

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SUPPORT OF SUSPENDED LEARNERS

by

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Lina Mmakgabo Methi, declare that the thesis entitled:

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SUPPORT OF SUSPENDED LEARNERS

is my own work and that all sources and citations from literature have been acknowledged in-text and referenced in full.

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“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13 New International Version.

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ABSTRACT

Consistent with research on alternative forms of discipline, out of school suspension seems to be amongst the traditional management practices that succeed “gun free zone” and “zero tolerance policy” corporal punishment. Research has shown that the number of learners suspended, particularly those in South African Township schools, is increasing with minimal efforts to support them; learners are faced by risks and they are not understood by adults who care for them. These learners are viewed as problematic, challenging and troublesome. They are subjected to unequal discipline practices (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011), irrespective of the differences in their adversities. Out of school suspension has been found to disadvantage learners in various ways: they are academically deprived and this put them at risk of being kept back in a grade; they are left with feelings of isolation and discrimination as well as thoughts of dropping out of school; and there is a high risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system.

The aim of this study was to explore, understand and describe the internal and external tensions experienced by suspended learners who have been identified with behaviour problems by reviewing the relevant available literature and through empirical research. The study also aimed to develop a feasible framework that could support suspended learners. A qualitative research design and phenomenology as a mode of enquiry were used in this study. The constructs of strength-based perspective and resilience thought to be relevant to the study were considered. The researcher agreed with the views of Saleeby (1996) and Ungar (2008) who focus on individuals’ strengths and assets not on content. They shift the frame of reference to define issues and concentrate on identifying, mobilising, and honouring the resources, assets, wisdom and knowledge of every individual, family, school and community.

The findings resulted in the emergence of seven themes. Some unique contextual findings were discovered and they were supported by the existing literature. Clinical implications, limitations and ideas for future research were also discussed. The proposed new paradigm takes into consideration an alignment of strengths,

competencies and contributions with resources and support in the environment to maximize resilience development in suspended learners.

Key words: Adolescent, suspension, resilient, protective factors, positive adaption,

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experiences
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBST	District Based Support Team
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HPCSA	Health Profession Council of South Africa
MEC	Minister of Education
PBIS	Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support
PPCT	Proximal, Person, Context, Time
RCL	Representative Council of Learners
SASA	South African Schools Act
SBP	Strength Based Perspective
SBST	School Based Support Team
SEL	Socio-Emotional Learning
SGB	School Governing Body
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SMT	School Management Team
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation
US	United States

TABLE OF CONTENT

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	v

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.2	BACKGROUND	3
1.3	RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY.....	9
1.4	PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	11
1.5	LITERATURE REVIEW	12
1.5.1	Exploring the Problem	12
1.5.2	Theoretical Framework	13
1.6	THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	14
1.7	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	15
1.8	RESEARCH DESIGN	16
1.9	RESEARCH METHODS	17
1.9.1	Population.....	18
1.9.2	Sampling	18
1.9.3	Data Collection Strategies	19
1.9.4	Data Analysis and Interpretation.....	20
1.10	CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS	20
1.11	TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY OF THE RESEARCH....	22
1.11.1	Credibility	22
1.11.2	Dependability	23
1.11.3	Conformability	23
1.11.4	Triangulation	23
1.12	RESEARCH ETHICS AND CONFIDENTIALITY	23
1.13	OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS.....	24
1.14	CONCLUSION	25

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	27
2.2	CONTEXTUALISATION OF SUSPENSION	27
2.3	RISK FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUSPENSION OF LEARNERS.....	31
2.4	THE EFFECTS OF THE SUSPENSION OF LEARNERS ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE	32
2.4.1	The Effects of Suspension on the Physical Development of Adolescents	32
2.4.2	The Effects of Suspension on the Mental Development of Adolescents	32
2.4.3	The Effects of Suspension on the Emotional Development of Adolescents	33
2.5	TRADITIONAL PROTECTIVE PROCESSES	34
2.6	LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS THE SUSPENSION OF LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS	35
2.6.1	The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996	35
2.6.2	The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996).....	35
2.6.3	Code of Conduct.....	37
2.6.4	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	37
2.7	GLOBAL TRENDS WITH REGARD TO SUSPENSION	39
2.7.1	Perceptions of Suspension in the United States	39
2.7.2	Perceptions of Suspension in Nigeria	42
2.7.2.1	<i>Discipline Challenges in Nigerian schools</i>	<i>43</i>
2.7.3	Perceptions of Suspension in South Africa	44
2.8	RESILIENCE	48
2.8.1	Conceptualising Resilience.....	48
2.8.2	Proximal Processes	51
2.8.3	Personal Characteristics	51
2.8.3.1	<i>Self-Efficacy</i>	<i>52</i>
2.8.3.2	<i>Cognitive Abilities</i>	<i>53</i>

2.8.3.3	<i>Positive Self-Worth or High Self-Esteem</i>	53
2.8.3.4	<i>Contextual Factors: People and Structures Surrounding the Child</i>	54
2.8.4.4	<i>Factors Impacting on Time</i>	57
2.9	PATHWAYS TO BUILDING CHILDREN’S RESILIENCE	58
2.10	THE CATALYTIC EFFECT OF PROTECTIVE PROCESSES	60
2.11	RESILIENCE MODELS.....	61
2.11.1	The Risk Protective Factor Model	61
2.11.2	The Compensatory Model.....	62
2.11.3	The Challenge Model.....	62
2.12	THRIVING	63
2.13	CONCLUSION	64

CHAPTER 3

THEOREICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED THEORIES

3.1	INTRODUCTION	66
3.2	STRENGTH-BASED PERSPECTIVETHEORY	66
3.2.1	Review of the Strength-Based Cycle	70
3.2.1.1	<i>Identification of the Strength-Based Cycle</i>	70
3.2.1.2	<i>Development of Strengths</i>	71
3.2.1.3	<i>Positive and Valued Meaningful Experiences</i>	71
3.2.1.4	<i>Opportunities Provided for Successful Development</i>	71
3.2.1.5	<i>Positive Expectations</i>	72
3.2.2	Implications of the Strength-Based Perspective	72
3.2.3	Desired Outcome of the Strength-Based Perspective	73
3.2.4	Review of Categories of Strength	75
3.3	RESILIENCE THEORY	77
3.3.1	Adversity	79
3.3.2	Mediating Processes.....	80
3.3.3	Outcomes.....	80
3.4	RISK FACTORS.....	81
3.5	UNIQUE PROTECTIVE FACTORS	83
3.5.1	Relationships.....	84

3.5.2	Identifying and Cultivating a Sense of Purpose	85
3.5.3	Individual Developmental Competencies	86
3.5.3.1	<i>Intellectual Capacity</i>	86
3.5.3.2	<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>	86
3.5.3.3	<i>High Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence</i>	87
3.5.3.4	<i>Social Competence</i>	88
3.5.4	A Powerful Identity	89
3.5.5	Personal Efficacy.....	89
3.5.6	Access to Material Resources.....	90
3.5.7	Sense of Cohesion	90
3.5.8	Cultural Adherence	91
3.6	PROMOTIVE FACTORS.....	91
3.7	INTEGRATION OF THE STRENGTH-BASED PERSPECTIVE AND RESILIENCE THEORY	92
3.8	MODELS INFLUENCING RESILIENCE	95
3.9	CONCLUSION	96

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	97
4.2	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	98
4.2.1	Phenomenological Research Design.....	100
4.2.2	Epoché	102
4.3	RESEARCH PARADIGM.....	102
4.3.1	Philosophical Assumptions	103
4.3.1.1	<i>Ontological Assumption</i>	104
4.3.1.2	<i>Epistemological Assumptions</i>	105
4.3.1.3	<i>Axiology</i>	106
4.4	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	106
4.4.1	Selection of Participants.....	107
4.4.2	Description of Contexts	108
4.4.2.1	<i>School A</i>	108

4.4.2.2	<i>School B</i>	109
4.5	DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES	110
4.5.1	Semi-structured Interviews	110
4.5.2	Documents	112
4.5.3	Focus Group Interviews	113
4.5.4	Field-notes	115
4.6	DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	117
4.7	RESEARCH ETHICS	119
4.7.1	Informed Consent	119
4.7.2	Assent and Consent	120
4.7.3	Avoidance of Harm	121
4.7.4	Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity	121
4.8	DETERMINING RIGOUR	123
4.8.1	Credibility	123
4.8.1.1	<i>Prolonged and Varied Engagement in Each Setting</i>	124
4.8.1.2	<i>Interviewing Process and Techniques</i>	125
4.8.1.3	<i>Peer Debriefing</i>	125
4.8.1.4	<i>Triangulation</i>	125
4.8.2	Dependability	126
4.8.3	Conformability	126
4.8.4	Transferability	127
4.8.4.1	<i>Purposive Sampling for a Nominated Sample</i>	127
4.8.4.2	<i>Data saturation</i>	127
4.9	CONCLUSION	128

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1	INTRODUCTION	129
5.2	RESEARCH FINDINGS	130
5.3	PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND LITERATURE CONTROL	130
5.3.1	Theme 1: Family Dynamics	132
5.3.1.1	<i>Sub-Theme 1: Family Structure</i>	132

5.3.1.2	<i>Sub-Theme 2: Socio-Economic Status</i>	132
5.3.2	Theme 2: Understanding Behaviour Problems	138
5.3.3	Theme 3: The Nature of Behaviour Problems	144
5.3.3.1	<i>Sub-Theme 3.1: Late-Coming</i>	144
5.3.3.2	<i>Sub-theme 3.2: Substance Abuse</i>	145
5.3.3.3	<i>Sub-theme 3.3: Disrespect for Teachers by Learners</i>	145
5.3.3.4	<i>Sub-Theme 3.4: Gambling</i>	147
5.3.3.5	<i>Sub-Theme 3.5: Bullying</i>	148
5.3.3.6	<i>Sub-Theme 3.6 Vandalism of School Resources</i>	149
5.3.4	Theme 4: Discipline Strategies	150
5.3.4.1	<i>Sub-Theme 4.1: Internal Discipline Procedures</i>	150
5.3.4.2	<i>Sub-Theme 4.2: Legal Discipline Procedure</i>	153
5.3.5	Theme 5: Staff Development	155
5.3.5.1	Sub-theme 5.1: Capacity Development in Addressing Challenging Learner Behaviour in School	155
5.3.6	Theme 6: Support Systems	157
5.3.6.1	<i>Sub-Theme 6.1: School Support Systems</i>	157
5.3.6.2	<i>Sub-Theme 6.2: District-Based Support Team</i>	159
5.3.6.3	<i>Sub-Theme 6.3: Support for Parents of Suspended Learners</i>	161
5.3.6.4	<i>Sub-Theme 6.4: Peer Support</i>	164
5.3.7	Theme 7: Collaboration with External Service Providers	165
5.4	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	166
5.4.1	Suspended Learners' Experiences of Family Dynamics	167
5.4.2	Understanding Behaviour Problems	169
5.4.3	Discipline Procedures	174
5.4.4	Staff Development	176
5.4.5	Support Structures	179
5.4.6	Collaboration with External Service Providers	183
5.4.7	Promotive Factors	185
5.5	CONCLUSION	189

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	190
6.2	SYNOPSIS OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS	190
6.3	EXPLORATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN TERMS OF THEMES	193
6.3.1	Secondary Research Question 1: What are the risk factors experienced by suspended learners who reside in townships and attend the selected secondary schools?	193
6.3.2	Secondary Research Question 2: What are the effects of suspension on the cognitive, physical and psychological being of learners?	195
6.3.3	Secondary Research Question 3: What personal factors are available in families, schools and communities and how can they be accessed to effectively assist the school and learners at risk?.....	197
6.4	RECOMMENDATIONS	200
6.4.1	Recommendation 1	201
6.4.2	Recommendation 2	201
6.4.3	Recommendation 3	201
6.5	SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	201
6.6	SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE PRACTICE BY SCHOOL COMMUNITIES.....	202
6.7	SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT SUSPENDED LEARNERS	203
6.7.1	Conceptualizing the Suggested Framework.....	204
6.7.2	Strategies to Reclaim Personal Power	206
6.8	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	211
6.9	CONCLUSION	212
	REFERENCES.....	215

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Offence Categories and Disruptions of Infractions that Could Result in Suspension.....	45
Table 2.2: Available Legislation and its Implications.....	47
Table 4.1: Research Methodology and Design: Process of Enquiry	97
Table 4.2: Philosophical Assumptions with Implications for Practice	104
Table 5.1: Key of the Abbreviations.....	131
Table 5.2: Identified Categories, Themes and Sub-Themes	131
Table 6.1: Strategies to Reclaim Personal Power.....	206

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Published Rise of Out-of-School Suspension	40
Figure 2.2: Misbehaviour of Learners in the Provinces of South Africa ...	44
Figure 2.3: The PPCT Model of Resilience.....	50
Figure 3.1: The Strength-Based Cycle.....	69
Figure 3.2: Resilience as a Process and an Outcome.....	78
Figure 5.1: Negativity Cycle	171
Figure 5.2: Image of Strengths and Resilience.....	186
Figure 5.3: Reciprocal Determinations in the Causal Model of Social Cognitive theory	188
Figure 6.1: Integration of Internal and External Positive Factors to Build Resilience	205
Figure 6.2: The Metaphor of “Kitsungi Bowl”	212

ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Ethics Clearance Certificate.....	255
Annexure B: Application for Permission to Undertake Research in GDE Institutions	257
Annexure C: Application to Two District Offices for Permission to Undertake Research in Schools	259
Annexure D: Letter to Principals Requesting Permission to Conduct Research.....	261
Annexure E: Letter to Parents, Guardians, Teachers and District Officials Inviting Participation in Research Study.....	263
Annexure F Letter Requesting Parental Consent for Minors to Participate in a Research Project.....	266
Annexure G: Focus Group Consent and Confidentiality Agreement ..	269
Annexure H: Declaration of Editing	270
Annexure I: Permission Letters from Gauteng Department of Education and Schools to Undertake Research in Schools.....	271
Annexure J: Transcriptions.....	274

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Suspending learners from the educational system for a period of time because of unsatisfactory behaviour seems to be a universal reality that is broadly used in schools. Learners are suspended for a variety of reasons, such as the possession of illegal drugs; hugging a friend; having a certain disapproval of hairstyle; and being accused of vandalism - just to name a few. Although suspension is regarded as a punitive method of discipline (Iselin, 2010), some researchers believe that it is effective in that it removes problematic learners from schools; provides a temporary relief for teachers; and draws parents' attention to the need for a suitable intervention. However, the fact that suspended learners are not permitted to return to their schools or be on the school premises for the period of suspension may result in negative consequences, such as possible future anti-social behaviour and becoming a juvenile justice system statistic. Thompson (2015) is of the opinion that disciplinary action that removes learners from schools has been proved to increase negative outcomes, including early school leaving, poor performance, poor school attendance and delinquency.

Reports containing an overview of the problem of learner misconduct in schools have attracted the attention of politicians and policy-makers to the issue of school disruption which has elicited a reaction from them (Maphosa and Mammen, 2011). The use of out-of-school suspension and dismissal are associated with the harsh practice of 'zero-tolerance' (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Zero-tolerance was originally introduced to promote security in corroborating and solving serious offenses, like gambling and the illegal possession of firearms (Matsilele, 2018) It was then assumed that enforcing strong stability would also frustrate other disturbing problems (Skiba, 2014). It is well documented that the zero-tolerance policy has addressed both violent and non-violent, or low level, offences (Losen & Martinez, 2013). The question that begs to be asked is: *Does the implementation of zero-tolerance in the suspension of learners make a difference in curbing learner misbehaviour?* According to Dieringer, Cregor and Willis (2015), there is no evidence to show that out-of-school suspension reduces infringement rates or improves learners' behaviour at school. This finding essentially

informed the need to develop alternative methods of discipline and for schools to invest in restorative justice approaches that demonstrate marked decreases in suspensions internationally (Baker-Smith, 2018).

Before the advent of true democracy in 1994, maintaining discipline in South African schools was widely dependent on the use of corporal punishment (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Woulter & Russo, 2013). In the general process of transformation, corporal punishment was abolished in schools and many teachers were uncertain about how to discipline their learners. The relevant authorities developed structured and efficient discipline policies that were implemented as alternatives to corporal punishment. The policies took into consideration the learners' rights to dignity, freedom and security (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996). According to Ntshangase (2015), in resolving the problem of discipline government adopted the "*parents patriae*" approach whereby it assumed the leadership role with the learners as parents were perceived to have failed in raising their children according to the dictates of the Bill of Human Rights. Mampane, (2018) contends that *in loco parentis* basically implies that the teacher's responsibility is, in most cases, constitutionally compliant with, and progressive in, recognizing learners' human rights. In order to balance the situation, parents should also take responsibility for their children when raising them. Theron, Liebenberg and Malindi (2014) maintain that this implies that parents have a duty to uphold and extend the fundamental human rights of their children.

Suspended learners are ordinary children who have been exposed to the challenges of everyday life but lack the ability to deal with them (Masten, 2001). They tend to display emotional, behavioural and/or learning disabilities. Teachers in South African schools struggle to maintain learner discipline (Porteus, Vally, & Ruth, (2001); Mncube, 2009; Nunan & Ntombela, 2018). It is the duty of teachers to understand the causes of disruptive learner behaviour to be able to develop appropriate intervention strategies. A potential option is to consider changing aspects of the schools' culture as a possible solution to improving the well-being of learners. Despite the fact that school disciplinary procedures in South Africa have improved radically, learners still tend to misbehave in many township schools.

I believe that evicting misbehaving learners from the classroom or suspending them from school may not be the best option. As an alternative, I suggest that learners should be offered more fruitful interventions that focus on eliminating potential threats to their health and enhance their ability to change and to improve their lives by managing the risks they face. A positive relationship between adolescents and adults should be developed to promote the protective resource of emotional support in terms of alleviating their fears and anxieties. The primary aim of this study was to find ways and means by which resilience could be built in suspended learners who are exposed to adversity. In order to strengthen and support them in finding ways to meet their needs, I was eager to explore and understand suspended learners' experiences in their natural setting as well as what internal or external resources were available to enhance learners' abilities to direct and manage their lives psychologically, socially, culturally and physically (Ungar, 2012).

This chapter presents contextualised background information concerning the risk factors experienced by suspended learners in Grades 8 and 9 in township secondary schools. An outline of the problem statement, the research questions and the aims that guided this study are discussed. The chapter also presents the theoretical framework which was used as a lens through which the building of resilience in suspended learners was explored as well as the research design and ethical implications that were considered to ground the study. Lastly, the chapter highlights definitions of the main concepts used in the study and gives an outline of the report's chapters.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The behavioural problems portrayed by some vulnerable learners raised the concern to understand why exposure to adversity produces negative outcomes in some adolescents - even after strategies are put in place to support them. Research undertaken by Theron and Engelbrecht (2012) as well as Theron, Liebenberg and Malindi (2014) in South African schools shows that there are caring teachers in schools who act as agents of resilience for children with limited access to formal health and social services. Generally, and against all odds, there are teachers who are caring and nurturing and who are willing to go beyond what is expected of them in terms of their core responsibilities to provide emotional support for learners with behaviour problems.

Many of these learners are personally challenged in that they live with chronic adversity and suffer stressful times, such as family breakdown and trauma (Roffey, 2016). Theron (2009) maintains that a resilience promoting knowledge capacity is lacking amongst teachers in view of the increasing rate of suspensions - aggravated by learners' poor academic performance and behaviour problems.

Children have a fundamental emotional need for protection, safety and security as well as consistent trusting relationships (Van der Kolk, 2017); when these needs are not met, they are seriously disempowered (Bell, 2002) and to succeed in life they desperately struggle to overcome adversity (De Jager, 2008; Walsh, 2003). Ungar, in Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Othman, Kwong, Armstrong and Gilgun (2007), classifies the seven needs of children as follows: access to supportive relationships; development of a desirable personal identity; experiences of power and control; experiences of social justice; access to material resources; experiences of a sense of cohesion with others and adherence to cultural traditions.

External stimuli, over which children have little or no control, have an adverse effect on their physical growth and temperament. Van der Kolk, (2017) suggests that most of the trauma that children experience begins at home where they are exposed to difficult situations - often facing life-threatening problems - that endanger their well-being. Unless children's needs are met within the context of a caring home with nurturing relationships and secure attachments which enable them to make informed life choices, they will attempt to meet these needs in their own ways that may well result in unacceptable behaviour (Bell, 2002). In their perspective, Shah and Stewart-Brown (2018), nurture, praise, positive discipline and secure attachments play an important role in promoting child resilience. The environment can have a positive or negative influence on the lives of a developing adolescent. The family environment forms the basis of the moral development of the adolescent where it is crucial for parents and other significant adults in the lives of the children to provide them with caring and nurturing relationships in order to prevent unforeseeable negative consequences and to enhance their resilience (Walsh, 2015; Coleman, 2018). Good parenting allows children to feel safe and helps them develop self-regulation attributes that prevent stressors to negatively impact their development and their lives (Shah, and Stewart-Brown, 2018). However, negative parenting behaviour, such as screaming and

shouting at children and bruising and assaulting them, leads to their vulnerability and to displaying symptoms of external depression with the possible effect of long term chronic trauma; this implies that adolescents and their environment need careful managing (Hinnant, Erath & El-Sheikh, 2015; Shah & Stewart-Brown, 2018).

Environmental stressors that could influence suspended learners' lives are mostly concerned with their close relationships, namely: losing the most important people in their lives to death, relocation, divorce and removal from their homes because of domestic violence (Mathibela, 2017). The consequences of these stressors are manifested not only in the adolescents' performance at school but also in their physical health and psychological well-being that may later threaten their adult lives (Ungar, Russel & Connelly, 2014: 66). The adolescents', as learners, reactions to stressors may include aggressive behaviour, disrespect and tardiness or playing truant from school (Burke, 2015).

There are several perspectives that account for why some learners cope well in the face of adversity while others are rendered helpless and frustrated by their circumstances. The work by Garmezy (1985) related to developmental psychology involves stress resistant children; in the context of school and education resilience refers to an ability to thrive academically despite adverse circumstance. Resilient theorists, such as Rutter (2013), Masten (2014) and Liebenberg and Ungar (2011), contend that factors that contribute to individual resilience stability may be the result of the genetic makeup or healthcare of other people who have shown that they are able to cope well - despite being susceptible to adversity. A study by Van Breda (2017) suggests that the dominant part of learner resilience instability originates in upsets and impeded networks described as destitution, wrongdoing and broken families. Unmistakably, growing up under such distressing conditions undermines learners' wellbeing, development and improvement as well as learning; the learners appear to be defenceless and crippled in managing their uncertainties in terms of insight and knowledge and innovation (Masten, 2001; Davis, Myers, Logsdon & Bauer, 2016).

Porter (2000) believes that children's development is an inner unfolding, driven by biological maturation and curiosity. Therefore, abnormalities in the normal flow of information between the senses, the brain and the muscles may cause significant

problems in the behavioural functioning of individuals (Jordan-Black, 2005; De Jager, 2009). It has been suggested that certain behavioural and emotional problems are the result of malfunctioning processes where the senses, the brain and the limbs do not coordinate to their full potential. According to De Jager (2008), such behaviour originates in the responses of the survival brain and reacts instinctively in actions, such as hitting, swearing, bullying or running away without thinking rationally or considering emotions before responding, which puts learners at risk of expulsion or suspension. De Jager (2008) is of the opinion that children are unable to think due to underdeveloped cognitive skills and, hence, they need guidance and protection.

Manteau-Rao (2016) believes that individuals with emotional and mental issues and who experience psychological events and environmental stress may have difficulty coping with difficult conditions due to some failure in the maturity of executive functions. The sensory system is a mediator between human beings and their environment; children with a poor sensory regulation system find it difficult to see things from someone else's perspective which can result in them stubbornly isolating themselves by tending to make a drama out of smallest incident and being prone to tears, rage, jealousy, sulking or depression (De Jager, 2008). These children struggle to adapt to new situations which inevitably lead to restlessness and agitation (Manteau-Rao, 2016).

Constitutional codes serve as the highest authority that underpins the mandate for legitimising both public and private organisations (Dieltiens, 2014). In terms of the Schools Act (1996) learners, specifically in the context of the Gauteng Department of Education, may be suspended for a minimum period of five school days for minor offenses; it is further recommended that they should be enrolled in diversion programmes. However, serious offense learners may be expelled and moved to another school on condition that they receive intervention and support by means of diversion programmes or behaviour modification strategies (Schools Act, 1996). The questions that need to be answered are: *Does it work?* and *Does it succeed in curbing the misbehaviour?*

According to Prinsloo (2006), the rights of all South African citizens are laid down in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and Act 108 of 1996. The Schools Act,

No. 84 of 1996, sets out a partnership between parents, teachers and learner bodies to enhance their mutual responsibility for the education of children (Prinsloo, 2006; Dieltiens, 2014). The Constitution clearly defines educational activities and the specific roles of teachers who are expected to support the decisions of government and to promote positive values in schools (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010). However, teachers often find it difficult to maintain discipline, as stipulated in the Schools Act, while at the same time protecting the rights of children (Maphosa & Mammen, 2011) as mandated by the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996); this, unfortunately, results in an escalating and unbearable lack of learner discipline (Masitsa, 2008; Zulu, Urbani, Van der Merwe & Van der Walt, 2004).

The School Governing Body (SGB) is a statutory body that was established in terms of the Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996, to comply with the prescripts of the relevant laws pertaining to establishing collaborative initiatives with regard to, among other things, the maintenance of discipline in public schools (Bray, 2005). Dieltiens (2014) maintains that communities that cooperate in building common interests benefit schools and enhance the resilience of learners. SGBs draw their authority to act from the provisions in the Schools Act (Prinsloo, 2006) and they derive all their power from the supreme constitution (Bray, 2005). The Schools Act mandates SGBs to develop a safety plan and to suspend learners who are allegedly unable to maintain the good standards of their schools. However, SGBs may only implement suspension after learners are given an opportunity to speak in respect of their suspension after they have undergone disciplinary procedure (Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996).

Research conducted by Mncube (2009) shows that in some schools all decision-making pertaining to discipline is the responsibility of the School Management Team (SMT) and not that of the SGB. It has been noted that even though the functions of the SGBs are clearly articulated in Section 20 of the Schools Act (1996), SMTs in certain schools still tend to make disciplinary decisions and exercise expulsion and suspension which undermines the powers vested in SGBs. Proposed amendments to the South African Schools Act may soon be implemented. There appears to be a fear amongst members of SGBs that their current functions will cease to have power; however, the current laws are still effective until the new Bill is passed. The current role of SGBs is still to uphold the mandate of the constitution of the country and to protect

the rights of learners in terms of school discipline, teenage pregnancies, language, religion and culture (Karlsson, 2002; Sayed & Motala, 2012). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 and the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) have served as a foundation in democratising South African education and ensuring access to basic education for all children and adults. In terms of learner discipline, SGBs have the authority to discuss and plan discipline in a fair and understanding manner in order to respect the rights of all participants in the process (Prinsloo, 2006).

The legal framework that guides intervention and support related to challenging behaviour in schools is still under restorative justice in South Africa which leaves teachers at a disadvantage in addressing behaviour problems. However, teachers in Gauteng Province are trained to implement the Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS)¹ policy which facilitates support and intervention (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The SIAS policy document is used as a diagnostic guideline for the early detection of severe learning difficulties in learners, including behaviour problems. It outlines how the support needs of learners should be identified and how they should be supported in schools. The policy document outlines implementation procedures to ensure that all learners receive the necessary support to participate at, and develop their full potential in, school (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Although the intentions of the SIAS document are good, the pressure put on training teachers to use and implement it leaves much to be desired.

According to Dieringer, Cregor and Willis (2015), there is little evidence to prove that suspension as a disciplinary measure reduces the prevalence of learners' disruptive behaviour or improves their behaviour in school. Burke (2015) believes that disciplinary action that takes learners out of the classroom is negative; that it aggravates their misbehaviour; and that it makes it more difficult for them to focus on their schooling. Generally, research has shown that suspension has a negative impact on the welfare of learners and that it reflects negatively on schools (Anyon, Gregory, Stone, Farrar, Jenson, McQueen, Downing, Greer & Simmons, 2016). According to Anyon *et al.*

¹ Screening Identification Assessment and Support was developed in 2006 as a draft policy to orientate teachers in the implementation of policy in schools and districts. The final policy was promulgated on 19 December 2014 for implementation as from 2015.

(2016), learners who have been suspended are at risk of being excluded from school and are forced into crime a process referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Rausch, Skiba & Simmons, 2005; Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya & Hughes, 2014; Anyon, Lechuga, Ortega, Downing, Greer & Simmons, 2018).

The relevant available literature on the subject indicates that research has been conducted on various intervention strategies that may be used to support learners with behaviour problems. Despite efforts having been made to establish networks with health services and social development, the number of suspensions in schools continues to escalate, including the dropout rate - especially that of learners from a previously disadvantaged township background. Building resilience in adolescents is more likely to be an effective intervention strategy because it increases a focus on "protective processes" that promote well-being rather than identifying and eliminating risk (Masten, 2002).

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The increasing rate of behaviour problems exhibited by secondary school learners, due to their inability to cope with their contextual and/or personal circumstances, has resulted in suspensions that are imprudently used as a disciplinary measure. According to the Scheduled Statistics of 2015, the number of recommended suspensions increased in each of the sixteen Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) districts in South Africa. It seems that some schools implement suspension in response to a wide range of misbehaviour, including tardiness, truancy, disruptive behaviour, noncompliance and insubordination (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Challenging behaviour among teens appears to be prevalent in many schools and teachers find it difficult to deal with issues of violence, inappropriate behaviour, frustration, communication, disruptive classroom behaviour and truancy (Porter, 2015).

Skiba and Sprague (2008) are of the opinion that the characteristics of learners and school factors are determinants of the rate of suspension in township schools. It is assumed that the characteristics of learners could include physiological developmental delays or contextual life experiences. Maphosa and Shumba (2010) maintain that learner morality can be severely damaged and may affect the effectiveness of schools

and the safety of teachers and learners if behavioural problems are not identified and addressed at an early stage.

Schools that practice suspension isolate learners and disrupt the relationship-building process that takes place between teachers and learners (Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018). Suspension from school may be assumed to punish learners, alert parents and protect other learners as well as teachers. Pentek and Eisenberg (2018) argue that teachers are disempowered in disciplining learners as they no longer know what to do to maintain discipline. Generally, it seems that society perceives schools with high rates of suspension, expulsion and law enforcement referrals to be less safe and more dangerous than other schools (Anyon *et al.*, 2018).

Research indicates that the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) have high rates of suspension (American Academy of Paediatrics Committee on School Health, 2003). Indiana is ranked first in the US in terms of suspensions (Skiba, Eaton & Sotoo, 2004). Dieringer *et al.* (2015) contend that in the US secondary school principals face the vexing issue of suspending or expelling learners on a daily basis. Similarly, in South African schools Maphosa and Shumba (2010) report a sharp increase in the number of problem behaviour cases, such as learners being allegedly involved in gang-related incidents involving children (Pileggi, 2018) and problems with gambling, associated with both violent and non-violent behaviour among adolescents (Rodda, Hing, Hodgins, Cheetham, Dickins & Lubman, 2018). Other problems include substance abuse and sexual victimisation which are deemed to be the long-term consequences of adverse childhood experiences; inherent traumatic experiences; and the violation of children's rights (Kabiru, Beguy, Crichton & Ezeh 2010).

Yuan and Che (2012) maintain that teachers who deal with learner misbehaviour experience greater classroom disruption and lose a substantial amount of contact time which, in turn, affects the quality of their teaching and the children's learning experiences. Research conducted by Nel, Tlale and Engelbrecht (2017) suggests that little has been documented about the reality and dilemma faced by teachers in their attempt to support learners with diverse educational needs in the South African educational context. This does not imply that teachers cope well with learners' behaviour problems. SGBs and SMTs spend hours in disciplinary hearings that result

in suspension and/or recommendation for expulsion to the Head of Department of Education.

Both internationally and nationally the issue of learner suspension has received a great deal of attention over a long period of time (Maphosa & Mammen, 2011). Skiba and Rauch (2006) disagree that suspensions are effective in their desired outcome of reducing unacceptable behaviour or that they are they effective in promoting positive expected behaviour. It is, therefore, for this reason that this study aimed to augment the discourse concerning support for learners with behaviour problems by probing risk factors experienced by suspended learners and determining protective factors that contribute to the achievement of desired outcomes by reinforcing learner resilience and implementing and incorporating the legal rules that embrace and give effect to the norms, values and principles that promote open, transparent and accountability in education governance (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Education plays a major role in the socialisation and moral development of young people (Aly, Taylor & Karnovsky, 2014). Children need to hear words of encouragement and approval to make them feel appreciated and safe (De Jager, 2014). Building resilience is a way to promote the positive development of children, especially those in conditions of poverty; it helps them avoid harmful, self-destructive or anti-social behaviour, mental disorders and threats to their physical well-being and being suspended from school (Ungar, Russell, and Connelly, 2014). Ungar *et al.* (2014) argue that resilience refers not only to children's personal qualities but also to how well their social and physical environments facilitate internal and external factors, such as healthy relationships, a powerful identity, social justice, needs that include food and education, a sense of belonging, life purpose and spirituality. If the needs of children are provided for and their self-confidence is boosted, the thinking brain is stimulated (De Jager, 2008:33). An active brain strengthens learners' ability to negotiate resources and develop the capacity to utilise them in a meaningful way. It should be remembered that, more than anything, children have a great need of attention and time (De Jager, 2014:37).

It is important to understand that available research results reflect the fact that academic performance and social interaction are determinants of resilience. However, little attention has been given to the integration and accessibility of multi-disciplinary government-funded services that are meant to help facilitate the positive psycho-social development of at-risk young people. It is through the thoughts and reflections of suspended learners that their reality and experiences can be understood to provide an overview of protective resources and ways that promote their resilience; they are able to verbalise the means by which they navigate their situations and how they negotiate material resources (Ungar *et al.* 2014). Resilience is gauged in terms of evidence that suggests that some people are more successful than others who have experienced similar problems; moreover, negative experiences may have an encouraging or strengthening effect in responding to adversity (Thompson, 2015).

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the relevant available literature was undertaken with particular reference to the problem being investigated and to establishing a theoretical framework.

1.5.1 Exploring the Problem

The literature review included the work of other researchers regarding risk factors that contribute to the suspension of learners and the availability of protective processes and factors within schools and their effect. The fact that, generally, schools struggle to find appropriate strategies to address a range of learner behavioural health needs is similar to what is experienced by teachers in the current South African township school context. As evidenced in the large number of suspensions in the 16 districts of the Gauteng Department of Education, a substantial number of them are instigated by behaviour problems. This could be attributed to the inappropriate use of available resources and being unaware of best practices and promising strategies for non-exclusionary interventions that could be tailored to meet the needs of individual learners.

The literature review aimed at exploring legislation that regulates the suspension of learners in South African schools; it included the Constitution of the Republic of South

Africa (Act 108 of 1996), the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) and policy documents of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). The review also focused on resilience theories that reflect the inner strengths of individuals, such as coping skills, as well as external ones, like family and community support - rather than risks and deficits; I was particularly interested to learn how these strengths could help individuals overcome risk exposure and traumatic experiences. It explored trends in resilience and approaches and their effectiveness in building resilience in suspended learners. Numerous studies showed that programmes in schools concentrate on changing the children's context rather than assisting them to function in poorly resourced environments (Ungar *et al.*, 2014:69).

Previous research has shown that school suspension can negatively influence the development of learners, including the internalisation of emotions related to socio-emotional and behavioural development. Unless suspended learners are assisted with access to appropriate intervention programmes or placement they will drop out of school. Learners who may, potentially, be suspended can be identified by the following: poor school performance, truancy, lack of respect for authority and an increase in family stress due to poor interpersonal relations. Global perspectives with regard to suspended learner's experiences are explored in the Literature Review in Chapter 2, including the risk factors or harmful life circumstances that impinge on individuals' development and protective factors or resilience-enhancing resources that may be applied in support of suspended learners.

1.5.2 Theoretical Framework

This study used an integration of the Strength-Based Perspective Theory (SBP) and the Resilience Theory as a theoretical framework. The Strength-Based Perspective Theory concentrates on the inherent strengths of individuals, families groups and organisations that deploy peoples' personal strengths to aid recovery and empowerment. In simple terms, the SBP contains approaches that promote resilience as opposed to dealing with deficits (Pulla, 2006) and recognises that when people face adversity they become resilient and resourceful and learn new strategies to overcome it. Globally, strength-based practices are gaining impetus in diverse fields of human services management, healthcare, education and training as all environments have

resources and in every society individuals and institutions are willing to help one another in terms of human well-being. Teachers in schools do their best to make their learners understand what they really want them to understand. I believe that the SBP theory will help teachers refrain from using crippling, labelling and stigmatising language; it will assist them to identify and build on the suspended learner's strengths so that they can reach their goals and retain or regain some independence in their daily lives.

Concomitantly, the Resilience Theory suggests that individuals have the capacity to navigate their way through psychological, mental and physical resources that sustain their well-being (Ungar, 2015). Resilience Theory provided a lens through which the unique experiences of suspended learners were explored to understand them in their different living contextual backgrounds as well as the resources at their disposal and their ability to negotiate them. This is in line with the strength-based approach that operates on the assumption that people have strengths and resources which may be used for self-empowerment. It was thought that it would, therefore, be pertinent to consider building the resilience of suspended learners by developing their capacity to navigate their way to psychological, social, cultural and physical resources in the context of a strengths perspective - an opportunity that may gather available resources during crises for efficient functioning following adversity (Pulla, 2012). The SBP and Resilient Theory complement one another in that they both focus on understanding healthy development despite risk and on strengths rather than weaknesses (Windle, 2011).

1.6 THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study was to explore and understand the life experiences of suspended learners who have been identified with behaviour problems. These learners reside in townships and attend the two selected schools with other learners from different socio-economic backgrounds. It was through the documentation of the genuine narratives of the real life experiences of suspended learners in these two contexts that their challenges and needs could be understood. Acknowledging the suspended learners input served to recognise them as children who were in dire need

of additional support. The theoretical framework was informed by the interpretation of the learners' experiences related to the real issues that they faced (Knafo, 2015).

The objectives of the study were the following:

- To explore the risks factors that caused the behavioural problems experienced by suspended learners.
- To explore and understand cognitive, psychological and contextual protective processes within the context of the participants.
- To determine how the personal factors within the family, school and community could contribute in supporting suspended learner.
- To develop a support framework that could be used to build resilience in support of suspended learners.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question was: *What are the life experiences of suspended learners who have been identified with behaviour problems?*

The secondary research questions that would further inform the primary question were the following:

- What are the risks factors experienced by suspended learners who reside in townships and attend the selected secondary schools?
- What are the effects of suspension on the cognitive, physical and psychological being of learners?
- What personal factors are available in the family, school and community and how can they be accessed to effectively assist the school and the at risk learners?
- What support framework could be applied to build resilience in suspended learners?

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was a qualitative one that was guided by the philosophical assumptions of interpretive practice to understand the complex nature of the experiences of the participants. Nieuwenenhuis (2007) describes interpretivism as communicating people's perspectives on how they make 'their world' by sharing its meaning and how they are cooperatively united. An interpretivist's paradigm attempts to provide answers to the question: *How and what can we know?* (Willig, 2008). Interpretivists, in general, focus on the process by which meanings are created, negotiated and sustained (Schwandt, 2000). The social constructivist paradigm was deemed appropriate for this research because it is concerned with individuals' understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2013:24-25) and that the reality of their experiences can only be fully known by them (Delpont, Fouché, and Schurink, 2011).

A research paradigm offers a good, logical framework for natural studies (Babbie, 2015) and the three different philosophical assumptions that underpinned this study are the following:

- The **ontological** assumption about resilience is that children are faced with adverse contextual experiences and need coping skills to survive. Research in the relevant literature indicates that there are various reasons why certain individual learners are associated with suspension.
- The **epistemological** assumption of this research is related to the interpretivist's view that the personal perspective is subjective and socially constructed by its participants (Bryman, 2016; Lincoln & Guba 2000). Therefore, face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews and documents were selected as data gathering instruments for this study. This was done to understand the suspended learners' worlds through first-hand experience of truthful reporting and by using quotations of actual conversations detailing the participants' perspectives (Merriam, 2009).
- The **axiological** assumption related to suspended learners refers to human rights as protective processes and factors. It reflects an awareness of the human rights and the ethical responsibility of teachers, parents and caregivers

to understand the critical dimensions of the diversity of challenges adolescents are faced with and enable them to provide them with efficient support.

Phenomenology is used as a mode of enquiry and was the philosophical basis for this study. Phenomenologists, in contrast to positivists, believe that researchers cannot be detached from their own pre-suppositions and that they should not pretend otherwise (Hammersley, 2005). According to Willig (2008), the principles of phenomenology are concerned with the type of data researchers aim to collect and the role of participants in the research process. It is a plan for selecting research subjects, research sites and data collection procedures to answer research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The hermeneutic phenomenological approach was selected because it places attention on the subjective experiences of individuals and groups and attempts to unveil the world as experienced by the subject participants through their world life stories (Kafle, 2011). The approach helped obtain direct and subjective interpretations from participants about their suspensions; their comprehension of reality in a non-judgmental way; and how the hidden meanings and the essence of their experience were manifested (Grbich 2007).

The epistemological position of this study was that data is contained within the perspectives of the participants, their families and the selected schools. It is generally accepted that the type of data to be collected in a qualitative study needs to be naturalistic and should create a comprehensive record of participants' words and actions (Willig, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Langdrige, 2007). Langdrige (2007) further describes phenomenology as a qualitative method that focuses on human experience as a topic in its own right.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods included identifying a valid population that could be sampled; data collecting strategies; and data analysis and interpretation.

1.9.1 Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:119) consider populations to be a set of elements or situations, such as individuals, objects and events, that meet specific criteria and which are used to generalise the results of the research. The population for this research was drawn from selected Grade 8 and Grade 9 learners who had been suspended due to their challenging misbehaviour. Although the population was a fairly a large group of individuals, only a few were selected by using the purposive sampling of individuals who would represent the behaviour and attitudes of the entire population.

1.9.2 Sampling

The phenomenon being researched dictates the methods to be used in the study, including the type of participants (Groenewald, 2004). Purposive sampling was chosen to identify the primary participants as it is considered by many academics to be the most important kind of non-probability sampling (Sharma, 2017). The sample for this study was based on the aim of the research (Groenewald, 2004; Patton, 2002) and learners who had experienced being suspended were identified (Groenewald, 2004). Twelve learners were purposively selected from the two chosen secondary schools in two different districts. Suspended learners have personal characteristics or environmental conditions that predict the onset, continuity and escalation of problematic behaviour (Rutter, 1987). The common factor that influenced their selection was that the learners came from the same predominantly disadvantaged residential area even though their schools were situated at different areas; School A is a former Model C school in a predominantly white community but almost none of the learners registered at that school reside in the area; the tendency is that learners who attend school in a remote area are transported to school in mini-buses on a daily basis from nearby townships. Suspended learners have been stereotyped as coming from the townships and from disadvantaged members of minority groups (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Bradley, Corwyn, McAadoo & Coll, 2001). However, on any given day, even the most advantaged youth may be at risk of participating in or developing problematic behaviour. School B is situated at the centre of a previously socio-economically disadvantaged area and most of the learners reside in a nearby area that

is described as an informal settlement. The selected participants from both schools have been suspended from school more than once.

Participants were selected because of their accessibility, their geographical proximity, their availability at a given time and their willingness to participate in the study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). I contacted the school offices of the principals of both schools telephonically in order to obtain a list of previously suspended learners and their parents' details. The parents, who were deemed to have the most conspicuous and direct influence on their children's behaviour and who were part of my exo-system, were also contacted telephonically to obtain preliminary consent for their children to participate in the research as well as their consent to personally take part in face-to-face interviews. The school-based support teams at the schools, school social workers and educational psychologists servicing the schools in both districts were contacted by e-mail and their consent was obtained in writing.

1.9.3 Data Collection Strategies

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), qualitative data collection is well aligned with the research questions that relate to the topic of the study; it allows for comparison and linkage as well as experimental and individualistic methods of data collection and analysis. My aim was to explore, describe and explain the experiences of suspended learners who demonstrate challenging behaviour in schools and to determine what can be done to support them in terms of building their resilience. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) add that qualitative research contains a description of the process whereby the behaviour occurs as well as its causes and places an emphasis on the process that allows conclusions to be drawn that explain the reasons for the behaviour. Creswell (2003) describes the data collection process as separate events where solid information is gathered from responses to the research questions. Data for this study was collected using a qualitative method of research that included individual interviews, focus groups interviews, field notes and relevant related documents.

1.9.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data analysis process is said to involve reducing the amount of raw information; filtering the importance of the questions; identifying meaningful patterns; and building a framework to communicate the essence of what the data reveals (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005). Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships between categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In this study field notes and *verbatim* transcripts of audio-recordings made during the interviews were used which facilitated the easy retrieval of data for analysis. There was some advance planning in terms of color-coding of notes to keep track of dates, names, titles and subject participation to assist in categorising the data in the process of analysis (De Vos *et al.*, 2005). Maree (2007) maintains that how researchers collect and order data and what they extract from it is really the product of the lens through which researchers see the world; it dictates the angle from which researchers approach the data.

1.10 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Key terms that were used in the study are defined and clarified below:

- **Adolescence** - Carr-Gregg (2005:5) states that 'adolescence' comes from the Latin word "*adolescere*" which means to grow to maturity - the period in human life from puberty to adulthood. Adolescence may be defined as the time during which most of the biological, cognitive, psychological and social characteristics of individuals change in a coherent way from childhood to adulthood. It is the period during which children develop a sense of identity and form the attitudes and skills that will carry them through later adolescence and the rest of their lives (Erikson, 1968; Meeus, 2011; Crocetti, 2017). While the Deficits Model describes the characteristics of adolescents (Erikson, 1968; Crocetti, 2017), focuses basically on genetics and maturation and suggests that adolescents are in danger of being destroyed (Benson, Scales, Hamilton and Sesma, 2006), it laid a foundation for the Resilience Theory by also considering related issues, such as individuals' developmental pathways, identity formation and relationships as well as health-enhancing capacities within the individual,

family and community (Walsh, 2003; Ungar, 2004; Masten & Obradovic, 2008). In this study the concept is related to the risks suspended adolescents experience and internal and external protective factors that build their resilience.

- **Challenging behaviour** – This is defined as behaviour of such intensity, frequency or duration that the physical security of the person and/or other persons is in serious danger; it is behaviour that can greatly restrict or prohibit access to ordinary community facilities (Bailey, Hare, Hatton & Limb, 2006). Challenging behaviour in this study refers to repeated patterns of behaviour that disturb or endanger learners' optimal learning or involvement in pro-social interaction with their peers and with adults.
- **Building resilience** – The process of building resilience concerns individuals' expertise and ability to visualise; manage their emotions and their social lives; solve problems; and constructively and appropriately respond to human and social life events that are characterised by adversity, risk and challenges (Kruger & Prinsloo, 2008). Resilience is not an inherent construct; all experiences and exposures that babies have before they are born, the high stress levels mothers are exposed to, poor nutrition, illness, loss of a family member, domestic violence and poverty adversely affect unborn children (Wright., Masten and Narayan, 2013). Masten (2001) describes resilience as a human and physical resource that is accessible in individuals' interaction with contextual challenges. Ungar *et al.* (2014) believes that children need information, results, many solid relationships, strong knowledge, a strong identity, values, a purpose in life, rights and responsibilities, safety, security and support. In the context of this study building resilience refers to the capacity of individuals to access resources that sustain their well-being and their capacity, individually and collectively (Ungar, 2013).
- **Suspension** - Suspension refers to the relative short-term removal of learners from school for a disciplinary offence (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). According to former Minister of Education Jacobs (2001), suspension means that a learner is not entitled to attend a class at school or hold office and perform any duty and function in terms of any law relevant to school governance for the period of the suspension. A suspended learner may not participate in extra-curricular

activities at the school or attend school for a period of time that may not exceed one week.

