

# **Understanding Learners’ Experiences of Peer Support in the Intermediate Phase**

by

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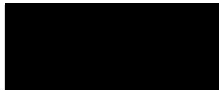
## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to understand learners' experiences of peer support in the intermediate phase. The study was conducted in one private, mainstream school in Pinetown, Durban. The study adopts a qualitative research approach in which a case study design was adopted. A total of six participants were selected for this study, two from grades 4,5 and 6 each, through purposive sampling and convenience sampling. The data generation process was obtained through talking circles with the participants and the collages that they created. A thematic analysis of the data revealed findings that show the intermediate phase learners as having a positive experience with the Peer Support Team. The learners were familiar with the Peer Support Team through the interactions made by the peer supporters. The learners recognized the team through classroom visits and the interactions they had with the Peer Support Team when they experienced bad situations, academic stress, issues of anger, or when their teachers were busy. As a result, the learners found the Peer Support Team helpful, non-judgmental, open, loving, caring, understanding, encouraging, kind, and attentive listeners. They were also a source of happiness and growth. The learners also found that their experiences with the Peer Support Team could be enhanced through regular class visits, being able to find them in one place and having a larger Peer Support Team.

*Keywords:* Peer support, Peer Support Team, peer supporter, peer supportee

## Declaration

I declare that this dissertation presented to the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) as partial requirement for my Master's degree is my own original work. All research has been acknowledged and referenced.



Student's signature

03/02/2021

Date



Supervisors Signature

03/02/2021

Date

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

- HPCSA – Health Professionals Council of South Africa
- LAC – Looked After Children

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the background to my study and a discussion of the rationale for my study. The problem statement is also outlined together with the objectives and research questions that guide this study. This chapter outlines the importance of the study, an overview of the research approach and design, and the methodology and organization of this dissertation.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

First popularized in 1984 by Rey Carr (Carr, 1984), peer support has become a global phenomenon over the years and spans many professions and contexts (Stratford et al., 2017). Cowie & Sharp (2018) define peer support as the friendly and cooperative behaviour of one person to another. It generally entails the support of one person to another. Peer support has different names, such as peer counselling, peer tutoring, peer mentoring, peer assisting, peer facilitating and peer mediating. These depend on the contexts and purposes they serve (Cowie & Sonia, 2018). For this study, the term peer support will be used. The context is the school environment, and it refers to the support of one learner to another from a psychosocial perspective.

As discussed earlier, peer support goes by different names in different contexts depending on their personal needs. An example of a context includes public secondary schools in Ugunja, Kenya, where they are called peer counsellors and function to promote discipline among the students (Osodo, Osodo, Mito, Raburu, & Aloka, 2016). Another context where peer support is prevalent is in England where they support young women who have fallen pregnant at an early age. Here they are known as peer mentors and have assisted women in making informed choices with regards to their educational and personal development, and increasing self-confidence and self-esteem (Mezey, Robinson, Gillard, Mantovani, Meyer, White, & Bonell, 2015).

At the school where I am currently employed, there exists a Peer Support Team which is comprised of learners in grades 11 and 12 who are assigned to classes in the primary school. The name peer support was chosen because their main role is to support learners by assisting

their peers in lower grades, in thinking through and reflecting on any concerns they may be experiencing. We chose to not call them peer counsellors as they are not professionally qualified counsellors. Cowie and Sonia (2018) echo similar sentiment by explaining the term peer counsellor and its use in its broadest sense, not concerning trained professionals, but the willingness of persons to offer help, support and to listen to others.

Within the context of this study, there is a programme called Peer Support that is used by the school which guides how peer support should be conducted. The peer support programme entails high school learners being assigned to primary school learners, referred to as peer supportees, and being models of support should the learners need help. Prospective learners who wish to join the program and become peer supporters are trained by mentors to have high levels of skills to run a high-level program (Papakitsos & Karakiozis, 2016). This is usually a course that is run over two days. Afterwards, these prospective members will be allowed to shadow existing peer supporters to get a feel for the job. Shortly after, those who meet the criteria are selected. The Peer Support Team comprises educators, who serve as facilitators, and learners who make up the Peer Support Team. Each member of the Peer Support Team is allocated a class in the primary school and their primary function, in addition to the provision of support, is to touch base with the primary school learners, through interventions and letters in a shoebox housed in the classrooms. Members meet every week and ensure that skills are updated continually (Diekmann, 2002). A lack of programme or way of functioning could lead to challenges such as lack of confidence, criticism from other students, poorly defined roles, poor support provision and less time to engage in the peer support program (Kamore & Tiego, 2015).

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

At the school where I am currently employed, there is an existing Peer Support Team. Although the team exists, they have limited activity. Learners at the school experience many social problems and find it difficult to approach the teachers or the parents to assist them with these issues (Romm & Tlale, 2016). They often feel that they would not be understood and experience further problems as a result, some of these being suicidal ideation and rebellious attitudes. The Peer Support Team is the only ‘counselling’ team at school, therefore it has been challenging to have the learners approach the peer supporters as sessions can only take place in the morning before school, during breaks and after school (Vela, Flamez, Sparrow, & Lerma, 2016). Peer supporters cannot take up lesson time to assist the learners. Parents are sceptical as they do not want their children to miss out on their lessons, and there is also a lack of

understanding as to what the role of a peer supporter entails (Rouillard, Wilson, & Weiderman, 2015). Some parents cannot afford to send their children to seek professional assistance. Therefore, a support system must be in place so that the learners receive assistance in dealing with the problems that they are experiencing. It is also important to note that the learners at school are not fully aware of the existence of the Peer Support Team as the contact sessions between the team and the learners have been minimal. It is therefore problematic that although help is available, learners do not know how to go about contacting the team. Therefore, the team needs to be re-established and the learners' experiences need to be explored to further develop the Peer Support Team.

#### **1.4 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

This study explores the experiences of learners towards the Peer Support Team at the primary school. The reasons that propelled me to do this study stem from my personal and professional experiences as a teacher and the contextual dimension as expressed within the literature on learners' experiences of peer support.

Personally, a mentorship programme was introduced in my grade 11 year, and I was fortunate enough to get selected as the first batch of mentors for the school. Becoming a mentor was not the easiest process. We had to apply for the position and then once shortlisted, go for an interview that was done by the teacher responsible for the entire programme. Thus, being selected was a big deal and an opportunity to have a leadership position in the school. The duties were straightforward. The mentorship programme was designed specifically for the incoming grade eights. Each grade 11 learner was assigned six grade eight learners and all they had to do was guide them as they became acquainted with their new school and be present should they need assistance with anything. This experience re-enforces my reasons for this study. It was a rewarding position because I was able to help others and the mentees have positive experiences of the mentor programme as well.

Professionally, as a teacher, a Peer Support Team is currently established at the school where I am currently employed. The Peer Support Team is made up of both educators, who identify as facilitators who oversee the whole team, and grades 11 and 12 high school students who are the peer supporters. Each class, ranging from Grade RRR to Grade 7, are assigned two peer support members. However, over the past year, the activity from the Peer Support Team has been minimal. The training was done as a once-off event and there have been few contact sessions between the facilitators and the Peer Support Team, and between the Peer Support

Team and the primary school learners. Many learners are unaware of the existence of a Peer Support Team and are unable to identify members. This might or could influence the school context as there exist many issues such as bullying, low self-esteem and suicidal ideation that are not being dealt with. By making primary school learners more aware of the Peer Support Team, could assist in addressing these problems (Tzani-Pepelasi, Ioannou, Synott, & Donnell, 2019).

From a contextual dimension, peer support has been implemented as a means of targeting specific issues faced by schools. Areas addressed by peer support include discipline, bullying, classroom management and even assisting in the promotion of safety, self-image, and friendship (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019; Osodo et al., 2016). Kamore and Tiego (2015) state in their study that peer support programmes are internationally accepted intervention strategies that enhance guidance and counselling services for the students in educational institutions. Peer support systems also occur in different contexts such as schools, tertiary institutions, medical facilities, and non-profit organizations, all with the shared goal of providing support and help to others. This is confirmed by a study conducted in English secondary schools where a peer-mentoring scheme was introduced to support immigrant students (Messiou & Azaola, 2017). Findings revealed that the scheme was able to address areas that were usually challenging for the new students. These areas included learning a new language, making friends, and adjusting to the education system. It also highlighted the importance of providing support to others and being mindful of multi-cultural societies (Messiou & Azaola, 2017). Another study that was conducted in Norway, focused on the role of a peer support programme for doctors (Ro, Veggeland, & Aasland, 2016). They were available when needed by the doctors and listened to them, helped sort out situations and were able to contain feelings (Ro et al., 2016). A study done in America by Andre, Deerin and Leykum (2017), implemented a peer mentoring programme at the University of Texas-San Antonio School of Medicine. Findings revealed that each year the students' perceptions of the program improved, and they reported feeling more prepared, supported, and satisfied with the peer mentoring experience. Although a peer support programme is established, the experiences of the learners towards the peer support programme have not been considered. My study will aim to explore learners' experiences.

## **1.5 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study provides an understanding of how the intermediate phase learners experience the Peer Support Team at school. The data collected and analysed from this study will assist the Peer Support Team, along with teacher facilitators and peer supporters, to develop strategies that will enhance the way they operate as a team to provide the learners with better services, which will, in turn, lead to better experiences on the part of the learners.

Many schools in South Africa are in situations where they are unable to provide counselling services to the learners. They also could not have heard of peer support as I discovered that research is limited on peer support from a psychosocial perspective. The data generated from this study could be used to assist such schools in developing their Peer Support Teams so that learners at these schools will have trained students that are there to support them.

## **1.6 AIM OF THE STUDY**

This study focuses on understanding learners' experiences of peer support in the intermediate phase of schooling.

## **1.7 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the study are:

- To identify the type of experiences the learners have of the school Peer Support Team.
- To explore how learners conceptualise their experiences of school peer support.
- To understand why the learners conceptualise their experiences of peer support the way they do.

## **1.8 CRITICAL QUESTIONS**

In correspondence with the objectives, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What type of experiences do the learners have of the school Peer Support Team?
- How do the learners conceptualise their experiences of school peer support?
- Why do learners conceptualise their experiences of peer support the way they do?

## **1.9 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.9.1 Research Approach**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach as the methods entail collecting in-depth data on naturally occurring phenomena (Rahl, 2017). According to Lune and Berg (2017), a qualitative researcher will explore various contexts and the inhabitants who occupy these social settings. This approach was selected as it allows the researcher to get an in-depth insight into the experiences learners have of peer support in the natural school context. The participants were able to provide detailed descriptions of their feelings and experiences through text and visual means.

### **1.9.2 Research Paradigm**

The paradigm adopted by the research of this study is interpretivism. Interpretivism rejects the idea of a single reality that exists independently of our senses but rather there are multiple, socially constructed realities (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This paradigm aims to understand the world of the human experience (Rahl, 2017). According to Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), a research paradigm shapes how the researcher sees the world and how he or she interprets or acts within that world. It is the lens through which the researcher views the world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Rahl, 2017). This applies to my study in that the experiences towards the Peer Support Team at school were interpreted by the researcher. Every person had a different experience that was void of factual information. The study took place in a school context hence it is the natural setting of the learners.

### **1.9.3 Research Design**

The research design is a case study design. According to Ridder (2017), a case study research design explores the real-life, in-depth phenomenon within its natural environment. The case study can refer to an individual, group, organisation, problem, or anomaly. This is confirmed by Rahl (2017) who describes case study research as a detailed description of a problem or situation. A case study design was selected for the present research study as it aimed at exploring a phenomenon in detail, the phenomenon being peer support. The study took place in the natural setting of the phenomenon, that being the school context. As the experiences of learners across the intermediate phase were explored, the advantages are that these multiple cases of the same phenomenon will enable me to identify differences and similarities and their effect on the findings of the study (Ridder, 2017).



## **1.9.4 Sampling Techniques**

The participants were selected using convenience and purposive sampling strategies.

### ***1.9.4.1 Convenience Sampling***

According to Rahl (2017), convenience sampling entails the collection of data from a population that is close and accessible to the researcher. At the school where I am currently employed, the grades range from grade RRR to 12. This study specifically looked at learners in the intermediate phase from grade 4 to grade 6. Therefore, convenience sampling was employed as the context of the study is also the school where I work.

### ***1.9.4.2 Purposive Sampling***

Sampling is also purposive as participants were deliberately selected based on the personal qualities that they possess (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). A peer from the support team is assigned to each class. The classes are small, and the student numbers range from 10 to 20 learners per class. It characterises as purposive sampling as participants, that being the school learners, experiences of peer support, which takes place at the school, was explored.

### ***1.9.4.3 The sample***

Participants were selected from the same school, situated in Pinetown, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. The sample size consisted of six learners, two from grades 4, 5 and 6 each. Learners were randomly selected from each class.

## **1.9.5 Data Generation**

### ***1.9.5.1 Talking Circles***

The data collection method that was employed in the present study was talking circles. Talking circles are a type of study which recognizes them as sharing, talking and discussion groups (Wright, Wahoush, Ballantyne, Gabel, & Jack, 2016). Circles are recognized as holistic ways to orally pass down stories through generations, promote healing and learn from each other (Wright et al., 2016). This data collection method was adapted to the present research study. The learners were able to share their experiences of the phenomenon under study in a safe environment. Similar strategies like the ones implemented in the study by Wright et al. (2016) were adapted to the present research study. Prior to engaging in the talking circles, learners had an opportunity to share a meal and engage in dialogue and adjust to the new situation.

