UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

# A phenomenological study of the experience of assets that support learning

*by*

**ILZE FERREIRA**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree

**MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS**
**Educational Psychology**

*in the*

Department of Educational Psychology
Faculty of Education

*at the*

University of Pretoria

SUPERVISOR
Prof. I. Eloff

PRETORIA
August 2008

*Ek het vanoggend vroeg wakker geword*
*en onthou dat ek baie pligte het om na te kom vandag.*

*Ek kan kies watter soort dag ek gaan hê.*

Vandag kan ek kla omdat die weer reënerig is, of...
ek kan dankbaar wees dat die gras gratis water kry.

*Vandag kan ek oor my gesondheid kla, of ...*
ek kan verheug wees omdat ek lewe.

Vandag kan ek treur omdat rose dorings het, of ...
ek kan juig omdat dorings rose het.

Vandag kan ek kla omdat ek moet gaan werk, of ...
ek kan juig omdat ek werk het wat my van 'n inkomste voorsien.

Vandag kan ek murmureer omdat ek huis moet hou, of ...
ek kan geëerd voel omdat die Here skuiling aan my verstand,
liggaam en siel geskenk het.

Vandag lê voor my en wag om gevorm te word.
En hier is ek, die beeldhouer wat die vorming mag doen.

Hoe vandag sal wees, hang van my af.
Ek kan kies hoe 'n dag ek sal hê.

With this study, I had a choice.
I could have explored the needs for learning support, but instead,
I chose to focus this explorative journey on assets for learning support.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to praise my Heavenly Father for the promise in Rom15:13 that the God of hope would fill me with all joy and peace as I trusted in him, so that I could overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, while completing the last part of my MEd journey. It has been a bumpy journey, which I wouldn't have been able to complete without the tremendous support from the following blessings in my life:

Professor Irma Eloff, who is an angel and my supervisor. Thank you for you patience, your words and stickers of motivation, the recommendations and guidance. Thank you for believing in me and investing your time in my development.

The urban primary school for allowing me to conduct the research study. I would also like to thank the participants of this study for sharing their time and experiences with me. Without the urban primary school and the participation of the learners, this mini-dissertation, or this asset, couldn't have been mobilised.

My dear friend Karien, thank you for the emotional support and professional recommendations.

My father Manie and mother Cynthia who have provided me with the opportunity to study and who have always supported me. Thank you for your love, the coffee, the proofreading, the interest shown and for moulding me into the strong woman I am today. My sisters Zelna and Janine, who are also my friends. Thank you for your patience and understanding, but most of all, thank you for always being there for me.

Adrie van Dyk for the technical support and Cliff Smuts for the editing of the grammatical and language aspects of this mini-dissertation.

My sincere gratitude also to other family members and friends for showing interest and especially for supporting me throughout the last year.

---o O o---

# DECLARATIONS

I, Ilze Ferreira (20155362), hereby declare that this mini-dissertation titled:

*A phenomenological study of the experience of assets that support learning*

is a construction of my own thoughts, commitment and creativity. References to other authors work are listed in the list of references.

_____ _____

I. Ferreira Date

---o O o---

I, Cliff Smuts, hereby declare that I undertook the editing of the grammatical and language aspects of this mini-dissertation.

_____ _____

C. Smuts Date
Keyterstraat 51/ Posbus 469
OUDTSHOORN
6620
Tel. (044) 272-2473
Sel: 084 679 2210
E-pos: csmuts@xsinet.co.za

---o O o---

# ABSTRACT

**A phenomenological study of the experience of assets that support learning**

by

**Ilze Ferreira**

Supervisor Prof I Eloff
Department Educational Psychology
Degree: MEd (EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY)

The asset-based approach has been studied within the South African context. Up to now, primary school learners' meaning of the experienced phenomenon, "assets for learning support" however remains an under-explored topic. The intent with this study was to qualitatively explore and discover the essence of the phenomenon, 'assets for learning support', as experienced by learners who attend an urban primary school. This phenomenon was explored from an interpretive/ constructivist paradigmatic perspective, which also informed the study's qualitative methodology. A phenomenological research design was utilised. The study was conducted in a mainstream primary school, situated in an urban context. The participants for this research were eight female participants in Grades 5-7 that were confronted with and overcame extrinsic barriers to learning, while attending an urban primary school. They participated in a focus group discussion within a classroom on the school premises. During the focus group, the learners' relevant and natural unit of significant statements were listed (horizontalisation) and structured into central clusters of meanings. Textural themes (what) and structural themes (how) were identified. The study found that human resource assets are integrated assets connecting other assets that support learning. The study also found a significant compound effect of assets upon each other. The essence of the experienced phenomenon is that the identified assets (how) interrelatedly mobilise (what) other assets (textural findings) on one of five levels (structural findings) within various systems and contexts, which contribute to mobilise learning support as an asset.

---o O o---

# KEY CONSTRUCTS

Assets

Identification of assets

Asset-based approach

Learners

Learning

Barriers to learning

Learning support

Interpretive/ constructivist

Phenomenology

Phenomenon

Essence of experience

Qualitative research

Explore

---o O o---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page



**---o O o---**

# CHAPTER 2
# LITERATURE STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT



**---o O o---**

# CHAPTER 3
# A PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH DESIGN AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS



**---o O o---**

# CHAPTER 4
# THE RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS: ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT



**---o O o---**

# CHAPTER 5
# CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



**---o O o---**

# LIST OF FIGURES

Page



# LIST OF TABLES

Page

**---o O o---**

# LIST OF ADDENDUMS

**ADDENDUM A**
The Gauteng Department of Education (DoE) District Office

**ADDENDUM B**
The Research and Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria
Faculty of Education

**ADDENDUM C**
Supervisor of my academic assignment (2005)

**ADDENDUM D**
The primary school

**ADDENDUM E**
Forty assets elementary-age children need to succeed

**ADDENDUM F**
Participants' parents

**---o O o---**

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION OF ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT AS EXPERIENCED BY PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 serves as an encapsulation of the content that acted as the supportive framework within which this study was grounded. Therefore, this chapter briefly introduces the orientating framework of this study.

This study grew from an academic assignment I conducted in 2005. For the purpose of my mini-dissertation, I wanted to include and explicate my thought process and the rationale of the academic assignment, as part of my academic journey. I wanted to create a holistic construction of this journey I embraced. In this chapter the rationale of the academic assignment (2005) and the study are explicated and justified. The intent of the study, the primary critical question that refines the statement of intent, as well as the secondary research questions, are stated. A section dedicated to define the key concepts that were used in this study is included. The purpose of the study is stated, followed by a briefly outlined introduction and orientation to the research methodology and design of this study. This chapter concludes with a broad framework of Chapters 2 to 5, which elaborate on the orientating framework that is introduced in this chapter.

## 1.2 THE RATIONALE

As stated in the introduction, this study grew from the academic assignment I conducted in 2005. The following section states the rationale behind the academic assignment, which dynamically leads to the rationale that supports this study.

### 1.2.1 RATIONALE BEHIND THE ACADEMIC ASSIGNMENT

Part of my academic training in the field of Educational Psychology was to conduct a practical assignment that focused on asset-mapping for learning support in a school system. During the preparation for my assignment, I found myself contemplating and reflecting on the term “learning support.” My initial perception was that learning support is bound to classroom activities. I was under the impression that learning support is only relevant for learners who experience slight to severe barriers to learning. However, I have since learnt that it is generally believed that all learners benefit from learning support. The intensity for each learner, however, differs (Landsberg, 2005:66).

But what are the assets that support learners' learning? From my experience of assets that support my own learning, I found myself questioning how an entire system could support learning. Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan & Shaw (2000, in Swart, 2004:239) state that "learning support comprises those activities that increase the capacity of the system to respond to the diverse needs of all the learners". Activities for learning support could include educator development and continuous support activities, curriculum adaptation, collaboration of all role-players, parent involvement, peer support, therapy and counselling (Swart, 2004:239).

Learners are part of a multitude of systems. They all stand to benefit from learning support. For this reason, I questioned whether only "activities" support learning and whether there may perhaps be a multi-layeredness to the phenomenon. Surely the classroom infrastructure or even the friendly response from an educator supports learning? In relation to the definition by Booth *et al*. (2000, in Swart, 2004:239), I questioned the role of learners in learning support and whether learners are solely dependent on the system for learning support. UNICEF (2002:6) states that the manner in which children view the world and their ability to share their observations, differ from adults. I became increasingly intrigued by whether learners construct the same meaning about their experience of the phenomenon, "assets for learning support", as adults.

For the purpose of my assignment, I decided to focus on the identification and interpretation of assets, as experienced by learners. I chose an urban school. In the late 1990s the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria created a community project with this urban school, and thus, a learning environment for both the Master students in Educational Psychology and the learners of the school. Once a week, for a whole year, the students facilitate language development group sessions for selected learners of the school. Learners are selected based on identification by educators (e.g. learners who may benefit from language enrichment activities). I was fortunate to have been part of such an enriching experience. The University of Pretoria already had a long-standing agreement with the school, allowing Master students in Educational Psychology to conduct practical assignments at the school. For ethical purposes, I obtained permission from the Principal of the school to conduct a study that would expand my initial practical assignment considerably. I therefore asked permission for my specific study. My explorative approach led to the accumulation of in-depth data about learning support and the mobilisation of assets to support learning.

### 1.2.2 RATIONALE BEHIND THIS STUDY

The completion of my practical assignment was not for the purposes of research. Insights were gathered, but the intent was to pass my academic assignment and to utilise these

insights during my language development group sessions. The utilisation of these insights could then potentially benefit the learners of the school. In the nine years of the partnership between the University of Pretoria and the urban school, none of the accumulated data on learning support has, however, been utilised and shared for the purpose of research. I believed that this information could yield rich insights into learning support. Yet, until the data had been mobilised, it would remain unshared knowledge amongst the wider community of researchers in learning support. In this mini-dissertation, I therefore focused on the quest I undertook, in collaboration with learners, to understand their experience of assets for learning support. For the purpose of my mini-dissertation, I utilised the existing information and the process that was followed to acquire the insights of my academic assignment. The utilisation of the process and the data allowed me to construct this into a study, which could be shared more broadly.

A study done by Nwanna (2006), explored the manifestations of learning support in the lives of high school learners. However, up to 2008, primary school learners' meaning of their experience of this phenomenon in terms of assets remained a largely under-explored topic. It can perhaps relate to the fact that the lives of children have traditionally been explored through the perceptions and understandings of adults (Christensen & James, 2000:2). According to De Saint-Exupéry (1957) in the book, Le Petit Prince, adults can only comprehend the worldviews and experiences of children if children themselves explain it to them. I am of the same opinion and it seems like the youth around the globe agree. A 17 year-old Malaysian delegate, Khairul Azri, stated at the UN Special Session on Children (UNICEF, 2002:1),

> "Adults miss the point. When is a child considered skilful enough to contribute and participate actively? If you do not give them the opportunity to participate, they will not acquire the skills. Give us the chance early and see how we fly."

There is an old proverb that implies that only children and fools speak the truth (Scott, 2000:106). I do believe that we need to move closer to the children in order to understand their experiences and, in this case, the phenomenon of, "assets for learning support."

In the past, "children's voices," have sometimes been "muted" within the social sciences. Traditionally, the focus was on conducting research on, rather than with children. Lately, studies increasingly tend to focus more on conducting research *with* children (Christensen & James, 2000; Roberts, 2000; Critchley, 2002; De Wet, 2004; Moumakoe, 2004; Smuts, 2004; Viljoen, 2004). A space is thus created to amplify the voice of the children – as it was intended with this study. It is like the Yoruba proverb elucidates, "You don't have to be old to be wise" (UNICEF, 2002:23).

It could be asked why this exploration of learners' meaning of the experienced phenomenon, "assets for learning support," was important. Moumakoe (2004:33) states, "The success of education and of South Africa as a whole is dependent upon the success of the nation's children". Therefore, if the learners are experiencing barriers to learning, it will not just affect the learners, but also the broader community. The political dispensation of separation before 1994 impacted negatively on education, especially within disadvantaged communities. In 1994, South Africa's Rainbow Nation adopted a democratic system of governance. From there, the road to freedom and equality between races was paved. The primary objective of an education system in a democratic society is to provide quality education for all learners, so that all learners will be able to reach their full potential and be able to contribute meaningfully to, and participate in society, throughout their lives (Landsberg, Krüger & Nel, 2005:xiv).

Before 1994, schools and educational systems in South Africa were structured solely based on ethnicity, race and colour (Mothata, Potgieter, Squelch, van der Bank & Visser, 1997:6; Williams & Samuels, 2001:6). This inevitably affected education, as it led to numerous barriers to learning. A school is a place where children learn fundamental skills and construct knowledge about the world. It is also a place where children are socialised and made aware of society's future expectations of them as citizens (UNICEF, 2002:27). The message of inequity sent to the learners and the people of the world had to be addressed.

In October 1996, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Educational Support Services (NCESS) were set up by the then Minister of Education, Sibusisu Bengu, to investigate and make national policy recommendations, on all aspects of "special needs and support services", within education and training in South Africa (Department of Education (DoE), 2001:5; Landsberg, 2005:62; Nwanna, 2006:43). Consequently, the findings highlighted the barriers previously disadvantaged learners and schools faced. The central findings of the investigations stated that (DoE, 2001:5):

- specialised education and support have predominantly been provided for a small percentage of learners with disabilities within "special" schools and classes;
- where provided, specialised education and support was provided on a racial basis, with the best human, physical and material resources reserved for whites;
- most learners with disabilities have either fallen outside of the system or been "mainstreamed" by default;
- the curriculum and education system as a whole have generally failed to respond to the diverse needs of the learner population, resulting in massive numbers of drop-outs, push-outs and failures; and

- while some attention was paid to the schooling phase with regard to "special needs and support," the other levels or bands of education have been seriously neglected.

Since December 1996, South Africa has adopted a democratic Constitution (Mothata *et al*., 1997:5; Green, 2001:10; Lemmer, 2002:28). The Constitution recognises education as a basic human right of every citizen (Mothata et al., 1997:5,9; Muthukrishna, 2001:155; Lemmer, 2002:29). Importantly, it puts forward the right to equal educational access for all learners, regardless of their needs and differences (Green, 2001:10; Swart, 2004:237; Phasha & Swart, 2005:214).

From 1994 to 1999 a decline in the matric pass rates had become a tremendous concern (Education Action Zone - Gauteng Department of Education (DoE), 2006:1). The Gauteng DoE ascribed this decline to the unsatisfactory performance of educators and learners, uninvolved parents and the breakdown in school governance (Education Action Zone - Gauteng DoE 2006:1). However, the origin of language barriers does not develop in matric. School failure in matric is mainly the end result of barriers that had most likely already been experienced since primary school.

The current President of South Africa, Mr. Thabo Mbeki, advocates the African Renaissance philosophy, as the hope for Africa to prosper – a renewal process. The African Renaissance is seen as an important process in which the unity among the people of Africa, as well as mutual collaboration and understanding, can promote reconciliation, healing, reconstruction and development (Mulemfo, 2001:xv, 53). However, while the President has planted the philosophical seed of the African Renaissance, the implementation and success of the philosophy now rest in the hearts of Africa's people.

Globally, children, adults, families and communities have needs. The rainbow nation of South Africa, face significant challenges, such as schools that are often under-resourced (Eloff, 2006a:13) and other barriers such as socio-economic issues (Engelbrecht, 2001:19; Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2004:5, Williams & Samuels, 2001:7). But what is the value of contemplating problems by emphasizing the focus on needs and deficiencies? Why not rather acknowledge problems as barriers or challenges that can be overcome and focus on assets within the systems, in order to overcome the barriers? I believe that individuals can be supported to see challenges through lenses of hope for the future.

The asset-based approach has already been studied within the South African context, for example, the studies by Kriek (2002), De Wet (2004), Ferreira (2004a), Smuts (2004), Viljoen (2004), Coetzee (2005), Lancho Perea (2005), Loots (2005) and Matentjie (2006). Eloff (2006a:13) writes about the growing field of professionals that are opting to focus their thoughts and work on strengths, assets, resources and capacities. At the same time as the

emergence of the asset-based approach, movement was also evident towards Positive Psychology (Lopez & Snyder, 2002:viii; Eloff, 2006a:15). Seligman (2002:4) states that psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage, but also of strengths and virtue. The aim with treatment is not only to fix what is broken: but also to nurture what is best within us, by focusing on our strongest qualities. In particular, psychology could also focus on positive human functioning. Characteristics that Positive Psychology and the asset-based approach share, is that both value focus on and utilise available assets, resources and strengths. I believe that the changing realities within the social contexts around the globe have prompted a change of thought and approach, which led to a global movement that focuses on capacities and strengths.

Rose (2006:236) highlights that there are professionals that choose to use the asset-based approach with children and young people. The asset-based approach works from the principal that each individual, as well as each system, has assets (Eloff, 2001:75; 2003b:19; 2006b:32). In this text, the term “assets” refers to both intrinsic assets (individual assets) and external contextual assets (assets in the system). In other words, learners’ individual characteristics, as well as the interaction with their environment, can affect learners’ development.

Meisels and Shonkoff (2000a:xi) bring forth that the quality of the environment in which children spend their early years, significantly influences the ability of children to develop a sufficient foundation for learning later in their lives. According to Berger (1991:122), the foundation laid at home directly influences the degree to which the school environment can effectively support learners’ learning. It is viewed that language development and conceptual development are stimulated in the home environment – even before formal schooling starts (Senosi, 2004:1). Agreeing with Du Preez (2004:45) it can be said that, “learning does not only refer to the action that takes place in a classroom, but also pertains to any aspect of involvement, development, experience, exposure and therefore of ‘living’”. Hence, intrinsic factors and the system in which the learner interacts can either support learning or it can become a barrier to learning.

Literature on barriers to learning (Department of Education (DoE) 2000:13, Green 2001:13) distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to development and learning. Intrinsic barriers to development and learning refer to specific barriers, including genetic problems, brain damage, personality and disabilities (Green, 2001:13). Extrinsic barriers to effective learning and development, evident in South Africa are, “systemic barriers, including the education system, socio-economic issues, such as poverty, violence, crime, substance abuse and HIV infection, community attitudes to both learning and disability and language

issues" (DoE 2000:13). Individuals of our country face these barriers on a daily basis. The influences of this on learning support should not be ignored.

The Nwanna (2006:162,173) study found that high school learners experience a range of barriers to learning, which result from factors relating to the learners themselves, families, peers, educators, the education system and the society. Evidently, as Du Preez (2004:45) states, "learners are part of a multitude of systems, they learn in their families, schools, classrooms, peer groups, communities, cultures and in every situation in which they find themselves". The level of education, consequently, has an effect on the learner, as well as the closer community, the citizen's associations, local institutions and the wider social system (Eloff, 2003a:15).

When pondering barriers to learning within South Africa, it seemed that all learners could, at any juncture of their school career, experience barriers to learning to some degree. Bellingham, Conrad, McDonald, Morgan, O and Payton (1997:140) highlight the correlation between difficulties of elementary-school-aged children and adolescent behavioural problems, such as school failure, later in life. The results of the study further highlight the valuable role of earlier intervention (learning support), as well as the importance of exploring assets for learning support at primary school level. In other words, earlier intervention (learning support) can prevent the experience of barriers to learning that could also prevent social disintegration from occurring later in a learner's development.

In a prophetic article, Ramphele (1991:15) warns that: "Social disintegration will not disappear with the institution of a democratically elected government…" Ramphele (1991:16) elaborates that social disintegration "is a problem, which requires an investment in time and resources, if we are to avoid a downward spiral". The DoE (1997:6) notes that learners and the school system, within the school contexts of South Africa, require support such as teaching and learning support. To turn the downward spiral of needs and deficits I am of the opinion that we could explore providing support – specifically learning support – from a capacity-orientated focus. Addressing barriers to learning (by reducing them, circumventing, breaking through or even removing them), as well as promoting and supporting effective learning, is a mutual responsibility by all role-players (Bouwer, 2005:48; Phasha & Swart, 2005:219).

From an asset-based perspective, Eloff (2001:74) as well as Eloff and Ebersöhn (2001:150), acknowledge that all classrooms, schools and learning environments possess unique combinations of assets and capacities for learning support. The objective is to overcome barriers to learning by utilising and strengthening inherent assets for learning support, within the learner and the social system.

When keeping the systemic influence of a community in mind, I believe that intervention at primary school level can possibly support learners to overcome barriers to learning prior to Grade 12. It is evident that adults perceive assets for learning support, to be wider than just the school context (Bouwer, 2005:48; Phasha & Swart, 2005:219, Du Preez 2004:45, Swart 2004:239). However, do children and adults experience this phenomenon in a similar fashion? Would learners who have successfully passed each grade in primary school – despite experiencing barriers to learning – be in a position to provide insight into their experience of the phenomenon?

Meisels and Shonkoff (2000b:3) acknowledge that, "Children are the touchstone of a healthy and sustainable society. How a culture or society treats its youngest members has a significant influence on how it will grow, prosper and be viewed by others." A study exploring the essence of the phenomenon, "assets for learning support," as experienced by primary school learners, attending an urban school, where they are confronted with and overcoming extrinsic barriers to learning would be expected to yield insights in this regard.

## 1.3 STATEMENT OF INTENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The intent with this study was to qualitatively explore and discover the essence of the phenomenon, "assets for learning support", as experienced by learners who attend an urban primary school. I chose an exploratory study by which I could conduct a flexible investigation. In order to refine the statement of intent, this research was focused by the following primary research question:

*"What is the essence of the phenomenon 'assets for learning support' as experienced by learners attending an urban primary school?"*

The subsequent secondary research questions led to a pinnacle process, which supported the exploration of the primary critical question:

- What are the identified assets for learning support as experienced by learners attending an urban school?
- What are learners' interpretations as to how the identified assets support their learning?

## 1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explicate the essence of learners' experience of the phenomenon, "assets for learning support", within the learners' environment, in order to expand the knowledge base on learning support for primary school children.

## 1.5 CONCEPTUALISATION

This section defines the concepts that were used in this study context.

- **Explore**

Exploratory research is traditionally conducted in relatively unknown areas of research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:101). Thus, the purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to gain new insights into a relatively under-explored phenomenon, such as the explored phenomenon in this study.

- **Learners**

In this study, the term "learners" comprised of female, school-going children from Grade 5 up to Grade 7, who participated in a community project and were attending a mainstream urban primary school in Gauteng, South Africa.

- **Barriers to learning**

A barrier is perceived as an obstacle, an obstruction, a stumbling block or an impediment that hinders progress or movement (Hawker, 2002:48). Barriers to learning refer to any factor, either internal or external to the learner, which causes a barrier to that person's ability to benefit from schooling (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002:4). As stated by Swart (2004:237), it refers to all factors that obstruct teaching and learning. In this study, barriers to learning referred to any factor, either internal or external to the learner, which imposed on the learner's ability to learn.

- **Phenomenon and phenomenology**

The word phenomenology is derived from the Greek word "phainomenon," which refers to the "appearance of things or phenomena" (Spinelli, 1989:2). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:139) the term "phenomenology" refers to "a person's perception of the meaning of an event, as opposed to the event as it exists external to the person". A phenomenon refers to the central concept being explored by the phenomenologist (Creswell, 1998:236). It is also a lived experience. Phenomenon in this study referred to assets for learning support as experienced by the learners.

- **Essence of experience**

Essence refers to the "essential, invariant structure of the experience, recognising that a single unifying meaning of the experience exists" (Creswell, 1998:55). An essence is, therefore, the core meaning (Ehrich, 2003:46) learners give to the experienced phenomenon. All experiences have an underlying "essence/ structure" (Creswell, 1998:55). In this study I investigated the essence of assets for learning support for a group of primary school learners.

- **Assets**

Eloff (2003a:14; 2006a:27) refers to assets as "skills, talents, gifts, resources, capacities and strengths that are shared with individuals, institutions, associations, the community and organisations". In this study, assets were viewed as anything within, or external to a learner, that supported the learner's learning.

- **Identification of assets**

Reber and Reber (2001:338) define the word "identify" in various manners. However, they conclude by stating: "There are variations on all of these definitions, and in many instances a single use illustrates more than one of them." Identification of assets in this study referred to the process where available assets for learning support were consciously recognised.

- **Learning and learning support**

Constructivism is regarded as "a theory about knowledge and learning" (Fosnot, 1996:ix, Pinkett, 2000:3). It focuses on the active role of a learner to construct and reconstruct meaning (Bender, 2001:71). Meaning is constructed in an attempt to make sense of the world. Learning is viewed as a process of active construction (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997:40) and not a process by which knowledge is acquired or discovered (Human-Vogel, 2004:25). Learning support in this study, therefore, referred to assets, which were mobilised to support and enhance the active construction and reconstruction of learners' constructs, and thus, learning.

## 1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology of this study is briefly outlined in the following section.

- **Interpretive/ constructivist paradigm**

This study was conducted from a qualitative methodological perspective. The interpretive/ constructivist paradigm is associated with a qualitative methodology (Mertens, 1998:7). Hence, the paradigmatic perspective of this study informed the study's qualitative methodology. The paradigmatic worldview that was embraced in this study was that the meaning of reality is subjective and multiple, and that knowledge is dependent of context. Thus, learners construct a subjective reality of assets for learning support, due to their experience of the phenomenon, within the urban context.

- **Qualitative methodology**

This study was embedded in a qualitative methodology. I felt that it would be sensible to study the phenomenon from this methodology, as I wanted to explore the learners' experience of this phenomenon from their life-worlds. The "what" nature of the research question further reinforced the appropriateness of the qualitative methodological approach.

The phenomenon as experienced by learners was, therefore, qualitatively explored from an interpretive/ constructivist paradigmatic perspective.

- **Phenomenological research design**

The stated research questions were originally explored by consulting literature based on previous studies and literature relevant to the topic. Continuous reflection and questioning led me to develop a research proposal that would explore the essence of the phenomenon, "assets for learning support," as experienced by learners. To enhance the understanding of this phenomenon and also for the purpose of this study, phenomenology was selected as a relevant research design. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:36) explain that phenomenology is both a philosophical perspective as well as a qualitative form of investigation. In this study, the phenomenological research design was used as a strategic framework for action, to act as a bridge between the research questions and the execution and implementation of the research. The asset-based approach was utilised as theoretical framework throughout the study.

- **Selection of participants**

The participants for this research were primary school learners that were confronted with and overcame extrinsic barriers to learning, while attending an urban primary school. This particular primary school was selected due to accessibility of the ongoing community project between the University of Pretoria - Department of Educational Psychology and this primary school (convenience sampling).

- **Place of research**

This study was conducted in a mainstream primary school, situated in an urban context, in Gauteng, South Africa. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3) mention that qualitative research involves a "naturalistic approach to the world". This implies that the research had to be conducted in the participants' natural setting. The setting of the focus group was kept as "naturalistic" as possible, by having the focus group discussion in a classroom, on the school premises, in the learners' immediate school environment.

- **Focus group as data collection procedure**

Learners' experience of the phenomena could not be directly observed. In an attempt to understand the essence of the phenomena as experienced by learners, a focus group discussion with semi-structured questioning was used as a method for data collection. The focus group was thus utilised as an informal group interview.

During the focus group discussion, participants' verbatim responses were recorded and written on a flipchart. I attempted to protect the study from bias by means of constantly

reflecting upon the research process. I also made use of bracketing to prevent my own subjective experience from sabotaging the trustworthiness of the study.

- **Data analysis and interpretation**

Data analysis and interpretation was guided by the analysis steps as mentioned by Creswell (1998:55, 147, 150). The five analysis steps Creswell (1998:55) refers to are: *horizonalisation, clusters of meanings, textural description, structural description and the essential invariant structure (or essence)*.

In this study, learners' meanings, thus, each relevant and natural unit, of significant statements, were listed (horizontalisation) and structured into central clusters of meanings (Creswell, 1998:55,150). The verbatim responses of the learners, or else referred to as natural units of significant statements (identified assets and interpretation of assets), were firstly utilised as findings to answer the secondary research questions. Secondly, the verbatim findings were further mobilised, in that they were also utilised as data to be interpreted in order to answer the primary critical question. For the purpose of clarity, the data, findings and themes of this study were structured within the categorical guidelines, within the asset mapping framework, as proposed by Eloff (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39) (**Figure 3**). It also supported the theoretical framework of this study.

The data and findings of this study were structured into tables that reflect particular constructs of the data analysis steps and interpretation. Textural themes (what) and structural themes (how) were identified. The concluding step in this study was to construct an overall description of the essence of the experienced phenomenon (Creswell, 1998:55, 150).

- **The role of the researcher**

My main roles during this study were that of a researcher in the field of Educational Psychology. However, I did not conduct this research from an Educational Psychology, therapeutic perspective. Making use of bracketing and reflection helped me to access my identity as a researcher. Prior to the writing of the research proposal, I had to orientate myself within the literature relevant to the topic of my interest. This transitional research process further supported me to step fully into the role of a researcher. However, the nature of this study also required of me to take on an active role as a moderator and that of a facilitator.

- **Ethical considerations**

In order to ensure that the study met ethical standards, I adhered to the ethical principals, as stipulated by the University of Pretoria Faculty of Education, Research and Ethics Committee (2005). I obeyed the ethical issues that protect the researcher (e.g.

transparency, comprehensive referencing and peer review) as well as the ethical issues that protect the participants (e.g. voluntary participation, informed consent [verbal assent from the learners and signed proxy consent from their parents], safety in participation and the principals of privacy [confidentiality and anonymity]).

I obtained permission to use the gathered data for my dissertation and an article from The Gauteng Department of Education (DoE) District Office (**Addendum A**), The Research and Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria - Faculty of Education (**Addendum B**), the supervisor of my academic assignment (2005) (**Addendum C**) and the primary school (**Addendum D**). The identity of the school and the learners were not named, identified or compromised.