- **Protective factors** – These factors are defined as social and personal capacities to recover, adapt, and persist amidst adversity (Madewell & Ponce-Garcia, 2016). Protective factors are often given credit for facilitating the process of overcoming adversity. The defining feature of protective factors is a modification of the person's response to a risk situation. Werner (1989) clustered protective factors in three major categories: (a) personal attributes of the individual; (b) affectional ties within the family; and (c) the existence of external support systems which arise in the school or within the community.
- **Positive adaptation** – This is defined as various ways of attaining developmental tasks, competence in different domains of life, high self-esteem and self-efficacy (Bonanno, 2004; Masten & Reed, 2002). Positive adaptation remains key criteria for identifying resilience.

1.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY OF THE RESEARCH

Constructivists display pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended and contextualised perspectives when it comes to issues of trustworthiness and credibility of research. The validity procedures for trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability that are reflected in this report and that are defined below provide the criteria for judging quality in terms of the qualitative approach. Triangulation is also a procedure that confirms validity where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to establish themes or categories (Maree, 2007).

1.11.1 Credibility

Credibility is concerned with the conviction with which the findings of a particular researcher in a study are accepted by others. Honesty affirms that research is conducted in terms of good governance and has been reopened to the participants to show that I have fully understood their lifestyle (Bryman, 2004).

1.11.2 Dependability

According to Payne and Payne (2004), dependability refers to the general applicability of the research results. Bryman (2004) is of the opinion that dependability involves ensuring that there is sufficient documentation for all aspects of research and that it is always accessible.

1.11.3 Conformability

Conformability questions the degree of what quantitative researchers call “observer bias” (Payne & Payne, 2004). Researchers are expected to act in good faith and not overtly allow personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the outcomes of their research findings (Bryman, 2004).

1.11.4 Triangulation

Triangulation is described as a method where researchers use different and multiple types of information to identify and develop themes or sections in a study (Creswell, 2007). In this research triangulation, using a variety of data collection sources, was used to improve the validity and reliability of the findings (Maree, 2007). Triangulation was also used to reduce bias in terms of the findings.

Shenton (2004) maintains that the product of a qualitative project is directly organised from a limited number of environments and humans and that it is impossible to conclude that new findings can be used in all situations. In this study the element of transferability is out of question due the uniqueness of the participants and their circumstances.

1.12 RESEARCH ETHICS AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The protection of human rights is mandatory in healthcare as well as other professions (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000); it includes how researchers acquire information about a group and its impact on participants. De Vos *et al.* (2005) believe that ethical advice serves the rule whereby each researcher should evaluate his/her own

behaviour. For the purpose of this study the code and principles of the Health Professional Council of South Africa (HPCSA) Policy were adhered to. The principles include obtaining informed consent; no violation of privacy or confidentiality; and protection from harm, unwarranted physical or mental discomfort, distress, danger or deprivation.

Before commencing with the study I obtained permission to conduct research from the university's Ethics Committee, the Department of Education, the schools from which learners and teachers were drawn and the parents of the identified learners. Social research often requires participants to demonstrate their knowledge about a relevant topic and reveal information about friends and associates (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Therefore, I went to great lengths to ensure that the participants' interests and wellbeing were protected and kept confidential. The parents were also convened for a brief session where the reason for the study was explained to alleviate any doubts they might have had about participating.

Wiles, Crow, Heath and Charles (2008) describe confidentiality as a strong factor to protect the identity of the participants in research articles or any information that is, generally, available concerning the study. Pseudonyms for participants were used in order to ensure that their identities would be protected in the report (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006); they experienced no harm as the principles of confidentiality and anonymity were maintained.

1.13 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This final report is divided into the following six chapters.

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY outlines the research problem which provides the background to the study. The rationale briefly explains the reason for undertaking the study; the general and specific aims of the research are given; research methods used are described; key concepts are defined; trustworthiness and credibility are discussed; and research ethics and confidentiality are guaranteed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW examines the relevant available literature in terms of the risk factors experienced by suspended learners in secondary schools and contextual protective processes employed nationally and internationally are reviewed.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK explores the Strength Based Perspective Theory and Resilience Theory as a theoretical framework that underpins the knowledge base of this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY provides the philosophical paradigm that guides the study. The research design and methods used to select the participants, data collection and analysis are discussed and clarified.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION is a detailed thematic discussion of the findings and an interpretation of results as they relate to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS draws conclusions from the findings and makes recommendations.

1.14 CONCLUSION

An overview of the study was given in this chapter as well as a broad outline of the problem that was explored, namely: the background to suspensions of learners in schools due to behavioural problems, especially those experienced by Grade 8 and Grade 9 learners in the two selected secondary schools. The chapter also provided the rationale for the study. A review of the relevant available literature related to this study guided the questions and provided the basis for the theoretical framework of the study. The methodology and research process included a detailed description of the research design and the data collection and analysing techniques.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, is an overview of past and current research on the topic of the suspension of learners who demonstrate challenging behaviour, particularly in township secondary schools. Perceptions of the problem are investigated from international and national perspectives to obtain a deeper understanding and insight

of the experiences of suspended learners; legislative approaches that regulate the suspension of learners in schools are explored as well as applicable contextual resilience models.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 presented an overview of the study that included an introduction, the research problem, aims and research design. In this chapter the relevant available literature is reviewed in terms of the suspension of learners as an alternative disciplinary measure. The literature review explores the contextualisation of suspension and its implications in the development of adolescents. It includes a critical investigation of the available literature on legislation provided by the highest authorities as the guiding principles for instituting suspension as an appropriate measure to address challenging behaviour. The adverse experiences of suspended learners and their effects on adolescents' development are also examined. In addition, the chapter provides some insight into the dimensions and complexity of the problem by reviewing global perceptions of learner suspension. Furthermore, the work of other researchers who identify and research various approaches that may contribute to building resilience in suspended learners is scrutinised in terms of resilience trends and their application. The aim of the study was to explore, describe and understand the experiences of suspended learners in the context of South African township secondary schools with the intention to build learner resilience. Despite the suspension of learners being seen as a legitimate approach to addressing challenging behaviour, research has proved that legal suspension is ineffectual and increases the hazards of negative social behaviour and poor academic results (Skiba & Losen, 2015), particularly in children from generally distraught communities. The approach to suspend learners from school raises a concern as to whether or not it truly serves its purpose - to control learner indiscipline (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010).

2.2 CONTEXTUALISATION OF SUSPENSION

Learners continue to be suspended from going to school for long periods of time because of their challenging behaviour and the lack of appropriate disciplinary measures in most schools. The questions that needed to be asked are: *Does the suspension of troublesome learners from school decrease disturbance and improve*

the school climate sufficiently to balance the inherent dangers to educational opportunities and performance? and Does it address the inborn traits that the learners have? (<https://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/zero-tolerance.pdf>). Suspension in educational institutions, also known as temporary exclusion, is mandatory leave imposed on learners as a form of punishment that can last from one day to several weeks, during which time they are not permitted to attend regular school lessons.

Teachers in South African schools struggle with the problem of learner discipline. The approaches to punishing ill-disciplined learners in schools have advanced significantly but the problem still poses a challenge in many schools; research indicates that teachers are at a loss as to how to handle the situation (Woulter & Russo, 2013). Prior to 1994, with the introduction of a new democracy, the maintenance of discipline in South African schools relied heavily on the use of corporal punishment (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Woulter & Russo, 2013). According to Ntshangase (2015), intervention in dealing with behaviour problem became mandatory and culminated in the principle of '*parens patriae*' whereby the state takes control of children from parents who are perceived to have failed in rearing their children. This development led to the establishment of juvenile detention centres, such as houses of refuge, reformatories and industrial schools which promoted a 'school-to-prison-pipeline' (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

The issue of discipline in schools is a global one that has been addressed internationally in the past by using varied disciplinary measures, such as corporal punishment, zero tolerance and Gun Free Zones. New approaches related to suspension have been attempted and introduced across the world as measures to address challenging behaviour. In terms of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 the, then, Minister of Education (MEC) introduced proceedings that could lead to suspension as an alternative to corporal punishment (Jacobs, 2001) whereby learners are suspended for a minimum period of five school days for minor offenses and prescribed a redirection programme. For serious offenses arrangements for the placement of learners in other schools could be considered on condition that they receive intercession assistance and support. Suspended learners are not permitted to participate in additional curricular activities at their schools or to attend class for a period of time that may not exceed some multi-weeks. Normally, ten days is viewed as

the separating line between suspension and expulsion; however, some schools remove learners for a semester or a year or more (Skiba, Eaton & Sotoo, 2004) as the procedure does not appear to be well monitored and evaluated.

The suspension of learners is embraced in South Africa's new democratic constitution, ensuring the privilege to nobility, balance, opportunity and security (Porteus, Valley & Ruth, 2001). Questions that persist are: *Is it working?* and *Is it curbing ill-behaviour?* According to Dieringer, Cregor and Willis (2015), there is no research that suggests that out-of-school suspension or ejection reduces rates of disturbance or enhances the school atmosphere. Despite what might be expected, generally because of their behaviour problems and the absence of proper disciplinary measures in schools, learners are constantly suspended from attending class for long periods of time or they are permanently prohibited from doing so. Brea and Morris (2014) believe that an overly punitive environment erodes a school's moral authority, producing alienation and resistance.

Burke (2015) maintains that disciplinary action that takes learners out of the classroom may make it more difficult for them to remain on track to be promoted to the next grade. Research has demonstrated that, by and large, the results of evaluations in Reading and Mathematics of learners who have been suspended or expelled - when compared to those of well-behaved learners - are negatively affected (Burke, 2015). Thompson (2015), Skiba and Losen (2015), Maphosa and Shumba (2010) and Marchbanks, Blake, Booth, Carmichael, Seibert and Fabelo (2014) support the finding that disciplinary procedures that remove learners from school appear to improve the probability of a large group of negative results, including school dropouts and adolescent misconduct, leading to juvenile delinquency as well as having implications for the economy. However, as schools have a duty to distinguish and execute alternative disciplinary practices and systems teachers seem to be in a quandary to find successful methods of managing learner indiscipline in schools while at the same time securing the children's rights (Maphosa & Mammen, 2011). The truth is that numerous teachers still struggle with issues of discipline and are at a loss as to what they should do without resorting to corporal punishment (Porteus *et al.*, 2001). Learner rowdiness can, at times, be extreme and adversely influence the smooth running of

schools and threaten the security of teachers and other learners (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010).

A behaviour problem is still considered to be a discipline and classroom control issue with little acceptance that learners have views that could have a major impact on managing social and behavioural matters (McNamara & Moreton, 2001). As a general rule, the formal explanations for suspensions may address the degree of irritation that will be tolerated and be the climax of a long crumbling connection between the school and the learner; constant suspensions are frequently a prelude to expulsions (Aziza, 2001). When learners with emotional and challenging behaviour are a problem in school there is a propensity to place the blame on both internal factors, such as medicinal, mental and psychological conditions, as well as low levels of confidence and self-esteem and external factors that include socio-economic status, home background, the loss of a relative and parental detachment or separation (McNamara & Moreton, 2001). De Jager (2008) contends that emotional brain activity is involved in determining what is true and of value; if what learners logically believe to be true does not connect with what their background has shown them, their conduct is more likely to be coordinated by their background than by rationale since conduct is affected by, and restricted to, what has been stored in memory.

Thompson (2015) is of the opinion that the majority of suspensions come about as a result of disruptive activities that occur under the watchful eye of school authorities that have the power to manage bad conduct. Many teachers agree that suspensions ought to be the final resort for the most genuine offenses (Thompson, 2015) and that the emphasis should to be on preventing learner misbehaviour by introducing structures and arrangements that enhance the school atmosphere, empower positive learner behaviour and focus on serious social wellbeing techniques (Thompson, 2015). Research has shown that removing learners from the classroom is a primary method that schools use to address learner misbehaviour (Mergler, Vargas & Caldwell, 2014). Learners with behaviour problems need to develop emotionally; they require a safe and secure environment that has a consistently predictability to make them feel safe and secure which enhances their confidence (Rose, Parker, Gilbert, Gorman & McDonald, 2014).

I am of the opinion that alternatives to suspending learners from the classroom should aim at keeping them in school and modify their behaviour by attempting to handle the basic causes of misbehaviour and equip the learners with coping skills for the future. Tlale (2013) contends that inclusive education was designed to respond to the diverse needs of all learners and that it is about maximising the participation of all learners in education which, I believe, includes suspended learners. However, despite the many changes that have taken place within the education system since 1994, in terms of the education of children with special educational needs, including those in conflict with the law and who demonstrate challenging behaviour, support for suspended learners continues to be a low priority in schools (Francis & Muthukrishna, 2004).

2.3 RISK FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUSPENSION OF LEARNERS

Although children are not responsible for the harm inflicted upon them, certain characteristics have been found to increase their risk of being abused and/or neglected. Risk factors have characteristics associated with child abuse and neglect that may or may not be direct causes that contribute to the suspension of learners. Several authors argue that emotional abuse in childhood which typically includes experiences of being rejected; degraded, terrorised, isolated or teased may be more strongly related to internal symptoms and the development of depression than physical or sexual abuse (Infurna, Reichl, Parzer, Schimmenti).

A combination of individual, relational, community and societal factors contribute to the risk of child abuse and neglect. According to theories of child and adolescent development, adolescence is a period characterised by rapidly changing emotions with a tendency to over-react to everyday situations. Interaction with the physical, cognitive, social, emotional and moral dimensions of development in children occurs continuously throughout their development (Knoetze, 2013). Adolescents are subjected to increased demands on their physical, mental and emotional aspects of development. Children reared in stressful environments are often surrounded by caregivers and adults who model ineffective responses to distress. Hart and Glaser (2011) are of the opinion that psychological maltreatment experienced by most adolescents includes omission and commission acts, such as spurning, terrorizing,

isolating, exploiting and denying emotional responsiveness. Psychological maltreatment refers to a repeated pattern of behaviour that convinces children that they are worthless, unwanted, unloved and/or only of value in meeting another's needs, resulting in lasting damage to their well-being and development (Abuya, Odundo, Rambo & Nyonje, 2016). Arslan (2016) describes psychological maltreatment as the most omnipresent form of child mistreatment that results from the relationship between parents and children. Such potentially harmful interactions may severely impair children's emotional and developmental health. Some bad adolescent experiences are created by situations, such as family misunderstandings, civil wars, homelessness, food shortage and child maltreatment; others are caused by chronic illness, bereavement and natural disasters. All of these, however, have the propensity to disrupt the normal development of children or adolescents.

2.4 THE EFFECTS OF THE SUSPENSION OF LEARNERS ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The effects of the suspension of learners on school attendance are explored in terms of its effects on the physical development of children; their mental development; and their emotional development.

2.4.1 The Effects of Suspension on the Physical Development of Adolescents

School suspension is the most severe option available to schools to handle learner misbehaviour; it is, therefore, expected that violence and anti-social behaviour as well as rebelliousness may be linked to suspension. By excluding learners from school, suspension shifts the problem from the school to the community. Unsupervised adolescents are free to engage in activities that may lead to property loss and physical injury as well as increased medical, police and juvenile justice costs.

2.4.2 The Effects of Suspension on the Mental Development of Adolescents

School suspension reduces the chances of affected learners completing their education and it can also impair employment opportunities and negatively affect their future prospects. Learners who dislike going to school get what they want, i.e., time off

school. Some learners actively seek suspension to participate in activities and events outside school, such as staying home to play video games. Individuals may gain notoriety as well as the attention and admiration of peers by provoking a school suspension. It appears that the misbehaviour that lends learners in trouble may be seen by them as a reward and the behaviour is likely to be repeated in the future. Recent research in schools has revealed some disturbing statistics about the impact of suspension on learners; within 12 months of being suspended from their schools, they are more likely to engage in anti-social violent behaviour. Although mental health disorders may increase the likelihood of suspension from school, suspension may have a more profound and long-lasting effect on learners' mental health. Research has shown that a child affected by Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) alone or with co-occurring conditions, including learning difficulties, anxiety, depression and autism, is more likely to be suspended from school than a child without those conditions – causing high levels of psychological distress at least three years or more after the suspension.

2.4.3 The Effects of Suspension on the Emotional Development of Adolescents

The observable behaviour of children is a reactive expression of their inner feelings to the poor treatment they receive from their environment. Their actions are the best way they have of releasing the negative energy that builds up in their bodies. Most children who display behavioural problems tend to have a low emotional image and low self-esteem and they lack appropriate social skills. According to the available research, in schools that frequently use suspension, learners have a low sense of security and produce poor academic results. Numerous studies have evaluated the relationship between self-esteem and emotional and behavioural problems. The findings suggest that individuals' emotion dis-regulation may play an important role in the connection between low self-esteem and aggression (Garofalo, Holden, Zeigler-Hill & Velotti, 2016). A process of disempowerment unconsciously occurs and, according to Hammond and Zimmerman (2012), often results in labelling that obscures the recognition of a youth's unique capabilities and strengths; focuses on the 'cannots' rather than the 'cans'; and neglects the potential resulting from adversity.

On an individual level, suspension exacerbates anger, apathy and disengagement – psycho-social consequences that increase the likelihood of recidivism (Wayne, 2018). When emotion regulation strategies fail, the adolescent may rely on aggressive acts in an attempt to restore feelings of self-worth (Brooks, 2006). Embracing a strength-based paradigm encourages seeing beyond the risk behaviour and characteristics of youth and families in high need communities to the potential of what can be. It attempts to identify the positive bases of the person's resources or what may need to be added and the strengths required to address the challenges resulting from the problems (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012).

2.5 TRADITIONAL PROTECTIVE PROCESSES

Since traditional behavioural management practices that include corporal punishment are prohibited in South Africa (Du Plessis, 2015), legislation has established that disciplinary action must be accompanied by procedural protection that assures the rudiments of fundamental fairness to avoid putting the education system in crisis mode (Du Plessis, 2015: 383). The Schools Act calls for the active involvement of all stakeholders in all aspects of school decision-making processes (Mokoena, 2011). Bush and Heystek (2003) define stakeholders as those who have a legitimate interest in the continuing effectiveness and success of an institution. This reform in decision-making approaches poses a challenge for most principals in terms of their skills and capacities as they are required to adopt more collaborative and inclusive decision-making (Mokoena, 2011).

Research indicates that early childhood teachers can support children's protective systems by building their personal attributes associated with resilience, such as self-efficacy and self-regulation (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Teachers can ensure a secure relationship that is especially important for depressed children in terms of additional support during times of crisis. In addition, by working with parents and child caregivers teachers may provide added protection for children who experience adversity. At a community level teachers can promote awareness in the public and private sectors by informing members of the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on early brain development and possible outcomes in later life. Society is positively impacted

when ACEs are reduced and individuals are raised in thriving families and communities (Sciaraffa, Zeanah & Zeanah, 2018 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-017-0869-3>).

2.6 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS THE SUSPENSION OF LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS

Legal documents that mediate school discipline and that serve as a framework to address the suspension of learners in schools include the country's constitution, the South African Schools Act and subsequent revisions, codes of conduct and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

2.6.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, protects the fundamental rights of every citizen. Bray (2005) believes that constitutional changes in South Africa necessitated a transformation of the education system and culminated in the development of a new democratic education system - one that would embrace and give effect to the norms, values and principles that promote openness, transparency and accountability which were to be incorporated in education governance.

2.6.2 The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996)

The South African Schools Act which is hereafter referred to as SASA (Act No. 84: 16[1], 20, 36 and 37 of 1996) granted all public schools the legal personality to act as "juristic persons", i.e., legal persons bearing rights and duties (Prinsloo, 2006) and the right to govern their schools autonomously without undue influence from both national and provincial education authorities (Bray, 2005). The Act stipulates that the governing body of a school is regarded as the legitimate 'government' of the school (Bray, 2005) and that it should comply with the prescripts of the relevant laws pertaining to the punishment and suspension of learners in public schools. However, the governing body has no original power to act on its own outside the provisions in the Schools Act (Prinsloo, 2006). The school governing body (SGB) is a statutory body and derives all its powers and functions from the Schools Act and the supreme Constitution (Bray, 2005). The Act empowers all public school governing bodies to adopt a code of conduct

for their schools, whilst guidance is given by the Minister in the National Department of Education.

The South African Schools Act provides for governing bodies of public schools to adopt and implement a code of conduct and a safety policy for learners (Mestry, 2015). Du Plessis (2015) observes that schools need to determine the most appropriate manner of implementation with assistance from the Guidelines for the Consideration of Governing Bodies (Mestry, 2015); develop performance indicators related to their implementation strategies; and monitor their progress towards achieving the stated outcomes. Each school is expected to develop a behaviour code in partnership with its community and to manage learner behaviour in partnership with learners and their families (Du Plessis, 2015). A well-disciplined school is defined as one where rules, policies and procedures are followed and where everyone is aware of the implications and consequences of breaking school rules (Mestry, 2015).

Since its implementation, SASA (1996) has mandated that secondary school learners participate in the governance of their school (Steinmann, 2013) and that decision-making in schools should be characterised by the greater participation of all stakeholders (Mokoena, 2011). Bray (2005) is of the opinion that although learners are not competent to enter independently into legal contracts, they are educationally mature enough to represent the student body of the school and act in their best interest. According to SASA (1996), learner representation in the form of the Representation Council of Learners (RCL) is part of the SGB and it is vested with the responsibility of drawing up a code of conduct for learners and in managing its implementation (Steinmann, 2013).

It is democratically sound to enable all stakeholders to participate in the governance of schools where learners, families, members of schools' staff and service providers work together to negotiate learner development plans to support learning and behaviour change in learners and manage their unacceptable or persistently irresponsible behaviour (Du Plessis, 2015). Prinsloo (2005) defines a safe school as one that is free of danger and where there is an absence of possible harm; a place in which non-educators, educators and learners may work, teach and learn without fear of ridicule, intimidation, harassment, humiliation or violence.

2.6.3 Code of Conduct

Discipline is about setting limits and clarifying roles, responsibilities and mutual expectations as well as creating a predictable, orderly and stable life. It is not punitive and it is in the best interests of the children (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010). Therefore, it is desirable for each school to develop a code of conduct for learners to maintain discipline and order.

A code of conduct in schools functions in a similar way to the law in the broader society that consists of norms, values and rules which the society has accepted as its law; people must obey the law and when the law is disobeyed, legal measures must be enforced to restore legal equilibrium (Bray, 2005). Similarly, a behaviour code is a statement of the school community's values and its expectations relating to learner behaviour and the school's management of learner behaviour (Du Plessis, 2015). Behaviour codes need to be explicit and the consequences of misbehaviour must be non-violent (Du Plessis, 2015); they should be crafted in such a way that they adhere to preventative measures that have been put in place (Mestry, 2015). According to Section 8(2) of the Schools Act, a code of conduct must aim at establishing a disciplined and purposeful school environment that is dedicated to improving and maintaining the quality of the learning process. However, Skiba, Arredondo and Rausch (2014) found that all the school codes of conduct that they reviewed were punitive or reactive - even for minor infractions.

2.6.4 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the basis of all Unicef work. It is the most complete statement on children's rights ever produced and it is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history. The UNCRC provides a framework for understanding the maltreatment of children as part of a range of violence, harm and exploitation at individual, institutional and societal levels. The convention pledges to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms physical and mental violence, injury or abuse and neglect or negative treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse (Porteus *et al.*, 2001). As the most important children's rights instrument, it has

been ratified by 193 nations - but not by the United States and Somalia - and represents the most comprehensive legally binding document on the treatment of children (Tlale, 2013).

Tlale (2013) believes that every child has a fundamental right to education and that their unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs should be recognised in practice. Children's rights of participation and provision are as important as their right to protection; the principles embodied in the UNCRC are also concordant with those of medical ethics. The greatest strength of an approach based on the UNCRC is that it provides a legal instrument for implementing policy, accountability and social justice - all of which enhance public-health responses. The incorporation of the principles of the UNCRC into laws, research, public-health policy and professional training and practice will result in further progress in the area of the maltreatment of children (Tlale, 2013). Restorative justice is a theory of justice that relies on reconciliation rather than punishment and on the idea that a well-functioning society operates with a balance of rights.

The rules dealing with safety in schools are derived from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) which is the highest authority that protects the fundamental rights of everyone in the country (Prinsloo, 2006). Squelch (2000: 8) describes the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa as the supreme law of the country and, therefore, all law - including education legislation, regulations and school policies - may not be in conflict with it.

With reference to legislative approaches discussed above I believe that they focus more on the transformation of the system and neglect the needs of individual learners with behaviour problems. It means that when learners break the rules the book is referred to and the prescribed punishment is applied; hence, the increasing number of cases where learners are alleged to have committed murder on the school premises (Harber, 2001; Mtsweni 2008; Zulu, Urbani; Van der Merwe & Van der Walt, 2004). This suggests a shift toward punitive governance and it is not limited to the criminal justice system. Globally, schools have increasingly relied on practices associated with learner suspension as a method to sanction learner misbehaviour (Kupchik 2010).

2.7 GLOBAL TRENDS WITH REGARD TO SUSPENSION

Suspension is widely used in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) to respond to problematic behaviour. Global trends regarding suspension in schools were explored using, more specifically, the US, Nigeria and South Africa as prime examples.

2.7.1 Perceptions of Suspension in the United States

Newspapers have documented a seemingly endless number of cases in which US learners have been suspended, including bringing a knife in a lunch box; pointing a gun drawn on paper at classmates; and bringing a plastic axe to school as part of a Halloween costume. The suspension of learners is a global concern and has been for decades. It is difficult to determine just how long this phenomenon has existed but there is documented evidence from the 1970s when a Children's Defence Fund report suggested that black students were two to three times more likely to be suspended compared to white students in various localities throughout the US. Research data shows that African-American learners have been submitted to increasingly harsher discipline compared to their white counterparts (Selmi, 2016). According to Rumberger and Losen (2016), school suspension rates have risen since the early 1970s. The 2017 Victorian Ombudsman Report in Australia maintains that the suspension of learners is an escalating educational issue and that many schools are not equipped with the resources and expertise to provide support for children in need of it (<https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/News>). It seems that matters have deteriorated because suspensions have sharply increased and the harm caused by school exclusions has become more apparent. Figure 2.1, below, published by Miami University in 2016 reflects the rapid rise in suspensions.

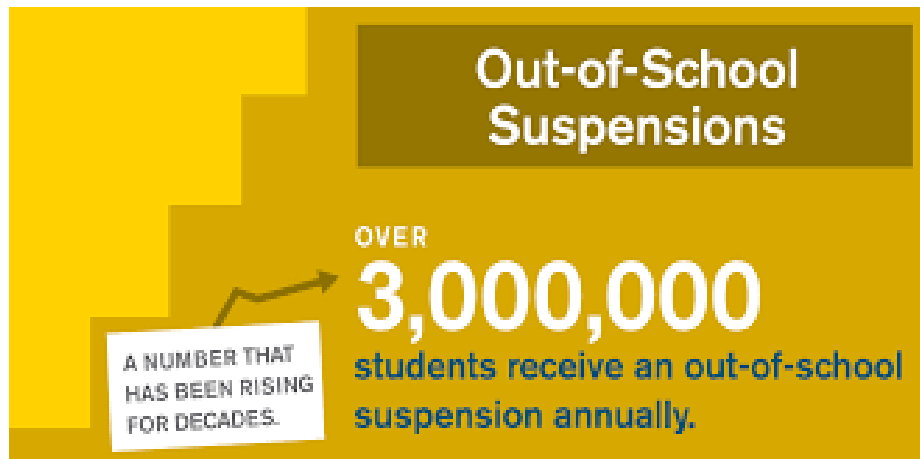


Figure 2.1: Published Rise of Out-of-School Suspensions

During the 2011–2012 school year in the US 3.5 million students were disciplined by in-school suspension and 3.45 million by out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). **In-school suspension** refers to instances where a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular classroom(s) for at least half a day but remains under the direct supervision of school personnel. **Out-of-school suspension** means excluding a learner from school for disciplinary reasons for one school day or longer. A meta-analysis conducted by Noltemeyer, Ward and Mcloughlin (2015) shows a negative relationship between suspension and learner performance in achievement tests. A slight negative effect size (ES) of -0.10 is associated with student achievement for those punished with in-school suspensions and a more meaningful -0.24 ES for learners receiving out-of-school suspensions. Similarly, Skiba (2014) believes that punitive-focused forms of school discipline do not address disruptions to the learning environment nor do they improve the educational outcomes of learners; instead, they risk retention and increase school dropout numbers. Gaps in learning and understanding are exacerbated as the suspended learners are deprived of opportunities to engage in the learning. It seems that no one is addressing those gaps and the cycle continues, creating more gaps for learners that prevents them from accessing real opportunities and succeeding in life and in society (Willis, 2015). Removing learners from the learning environment by means of out-of-school suspension is an ineffective disciplinary measure that does more damage to the learners' academic and emotional development than it does in preventing future misbehaviour. I agree with Willis (2015) who believes that punitive forms of suspension do not change the outcomes of the system and that they do not counteract the harm

caused to the victim or perpetrator. Improved forms of accountability need to unfold the issues around the incident including reparation and healing of the emotional harm caused (Willis, 2015).

Numerous studies have shown that programmes implemented to address behaviour problems in US schools “focus on changing a child’s context rather than adapting the child to function in poorly resourced environments” (Ungar *et al*, 2014:69). In reviewing school discipline strategies, Thompson (2015) has suggested ways to improve the effectiveness of teachers and support personnel by implementing innovative initiatives, such as restorative justice, social integration, peer mediation and institutional support teams and establishing school-based health centres. To date, little attention has been given to combined interventions from multi-disciplinary teams of specialists from child welfare, mental health, special needs education and juvenile corrections with vulnerable adolescents despite the fact that adolescents with the most complex needs and who are at high risk are typically clients of more than one service system (Ungar, Liebenberg, Dudding, Armstrong & Van de Vijver, 2013). Tlale (2013) contends that the already firm relationship between development plans, schooling and family support programmes should be strengthened by promoting multiple service systems to respond to diverse learner issues. Rather than focusing on the transgressions of learners, appropriate resources and support should be provided to achieve positive outcomes irrespective of the personal characteristics of the learners concerned.

English policy discourse about, and policy responses to, learner misbehaviour focuses more on reducing social exclusion, improving learner behaviour and returning the *locus* of control over rule enforcement to teachers. However, despite these substantial differences, suspension rates are similar in the US and in the UK. According to the literature, there appears to be a concern worldwide about the state of learner discipline and about learner misconduct in schools.

Districts, provinces and policy developers, generally, have pressed for additional constructive alternatives that foster a productive and healthy educational climate while not depriving massive numbers of learners of the chance to learn (Skiba & Losen, 2016). However, Du Plessis (2015) projected an acceptable course of action where the child’s age, cultural background and family experiences and values are taken into

account. Similarly, Rumberger and Losen (2016) are of the opinion that important instructional outcomes would emerge once schools endeavour to bring down disciplinary suspension rates and concentrate on enhancing the health and mental well-being of learners.

2.7.2 Perceptions of Suspension in Nigeria

According to Nakpodia (2010), for a satisfactory climate to exist within a school, a certain level of discipline must be maintained. Discipline is seen as an efficient management tool in accomplishing the goals of the school. For the discipline of learners to be effectively achieved, a set of rules to guide their conduct needs be formulated. As in other countries, Nigerian schools are guided by their Education Act of 1967 which provides rules and regulations that govern learner discipline in schools. The rules and regulations cover many areas that affect learners, school attendance, the use/misuse of school property, learner-to-learner relationships, learner-to-teacher relationships, class regulations and tests/examinations (Mabea, 2013). Sceptically, Verdugo and Glenn (2002) suggest that disciplinary policies simply do not have the required effect and suspensions do not prevent learner misbehaviour (Nichols, 2004). In Nigerian law the human rights principles of the country are contained in Sections 30-42 of its 1979 constitution. A teacher involved in handling the ill-discipline of learners is required to do so within the limit of the law (Nakpodia, 2010). For instance, teachers must adopt the appropriate code of conduct when dealing with learners. The method adopted to ensure discipline must be authorized by the Ministry of Education and the actions of the teachers must be protected by vicarious liability, i.e., they are working within the scope of their employment (Nakpodia, 2010). Further restrictions of the Act forbid male teachers from enforcing corporal punishment on female learners. Although teachers act in *loco parentis*, teachers in Nigeria find school discipline regulations problematic (Nwideeduh, 2003). According to Nakopidia (2011), school authorities and teachers in Nigeria do not seem to take enough care in exercising their *in loco parentis* authority in safeguarding the school system; it is assumed that most teachers and administrators are ignorant of their roles in terms of their learners, the rules and regulations governing the school system and in their legal knowledge of learner rights (Nakpodia, (2011).

2.7.2.1 Discipline Challenges in Nigerian schools

Good discipline enhances the image of a school and it prepares learners for future success. However, the implementation of effective discipline at school is key for learners on their journey to adulthood (Stanley, 2014). Unlike the SASA, the Education Act in Nigeria stipulates that corporal punishment may be administered but only by a relevant delegated adult, such as a headmaster, teacher or boarding housemaster (Okiemute, 2011). Most teachers ignore this regulation as they believe it influences the manner in which parents and the general public treat them - with disrespect. Teachers worry about the aggression that is directed at them by both learners and their parents (Stanley, 2014). Learners misbehave in the knowledge that they are not supposed to be beaten and that if it happens, their parents will hound the teacher and even sue him/her (Okiemute, 2011).

According to Nigerian teachers, corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion regulations are a scheme which removes their rightful authority over learners and makes them feel disempowered (Okiemute, 2011). They claim that the regulations contravene the cultural practices of raising children where every adult in a society is regarded as a parent and has the right to discipline any child (Mabea, 2013). In Nigeria, pupils should be given a fair hearing prior to suspension or expulsion which is a common procedure in South Africa. It is recommended that parents are invited to the disciplinary committee hearing if the sanction of suspension or expulsion is contemplated (Mabea, 2013; Nakpodia, 2011).

The suspension of learners was introduced as an alternative means of enforcing discipline in schools; however, teachers believe that it causes some ambivalence in the school administration with biased decisions being taken concerning problem learners (Okiemute, 2011). Learners should have the right to appeal to a higher authority and a principal or headmaster is at liberty to inform the entire student body of the reason for the suspension or expulsion if it deters them from misbehaviour in the future. In research conducted by Nakpodia (2011) regarding the violation of learners' rights in incidents, such as expelling learners from school and, thus, preventing them from writing the General Certificate of Education, it was found that the court ruled in favour of the plaintiffs who were mostly parents - appearing on behalf of the learners -

on the basis of the learners fundamental human rights as set out in the constitution. The court ruled in favour of the learners, reasoning that although teachers had the right to correct learners they had no right to deprive them from writing the examination for which they were registered. When teachers punished learners, it was inevitable that their parents would come to the school to reprimand the teachers - even in the presence of the learners.

2.7.3 Perceptions of Suspension in South Africa

There have been reports of a sharp increase in the number of cases of problem learner behaviour in South African secondary schools. Learners are alleged to have murdered other learners and caused serious injury on school premises (Ngcukana. 2009; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010) as well as a learner stabbing another learner (Mncube, 2009). The problems recur rather than decrease which is evident in the number of cases that are reported in the various provinces of the country: 531 in Gauteng; 126 in Western Cape and 942 in Limpopo in 2018 alone. Serious incidents, such as attempted murder, stabbing, assault, intimidation, sexual assault and drug dealing have led to disciplinary action against learners in the past year. The following figure adapted from the *Sunday Times* (8 April 2018) is a synopsis of the current misbehaviour of learners in secondary schools in the different provinces of South Africa.



Figure 2.2: Misbehaviour of Learners in the Provinces of South Africa

The misbehaviour of learners poses a threat to the integrity of teachers as they fear for their lives in terms of violent attacks by learners. One teacher told the *Sunday Times* that she was considering a new career after she was punched on her head and in her face by a female learner. The teacher confessed that she felt unsafe, threatened and helpless when she was attacked in the presence of the learner’s parent and the acting principal. The Gauteng branch of the National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) has also reported several incidents of learners throwing chairs at teachers and swearing and spitting at them. The efforts of the teachers to discipline learners appear to have little effect and teachers continue to be humiliated in the presence of suspended learners who are regarded as heroes when they come back to school.

According to research in the available literature, learners may be suspended for offences ranging from lesser infractions, such as refusing to follow instructions or violating school rules (Burke, 2015) - as reflected in Table 2.1 below

Table 2.1: Offense Categories and Descriptions of Infractions that could Result in Suspension

Offense Category	Infraction	Description of Infraction
Physical Aggression	Fighting;	Mutual participation in an incident involving physical violence where there is no major injury.
	Physical altercation – minor pushing/shoving;	
	Sexual offenses/ Inappropriate/indecent exposure.	Act of sexual intercourse, sexual contact or behaviour intended to result in sexual gratification without force or threat.
Verbal Aggression	Harassment (verbal or psychological); Threat/intimidation causing fear of harm.	Attacking learners/personnel creating an intimidating environment.
Insubordination/ Disruption	Disobedience; Obscene behaviour; Violation of school rules.	Unwillingness to submit to authority or refusing to respond to a reasonable request.
Vandalism	Burglary; Stealing property/unlawful entry;	Unlawful entry into a building with intent to commit a crime; Unlawful removal of property belonging to another person

	Damage to school or personal property.	
Substance Abuse	Illegal drug possession, sale, use/under the influence; Alcohol possession or use.	Violation of laws prohibiting the manufacture, sale, purchase, transportation, possession or consumption of intoxicating substances /alcohol.
Criminal Offenses	Arrested for manufacture or delivery of substances;	Manufacture or delivery of substances.
	Physical attack/harm;	Causing bodily harm or touching another against his/her will.
	Kidnapping;	Unlawful seizure. Transportation or detention of a minor without the consent of parents or legal guardian.
	Robbery;	Taking other person's possession by force or threat or violence or by subjecting the victim to fear.
	Arson/setting a fire;	Unlawful and intentional damage any school or property by fire.
	Weapon possession.	Possession of an instrument or object to inflict harm on another person.

Source: Study conducted by Mahoney (2012), cited in Burke (2012)

Since traditional behaviour modification practices, such as corporal punishment, are banned in South Africa, major litigation has shown that disciplinary action should be taken by implementing protection laws that guarantee penalties for the prevention of crises in the education system (Du Plessis, 2015:383) - as promulgated in the SIAS Policy as follows:

Table 2.2: Available Legislation and its Implications

LEGISLATION	WHAT THE LEGISLATION SAYS	IMPLICATIONS
The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) - as amended	Section 10 Everyone has an inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools must respect and protect the dignity of learners.
	Section 12 (1d and e) Everyone has the right to freedom and security which includes the right (d) not to be tortured in any way; and (e) not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools must not treat or punish learners in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way.
	Section 28 (1) Every child has the right (d) to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools must ensure that children are protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation.
The National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act 27 of 1996) - as amended	Section 3 (n) No person shall administer corporal punishment or subject a learner to psychological or physical abuse at any education institution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools must not administer corporal punishment or subject a learner to any form of abuse. Any person who contravenes this legislation will be charged.
	Section 10 (1) No person may administer corporal punishment at a school to a learner. (2) Any person who contravenes this is guilty of an offense, and liable on conviction to a sentence, which could be imposed for assault.	
The South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No.84 of 1996) - as amended		

Source: Adapted from Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (2014)

2.8 RESILIENCE

The focus of resilience research has shifted in the last decades and more recent definitions have replaced the pathogenic responses to adversity with capacities for successful adaptation.

2.8.1 Conceptualising Resilience

Resilience is construed differently by numerous authors in variable contexts and disciplines. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as a method of adapting well in terms of issues, stresses, disasters and threats; possibly the most important causes of stress arise in family relationships and serious health issues as well as geographic point and financial stress (Windle, 2011). Different resilience theories focus on inherent qualities that individuals have that include adaptation skills as well as family and network support in the face of danger and deficiencies and the way these assist them to defeat exposure to hazards and unlawful encounters (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012; Van Breda, 2001).

According to Kruger and Prinsloo (2013), resilience could be a dynamic formative method that is characterised in numerous ways by scientists as being a biological process, disposition or capability and a sustained positive outcome. It is the personal capacity to pass through or adapt to tough and difficult life circumstances (Williams & Portman, 2014; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). By and large, resilience is the ability to positively adjust in the face of hazards and adversity. Mampane and Bower (2011) maintain that resilience results from the ability to spot and employ personal capacities, competencies/strengths and assets in an exceedingly specific context when facing perceived adverse situations.

Learners should be prepared to draw on their biological, psychological and environmental resources to successfully adapt to and modify the challenges of life (Kruger & Prinsloo, 2008). To build resilience in suspended learners, specific attention must be paid to the mechanisms underlying the organic processes that enhance individuals' ability to cope effectively with future stress and adversity and assist them

to overcome and beat the effects and consequences of past psycho-social hazards (Rutter, 1993).

Resilience analysis provides knowledge that has the potential to considerably improve psychological, instructional, social and emotional outcomes in adolescents. Windle (2011) suggests that resilience represents personal qualities that modify the individual to be able to thrive in the face of adversity; it could be a comparatively stable temperament attribute characterised by the flexibility to beat, steer through and recover from adversity. Masten (2000) contends that resilience is a positive movement in individuals' well-being that influences their functioning and future performance within society. The lack of resilience could, therefore, be a reason for a breakdown in the transition between human traumatic events and safe protection (Wright, Masten Narayan, 2013). This process of interaction is what determines the organic path to health and well-being or to malady and pathology.

An approach to developing resilience in learners should focus on providing organic process support systems, such as internal and external factors, which will interact with learners' innate resilience and develop their capacities for positive organic process outcomes (Johnson & Lazarus, 2008). Several researchers use the 'ecological model' that shows that individuals' behaviour is influenced by their different social and physical environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Adolescents experience risk factors in varying degrees both contextually and on a private level. People's experiences, skills and knowledge assist them cope in life and it is possible that they are surrounded by individuals who act as a support system.

Resilience is not simple to outline within the context of bio-ecological theory. Theron, Liebenberg and Malindi (2014) are of the opinion that resilience or the method of adjusting well to difficult conditions may be socio-ecological. The method is mainly concerned with a person's strengths and capabilities and the social support provided by the environment (Loyola & Aguilin-Dalisay, 2005). Resilience is an individual's ability to recover successfully from psychological trauma and varied life stressors with no adverse effects or damage. Similarly, Resilience Theory recognises the role of private and discourse factors, i.e., family, school and neighbourhood, in addressing adolescents' difficult behaviour (Morojele, Brook & Brook, 2016). The re-creation of

Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model (1989) focuses on person-context interrelationships to demonstrate the accumulative effects of risks in a child's life and also the many things and processes that defend them (Ungar, 2008). This model attends to the interaction of four components: (1) the interaction of proximal surroundings usually known as proximal processes; (2) the characteristics of the individual; (3) the social context of the person; and (4) amendment over time. Therefore, the various contexts that directly affect suspended learners, including parents, neighbourhood and friends, and those that affect them indirectly, such as unemployment, divorce and policies related to discipline, produce the exact contexts faced by suspended learners. In considering the PPCT Model developed by Bronfenbrenner, one learns that resiliency is a biological process outcome of the proximal process which is experienced by resilient adolescents as developing individuals in their interaction with their surroundings over time (Loyola & Aguilin-Dalisay, 2005).

According to Bronfenbrenner (2006), the developmental outcome - as indicated in Figure 2.3, below - refers to the qualities of the developing individual that emerge later as a result of the joint, interactive and mutually reinforcing effects of the four principal antecedent components of the PPCT Model. Masten (2004:316) asserts that providing good resources is essential in promoting resilience in learners and that resilience can manifest even in the most adverse conditions in the presence of resources or protective factors.

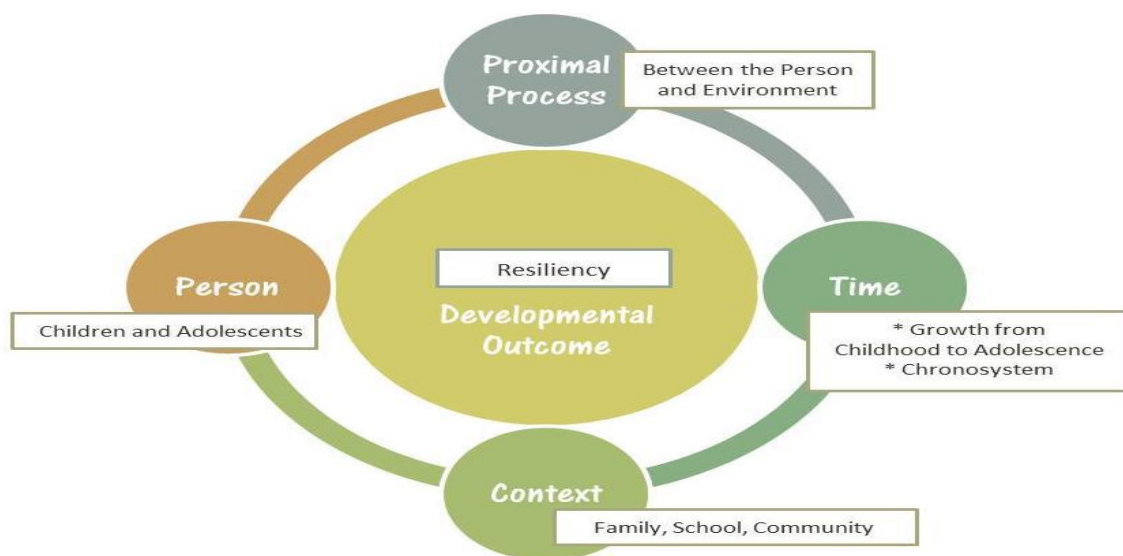


Figure 2.3: The PPCT Model of Resilience

2.8.2 Proximal Processes

In building resilience a clear example of a proximal process variable is the quality of relationships within different ecological systems. The quality of relationship with parents, caregivers and teachers is considered to be one of the most influential predictors of post-abuse adjustment in children of all ages, including adolescents. Houshyar and Kaufman (2005) maintain that the presence of a supportive and stable caregiver has been identified as a most important factor that associates abused individuals with good developmental outcomes as opposed to those with more deleterious outcomes. Parenting styles and what they provide in the way of socialisation for children as well as parents' actions regarding pro-social behaviour have been documented in relation to children's behaviour (Knafo & Plomin, 2006). Werner (2000) believes that emotional ties that encourage trust, autonomy and initiative that are provided by stable caregivers and are a common characteristic among resilient children. As the subjects who were studied are developing adolescents, warm family interaction which involves mutual responsiveness, the counteracting of mounting tension and fostering conflict resolution would be an ideal situation.

Other examples of proximal process variables in the literature that are related to resilience include various forms of mentoring. The influence of support systems that include caring neighbours, teachers, mentors and friends who reinforce and reward competencies have been consistently associated with resilience. Mentoring is especially relevant during adolescence as the effort to separate from parent figures intensifies (Werner, 2000).

2.8.3 Personal Characteristics

There are numerous examples of force-resource variables associated with resilience in the relevant literature. Werner (2000) concludes that a prototype for a resilient child is one who engages with others; who has good communication and problem-solving skills; who has the ability to recruit help; and who has the faith that his/her own actions can make a positive difference in his/her life. Personal characteristics that have been associated with resilience include intelligence, a sense of optimism, high self-regard,

attribution styles, cognitive functioning, self-perception, *locus* of control, social competence and coping styles. Social competence and personality maturity have also been identified as personal characteristics that are associated with resilience in adolescents. To determine the resilience of individuals requires an understanding and knowledge of whether they are developing as they should in terms of functioning effectively and a good knowledge of the underlying or potential threats to their development and their potential to adapt positively.

The following three personal characteristics are discussed to highlight possible proximal processes which have the potential for building resilience. In reviewing the relevant available literature, it was found that learners with behaviour problems have personal strengths that help them bounce back from setbacks. These personal strengths and individual characteristics that are categorized in the different facets of a person are discussed below.

2.8.3.1 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' belief in their personal ability that determines what course of action they take; how long it is sustained in the face of adversity; and their ability to regain strength. Self-efficacy is the human analysis of ability to undertake actions designed to realize desired goals successfully. Research has determined that it is virtually setting personal challenges with a good sense of private commitment and motivation to fulfil those challenges. Self-efficacy relates to perceived future performance instead of actual performance (Zimmerman, 2000) and needs internal and external motivation.

The Self-efficacy Theory has four components: information; the development of social and self-regulatory skills; skill enhancement; and the development of resilience. Self-regulation is the ability to overcome obstacles, get back on track and ward off distractions from tempting stimuli (St Quinton & Brunton, 2017). Social skills are competencies and not character traits; they can be taught and developed through explicit teaching and by providing opportunities for practice and reflection (Main & Whatman, 2016). Self-efficacy assumes that for behaviour to change an individual requires skill as well as self-control.