### ***1.9.5.2 Collages***

A collage is a graphic representation comprising of pictures taken from various sources of media such as magazines, newspapers, and the internet. It is an effective way to gain a deeper

understanding of the participant's subjective experience, as we look at the meaning attached to certain concepts from their perspective (Plakoyiannaki & Stavraki, 2018). Participants were asked to complete a collage using pictures and text to display their experiences of the Peer Support Team.

### **1.9.6 Data analysis**

The data analysis technique that was used was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis refers to a specific set of techniques used to analyse text data and form themes (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Thematic analysis is relevant to this study as it is an analysis of in-depth, qualitative data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The data gathered from the talking circles in the present study were recorded and transcribed onto a Microsoft Word document afterwards. The stages of thematic analysis were followed thereafter (Nowell et al., 2017). Nowell et al. (2017) identify a six-step phase by which to analyse data. This includes:

1. Familiarization with data
2. Generation of codes
3. Search for themes
4. Review of themes
5. Definition and naming of themes
6. Writing of the report

### **1.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

According to Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey (2016) researchers defend the integrity of their work by evaluating it against the criteria of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and consistency. Credibility was addressed by debriefing the learners and having them check the findings to ensure it fits with the information provided on their part (Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability entails that although the research will not be generalized to the population, detailed descriptions of findings can be provided so that they can be transferred to the findings of those who pursue similar studies (Nowell et al., 2017). Once credibility and transferability had been reached, consistency was established by ensuring the trustworthiness of the procedures undertaken by the researcher (Noble & Smith, 2015). The credibility, transferability and consistency contributed to the trustworthiness of the research findings.

## **1.11 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

This research consists of six chapters:

### Chapter One

Chapter one is the introductory chapter of this study and provides a background of peer support. It contains a statement of the problem which describes how school learners currently experience peer support.

### Chapter Two

Chapter two explores the phenomenon of peer support. The researcher examines the meaning of peer support, and the different contexts in which it is applied.

### Chapter Three

This presents the theoretical framework of the research study. This research study is underpinned by the person-centred approach of Carl Rogers.

### Chapter Four

Chapter Four presents the methodology and the research design used. It also includes a discussion of the choice of research design, approach, and paradigm.

### Chapter Five

Chapter five outlines an analysis of the data and presents the findings gained from the qualitative data generation methods that were adopted for the purpose of this study. Data was generated through talking circles and collages. A six-phase thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

### Chapter Six

This chapter concludes the findings of the study and makes recommendations for future research of the topic.

## **1.12 SUMMARY CHAPTER**

The chapter presents the introduction and background to the learners' experiences of peer support in the intermediate phase. The statement of the problem outlines the reasons learners need a Peer Support Team and the challenges they face in trying to connect with the Peer Support Team. The importance of the study highlights the necessity of research in this area. This chapter also presents the rationale of the study as well as the objectives and critical questions guiding the research. The research methodology and research design were also presented. The next chapter reviews the literature on peer support.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

A literature review is a comprehensive outline of prior research that provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of scholarly work (Denney & Tewksbury, 2013; Jensen, 2015). It provides an overview of what is known about the topic, what can be known, and sets the foundation of academic explorations (Denney & Tewksbury, 2013; Jensen, 2015; Xiao & Watson, 2017).

This chapter reviews literature related to peer support. It begins with an introduction and explains the concept of peer support. It then explores the functions of peer support as an established institution and the benefits of peer support in various contexts.

#### **2.2. PEER SUPPORT CONCEPTUALISED**

*“It’s important we share our experiences with other people. Your story will heal you, and your story will heal somebody else. When you tell your story, you free yourself and give other people permission to acknowledge their own story.” – Iyanla Vanzant.*

The above quote ideally encapsulates the essence of peer support. But what does peer support mean? To understand the meaning of peer support, it is imperative that each component of peer support is explored first. These concepts will be explored in the context of school-aged learners.

##### **2.2.1 What is a peer?**

A peer is someone who has a shared history and social context (Cowie & Sharp, 2018). In the school context, peers are generally those who have similar ages and are in the same class or grade or participate in school activities together.

##### **2.2.2 What is support?**

Young people need to have the presence of close relationships in their lives. This should also come with affection, respectful physical contact, comfort, and empathy. They need to be taken into consideration and given opportunities to share feelings, including challenging ones like anger, fear, anxiety, and bewilderment (Cowie & Wallace, 2000). They also need to have access to educational opportunities and there must be a provision of support and resources that will prepare them for life after school (Cowie & Sharp, 2018). Support, however, does not

entail doing things for others but enabling them to gain experience of taking responsibility for themselves and others and dealing with conflict in a constructive manner.

### **2.2.3 What does it mean to be a supportive peer?**

Conflicts and confrontations are unavoidable in school life (Papakitsos & Karakiozis, 2016). Learners perceived as vulnerable are targeted by ‘bullies’ and other learners become bystanders without any intervention. There are times when learners are left to fend for themselves and, as a result, live in either a state of fear, anxiety, depression, or isolation. They feel that no one really cares about them and therefore won’t be open to anyone about their feelings. There are times when there is hostility or indifference towards these victims of bullying (Cefai, Bartolo, Cavioni, & Downes, 2018). Evidence, however, has shown positive effects of peers being supported by others (Schurz, Uddin, Kanske, Lamm, Sallet, Bernhardt, Mars & Bzdok, 2021). Peer support can be understood in an informal and a formal context.

### **2.2.4 Informal peer support**

Informal peer support will take place at schools as a response to deal with situations. Schools adopt a mental health approach where teachers take on the role of educating the learners on the importance of supporting each other. They teach them to look out for those who are being excluded and lonely. Some schools might even have an area for learners where they can go for support from their peers. This can involve all the children in the school, and at the same time, develop their awareness, empathy, and support skills. Another form of informal peer support is when some schools might adopt a buddy approach for new learners where they are introduced to another learner who will spend time with them and assist them in settling in (The Buddy Approach, n.d.).

### **2.2.5 Formal peer support**

In recent years, peer support has come to exist as a formal, established institution at schools. Learners are trained to help each other in a planned and structured way (The Buddy Approach, n.d.). A book published by Cowie and Wallace (2000) discusses the importance of peer support in schools. By changing the quality of the relationships that peers share, peers may be more likely to offer help to each other in times of conflict (Cowie & Wallace, 2000). When peers support each other, they feel included and accepted by other pupils. Learners feel a sense of belonging and are supported by their peers. The very act of peers supporting each other, and the encouragement of this, significantly contributes to the atmosphere created in the classroom and school environment (Cowie, 2020). When there is a strong bond between peers, then it

significantly reduces stress. Peers often turn to each other for consolation in stressful situations where they are listened to, supported, and understood (Cowie & Hutson, 2005).

Peer support takes the form of mentoring, tutoring, and counselling. This literature review will focus on peer support from a psychosocial vantage point. Counselling can be defined as an activity in which a trained professional engages in a particular relationship with a person who is experiencing personal or emotional difficulties (Cowie & Sharp, 2018).

According to White Paper 6, all schools are required to have an established counselling body (Government, 2001). Counselling services are not only for learners who experience issues but also for the positive development of individuals. The counselling body should provide services to help students develop their personalities, education, and career development (Cowie & Sharp, 2018). The counselling body must also play a positive role in the overall school environment by bringing about positive changes. This may influence the perceptions learners have about counselling bodies and create an atmosphere that promotes learning and social growth (Amat, 2018). Counselling services can either be in the form of a school counsellor, psychologist, or an established Peer Support Team.

This literature review will further explore the phenomenon of formal peer support from a psychosocial vantage point. We will expand the meaning of peer support and the different variations of peer support. The effectiveness of peer support in any place can only be examined by the experiences of the recipients of peer support. Therefore, we will also explore how peer support has been experienced in various situations. Considering the literature that will be examined, it is evident that peer support has been offered in many different countries, as well as in different contexts, however, as discussed in section 1.5, the gap that this study intends to fill, is the issue that peer support has not been explored from a psychosocial perspective and that too, particularly in the intermediate phase. It is imperative to note that there are two sources used in this literature review that are not recent, that is, 'The Mannerheim League for Children's Hand Guide or Setting Up a Peer Support Programme, 2011' and 'Peer Support in Action, 2000' by Helen Cowie and Patti Wallace. These sources contain information regarding peer support that is relative to how peer support functions today, however, it points to the notion that there is also a lack of literature that specifically talks about peer support in South African schools, specifically from a psychosocial perspective.

### **2.3 PEER SUPPORT AS AN ESTABLISHED INSTITUTION**

At school, children are each other's peers because they have the same shared experiences of being of similar age and at the same school (Welfare, 2011). They are free with each other and interact regularly at the same level (Bii, Aloka, & Raburu, 2016). Peers play an important role in the lives and personal development of learners which is why being accepted is so important to them (Welfare, 2011). They are major socialisation agents among adolescents (Ambayo & Ngumi, 2016). As discussed in section 2.2.3, children are exposed to the everyday occurrences of conflict, loneliness, and exclusion. School learners are also dealing with peer pressure (Coleman, 2018). Learners could also have academic problems. An institution needs to have measures in place to effectively deal with these kinds of situations, as mental health is prioritised. This is usually dealt with by employing a counsellor or school psychologist. An alternative is peer support. Simply put, peer support is the support of one peer to another.

Peer Support also has many different names such as peer counselling, peer mentoring, peer tutoring, peer mediation and peer assistance. These names, however, do not necessarily mean the same thing. The names go with what they offer. Some of them could offer support academically, socially, or psychologically.

Peer Support in this sense is very similar to peer counselling because learners are helped psychologically. Peer support, however, is the preferred term in the context of this research because counselling entails help on a professional level. Therefore, to practice counselling, one would have to be registered with the Health Professionals Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

Peer support emphasizes the process of emotional support such as befriending and conflict resolution using counselling-based approaches (Cowie & Wallace, 2000). It specifically refers to an established student body that assists learners with social and psychological issues at school. It is a structure that facilitates the learners' potential for responsible, sensitive, empathic caring (Zeng & Chung, 2018). Peer supporters are also known as peer counsellors, peer ambassadors, peer facilitators and peer helpers (Coleman, Sykes, & Groom, 2017). They comprise ordinary students who are genuinely willing to help others and make a valuable contribution to the school community voluntarily, and most importantly, they are cooperative and friendly towards others (Welfare, 2011 & Cowie & Sharp, 2018). A peer support programme can be introduced at the primary school level as it is when relational problems, such as bullying, rejection and exclusion, begin to arise so generally students in older grades are chosen as they provide positive role models (Glazzard & Rose, 2019).



Peer supporters are carefully chosen by adult facilitators who train and supervise them (Welfare, 2011 & Bii et al., 2016). Potential peer supporters need to communicate efficiently, listen actively to others, have an effective problem-solving approach to others' difficulties and offer practical support (Cowie & Wallace, 2000; Bii, et al., 2016; Coleman, 2018). This is attained by developing good listening skills, having empathy for others experiencing social and emotional difficulties and being willing to support above all (Zeng & Chung, 2018).

Evidence shows that peer support has many benefits. Peer supporters develop and strengthen the learners' social and emotional skills. Learners are open and at more ease when discussing their worries with their peers. They feel part of the school community and become more responsible at maintaining good mental health as well as ensuring the mental health of others. They are better able to cope with conflict. They also gain confidence, self-awareness, empathy, resilience, and interpersonal skills (Coleman, 2018). It is important to note that peer support does not eliminate the problems but helps to combat and prevent them before they develop into a crisis. Peer supporters are supposed to be models but with the wrong guidance, can cause problems, especially if confidentiality is not being maintained (Bii et al., 2016). The functions and benefits of peer support will be discussed in more detail below.

#### **2.4 FUNCTIONS OF PEER SUPPORT**

As highlighted in section 2.3, peer support is the support offered by a peer support group to learners at school. Generally, older students from grades 11 and 12 forms part of the peer support group. Older students are selected because not only are they role models, but they also relate to learners in younger grades owing to their shared experiences. The peer support group also called the Peer Support Team, is a legitimate school organisation that is guided and governed by the rules and regulations of the school peer support policy. They are overseen by facilitators, made up of staff members that supervise and guide them on their journey as peer supporters (Cowie & Sharp, 2018). Training of both teacher facilitators and peer supporters are necessary (Ambayo & Ngumi, 2016).

To become part of the Peer Support Team, prospective peer supporters must first apply for the position. They then undergo training, provided by the facilitators, as well as existing peer support members. The facilitators are the teachers at the school (Kamore & Tiego, 2015). They also shadow the existing peer support members as part of their practical experience. They are then assessed on their performance and 'fit' for the position and formally selected. Once

selected, they consent and abide by what is required of them as a team. Their roles are clearly outlined at the forefront (Kamore & Tiego, 2015).

Peer Supporters are available to all learners and those who are distressed from issues like conflict, abuse, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and peer pressure (Cefai et al., 2018). The peer support methods include befriending, cooperative group work and circle time, which is where the Peer Support Team and learners sit in a circle and have discussions (Cowie & Wallace, 2000).

The services of peer supporters include promoting group cohesion and positive group behaviour by running class discussions and organising various games and activities that help students bond with each other and work together. Peer supporters also play an important role in preventing and combatting bullying. They also arrange a variety of activities designed to promote a more supportive atmosphere in schools, while at the same time learning through activities and processes themselves. The scope and range of peer support may vary from school to school (Welfare, 2011).

The Peer Support Team is also responsible for creating a cooperative and friendly atmosphere in the school. They encourage collaboration and emphasize the importance of accepting learners as they are. They are proactive in dealing with conflict and aim to reduce and prevent bullying, exclusion, and substance abuse (Welfare, 2011).

