meeting at any other time, but I am called into meetings, not to hear how I am or how LO is going – it is just "Why do you not have more distinctions?"' (Participant C, LO teacher)

It was clear from five of the respondents that praise or acknowledgement for LO and the work performed, skills needed and the constant need to be able to respond with sound knowledge to the learners' questions about an increasingly complex world, an increasingly fluid and sensitised society, and the toxic dynamic between society and environment. Participant I stated that:

'The need to interact critically and challenge the power relationships between racial groups, gender identities, sexual orientations, the decline in mental health, the fragility of environmental resources has not decreased, it has increased. So much needs to be performed constantly by an LO teacher to stay current, source content, design new lessons, and have factual substantiation for everything we take into that LO Space.' (Participant I, LO teacher)

'The need to prove oneself as an LO teacher is far greater on young inexperienced teachers, who do not have the skills or knowledge to manage expectations or to set boundaries and make enough time to self-reflect and self-regulate. This further increases the high turnover rate of teachers that weakens the subject.' (Participant B, LO teacher)

However, participants seem to feel that a loss of autonomy can be minimised by supportive mentorship:

'With maturity and experience, it is far easier to negotiate boundaries and set limits according to your level of expertise.' (Participant E, LO teacher)

Becoming assertive and setting clear boundaries reflect a conscious choice to adapt to becoming a strategist and facilitator as their set teacher behaviour and becomes the coping mindset needed to facilitate courageous conversation. However, as Participant C reflected:

'... preparing for every possible question and being prepared with a coping strategy for every possible contentious response or

risk of confrontation becomes mentally exhausting.’ (Participant C, LO teacher)

The importance of overcoming the lack of time to reflect and self-regulate is described by Participant D as follows:

‘... 2020 [despite the Covid protocols and online teaching] just that time helped me to gain a new perspective and to really look at myself, like look at what am I really here for as a LO teacher? What should my focus be?’ (Participant D, LO teacher)

The professional courage required from the LO teachers increases their vulnerability and professional risks, but without support, it results in self-isolation triggered by their fear of failure. Participants G shared that:

‘... one parent just ripped everything [LO content covered in the classroom] to shreds for about a year – it affected me emotionally, and basically I didn’t teach those aspects for a while. I basically said to the school. The school needs to actually say, don’t teach that, if that’s what they want. If they say don’t teach it, then I won’t teach it.’ (Participant G, LO teacher)

Fostering mutual respect in the Life Orientation space

Despite the challenges faced by LO teachers, there are many aspects that provide motivation to the teachers. Participant H stated that:

‘You have to love this subject; the interaction with the learners, mentoring them until they have those “Aha-moments.” Providing well-placed scaffolding until they are ready to embrace the challenge and extend themselves, all while learning to listen and learn with others equally.’ (Participant H, LO teacher)

Participant G stated that experienced teachers who are aware of and can sufficiently manage their workload have longevity, emotional intelligence, aptitude and a thirst for new knowledge. These teachers also have internal motivation and are energised by challenging and rigorous debate – they find LO a beautiful subject.

Participant G described the impact of mutual respect as follows:

‘... when it comes to learners and in the classroom, then I’m only uplifted by what happens. I’ve never walked away from a lesson with learners and felt “That was dreadful” or felt upset or whatever – never!’ (Participant G, LO teacher)

Participant D described the need for mutual respect as follows:

‘... part of our role as LO teachers is to challenge learners on statements that are made, and in that challenging ... there has got to be an element of trust in a teacher, and respect for a teacher’s capabilities.’ (Participant D, LO teacher)

Participant A mentioned that:

‘... it is paramount that LO teachers focus on getting to know their learners, gauge their maturity levels and their readiness before they move on to the self-analysis of their own beliefs and opinions during Grade 11 and Grade 12.’ (Participant A, LO teacher)

Participant B added to Participant A’s comment that:

‘Learners have to be provided with the cognitive scaffolding to identify their triggers, understand them and practice how to reflect on and accommodate cognitive and emotional dissonance so that they may be able to cope with a peer or teacher challenging their opinions.’ (Participant B, LO teacher)

The bond that is created between teacher and learner and learners with their peers in a relationship characterised by mutual respect is illustrated by Participant G:

‘I’ve got one youngster in matric, who as he has realised that he actually has a voice, he is just the most amazing youngster, and he has this wealth of knowledge ... because he’s the one, at the end of our meeting the other day, who said “I just want to say, if any of you are feeling uncomfortable after this, that’s OK, you’re on the road to recovery.” How sweet is that – “you’re on the road to recovery.”’ (Participant G, LO teacher)