2.8.3.2 Cognitive Abilities

Cognitively resilient adolescents accept adversity; they have problem-solving skills and a sense of direction (Loyola & Aguilin-Dalisay, 2005). Self-reflection means giving serious thought of one's character and actions (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010). It is a procedure that learners experience to remember past learning encounters and what they did to work out how learning ought to happen. It is the investigation of associations between the data that was taught and learners' own thoughts (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2011: 530). It is conceivable that training and the use of positive emotions may offer advantages in the coping process.

2.8.3.3 Positive Self-Worth or High Self-Esteem

Historically, positive self-worth has been related to resilience in adolescents (Masten, 2001); their understanding of their personal futures in conjunction with self-esteem serves as a protecting resource for at risk children. Psychologically, resilient youth who are presented as sincere seem, by all accounts, to be intuition types (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2002). It is conceivable that training and the powerful use of positive feelings and emotional intelligence is an essential part of the lives of resilient people and may offer focal points in the process of adaptation. It appears; therefore, that high self-esteem and self-efficacy with a sense of hope, enhanced emotional intelligence and personal control make coping successfully more likely. A high level of self-esteem protects individuals from negative experiences and it is associated with lower levels of emotional distress and reduced anxiety levels (Brown, 2010). Research has also shown that personality traits can shape how individuals perceive and respond to potentially traumatic events which suggests that they may play a significant role in determining the likelihood of individuals developing acute anxiety symptoms and the extent/severity of those symptoms (Besser, Zeigler-Hill, Weinberg, Pincus & Neria, 2015). Besser and Neria (2009; 2010; 2012) maintain that a sense of helplessness increases the probability that one adversity will lead to another.

2.8.3.4 Contextual Factors: People and Structures Surrounding the Child

Bronfenbrenner theoretical thinking in the PPCT Model that guides an examination of the socio-ecological systems that surround learners and how available resources can be mobilised to build their resilience has been discussed in detail in the previous section. The ecological environment is perceived as a theory of human development in which everything is seen to be interrelated and researchers' knowledge of development is bound by context, culture and history (Darling, 2007). This model was designed to encompass the full contextual scope that the PPCT Model and the related literature concerning resilience points to the importance of predicting, analysing and fostering resilience.

In a review of the relevant literature it was found that the environment also plays a significant role in the development of resiliency; settings may or may not have an influence on the lives of adolescents. However, several studies highlight the impact of macro-contexts on resilience; for example, Bogar and Hulse-Killacky (2006) found that 'life circumstances', such as poverty, influence resilience. Poverty and segregation - racial or otherwise - are risk factors that could have a negative impact on the development of any child or youth and might predispose them to unhealthy development which Malindi and Theron (2010) regard as hidden resilience. According to Ungar (2004), hidden resilience has the potential to promote a sense of meaning and purpose as well as participatory opportunities, belonging and attachment, recreation, financial stability, personal and social power, social support and food and shelter. Loyola (2005) is of the opinion that the level of individuals' resilience could be measured by the extent of social support they receive from their environment which includes structures, such as family, school and community.

2.8.3.4.1 Family

Strengthening the learner's environment is key to enhancing resilience and well-being. Families are consistently identified as a vital resource for healthy youth development in terms of a variety of health outcomes (Zimmerman, 2013). Family and social support can also be considered as proximal process variables that are consistently emphasized in the literature as protective factors in children's development after

trauma with the purpose of ameliorating the situation and protecting individuals from adverse circumstances (Mampane, 2010). The role of the family in caregiver support and distress, particularly maternal support and distress, serves as a strong predictor in post abuse adjustment. In the context of family hostility, children generate fewer attempts at intentional behaviour, thereby undercutting their successful adaptation. Other studies that include family-related variables, such as family cohesion, adaptability, family environment and overall functioning, have not produced consistent results. Effective parenting is viewed as a major variable that has the potential to mediate the risk effects in children (Coleman & Ganong, 2002).

2.8.4.3.2 School

Schools should develop methods to help at-risk learners become resilient learners who are able to succeed in adverse circumstances (Thornton, Collins & Daugherty, 2006). The benefits of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model are meant for the whole school community. Such benefits include not only building self-esteem and self-efficacy; peer relationships and relationships between learners, teachers and parents; but also school connectedness and feelings of belonging. School engagement can be seen as a proximal process variable in adolescents because the school is arguably one of the most important environments for them. Active engagement in learning and the school environment by a young person is seen as a protective factor within a developmental asset framework (Sesma, Mannes & Scales, 2013). Mampane's research (2010) suggests that although township schools experience risk and adversity, many of them continue to produce good academic results. This could be attributed to the fact that teachers employed in township schools are qualified professionals in terms of the Norms and Standards of Educators Policy (Department of Education 2000) and they are central to the successful performance of learners in schools. However, the literature review showed that there is a need to train teachers to support learners with behaviour problems in areas that are not directly related to school work, such as in extracurricular activities. Engagement in school activities develops a sense of involvement and participation that helps to provide meaning for life and has a protective value for at-risk children (Mahoney, 2000).

Despite high prevalence rates of suspension in schools, screening for behaviour problems has been inconsistent in schools which could be attributed to a lack of capacity and proper assessment tools. Low screening rates reflect possible challenges within the education system, particularly in terms of misconceptions about behaviour problems, the lack of formal training related to screening tools and the lack of service providers in the prevalence of behaviour problems. The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy was promulgated in 2014 and the Gauteng Department of Education took it upon itself to guide all teachers through the application and implementation of the processes that support learners with barriers to learning. The policy provides a framework for the standardisation of procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their well-being, participation and continued inclusion in school (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The advantages of screening are: they are brief and less resource intensive and can quickly identify youth who are at-risk and who require additional support without them being referred for disciplinary hearings; teachers are able to understand the learner's challenges immediately and target subsequent interventions accordingly (Soleimanpour, Geierstanger & Brindis, 2017).

Positive family support (PFS) - as proposed by Smolkowski, Seeley, Gau, Dishion, Stormshak, Moore, Falkenstein, Fosco and Garbacz (2017) - provides substantially based support for adolescents and their families as well as school support to promote resilience and well-being in learners. The PFS model is a school-based approach to provide a range of family management interventions for learners and their caregivers (Smolkowski *et al.*, 2017). Research has shown that there appears to be a lack of communication between teachers and parents which often leads to an unpleasant form of parental involvement (Tlale, 2016). The model, therefore, provides for a parent management system that includes family supervision or monitoring, parent support sessions and community referrals. The model integrates various levels of the socio-ecological system to raise parents' awareness of school expectations; promote learner engagement through a family resource centre; and recommend short workshops to teachers about increasing parent engagement and teacher–parent communication (Smolkowski *et al.*, 2017). Baker, Wise, Kelley and Skiba (2016) are of the opinion that the greatest barrier to parental involvement is a lack of knowledge and understanding of how teachers and parents can effectively work and plan together. The PFS seems

to be an ideal intervention strategy that promotes collaboration within different systems. Soleimanpour *et al.* (2017) are in favour of an integrated system of care where the school collaborates with other macro systems, such as mental health and other services, to promote coordination of care and the efficient use of resources.

2.8.4.3.3 Community

The active involvement of the community in a collaborative partnership with teachers and a mutual recognition of each other's needs are crucial in developing the youth. Township life is mostly associated with poverty, crime and violence and has even been equated to a 'war zone' when the safety of residents has become compromised (Harber, 2001; Prinsloo 2005). Research conducted by Burton (2008) explores and confirms the occurrence of violence, crime and adverse conditions in townships and in the developmental environment of many learners in South African schools. Ebersöhn and Bouwer (2015) also comment on the disintegration of families as divorce increases worldwide and constitute a potentially destructive and devastating reality in society. Learners living in townships require a good deal of protection and resilience to overcome the obstacles and adversities in the context of their development. They need to succeed academically despite being exposed to adversity, such as poverty, inadequate housing, food instability and financial insecurity (Williams & Portman, 2014; Mampane & Bouwer, 2011).

2.8.4.4 Factors Impacting on Time

It has been hypothesized that lower levels of clinical symptoms in challenging behaviour in adolescents can be associated with closer proximal relationships, safe and nurturing contextual environments and an increase in the passage of time. In addition, according to the PPCT Model, it is expected that proximal process characteristics will have the greatest influence on psychological symptoms. As children grow into adolescents, the effect of social support on resiliency development decreases as they learn to cope, adapt and recover from adverse situations on their own through their personal strengths (Loyola, 2005). The patterns of social interaction between individuals change over time and such changes impact the focal individual,

both directly and by altering the configuration of ecological systems around the individual.

Although Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological theory helps to sort protective factors and processes into micro and macro systems, it neglects the environments of targeted biological systems as well as the recursive and dynamic interaction between factors within and between the different systems. The bio-ecological model permits the analysis of variations in the developmental process and outcomes as a joint function of the characteristics of the environment and of the person. However, the model defines development as a phenomenon of continuity and change in the bio-psychological characteristics of human beings that extends over the course of life; across successive generations; and through historical time, both past and future (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The search for a deeper understanding of the risk factors experienced by suspended learners as well as protective factors has become a dire need in the field of education to build their resilience and sustain their well-being.

2.9 PATHWAYS TO BUILDING CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE

The development of resilience in suspended learners within the school context involves helping them find ways to respond in a positive manner to the many challenges they face. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) suggest that everyone has resilience potential, but its level is determined by individual experiences, qualities, the environment and by each person's balance of risk and protective factors. Learners may perceive challenges as an opportunity for self-growth and for connecting with others (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2002) or as a form of neglect, abuse, turbulences and uncertainty (Smokowski *et al*, 1999). In the 1970s researchers working with at-risk children in psychopathology noted that some children had smart outcomes despite being exposed to risk. This discovery stirred a search for specific variations in children who thrive within the face of adversity and it generated a field of analysis on resilience. For the purpose of this study a synopsis of the key elements of pathways to building children's resilience is discussed below.

According to Rutter (2006), resilience is an interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological

outcome despite those experiences. The key component of Rutter's theory is that resilience is not related to individual psychological traits or superior functioning, but rather a standard adaptation given to correct resources. Rutter (2006) criticises the concept of 'super kids' or 'invulnerable' ones and suggests that individual variations in resilience are due to genetic effects that make children more or less susceptible to environmental changes or physiological responses to environmental hazards. He emphasises that it is the surroundings not the individual that is the catalyst for these variations.

It is the responsibility of society to care and protect its children. Theron, Liebenberg and Malindi (2013) maintain that this implies that society has a role to actualise basic human rights of dignity and respect for children and take special care to uphold these rights. The extent of this obligation is articulated and entrenched in the Children's Rights as promulgated in the Constitution of South Africa (1996).

Reciprocal collaboration and a strong network of coordinated care is important to provide appropriate support and intervention for suspended learners and their families as well as the academic support needed to enhance their classroom performance. Malindi and Theron (2010:319) believe that in protecting the possible harmful effects of risk processes the role of ecological protective resources, such as supportive families, health-promoting schools, community organisations and cultural rites of passage, should play a major role. Therefore, mental health and other services, such as medical service and the services of school psychologists, priests, social workers and juvenile justice, should be integrated to provide coordinated care and an efficient use of resources (Soleimanpour *et al.*, 2017).

Culture shapes the values that are reflected in how and to whom health-promoting resources, like education and mental health services, are provided. Constructive norms and practices shape micro-level transactions in ways that support adolescents to adapt well to their socio-cultural and socio-economic circumstances (Theron & Liebenberg, 2015). This precedence is set for children to uphold the integrity of the socio-cultural ecology (Bornstein, 2012). A culturally embedded understanding of resilience promotes the diversity of coping skills and the heterogeneity of what is believed to be normative behaviour. In this way children will be empowered with

resources to mitigate disruptions in attachment in culturally determined ways (Ungar, 2015).

In a study by Smokowski *et al.* (1999) it was found that adolescents frequently credited their flexibility to direction and coaching and they were grateful for their family being a protective factor. As indicated by Descombe, (2003), family protective assets are those that shape the family's capacity to continue despite hazard factors. The consistency in such families depict amicable characteristics that incorporate consistency, good communication, warmth, structure, observation, supervision and regard.

The benefits of building resilience include bringing helplessness down to misfortune, enhancing prosperity and accomplishing better care results. Strategies, like looking for coaching connections; accomplishing life adjustment and other worldliness; constructive feelings; and self-improvement and reflection, are defensive factors that can enable people to accomplish constructive individual results (Cunningham, Shochet, Smith & Wurfl, 2017). Various authors comment on the significance of sentiments of connectedness, accomplishing life adjustments and having a 'tying down power' throughout everyday life; they recognize the significance of 'a conviction framework that gives existential importance, a firm life account and a valuation for the uniqueness of oneself' for having large amounts of versatility (Restall & Conrad, 2015).

2.10 THE CATALYTIC EFFECT OF PROTECTIVE PROCESSES

Until recently, most of the focus in the discussion of psychosocial risk has been on the reduction of adverse influences. Protection does not reside in the psychological chemistry of the time but rather in the ways in which people influence life changes and in what they do about their disagreeable or disadvantaging circumstances. Similarly, Masten (2001) maintains that resilience involves competence and adaptability in the face of adversity. Resilience enables a young person to assess whether the adaptation is 'good' or 'helpful', guided by societal and cultural norms within their contexts. Protective factors serve to modify, ameliorate or alter a person's response to some environmental hazard that is predisposed to a maladaptive outcome (Rutter, 1987; Kimhi & Eshel, 2015).

Young people display resilience in their responses to serious adversity, whether it is a stressful life event or a situation of continuous stress, such as war, the death of a parent, abuse or poverty. The types of protective processes that emerge from analyses of the developmental course of high-risk children include the dispositional attributes of the individual, like activity level and sociability; least average intelligence; competence in communication skills, such as language and reading; and an internal *locus* of control. Affection from a parent, sibling, spouse or mate within the family provides emotional support in times of stress. External support systems, whether at school, at a youth programme, at work or at church, reward the individual's competencies and determination and provide a belief system by which to live (Perkins, Witt & Caldwell, 2018).

2.11 RESILIENCE MODELS

Resilience theory incorporates a few models that depict how promotive elements may shield adolescents or immunise them against the negative impact of negative effects of risk (Masten *et al.*, 2007; Luthar, 2006). These models control data analysis techniques and can illuminate the outline of mediation by characterising procedures to improve promotive variables. In the literature the compensatory and protective models of resilience are the two that are most commonly studied (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Garmezy, Masten & Tellegen, 1984; Masten *et al.*, 2007). While many studies focus on promotive factors, they are not explicitly applied in an analytic framework guided by resilience theory.

2.11.1 The Risk Protective Factor Model

The protective factor model suggests that promotive assets or resources modify the relationship between a risk and other promotive factors and outcomes; two possible protective models are risk-protective and protective-protective. The risk-protective model suggests that promotive factors operate to moderate or reduce the association between risks and negative outcomes. The protective-protective model enhances the effects of the promotive factor alone for predicting an outcome. Protective models are tested by exploring interaction effects in regression or multi-group analysis in structural equation modelling. Hurd and Zimmerman (2010) provide an example of a risk-

protective model in their study of adolescent mothers. They found that natural mentors helped protect adolescent mothers from the negative effects of stress on their mental health. Another study of self-esteem and cultural identity among native American youth provides an example of a protective-protective model (Zimmerman 2013). It was found that low self-esteem increased the negative association between cultural identity and alcohol use in an interaction effect in a regression analysis. When applied to the effect of suspension on learners the risk protective factor model could imply the absence of promotive assets or resources that could add to an increase in psychological, mental and physical attributes. Although there is extensive information in the literature on resilience processes, this study intended identifying protective processes that enhance resilience rather than being all encompassing.

2.11.2 The Compensatory Model

The compensatory model encapsulates the promotive factors that neutralise risk exposure in a counteractive fashion. The compensatory factors have an opposite effect on a developmental outcome in terms of anxiety, violence and anger rather than risks and they have independent effect from risks. Therefore, compensatory factors facilitate the prediction of outcomes and they are simply entered in a regression analysis after risks are accounted for in the equation. Parental support and love, for example, was found to compensate for risks associated with divorce and being surrounded by a dysfunctional family (Walsh, 2015). In this study, parent support predicted less violent behaviour among adolescent children - an effect that is independent and in the opposite direction of the risks.

2.11.3 The Challenge Model

Rutter (1987) introduced the challenge model of resilience that operates as an inoculation whereby exposure to modest levels of risk actually help youth overcome subsequent exposures that make them vulnerable to negative outcomes. It is vital, however, that the initial risk exposure should be challenging enough to help youth develop coping mechanisms to overcome its effects, but not too taxing as to overwhelm any effort to cope. Interpersonal conflict that is resolved amicably, for example, can help adolescents learn how to overcome social tensions to avoid a violent response in

some later more heated social disagreement that may involve others, such as a gang fight.

Adolescents need to develop strengths, acquire skills to cope, recover from hardships and be prepared for future challenges; they need to be resilient in order to succeed in life. Learners need to feel connected and be part of the school. This can be made possible through the promotion of a healthy relationship between the teachers, learners and peers. The building of developmental assets in learners supports the academic mission of schools because higher levels of assets are associated with greater academic achievement and lower rates of school dropout (Brooks, 2006). Perceived school connectedness has been associated with reduced levels of emotional distress, suicidal tendencies and violent behaviours as well as the use of cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana. It is also associated with a later age for a debut to sexual activity (Brooks, 2006).

2.12 THRIVING

Recent studies in resilience have started exploring the concept of 'thriving' as it emerged in a study on vulnerability and coping paradigms. Resilience and thriving are noted as two outcomes that are likely to develop in an individual following trauma. Thriving can be defined as the effective mobilisation of individual and social resources in response to risk or threat that leads to positive mental or physical outcomes and/or positive social outcomes. Typically, suspended learners experience a variety of difficulties during the course of their lives which hamper their personal growth and development. Thriving is described as a developmental and growth-oriented process that mitigates trauma in the lives of the youth (Bonanno & Mancini, 2008). Therefore, thriving may be referred to as the "personal qualities that enable one to survive in the face of such adversity" (Connor & Davidson, 2003: 76). These qualities include confidence and a positive self- image. Research in the relevant literature has also identified personal enablers, such as an individual's proactive personality, spirituality, motivation, psychological resilience and positive perspective of life in general. People tend to thrive when they surpass and transcend their prior level of functioning; they regain and even accelerate their upward psychological trajectory; and they seem to

mentally and emotionally benefit from their suffering because of their crises which helps them to flourish.

The recent literature on thriving suggests that people will respond to thriving in three different ways when confronted by a challenge: they may (a) survive the incident, (b) recover from the incident and (c) thrive as a result of enduring the hardship (Nishikawa, 2006). Survivors continue to function although it may be in an impaired state. Recovery indicates a return to a baseline where individuals revert to their previous level of functioning. However, thriving results in a transformation that includes a cognitive shift in responses to a challenge; the person may refocus priorities and have a stronger sense of self. Usually, thriving results from a profound event or crisis where a person's sense of purpose, meaning or identity is called into question (O'Leary, 1998).

2.13 CONCLUSION

In terms of the relevant existing literature that was reviewed it is evident that current school discipline practices are far more invasive and punitive than in past decades, reflecting a growing crime control approach to learner misbehaviour (Noguera, 2008; Welch & Payne, 2010). For example, the adopt-a-cop system in schools demonstrates the direct reach of the criminal justice system into the educational context. Security cameras and random property searches on school grounds borrow criminal justice techniques of surveillance and zero tolerance policies mimic rigid legal guidelines that mandate automatic suspension or expulsion for specified offenses (Noguera 2008). Approaches that are used in schools neglect the inherent developmental attributes that pose a risk to influencing the observable, unacceptable behaviour of learners and their inability to bounce back. Although suspension is used as a disciplinary measure in schools in an attempt to punish or to promote appropriate behaviour, it can result in a number of unfavourable outcomes. Suspension is the first step in a chain of events that lead to short and long term consequences, including academic disengagement, academic failure, an increased dropout rate and delinquency (Skiba, Arrendodo & Rausch, 2014).

This chapter presented an overview of the various perspectives of intervention strategies encountered in the relevant literature that may be used and how they

contribute to building resilience in suspended learners with behaviour problems. The chapter discussed different resilience trends and models focusing on their contextual attributions. The next chapter, Chapter 3, presents the theoretical framework and related theories that underpin this study.

CHAPTER 3

THEOREICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED THEORIES

“A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes.” (Mahatma Gandhi, 1869-1948)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed specific disciplinary guidelines for addressing behaviour problems in secondary schools and their implications for the suspension of learners. This chapter presents a justification of the theoretical framework that underpinned this research. The study used an integration of two theories: the Strength-Based Perspective Theory and the Resilience Theory. A description of the principles of both theories is given below before a review of the framework as a whole.

3.2 STRENGTH-BASED PERSPECTIVE THEORY

The Strength-Based Perspective Theory (SBP) is more an approach than an arrangement of rigid rules and principles; it endeavours to advance the wellbeing of adolescents and their families. A strength perspective is a strategy for identifying or learning to recognise and use resources already available to individuals to help them reclaim their personal power. Teachers and parents need to help children realise that they already possess much of what they need to proceed along their chosen paths in life. Unlike the strength-based practice which focuses exclusively on the assessment of individuals' capabilities and aspirations, a strengths perspective rests on an appreciation of positive attributes and capabilities that suspended learners possess and on the ways in which individuals and social resources may be developed and sustained to enhance resilience (Van Breda, 2018). For instance, in helping such learners, instead of asking a question like: *“What is wrong with this learner?”*, the question should be: *“What strengths does this learner possess that may help him/her grow and change?”* For the purpose of this study I chose to use the strength-based perspective because it focuses on enhancing growth and development by concentrating on positive attributes and resources already present rather than on their absence. This perspective asserts that individuals do not grow by dwelling on their

problems as that has the potential to weaken their confidence and their ability to develop in self-reflective ways.

The SBP draws on different approaches, including Community Development (Bryan & Henry, 2008); the Solution-Centred Approach (Walsh, 2002); Development Assets (Lerner, 2003); Resiliency (Garmezy, 1993); and Positive Youth Improvement as well as flexibility approaches (Connell, Gambone & Smith, 2001). The American scholar, Dennis Saleebey (1996), is credited with arranging and advancing the social work routine with regard to quality-based work during his tenure at the University of Kansas where he was Emeritus Professor of Social Welfare in the School of Social Welfare. He was a passionate believer in encouraging people to build on their strengths and asserted that “All humans, somewhere within, have the urge to be heroic; to transcend circumstances, to develop one’s powers, to overcome adversity, to stand up and be counted” (Saleebey, 2008: 123).

The strength-based perspective is a synergistic procedure between individuals who are supported and those who support them. The new worldview refrains from labelling and expects adolescents and their families to control and help themselves. In addition, it attributes the role of accomplice to specialist co-ops instead of specialists, experts, initiators and executives of the change procedure (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012). The approach depends on the possibility that individuals and situations interact and change each other in the process (Alvord, & Grados, 2005).

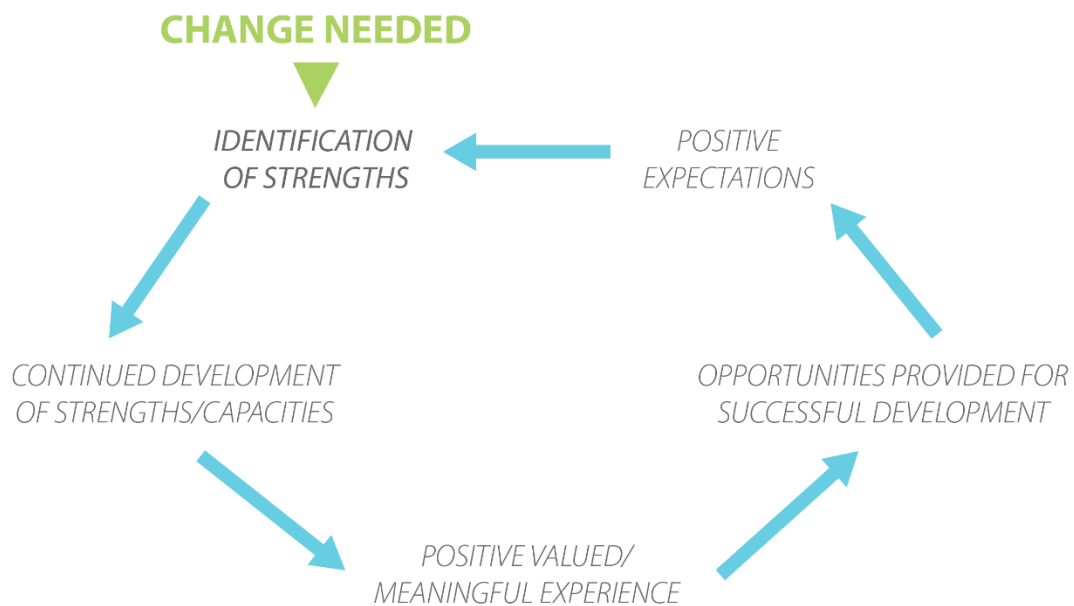
Unlike traditional teaching and professional development models that focus on deficit-based methodologies of evaluation, finding, profiling and exhibiting decisions related to individuals' lives and disregarding the qualities and encounters of the individuals, the strength-based approach concentrates on the inherent strengths of individuals, family groups and organisations in terms of knowledge, talents, capacities and resources to mobilise and pursue their aspirations and to aid their recovery and empowerment (Saleebey, 2008). It avoids the use of stigmatising terminology that people in need may become accustomed to and eventually accept as they feel helpless about changing and affecting their future.

I believe that this is a resourceful approach to understanding what causes conflict and commotion in the lives of suspended learners. She is of the opinion that rather than label them as the problem, it is necessary to explore how learners are robbed of childhood opportunities and what capacities and strengths they have to transcend their circumstances. She agrees with the realistic notion that individuals experience and dwell on problems and challenges; instead, however, they should shift their frame of reference to analyse issues and focus on what works well and is effective in supporting the adaptive growth of adolescents (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012). It is identified tensions that form the base of a more holistic intervention approach. The strength-based approach was deemed to be useful for the study in that it operates on the assumption that people have strengths and resources for their own empowerment. Through the application of the strength-based approach individuals learn to understand their capacity and thinking styles and acquire skills to adapt them so that they can identify the true causes of adversity and its effect on their lives. It could result in establishing a platform for negotiating and navigating the resources, wisdom and knowledge that every individual, family, group or community has and that directly or indirectly improve situations (Pulla, 2012; Early & GlenMaye, 2004).

The strength-based approach was selected for this study because it recognises that adolescence represents a unique period of major development and a time when the youth frequently have unmet physical, psychological, mental and health needs. Pulla (2012) refers to adolescence as a period during which the youth face adversity, become resilient and resourceful and learn new strategies to overcome adversity. The adolescent, like any human being, has the resources to overcome adversity but these resources may not be evident to the individual. Teachers in schools seriously consider how best to guide their learners through life skills subjects and provide pastoral care. Research has shown that teachers struggle with issues of discipline in schools and that internationally and nationally governments have failed in their attempts to introduced alternative punishments (Thompson 2015; Skiba & Losen, 2015; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Marchbanks, Blake, Booth, Carmichael, Seibert & Fabelo, 2014). According to Epstein, Harniss, Robbins, Wheeler, Cyruлик, Kriz and Nelson (2003), this relates to the idea of fixing children's deficits. In contrast, the objectives of strength-based approaches do not allow stigmatised language but rather encourage individuals to identify and build on their strengths so that they are able to achieve their goals and

regain independence in their daily lives. If teachers focus on the identification and development of strengths, learners may develop a stronger foundation from which they are able to face adversity.

The SBP fits within a holistic model where each learner is viewed as an individual possessing unique strengths and weaknesses. The strengths may include learners' willingness to accept help; a positive attitude; their ability to have overcome hardships in the past; and in the support system available to them. The model attempts to identify a positive basis of the person's resources - or what may need to be added - and strengths that will lay the foundation for addressing challenges resulting from problems (McCaskey, 2008). The approach provides positive contextual building blocks which can serve as the starting point for future growth in adolescents. Hammond and Zimmerman (2012) suggest a strength-based cycle to provide a more holistic approach to building resilience in suspended learners - reflected in Figure 3.1 below.



(Adapted from Hammond and Zimmerman, 2012:3)

Figure 3.1: The Strength-Based Cycle

3.2.1 Review of the Strength-Based Cycle

The review of the strength-based cycle includes an identification of the cycle; the development of strengths; positive and valued meaningful experiences; opportunities provided for successful development; and positive expectations.

3.2.1.1 Identification of the Strength-Based Cycle

Strength-based approaches seek to grasp significant factors that are conducive to individual resilience and well-functioning families or communities. Consulting with individuals is crucial in allowing them space to speak about their strengths and weaknesses because it is vital for them to realise the objectives that they need to achieve to change their lives (Brun & Rapp, 2001). It is imperative that teachers should attempt to understand factors that alter individuals for them to flourish and achieve health, well-being and success (Oberle, 2018). The strength-based perspective is rooted in the conviction that individuals have existing competencies; that they are capable of learning new skills and finding solutions to drawbacks; that they will use existing competencies to identify and address their own concerns; and that they will be concerned about the method of discovery and learning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Generally, individuals are more confident and comfortable to journey into the future or the unknown when they are invited to start with what they already know.

Boniwell (2008) suggests that the key to a practical strength perspective for identifying strengths is through an initial contact with new learners. The SIAS policy document (2014) serves a good purpose in identifying barriers on admission as it stipulates that all learners must have a profile developed on admission which will serve as the baseline for intervention and support in the classroom. Learner profiles may take the form of a formal document or process or they can simply be a series of conversations with the learners. They should include information about learners' skills, strengths and interests and they may highlight potential barriers to learning and result in recommendations being made concerning what is needed to support learning. Learner profiles can help school staff members build relationships with learners and understand matters from their perspective. Learner profiles have benefits for both learners and teachers. For example, learners have an opportunity to express who they are; address

assumptions people may have about them or their disabilities; express their aspirations and passions; and have a say in what happens at school and in their learning. Similarly, teachers are able to build a rapport with learners as well as identify and address potential barriers to learning earlier in the child's development.

3.2.1.2 Development of Strengths

Capacity building may be a method, a goal or a life-long journey that is dynamic rather than static. There is an absolute belief that each person has potential and it is their distinctive strengths and capabilities that confirm their evolving story and outline who they are.

3.2.1.3 Positive and Valued Meaningful Experiences

All people have the urge to succeed; to explore the globe around them; and to be helpful to others and their communities. This is often sustained within the belief that change is inevitable. According to Theron and Theron (2010), positive and substantive experiences have a positive influence on individuals' abilities to deal with matters that make them feel vulnerable. The individual's ability to contextualise and normalise any kind of distress involves a cooperative effort to appreciate and initiate change with a strength perspective is a typical point of departure. There must be a commitment from community service suppliers to be co-partners with local schools and people to develop effective methods of nurturing resilience in learners who are at-risk and in their families (Hammond, 2010). It is generally acknowledged that 'it takes a village to raise a child' which suggests that constructively and collaboratively participating in addressing difficult behaviour may require that all stakeholders should know and understand their systems in order to develop methods that mitigate the consequences of difficulties.

3.2.1.4 Opportunities Provided for Successful Development

The SBP reminds us that each person, family, cluster and community holds the key to their own transformation and a purposeful modification process. The challenge is - and always has been - whether or not individuals are willing to completely embrace this method of working with others.

3.2.1.5 Positive Expectations

It is important to value individual differences and the essential need to collaborate; effective change is a collaborative, inclusive and participatory process: “It takes a village to raise a child” (Hammond, 2010:5). Positive change occurs in the context of authentic relationships - people need to know that someone cares and will be there for them unconditionally. It is a transactional and facilitating process of supporting change and capacity building – not a fixing one. Building skills and capacity increases self-efficacy which, in turn, encourages the pursuit of goals and leads to greater goal attainment. A strength-based perspective identifies individuals’ resilience in the face of adversity and builds resources that will increase this resilience.

SBP interventions have progressed in creating a coordinated sequence of positive experiences and providing developmental support and opportunities (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012). By adopting the strength-based cycle process, I intended making a contribution in developing a support framework that would engage suspended learners in actions which would help them define their situations (Boniwell, 2003). The learners were able to tell their stories through their unique socially constructed reality and I was able to discover what suspended learners had learnt and know about themselves and their environment (Early & GlenMaye, 2004; Saleebey, 2008) and identify their personal and familial qualities, family traditions, rituals and the combination of the strengths of the nuclear and extended family members as well as their hopes and dreams (Early & GlenMaye, 2004).

3.2.2 Implications of the Strength-Based Perspective

The intention of the SBP model is to obtain a complete and balanced scientific understanding of the human experience, including its peaks and valleys and everything in between (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). The SBP should be applied in terms of the language of interaction with the learners that teachers serve; the language of service, team and network interactions; as well as the presentation of service delivery, monitoring, reporting and feedback. The SBP attempts to comprehend the crucial variables conducive to individuals’ resilience that are found in well-functioning families/communities. The intervention methods used should be client-driven and

relationship targeted. This approach seeks to know human virtues, such as the strengths people use to deal effectively with life as well as the basic strengths of humankind (Smith, 2006). Traditionally, the SBP has targeted individuals' assets and strengths (Brown & Lent, 2000); it has emphasised the importance of cultural diversity and, therefore, the impact of culture on the expression of individual strengths (Smith, 2006). It engages distressed individuals with respect and compassion and perceives capability-building as a dynamic method that evolves over a lifetime. It also affirms the reparative potential in individuals and seeks to reinforce strengths as opposed to weaknesses.

3.2.3 Desired Outcome of the Strength-Based Perspective

The SBP should be embraced as a philosophy for working with individuals. School suspension does not seem to be especially reserved for the worst behaviour; usually, it also appears to be used for non-violent or non-threatening conduct, like non-attendance, talking back to teachers, uniform violations and being late for school. Traditional approaches to school discipline such as in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension are reactive and have a long history of exclusionary discrimination (Green, Mynard & Stegenga, 2018). Despite research indicating the ineffectiveness of suspension practices, learners continue to receive suspensions at an increasing rate globally. Society is of the opinion that the core responsibility of schools is to foster the cognitive, emotional and social development of learners. To that effect, there is both national and international evidence to suggest that the development of socio-emotional strengths is associated with a reduction in aggressive behaviour (Belgrave et al., 2004), increasing life satisfaction (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and resilience (Graves et al., 2017). Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) is adopted for the purpose of this study because it involves implementing practices and policies that help learners acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enhance personal development, social relationships, ethical behaviour and enhance their resilience (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017; Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik & Elias 2003; Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004).

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) interventions are strength-based interventions that promote asset development and enhance the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural

competencies of individuals. The emerging literature indicates a link between the developments of personal strengths with a decrease in aggression and enhanced well-being. SEL interventions promote asset development by enhancing the following five interrelated cognitive, affective, social and behavioural competencies, adapted from the work of Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich & Gullotta (2015) and are considered to be important for success in school and life:

- **Self-awareness:** Accurately recognising one's thoughts and emotions and their influence on behaviours; accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations; possessing a well-grounded sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence, perceived control and optimism.
- **Self-management:** Effectively regulating one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour; managing stress; savouring emotional wellbeing; successfully engaging in skills, such as coping, problem solving, mindfulness, relaxation and positive and productive thinking.
- **Social awareness:** Identifying appropriate social resources and support; displaying accurate perspective taking, respect for others and empathy.
- **Relationship skills:** Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships; seeking and providing help when needed; communicating effectively; negotiating conflict constructively; solving interpersonal problems.
- **Responsible decision-making:** Making constructive, responsible and ethical choices that promote self and others wellbeing; effectively managing goals, time and tasks.

Adolescents with solid social and emotional capacities connect more in classroom exercises and receive higher acknowledgment by teachers and peers (Denham and Brown 2010).

Secondary school settings typically present learners with less structure, more demands, new roles and increased pressures that contribute to their struggles with stress, distress and adjustment difficulties (Conley, 2015). Studies in the literature indicate that stress, maladjustment and mental health problems are high among learners displaying behaviour problems (Gillies, Boden, Friesen, Macfarlane &

Fergusson, 2017). To promote the personal and interpersonal awareness and competence of such learners, enhancing their social and emotional skills would be more appropriate to help them navigate new and challenging academic, social and emotional terrains. Promoting these competencies, in turn, is likely to curb problems or maladjustment in emotional and social domains (Conley, 2015).

The assets promoted within SEL have the potential to enhance positive development in all adolescents. Positive benefits have been reported concerning SEL interventions conducted in Australia and Asia over the past ten years (Yu & Jiang, 2017) and learners from various racial and socio-economic backgrounds; whether demographic subgroups benefited differentially from the interventions is still unclear. However, from my perspective SEL seems to have a potential to capacitate suspended learners so that they are able to navigate their personal and contextual resources to build resilience.

Studies in the existing literature have shown that the style of parenting characterised by knowledge and encouragement of a child's unique personality, abilities, talents, skills and strengths, (Waters, Loton & Jach, 2018) promotes desired outcomes in various aspects of the child's development. When parents adopt a strength-based approach they intentionally seek to perceive and promote positive attitudes, self-awareness and awareness of others; in other words, parents construct their children's resources for the future. Developing safe attachment in children at an early age enhances later interaction in their exploratory behaviour which slowly develops into greater self-sustainment and impartiality as they find out that they can cope with the demands of life. SBP motivates adolescents to explore new situations, including traumatic situations, using their strengths and abilities or personal strengths to interact with their environments. In this way, SBP provides a 'positive filter' for the way children react to stress; it means that they are likely to reap the benefits of positive stress, such as skill development and adaptability (Waters, 2015).

3.2.4 Review of Categories of Strength

Wisdom and knowledge as well as under-knowledge and information are considered to be part of psychological strength that involves the acquisition and use of information,

like power that includes novel and productive thinking; curiosity that encompasses interest, novelty-seeking and openness to experience; and a love of learning. Artistic strengths, such as the flexibility to understand and the ability to express oneself in writing, speech and different art forms, also benefit this category. Children should have a strong sense of hope and optimism and view life as a dynamic journey that involves them in writing the next chapters of their lives – about how they perceive themselves and who they invite along on their journey. Emotional strengths include insight, optimism and perseverance; golf-stroke problems with perspective; finding a purpose to life; and having the flexibility to endure challenging situations that provide opportunities to develop coping skills. Therefore, children should not be over-protected in order to grow emotionally.

Character strengths or personality strengths include behaviour traits, such as integrity, honesty, discipline, courage and perseverance. Associated relative nurturing strengths reflect individuals' ability to establish purposeful relationships with others and a capability to speak to and nurture others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Core and essential skills that have been identified that satisfy social relationships include maintaining friendships, sharing jokes and laughing with peers as well as the flexibility to join and interact with peers from diverse groups and an ability to maintain a conversation (Peterson & Seligman, 2003, 2004). Individuals' ability to secure social support and community strengths is aligned to relationship strengths.

According to Niemiec, Shogren and Wehmeyer (2017), in positive psychology the virtue of temperance is associated with protective traits that help individuals avoid excess and stay on track in the face of temptation. Strengths that are associated with temperance include the following:

- **Mercy** - Forgiving those who have done wrong or acted against you. Giving people a second chance and not being vengeful. Mercy tempers hatred and anger.
- **Humility and modesty** - Allowing your accomplishments to speak for themselves. Not seeking the spotlight or trying to seem more special than you are and truthfully acknowledging who you are and what you've done. Humility tempers arrogance.

- **Self-control** - Regulating what you feel and do; being disciplined and not letting your desires or emotions get out of hand. Self-control tempers impulsiveness.
- **Prudence** - Taking care in what you say and do as well as not taking undue risks. Prudence tempers actions and decisions leading to regret.

Strengths of transcendence are strengths that forge connections with the universe and provide meaning. They include an appreciation of beauty and excellence and/or skilled performance in various domains of life; being aware of, and thankful for, the good things that happen; hope in terms of optimism, future-mindedness and future orientation; expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that may be engendered; humour and playfulness in an enjoyment to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; and seeing the light side of life by making - not necessarily telling – jokes. In addition, there is also spirituality or religiousness, faith and purpose reflected in having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits in the larger scheme of things; and having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort (Niemic, Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2017).

3.3 RESILIENCE THEORY

The study of resilience in childhood was initiated in many investigations that concern adolescents existing in negative conditions. Resiliency was first applied to the improvement of childhood in the 1970s by Werner and Garmezy as they questioned why, in early life, some who live in terrible conditions thrive and achieve effective outcomes (Ungar, 2005). Werner personally survived the devastation of Europe as a missy and Garmezy, as a soldier, witnessed the devastating results of battle (Masten, 2014). Researchers describe such children as ‘invincible’ but later the term was changed to ‘resilient’ with the identification of impact on context.

This study followed the developmental elements of resilience proposed by Masten (1994) in her approach to minimize risk by limiting the accumulation of stressors experienced by suspended learners; growing the availability of assets for accessibility; and mobilising protective strategies within and around learner contexts. The resilience

theory provides a practical lens through which human improvement may be viewed with optimism and hope. Suspended inexperienced learners need to be taught to understand and recognise elements related to advantageous consequences in order to prepare them to be independent in the future - not like the deficits models that focus attention on repairing problem behaviour.

Researchers in the relevant literature, such as Ledesma (2012) and Green (2002), maintain that there is an immediate relationship between stress in suspended learners and their capability to preserve resilience within the face of prolonged adversity. Rutter (2006) contends that there is a vital heterogeneousness in response to how individuals meet discourse challenges. Resilience is an interactive thought or process during which its presence is inferred from the varied results of adverse human experiences (Rutter, 2012). Resilience, therefore, describes the stage at which a person may be within the course of, or when facing, adversity; it is related to constructs like survival, recovery, thriving and hardiness (Ledesma, 2014). Evidence in the literature also suggests several variables that characterise resilience as a fine shallowness, sturdy brick skills, a way of coherence, self-efficacy, optimism, durable social resources, ability and perseverance (Ungar, 2004; Masten, 2005; Bonanno, 2004; Worsley, 2006) which fits in well with strength-based approaches.

The following figure illustrates resilience as a process and an outcome.

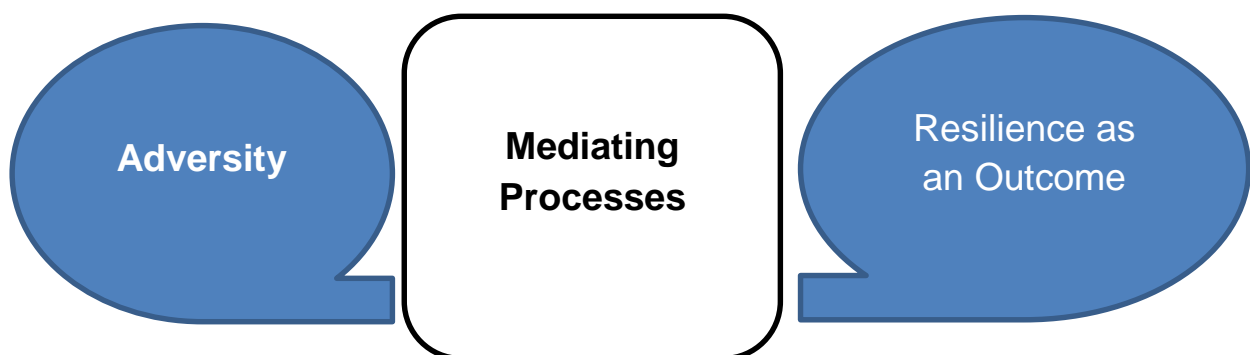


Figure 3.2: Resilience as a Process and an Outcome

Resilience as a process and as an outcome is shown in the above figure as consisting of the following three elements: Adversity, Mediating Processes and Resilience as an Outcome.

3.3.1 Adversity

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, adversity is characterised as a troublesome or obnoxious circumstance

(<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/adversity>). O'Keefe on his website, <https://www.keepinspiring.me/>, distinguishes six kinds of difficulty:

- **Physical Adversity** - Sudden physical changes either accidental or inherent can cause various new difficulties and an extraordinary change to the manner in which one carries on with life.
- **Mental Adversity** - According to Huesmann, Eron and Yarmel (1987), low intellectual ability meddles with early learning of nonaggressive critical thinking ability and adapting procedures which, in turn, interferes with learning opportunities at school and with peers, thereby, impeding scholarly improvement.
- **Emotional Adversity** - Intense or constant real life stressors are risk factors.
- **Social Adversity** - Dysfunctional families, family violence and poor parenting styles pose a negative challenge to children's development. Studies related to divorce suggest that there is a crisis period of readjustment immediately after marital disruption, followed by a gradual improvement in children's functioning. Baldwin, Baldwin and Cole (1990) distinguish between proximal risk and distal risk in studies of multiple-risk factors. Distal-risk factors refers to social class and are not experienced directly by children but are mediated by proximal variables. Proximal-risk factors include inadequate nutrition, discord between parents and anti-social behaviour in parents that impinges directly on children.
- **Spiritual Adversity** - People who believe strongly in the human spirit, the power of community or something equally important will often have a sense of peace that many others do not possess.

- **Financial Adversity** - Poverty, low maternal instruction, low financial status, low birth weight, family insecurity and schizophrenia in natural guardians have been connected to low academic accomplishment and emotional or social issues (Chase, 2018).

3.3.2 Mediating Processes

Van Breda (2018) refers to mediating processes as protective factors and processes that enable people to achieve in the face of adversity. Research suggests that there are both internal and external factors or manifestations of resilience. These strengths are seen to transcend culture, ethnicity, gender, location and time and can be applied to all individuals in terms of the provision of support and opportunities (Bernard, 2004).

3.3.3 Outcomes

In the literature related to Psychology, the term 'resilience' has been used to describe three distinct kinds of phenomena: (1) Good outcomes despite high-risk status; (2) Sustained competence under threat; and (3) Recovery from trauma. Studies containing these phenomena have yielded similar as well as unique findings. The resilience of suspended learners should be evident in their effective coping skills and in efforts to restore or maintain internal or external equilibrium under significant threat by means of human activities, including thought and action (Masten & Garmezy, 1990).

Suspension, as an alternative form of discipline, removes learners from structured school supervision and places them under what is undoubtedly less structured parental supervision, particularly if the parents are employed. Learners may experience anxiety, despair and a feeling of helplessness due to being removed from their peers. Consequently, due to a lack of positive coping skills and the capacity to navigate and negotiate resources in a meaningful way, learners may be easily tempted to engage in risky problem behaviour which might lead to further involvement in the juvenile justice system. The assumption is that learners who are suspended on regular school days have sufficient time to interact with crime (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). Understanding the experiences and quality of life of suspended learners is a basis for intervention on which to build learners' resilience and enhance their well-being.

The Resilience Theory emphasises strengths rather than problems and it comprises key contextual protective elements (Toomey, Brennan & Friesen, n.d.). Ungar (2005) suggests that in the context of exposure to sizable adversity or risk the capability or strength of humans to navigate their way through psychological, social, cultural and bodily resources that preserve their well-being and their potential to negotiate (strength) these resources in culturally significant ways will decide the resilience of people or groups. Similarly, Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) maintain that the ability to manipulate poor results due to exposure to certain risks and avoid negative pathways related to risk, as well as the functionality to deal with aggravating experiences, develop from factors that help resiliency in individuals.

3.4 RISK FACTORS

Risk factors are elements that serve to improve resilience; they are good for building character and they enhance a person's resilience after some time (Ungar, 2003). Masten and Garmezy (1985) argue that to be considered resilient, one needs to encounter problems as resilience stems from adversity. In the relevant literature on resilience, many factors are cited as vital in determining resilience that include personality; environmental elements and socialisation, such as poverty, violence and negative infant experiences; the amount and type of experienced stress; accessible resources; and social support (Masten, 2002; Ungar, 2011; Masten & Monn, 2015). A practical example is: A child is at risk of violence and aggression where risk factors are chronic exposure to violence in the home and at school, minimal parent supervision and a low level of school association and bonding. However, protective factors are present in the child's life that may include high self-esteem and social competence; a sense of belonging at school; a supportive best friend; and extended family members who serve as positive role models.