It is important that the functioning of the Peer Support Team is thorough, otherwise, a team that functions ineffectively could have detrimental effects on the learners. This was observed by Kamore & Tiego (2015) who conducted a study to assess the factors hindering the efficiency of the peer counselling programmes in Kenyan high schools. Results showed that although peer counselling was available in most high schools, there was a lack of criteria for the selection of peer counsellors (Kamore & Tiego, 2015).

## **2.5 BENEFITS OF PEER SUPPORT**

Evidence shows that peer support is an effective way of engaging learners. The learners are comfortable discussing issues with the peer support members and are proactive in learning and asking questions (Welfare, 2011).

Peer support is most successful in an environment that promotes collaboration, cooperation, consideration, appreciation of others' values, support and care of others and helping people to become more self-reliant. Every person is equal (Cowie & Sharp, 2018; Robert, 2016).

Peer support also promotes personal growth, learning, study skills, empathy, responsibility, and active citizenship (Welfare, 2011). It is important to interpret support behaviours from peers as positive emotional support, as it relates to care, empathy, enthusiasm, acceptance, and respect (Robert, 2016). In contrast, a study conducted by Ambayo and Ngumi (2016) in Kenya sought to explore the influence of peer counselling on students' behaviour change in secondary schools. Results revealed that although peer counselling positively influences students' academic performance, it does not influence their social and emotional behaviour (Ambayo & Ngumi, 2016).

## **2.6 THE BENEFITS OF PEER SUPPORT IN THEIR VARIOUS CONTEXTS**

To gain a deeper understanding of the concept of peer support, we must explore the various areas where peer support is implemented and the results thereof. Peer support is not only confined to the school context but is also present in many professions and institutions. Peer support must be understood considering the various contexts in which it operates.

### **2.6.1 Peer support as peer mentoring**

Peer mentoring, also known as peer tutoring and peer education, entails the provision of assistance from peer to peer academically. They focus on education and providing information (Glazzard & Rose, 2019). Therefore, in peer mentoring, peer mentors assist learners in subject areas, particularly those experiencing challenges in understanding the work. Peer mentoring can take place at any level of education and mentees could be those that have specific challenges with the schoolwork or learners with learning disabilities (Coleman, 2018).

### **2.6.2 Peer support and orphaned learners**

There is a considerable similarity between peer counselling and peer support, as reviewed in section 2.3, so henceforth, these terms will be used interchangeably. A quantitative study by Bii et al., (2016), implemented in Kenya, explored the efficacy of peer counselling on the emotional adjustment of orphaned learners in schools. Results showed a positive correlation between the peer counselling that was provided to the orphaned learners and their emotional adjustment. As the learners had more contact sessions with the peer counsellors, their emotional adjustment also increased. This was due to peer counselling which was effective in addressing their emotional, social, and physiological needs. Their emotional adjustment was enhanced as a result (Bii et al., 2016). An aspect of this study that stood out was that peer counselling was effective because the learners were able to connect with them due to their shared experiences and challenges. The advice that was provided by the peer counsellors could be used to solve

their problems. The peer counsellors provided social support and companionship. The orphaned pupils, as a result, felt secure, worthy, confident, and hopeful (Bii et al., 2016). Another case, however, reported that the peer counselling was not effective because they did not have the same experiences, that of, being orphaned, so they could not completely relate to them. It was also found that the peer counsellors were not emotionally mature to provide counselling on a professional level (Bii et al., 2016).

### **2.6.3 Peer support in prisons**

A study by McFarlane & Morris (2018) explored the role of peer support in aspiring students in prison to take more responsibility for their learning. Results showed that the students were provided with effective opportunities to engage more in the community of fellow students by supporting each other and participate fully in learning despite being in an environment that only permitted isolated distance learning.

### **2.6.4 Peer support and learners with disabilities**

A study by Leseyane, Mandende, Makgato and Cekiso (2018) compared the relationship that dyslexic learners shared with their peers in a public school to the relationship dyslexic learners shared with their peers in a special school. Results revealed that dyslexic learners were exposed to ill-treatment by other learners in public high schools, and were despised, ridiculed, bullied and undermined. The teachers did not address this problem and contributed to the negative circumstances of the learners by not giving them extra attention and passing comments that embarrassed them. They were also labelled by their peers and excluded from participating in activities. The relationship that these learners had with their peers was negative. This led to the development of negative self-concept. On the other hand, there was a positive relationship between dyslexic learners and their peers in a special school. They did not see themselves as different and shared a positive relationship with their peers and teachers. The teachers knew how to deal with their challenges (Leseyane, Mandende, Makgato, & Cekiso, 2018).

Bradley (2016) evaluated a programme designed for autistic learners in mainstream secondary school environments. The study aimed to address whether peer mentors increased self-esteem, improved social satisfaction, and reduced bullying for autistic learners. Results revealed that peer mentors had a positive impact on how the learners experienced school life. Learners with autism recognized that they could count on peer mentors as a source of support (Bradley, 2016).

### **2.6.5 Peer support as peer mediation**

Another form of peer support is peer mediation. Peer mediation specifically deals with issues of conflict, where a peer needs to resolve an issue taking place between two or more learners. A critical assessment of peer mediation was conducted by Papakitsos & Karakiozis (2016) to examine how conflicts were addressed at schools. Bullying, which was one of the main causes of conflict, makes mediation difficult because of the issue of an imbalance of power. Peer mediation, however, is not an effective method to use in cases of sexual harassment or substance abuse, as these issues need to be dealt with by the necessary authorities. Although participation was scarce at first, it eventually reduced conflict and bullying incidents. Learners involved in the programme developed social skills and there was an improvement in the social climate of the school. Peer mediation is only effective if there is a high level of training and support of mediators (Papakitsos & Karakiozis, 2016).

### **2.6.6 Peer support and pregnancy in looked after children (LAC)**

Peer mentoring, an alternative form of peer support, has also been effective in the community by assisting young, pregnant women. A study conducted in the United Kingdom by Mezey et al., (2015) explored the influence of peer mentoring in reducing pregnancy among looked after children (LAC). Peer mentors were older, experienced caregivers assigned to provide support, guidance, and care to young pregnant women. Results showed that peer mentoring proved successful in assisting young, pregnant women in developing self-esteem, confidence and in making choices regarding their education, personal development, and relationships. This was because the peer mentors had been through similar experiences and could relate to the women. (Mezey et al., 2015).

### **2.6.7 Peer support in media**

Peer support has also been beneficial in education using media strategies. A study conducted by Muslem and Abbas (2017) sought to investigate the impact of immersive multimedia learning strategies with peer support on production skills in reading and speaking in first-year university students. Results showed that the group that had peer support assistance performed much better in all measures of reading or speaking (Muslem & Abbas, 2017).

### **2.6.8 Peer support and discipline**

Peer counsellors have also had a significant influence on the promotion of discipline in schools. A study carried out by Osodo et al., (2016) in public secondary schools in Kenya found that peer counsellors played a significant role in promoting discipline among students. The peer

counsellors were always available to listen to the students who had concerns. They responded positively to messages from peers, initiated meetings and had more of a positive influence on them. The peer counsellors identified students with problems and referred them to the school counsellor if they involved issues that they were unable to address. For peer counsellors to perform optimally, they also must be motivated. Peer counsellors were also equipped with sexual reproductive knowledge, information about risks, responsibilities, outcomes and impacts of sexual actions with their peers. By supporting and developing peer counsellors, they were the best group to reach out to fellow students in curbing disciplinary issues. Peer counsellors also encouraged good academic participation and achievement among peers. The students developed positive attitudes with each other due to the influence of the peer counsellors. Students also developed better study habits and time management, which assisted in teacher tasks. Peer counsellors emphasized the value of discussing problems and difficulties experienced by the students without resorting to violence. The students developed good problem-solving skills as a result and learned the importance of maintaining peace. Having an established peer counselling body at school also reduced costs as professionals could focus on other duties. The peer counsellors had skills and abilities that enhanced their counselling abilities. They also provided knowledge on various careers available (Osodo et al., 2016).

#### **2.6.9 Peer support as learning support**

Peer support also takes the form of learning support at schools. It particularly focuses on learners who experience barriers to learning. These learners are removed from the mainstream class and receive support at home mainly in language and mathematics (Kriel & Livingstone, 2019). Learning support is needed at mainstream schools. The study by Kriel & Livingstone (2019) aimed to investigate the learners' experiences of being withdrawn for learning support and the effect on their self-esteem. Results showed that the learners did not report negative experiences of learning support. Learning support increased confidence in their academic abilities. Most of the learners enjoyed learning support. The aim was to ensure that all learners were included regardless of barriers to learning (Kriel & Livingstone, 2019).

Correspondingly, a study by Ngoon, Chen, Deutsch, & Lip (2016) describes how learning support also takes place on an online platform. A learning site, known as Oppia, is an open-source, interactive online learning site that aims to create a community of everyday learners by allowing users to both teach and learn from each other. The study was based on the premise that with online learning there is more potential in collecting information that supports peers in sharing knowledge with each other and collaborating on learning experiences. The process

was improved by the interaction of the peers which took place on online chat rooms or discussion forums. With Oppia, learners can engage in dynamic conversations and educational content. Learners work together to produce better learning experiences on the web (Ngoon et al., 2016). Similarly, a study by Sinclair (2017), examined the importance of peer support among a group of post-graduate students in an online programme. Results revealed that students placed great emphasis on the importance of peer support. Peers relied on each other for support and assistance with studies. They enjoyed engaging in face-to-face support. This case emphasized the importance of peer support and encouraged the administration to implement other methods of facilitating peer support between and among other cohorts (Sinclair, 2017).

Peer support has also assisted learners who experience language barriers in the classroom. Carhill-Poza (2017) suggests that school policies that were designed to support language development created boundaries between language learners and their bilingual and multilingual peers and lessened the opportunities to learn and use academic English. Language learners needed social support from their peers to learn academic English (Carhill-Poza, 2017). This is confirmed by Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems (2016) who found that students are more comfortable approaching their peers for help and advice for learning strategies (Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems, 2016).

#### **2.6.10 Peer support and distance learning**

A study led by Ouma (2019) explored the role of learner support in distance learning. Distance learning entails students learning at home and not attending lectures full time. For distance learning to take place, learners need to be equipped with resources and technologies like computers and cell phones that bridge the connection between them and the university. As a result, support from peers plays a key role in making distance learning effective. This is only attainable with learners that have access to effective technologies. There exists, however, the scenario where learners don't have access to these kinds of technology which limits interaction. It was discovered that the faculty under study did not organize a special programme to prepare and counsel the students to cope with the learning needs of distance education (Ouma, 2019).

#### **2.6.11 Peer support and bullying**

Research has presented peer support as having a positive impact on children's school experience and well-being and could function as school bullying intervention and prevention. A qualitative study by Tzani-Pepelasi et al., (2019) aimed to highlight the 'buddy approach' as

having a positive impact on preventing bullying at school. A mentoring programme was implemented, and mentors were selected to assist mentees who experienced bullying at school. Findings revealed that the buddy approach is valued by both mentees and mentors. The buddy approach promoted belonging, friendship, responsibility, satisfaction, and pride. Mentees felt safe having the mentors around (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019).

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

Peer support as an established institution in the school context was discussed along with the functions and benefits of peer support. The evidence points to the notion that peer support is beneficial to schools as they have positive contributions to school environments and the learners. However, although there are so many areas where peer support exists, literature on peer support in the South African context is minimal. Peer support also takes place in different contexts ranging from psychological to academic functions. However, there is little research that specifically focuses on the experience of learners at a primary school level. This study will therefore explore how learners experience peer support in the intermediate phase from a psychosocial vantage point.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

A theoretical framework comprises the theories that support a research study and explains why the research problem exists (California, 2021; Vinz, 2020). It contains details regarding the perspective the researcher will take to address the gap and shortcomings (Lempriere, 2019).

*“We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know” - Carl Rogers.*

This quote effectively encapsulates the spirit of the person-centred approach, which is the theoretical framework underpinning this research study. The following chapter will discuss the history of the person-centred approach and the attributes of the person-centred counsellor. The limitations of the person-centred approach are also outlined.

#### **3.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH**

The Peer Support Team is a school-based counselling body comprising learners in grades 11 and 12 who offer support to the learners in grades RRR to 7, from a psychosocial vantage point. All counselling bodies require a framework that guides their approach. In this case, the person-centred approach guides the Peer Support Team as well as this research study. The person-centred approach was founded by Carl Rogers.

Carl Ransom Rogers was born in Chicago, 1902 (Woods, 2014). His family was staunch Evangelists who prided themselves on the principle of hard work and no alcohol. Growing up on a farm in the countryside, they were close to each other and had little contact with other people (Woods, 2014). During this time, Carl developed a keen interest in science and observed that despite being exposed to harsh conditions, plants and animals were still able to develop and grow. He wondered if people, perhaps, could face challenges like criticism and judgment, and still grow to live fulfilling lives (Hayes, 2015; Woods, 2014).

Between the 1940s and 1960s Carl Rogers, as a humanist psychologist, worked at many institutions and it was during this time that he gave birth to his person-centred approach (Kettley, Kettley, & Bates, 2015; sagepub.com). Rogers observed that human beings possessed the potential to be good (Florkowski, 2017). This led to the recognition that all people lived in

their own personal and subjective worlds, but at the same time had an essential desire and potential for growth and change given the right environment, despite the possible challenges they could face. (Florkowski, 2017; Hayes, 2015; Kettley, Kettley, & Bates, 2015). It was particularly during the time he worked as a psychologist for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in New York that forms the benchmark at which his theory of counselling came into existence (McGowan, 2020). However, Rogers continued to change and revise his concepts as he was open to new ideas and as put by Florkowski (2017), "...cautious of dogmatic stagnation". During these years of academic engagement, Carl Rogers also enjoyed a happy married life (Woods, 2014).