Discussion of findings

The participants experienced vulnerability, to be attributable to a lack of support from school management and colleagues, specifically regarding broad, often unrealistic, expectations of expertise regarding social issues that are considered the purview of LO.³⁹ This teacher’s vulnerability is further compounded by negative perceptions of LO’s value, a general lack of understanding of the context and content of LO and socio-historical trauma experienced by BIPOC teachers, learners and parents.^{15,40} The participants expressed that they had to learn to be assertive in dealing with unrealistic expectations and the lack of recognition in developing an improved perception of the academic value of their subject.⁷ They also had to develop coping skills to overcome the challenges that deplete their professional motivation and result in the lack of teacher longevity.⁴¹ The impact of maintaining this learned teacher behaviour made it vital to utilise self-reflection as restorative self-care and to rely on internal motivation independent of an external support system.¹²

It is not merely the workload but the mental drain of being fearful of reprisals.²⁴ Teachers must constantly be cognisant of parent’s and management’s possible reaction to the content analyses of belief systems and worldviews that are common during courageous conversations. A backlash from learners, parents and management because of the content analyses of belief systems and world views of which they must be cognisant.⁴² It is impossible to remove racial identity and perspectives from the curriculum topics or content of LO as a subject area because culture and ethnicity are a big part of how meaning is added to the lived experiences and how the LO teacher interacts with their learners.¹⁰ Therefore, it is not unusual that the conversations at home that become evident in the classroom also indicate that the classroom conversations feature around the dinner table at home.⁴³ The importance of socio-historical perceptions is still inherent and needs to be acknowledged and resolved.¹⁰

The skills to negotiate an LO space in which there is trust, respect, accommodation and openness, need to be honed constantly.⁹ This negotiation starts each year afresh, with each new class. It remains very stressful and LO teachers remain nervous in this space. It is not possible to pre-empt all responses, you are actively negotiating that trust relationship and safe space with each courageous conversation. The lack of understanding, especially from management, the courage and motivation needed to navigate the specific content and context of LO and courageous conversations is an increasing drain on the LO teacher's self-motivation.

Most participants indicated that they find it easier to foster openness with their learners by using themselves and their combined lived experiences as subject matter in general LO lessons and courageous conversations.⁴ Taking this risk makes the trust relationship between teacher and learner integral to the honesty and respect negotiated in this safe LO space.³⁵ The common denominator in the various participants' individual critical agencies for their teaching praxis is that with LO, through promoting personal growth and development, the concept of an evolving worldview is to afford young adults with an agency that is crucial to the world beyond school.²¹

Identifying the factors that are contributing to the LO teachers' sense of vulnerability is vital in understanding their choices of content, the boundaries of the school culture they need to navigate, the availability of a support system (internal or external) and the level of respect and trust that exist in the space where they need to implement these difficult conversations.^{17,28}

Recommendations

There is a clear need to create training opportunities and hands-on workshops for LO teachers, especially regarding the setting of boundaries and negotiation of a safe space for courageous conversations. Their existing skills need to be updated to be able to open up controversial topics and discussions. Clear efforts should be made to create a better understanding and insight into the context and content of LO. Management structures especially should be encouraged to be more supportive of the value added to the affective and psychological becoming of the learner in the LO classroom.

Conclusion

Life Orientation teachers had to adjust their teaching practice to accommodate the informal directive from the IEB to implement conversations on controversial issues in the classroom.¹⁴ However, the LO curriculum additionally encompasses many topics, such as democracy, race, gender, sexuality, belief systems, political policies and human rights that do not have set content to provide the LO teacher with the flexibility to keep the content current and valid to their learners. Attempting to plan for all possible questions or perspectives, that may manifest in their classroom during a critical discussion compounds the teacher's constant sense of being vulnerable. It is important to identify accessible

support systems to provide LO teachers with the skills to self-regulate, practice self-care and restore their waning motivation and positive decision making. It is only when the teacher can balance effective and meaningful experiences, without fearing the challenges and discomfort, that the lived experience of courageous conversation can continue and the value and academic impact of the LO subject and teacher can fully be achieved.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

C.D.d.V. conceptualised and executed the study as this article is based on her Masters dissertation. S.d.J. supervised the process, edited the article and added to the writing.

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Data availability

Permission to access data can be requested from the supervisor of the study, Dr Sarina de Jager (sarina.dejager@up.ac.za), upon reasonable request. The study was still in progress at the time of this article's publication.

Disclaimer

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