Despite viewing resilience as a process, certain life conditions have been found to commonly present risks for youth. Research carried out by Mampane and Boucher (2011) found that township schools experience negative circumstances, such as violence and crime, a lack of parental supervision, poverty and unemployed parents. When problems like those cited above occur simultaneously, the consequences for adolescents are not good (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2001); they include violent

behaviour, poor educational achievement and dropping out of school (Brooks, 2006; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Although the hazard factor of their susceptibility to poor consequences is high, there are possibilities for suspended learners to avoid them (Brooks, 2006; Werner & Smith, 2001). The nature of the danger could be used to guide the energy of resilience to bounce back; for example, within the context of extreme adversity a return to ordinary functioning or recuperation is sufficient. It should also be considered that the meaning and kind of adversity may be subjective and may result in distinct subjective reactions. According to Rutter (1999), a study of resilience needs to explore a variety of viable consequences as alternatives to focusing only on positive ones or on extraordinary regular functioning. Germann (2006), Evans (2012) are of the opinion that adolescents have an inherent potential to solve problems and they describe them as splendid survivors and resilient and competent actors involved in an everyday battle to live well. However, schools seem to forget the inherent potential of learners when they decide on sanctions.

Mampane and Bouwer (2011) believe that the social systems of the family, schools and the community fulfil a primary role in addressing problems experienced by suspended learners. This is supported by Pinkerton and Dolan (2007) who suggest that social help plays an integral part in coping successfully; it assists resilience and is advantageous in promoting intellectual health. This is accomplished through collaboratively negotiating for, and interacting with, contextually relevant systemic assets, such as quality education or opportunities for employment, that heighten the chances of positive developmental effects (Ungar, 2015). Instead of applying a holistic strategy involving a multi-disciplinary group in making choices for suspend learners, the restorative justice method is pursued to address transgressions.

Since traditional behavioural administration practices that include corporal punishment are prohibited in South Africa (Du Plessis, 2015), litigation stipulates that disciplinary moves should be accompanied by procedural protection that guarantees rudimentary fundamental equity and fairness to keep the education process from crisis (Du Plessis, 2015). This reform in decision-making tactics poses a challenge for most principals in

terms of their competencies and capacities as they are required to engage in a greater collaborative and inclusive decision-making way (Mokoena, 2011).

3.5 UNIQUE PROTECTIVE FACTORS

A few pathways to resilience have been suggested by researchers who have refined an appreciation of the ingredients and methods involved in building resilience in adolescents. Research studies have described resilience as procedures and patterns of good adaptation following threats to adaptation (Windle, 2011). There is agreement about a range of important prerequisites and variables that assist resilience. The unique protective factors that are recognised by Ungar (2012) were adopted in this study as they mirror addressing risks and tensions associated with psychological, bodily and social barriers to development. Ungar (2008) notes that the ability to navigate and negotiate resources to survive and thrive is related to both internal and external tensions that impact on the individual, the family and the community. They are: (1) Material resources; (2) Supportive relationships; (3) A desirable non-public identity; (4) Experiences of strength and control; (5) Adherence to cultural traditions; (6) Experiences of social justice; and (7) Experiences of social brotherly love with others.

Any tension may be a barrier to children's development when it is manifested in a way that threatens long time successes (Ungar, 2012). Therefore, protective factors act as a shield that can influence individuals' misbehaviour in school and assist them to survive being suspended. Balancing tensions will influence the individuals' resilience; the task of determining factors that are universally protective or specifically protective for a given developmental outcome or constellation of psycho-social outcomes is arduous and complex.

Ungar (2008) argues that it is how these options unravel the challenges posed through each tension that contributes to an adolescent's journey to resilience. Modern resilient theories focus on how inside and exterior variables of resilience - as strengths and protective elements - contribute to an individual's ability to thrive in the face of adversity. Internal variables may be defined as personality elements or man/woman factors that encompass hardiness, coping ability, an experience of coherence,

cognitive resources and self-efficacy (Ungar, 2011; Worsely, 2006; Rutter, 2008). Different researchers have defined external variables that have an impact on a person's capacity to remain resilient in terms of relationships and in connection to caring capable adults in the household and the neighbourhood (Masten, 2005; Nishikawa, 2006; Rutter, 2011; Ungar, 2011). The interior and exterior variables are discussed in detail as unique, protective and identifiable clusters of resilience factors. In terms of this study promotive elements are considered as similar to those of 'Ubuntu' that are used culturally to construct resilience in support of suspended learners.

3.5.1 Relationships

Low levels of family function; a lack of parent-adolescent communication; and low degrees of household brotherly love and guidance have been associated with challenging behaviour. The role of parental involvement is viewed as a preventative measure in early school grades, in particular. Families are the most important caregivers for children. Programmes that recognise the significance of the parents' capacity to increase resilient in children are more likely to produce successful results (Brooks, 2006). If parents are not constrained in disciplining their children, any programme associated with behaviour modification initiated by the school may not complement the actions of the parents. Positive interpersonal relationships partly reflect individuals' social ecologies that predict successful development and adjustment in circumstances of adversity (Liew, Cao, Hughes & Deutz, 2018).

Although studies have yet to document a direct link between resilience and parent-children relationships, several published studies have shown a direct connection between resilience and peer relationships in terms of friendship quality in the classroom. Social networks consisting of mentors, friends and teachers serve as protective factors that encourage active participation and enhance resilience in learners. Cillessen, Van IJzendoorn, Van Lieshout and Hartup (1992) maintain that boys who have low resilience tend to be rejected by their peers; they are also seen by their peers as being aggressive or shy.

Adolescent relationships with schools and different adults may buffer the impact of adverse challenges on their lives (Foster, Horwitz, Thomas, Opperman, Gipson,

Burnside, Stone & King, 2017). In the absence of constructive and supportive conditions in the home environment, the school is the next logical resource. Teachers who demonstrate respect, excitement and caring for their learners on an individual level create a deeply motivating context for learning that has probably little to do with their teaching methods. Teachers on all levels should be involved in assisting learners through their anxiety-related issues (Roth, 2017). It is this calibre of teacher who allows children from at-risk homes to benefit educationally and morally; children suffer most in the absence of such teachers. Learners need to respond to continuous positive motivational messages that encourage them and which reflect positive role modelling and monitoring that enhance positive relationships. Enhancing pro-social factors, such as communication, organisation, stress management and conflict resolution, will allow learners to become more resilient as they encounter new challenges in life. The role of the school counsellor is also important and needs to be acknowledged (Foxy, Baker & Gerler, 2016).

3.5.3 Identifying and Cultivating a Sense of Purpose

The adaptive value of culture relies on how people grasp their social heritage (Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Steynberg & Wan, 2010). Embracing culture implies action or mindful methods of being and doing. Mindful participation, which includes the reproduction of communal knowledge and practices that are protective as well as negotiation in adapting to new contextual conditions and subsequent cautious transformation in collaboration with others, forms the basis on which to comprehend culture as a co-developed process. When culture is understood and enacted as co-constructed, it offers 'ways of being and doing' that "supply the solutions we use to survive and prosper in the society of our birth" (Pagel, 2012:3). Co-constructed solutions offer tools with which to navigate hardship. In attempting to explain how socio-cultural factors shape context in ways that facilitate and/or obstruct resilience, it is necessary to consider not only what values and practices from social cultural systems are passed on to individuals, but also how individuals adopt, adapt and mobilise these as socially-constructed and socially-shared 'ways of being and doing.' These shared 'ways of being and doing' flow from intergenerational legacies of knowledge and values that offer capital which provides guidelines for everyday living

and potentially binds together the people who share them (Theron & Liebenberg, 2015).

3.5.3 Individual Developmental Competencies

Evidence in the relevant available literature suggests that certain protecting factors, such as personal attributes that include mental capacity, emotional intelligence, true social skills, high vanity levels and self-confidence, function as a buffer against negative experiences and should assist adolescents in tough circumstances to cope and thrive (Bandura, 2002).

3.5.3.2 Intellectual Capacity

Studies of childhood resilience show that at-risk learners can be at differing success levels throughout extraordinary domains of adjustment. Cognitive skills help encompass insightfulness and common abilities, such as problem-solving, information processing and mental ability. Empirical research indicates that robust cognitive capabilities predict elements of adolescence competence throughout a range of domains, which include but are not constrained to acceptable social and behavioural functioning (Racz, Putnick, Suwalsky, Hendricks, and Bornstein, 2017). Possible explanations for poor cognitive consequences for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds include little early stimulation from parents who do not monitor their children (Schady, 2011: 2306).

3.5.3.3 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is regarded as a less cognitive part of intelligence as it is concerned with understanding oneself and others; relating to people; and adapting to cope with immediate surroundings (Ebersöhn & Maree 2006). Emotional intelligence is recognised as having a range of positive outcomes on the functioning of humans; it has also been identified as the primary factor that may retain and enhance acceptable behaviour (Alvord, & Grados 2005). Studies related to childhood resilience have observed that children in high risk scenarios display good coping competencies regardless of their negative emotional problems. Emotional potential that promotes

resilience comprises knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required to exhibit functional integration through affective, cognitive and behavioural systems (Beauchamp & Anderson, 2010)

3.5.3.3 High Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

The focus on adolescent resilience is on multiple adverse conditions; for example, socio-economic disadvantage, parental mistreatment, chronic illness and violence as well as neglecting the attributes of the individual child. Gilligan (1997) sees resilience in terms of the qualities possessed by individuals – qualities which help them to cope, and even thrive when faced with great hurt or disadvantage. Similarly, Ungar, (2005:6) regards resilience as both an individual's capacity to navigate paths to health resources and a condition of the individual's family, community and culture to provide these resources in culturally meaningful ways. The two definitions have the inherent qualities needed for individuals to adapt positively, manage their context and even thrive under a range of adverse conditions in common.

Extrinsic factors are known to include at least one secure attachment relationship; access to wider support, such as extended family and friends; and positive nursery, school or community experiences. Intrinsic factors include a sense of security where the child feels loved, a healthy self-esteem and a sense of agency or self-efficacy. This means that for individuals to have positive self-esteem they must feel confident both about their sense of self-worth where they are able to say: "I am a good person, entitled to care and respect from others" and their sense of self-competence when they can assert: "I am able to meet the challenges I face in life." The literature suggests that self-esteem and self-efficacy are characteristics of resilient adolescents which recur most frequently.

Self-esteem is strongly related to happiness and it seems that excessive self-esteem leads to happier consequences regardless of stress or other situations (Strauss, 2000; Werner, 2000). A learner who is constantly encouraged will overcome situational obstructions and time; discover better techniques of creating positive capabilities; and be able to deal with the stress of learning with very little extra external assistance (Bandura, 1986). A number of studies have shown that individuals with high levels of

resilience and self-esteem exhibit fewer emotional and behavioural problems. It has been found that Individuals with high self-esteem feel quite positive about their characteristics and competencies which can positively influence their well-being (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010). However, it has been proved that low self-esteem is more probable to result in melancholy under certain circumstances as well as lead to emotional and behavioural problems (Steiger, Allemand, Robins & Fend, 2014). Many studies suggest that the negative results of low self-esteem are mostly felt in precise instances (Ravary & Baldwin, 2018); they have evaluated the relationship between self-esteem and emotional and behavioural problems (Cheng & Furnham, 2003; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt & Caspi, 2005; Shaniya & Sharma, 2012; Yilmaz-Irmak, 2008). The results of these studies indicate that individuals with more emotional and behavioural problems have lower self-esteem and although some research show that high self-esteem mitigates the outcomes of stress (Strauss, 2000; Werner, 2000; Biehal, 2006), relationships involving people with low self-esteem tend to be less satisfying - partly due to their negative behaviour and expectations of rejection in the relationships (Bellavia & Murray, 2003; Murray, Bellavia, Rose & Griffin, 2003). If individuals display a high self-esteem consistently toward others over a period of time, they are more likely to receive similar treatment in return.

3.8.3.4 Social Competence

The pioneers in research concerning resilience recognised that family function and quality caregiving played central roles in high-risk children's resilience (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Pinkerton and Dolan (2007) believe that individuals need emotional and social competencies to cope with life's challenges; social support is especially important during adolescence which is a time of transition when youngsters have to grapple with a range of physical, emotional and social challenges. According to studies in the literature, human adaptation and development arise from continuous interaction across many levels of function within individuals as well as between individuals and their environments (Masten & Monn, 2015). Definitions of resilience in a systems-oriented framework relate to processes and interaction among interdependent systems; this implies that the capacity of any given system to adapt to challenges depends on the function of many interacting, changing systems (Masten, 2013; Masten & Monn, 2015). The resilience of an individual in the course of personal development

depends on the function of complex adaptive systems that are continually interacting and transforming and, as a result, resilience is always changing and the capacity for adaptation of the individual will be distributed across interacting systems.

3.8.4 A Powerful Identity

The psycho-social stage of development that coincides with adolescence is called the stage of identity versus role confusion (Erikson, 1963). The suspended learners in this study fall in this category. The learners were suspended due to behaviour problems at school. Their major life task is to consolidate different elements of childhood and form a clear personal identity (Cowan, 2004). Adolescents strive for a feeling of belonging in their families, communities and schools. The sense of belonging is theorised as encompassing the feeling of being valued by, or being vital to, others and of fitting in with others based on shared characteristics. An experience of belonging, whether or not it is in terms of family, community, friends or school, contributes to human intellectual health. Similarly, adolescents become aware of themselves as separate members of society and need to work out who they are and how they fit into different social settings (Myers, 1997). Evidence in the literature suggests that there is a hyperlink between adolescents' sense of belonging and their ability to function physically, psychologically and spiritually that encompass a greater ability to manage stress when it occurs; to 'bounce back' in hard instances; and to accelerated bodily health and counter psychological misery (Hazel, Kemp, Newman & Twohill, 2011). Other desirable outcomes of a powerful identity include self-confidence, connection, commitment to others, self-worth, mastery and future orientation, belonging and membership, responsibility, spirituality and self-awareness (Rhee, Furlong, Turner & Harari, 2001).

3.8.5 Personal Efficacy

Usually, self-regulated learners are proactive learners who integrate a variety of self-regulatory processes, such as goal setting, self-observation and self-evaluation, with task strategies that include study, time-management and organisational strategies and self-motivational beliefs, like self-efficacy and intrinsic interest. It is thought that learners regulate their academic behaviour and beliefs in three cyclical phases:

forethought, which means, the processes that precede any attempt to perform a learning task; **performance control** which are the processes that occur during learning efforts; and **self-reflection** - processes occurring after learning or performance (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004:538).

3.8.6 Access to Material Resources

According to Masten and Garmezy (1985), resilience encompasses three aspects in adolescents' lives which consist of individuals' attributes, support from family and external sources of support. Resources are positive factors outside individuals, such as support from others and programmes that provide opportunities for growth (Zimmerman, 2013). The more assets or resources available, the more resilient they become.

3.8.7 Sense of Cohesion

A sense of cohesion (SOC) was originally defined as a global orientation that expresses the extent to which individuals have a pervasive, enduring dynamic feeling of confidence that their internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that everything will work out as well as can reasonably be expected (Antonovsky, 1979:123). When events are under individuals' control, it leads to a possible 'sense of control' or a feeling of 'I am in control'. Being in control describes the extent to which individuals comprehend and make cognitive sense of perceived stimuli (Antonovsky, 1998). It also implies that, although one may experience great difficulties and challenges as well as complex situations, there is a fundamental conviction that these situations will make sense and can be managed.

Manageability relates to the availability of resources at one's disposal to cope with problems successfully (Antonovsky, 1998) which reduces a feeling of helplessness and taps into one's thinking brain to access problem-solving skills to gain meaning in continuous engagement. Meaningfulness means that life is emotionally worthwhile and sensible and in this way it accounts for individuals' motivation to engage in difficult life situations (Antonovsky, 1998). To say that life is meaningful is to say that one cares (Antonovsky, 1998). When a difficult situation is perceived as meaningful, individuals

choose to invest emotional energy in dealing with it; the difficulty is seen as a challenge in which it is worth investing energy and commitment - rather than as a burden. Individual with a weak SOC experience the events of life as unfortunate occurrences that happen to them and victimise them unfairly; they feel that nothing in life matters much - or worse, that they are unwelcome demands and wearisome burdens. In contrast, those with a strong SOC confront stressors and are capable of clarifying and structuring the nature of the stressors; believe that the appropriate resources are available that can be mobilised to deal successfully with challenges; and are motivated to deal with them.

3.8.8 Cultural Adherence

Ubuntu in various South African languages is *Botho* in Sesotho, *Vumunhi* in XiTsonga and *Uhuthu* in TshiVenda (Waghid, 2018; Munyaka & Motlhabi, 2009). In the study by Theron and Phasha (2015) *Ubuntu* is conceptualised as a cultural pathway to resilience in the South African context. *Ubuntu* is fundamental to the African heritage belief of interconnectedness (Nolte-Schamm, 2006) and has a potential to develop the family systems and spiritual practices of black children growing up in traditional contexts (Theron & Phasha, 2015). According to Munyaka and Motlhabi (2009: 63), *Ubuntu* is linked ontologically to the traditional value systems of black Africans whereas epistemologically it reflects integral moves that include sharing and mutual care that can result in the alleviation of human suffering and prejudice. *Ubuntu* relates to a protective heritage characteristic inherent in African approaches to life (Theron & Theron, 2010) and includes attributes, such as kindness, respectfulness, friendliness, discipline, moral uprightness, being responsible and being duty-bound. Traditional African 'ways-of-being' uphold interdependence (Ramphela, 2012). Interdependence is cited in the traditions of a family community by Mkhize (2006:187) which is a relational network comprising those who are caring and reliable in the family and the community. Qualitative studies that advocate social-ecological explanations for the resilience of Sesotho- and Isizulu-speaking adolescents to poverty, violence, limited education opportunities, racial marginalisation and other South African markers of structural disadvantage accentuate the contributions made by family and community (Malindi, 2014; Theron, 2016; Theron & Phasha, 2015). Decolonised family systems

enable access to basic resources; provide emotional encouragement; model stoicism; and teach resilience-enabling beliefs and culturally salient values.

3.9 PROMOTIVE FACTORS

Promotive factors are resources and processes that benefit individuals, families and communities (Rutter 2012). Promotive elements include good contextual, social and person variables that operate in opposition to risk factors (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Masten and Powel (2003) describe how promotive elements counteract the impact of risks. They describe the elements as cognitive abilities, temperament, parenting quality and correct schools. Their argument is based on how these contexts work in a different way in the presence of adversity as an alternative rather than on their influences. Pienaar, Swanepoel, van Rensburg and Heunis (2011) argue that attendance of religious or spiritual activities appear to assist adolescents in terms of how they view existent challenges - as windows through which personal growth occurs. With regard to adolescents in particular, Huculak and McLellan (2010) point out that being part of a religious community serves as a buffer in opposing poor adolescent experiences. This is particularly true if the community's activities include going to church; participating in studying and reading the Bible; and being involved in prayer and intercession and activities that are related to behaviour modification. According to Sawatzky, Gaderman & Pesut (2009), young people who are drawn to religion no longer tend to relate solely and more strongly to friends, school and family; they appear to recover better from adversity than their counterparts who are not religiously inclined.

3.10 INTEGRATION OF THE STRENGTH-BASED PERSPECTIVE AND RESILIENCE THEORY

Work in the field of resiliency started with empirical studies in the area of schizophrenia and, in particular, studies of children of schizophrenic mothers (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000) as well as children of the holocaust (Moskovitz, 1983). The focus on childhood resiliency was then expanded to look at multiple adverse conditions, such as socio-economic disadvantage, child maltreatment and chronic illness. Although attention focused initially on the individual characteristics of resilient children, subsequent studies established three sets of factors: the attributes of the individual

child; the family setting; and the wider social environment. A resiliency-based approach draws attention to the environment and networks around children as well as to the areas of strength or vulnerability within individuals. These two elements are not discrete and the focus is on the whole system surrounding the individual. Although many adolescents exhibit social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that result from personal and contextual challenges, a substantial number are able to demonstrate resilient functioning

The prevailing deficit model sees adolescents from high-stress backgrounds as being at risk of impairment in learning and behaviour; the intervention goal is to prevent, reduce and repair the damage (Ellis, Bianchi, Griskevicius & Frankenhuis, 2017). Missing from this deficit approach is an attempt to leverage unique strengths and abilities that develop in response to high-stress environments. Rather than following the traditional perspective that focuses on learners' weaknesses and risk factors, this study adopted a new paradigm of integration in terms of the strength-based perspective and the resilience theory.

A strength-based perspective reveals a much richer narrative about what children and adolescents do to 'make things happen' and 'succeed despite the odds' rather than just 'letting things happen' as passive bystanders in their own lives where the emphasis is on how they fall short (O'Leary, 1998). Children's ability to thrive is distinguished by a more positive empowering view of human potential (Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, (2000). It has been said that when individuals are faced with stress and challenges, if they do not succumb they will survive, recover and possibly even thrive. In terms of this perspective challenges are actually welcomed because they have the potential to provoke growth and development. The strengths perspective reinforces possibility, promise and hope for the future. When adolescents thrive they not only bounce back in the face of adversity but they surpass previous levels of functioning, grow vigorously and flourish (O'Leary, 1998). A strength-based perspective also embraces a positivistic and optimistic philosophy.

Resilience theory provided a conceptual framework in considering a strengths-based perspective to understanding children's and adolescents' development as well as informing intervention design (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman & Brenner,

2010). Resilience theories represent personal qualities that enable individuals to thrive in the face of adversity. Resiliency emphasizes the natural self-righting tendencies of individuals who, when given the opportunity and support, succeed against what are sometimes incredible odds. Resilience is derived from the qualities of both the individuals and their environment that contains the potential for positive development (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). The implication is that a synthesis of critical factors is required in building resilience capacity in young people. There should be caring supportive adults in the lives of children or adolescents and opportunities for involvement in meaningful activities and decisions affecting them (Ungar, 2008). According to Windle (2011), resilience is a relatively stable personality trait characterised by the ability to bounce back from adversity. Alternatively, resilience is viewed by others as a personality trait that protects individuals against life's adversities and negative emotions by means of resourceful adaptation, flexibility and inventiveness (Windle, 2011; Walsh, 2015; Mills, Davis & McLaughlin, 2018).

Resilience theory has its roots in the study of adversity and an interest in how adverse life experiences can translate into vulnerability with negative outcomes (Van Breda, 2018). Researchers have observed, however, that the relationship between vulnerability and negative outcomes is not universal; some people dip and recover while others show little or no deterioration in functioning. There are also some who appear to achieve higher levels of adaptation than before (Masten, 2011) through integrated systems. While the strengths-based approach operates on the assumption that people have strengths and resources for their own empowerment, the resilience theory assumes that the responsibility for positive adaptation lies within systems in and around individuals just like in their personal attributes (Ungar, 2018). Resources should be available and at learners' disposal and they should have the ability to negotiate them in a meaningful way. A combination of individual, family, community and cultural resources should be there to support children after they have been exposed to adversity (Ungar, 2008). The personal ability of individuals to navigate and negotiate resources for what they need is dependent on the developmental skills they have acquired; their mental, psychological and contextual material resources; and the willingness of the social ecologies of other individuals, families and communities (Ungar, 2008; Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Othman, Kwong, Armstrong & Gilgun, 2008).

Educational resiliency within learners occurs when they are able to demonstrate academic achievement and become involved in activities that lead to successfully completing their schooling (Rahman, Turner & Elbedour, 2015; Johnson, 2013). In research studies concerning children and adolescents, the achievement of salient developmental tasks in the face of adversity, such as displaying acceptable behaviour, is viewed as a positive outcome (Windle, 2011). The goal of helping children to compensate for weaknesses or otherwise overcome developmental histories of stress and adversity should be directed to understanding and developing strengths and capabilities that can transform the lives of individuals in positive ways. This could be achieved through collaboration with teams of experts coming together with shared respect for the knowledge and skills that each person, sector or discipline brings to the table.

3.11 MODELS INFLUENCING RESILIENCE

A theoretical model devised by Constantine and Bernard (2001) suggests that external assets, like the school, home, community members and peers, contribute to the development of adolescents' internal assets that include cooperation, empathy, problem solving, self-awareness, efficacy, goals and aspirations. Donnan and Hammond (2007) also present a strength-based ecological model that proposes that the cumulative effect of individuals' strengths promotes resilience and helps them to adapt to adversity. Problems set individuals apart from others who are thought not to have any problems. It is for this reason that approaches differ in the way problems are defined and addressed. The two models described above complement each other in revealing the strengths in external assets - as alluded to in the theoretical model of Constantine and Bernard; by framing them in an accessible and useful way individuals will be able to identify the resources available within themselves and in their lives.

With reference to the resilience doughnut developed by Worsley and Fordyce (2006), common qualities were observed amongst individuals in adversity who were able to thrive. They identified seven areas representing external factors that repeatedly appeared in the lives of resilient people. According to Worsley and Fordyce (2006), instead of studying why people have a risk of failure, pathways for building and developing resilience in individuals should be established. Therefore, the resilience

doughnut which is based on what works enables a practical approach to helping individuals change their lives. This approach seems to contradict the strength-based perspective in a sense that it rests on the premise that strengths can be transferred to other situations or to other people. Worsley and Fordyce (2006) believe that the strengths possessed by one individual need to be understood to be transferred to others; if something works for one person, it can also work for others.

Despite recognising the complexity of human situations and protective factors and the interplay between individuals and their environments as well as their unique composite of personality characteristics, it is impossible for even the best trained professionals to judge how individuals should best live their lives. Strengths are not identified to represent symptoms of underlying pathology and there is no need for clinical diagnosis. I agree with both the theoretical model of Constantine and Bernard (2001) and the ecological model of Donnan and Hammond (2007) as they appear to regard the aspirations of individuals as sincere and their acceptance and validation replace scepticism about what individuals can realistically achieve. She believes that to appreciate the concept of resilience better, it is important to understand the contextual risk and protective factors.

3.9 CONCLUSION

The proposed Resilient Framework is an educational model which should assist the Department of Education and other human support services in their quest to understand the complexity of challenging behaviour in schools (Ledesma, 2014). The purpose of this chapter was to establish the theoretical framework of the study, reflecting on the risk factors experienced by suspended learners with challenging behaviour and identify categories of strengths that might carry them through to achievement despite adversity. The discussion unfolded in two parts: The first part discussed the strength-based perspective theory and the resilience theory while the second part described interrelatedness and the relevance of the characteristics of the two theories and how they apply to building resilience. The next chapter, Chapter 4, describes the research methodology and focuses on the methods used in this study.

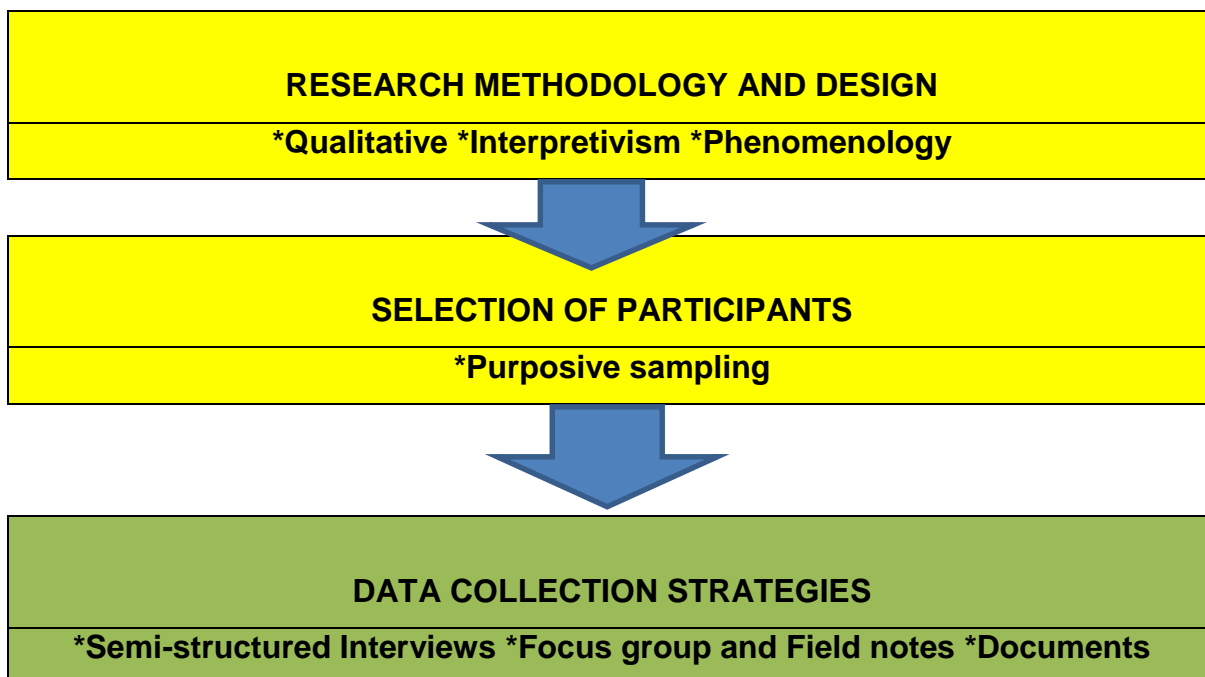
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

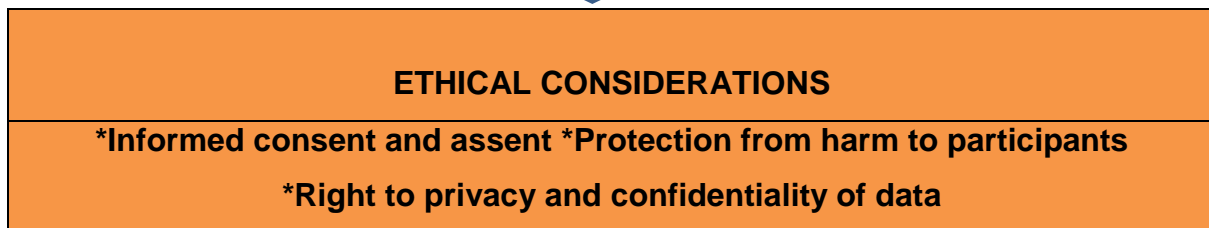
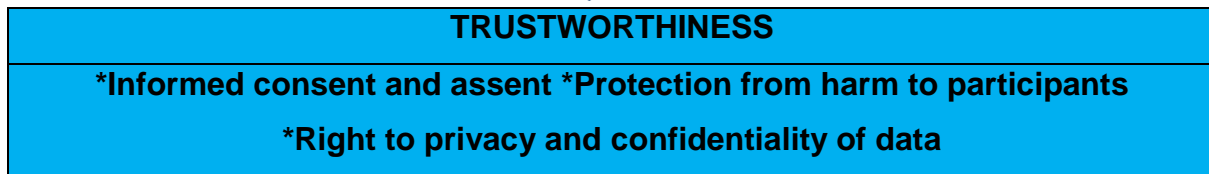
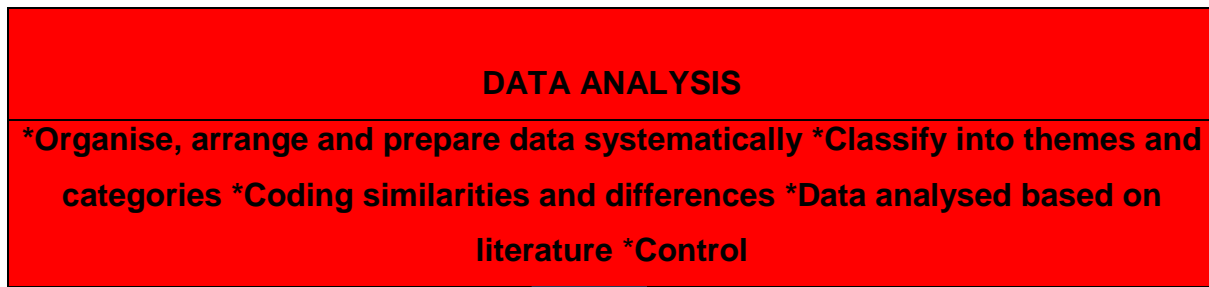
4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented a detailed review of the relevant literature related to the research questions. More specifically, the available literature concerning the experiences of learners who are suspended because of behaviour problems was discussed. Chapter 4 explains the techniques and procedures which were followed in conducting the research. The chapter gives an account of the research design and methods adopted, including data collection strategies and analysis procedures; strategies for trustworthiness to ensure validity and reliability; and the ethical considerations that guided this investigation.

Table 4.1, below, outlines the research methodology and processes that were followed.

Table 4.1: Research Methodology and Design - Process of Enquiry





(Adapted from Creswell, 2012)

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Yin (2009:26) describes a qualitative research design as a plan that facilitates the processes of collecting, analysing and interpreting data and that provides me with a structure to follow in carrying out research. The research design of this study was qualitative in nature and aimed at gaining an understanding of the experiences of suspended learners as a social phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011:3), qualitative research explores phenomena in their natural settings and attempts to make sense of, or interpret, them in terms of the meanings people bring to them. The qualitative research approach was used to gather information that highlights the lived experiences of suspended learners.

Qualitative research was selected for two reasons. Firstly, a qualitative research design provides a detailed narrative description and interpretation that captures the

richness and complexity of the behaviour, experiences and events of the participants - in this case, suspended learners in schools. Yin (2009) believes that qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher focuses on the participants' perspectives as related to their feelings - rather than on numbers and quantitative data. This researcher relied as much as possible on the participants' views of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), thereby acknowledging that the reality of their experiences could only be fully known by them (Fouché & Schurink, 2011).

Secondly, I used qualitative research techniques to collect data that would inform the intended intervention framework which could be adopted to support suspended learners in secondary schools. According to De Vos *et al.* (2005), phenomenology as a method of inquiry is characterised by participant observation and a description of behaviour through reflection stimulated by researcher-participant dialogue (Ponterotto, 2005). From time-to-time learners experience difficult situations in their lives which they are not able to talk about or explain how they feel about them. In order to understand what they were going through I engaged with them and encouraged them to tell her their stories about incidents that related to their unacceptable behaviour; reflect on something they had done; and acts they had witnessed or in which they had participated (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). I was determined to get as close as possible to the participants and spent a great deal of time with them to observe the smallest details of their experiences and those moments of responsiveness concerning what it was like to have experienced them (Eatough & Smith, 2017). At times, the telling was accompanied by tears, but being there physically made it possible to collect rich data that revealed their lived experiences (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). I wanted to learn what the lived experiences of suspended learners were like - not just their reactions to the experiences (Munhall, 2007).

In responding to the research question: *What are the lived experiences of suspended learners who have been identified with behaviour problems?* I chose to use phenomenology because it allowed her to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings and feelings of suspended learners who have actually experienced or lived the phenomenon of out-of-school suspension.

4.2.1 Phenomenological Research Design

Phenomenology is a subjective research strategy that is used to depict how people encounter specific phenomena. There are diverse strategies for phenomenology that are isolated by their different points of view of what phenomenology is - to a great extent assembled into two kinds: descriptive and interpretive phenomenology. Although Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was not the first to coin the term, it is not controversial to propose that he is the 'father' of philosophical development, known as phenomenology. Husserl's ground-breaking work on phenomenology attracted the attention and fuelled the enthusiasm of numerous researchers and the advancement of different developments. Husserl used the words "transcendental" and "phenomenology" conversely to portray the exceptional strategy for the eidetic decrease by methods with which the phenomena are described. The reduction process devised by Husserl focuses on the technique of Epoché or bracketing whereby I could purposefully set aside outside prejudices and beliefs in order to gain a clear view of a phenomenon (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

A contemporary exponent of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is Amadeo Giorgi who speaks about phenomenology as a rigorous science. Some researchers claim that Giorgi was the first to apply phenomenology to humanistic psychology as opposed to the reductionism proclaimed in the field of psychology and existential movements (Morley, 2010). In his approach Giorgi (1970) tried to show the interdependence and gestalt totality of method, theory and subject matter as an epistemological background experience of participants. Giorgi (1970), succeeded by means of a kind of empathic immersion with the participants and their descriptions to obtain a sense of the ways in which the given experiences were actually lived. Giorgi, Giorgi and Morley (2017) deviate from Husserl and cover various interpretations of the meaning of phenomenology when applied to psychology. They maintain that phenomenological inquiry should use a descriptive method as it is through the analysis and description of how things are constituted in and by consciousness that we can grasp the phenomena of our world.

The descriptive phenomenological method helped this researcher comprehend the nature of the lived experiences of suspended learners. Due to the complexity of the

phenomenological view of experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), I chose to use the descriptive phenomenology as a tool to describe the experiences of suspended learners. In particular, the descriptive psychological phenomenology of Giorgi (1970) describes raw data and allowed me to return and re-examine taken for granted lived experiences to uncover new and/or forgotten meanings.

From a philosophical perspective of descriptive phenomenology Husserl argues that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness (Giorgi, 2012; Reiners, 2012). The focus of descriptive phenomenology is the correlation of the 'noema' (the what) of experience and the 'noesis' (the how it is experienced). The 'noema' represents the objective experience of the participants, whereas the 'noesis' represents the subjective experience. In phenomenological research both the 'noema' and the 'noesis' need to be considered in order to understand the experiences described by the participants (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

Giorgi (1975) criticises interpretive approaches to phenomenology; he believes that phenomenological inquiry should use a descriptive method as it is through analysis and description of how things are constituted in and by consciousness that we can grasp the phenomena of our world. Descriptive phenomenology attempts to unfold meanings as they are lived in everyday existence. The fact that phenomena cannot be separated from experience is explicit. Within this realm of original phenomena, Husserl (1938) permits neither induction nor deduction but only intuition on the basis of precise analysis and exact description. Information gathered is used to determine the complexity of views of the participants rather than narrow the meanings into few categories or ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is, therefore, pointless to speculate about the phenomenon and knowledge derived from it. According to Husserl (1985), the way to access a phenomenon is through pre-reflective descriptions of it in a person's own words (Jasper, 1994). The difference between the two versions is that the Husserlian phenomenology is built on the idea of reduction which implies suspending researchers' personal prejudices in an attempt to reach the core meaning through a state of pure consciousness (Kafle, 2011). As I was interested in understanding the experiences of suspended learners she found phenomenology to be the philosophy and methodology that best described, as accurately as possible, the phenomenon and the multiple meanings of the lived experiences of suspended

learners - refraining from any pre-given framework and remaining true to the facts (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

4.2.2 Epoché

In its philosophical sense 'epoché' means bracketing or phenomenological reduction. It describes a state where all judgments about non-evident matters are suspended in order to induce a state of ataraxia – the freedom from worry and anxiety. Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process. According to Husserl (1997); Moustakas (1994); and Lavery (2003:23), researchers must set aside prejudice, prior knowledge, judgements and preconceptions about a phenomenon to hear the contributions of the participants with an open mind. Husserl (1985) emphasises that all knowledge derived from sources other than the phenomenological one should be put aside and rendered non-functional. In this study bracketing was useful to facilitate the process of data collection and the focus was more on capturing the essential characteristics of the expressed meaning rather than a pre-understanding of the phenomenon (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Lavery, 2003). The essential characteristics that contain the core meaning of an individual's experience that makes it what it is were effectively captured.

Morsely (2010) argues that what Husserl meant by 'epoché' is more radical than is generally recognised. He regards it as profoundly personal and not merely an intellectual operation as it relates to holding back previous experiences and convictions from consciousness. This was applicable to the study as there were instances where, as an Educational Psychologist, I was tempted to provide interventions to calm the participants; however, bracketing was maintained. A journal of reflection was also at hand to record observations.

4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study was guided by philosophical assumptions from interpretive practice. The paradigm, often referred to as social constructivism (Mack, 2010), is a value-based process characterised by multiple realities; the mutual creation of data; and the

development of individual and multifaceted perceptions of phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Terre Blanche, Kelly and Durheim (2006) are of the opinion that an interpretive perspective involves seriously taking into account the participants' subjective experiences as their essence and what is real for them (ontology); making sense of their experiences by interacting with them; listening to what they say about their lives (epistemology); and making use of qualitative research techniques to collect and analyse information. Unlike positivist researchers who view social reality as independent of a social context, interpretivists allow individuals to seek an understanding of what is happening around them by developing the subjective meanings of their experiences (Willig, 2008; Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durheim, 2006). Human behaviour should be studied and understood within a setting in which it occurs (Wijesinghe, 2011). Thus, interpretivist research is geared towards understanding rather than explaining phenomena.

The interpretive paradigm rests on the assumption that reality is varied and multiple; hence, perceptions of the same phenomenon - in this case suspended learners - could vary. The interpretive perspective helped me to explore and understand the participants' views about their lived experiences of being suspended from school. The core assumption of interpretivism is that the whole needs to be examined in order to understand and interpret, rather than explain, a phenomenon (Tlale, 2013). This approach allowed me to explore the richness, depth and the complexity of the phenomenon being studied (Wijesinghe, 2011). Unlike the positivists' approach that maintains that the nature of reality is single, tangible and fragmental, the interpretivists' realities are multiple, constructed and holistic and, therefore, relationships of knower with the known are interacted and inseparable (Wijesinghe, 2011). Nieuwenhuis (2007) contends that interpretivism explores lived experiences, behaviour, emotions and feelings to obtain a deeper understanding of the research participants' perceptions, experiences and opinions.

4.3.1 Philosophical Assumptions

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology refers to a set of philosophical doctrines loosely sharing the following: a) Assumptions as to what the world is like (ontological) and how it can be known (epistemological) and b) Strategies for the descriptive

management of the mental entities relating to such a world. To provide direction for this study, the stance was taken of: (1) Viewing the nature of the reality of the participants (ontology); (2) **Describing** how the researcher came to know the reality of the participants (epistemology); and (3) What methodology and ethical considerations or value system (axiology) guided the research process.

Table 4.2: Philosophical Assumptions with Implications for Practice

<i>Assumption</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Implications for Practice (Examples)</i>
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is multiple as seen through many views	Researcher reports different perspectives as themes develop in the findings
Epistemological	What counts as knowledge? How are knowledge claims justified? What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?	Subjective evidence from participants; researcher attempts to lessen distance between himself or herself and that being researched	Researcher relies on quotes as evidence from the participant; collaborates, spends time in field with participants, and becomes an "insider"
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Researcher acknowledges that research is value-laden and that biases are present	Researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes his or her own interpretation in conjunction with the interpretations of participants
Methodological	What is the process of research? What is the language of research?	Researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design	Researcher works with particulars (details) before generalizations, describes in detail the context of the study, and continually revises questions from experiences in the field

Adapted from Guba and Lincoln (2011)

4.3.1.1 Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption of this study draws on the descriptive phenomenology and focuses on the nature of reality and 'being' in the world. Unlike positivists, who view reality as something 'out there' to be apprehended (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), interpretivists believe in the existence of multiple realities that are constructed and can be altered by the knower and relate to the nature of reality and its characteristics. From the philosophical perspective of phenomenological research this implies that reality is perceived as multiple realities and reports on these multiple realities by exploring multiple forms of evidence from different individuals' perspectives and experiences.

Furthermore, the ontological assumption of this study is based on the researcher's beliefs as an Educational Psychologist and former Inclusive Education and Special Schools specialist supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning in the mainstream schools of the Gauteng Department of Education and, more particularly, in the Tshwane South District. From my observation of learners, it was concluded that they are subjected to the process of suspension without taking into consideration the reality of their lived experiences. I maintained a distance and separation from the objects of the study and attempted to reach some objective truth. The reality of the participants was observed from multiple social systems that included family, school and community. As an Educational Psychologist she remained mindful of the perceptions of the phenomenon being studied and her possible subjective interpretation of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). She used a reflective journal to remain as objective as possible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

The literature reviewed suggests that schools under the Gauteng Department of Education have a reported increase in the number of learners expelled and suspended due to behaviour problems. Families and communities have their own perceptions of what constitutes good and bad behaviour in their children. Behaviour problems are a part of social reality and they are frequently reported in the media to alert the community to some of the offenders' activities which are risky and have the potential to harm others - as alluded to in the literature. Building the resilience of learners from diverse backgrounds is fundamentally mind-dependent. It is through the application of the human mind and through socially constructed meanings that a difference can be made in the lives of suspended learners (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape, 2014).

4.3.1.2 Epistemological Assumptions

According to Ormston *et al.* (2014), epistemology is concerned with ways of knowing and learning about the world. It relates to how we know what we know and how our experiences colour what and how we know (Baily, Shah & Call-Cummings, 2015). Researchers attempt to move as close as possible to participants being studied. Subjective evidence is assembled, based on individual views from research conducted in the field. I interacted with the participants to gather subjective evidence from their responses; she used the interaction to get to know them; and she had a first-

hand opportunity to explore the individuals' experiences by observing and listening as well as by living alongside them in order to write and interpret texts (Clandinin, 2013:18). However, she remained aware that the nature, source and limits of information gathered are context-bound and experiential and may be impacted by factors that are localised and transient (Baily *et al.*, 2015). The inductive knowledge which she gathered about the social lives of the suspended learners with behaviour problems served as an introduction to develop theories, support strategies and guide policy-makers.

4.3.1.3 Axiology

All researchers bring values to studies but qualitative researchers make their values known. Axiology is called the value theory and includes the disciplines of ethics, pragmatics and aesthetics (Kafle, 2011). In qualitative studies researchers admit the value-laden nature of their studies and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered in the field (Creswell, 2012). The process, therefore, needs to be managed to avoid an unfair emphasis being placed on data during the analysis process (Morse, 2015). I positioned myself and entered the setting with a neutral stance.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for a research work consists of rules and procedures and focuses on how to accumulate knowledge about the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:185; Babbie & Mouton, 2007:4). Phenomenology is qualitative in nature and focuses on people's perceptions of the world or their perceptions of things in their 'appearing', in principle (Langdrdge, 2007). As I explored out-of-school suspension as a phenomenon experienced by learners, I used tools and techniques that included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, documents and field-notes to gather information that translated into knowledge and advanced important questions related to educational practice and policy (Kozleski, 2017); she also personally served as an instrument for data collection. The descriptive phenomenological research method, as proposed by Giorgi (1985; 2009), provides researchers with steps to follow in

describing the relevant required tasks: selecting the participants, collecting data and analysing it and reporting the findings - as discussed below.

4.4.1 Selection of Participants

The participants in this research were selected from an exclusive population of suspended learners. While most qualitative research shares a desire to understand participants' *perspectives* about a particular phenomenon, phenomenology explicitly seeks to understand their *experiences* and how they make meaning of those experiences. I considered the objectives of the study and selected prospective participants from a heterogeneous group of learners who had experienced being suspended from school. Purposive sampling was conducted with the assistance of the deputy principals of the two schools selected for the study. Twelve learners - six from each school - were selected from the list of learners who had been suspended more than once and who were at risk of being expelled from school. The learners identified were in Grades 8 and 9. The participants were selected because of their accessibility; their geographical proximity; their availability at a given time; and their willingness to participate in the study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). In order to achieve a better understanding of the participants, the learner participants and their parents were encouraged to participate in face-to-face interviews with me in briefing sessions arranged by the two schools.

Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam, (2003:77) define purposive sampling as a strategy where members of a sample are chosen with a purpose to represent a location or type in relation to the criterion of a study. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the knowledge gained was representative of the population of suspended learners from which the sample was drawn. This technique is designed to understand common processes and shared experiences as well as to identify shared cultural knowledge and norms (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). However, purposive sampling has its shortfalls; it is likely to be biased due to the uniqueness of the participants and their social context. This may pose the risk of developing a variety of intervention strategies and that process might not be cost effective.

The criteria for participation in this study were: (a) Grade 8 and Grade 9 learners who had been suspended from school more than once for behaviour problems and who were willing to describe their suspension in tape-recorded interviews (Eddles-Hirsch, 2012; 2013); (b) parent(s) of identified learners who had been suspended; (c) a delegated member of the SMT, SGB and SBST from each of the schools being studied. The sample size had limiting factors related to referral processes at both schools as well as the ages of learners in Grades 8 and 9. The criteria followed to refer learners was not clearly regulated in both schools as learners had to be identified - even those sanctioned for minor misdemeanours and recorded for disciplinary process. The ages of identified learners raised some concern as most of them were over the cohort age for Grade 8 and Grade 9 learners.

4.4.2 Description of Contexts

I chose to carry out the study in two separate districts after careful consideration and discussions with social workers and other educational psychologists who reported a high rate of learner suspensions in the two areas. The two schools were chosen for their diversity in composition of context and culture. The following is a description of the settings of the two schools.