Upon the development of his person-centred approach to counselling, it was seen as new and revolutionary, which led Carl Rogers to be recognized as one of the most influential psychotherapists in American History (Hayes, 2015; Florkowski, 2017). Carl Rogers was even nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 for his work in South Africa and Ireland in conflict resolution (Schreiber, 2010). He lost to Mother Theresa and sadly died later that year (Woods, 2014).

The person-centred approach has stood the test of time and is now regarded as one of the main movements in the field of psychology and more (Florkowski, 2017; Corey, 2013). It is a non-directive approach to counselling which means that the person is the centre of attention and is allowed to be him/herself without any imposition on their way of thinking and feeling. There is an understanding that the person possesses his/her frame of reference, values, and emotions (Banaszak & Florkowski, 2014). It is not medically oriented; therefore, it does not diagnose or prescribe treatment and predict outcomes (Florkowski, 2017). There is an emphasis on feelings in the person-centred approach (Florkowski, 2017).

Florkowski (2017) recognizes that the person-centred approach can also be applied in non-medical settings. This includes the academic field where it can enrich the environment as well as apply to interpersonal relationships, including conflict resolution (Heyns, Bresser, Buys, Coetzee, Korkie, White & McCormack 2019). It essentially characterizes any relationship that cultivates growth and focuses on healthy relationships (van Lieshout & Cardiff, 2015; Heyns, et al., 2019). This relates to the current research study as it is also an academic setting.

Although this was developed over half a century ago, it encompasses important values which are relevant to peer support today. In other words, the core values that underpin the person-centred approach are encompassed by the learners that form the school Peer Support Team.

Carl Rogers' person-centred approach is also relevant in the counselling and educational fields. The literature in the previous chapter described the various understandings of peer support, however, this study focuses on peer support in the form of counselling thereby the necessity of a relevant, grounded theoretical framework is of paramount importance.

In the following chapter, we will briefly explore how the person-centred approach views a person, the attributes of the person-centred counsellor and how this applies to the current research study.

### **3.3 VIEW OF THE PERSON: HOW DO THE PEER SUPPORTERS VIEW THE LEARNERS?**

As discussed in section 1.2, the Peer Support Team comprises learners in grades 11 and 12 who go by peer supporters. The learners in the lower grades, that is grades RRR to 7, are referred to as peer supportees. The peer supporters must recognize that learners in the lower grades are still in the process of development. By having that understanding, they can establish genuine relationships with them. Therefore, the way the peer supporter views the peer supportee will in turn influence the kind of relationship that is established and their approach thereafter. How the person-centred approach views a person will be discussed in the section below. The relationship between a counsellor and client will be used to explain the person-centred approach and link to the peer support situation.

Carl Rogers was a humanist psychologist, which means that, according to the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology, people are free-willed, responsible, and self-actualizing beings that strive to constantly reach their full potential (Coleman, 2001).

People are trustworthy. They possess the potential to be essentially good, positive, progressive, truthful, and self-directed. They are independent beings that aspire to grow and actualize to reach their full potential. They can solve their problems without any intervention on part of the counsellor (Corey, 2013; Eremie & Ubulom, 2016). Similarly in the school setting, children are viewed as having the ability to achieve their full potential and cultivated towards that.

People strive towards actualization. This means that they strive to be the best that they can be or achieve the best that they possibly can. This can only take place if favourable conditions are provided such an opportune environment and where trust is evident (Florkowski, 2017; Hayes, 2015).

Considering how a person should be viewed, the counsellor needs to adopt certain attitudes and characteristics when working with people. The quality of the relationship between the counsellor and the person will determine the outcome of the counselling process. Respect for the client's subjective experience must be present along with the understanding that each client is unique and must be trusted to make positive and constructive decisions that are best for them (Corey, 2013). Therefore, the right conditions must be provided for this to be attained. If the counsellor is real, supportive, caring, and non-judgemental, then positive change can take place (Corey, 2013).

As the person embarks on the journey to reach their full potential, they can be trusted to make decisions and behave accordingly to achieve the best they can be. This is also influenced by their subjective experience and the environment. The choices that they make will influence their actions. He or she will become the architect of his/her own life (Werner Meyer, 2002). The counsellor, therefore, needs to provide an environment that provides certain conditions that will steer the client towards this goal and, at the same time, embrace the qualities that will encourage the actualization of this potential.

Similarly in the peer support situation, although the students are not registered counsellors, they can adopt the same values embraced by the person-centred approach. In this way, they have a way of viewing the younger learners and providing an environment that guides the learners towards achieving their potential.

### **3.4 ATTRIBUTES OF A PERSON-CENTRED COUNSELLOR THAT THE PEER SUPPORTER EMBRACES**

As stated in section 3.3, it is the responsibility of the counsellor to create an environment that will promote growth, progression and guide them towards achieving their potential. This environment is created by the person-centred counsellor who adopts the core conditions of counselling which are congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard for the client. (Corey, 2013; M'eng'ang'a, 2019; Florkowski, 2017). These will support the client in discovering their answers (Hayes, 2015).

Congruence is genuineness or realness (Eremie & Ubulom, 2016; Bettencourt, 2014). Here the counsellor agrees with the client. The counsellor is honest with him/herself and the client. Their inner expression corresponds with their outer expression. They are authentic when they express their feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and reactions to a certain extent (Corey, 2013; M'eng'ang'a, 2019; Woods, 2014). Similarly, the Peer Support Team is genuine with the learners in the lower

grades. They are real in their thoughts, expressions, and reactions but not to the extent where the learner will take offence to the reaction.

The second core condition is when the person-centred counsellor shares a deep empathic understanding of the client's world (Eremie & Ubulom, 2016; Hayes, 2015). A counsellor is empathic when they grasp the subjective world of the client. The counsellor understands the experiences and feelings as they are revealed throughout the session with the client, as they draw on their personal feelings and experiences that are like the clients. The counsellor is still able to maintain a sense of who he/she is without getting completely lost in the world of the client (Corey, 2013; M'eng'ang'a, 2019; Woods, 2014; Hayes, 2015). Rogers perceives empathy as a crucial ability as it is the key to building deeper connections with the client (Florkowski, 2017). Empathy is expressed by the Peer Support Team when they show a true understanding of the learners' subjective world. This is bridged by the fact that the learners who make up the Peer Support Team are still students and were in the lower grades not far back. In this way, the learner has the assurance that the Peer Support Team will show a true understanding of their situation.

Unconditional positive regard is attained when the counsellor sees the client as an important person (Eremie & Ubulom, 2016). The client is accepted, and the counsellor communicates deep and genuine care for the client. The caring is genuine and void of evaluation of judgement of the client's feelings, thoughts, and behaviour. The caring and acceptance are warm so that the clients have the freedom to express their feelings and experiences freely (Corey, 2013; M'eng'ang'a, 2019; Woods, 2014). The peer supporters care deeply for the supportees. They do not judge the learners and show them that they are accepted. In this way, the peer supportee has the freedom to express his or her feelings.

The counsellor is not to be under any façade but rather, as agents of change, to be without a role (Corey, 2013). The counsellor must be present as the client shares his /her feelings and experiences. As the counsellor enters the world of the client, he or she must be real and create an environment that allows the client to find themselves and openly express their experiences and feelings, beliefs, and world views (Corey, 2013).

The relationship between the counsellor and client is characterized by equality. The counsellor is in no place of authority and does not know best (Corey, 2013). Clients are more likely to drop pretences provided they experience congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. The relationship between the counsellor and client is effective when the counsellor

enters the client's subjective world, is transparent, willingly lets the client share his/her feelings and be who they are and shares the experiences of the client (Woods, 2014). In return, the client can sense these attitudes of the counsellor (Woods, 2014). The client feels comfortable as a person and under no obligation to meet the expectations of others to attain love from them. There is non-possessiveness and tolerance when real love is present (Florkowski, 2017). The differences between the peer supporter and peer supportee that arise, such as the difference in age, grade and years in school should not place the peer supporter on a higher platform than the peer supportee. These differences need to be put aside so that the peer supportee is more likely to openly share their feelings and experience. It is a shared journey between the supporter and supportee (Corey, 2013).

The ability to create a safe relationship is essential (Banaszak & Florkowski, 2014). By establishing a warm and accepting relationship, the counsellor is then able to reflect on the clients' feelings by looking out for verbal and non-verbal cues (Eremie & Ubulom, 2016). According to Florkowski (2017), the aim of therapy is for the client to reach their utmost potential, regardless of the challenges that they may face. This is also known as the actualising tendency. The client is the agent of change and knows the best way to move ahead when the relationship is free of threat (Hayes, 2015).

According to McGowan (2020), the person-centred approach of Carl Rogers is adapted to the counselling and school setting by having the ability to deal with the challenges young clients face provided there is contact between the counsellor and client on a psychological level; the core facilitative conditions of congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard are met by the counsellor. These are enough to bring about a positive change in the client (McGowan, 2020). Findings by a study conducted by McGowan (2020) also reported that the person-centred approach has also brought about positive changes in teaching practices at schools and coping with change and challenges in cultural fields.

One of the main reasons why people seek therapy with counsellors or therapists is because they are in situations where they feel helpless, powerless, and unable to make clear decisions. By attending therapy, they hope to regain more control of their lives and make a positive change and improvement (Corey, 2013). In the school situation, learners seek out the Peer Support Team because they are in overwhelming situations like bullying, not coping academically or even personal problems that affect them during school. They seek help so that they can cope better or deal with situations better or even someone who just needs to listen to them. The

counselling strategies underpinned by the person-centred approach are non-diagnostic. Usually, they listen attentively while applying core conditions without disrupting or advising the clients. Similarly, the Peer Support Team mainly listens to the learners attentively and then guides them in reaching their own decisions.

The person-centred approach allows the client to take responsibility for themselves in the relationship so that they can gain greater self-understanding (Corey, 2013). As the clients begin to feel more accepted and understood, they lower their defences and are open to sharing their experiences and feelings. They will express a range of emotions, both positive and negative, such as their fears, anxiety, guilt, shame, hatred, and anger. They place trust in the counsellor so that they can express these emotions without any judgement. They feel safer and less vulnerable, more realistic and come to be more accepting of others and themselves (Corey, 2013). They appreciate themselves more and worry less about meeting the expectations of others and their behaviour corresponds more with who they truly are. When the clients begin the healing process, the counsellors are supportive. Clients value being understood and accepted, so therefore the counsellor gains confidence in creating a safe place where the client can explore feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours.

The client is central to the therapeutic process. The counsellors are not in a place of authority but rather facilitators who are guiding the clients towards taking responsibility for their change. Should a counsellor diagnose and prescribe, then they would be in control of the relationship. In the person-centred approach, the control lies with the client. The therapist will embrace the core conditions to create a climate characteristic of realness, warmth, acceptance and understanding so that the client in turn can strive towards actualizing his or her potential. The power is transferred from the therapist to the client (Demanchick & Kirschenbaum, 2014).

The counsellor must temporarily give up their views and opinions to understand the subjective world of the client (Corey, 2013). The counsellor needs to be an attentive listener, accepting, understanding, and responding. The counsellor also needs to maintain openness in his or her reactions but here to a certain degree as should the client confide in the counsellor about something they deem shameful, then the counsellor should not have a reaction that is reflective of shame but rather of composure (Corey, 2013). In this case, the reactions need only be open to a certain degree but composed in certain cases. Counsellors will continue to evolve and develop as they experience more therapeutic engagements. Similarly, a peer supporter is not a first-hand expert but gains expertise through the engagements with the learners. This process

of growth and development is indicative of the values embraced by the person-centred approach. One can assume that growth is not only limited to the client but includes the growth of the counsellors as well (Corey, 2013). The most essential starting point as counsellors is to remain in the client's frame of reference that they are better able to understand the client's feelings and experiences. The counsellors have a variety of responses and methods in which to assist the clients. They must continue to monitor these responses and methods to ensure it continually fits with the client's view of the problem or situation. The person-centred approach is more goal-oriented. The goal being self-actualization of the client, the counsellor needs to be grounded, centred, genuine, respectful, caring, present, focused as well as a good listener, patient and accepting to be an effective counsellor to the client (Corey, 2013).

The explanations above have applied to the one-on-one therapeutic situations, yet the person-centred approach is also applicable to a group counselling situation. Usually, a learner will seek out a peer supporter to gain personal assistance in dealing with a problem or situation. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, the peer supporter is also required to make classroom visits where they address the whole class at a time or even a group of learners. The role of the counsellor does not change in this case. The counsellor still maintains the role of a facilitator and ensures that core conditions have been embraced. The counsellors ensure that a safe and healing climate has been created. This will lead to the clients being more open to being honest and interacting civilly. The members of the group will not only appreciate and trust themselves but also each other. This in turn will lead to progression where they can move forward in the healing process. Here the facilitator will not only empathize with one member but try to grasp the subjective world of each of the group members. The members will also begin to empathize with each other. They will experience the struggles together and move towards development together as well. The facilitators must ensure that their responses are not a commentary on the group process or even observations on the group dynamics. This could make members self-aware of such things and slow down the healing process (Corey, 2013).

At the end of therapeutic engagement, the client should feel more assurance and less tension as well as more confidence in positively dealing with future challenges. The counsellor must refrain from providing the client with advice as this defies the aim of the client independently maintaining control of their lives (Florkowski, 2017).