As a researcher and a learner, I followed the guidance, instructions and advice of leaders in the field of research, throughout the research process. I also depended on the skills (identifying, accessing and mobilising assets in my environment such as the library) and competencies (integrating the assets to support my learning experience) that I have acquired through my journey of academic training.

- **Quality criteria of the study**

A selection of applicable strategies to enhance the validity of the qualitative research in general, as identified by McMillan and Schumacher (2001:408), were incorporated. These strategies included participant language, verbatim accounts, mechanically recorded data, member checking and participant review.

I also adhered to the following quality criteria for the framework of social construction and constructivist as identified by Patton (2002:268), namely subjectivity acknowledged (discussing and taking into account biases), authenticity, triangulation (capturing and respecting multiple perspectives), particularity (doing justice to the integrity of the unique case), enhanced and deepened understanding (*verstehen*) and contributions to dialogue.

## 1.7 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This framework outlines the reporting of the chapters. The framework serves to assist in the orientation of the process and content of this study.

**CHAPTER 2: A literature study and theoretical framework: Assets for learning support**

Chapter 2 focuses on literature relevant to the statement of intent of the study, the research questions and the purpose of this study. The relevant literature is reviewed. The asset-based approach, as theoretical framework of the study is fore-grounded and discussed.

**CHAPTER 3: A phenomenological research design and the research process**

In order to answer the research questions as formulated in Chapter 1, this chapter explains the paradigmatic perspective, the underlying methodology, as well as the research design. The participant selection, methods of data collection, place of research, data analysis and interpretation, my roles during this research, as well as the ethical considerations and the quality criteria of the study, are outlined and justified within the framework of the study.

**CHAPTER 4: Assets for learning support: The research results and findings**

In this chapter, I share the research findings of this study. The chapter comprises of a description of the focus group and an encapsulation of the data analysis and interpretation processes. The textural and structural themes of this study are presented. The remainder of this chapter consists of the research findings that are related to relevant literature and the research questions of this study. Explanations, correlations and discrepancies between my research findings and relevant findings in the literature are highlighted and interpreted.

**CHAPTER 5: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations**

In Chapter 5, encapsulations of the previous chapters are explicated. In this chapter, a summarising conclusion of the research questions and the purpose of this study are addressed. Limitations as well as recommendations are composed.

## 1.8 CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 was an introduction and orientation to the study. This chapter explained the rationale for academic assignment (2005) and the study. The chapter introduced the statement of intent and the critical research questions. The section dedicated to the conceptualisation explicated the understanding and meanings linked to concepts that were used in this study. The purpose of the study was also stated. The research methodology and design were briefly outlined. A broad framework of Chapters 2 to 5 was provided.

**---o O o---**

# CHAPTER 2
# LITERATURE STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Stepping into a chapter on theory, theoretical approaches and literature, I deemed it necessary to clarify my own meaning of theory and approach. This need for clarity was introduced due to my own "academic" uncertainty. Eloff's (2003a:8) stance on theory is that it is a set of scientifically acceptable principals or facts, which are used to understand and explicate the phenomena of the world we live in. Donald *et al*. (1997:32; 2002:8) define theory as "an explanatory framework, which orders and makes connections between currently known observations and information." In other words, theory is humanly constructed due to the subjective experiences of individuals. From the paradigmatic perspective of this study, the construction of theory should, therefore, be an ever-changing and dynamic process, which evolves during engagement in social interaction. Theory isn't fixed and it may change over time. It provides the foundation for action (Eloff, 2003a:8).

An approach, on the other hand, is the manner in which we move towards a purpose (Eloff, 2006a:20) or the manner in which we move into action. In educational psychology, not only does the underpinning approach foreordain the success of the intervention, but the selected strategies and techniques in any intervention are subject to the underpinning approach (Eloff, 2003a:3). Yet, professionals are often not aware of their own approach.

With this study, I wanted to join the growing number of capacity-focused researchers. I planned and undertook this study with the asset-based approach embedded as underlying theoretical framework. This approach formed the main part of the theory explaining this research, due to the capacity-orientated focus of this study. In Chapter 2 literature relevant to the statement of intent, the research questions and the purpose of this study are discussed from an asset-based approach. Key constructs to this study are "assets", "learning," "barriers to learning" and "learning support" within an asset-based approach. In this chapter, these relevant constructs are placed against a backdrop of relevant and available literature. In the next section, I turn the lens to the asset-based approach, as theory can only be applied when orientated with regards to the constructs of a theoretical framework.

## 2.2 THE ASSET-BASED APPROACH

In Chapter 1, reference was made to the capacity-orientated focus of the asset-based approach and Positive Psychology. Initially, I wasn't certain whether both these theories carried relevance to this study. I found that the aim of Positive Psychology is often to understand and nurture intrinsic strengths, assets, resources and positive constructive intra-psychic domains (Eloff, 2006a:15) that allow individuals, communities and societies to flourish. It has been found that assets have a positive effect on well-being (Page-Adams & Sherraden, 1997:431) and that the study of well-being falls under Positive Psychology (Seligman, 2002:3). I questioned the relevance of Positive Psychology to this study. Firstly, even though assets that support learning will most likely enhance well-being, the focus of this study was not to explore "well-being". Secondly, the focus of this study was on intrinsic, as well as external contextual assets. My conclusion was that this study did not rest on Positive Psychology, but rather that the asset-based approach provided a relevant theoretical framework in that it supported the primary purpose of the study, which was to explore assets for learning support.

The asset-based approach was initially introduced within the context of community development and has since been successfully applied in other contexts. The focus is on present capacities, skills and social resources of individuals and their communities (Emmett, 2000:512; Eloff, 2003a:10; 2006a:22). Other fundamental characteristics that this approach take into account is an emphasis on creating networks and building relationships, as well as the recognition of intrinsic creativity, control and power (Eloff, 2003a:10; 2006a:22). The focus does not fall on problems and deficiencies, but rather to collaboratively, overcome barriers through the utilisation of assets.

### 2.2.1 ASSETS

While reading on assets (Ebersöhn & Mbetse, 2003; Eloff, 2003a; Lubbe, 2004; Eloff, 2006a; Probst, 2006), I became aware of a dynamic change in the manner assets were originally viewed. Initially, assets were primarily viewed as tangible and existing in external environments (Eloff, 2006a:14). I agreed with the latter stance, nevertheless, I was of the opinion that the dynamic impact individual assets could have on overcoming barriers, went under-acknowledged. In the second edition of *Lifeskills and Assets*, the latter author (Eloff, 2006a:15), acknowledges the enriching impact of Positive Psychology on the asset-based approach, but more specifically, on the way individual assets are viewed. Intrinsic assets or intrapersonal assets are now just as much recognised as contextual assets.

The concept "assets", is an encapsulating term that refers to skills, talents, gifts, resources, capacities and strengths, which are shared with individuals, institutions, associations, the

community and organisations (Eloff, 2003a:14; 2006a:27; Lubbe, 2004:324). In a similar vein, Mokwena (1997:68) refers to assets as people, buildings and organisations. When reviewing the definitions, it seems that assets are present within individuals and social contexts or systems. For the purpose of this study, I embraced the encapsulating definition provided by Eloff (2003a:14; 2006a:27) and Lubbe (2004:324). Assets are anything within (individual assets) or externally contextual to learners (assets in the system) that support learning. In this study, learners were regarded as assets. I believed that the valuable contribution that children can make to the development of our communities should not be ignored. It was stated at the declaration of "A World Fit for Children" that,

> "Listen to children and ensure their participation: Children and adolescents are resourceful citizens capable of helping to build a better future for all…" (UNICEF, 2002:49).

The asset-based approach is more than just an approach; it requires a shift of mindset in the way we observe and interact with the world. Within this approach, it is believed that all individuals and social contexts have deficiencies and needs, as well as capacities and strengths (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993:13; McKnight, 1997:126; Eloff, 2001:74; Lubbe, 2004:323). However, the focus is on present assets and not on absences or problems. A question that came to my mind was whether the asset-based approach doesn't conveniently ignore needs and deficiencies. Surely barriers such as school failure or poverty should be acknowledged.

The asset-based approach does not turn a blind eye towards needs and limited resources (Ebersöhn & Mbetse, 2003:323; Probst, 2006:13). The identification of problems and needs are essential components of the approach. However, overcoming barriers from this perspective focuses on creating and rebuilding relationships between various role-players and mobilising assets to do so. This implies that problem-solving could come from within the individuals, and thus, the learners attending the urban school. The objective would then be to overcome problems such as barriers to learning, by utilising and strengthening inherent assets within the systems (Ferreira, 2004b:333).

Furthermore, the asset-based approach acknowledges the possibility of individuals and communities needing additional resources outside an individual or a community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993:8; Emmett, 2000:512). The asset-based approach suggests that "outside resources" can be better utilised after the mobilisation of already existing assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993:8; Emmett, 2000:512). I agreed with this view and was of the opinion that the learners should consciously identify and interpret existing assets within themselves as well as the urban context, as these assets often go unacknowledged.

I felt that the data of this study had to come from the learners as they experienced the phenomenon of an urban primary school. Should I have identified and interpreted assets for learning support, as an outsider to this context, the trustworthiness of the data could perhaps be questioned and the identified assets could possibly have become a barrier to the learners. Hence, in this study, I came to realise that this capacity-orientated approach required an alternative approach towards participants and data collection (Eloff, 2001:75; Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001:156).

The asset-based approach adheres to a bottom-up approach, which shifts the emphasis away from the idea of professional dominance, towards an enablement and collaborative perspective (Ammerman & Parks, 1998:34;p Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001:150; Eloff, 2006a:21). While conducting the research, I also experienced the interaction between the participants and myself to be that of partners that collaboratively embarked on a research journey. The asset-based approach is by necessity “internally focused” (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993:9; Eloff, 2001:75); hence, the professional no longer provides “ready-made solutions” (Mokwena, 1997:67). My role as a researcher required that I provided leadership and guidance, with the emphasis on collaborative and dynamic partnerships between the participants and myself. The methodology of this study supported the learners to become conscious of their assets. Yet, effective living greatly depends on the utilisation of assets (Eloff, 2003a:9). The next section looks at the asset-based process that aims to enhance living through asset utilisation.

### 2.2.2 THE ASSET-BASED PROCESS

With the aim to enhance living, Eloff and Ebersöhn (2006a:7), offer an asset-based process (asset awareness, identification, accessing, mobilisation and sustainability), which can collaboratively assist individuals and support providers. These authors elucidate that, when utilising the asset-based approach, individuals become aware of assets, resources and capacities. Assets can then be identified through the use of asset mapping, collaboration, and relationship building. Asset accessing involves evaluating the value of assets in terms of a given goal or solution.

The identification and accessing of assets is only the start of the asset-based process. I agree with Ebersöhn and Mbetse (2003:323) that assets should also be translated into action. This can occur by repeatedly and collaboratively mobilising assets. The sustainability of asset mobilisation and development, however, often depends on the leadership of committed individuals. If access to, or mobilisation of, a potential asset is hampered, the potential asset will only remain undeveloped potential. This process was relevant to the study, in that during the focus group discussion, learners consciously became aware of, identified and interpreted assets for learning support. My stance during the focus group was

thus that of a "connector" between the learners and their conscious awareness, identification and interpretation of assets for learning support. In this study, the learners utilised intrinsic creativity and actively informed the process of data generation.

The learners identified assets that were already supporting their learning and it was assumed that the assets were already accessed and mobilised and, that sustainability was relevant to some of the assets. In this study, assets were viewed as anything within, or external to a learner, that supported the learner's learning. The next section deals with various contexts of systems, in which assets for learning support can be experienced.

### 2.2.3 ASSET MAPPING WITHIN THE "BIGGER PICTURE"

The emphasis of the asset-based approach is on creating networks and building supportive relationships among all social contexts (Mokwena, 1997:68; Eloff, 2001:75; Ebersöhn & Mbetse, 2003:324). In other words, it is about utilising already existing assets within systems. A search for a guiding framework for asset mapping (identification) led me to existing literature of work done by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), Donald *et al*. (1997) and Eloff (2006b). The literature indicates that two existing theories bare relevance to a theory for the asset-based approach. The community asset map by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) is particularly relevant. They differentiate assets on the following three levels:

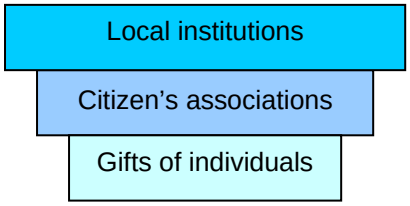



**FIGURE 1:** KRETZMANN AND MCKNIGHT'S (1993:7) IDENTIFIED ASSET LEVELS

The second relevant theory is the theoretical framework of the ecosystem perspective, developed by Donald *et al*. (1997). The ecosystem perspective evolved out of a combination of ecological and systems theories (Donald *et al*., 1997:34; 2002:44). This theoretical framework set assets and capacities apart at the following levels:

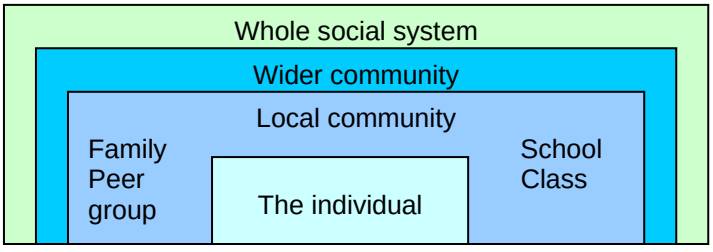



**FIGURE 2:** DONALD *et al*.'S (1997:65) IDENTIFIED ASSET LEVELS

Both theories refer to assets and capacities at various levels. Eloff (2003a:14; 2006a:27) proposes an integrated framework of the former and latter, to serve as a framework for the asset-based approach. I agreed that adaptations from these frameworks were required to accommodate the uniqueness of the South African context. This proposed framework highlights the dynamic, interacting and interdependent nature of relationships within the various social contexts of systems.

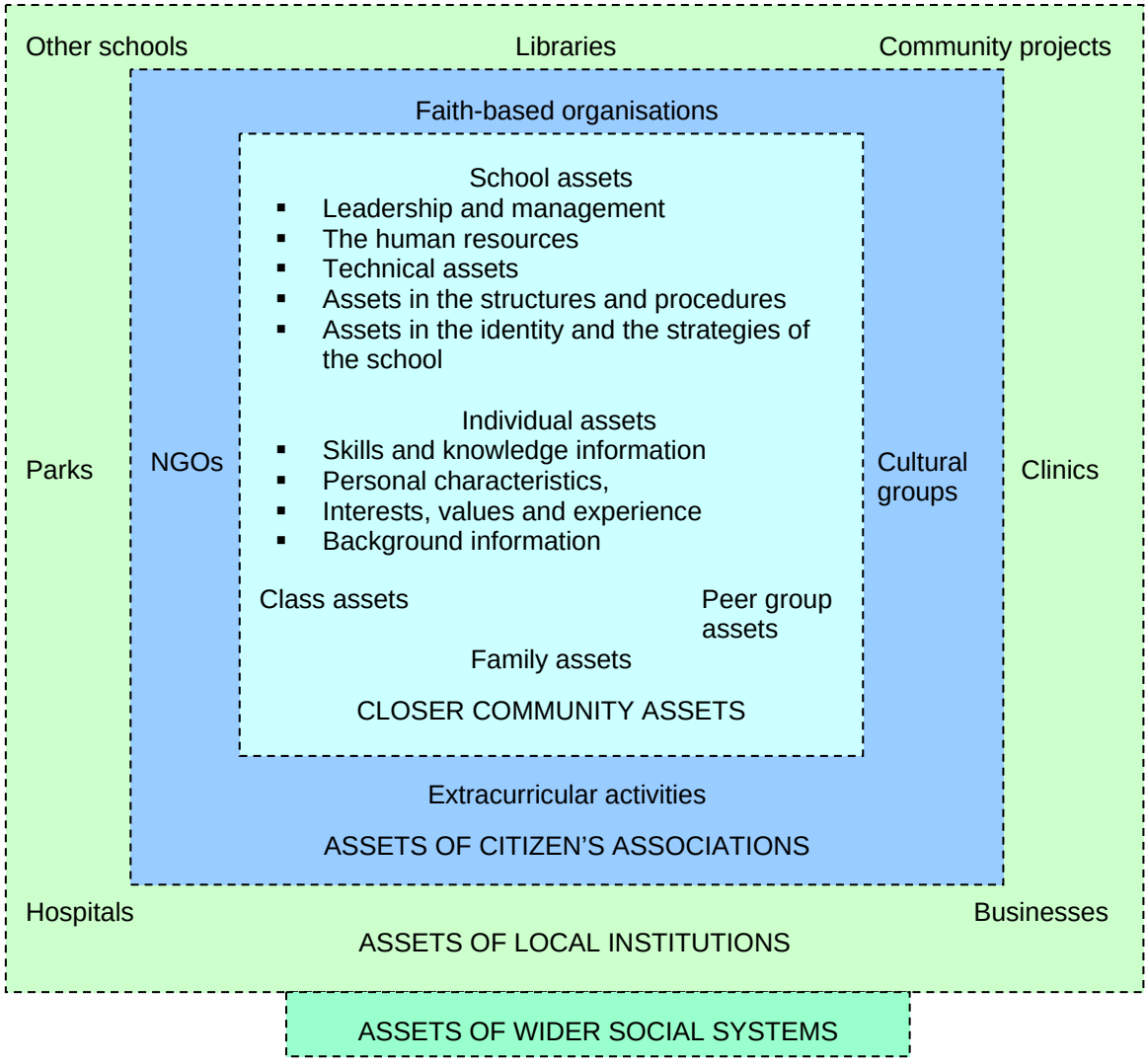



**FIGURE 3:** A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSET MAPPING (Eloff, 2006a:26; 2006b:33-39)

I employed this integrated framework for asset-mapping (Eloff, 2006b:31), as guiding steppingstone in this study. Evidently, the key to the future of an individual or a community lies in the hands of the people (in this case, the learners) within various systems. Within Eloff's (2006b:33-39) framework, she elucidates various categorical constructs on which potential assets can be looked for. It should be kept in mind that the assets structured within the various domains can overlap. These categorical constructs are discussed next.

- **Individual assets**

All individuals have an abundant array of assets. These assets are structured within the centre of the asset mapping framework (Eloff, 2006a:26). It is regarded that the central fraction of the "asset system" has the most profound ripple effect on all the other systems. Eloff (2006b:33) makes reference to the following individual assets: *Skills and knowledge information* refers to information that individuals have acquired over the course of their lives, at school, in their homes, or at work environments. Eloff (2006b:34) is of the opinion that *personal characteristics*, which refer to the signature strengths of individuals, can also have a significant influence on the process of learning support. The author (2006b:34) differentiates between cognitive, emotive and behavioural characteristics, as well as, learning and life skills domains. Even though all individuals do have personal characteristics, viewing them as assets could depend on the nature of the specific context. Other individual assets that Eloff (2006b:35) refers to are *interests, values and experience* and *background information.* According to Eloff (2006b:35), exploring individual interests, values and experience's from an early age, could alleviate the process of assets mobilisation. The rationale is that the process of asset mobilisation could be made easier when assets are regarded as important to an individual, or if the individual shows interest in developing particular assets. *Background information* entails the personal information that would make future contact with an individual possible.

- **The school system**

*Leadership and management* assets refer to the investment and development in the leadership capacities of any individuals, leadership styles and provided visions. *Human resources* in a school system could include strengths and interpersonal relationships, activities that support the development of the staff and teamwork in a school (Eloff, 2006b:36). The identification of human resources and individual assets could overlap with one another. The *structures and procedures* of a school are also regarded as assets within the school system. The lines of authority and responsibility in a school refer to structures. Procedures, on the other hand, refer to the rules, regulations, and methods whereby the structures relate to one another (Eloff, 2006b:37). *Technical assets* found in a school system could entail any resources and facilities available. It could refer to buildings, learning materials, surrounding environments, furniture, sport facilities and so on (Eloff, 2006b:36). The assets *in the identity and the strategies of the school* are another domain of assets in a school system. Potential assets within this construct could include whether the school is regarded as a "good school", the policy of the school, a mission statement, goal setting, the curriculum, and so forth (Eloff, 2006b:37).

- **The classroom**

Assets can differ from one classroom and context to the next. It could include blackboards, books, peer-group support, teaching method and much more.

- **The family**

Similar to the classroom, the family can also be regarded as a comprehensive system for learning support. Assets within this domain can be individual characteristics of the family members, interpersonal assets, physical assets or any other accessible resources to the family.

- **Peer groups**

Eloff (2006b:38) is of the opinion that peer groups are the most under-utilised resources available for learning support. These assets could include emotional support, functional support, learning support, motivation, exemplary behaviour, sharing, communication, technological interests, responsibly, trust, caring and coping (Eloff, 2006b:38)

- **Citizens' associations**

Assets on this level could include cultural groups, churches, non-governmental organisations and extracurricular activities.

- **Local institutions**

This can comprise of businesses, parks, hospitals, clinics, community projects and libraries, which are also regarded as assets in themselves.

- **The whole social system**

Learning support, which is undertaken within the whole social system, may have profound effects on the outcome of learning support. The assets of the broader social system may be situated in economic infrastructure, political freedom, a climate of social change, emergent institutional and cultural tendencies, legislative support for proactive initiatives and technological advances (Eloff, 2006b:39).

Although I discussed the afore-mentioned constructs as detached, they should be viewed as integrated and dynamic constructs. The interrelated and systemic relationships between the context and systems cannot be denied. As Mokwena (1997:69) states, "because communities consist of individual members, the strengths and weakness of communities are measured and reflected by the strengths and weaknesses of individuals." Kretzmann and McKnight (1993:13) are of similar impression and voice that "each time a person uses his or her capacity, the community is stronger and the person more powerful." I was of the opinion that, by utilising the asset-based process for assets for learning support, individuals and communities would be able to overcome barriers to learning related to the urban context. I

thus agree with Cunningham and Mathie (2003:477) that positive action for change is more likely to inspire when emphasis are on assets within the systems.

### 2.2.4 ASSETS AND BARRIERS OF THE ASSET-BASED APPROACH

The asset-based approach is relationship-driven. It offers a connecting bridge across a multitude of helping professions (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001:150; Eloff, 2003a:9), but also between members of communities, as the asset-based language is understandable by all. A perceived barrier is that the asset-based approach to intervention can be more time-consuming than exploring assets for learning support quantitatively.

In this study, I was most concerned with assets for learning support as experienced by learners. Hence, learning and the construction of knowledge had to be explicated in order to understand how assets can support learning. The next section focuses on learning, as well as learning from a constructivist paradigm. It was the paradigmatic perspective of this study that informed the construction of learning and not the asset-based approach.

## 2.3 LEARNING

While conducting research on learning, I stumbled upon a comic strip on teaching versus learning (Dawber, Modise & Winkler, 1998:8). A little boy explains to his friends that he taught his dog how to whistle. The friends excitedly ask that the dog demonstrate his newly acquired skill. While walking off, the little boy replies, “I said I taught him. I didn’t say he has learnt it yet”. It got me reflecting on my own view of learning. I realised that learning is not something that is constructed merely in a classroom and that teaching can be a step towards learning. Literature confirmed this train of thought (Dawber *et al*., 1998:11, Donald *et al*. 2002:107). Teaching only forms part of learning and therefore, learning will take longer than teaching (Dawber *et al*., 1998:11). Hence, teaching can occur without learning and learning can occur without teaching. This then denotes that learning is not limited to classroom assets in the school context where teaching occurs. Evidently, learning support could occur within the wider systemic contexts as stipulated in the proposed and employed framework of Eloff (2006b:31) in this study.

Human-Vogel (2004:29) and Bender (2001:3) stress that there is little scientific consensus regarding definitions on learning. Nevertheless, the objective with teaching and learning is to facilitate optimal development of the members of society (Donald *et al*., 1997:61). The way in which learning is viewed, and ultimately the preferred definition, hinges on the embraced paradigmatic perspective (see Chapter 3). Due to the significance of the constructivist-learning model, as an integration of the paradigmatic perspective of this study, learning from this worldview is explored next.

### 2.3.1 LEARNING FROM A CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

Cognition viewed from constructivist approaches has a long history (Driver & Oldham, 1986:106; Gouws, 1998:72; Cockcroft, 2002:177). Theorists such as Osborne and Wittrock, Piaget, Kelly and Vygotsky, are viewed as constructivists who contributed to the construction of this approach (Driver & Oldham, 1986:106; Gouws, 1998:72; Cockcroft, 2002:177). Constructivism is currently a significant theoretical paradigm that has bearing on all aspects of teaching and learning (Donald *et al*., 2002:98). It also underpins the outcome-based approach to education in South Africa.

Donald *et al*. (2002:126) elucidate that all individuals have the urge to actively adapt and develop effective ways of understanding and acting in relation to the world of information and knowledge. Due to the latter, all learners have an internally driven motivation to want to learn, built into the process of our human development.

From a constructivist paradigm, learners are seen as active agents that construct their world of knowledge, values, social interaction or social and emotional adaptation (Donald *et al*., 2002:102). Learning is viewed as a lived experience during which learners actively construct and reconstruct meaning to make sense of the world. Learning is not a process by which knowledge is acquired, discovered or transferred (Gouws, 1998:73; Human-Vogel, 2004:25). While preparing for this chapter, I experienced meaningful learning. During this interactive process, I questioned the content and meaning of the theoretical perspective and existing literature. This led to some of my existing constructs being re-constructed. In my view, knowledge is subjective. In other words, learners' knowledge of assets for learning support is subjectively constructed and reconstructed, due to their day-to-day experience of this phenomenon, while attending an urban primary school.

Donald *et al*. (2002:99) state that learners' development is positively or negatively shaped by nature and nurture. This implies a high degree of flexibility with regards to learners' individual cognitive development, but also, that learners should not be viewed in isolation from the world. Learners are active and participating members of society, who construct knowledge, when actively interacting in the world, and thus, also with learning tasks (Driver & Oldham, 1986:110; Gouws, 1998:73, Human-Vogel 2004:24). When learners interact and engage with the content, new constructs of meaning are constructed. As a result, learners' "understanding" are enhanced when they construct meaning for themselves – instead of learners being told "what," and "how," or crammed with knowledge by a support provider.

During the focus group discussion, learners' active participation contributed to the construction and reconstruction of subjective knowledge on assets for learning support. It seemed as though the social interaction between the learners sometimes led to the

reconstruction of existing constructs. I explored literature and found that a further influence on constructivism came from theorists, such as Vygotsky and Bakhtin (Gouws, 1998:72; Donald *et al*., 2002:100,102). These theorists upheld that knowledge is a social construction, which is developed and learnt during social interaction.

The data of this study was captured in Gauteng, at an urban primary school. A question that came to mind was whether the data of this study could be generalised. I found that, owing to the fact that knowledge is created in a specific social context, we can no longer refer to an absolute truth that can be generalised (Adams, 1998:43, Donald *et al*. 2002:100, Human-Vogel 2004:24). Knowledge and belief structures influence the meanings constructed within a specific context (Driver & Oldham, 1986:110). In other words, learners' meaning of a phenomenon, experienced within the urban context, can be understood, but it cannot be generalised. Learners' experience of a phenomenon can differ, depending on the diverse social contexts in which the phenomenon is experienced. Each individual constructs a different understanding of the world (Adams, 1998:43; Cockcroft, 2002:177). Learning is thus context-dependant and unique to each individual learner or community and its context.

Learning from this paradigm is a self-regulated and intentional process of knowledge construction (Adams & Kruger, 1998a:6) when actively interacting in the world (social construct). The locus of control for behaviour lies within the learner (Driver & Oldham, 1986:110). However, the internal motivation of wanting to learn and learning can be strengthened or suppressed by the interactive influence with diverse systems –demonstrated by the framework for asset mapping (Eloff, 2006a:26).

Looking at assets for learning support from a constructivist perspective and keeping the interaction between the systems in mind, the experience of an asset or a barrier is not exclusive to any one system. An asset or a barrier on one level will affect the other systems. The next section looks at the origination of the terminology barriers to learning and the meaning of the construct.

## 2.4 BARRIERS TO LEARNING

In October 1996, The NCSNET and NCESS were asked by the then Minister of Education to investigate and make national policy recommendations on all aspects of "special needs and support services", within education and training in South Africa (DoE, 2001:5; Landsberg, 2005:62; Nwanna, 2006:43). The commissions viewed the terminology "learners with special educational needs (LSEN) as inappropriate. The use of this type of terminology often results in labelling, discrimination, pre-judgement, neglect and ultimately, creating a culture of non-acceptance of diversity (Department of Education (DoE), 1997:14). The propensity is often to situate problems within the learners, when the contrary may be the case. A paradigm shift

was proposed, in that the focus should fall on identifying "barriers to learning and development" (Ramphal & Ramphal, 1998:246; Muthukrishna, 2001:46; Swart, 2004:237). The focus then falls on barriers within the social context of systems and not on the learner.

Evidently, barriers to learning refer to any factor, either internal or external to the learner, which causes a barrier to an individual's ability to benefit from schooling (Donald *et al*., 2002:4). Ells stated that it refers to all factors that obstruct teaching and learning (Swart, 2004:237). The NCSNET/ NCESS Report (Department of Education (DoE), 1997:7) makes reference to internal and external causes of barriers to learning: In South Africa, the single most influential factor for learners to drop out of school, are matters due to *socio-economic barriers* (Donald *et al*., 2002:209) such as poverty, unemployment, violence, crime, substance abuse, high illiteracy levels, urbanisation, HIV/Aids and communities' attitudes toward learning (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001:153). Learning difficulties, rooting from disadvantaged backgrounds are also very common in South Africa. During this study, families of the participants were confronted with poverty. Some of the learners' parents were also illiterate and unemployed. Research done by Moumakoe (2004:111), established the adverse effects of poverty and its related hardships on learning and development of learners in rural areas. Keeping the latter in mind, what intrigued me during this study was that, despite the experience of barriers, the learners have passed each school year – thus barriers to learning can be overcome.