4.4.2.1 School A

School A is a public secondary school situated on the northern outskirts of Pretoria in Gauteng Province. Although the school is situated in a northern suburb of Pretoria, almost 90% of the learners are from nearby previously disadvantage townships and use public transport to school on a daily basis. The school previously had Afrikaans as medium of instruction but in response to the call for an English medium school in the vicinity, the governing body accepted the challenge. The school complies with the policy of inclusive education and caters for 1209 learners in Grades 8-12. The portfolio of staff members includes a grade head for each grade; heads of department for the various grade and subjects; two deputy principals; a principal; and a disciplinary officer who was formerly in the police force with a law background and legal knowledge. In terms of learner support the school has privately employed a school psychologist and a school social worker who work closely with the grade teachers and the head of

department who coordinates the school-based support team. Extra-curricular activities at the school are well-resourced and learners engage in various sports to enhance their physical, emotional and social development.

4.4.2.2 School B

School B is a public secondary school situated to the far east of Pretoria in Mamelodi Township in Gauteng Province. The staff profile includes the principal, two deputy principals and heads of department for different subjects who comprise the school-based support team. The school caters for learners from surrounding informal settlements in Grades 8 to 12 with ages ranging from 13 to 21 years. Most of the learners walk about 3 kilometres to school daily as there is no school bus and they cannot afford taxi fares. School B is well-structured with spacious classrooms, although there seems to be overcrowding in the classrooms. The environment appeared to be poorly care for with extensive littering and broken furniture in the classrooms. The classrooms and sports fields need to be renovated.

The teachers experience great difficulty in terms of parental support. They are perceived to be dedicated and committed to ensuring the best possible outcomes for their learners despite their lack of resources. It seemed that it is not easy for teachers to manage cleanliness due to lack of relevant resources. Classrooms appeared not to be effectively managed as learners were found to be noisy during teaching and learning time and some learners were absent from classes without permission. Other learners were discovered gambling and smoking in the toilets during teaching and learning time. Due to the socio-economical background of their families, most learners are on the government feeding scheme and their unemployed parents receive financial grants to help them maintain a better standard of living. The school has one sport field which appears unused; it was said that learners do not participate in extramural activities.

The characteristics of the sample were determined by each school; they identified learners who were on the school's record for behaviour problems. Most of the learners identified in School B were above the cohort age group for Grade 8 and 9 learners who were repeating the grade for the second and third time. Those learners had been

suspended from school more than twice and had still not been referred for intervention as required by the SIAS policy. In School A, even though learners were identified for allegedly minor infractions as a way to maintain discipline and order within the school, there were those who were charged with serious misconduct, such as substance abuse on school premises.

4.5 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

Creswell (2003) defines data collection as a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering rich information to answer established research questions. This study pursued a descriptive phenomenological methodology of conducting qualitative research in the form of fieldwork in participants' natural setting to gain an insight into their actions and beliefs and their perceptions of their worlds. Naïve descriptions are first-person accounts of experiences as they were lived and understood by the participants (Broome, 2011).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), qualitative data collection aligns well with questions that address descriptions, comparisons and correlations, using experimental and single-subject approaches to gather and analyse the data. I wanted to discover how and why learners experience behaviour problems in schools. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) maintain that qualitative studies look for the process that causes misbehaviour as well as explanations of why it occurs; the emphasis on process allows for conclusions to be drawn that explain the reasons for the results. The process of enquiry unfolded in three phases. During the first phase parents were interviewed and valuable information was gathered as a background history to their context and their perceptions of it. In the second phase identified learners were interviewed to give them an opportunity to discover their perspectives of their world. Focus group interviews were conducted in the third phase of the data gathering process.

4.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

When opting for descriptive phenomenology as a methodology, data is often gathered using interviews; analysing written accounts, such as documents; and by making

observational field-notes on processes and subjects in context (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The aim of qualitative interviews is to see the world through the eyes of the participants which can be a valuable source of information (Maree, 2007). I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions because it allowed for probing and for clarifying responses. Descombe (2003:113) is of the opinion that semi-structured interviews allow interviewees to “speak their minds” and “lend themselves to in-depth investigations”, particularly with regard to personal accounts of experiences and feelings.

Both the identified learners and their parents were interviewed separately to ensure confidentiality and to understand their family backgrounds and how they affected the observable behaviour of their children. Issues of informed consent were addressed and are detailed in the ethical considerations section. It was explained to both the learners and their parents what the purpose of the interviews was and how I was going to make use of their information. The data collected from the semi-structured open-ended interviews led to insightful exchanges of dialogue with the participants in terms of awareness of interpersonal behaviour and motives concerning their views (Yin, 2014). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) maintain that people are individuals and should be understood as such but, at the same time, individuals with unique personal conditions are always in a social context with social conditions in relation to others.

The opening questions were the same for each participant and were posed to encourage the children to begin describing their contexts; their stories; the reasons why they had been suspended from school; and the challenges they faced at home and at school. To facilitate the telling of their experiences, the first question the participants were asked was used to establish a rapport with them and to build a relationship of trust: “Tell me about your family.” They were also requested to describe how they had been supported through their ordeals and how they had managed to cope in the face of adversity. The interviews were sometimes emotional; however, with reference to the shift to phenomenological attitude I used and maintained bracketing and refrained from making judgements during data collection process (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

The participants' naïve descriptions were audio-recorded, thereby producing a text that could be transcribed and interpreted later. Samples of the transcription of interviews are provided in the annexures. According to Haydon, Browne and Van der Riet (2017), narrative inquiry, located in the phenomenological method, explores the experience of individuals and how their physical, social and cultural environments impact and shape their individual experiences. I questioned what was good and bad in relation to the research questions to understand conditions, experiences and events from the personal perspectives of the participants. Merriam (2005) argues that a good researcher should be able to interpret the questions asked and be flexible, adaptable and unbiased. Elaboration and clarification probes were used to obtain the essential meaning of the reality of the circumstances of the participants and to check if the understanding of what had been said was accurate (Maree, 2007).

In order to obtain comprehensive historical background information concerning the identified suspended learners, the parents were interviewed at the initial stage of the data gathering phase using face-to-face open-ended semi-structured interviews. Maree (2007) contends that the aim of qualitative interviews is to obtain rich information which is needed to understand participants' construction of knowledge and social reality. The face-to-face interviews focused on the content of the interviewee's responses; close attention was paid to tone, content, and body language. In terms of the sensitivity of the content shared, a rapport was established with the interviewees by enquiring about their family settings and ensuring them of confidentiality (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed by me. In addition, I provided a space in which the participants would feel safe in discussing matters that were usually kept private (Guest *et al.*, 2013). Since the aim was not to generalise the empirical research findings, unique responses assisted in achieving an in-depth understanding and insight of the phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

4.5.2 Documents

A document, such as a government report, media article and/or a learner profile, is a written text produced by an individual or a group that has value or facts about a certain phenomenon (Hammarberg, Kirkman & De Lacey, 2016). An analysis of written

documents was used to validate information received during the interviews and from field-notes made during the inquiry. In this study, documents refer to any formal documents that inform discipline and school regulations. This includes documents, such as the school prospectus; vision and mission statements; discipline policy; intervention and support strategies; code of conduct for learners; report of disciplinary meetings; and formal communications from head office. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:451), written documents could take the “form of minutes of meetings, memoranda, working papers and draft proposals.”

The National Policy (SIAS, 2014) stipulates that learners who are identified with barriers to learning should be supported in the system and the process of identification, assessment and support must be recorded in the learners’ profiles. The procedures followed in the two schools were unique to each school, but they were based on policy. The merit system is used in School A and evidence of the learners’ activities are recorded on the computer system and communicated to parents by telephone. The minutes of disciplinary meetings were evaluated to ensure their authenticity and the accuracy of the records before using them. Due to a lack of resources, School B uses handwritten letters to communicate with parents. Disciplinary procedures are adhered to in both schools; however, there was minimal evidence of provision of intervention, particularly in School B.

4.5.3 Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups are collective conversations or group interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kelly, 2010:304) on a focused topic (Guest *et al.*, 2013). Van Breda (2006: 107-108) further defines the concept as a “purposive discussion of a topic involving 6–10 people who share a similar background and common interests.” The researcher chose to use the focus group because, on a practical level, it is efficient in a sense that it generates large quantities of data from a larger number of participants in a relatively short time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I conducted two focus groups with 20 school professionals; each group was composed of ten participants. Each school is unique and so are their management styles. As the conversation progressed, the participants were asked probing questions to: (a) encourage them to concentrate on specific points; (b) to elicit further details or check for clarification; and (c) to test the validity of a more general

response for more detail and gather evidence (Patton, 2002). The participants' responses were audio-recorded and later transcribed *verbatim*.

Participants in the focus groups were delegates from the school management team, school governing body, school-based support team and district-based support team. School A was fully represented with participants from the different categories as *per* their positions; however, for various reasons School B was represented by only the school-based support team and the school management team. The data collection period was determined to provide participants with opportunities to collaborate and confirm the correctness of previous collected data.

According to Creswell (2009), focus group interviews are useful in that they reveal the beliefs, attitudes, experiences and feelings of the participants. Focus group interviews produce high quality data (Patton, 2002) which, primarily, helps researchers understand specific problems from the participants' points of view (Dilshad & Latiff, 2013). The purpose of focus group interviews is to increase the participation of a broader spectrum of eligible stakeholders who may, otherwise, not be able to participate if restricted to one method of data collection. In addition, focus groups often produce data that is seldom forthcoming in individual interviews and observations and that may result in revealing powerful interpretive insights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). They also allow for the proliferation of multiple meanings and perspectives as well as for interaction amongst participants.

I developed an interview guide; identified a meeting place; and facilitated the participation of focus group members (Tlale, 2013). An agenda was circulated to participants before the date of the meeting in order to respect teaching and learning time. According to Van Breda (2006:108), a venue free from external distraction, background music, noisy ventilation systems and machines is a prerequisite for a successful interview. At School A, the setting was protected from interruptions and the participants were able to interact freely. At School B, however, there were some interruptions from noise as learners left for home after school. In selecting venues, I wished to ensure that they satisfied the requirements of good focus group interaction; unfortunately that was beyond her control. For this study the focus groups took place at the two selected secondary schools with ten members per group.

Despite much criticism of the approach used as well as the challenges experienced in getting the teachers to attend the focus groups, the strategy allowed the researcher to capture participants' responses in a natural face-to-face setting by means of focused themes and prompts (Ntshangase 2015). As a result, I was able to learn about the social norms of particular communities as well as the range of perspectives that exist within the two school communities (Tlale, 2013).

The research question for this study was established to explore, understand and explain the experiences of learners suspended due to behaviour problems. The sub-questions were in sync with the context and purpose of the study to obtain participants' perceptions of activities and their roles, feelings, motivations, concerns and thoughts. They were developed to engage the participants in a dialogue regarding their experiences to help me reach conclusions and make recommendations for building the resilience of learners with behaviour problems (William & Portman, 2014). Maree (2007) agrees that through open-ended questions participants may propose solutions or provide insights into events but the focus should, mainly, be on their own perceptions, experiences and opinions concerning the phenomenon being studied.

Regular checking of information telephonically in the process of triangulation led to rigour in the inquiry. Baillie (2013) and Berry (2016) argue that a long period of collaboration between participants and researchers could influence the data collection where researchers unwittingly influence participants. However, the value of a close relationship between narrative inquiry researchers and participants often outweighs the negative aspects (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber & Orr, 2009). The use of field-notes, as a strategy for reflection, was implemented as a 'preventative' tool (Baillie, 2013), thereby ensuring credibility and guaranteeing rigour in the research. I, therefore, based my study on triangulation to verify data and to ensure its authenticity (Maree, 2007). It is generally accepted that the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings can be affirmed by the triangulation of data sources and methods (Yin, 2011).

4.5.4 Field-notes

I adopted the method developed by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) to guide the events and incidences experienced during the collection, incorporation and dissemination of

field-notes as a data gathering technique. I used a journal to record details of incidents and observations that allowed her to contextualise learners' behaviour as they interact with each other in their school and home environments. In that way I was able to obtain rich data concerning the context of the study. I mingled with the teachers and learners while I was waiting for my appointment time; I was able to observe the reality of the participants without influencing their behaviour (Maree, 2007). Phillipi and Lauderdale argue that field-notes predominantly assist in constructing thick, rich descriptions of the study context and the real encounters with the participants as well as document's valuable contextual data. In addition, the primary advantage of using the field-observation notes is that the participants' behaviour is likely to be more realistic which increases the external validity of a study (McBride, 2012). In order to achieve this, I established a positive relationship with key stakeholders and became familiar with the physical environment to assist orientation (Fry *et al.*, 2017). Although I relied on recordings of the interviews, all my senses were employed in documenting the qualitative data. I collected additional information during my field visits. Maree, (2007) maintains that researchers learn through personal experience and reflection how settings are socially constructed in terms of power, communication lines, discourse and language.

As *per* an initial arrangement with the two schools under study the interviews were scheduled for the first term in 2018 as the researcher had already received the consent of all the participants in advance. The data collection schedule was drafted and sent to both schools, but due to unforeseen circumstances it was impossible to adhere to it. All appointments were scheduled for after school to avoid interference with teaching and learning contact time. At some point the agreed upon times would clash with extra-curricular activities. Parent interviews were held first with some challenges incurred where parents would postpone appointment time due to personal and work related constraints. As a result the delay caused, the meetings continued into the second term of year which also presented some challenges: half yearly examinations were in the offing; a lack of electrical power at times contributed to problems as the school had to reschedule examinations and return to teaching and learning which affected the schedule for interviews.

Proper planning was absent in School B where I had to strategically find my ways to ensure that data was collected; I was only allocated time to see learners in the afternoon when no staff members were available to guide the process. In School A there was always a teacher available to monitor learners on the sports field and to make sure that the interview sessions were conducted in a safe and secure space. I was impressed by the flexibility of the staff members when there was a power failure and an examination had to be postponed to later in the day to minimise disruptions. Everything happened swiftly; teachers had to reconvene to attend to their classes and resume teaching and learning and the appointment I had scheduled with them was moved to another day.

The number of suspended learners in both schools was unequal, with School B having the most. Although I targeted a heterogeneous group of 13-14 year olds in Grades 8 and 9, in School B the age group of identified learners in those grades ranged from 14 to 18 years. The referring procedure was noted to be similar. All identified learners displaying behaviour problems were reported directly to the principal - and the deputy principal in the case of School A - who eventually issued a letter of invitation to the parents to attend a meeting at the school. In effect, the learners were suspended until the parents honoured the invitation to discuss the matter with the principal. School A invited the parents for very serious offences and used detention and merit system for minor problems whereas School B suspended learners for even minor infractions.

It was discovered that learners, particularly in School B, experienced language problems when expressing themselves. Interviews were, therefore, conducted in their mother tongue and later their responses were translated into English prior to being transcribed. Learners from School A were at an advantage as they were from a background where English is used as their First Language.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I spent a considerable amount of time examining the collected data in order to understand the experiences of the research participants as fully as possible. The data was organised into themes and sub-themes and comparisons were made across interviews to validate the findings. The thematic analysis is supported by direct

quotations in the findings. In this report quotations are used to help readers understand the experience as lived by the participants.

The first step in qualitative data analysis is to organise, arrange and prepare the data systematically (Tlale, 2013). The process of data analysis involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting significance from trivia, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data has revealed (De Vos, 2005). I constantly reflected on connections, relationships and impressions while data was being collected. As the objective of data analysis is to yield significant answers to the research question, I used field-notes, voice-recordings of the interviews and documents to facilitate the easy retrieval of data for analysis. In planning ahead, colour-coding of notes to keep track of dates, names, titles and the participation of subjects was used in categorising for data analysis purposes (De Vos, 2005). According to Maree (2007), how data is collected; how it is ordered; and what is extracted from it is the product of the lens through which researchers look at the world and, consequently, the angle from which they approach the data in a study.

I, therefore, aligned the data collected with the qualitative research design to implement intended data analysis strategies. Inductive analysis was used to synthesize the data and make meaning of it, starting with specific data and ending with it being unpacked in terms of categories and patterns. Qualitative data analysis is, primarily, an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The data was transcribed and converted into a format that facilitated the analysis of notes and other information and converting them into a format that assisted the analysis process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Data colour coding was used to differentiate information that was comprehensible and contained one idea, episode or piece of relevant information. De Vos (2005) believes that the analytic process demands a heightened awareness of the data, where researchers have to identify salient themes, recurring ideas or language and patterns of beliefs that link people and settings together.

The themes and meanings that emerged from the data were used to identify distinct categories of content in the field-notes and audio-recorded data for analysis and

interpretation. Thematic coding is a method of identifying common themes within passages of texts with a purpose of data retrieval. The qualitative nature of phenomenology allowed me to identify trends and look at the bigger picture. According to Babbie (2010:357), coding is the process of transforming raw data into a standardised form. The coding process was taken further by considering key words or phrases directly from the text and by describing both implicit and explicit concepts within the data. The data was categorised, arranged and labelled with specific terms familiar to the participants; arranged in groups with regard to similar themes; and synthesised to single out major or frequent topics as well as sub-topics and less frequent or less important ones. It allowed for a systematic interpretation of the interview transcripts in extracting themes common across the interviews or unique to interviews and then creating conceptual links (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.7 RESEARCH ETHICS

An ethics clearance certificate was obtained from the University of South Africa prior to commencing with the data collection process. With reference to the axiological assumption of this study, I admit the value-laden nature and confidentiality concerning the social life of the participants as they are put in a vulnerable position in disclosing sensitive information. All ethical concerns were taken into consideration during the entire inquiry process. Ethical measures used in this study include informed consent; assent; avoidance of harm; assurance of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity; and limited access to field and research documents - as well as relational ethics.

4.7.1 Informed Consent

Obtaining consent and assent is the cornerstone of the research relationship with participants; it is a routine practice that demonstrates respect for the research participants' autonomy and dignity (Graham & Powell, 2015). Participants must agree to participate voluntarily; they must not be pressurised or coerced physically or psychologically (Getz, 2002); and their agreement must be based on full and open information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Leedy and Ormrod (2015) point out that research with humans requires their willingness to participate in research. In order to facilitate this, it was ensured that all volunteers agreed in writing to participate before they were

enrolled in the study. The agreement to participate is based on the fundamental right of all subjects to be told everything about the study. Therefore, an explicit contract was entered into with the participants whereby I introduced myself; informed the participants what the research was about and that she had obtained permission from the Gauteng Department of Education and the District Director to conduct the study; explained who would benefit from this study and their right to withdraw from the process at any time; and obtained participants' consent to audio-record the interviews. By giving their consent to participate in the study, the volunteers acknowledged that they understood and accepted all aspects of the study, including the risks involved (Getz, 2002). In terms of ethical principles, written permission was also obtained from the school principals of the two selected schools, SGB delegates, teachers and parents before conducting the interviews.

4.7.2 Assent and Consent

In a study conducted to determine the age of maturity for young children to consent to research, it was found that 15 year old adolescents are allowed to give consent if they understand age-appropriate information that is explained orally as well as in a written form; they should also understand the planned procedures, potential harm, benefits and their right to withdraw from the project (Leibson & Koren, 2015). Children have a right to refuse to participate in research and their silence or dissent should be respected in the same way as their consent and participation (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014; Lewis, 2010).

Prospective participants from School B were older than their classmates - between 16 and 18 years of age; they were required to sign the assent form personally. The younger ones in School A had parents sign for them. Bray (2007:447) maintains that for children to participate they should be given a clear explanation of the purpose of the research and a clear choice about whether or not they want to be involved, based on a full knowledge and understanding of what is involved. Obtaining consent and assent for a study is a delicate and important process that has serious consequences for children's/young people's participation in research and, therefore, both parents and children need to agree to participate.

4.7.3 Avoidance of Harm

Researchers are responsible for protecting participants from any physical, emotional or social harm that might result from their research and for anticipating any potential adverse consequences. The participants are considered vulnerable due to their possible emotional instability and they may require additional safeguards to protect their welfare with an integration of specific methods in the research design. In this study the sensitive information shared by the participants provided a background against which I understood their contexts. Since it was crucial in terms of the research objectives she made a commitment to the participants that this information would not be included in any written material or shared with any other person - even in an anonymous form. During the study, I was constantly concerned about participants' vulnerability and the possible consequences of their revelations of which they may not have been aware (Josselson, 2007). Gatekeeping, in the form of counselling and trauma debriefing, was made instantly accessible to protect the children from any form of emotional trauma.

4.7.4 Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity

Qualitative researchers place importance on holistic accounts; the use of thick description; and the presentation of raw interview and observation data and, therefore, upholding participant confidentiality and privacy may be the most difficult challenge they face (Ellis, 2007; Forbat & Henderson, 2003; Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith, 2003). Privacy is a basic human right and a key factor in ethical research practice, especially when the research topic is sensitive or potentially stigmatising.

Codes of ethics insist on safeguards to protect participants' identities and those of the research locations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I undertook to maintain privacy by obtaining informed consent and assent and by guaranteeing to protect the privacy of the participants prior to the commencement of the data collection stage. Confidentiality in research implies that private data that identifies the subjects will be secured and concealed or only be made public behind a shield of anonymity. In adhering to the principle of confidentiality of research in the study participants were identified by means of codes rather than names during the processes of data collection and analysis (Leedy

& Ormrod, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:334). The names of participants' schools and their names are not reflected or identifiable in print.

As data collection involves face-to-face interaction with participants where I temporarily enter the participants' worlds and access experiences and reflections which may be highly sensitive and involve future or unforeseen risk for the participants and possibly others (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012), this researcher felt the need to purposefully foster a relationship of trust with participants to learn from them and achieve the study's aims.

Due to the sensitivity of the research question there was a likelihood of sensitive information emerging during the interviews. There are no guarantees against unexpected emotional outbursts when dialogue about human relationships is introduced. Being the facilitator of the focus-groups and the semi-structured interviews with the children, I - as an educational psychologist - applied her considerable skill, ability and responsibility to properly handle unexpected situations and outbursts of feeling. An on-site educational psychologist was deployed for the further emotional counselling of affected participants.

Some children are not accustomed to adults being interested in their views and asking for their opinion. They may perceive adults to be authority figures and, consequently, try to please them with what they think may be the preferred reaction. Power inequalities between adult researchers and children are inevitable. During interviews this researcher sought to project a less authoritative image by using informal language and by paying close attention to non-verbal communication, including the children sitting in positions, and in ways that were, presumably, comfortable for them. As indicated previously, the settings of the two schools were different; School A provided a well-furnished boardroom with less noise and no interruptions while at School B a classroom was used with unbearable noise and disturbances from learners who were cleaning their classrooms after school. In order to maintain the privacy of the interview, I had to lock the doors to prevent other learners from causing a disruption.

According to phenomenological methods, researchers should analyse in terms of essence, resonance and a good phenomenological description (Van Manen, 1997).

The attention paid to negative cases and the “rich and detailed thick description” in participants’ responses or a “good phenomenological description” (Van Manen, 1997:27) characterised the data analysis stage. Damianakis suggests divergences and complexities for possible inclusion in reporting lived experiences.

4.8 DETERMINING RIGOUR

Researchers who conduct quantitative studies use conventional terms, such as internal validity, reliability, objectivity and external validity in determining rigour. The basic strategy to ensure rigour in qualitative research is, however, based on its systematic and self-conscious research design, data collection methods, analysis, interpretation and communication (Mays & Pope, 1995). Rigour should focus on neutrality which involves reflecting on, and identifying, any possible researcher bias or bracketing as well as discussing the progress of the study periodically with colleagues to ensure that I am aware of any bias which prevents the closure of the analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed criteria to ensure rigour which they termed ‘trustworthiness’ to evaluate the credibility, transferability, dependability and the trustworthiness of the completed product.

Trustworthiness stems from the co-construction and interpersonal contact with participants and the subsequent data (Guercini, Raich, Müller & Abfalter, 2014). Trustworthiness or rigour of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Pilot & Beck, 2014). Mahlo (2011:97) suggests that trustworthiness is a method of ensuring rigour in qualitative research without compromising relevancy. In this study the following criteria, outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), were used to address trustworthiness.

4.8.1 Credibility

In establishing credibility in this study I prolonged and varied the engagement in each setting; paid careful attention to interviewing processes and techniques; participated in peer debriefing; and applied triangulation.

4.8.1.1 Prolonged and Varied Engagement in Each Setting

The data collection schedule allowed for a prolonged engagement process with the participants to build trust and rapport between them and myself and to elicit rich, detailed responses. The participants were given an opportunity to slot into the schedule according to their availability within pre-arranged time-frames and keeping teaching and learning time in mind. This process was promoted by allowing adequate time for collecting data and obtaining an understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Based on the fact that prolonged engagement provides scope and persistent observation, I paid attention to the feelings or emotions of the participants and situation being studied to acquire depth of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of narrative inquiry as a research method also contributed to the credibility of the study with its focus on the lived experiences of the participants and how they gave meaning to the experiences. The results of a study should demonstrate not only that the intervention worked with a specific group but that what was learned has social value in a specific context. A reviewer should be able to follow the progression of events and decisions and understand the logic of the group; there should be an adequate description, explanation and justification of the methodology and methods used (Kitto *et al.*, 2008). A qualitative study is credible when its results, presented with an adequate description of context, are recognisable to people who share the experience and those who care for, or treat, them. In this study an audit trail that can be reviewed by other researchers and allow them to draw the same conclusions existed in the audio-recordings and notes used during the interview process (Cope, 2014). Examples of study materials included interview transcripts, data analysis and process notes as well as drafts of the final report.

I guaranteed the credibility of the study by practically using bracketing and reflectivity. According to Laverly (2003), Husserl proposed that people should bracket out the outer world as well as individual bias in order to successfully achieve contact with essence - a process of suspending judgement or bracketing particular beliefs about the phenomena in order to see them clearly (Laverly, 2003). Bracketing is a means of demonstrating the validity of the data collection and analytic processes which, in turn, facilitates the readers' ability to assess the validity of studies that purport to be free of researcher influence (Porter, 1993). Bracketing is a method to protect researchers from

the cumulative effects of examining what may be emotionally challenging material. While bracketing can mitigate the adverse effects of the research endeavour, it also facilitates researchers' deeper levels of reflection across all stages of qualitative research - from selecting a topic and population to designing the interviews, collecting and interpreting data and reporting findings. Opportunities for sustained in-depth reflection may enhance the acuity of the research and facilitate more profound and multi-faceted analysis and results.

4.8.1.2 Interviewing Process and Techniques

The purpose of the research; how it was conducted; procedural decisions; and details of data generation and management were transparent and explicit (Hammarberg, Kirkman & De Lacey, 2016). The semi-structured interviews reinforced focus and flexibility during the interviews. The interview process included several prompts that allowed the participants to expand on their answers and gave the researcher an opportunity to request more information, if required.

4.8.1.3 Peer Debriefing

Several sessions of peer debriefing were held between me and my colleagues when they reflected on different stages of data gathering and their views concerning the theoretical framework. They also discussed preliminary findings from different data collection sessions.

4.8.1.4 Triangulation

Yin (2011) suggests that multiple sources of evidence are required as a basis for trustworthiness and credibility. The greater the agreement from different data sources on a particular issue, the more reliable the interpretation of the data (Patton, 2002:316). The use of several data sources and different methods is called triangulation (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation, using multiple sources to draw conclusions (Casey & Murphy, 2009), is implemented to enrich the credibility and trustworthiness of a study. Triangulation can both confirm findings and different perspectives and add a breadth to the phenomenon of interest (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville,

2014). Multiple methods of data collection were used in this research, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, field-notes and relevant documents in an attempt to gain an articulate, comprehensive view of the phenomenon and to reinforce the rigour of the study.

4.8.2 Dependability

Dependability was established by creating an audit trail by means of process logs and peer-debriefings with colleagues. Process logs consist of a researcher's notes on all activities that occur during the study and decisions that are taken about different aspects of the study, such as who to interview and what to observe. Detailed notes were kept of all data collection process, decisions and analysis as the study progressed. The notes were reviewed by colleagues in peer-debriefing sessions and with another respected qualitative researcher. These discussions prevented the bias of only one person's perspective on the research taking place. In addition, member-checking was conducted with parents and teachers as study participants.

4.8.3 Conformability

Conformability of a study is based on a valid interpretation of the data and findings of the research that emerge from a true reflection of the responses of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Confirmation of the content to ensure that the findings of the research are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants is achieved on two levels. In order to avoid bias, the collected data was audio-recorded and thematically analysed. A reflective journal was kept to record issues related to sensitive topics or any potential ethical issues that may have affected the data analysis. The ability to put aside personal feelings and preconceptions is more related to how reflective, rather than how objective, one is (Tlale, 2013). Member-checking was used to confirm each participants' acceptance of content and categories that emerged during subsequent interviews and to verify and validate findings by providing copies of a draft report to the participants. I attempted to avoid generalisation by seeking to understand the participants' perspectives. Due to the sensitivity of the content shared by the participants only selected properties and dimensions of each category of content that could be beneficial to the population were disseminated for ethical reasons.

4.8.4 Transferability

Researchers normally support their studies' transferability with a rich, detailed description of the context, location and people studied and by being transparent about the analysis of data and its trustworthiness. In describing their studies, researchers need to paint vivid pictures that will fully inform their readers (Amankwaa, 2016). Transferability is further discussed in terms of purposive sampling for a nominated sample and data saturation.

4.8.4.1 Purposive Sampling for a Nominated Sample

As outlined in the research methods section, this researcher used a purposive sampling technique because qualitative research designs can involve multiple phases, with each phase building on the previous one. The selected participants were representative of the population of suspended learners. I chose to include suspended learners' parents in the semi-structured interviews and their teachers in the focus group interviews to articulate their relevant experiences. According to Merriam (2005), the size of a sample depends on the nature of the phenomenon; its concrete versus its subjective nature; the complexity and scope of the phenomenon; and how much is already known about the topic. These elements were seriously considered in order to obtain rich data with variation and depth that could be analysed and categorised in themes that adequately represented the phenomenon.

4.8.4.2 Data saturation

It cannot be assumed that data saturation has been reached just because resources have been exhausted. Data saturation is not about numbers *per se*, but rather about the depth of the data (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). A sample size was selected for this study that included six learners and six parents from each of the two schools being studied as well as representatives from the SMTs, SGBs, DBSTs and SBSTs of both schools. A large sample size does not guarantee that data saturation will be reached - nor does a small sample size; rather, it is what constitutes the sample size (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). Amongst the selected participants there was an imbalance in terms of number of suspended learners identified in both schools. Although School A identified

six learners as requested, only 5 were interviewed; one was in Grade 10 and did not meet the inclusion criteria. School B identified 7 suspended learners and one expelled learner who was excluded from the interviews. The saturation of data was reached on completion of the interviews with the twelve learners and their parents when the same points that carried the same themes were repeatedly heard.

4.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the research approach, design and methods employed in the study were described as well as the data collection and analysis procedures that were implemented; the purpose of the approaches was given and justified. The ethical considerations in the study as well as strategies that ensure trustworthiness were discussed. In the next chapter, the research findings in terms of themes and sub-themes that emerged are presented.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives an account of the findings of the empirical research activities that were conducted in two demographically distinct secondary schools of the same provincial department of education. The chapter is dedicated to both learners and their parents for allowing me to qualitatively encroach on their personal space to obtain data through semi-structured interviews. The research results also include findings from the focus group interviews conducted with representatives from school management teams as well as from documents and field notes recorded throughout the collection of data process. This chapter presents examples of rich descriptive data that represent the voices of suspended learners.

This chapter reports the results of the study by presenting the themes that emerged during the thematic analysis of the raw data. The discussion of themes, sub-themes and categories are supported by quotations from the reviewed relevant literature as well as the theoretical background of the study. The chapter is divided into two phases: the results of the semi-structured interviews, where learners and parents represented their family contexts, are presented first and include the integration of the personal and social space of both the learners and their parents to give the contextual experiences of suspended learners; the second phase presents the results of the focus group interviews. The document analysis is integrated in the discussion.

In analysing the narrative responses of the participants without losing sight of the wholeness of their lives, I used the phenomenological analysis of interviews process as described by Giorgi (1975). The choice of these methods was guided by the aim of the study that sought in-depth information regarding the causes of behaviour problems of suspended learners and how they impacted on them on a personal, physical, cognitive and emotional level. The descriptive approach was deemed more appropriate for this study because it allows lived experiences to be described by the participants without me influencing their responses. Descriptive and hermeneutic (interpretive)

phenomenology are two classical approaches that guide the majority of psychological research (Langdrige, 2007).

Qualitative data is derived from narrative material in *verbatim* transcripts of in-depth interviews. In this study the identified themes were the learners' personal experiences, their experiences at school, at home and within the community as well as their perceptions of the support infrastructure. In analysing the learners' lived experiences I explored the personal and social interaction of the participants; their past experiences; and the influence of their context as the space from which to understand what they were experiencing. Using this set of concepts, the focus was on personal and the social aspects in terms of internal conditions, such as feelings, hope, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions, as opposed to their external environmental conditions to understand the experiences of suspended learners.

5.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings are discussed in terms of the different themes that emerged from the data to understand the experiences of suspended learners. In order to explore and understand the experiences of suspended learners I had to give the parents and their children an opportunity to tell their stories - to bring the past into the present and in order to shape the future. The past relates to the stories that narrate incidents that had occurred which the suspended learners could vividly remember; the present reflects current experiences relating to their problem behaviour and how it impacts on their development as adolescents; and the future shows the possibilities for change, improved academic performance and enhanced resilience.

5.3 PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND LITERATURE CONTROL

To facilitate readers' understanding of the findings and as a means of quality control, the following codes, for example, were used as a key to the original transcripts:

Table 5.1: **Key of the Abbreviations**

PLA 1 - Learner Participant 1 from School A
 PLA 2 - Learner Participant 2 from School A
 PLB 1 – Learner Participant 1 from School B
 PLB 2 – Learner Participant 2 from School B
 PPA 1 - Parent Participant 1 from School A
 PPB 1 - Parent Participant 1 from School B
 FGA 1 - Focus Group Participant 1 from School A;
 FGB 1 -Focus Group Participant 1 from School B

The findings of this study are presented with the focus on the themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis - as reflected in Table 5.2, below.

Table 5.2: Identified Categories, Themes and Sub-Themes

Categories	Themes	Sub-Themes
Experiences of Suspended Learners	Family Dynamics	Family Structure Socio-Economic Status
Nature of behaviour problems	Understanding of Behaviour Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late-coming • Substance abuse • Disrespect of teachers • Gambling • Bullying • Vandalism • Lack of self- respect • Challenging authority
Discipline and its effect on suspended learners	Discipline Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Discipline procedures • Legal Discipline procedures
Capacity development in addressing challenging behaviour at school	Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops and training of teachers

Levels of Support	Support Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School support system • District-based support team • Parental support • Peer support
Collaboration	Collaboration with External Service Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility of external service providers

5.3.1 Theme 1: Family Dynamics

This theme explored the family dynamics of learners identified with behaviour problems. The following sub-themes emerged from Theme 1: Family Structure and Socio-Economic Status.

5.3.1.1 Sub-Theme 1: Family Structure

Of the twelve learners interviewed, only one came from a nucleus family; eight were from single parent families; and two were raised by their grandparents. Three reported that their parents had died and two of them had been raised by different people within the family. Not all families who experience adversity in life are affected in the same way. In telling their stories the participants brought their unique personalities and family histories to their experiences. The findings reveal that the majority of learners who are suspended from school are affected by family circumstances; some of them are raised by single parents while others either stay with their grandparents or relatives for various reasons. According to one participant,

“He is my grandchild... their mother is someone who does not live at home...”
(PPB 7).

The grandmother indicated that the reason for the mother not living with her child was that she had her own place where she had privacy with her boyfriend; she added:

“...she likes to make a lot of noise when she is drunk” (PPB 7).

Another participant said:

“He stays with his grandmother and uncles because I had moved out to stay with my partner (boyfriend)” (PPB 5).

It may be concluded that the presence of grandparents serves a protective resource in the lives of the children.

The literature indicates that behavioural problems are on the increase in schools - mainly due to broken homes, scattered relationship, numerous major changes in life, and a lack of basic security (Jyothi, 2015; Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015). Unfortunately, parents are oblivious to the problem. One learner said:

“It hurts to live without your parents around you” (PLB 2).

From the data it was evident that most of the learners with behaviour problems are affected by the absence of either the father or the mother in the home. The pain experienced by children who feel neglected by their parents was reflected in the response of one of the learners who was left to stay with his grandparent. According to PPA 5, the boy would misbehave as a cry for help. Research has shown that a lack of parental involvement is one of the greatest barriers in children’s development (Smolkowski, Seeley, Gau, Dishion, Stormshak, Moore, Falkenstein, Fosco & Garbacz, 2017).

Although Jyothi (2015: 25) alluded to various reasons that may lead to single parenting, not all of them are negative. Some learners and families succeeded despite the challenges in their lives (Luthar, 2003). One teacher alluded to the diversity in the family circumstance of learners and pointed out:

“Some of our learners are from a child-headed family, some of our learners are staying with their grannies and some in a child-headed family just like I said where there is no provision of food, no provision of clothes...” (FGB 9).

Some circumstances affect families' normal structure, which is being father, mother and siblings being together. Divorce affects children most; it leaves them with feelings of insecurity and they appear to take the blame for the divorce - believing that they have done something wrong for their parents to divorce. This could be because humans do not break attachments lightly and children often persist in holding on their bonds - even when the parents have abandoned them.

Many parents are forced by circumstances beyond their control to raise children alone. Another instance that was evident in the data that affects children is the death of one parent and the remaining one remarrying. One parent said:

“When I was pregnant, the father was there and supportive but he passed away...” (PPA 5).

In a different context the father who lost his wife admitted:

“After my wife passed on, I thought I was strong...I met another woman...but unfortunately she fell sick and pass on” (PPA 4).

The impact of the loss of a significant person was noticed when intervention was needed for behaviour problems. PPA 4 continued by saying:

“The child told me ...he has anger because of the loss of his mother and his stepmother” (PPA 4).

A substantial body of research has shown that, on average, children who are raised from birth in two-parent families achieve better cognitive and behavioural outcomes when compared with children who have lived in single-parent families (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Fields & Casper, 2001; Seligman & Darling, 2017; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001).

From a cultural perspective one parent pointed out that unmarried couples are not allowed to stay together until certain rituals are performed. She said:

“He would stay there and I would stay here” (PPA 3).

The participant agreed that the arrangement somehow contributed to her child’s behaviour problem at school. She added:

“...maybe interrupted his life and not having his father with him all the time, especially for a boy... it then hurt because he would act out” (PPA 3).

Bouwer (2015) maintains that learners in township schools require substantial support to enhance their resilience due to the sharp increase in family disintegration. Studies have also shown that single parenting is increasing (Jyothi, 2015; Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015) and that it has an impact on the high levels of stress, anxiety and depression that children experience (Hart and Glaser, 2011).

Most of the learners who were identified with behaviour problems suffer from anger issues caused by the absence of the mother, father or both parents due to separation, divorce or death. PPA 4, PPB 2 and PPB 7 cited anger as the main problem. One parent said:

“He is short tempered and violent towards other kids at home” (PPB 2).

This could be attributed to a lack of parenting skills (Hart and Glaser, 2011). Raising children alone can be challenging in modern times. Ebersöhn and Bouwer (2015) also comment on the devastating impact of divorce on children. The absence of both parents in children’s lives has a negative impact in their upbringing which causes children to experience diverse behavioural challenges.

A teacher suggested:

“Learners who come from a one parent household, usually if it is a female, the mother or grandmother being the sole guardian, mostly then the boys do show behavioural problems especially towards females and at school they battle to adhere to the rules” (FGA 8).

Apparently, adolescents who grow up without the presence of one or both parents tend to have anger issues. One parent reported:

“He is the kind of child who has anger. He gets angry so fast and the way he gets angry so fast, I think that it is because of his mother because she is a drunkard...” (PPB 7).

Anger is often triggered by frustration or obstructions that prevent individuals from attaining goals. Brooks (2006) is of the opinion that failure to regulate emotions results in aggressive tendencies and this has a connection with low self-esteem and low self-confidence (Garofalo, Holden, Zeigler-Hill & Velotti, 2016).

The collected data indicates that parents received many complaints from the school regarding their children’s behavioural problems. Complaints about learners, especially those living with single parents or non-biological parents, include being involved in drugs, arriving at school late and skipping classes. One parent indicated that her child

“...bunks classes most of the time”(PPB 2).

It may be concluded that the absence of parents in children’s lives has a negative impact in their upbringing; they also tend not to do well at school. A teacher reported:

“They do not have time to do their school work; they come late at school, lot of absenteeism because of tiredness...” (FGA 9).

According to their learner profiles, most of the participant learners who were suspended because of behaviour problem have repeated a grade once or even twice. A teacher expressed concern, saying:

“We normally struggle with these learners that are repeating the grade” (FGA 6).

According to the Gauteng Department of Education Assessment Policy, a learner should not repeat a phase more than twice. As a result, learners tend to take advantage

of this and do not make any effort with their school work knowing full well that they will be promoted to the next level. A participant who seemed concerned said:

“...because they know they do not have to do anything because they are going to be progressed to the next grade” (FGA 6).

Although the finding of the study suggest that these learners behave differently when they are at home, the parents strongly believe that those children who behave differently at school are negatively influenced by peers or friends when they engage in unethical behaviour. This is supported by parents who believe that peer pressure is a factor contributing to bad behaviour:

“I think he is associating himself with bad friends. The thing is, he behaves well at home but when he is at school, he starts to behave in a funny way” (PPA 4).

“I think it is the kind of friends he associates himself with. Whenever I am called to come to school I meet his friends’ parents. I also find out that they have done the same thing so I think he gets influenced by his friends” (PPB 2).

Studies in the literature have shown that groups of friends establish certain social norms and that behaviour which adheres to these norms is rewarded with expressions of support and approval whereas behaviour that deviates from group norms may bring about disapproval or rejection (Theron, Liebenberg & Malindi, 2014). People strive for a positive social identity because they derive part of their self-esteem from group membership. Unfortunately, some peer groups take on anti-social behavioural norms that reinforce delinquent behaviour. Therefore, it may be assumed that an individual’s strengths and capabilities and the social support provided by the environment serve as a building block to resilience (Loyola & Aguilin-Dalisay, 2005).

The points made concerning this theme reflect the diverse contextual risk factors experienced by suspended learners and how they are variously affected. Previous studies also reveal that adolescents from single parent families are more prone to behaviour problems (Jyothi, 2015; Daryanani, Hamilton, Abramson, & Alloy, 2016; Jackson, Preston & Franke, 2010). It is unfortunate that children’s unacceptable behaviour is displayed mostly at school rather than in the home. However, research

also shows that children living in single-parent households have more mental and physical health problems than those living in two-parent households (Amato, 2005; Brown, 2010; Bramlett, & Blumberg, 2007); those who stay with both their parents also face their own problems which may involve drugs and alcohol. The reviewed literature indicates that family and social support are protective factors in children's development (Mampane, 2010) that play a role in mitigating risk effects in children (Coleman & Ganong, 2002).

5.3.1.2 Sub-Theme 2: Socio-Economic Status

All families need some support in terms of finances and access to health care and education in order to provide for their children; some families may benefit from more focused parenting support, such as parenting programmes (Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015). Socio-economic status (SES) is an individual's or family's economic and social position, based on income, education and occupation. It was discovered during the analysis of documents that of the seven parents interviewed at School B, only one was employed; however, all 5 parents in School A were reported to be employed. Existing studies show that children from families with lower incomes and where parents' education levels are low, are more likely to exhibit behaviour problems (Hartman, Winsler, & Manfra, 2017). Adolescents from such circumstances face the risk of psychological, social and financial problems. The characteristics of social problems include poor social perception, lack of judgment, difficulty in perceiving the feelings of others, problems in socialising and making friends and problems with family relationships and in schools. The participant teachers acknowledged that the family contexts of some of the learners contributed to their behaviour problem. According to FGB 2,

“Our children are facing a lot of problems at home. Sometimes the children exhibit emotional and behavioural problems” (FGB 2).

.Another participant elaborated:

“That becomes a barrier in such a way that they do not have time to do their school work, they come late at school, lot of absenteeism because of tiredness and other stuff” (FGB 9).

Reasons for behaviour problems appear to include low self-confidence, a poor self-concept, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Gnanadevan, Selvaraj, & Sivakumar, 2015). Studies found that ‘life circumstances’, such as poverty, influence resilience (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky 2006); for instance, children who have received appropriate nutrition from the time of conception; who are attached to their parents; and who have received cognitive stimulation and warm, positive parenting with consistent limit-setting, are more likely to succeed in their education; develop to be healthy as adults; and be less likely to engage in risky sex and substance misuse as well as violent and criminal behaviour (Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015; Hartman, Winsler, & Manfra, 2017). Poverty and segregation, which Malindi and Theron (2010) regard as hidden resilience, are described as risk factors that could have a negative impact on children’s development. To support adolescents from poor a socio-economic background, Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) recommend that children should receive support from an early age to enhance their protective system and personal attributes related to resiliency. In addition, Garofalo, Holden, Zeigler-Hill and Velotti (2016) contend that such characteristics should not be associated with low-self-esteem, aggression and lack of self-confidence. From my field-notes it was found that learners from School B receive food from the government feeding scheme. They come from

“child-headed family just like I said, where there is no provision of food... some had to work after school for them to provide food” (FGB 9).

In terms of the two schools that participated in the study, suspended learners from School A appeared to be less affected by poverty. The parents commented:

“I don’t see any challenges that we have at home... what we do not have we do not need” (PPA 1).

“My family environment is okay in the sense that we are there for our kids” (PPA 2).

Research has shown that adolescents from higher SES backgrounds exhibit fewer internalising and externalising problems; fewer social skills deficits; and higher life satisfaction (Gnanadevan, Selvaraj, & Sivakumar, 2015). From collected data it is evident that the behaviour problems of learners from School A are less serious than those from School B. Extracts that depict participants' concerns include *"being disrespectful"* (PPA 1); and *"he want to fit in to his group"* (PPA 2). PPA 2 reported that she was often called to school to enhance parental involvement. The participant said:

"I think they are trying to make us aware that we maybe need to regularly talk to them about discipline" (PPA 2).

Poverty, it seems, can significantly undermine parenting and decrease the chances of children in life; it can also be transmitted from one generation to the next and appears to be the root cause of most problems faced by suspended learners. The challenges that learners face in terms of food, shelter, school fees, transport and stationery as well as the extended family's inability to take care of them may all be attributed to poverty. Parents living in poverty are likely to be poorly educated and less able to support their children's educational development (Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015). Participant parents who were interviewed from School B appeared to possess characteristics of people from a low socio-economic background; they rely mostly on pensions and child grants for survival:

"They don't go to bed hungry...when they come back they have something to eat" (PPB 1).

"She does get SASSA money for them... I personally don't use their money because I am working" (PPB 7).

Poverty, by definition, reduces the ability of parents to provide their children with adequate nutrition and education. Neighbourhood, family and school poverty can be regarded as environmental threats to children's well-being. Poverty alleviation policy in terms of promoting access, equity and quality has resulted in the establishment of no-fee paying schools where learners from poverty stricken families and orphans are exempt from paying school fees. According to Motala, Morrow and Sayed (2015), the

policy outlaws the segregation and exclusion of such learners from accessing education.

The Child Support Grant (CSG) policy which stipulates that social grants should be given to needy children under the age of 7 years was launched in South Africa on 1 April 1998. The objective of the CSG was to provide support for children in poverty rather than poverty prevention (Triegaardt, 2005; Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015). This initiative was driven by an emphasis on early child development and child protection (Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015). The participant parents from School B confirmed that they receive child grant support:

“...they get child grant and they do not go to sleep without eating” (PPB 3).

Although the CSG policy recognises the rights of children and targets poor children, the money needs to be properly managed by a responsible adult to ensure that it serves its intended purpose.

In addition, the National School Nutrition Programme was also established to ensure that needy learners are fed on a daily basis to enhance their mental health (Malindi & Theron 2010). Learners who live more than five kilometres from selected remote schools are also provided with school transport to improve school attendance among at-risk learners (Motala, Morrow & Sayed, 2015). These policies and programmes serve as protective factors that positively reduce some environmental risks that contribute to children’s lack of resilience (Rutter, 1987; Kimhi & Eshel, 2015).

5.3.2 Theme 2: Understanding Behaviour Problems

Participants from the two selected schools provided diverse contextual definitions of behaviour problems but with a common understanding. As a summary of their responses, the participants highlighted the following:

“Behavioural problems is when a child, particularly a school learner does not adhere to the code of conduct (a sentiment expressed by FGB 3 and supported by FGA 1; FGA 5; & FGB 7).