### **3.5 EVALUATION OF THE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH**

The success of the relationship between the counsellor and client is determined by the quality of the relationship. This is if the counsellor has met the conditions of congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard for the client. If these core conditions have not been met, then the connection between the counsellor and the client will not be established. The client will not be open with their feelings and experiences and therefore healing will not take place. Therefore, this will affect the journey to self-actualization (Eremie & Ubulom, 2016).

According to Florkowski (2017), the person-centred approach is too general and lacks clear techniques, and does not take underlying mental issues into account. This, however, proves to be advantageous for the Peer Support Team, as they are not experienced to be registered counsellors. Due to the emphasis on the clients, the person-centred approach is ideal for learners at a school-going age. Since the person-centred approach only deals with surface issues and does not challenge the client to go deeper; this is ideal as the Peer Support Team is not in a position to deal with deep issues (Florkowski, 2017; Simuforosa & Loveness, 2017).

The person-centred approach is also supported by research undertaken by Simuforosa & Loveness (2017) in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe. Children struggled to achieve due to emotional problems, chaotic families, mental health and poverty. By adopting the person-centred approach, counsellors were able to develop strategies to counter these issues which in turn promoted growth, openness and a positive change in the learners (Simuforosa & Loveness, 2017). McArthur, Cooper, & Berdoni (2016) echo similar sentiment by asserting that the person-centred approach is integral in reducing psychological distress and facilitating achievement in learners. Learners found it easier to express anger and anxiety, as well as gained confidence which led to an improvement in their school work. This is due to the attentive listening on part of the counsellor as opposed to diagnosing and prescribing. Although the Peer Support Team are not professional counsellors, the adoption of the person-centred approach can potentially lead to similar outcomes among the intermediate phase learners.

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

The focus of this chapter was on the person-centred approach and its role in the area of peer support. The history of the person-centred approach, as well as the core conditions of the person-centred counsellor, was explained. The therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and client was outlined. These areas were discussed concerning peer support. The next chapter will discuss the methodology of the research study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Like following the step-by-step process of a recipe to baking a delicious chocolate cake, similarly, a researcher needs to follow a step-by-step process when conducting research. This is known as methodology. According to Patil & Mankar (2016), methodology refers to the procedures and techniques that researchers use to describe, explain and predict phenomena. Its focus is on how the data will be collected and analysed thereafter.

This chapter will focus on the detailed methodology and the specific methods that I have employed to understand learners' experiences of peer support in the intermediate phase. This chapter will also focus on the research paradigm employed by the researcher, the research design, the sampling techniques and the forms of data collection and data analysis that I have used. I will end this chapter with the ethical considerations I considered during my study.

Before establishing how the researcher will collect and analyse the data, he or she must consider his or her perspective. In other words, it is important that the methodology ties in with the way the researcher views the world. This is known as a research paradigm (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). The research paradigm that will guide the methodology of this study, is the interpretivist paradigm.

#### **4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM: INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM**

Background knowledge tells us what exists, how to understand it and how to study it, therefore a paradigm consists of the various forms of background knowledge that leads to the formation of a set of ideas that guide our actions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Cresswell, 2007). According to Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), a paradigm is the world view of the researcher which is comprised of his or her perspective with informs the interpretation of data. It is the abstract beliefs and principles that shape how the researcher sees the world and how he/she understands and behaves in that world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Ngozwana, 2018).

This research study adopts an interpretivist paradigm. This means that the aim is to explore the human subjective experience in its natural context, defined by where a person lives and works, and understand the reasons and meanings that lie behind social actions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Hartas, 2015; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). These, along with one's cultural and historical background, leads to each person having a different worldview. Every person

has a different perspective which is created through one's cultural and historical backgrounds as well as through interaction with others (Cresswell, 2007).

The philosophical qualities of an interpretivist paradigm are defined by the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of the research study (Edmunds & Kennedy, 2015).

The ontology refers to the existence of the nature of reality and what can be known about it (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). According to this approach, the reality is based on the subjective experience of the participant. The researcher must use empathy to understand the world of the participant while observing it at the same time. Since each person is their unique self, they would have their subjective reality, therefore the researcher would embrace multiple realities when engaged with the participants. In acknowledging the existence of multiple realities, the researcher also understands that there is no single truth, but multiple truths.

Epistemology refers to the essence of knowledge, its natural state, and formation and how it can be communicated to others (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). According to the interpretivist paradigm, knowledge can be gained from the interaction between the researcher and the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This is gained through listening carefully to what they tell us as we make sense of their experiences. The researcher spends time with the participants almost to the point of being immersed in their lives, so the researcher can have a clear understanding of what is being said (Cresswell, 2007).

Methodology refers to the research techniques that will be employed by the researcher for the collection of data and then the analysis of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). In other words, the systematic process is followed by the researcher to gain more insight into the research problem (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

I have chosen to define my research by the interpretivist paradigm as I acknowledge that in the process of trying to understand the learners' experiences of peer support, that each learner will have the reality that they have constructed based on their personal experiences of peer support. This has been constructed through interaction with the Peer Support Team. Each learner belongs to a different grade and therefore interacts with a different member of the Peer Support Team. Each member of the Peer Support Team will have a different approach to learners. As a result, the learners will have different experiences and understandings of peer support. There is no single truth, but rather there exist multiple truths because of each learners' unique perspective and subjective experience.

### **4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

A research design is characterised by its methods of data collection and analysis. This research study adopts a qualitative research design due to its emphasis on studying phenomena as it takes place naturally in real life without any interference on part of the researcher (Kozleski, 2017; Edmunds & Kennedy, 2015). Qualitative research designs are characterised by the collection of data in its natural context as it embraces the collection of data in the form of written and spoken words based on the subjective experiences of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Kozleski, 2017; Hartas, 2015). The researcher ensures that a complete understanding of the participants' world is gained in this way (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Lune & Berg, 2017). The data is then analysed thematically by identifying and categorizing themes (Kozleski, 2017).

To attain the rich, linguistic data that represents the subjective experiences of the participants, the researcher uses data collection techniques that effectively harness the feelings behind a person's words and actions which the researcher is then able to describe and interpret in detail (Hartas, 2015). At the same time, the researcher is mindful of his or her thoughts and feelings which are also brought to the research platform; however, the researcher must ensure that this does not introduce subjective bias into data collection and interpretation (Hartas, 2015).

Due to qualitative research taking place in natural settings, the behaviour of the participants is studied as it takes place naturally, without any manipulation from the researcher. It is, however, important to take account of not just the immediate context of the research study, but also the larger context that is made up of socio-political, gender-based, racial, and technological factors (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). In this way, the researcher can have a complete understanding of the information (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006).

Data collection entails direct contact with the participants, such as an interaction, observation, or the reading of words. These are collected in the natural environment to preserve the authenticity of the data. The data needs to be reconstructed in such a way that the readers can connect with the information. These interactions of a sort are not instantaneous but rather prolonged durations where the researcher is fully engaged with the participants, sometimes making use of various means of information gathering to gain a deeper understanding of the world of the participants (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006; Lune & Berg, 2017).

The semantic nature of the data also leads to a presentation in the same form of words. The subjective experiences of the participants cannot be expressed numerically as it needs to be

presented in detailed descriptions as the reader can then grasp the understanding that was present during data collection (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006).

The data is gathered first and then synthesized inductively before he or she draws generalisations. In this way, the researcher gains diverse ways of making sense of the data (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006).

I will conduct research in the primary school of the participants which is also the place of my employment. It is also where the Peer Support Team is based and where interaction with the primary school learners takes place. By doing this, I am ensuring that data collection takes place in the natural environment of the participants. I am also familiar with each participant which will reduce the tension and allow each participant to freely share their feelings, experiences, and views through interactional and visual means. This will also allow me to gain a deeper understanding of the learners' experiences with the Peer Support Team.

To gain a rich spread of data, the researcher needs to equip himself /herself with effective interpersonal skills so that effective interaction can take place and a foundation of trustworthiness, civility, open-mindedness, and respect for the context norms available.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN: CASE STUDY**

A research design is a framework that connects the research questions to the research (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). According to Brooks & Normore (2015), a research design is chosen based on how it can help explore the research questions. To do this, they need to have a clear understanding of what they are studying, and which design is appropriate for that topic, phenomenon, dynamic, person and place.

A case is an in-depth study of a single case, over time, employing various sources of data collection (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006; Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). The case may be a programme, an event, an activity, or a group of people, that has clear boundaries of time and place. The researcher defines the case and boundaries. A case can be selected because of its uniqueness or used to illustrate an issue (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006; Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015).

To gain a deeper understanding of peer support, I have chosen to explore the experiences of learners in the intermediate phase of schooling which is my case for the study. I also employed multiple means of data collection to deepen my understanding which are talking circles and

collage visual representations. As the magnitude of this study is a half dissertation, the duration of data collection will be a week.

## **4.5 SAMPLING**

### **4.5.1 Convenience Random Sampling**

Sampling is the selection of participants from a population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). I drew random samples so that the sample is representative of the population, and I was then able to draw conclusions. I employed a combination of convenience sampling and purposive sampling in this research study.

In convenience sampling, participants are selected because they are easily available (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). However, they are not representative and cannot be generalised to the larger population. Since my participants form part of the intermediate phase of schooling, I have chosen to select participants from my place of employment. However, I will be unable to generalize the results to a larger context as not all schools adopt a peer support system.

### **4.5.2 Purposive Sampling**

Sampling is also purposive because a certain type of participant is required. After all, the participant is knowledgeable about the field to bring a range of perspectives to the research platform. The researcher uses specific criteria when selecting participants (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The researcher must personally ask the potential participants if they are willing to participate in the research study. Sometimes the researcher has to offer an incentive.

Sampling is also purposive in my research study as the participants have been purposively selected from the intermediate phase of schooling and who have had experiences with the Peer Support Team.

According to Padilla-Diaz (2015), the researcher also needs to be equipped with skills in paralanguage, kinesics, oculesics, proxemics, vocalisations, identification, and the recognition of different kinds of silences and sensitivity to cultural diversity.

Participants are willing to participate because they find importance in what the research study entails, however, sometimes people need to be paid or provided with refreshments to show that their participation is appreciated. The researcher also needs to explain to the participants the outline of the research study and what the data collection procedure will entail in terms of content and process, and how much time they will need to commit to the study. It is important to take note of their concentration span.

I chose two learners from grades, 4, 5 and 6 each. I, therefore, had a total of six participants. The following table contains biographic information regarding the participants. As will be further discussed in section 4.9.2, the participants selected pseudonyms for names, so that their identities are protected.

Grade	Pseudonym	Male/Female	Residential Area	Home Language
4	Antarctica	Male	Pinetown	English
4	Africa	Female	Pinetown	isiZulu and English
5	Khrissy Bear	Female	Pinetown	English
5	Puppy	Male	Pinetown	English
6	Anne	Female	Pinetown	isiZulu and English
6	Sophia	Female	Pinetown	isiZulu and English

I also provided the learners with refreshments, prior to conducting the talking circles, as an incentive for participating in my study.

#### 4.6 DATA GENERATION METHODS

Data refers to the information that will be collected during the research process by specific means that will be employed by the researcher. It depends on the techniques used by the researcher and therefore can take the form of written or spoken words, and behaviour. It has a significant relation to the context; therefore, the researcher needs to make sure that it maintains its meaning during the process of data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

Triangulation is a method that is used to increase the validity and credibility of the research findings (Noble & Heale, 2019). Triangulation involves the collection of data in different ways and as from many various sources as possible (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). In this way, the researcher is able to gain different insights into the phenomenon, and at the same time, ensure the trustworthiness of the study and the accurate reflection of the phenomenon under study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). I applied the method of triangulation by employing two methods of data collection in this research study, that being, talking circles and collages (see Appendix F and G).

#### **4.6.1 Talking Circles (See Appendix F)**

Talking circles have their roots in indigenous cultures where people sit together in a circle, usually for the purpose of storytelling and problem solving (Buchanan, Donmoyer, & Makokis, 2016). It is based on the principle that there is equality between participants and that they share equal power (Winters & America, 2017). Talking circles share a similarity to focus groups, in terms of structure. It is a data collection method that takes place in a group where participants are seated in a circle. They are both similar in the sense where the participants have a shared experience, however, sampling procedures of random selection still apply. In a talking circle, participants share their feelings and experiences, almost in a story-like manner (Wright et al., 2016). There is a strong resemblance between a talking circle and in certain cultures where people sat around the fireplace and shared their stories (Dawson & Toombs, 2017).

Every participant can speak in a talking circle, however, only one person can speak at a time respectfully. Both speaking and listening are very important in a talking circle as it allows for meaningful discussion (Winters & America, 2017). Sometimes an object is passed from person to person to control the flow of discussion. The basic premise of a talking circle is that every member has something valuable to contribute. Every group member also needs to attend to each other. Once each person has had the opportunity to speak, the process begins again. The participant might address what was said by the previous person or begin a new conversation (Buchanan et al., 2016). Should conversation die, then the researcher can always prompt with more questions to keep the conversation flowing.

At some point during data collection, theoretical saturation can take place. This is when a researcher must stop collecting more information as it has become redundant and repetitive. This is usually towards the end of a research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

I conducted talking circles with learners in each phase individually, therefore data was generated from three talking circles. Although I initially planned to conduct the talking circles via Zoom, I opted to collect the data at the school. Upon asking the permission of the principal, parents, and participants, I conducted the talking circles during the break time of the learners so as not to disrupt academic time. The talking circles were very small in structure as due to the Covid pandemic; social interaction is discouraged. The learners all wore face masks and were seated two meters apart in a circular structure. The talking circles were conducted in an empty classroom so that there is no disruption from other learners during the break. I did not make use of an object to direct the flow of conversation as learners cannot touch the same



objects so I as the researcher controlled the flow of conversation. The talking circles were recorded for thematic analysis later in the research process.