*Lack of parental recognition and involvement in learners' education* were also identified by the DoE (2001:18) as a possible cause of barriers to learning. Dawber *et al*. (1998:2), identified barriers that relate to the home environment such as hunger, lack of stimulation at home, limited exposure to hearing stories and songs, poor discipline and few opportunities to observe the environment or to ask questions. In South Africa many learners, with reference to the participants of this study, are educated *in second and third language education.* The DoE (2001:18) also refers to inappropriate language or the language in which learning and teaching takes place. Within the unique context of South African, language and cultural diversity can constitute to barriers to learning within the school context, especially if the learners' language, traditions, values, norms and customs differ from those of the school's culture (Prinsloo, 2005:37).

The DoE (2001:18) in The Education White Paper alludes to negative attitudes to, and stereotyping of differences. *Discriminatory attitudes such as the labelling of learners* can furthermore cause barriers to learning and development as well as the *categorisation of learners through placement.* Inadequate policies and legislation relate to this matter (DoE, 2001:18). The NCSNET/ NCESS Report (DoE, 1997:7), as well as the DoE (2001:18) further identified *unfriendly environments, which is inaccessible and unsafe, inappropriate and*

*inadequate provision of support services, due to emphasis placed on learners' inadequacies, rather than the barriers within the systems* and *a lack of human resource development strategies* (lack of ongoing in-service training of educators) as other possible barriers to learning.

Turning to curriculum, an *inflexible curriculum and inadequately trained* educators can become a barrier to learning. In the Education White Paper 6, The DoE (2001:18-19) acknowledges that barriers to learning can arise due to inflexibility of the curriculum with regards to: 1) Content being taught, 2) Language or medium of instruction, 3) How the classrooms or educators are organised and managed, 4) Methods and process utilised for teaching, 5) Pace of teaching and the time available to complete the curriculum, 6) Learning materials and equipment used, and 7) How learning is assessed.

Barriers to learning can be identified within different contexts of systems, such as barriers relating to the individual, the curriculum, the environment, home environment and the broader social context (Landsberg, 2005:62). Agreeing with the latter, Booth (2000:92) elucidates that barriers to learning can occur at all system levels. One could encapsulate that barriers to learning refer to anything within systems that hinders and impinges effective and optimal construction of knowledge and thus learning. The experience of barriers to learning often only become apparent after learning breakdown such as inattentiveness, frequent absence from school, underachievement, failure or even dropping out of school occurs (DoE, 1997:32; Ramphal & Ramphal, 1998:247). Nwanna (2006:35) states that if support is not administered, learners may become stuck in the system or drop out of school – effecting all other systems.

When pondering over barriers to learning within South Africa, it seems that all learners can to some degree, at any juncture of their school career, experience barriers to learning. The DoE (1997:6) notes that learners and the school system require various types of support, but specifically makes reference to teaching and learning support within the school context. I do feel that recognition should be given to barriers to learning; however, I am of the opinion that barriers can be addressed through efficient learning support. The intent with learning support should thus be to enrich education by overcoming barriers to learning. Hence, in this study I proposed a paradigm shift, by focusing on assets for learning support within the social context of systems, in order to overcome barriers to learning from an asset-based perspective.

## 2.5 LEARNING SUPPORT FROM AN ASSET-BASED PERSPECTIVE

The concept learning support acknowledges learners' potential to develop and learn at their own pace in harmony with their own unique abilities (Bouwer, 2005:48). The aim of learning support is to enable learners to reach their maximum level of independent learning (Bouwer,

2005:48). What I understand from the latter is that factors such as intelligence, which is largely genetic, and cognitive processes that can be taught / learnt (Lomofsky & Skuy, 2001:189) integrate with the construct of learning support. This view relates to the constructivist perspective of learning, in that learners are both shaped by nature and nurture (Donald *et al*., 2002:99*).* Furthermore, it entails and aligns with the theoretical grounding of this study, in that barriers to learning and assets for learning support can be identified, accessed, mobilised and sustained (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2006a:7) within various interactive social contexts within the systems.

Learning support is about enabling learners to function optimally as individuals. In other words, all learners can benefit from learning support. Yet, the literature search on learning support mostly resulted in relation to inclusion and how learners, who experience internal barriers to learning, can be supported (Armstrong, Armstrong & Barton, 2000; Mittler, 2000; Engelbrecht & Green, 2001; Landsberg *et al*., 2005), as well as the relation between learning support and early childhood intervention (Fuller, 1999; Meisels & Shonkhoff, 2000a; Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001).

Booth *et al*. (2000, in Swart, 2004:239) state that learning support refers to activities that add to the system's ability to respond to the diverse needs of all the learners. From this study's theoretical grounding, I would rephrase the latter by stating that learning support refers to assets that add to the system's ability to overcome barriers to learning as experienced by learners. I regard the asset-based approach as an influential approach in learning support, as learning support in itself can also be regarded as an asset. The focus from this perspective is on present assets to support learning that are available within the learners and the social context (Eloff, 2006a:22).

Learners spend much of their time within the school context. Concurrent with Dawber *et al*. (1998:12-13), I feel that it is imperative that schools create a supportive learning environment. The latter authors make reference to supportive learning environments where learners feel encouraged and safe to take risks within the class. In agreement with the latter, Nwanna (2006:47) expound that educators need to understand how learners learn (cognitive processes) and establish conditions that will support learners to achieve success. However, I am of the opinion that learning does not start, nor end, at the school gate. From a constructivist perspective, knowledge is actively constructed within a social and cultural context. It seems that assets for learning support could include social interaction within various contexts and with numerous role players.

Swart (2004:239) and Bouwer (2005:48) state that learning support relies on educator development and continuous support activities, curriculum adaptation, collaboration of all role-players from the systems to which the learners belong: parent involvement, peer support,

therapy and counselling. This aligns well with the assumptions of this study. According to Phasha and Swart (2005:219), barriers to learning need to be addressed by all role-players. The DoE (1997:7) highlights that support should be provided by members of the learning community (e.g. parents, teachers), other community resources (e.g. volunteers), educational support personnel (e.g. psychologist, doctors, social worker), and assistive devices (e.g. appropriate information technology).

Learners are not solely dependent of external learning support. As stated before, the asset-based approach places high value on relationships and collaboration, but also on personal characteristics (Eloff, 2006a:22). Also from a constructivist perspective, as supported in this study, learners are active agents (positively or negatively), who can actively and personally shape their own development by overcoming barriers to learning by utilising assets for learning support. In other words, learners can be regarded as assets, in that they ought to accept responsibility for their own learning support. Clearly, learning support is an interrelated and shared responsibility by all, including learners.

I am of the opinion that learning support should preferably occur prior to learners' experience of barriers to learning. If a strong foundation for learning is provided at an early (st)age, learning breakdowns such as school failure can be prevented. Sadly, in 2001, Eloff and Ebersöhn (2001:153) gave an account of the ineffectual support for learners between birth and six years, due to the experience of extrinsic barriers to learning. A study conducted into early childhood education in 1994, denoted that approximately 10 % of South Africa's children between these ages were receiving early childhood education as a form of learning support (DoE, 1997:35). Furthermore, it was stated that this sector was epitomised by disparities in terms of race (white bias), geographic locality (urban bias), social class (middle class bias) and disability (able-bodied bias).

In 2000, the National Department of Education, in collaboration with the European Union Technical Support Project, conducted an audit of Early Childhood Development (ECD) throughout South Africa (Williams & Samuels, 2001:1). Vital statistics of the audit were that still less than one sixth of the 6,4 million children of South Africa, within the age cohort of birth to seven, were in some form of ECD provisioning and that less than half of the five to six year old children were being accommodated (413,000 out of an estimated 960,000 children) (Williams & Samuels, 2001:1). As the case had been with the DoE (1997:35), disparities in terms of race were also found in the audit. Across the quality of support, infrastructure, program and educator indexes, African sites were still rated the lowest and white sites rated the highest (Williams & Samuels, 2001:1). Hence, the experience of barriers to learning can exist prior to formal schooling, leading to many learners, especially in previously disadvantaged communities, to start their formal education with a backlog.

I am of the opinion that efficient learning support, provided at primary school level could facilitate a stronger learning foundation prior to high school. Thus, the supporting hand of primary schools in the development of learners, should not be ignored. A question that remained in my mind was why or how some learners overcome certain barriers to learning. Survey research conducted by the Search Institute in America, explored and identified strengths that help children from Grades 6-12, to grow up as healthy, caring and productive individuals (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:1; Probst, 2006:6). Surprisingly, the results showed that the average number of assets reported by the children, decreased from Grade 6 to Grade 12 (Rose, 2006:237). Forty developmental assets, comprising of twenty external assets and twenty internal assets, were identified (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:4; Probst, 2006:8-11) (**Addendum E**). The external assets were structured under categories of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, as well as constructive use of time (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:14; Probst, 2006:6). Categories of commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity, were structured under internal assets (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:15; Probst, 2006:6).

The research showed that the strengths within the latter categories provide a sturdy foundation for positive development and academic success (Probst, 2006:7). A cumulative relationship is also apparent between the number of experienced assets and school success, positive living and high-risk behaviour (Probst, 2006:7, Rose 2006:237). Concurrent that there could be a relation, I questioned whether quantity always prevails over quality, and whether one could truly distinguish diversity in the value of assets? I further pondered over the value of then conducting this research within the context of the urban environment, where needs and deficiencies seemed to outnumber assets.

I consulted literature based on the phenomenon as experienced by learners and subsequently the relationship between the asset-based approach and learning support. The limited scope of existing literature relating to the topics of my interest could not bring clarity to the questions I had constructed. Eloff (2006a, 2006b) is one of the few authors who briefly refer to the relationship between the capacity-focused approach and learning support. When keeping the latter in mind, as well as the emerging nature of research and practice imbedded in the asset-based approach, I was of the opinion that this study, exploring learners' experience of the phenomenon, could contribute to the existing base of knowledge and in itself become an asset. Hence, the limited scope of the existing literature also made me realise the value of conducting this research study.

To conclude with this section, it seems as if learning support is connected to nature assets, such as intelligence, and nurture assets such as cognitive processes (learning strategies), collaborative support from various role-players (e.g. parental involvement, peer support,

therapy, counselling), and social interaction within a specific context in the systems (e.g. home, school, classroom). The roles of “nature” and “nurture” highlight the uniqueness of individuals and their environments. When integrating the content of this literature study, it seems that, due to the subjective experience of barriers to learning and learning support, learners’ meaning given to their experiences might differ from one another. What I am implying is that meaning given to assets for learning support could possibly differ for each learner, within a unique context. The experience of learning support would then be context dependent.

I am of the opinion that the term “assets” provides an encapsulation for all factors, internal or external to a learner, within various contexts of systems, that supports learners learning. Yet, the question still remains, what are learners’ constructs of assets for learning support as experienced by them.

## 2.6 CONCLUSION

Chapter 2 focused on the literature study and the theoretical framework relevant to this study. Metaphorically, the world can be viewed as our playground. Evidently, the lenses through which we view the world, inform our approach to life. In this study, I chose to view the world from an asset-based approach. The lenses of this approach highlight that all individuals form part of interrelated systems. The interaction in these systems leads to the construction of knowledge and thus learning. Each individual context and system does have assets that can support learning. As a result, by identifying, accessing, mobilising and sustaining assets for learning support, barriers to learning can be overcome.

**---o O o---**

# CHAPTER 3

# A PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH DESIGN AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present and justify the methodological choices I applied to this study. The paradigmatic perspective, the underlying methodological approach, as well as the phenomenological research design that this study was approached from are stated. The participant selection, methods of data collection, place of research, my roles during the research, as well as the data analysis and interpretation are outlined and justified within the framework of this study. I conclude this chapter with the ethical considerations and the quality criteria of the study, which contributed to the accountability of the research process.

## 3.2 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

The methodology of a study should be viewed within the paradigmatic perspective that a study was approached from. In this study, recognition was given to learners' subjective realities on the experienced phenomenon. Reality was, therefore, viewed as multiple due to the subjective experiences of each learner. For this reason, verbatim responses and consequently the findings of this study were presented in the form of words and quotes. Diverse perspectives on the phenomenon were also reflected.

Knowledge was viewed as context dependent due to subjective realities of learners. The nature of knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and participants are conceptualised as the epistemological stance (Adams, Collair, Oswald & Perold, 2004:356). I felt, that by minimising the "distance" between the participants and myself, a better understanding on learners' meaning of the experienced phenomenon could be constructed. It required of me to collaborate and spend time in the context of the learners. During my orientation to the school and its immediate environment, as well as during the focus group, I became an "inside visitor" to the learners' world.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000:157) state that the epistemology implies an ethical-moral stance towards the world and myself as a researcher. My roles, as well as the distance between the participants and myself, had an impact on the axiology, which refers to ethics and values (Creswell, 1998:76). The axiology, however, is also shaped by the methodology that results from the paradigmatic perspective. The research methodology, and thus, how I conceptualised the entire research process, emerged from the ontology and the

epistemology. I decided that a qualitative methodological approach would best assist me in gaining knowledge on the meaning learners give to the experienced phenomenon, by minimising the distance between the participants and myself.

The obtained literature on paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 2000:164; Mertens 1998:7, Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:6), in addition to the interaction with multiple resources, led me on a path of diverse realities on the main paradigms in social sciences. This dynamic process assisted me in the construction and interpretation of knowledge. Guba and Lincoln (2000:164) refer to paradigms, such as positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism and participatory paradigms. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:6) give preference to positivist, interpretivist and social constructionism as paradigms. Initially I found myself embracing Mertens's (1998:7) three main categories for paradigms, namely positivist / post-positivist, interpretive / constructivist and emancipatory.

This study was anchored in the interpretive / constructivist paradigm. For the purpose of clarity, interpretivism and constructivism are discussed as separate paradigms in the next section. I conclude with the integrative interpretive / constructivist paradigmatic perspective. It is this paradigmatic perspective that underlined this study's broad theoretical orientation, the epistemological beliefs and the methodological approach of this research (Schurink, 1998:240; Mertens, 1998:6).

### 3.2.1 INTERPRETIVISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM AS PARADIGMS

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:6) differentiate between the ontology of interpretivism and constructivism. However, both paradigms share the common goal of understanding the lived experiences of individuals, from the point of view of those who lived it. The way of understanding lived experiences of individuals however, differs.

- **Constructivism as a paradigm**

Constructivism is based on the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Gardner and Goodman (Fosnot, 1996a:11). Von Glasersfeld (1996:4) explains that, due to the relationship of viable biological organisms and the environment, a subject can reformulate the relationship between his cognitive conceptual structures and the experiential world. Learning or understanding then occurs during the construction and reconstruction of these conceptual structures. The constructs that develop are, therefore, temporary due to new experiences.

Brooks and Brooks (1993:VII) explain that knowledge is seen as an internal representation of the world. It is "temporary, developmental, socially and culturally mediated." According to Schurink (1998:247) "knowledge is constructed through a process of self-conscious actions by those who are personally experiencing it." The epistemology is thus subjective. A

fundamental goal of constructivism is therefore to understand subjective personal patterns of meaning.

- **Interpretivism as a paradigm**

Interpretivism is viewed as a theory for "understanding" through interpretation within a particular context. Jansen (2004:380) explains that, in order to achieve understanding of reality, interpretivism forefronts the subjective meanings that are assigned to a specific experience. Reality is seen as experiences that can be interpreted, but not controlled nor predicted (Schurink, 1998:246). Knowledge arises from qualitative methodology, such as observations and interpretations. Emphasis is placed on the "social context, conventions, norms and standards of a particular person or community" (Jansen, 2004:380).

I agree with Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:6) regarding the differences of ontology in constructivism and interpretivism as separate paradigms. Reality in constructivism is viewed as constructed through direct and personal experience. Reality in interpretivism is understood through interpretation. Yet, both acknowledge reality as seen by the participants of a study and, therefore, reality is acknowledged as subjective. Due to the uniqueness of each individual and context, diversity among individual realities will be found. Both paradigms also emphasise the valuable role context plays in gaining knowledge through qualitative methods.

- **Interpretive/constructivist paradigm**

I value each individual and context as unique. Individuals can intentionally and creatively create their own realities. From an interpretive / constructivist paradigm, reality is regarded as being socially constructed by the participants of a study (Mertens, 1998:11). Multiple mental constructions can be apprehended. The ontology of this phenomenological study required that I would report learners' multiple statements on the explored phenomenon. The verbatim statements represented learners' diverse and subjective experiences of the phenomenon. In this study, multiple realities were intertwined. Allusion can also be made to the reality of the literature acquired, as well as the reality of the researcher, the participants and the reader.

The epistemology of this paradigm predisposes that knowledge is constructed through interaction and listening skills (Adams et al., 2004:356). Learning is viewed as a process dependent on interaction with the environment. Qualitative research techniques best embraced this paradigm (Mertens, 1998:14, Adams et al. 2004:356). I believed that a qualitative methodological approach would enrich the quality of this research, through dialectical interaction with the learners during a focus group discussion. This study evidently assimilated well with the interpretive / constructivist paradigm.

### 3.2.2 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methodology breaks away from positivism and stems from an approach that assumes multiple realities (Merriam, 1998:4; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:15). The philosophical assumption is that reality and meaning are constructed through individuals' interactions in their direct environment (Merriam, 1998:6). As stated earlier, Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3) as well as Creswell (2005:42) elaborate, that qualitative research involves a "naturalistic approach to the world". This implies that research must be conducted in the participants' natural settings. The philosophical assumption, Denzin and Lincoln's (2000:3) as well as Creswell's (2005:42) elaboration, required of me to understand the learners' multiple meanings of the phenomenon as experienced in their environment. Subsequently, it also entailed the exploration of the context within which assets for learning support are experienced.

The qualitative research process is generally viewed as flexible (Merriam, 1998:8; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:16; Delport & Fouché, 2005:75). Qualitative research is also "idiographic", in that it refers to the objective of understanding the meaning that individuals attach to life (Schurink, 1998:242). I aimed to understand the phenomenon from an insider's perspective, or in this study, the learners' perspectives. Merriam (1998:6) and Schurink (1998:242) refer to this manner of inquiry as the "emic perspective".

During the focus group discussion, the learners realised the immediacy or the changed view that the asset-based approach offers. They took note of the different way in which they could view themselves and their communities. This offered ownership to the way in which they viewed themselves and their environment (Eloff, 2003a:7; 2006a:20). The learners expressed their amazement regarding the relevance and practicality of support that the asset-based approach offers. A sense of the mutual responsibility of various role-players in their community also came to light as well as a comprehension that they are not dependent on others to change their worldviews.

Merriam (1998:8) and Adams et al. (2004:365) refer to the descriptiveness of a qualitative study. These authors state that a qualitative study should enable the researcher to provide an extensive description of a phenomenon. Creswell (2005:45) asserts that qualitative research is useful, when the researcher intends to present a detailed understanding of a phenomenon, or if little is known about a phenomenon. To elucidate my choice of qualitative research: Firstly, the field of learning support from an asset-based perspective in primary schools is a relatively under-explored phenomenon – especially with regards to learners' experience of the phenomenon. Secondly, my intention was to attempt a detailed description, which could provide a better understanding of the essence of the phenomenon as experienced by learners.

A qualitative research approach implied that I would inductively collect data within the learners' natural environment (Merriam, 1998:7; Mertens, 1998:160; Schurink, 1998:241; Delport & Fouché, 2005:75). If a researcher makes use of inductive reasoning, a conclusion is researched through observation, after which a summary of generalisations is formed. However, my aim as a qualitative researcher in executing this study from an interpretive / constructivist paradigm was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in the urban context and not to generalise the findings to other contexts. Inductive reasoning assists the researcher – especially when literature is deficient or existing theory is insufficient (Merriam, 1998:7). As mentioned, learners' experience of the phenomenon is currently an under-explored topic. This limitation consequently confines the generation of hypotheses to be deduced from existing theory or literature.

During this study the above-mentioned characteristics of qualitative research were actualised. When keeping the statement of intent and the purpose of this study in mind, it is evident that this study related best to a qualitative research methodology. I also felt comfortable approaching this study qualitatively, as it united with my own paradigmatic perspective to life.

## 3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.3.1 PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH DESIGN

For the purpose of this study, phenomenology was selected as a relevant research design. The intent of this section is not to expound on the philosophy of phenomenology. The focus is rather to provide a brief outline of this research design and its relevance to this study.

Phenomenology originated from European philosophical tradition and was introduced by Husserl in the 1930s (Ehrich, 2003:45). As stated in Chapter 1, the word phenomenology is derived from the Greek word "phainomenon," which refers to the "appearance of things or phenomena" (Spinelli, 1989:2). A phenomenon could include anything (emotions, thoughts and physical objects) that appears or presents itself (Ehrich, 2003:45). In this study, the phenomenon referred to learners' experience of assets for learning support.

The aim with a phenomenological study is to understand and describe the core meaning or "essential, invariant structure"; (the essence) of a lived experience that several individuals consciously give to a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998:37, 51, 235, 236). Ehrich (2003:47) also refers to consciousness, but prefers to use the concept "intentionality". According to her, individuals are always conscious of something. Creswell (1998:235), however, refers to "intentionality of consciousness", which implies that the consciousness of an object is always intentional. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:489) explain, that the participants of a

phenomenological study must either already have experienced the phenomenon under study or they are still experiencing the phenomenon. However, it is important that the participants in a phenomenological study must be able to enunciate their conscious experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998:111).

Ehrich (2003:47), as well as Merriam (1998:15), refer to the "search for essence" or "structure". Creswell (1998:235,236) also refers to the reduction of experience to a central meaning or "essential, invariant structure" (essence). Creswell (1998:235) explains that the objective of the phenomenologist is to lessen the textural (what) and structural (how) meanings of an experienced phenomenon, to a brief description that portrays the experiences of all of the participants in a study - in other words, a reduction to the "essence." Consequently, the meaning participants give to a phenomenon further needs to be understood and interpreted (De Vos & Fouché, 1998:80).

My roles during this study were that of a researcher and a learner in the field of Educational Psychology. I believe that learning is a lived experience by every person. It is evident that, prior to the study, I already had my own subjective reality of meaning and experiences of what the assets are that support my own learning. Bracketing (epoché) refers to the suspension of the researcher's preconceived ideas, or subjective experiences of phenomena (Merriam, 1998:16; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:139), as far as humanly possible.

During the focus group discussion, particular assets, which I viewed as assets for learning support, went unacknowledged. Pondering on this matter, I realised that not all assets, in all contexts or systems, are equally available, effectively utilised, or even acknowledged. However, this study was about learners' experience of the phenomenon and therefore, the use of bracketing was essential for the understanding of learners' experience of the phenomenon. Constant reflection of my thoughts and actions assisted me in this study to overcome this challenge.

In order to understand the experience of assets for learning support, we concern ourselves with a phenomenon in the conscious world of learners' everyday learning. With the purpose of exploring and not predicting or controlling learners' meaning of the experienced phenomenon, it is clear that a phenomenological research design was appropriate for this study. I did, however, experience particular challenges (other than making use of bracketing), due to my choice of research design.

Originally, I felt overwhelmed by the academic constructs of phenomenology. Identifying and mobilising assets in my environment helped me overcome this challenge. I read up on phenomenology and made inquiries to expert researchers to support my learning. In addition, I made use of constant reflection of my understanding and growth during this process. During

the selection of participants, I also had to take care to select participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study. The next section addresses how I approached this process.

### 3.3.2 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The participants for this research were primary school learners that were confronted with and overcame extrinsic barriers to learning, while attending an urban primary school. This particular primary school was selected due to accessibility of the ongoing community project between the Department of Educational Psychology and this primary school (convenience sampling).

Educators were approached to assist me with the selection of participants. Willing educators were advised to purposefully select eight female learners in Grades 5-7 (3: Grade 5, 3: Grade 6, 2: Grade 7). Scott (2000:111) suggests that, when conducting focus groups, different genders should be interviewed separately due to a difference in communication styles. As a female researcher, I was of opinion that female learners would identify and possibly relate better to me than male participants.

In this study, homogeneous sampling (Mertens, 1998:262; Creswell, 2005:206) occurred, in that learners, who possess similar traits, were purposefully selected. Common denominators were that all participants were female learners attending the urban primary school, where they have all passed each grade the first time – despite being challenged by extrinsic barriers to learning. It was important that the participants were not related to one another prior to the study. I felt that, should learners be related, it could possibly influence the group dynamics (for example an older sister or friends dominating the focus group discussion and excluding non-related learners) and therefore, also the quality and trustworthiness of the data.

As stated before, findings or experiences can't be generalised, even more so if learners come from different contexts within the systems. All the participants in this study lived in the immediate vicinity of the school, where similar extrinsic barriers to learning challenged the community. The latter was important, so that all the participants could speak from a similar frame of reference of assets for learning support, as experienced in the urban context. I was also of the opinion that, if the learners stayed far from the urban school, it could possibly become a barrier during the data collection process, as learners would have to leave earlier than learners living in the vicinity of the school.

Prior to the focus group, an encounter was arranged with the learners. It was important to me that the learners felt at ease during the entire research process. A concern to me was that I

would be a stranger to the learners and that these new and unknown experiences could have led to feelings of discomfort, which could impact negatively on the data collection. An encounter was arranged between the participants and myself, during break time, prior to the focus group meeting, in order to overcome this possible barrier.

#### 3.3.2.1 The first encounter with the selected participants

During the first encounter with the learners, I introduced myself and emphasised my intent as well as my role. I started by explaining to the learners that individuals can learn more at pre-primary schools, primary schools, high schools and universities. I elucidated to them that I am studying at the University of Pretoria, where I am learning more about psychology. We had a brief discussion about psychology, after which I outlined that similar to them, I also got homework and that I needed their assistance in the completion of homework (academic assignment). It was explained that I had to find out more about the things ("… the big word we use are assets") that help children learn, so that they can pass each school year. I told the learners how they were identified and that I was informed that they hade all passed each school year since Grade 1.

During this contact session, the participants' roles were explained, should they have agreed to participate in the focus group discussion. It was explained that the verbatim responses of the learners would be recorded and written on a flipchart (like taking notes in a class). The following two semi-structured questions were stressed: "What helps me to learn so that I can pass each school year?" and, "Why or how does it help me to learn?" I explained to the learners that, should they decide to participate, they could withdraw at any point (voluntary participation), no matter what the reason ("… bored, don't feel like it, feel uncomfortable, want to do something else, any reason, you don't even have to give a reason"). The manner in which their privacy would be respected was also explained.

Due to the manner of gaining access to the learners, confidentiality with regards to the identification of participating learners was a challenge in this study. This challenge was stated to the learners and their parents. It was emphasised that the learners' identities with regards to who shared what data would remain confidential and anonymous to the school and other parties or organisations. However, I couldn't guarantee that the learners themselves would respect this. The learners agreed that, out of respect for one another, they would also not tell other individuals who shared what information.

Among the afore-mentioned, we also explored the process of getting homework and that the teachers are the ones who mark their homework. I elucidated that it was the case with me, and that, after the completion of my assignment, I had to speak to my teacher (lecturer) and show her the work. I further explained that I had to speak to my teacher (lecturer) and

another lady (external examination) during my examination about the information that the participants gave me. It was made apparent that what they told me would be treated confidentially and I assured their anonymity.

It was explained that my teacher (lecturer) would keep my homework (assignment) and that she or my school (the University) could use it in the future to educate other people who want to learn more or to do more research. Emphasis was again placed on the fact that, should the University use my homework (the data), neither their names nor the name of the school would be applied. The school and the learners were in no way named, identified or compromised. All the learners were informed about the research process on an age-appropriate level and they were eager to assist me with this process - they gave their assent.

To encapsulate, during the first contact session, I introduced myself to the learners, explained my role, the study and process, as well as their possible role in the study. I explained the ethical principals that would be adhered to, such as voluntary participation, informed consent and safety in participation, as well as the principles of privacy and that of trust (Research Ethics Committee – University of Pretoria 2005).

#### 3.3.2.2 Considerations and experienced challenges

During the first contact session, the participating eligibility of learners was confirmed. Factors that were considered were voluntary participation, as well as English language abilities and social adaptability. Learners attending this urban school were educated in English as their first language and Afrikaans as their second language. However, the selected participants were not being educated in their mother tongue. Their mother tongues ranged from Sepedi, Tswana, Tsonga and Venda.

The success of the data collection depended on the participants' experiences and their ability to verbalise these experiences in a language that I would understand. During the first meeting, participants stated that English was a language in which they all felt competent. The study was, therefore, executed in the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT), which was English. I approached this challenge, by realising that the quality of verbal language could perhaps be a predictor of performance in school. I generalised that, if language is a predictor of school performance, and selected learners have all passed each grade since Grade 1, I could assume that they would be able to actively participate in this study. The study was thus executed in the language of the learners' schooling.

For the purpose of this research, verbal assent was obtained from the learners participating in the focus group. Signed proxy consent was obtained from the participants' parents (**Addendum F**). A perceived challenge during the study was to gain access to parents /

guardians, to explain and to obtain signed letters of proxy consent. A large majority of the learners of the school came from a disadvantaged community. This created a communication barrier. The learners were, however, instrumental in overcoming this barrier. At the end of the first encounter with the learners, I gave each learner a letter of proxy consent to present to their parents. I explained to the learners that, should they not want to participate, they need not give their parents the letters.