“A child behaves improperly” (stated by FGB 2 and FGA 5).

According to the findings, it is clear that behavioural problems exceed the codes of conduct set by different schools; problems include a lack of respect for teachers by learners. One participant said:

“Learners who are in principle opposed to any form of restriction, they see it as restriction and we see it as rules” (FGB 7).

Although the SIAS policy was introduced in 2014 to address barriers to learning, its implementation is still at an initial stage; it seems that townships schools - secondary schools, in particular - have not yet fully applied and implemented the policy as proper referral procedures are still not followed. I noticed how learners were referred to the principal's office during her field visits; learners were suspended with immediate effect once identified - even for minor offences.

Through document analysis it was discovered that learners who were identified with behavioural problems in both schools were born in early 2000 and that their ages range from 14 to 18 years. In working through the documents it was found that from the two schools six of these learners were in Grade 8, five were in Grade 9 and one was in Grade 10; it was also assumed that they were probably the oldest learners in their respective classes. Of the twelve learner participants only one was a girl and, therefore, it may be concluded that the prevalence rate of suspension of boys is higher than that of girls in both schools. Three of the learners were repeating the phase for the third time and the others were repeating it for the second time. It was alleged:

“If they battle to read or write, then it escalates into behavioural problems to such an extent that such learners just cannot do this amount of education” (FGA 1).

This reveals a gap in determining the effects of poor reading and writing ability on behaviour problems.

Some teachers seem to be emphatic to learners' experiences when it was said:

“Some of our learners from a child headed family... where there is no provision of food, no provision of clothes and a lots of things” (FGB 9).

The relevant literature suggests that behaviour problems are a discipline issue that requires management (Thompson, 2015). The legislative framework discussed in Chapter 2 of this report relates to the inclusive education system that complies with the prescripts of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996; the South African Schools Act, Act 84: of 1996; and the Bill of Human Rights in addressing discipline issues. , like Ungar, Liebenberg, Dudding, Armstrong and Van der Vijver (2013) maintain that if appropriate and proper discipline measures are not put in place suspended learners will continue to display psychological, cognitive and social misbehaviour that requires the services of a multi-disciplinary system.

The findings indicate that learners harass teachers when they try to discipline them at school. One participant said:

“...intentionally provoking the teachers, delinquency, intentionally not listening to the instructions. The things that we tell them not to do are the things that they are doing” (FGB 4 – supported in comments by FGB 9; FGA 5; FGB 6; and FGB 10).

Time wasted is never regained and learners who misbehave, therefore, deny good learners opportunities to learn in class as each and every subject is allocated a specific time/period. This conclusion is supported by the following comments:

“...the learners that come constantly late for class... the academic time is cut short and compromised because of this” (FGA 6).

“...they challenge the authority” (FGA 5).

Many studies in the relevant literature and the current media report on bad behaviour of high school learners in different provinces. There was evidence that teachers continue to be humiliated as

“...they have the backing of their friends that are brave...” (FGA 7).

5.3.3 Theme 3: The Nature of Behaviour Problems

Despite the fact that the two selected schools are situated at distinct contexts, the identified learners with behaviour problems reside in underprivileged townships. The participants were drawn from Grade 8 and Grade 9 classes but they were two to three years behind their cohort group. During site visits I observed the two school premises independently and noticed the interaction of students and adults; routines; and the physical condition of the schools. I interacted with some teachers, walked around the school and spent time in Grade 8 classrooms. Classroom management; teaching and learning activities; and learner-to-learner interactions and behaviour were observed to be different in the two schools. During the interviews, the participants described their family contexts and cited elements of multiple contexts of risk, including abuse, neglect, poverty, rejection as well as emotional experiences in terms of family dynamics. In addition, the most risk factors displayed by participant learners were categorised into the following sub-themes:

5.3.3.1 Sub-Theme 3.1: Late-Coming

With reference to the study conducted by Maile and Olowoyo (2017), late-coming to school has become a major problem in many schools with serious consequences, especially in township schools. As reflected in field visit notes, it was noted on several occasions when I visited School B, in particular, that late-coming is common among learners - it occurred almost every time I visited the school, although varying reasons were given for this behaviour. The school starts at 07:30 and any learner who arrives after 8h00 is locked out of the school gate for the rest of the school day. A teacher confirmed:

“On a regular basis we do encounter serious challenges in relation to late-coming” (FGB 2).

Some of the learners said that they arrive late because they travel long distances to school on foot as they do not have money to pay for taxis. In School A it is different; most of the learners travel from the township in mini-buses and the majority are always on time. The mini-buses park near the school gate until the end of school day to

transport the learners back to the township. Learners who are late without a valid reason and without the knowledge of their parents are put on detention or graded negatively on a merit system as a form of punishment. Alternatively, the parents must come and account for their children's late-coming.

5.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Substance Abuse

Many participants believed that behaviour problems are mostly driven by substance abuse. Learners from different contexts are engaged in unlawful activities inside the schoolyard. They are found with *dagga* in their school bags or the pockets of their trousers. According to data gathered, the behavioural problems experienced are accelerated by the smoking of *dagga*; there is a myth amongst learners that *dagga* relaxes the mind and makes people clever and lose weight. Unfortunately, the learners are not aware that substance abuse has the ability to influence certain behaviour or act as a catalyst in the process of misbehaving which goes against the codes of conduct of the schools. Most participants in the focus groups alluded to the fact that some problem issues emanate from the risky behaviour of learners; for instance, learners abuse alcohol and drugs, engage in unsafe sexual activities and bullying were cited in participants' responses. This is evident in the following response of a teacher:

"I think the major problem is substance abuse but we need to find out where it comes from before we can address it" (FGA 10).

The description of the nature of behaviour problems displayed by suspended learners was reiterated by other focus group participants who experienced *"usage of substances, like different forms of drugs"* (FGB 2); FGB 5 and FGB 9 added that they noticed that this was common regular practice, especially amongst male learners (Jyothi, 2015).

5.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Disrespect for Teachers by Learners

Disrespect for teachers seems to be the most challenging misbehaviour experienced by teachers at both schools. Section 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996a states that everyone has an inherent dignity and the right

to have their dignity respected and protected. Some learners also challenge teachers' authority, especially in a group environment because they have the backing of their friends that put on a brave face. Learners who have behavioural problems were found, above all, to have unacceptable behaviour - as discussed in Sub-Themes 3.1 and 3.2 and to disrespect their teachers, all of which are in breach of both schools' codes of conduct. The focus group participants' responses confirmed that learners disrespect their teachers; some of them challenge their authority; and they are mostly backed by their friends. In terms of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological perspective proximal process variables, such as family hostility, peer pressure and poverty, can have a negative influence on the personal development of learners with behaviour problems. The following are excerpts from the responses of focus group participants:

"... learners are actually insulting educators and calling them names" (FGB 5).

"... intentionally provoking the teachers and intentionally not listening to the instructions" (FGB 4).

Besides the statement in Section 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996a concerning everyone's inherent dignity and their right to respect and protection, the Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa (2010:13) maintains that relationships between teachers and learners should be based on mutual respect, dignity and responsibility. Without showing any remorse one participant learner admitted:

"We, as school children, we would swear at school teachers" (PLB 1).

Recent incidents reported in the local media describe learners throwing chairs at teachers, swearing and spitting at them. There is definite proof of a lack of respect among learners - not only for their teachers - but also for each other. It may be concluded that the learners' behaviour could be due to the absence of parents in their lives.

5.3.3.4 Sub-Theme 3.4: Gambling

Gambling involves risking something of value in the hope of winning something of greater value. Participant teachers attributed the source of gambling to substance abuse. One focus group participant said:

“...all these behavioural challenges that we experience most of the time it is because of substance abuse” (FGB 2).

Previous relevant studies show that, generally, gambling does not become problematic; however, it may be associated with a gambling disorder if the frequency increases. People who develop gambling disorders earlier in life also tend to have problems with substance abuse or impulsivity disorders. Women who develop gambling disorders are more likely than men to also have problems in terms of anxiety, depression or bipolar disorder.

The majority of the learners indicated that together with some friends they have been involved in some illegal activities, like gambling and smoking *dagga*:

“...it is when they had found me outside. Most of the time we would be just chilling and sometimes gambling inside the classroom whenever there is no teacher” (PLB 3).

“Most of the time they would expel me because of gambling and fighting” (PLB 6).

“Most of the time we would be just chilling and sometimes gambling inside the classroom whenever there is no teacher” (PLB 3).

One of the learners said that he is no longer involved with those friends. During member-checking another learner acknowledged getting involved in some illegal activities, like gambling and smoking *dagga*. One parent confirmed the gambling problem of her child:

“His gambling behaviour only happens here at school” (PPB 5).

Another parent, FGB 9, agreed.

There could be a number of contributing factors as to why teachers fail to manage their classes:

“...learners are just not following the class rules and the code of conduct of the school” (FGB 2).

“... they struggle to adapt to the code of conduct, rules and regulations” (FGA 1).

The escalating prevalence, nature and impact of these problems overwhelm teachers; they seem to lack confidence in dealing with behaviour problems despite following the prescriptions of the Department of Education Discipline Policy:

“...everything is drawn up in accordance to what is prescribed by the department. The whole process is according to the prescriptions from the department” (FGA 9).

Gambling is commonly associated with people who live in lower socio-economic areas. As reflected in document analysis, the majority of parents from School B are unemployed and depend on social grants. Some families are headed by children who have to make end meets to support their siblings:

“Some of our learners from a child-headed family” (FGB 9).

The above factors are evidence of the difficult circumstances adolescents find themselves in; they have a great influence on their social lives and how they behave in the home and at school. It is mostly the boys who engage in gambling in the township schools that were studied.

5.3.3.5 Sub-Theme 3.5: Bullying

Some of the participants in the focus group acknowledged that

“We also experience bullying at our school” (FGB 9 - supported by FGB 5).

Research findings in the literature indicate that children with low self-esteem are prone to being bullied at school. Similarly, children suffering from depression or stress-related conditions are also more likely to be bullied, which often exacerbates the condition. Two learner participants admitted:

“...I was a bully last year. I would take their money because I was desperate for money” (PLB 7).

“I am naughty at school, I hit other children” (PLB 1).

Bullies tend to derive pleasure from making fun of their victims. This could simply mean that because they are troubled by their circumstances, they seek enjoyment through hurting others; because they feel inferior, they want to divert attention from themselves by acting in an unacceptable manner to those who are weaker.

5.3.3.6 Sub-Theme 3.6 Vandalism of School Resources

Although it was suggested that vandalism of school resources, such as

“...vandalism of school furniture and intentionally littering in the school” (FGB 5)

was one of the behavioural problems experienced, it was not cited as a serious allegation by all the participants. Vandalism is the destruction of school property which could include tagging, graffiti, breaking furniture or destroying other school resources. Vandalism cost schools money that also affects teaching and learning as disruptive behaviour requires attention from the teachers. It may be said that then the teachers are required to direct all their attention to the problematic learners and teaching and learning time suffers in the process; other learners are denied the opportunity to learn in class as each and every subject is allocated a specific period of time. Although security guards man the gates in both schools, learners at School B appeared to lack disciplinary reinforcement as they did not show respect for school property. It was observed that there were broken desks and tables in almost each class with some left standing outside and the doors of most classes were damaged. Littering was also seen

to be a problem during field visits. School A, however, appeared to take care in maintaining cleanliness. The learners appeared to adhere to the school code of conduct with regard to maintaining the image of the school.

Learners were found to be rowdy and noisy during field visits, particularly in School B where many classes were left unattended and learners were seen roaming aimlessly around the school premises. There was a sports field at the back of the school but I discovered that learners rarely engaged in sporting activities. The situation seemed different in School A where learners were always in class with a teacher attending to them. On Wednesdays, when I visited School A, learners were actively involved in various sports activities and there was always a teacher to monitor the games in the afternoons.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Discipline Strategies

Discipline strategies were found to include internal and legal discipline procedures.

5.3.4.1 Sub-Theme 4.1: Internal Discipline Procedures

A code of conduct spells out the rules regarding acceptable learner behaviour at a school and describes the disciplinary system to be implemented by the school in terms of transgressions by learners. A code of conduct applies to all learners when they are on the school premises; when they are away from the school representing it, and when they are attending a school function. Participants from both schools explained the process of following-up once a learner had been identified as having behavioural problems. Although it can be confirmed that learners were not just expelled or suspended once they had been identified, it is clear that the disciplinary processes of the two schools differ. Due to lack of human resources and appropriate expert support a great deal of time is wasted before there is a desired intervention. One participant pointed out:

“So I must start firstly and if the problem is not solving by me as a teacher, the next step is SBST (District Based Support Team). If the problem is still persisting, the SBST then should refer the matter to the DBST and then they

will see what to do. They will refer the child to specialists and psychologists (FGB 9).

During my visits to School B I observed that learners were sent home with a letter to invite their parent(s) to come to the school to address matters related to problems - even minor ones, such as being outside the classroom during teaching time. This procedure was confirmed by one participant:

“Usually we actually write a letter to invite a parent to the school, the parent will come, usually we ask the parent to come the following day” (FGB 5).

In contrast, School A appeared to follow a set of internal disciplinary procedures to ensure fairness. In support of this finding, focus group participants in School A reported:

“We have a line function and it normally starts with the class teacher..., so if I experience a disciplinary problem, I as a teacher first, have to address it” (FGA 6).

In addition, it was said:

“If that problem is then not successful... it escalates to the grade head... If the grade head is not successful in solving the problem, it escalates to an HOD. If the HOD is not successful, it escalates to one of the deputies or the principal responsible for a certain grade” (FGA 6 – supported by FGB 9).

The way in which both schools operate regarding the procedure followed once a learner has been identified to be problematic is according to the policies of Department of Education but their approaches differ. Learners in both schools are disciplined by taking away their school bags; giving them letters for their parents to accompany them to school at their earliest convenience; and also by cleaning the classes:

“They take our school bags and give us letters. The letter says you must come with your parent” (PLB 1).

“They take away our books and make us sweep the school” (PLB 3).

“They suspend us and say we should come with our parents” (PLB 6).

Focus group members from **School A** cited alternative disciplinary measures implemented by the school, including:

“We have a merit and demerit system. Where learners eventually get a demerit, parents are sent an SMS... “ (FGA 6).

Learners in both schools are aware of the school’s code of conduct. According to PLB 3:

“A learner must come to the school in the morning, a learner must wear full school uniform, learners should not fight in the school, must not do gambling, must not smoke at school and some I cannot remember” (PLB 3).

The participants seemed to know and understand the codes of conduct. Since their alleged misbehaviour is usually contrary to the code of conduct, it may be concluded that these learners lack insight concerning the meaning of the rules. Du Plessis (2015) maintains that the behaviour codes should be clear and understandable to learners and should be explained to them at the beginning of the year. It is understood that they may face challenges in their social life, but it does not give them the right to misbehave at school.

The punishment for misbehaviour should be preventative and developmental (Mestry, 2015). However, one participant learner feels that the punishment they receive at school is degrading but is content with sweeping as a punishment:

“It makes me feel like I don’t have dignity and I don’t listen. I think sweeping classes will be a better punishment” (PLB 5).

The punitive practices implemented give an impression of the schools neglecting the SIAS policy. If the standardised procedures set out in the policy are adhered to,

learners will not be suspended; those with behaviour problems will be identified earlier; and the problem will be addressed appropriately.

It is the responsibility of schools to establish support systems within their communities to help at-risk learners become resilient learners (Thornton, Collins & Daugherty, 2006). The creation of school environments and the development of individual support systems have the potential for self-improvement and to stimulate the academic growth of learners from diverse socio-economic levels (Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

5.3.4.2 Sub-Theme 4.2: Legal Discipline Procedure

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996), is the highest authority with regard to how schools should maintain discipline. The South African Schools Act (RSA Act No. 84: 16(1), 20, 36, and 37 of 1996), guided by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996), serves as the traditional protective resource from which schools should be guided in their disciplinary processes and procedures. The Act mandates school governing bodies to develop, adopt and implement a code of conduct as a resource to manage discipline in schools. The code of conduct of each school is guided by the culture, moral codes and the ethos of the school. However, if the youth are to be supported in building resilience, collaboration with other stakeholders and/or professionals from a variety of youth-focused disciplines is required. In their responses to the researcher's questions, the focus group participants referred to discipline procedures that are prescribed by the Department of Education:

"The whole process is according to the prescriptions from the department" (FGA 6).

"Before we could expel a learner, we do try and engage the stakeholders like social workers, SGB members and even the SBST in the school to ensure that they actually interact with the learner and try to resolve the challenges that the learner is facing. After realizing that we are not winning, that is where we put forward a disciplinary hearing" (FGB 5).

This confirms that both schools are guided by policy on how to discipline learners with behaviour problems. However, participants from School B indicated that they faced a major challenge in terms of a lack of human resources.

The recent South African Children's Act, No. 38 of 2005, emphasises the responsibility of parents to take care of their children in relation to their right to protection. The focus group participants in both schools spoke of challenges with regard lack of parental involvement:

“Concerning the issue of difficult parents, I think I once attended to the issue of difficult parents who did not want to come to the school” (FGA 10).

Children are not, in respect of their powers to reason, the equals of adults. They are not born in this state of equality, though they are born to it (Archard, 2014). That they are able to grow up and be educated into becoming rational agents makes humans distinctively different from ‘beasts’, but Locke does not think that such rational agency comes at birth. Therefore, parents are duty bound to raise their children in such a way that in due course they may enter society as moral individuals.

Research has shown that the cumulative effect of punitive practices results in an increased the criminalisation of school discipline (Hirschfiels, 2008; Willis, 2008) in the criminal justice system. In addition, punitive practices are linked to poor academic performance (Noltmeyer, Ward & Mcloughlin, 2015); a decrease in learner engagement; and high dropout rates (Skiba, 2014). Furthermore, the school-to-prison pipeline indicates that youth who are removed from school - often due to punitive punishment - are at risk of finding themselves in the legal correctional system; suspension, as a form of punishment, acts as a negative turning point for adolescents by increasing the possibility of their contact with criminal justice in the form of arrest.

Studies conducted by Theron and Theron, (2010) show how South African research has failed to describe the cultural and contextual anchors of resilience. Values that provide a sense of cohesion and meaning to life no longer play a central role in schools. Schools and families seem to feel helpless and unable to manage the resources at

their disposal to build the resilience of suspended learners. It is to this effect that behaviour problems are still a concern, especially in township schools.

5.3.5 Theme 5: Staff Development

In Theme 5 the following sub-theme was thought to support and inform the theme.

5.3.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Capacity Development in Addressing Challenging Learner Behaviour in School

Globally, teachers require an insight into how to best facilitate the resilience of adolescents who are at risk of behaviour problems. It is the responsibility of teachers to provide support for learners who exhibit social, mental, emotional and behavioural problems in the classroom. A growing corpus of research, however, questions teachers' capacity to undertake this important role - particularly given the limited time available to capacitate them. Focus group participants from both schools acknowledged that they receive professional development or training in dealing with learners who have behavioural problems. They are encouraged to engage in personal development activities and register with higher institutions of learning to develop their own capacity. Most of the focus group participants indicated that they attended development workshops:

“Some of us also attended a continuous assessment programme” (FGA 9).

However, one participant pointed out:

“I just wanted to say it is not all of us educators who have received training” (FGB 4).

Other participants felt that the process of selecting teachers who should attend such professional development or training courses was discriminatory because they had never attended these programmes. They also indicated that only those who teach Life Orientation are selected to attend the workshops and training programmes.

The participants seemed to feel powerless when it came to handling learners with behavioural problems. One pointed that they were aware of the procedure but some thought that it needed more skills than an ordinary teacher had to be able to interact with problem learners. However, the training sessions and workshops that teachers attended seemed to be focused on curriculum development and neglected the skills needed to address behaviour problems that are the major distractor to learning.

It may be concluded that there is a gap between the organisers of workshops or the selecting committees and teachers when selecting those who should attend the workshops. According to Rutter (1993), teachers should be appropriately skilled to address behaviour problems in schools and to build the resilience of suspended learners. According to one focus group participant:

“...I am powerless when it comes to handling the learners... I think it needs more skills than just an ordinary teacher who will use normal discipline only” (FGB 4).

Graham, Phelps, Maddison and Fitzgerald (2011) suggest that teacher training does not adequately equip teachers' capacity to respond practically to the realities of the everyday classroom. This may be influenced by a complex interplay between teachers' construction of behaviour problems; the importance they place on mental health promotion in schools; issues of teacher confidence; role identity; conflict; and school culture as well as teachers' own sense of mental well-being (Graham *et al.*, 2011). It is a prerequisite of the school management team to ensure that no member of staff should be denied an opportunity to develop in order to be able to execute certain duties related to their work. School A appeared to be proactive in that participants mentioned the following:

“At the beginning of every year, since we sometimes get new staff we have staff meetings where the teachers go through the school policies and the respective disciplinary procedures that must take place in the school” (FGA 1).

“Other capacity sessions include class management in the beginning of the year on how to manage your class workshops arranged by the district and get speakers to address the staff ...” (FGA 5 supported by FGA 1; FGA 10).

5.3.6 Theme 6: Support Systems

The findings indicated that support systems included school support teams and district-based ones as well as support for parents of suspended learners and peer support.

5.3.6.1 Sub-Theme 6.1: School Support Systems

Structured and professional support services are essential for learners to actualise their optimal potential. Malindi and Theron (2010:319) maintain that a developing child is in constant interpersonal relations with the structural features of their environment, like the family, school, neighbourhood and church. This is in agreement with Bronfenbrenner (1979:22) who believes in the role of ecological protective resources, such as supportive families, health-promoting schools, community organisations and cultural rites of passage. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) argue that building the resilience of learners is a shared responsibility that cannot possibly be carried out by only a school system or policy. The Department of Basic Education’s policy on Screening, Identification and Assessment Support (SIAS) is aimed at supporting teachers in identifying the level of support required in schools and in the classroom to increase academic performance and enhance their resilience (DBE, 2014). The policy clearly stipulates the roles and responsibilities of the various support systems within the school. On an operational level, the school management team should plan, support and monitor the implementation of the policy to ensure that all learners are supported and given an opportunity to participate meaningfully in the learning process. The provision of specialised staff members and resources in schools, like the school-based support team; resources for learning and support; partnership programmes; curriculum differentiation; training and guidance; and environmental access, are all mandated responsibilities of the SMT.

The theme of support systems is manifested in the findings from the focus group discussions on how to support suspended learners to build their resilience and improve

their academic achievement. It was noted that participants from School B indicated a lack of human resources which made it difficult for them to deal with learners who have been identified with behavioural problems; they maintained that the teachers did not have the required skills to do so:

“We do not have relevant skills in addressing challenges that our learners face on a regular basis” (FGB 5).

It is also important to note that the school only relies on workshops to equip the teachers with knowledge and skills to deal with problematic behaviour. One participant mentioned:

“The workshop that we have attended was an eye opener because it was able to give us relevant information that we can actually utilise in terms of addressing some of the challenges which our learners face on a regular basis” (FGB 5).

It may be concluded that the workshops only are not sufficient as some of the teachers do not attend them. However, it is true that individuals are often able to and do modify, select, reconstruct and even create their environments; this capacity emerges only if the person has been enabled to engage in self-directed action as a joint function not only of his biological endowment but also of the environment in which he/she developed (Bronfenbrenner, 1989:223-224).

School A seemed to be better off because there is a psychologist and a social worker based at the school. The focus group participants, however, suggested that it was not sufficient as more than one thousand learners are accommodated by the school:

“The cases that they have to deal with are sometimes a lot for them because we have 1200 learners in this school” (FGA 6).

It appears that the teachers in the school are not well trained to deal with problem learners even though there is processes in place that need to be followed once learners have been identified as having problematic behaviour and the teachers are aware of these processes. Despite the existence of mandated processes, the school seems to

still experience numerous disciplinary problems because it lacks human resource capacity. However, the majority of the participants confirmed that they attended workshops organised by the district.

Fear of victimisation and a lack of support/protection for teachers was expressed by one participant:

“I am not gun proof, I am not knife proof. The teachers are exposed to these things on a daily basis”. Teachers must forever remember that they are adults and that they deal with children. You know sometimes you just keep quiet, you walk away and you say, I can’t anymore” (FGA 7).

It may be further concluded that the human resource capacities with regard to supporting learners with behaviour problems seems to be lacking in both schools that participated in the study. It is important that each and every school should have their own psychologists and social workers who are based at the schools on a departmental post instead of an SGB post. This will ensure that teachers are able to perform their duties efficiently and effectively because their workload would be eased.

5.3.6.2 Sub-Theme 6.2: District-Based Support Team

White Paper 6, which serves as an operational guideline for the implementation of inclusive education, introduced the need for holistic integrated support through inter-sectoral collaboration. It is through such collaboration that District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) were introduced (Makhalemele & Nel, 2014). The function of the DBST is to assist education institutions in identifying and addressing barriers to learning and to promote effective teaching and learning (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & Van Deventer, 2016). The focus group participants from both schools indicated that they receive minimal support from the district. Participants from School B said that only one social worker and one nurse had been assigned to work as external service providers in Mamelodi East schools. The heavy workload that the nurse and the social worker are required to carry is not feasible as there are about 40 secondary schools in Mamelodi. In emphasising the workload of the social worker one of the focus group participants from school B pointed out:

“She is taking care of almost all the schools around Mamelodi” (FGB 5).

Teachers feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they are expected to do, including teaching and also addressing social issues experienced by learners:

“On the other hand, the social problems really are a lot of work for teachers as well” (FGB 9).

School A experiences the same problem even though there is a psychologist and a social worker based at the school. The participants also acknowledged a lack of human power in the district and the social, worker and psychologist are employed by the school on a contract basis:

“The social worker and the psychologist are not paid by the government. We are not working with one school, we are working with one learner. How many learners are you going to attend to?” (FGA 10).

The participant was supported by others one who seemed concerned about the severity of behaviour problems and called for a psychologist *per phase* and *per school* who would be paid by the government. To reinforce support and because the two counsellors they have at the school which has 1200 learners is still deemed insufficient, the SMT of School A has made arrangements with the local university for student social workers to come to the school to do their experiential training:

“We do get in social worker students from the university that comes and do the practical and try and support that too” (FGA 10).

It may be said that the support received by schools from the district to address behavioural problems seems to be minimal. As a former DBST member I can attest to the lack of human resource capacity in the Department of Inclusion and Special Schools of Tshwane South District. In 2016 the district had only 6 qualified educational psychologists who were servicing almost 320 primary and secondary schools. A possible way forward for these schools to be able to deal with challenging behaviour

is if the Department of Education could place psychologists and social workers in each and every school.

5.3.6.3 Sub-Theme 6.3: Support for Parents of Suspended Learners

Only one learner from those who participated in the research lives with both parents. Most of the learners in both schools live with their guardians or a single parent. Parents have a major influence on a children's achievement, especially in their education and their presence in their children's lives plays a mediating role in terms of risks (Coleman & Ganong, 2002). It can be said that the absence of a parent in children's academic endeavours makes them insecure and affects their well-being, in general. The realities of to-day have revealed the absence of parents in their children's upbringing, especially because of work-related commitments. Whether a parent's absence is short-term or long-term, the fact remains that it negatively affects their children's education and somehow their behaviour as well.

According to Du Plessis (2015) the school governing body of each school has a mandate to develop a behaviour code in partnership with its community and to manage learner behaviour in partnership with learners and their families. The school community share responsibility for areas of learner engagement, respectful behaviour, attendance and it acts as a reference point on how a school should respond to individual learner misbehaviour. This is determined in the established code of conduct and is used as a useful reference in determining whether these responsibilities have been breached.

The findings of the study suggest that most parents do not offer their support to the school and this could be attributed to lack of knowledge and illiteracy. During the interviews parents were asked the following question: *"What kind of support do you receive from school?"* Some parents acknowledged the support they get from school:

"I think they are supportive because they are able to report anything" (PPA 1).

However, the majority of the parents indicated that they do not receive any support from the school. One parent said:

“I don’t think they do try to help him because they just call us when he has done something wrong” (PPB 1).

Parenting is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of children from infancy to adulthood. It is a process that has biological, psychological, social and financial dimensions. Parenting refers to the activity of raising children rather than their biological relationship. It is the prerogative of parents to support their children and take care of their biological needs; to provide an optimal environment; to protect them; to teach and educate them about their traditional norm and values; to provide guidance, direction, assistance and help; to motivate them; and to develop their social and emotional skills.

In short, the most important responsibilities of parenting are socialisation, stimulation and protection. This is in line with the strength-based practice - as discussed in Chapter 3. It has been found that learners who do well academically and who participate in life and whose behavioural morals and standards are commendable have parents, whether single or together with a partner, support them one hundred per cent - home and at school and they attend the parents’ meetings. Park, Peterson & Seligman (2004) assert that good parenting results in children facing fewer behaviour challenges and that it enhances their ability to bounce back from adversity because the parents are involved and informed. Zimmerman (2013), Mampane (2010) and Coleman & Ganong (2002) also contend that families are the cornerstone of children’s development.

It seems that the parents of problematic children who do not perform well do not make any effort to come to school when summoned or, when they do, they blame the teachers for the misbehaviour of their children. They tend to ignore the invitations to the school; most of them have lame excuses and some even swear at the teachers. The focus group participants from both schools were convinced that parents are not committed to the children’s education:

“The parents usually tell you that they are committed somewhere” (FGB 3 and a similar comment from FGB 5).

“If the kid is giving you problems, why don’t you resign” (FGB 2).

The level of frustration in the parents' voices was evident and reflects the need for parental support. One parent, it appears, dismissed the summons from school by saying:

“Just call the police or take him out of the school and lock him up” (FGB 4).

It becomes very difficult for the school to exercise disciplinary measures when a learner has disobeyed the disciplinary policy because some parents protect for their children despite their bad behaviour. It is also alleged that parents do not attend school meetings to address important matters about the education of their children:

“With any meeting scheduled with parents, we are always having; I don't think it ever reaches 50%” (FGA 1 with agreement from FGA 4).

Both schools seem to make an effort to engage parents but often to no avail which results in learners being suspended in order to force the parent to come to the school. During field visits it was noticed that most parents were not even aware of the rights of their children when they were suspended. Questions, such as *“What will my child do when they are suspended? Does the school have to provide him/her with work? Can I appeal a suspension?”* were not asked and parents' responses were always negative and aggressive. In the findings of the study conducted by Tlale (2016) it emerged that teacher factors and parental involvement play a major role in determining the behaviour modification of learners. Smolkowski, Seeley, Gau, Dishion, Stormshak, Moore, Falkenstein, Fosco and Garbacz (2017) propose a positive family support model to mitigate the negative communication gap between parents and teachers.

Sometimes families find it difficult to get their children to school because of issues in the home, such as poor health, mental health problems, grief and loss, parental separation, family violence and homelessness. The parents' general responses to their children's misbehaviour clearly indicate their need for support; the school can be a source of support for parents and their children. It is the parents' responsibility to talk to the teachers, principals and school-based support teams to discuss ways to support their children and how they can work with the school to resolve any problems their children have. The teachers in the focus group felt that even though the schools

conduct workshops for parents to empower them with parenting skills, attendance is always poor. The district office also tries to engage parents by encouraging them to support their children but not all of them care what happens to their children.

5.3.6.4 Sub-Theme 6.4: Peer Support

Peer pressure seems to be high in both schools that participated in the study. All the learners with behavioural problems seem to spend their time with friends involved in activities that do not benefit them:

“Yes. Sometimes we would go to the parks. We hang out with girls until around eight” (PLB 1).

“I spend time with my friends, we sometimes play soccer and sometimes we just play around like running and stuff” (PLA 2).

It is important to note that it was found that they are also involved in illegal activities ranging from gambling, smoking of *dagga* and bullying other children. These activities that were cited by the learners take place either at school or after school. It may be concluded that this kind of behaviour only increases the possibility of failure; none of indicated that they spend time doing homework or anything positive. One learner said:

“We would do things that are out of line” (PLB 1).

Research has shown that peer support is a stronger predictor of immediate resilient functioning than family support (Van Harmelen, Kievit, Ioannidis, Neufeld, Jones, Bullmore, Dolan, Fonagy, Goodyer & NSPN Consortium, 2017). It is possible that supportive friends function as defenders against bullying to provide emotional and practical support which makes victimised children believe that they belong to a social group and they are not alone (Oldenburg, Van Duijn,. & Veenstra, 2018). A study conducted by Foster, Horwitz, Thomas, Opperman, Gipson, Burnside, Stone & King (2017) indicates that friendship can be protective in nature and can help to improve the resilience of adolescents. However, the environment in which learners with behaviour problems grow up somehow negatively affects their development. With reference to

the biographical profile of these learners' families, it is evident that their physical, emotional, social and cognitive beings are neglected. Their misbehaviour is possibly due to the frustration and lack of coping skills to navigate their contexts. Ebersöhn (2008) identified individual emotional aspects, such as *locus* of control, high self-efficacy, optimism and an adaptive coping repertoire, as high protective factors. Learners who participated in this study appeared to be less resilient and more vulnerable, particularly those from the township. They portrayed high incident risk factors, such as tendencies to express anger and aggressiveness; truancy; learned self-helplessness; and an inability for self-regulation.

5.3.7 Theme 7: Collaboration with External Service Providers

A circle of networks in the community is being established to support learners with behavioural problems. One of the focus group participants referred to services offered by the Itsoseng Clinic (Psychologist); Khanyi Family Centre (Non-Government Organisation); the SANCA Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre in Mamelodi; 'Second Chance' (Non-Government Organisation); and churches in and around Mamelodi East. Hammond (2010) believes that a strong relationship between external service providers and schools is important to enhance mental health and build the resilience of suspended learners. Although these services have a protective value for the entire school community, according to participants from School B, some of these networks are no longer functional due to some alleged misuse of funds that led to their closure.

In response to the researcher's probing questions, most of the focus group participants from both schools indicated that different service providers are easily accessed by the schools and the parents. The responses were different from some parents, particularly those from School B; they did not seem to be aware of the available external services at their disposal. However, some of those who acknowledged that they were aware of the services indicated that they had never received any support from them. It appears that the service providers are underused by both schools. One participant indicated that he used a private counselling psychologist to support his child even though he was aware that there was one at the school. Despite an in-house school social worker and a psychologist being employed in a school governing body post, the participants

called for the appointment of more psychologists and social workers in government posts because of the number of learners that need their services.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) was also found to be available to schools although the participants were concerned about their poor response time. One participant from School A acknowledged:

“We do work with SAPS but because it is a child they do not want to take them, they do not want to remove them and quite often the police comes in the same time the school comes out because to them it is not a serious issue and there is nothing serious about a learner being in the school premises illegally. Our hands are actually tied” (FGA 7).

However, the visibility of the police was confirmed to be in both schools. Participants from School B seemed to be content with the police service:

“They are easily accessible to parents because if we do encounter certain challenges or the parents encounter certain challenges in their respective homes, we do actually advise them to engage with those service providers and they usually respond to the challenges which those parents or families encountered” (FGB 5).

These indicated that the SAPS plays an important role in handling some of the problematic learners in their school whereas in School A this is not the case.

5.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Given the increasing number of suspended learners in township schools, the parents and the school community acknowledged the need to understand the risk factors contributing to behaviour problems as a stepping stone to developing intervention strategies. There is a need for more stakeholders to focus on learners who demonstrate behaviour problems in order to advance the knowledge and skills required to build the resilience of suspended learners. When studying the relevant literature on resilience many factors, such as personality; environmental elements and socialisation

including poverty, violence and negative infant experiences; the amount and type of experienced stress; accessible resources; and social support, may be identified as vital in determining factors of resilience (Masten, 2002, Kaplan, 2002 Ungar, 2011, Masten & Monn, 2015). The nature of adversity could be used to guide the energy of resilience to bounce back and facilitate a return to ordinary functioning or recuperation. It should also be considered that meaning and kind of adversity may be subjective and may result in a distinct subjective reaction.

The results of the analysis of the collected data, as discussed in the themes and sub-themes in this chapter, suggest that behaviour problems portrayed by suspended learners could be influenced by different factors that leading to misconceptions. Learners' lives are a web of interacting relationships, all making them the people that they are. For adolescents to navigate their contextual circumstances they need social support from their family, the school and the community. This section discusses suspended learners' experiences from a broad psycho-social perspective of negative attributes that hamper them in accessing resources in their exposure in order to actualise their resilience. The discussion is based on learners' direct and indirect expressions of the risks that could guide their capacity to bounce back from adversity.

5.4.1 Suspended Learners' Experiences of Family Dynamics

There is variation in the family structures of learners in the two schools that were studied. It was discovered that four of the suspended learners who had been identified with behaviour problems in School A come from single parent families and only one is from a nucleus family. The number of single parent family structures in School B is alarming and characterised mostly by young parents involved in relationships of convenience. Participant learners find themselves trapped in the hands of single young parent households where they cannot be provided for emotionally and socially. To make end meets the parents engage with stay-in boyfriends and force their parenting responsibilities on the grandparents. Research has shown the influence of poor family structure and parenting style as common risks to the development of adolescents (Ward, Makusha, & Bray, 2015). Heleniak, Jenness, Van der Stoep, McCauley & McLaughlin, 2016 argue that disruptions in emotion regulation processes represent a

key developmental mechanism that links child maltreatment to the onset of psychopathology.

The parent participants expressed their frustration when it came to managing their children. This could be attributed to factors related to their lack of capacity to deal with their circumstances in terms of the unavailability of, mainly, father figures in their families. Newman (2002) maintains that traumatic life events, such as the death of a parent, are generally less damaging to the wellbeing of children than being part of a violent and dysfunctional family on a day-to-day basis. The single parent families in this study outnumbered the nucleus families. From the data gathered, it was evident that the transgressions of suspended learners originated in the emotional instability prevailing in their families and their lack of capacity to deal with it. It was further found that much as the alleged transgressions are unacceptable and pose a danger to other learners and teachers, they continue to happen. Research by Burton (2008), Harber and Muthukrishna (2000) and Mampane and Bouwer (2011) suggests that township schools are surrounded with negative influential circumstances that impact on learner behaviour. When problems occur simultaneously, the consequences for adolescents are dire (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2001; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005); the results include suspension as an alternative form of discipline.

Many adolescents are forced by circumstances to become involved in a variety of risky behaviour. Learners from high-risk environments, such as violent communities and families with alcohol, drug, physical and sexual abuse as well as mental illness, are not expected to have desirable experiences (Lösel, & Farrington, 2012). The posed risk factors for suspended learners signify limited parental support, involvement, supervision and protection as well as deprivation in terms of care and love (Ebersöhn, 2008). However, Bernard (1997) maintains that 50-70 percent of children from families with mental illness or from poverty stricken backgrounds, become confident, competent and caring persons.

Extended families that may include other relatives and grandparents appear to have a positive influence on adolescents experiencing adversity. Cook and Du Toit (2005:248) describe extended families as being able to provide a social support network which is an important source of aid to adolescents belonging to particular families. As these

adolescents search for their own identities, some of the participant's grandparents were said to have provided them with cultural and family knowledge (Ochiltree, 2006; Dass-Brailford, 2005:582). Extended family members, like aunts and older cousins, also provide adolescents with additional emotional and material support which often encourages resilience (Dass-Brailford, 2005:582; Cook & Du Toit, 2005:248); they create a sense of hope and optimism and assume a protective role (Seligman & Peterson, 2003). Mohangi (2008) argues that optimism and hope denote a positive attitude and disposition that good things will happen, independent of one's ability. The extended family members in this study were described as caring, nurturing, loving and willing to support the children, especially grandchildren. The positive attitude displayed served as a buffer to the effects of the interaction between the protective systems and positive relationships that seem to envelop the children (Mohangi, 2008). In return the children showed a reciprocal positive reaction to their grandparents - more than that to their own biological parents.

In the South African context, family income determines academic performance, access to resources and basic needs of education, food, transport and shelter. The majority of learners in the two schools that were studied are African and they come from low income families. In particular, seven out of eight parents from School B indicated that they were unemployed. Building the resilience of individuals is a dynamic process involving shifting balances of protective and vulnerability forces in different risk contexts and at different developmental stages and relies on strong connections between the adolescents and adults who are 'most proximal' and 'most enduring' sources of love and nurturing (Luthar & Zelazo, 2003). Parenting styles and affectionate ties that encourage trust, autonomy and initiative serve as protective factors and enhance adolescents' ability to bounce back in adversity because the parents are involved and informed (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

5.4.2 Understanding Behaviour Problems

Researchers agree that the school is a breeding ground for negative behaviour as learners attempt to find themselves and a place where they fit in (Okrentowich, 2006). From the data collected in this study it was clear that the environment of the participants is infested with adverse challenges that include the daily accumulation of

destructive and disempowering messages that influence the behaviour of the learners. It was discovered that learners in the age group 15 to 18 years and in Grades 8 and 9 were more vulnerable to suspensions than other groups. A biographical study of the participants indicated that many learners come from adverse circumstances. According to Mampane and Bouwer (2011), in adolescents who grow up in the townships of South Africa, the presence of risk is commonplace and often escalates on a daily basis. During the interview with learners it was noted that they were able to reflect on their lives and to view themselves and their circumstances. Some of them showed remorse and regret about their behaviour when they spoke and they expressed the need to change.

Research has shown that vulnerable group of children and adolescents are more likely to have multiple psychological problems (Saleem, & Mahmood, 2013; Arslan 2012). The problems faced by schoolchildren are usually referred to as emotional and behavioural problems (Arslan, 2012); the terms, 'internalising' and 'externalising' problems (Connor & Davidson, 2003) are also used. Internalising problems are referred to more as relating to controlled behaviour which includes symptoms of depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, low self-esteem and somatic complaints (Brown, 2010; (Besser, Zeigler-Hill, Weinberg, Pincus & Neria, 2015). The learners in this study displayed similar emotions that influenced their behaviour due their feelings of helplessness. Externalising problems are referred to more in terms of controlled and overt behaviour, including aggression, acting out tendencies, disruptive, defiant and hyperactive behaviour. It was found that the learners' chances of being suspended were influenced more by externalising and acting out their emotions and the inappropriate intervention they receive from the schools. The learners appear to find themselves moving in a cycle of negativity without personal growth and development. Figure 5.1, given below, illustrates the negative cycle.



Figure 5.1: Negativity Cycle

Suspension as a punitive measure to address the problems displayed by learners may risk the escalation of harm. Learners' self-sufficiency is diminished by frequent interventions by teachers in issuing commands, criticisms and only occasional praise and where disciplinary measures are not consistent (Newman, 2002). Subsequently, learners avoid expressing emotions and disclosing their distress in asking for teachers' assistance in problem-solving which is an adaptive emotion regulation strategy commonly employed by children (Heleniak, Jenness, Vander Stoep, McCauley & McLaughlin, 2016). In the study it was noticed that in some instances learners were suspended without proper screening, identification, assessment and support - as required by the SIAS policy (2014). Learners are instantly referred to the principals' office to be given a letter of immediate suspension to gain learners' attention and make them feel guilty and ashamed.

An authoritarian school often interferes without any real need to do so and issues threats without always carrying them through (Neal, & Frick-Horbury, 2001). Authoritarianism affects learning negatively and harms the reputation of the teaching profession. If the teacher lacks authority and relies on authoritarianism, then education in that classroom will fail regardless of the quality of lesson plans. Newman (2002) suggests that long-lasting but relatively minor 'daily hassles', like harassment and teasing, have a more profound effect on children than acute events. The learners will play the school game and become truants instead of having their minds

opened. According to some researchers, where this type of environment is practiced it is frequently reported that if the demands are too forceful, the children will break down, rebel or run away (Khaki, 2005). As a result the learners become emotionally isolated from their teachers and peers; they rarely have stable interpersonal relationships or a good self-concept. This contradicts Luthar and Zelazo (2003) when they say the most proximal and most enduring relationships seem to be the most nurturing.

The mistake teachers make is that they assume learners understand what they mean when they make rules. In this study some of the learners seemed to enjoy being sent to the principals' office which resulted in recurring suspensions. While the school management members and the teachers of one school seem to adhere to policy and are firm in their disciplinary procedure, the other school was found to be authoritarian with uncoordinated disciplinary measures. The availability of human capacity, in terms of a school social worker and school psychologist for dealing with behaviour problems, served as a protective factor as learners receive intervention prior to suspension being considered.

When faced with difficult tasks, learners with behaviour problems tend to dwell on their personal deficiencies and on obstacles they encounter as well as all kinds of adverse outcomes rather than concentrating on how to behave well in the face of adversity. Unconsciously, the psychological stress which is experienced by suspended learners when there is an imbalance between the demands made on them and the actual or perceived resources available to meet their challenges lead to problems in extreme forms of behaviour that include gambling, substance abuse, bullying and vandalism - as identified in the two schools that were studied. Behaviour problems are assumed to be a result of erroneous beliefs, distorted thoughts and poorly controlled emotional responses to stress. According to Bandura (2009), behaviour is shaped and controlled either by environmental influences or by internal dispositions. To address these problems an assessment of individuals' social perspectives, beliefs and feelings is necessary (Nicols, 2000). Assistance should be provided through the establishment of a supportive climate and training in important social skills (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Measuring the magnitude of risk, by means of certain indicators/variables, may assist

in understanding adolescents' adversities and in devising intervention strategies to build resilience.

In order to understand individuals' resilience it is necessary to be aware of what Masten (1994) refers to as adaptation ingredients. These incorporate a developmental path or history which focuses on a competence or psychological functioning of the individual over time; the nature of the adversity faced by the individual; individual and social assets and risks; individual characteristics that function as vulnerability or protective factors; environmental liabilities or protective factors; and context of adaptation.

Behaviour problems are a significant focus in the work of educational psychologists (EPs). In helping suspended learners build resilience the behaviour, thoughts and actions that can be learned by, and developed in, any individual should be considered. Resilience is also related to positive psychology which focuses on human strengths and weaknesses; it aims to help individuals get more out of life, live and flourish rather than merely exist and it cultivate wellness as well as being a remedy pathology (Boniwell, 2008;). Definitions of resilience by different researchers all emphasize the importance of individuals' inner strength, physical strength and support they receive from the environment (Saleemy, 1997; Masten, 2011; Rutter, 2006; Bonanno, 2008). Resilient children and adolescents are thought to make use of the protective resources in their environments more efficiently than their peers (Ungar, 2008:225; Ungar *et al.* 2008). In this study resilience referred to the adolescents' capacity to navigate their way to psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that they need during periods of adversity and to their ability to access these resources in a meaningful way (Ungar, 2008).

Adolescents who face hardships often rely on their communities to provide them with positive protective resources in order to cope resiliently. The community of Mamelodi East is found to have safe facilities like libraries, clinics, transport, shops and recreational services for the use and benefit of all members of the community. These facilities serves as a buffer to adversity and the services are able to accommodate all community members. However, the accessibility and misuse of resources is reported to be a risk factor that needs further investigation.

5.4.3 Discipline Procedures

Du Plessis, (2015) maintains that behaviour codes need to be developed in conjunction with the school representative for learners where the consequences of misbehaviour must be agreed upon. Although the South African Schools Act provides guidelines for the development of the school code of conduct, each school develops a behaviour code in partnership with its community, based on contextual challenges. In terms of the findings of this study, although the contexts of the two schools that were studied indicated some similarity with regard to discipline measures, there was also some variation. Both schools explained the process of following up once a learner had been identified with behavioural problems. However, it was clear that the disciplinary procedure taken by each school differed.

The schools mostly deal with problems internally before they can be reported to the school-based support teams; parents are immediately written a letter to invite them to the school. Schools are allowed to discipline learners, but the discipline must be fair and appropriate and it should fit the level and seriousness of the behaviour. Section 10(1) the South African Schools Act stipulates that no person may administer corporal punishment at a school. Dr Shaheda Omar, the director of clinical services at the Teddy Bear Clinic argues:

“Discipline means teaching acceptable behaviours and unlearning maladaptive behaviours with support, guidance and direction in managing behaviour. Discipline is about setting limits, clarifying roles, responsibilities and mutual expectations and creating a predictable, orderly and stable life” (Mail & Guardian 2017 17:43).