The following questions were asked to initiate and generate conversation with the learners:

- What do you think of the Peer Support Team that we have at school?
- What do you like most about our Peer Support Team?
- What do you like the least about our Peer Support Team?
- How do you think the Peer Support Team could be better?
- Why do you think we have a Peer Support Team at school?
- What do you expect from the Peer Support Team?

#### **4.6.2 Collage Visual Representations (See Appendix G)**

A collage is an artistic technique that is said to have roots in Picasso and Braque (Plakoyiannaki & Stavradi, 2018). A collage is a graphic representation comprising of pictures taken from various sources of media such as magazines, newspapers, and the internet. It helps uncover what the participants cannot express verbally and is an effective way to gain a deeper understanding of their subjective experience, as we look at the meaning attached to certain concepts from their perspective (Culshaw, 2019). It is therefore also seen as a projective technique (Plakoyiannaki & Stavradi, 2018).

A collage analysis entails a detailed examination of the arrangement of pictures on the page, the type of pictures chosen and tries to draw generalizations as close to the participants' authentic meaning when making the collage.

Learners were requested to put together collages that contained pictures that portrayed their experiences of the School Peer Support Team. Due to the pandemic, I asked the learners to put together their collages on Microsoft Word which they emailed to me. I first ensured that they had access to data as the images they were to use in their collages were downloaded from the internet. This also ensured adherence to Covid safety regulations. Each learner was requested to use eight pictures in their collage (See Appendix G).

#### **4.7 DATA ANALYSIS: THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS**

A qualitative research study must be conducted methodically so that the results are meaningful and useful (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

Thematic analysis is the process of reading through the data a few times over to gain a better understanding of it, and then breaking it down into themes and drawing generalisations at the end of the process (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). The end goal is to invite the reader of the research study to also gain an understanding of phenomena within their natural context. The researcher needs to ensure this is done in a trustworthy and rigorous manner (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

As opposed to the quantitative methods of data analysis, the researcher becomes the instrument in qualitative data analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). A thematic analysis follows a series of steps from the point of immersion to generalization. Before conducting a thematic analysis, the recordings of the data collection first must be transcribed which is the word for word recording of the data as written form, either hand-written or typed. This will assist the researcher in analysing the data.

Thematic analysis is comprised of six phases which are discussed below:

##### *Phase 1: Familiarisation with data*

All data collected must be converted into a textual format (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). The researcher immerses himself/herself in the data by reading through the transcriptions repeatedly. As the researcher does this, he or she makes notes, draws diagrams and brainstorms (Nowell et al., 2017). This is so that the researcher attains an overall understanding of the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

I familiarised myself with the data by first listening to the recording of each talking circle. I then transcribed each recording on Microsoft Word. I familiarised myself with the collages by examining each collage and making notes on the types of pictures used in their arrangement and the meaning behind each picture. I made notes on Microsoft Word so that all my data was stored on the same programme, ready for the next phase of analysis.

##### *Phase 2: Generating Codes*

Once the researchers have become familiar with the data, he or she creates codes, which are labels attached to specific sections of the text as they will lead to the development of themes

(Nowell et al., 2017). A code can refer to a small unit of analysis that captures interesting features of data, for example, phrases, lines, sentences, or paragraphs (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). Researchers adopt different strategies when coding, for example using colourful pens, or printing many copies and cutting and grouping themes together, and assigning codes thereafter (Terre Blance et al., 2006). The codes are then analysed individually and then in relation to each other. Codes are never the final part of the process as they are constantly changing (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Coding reduces the raw data so that the researcher can organize the data into manageable sections and form profound insights or abstractions (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

During phase two, I printed a copy of my transcribed recordings and the notes I made from examining the collages. I used highlighters to highlight keywords in the data. I then cut the information and organized them into groups based on their similarities. I assigned each group a code.

### *Phase 3: Searching for themes*

Once coding has been completed, the researcher will search for themes among the codes. The process of inducing themes entails organising the codes into categories based on similar characteristics (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Usually, multiple themes are made. Some of the initial codes created will form themes whereas others may form sub-themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

During phase three, I carefully examined the codes and organized them into groups. Each group was assigned a theme that linked to the research question.

### *Phase 4: Reviewing themes*

The themes require refinement during this phase. The researcher explores the codes within each theme and considers whether they form a coherent pattern and whether they accurately reflect the meanings in the data. The themes are analysed individually so that the researcher can compare and contrast the different sections to gain a new perspective. The researcher may then find that certain codes don't belong in a particular theme and need to be moved or removed (Terre Blance et al., 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

During this phase, I re-examined the codes under each theme. I noticed that some codes did not belong to certain themes, so these codes were either moved or were not used, as they did not relate to the research questions.

### *Phase 5: Defining and naming themes*

The researcher determines what aspect of the data stands out in the theme and identifies what makes it so interesting and why. The researcher then needs to conduct and write a detailed analysis on each theme, and determine the story told by each theme (Nowell et al., 2017).

By phase five, I had a total of four themes. These themes were named based on their link to the research questions.

### *Phase 6: Producing the report*

Once the themes have been established, the researcher begins the final analysis and writes up the report. According to Nowell et al., (2017), “...the write up should provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the data...” (Nowell et al., 2017). The narrative answers the research questions and connects the themes (Vaismoradi, 2016).

The process of interpreting and checking the data now entails that the researcher repeats the entire process of reading through the transcript and comparing the coded themes made. The researcher attempts to note weak points or the repetition of themes and whether there are bits of information that seems to contradict each other.

The researcher continues to move between steps one to five so that sub-themes could be discovered that was overlooked before. The entire process of thematic analysis is inductive where although the data gained from the data collection has been broken down into themes and coded thereafter, the information is broken down into patterns and categorized, but brought together as a meaningful whole.

Chapter five of this research study entails a report of the research findings.

## **4.8 VALIDITY OF QUALITATIVE DESIGNS**

It is imperative that research is conducted with utmost rigour from start to finish. The integrity of the research study is defended by the researcher through triangulation which ensured trustworthiness, credibility, applicability, and consistency (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). For this study, more than one data collection tool was used to strengthen the richness of the data (see section 4.6).

### **4.8.1 Trustworthiness**

The researcher makes use of trustworthiness to assure the reader of the legitimacy of the research study (Nowell et al., 2017). According to Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey (2016)

the trustworthiness of a study entails transparency throughout the research process such as the purpose of the research, how it was conducted, decisions made and how data was generated. According to Noble & Smith (2015), the trustworthiness of a research study refers to the integrity and application of the methods and how precisely they reflect the data. In other words, there is congruence between the explanations provided by the researcher and world reality (Terre Blance et al., 2006).

I ensured that the participants were informed of the purpose of the research study, the data collection methods employed and how the data was to be analysed and interpreted. By employing two data collection strategies, the data generated would reflect the reality of the participants.

#### **4.8.2 Credibility**

In qualitative research, validity becomes credibility. The researcher ensures credibility through reflexivity which is the acknowledgement of the existence of multiple realities and that the findings will not be influenced by the personal experiences and views of the researcher so that the participants' perspectives are accurately presented (Noble & Smith, Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research, 2015). The information presented by the researcher corresponds with the participants' experiences. This was achieved through a prolonged duration with the participants (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher also defends credibility through triangulation, which is the use of multiple sources of data collection, and directly quoting the words of the participants (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

I defended the credibility of the study through the employment of triangulation by using two data collection methods, that is, talking circles and collage visual representations. In this way, the richness of the data generated was preserved.

#### **4.8.3 Consistency**

The reliability of a study becomes the consistency of the procedures (Noble & Smith, Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research, 2015). In qualitative research, reliability becomes consistency as it refers to the trustworthiness of the methods taken which are determined by the researcher which should be clear and transparent (Noble & Smith, 2015; Hammarberg et al., 2016).

#### **4.8.4 Dependability**

The dependability of the research is maintained by ensuring that the research process is logical, perceptible, and well documented (Nowell et al., 2017).

#### **4.8.5 Generalizability**

Generalizability in qualitative research refers to whether the results that have been yielded can be generalized to the larger population. Generalizability becomes applicability or transferability when the findings of the study can be applied to other cases like contexts, groups, or settings (Noble & Smith, 2015; Nowell et al., 2017; Hammarberg et al., 2016)

Once credibility, dependability and generalizability have been reached, the researcher establishes confirmability which tells the reader that the interpretations and findings have been derived from the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

It is essential that the participants are protected throughout the research process (Arifin, 2018). The researcher needs to ensure that the following measures are in place to ensure safety of the participants.

#### **4.9.1 Informed Consent**

Before conducting research, it is imperative that the researcher seek the consent of the participant along with an outline of exactly what the research study will entail so that the participants can ask questions (Arifin, 2018). The participants then have the choice on whether to accept or decline participation in the research study which must be given in writing (Arifin, 2018).

As the researcher, I ensured that the informed consent of the participants was attained by providing the learners with a letter of assent, and considering they are minors, their parents with a letter of consent, outlining the details of the research process such as the forms of data collection and data analysis, which they signed and returned to me. Please see Appendix D for the letter of consent that was sent to parents and Appendix E where the letter of assent was given to the learners.

#### **4.9.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Confidentiality means that the setting and participants should not be made known by the researcher (Ngozwana, 2018). The participants need assurance that their personal information along with the findings of the study will not be disclosed to any third party (Arifin, 2018). The researcher uses pseudonyms for names so that the participants remain anonymous. The setting should also not be disclosed. Locations and features should be disguised to appear like other

places. The participant needs to be protected from other persons in the same setting and the public (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

I ensured that the anonymity of the participants was maintained by allowing them the opportunity to choose their pseudonyms and ensuring them that the information that they provide will be securely stored in a password coded file on the computer for five years.

#### **4.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The Peer Support Team builds a relationship with the learners through interacting with them regularly through class visits and interventions, as well as one-on-one sessions when the learners are experiencing problems. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching was moved to an online platform, and therefore the learners were unable to meet with the Peer Support Team and get to know them well. This, in turn, influenced the perceptions that the learners had of the Peer Support Team.

Sometimes participants may also drop out or leave during the research process. During my research study, one of the participants moved to another province and was unable to hand in a collage.

Different schools apply different forms of counselling. Some schools have employed counsellors or psychologists, others have Peer Support Teams, whereas some have none. The forms of peer support adopted in schools may also differ in nature, for example, some might offer support academically whereas others, from a counselling perspective. This study, however, cannot be generalised to the larger population because not all schools offer peer support in the same way.

#### **4.11 CONCLUSION**

This chapter discussed the methodology of the research study. It described the research paradigm, the approach, the design, and the data collection techniques. The chapter also outlined the sampling procedures and sample size as well as the form of data analysis. Lastly, the chapter ended with the trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. The next chapter will present a discussion of the findings that surfaced from the data generated.

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the summary of findings derived from the conduct of the research study which is to understand the learners' experiences of peer support in the intermediate phase of schooling.

Data was collected through talking circles and collage visual representations (see section 4.6). Data collection instruments and participant collages have been attached as appendices (see Appendix F and G). Unfortunately, the collage made by the Puppy could not be attached as it contained photographs of the Peer Support Team at the school.

The thorough analysis of the data revealed the following research findings which pertain to the experiences learners in the intermediate phase have of the Peer Support Team. Four central themes that surfaced during data analysis which will be discussed below. Themes one, two and three relate to the research questions and theme four relates to the learners' expectations of the Peer Support Team.

Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Theme 1: RSQ 1</b> The type of experiences that learners have of the Peer Support Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Familiarity</li><li>• Teamwork</li><li>• Free service</li><li>• Trustworthy</li></ul>
<b>Theme 2: RSQ 2</b> How the learners conceptualize their experiences of the school Peer Support Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fun activities</li><li>• Bad situations</li><li>• Anger issues</li><li>• Busy teachers</li><li>• Academic issues</li></ul>
<b>Theme 3: RSQ 3</b> Why the learners conceptualized their experiences of the peer support in a certain way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Helpful</li><li>• Non-judgemental</li><li>• Open</li><li>• Loving</li><li>• Happiness</li></ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care</li> <li>• Understanding</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• Kindness</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Growth</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.5. Theme 4:</b> Expectations of the Peer Support Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular Presence of the Peer Support Team</li> <li>• Difficult to find</li> <li>• Bigger group</li> </ul>

## **5.2 THEME 1: THE TYPES OF EXPERIENCES THAT LEARNERS HAVE OF THE PEER SUPPORT TEAM**

A Peer Support Team comprises young people who are trained to work together outside their circle of friends (Cowie & Hutson, 2005). The learners understand the purpose of the Peer Support Team at school, which is a team made up of learners in grades 11 and 12. The following sub-themes were identified by the participants as characteristics that familiarised them with The Peer Support Team and formed the foundation of their experiences of the Peer Support Team.

### **5.2.1 Familiarity**

The participants indicated a sense of familiarity with what the Peer Support Team is in the school environment. Images in the collages displayed groups of young people, probably students, that are captioned “Peer Support”. This entails recognition of the Peer Support Team as a group of students working together. The participants also expressed that they knew them personally and who they are at the school as the peer supportees made an effort to contact them.

Puppy used pictures of the actual school Peer Support Team which shows that he identified them personally and that they are real to him.