In the letter of informed consent, it was stated that the participation of the learners would be voluntary and that the learners could withdraw from the community project at any time. Before the commencement of the study, I decided that, should either party object to participating, the choices would be respected, by withdrawing the invitation to participate in this study. Nevertheless, all the letters were signed by the parents / guardians and returned. Hence, all learners actively agreed to participate in this study.

### 3.3.3 FOCUS GROUP AS DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Children are not a homogenous group and they all experience phenomena in a variety of ways. In an attempt to understand this phenomenon as experienced by learners, I decided to use a focus group as a method for data collection. During the focus group discussion, multiple and diverse realities of the experienced phenomena were echoed, acknowledging the diverse realities of the learners.

Focus groups have been part of the social sciences since 1920 (Madriz, 2000:837). This type of group is regarded as a qualitative method that is viewed as a form of interviewing (De Vos & Fouché, 1998:90; Mertens, 1998:174; Babbie, 2004:302; Creswell, 2005:215; Greeff, 2005:299; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:146; Neuman, 2006:412). Morgan (1997:2) acknowledges that a focus group is basically a “group interview”. During this study, the focus was not on the interaction between the participants and me. The focus was on the interaction of the participating learners in the focus group and their verbal expressions about the experience of assets for learning support. Knowledge (data) was therefore constructed during group interaction. This further aligned with the study’s paradigmatic perspective.

The formation of the focus group of this study was guided by the following factors as identified by Scott (2000:111):

- Children should be interviewed in restricted age groups to prevent older children from domination. In this study, the age groups were restricted to ages 11-13 to prevent domination.
- Different genders should be interviewed separately due to difference in communication styles. In this study, the participants were all female learners.

- A focus group should be limited to a maximum of eight participants. Only eight learners participated in this study.

Phenomenological studies are mostly associated with interviews (De Vos & Fouché, 1998:80; Fouché, 2005:270; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:139). A benefit of making use of a focus group is that the research process is not as time-consuming as conducting individual interviews (Creswell, 2005:215). I am under the impression that the interaction during the focus group added value to the quality of data collection. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:43) are of the opinion that the interaction in a group stimulates the construction of new constructs. Another advantage of the use of a focus group in this study was that knowledge was constructed on the experienced phenomenon in a limited period of time.

Neuman (2006:412) states that a focus group is an informal group interview. Morgan (1997:6) however, states that the formality of a focus group will be determined by the researcher's intent, the nature of the setting, as well as the reaction of the participants to the research topic. This study was conducted as an informal group interview. An informal atmosphere was created due to the factors as identified by Morgan (1997:6), as well as:

- The informal introduction and orientation of the research to the learners
- The relevance of the participants to the study
- My role as a moderator and facilitator
- The interactive group dynamics
- The place of research.

The focus group discussion took place after school hours. The group continued for three hours, during which two breaks were also taken. Each learner received a lunch bag, containing a sandwich and a cool drink. The interaction contributed to an informal and interactive environment. During a third meeting, the participants also got the opportunity to review my synthesis of the focus group discussion.

Babbie (2004:302) explains that focus groups can take on a structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviewing form. Christensen and James (2000:2) are of the opinion that children can successfully participate in structured as well as unstructured interviews. Scott (2000:101) mentions that children from the age of seven can already participate in individual and also semi-structured group interviews. The focus group of this study was based on semi-structured interviewing, in an interactive and informal manner. A language barrier could have been created due to the academic language of the experienced phenomenon, namely "assets for learning support." This possible language barrier was bridged by simplifying the research topic to an understandable level for the learners. For the purpose of the focus group, the research topic was introduced as, "What helps me to learn so that I can pass each

school year?" and, "Why or how does it help me to learn?" This data were also written on a flipchart.

#### 3.3.3.1 Challenges of the focus group

Focus group interviews implicate certain challenges. Neuman (2006:412) refers to the following limitations:

- **Participants' attitudes often become more extreme after focus group discussions**

The focus of this study was on assets for learning support. In view of the specific theme for this focus group, the "polarisation effect", or conscious awareness of assets for learning support did not in my opinion have a negative effect on the learners. For example, they did not require debriefing after the focus group, as would be the case when exploring children's experience of divorce or learners with HIV/Aids. Thus, in this study, the participants did not risk harm (physical, psychological, legal, and social) by participating in this study. In fact, as stated before, some studies have shown that positive action for change is more likely to inspire when the emphasis is on assets within the systems (Cunningham & Mathie, 2003:477). Hence, the learners' new construction of asset awareness, after the focus group discussion, was seen as an asset that could be mobilised towards learners' development as well as positive action of change.

- **Only one or a few topics can be discussed during a focus group session**

The phenomenological study aimed to explore the participants' experience of a specific phenomenon. Thus, the fact that only one topic could be discussed, served the purpose of the study well.

- **A moderator may unknowingly limit open, free expression of a group**

I am of the opinion that the research process and my role (researcher but also a moderator) during the focus group encouraged free expression. The focus group as research technique further encouraged free expression of the participants within the safety of the group. Other factors that contributed to an informal environment that encouraged free expression of the learners experience were effective facilitation skills, me being aware of the group dynamics and the supportive atmosphere (taking regular breaks, providing the learners with a lunch bag) that was created. By also being aware of this potential pitfall, I constantly reflected on my actions during the research process.

- **Focus group participants produce fewer ideas than individual interviews**

I do acknowledge the possibility that fewer ideas could have been produced than in individual interviews. However, Neuman (2006:412) states that participants tend to feel more

empowered when participating in focus groups, especially if the study is action-orientated. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:146) also highlight that some individuals might feel more at ease during group discussions. I believe that, compared to interviewing learners individually, the focus group discussion could have increased the comfort levels of the participants. I was a stranger to the learners and was concerned that learners might have felt overwhelmed, shy or even scared if I interviewed them individually.

Furthermore, as stated before, from a constructivist perspective, learning is constructed when interacting with the world. Learners could, therefore, better understand assets that support their learning, while constructed by themselves in the social setting. For the purpose of this study, I felt that the group interaction could stimulate the construction of new constructs (awareness of assets) by bringing other constructs (assets for learning support) to the level of consciousness. In this study, the questions and solutions came from the experts, namely the learners that live their lives in a specific community. I am of the opinion that the latter contributed to the trustworthiness of the research findings.

- **Focus group studies rarely report all the details of sudy design / procedure**

This was not the case in this study. In this chapter, I gave a detailed report on the phenomenological research design as well as the focus group as data collection procedure. As mentioned, this phenomenological study aimed to explore learners' experience of the phenomenon. During data collection, the focus was on participants' verbatim responses and not on non-verbal communication. Krueger (1988:44-45), as well as Schurink, Schurink and Poggenpoel (1998:325) also note some challenges of focus groups:

- **Focus groups offer the researcher less control than individual interviews**

As stated before, this study was embedded in the theoretical framework of the asset-based approach. Within qualitative research studies, it is viewed that the "researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1998:7, Mertens 1998:175, Bresler & Stake 2006: 278). The researcher can, thus, influence the data. Madriz (2000:838) is of the opinion that, when conducting focus group discussions, the researcher's influence can be reduced by tilting the balance of power to the group. For that reason and working from an asset-based theoretical approach, my role had to shift from professional dominance to an interactive, collaborative role. I became engrossed in the study as required of a qualitative researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:16). As a moderator I facilitated the process, and therefore had some control over the dynamics of the focus group. I would say that during the study I controlled practical arrangements (when we took breaks, giving permission for learners to make use of ablution facilities).

I was of the opinion that there was no sense, that I, as the researcher, identified assets within a context unfamiliar to myself. This study therefore strongly relied on learners' experience of the phenomenon. A dependency was created on learners' verbalisation of their experiences, since the actual observation of all assets for learning support would have been a complicated endeavour. Some assets may also have been historical and thus non-observable. The learners controlled the shared data (identified and interpreted assets for learning support) as experienced by them. By using focus group techniques, learners' valuable meanings of the experienced phenomenon were discovered in an interactive environment.

- **Moderators require special skills such as controlling group dynamics**

This is a skill that I have practised and acquired during my life journey and masters training. During 2005, I had to conduct language enrichment group sessions at this primary school, as part of my academic training. As part of my preparation, prior to the group sessions, I turned to available literature on group dynamics. With the commencement of the group sessions, the academic jargon became alive. I could apply my newly constructed theoretical knowledge in practice. During this time period, I thus obtained further theoretical exposure and practical experience with regards to the facilitation of group dynamics

- **The discussion must be conducted in an environment that is conducive to discussion**

The study was done by having the focus group discussion in a classroom on the school premises within the learners' immediate school environment. The selected place of research was convenient due to its accessibility, but it was also a familiar context in an unchanged environment where the learners felt comfortable.

- **Data is difficult to analyse due to the fact that the comments of participants have to be interpreted within a constructed social setting**

This required of me to collaborate and spend time in the context of the learners. I had to familiarise myself with the primary school in the urban context. A qualitative research methodology requires of the researcher to be well prepared. Part of my preparation for this research study was to get to know the urban primary school and its immediate environment. My orientation to the environment was done through social interactions with members of the urban community (educators, parents, business owners, and learners), observations and visual material, such as photographs. I orientated myself prior to the data collection, so that I would be able to recall the information that the learners referred to during data collection.

Through identification and interpretation I composed an asset map of the newly developed constructs. An asset map is a graphical (visual) representation of identified assets within the systems the professionals are working in (Eloff, 2006a:27). Data collection methods that were thus employed during my preparation for this study were my own constructed asset

map, visual data (photographs) and insights from discussions with members of the urban community (educators, parents, business owners, learners') as well as observations, which I utilised in my asset map. It wasn't necessary for me to gather more information on the social setting after the focus group, as the learners didn't make reference to assets that I wasn't familiar with. Data could thus be captured and analysed within the participating learners' natural setting. The identified themes were also verified during a third encounter with the learners.

### 3.3.4 PLACE OF RESEARCH

This data collection was conducted in 2005, at a mainstream primary school, situated in an urban context, in Gauteng, South Africa. At the time the school consisted of 1160 learners, who were mostly challenged by extrinsic barriers to learning. Language diversities are common among the learners of this urban school. Even though the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) is English, most of the educators and learners speak more than three languages. The mother tongues ranged from Sepedi, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda and Portuguese to Afrikaans and English. The school staff consisted of forty-eight individuals. The staff, as employed by the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and the School Governing Body (SGB), as well as the quantity of learners per class, was structured as follows:

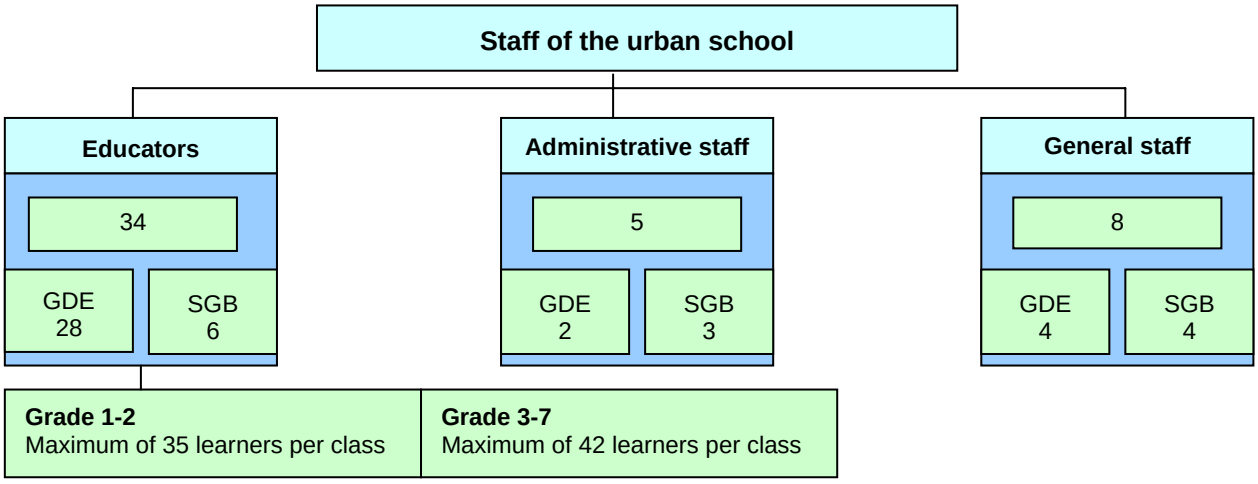



**FIGURE 4:** A STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL STAFF

The grade 1 educators were of the opinion that the majority of the Grade 1 learners were not at the expected school readiness level. Many learners did not have access to early childhood intervention. The School Governing Body subsequently appointed six educators to overcome this backlog, by limiting the amount of learners in Grades 1-2 classes to 35 learners. Educators have their own classrooms. This contributes to the stability and structure for learners, by creating an association to routine.

Scott (2000:103) highlights the significance of context when interviewing children. He explains that the place of research affects the way children respond. The setting of the focus group was kept as "natural" as possible. As mentioned, the focus group discussion took place one afternoon, after school, in a classroom on the school premises. Not only was the selected place of research more convenient for the learners, but it was also in a familiar, unchanged environment where the learners felt comfortable.

### 3.3.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Language played a vital role in this study. During the focus group, participants identified and gave meaning to their experience of assets for learning support. They communicated their experiences through the use of language. The data was recorded and verbatim written down on a flipchart. Flipcharts were compiled as a data documentation method. One column represented the responses on the question, "What helps me to learn so that I can pass each school year?" (Identifying assets for learning support). A second column contained the "Why or how does it help me to learn?" responses (Interpretation). During this process, statements that related to the topic were already identified and separated from irrelevant information, such as "Ma'm, can I please go to the loo". Participants could also contribute by elaborating on each other's experiences and meanings on the phenomenon.

The data collection process consequently led to the data already being managed and organised. This process made the data more manageable. In a sense, data collection and data analysis formed part of the same process. Patton (2002:279) highlights the increased appreciation and recognition of creative analysis in qualitative research, despite the development of more sophisticated software to support analysis. Patton (2002:275, 276) explains that existing data analysis "steps" mainly function as guidance. Data analysis steps that are relevant to phenomenological studies, as mentioned by Creswell (1998:55, 147, 150) were used as guidelines during further data analysis. The five analysis steps Creswell (1998:55) refers to are, horizonalisation, clusters of meanings, textural description, structural description and the essential invariant structure (or essence).

After the data collection, I transcribed all statements, which were mechanically recorded. I employed this strategy in order to ensure that valuable data were not overlooked during the focus group. I also read through the statements on the flipchart. The relevant information was again identified and separated from irrelevant information that did not relate to the theme of the study. The relevant verbatim responses of the learners, or else referred to as natural units of significant statements, were listed (horizontalisation of the data) and treated with equal worth (Creswell, 1998:55, 147). In consequence, subjectivity was acknowledged.

I read through the list of natural units of significant statements. While reading through the data, natural meanings emerged that were structured within the asset-mapping framework (**Figure 3**), as proposed by Eloff (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39). Creswell (1998:150) explains that only when data have been structured into clusters of meaning, should the researcher explore and bear in mind the numerous ways in which various participants experience the phenomenon. The numerous and divergent perspectives from which various participants experience the phenomenon were explored. The focus was, however, on identifying common themes among the various meanings. Hence, multiple perspectives were captured and respected. During this process, I as the researcher consciously reflected on my own perspectives by also making use of bracketing and appreciating learners' experiences.

The data was interpreted by identifying textural themes (what) and structural themes (how) that was elicited from Maslow's hierarchy of needs. I adapted the "need" construct, by substituting it with "assets". The textural (what) and structural (how) themes and findings of this study were structured into tables that reflect the particular constructs of the data analysis steps. The verbatim responses were firstly utilised as findings. While the focus of the study was to explore primary school learners' experience of the phenomenon, the two secondary research questions focused on learners' identification and interpretation of assets that support their learning. I believed that by making use of learners' verbatim responses, it could contribute to the trustworthiness of the study and assure the reflection of learners' authentic voices.

In order to construct an overall description of the essence of the experienced phenomenon, the participants' verbatim findings were further mobilised, in that it was also utilised as data. I conducted further analysis and interpretation, in order to answer the primary research question. I believed that the answering of the subsequent secondary research questions led to a pinnacle process, which brought intelligibility to the primary research question. I was of the opinion that this process could result in doing justice to the integrity of the unique particularity of the study.

## 3.4 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

As stated, I assumed the role of a researcher, as well as that of a moderator, who provided the topic of discussion and acted as a facilitator during the focus group. I had to make use of effective facilitation skills to enable the learners to identify assets. I was well aware of the group dynamics, such as keeping participants focused on the topic and ensuring that a learner did not dominate the group interaction. Evidently, I played a vital role in the research process. Patton (2002:276) states that, "the human factor is the great strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis – "a scientific two-edged sword".

My active role as a researcher required of me to remain sensitive to my own subjective meanings of the phenomenon, which could have influenced the trustworthiness of the data. This challenge was overcome by utilising the participants' verbatim responses. In Chapter 4, the verbatim responses and consequently the findings of this study are presented in tables as well as in a descriptive format. The verbatim responses provide a descriptive understanding of the phenomenon as the participating learners experienced it and contributed to the trustworthiness of the study.

## 3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research is an ethically grounded process that builds values such as trust, respect and empathy between the researchers and the participants of a study. Strydom (1998:24; 2005:57) defines ethics as a "set of moral principals that are suggested and widely accepted by an individual or a group, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students." According to Babbie (2004:63), *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines "ethical" as "conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group." The role of moral principals (ethics) in research is to provide rules and behavioural prospects about the most correct conduct towards research and participants. By including ethical conduct in research, validity and reliability within a qualitative study is also ensured (Merriam, 1998:198).

Questions have, however, been raised with regards to the suitability of generic ethical principals when minors participate in a study (Lindsay, 2000:12). Debates on children's rights in making choices in research participation also remain unresolved (France, Bendelow & Williams, 2000:155). Melton, Sieber & Stanley (1995:400) argue the underestimation of minors' assent to participation in research. I do acknowledge the possible reality of challenges in relation with informed consent with minors. I agree with Lindsay (2000:12) that, when the child's age, cognitive abilities, emotional status and knowledge are taken into consideration, these possible challenges can be bridged. During this study I focused on the value of age-appropriate language for communication (through simplifying academic terminology). Jones and Tannock (2000:91) agree that the explanations to children need to be appropriate to their level of comprehension. It is argued that the same ethics relevant for adults can be, and were applied with "child sensitivity" to the minors who participated in this study.

The literature acquired (Mertens, 1998:23; Strydom, 1998:24; 2005:57; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:101-104; Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, 2005), made mention of different identified ethical issues. This study was grounded in the ethical principals as recognised by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (2005), Faculty

of Education. Approval to use existing data was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education District Office, The Research and Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria - Faculty of Education, the supervisor of my academic assignment (2005) and the primary school.

The objective of the ethical review by the Research Ethics Committee was to protect myself as the researcher, as well as the participants of the study (Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, 2005). This process in itself led to an elevation in research quality (Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, 2005). When doing research, it is of the utmost importance that informed consent is obtained before the research project starts. The Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (2005) explains that informed consent entails that the participants in a study is at all times thoroughly informed about the research process and purpose.

According to the Society for Research in Child Development (1990) when children aged seven and older take part in research, informed consent must also be obtained from the children's caregivers and from the children themselves. Hudson (1996:6), however, is of the view that a child's assent countermands a parent's decision. Lindsay (2000:11) only refers to permission from the school and parents if participants are "up to school-leaving age". The Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (2005) states that minors themselves must actively agree if they want to participate in a study, based on sufficient orientative information. Proxy consent must also be obtained from parents/guardians.

For the purpose of this research, verbal assent was obtained from the learners participating in the focus group and signed proxy consent from their parents. It was the learners' choice to participate in the study. The content of the letters complied with the content as stipulated by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (2005). Before the commencement of the study, I decided that, should either party object to participation, the choices would be respected by withdrawing the invitation to participate in this study. Participation was thus voluntarily and participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

The school as well as the participants were offered confidentiality and anonymity for their involvement in the research. A challenge in this study was the confidentiality with regards to the identification of participating learners. This matter was due to the manner of gaining access to learners in the primary school by means of teacher referrals. This challenge was communicated to the learners and parents. Under no circumstances was the identity of the participants made known to any other parties or organisations. The school and the learners were thus not named, identified or compromised. They also gave consent that the focus group discussion could be recorded. Ethically, this assured that the data displayed the authentic voice of the focus group.

During this study, the participants didn't risk harm (physical, psychological, legal, and social) by participating in this study. In fact, it could be argued that the participants in this study could benefit from participating, in that a space was created where learners' voices, based on their experiences of the phenomenon, were amplified. Participants constructed a conscious awareness and realisation of assets that support their learning within their immediate context. This newly constructed knowledge could be further mobilised by the learners, should they choose to do so.

As required by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (2005), the valuable data will be stored for a period of at least 15 years. The file containing the data of my academic assignment will be returned to the University of Pretoria. I will also keep backup copies of my assignment (hard copy and on memory stick) and the data for safekeeping.

## 3.6 QUALITY CRITERIA OF THE STUDY

As a qualitative researcher, I was interested in the authenticity of the learners' experiences of the phenomenon, rather than seeking a singular truth. Merriam (1998:206) explains that human behaviour is fluent. Therefore, the aim of reliability in qualitative research is "not whether findings will be found again, but whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, 1998:206). I aligned myself with this author's subjective interpretation of reliability within qualitative research. Merriam (1998:198) explains that the trustworthiness of a qualitative study depends on the reliability and validity of a study. However, the nature of reliability and validity in qualitative research differs from quantitative research (Merriam, 1998:198).

In qualitative studies "dependability" and "consistency" are analogues to reliability (Neuman, 2006:196). From an interpretive / constructivist paradigm, change is expected and therefore "dependability" does not refer to the discovery of matching results when the same measures are implemented (Mertens, 1998:184). "Truth", is regarded as an analogue to validity (Neuman, 2006:196). According to Mertens (1998:297), credibility is a parallel for validity. Credibility refers to the extent to which an explained phenomenon corresponds with the realities of the individuals who experienced the phenomenon. From an interpretive / constructivist paradigm, confirmability is seen as an analogue for objectivity (Mertens, 1998:299).

As stated before, a selection of applicable strategies to enhance the validity of the qualitative research in general, as identified by McMillan and Schumacher (2001:408), were incorporated. During this study, I personally collected the data. The participants were also part of the data collection and the data generation during the focus group. The focus group

was conducted in English (participant language). The participants' verbatim responses were used in this study (verbatim accounts). During this phenomenological study, emphasis was placed on understanding the learners' verbatim explanation of their experience of the phenomenon. Therefore, the focus was not on observations of non-verbal language. The data was mechanically recorded. In addition, verbatim responses were also written on a flipchart.

During data analysis one of the steps, as identified by Creswell (1998:150), is for the researcher to explore and bear in mind the numerous ways in which various participants experience the phenomenon. During this step, the divergent perspectives were also explored. I searched for discrepant data that might have presented a divergence from the emerging patterns. Checking for bias, neglect or lack of precision further validated the data.

The research process led to immediate member checking, which implies that learners checked the accuracy of data during data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:408). At a separate occasion, participants were given the opportunity to review my synthesis of the focus group discussion (participant review). During this meeting the learners validated the findings of the phenomenon that was studied.

I also adhered to the qualitative quality criteria for the framework of social construction and constructivist as identified by Patton (2002:266-268). Patton (2002:266) acknowledges that the quality and credibility criteria of qualitative studies can differ, depending on the philosophical underpinnings and the theoretical orientation of the study. Patton (2002:266) furthermore identifies five frameworks with contrasting sets of criteria for diverse qualitative inquiry. These frameworks can be seen as "angles of vision", or, "alternative lenses" for critiquing and undertaking inquiry (Patton, 2002:271). In this study I adhered to the social construction and constructivist criteria as identified by Patton (2002:266-268). The following criteria assimilated with this study and also contributed to the persistent attempt to obtain trustworthiness of this study. During this study,

- subjectivity was acknowledged,
- multiple perspectives were captured and respected (triangulation),
- I consciously reflected on my own perspectives and appreciated the learners perspectives (authenticity),
- I experienced an enhanced and deepened understanding of the phenomenon,
- justice was done to the integrity of the unique phenomenon and
- dialogue was encouraged.

## 3.7 CONCLUSION

Based on the requirements for my academic assignment (2005) and the literature review I did since 2005, I planned and conducted this qualitative, phenomenological study in order to explore assets for learning support as experienced by learners. Hence, the research process was also informed and guided by the research questions. This chapter took the reader on a systematic, descriptive journey of the research process. The purpose with this research process was to gather data that could bring clarity to the research questions and the intent of this study. Intertwined with this chapter, I also made reference to the challenges that I experienced, as well as how I addressed these challenges.

**---o O o---**

# CHAPTER 4
# THE RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS: ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) developed the asset-based approach, with the objective to enhance community development by focusing on strengths and capacities. It could be argued that this dynamic approach to community development inspired an alternative approach in various helping professions. It could also be argued that the development of the asset-based approach coincided with a shift towards capacity-orientated approaches in a variety of disciplines. Educational psychology studies, embedded in this capacity-orientated perspective, have increased in recent years (Kriek, 2002; De Wet, 2004; Ferreira, 2004a; Smuts, 2004; Viljoen, 2004; Coetzee, 2005; Lancho Perea, 2005; Loots, 2005; Matentjie, 2006). As mentioned, Eloff (2006a:13) also writes about the growing field of professionals that are opting to focus their thoughts and work on strengths, assets, resources and capacities.

Parallel to the movement towards strength/ capacity-based approaches in various fields, there had been a worldwide development towards more inclusive, participatory approaches. Heidi Grande, a 17 year old Norwegian delegate, asserted at the UN general Assembly Special Session on Children, (UNICEF, 2002:65) that:

> "We, the children are experts on being 8, 12 or 17 years old in the societies of today … To consult us would make your work more effective and give better results for children. My proposal is that you make us part of your team."

The main purpose of this study was to explicate the essence of the phenomenon 'assets for learning support', as experienced by primary school learners. It was essential to make the learners part of the team. This study was also about opening avenues that could lead to future research, but more importantly, to explore the construct of learning support, from an asset-based perspective. In turn, this may inform future interventions that support learners' learning by focusing on strengths and capacities.

In this chapter I share the research results and findings of this study. As with all the chapters, I systematically and descriptively explicate the journey in an attempt to explain my cognitive and behavioural processes of discovering the research findings. Hereafter, a section on my reflection of my experience of the focus group follows. The remainder of this chapter

comprises an encapsulation of the data analysis and interpretation. I present the textural and structural themes of this study. The primary focus of this chapter is on the research results and findings. In order to answer the secondary research questions, the findings are stated, discussed, related to relevant literature and lastly, where relevant, also interpreted. An encapsulation of the findings of the secondary research questions leads to a peak point, where in the last section of this chapter, the primary critical question is addressed.

## 4.2 A BRIEF REFLECTION ON THE COURSE OF THE DATA COLLECTION

In the first 10 minutes of the focus group discussion, Mittler's (2000:3) opinion that the medical model is still embedded in the general consciousness of support workers came to my mind. It seemed as though the learners got trapped in the dominant societal discourse of immense needs and problems. Initially, the learners tended to focus on extrinsic barriers such as poverty, unemployment and crime, which cause barriers to their learning. These extrinsic barriers are consistent with barriers to learning that is articulated by the DoE (2000:13).

In this study, I embraced an enablement and collaborative perspective, as proposed by Ammerman and Parks (1998:34), as well as Eloff and Ebersöhn (2001:150). Also in agreement with Ebersöhn and Mbetse (2003:324), as well as Mokwena (1997:68), I found that as a professional, I had to assist individuals (learners), to focus on assets for learning support and not on barriers to learning. As a moderator and a facilitator during the focus group, I had to remind the learners within the first five minutes into the discussion of the capacity-focus of the study. As stated before, the asset-based approach does not subscribe to a notion of negating the reality of needs and limited resources (Ammerman & Parks, 1998:35; Ebersöhn & Mbetse, 2003:323; Troxel, 2005:594; Probst, 2006:13), but to rather acknowledge strengths and capacities. This was also acknowledged during the focus group discussion. One of the learners even stated, "… a person is so used to being negative and seeing what you don't have, that you forget the good things."

Eloff (2003b:19; 2006b:32) asserts that the asset-based researcher should be, "prepared to be surprised" – which I was. After jogging the learners' memory of the focus of the assignment, the learners' comfortable change of mindset and capacity-orientated view of their contexts overwhelmed me. The learners even raised awareness if, and when another learner stepped back into the needs-based approach mindset.

In a study preparing public health course students for more effective community intervention by utilising asset assessment, Ammerman and Parks (1998:32) experienced that the group tended to rank deficits information as more important, relative to assets. It took the students a year to embrace the asset-based model. Similar results were also experienced in case

study research conducted by Loots (2005:66). The author found that adult participants were inclined to refer to deficits and needs in their community. My experience of the focus group interaction differed from these authors. It took the learners not more than 10 minutes to adapt to a capacity-orientated mindset.

The data was constructed, identified and interpreted by the primary school learners who participated in the focus group discussion. The following section briefly explains the data analysis and interpretation process employed in this study.

## 4.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA INTERPRETATION

The findings of the secondary research questions are structured into tables that reflect particular constructs of the data analysis and interpretation process. In the previous chapter, allusion was made to the relevant data analysis steps for phenomenological studies, as advised by Creswell (1998:55, 147, 150). These referred to data analysis steps that were utilised as guidelines during the data analysis of this study. After the horizonalisation and the construction of clusters of meanings, within Eloff's (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39) proposed asset-mapping framework (Figure 3), textural themes (what) and structural themes (how) that were elicited from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, were constructed.