When schools fail to provide sufficient support for learners, the social, emotional and behavioural challenges that often accompany learning and attention issues can lead to serious consequences. These include social isolation, disproportionate disciplinary rates and an increased likelihood of learner truancy, dropping out of school and becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

The way in which both selected schools operate regarding the procedure followed once a learner has been identified is problematic as it deviates from the policy of the Department of Education. The policy requires that schools should emphasise support for learners to behave well rather than punish them when they misbehave by removing them from the learning environment – unless all other approaches have been tried and failed. The policy also requires schools to investigate the underlying reasons for learners' misbehaviour; intervene early; and to support learners to behave well. However, schools must work with parents to understand and address the underlying reasons for the children's behaviour through the school-based support team and by providing the children with support. The process of identification and support needs to be documented in the learners' profile.

If a learner is facing suspension, the parent must be notified ahead of time or immediately if the suspension is a matter of urgency - which can only happen if the child is putting him/herself or someone else at risk. I can confirm that learners are usually not officially suspended once they have been identified; they are immediately reinstated to class once the parent comes to school to sign an acknowledgement that he/she was informed of the learner's challenging behaviour. Although policy on the suspension of learners states that learners may not be suspended for more than ten days, it was found that the suspension implemented in the schools in this study did not specify the period because the learners were reinstated as and when the parent responded to the invitation to come to the school. It was noted that some learners dropped out of school because the parent(s) were not able to come to school when summoned. Skiba, Eaton and Sotoo (2004) agree that the procedure does not seem to be well monitored and evaluated.

According to the South African Schools Act, if a child is suspended for three days or less, the school must provide meaningful work for the child to do at home. If the child's suspension is for more than three days, the school must provide an 'Absence Learning Plan' and a 'Return to school plan'. During, or soon after, the suspension the school should meet with the parents and any professionals involved in supporting the child to discuss the child's behaviour and strategies for addressing the underlying issues in order to prevent another suspension. During member-checking in this study it was noted that most parents were not informed with regard to the suspension procedure

followed by the schools. It is a prerogative of parents to be well-informed of the process as well as the rights of their children; schools have a responsibility to capacitate parents with regard to their rights and those of their children's. Developing skills and building capacity increases self-efficacy in suspended learners which, in turn, encourages the pursuit of goals and leads to resilience. Building resilience is a process that requires support systems that include internal and external factors, such as the socio-ecological background of the learners, to interact with learners' innate resilience and enhance their capacity to achieve positive outcomes (Johnson & Lazarus, 2008; Perkins, Witt & Caldwell, 2018).

A strength-based perspective identifies individuals' resilience in the face of adversity and builds resources that will increase this resilience. It is for this reason that a variety of self-regulation processes, such as goal setting, self-observation; self-evaluation with task strategies, like study skills; time-management and organisational strategies; self-motivational beliefs and self-efficacy; and intrinsic interest, are important in building the resilience of the adolescents (Bandura, 1994). A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. In this study the learners expressed doubts concerning their capabilities; they shied away from learning challenges and family dynamics which they view as personal threats; and they appeared to have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they chose to pursue.

5.4.4 Staff Development

The influence of support systems, including caring teachers and mentors, are associated with resilience (Werner, 2000). There are societal expectations of teachers; their main responsibility is to assist learners to learn and achieve good results. If learners present behaviour problems, it is difficult for learning to take place. As a result teachers are challenged to create and maintain a positive, productive classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning. In teachers' attempts to face challenges, they find themselves making common classroom behaviour management mistakes.

Members of Society expect order and good results from teachers and they are increasingly impatient and lack understanding if teachers do not provide them. A

teacher's primary responsibility is to help learners learn in the classroom but it is difficult for learning to take place in a chaotic environment. Subsequently, teachers are challenged on a daily basis to create and maintain a positive, productive classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning. In teachers' attempts to face this challenge, they find themselves making common classroom behaviour management errors, such as shouting at learners; banging doors; calling learners names or labelling learners; and screaming at learners if they make mistakes. Glenn and Nelsen (2000) believe that the impact of teachers' behaviour on learner behaviour and their management skills are underestimated. Good behaviour in learners must be developed through a process that teachers must model.

The teachers should demonstrate behaviour that makes learners feel recognised and have a sense of belonging; by greetings learners it makes them feel that someone is showing interest in them. Supportive teachers give time to learners and they are available for consultation at all times. Moreover, positive learner interaction with teachers; the creation of support groups; and better classroom management leads to self-disciplined learners, academic persistence and resilience in learners. In terms of support within the context of a township, Mampane and Boucher (2011) found that middle-adolescents viewed a supportive and nurturing school as vital in enforcing rules; providing successful teaching; ensuring sound educational outcomes; and, ultimately, guiding learners towards positive future goals. Sumsion (2005) points out that teachers are seen as carers and nurturers; participants in play activities; providers of learning opportunities; teachers of specific skills and knowledge; and managers of behaviour. Singh (2018) argues that good learner-teacher relationships are those where learners feel seen, felt and understood by teachers. Teachers play a model role in children's learning and skill acquisition. Teachers who show that they care are also thought to support learners to feel a positive connection to their school which, in turn, helps them feel that they belong and are important (Johnson & Lazarus, 2008:20).

Disruptive behaviour in the classroom affects not only the learner involved but also the teacher and other learners. The disruptive learner is satisfied because of the attention that rewards his/her negative behaviour. Minor incidents, if positively rewarded, could lead to other forms of disruptions which, if not controlled, could become aggressive and result in violent situations (Skinner, 1971). It is for this reason that educational

psychologists are helpful in supporting teachers concerning how to identify challenging behaviour in the classroom; recognise its causes; and implement intervention strategies in alternative forms of discipline that will not only stop the disruption but keep the learners focused on their task and also prevent it from occurring regularly. This means that if the teachers are knowledgeable about the causes of delinquency, they will be able to develop strategies to control and prevent it. Although teachers in this study alluded to the fact that they receive personal developmental training, only a limited number of them were capacitated. Some of the training and workshops attended by the teachers include the implementation of the SIAS Policy which outlines guidelines for intervention by teachers and the referral procedure to the district-based support team. The policy highlights corroboration with external service providers to enhance the resilience of learners. The teachers have also been trained in Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support (PBIS) which is described by Sprague, Walker, Golly, White, Myers and Shannon (2001) as the application of positive behavioural interventions and systems to achieve social change.

Collaboration with the district-based support team has also been found to have a desired protective influence with good intentions that are affected by limited human resources in reaching schools. As a result, more focus is geared to the accumulation of statistics of referrals and curriculum support rather than accommodating the needs of each identified learner with behaviour problems to promote their well-being.

In exploring the relevant literature related to classroom management and undesirable behaviour in classroom settings, it was noted that many researchers focused on the subject of unwarranted learner behaviour in the classroom (Nicols, 2000). It seems that the most effective way of managing behaviour problems should be to work to prevent them arising and to minimize their occurrence. The role that teacher' attitudes and values play in the identification and generation of behaviour problems could be equally **significant**; caring relationships may be achieved by demonstrating kindness, compassion and respect. However, adolescents often observe that their teachers react to stress by drinking and smoking, thereby providing a bad example for them (Health Outlook, 2005). This leads them to believe that it is fine for them to do the same but what they do not know is that it will cause them harm in future. Many teachers become defensive and irritated when confronted by learner misbehaviour and find it difficult to

look hard at themselves and their methods and attitudes. The major cause of children's misbehaviour at school stems from how teachers manage their classrooms.

5.4.5 Support Structures

Parents are responsible for the nurturing of the emotional and social aspects of their children's lives. A growing body of research has shown that in the context of adversity a family's well-being depends on both how well the family, as a system, accesses the resources it needs to sustain itself and grow as well as how well other systems change to meet the needs of families (Burton, 2008; Madsen, 2009; Walsh, 2012, 2013; Ungar, 2010) The lack of parental encouragement and support forces learners to become self-authors at an early stage. Children need a family, a community and a culture that will support them on their journey to resilience and that will supply what they negotiate for; resilience is a product of the constant interaction between intra-personal and inter-personal factors (Masten & Reed, 2005; Ungar, 2008). Ungar *et al.* (2008) and Ungar (2008) emphasize that resilience is dependent on adolescents' capacity to navigate protective resources that already exist and use of these resources in ways that are culturally meaningful to the adolescents, their families and the shared community.

According to Ungar (2008), two processes explain resilience: navigation and negotiation. Adolescent should be able to actively navigate their way to resources, such as positive relationships; skills that develop self-esteem; and quality education; as well as in participating in community and family affairs. Adolescents' families and communities should also be available for resources to be found. A process of negotiation is necessary to make sure that the resources provided are meaningful to those requiring support (Ungar *et al.*, 2008).

In this study, the experiences of learners who had been suspended due to behaviour problems at school were explored. The collected data revealed that the family dynamics of learners, including their socio-economic backgrounds, contain at-risk factors in the developmental and academic processes of suspended learners. Single parenting, poor interpersonal relations within the families, illiteracy and unemployment coloured the contexts of the participants and appeared to hinder the developmental capacity for resilience. However, the learners indicated that they had grandparents,

aunts and uncles who were interested in their well-being and who they could talk to about their problems in the absence of parents.

Many existing studies show that a primary factor in resilience development is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family; a close relationship with at least one adult is required (Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990; Liew, Cao, Hughes & Deutz, 2018; Foster, Horwitz, Thomas, Opperman, Gipson, Burnside, Stone & King, 2017; Joyce, 2018). By interacting with other systems, like networks of social support (Behrman, 2013) and formal government agencies, such as child protection services (Madsen & Gillespie, 2014), the most positive impact on a family's ability to withstand stress, and its resilience, will be enhanced. Broader systems should be willing and able to adapt to a family's needs and make resources available in culturally appropriate ways (Ungar, 2011). Hence, there is corroboration between the schools and the external service providers but it was found it to be ineffective and not monitored appropriately; the line of communication does not seem to be demarcated and follow-ups are not regularly conducted. One of the parents indicated during member-checking that she has been waiting in vain for the social worker to visit her home. Learners end up on the streets because schools are alarmed by challenging behaviour and have a minimum capacity to address it.

Masten and Reed (2002) are of the opinion that effective parents probably try to keep away from as many risk factors for their family as possible; therefore, it is not surprising to find that adolescents with skilled and effective parents encounter fewer adverse life events. Firm, rational and reasonable parents also create an environment that is predictable and which encourages resilience (Walsh, 2015; Masten & Reed, 2002). Rutter (2013) cites factors, such as maternal warmth, sibling warmth and a positive atmosphere in the family as protective against emotional and behavioural disturbances. The family dynamic conditions of most of the suspended learners who participated in the study were found to be undesirable and posed potential risks which had an influence on the learners' challenging behaviour. However, some parents have been shown to monitor their children's behaviour; recognise deviant behaviour when it occurs; and appropriately punish such behaviour.

In terms of Turner and Piquero (2002), self-control is established early in childhood as a result of parental socialisation efforts. This social self-control process is believed to be dynamic during the first eight to ten years of a child's life when self-control becomes relatively stable but it may change in absolute value (Turner and Piquero, 2002). The study conducted by Mampane (2014) suggests that a sense of duty and personal responsibility is a proactive approach in taking charge and acknowledging personal strengths. Seligman, Niemiec, Shogren and Wehmeyer, (2017) consider regulating what you feel and do; being disciplined; and not letting your desires or emotions get out of hand as strengths associated with temperance. In the context of this study suspended learners were found to be less resilient and more incapacitated. Mampane (2014) argues that children from poor family backgrounds will probably fail in identifying and utilising the support of other adults; they will depend on ineffective strategies of mere coping instead of striving for goal attainment. Singh (2018) contends that building resilience really comes through the development of social and emotional skills, which include coping skills.

Despite the lack of parental and family capacity to enhance resilience, certain environmental influences are required for optimal resilience expression. Environmental contexts, which are major influences in developing resilience in learners, are the community, peers and the individual learner's characteristics or predisposition to dealing with difficult life situations (Ryff & Singer, 2003). Ungar (2008) and Ungar *et al.* (2008) maintain that the wellness of adolescents depends on their ability to cooperate, negotiate and live in harmony with other people, but also on the availability and accessibility of linked protective resources. Grandparents were found to be very resourceful in the lives of suspended learners who participated in this study; they are always supportive and instil morals in their grandchildren and they use their pension money to provide for their grandchildren's needs. These influences need to exist for individuals to develop a range of personal skills and successful coping strategies to overcome adversity (Oswald, Johnson & Howard, 2004). However, a lack of clarity about how to measure resilience, for example, can make it difficult to determine whether or not resilience initiatives are working (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Khanlou & Wray, 2014; Luthar *et al.*, 2000).

The school is a child's second home and teachers automatically and immediately replace the real parents. Most adolescents' behavioural problems emerge as a result of how the environment interacts and supports them (Barber & Buehler, 1996). The school atmosphere that is conducive for positively adolescent behaviour is of great concern for teachers, administrators and parents. A good relationship between parents and teachers may buffer the impact of the adverse challenges on the lives of children (Foster, Horwitz, Thomas, Opperman, Gipson, Burnside, Stone & King, 2017). Malindi (2009) argues that a resilient school that can function well under stressful conditions and which is manned by teachers and role models, who can function effectively in the face of adversity, can play a pivotal role in promoting resilience among high-risk adolescents. From a South African perspective Life Orientation, as a learning area, prepares adolescents for life's challenges by teaching and training them to acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that can function as a shield to risk (Theron, 2007). These are oversight promotive aspects that go unnoticed by the school community, parents as well as suspended learners.

Community structures, like churches, schools, recreation and sport clubs, usually present adolescents with role models and mentors who can encourage them towards resilience (Masten & Powell, 2003:13). Religious leaders, educators, school therapists, sports coaches and other significant adults who possess social competency are some of the people adolescents might feel comfortable approaching. Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Cheung and Levine (2008:2) and Masten (2001) are of the opinion that resilience is an ordinary phenomenon and that protective resources have always been available and are provided by the community. These resources have been found to also be available within township communities. However, it is the capacity to navigate and negotiate them in a meaningful and cultural way that poses a risk for suspended learners and their families.

Peer relationships provide children with a good foundation of social support outside immediate and extended family settings (Malindi, 2009). Adolescents feel freer and find it easier to talk about the problems they face in the absence of adults. They find it easier because peers can relate to each other's situations in asking for advice or help - even offering advice is easier. The suspended learners who participated in this study were found to have established groups in terms of common behaviour. There were

those who were prone to fighting, bullying and gambling and others who were just disrespectful to authority. Individuals feel the comradeship and acceptance in a particular group because there is an adherence to the norms and values of the group (Weymouth, & Buehler, 2018).

Being part of a popular crowd may also be a risk factor for moderate or mild deviant behaviour. Learners become at-risk of behaviour problems when there is early involvement in problem behaviour; involvement in unsupervised time spent with peers; and low self-control. Having low self-control has been proved to be a predictor of diminished interpersonal functioning and has been shown to increase risk of maladaptive behaviour in children (Tangney, Boone & Baumeister, 2018).

Although Narayan *et al.* (2008) assert that the experience of one or more of the risk factors does not automatically lead to behavioural problems or criminality; however, the more risk factors that are present in adolescents' environments, the greater the chances are that they will experience problems - one of which is suspension from school. The harmful actions of adolescents do not occur within a social vacuum. They are found to be easily influenced to conform to behaviour patterns of their peers and engage in risky behaviour, such as smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol and delinquency (Owens, 2002; McMillan, Felmlee, & Osgood, 2018). According to the relevant available research, peer pressure may lead individuals to behave in a way that is not usually and also that adolescents are more vulnerable to peer influence because it is a time when they experiment with new identities and experiences (Stuart, 2001).

5.4.6 Collaboration with External Service Providers

Social support is defined as a range of significant interpersonal relationships that have an impact on individuals' functioning (Ungar, 2018) and that are also related to the development of resilience and the achievement of good academic outcomes (Wasonga *et al.*, 2003). There is a diverse range of service providers in and around Mamelodi Township that work well for some but not as well for others. Perceived social support systems related to well-being are direct and positive; they allow individuals to feel cared for, valued and a part of the system and, therefore, they promote a relief to the negative effects of adversity. Hart (2010) contends that Educational Psychologists

(EPs) play a significant role in assisting schools to address issues involving misbehaviour. They are often called upon to consult with and advise children and young people exhibiting problematic behaviour as well as to train staff members in approaches related to behaviour management and support. It was discovered that in and around Mamelodi Township the following psycho-social services are available and accessible to the community: Itsoseng Clinic, Mamelodi East Clinic, Mamelodi Day Hospital, a charity centre and social development centres

It was further found that the suspended learners endured severe psychological stress which Ungar (2008) refers to as internal risk factors; apparently the learners are not receiving any appropriate intervention to address their circumstances. Stress is experienced when there is an imbalance between the demands on individuals and the actual or perceived resources available to meet their challenges. Counsellors, psychologists and social workers can assist in reducing stress for learners by providing protective factors and processes that enable learners to achieve better in the face of adversity (Van Breda, 2018). Protective factors can be manifested in the form of inherent strengths of individuals which are internal factors or features of the environment that assist learners become resilient, valuable and worthwhile individuals which are extrinsic protective factors (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Zimmerman, 2013). Stress reduction is not only a matter of coping but also an opportunity for self-assessment of the ability to manage dysfunctional apprehensive cognitions and individuals' belief in their capacity to reconstruct the cognitions which are critical in managing stress (Hanna, 2019).

During my field visits I attended a session where the teachers who had attended SBST training organised by Matthew Goniwe Centre for Teacher Development were giving feedback to other staff members as a way of cascading and sharing their new knowledge. Although the shared information was valuable, I am of the opinion that the desired impact was not achieved for the following reasons:

- The teachers attended training for 5 days and their colleagues were expected to implement knowledge that was acquired in a 2 hour long workshop.

- The feedback session was held in the afternoon when teachers were constantly moving in and out of the venue; some left early because they had been scheduled to attend other workshops and others to attend to personal commitments.

5.4.7 Promotive Factors

Sameroff (2000) describes promotive factors as ‘assets’ or ‘resources’ associated with desirable outcomes at nearly all levels of risk. To build resilience, learners need to acquire coping skills that will allow them to confront adversity when it arises and sustain a sense of harmony in their lives. Werner and Smith (1982) studied children who were portrayed as strong and resourceful in harsh environments. Rutter (2013) argues that many people manage to produce relatively good outcome despite having experienced serious stress or adversity and that they mature in the face of overwhelming hardship. This implies that risk factors for learners are not always destructive; they sometime promote personal development and provide the basis for new skills. It is said that in most difficult problems there is some opportunity for growth. Ideas of empowerment, healing, community and membership are central to the strength perspective as well as the belief that trauma may be a source of challenge and opportunity (Turner, 2001; Mastens, 2008). The following figure, Figure 5.2 is an image of strengths and resilience.



Figure 5.2: Image of Strengths and Resilience

Masten (1994) describes resilience as a pattern created over time that is characterised by eventual good adaptation despite developmental risk, acute stressors or chronic adversity. Learners acquire strengths and techniques to adjust quickly from past experiences as well as inner strength and support from programmes, home, peers and community (Masten, 2001, 2014; Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013). Current available studies show that internal *locus* of control, higher level of social support and making meaning of traumatic events are linked to positive adjustment (Kimhi, Eshel, Lahad, & Leykin, 2019). Learners from dysfunctional families should distance themselves from problematic situations to achieve a sense of independence (Werner, 2000) and to avoid the likelihood of experiencing a psychiatric disorder.

Close family networks serve as a buffer against adverse social circumstances and they protect adolescents from the adversity they may face as individuals as it reinforces family attachment and strength to foster resilience among individual (Theron & Liebenberg, 2015). In the study it was noted how grandparents and some extended family members supported their grandchildren. They provide them with basic needs

and emotional support which serves as a buffer and gives the learners hope and courage to continue with their studies. The grandparents set constructive norms and practices as empowering resources for developing coping skills; they also influence the formation of resilience in adolescents (Ungar, 2015). Norms and social constructs define specific parameters that have the potential in achieving well-being, success and happiness. With reference to the study by German, Gonzales and Dumka, (2009), many Mexican families living in the United States carry a deep cultural notion of family unity. Similarly, *Ubuntu* in the South African context places a high value on the family as a unit and the obligation that individuals owe their families (Malindi, 2014; Theron, 2016; Theron & Phasha, 2015); it promotes interconnectedness (Nolte-Schamm, 2006) and reflects integral moves that include sharing and mutual care (Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009) as well as upholding interdependence (Ramphela, 2012).

Based on the results and findings of this study with regard to the experiences of suspended learners, I theorised that the promotive elements that operate in opposition to risk that can potentially assist adolescents to adapt and develop resilience include making connections with family, friends and others; helping oneself by helping others, as it is said: "*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (You are because of others); engaging in empowering activities that provide one with stability and comfort; reaching self-awareness and taking care of oneself; nurturing a positive view of oneself; keeping things in perspective; and maintaining a hopeful outlook (Carlson *et al.* 2003; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Perceptions of confidence and competence are key aspects of resilience (Windle, 2011; Ungar, 2011). Bandura (2012) suggests that a sense of competence may be a function of self-efficacy which influences the amount of stress, depression and anxiety suspended learners experience in their circumstances. Social Cognitive Theory subscribes to a casual structure grounded in the reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1986) of the interplay of intrapersonal influences; the behaviour individuals engage in; and the environmental forces that impinge upon them (see Figure 5.3, below).

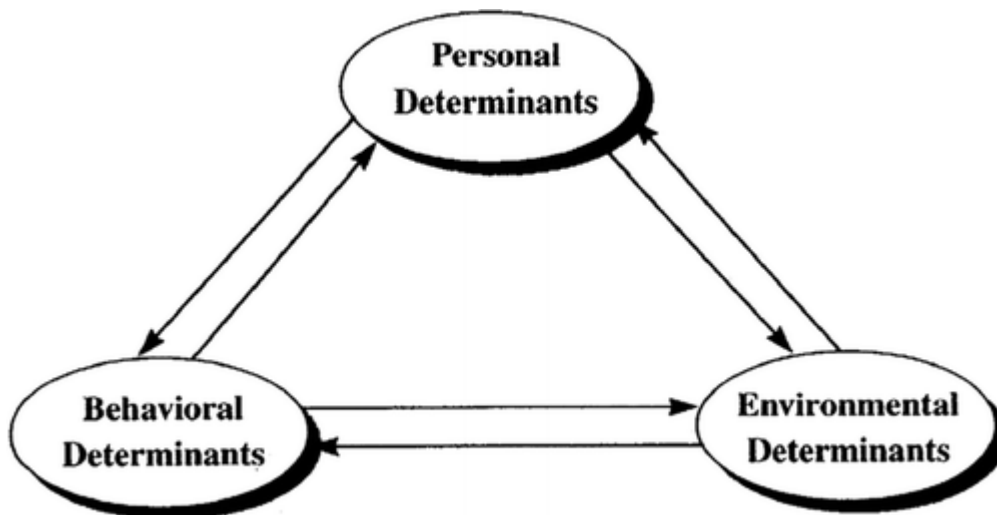


Figure 5.3: Reciprocal Determinants in the Causal Model of Social Cognitive Theory

Suspended learners have a hand in shaping events and the course their lives. The causal model is the dynamic interplay of intrapersonal influences in which self-efficacy is a constituent; the determinants of their actual behaviour; and the determinants of their environment that mediates their resilience. How individuals feel influences motivation; performance; decision-making processes; and making choices in activities and environments (Bandura, 1986; 2010). The findings of this study indicate a gap in the interplay of contextual determinants and the intrapersonal protective factors of suspended learners who experience increased levels of stress.

Self-efficacy refers to ways in which individuals perceive their capabilities rather than recording actual behaviour (Bandura 1993). Self-efficacy consists of knowing one's beliefs and dealing effectively with negative situational demands (Bandura 2010). It seems that unless learners in this study are able to believe that they can produce what they want and do, they remain discouraged to work or to endure challenges; hence, they retaliate with unacceptable behaviour. Rather than thinking about success, they find themselves stuck with obstacles, challenges and personal failures; they turn inward on their self-doubts instead of thinking about how to perform successfully. Resilience studies focus on the psycho-social environment for the development of individuals to provide opportunities that will facilitate their physical and psychological capacity to navigate and negotiate resources in a meaningful and cultural way Ungar,

2011). Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (Bandura, 1993).

Teachers should treat learners as responsible individuals and encourage them to be involved in various aspects of life and to have a sense of coherence. A sense of coherence means dealing with adverse factors to reduce stress in life. There is some confusion concerning how to measure the amount of support or control learners need in order to build their resilience. Resilience and thriving require that learners prioritise activities in their lives in terms of their values and what constitutes meaningfulness for them (Strümpfer, 2003; Moleli, 2005). The availability of a strong basis of values and cultural support helps learners overcome the most devastating conditions. Religious practice is also recognised to be an important mental health resource that may serve to reduce the erosion of self-esteem and sense of mastery or control that often result from stressful life events.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In this Chapter the research results and findings related to the experiences of suspended learners were presented. Specific reference was made to the risk factors that influence suspended learners' behaviour problems and the protective factors available at their disposal that can be mobilised to build resilience. It appears that some of these findings are similar to those of studies done elsewhere. The results were based on a discussion of themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged from the thematic data analysis. The exploration of themes uncovered a whole range of protective processes that are employed by suspended learners, their families, the schools and the community. I related the findings to the relevant literature and highlighted similarities, contradictions and the understandings which was arrived at.

In the final chapter, Chapter 6, the research questions that guided the research are answered. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made for the development of a framework to support suspended learners who display behaviour problems when building resilience.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the findings and interpretation of data gathered from interviews, focus group, documents and field notes were presented by situating and relating the results within an existing literature base and a conceptual framework. In this chapter a synopsis of findings is given; conclusions are drawn; recommendations are made; and answers are provided in terms of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The secondary research questions are first addressed, followed by the primary research question which suggests the potential contribution of the study to the existing body of research and practice in the field of Psychology of Education. In addition, the limitations of the study are presented to highlight the shortcomings of the study as well as my reflections. A suggested framework is outlined that could be used in support of learners with behaviour problems and suggestions for future research are made. Recommendations related to identified gaps are also discussed and the chapter concludes with what is deemed to be a suitable a metaphor.

6.2 SYNOPSIS OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 provided readers of this report with a broad overview of the background to the research; the preliminary research questions; the objectives of the research; the research design; and the method followed in the collection of data. In the first chapter it was indicated that the study explored the experiences of learners who had been suspended from school due to behavioural problems. The relevant available literature is cited where the phenomenon of out-of-school suspension is a reality and that it is increasing nationally and internationally. The risk factors impacting on learners' development are vast and could be attributed to internal and external factors.

It is suggested that schools are alarmed by the increasing rate of behaviour challenges portrayed by learners; that the escalating number surpasses the capacity of teachers who are trained to address and support learners with behaviour problems; and that families are overwhelmed by their individual circumstances that pose a risk to their

children's uncontrollable behaviour. There is an indication that the study considered protective factors that could be navigated and negotiated in a meaningful and cultural way in order to prevent and/or ameliorate the suspension of learners from school.

The aims of the study, the research questions, research design and methodology and population as well as the sampling are outlined. The data collection techniques that were used included semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, documents and field notes. Trustworthiness and credibility as well as ethical consideration and confidentiality were also considered in this research.

Chapter 2 gave an account of the literature reviewed in terms of the objectives of the study and the research questions. National and international perceptions and approaches used to address the phenomenon of school suspension were examined. Legislative approaches, as guiding principles, that are provided by the highest authorities in instituting suspension as an appropriate measure to address challenging behaviour were reviewed and discussed to give policy direction to schools for implementation. The chapter explored resilience trends and their application in building resilience of suspended learners. In addition, models of resilience were also examined to provide an understanding regarding the development of a support framework for intervention and support, specifically for learners in township school.

The literature review in Chapter 3 focused on the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The theoretical framework of this study was informed by the integration of the strength-based practice and the resilience theories. The strengths perspective formed the theoretical basis for this study with the focus on the strengths of families, schools and communities in order to establish intervention pathways to build the resilience of learners suspended due to behaviour problems. A strengths perspective relates to empowerment as the means of helping individuals, families, groups and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socio-economic and political strength and influence to improve their circumstances (Saleebey 2009). In contrast to the medical model, the strengths perspective is rooted in theories of empowerment and ecosystems, with underpinnings of humanistic philosophy (Pulla, 2012). The strengths perspective asserts that people have the capacity to develop and become independent and self-reliant if their strengths are identified and utilised (Saleebey,

2011; Patton, 2012; Midgley, 2010). The assessment of strengths was one of the aims of this study. The study was undertaken to discover the resources that are available in families, schools and communities that could contribute to supporting suspended learners.

Adolescents who participated in this study face significant adversity and are more likely to encountering problems as they navigate along their developmental paths (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). The deficits that predispose, enable and reinforce negative behaviour are highlighted in their experiences. The resilience approach emphasizes assets and resources as the centre for change. In the context of this research the term 'resilience' referred to the study of capabilities, processes and outcomes represented by desirable change in the context of risk or adversity. The benefit of conducting this study is that it allowed the researcher to develop an intervention strategy and to focus on mobilising assets and resources for suspended learners exposed to risk rather than concentrating on risk amelioration (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar & Cicchetti; Yates *et al.*, 2003).

Chapter 4 gave an in-depth account of the research design and methodology used in conducting this study. An outline of the research methodology was presented in table form (Table 4.1), followed by a discussion of the philosophical paradigm for this study. An interpretive paradigm was used because it reflects the recognition of the subjective understanding of participants' own understanding of their experience and the need to interpret it. Data collection techniques were outlined and discussed. Furthermore, issues of trustworthiness and credibility were discussed as well as the ethical considerations that directed the study.

Chapter 5 highlighted the results of the entire research study in terms of findings from the data that was collected in semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and documents as well as field notes. The findings were discussed in relation to the reviewed literature and the rationale of the study. The themes generated from the semi-structured interviews were explored in relation to the main research question and secondary research questions. This study suggested other questions that need further investigation. Therefore, recommendations for future research and practice are

presented in Chapter to build on the results of this study. The generalised discussion of results established conclusions for the overall study.

In Chapter 6 a synopsis of the preceding chapters is presented and this is followed by a detailed exploration of research questions. Recommendations are made related to the research findings, as discussed in the literature review and analysis and interpretation of data in Chapter 5 that culminated in the findings of the research. Lastly, an intervention framework is suggested that may be used to support learners who are suspended in schools.

6.3 EXPLORATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN TERMS OF THEMES

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe and explain the experiences of suspended learners identified with behaviour problems. The questions that guided this research were presented in Chapter 1. In this section the four secondary research questions are addressed using the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the collected data; an attempt is made to address the primary question as well.

6.3.1 Secondary Research Question 1: What are the risk factors experienced by suspended learners who reside in townships and attend the selected secondary schools?

In district, urban, rural or township schools, each possesses certain qualities and characteristics that create unique distinctions between and among the schools, learners and their surrounding communities. In this study it was found that the risk factors that suspended learners are faced with include, but are not limited to, both internal and external factors, such as single parenting; socio-economic status and the lack of teacher capacity to deal with behaviour problems of learners; unskilled parenting; and poor disciplinary procedures in schools. In terms of the two selected schools, the risk factors were found to be directly and indirectly contextual in the way in which they were experienced by individual learners. Predisposed factors, such as an inability to read and speak English, low self-esteem and poor sense of coherence were also evident in some of the learners.

Single parents, low socio-economic status of families and poor parenting skills emerged as risk factors experienced by suspended learners in the study. This study did not focus on the differences between participants and the two selected schools; however, it is important to mention the historical background of their families to put the experiences of the suspended learners in context. Although the learner participants were selected from two different school settings, they all reside in the township and come from almost similar family structures. Of the 12 parents interviewed, 8 were reported to be single mothers; 2 are widowers and 1 is a widow. Only one family was said to be a nucleus family. Seven of the 12 parents are unemployed and depend on child grants for survival. The grandparents also apparently use their pension money to support their grandchildren. It appears that the behaviour of suspended learners in this study is influenced by the effects of family contexts related to deficiencies in single parenting and the poor socio-economic background of families.

Accounts of negative experiences, however, suggest very different pathways. For many, it was the sense of a lack of emotional nurture or a failure to identify the need at an early age that often led to behaviour problems. Problem behaviour may arise from a complex interaction of risk and protective factors across a number of domains and these clusters differently depending on the type of behaviour portrayed. Risk factors identified at the two schools being studied include late-coming, substance abuse, disrespect of teachers, gambling, bullying, vandalism, lack of self-respect and challenging authority.

Suspended learners' challenges seem to be embedded in poor disciplinary procedures in schools which exacerbate the risk of behaviour problems. Learners continue to be suspended from class for longer periods of time because of their challenging behaviour and, generally, by the absence of proper disciplinary measures in schools. The learner participants expressed their frustration of being suspended for minor misdemeanours, like being found loitering in the toilet or for late-coming. Some of the participants alluded to the fact that the principal gives them a letter inviting their parents to the school for particularly minor forms of misconduct and suspension - as an alternative form of punishment - negatively impacts on learners' academic progress and increases their risk of involvement in the justice system in the future. It emerged from the research that proper procedures in screening, identifying, assessing and supporting learners

with barriers to learning are not adhered to as proposed in the SIAS policy. The school-based support team appears to become redundant as the school management team takes control in implementing disciplinary measures.

Although the code of conduct for learners serves as a protective tool, it was found that its application is not reinforced and does not seem to have any meaning for the learners. Participant suspended learners in this study were aware of the school's code of conduct and seemed to understand the schools' expectations in terms of behaviour as set in the code of conduct. It was concluded that the learners do not comply with the rules intentionally. Familiarising oneself with rules and regulations usually means that you will actually abide by them but it is different with learners who demonstrate behavioural problems as they tend not comply with their school's code of conduct. Self-regulatory skills, such as planning, goal-setting and self-monitoring are important protective factors within the self and can influence both emotional and behavioural outcomes (Bower, Carroll, & Ashman, 2012). This capacity seems to be overlooked by the school community and, hence, learners fall prey to the risk of suspension.

6.3.2 Secondary Research Question 2: What are the effects of suspension on the cognitive, physical and psychological being of learners?

The adverse effects of school suspension on the learner can be profound. The observable behaviour of children is a reactive expression of their inner feeling towards the poor treatment they receive from their environments. Feelings of a lack of support could be detected in the learners in this study. They displayed poor concentration, poor receptive and expressive language development, impulsivity and inattentiveness which are important skills needed for learners to access learning in the classroom. In misguided support of these learners school suspension is used as an alternative form of discipline. Researchers maintain that disciplinary action that takes learners out of the classroom can make it more difficult for them to remain on track in their progress academically (Burke, 2015; Dieringer, Cregor & Willis, 2015; Thompson, 2015, Skiba & Losen 2015, Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Marchbanks, Blake, Booth, Carmichael, Seibert & Fabelo, 2014). From the school discipline records and learner's progress reports I perused, it was evident that the participant learners in the study do not coping well in terms of their academic performance. Strong indicators of risk for challenging

behaviour include poor academic performance, homework not done, regular absenteeism for no apparent reason, truancy from classes and late-coming. Heleniak, Jenness, Van der Stoep, McCauley & McLaughlin (2016) maintain that school suspension may cause learners to feel that there is a lack of support from the learning community which causes a natural reaction of disengagement and, ultimately, results in learners dropping out of school or being kept back in a grade.

In their narratives the learners spoke about being exposed to contexts of risk that included internal symptoms of abuse, neglect, poverty and rejection as emotional experiences (Infurna, Reichl, Parzer, Schimmenti, Biface & Kaess, 2016). They appear to roam around the school aimlessly and do not seem bothered when they are suspended multiple times. They appeared to feel worthless, unwanted and unloved with low self-esteem (Abuya, Odundo, Rambo & Nyonje, 2016; Garofalo, Holden, Zeigler-Hill & Velotti, 2016); they seemed not to care about themselves or anyone else. Because of their uncontrolled impulsive behaviour fights erupted on the school premises in the presence of teachers. According to Salovey (in Ebersöhn, 2008), the needs of children are often insufficiently prioritised as they do not represent an influential constituency in the political arena and, as a result, they are easily ignored.

It was noted during field visits that suspended learners seemed to have lost hope and courage. During member-checking the researcher discovered that a few of the learners had dropped out of school. Parents also indicated that they felt helpless and were tired of being summoned to school several times just to be informed of their children's transgressions without any intervention plan being put in place. Previous research indicates that leaving school early is the outcome of a long process of disengagement from school (Brea & Morris, 2014; Skiba & Losen, 2015; Maphosa & Shumba 2010). Heleniak *et al.* (2016) maintain that a tendency to use maladaptive cognitive responses to distress, like rumination, may also develop when emotional displays are met with dismissive or punishing reactions from adults.

Ironically, school suspension often places learners back in the very environment that may have contributed to their challenging behaviour in the first place. Children reared in stressful environments are often surrounded by caregivers and other adults who model ineffective responses to distress (Heleniak *et al.* 2016). Research has also

shown that the most omnipresent form of child maltreatment results from a poor relationship between parents and children (Arslan, 2016; Hart & Glaser 2011; Infurna *et al.*, 2016).

Although Masten (2001) describes resilience as functioning well under adverse conditions, the learners in this study were found to be incapacitated with limited cognitive abilities to navigate and negotiate relevant resources in a meaningful way. Often risk or adversity is not an isolated event that children are able to actively change. Although the findings revealed that there are external service providers in the vicinity of the school that serve as a buffer for suspended learners, they seem to be underutilised or are inaccessible - as alluded to by the participants.

Due to ignorance or a lack of knowledge some parents were not aware of the resources at their disposal. Therefore, the use of suspension as a form of discipline increased the number of learners who were suspended; the same learners were repeatedly suspended. If policy is adhered to and intervention rather than punishment implemented, the number of suspensions would possibly drop. Poor discipline may lead to learner disengagement, alienation and unacceptable behaviour (Skiba *et al.*, 2011, 2014). The findings in this study indicate that suspensions as an alternative form of discipline impacts negatively on learner retention and increases the number of school dropouts. Periodic scrutiny of policy should be carried out not only in terms of a need to better understand the educational, emotional and social impact of school suspension on learners but also to change the lives of suspended learners.

6.6.3 Secondary Research Question 3: What personal factors are available in families, schools and communities and how can they be accessed to effectively assist the school and learners at risk?

Resilient children and adolescents are thought to utilize social support systems more effectively than their peers. Teachers, ministers, peers and older friends, like the supportive parent in the previous section, form 428 Journal of School Psychology bonds with resilient children or adolescents. These relation bonds are commonly cited as buffering risk and facilitating adaptive development (Garmezy, 1983; Werner & Smith, 1982). In the context of this study the learners seemed to have varied family

circumstances; several receive emotional and financial support from their grandparents and other extended family members. The findings in this study seem to agree with those of Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1986) who cited the proximal process variables as protective factors in children's development. Bronfenbrenner (2001) argues that to support development, the proximal processes have to be a repetitive face-to-face interaction of an increasingly complex nature and should take place on a regular basis over an extensive period of time. Therefore, suspended learners' optimal development depends on the quality and also the quantity of the proximal processes in both family microsystems (Ebersöhn, 2015).

Employment opportunities and higher levels of education of parents also serve as buffers to resilience. Other factors that have been consistently associated with resilience include the influence of support systems, such as caring neighbours, teachers, mentors and friends, who reinforce and reward competencies. It emerged from this study that although the teachers accept responsibility to mentor and support learners, an element of fear was expressed due to the violent and aggressive tendencies displayed by some learners with behaviour problems. Most of the teachers cited the need for self-protection, claiming that the system did not provide them with any.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) is the highest authority that protects the rights of all citizens. It sets the tone for discipline and morality that should be incorporated in education policies. Processes of learner support should be underpinned in the norms and values of the constitution; therefore, the constitution serves as a pillar of support for learners with behaviour problems in schools. All education governance policies are informed by the constitution and have a protective value to enhance the well-being of learners. On perusing the school documents it was observed that both schools have a code of conduct for learners. The purpose of a code of conduct is to protect and promote the integrity and security of each learner and all members of the school community. The participants were aware of the document but did not seem to conceptualise it. The codes of conduct reviewed reflect not only the rules of the schools, but the rights of the learners as well. It was stated in the codes of conduct that "the school prides itself on its record of allowing learners to express and

resolve school-related grievances together with the school Management team (SMT) and School Governing Body” (GDE, Code of Conduct for Learners, 2016).

During field visits it was noted that both schools have established a school-based support team (SBST). It also came to my attention that all staff members in both schools have been introduced to the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS, 2014). Orientation workshops are intended to outline procedures to be followed by teachers in supporting identified needs of learners in a consistent and standard way within the inclusive education system. However, the focus group participants indicated that there are still some discrepancies with regard to personal development training sessions that teachers attend. Some teachers indicated that preference is often given to Life Orientation teachers to be capacitated in dealing with barriers to learning. A study conducted by Spaul (2015) shows that schools which served predominantly White learners under apartheid remain functional despite now being racially mixed, while the vast majority of those that served Black learners remain dysfunctional and unable to provide the necessary support systems for learners with behaviour problems.

The characteristics of individual teachers and quality of instruction are regarded as important preconditions for dealing with challenging behaviour. Competence and commitment means that teachers are well equipped to provide a supportive atmosphere and become highly effective professionals. Documented research suggests that teacher support is inadequate, leaving teachers feeling unsupported and ill-equipped to face the challenges presented by learners with behaviour problems. Recently, Van der Berg, Spaul, Wills, Gustafsson and Kotzé (2016:26) reported on this, stating that “teacher support is far from adequate in most public education systems”; it may be concluded that teachers do not receive thorough, appropriate, and/or sufficient support (Annual Performance Plan 2014–2015:22) and school visits from district officials do not focus on areas of support (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2014).

The SIAS Policy (2014) stipulates the roles and responsibilities of education districts and regional offices in terms of conducting school visits and collaborating with School Based Support Teams (SBST) in schools. SBSTs screen and identify additional

support needs that are not met by current plans of action and apply for additional support from the District Based Support team (DBST). It is the responsibility of the DBST to plan, budget and make provision for the necessary resources to address identified needs. From the data collected in this study, the teachers indicated that support from the DBST was not sufficient due to a lack specialised professionals in the field of special needs.

Many children become resilient when faced with adversity. Resilience does not have to stem from trauma; it can also develop in supportive home environments and classrooms. In the study conducted by James, Reddy, Ellahebokusd, Sewpaul and Naidoo (2017) it was found that contextual factors related to relationships, like family cohesiveness, parental supervision and school connectedness, are among the protective factors that mediate risk and promote resilience in adolescents. These findings have implications for an integrated approach to adolescent risk behaviour aimed at individuals and associated contexts, like the family, school and community (Jessor, 1991; Nkansah-Amankra *et al.*, 2010; Patel *et al.*, 2007). These skills and knowledge of strategies that enhance protective factors are crucial to promoting and nurturing adolescent resilience.

6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study of resilience has surged over the past decade in many disciplines; studies have included some related to individuals and families in the Social Sciences. Recommendations made and suggestions proposed from in this study may ameliorate behaviour problems in schools. An African idiom that promotes early intervention in learners that says “*E robjwa e sa le meetse*” advocates the importance of teaching survival skills from an early age. Similarly, suspended learners need to be capacitated to be resilient and self-supportive in difficult situations in preparation for life after school. This can only happen if the identification of behavior problems in learners is done sooner and if parents, teachers and caregivers are capacitated to do that and act accordingly.

Recommendations emanating from the findings of this study are the following:

6.4.1 Recommendation 1

From the parent interviews it was evident that parents are not informed about the legal processes of learner suspension, let alone the internal referral process followed by schools. It is recommended that parents should be made familiar with factors that lead to suspension. They should also be provided with information concerning their right to appeal suspensions and be given contact details of relevant stakeholders in case they have questions. Parents should be afforded opportunities to attend workshops on aspects of learner suspension and the role of parents and caregivers and be informed of the mandate of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) with regard to suspension of learners. This will benefit all stakeholders and maximize collaboration between parents, school and the community.

6.4.2 Recommendation 2

Suspended learners who participated in this study were observed to have cognitive, emotional and social needs which are manifested in behaviour problems. Recent research emphasizes the importance of supportive and caring adults in communities and neighbourhoods in promoting positive development in children and youth. It is, therefore, recommended that teachers should be capacitated to facilitate the early identification of learners with behavior problems so that appropriate intervention can take place. In order to equip teachers to do this, there should be workshops for newly employed teachers in collaboration with the Department of Education, the Department of Social Development and school social workers situated at the GDE district offices.

6.4.3 Recommendation 3

According to Lerner, Von Eye, Lerner, Levin-Bizan & Bowers (2010), contextual and inherent assets are crucial for young people to thrive and flourish. Experiencing a strong sense of belonging and connectedness to the school can be considered a critical factor in the overall positive development of learners that contributes to their social and emotional well-being and their academic growth in early adolescence. It is recommended that the learners suspended for more than five school days should participate in a programme for behaviour modification. Learners who participate in the

programme should be allowed to reflect on their behaviour; identify their challenges; and receive any additional support they might need to build their resilience.

6.8 SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the increasing numbers of suspended learners in township schools and the risk factors experienced by suspended learners, family dynamics and their socio-economic background has been found to contribute to the frustration levels of parents in terms of their lack of capacity to navigate and negotiate the available resources to enhance the resilience of their children. Learners' academic achievement and progression is also profoundly affected by the socio-economic characteristics of their families, schools and communities (Lam, Ardington & Leibbrandt, 2011). This study has presented a picture of what suspended learners go through that leads them to externalise their emotions through behaviour problems. I believe that a systemic analysis of the multiplicity of challenges faced by these learners will identify a number of issues that need to be investigated further. In his study Tlale (2016) alludes to the importance of a collaborative engagement between parents and teachers. In addition, the Department of Education and the Department of Social Development attempt to provide support and guidance for parents in the form of workshops with the intent to empower them with parenting skills but they neglect the parents' personal and contextual life experiences. The findings of this study have identified the need for the psycho-social experiences of parents to be addressed. It is, therefore, recommended that future research should explore the risk factors experienced by parents so that they are able to corroborate positively with schools in supporting their children. This has important implications for what may be considered as a target for the development of interventions (Windle, 2011); the adolescents' academic achievement and progression are profoundly affected by the socio-economic characteristics of their families, schools and communities (Lee, & Lam, 2016).

6.6 SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE PRACTICE BY SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

The results of this study are relevant in that they align with important theoretical assumptions about the acknowledgement of the significance of community support for suspended learners throughout their school career and how significant connections

between parents, school and external community service providers can promote the resilience of adolescents.

It is suggested that in terms of school communities different stakeholders offering psycho-social support for learners with behaviour problems in the field of education should familiarise themselves with the findings of this research which have implications for the development of interventions to promote resilience in learners and to improve psycho-social outcomes for suspended learners which could have the potential of transferability to individuals with behaviour problems.

6.7 SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT SUSPENDED LEARNERS

There are many ways in which schools can build the resilience of suspended learners. In terms of their context the researcher chose to use the principles embedded in the definition of resilience provided by Ungar (2008). Dr Michael Ungar has worked as a social worker and family therapist for over 2 years and he is currently the funder of the International Resilience Research Centre in Canada that coordinates resilience research in over 14 Countries, including South Africa. The proposed principles of resilience include structures around the individual; services the individual receives; how health knowledge is generated; and a combination of all with characteristics of individuals that allow them to overcome adversity.

“Reclaiming Personal Power” is a suggested framework that is embedded in the strength-based perspective and resilience theories. The framework is informed by contemporary theories about what influences learners’ well-being and resilience. It is aimed at building the resilience of suspended learners to help them reclaim their power to be self-sufficient and manage their lives. The suggested framework adopts proven methods developed and tested by researchers of resilience, such as Ungar (2008), as something nurtured rather than something innate. Resilience is much more than an individual’s capacity to overcome adversity. It is also the result of how well individuals, their families, schools and communities work together to help vulnerable learners navigate their way to the resources they need for wellbeing and whether those resources are made available in ways that are meaningful to the learners. The

framework takes cognisance of positive inherent attributes and capabilities that suspended learners possess and how they can be mobilised.

6.7.1 Conceptualizing the Suggested Framework

The rationale for this framework has its origins in the concept of reclaiming personal power embedded in the integration of the strength based perspective and resilience theories discussed in Chapter 3. The integration of the internal and external resources of suspended learners is critical in designing and supporting them to reclaim their personal power to thrive in the face of adversity. It was noted that the capacity to learn is the largest vulnerability for learners with behaviour problem and, therefore, early experiences in life shape the way they relate to others and themselves for the rest of their lives. Reclaiming personal power is intended to be a collaborative effort that supports suspended learners to regain their power - irrespective of the challenges they face in their lives.