Sophia acknowledged:

*“What I like about the Peer Support Team is that they don’t just talk about one thing, they ask about how we’ve been doing, the past days, how we’ve been doing throughout your life, how we’ve been doing throughout the year. Have you been making friends? Do you have trouble making friends? They’re there with you every step of the way.”*

*– Sophia.*

### **5.2.2 Teamwork**

The participants recognized that the Peer Support Team worked together to provide a service to the student; that they were there for them and spoke to them.

Khrissy Bear added the phrase to her collage:

*“Talk to one another.” (Khrissy Bear).*

Anne inserted the phrase below to her collage:

*“You’ll never walk alone.” (Anne).*

The characteristic of teamwork was further emphasized by the images on the collages which showed people together, smiling and looking happy (see Appendix G).

Puppy inserted two images of learners with members of the Peer Support Team sitting together on a bench and smiling.

Another photograph by Puppy shows learners all holding a basketball with words written on their forearms which indicate teamwork and collaboration. The words are positive.

The participants’ responses above indicate an understanding of the Peer Support Team which is comprised of people working together as a team. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, teamwork refers to the act of working together in a group, with other people, to achieve a common goal (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). The emphasis here is not only on the teamwork that took place between each member of the Peer Support Team, but also the teamwork between the Peer Support Team and the intermediate phase learners. This was evident in phrases that entailed communicating with each other and being there for the learners.

### **5.2.3 Free service**

The participants knew that the services offered by the Peer Support Team are of a counselling nature. They realised that such services were often paid for with professionals and realized that they could have similar services free of charge at the school.

Anne added the following phrase to her collage (see Appendix G):

*“I like the fact that you don't have to pay to talk to somebody for Peer support. They are always there without a fine being needed to pay.” - Anne.*

According to Openview Counselling, therapy is an expensive service offered by professional counsellors and psychologists (Openview, 2021). The participants realised that external therapy is expensive whereas peer support services are free.

### **5.2.4 Trustworthy**

The Peer Support Team was also recognized as a team that could be trusted. It was interesting to note that the learners in the intermediate phase, expressed fear of others finding out about their problems which is why the trust factor was crucial. Should other learners find out about their issues, then it could all fall apart!

Puppy notes:

*“Yeah, I agree. It's good for the Peer Support Team to not really tell others about the situation because its uncomfortable to know that everyone else just wants to help you but then you have someone who understands you really well and then would help you, but then everyone else would give their own opinions then it's too much, it will be going around and then it's all falling apart.” - Puppy.*

Trustworthiness is essential during adolescence as it sets the foundation for future peer relations (Ma, Westhoff, & van Duujrenvorde, 2020; Kocher, 2015). At a certain age, trust significantly depends on the familiarity of one's facial appearance (Ewing, Caulfield, Read, & Rhodes, 2015). In other words, the more familiar and trustworthy the face, the greater the amount of trust placed on the person. Trusting the right person is imperative as it leads to the building of positive social interactions later in life such as friendships and romantic relationships (Ma et al., 2020). Through interactions with the Peer Support Team, the participants became familiar with the members and placed trust in them. The Peer Support Team created environments that are conducive to establishing trust and cooperative relationships (Kocher, 2015). Participants know that they can trust them with personal information that other learners will not find out

about (Cowie & Hutson, 2005). Trusting the wrong person could lead to detrimental consequences such as rejection and gossip about personal secrets (Ma et al., 2020).

### **5.3 THEME 2: HOW LEARNERS CONCEPTUALIZED THEIR EXPERIENCES OF THE SCHOOL PEER SUPPORT TEAM**

This theme highlights the reasons why learners felt that they needed a Peer Support Team. The participants were asked to discuss the different experiences that led to how they came to understand the Peer Support Team.

#### **5.3.1 Fun Activities**

The participants described these situations as significant as it is where they got to spend time with the Peer Support Team. These are described as being fun and important as the learners also mentioned learning valuable lessons from these activities. They learnt important lessons such as being careful of one's words, being patient with each other, communicating well and controlling one's temper.

Khrissy Bear describes an activity:

*"I like when they come in and they play fun games with us to understand how others feel when they are upset or when they are happy. Like the one we had when we had to, when they scrunched a sheet of paper. It was nice and clean and then they scrunched it up, they unfolded it. When they scrunched it up, it was like someone said something bad to someone else and when they unfolded it, it was all crumpled so you can't really take back the words you said to someone."-Khrissy Bear.*

Puppy added:

*"Yeah, I totally agree. It's very helpful towards the Peer Support Team and its very helpful towards our daily lives and I like the one when they had to put the book on the forehead, and we had to guess what the T.V. show is and all of that and it also helps us to be patient with one another and teaches us how to really communicate with the population." – Puppy.*

Puppy reinforced:

*"I really agree with that, they really help us to be, with that activity, they really help us to be patient when, coz we had to raise our hand when they wanted us to, when we wanted to describe something. So, we really had to be patient and not shout out like hold our temper." - Puppy.*

Africa also stated:

*“I think it’s very fun because you learn different things.” – Africa.*

The school Peer Support Team initially establishes a connection with the learners by interacting with them at the same level regularly (Bii et al., 2016). The Peer Support Team tries to reach out to the learners. During these visits, they played games with the learners that also had a value-added aspect.

### **5.3.2 Bad situations**

The participants realised that the Peer Support Team was there if they were in bad situations. In other words, they could go to a peer support member if they experienced personal problems.

Sophia acknowledged a statement made by Anne:

*“Like she said, when you are feeling sad but also when its personal things, because the Peer Support Team is open to anyone who has troubles at home or at school.”*

*– Sophia.*

Many factors constitute as bad experiences that could potentially form part of a learner’s school experience. These could be personal problems at home, extra-curricular activities, or academic problems (Kaviyarasi & Balasubramanian, 2018). These could also be problems that the learners experience with other learners at school such as conflicts and confrontations (Papakitsos & Karakiozis, 2016).

The team was also a source of assistance when the learners did not have anyone else to go to. Learners recognized that parents were sometimes either working and were too busy or had their problems to attend to. This led to the learners confiding in the Peer Support Team if they needed help.

Khrissy Bear describes a situation where it was difficult to talk parents and other family members:

*“...and the same thing like with what Puppy just said...with... sometimes your parents might also be going through something and then you wanna talk to them but they can’t really help you because they also going through something in their lives so maybe you can either go to maybe another family member and also they might be going through something so that’s why I think it’s good to have a Peer Support Team.” – Khrissy Bear.*

The participants reflected on issues that they may experience with their parents which was why they also needed the Peer Support Team. They expressed a fear of being compared to others. They needed someone to listen to them without being argued with. They were afraid of being judged.

Puppy describes being compared to others:

*“Yeah totally agree. Sometimes you can’t always tell your parents coz maybe it’s something wrong with them or with you coz then it’s better to tell them. Coz if you talk to your parents, probably they’re comparing you to someone else like but then the Peer Support Team would help you in your specific needs and you won’t get any talk back or anything, they would understand that would happen.” - Puppy.*

Sophia describes issues with parents:

*“I agree with Anne, because it doesn’t mean we in a private school, everything is perfect and everything goes well because parents might not be giving us what we need at the time, might be doing things that we don’t like and some parents experience divorce, the children think that it’s their fault but it’s actually not so we need the Peer Support Team to just be there.” - Sophia.*

Sophia adds:

*“Yes, they do need somebody close to talk to because some children are afraid that their parents are going to judge them, do things that they don’t actually want their parents to do coz they need somebody that’s going to be there and not tell anyone unless somebody says okay, its time now to tell my parents.” – Sophia.*

Issues at home were also another reason why the learners chose to confide in the Peer Support Team. Learners experienced conflict with their parents and sought the Peer Support Team as confidence (Council, 2017). Learners were hesitant to confide in their parents at home because they were afraid of being judged or compared to other children. Learners usually turn to people at school for help in dealing with these issues. One of the defining qualities of the Peer Support Team is that they adopt the person-centred approach, so they listen and give the learners a chance to express their feelings and experiences. Similarly, a study by Simuforosa & Loveness (2017) in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe, revealed that one of the reasons as to why children struggled to achieve, were due to chaotic conditions at home. The counsellors developed

strategies to help the learners grow, become more open and make a positive change (Simuforsa & Loveness, 2017).

### **5.3.3 Anger Issues**

The participants also pointed out that the learners in the intermediate phase experienced anger issues that they found difficult to control and how the Peer Support Team could help them control their anger.

Africa describes an incident where another learner got angry:

*“I think that they, like we had a student last year, now they’re angry and tried to hurt himself badly so that I think the Peer Support Team could help with that.” – Africa.*

Antarctica describes how people generally get angry:

*“Because...many people might get angry very quickly. It’s like common. It’s very common for someone to get angry and like if that, if someone is still angry, that might stop them from doing nice work or that might stop them from feeling nice...from feeling good or like feeling like they should come to school or something” – Antarctica.*

According to Papakitsos & Karakiozis (2016), conflicts and confrontations are part of school life. Learners struggle with controlling strong emotions, particularly anger, and therefore need guidance on how to manage these feelings. The Peer Support Team is seen as a source of intervention for the learners who need help managing their anger outbursts and preventing them from doing something to hurt themselves or others. They also needed to manage these emotions so that they can focus on their schoolwork.

### **5.3.4 Busy teachers**

The participants pointed out that teachers were also people that they could go to, however, sometimes the teachers were also too busy to help them.

Khrissy Bear describes how teachers are too busy:

*“I think we have a Peer Support Team coz, sometimes our teachers might be really busy and we wanna talk to them but they really busy and if it happens at school and not at home, we can’t go and rush back home because we have school so we can easily just go and talk to someone that we know we can trust and that won’t tell anybody so that it will be a safe space for us just to talk to somebody” – Khrissy Bear.*

Apart from the immediate home environment, the school environment is where children spend a lot of time. Teachers become figures of counsel and advice when learners are in situations that they find challenging whether it is academic or personal. Sometimes if the learners are unable to confide in a counsellor, they turn to teachers. Teachers, however, also have academic duties that need prioritisation.

Considering the academic duties of the teachers, a relationship between the Peer Support Team and the teachers could benefit the learners. By collaborating, the teachers could identify problems that the learners are experiencing and report them to the Peer Support Team so that they could intervene on their behalf.

This is evident in the picture used by Puppy which shows teachers holding hands with younger learners.

### **5.3.5 Academic Issues**

The participants also described a situation where the Peer Support Team helps with exam strategies.

Khrissy Bear stated:

*“And also with the same thing, like what Puppy said with exams, children sometimes get stressed and they need someone to talk to and sometimes they will go to their parents but sometimes they need somebody else to talk to like maybe a teacher to a Peer Support Team.” – Khrissy Bear.*

Puppy used an image of primary school learners working together with a peer supporter on a task. This reinforces the ability of the Peer Support Team to help learners on an academic level.

Working in an academic environment comes with its challenges, which cause learners to stress, especially during assessment times. The Peer Support Team could provide the learners with strategies to help them during these times to cope with these challenges. This is also highlighted by the fact that the learners in the Peer Support Team are still students who also must experience the stress of exam time and therefore can relate to the learners’ experiences. They will be able to provide the learners with effective strategies as they have relatable experiences. Although the Peer supporters mainly assist the learners from a psychosocial vantage point, they are still able to provide them with coping strategies. A similar study by Ambayo and Ngumi (2016) in Kenya found that peer counselling had a positive influence on the learners’ academic



performance. Another study by Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems (2016) identified peer mediation as playing an important role in the students' engagement and motivation.

#### **5.4 THEME 3: WHY LEARNERS CONCEPTUALIZED THEIR EXPERIENCES OF PEER SUPPORT IN A CERTAIN WAY.**

The next theme explores the positive traits of the Peer Support Team that contribute to why the learners have certain experiences of them. The sub-themes are helpful, non-judgemental, open, loving, happiness, care, understanding, encouragement, kindness, listening and growth.

##### **5.4.1 Helpful**

One of the most prominent words that surfaced during data collection and analysis was the word 'help'. The main quality that was associated with the Peer Support Team was help. The participants found them to be helpful above all else. This was evident in the collages as well. The learners also counted on the Peer Support Team to feel better. No matter what they were facing, the Peer Support Team could help them feel better. The Peer Support Team was also associated with positive emotions and feelings.

Some of the images used by the participants emphasized the helping nature of The Peer Support Team (see Appendix G).

Sophia used a large picture of people holding hands around the world in the centre of her collage which states, 'People helping people'.

Anne inserted an animated picture of a therapist session of a man lying on a couch while his therapist makes notes.

Africa, Sophia, and Anne inserted a picture of a person helping another up the hill.

Africa used an interesting picture with great symbolic meaning of a lifesaver tube floating in water – which indicates rescuing, helping when in distress.

The participants also described how helpful they found the Peer Support Team.

Antarctica commented:

*"I like how, if you having a bad day, you can just come to them and tell them what makes you feel bad or, and they can help you cheer up." – Antarctica.*

Antarctica also added:

*“At school, let’s see. Let’s say someone was feeling really bad and if they could do nothing for them. They’ll feel even worse and they might get more negative and they might like, if they still negative every single day, they might, and people might stop being their friend or something. So you go to the Peer Support Team and you tell them why you feel negative and they can help you feel better.”- Antarctica.*

And:

*“I expect them to be very helpful and they very calm, they don’t like shout out loud or anything. They help you, if you’re like angry, they may be a bit calm to make you feel a bit better.”- Antarctica.*

Puppy contributed:

*“Well, I think that the Peer Support Team is a real helper in the school environment and they really help students with their help and their ability to help in the work and help in the support thing. They’re here to help you get through all the situations in real life.” – Puppy.*

Khrissy Bear reinforced:

*“...the Peer Support Team really helps us so I don’t really know how they, I don’t really know, like there’s nothing that you can’t like about them, they really nice, they kind and they really help us so I can’t really think of anything.” – Khrissy Bear.*

The goal of the Peer Support Team is to provide help to the learners in the younger grades. Evidence by (Cowie & Wallace, 2000) has shown positive effects of peers helping others. This help is mainly counselling in nature. It is one of the qualities most appreciated by the learners. The pictures used by the learners in the collages also expressed a profound level of understanding where they understood the meaning behind the Peer Support Team and the therapeutic nature of the Peer Support Team. They recognised that the Peer Support Team could be counted on in times of distress or when they needed to be saved almost as if the Peer Support Team were the lifeguards of the school. (Cowie & Sharp, 2018).