### 4.3.1 THE TEXTURAL AND STRUCTURAL THEMES OF THIS STUDY

Allusion has been made to professionals having the choice to abide by an approach of their choice. Within an approach there are various theories grounded in the approach, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970:42), which is embedded and aligns with the needs-based approach. Maslow's stance is that the fulfilment (gratification) of needs is the primary source of motivation in behaviour (Rudolph & Thompson, 2000:9, Donald *et al*. 2002:122). Maslow (1970:42) identified five basic needs namely:

**TABLE 1:** MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS (MASLOW 1970:42)

| | |
|---|---|
| Need for self-actualisation | To realise one's potential<br>To know and to understand |
| Esteem needs | For respect, recognition, prestige, status, self-esteem |
| Social needs | For love, acceptance, care<br>For interpersonal communication and social life<br>For belongingness |
| Safety needs | For safety, environmental security, security, peace of mind, protection |
| Physical needs | For oxygen, water, food, rest and shelter |

Rudolph and Thompson (2000:11) state that the satisfaction of the first four levels of needs contributes to the fifth need of self-actualisation to be met. It may be questioned as to how Maslow's theory on needs bares significance to this capacity-orientated study.

While reading through the natural units of significant statements (verbatim responses of the identified and interpreted assets), my constructs on Maslow's theory kept on surfacing. The learners' interpretation of assets strikingly related to Maslow's five main categories of needs. I decided to follow the flow of the learners' interpretation and acknowledge the fact that my own theoretical training probably contributed to this development in the study. I embraced this awareness during the analysis and interpretation of the data. I decided to use Maslow's existing framework, and thus, his five main categories and its explanations (with exclusion of security, love, prestige and status) as the textural (what) and the structural (how) themes of this study. I adapted the "need" construct, by substituting it with "assets", as the primary focus of this study was to explore assets for learning support.

Maslow's existing framework, and thus, his five main categories and its explanations were identified, accessed and mobilised as the textural (what) and the structural (how) themes of this study. I added survival, support, fun and pride as textural themes. The relation between the constructed themes and the data/ findings are presented in section 4.4.1. The subsequent, relevant themes (colour-coded) were constructed in this study:

**TABLE 2:** THE TEXTURAL AND STRUCTURAL THEMES OF THIS STUDY

| TEXTURAL THEMES (WHAT) | STRUCTURAL THEMES (HOW) |
|---|---|
| Realising one's potential and to know and to understand | Assets for self-actualisation |
| Respect, recognition, self-esteem, pride | Esteem assets |
| Support, acceptance, care, interpersonal communication, belongingness/ social life and fun | Social assets |
| Feeling safe, environmental security, peace of mind and protection | Safety assets |
| Survival, oxygen, water, food, rest and shelter | Physical assets |

The natural units of significant statements, from which the latter themes were constructed, were structured within the asset-mapping framework (**Figure 3**), as proposed by Eloff (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39). The subsequent table encapsulates the headings of the content that are discussed in the remainder of Chapter 4. The table also includes the relevant contexts and systems in which assets for learning support were identified and interpreted, as well as the textural and structural themes that were constructed from the identified and interpreted assets for learning support, as discussed within the asset-mapping framework of Eloff (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39).

**TABLE 3:** FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

| RESEARCH FINDINGS AND THE LITERATURE CONTROL | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Research findings and the literature control in relation to the secondary research questions** | | | |
| **Learners identification and interpretation of assets for learning support** | | | |
| ***Contexts and systems*** | ***Refined categories*** | ***Structural themes*** | ***Textural themes*** |
| Individual assets | Skills and knowledge information | **Social assets** | Support, interpersonal communication |
| | Personal characteristics – Emotive characteristics | Esteem assets | Self-esteem |
| | Interests, values and experience | Assets for self-actualisation<br>Esteem assets<br>Safety assets | Realising one's potential<br>Self-esteem<br>Peace of mind |
| School assets | Leadership and management | Esteem assets<br>Social assets | Recognition, pride, respect, self-esteem<br>Support |
| | Human resources | Assets for self-actualisation<br>Esteem assets<br>Social assets<br>Safety assets<br>Physical | To know and to understand<br>Self-esteem, recognition<br>Support, acceptance, care, interpersonal communication<br>Feeling safe, protection<br>Survival |
| | Assets in the identity and the strategies of the school | Esteem assets<br>Social assets<br>Safety assets<br>Physical assets | Self-esteem, pride<br>Support, care, belongingness/ social life and fun<br>Protection<br>Food |
| | Technical assets | Assets for self-actualisation<br>Esteem assets<br>Social assets<br>Safety assets<br>Physical assets | Realising one's potential<br>Recognition, self-esteem, pride<br>Support, acceptance, care, interpersonal communication, belongingness/ social life and fun<br>Feeling safe, environmental security, peace of mind and protection<br>Survival, oxygen, water, food |
| The classroom | | Esteem assets<br>Social assets<br>Safety assets | Pride<br>Interpersonal communication<br>Peace of mind, environmental security |
| The family | | Esteem assets<br>Social assets<br>Safety assets<br>Physical assets | Recognition, self-esteem<br>Support, care, interpersonal communication<br>Feeling safe, peace of mind and protection<br>Food, rest and shelter |
| The peer group | | Social assets<br>Safety assets<br>Physical assets | Belonging/ Social life, fun, interpersonal communication, support<br>Peace of mind<br>Food |
| Assets of local institutions | | Safety assets<br>Social assets | Feeling safe, protection, peace of mind<br>Interpersonal communication |
| **An encapsulation of the research findings and the literature control in relation to the research questions** | | | |
| **The essence of the phenomenon "assets for learning support" in primary school learners attending an urban primary school** | | | |

## 4.4 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND THE LITERATURE CONTROL

### 4.4.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND THE LITERATURE CONTROL IN RELATION TO THE SECONDARY QUESTIONS

Although the learners originally found the task of focusing on assets challenging, they soon shifted towards a stance where they could engage in conversation about assets that support their learning. This study therefore supported the stance that individuals and social contexts have deficiencies and needs, as well as capacities and strengths (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993:13; McKnight, 1997:126; Eloff, 2001:74; Lubbe, 2004:323). The learners identified assets on individual, institutional and local organisational levels. Per se, the learners did not identify nor interpret any assets on the citizen's associations level or the wider social system as proposed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993:7) as well as Eloff (2006a:26; 2006b:38-39).

Henceforth, I present the natural units of significant statements (findings) of the identified (A) and interpreted assets (B) that support primary school learners' learning, in relation to the identified themes (textural and structural), as re-interpreted from Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This is displayed in table format. The identified assets are underlined and all interpretations are colour-coded to highlight the subsequent relations. The natural units of significant statements, answers both the secondary research questions as outlined in Chapter 1.

The findings are discussed under each section, after which it is simultaneously related to existing literature. Relevance, explanations, correlation and discrepancies between my research findings and relevant findings in the literature are brought forth. However, no other phenomenological studies on the phenomenon of assets for learning support, as experienced by learners, were found. The literature control of this study was, for this reason, limited, due to the uniqueness of this under-explored topic. In some instances therefore, I also connected my findings to "related" studies.

#### 4.4.1.1 Learners identification and interpretation of assets for learning support

**(a) Individual assets**

From an asset-based perspective, it is believed that all individuals have an abundant array of capacities and strengths or otherwise conceptualised, as "assets" (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993:13; McKnight, 1997:126; Eloff, 2001:74; Lubbe, 2004:323; Eloff, 2006b:33). During this study, the following individual assets for learning support were identified and interpreted by the learners:

**TABLE 4:** PARTICIPANTS' IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF INDIVIDUAL ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

| **INDIVIDUAL ASSETS** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Natural units of significant statements (identified assets) – A** | **Natural units of significant statements (interpretation of assets) – B** | **Structural and textural themes** |
| ***Skills and knowledge information*** | | |
| "Ask questions. When you ask if you don't understand work somebody can explain it to you." [Flipchart 1 line A9-10] | "Asking questions, talking makes us learn better." [Flipchart 1 line B9] | **Social**<br>Support<br>Interpersonal communication |
| ***Personal characteristics*** | | |
| **Emotive characteristics**<br>"I am proud of myself. When you proud, you feel good and you learn better and you want to do better in school and everywhere." "It is like, motivation." [Flipchart 7 line A23-25]<br>"When you feel proud. I feel proud and it makes me feel good about me and then I learn better." [Flipchart 7 line A26-27]<br>"I feel proud too." [Flipchart 7 line A28] | "Feeling proud and good about you makes it easier to learn." [Flipchart 7 line B23-24]<br>"To learn and know that you can do good helps me to learn." [Flipchart 7 line B26-27] | **Esteem**<br>Self esteem<br>. |
| ***Interests, values and experience*** | | |
| **Interests and values**<br>"To dream, I want to have a good work someday. I want to get out of the city. I always think of getting out of the city. Then I learn harder and feel good about myself, because I know I can." [Flipchart 7 line A29-32] | "To dream a future." [Flipchart 7 line B29]<br>"To feel good about me." [Flipchart 7 line B30]<br>"To know that I can have a better life." [Flipchart 7 line B31] | **Self-actualisation**<br>Realising ones potential<br>**Esteem**<br>Self esteem |
| **Experience**<br>"To do good in school we must be rested. When I am rested I can learn and not worry." [Flipchart 6 line A1-2] | "When you don't worry and you are rested you learn better." [Flipchart 6 line B1-2] | **Safety**<br>Peace of mind |

The learners identified and acknowledged limited individual assets. The depth, but also the high order thinking, analysis and interpretation of the experienced phenomenon impressed me. I would have thought that reference would mostly be made to individual assets such as values, commitment to schoolwork and recognition of their own cognitive abilities. However, the learners identified asking questions, being proud of themselves, having future perspectives and dreams, and being rested as assets for learning support.

It became apparent in the interpretation that the identified assets mobilise other assets for learning support. Asking questions can mobilise social assets (*interpersonal communication*: "talking", *support*; "someone can explain it to you"), being proud of oneself can mobilise esteem assets (*self esteem*; "feel good", "feel good about me", "good", "know what you can do", "feel good about myself"), to have a future perspective and dreams can mobilise self-actualisation assets (*realising one's potential*; "learn harder … because I know I can", "to know I can have a better life") and being rested can mobilise safety assets (*peace of mind*; "not worry", "don't worry"). It seems as if the identified, as well as interpreted assets, all

contribute to learning support. No assets were identified on the level of background information, as identified by Eloff (2006b:35).

As stated before, the Search Institute conducted a survey study with children, exploring and identifying strengths that help children from Grades 6-12 to grow up as healthy, caring and productive individuals (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:1). A number of the constructed textural themes correspond to the four main categories of internal developmental assets, as identified by the Search Institute in America (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:15; Probst, 2006:6). The comparative relationships can be viewed in the subsequent manner:

**TABLE 5:** THE COMPARATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FINDINGS OF THE SEARCH INSTITUTE (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:15; Probst, 2006:6) *VERSUS* SOME OF THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

| CATEGORIES AS IDENTIFIED BY THE SEARCH INSTITUTE | STRUCTURAL AND TEXTURAL THEMES OF THIS STUDY |
|---|---|
| *Positive Identity*<br>Self-esteem | *Esteem*<br>Pride, Self-esteem |
| *Social Competencies*<br>Interpersonal skills | *Social*<br>Interpersonal communication |
| *Commitment to learning*<br>Achievement expectation and motivation<br>*Positive identity*<br>Positive view of personal future | *Self-actualisation*<br>To know and understand. To realise one's own potential. |

During their study assets relating to positive values were also recognised by the children (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:15). In this study, even though assets were constructed under the heading "Interests and Values", the focus was of limited scope. Furthermore, in this study the learners acknowledged assets that were created, owing to their own personal experiences. Thus, in addition to the findings of the Search Institute, learners attending the urban primary school also regard previous experiences as individual assets for learning support.

### (b) School assets

The participants in this study identified the majority of assets for learning support within the school context. Assets for learning support were identified and interpreted on the category levels of leadership and management, human resources, assets in the identity and the strategies of the school, as well as technical assets within the school context. As a consequence of the quantity of identified and interpreted school assets, I prefer to discuss the refined categories separate from one another. The following assets were identified and interpreted within the school context:

**TABLE 6:** PARTICIPANTS' IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF SCHOOL ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT – LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

| SCHOOL ASSETS | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Natural units of significant statements (identified assets) – A** | **Natural units of significant statements (interpretation of assets) – B** | **Structural and textural themes** |
| ***Leadership and management*** | | |
| "The leaders at the school. If you work hard, you get recognised and you become a leader and then people look up at you. It is respect."[Flipchart 6 line A 26-28]<br><br>"Becoming a leader. You get rewarded and then you feel proud of yourself." [Flipchart 6 line A29-30]<br>"Being a leader. You feel special because they see that you are a good person and you can help other kids and the teachers and like the other girl said, when you feel good about yourself it is easier to learn and do homework." [Flipchart 7 line A1-6] | "Recognition." [Flipchart 6 line B26]<br>"When you feel good about yourself." [Flipchart 6 line B27]<br>"It is respect." [Flipchart 6 line B28]<br>"Pride." [Flipchart 6 line B29]<br><br>"Helping others makes me feel good about myself and then I learn better." [Flipchart 7 line B1-3] | **Esteem**<br>Recognition<br>Pride<br>Respect<br>Self-esteem<br>**Social**<br>Support |

From the findings of the study, by becoming a leader, social assets (*support*; "helping others", "helping other kids and the teachers") and esteem assets (*respect*; "respect", *pride*; "pride", r*ecognition*; "recognised", "recognition", "people look up to you", "rewarded", "…see that you are a good person"; as well as enhanced *self-esteem*; "when you feel good about yourself", "feel special", "feel good") are mobilised. It seems that the mobilisation of esteem assets mostly originates from social interaction, or social assets within the contexts, which leads to the mobilisation of other assets for learning support.

The work done by the Search Institute makes allusion to the empowering effect when children are given useful roles and when children provide service to others (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:22). As per the experience of the participants in this study, leadership roles in schools create the opportunity for learners to enhance esteem, due to the social relatedness of leadership. It seems as though it is more the reward and recognition of becoming a leader, that support learning, and not *per se* the service and role skills attached to the leadership position.

- **Human resources**

Donald *et al*. (2002:224), refer to social support networks, including people beyond the family whom learners might identify as positive role models (assets). In this study, educators form part of this category. The following assets for learning support were stated by the learners, with regards to human resources in the school context:

**TABLE 7:** PARTICIPANTS' IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF SCHOOL ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT – HUMAN RESOURCES

| HUMAN RESOURCES | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Natural units of significant statements (identified assets) – A** | **Natural units of significant statements (interpretation of assets) – B** | **Structural and textural themes** |
| "The principal. The principal is very friendly, so when you have a problem you can go and speak to him and he will protect you." " Yes, it is true ma'm." [Flipchart 1 line A27-29]<br>"The principal. When we play in competitions, the principal supports us and comes and look at us because he cares about us, even if we loose." [Flipchart 1 line A30-33]<br>"The principal ma'm. He makes you feel good about yourself." [Flipchart 2 line A1-2] | "Feeling safe." [Flipchart 1 line B27]<br>"Talk about your problems." [Flipchart 1 line B28]<br>"When it feels that people support and care for you." [Flipchart 1 line B30-31]<br>"When you feel good about you." [Flipchart 2 line B1] | **Safety**<br>Feeling safe<br>Protection<br>**Social**<br>Interpersonal communication<br>Care<br>Support<br>Acceptance<br>**Esteem**<br>Self esteem |
| "The teacher. Ma'm helps me with my work and she teaches me new things." [Flipchart 1 line A1-2]<br>"Ma'm. The friendly ones, because they care about us and you can ask them things." [Flipchart 1 line A3-4]<br>"My teacher. My teacher gives me sweets when I do good work." [Flipchart 1 line A5]<br>My teacha. It is nice when your 'teacha' likes you, because then you feel special and good about you." [Flipchart 1 line A6-7]<br>"My teachas too. My 'teacha' tells me I am very clever." [Flipchart 1 line A8] | "When people help you, and care for you and you can ask them things." [Flipchart 1 line B1-2]<br>"It is not the sweets that help me to learn, but when Ma'm, see that I do good work." [Flipchart 1 line B5-6]<br>"When you feel good and special, like when people like you." [Flipchart 1 line B7] | **Social**<br>Support<br>Care<br>Acceptance<br>Interpersonal communication<br>**Esteem**<br>Recognition<br>Self esteem |
| "The ladies in the office. They tell me where I must go and then I can go to the right class to learn things because you understand what they say." [Flipchart 2 line A11-13]<br>"The office aunties. They always help you if you are feeling sick, so that I can go back to class and learn. They give you medicine to feel better." [Flipchart 2 line A14-16]<br>"The office ladies are very friendly. I like to go there if I am sick and then they can give you plasters or pills." [Flipchart 2 line A17-18] | "Talking to the ladies." [Flipchart 2 line B11]<br>"Understanding what they say." [Flipchart 2 line B12]<br>"Help." [Flipchart 2 line B14]<br>"Medication makes you feel better." [Flipchart 2 line B17-18] | **Social**<br>Interpersonal communication<br>Support<br>**Self-actualisation**<br>To know and understand<br>**Physical**<br>Survival |

The learners identified the principal (leadership style), educators and administrative staff as assets for learning support. From the learners interpretation, the social interaction (social assets) between the learners and the assets on the human resources level mobilise other assets. Hence, the learners also experienced physical assets (*survival*; "medicine to feel better", "medication makes you feel better", "plasters or pills"), safety assets (*feeling safe*; "feeling safe", *protection*; will protect you"), social assets (*interpersonal communication*; "speak to him", "talk about your problems", "talking to the ladies", "ask them things", "understanding what they say", *care*; "… he cares about us, even if we loose", "care for you", "they care about us", "… care", *support*; "principal supports us", "helps me", "helps you", "help", "friendly", *acceptance*; "likes you", "people like you", "support …"), esteem assets (*recognition*, "gives me sweets when I do good work", "tell me I am very clever", "see that I

do good work", *self esteem*; "feel good about yourself", "feel good about you", "feel good and special" and self-actualisation assets (*to know and understand*; "… you understand") as assets for learning support. It seems that the mobilisation of assets leads to the mobilisation of other textural assets on the same or on other structural levels of assets.

From the above, this studies findings support De Wet's (2004:84) statement that educators are also responsible for creating an atmosphere that supports learning. The author refers to the role of educators, to educate parents about children's learning. Learners, however, experience that an atmosphere is created that supports learning, through the social interaction, which mobilises other physiological and psychological assets, such as feeling accepted. Hence, learners in this study experience educators as assets for learning support in a different manner than was found by De Wet (2004:84).

- **Assets in the identity and the strategies of the school**

Potential assets within this construct could include whether the school is regarded as a "good school", the policy of the school, a mission statement, goal setting, the curriculum, and so forth (Eloff, 2006b:37). The following assets for learning support, that relate to the identity and strategies of the school, were identified and interpreted:

**TABLE 8:** PARTICIPANTS' IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF SCHOOL ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT – THE IDENTITY AND THE STRATEGIES OF THE SCHOOL

| ASSETS IN THE IDENTITY AND THE STRATEGIES OF THE SCHOOL | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Natural units of significant statements (identified assets) – A** | **Natural units of significant statements (interpretation of assets) – B** | **Structural and textural themes** |
| "It is a good school in a bad area. The teachers help you and care about us." [Flipchart 3 line A26-27] | "When teachers help you and care for you." [Flipchart 3 line B26] | **Social**<br>Support<br>Care |
| "The school. It is nicer at my school. I want to stay here the whole day and not go home, because there is a lot of fun things, the garden, the after school, friends, teachers, sport." [Flipchart 3 line A28-30] | "Having fun." [Flipchart 3 line B28] | Fun<br>Belonging/Social life |
| "Our school. I am so very proud of my school. I am part of the school and that make me feel proud of myself." [Flipchart 3 line A31-32] | "Being proud makes me also feel good about me because we belong to a pretty school." [Flipchart 3 line B31-33] | **Esteem**<br>Pride<br>Self-esteem |
| "My school. I am proud of my school because they care about me and they protect me from the bad people outside the school and if I don't have food, they give me." [Flipchart 3 line 36-38] | "The school protects me and gives me food, that helps me to learn." [Flipchart 3 line B36-37] | **Safety**<br>Protection<br>**Physical**<br>Food |

I found it interesting that the learners identified the positive identity of the school, based on various factors and not just on the overall picture of a primary school situated in the urban context. Identity and the strategies of the school assets that were interpreted were physical assets (*food*; "food"), safety assets (*protection*; "protect me"), social assets (*support*; "help you", *care*; "care about us", "care for you", "they care about me…," *fun*; "having fun", "… there is a lot of fun things, the garden, the after school, friends, teachers, sport",

*belonging/social life*; "I am part of the school") and esteem assets (*pride*; "very proud of my school", "proud of myself", *self-esteem*; "being proud makes me feel good about me …").

It seems that social assets (social interaction) is the root from which most of the other assets for learning support in the school are mobilised. For example, the identified safety, physical and the esteem assets were all mobilised due to the supportive nature of the school, resulting in social interaction (social assets) between learners and the staff of the urban primary school.

Constructed from the findings of this study, I am in agreement with Eloff's (2006b:37) stance, in that the favourable identity of a school can be an asset for learning support. It seems as if the learners experience the quality of interaction with the staff as representative of the identity of the school. Thus, the favourable identity of a school, as an asset for learning support greatly depends on the learners' experience of the social interaction between the learners and the staff of the urban school.

- **Technical assets**

It is within this category level of the school context that the learners identified and interpreted most of the assets for learning support. The following assets were identified and interpreted:

**TABLE 9:** PARTICIPANTS' IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF SCHOOL ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT – TECHNICAL ASSETS

| TECHNICAL ASSET | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Natural units of significant statements (identified assets) – A** | **Natural units of significant statements (interpretation of assets) – B** | **Structural and textural themes** |
| "The after school centre were we stay in the afternoon. I go to the after school. They help me with my homework and they give me food." [Flipchart 3 line A11-12] | "When people help you, it helps me to learn." [Flipchart 3 line B11-12] | **Social**<br>Support<br>Belonging/ Social life<br>Fun<br>Care |
| "Also the after school. I do my homework at the after school centre, it helps me to do good in school." [Flipchart 3 line A13-14] | "Food for your body and brain." [Flipchart 3 line12] | **Physical**<br>Food |
| "The after school. You also make 'chommas' (friends) there and then it is nice to come to school cause you in group and you can have fun." [Flipchart 3 line A9-10] | "Friends and fun and when it feels like the people care for me." [Flipchart 3 line B9-10] | **Safety**<br>Feeling safe |
| "The place we go to after school. They take care of us." [Flipchart 3 line A15] | | |
| "Also that place. We are safe if you are at the after school, because the ladies take care of us." [Flipchart 3 line 16-17] | "When I feel safe." [Flipchart 3 line B16] | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "The sickroom. When I am sick, I can come to school and be in the sickroom. I am scared to stay in the flat just by me. So now, I don't worry if I am sick." [Flipchart 2 line A21-23]<br>"…Yes Ma'm, when you are scared, you cannot learn anything cause you think of the trouble. I am safe in the sickroom." [Flipchart 2 line 24-26] | "When I don't worry." [Flipchart 2 line B21]<br>"When you feel safe." [Flipchart 2 line B24] | **Safety**<br>Peace of mind<br>Feeling safe |
| "School uniform. Eesh Ma'm, if feel so very proud of my school uniform, when I am wearing it, I feel so very proud of me, and then I learn better." [Flipchart 7 line A9-11]<br>"Our school clothes. The school clothes keep me warm in winter and in the summer it is right." [Flipchart 7 line A12-13]<br>"Our school clothes. It makes me feel that I am part of the school and then I feel good." [Flipchart 7 line A14-15]<br>"Eesh, also the uniform. I feel so very clever and good about me when I where my uniform." [Flipchart 7 line A19-20]<br>"Uniforms. I feel proud wearing my uniform." [Flipchart 7 line A18] | "Pride." [Flipchart 7 line B9]<br>"When my body is happy." [Flipchart 7 line B12]<br>"If I feel I am part of something it makes me feel good about me and then I learn better." [Flipchart 7 line B14-16] | **Esteem**<br>Pride<br>Self-esteem<br>**Physical**<br>Survival<br>**Social**<br>Belonging/ Social life |
| "The fence and the security things at the school." [Flipchart 3 line A18]<br>"Me too Ma'm. Ma'm, there is a lot of bad people here. There are gangs that kill people, but they can't come into the school. I feel safe because the security protects us." [Flipchart 3 line A19-21]<br>"The security things at the school. I don't worry that something bad is going to happen." [Flipchart 3 line A22-23]<br>"All the security gates and things at the school. It also makes me feel that the teachers care about us." [Flipchart 3 line A24-25] | "Safe." [Flipchart 3 line B18]<br>"Protected." [Flipchart 3 line B19]<br>"Don't worry about things then I do good in school." [Flipchart 3 line B22-23]<br>"Teachers care about us." [Flipchart 3 line B24] | **Safety**<br>Environmental security<br>Protection<br>Peace of mind<br>**Social**<br>Care |
| "The tuck shop. They sell the food for very cheap, cheaper than even in the shops. It makes me feel that they care." [Flipchart 6 line A17-19]<br>"If we are hungry we can buy food and sweets at the tuck shop. We can buy food there if we forgot our food at home. When my tummy is full I can learn better." [Flipchart 6 line A20-23] | "The people at the tuck shop care about us." [Flipchart 6 line B17-18]<br>"When I am not hungry our bodies are happy." [Flipchart 6 line 20-21] | **Social**<br>Care<br>**Physical**<br>Food |
| "The pretty plants in the gardens. Plants give oxygen. When there is plants, there is oxygen and oxygen is important for learning."[Flipchart 4 line A 27-29]<br>"Plants. Oxygen helps us to learn better." [Flipchart 4 line A30]<br>"Also the 'planties' and 'grassies'. It feels proud to come to a school where there is grass and plants." [Flipchart 5 line A1-2]<br>"Grass and plants. It makes us feel proud that we are part of this school." [Flipchart 5 line A3-4] | "Oxygen is important for learning."[Flipchart 4 line B27]<br>"Your body needs it." [Flipchart 4 line B30]<br>"Feeling proud." [Flipchart 5 line B1] | **Physical**<br>Oxygen<br>Survival<br>**Esteem**<br>Pride |
| "The playground where we play. Ma'm, then we play and talk to friends and forget about the school work." [Flipchart 4 line A1-2]<br>The playground. We play on the playground and then we make friends. We can then help each other in the class, because we are now friends." [Flipchart 4 line A3-5] | "Having fun and talk with friends sometimes, you cannot always learn-learn-learn." [Flipchart 4 line B1-2]<br>"Friends help each other." [Flipchart 4 line B3] | **Social**<br>Fun<br>Interpersonal communication<br>Social life<br>Support |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "The different sports. I am very good with sports. It makes me feel proud and good about myself and then I also learn better and I want to do better." [Flipchart 4 line A6-8] | "Feeling proud and good about yourself. To know what is your talents, then you also feel proud of yourself." [Flipchart 4 line B6-8] | **Self-actualisation**<br>Realising ones potential<br>**Esteem**<br>Pride<br>Self-esteem |
| "I am in the garden club and I help to make the garden pretty. I learn new things and Ma'm helps me. She always tells me that I am doing a good job." [Flipchart 4 line A9-11]<br><br>"Gardening club. I feel proud of myself and then I have energy to learn better." [Flipchart 4 line A12-13]<br>"Also the garden club. I am in the garden club and we make the garden. It makes me feel good about myself. When I feel good, I learn better." [Flipchart 4 line A14-16] | "If people help you." [Flipchart 4 line B9]<br>"If people see that you are doing good things and they tell you." [Flipchart 4 line B10-11]<br>"Feeling proud of yourself." [Flipchart 4 line B12] | **Social**<br>Support<br>Interpersonal communication<br>**Esteem**<br>Recognition<br>Pride<br>Self-esteem |
| "The toilets. Ma'm, if I must wee I cannot learn. At our school I can go anytime I must go." [Flipchart 8 line A1-3]<br>"The toilet too, Ma'm. If there are no toilets, where must we then go? I will never pee. I don't have to worry about it at my school." [Flipchart 8 line A4-6]<br>"The toilets. All the grades have their own toilet. I like that, because I don't have to worry that older kids will bully me there, it is safe." [Flipchart 8 line A7-9] | "Taking care of your body." [Flipchart 8 line B1]<br><br>"That you don't have to worry, you can just go to the toilets." [Flipchart 8 line B4-5] | **Physical**<br>Survival<br>**Safety**<br>Peace of mind<br>Feeling safe |
| "Water. Your body needs water to function. We have running water at our school so we can drink water at any time." [Flipchart 8 line A12-14]<br><br>"You must feed your body with water. When I am thirsty I drink water, otherwise I cannot learn. But I don't have to worry about that." [Flipchart 8 line A15-18]<br>"You also need water for the toilets. If you can't flash the toilet, it is very 'grouse', then you don't want to go to the toilet, and then you can't learn because you can't concentrate." [Flipchart 8 line A19-23] | "Your body needs water then you can concentrate, otherwise you will be worrying all the time".[Flipchart 8 line B12-14]<br>"Water is important for good health." [Flipchart 8 line B15]<br><br>"If the toilets can not flash we can get sick of germs." [Flipchart 8 line B19-20] | **Physical**<br>Survival<br>Water<br>**Safety**<br>Peace of mind<br>Environmental security |

The learners identified the after school centre, the sickroom, school uniforms, security measures taken at the school, the tuck shop, the gardens at the school, the playground, different sports, the gardening club, ablution facilities and water as experienced assets for learning support. From the learners' interpretations, the identified assets mobilise other assets for learning support on the following levels:

Physical assets (*food*; "give me food", "food for your body and brain", "food and sweets", *oxygen*; "oxygen", *survival*; "the school clothes keep me warm in the winter and in the summer it is right", "your body needs it [oxygen]", "if I must wee I cannot learn", "taking care of your body", "body needs water", "can get sick of germs", *water*; "When I am thirsty I drink water", "good health");

Safety assets (*feeling safe*; “we are safe”, “feel safe”, “I am safe in the sickroom”, “safe”, *peace of mind*; “don’t worry”, “don’t have to worry”, “I don’t have to worry that older kids will bully me there”, “other wise you will be worrying all the time”, “if I must wee I cannot learn. At our school I can go anytime I must go”, *protection*; “protected”, *environmental security*; “I feel safe because the security protects us”, “If you can’t flash the toilet, it is very ‘grouse’, then you don’t want to go to the toilet, and then you can’t learn because you can’t concentrate”);

Social assets (*support*; “help me with homework, “people help you”, “it helps me to do good in school”, “help each other”, “friends help each other”, “Ma’m helps me”, *fun*; “have fun”, “fun”, “play”, *care*; “take care of us”, “care for me”, “teachers care about us”, “it make me feel that they care”, *belonging/social life*; “you also make ‘chommas’ [friends] … then it is nice to come to school cause you in a group”, “friends”, “part of the school”, “part of something”, “make friends”, *interpersonal communication*; “talk”, “talk with friends”, “tell you”);

Esteem assets (*pride*; “feel so very proud of my school uniform”, “I feel so very proud of me”, “pride”, “I feel proud wearing my uniform”, “feels proud”, “feel proud and good about myself”, “good about yourself”, *self-esteem*; “I feel good”, “I feel so very clever and good about me”, “It makes me feel good about me”, “feel good about myself”, “feel good”, *recognition*; “tell me that I am doing a good job”, “see that you are doing good things and they tell you”; and self-actualisation assets (*realising ones potential*; “I am very good with sports”, “know what is your talents”);

Evidently, learners experience that school assets provide a unique combination of assets. Eloff (2006b:36) refers to buildings, surrounding environments, sport facilities, learning materials, furniture and so on as assets within this context. Keeping the above findings of this study in mind, I found that the assets that Eloff (2006b:36) identified, could in the future possibly be viewed as categories in which school assets can be identified. The learners identified the following assets, which can be structured under these proposed categorical assets: buildings (sickroom, bathrooms, after school centre, tuck shop), surrounding environments (after school centre, fences and security, the gardens and plants, playground, school uniform) and sport facilities (a variety of sports, gardening club). The learners also made reference to supportive learning environments within the classroom. Assets for learning support that can be structured under the categories of furniture and learning materials are discussed under (c), e.g. classroom assets.