A strength-based approach aims to take advantage of existing strengths, positive qualities and intentional promotion of well-being and resilience, rather than focusing solely on deficits or problems that need to be fixed (Alvord & Grados, 2005). Individual resilience is the interplay between the internal attributes of individuals and the external factors of the environment. The framework, therefore, looks at the integration of strengths in both the internal and external attributes of relationships and identity formation as well as awareness of resources and how they can be mobilised to build resilience.

Acknowledging the influence of individuals' environment will help to identify systematic as well as individual change intervention efforts. According to Bronfenbrenner socio-ecological theory, a complete understanding of children's behaviour is gained from first-hand observation; changes made in the real-world setting, like the home, school and the community. It is, nonetheless, also important to focus on how to optimise strengths so that children may develop to their full potential and cope with challenging experiences. Saleebey (1996) argues that a strengths perspective demands a different way of looking at individuals, families and communities. Similarly, Weick *et al.* (1989) maintain that a strengths perspective involves practitioners in assisting people to

identify and appreciate their own strengths and resources. It is from this perception that the researcher sought to develop “Reclaiming Personal Power” as a framework for intervention that individuals and groups could draw on as a basis for change.

The following figure illustrates what the researcher regards as a tentative suggestion concerning how the framework can be conceptualized in practice to build the resilience of suspended learners. The figure shows how the integration of the three micro-systems may be applied to enhance the resilience of suspended learners, translated into three elements of practice that emerged from the interview data: relationships, identity and access to material resources as a baseline assessment to improved and intensified support systems. This framework serves as a ground-breaking manual that has effective solutions for teachers.

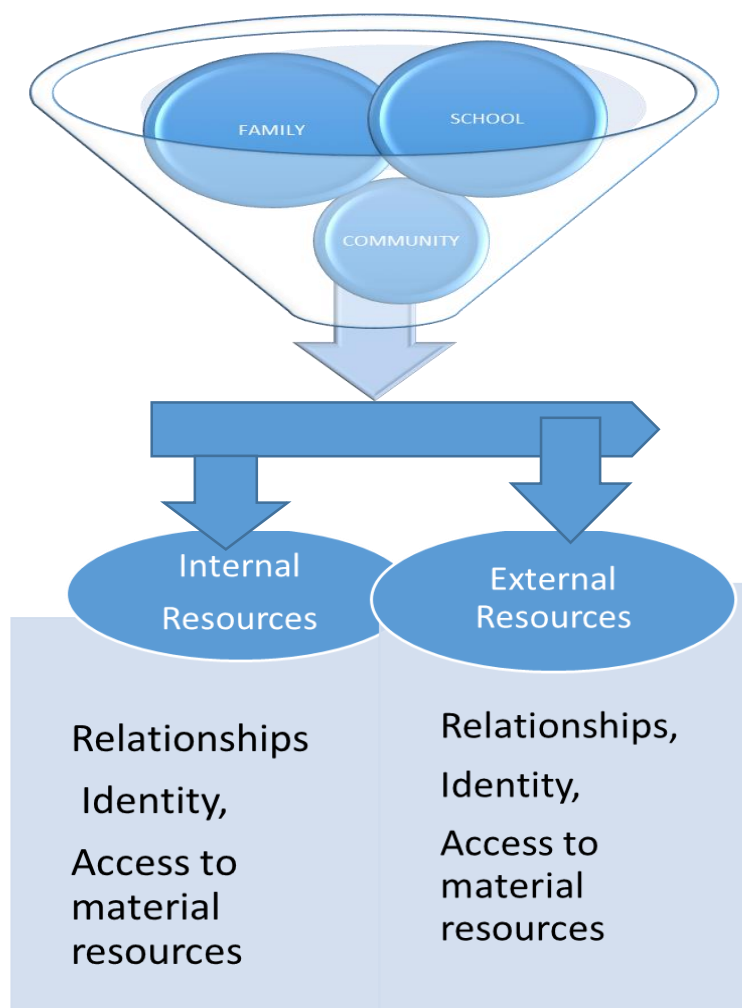


Figure 6.1: Integration of Internal and External Protective Factors to Build Resilience

It is important to note that the proposed framework should not be used in an assessment capacity. Rather, it is meant to be a pilot project after which improvements can be introduced. Research shows that aversive practices, like suspension, are implemented in the hope of changing learner behaviour (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Although the strategy emerged from good intentions, it is harmful and discriminatory in nature. It is the responsibility of the parents, the school and the community to establish meaningful relationships capacitating systems of support to build the resilience of learners and enable them to navigate and negotiate resources that enhance their well-being.

6.7.2 Strategies to Reclaim Personal Power

The following table contains information and an outline of the three micro-systems that may be applied to enhance the resilience of suspended learners, in the three elements of practice that emerged from the interview data: relationships, identity and access to material resources as a baseline assessment to improved and intensified support systems and related to the proposed development of envisaged protective factors to achieve the desired outcomes of the strength-based perspective.

Table 6.1: Strategies to Reclaim Personal Power

Relationships	Identity	Access to Material Resources
<p>Characteristics</p> <p>Diverse pathways arise in family life because of the various interaction involved in shaping the adaptive function and development of systems.</p>	<p>Characteristics</p> <p>Dealing with school discipline issues is one of the most stressful roles of teachers. No one likes to call parents with bad news about learners' behaviour without tarnishing the learner's dignity.</p>	<p>Characteristics</p> <p>To assist learners to access resources designed to build their resilience they need to be exposed to the relevant resources. Schools serve to facilitate support for learners facing adversity so that they can cope resiliently (Mampane &</p>

<p>Within the school-system, learners should acquire education and have positive learning experiences with support in an inclusive setting in order to recover from severe adversity (Masten, 1994).</p> <p>Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) believe that it is essential to develop internal assets in adolescents that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Social skills for connecting and developing positive relationships with parents, teachers, organizations and service providers within their communities; (b) Self-efficacy for health-promoting behaviour; and (c) Effective approaches to build the resilience of adolescents, including establishing positive relationships and learning emotional skills to capacitate learners to negotiate and navigate resources. Parents, 	<p>Learners should be provided with opportunities to express their talents, undergo experiences and receive respect in a non-threatening way.</p>	<p>Bouwer, 2006). Schools should create a healthy learning environments that promote self-efficacy, enjoyment of school, healthy classroom participation, self-esteem, and motivation (Martin & Marsh, 2006)</p> <p>The selected schools have a physical structure equipped with furniture, qualified teachers, learning materials, feeding scheme, and a sports field. Teachers can foster competencies in vulnerable learners by structuring activities, to incorporate learners' interests, abilities, experiences, prior knowledge and learning styles (Kruger & Prinsloo, 2008; Martin & Marsh, 2006)</p> <p>For learners to navigate and negotiate for resources to solve interpersonal problems</p>
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<p>teachers and service providers can support adolescents without judging them.</p> <p>By establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, communicating effectively is essential to enhance the quality of attachment to families, teachers and the community.</p>		<p>the following activities are suggested:</p>
<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Self-Concept <p>Learners need to be able to assess their supportive structures (what do they affiliate with; activities they engage in and significant others they can depend on) as well as the role that parents play in promoting cultural norms and values, spirituality and general moral codes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of School Policy for Family Engagement 	<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Learners’ Dignity and Privacy <p>Protecting learners’ privacy should be a priority. Teachers need to be careful about what they say when they notify parents of the learners’ transgressions, taking into consideration that they have to return to their classrooms with dignity and purpose, unhindered by past mistakes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Awareness Exercises 	<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of Resources <p>Provision of evidenced-based material should be provided by the Department of Education and other external organisations to maximize resources that enhance learner development and promote resilience; cater for diversity and experiences in the classrooms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing <p>Sessions can be arranged by teachers or school leadership in the form of</p>

<p>To make an input in terms of family support, parents need to be capacitated with the actual development of school policy (Green, Nese, McIntosh, Niskioka, Eliason & Canizal, 2015). Involving parents/families is key to enhancing parent involvement and to setting lifetime positive relationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Development Programme <p>The effective professional development of teachers is necessary in preparing them to build a positive relationship with learners. As a teacher support system and capacity is strengthened to engage in practice of an evidence-based classroom, learners will become more competent in displaying expected behaviour and the number of office referrals will be reduced</p>	<p>Helping learners develop self-awareness is should help them maintain a good self-concept by being able to recognise their thoughts and emotions and their influence on their behaviour as well as accurately assessing their strengths and limitations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Intelligence <p>Teachers can engage learners in social emotional learning programmes (SEL) to help learners acquire and apply knowledge, skills and attitudes that enhance personal development, social relationships and ethical behaviour as well as enhance their resilience. According to (Catalano <i>et al.</i>, 2004) learners who receive an emotional and social skills programme in a positive</p>	<p>awareness campaigns to educate learners on issues such as substance abuse, gambling, positive social relationships, and mental health in general.</p> <p>Schools should provide knowledge base and teach problem solving skills and provide settings where learners connect with caring and competent adults (Masten, 1994).</p> <p>Teach using project-based learning tools. Learners must taught skills to collaborate, work in teams and get along. These are all social skills.</p> <p>Strengths based approach that identifies student abilities and positive qualities then works proactively to build upon these strengths, gives your learners more opportunities to be successful and build a strong sense of self-worth.</p>
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<p>and performance increased.</p>	<p>school environment tend to be more resilient.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assertiveness Help learners to develop assertiveness to allow them to appropriately express how they feel when building their self-confidence. Learners in this study were found to display low self-esteem and lack of confidence. The rationale, therefore, for including social communication skills is to enhance their ability to manage relationships and to express their emotions without feeling guilty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of responsibility Making connections and building their social support network. The activity can be used to teachers and learners how to establish positive interpersonal relationships and choose appropriate role models. • Building on strengths Identifying the gifts and good qualities that learners feel they have and allow them to engage in a discussion to reflect on their own strengths.
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Communicating genuine realistic appreciation and encouragement to learners, is a powerful way to nurture self-esteem and resilience. When learners believe that they are worthy and capable of overcoming challenges, they become resilient. Too often teachers focus on learners' negative behaviour while their positive gifts, qualities and strengths are not sufficiently recognised. The importance of the suggested intervention is that it can be incorporated in curriculum; supported on the sports field; fostered after school; and confirmed in the hallways. Teachers, parents and the community have a role to play in the social and emotional development of learners; it only takes a smile, a proper name and genuine passion.

6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is acknowledged that the research had the following limitations which were addressed in this study:

- Although the participants lived in a township, the two selected schools were situated in different contexts; one is a former Model C school in a suburb of Pretoria and the other one is in the township of Mamelodi. The participants shared common residential resources but different school environments which may produce different outcomes in a comparative study. Thus, the demographics of the urban area may not transfer to another population.
- Although English was used to develop interview questions, the interview process had to be translated into Sepedi to accommodate both learners and parents to make the questions more understandable and less confusing for them. However, this prolonged the process of transcription as data captured in Sepedi had to be translated into English before it could be transcribed. There is a possibility that the researcher may not have captured the exact meaning of participants' words with their intended meaning and, hence, some meaning might have been lost in translation.
- The responsibility of identifying participants was left to the schools. The selection criteria included identifying 12 learners aged between 13 and 15 in Grades 8 and 9 who had been suspended more than once because of behaviour problems. Finally, due to unforeseen circumstances the participants consisted of 12 boys and only one girl. Unfortunately, one boy was expelled from school and had been placed at a different school and, therefore, the learner had to be excluded from participating. The girl also refused to be audio-recorded; as a result her responses were not captured and were not used in the analysis and interpretation of findings.
- It was not the purpose of this study to extend results beyond generalisations of the specific population from which the sample was drawn. Therefore, the number of participants who took part in the study was rather limited. With the increasing number of suspensions of learners in schools from various contexts

future research should explore the diversity of the risk and protective factors with larger samples.

- Time was a limiting factor in this study. In order to address this limitation, leadership at the relevant locations of the study facilitated the coordination of scheduled interviews to expedite the interview process. The pressure of time limits did not hinder the research locations or the availability of some participants to provide thorough in-depth responses.

6.9 CONCLUSION

The qualitative study consisted of 12 secondary school learners who had been suspended more than once as well as their parents and their teachers. The data was collected in semi-structured open-ended interviews with learner participants, their parent's and a selected delegation of teachers as well as in focus group interviews and by means of a document review. The total sample for this study consisted of 12 participants to reach data saturation (Yin, 2011). Data collected from interviews and documents were studied and analysed to identify common patterns and themes related to the experiences of the suspended learners who were identified with behaviour problems and make decisions about what could be done to build their resilience.

Adolescents who have experienced extreme adversity, such as rejection, poverty and abuse often have no clear sense of what the future holds for them; they grow up viewing the future and the world as dangerous (Sewell, 2002). The metaphor of Kintsugi bowl depicts the cracks in the lives of suspended learners and projects hope in building their resilience.



Figure 6.2: The Metaphor of “Kintsugi Bowl”

The ancient Japanese art of *Kintsugi* offers a rich metaphor related to the idea of resilience. Kintsugi means ‘to join with gold.’ It is a crafting method that consists of assembling broken pieces of an accidentally-smashed pot (Scherb, 2018). The broken pieces of the pot are glued together with lacquer inflected with a very luxuriant gold powder (Scherb, 2018). The visible fractures are adorned with gold rather than hidden. Symbolically, the golden cracks represent the worth of the bowl because of its imperfections rather than despite them. The bowl resembles suspended learners with behaviour problems, cracked by the adversities of life. The gold graces the pot with the quality of beauty, uniqueness and strength. The metaphor provides a lesson for embracing the failures and experiences of suspended learners that crack their spirit. It may be asked: “*How do learners turn those life cracks into gold?*” This relates back to the researcher’s idea for building resilience in suspended learners. The beauty and uniqueness of the gold relates to the inherent personal traits of learners as well as the positive protective resources available within the family, school and community as potential contributions in terms of the existing theoretical and knowledge base with regard to building resilience in learners at risk.

Despite an increase in knowledge about the resilience of children faced with adversity, there are still gaps with regard to the complexity of relationship dynamics between schools and parents in support of at-risk learners in their optimal development. Learner support is most effective if it is applied when and where the trouble occurs. School suspensions should only be considered as a last resort for the most serious behavioural transgressions. It is important to assess each case of learner misbehaviour individually and tailor the response intervention according to the unique challenges of the learner. By excluding learners from school, suspensions shift the problem from the school to the community. Suspensions give learners who do not enjoy going to school what they want – time off school. Some learners actively seek suspension to participate in activities and events outside school, such as staying at home to play video games. School suspensions reduce the chances of learners completing their education. They can also impair employment opportunities and negatively affect learners’ futures. It is worth trying to identify what underlies learners’ challenging behaviour and provide constructive responses to address the issues. Nothing is as effective as a personal touch. The results of this study could advance the

information base; improve school district policies; and improve prevention practices to enhance the resilience of suspended learners.

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ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Ethics Clearance Certificate

Annexure B: Application for Permission to Undertake Research in GDE Institutions

Annexure C: Application to Two District Offices for Permission to Undertake Research in Schools

Annexure D: Letter to Principals Requesting Permission to Conduct Research

Annexure E: Letter to Parents, Guardians, Teachers and District Officials Inviting Participation in Research Study

Annexure F Letter Requesting Parental Consent for Minors to Participate in a Research Project

Annexure G: Focus Group Consent and Confidentiality Agreement

Annexure H: Turnitin Report

Annexure I: Declaration of Editing

Annexure J: Permission Letters from Gauteng Department of Education and Schools to Undertake Research in Schools

Annexure K : Example Transcriptions

ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Ethics Clearance Certificate



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2017/09/13

Ref: **2017/09/13/04229509/17/MC**

Dear Ms Methi

Name: Ms L M Methi

Student: 04229509

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2017/09/16 to 2022/09/13

Researcher:

Name: Ms L M Methi

Email: linam.methi@gmail.com

Telephone: 0824176066

Supervisor:

Name: Prof LDN Tlale

Email: tlaleldn@unisa.ac.za

Telephone: 012 4292064

Title of research:

Building resilience in expelled and suspended learners identified with behaviour problems

Qualification: D Ed in Psychology of Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2017/09/13 to 2022/09/13.

*The **medium to high risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2017/09/13 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and



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principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date 2022/09/13. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

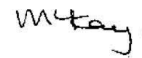
Note:

*The reference number **2017/09/13/04229509/17/MC** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



Dr M Claassens
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
mcdtc@netactive.co.za



Prof V McKay
EXECUTIVE DEAN



Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

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Annexure B: Application for Permission to Undertake Research in GDE Institutions



Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I, Lina Mmakgabo Methi - a student at UNISA, request permission to conduct research in two of your schools. The title of my study is: **BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SUPPORT OF SUSPENDED LEARNERS**. I hope that the knowledge and perceptions gained in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the unique dynamic causes of behaviour problems and offer effective support strategies for parents, teachers and district officials in dealing with challenging behaviour in schools.

The role of the participants in the study will be to respond in interviews individually and in a group; participate in focus group sessions while the researcher observes qualitatively to collect rich and directly observed data. Documents, such as learner profiles and school discipline policies, will be examined to obtain an understanding of the discipline processes followed by the selected school. The study will entail face-to-face interviews with the parents/guardians/foster parents of the identified learners; group interviews with the learners; focus group interviews with the principals, delegated School Governing Body members, Life Orientation Heads of Department and District Officials.

Participation in the study is voluntary; the participants will not be exposed to any form of risk or injury during the interviews and the confidentiality of the content of interviews will be maintained. Participants will be free to withdraw at any time during the course of the study without any threat or penalty. There will be no monetary benefits or compensation related to participating in the study. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in the study. The University of South Africa, in collaboration with my supervisor, is guiding this study. The researcher will furnish the schools with the

findings of this study in the form of a copy of a thesis and recommendations made on the basis of the proposed study.

Please contact me should you have any queries or concerns.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Ms LM Methi

Annexure C: Application to Two District Offices for Permission to Undertake Research in Schools



Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN ONE OF YOUR SCHOOLS

I, Lina Mmakgabo Methi - a student at UNISA, request permission to conduct research in one of your schools. The title of my study is: **BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SUPPORT OF SUSPENDED LEARNERS**. It is hoped that the knowledge and perceptions gained in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the unique dynamic causes of behaviour problems and offer effective support strategies for parents, teachers and district officials in dealing with challenging behaviour in schools. The role of the participants in the study will be to respond to interviews individually and in a focus group. The study will entail one-on-one interviews with the parents of identified learners; interviews with individual learners; and focus group interviews with the principals, delegated SGB members, LO Heads of Department and a District Official. The interviews will be audio-recorded and are expected to last for about thirty to sixty days.

Participation in the study is voluntary; the participants will not be exposed to any form of risk or injury during the time of interviews and the confidentiality of the content of the interviews will be maintained. Participants will be free to withdraw anytime during the course of the research without any threat or penalty. There will be no monetary benefits or compensation related to participating in the study. There are no foreseeable risks to you by participating in the study. The University of South Africa, in collaboration with my supervisor, is guiding this study. I will furnish the school with the findings of this study in the form of a copy of the thesis and recommendations made on the basis of the proposed study.

Please contact me should you have any queries or concerns.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Ms LM Methi

Annexure D: Letter to Principals Requesting Permission to Conduct Research



Dear Principal

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I, LM Methi - a student at UNISA, request permission to conduct research in your school. The title of my study is: **BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SUPPORT OF SUSPENDED LEARNERS**. The approximate time that sessions will take is about one hour for each session. An additional hour will also be required to analyse some school documents that include discipline policy documents and learner profiles. Your school has been chosen because I consider it to be representative and informative concerning the topic to be studied. All information obtained will be used for research purpose only and will remain confidential. School names will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. Participation in this study is voluntary.

The study will entail face-to-face interviews with the parents of identified learners; focus group interviews with the principal, delegated SGB members, Life Orientation teacher, Head of Department and District Official; and an interpretation and analysis of psychometric assessment results. This study will benefit learners, teachers, parents, community and government. It will inform government of strategies for teachers and enable them to understand the possible root causes of behaviour problems displayed by learners; develop appropriate intervention strategies; and enhance resilience in learners.

Although there may possibly be emotional discomfort for learners who participate in the study, relevant and appropriate support will be provided in the form of debriefing and counseling by a professional psychologist.

I will furnish the school with the findings from this study.

Please contact me if you have any queries or concerns.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Ms LM Methi

Annexure E: Letter to Parents, Guardians, Teachers and District Officials Inviting Participation in Research Study



Dear Sir/ Madam

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

I, Lina Mmakgabo Methi - a student at the University of South Africa, intend conducting a research project. The title of my study is **BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SUPPORT OF SUSPENDED LEARNERS**. Permission for the study has been given by the Department of Education and the school principal. I have purposefully identified you as the parent/teacher of a learner who has been identified as displaying with challenging behaviour at school.

I hereby invite you to participate in this study. Your participation in this study will be voluntary and anonymous; the confidentiality of the content of interviews will be maintained. Your participation will involve an interview of approximately sixty minutes in length, to take place at your child's school at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the questions if you so wish. The study will entail face-to-face interviews with the parents of identified learners, focus group interviews with the principal, delegated SGB members, Life Orientation teacher, Head of Department and District Official and the interpretation and analysis of psychometric assessment results.

This study will benefit learners, teachers, parents, community and government; government will be able to come up with strategies of support to teachers to understand the possible root causes of behaviour problems displayed by learners; develop appropriate intervention strategies; and enhance the resilience of learners. Participants will not be exposed to any form of risk or injury during the time of interviews. The researcher will furnish the school with the findings from this study.

With your kind permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information that will later be transcribed for analysis. All information you provide will be considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the final report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for 12 months in my office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

I look forward to speaking to you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I request that you sign the consent form which follows on the next page

Yours sincerely

Ms Lina M. Methi

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Name:

I hereby consent to participate in the research study to be conducted by Lina Methi. The title of the study is **BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SUPPORT OF SUSPENDED LEARNERS**. The study will benefit learners, teachers, parents, community and government; government will be assisted to come up with strategies of support for teachers to help them understand the possible root causes of behaviour problems displayed by learners, develop appropriate intervention strategies and enhance resilience in learners. Participants will not be exposed to any form of risk or injury during the time of interviews. The researcher will furnish the school with the findings from this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in the study and allow the use of audio/video recording during the research process.

I have signed below to acknowledge my permission to use recorder.

Signed:.....

Date:

Annexure F: Letter Requesting Parental Consent for Minors to Participate in a Research Project



Dear Parent

Your child is invited to participate in a study entitled **BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SUPPORT OF SUSPENDED LEARNERS**. I am undertaking this study as part of my doctoral research at the University of South Africa. The purpose of the study is to build the resilience of learners experiencing behavior problems and the possible benefits of the study are the improvement of support strategies for teachers and parents. I am requesting your permission to include your child in this study because he has been identified by the school as experiencing behavior problem. I expect to have five other children participating in the study. The process of the study will follow the following schedule:

DAY	ACTIVITY	PARTICIPANTS	TIME
1	Individual Interviews	Parents/guardian/ foster parents	60 Minutes
2	Individual interviews	Learners	60 Minutes
3	Focus group	School A Teachers	60 Minutes
4	Focus group	School B Teachers	60 Minutes

- The period for interview sessions and focus groups are planned to last for about forty to sixty days and will be audio-recorded.
- Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. His/her responses will not be linked to his/her name or your name or the school's name in any written or verbal report based on this study. Such a report will be used for research purposes only.

Although there may be possible emotional discomfort for your child by participating in the study, relevant and appropriate support will be provided in the form of debriefing and counseling by a professional. Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in the study; however, the possible benefits to education are improved support strategies in addressing behavior problems at school. Neither you nor your child will receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not affect him/her in any way. Similarly, you can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

The study will take place during regular classroom activities with the prior approval of the school and your child's teacher. However, if you do not want your child to participate, an alternative activity will be available in the form of a questionnaire. In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study and you and your child will also be asked to sign the assent form which accompanies this letter. If your child does not wish to participate in the study, he or she will not be included and there will be no penalty. The information gathered from the study and your child's participation in the study will be stored securely on a password locked computer in my locked office for five years after the study. Thereafter, records will be erased.

It is hoped that the study will offer effective support strategies for parents, teachers and the district officials in dealing with challenging behaviour in schools. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

If you have questions about this study please ask me or my study supervisor, Prof LDN Tlale, Department of Psychology of Education, College of Education at the University of South Africa. Permission for the study has already been given by the GDE, the SGB, the principal and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow your child to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of child: _____

Sincerely

Parent/guardian's name (print

Parent/guardian's signature:

Date:

Ms Lina M. Methi

Researcher's name (print)

Researcher's signature

Annexure G: Focus Group Consent and Confidentiality Agreement



I _____ grant consent/assent that the information I share during the focus group may be used by Ms Lina M. Methi for research purposes. I am aware that the group discussions will be digitally recorded and grant consent/assent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected. I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality.

Participant 's Name (Please print): _____

Participant Signature: _____

Researcher's Name: (Please print): Ms Lina M. Methi

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Annexure H: Declaration of Editing

DECLARATION OF EDITING


19 June 2019

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I have language edited and proof-read the thesis by **LINA MMAKGABO METHI** entitled:

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SUPPORT OF SUSPENDED LEARNERS

The language editing/proof-reading process included the checking of spelling, punctuation, syntax and expression. An attempt was made to simplify complex sentences and, where necessary, combine short sentences to clarify meaning. Attention was given to the use of various language elements, such as prepositions, consistency in language usage and formatting as well as capital letters and punctuation.



Prof. Walter Greyvenstein (D Litt et Phil; TTHD; LTCL)
44 Second Street
Linden
Johannesburg 2195

Tel. No.: 011 782 6174
E-mail: wgreyven@lantic.net

Annexure I: Permission Letters from Gauteng Department of Education and Schools to Undertake Research in Schools



Enquiries: MP NTSHANGASE
Tel: 012 543 1203
Reference: 22/16/1

TO : MS LM METHI

**FROM : MS SL MOLOBI
DISTRICT DIRECTOR: TSHWANE NORTH**

DATE : 13 FEBRUARY 2018

SUBJECT : PERMISSION GRANTED TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear Madam

It is our pleasure to inform you that the District Office grants you permission to conduct research at **Hóórskool SP CR Swart** on the topic: **"Building resilience in expelled and suspended learners identified with behaviour problems"**.

You may only conduct the research **after contact time** to protect teaching and learning activities. The principal must be consulted about an appropriate time to conduct the research.

You are personally responsible for providing and utilizing your own research resources. Participants' names must not appear in the research report and all appropriate ethical measures must be implemented to protect them.

Tshwane North District expects you to submit, upon completion, a summary of your research findings as stipulated in **Clause No. 14 of the GDE letter of approval you received**.

The District appreciates your contribution towards the enhancement of education in the province and District and anticipates your success with your research project.

Regards


MS SL MOLOBI
DISTRICT DIRECTOR: TSHWANE NORTH

DISTRICT OF TSHWANE NORTH
Tel: (012) 543 1199, Cell: 081 305 2060, Fax: 085 771 8796 | Email: Shirley.Moloi@ed.gov.za
Woolstun Road, Pretoria, 0001
West Road, Winnecroft, 0066, Private Bag 3540, Pretoria, 0001
www.ed.gov.za | CAP Centre: 0800 005 375



Enquiries	: Sello Ngwenya
Sub-directorate	: ISSP + CIA
Telephone	: 012 401 6331
Mobile	: 083 571 2582

Dear Sir/ Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: METHI L.M

We acknowledge receipt of your request for permission to conduct research as approved by the GDE Research unit. We grant you permission to conduct research in the selected schools as per ethics approval up to the 30th September 2017. The full title of your research: "Building resilience in expelled and suspended learners identified with behaviour problems". You are expected to adhere strictly to the conditions given by Head Office. You are also advised to communicate with the school principal/s and/or SGB/s of the targeted schools regarding your research and time schedule.

Our commitment of support may be rescinded if any form of irregularity/ no compliance to the terms in this letter or any other departmental directive/ if any risk to any person/s or property or our reputation is realised, observed or reported.

Terms and conditions

1. The safety of all the learners and staff at the school must be ensured at all times. All safety precautions must be taken by the researcher and the school. The Department of Education may not be held accountable for any injury or damage to property or any person/s resulting from this process.
2. The school/s must ensure that sound measures are put in place to protect the wellness of the researcher and his/ her property.

NB: Kindly submit your report including findings and recommendations to the District at least two weeks after conclusion of the research. The permission granted will expire on the 28th September 2018.

You may be requested to participate in the Department of Education's mini-research conference to discuss your findings and recommendations with departmental officials and other researchers.

The District wishes you well.

Yours sincerely



Mrs. H.E Kekana
Director: Tshwane South District
Date : 19 / 01 / 2018

Annexure J: Transcriptions

FOCUS GROUP 1

NAME: SCHOOL A

TIME 60 MINUTES

I: interviewer

FGA 1: Focus Group Participant 1

FGA 2: Focus Group Participant 2

	TRANSCRIPTION
I	
FGA 1	(he introduced all staff members)
I	<p>Thank you Mr. X and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for agreeing to take part in this project. It is towards my studies but at the same it is towards opening an eye to the school as to what is happening with regard to the challenges that our children are experiencing and what are we doing, is it enough, where are the gaps and what more still needs to be done and where can we go for assistance. That is the main objective of this study.</p> <p>There is no right or wrong answer that we are going to assess, every input is valuable and every input is to get towards supporting the learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. My topic is on resilience; I have a desire to help the learners to build their resilience. That is why I decided to come to your school and check how can I be of help to the school, to the parents, to the learners and to the educators. So I cannot be of help on my own, collaboratively, jointly, as different systems, we can make it happen. So that is the reason for my project.</p>

	<p>I am going to ask you a set of questions, it is just few questions, ten questions, feel free to answer. But before we answer, I am going to allocate a number to each and every one of you. Before you answer, I humbly request that at least we all participate and that we make sure that our voices are audible because on my request to take part, I indicated that the inputs will be audio recorded and I hope we are all comfortable with that. So the tape is on and when you speak please raise your voice so that it can be captured in the recorder. So I am going to allocate a number for each and every one. If you answer for the first time, just say the number so that when I follow up with the next responses I know that this</p>
	<p>Staff members: yes</p>
<p>I</p>	<p>: (allocated numbers to the staff members up to number 10) I am going to start with the first question, it is not directed to a specific person, anyone who feel that he/she can answer, you may do so. What is your understanding of behavior problems?</p>
<p>FGA 5</p>	<p>I think behavioral problems is when you have a set of rules that you want people to act according to and they do not act according to that set of rules. It is not written rules, it is like we know that we greet one another in the mornings, that is a very simple example, but then you come in and you are just rude but that is very simple. I would say that is behavioral problem and it is very simplified. You have a thing in your head that you want people to act like that and they do not act like that.</p>
<p>FGA 1</p>	<p>Behavioral problems with reference to learners are learner who struggle to adapt to the code of conduct, rules and regulations and because of that they cause</p>

	<p>disruption in the class and that is most of the time regarded as behavioral problems. If they battle to read or write, then it escalates into behavioral problems to such an extent that such learners just cannot do this amount of education.</p>
I	<p>You wanted to say something?</p>
FGA 1	<p>Behavioural problem is when a learner, not only a learner, any other person is doing something different to what we are used to. You already indicated that it is not a set of rules, it is something that we are used to but if somebody is different from what we are used to, especially when it interferes with other people's life or maybe as a school you have your own code of conduct and maybe that person is diverting from the code of conduct, then we can say that person behaves strangely and that is when we mention it as a behavioral problem.</p>
I	<p>Any other input? I want to believe that here at school you do come across learners who are causing such impairments, whose wellbeing are affected and at times affect the wellbeing of other learners, so can you please explain the nature of the most challenging behavior that you experience here at school?</p>
FGA 8	<p>Learners who come from a one parent household, usually if it is a female, the mother or grandmother being the sole guardian, mostly then the boys do show behavioral problems especially towards females and at school they battle to adhere to the rules.</p>
FGA 10	<p>The behavior that has been reflected by a learner usually at schools is being disrespectful towards the teachers and also being disrespectful to other learners; for instance, they disrupt classes while the teacher is busy. You will find that the learner is keeping busy with</p>

	<p>something totally different from the teacher is expecting that learner to be doing.</p>
<p>FGA 6</p>	<p>I will also say it is a lack of respect for themselves as well. Because they do not have respect for themselves, they have difficulties in respecting other people around them as well. So because they feel I think maybe inferior, they want to divert that attention away from themselves by acting in an unacceptable manner. Like for example; I teach English and the learners that come constantly late for class, it a show of disrespect because the lesson is supposed to start and then when they come late there is arguments and lots of reasons are given and then the academic time is cut short and compromised because of this. Another example is that because they have no self-respect, it is not important to them to do their homework. So they come unprepared to the class and they do not bring books to the class they do not do homework, they do not contribute in the class because they are not prepared for the class. They look for reasons to cites that they are not up to standard. We normally struggle with these learners that are repeating the grade. They are the trouble makers in the class because they know they do not have to do anything because they are going to be progressed to the next grade. Without thinking of the fact that in the next grade, I do not have a certain background or level of competency, I am not going to be able to function in the next grade. And what happens now is that they are pushed from grade 8 to grade 9 and from grade 9 to grade 10 and that is where we have got the problem, grade 8,9 and 10.</p>

FGA 5	They also don't respect but they challenge the authority and they do not accept that the teachers have the authority over them.
FGA 7	That is actually what I wanted to say. Learners who are in principle opposed to any form of restriction, they see it as restriction and we see it as rules. Especially in a group environment because they have the backing of their friends that are brave but on one on one confrontation, they are worth nothing. If you look at some of them and their background, it seems as if that opposition to rules is the only way to show that I am here as well and I am also an individual. Unfortunately, they tend to choose the negative way instead of the positive way to make an impact.
I	With that said, I just want to make a follow up and ask, is there a learners 'code of conduct here at school.
Staff members:	Yes.
I	Are they all familiar with it or is it just a document that is given without any explanation? Staff members: yes, they are familiar with it.
Staff members:	Yes, they are familiar with it.
FGA 4	I just want to add to what everyone said about the code of conduct. Each of them is given a school diary and in there, there's a school code of conduct. But to start with it, they participated in writing the school code of conduct before it was written in the diary. When the year started, the first day of the school, they sit with their register teachers and then they go through the school' code of conduct. The code of conduct has a section where a learner must sign that he/she has read the code of conduct. There is also a section where the parent must sign under all the pages of the school' code of conduct. So it is not just a document that is lying somewhere or it

	is just given to them that they don't know. They participated in formulating it and it was discussed in the class.
FGA 10	Also the parents are aware of the code of conduct because after the school has drafted the code of conduct, parents are called for a meeting to discuss the code of conduct of both the parents and the learners. Also during their administration, when you admit the learner, you give them the code of conduct. The code of conduct is there on their application form
FGA 6	No, it is not because every year we go through the whole process of compiling the code of conduct. So it normally starts in the third term and it goes to the SGB for approval. Once it is approved, it will be printed in the new school diary. So when they are admitted, that process is not yet complete because we start with admissions on the 1 st of April. So in January, they get the code of conduct and both learners and parent sign the code of conduct. We also send out newsletters and SMS's to the parents that they have to discuss the code of conduct with their children. There is also a reply slip on the newsletter that parents should complete to indicate that they are familiar with the content of code of conduct. That reply slip is then placed in the learners' profiles. So we even keep that in the office available if there are any queries. If a parent does not send back the reply slip, they are called in for a meeting because if the learner does not accept the code of conduct, it is a problem at school because a learner can actually be not at school.
I	With the list of challenging behaviors that you just alluded to, what is the procedure followed to identify the identified behaviors?

FGA 6	<p>We have a line function and it normally starts with the class teacher. A class teacher who start in the beginning of the year or if it is a new teacher that starts in the beginning of the term or whenever the educator starts, we have a meeting with a learner in the class. For example; the first day that I started my class. We discussed acceptable and unacceptable behavior and in collaboration with the learners we have I our classrooms.</p> <p>So if I experience a disciplinary problem, I as a teacher first, has to address it. We have a merit and demerit system. Where learners eventually get a demerit, parents are sent an SMS so that the parent immediately know that my child is constantly coming late for class, my child is not doing homework or my child does not bring books to school. so that is where it starts, with the subject teacher or the register teacher. If that problem is then not successful, we phone the parents. Then still if we are not successful, it escalates to the grade head.</p> <p>If the grade head is not successful in solving the problem, it escalates to an HOD. If the HOD is not successful, it escalates to one of the deputies or the principal responsible for a certain grade. Eventually, if it is out of control, we then first start with internal disciplinary hearing where the parents are called in and there are intervention strategies. We work with the parents and we work with the learners and then if that is not successful, we eventually go to external disciplinary hearings.</p>
I	<p>Before the start of the disciplinary hearings, when you start inviting the parents, what is your experience? Do you get that cooperation from the parents, or how do you see it?</p>

FGA 6	Most parents are very cooperative but I will say 10 to 20 percent, you don't get hold of them, they don't come, you struggle and send SMS's and you phone continuously until we resort to giving a suspension letter where we say your child may not come to school tomorrow if you do not accompany your child to school. the sometimes we get response but sometimes parents even ignore that.
I	In the introduction, the psychologist was introduced. At what point are the learners referred to them?
FGA 6	Constantly. We have the SBST meeting every Monday with the whole SBST team and we identify problems as well. So on the sideline together with the disciplinary process that is followed, we also refer them to the social worker and the psychologist.
FGA 1	With regard to number 6 's response to the parents, one of the challenges that we also experience is that, parents who do responds, it is normally the worst case behavioral problem. In many occasions, we find that those parents tend to be in denial of the child's behavior. Then the school disciplinary system basically challenged by such parents and we find that regularly and it is normally the most disruptive learners. Other parents will acknowledge the fact that the learner has a behavioral problem but you do find the parents who support the child irrespective of the behavioral problem that is there because by the time we call the parent, we have gone through many channels already and it is not just calling the parent immediately. So there is definitely a behavioral problem and that makes the tasks slightly more difficult when we still have to deal with the parent not supporting the school.

FGA 7	To add on what number 1 has been saying, concerning the issue of the involvement of the psychologist and the social workers. I work very closely with the psychologist of the school but we cannot repeat what she has done and do it again. She continues
I	How is the school discipline policy assisting, I want to believe there is a school discipline policy. How is it assisting, especially the content of it, how is it assisting it unfolding in maintaining discipline at school, or is it followed, do you adhere to it?
FGA 6	Everything is drawn up in accordance to what is prescribed by the department. The whole process is according to the prescriptions from the department.
I	Are the parents aware of it?
FGA 6	It is in the diary. We follow it step by step by the time that we, for instance recommend expulsion.
I	So with the difficult parents that you just mentioned, what do you do with them?
FGA 1	We just continue because normally what happens is that it reaches a point the discussions stops because the emotions takes over. Then we reschedule until the emotions has calmed down and we try again, and we continue to try because at the end of the day there is a certain procedure that we have to follow. Whatever recommendation is made, whether is from to the department to the HOD, if we did not stick to the procedure, the whole process is fraud. So we are very procedure bound and we stick as far as possible to that. So we reschedule and try again.
FGA 4	The social worker mentioned that we only get her involved in the process of expulsion. We have a social worker here at school and they are involved first and all this processes are followed here within the school.

FGA 10	Concerning the issue of difficult parents. I think I once attended to the issue of difficult parents who did not want to come to the school. but when we call them from the district office, they do come.
I	Is there any reason for that?
FGA 10	They now see the matter as being serious and it is no longer in the hands of the school. sometimes they feel that the school is treating them unfair. They think that if we call them to the district office, things will be fair. Of which is true, we do not operate the way in which the school operate. We operate differently, we are at the district office and we do not know the background of the learner and we do not have the background of the family. The psychologist is also doing the same here.
I	I have a concern with this fairness, how fair are you perceiving this?
FA 6	<p>First of all, when there is a problem, the parents thinks that it reflects on them and their homes. Then they become offensive and then it is the school that is at fault. For example; a learner who abuses drugs, we are not the ones exposing them or giving them the drugs. If a learner is caught with drugs, we recommend counselling. We are not a rehab Centre and if we say that to the parents, then they feel offended.</p> <p>We are not a rehab Centre and we cannot accommodate the drug addicts. So then we refer them for counselling from an outside agency. Although at school we have gone through various processes, they can either go for a full time or as an outpatient. Then they have to submit reports on a monthly basis because it stays in your system for at least 28 days. Whatever program they have gone through, they must</p>

	<p>just bring us proof and then we allow them back. But parents become defensive when there is a problem and they think we are attacking them personally of which is not the case.</p> <p>Sometimes parents say that they come maybe for the 10th time, because we involve the parents from the moment the child does not do the homework. From the moment the child is absent from school, the parent is involved. I have one grade 12 learner that the mother came and she has been in this school since grade 8. We managed to get hold of that parent for the first time yesterday. When I asked her if she is getting our SMS's, she said yes. So you understand where the problems come in, where parents feel that it is personal attack with them if there is a problem with the learner. Sometimes parents sitting in my office say that you are no longer going to be in my house, I don't want to know your story anymore because you embarrass me. Then I said to the parent, you can't chase the child away, you are joint by blood, you can't. They often threaten to cut the child out of their lives.</p>
I	<p>What type of professional development, you mentioned that some of you are part of SBST, and you also mentioned that discipline start with the register teacher in the classroom. So I just want to check what kind of professional development or training do the teachers receive with regard to disciplinary?</p>
FGA 4	<p>In the beginning of every year, since we sometimes get new staff. We have staff meetings where the teachers go through the school policies and the exceptive disciplinary procedures that must take place in the school. for example; if a teacher gets to class as a register teacher, what is the first thing the teacher</p>

	<p>must do in playing their role as register teachers and the school protocols are explained to all of us, both old and new as to the line functioning of the school, who reports what to whom and what is your role as a register teacher and if you pick up problems who is next in line that you must report to.</p> <p>Each term, there is a staff meeting where these things are still highlighted and sometimes we even go on team building and go outside the school, where teacher go through various activities to bond and get to know each other. During those sessions we still explain to all of us the various rules from the classroom teacher, register teacher, HOD's to the deputy principals and all to the principal. So these developments are ongoing, even on a daily basis we have morning briefings every day and some of these things are still highlighted.</p>
FGA 5	They also give us class management in the beginning of the year on how to manage your class.
FGA 1	We even have workshops and get speakers to address the staff and train them in different strategies on how to develop your skills. Brand new educators are normally assigned to Amanda to guide them through managing disciplinary at the school.
FGA 10	To add on that, I think the school is receiving both internal and external professional development. Number 1 alluded that they get other speakers to come and motivate them and they also attend some workshops. The unit that is dealing with the policy in the district also arranges workshops for them to workshop them on the policies and also the others who trains them on grievances and appeals concerning the issues of discipline.

FGA 6	There are also development courses that the department is also offering for staff members. So it is available for them and in some instances the staff is required to, for example; with IPMS, staff members draw up a personal growth plan (PGP) and indicate what their shortfalls are. we look at that when we have staff meetings and also provide them with a list of opportunities for growth.
I	With all said and the different capacities you have at the school, my question would be, challenging behavior still continues, what could be the problem from your perspective?
FGA 8	society declines to human rights but not the acceptance of responsibility causing consequences. If I do something I do not take responsibility for it. But especially the social environment to which they grow up and the media. Social platforms have a huge impact on how they perceive they should act because they do not fully realize that they are not fully grownups yet but they want to act like it. But they don't understand that they need to go through the growth process to become a young adult.
FGA 9	In my view, I think that in an environment like ours, where we have over a thousand of learners and teachers in all, I think there must one trusted person at least that can be more empowered than it is now, to inforce some form of punitive measures immediately to send information to all of us so that it doesn't look like as if somebody misbehaved yesterday but has been here for five days before it is determined and agreed by the SGB that this person must be suspended at one point. So I think that for me, maybe I am not getting the right words to

	<p>articulate my feelings but there must be consequences, punitive enough and that trust must be given to at least one person so that action and reaction can be judged fairly and appropriately within the right to help all of us conform to standards.</p>
I	<p>I am not sure if I get what you are saying, but let me just make a follow up. Are you saying to you the process is too long to address an issue?</p>
FGA 6	<p>I am partly saying that. I agree the process is too long and I want to give you a typical example. Let's say a learner who dropped out of the school and he has found out and there are video recordings and everything and that learner is suspended but comes to the school the following day, not respecting the suspension. Comes through and get in the yard and is at school, according to my understanding, you can't put that learner out of the gate and say you are suspended, you are not supposed to get into the yard so stay outside. That parents get called and told that your child is suspended from the school, please come fetch your child and the parent says ok I am on my way.</p> <p>Then the child stays in school and walks around even have the privilege of disrupting other classes the whole day and the school knocks off and the learner goes home. Then the next day he comes again and the process continues. There is virtually little anybody can do about that because you can't put the learner outside the gate because if anything happens there we are accountable. So you see thing like that for; but this learner ever other person who is in contact with this learner knows what the learner was caught doing something illegal at the school but he keeps coming to the school even though suspended. We do not have</p>

	that strong arm to say we take you out again and we cannot allow you in.
I	Are you not working with the police?
FGA 7	: we do but because it is a child they do not want to take them, they do not want to remove them and quite often the police comes in the same time the school comes out because to them it is not a serious issue and there is nothing serious about a learner being in the school premises illegally. Our hands are actually tied.
FGA 6	can I just say that I think the biggest problem is that there is no consequences. If you get expelled from this school, they just put you in another school and you continue until you follow the same process again there and get expelled again and then sometimes the learner go out of the system but for the state and social stability, what is that child going to do then. Then the child becomes a criminal. So you always consider the fact that it is a child and there you don't get the cooperation of the parents. If a child is suspended, it means that the child might not come to school. but then they send him back, so where do you go with that child.
I	Like you have mentioned that there is no consequence, my study is building resilience. I want to see something done. Rehabilitate the child or to improve the wellbeing of the child. So all this that is happening, the processes, are they intended towards them, what more can be done?
FGA 8	I always believe that there is a triangle in a process. More specially that we work with the child, the parent and the school. now one of those don't want to work with you, there is no way it can work. If you and I believe that a code conduct for a specific school is modeled to make the school work. Every institution has

	<p>rules and regulations and over the year we have adjust to the best of our ability to work for our children. Now we can't only focus in a learner. The parent has to buy in as well. If the parent does not buy in, what kind of a support does that learner have. For the hours at school, it is the educators, but when that learner goes home, what is done to help him in that process. That is where it forms a part because they tend to also play reports against each other.</p>
<p>FGA 6</p>	<p>: for us to help the child, our core business is curriculum delivery. Now we deal with social behavior, we get drug addicts, we get people that come and sell stuff to make money from other learners. We get parents that send their children to school for the social grant and not to get education. The longer they stay at school, they longer they can get that social grant which is also not much. But the intention is not there to support the child. We offer spots, we have in-house psychologist worker to help and support these learners, we have detention, we have study groups, we have parents meeting. I don't know if there is another school that does so much to help these learners and still be not successful. I think we must start with educating parents on how to be a parent. Because to have a child, and say world, here is the child, it is unfair.</p> <p>That child goes through primary school and adapt a behavior pattern. You cannot tell a person to stop riding a bicycle, then that child will forget how to ride a bicycle. So if they are constantly continuing with a certain behavior, it becomes a habit. And to break a habit, it becomes very difficult. I tell my staff that every day is a new day. Forget what happened yesterday. Remember it's the lord's children sitting in front of you. That is our</p>

	<p>approach and that is what we try and do, really to do more. I really don't know what more can be done. We allow people like you to come and do studies. We at one stage had a retired educator that came in and helped all the grade 8 and 9 that were repeating, free of charge to catch up, to learn basic spelling and manners and to do basic mathematics. They did not do it because it takes effort.</p> <p>Now the whole system allows for these children; if I fail grade 8, then next year I don't have to do a single thing. I am going to go to grade 9. In grade 9, I don't have to do anything because I am automatically going to grade 10. So the hole system also fails the children. I think the whole education system is failing the children because I don't have to study and one day I am going to sit in grade 12. We sit with progressed learners, and you know what, we have to work, support, berg and plead because if your assignment is not in at the end of term one, you still have an opportunity three months after you have written your grade 12 to hand in your assignment. So what are we teaching our children. We are not teaching them responsibility. So there are no consequences.</p>
I	Our time is over, thank you all for your participation.