The participants in this study identified most of the assets for learning support within the school context. This could relate to the amount of time that learners spend within this context. Even though the learners didn’t identify any structural or procedural assets in this context, from the findings of this study and concurrent with Dawber *et al*. (1998:12-13), the imperative role of schools in providing assets for learning support is emphasised.

### (c) The classroom

Just as the school, the classroom was identified as a social context that holds assets for learning support. The following assets were identified and interpreted:

**TABLE 10:** PARTICIPANTS' IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF CLASSROOM ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

| THE CLASSROOM | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Natural units of significant statements (identified assets) – A** | **Natural units of significant statements (interpretation of assets) – B** | **Structural and textural themes** |
| "The ABC paper on the wall and the other posters ... and the timetables. Eesh, I don't know my 7 timetable, then I look on the wall when we do sums, so I don't worry too much." [Flipchart 1 line A20-23]<br>"The pictures and the posters on the wall. When the class looks pretty then you feel proud." [Flipchart 1 line A24-25] | "If I don't worry I learn better." [Flipchart 1 line B20]<br>"Feeling proud of the class." [Flipchart 1 line B24] | **Safety**<br>Peace of mind<br>**Esteem**<br>Pride |
| "The tables and the chairs, the black board. The tables and chairs make it easier to work. Imagine we sit on the floor all day to work – it wouldn't be nice." [Flipchart 1 line A17-19] | "I don't have to worry about that." [Flipchart 1 line B17-18] | **Safety**<br>Environmental safety<br>Peace of mind |
| "Chairs, tables, books and all the other things in class." [Flipchart 1 line A11]<br>"Yes, like when Ma'm writes on the board and all the different text books and books" and the projectors the teachers use. "I feel safe in my school because I know that I can learn because there is chairs and tables and books and all that other things in the classes." [Flipchart 1 line A12-16] | "No worries, everything we need is at the school." [Flipchart 1 line B11-12] | **Safety**<br>Environmental safety<br>Peace of mind |
| "They tell us important things over the intercom. They tell us where we must go if our teachers are sick so you don't worry." [Flipchart 2 line A5-7]<br>"The intercom. They tell us the things we must know." [Flipchart 2 line A8] | "Talking to each other in the school, then you don't have to worry that you don't know where to go." [Flipchart 2 line B5-7] | **Social**<br>Interpersonal communication<br>**Safety**<br>Peace of mind |

From the above findings, the ABC papers and posters, timetables, pictures and posters, tables and chairs, books, chalkboard, projectors and the intercom mobilise *peace of mind* ("don't worry much", "don't worry", "no worries", "don't have to worry") and *environmental security* ("…easier to work", "don't have to worry", "safe") as safety assets for learning support. The safety assets further mobilise *pride* ("you feel proud", "proud") as an esteem asset. Social assets for learning support are also mobilised through/ via the intercom, which in turn mobilises *interpersonal communication* ("tell us important things", "tell us", "talking to each other in the school"). Evidently, assets dynamically and interrelatedly mobilise other assets, not just within the textural themes, but also within other structural themes.

As stated before, I proposed that the technical assets which Eloff (2006b:36) refers to, be utilised as categorical constructs. Assets for learning support that were identified and can be structured under the category of furniture in the classroom, are tables and chairs, projectors, chalkboards and the intercom. Learning materials that were identified in this study, are the

ABC paper and posters, timetables, pictures and posters as well as books. Eloff (2006b:37) acknowledges assets such as blackboards, books and teaching methods. Evidently, the learners identified similar assets, but did not make reference to teaching methods as an asset. They focused mostly on concrete assets for learning support within the classroom.

Donald *et al*. (2002:144) is of the opinion that a school environment, including the classroom context, should be explored in terms of consisting of physical and psychosocial assets. The research findings of this study supported this view – especially when keeping the role of educators and peer groups as assets for learning support in mind. Even though in this study, educators and peer groups are discussed under separate headings, they also do relate to the classroom context.

### (d) The family

The principal, educators and administrative staff as discussed under school assets – *human resources*, have been identified as assets for learning support. In the following sections, identified assets within the family and peer group structures are stated and discussed:

**TABLE 11:** PARTICIPANTS' IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FAMILY ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

| THE FAMILY | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Natural units of significant statements (identified assets) – A** | **Natural units of significant statements (interpretation of assets) – B** | **Structural and textural themes** |
| "Definitely when my mommy gives me food. When my tummy is full then I can learn." [Flipchart 5 line A5-6]<br>"The pap and meat my mom gives me has good nutrition that feeds our brain." [Flipchart 5 line A7-8] | "Food, your body needs it and your mom because she give you the food." [Flipchart 5 line B5-6] | **Physical**<br>Food<br>**Social**<br>Care |
| "The flat, because I can do homework there." [Flipchart 5 line A10] | "We learn better in certain places. Our parents buy and pay the bed and the flat and the room, so they also help us to learn better." [Flipchart 5 line B10-12] | **Physical**<br>Shelter<br>**Social**<br>Support |
| "The room. I am safe there and then I learn better." [Flipchart 5 line A13] | "When you feel safe. Our parents buy and pay the bed and the flat and the room, so they also help us to learn better." [Flipchart 5 line B13-15] | **Safety**<br>Feeling safe<br>**Social**<br>Support |
| "A bed. When I sleep on a bed I am rested." [Flipchart 5 line A17]<br>"I don't have a bed, I sleep on the floor. But I am also rested." [Flipchart 5 line A18-19]<br>"Me, I sleep on the couch. But I sleep good there. Also rested." [Flipchart 5 line A20-21]<br>"My bed. When I sleep good, I can learn." [Flipchart 5 line A22] | "You learn better when you are rested. Our parents buy and pay the bed and the flat and the room, so they also help us to learn better." [Flipchart 5 line B17-20] | **Physical**<br>Rest<br>**Social**<br>Support |
| "My mommy, because she support me and says I must work hard to get a good job when I am big. She believes in me and that makes me feel very good." [Flipchart 5 A25-28] | "Support and when your mommy talks to you and tell you she is proud of you, you feel good about yourself. Then you also learn better." [Flipchart 5 line B25-28] | **Social**<br>Support<br>Interpersonal communication<br>**Esteem**<br>Recognition<br>Self-esteem |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "My parents. They give me food, buy my clothes, protect me, help me with school. They are very proud of me." [Flipchart 5 line A30-32]<br>"All of that things help me to learn and do better." [Flipchart 5 line A33] | "When your parents are proud of you and help you." [Flipchart 5 line B30]<br>"Food for your brain." [Flipchart 5 line B31]<br>"When you feel that your parents protect you." [Flipchart 5 line B33] | **Physical**<br>Food<br>**Safety**<br>Protection<br>**Social**<br>Support<br>**Esteem**<br>Recognition |
| "My aunty. My mom she works, but my auntie do not work. My auntie helps me with my homework, but she doesn't always know what I must do." [Flipchart 6 line A5-7] | "Help from my aunty." [Flipchart 6 line B5] | **Social**<br>Support |
| "My sister helps me or my big cousins help me, because 'Goggo' can only help a little bit. She cannot read or write." [Flipchart 6 line A9-11]<br>When my big cousins help me, I don't worry that Ma'm is going to be cross that I didn't do my work." [Flipchart 6 line A12-14] | "Help from sisters and cousins." [Flipchart 6 line B9]<br>"No worries and stress." [Flipchart 6 line B10]<br>"Little bit of help with 'goggo'." [Flipchart 6 line B11] | **Social**<br>Support<br>**Safety**<br>Peace of mind |

Learners identified parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and cousins as assets for learning support, as well as a bed, the room and a flat. The identified assets mobilise other physical assets (*food*; "tummy is full", "your body needs it", "pap and meat", "feeds our brain", "food for your brain", *shelter*; "we learn better in certain places", "bed and the flat and the room", *rest*; "rested", "sleep good"), safety assets (*feeling safe*; "feel safe", *protection*; "clothes protect me", "protect you", and *peace of mind*; "I don't worry", "No worries and stress"), social assets (*care*; "mom because she give you food", *support*; "help us/ you", "helps me", "help a little bit", "help", "because se support me", *interpersonal communication*; "tell you", "says I must work hard") and esteem assets (*self-esteem*; "feel very good", "you feel good about yourself", and *recognition*; "they are very proud of me", "parents are proud of you", "tell you she is proud of you", "believes in me").

From the above findings, it again seems as if social interaction (social assets) between learners and family members leads to the mobilisation of more assets for learning support, which are constructed under the study's textural and structural themes. For example, parents are identified as assets for learning support. Parents' actions in providing food and shelter as assets for learning support mobilise physical and safety assets. A dynamic interrelatedness seems to be apparent between assets.

The learners further recognised the supportive roles of aunts, cousins, grandparents and siblings as family assets for learning support. Donald *et al*. (2002:224), refer to these individuals as social support networks. Kriek (2002:58) and De Wet (2004:83) likewise acknowledge siblings as assets to families, while Briedenhann (2003:73) as well as De Wet (2004:83) refers to the involvement of grandparents as assets.

Numerous studies, including this study, have found that families characterised by caring for one another and which are stable and supportive, are essential for children to rise above their circumstances (Donald *et al*., 1997:149; 2002:223). Reference is made, and supported in this study, to families encouraging competence such as school performance (Donald *et al*., 1997:149; 2002:223). The assets identified and interpreted by the learners co-support some of the subsequent findings as constructed by the Search Institute (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:14-15; Probst, 2006:6). However, as with the individual assets, the Search Institute didn't construct a category for physiological assets that support learners' learning, as was found in this study.

**TABLE 12:** THE COMPARATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FINDINGS OF THE SEARCH INSTITUTE (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:14-15; Probst, 2006:6) *versus* some of the findings of this study

| SOME CATEGORIES AS IDENTIFIED BY THE SEARCH INSTITUTE (ROEHLKEPARTAIN & LEFFERT, 2000:14-15; PROBST, 2006:6). | STRUCTURAL AND TEXTURAL THEMES OF THIS STUDY |
|---|---|
| **Support**<br>Family support and other adult relationships<br>Positive family communication | **Social**<br>Support<br>Interpersonal communication |
| **Empowerment**<br>Safety | **Safety**<br>Feeling safe<br>Protection<br>Peace of mind |
| **Positive identity**<br>Self-esteem | **Esteem**<br>Pride<br>Self-esteem |

### (e) The peer group

As stated before, Donald *et al*. (1997:149; 2002:224), make reference to social support networks as assets, which include peer groups. The following peer group assets were identified and interpreted in this study:

**TABLE 13:** PARTICIPANTS' IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF PEER GROUPS AS ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

| THE PEER GROUP | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Natural units of significant statements (identified assets) – A** | **Natural units of significant statements (interpretation of assets) – B** | **Structural and textural themes** |
| "My friends. Me and my friends, we are a group that play and talk together and we help each other with homework." [Flipchart 2 line A28-29]<br>"Yes, my buddies, my 'chom-choms'. In the class, if I don't understand what I must do or I forgot to listen what homework I must do, I ask my buddy to help me." [Flipchart 2 line A30-33]<br>"My friend. Sometimes I don't always understand the work the teacher is explaining. I ask my friend to help me and then I understand the work. Then I don't worry that I am going to fail." [Flipchart 3 line A1-4] | "Talking to friends and playing and having fun and helping each other helps us to learn better," [Flipchart 2 line B28-29]<br>"Then you don't worry that you are going to fail." [Flipchart 3 line B1-2] | **Social**<br>Belonging/Social life<br>Fun<br>Interpersonal communication<br>Support<br>**Safety**<br>Peace of mind<br>**Physical**<br>Food |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Friends. We help each other in the class or at the after school." [Flipchart 3 line A5]<br>"Friends too. I sometimes get the homework from a friend." [Flipchart 3 line A6]<br>"My friends. We don't always have food then my friend share his food with me so that I can learn." [Flipchart 3 line A7-8] | "When your friend gives you food then you can concentrate." [Flipchart 3 line B7-8] | |

From the above findings, again, a dynamic and interrelated, mobilising relationship seems to be apparent between various assets. Peer groups (friends or friendships) were identified as assets for learning support, which directly mobilise various social assets (*support*; "help each other", "helping each other", "… to help me", "share", *interpersonal communication*; "… and talk together", "talking", "I ask", *belonging/ social life*; "a group" and *fun*; "play … together", "playing and have fun") as well as safety assets (*peace of mind*; "don't worry") and physical assets (*food*; "food").

In this study, learners didn't make reference to peer support in classrooms, initiated by educators. It seems that learners became aware, identified, accessed, mobilised and sustained peer group assets, due to their own initiative. Eloff (2006b:38) is of the opinion that peer groups are the most under-utilised resource available for learning support. According to the learners, and based on their experience, peer groups do indeed support learners' learning. Du Toit (1996:132) states that, when learners teach one another, there is social support for learning, which makes children feel more confident to ask questions. In the study conducted by the Search Institute (Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:14) the children also highlighted the valuable role of positive peer interaction and influence. As found with this phenomenological study, De Wet (2004:83) likewise discovered that peers mobilise a sense of safety with one another.

### (f) Assets of local institutions

Eloff (2006b:38) makes reference to local institution assets such as businesses, parks, hospitals, clinics, community projects and libraries. In this study, the following local institution assets were identified:

**TABLE 14:** PARTICIPANTS' IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS AS ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT

| ASSETS OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Natural units of significant statements (identified assets) – A** | **Natural units of significant statements (interpretation of assets) – B** | **Structural and textural themes** |
| "The cops. Sometimes you see the cops around our school. It makes me feel safe knowing that they are there." [Flipchart 4 line A18-19]<br>"Also the police. The police protect us from bad people." [Flipchart 4 line A20] | "Feeling safe makes us learn better and we also feel that the police protect us." [Flipchart 4 line B18-19] | **Safety**<br>Feeling safe<br>Protection<br>Peace of mind |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "The police. I don't worry when I am at school that bad things are going to happen, because the police will protect us." [Flipchart 4 line A21-22]<br>"The police. The police also come to the school and talk to us about safety and what we can do." [Flipchart 4 line A23-24] | "The police give us information and then we feel safer, we don't worry that much." [Flipchart 4 line B23-24] | **Social**<br>Interpersonal communication |

The only asset learners in this study identified on this level were the police. The police are regarded as an asset for learning support that support learners by mobilising social assets (*interpersonal communication*; "talk to us about safety") and safety assets (*feeling safe*; "feel safe", "feel safer", *protection*; "protect us" and *peace of mind*; "don't worry"). The police therefore support the learners to overcome barriers to learning, related to the urban context.

### 4.4.2 AN ENCAPSULATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND THE LITERATURE CONTROL IN RELATION TO THE SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the various systems and contexts in which assets for learning support were identified and interpreted, evidently learners identified intrinsic and external contextual assets for learning support, wider than just the school context. Hence, according to the findings of this study, assets for learning support do not start, nor end, at the school gate. The findings of this study support Du Preez's (2004:45) statement, that learners are in fact part of a multitude of systems, and that learners do learn in their families, schools, classrooms, peer groups, communities, cultures and in various situations in which they find themselves.

The learners' interpretation of assets for learning support were also more comprehensive than suggested by Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan & Shaw (2000, in Swart 2004:239). According to these authors, learning support comprises of activities that support the system to respond to the diverse needs of all the learners. From the identified and interpreted assets within various context and systems, learners' experience of assets for learning support in this study is consistent with Mokwena (1997:68), in that assets refer to people ("parents", "siblings", "cousins", "goggo", "friends", "educators", "administrative staff", "the principal"), buildings ("the flat", "the room", "the class") and organisations ("the school"). The findings of the study evidently support the view of the DoE (1997:7), Bouwer (2005:48), as well as Phasha and Swart (2005:219), in that addressing barriers to learning as well as promoting and supporting effective learning, is the mutual responsibility of all role players.

Learners in this study acknowledged that assets are within individuals, families, schools, institutions and the community. The learners did not make reference to assets of associations and the wider social system. Learners identified assets for learning support, as internal or external to individuals within various contexts and systems. The research findings support Jane Healy's statement (in Fuller 1999:21) that "…the brain of a child who feels

secure, loved, and happy can direct all its attention toward learning and growth rather than focusing on worries and fears."

As stated in Chapter 1, the subsequent secondary research questions led to a pinnacle process, which informed to the primary critical question. The following section brings the findings of this study to a pinnacle point, as well as to the concluding step of the data analysis and interpretation. The final step in a phenomenological study is to construct an overall description of the essence of the experienced phenomenon (Creswell, 1998:55, 150), from the textural and structural findings. In this study I investigated the essence of assets for learning support, for a group of primary school learners and will thus describe the study's findings integrated.

### 4.4.3 THE ESSENCE OF THE PHENOMENON "ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT" AS EXPERIENCED BY LEARNERS ATTENDING AN URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

*"What is the essence of the phenomenon 'assets for learning support' as experienced by learners attending an urban primary school?"*

In this study it was found that even in the urban context, where one initially would think assets for learning support are limited, they do exist. In this study the learners identified assets for learning support in the various contexts and systems. During the learners' interpretation of the identified intrinsic assets (individual assets) and external contextual assets (assets in the system), other assets were also fore-fronted. In other words, it seemed as if the identified assets for learning support subsequently mobilised other assets, which contributed to learning support being mobilised as an asset.

From my prior learning experiences, I was familiar with the ripple effect that systems have on one another. However, I wasn't aware of literature that refers to the ripple effect that assets seem to have on one another. I found that Donald *et al*. (1997:65), Kretzmann and McKnight (1993:7) and subsequently, the extended framework for asset mapping by Eloff (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39) do emphasise the systematic influence of the various contexts and systems on one another. However, in the readings of the literature (Donald *et al*., 1997:65; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993:7; Eloff, 2006a:26; 2006b:33-39) the specific interrelated ripple effect of mobilised assets on one another, as a compounded effect, was not elaborated upon.

As stated, the identified assets for learning support interrelatedly mobilise other assets for learning support. These "secondary" assets were captured in the textural themes of this study. The textural themes or assets were structured into five structural themes, namely physical assets, safety assets, social assets, esteem assets and assets for self-actualisation. These themes were elicited from Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The following table

summarises the "secondary" mobilised assets (textural findings) within the different levels (structural findings), ranging from the most identified to the less identified assets for learning support within the different levels (as stated and related to the relevant identified and interpreted assets for learning support in Table 3):

**TABLE 15:** AN ENCAPSULATION OF "SECONDARY" MOBILISED ASSETS

| PHYSICAL | SAFETY | SOCIAL | ESTEEM | ASSETS FOR SELF-ACTUALISATION |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Food (6)<br>Survival (5)<br>Rest (1)<br>Oxygen (1)<br>Shelter (1)<br>Water (1) | Peace of mind (12)<br>Feeling safe (6)<br>Protection (5)<br>Environmental security (4) | Support (17)<br>Interpersonal communication (10)<br>Care (7)<br>Belonging / Social life (5)<br>Fun (4)<br>Acceptance (2) | Self-esteem (10)<br>Pride (7)<br>Recognition (5)<br>Respect (1) | To realise one's own potential (2)<br>To know and understand (1) |

From this study's phenomenological research design, it can be explained that the identified assets (*how)* interrelatedly mobilise (*what*) other assets (textural findings) on one of five levels (structural findings) within various systems and contexts, which contribute to mobilise learning support as an asset. Even though I make reference to "secondary" assets, on a conceptual level, they are of equal value as the first level of identified assets. In fact, it seems as if the "secondary" identified assets are actually the primary *experienced* asset, which leads to the mobilisation of learning support as an asset.

Due to the interrelatedness and systemic influence of assets on one another, assets should be viewed equally. Yet, to me it seems if human resources are the corner stone of all asset mobilisations. Most assets, such a support and interpersonal communication, exist due to human behaviour. Esteem assets can stem from human initiative in that learners feel proud to learn in a class where there are pictures and posters on the wall. Even though pride is mobilised as an asset, due to the decorated classroom, it is the educator who decorated the class that is in fact the origin of the asset mobilisation. This principal, as a human resource, relates to physical, safety, and other social and esteem assets. Limited assets for self-actualisation were, however, identified in the study. It may perhaps relate to the developmental level of the participants and their (for the moment) limited ability to report on it.

When thinking of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it could be seen that the learners and I myself took on an outside in approach. From the findings of this study, it seems that identified intrinsic and external contextual assets for learning support, within various systems and contexts, mobilise other physiological and psychological assets on one of five levels, which contributes to the mobilisation of learning support as an asset. The mobilised physiological or psychological assets on the various levels do meet certain needs (physical, safety, social,

esteem and self-actualisation needs) of the learners. This study consequently also provides an alternative way of utilising Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As emphasised before, the asset-based approach does not negate the reality of needs and limited resources (Ammerman & Parks, 1998:35; Ebersöhn & Mbetse, 2003:323; Troxel, 2005:594; Probst, 2006:13) but chooses to emphasise strengths and capacities. This study opted for this approach.

From an asset-based approach, the identification of problems and needs are an essential part of the process. The findings of this study support the view that, instead of being captured in the pitfall of overwhelming needs, rather explore existing assets that mobilise assets on various levels, which then do gratify the needs which Maslow identified. Thus, by adapting the needs-based view, we can expand prior knowledge and add to newly constructed alternative ways of conceptualisation in the field of learning support. It seems that the intent with learning support should be to identify intrinsic and external contextual assets for learning support, which mobilise physiological and psychological assets for learning support, on the levels as identified by Maslow (1970:42), in the context of the specific learners.

In Chapter 1, I questioned the role of learners in learning support and whether learners are solely dependent on the system for learning support. From the findings of this study, it seems as if learners do strongly rely on human resources as assets for learning support. As stated, the findings of this study thus support the view of Bouwer (2005:48), as well as Phasha and Swart (2005:219), in that addressing barriers to learning (by reducing them, circumventing, breaking through or even removing them), as well as promoting and supporting effective learning, is a mutual responsibility of all role-players.

The explorative approach in this study led to the accumulation of in-depth data about learning support and the mobilisation of assets for support learning. I believe that this alternative construction of Maslow's theory, as well as the interrelatedness of viewing assets could create a new and dynamic perspective as well as a deepened understanding of assets for learning support, as experienced by learners attending an urban primary school.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

From a phenomenological research design, I believed that by exploring the lived experiences of the learners, a subjective truth about the phenomenon "assets for learning support" could be discovered within the urban context. This chapter shed light on the research findings, from an interpretive/ constructivist paradigm. The findings were related to the research questions and to the purpose of the study.

I hypothesised in Chapter 1 that learning support could be more broadly conceptualised, for instance that a classroom infrastructure or even a friendly response from an educator can

support learning. The findings of this study supported the broader and more inclusive manner of viewing learning support, while also shifting the debate towards resources and capacities. Learners' experience of assets for learning support is not bounded to the classroom or the school context. Assets were identified within various systems and contexts. Human resources are, however, to my mind, the original asset of most intrinsic and external contextual asset mobilisation. It was found that identified intrinsic assets and external contextual assets for learning support mobilise other physiological and psychological assets on one of five different levels that contribute to learning support being mobilised as an asset. Learning support enriches education by overcoming barriers to learning through identifying, accessing and mobilising various assets that support learners' learning in overcoming barriers to learning.

**--- O ---**

# CHAPTER 5
# CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 explicates the encapsulations of the previous chapters. In this chapter, summarising conclusions addressing the research questions and the purpose of this study are also drawn. I regarded this study as an asset contributing to the field of research, but more specifically to the field of Educational Psychology. Hence, from the findings, future recommendations are generated to contribute to the enhancement of future research and practice in the field of education and educational psychology. The limitations of this study are also acknowledged.

## 5.2 REVISITING THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

In the first chapter of this mini-dissertation, the rationale of the academic assignment (2005) and the provenance of the research study were explicated and justified. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explicate the essence of learners' experience of the phenomenon 'assets for learning support' within the learners' environment, in order to expand the knowledge base on learning support for primary school children. This research was focused by the following primary critical question.

*"What is the essence of the phenomenon 'assets for learning support' as experienced by learners attending an urban primary school?"*

This study was further guided by the following secondary research questions:

- What are the identified assets for learning support as experienced by learners attending an urban school?
- What are learners' interpretations as to how the identified assets support their learning?

By firstly addressing the aforementioned secondary research questions, it led to a pinnacle process, which enhanced the inquiry process of the primary critical question.

In Chapter 1, a section that defines the key concepts that were utilised in this study, were also provided. The key concepts of this study were, "explore", "learners", "barriers to learning", "phenomenon" and "phenomenology", "essence of experience", "assets", "identification of assets", as well as "learning" and "learning support". As stated, the purpose

of this qualitative study was to explicate the essence of learners' experience of the phenomenon 'assets for learning support' within the learners' environment, in order to expand the knowledge base on learning support for primary school children. A brief description was provided that outlined the research methodology (interpretive / constructivist paradigm, qualitative methodology, phenomenological research design, selection of participants, place of research, focus group as data collection procedure, data analysis and interpretation, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations and the quality criteria of the study) that were utilised in this study. This chapter concluded with a broad framework that outlined Chapters 2 to 5.

Chapter 2 consisted of the literature study on and theoretical framework for assets for learning support, which related to the statement of intent, the research questions and the purpose of this study. The asset-based approach, including assets, the asset-based process, asset mapping within a systemic framework, as well as assets and barriers of the asset-based approach, were discussed as theoretical lens of this study. Relevant literature on learning, including learning from a constructivist paradigm, as well as barriers to learning and learning support from an asset-based perspective, were also explored, discussed and justified in relation to the focus of this study. Concluding from the literature study, I could also identify that the focus of my topic was indeed an under-explored topic. As stated before, due to the unique nature of this study, a limited base of existing knowledge in this specific field was found.

Chapter 3 systematically described the research design and the process I employed in this study. I justified my choices in order to address the primary and secondary research questions. The phenomenon as experienced by learners was explored from an interpretive / constructivist paradigmatic perspective. This chapter explained the qualitative methodology and the phenomenological research design I employed in this study. The selection of eight female participants in Grades 5-7, the first encounter with the selected participants, as well as the considerations and experienced challenges were stated. In this study, a focus group that took place in a classroom on the school premises was utilised as data collection procedure. The data collection procedure, challenges of the focus group and the place of research were described. The process of data analysis and interpretation was also discussed as part of the methodology of this study.

Furthermore, in Chapter 3, I outlined the various roles (scholar, researcher, interactive collaborator, moderator and facilitator) I embraced during this study. A discussion and justification on the ethical principals (voluntary participation, informed consent [verbal assent and signed proxy consent], safety in participation, as well as privacy [confidentiality and anonymity]) that I adhered to and the quality criteria that I employed within the framework of

this research study followed. Intertwined with this chapter, I referred to the challenges that I experienced, as well as how I addressed and overcame those challenges.

The systematic construction of the content of Chapters 1 to 3, led to the construction of Chapter 4. Chapter 4 consisted of the research results and findings, obtained from the research design and process explicated in Chapter 3. In this chapter, the research findings were stated. I reflected on the experience of the focus group and revisited the data analysis and interpretation process employed in this study. From the data analysis and interpretation, the following textural and structural themes, as re-interpreted from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970:42) were constructed and linked with the identified and interpreted assets for learning support, within the asset-mapping framework as proposed by Eloff (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39).

**TABLE 16:** THE TEXTURAL AND STRUCTURAL THEMES OF THIS STUDY

| TEXTURAL THEMES (WHAT) | STRUCTURAL THEMES (HOW) |
|---|---|
| Assets for self-actualisation | Realising one's potential and to know and to understand |
| Esteem assets | Respect, recognition, self-esteem, pride |
| **Social assets** | Support, acceptance, care, interpersonal communication, belongingness / social life and fun |
| Safety assets | Feeling safe, environmental security, peace of mind and protection |
| Physical assets | Survival, oxygen, water, food, rest and shelter |

In this study, the learners' verbatim responses were presented to support the findings. The natural units of significant statements answered both of the secondary research questions as outlined in Chapter 1. These research findings were then related to the literature, in relation to the secondary research questions. As stated before, the learners' identification and interpretation of assets for learning support were discussed under the following relevant headings from Eloff's (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39) asset-mapping framework, namely individual assets, school assets (human resources, assets in the identity and the strategies of the school and technical assets), the classroom, the family, peer group and assets of local institutions. An encapsulation of the research findings and the literature control in relation to the secondary research questions followed. However, the natural units of significant statements were further mobilised as data. Hence, in Chapter 4, the answering of the two secondary research questions led to the answering of the primary critical question, focusing on the essence of the experienced phenomenon.

Throughout Chapter 4, the research findings were stated, discussed and related to relevant literature and the research questions of this study. Explanations, correlation and discrepancies between the research findings and relevant findings in the literature were also highlighted. The following section provides a summary of the research findings that were comprehensively stated and discussed in Chapter 4.

## 5.3 AN ENCAPSULATION OF THE FINDINGS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As stated before, the findings of the secondary research questions led to a pinnacle process, during which the primary critical question was answered. For this reason, in Chapter 5, I firstly address the secondary research questions in order to reply to the primary critical question.

### 5.3.1 WHAT ARE THE IDENTIFIED ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT AS EXPERIENCED BY LEARNERS ATTENDING AN URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOL?

Learners attending an urban primary school experience assets for learning support within various systems and contexts. In this study, Eloff's (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39) asset-mapping framework was utilised as guiding framework to map the experienced assets for learning support as identified by the learners in various contexts and systems where relevant.

The learners only identified a few individual assets for learning support. Yet, the depth, but also the high order thinking, analysis and interpretation of the experienced phenomenon presented by the participants, was evident. I would have thought that reference would mostly be made to individual assets such as values, commitment to schoolwork and recognition of own cognitive abilities. However, the learners identified the asking of questions when they do not understand work (skills and knowledge information), feelings of pride (a personal characteristic) and on the level of interests and values, they identified the dream of having a good job and getting out of the urban context one day, as assets that support their learning. The experience of knowing that academic achievement is enhanced when rested was also identified on the individual level.

The learners attending the urban primary school mostly experienced assets for learning support within the school context, as the frequency of responses around this theme indicates. This could relate to the amount of time that learners spend on the school premises and the interaction that occurs within this context, as well as the study's focus on learning. There are various levels structured under school assets. Leadership and management is one of these levels. On this level, learners identified being selected as a school prefect as an asset for learning support. However, as found in this study and made evident under the interpretations of assets for learning support, as per the experience of the participants in this study, leadership roles in schools create the opportunity for learners to enhance esteem, due to the social relatedness of leadership. It is the reward and recognition of becoming a leader that supports learning, and not the service and role skills attached to the *leadership* position per se.

Another aspect of school assets is the level of human resources. Human resources (also social assets) that were identified were the school principal, educators and administrative staff. Learners' experience of these identified social assets for learning support, within the school context, also mobilises other assets for learning support, such as the favourable identity of the school as an asset for learning support. The learners stated that the urban school is a good school in a challenging socio-economic area. This asset was structured under assets in the identity and the strategies of the school. On this level, learners also identified other assets that support their learning, such as that the school offers a variety of activities and other assets (fun things, the garden, after school centre, friends, sport) and being proud of their school due to the caring and protective support that the school provides. Hence, when keeping the latter in mind, a dynamic, interacting and interdependent nature of assets for learning support within the various contexts of the urban primary school did become apparent in this study.

Furthermore, the learners also identified technical assets for learning support within the school context. Technical assets that learners identified were the sickroom of the school, school uniforms, the plants, ablution facilities, grass and gardens of the school, playgrounds, the garden club, the tuck shop, fences and security provided by the school, extra curricular activities and the after school centre. The learners didn't identify any structural or procedural assets.

Assets structured within the various domains of the asset-mapping framework (Eloff, 2006a:26; 2006b:33-39) can and did indeed overlap at times. In this study, assets within the classroom context were structured separate form the school context. Within the classroom context, the learners mostly experienced assets for learning support to be concrete of nature, such as the ABC posters, timetables and pictures against the classroom wall, tables and chairs in the classroom, as well as the blackboard, overhead projectors, intercoms and books.

The participants of this study furthermore identified other human resource assets, such as families, as assets for learning support. Within the family as an asset, human resource assets, including parents, relatives (grandparents, auntie and cousins) and siblings were identified. The high-rise apartments where the learners stayed, as well as sleeping in a bed, on a couch or on the floor, were also identified under family assets for learning support. However, the learners did place most emphasis on the supportive and providing role of their parents as their primary caregivers.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, in specific contexts, the role of peer group support may have to compensate for the lack of other support, such as family support. Donald et al. (2002:224) elucidate a linkage between peer support and the social context of a community. In this

study, the learners identified peer groups consisting of friends as assets that also support their learning within the urban context. Yet, in this study and like-minded with Eloff (2006b:38), it was found that peer groups, on various levels, could generally be better utilised as available human resource/peer group assets for learning support.

The police were also identified as human resource assets that support them to overcome barriers to learning. The police also fall under assets of local institutions and was the only asset identified within this level. Within Eloff's (2006a:26; 2006b:33-39) asset-mapping framework, the author makes reference to assets within the citizen's associations as well as assets of the wider social system. However, in this study, the learners attending the urban primary school did not identify any assets for learning support within the former or latte levels.

### 5.3.2 WHAT ARE LEARNERS' INTERPRETATIONS AS TO HOW THE IDENTIFIED ASSETS SUPPORT THEIR LEARNING?

While revisiting this secondary research question, it came to mind that one could almost re-conceptualise this research question to, "What assets do the identified assets mobilise, internal or external to the learners, that contribute to learning support". From the learners' interpretation of assets for learning support, textural and five structural asset themes were identified as secondary assets that are mobilised from the "original" identified assets for learning support. The asset themes were as follows: physical assets (oxygen, water, food, rest, shelter and survival), safety assets (feeling safe, environmental security, peace of mind, protection), social assets (support, acceptance, care, interpersonal communication, belonging / social life, fun), esteem assets (respect, recognition, pride, self-esteem) and assets for self-actualisation (to realise one's potential and to know and to understand). The interpreted assets, constructed from the identified assets for learning support as experienced by the learners who attend an urban primary school can be outlined as follows:

On the level of individual assets, peace of mind (safety asset) is mobilised from feeling rested. Asking questions in order for someone to explain work to them mobilises support and interpersonal communication as social assets. Self-esteem (esteem asset) is mobilised from being proud of oneself, as well as having a future perspective. By having a future perspective or a dream for the future, it seems to also mobilise self-actualisation as an asset as, according to the learners, it implies that you then know that you can have a better life (realising one's potential).

As stated before, most of the identified and interpreted assets came from the school context. On the level of leadership and management, it became apparent that by becoming a leader, social assets (supporting others) and esteem assets (being respected by others, feelings of

pride, external rewards and recognition by others, as well as enhanced self-esteem) are mobilised as extended assets that support learning.

The extension, or rather, the interrelatedness, of asset mobilisation also became apparent on the level of human resources. The social interaction between the learners and the identified assets on the human resources level (the principal, educators and administrative staff) mobilise other assets. Hence, assets further mobilised from human resources are physical assets (plasters, pills and medication provided when learners are sick), safety assets (feeling safe and protected in that they know that the staff will protect them if needed) and social assets (interpersonal communication, the supportive, caring, accepting, relationships that are communicated to the learners during interaction). The mobilised social assets also mobilise enhanced self-esteem (esteem assets), especially when recognition (esteem asset) is given to the learners. A self-actualisation asset (understanding) is mobilised when learners understand the messages that are communicated to them, from the human resources, during interpersonal communication (social assets).

On the level of the identity and the strategies of the school assets, the learners identified the urban school as a good school. This identified asset was interrelatedly mobilised due to the fun environment (the garden, after school centre, friends, teachers, sport) and the caring as well as the supporting relationship that the identity of the school reflects to the learners. The learners experience that the urban school cares about them, as food is provided to the learners for their survival (physical assets). They also experience that the school protects them, which in itself mobilises a safety asset. The positive identity of the school creates in general a sense of being proud (esteem assets) to belong to this good urban primary school, which cares about them and support its learners. In itself, it also enhances self-esteem (esteem assets).

School assets furthermore incorporate technical assets. The learners interpreted that, within this context, physical assets include receiving food from the after school centre and at the tuck shop, oxygen that is a necessity for survival which is mobilised by plants on the school premises, and school uniforms that also mobilise survival as a physical asset in that it regulates body temperature. Safety assets include the availability of ablution facilities which mobilise peace of mind and feelings of being safe knowing that each grade has its own ablution facilities; the sickroom and being at the after school centre mobilise peace of mind and feelings of safety; the security at the school mobilises feelings of safety and protection as well as peace of mind. On the level of social assets, learners are taken care of and supported at the after school centre where they socially interact and have fun with friends and also feel that they belong to a group; school uniforms mobilise feelings of belongingness; the security at the school mobilises the experience that the school cares about them; food is

sold cheaper at the tuck shop, which learners interpret as the school caring about them; social interaction with friends on the playground mobilise fun and support and being part of the gardening club mobilise social interaction and support as assets for learning support). Wearing school uniforms make learners feel proud and enhance self-esteem (esteem assets); the gardens at the school mobilise a sense of pride; achievement in sports, as well as belonging to the gardening club mobilise a sense of pride and enhance self-esteem as assets for learning support as well as self-actualisation assets (acknowledging and realising one's talents and potential mobilise a sense of pride).

Within the classroom context the ABC papers and posters, timetables, pictures and posters, tables and chairs, books, chalkboard, projectors and the intercom mobilise peace of mind and environmental security as safety assets for learning support. The safety assets further mobilise pride as an esteem asset. Social assets for learning support are also mobilised by the intercom, which mobilises social interaction. From the latter findings an interrelatedness of asset mobilisation within the textural and structural themes again became apparent. This was also found within the other human resources (structured under family assets, peer assets and assets of local institutions) that were identified as assets for learning support.

The learners identified parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and cousins as assets for learning support. The identified assets mobilised other physical assets (food, shelter and rest), safety assets (feeling safe, protection and peace of mind), social assets (support and interpersonal communication) and esteem assets (self-esteem and recognition). Peer groups (friends or friendships) directly mobilise various social assets (support, interpersonal communication, belonging and fun) as well as safety assets (peace of mind) and physical assets (food), and the police support learners' learning by mobilising social assets (interpersonal communication) and safety assets (feeling safe, protection and peace of mind).

This study does indeed acknowledge that all classrooms, schools and learning environments (contexts and systems) possess unique combinations of assets and capacities for learning support. As stated before, this study was guided by the interpretive / constructivist paradigm. The identified and constructed data as stated above was also interpreted in this study. I was of the opinion that the further interpretations of the data could contribute to the understanding of new constructs or meanings about the experienced phenomenon. I also believed that the amalgamation of these paradigms could contribute to the complex understanding of the under-explored phenomenon. The following section looks at the interpretation and the essence of the experienced phenomenon by the learners who attend an urban primary school.

### 5.3.3 WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF THE PHENOMENON 'ASSETS FOR LEARNING SUPPORT' AS EXPERIENCED BY LEARNERS ATTENDING AN URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOL?

As experienced by the learners, various intrinsic assets (individual assets) and external contextual assets (assets in the system) within the systems and context (see 5.3.1), mobilise other assets on a physiological and psychological level (see 5.3.2), which mobilise learning support as an asset. Hence, this study found that, just as the contexts and systems of the globe interrelatedly affect one another, so do the assets within various systems and context interrelatedly mobilise other assets within various levels, which mobilise learning support as an asset. It can be explained that the identified assets (*how)* interrelatedly mobilise (*what*) other assets (textural findings) on one of five levels (structural findings) within various systems and contexts, which contribute to mobilise learning support as an asset.

Graphically the interrelatedness of assets for learning support, as experienced by primary school learners in an urban school can be presented in the following figure. This figure relates and encapsulates the findings of this study by conceptualising the essence of this study.

From the following **Figure 5**, the essence can be encapsulated by stating that learners experience the mobilisation of various types of assets for learning support holistically within various systems, contexts and different levels. I am of the conviction that the interrelatedness of asset mobilisation for learning support could be far more complex than the aforementioned, simplified figure represents. However, I do feel that this figure could be viewed as a stepping-stone for understanding the complex interrelated ripple effect of mobilised assets for learning support on one another, within the various systems.

It seems as if the mobilisation of assets leads to the mobilisation of other textural assets on the same or on other structural levels of assets. In my mind, assets should be viewed equitably. Yet, in this study it seems if human resources are the corner stone of all asset mobilisations, as most assets exist due to human behaviour. The rationale supporting this finding is that it is the intrinsic and external contextual assets that human resources offer within contexts and systems that mobilise other assets that support learners' learning. Most of the identified and interpreted assets relate back to human resources. For example, it is the protection of the police that mobilises peace of mind as an asset. The assets provided in the classroom and school context are the result of human resources. It is also the learners' identification and interpretation of assets for learning support, which contribute to the experience of learning support being mobilised as an asset. This principal relates to physical, safety, other social and esteem assets. Thus, this study found that learners do experience learning support as an asset, to be a shared responsibility by various role-players.

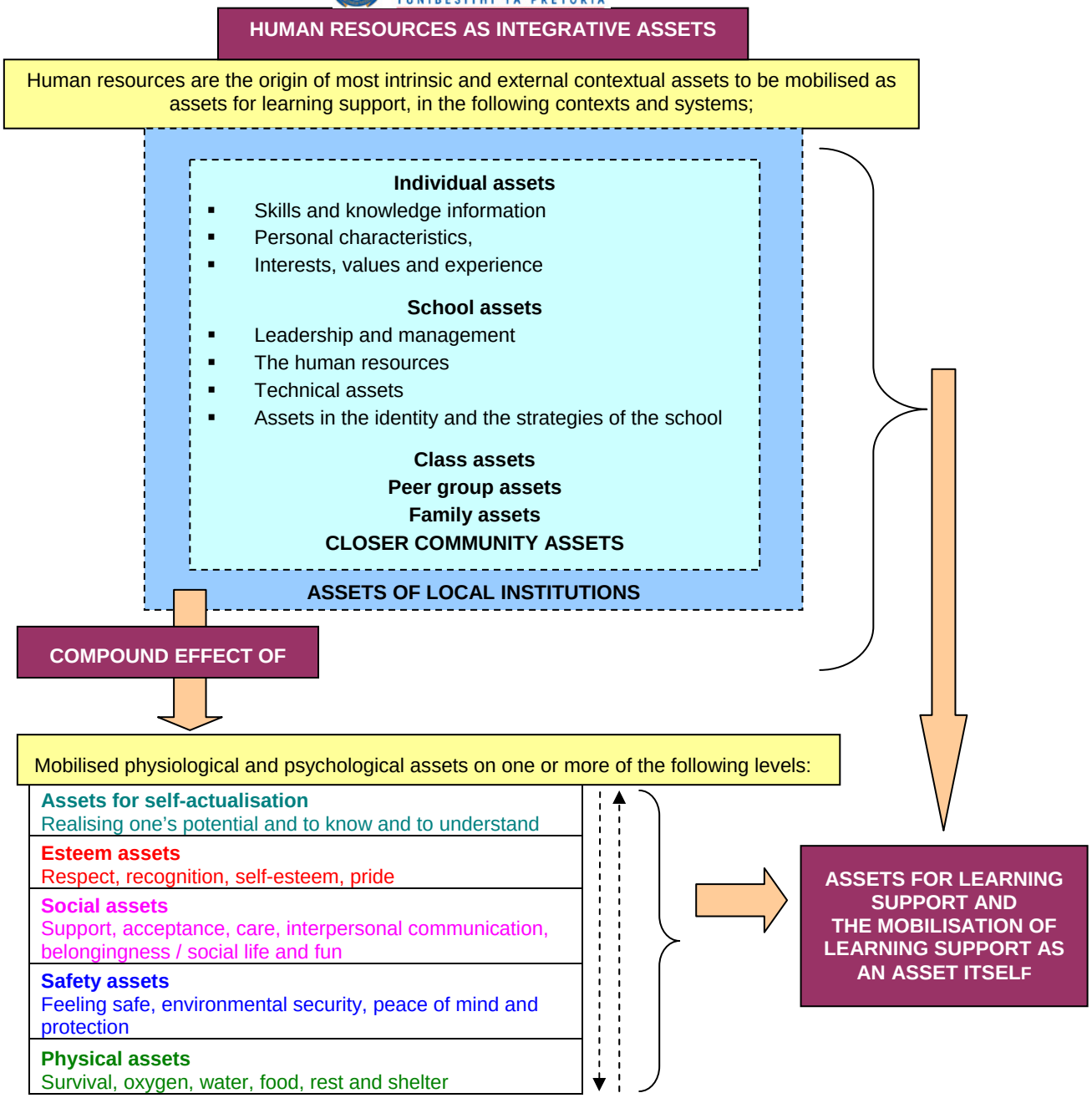



**FIGURE 5:** THE INTERRELATED RIPPLE EFFECT OF MOBILISED ASSETS ON ONE ANOTHER

## 5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study was only conducted on a small scale with African female learners, attending a primary school in an urban context. The participants weren't a representative sample of the South African population, as the study was conducted within an urban context in Gauteng. Furthermore, the findings of the study do not reflect both genders' experience of the phenomenon. It only enlightens the reader on female, primary school learners' experience of the phenomenon, which could imply the possibility of biased information. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalised, neither to all contexts, nor all genders or ages. However,

I did not aim to obtain generalisable findings, based on the paradigmatic perspective I selected. I sought descriptions and in-depth understandings within this bounded system.

During this study one focus group was utilised as data collection method. Reflecting on the process, I could have mobilised more complimentary methods for data collection, for example, the use of collages. This way I could have gathered more data, which could have possibly complemented the data obtained from the focus group discussion.

As stated before, this study explored an under-explored phenomenon, as experienced by primary school learners. A challenge was to find literature that relates and integrates learning support from an asset-based perspective. Literature that unites these constructs with learners' experience is also limited. Hence, even though literature on learning support and assets are available, due to the unique nature of this study, I was limited to relate the research findings too broader and existing literature. The challenge with regards to the limited base of existing knowledge suggests that more research regarding this phenomenon as experienced by children needs to be conducted. In a unique way, this study can be seen as a stepping-stone for future research. Thus, from an asset-based perspective, this study as an asset, offers a contribution to future research, which will subsequently have an effect on various systems and contexts.

## 5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

It became evident in this study that resources and assets, waiting to be utilised within various contexts and systems are immense, even if the assets do not seem palpable at first. Based on the findings of this study, I consequently made recommendations with regards to future research, education and the practice of educational psychology. Important to note is that the subsequent recommendations are mere suggestions within an open field of underexplored topics in which research can be done.

### 5.5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARDS TO FUTURE RESEARCH STUDIES

The intent with this study was to qualitatively explore and discover the essence of the phenomenon 'assets for learning support' as experienced by learners who attend an urban primary school. As stated, during the literature study, it became evident that this is an under-explored phenomenon. Due to limitations of this study, such as the findings that are not generalisable to neither all contexts nor all genders or ages, I would recommend researchers to explore this field, in order for us to better understand and construct dynamic interventions, which can support our learners. When keeping the interrelatedness of systems in mind, it is not just the learners who could benefit from quality interventions, but also the people of our rainbow nation and the future of South Africa.

The findings of this study, such as the figure representation of the interrelated ripple effect of mobilised assets on one another, could be utilised as a stepping-stone from which additional research can be conducted. The fact that only female learners attending an urban primary school participated in the study, limits the generalisability of the findings of this study. Future studies can explore different methodologies that can increase generalisability. In addition, various instrumental cases can be explored, during case study research. However, the methodology of this study can also be freely repeated by exploring the experience of this phenomenon by other learners of different genders and within various contexts. Furthermore, I am of the opinion that the findings of these studies could be utilised as an asset that can be further mobilised for intervention development. Hence, another long-term research door that can be opened in the future could be to explore newly constructed interventions, developed from the research findings in this study as well as from other studies.

Fuller (1999:20) writes that the prime time for curiosity and creativity to be stimulated is between the ages of 5 and 12. These are skills that need to be embedded in an asset-based worldview. Training youth leaders such as school prefects in the asset-based approach, instead of the adults of communities, can therefore be explored. It furthermore supports my view of accessing learners as knowledgeable resources, who could support our learning construction, of assets for learning support.

### 5.5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARDS TO EDUCATION

As it became evident in this study, learners identified the majority of assets that support their learning, within the school context. Consequently, I recommend that training institutions train educators in all phases, using the asset-based approach. One way of doing this could be during the training of students at universities and courses presented by the Department of Education or the private sector to professional educators. Educators will then need to place themselves in the asset-based framework and become conscious of the assets that support their own learning. This can be implemented during assignments, discussions, or even reflections that focus on assets.

The educators' experience of this capacity focus approach can then assist them in utilising it as an asset within the school and classroom context. It can also place educators in a more constructive position by viewing the glass as half full – even if they found themselves teaching in urban or rural areas. For example, educators can ask the children in their classes to share what they experience as assets that support their learning. This information can be mobilised by the educators to benefit the educator and the learners.

Eloff (2006b:38) states that peer groups on various levels could generally be better utilised as an asset. In this study, the valuable role of peer group support with regards to learning

support also became apparent. I would recommend that this valuable, yet under-utilised asset, be accessed, identified, mobilised and sustained as an asset for learning support within the school and the classroom. The holistic, dynamic and interrelatedness of assets, contexts and systems with relation to the explored topic, should be communicated to educators. Furthermore, the responsibility of various role-players as assets that could support learning should be communicated to educators. I am of the opinion that educators could share this newly acquired knowledge with the community members, such as other educators and parents in order to create an awareness of the supporting hand communities can have in supporting learners' learning.

### 5.5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARDS TO EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

The way we view and embrace life tends to interrelatedly affect other individuals within the systems. Communities tend to look up to psychologists and value our opinions. I recommend educational psychologists, trained in the asset-based approach, to collaboratively share knowledge with parents, educators and other professionals.

The asset-based approach is a relatively new field, not even to mention exploring learning support from this theoretical perspective. From the theoretical framework of the study and the research findings, psychologists can train other professionals in the helping field. Educational psychologists can facilitate and support educators and communities with asset mapping of assets for learning support within a particular community. Presenting courses to educators and investing in training youth leaders (school prefects) in the asset-based approach becomes highly recommended – not to provide academic jargon, but to teach them skills supported by knowledge. Educational psychologists can also provide guidance as to how peers can be utilised and better accessed as assets for learning support in classrooms and schools.

The asset-based approach as well as the findings of this study could be utilised during the training of future educational psychologists. The picture of assets for learning support, created from an asset-based approach, I belief, differs vastly from the greyish, deficits and needs picture, that would have been created if I undertook this explorative study from a need-based approach.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

While I was writing this chapter that encapsulates the fundamental aspects of this study, I found myself looking back over a rainbow-coated journey. Each colour represents a different emotion. The emotions ranged from excitement to feelings of uncertainty and frustration. But as this journey is coming to a new destination, the sun is shining a sense of pride and joy.

The asset-based approach demonstrates that change in a context or system does ripple through to change in another. In exploring the phenomenon from the learners' perspective, the interrelated and mobilising affect of assets also became apparent. Therefore, even though this study is diminutive in the bigger scheme of academic studies, I do believe that it will contribute to the growing field of Education and Psychology that focuses on strengths and capacities.

**---o O o---**

# LIST OF REFERENCES

***The * identifies the reference as primary resource***

Adams, H. 1998. Cognitive development. In Adams, H. & Kruger, N. (Eds). *Psychology for teaching and learning*. Sandton: Heinemann.

* Adams, H. & Kruger, N. (Eds). 1998. *Psychology for teaching and learning*. Sandton: Heinemann.

Adams, H. & Kruger, N. 1998a. Introduction. In Adams, H. & Kruger, N. (Eds). *Psychology for teaching and learning*. Sandton: Heinemann.

Adams, Q., Collair, L., Oswald, M. & Perold, M. 2004. Research in educational psychology in South Africa. In Eloff, I. & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). *Keys to educational psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Ammerman, A. & Parks, C. 1998. Preparing students for more effective community interventions: Assets assessment. *Family and Community Health*, 21(1): 32(14).

* Armstrong, D., Armstrong, F. & Barton, L. (Eds). 2000. *Inclusive education: Policy, contexts and comparative perspectives*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Babbie, S. 2004. *The practice of social research* (10th ed). United States of America: Thomson/ Wadsworth.

Bellingham, S., Conrad, T., McDonald, L., Morgan, A., O, N. & Payton, E. 1997. Families and schools together (FAST): Integrating community development with clinical strategies. *Families in Society*, March/April: 140-155.

Bender, C.J.G. 2001. *Module OPV 252: Leermodelle vir die 21ste eeu*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria (Faculty of Education).

Berger, E.H. 1991. *Parents as partners in education. The school and home working together*. Denver: Metropolitan State College of Denver.

* Bersoff, D.N. 1995. *Ethical conflicts in psychology*. Washington: American Psychological Association.

Booth, T. 2000. Inclusion and exclusion in England: Who controls the agenda? In Armstrong, D., Armstrong, F. & Barton, L. (Eds). *Inclusive education: Policy, contexts and comparative perspectives*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Bouwer, C. 2005. Identification and assessment of barriers to learning. In Landsberg, E., Krüger, D. & Nel, N. (Eds). *Addressing barriers to learning: A South African perspective (*1st ed*).* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Bresler, L. & Stake, R.E. 2006. Qualitative research methodology in music education. In Colwell, R. (Ed). *Menc handbook of research methodologies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Briedenhann, H. 2003. *Identifisering van bates by 'n voorskoolse leerder met serebraal gestremdheid*. Unpublished M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Brooks, J.G. & Brooks, M.G. 1993. *In search of understanding the case for constructivist classrooms*. Alexandria: Association for supervision and curriculum development.

* Christensen, P. & James, A. (Eds). 2000. *Research with children: Perspectives and practices*. London: Falmer Press.

Cockcroft, K. 2002. Theories of cognitive development: Piaget, Vygotsky and information-processing theory. In Cockcroft, K., Hook, D. & Watts, J. (Eds). *Developmental psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

* Cockcroft, K., Hook, D. & Watts, J. (Eds). 2002. *Developmental psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Coetzee, S. 2005. *Investigating the application of the asset-based approach in career facilitation*. Unpublished M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

* Colwell, R. (Ed). 2006. *Menc handbook of research methodologies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Creswell, J.W. 1998. *Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five traditions.* California: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. 2005. *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (*2nd ed*).* New Jersey: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.

Critchley, D. 2002. Children's assessment of their own learning. In Nutbrown, C. (Ed). *Research studies in early childhood education*. England: Trentham Books.

Cunningham, G. & Mathie, A. 2003. From clients to citizens: Asset-based community development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*, 13 (5): 474-486.

Dawber, A., Modise, M. & Winkler, G. 1998. *All children can learn: A handbook on teaching children with learning difficulties*. Cape Town: Francolin.

Delport, C.S.L. & Fouché, C.B. 2005. Introduction to the research process. In Delport, C.S.L., De Vos, A.S., Fouché, C.B. & Strydom, H. 2005. *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human service professions (*3rd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

* Delport, C.S.L., De Vos, A.S., Fouché, C.B. & Strydom, H. 2005. *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human service professions (*3rd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

* Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds). 2000. *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed). California: Sage Publications.

Department of Education (DoE) (RSA). 1997. *Education for all: From "Special needs and support" to developing quality education for all learners – Public discussion document/National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET)/ National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS)*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Department of Education (DoE) (RSA). 2000. *Education white paper 5 on an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Education (DoE) (RSA). 2001. *Education white paper 6 on special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

De Saint-Exupéry, A. 1957. *Die klein prinsie*. Kaapstad: Gothic Printing Company Ltd.

* De Vos, A.S. (Ed). 1998. *Research at grass roots. A primer for the caring professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

De Vos, A.S. & Fouché, C.B. 1998. General introduction to research design, data collection methods and data analysis. In De Vos, A.S. (Ed). *Research at grass roots. A primer for the caring professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

De Wet, A. 2004. *Identifying personal and environmental assets to enrich pre-school learning within a culture of poverty: An Ethnographic study.* Unpublished M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Donald, D., Lazarus, S. & Lolwana, P. 1997. *Educational psychology in social context: Challenges of development, social issues, special need in Southern Africa – A teacher's resource.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.

Donald, D., Lazarus, S. & Lolwana, P. 2002. *Educational psychology in social context (*2nd ed*).* Cape Town: Oxford University Press South Africa.

Driver, R. & Oldham, V. 1986. A constructivist approach to curriculum development in science. *Studies in Science Education*, 13: 105-122.

Du Preez, C.S. 2004. Health and well-being. In Eloff, I. & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). *Keys to educational psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Du Toit, P. 1996. *'n Remediëringsmodel vir die onderwyser in hoofstroomonderwys*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Education Action Zone - Gauteng Department of Education (Gauteng DoE). 2006. *Conceptualisation and strategic framework - Presentation handouts.* Mpumalanga: Mpumalanga Department of Education.

Ebersöhn, L. & Mbetse, D.J. 2003. Exploring community strategies to career education in terms of the asset-based approach: Expanding existing career theory and models of intervention. *South African Journal of Education*, 23(4): 323-327.

Ehrich, L.C. 2003. Phenomenology: The quest for meaning. In O'Donoghue, T. & Punch, K. (Eds). *Qualitative educational research in action: Doing and reflecting*. London: Routledge/Falmer.

Eloff, I. 2001. Promoting development during the early years. In Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (Eds). *Promoting learner development: Preventing and working with barriers to learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Eloff, I. 2003a. Introduction to the asset-based approach to life-skills counselling. In Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. *Lifeskills and assets*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Eloff, I. 2003b. Understanding the asset-based approach. In Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. *Life skills and assets.* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Eloff, I. 2006a. Introduction to the asset-based approach to intervention. In Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). *Lifeskills and assets* (2nd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Eloff, I. 2006b. Understanding the asset-based approach. In Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). *Lifeskills and assets* (2nd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Eloff, I. & Ebersöhn, L. 2001. The implications of an asset-based approach to early intervention. *Perspectives in Education*, 19(3): 147-157.

* Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. 2003. *Life skills and assets*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

* Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). 2004. *Keys to educational psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

* Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. 2006. *Lifeskills and assets* (2nd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. 2006a. Linking life skills and the asset-based approach conceptually and contextually. In Ebersöhn, L. & Eloff. I. *Lifeskills and assets* (2nd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Emmett, T. 2000. Beyond community participation? Alternative routes to civil engagement and development in South Africa. *Development Southern Africa,* 17(4): 501-518.

Engelbrecht, P. 2001. Changing roles for education support professionals. In Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (Eds). *Promoting learner development: Preventing and working with barriers to learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

* Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (Eds). 2001. *Promoting learner development: Preventing and working with barriers to learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Ferreira, J. 2004a. *Exploring facilitation skills in asset-based transdisciplinary teamwork.* Unpublished M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Ferreira, R. 2004b. Educational psychological intervention and therapy. In Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). *Keys to educational psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Fosnot, C.T. 1996a. Constructivism: A psychological theory of learning. In Fosnot, C.T. (Ed). *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives and practice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

* Fosnot, C.T. (Ed). 1996. *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives and practice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Fouché, C.B. 2005. Qualitative research designs. In Delport, C.S.L., De Vos, A.S., Fouché, C.B. & Strydom, H. *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human service professions (*3rd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

France, A., Bendelow, G. & Williams, S. 2000. A 'risky' business: Researching the health beliefs of children and young people. In Lewis, A. & Lindsay, G. (Eds). *Researching children's perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Fuller, C. 1999. *Through the learning glass: A child's nine learning windows you don't want to miss*. Michigan: ZondervanPublishingHouse.

Gouws, A. 1998. Turning information into accurate and useful knowledge. In Adams, H. & Kruger, N. (Eds). *Psychology for teaching and learning*. Sandton: Heinemann.

Greeff, M. 2005. Information collection: Interviewing. In Delport, C.S.L., De Vos, A.S., Fouché, C.B. & Strydom, H. *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human service professions (*3rd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Green, L. 2001. Theoretical contextual background. In Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (Eds). *Promoting learner development: Preventing and working with barriers to learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2000. Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed). California: Sage Publications.

Hawker, S. (Ed). 2002. *The oxford mini dictionary, thesaurus and wordpower guide*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hudson, C. 1996. *Unethical research with children?* Paper presented to Ethnography in Educational Conference. Oxford.

Human-Vogel, S. 2004. Cognition and learning. In Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). *Keys to educational psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Jansen, J. 2004. An introduction to education theory. In Eloff, I. & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). *Keys to educational psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Jones, C. & Tannock, J. 2000. A matter of life and death: A reflective account of two examples of practitioner research into children's understanding and experience of death and bereavement. In Lewis, A. & Lindsay, G. (Eds). *Researching children's perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Kretzmann, J.P. & McKnight, J.L. 1993. *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets. Chicago*: ACTA Publications.

Kriek, T. 2002. '*n Verkenning van 'n bate-gebaseerde benadering tot opvoedkundige sielkundige vroeë intervensie*. Unpublished M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Krueger, R.A. 1988. *Focus groups*. California: Sage Publications.

Lancho Perea, L.A. 2005. *A comparative study of a South African and a Peruvian school from an asset-based approach*. Unpublished M.Ed. (Education for Community Building) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Landsberg, E. 2005. Learning support. In Landsberg, E., Krüger, D. & Nel, N. (Eds). *Addressing barriers to learning: A South African perspective (*1st ed*).* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

* Landsberg, E., Krüger, D. & Nel, N. (Eds). 2005. *Addressing barriers to learning: A South African perspective (*1st ed*).* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J.E. 2005. *Practical research: Planning and design* (8th ed). New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Lemmer, E.M. 2002. Restructuring the system of education and training in South Africa. In Lemmer, E. & Van Wyk, N. (Eds). *Transforming education: The South African experience*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

* Lemmer, E. & Van Wyk, N. (Eds). 2002. *Transforming education: The South African experience*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

* Lewis, A. & Lindsay, G. (Eds). 2000. *Researching children's perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lindsay, G. 2000. Researching children's perspectives: Ethical issues. In Lewis, A. & Lindsay, G. (Eds). *Researching children's perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lomofsky, L. & Skuy, M. 2001. Educational needs related to intellectual and cognitive difference. In Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (Eds). *Promoting learner development: Preventing and working with barriers to learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Loots, M.C. 2005. *'n Verkenning van opvoeders se mobilisering van bates ter ondersteuning van gemeenskapshantering van MIV/Vigs.* Unpublished M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

* Lopez, S.J. & Snyder, C. 2002. *Handbook of positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lubbe, C. 2004. Educational psychological assessment. In Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). *Keys to educational psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Maslow, A. 1970. *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper and Row.

Madriz, E. 2000. Focus groups in feminist research. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed). California: Sage Publications.

Matentjie, T. 2006. *Investigating an asset-based approach to analysing education for all policy implementation on adult reading literacy in South Africa*. Unpublished M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

McKnight, J.L. 1997. A 21st-Century map for healthy communities and families. *Families in Society*, March/April: 117-129.

McMillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. 2001. *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (5thed). Virginia: Longman.

Meisels, S.J. & Shonkoff, J.P. (Eds.). 2000a. *Handbook of early childhood intervention (*2nd ed*)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meisels, S.J. & Shonkoff, J.P. 2000b. Early childhood intervention: A continuing evolution. In Meisels, S.J. & Shonkoff, J.P. (Eds.). *Handbook of early childhood intervention (*2nd ed*)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

*Melton, G.B., Sieber, J.E. & Stanley, B. 1995. Empirical studies of ethical issues in research: A research agenda. In Bersoff.* Ethical conflicts in psychology*. Washington: American Psychological Association.*

Merriam, S.B. 1998. *Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from case study research in education*. California: Jossey-Bass Publications.

Mertens, D.M. 1998. *Research methods in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative & qualitative approaches*. California: Sage Publications.

Mittler, P. 2000. *Working towards inclusive education: Social contexts*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Mokwena, K. 1997. Empowerment as a tool for community health development. *CHASA Journal of Comprehensive Health*, 8(2), April/June: 66-70.

Morgan, D.L. 1997. *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed). California: Sage Publications.

Mothata, M.S., Potgieter, J.M., Squelch, J.M., van der Bank, A.J. & Visser, P.J. 1997. *Understanding the SA schools act: What public school governors need to know*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Moumakoe, R. L. 2004. *The impact of poverty as a socio-economic barrier to learning and development of rural learners*. Unpublished M.Ed. (Special needs Education) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Mulemfo, M.M. 2001. *Thabo Mbeki and the African Renaissance: The emergence of a new African leadership*. Pretoria: Actua Press.

Muthukrishna, N. 2001. Changing roles for schools and communities. In Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (Eds). *Promoting learner development: Preventing and working with barriers to learning.* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Neuman, W.L. 2006. *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (6th ed). Boston: Pearson/ Allyn and Bacon.

* Nutbrown, C. (Ed). 2002. *Research studies in early childhood education*. England: Trentham Books.

Nwanna, M.R.N. 2006. *The manifestations of learning support in the lives of high school learners.* Unpublished Ph.D (Learning support, Guidance and Counselling) thesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

* O'Donoghue, T. & Punch, K. (Eds). 2003. *Qualitative educational research in action: Doing and reflecting*. London: Routledge/ Falmer.

Page-Adams, D. & Sherraden, M. 1997. Asset building as a community revitalization strategy. *Social Work*, 42(5): 423-434.

Patton, M.Q. 2002. Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1(3): 261-283.

Phasha, T. & Swart, E. 2005. Family and community partnerships. In Landsberg, E., Krüger, D. & Nel, N. (Eds.). *Addressing barriers to learning: A South African perspective (*1st ed*).* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Pinkett, R. 2000. *Bridging the digital divide: Sociocultural constructionism and an asset-based approach to community technology and community building*. Paper presented at the 81st Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). New Orleans, LA.

Prinsloo, E. 2005. Socio-economic barriers to learning in contemporary society. In Landsberg, E., Krüger, D. & Nel, N. (Eds). *Addressing barriers to learning: A South African perspective (*1st ed*).* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Probst, K. 2006. *Mentoring for meaningful results: Asset-building tips, tools and activities for youth and adults*. Minneapolis: Search Institute Publication.

Ramphal, A. & Ramphal, R. 1998. Including learners with barriers to learning and development. In Adams, H. & Kruger, N. (Eds). 1998. *Psychology for teaching and learning*. Sandton: Heinemann.

Ramphele, M. 1991. Social disintegration in the black community – implications for transformation. *Monitor*: 7-16.

Reber, A.S. & Reber, E. 2001. *Penguin dictionary of psychology (*3rd ed*).* London: Penguin Books.

Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. 2005. *Ethics and research statement including standard operating procedures*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Roberts, H. 2000. "Listening to children and hearing them. In Christensen, P. & James, A. (Eds). *Research with children: Perspectives and practices*. London: Falmer Press.

Roehlkepartain, J.L. & Leffert, N. 2000. *What young children need to succeed: Working together to build assets from birth to age 11*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing.

Rose, H.A. 2006. Asset-Based development for children and youth care. *Reclaiming children and youth*, 14(4), Winter: 236-240.

Rudolph, L.B. & Thompson, C.L. 2000. *Counselling children* (5th ed). United States of America: Wadsworth - Brooks/ Cole (Thomson Learning).

* Schuman, S. (Ed). 2005. *The International Association of Facilitators (IAF) handbook of group facilitation: Best practices from the leading organisation in facilitation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schurink, E.M. 1998. Deciding to use a qualitative research approach. In De Vos, A.S. (Ed). *Research at grass roots. A primer for the caring professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Schurink, E.M., Schurink, W.J. & Poggenpoel, M. 1998. Focus group interviewing and audio-visual methodology in qualitative research. In De Vos, A.S. (Ed). *Research at grass roots. A primer for the caring professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Scott, J. 2000. Children as respondents: The challenge for quantitative methods. In Christensen, P. & James, A. (Eds). *Research with children: Perspectives and practices.* London: Falmer Press.

Seligman, M.E.P. 2002. Positive psychology, positive prevention and positive therapy. In Lopez, S.J. & Snyder, C. *Handbook of positive psychology*. USA: Oxford University Press.

Senosi, S.S. 2004. *The support for learning provided by the parents of foundation phase learners in a township school*. Unpublished Ph.D (Orthopedagogics) thesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Smuts, E. 2004. *'n Narratiewe lewensgeskiedenis oor die manifestasie van bates by 'n kleuter met Spina Bifida Miëlomeningoseel.* Unpublished M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Society for Research in Child Development, Committee for Ethical Conduct in Child Development Research. 1990. SRCD ethical standards for research with children. *SRCD Newsletter*. Chicago: SRCD.

Spinelli, E. 1989. *The interpreted world: An introduction to phenomenological psychology*. London: Sage Publications.

Strydom, H. 1998. Ethical aspects of research in the caring professions. In De Vos, A.S. (Ed). *Research at grass roots. A primer for the caring professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Strydom, H. 2005. Ethical aspects of research in the social sciences and human service professions. In Delport, C.S.L., De Vos, A.S., Fouché, C.B. & Strydom, H. *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human service professions (*3rd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Swart, E. 2004. Inclusive education. In Eloff. I & Ebersöhn, L. (Eds). *Keys to educational psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Terre Blanche, M. & Durrheim, K. 1999. *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Troxel, J.P. 2005. Affirmative Facilitation: An asset-based approach to process consultation. In Schuman, S. (Ed). *The International Association of Facilitators (IAF) handbook of group facilitation: Best practices from the leading organisation in facilitation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

UNICEF. 2002. *The state of the world's children 2003*. New York: UNICEF.

Viljoen, J.R. 2004. *Identifying assets in the memory-box-making process with vulnerable children.* Unpublished M.Ed. (Edicational Psychology) mini-dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education.

Von Glasersfeld, E. 1996. Introduction: Aspects of Constructivism. In Fosnot, C.T. (Ed). *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Williams, T. & Samuels, M.L. 2001. *The Nationwide audit of ECD provisioning in South Africa*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

# LIST OF CONSULTED REFERENCES

Eloff, I. 2003. *Mapping assets in school-based family counseling*. Retrieved: January 12, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://0-www.cit.usfca.edu.innopac.up.ac.za:80/institutes/ccfd/oxford_papers Eloff.pdf.

Fourtounas, D. 2003. *The experience of letting go: A phenomenological study*. Unpublished D.Phil. (Psychotherapy) tesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Psychology.

Kretzmann, J.P. & McKnight, J.L. 1993. *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Retrieved: January 12, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://0-gearup.ous.edu.innopac.up.ac.za:80/gusaccess/documents/pdf/BuildingCommunitiesInsideOut.pdf.

Niss, M.H. 1996. *A phenomenological study of the "recovery phase": The turning point in addiction*. Unpublished D.Phil (Psychology) thesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Faculty of Arts.

Vithal, R. & Jansen, J. 2001. *Designing your first research proposal. A manual for researchers in education and social sciences*. Lansdown: Juta & Co. Ltd.

Weinberg, D. (Ed). 2002. *Qualitative research methods*. United States of America: Blackwell Publishers.

**---o O o---**

Should you and your child give consent that your child may participate in this project, your child's participation will be voluntary. This means that your child will participate in this project willingly and that you and your child understand that your child may withdraw from the project at any time. If either party object s to participation, the choices will be respected, by withdrawing the invitation to participate.

If you are willing for your child to voluntarily participate, please sign the "informed consent" clause at the bottom of the page. By signing this letter, you are declaring that you did read and understand the content of this letter. Therefore, you are also agreeing to the conditions as outlined in this letter.

I declare that your daughter will in no way be at risk nor at harm of any kind during this project. She will also not be deceived nor betrayed during or after this project.

Please feel free to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

_____

Ilze Ferreira
072 707 5575

**Informed consent clause**

I fully understand the implications of my child, _____'s (name of child) participation in this project and am aware of her rights.

Name of parent: _____ Signature: _____

Date : _____

Name of community worker: _____ Signature: _____

Date : _____

Dearest Parent

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria, completing my Master's degree in Educational Psychology. As part of my training, I must do a practical assignment in which I must make an asset-map of the assets that support childrens' learning. For this purpose, I have decided to focus on the assets for learning support, as identified by children.

The Principal of XXXXXXXXXX School has granted permission, for me to do my assignment at this school. Some of the educators at the school helped me to select eight girls that can assist me with information. Your child is one of the identified learners - seeing that she and all the other girls selected have passed each school year since grade one. You must be very proud!

With this letter, I would like to invite your child to participate in a project aimed at exploring the assets that support childrens' learning, as identified by the children. This information will be gathered from the children during a focus group. This group discussion will take place in a classroom (the date will still be finalised), one afternoon, for three hours. Each learner will receive a lunch bag, containing a sandwich and a coldrink.

During the group discussion the children will discuss what helps them to learn, so that they can pass each school year. They will also discuss why or how it helps them to learn. This information will be recorded and written on a flipchart. During another break period, after the focus group discussion already occurred, the children will get the opportunity to review the information that I found during the group discussion.

Due to the manner of gaining access to learners, educators know that your child might participate in this project. Should your child participate, I would like to assure you that your child's identity, with regards to whom shared what information, will remain confidential and anonymous to the school. Under no circumstances will the identity of your child be made known to any other parties or organisations. Confidentiality and anonymity of the children will be protected at all times. The information relevant to the discussed topic will be shared with my lecturer and an external examiner. Again, the children will in no way be named, identified or compromised.

My assignment containing only the information gathered during the group discussion will be stored and kept as the property of the University of Pretoria – Department of Educational Psychology. The University of Pretoria has the right to use the data for training purposes or future research. In this case, the school will in no way be named, identified or compromised. Permission must however, be obtained from the school and the Gauteng Department of Education (as agreed with the principal of the school).

# ADDENDUM F

## PARTICIPANTS' PARENTS

- Example letter of informed consent (proxy consent)

- **Forty assets elementary-age children need to succeed**

(Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000, 14-15, 22-23)

| Support | Empowerment | Boundaries and Expectations | Constructive use of time |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family support | Community values children | Family boundaries | Creative activities |
| Positive family communication | Children are given useful roles | Out-of-home boundaries | Out-of home activities |
| Other adult relationships | Service to others | Neighbourhood boundaries | Religious community |
| Caring neighbourhood | Safety | Adult role models | Positive, supervised time at home |
| Caring out-of-home climate | | Positive peer interaction and influence | |
| Parent involvement in out-of home situations | | Appropriate expectations for growth | |
| **Commitment to learning** | **Positive values** | **Social competencies** | **Positive identity** |
| Achievement expectation and motivation | Family values caring | Planning and decision making | Personal power |
| Children are engaged in learning | Family values equality and social justice | Interpersonal skills | Self-esteem |
| Stimulating activity and homework | Family values integrity | Cultural competence | Sense of purpose |
| Enjoyment of learning and bonding to school | Family values honesty | Resistance skills | Positive view of personal future |
| Reading for pleasure | Family values responsibility | Peaceful conflict resolution | |
| | Family values healthy lifestyle | | |

ADDENDUM E

## FORTY ASSETS ELEMENTARY-AGE CHILDREN NEED TO SUCCEED

(Roehlkepartain & Leffert, 2000:14-15, 22-23)

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Ms I Ferreira
PO Box 905-471
GARSFONTEIN
0042

Dear Ms Ferreira

**USE OF EXISTING DATA ON LEARNING SUPPORT**

Thank you for your letter and the support you have given to our learners over the past few years.

Ilze, you are welcome to use any information gathered from your research to complete your dissertation subject to the conditions you outlined in your letter dated 14 March 2007.

I wish you every success.

Yours sincerely

XX XXXXX
**PRINCIPAL**

/db

Your consideration and time is appreciated. Should any other information be required, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

ILZE FERREIRA
STUDENT

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Mrs I Ferreira
P.O Box 905-471
Garsfontein
Pretoria
0042

Contact number: 076 083 0277
Fax: 012 348 7475

XXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
Pretoria
XXXX

**REQUEST PERMISSION TO USE EXISTING DATA ON LEARNING SUPPORT, FROM A COMMUNITY PROJECT, AT XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX SCHOOL**

Dear Mr. XXXXX

I am currently a final year Masters degree student, specialising in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria. Part of the requirement for completing our Masters training is to submit a dissertation based on a research study and to have an article published in an accredited journal.

During 2005, part of my academic training in the field of Educational Psychology, was to conduct a practical assignment which focused on asset-mapping for learning support in a school system. Due to the ongoing community project between the Department of Educational Psychology and the XXXXXXXXXX school, I chose to conduct my practical assignment at your beautiful school. The community work was done under supervision and guidance of Prof. Irma Eloff (Head of the Department of Educational Psychology). I met with you and Mrs. XXXXXXXX on the 9th of May 2005 and you verbally granted me permission to conduct my practical assignment at your school. I focused on the identification of assets, as identified by learners. This data, as well as the data collected by my fellow students, yield rich insights into learning support and the mobilisation of resources to support the learning of learners. During the completion of the assignment, the idea of using the data as a research study came to mind. My lecturer also proposed that I use the data of the assignment for my mini-dissertation.

Hereby, I kindly request written permission from your school to use the gathered data, for my dissertation and article. The school and the learners will in no way be named, identified or compromised. Approval to use existing data has already been granted by the Gauteng Department of Education (see attachment).

# ADDENDUM D

## THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

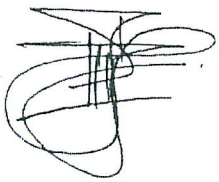
- Letter of introduction
- Letter of approval

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Universiteit van Pretoria

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

With this I grant permission for Ilze Ferreira to use the data obtained within the Sunnyside Language Enrichment project (during her years in training in the M Ed Educational Psychology), for the purposes of doing a dissertation of a limited scope.



**Prof Irma Eloff**
**Project leader: Sunnyside Language Enrichment project**
**Dept of Educational Psychology**
**Faculty of Education**
**University of Pretoria**
**PRETORIA**
**0002**
**Tel: (012) 420 5503**
**Email:** irma.eloff@up.ac.za

# ADDENDUM C

## SUPERVISOR OF MY ACADEMIC ASSIGNMENT (2005)

- Letter of approval

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

ANNEXURE D

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

| | |
|---|---|
| CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE | **CLEARANCE NUMBER : EP07/05/01** |
| DEGREE AND PROJECT | M.Ed Educational Psychology<br>The experience of assets that support learning: A phenomenological study |
| INVESTIGATOR(S) | Ilze Ferreira - 20155362 |
| DEPARTMENT | Educational Psychology |
| DATE CONSIDERED | 09-05-2007 |
| DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE | APPROVED |

*This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years from the date of consideration and may be renewed upon application*

| | |
|---|---|
| **CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE** | Dr S Human-Vogel |
| DATE | 25-06-2007 |
| CC | Prof I Eloff<br>Mrs Jeannie Beukes |

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following conditions:

1. A signed personal declaration of responsibility
2. If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted
3. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.

the process, which was followed to acquire the insights of my academic assignment and to construct this into a research study.

I obtained permission from the Gauteng Department of Education and the city centre school to use the gathered data for my dissertation and an article as required by the University of Pretoria. The school and the learners will in no way be named, identified or compromised.

Your consideration and time is appreciated. Should any other information be required please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

ILZE FERREIRA
STUDENT
076 083 0277

Due to accessibility and the context of the city centre school, I chose to conduct my practical assignment at this city centre school. During my preparation, I became increasingly intrigued by whether learners construct the same meaning about their experience of the phenomenon, "assets for learning support," as adults. For the purpose of my assignment, I decided to focus on the identification of assets, as identified by learners. The University of Pretoria already has an agreement with the school, that Master students in Educational Psychology can conduct practical assignments at the school. It was brought under my attention, that only since 2006, students must apply at the Research Ethics Committee for any conduct to occur at a school. For ethical purposes, I obtained permission from the Principal of the school. The parents of the minors and the children themselves also gave consent to participate in this community project.

The data of my practical assignment, conducted in 2005, and data of work done by my fellow students, yield rich insights into learning support and the mobilisation of resources to support learners' learning. It is important to note, that originally the completion of my practical assignment was not done for the purposes of research. Insights were gathered from the learners, with the intent to utilise these insights during the language development group sessions, to potentially benefit the learners and to pass my academic assignment. During my oral examination of the assignment, the idea of using the data as a research study came to mind. My lecturer also proposed that I use the data of the assignment for my mini-dissertation.

During the nine years of the partnership between the University of Pretoria and the school, however, none of the accumulated data on learning support has been utilised and shared for the purpose of research. I believe that this information could yield rich insights on learning support. Yet, until the data is mobilised, it will remain unshared knowledge amongst the wider community of researchers in learning support. In this mini-dissertation, I would like to focus on the quest I undertook, in collaboration with the learners, to understand their experiences of assets that support their learning. For the purpose of my mini-dissertation, I would like to utilise the existing information, as well as

Mrs I Ferreira
P.O. Box 905-471
Garsfontein
Pretoria
0042

Contact number : 076 083 0277
Fax number : (012) 348 7475

2007-04-04

Faculty of Education
University of Pretoria
Research Ethics Committee

**REQUESTING PERMISSION TO USE EXISTING DATA FROM A COMMUNITY PROJECT (2005) AT A CITY CENTRE SCHOOL, ON LEARNING SUPPORT**

To the Research Ethics Committee members

I am currently a final year Masters degree student, specialising in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria. As you know, part of the requirement for completing our training is to submit a dissertation based on a research study and to have an article published in an accredited journal.

Part of my academic training in the field of Educational Psychology (2005), was to conduct a practical assignment that focused on asset-mapping for learning support in a school system. The Department of Educational Psychology created a community project with a city centre school. Thus, a learning environment for both the Master students in Educational Psychology and the learners of the school was created. Once a week, for a year, the students facilitate language development group sessions, for selected learners of the school. This ongoing community project, of which I was fortunate to have been part of, has already been running for the past nine years. This community work is done under the supervision and guidance of Prof. Irma Eloff, Head of the Department of Educational Psychology and with the approval of the Principal of the school. All the data is filed at the University of Pretoria.

# ADDENDUM B

## THE RESEARCH AND ETHICS COMMITTEE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA – FACULTY OF EDUCATION

- Letter of introduction
- Letter of approval

UMnyango W
Department of Education

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Lefapha la Thuto
Departement van Onderwys

Enquiries Shadrack Phele
(011) 355 0285

12 March 2007

Mrs I. Ferreira
PO Box 905-471
Garsfontein
Pretoria
0042

Dear Mrs I. Ferreira

## APPROVAL TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH

The Gauteng Department of Education hereby grants permission to conduct research in its institutions as per application.

Topic of research: "The experience of assets that support learning: A phenomenological study".

Degree: M.Ed. Educational Psychology.

Name of university: University of Pretoria.

Upon completion of the research project the researcher is obliged to furnish the Department with copy of the research report (electronic or hard copy).

Wish you success in your academic pursuit.

Sincerely,

pp Shadrack Phele

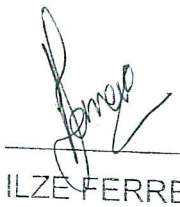
Albert Chanee
Divisional Manager
Education Financing, Planning and Monitoring.

Office of the Divisional Manager Education Financing, Planning and Monitoring
Room 1501, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001 P.O.Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000
Tel: (011) 355-0729 Fax: (011) 355-0670 E-mail: albertc@gpg.gov.za
Reference: 2005efpm

compromised. Approval will also be requested from the Research and Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (Faculty of Education).

Your consideration and time is appreciated. Should any other information be required please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



ILZE FERREIRA
STUDENT

PROF. I. ELOFF
STUDY LEADER
Tel: 012 420 3751

Due to accessibility and the context of XXXXXXXXXX, I chose to conduct my practical assignment at the XXXXXXXXXX School. During my preparation, I became increasingly intrigued by whether learners construct the same meaning about their experience of the phenomenon, "assets for learning support," than adults. For the purpose of my assignment, I decided to focus on the identification of assets, as identified by learners. For ethical purposes, I obtained permission from the Principal of the school. However, the University of Pretoria already has an agreement with the school, that Master students in Educational Psychology can conduct practical assignments at the school. The data of my practical assignment as well the data of work done by my fellow students, yielded rich insights into learning support and the mobilisation of resources to support learners learning.

It is important to note, that originally the completion of my practical assignment was not done for the purposes of research. Insights were gathered from the learners, with the intent to utilise these insights during the language development group sessions, to potentially benefit the learners of the school and to pass my academic assignment. During the nine years of the partnership between the University of Pretoria and XXXXXXXXXX, however, none of the accumulated data on learning support has been utilised and shared for the purpose of research. I believe that this information could yield rich insights on learning support. Yet, until the data is mobilised, it will remain unshared knowledge amongst the wider community of researchers in learning support. In this mini-dissertation, I would like to focus on the quest I undertook, in collaboration with learners, to understand their experiences of assets that support their learning. For the purpose of my mini-dissertation, I would like to utilise the existing information, as well as the process, which was followed to acquire the insights of my academic assignment and to construct this into a research study, which can be shared with the world.

Hereby, I kindly request permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to use the gathered data, for my dissertation and an article as required by the University of Pretoria. The school and the learners will in no way be named, identified or

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Mrs I Ferreira
P.O. Box 905-471
Garsfontein
Pretoria
0042

Contact number : 076 083 0277
Fax number : (012) 348 7475

2006-03-07

The Gauteng Department of Education
111 Commissioner Street
Johannesburg

**REQUESTING PERMISSION TO USE EXISTING DATA FROM A COMMUNITY PROJECT AT XXXXXXXXXX SCHOOL, ON LEARNING SUPPORT**

To Whom It May Concern:

I am currently a final year Maters degree student, specialising in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria. Part of the requirement for completing our Masters training is to submit a dissertation based on a research study and to have an article published in an accredited journal.

Part of my academic training in the field of Educational Psychology (2005), was to conduct a practical assignment that focused on asset-mapping for learning support in a school system. The Department of Educational Psychology created a community project with XXXXXXXXXX School. Thus, a learning environment for both the Master students in Educational Psychology and the learners of the school was created. Once a week, for a year the students facilitate language development group sessions, for selected learners of the School. This ongoing community project, of which I was fortunate to have been part of, has already been running for the past nine years. This community work is done under the supervision and guidance of Prof. Irma Eloff, Head of the Department of Educational Psychology and with the approval of XXXXXXXXXX, the Principal. All the data is filed at the University of Pretoria.

# ADDENDUM A

## THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DoE) DISTRICT OFFICE

- Letter of introduction
- Letter of approval

# LIST OF ADDENDUMS