#### **5.4.2 Non-judgemental**

The participants described how The Peer Support Team did not judge anything they confided in them about.

Anne stated:

*“I like the fact that they don’t judge which problems you have. They’re very open, they don’t laugh, they don’t do anything bad.” – Anne.*

Sophia reinforced her feelings:

*“I expect the Peer Support Team not to have judgement, not to judge people because usually some people, just because they have the advantage of being mean to somebody or just that little piece of advantage saying okay, this and this wrong, but not in a way that a person feels comfortable in telling you again, but just in a way that a person is just like, okay this was not the right choice, no I have to go now.” - Sophia.*

If the counsellor is real, supportive, caring, and non-judgemental, then positive change can take place (Corey, 2013). It was important that the Peer Support Team did not judge the learners regardless of the issues that they experienced and brought to them or confided in them. The Peer Support Team had to be authentic when they expressed their feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and reactions (Corey, 2013; M'eng'ang'a, 2019; Woods, 2014).

A standout quality of the person-centred approach is that they do not judge other people regardless of the problems that they were experiencing (Corey, 2013; M'eng'ang'a, 2019; Woods, 2014). Learners want to feel accepted and understood. The Peer Support Team listened without judgement and accepted the learners for who they are.

### **5.4.3 Open**

The participants described The Peer Support Team as open because they could approach them to talk to them.

Anne describes her feelings about the open nature of the Peer Support Team:

*“The Peer Support Team makes me feel happy and I love how it's open to everyone who is feeling upset or down about something or if somebody needs a person to talk to. They’re always there for you.” – Anne.*

And:

*“I like the Peer Support Team because they’re open to anyone who needs to talk, maybe when they have something on their mind and they feel a little sad, they can go to the Peer Support Team.” – Anne.*

The Peer Support Team needed to be open to the learners. When someone is open this means that they are easily approachable. This goes deeper in the sense where the Peer Support Team willingly welcomed the learners when they experienced problems.

#### **5.4.4 Loving**

The participants also described how loving The Peer Support Team is (see Appendix G).

Anne used an image in her collage demonstrating people standing around a sad person.

Sophia inserted an image of a heart and another image of people holding posters spelling out the word 'love'.

Sophia describes the loving nature of the Peer Support Team:

*"I like the Peer Support Team, the people that are in the Peer Support Team are actually loving, not just because they're trying to help you at the time, they also love you, they take time to know you, they take time to learn about you." – Sophia.*

Peer support emphasizes the process of emotional support (Cowie & Wallace, 2000). The Peer Support Team must be loving towards the learners. Learners need love and feel validation when one is loving towards them. This was also highlighted by the learners. The aspect of love was important to them. There is non-possessiveness and tolerance when real love is present (Florkowski, 2017).

#### **5.4.5 Happiness**

The participants used a lot of happy images in their collages which associated the Peer Support Team with happiness (see Appendix G).

Anne added the following statement to her collage with a smiling daisy:

*"I think peer support should go on forever only because you always need those people who are always there to talk to you. We need people like those because we can't guarantee that everyone is happy every single day." (Anne)*

Africa used a picture with people jumping in the air with their hands raised, which is also a sign of happiness.

Africa also added another picture of a baby holding her thumbs up, which again is a positive sign.

The images used by the learners in the collages demonstrated happiness by people which was reinforced through the information provided in the talking circles.

Anne made note of how the learners strive for happiness:

*“I agree with Sophia because not every single child is happy, they always need someone to look up to or someone close they can talk to.” – Anne*

Anne reinforced what she said:

*“I think we have a Peer Support Team at school because you can’t always guarantee that every child is happy every day. So we always need those people that will comfort us when we’re feeling upset.” - Anne.*

There were a lot of positive emotions that were associated with the Peer Support Team, particularly happiness. It is almost as if the Peer Support Team represented happiness. An emotion that learners use to describe their emotions is happy and sad. Feelings associated with pain, hurt and fear, ignite sadness, whereas emotions associated with joy, excitement and zest were associated with happiness. The Peer Support Team was there if the learners experienced sadness and wanted to be happy again. This was brought about by talking to the Peer Support Team.

#### **5.4.6 Care**

The participants also demonstrated how the Peer Support Team cared for them (see Appendix G).

Khrissy Bear inserted an image showing a man who is sad with people surrounding him showing care and comfort which indicates the team as being there when someone is sad.

Sophia inserted an image of a heart with the words ‘Caring with Passion’ written inside. She also added a picture of a woman comforting a homeless man.

Care means physically being there for someone showing them that you’re there. When you are at your most vulnerable, you needed to be cared for. Learners in the lower grades find this difficult to do for themselves which is why they needed the Peer Support Team. Usually, the learners would turn to their parents or teachers for care. If the counsellor is real, supportive, caring, and non-judgemental, then positive change can take place (Corey, 2013). The caring and acceptance are warm so that the clients have the freedom to express their feelings and experiences freely (Corey, 2013; M'eng'ang'a, 2019; Woods, 2014).

#### **5.4.7 Understanding**

The learners also emphasized how understanding The Peer Support Team was because the peer supportees were also still in school and could relate to the learners.

Puppy describes the understanding nature of the Peer Support Team:

*“Ya, me neither. And like they help us in daily life and in our mental life and they don’t really, if it was adults, it would kinda be like a little problem but they understand how to be kids because they were kids and they can remember the stuff they were taught and it was really helpful to be with kids that would help us with the daily life without like, no regards, or payback or anything.”-Puppy.*

Khrissy Bear inserted a quote about walking in other people’s shoes which could indicate empathy (see Appendix G).

The learners that make up the Peer Support Team are still learners themselves, so they can relate to the learners in the younger grades. This was expressed as imperative by the participants as being understood was important to them. Children often feel that they are not understood when it comes to adults. In this way, due to the small age gap between the learners and peer supporters, they feel understood by them. Understanding the other person’s perspective also relates to the core condition of empathy (Eremie & Ubulom, 2016; Hayes, 2015). The peer supporter needs to understand the subjective world of the learner. A counsellor is empathic when they grasp the subjective world of the client. The counsellor understands the experiences and feelings as they are revealed throughout the session with the client, as they draw on their personal feelings and experiences that are like the clients. The counsellor is still able to maintain a sense of who he/she is without getting completely lost in the world of the client (Corey, 2013; M'eng'ang'a, 2019; Woods, 2014; Hayes, 2015). Rogers perceives empathy as a crucial ability as it is the key to building deeper connections with the client (Florkowski, 2017).

#### **5.4.8 Encouragement**

This entails motivating the learners. The Peer Support Team makes them feel encouraged when they are experiencing low moments. They are encouraged to do better.

Sophia inserted a picture with the word ‘Motivation’ on it (see Appendix G).

Anne describes:

*“I expect encouraging words, kindness, supporting. I also expect them to help anybody not just people who are upset.” – Anne.*

Khrissy Bear explains:

*“I expect them to help us and not to... I expect them to encourage us to do better and also to help us when we in bad times and not maybe to go and tell others about our situation when they shouldn’t because then it can get around the whole school and then we feel uncomfortable. So I think that...I expect that they shouldn’t be telling others and that they should really help us.” – Khrissy Bear.*

#### **5.4.9 Kindness**

Kindness refers to the warm disposition that the Peer Support Team has towards the learners. They respect them and are nice to them and good to them. They are not rude to the learners.

Sophia added the phrase *“They are kind”* to her collage. She also inserted images with the words, ‘Kind, Considerate and Friendly’ (see Appendix G).

Anne stated:

*“I like the fact that they’re not scared to talk to someone who just needs help. They’re very welcoming. They’re very kind.” – Anne.*

#### **5.4.10 Listening**

Participants also described how The Peer Support Team listens to them.

Khrissy Bear added quote on listening to others also indicating another quality of the Peer Support Team (see Appendix G).

An imperative quality entails listening to the learners. The participants reflected that the Peer Support Team listened to them without interrupting them and allowed them the opportunity to express their feelings and experiences. This bears a strong resemblance to the person-centred approach that also highlights listening attentively to someone and giving them the freedom to express themselves (Corey, 2013).

#### **5.4.11 Growth**

It was also noted about how growth results from The Peer Support experience.

Khrissy Bear added a picture of an animated tree indicating growth (see Appendix G).

The whole school experience entails the process where children grow physically as they get older. Growth also takes on a maturity level as people grow to be better humans. This process of growth and development is indicative of the values embraced by the person-centred approach (Florkowski, 2017).

## 5.5. THEME 4: EXPECTATIONS OF THE PEER SUPPORT TEAM

The learners also expressed certain shortcomings of the Peer Support Team that they wished could be met. This could lead to a more effective relationship between the Peer Support Team and intermediate phase learners.

### 5.5.1 Regular presence of the Peer Support Team

The participants expressed that the Peer Support Team did not try to be more present in the learners' school life. The participants expressed that they understood that the peer supporters had their schoolwork to complete. As there's a possibility that learners could benefit from frequent visits as every day somebody could be going through something and needs someone to talk to. This also entailed doing more activities with them as this allowed more interaction with them and building a relationship with the learners.

Anne stated:

*"I don't like the fact that there's a few of them. I think there should be more and they should take more time doing it, maybe twice a week." – Anne.*

Sophia reinforced what was said by Anne:

*"I don't like the fact that they only come... so we put our issues in a box and they only come once a week or something but they're supposed to come every day to check it because somebody might have a problem today and the next day, they don't so they need to solve it today so all the issues can be solved." – Sophia.*

Khrissy Bear described the urgency of the situation:

*"I think that they could like, instead of doing, they, could do more activities with us coz mainly, like they come once in a while to do, I know like they doing tests and exams but also like maybe they could come like more than once in a while to come and do more activities with us."- Khrissy Bear.*

Puppy agreed with Khrissy Bear:

*"Yeah I totally agree. They should come more often but then we supposed to also understand that, and we think, I think that The Peer Support Team is very good at everything they do and what they could make is better is nothing because they do everything correct and they understand."- Puppy.*



### 5.5.2 Difficult to find

The participants also expressed that if they had problems and needed to talk to the Peer Support Team, they were difficult to find. The learners would appreciate it if the Peer Support Team could be one place so that they could find them when they needed to.

Antarctica explains how he did not know where to go:

*“Hmmm...I don’t really know where I can go. I don’t know where they are.” – Antarctica.*

Africa added:

*“Uhm, I’d like them to be in one place so we don’t have to scatter around the school to find them and that they always on guard.” – Africa.*

### 5.5.3 Bigger Group

Another aspect was that the Peer Support Team was a very small group. There were too few of them. By creating a larger peer support group then the Peer Support Team will be able to reach more learners in the school to help them.

The bigger peer support group is also beneficial as the current size of the group does not reach that many learners. A bigger group will entail being able to provide the peer support service to the whole school.

They expressed their wishes during the talking circle.

Anne stated:

*“I don’t like the fact that there’s a few of them. I think there should be more and they should take more time doing it, maybe twice a week.” – Anne.*

And:

*“Like I said earlier on things would be better if they add more learners to add other children who need help maybe with bullying or anything.” – Anne.*

Sophia agreed with Anne:

*“Yes, they should start a bigger group because you don’t find a lot of high schools participating in this, trying to help learners who are going through some personal things about themselves so the high school should start contributing in everything that’s happening at school.” – Sophia.*

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The findings revealed that learners generally experienced a positive relationship with the Peer Support Team. They were able to turn to them when they experienced bad situations, strong feelings and had no one else to talk to. They felt that the Peer Support Team was there to help them and provided them with important qualities such as care, love and support and understood them. They also felt happy and accepted with the Peer Support Team.

They do, however, feel that the Peer Support Team could be better by establishing a larger group and making a regular effort to see those more often as well as being situated in a place where they could be easily found.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this study was to understand learners' experiences of peer support in the intermediate phase. The purpose of the study was to explore what experiences learners have of peer support and why and how these experiences were conceptualised. This chapter presents the summary of findings and makes recommendations from the study for implementation and further research.

#### **6.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS**

##### **6.2.1 The types of experiences learners have of the Peer Support Team**

The findings of this study indicated a familiarity with the Peer Support Team on part of the learners. The learners were able to identify the Peer Support Team at school and understood the services they offered. They were aware that the Peer Support Team was a group of students in grades 11 and 12. They knew the members of the team personally and were able to recognize them at school. The learners understood that the members worked together as a Peer Support Team but there was also an understanding that there was also a sense of teamwork between the peer supporters and the intermediate phase learners. The learners acknowledged that the peer support services at school are free as one would usually have to pay for professional services. There was an acknowledgement that this was advantageous as should the learners have any problems, the parents didn't have to pay, as these support services were free at the school. There was a deep sense of trust placed in the Peer Support Team. This was due to the relationship that had already been established by the team. Through engaging more with the Peer Support Team, the learners became more trustful of them. Fear of that trust being broken was also expressed by the learners as they did not want other learners to know about their personal information which is why trusting the Peer Support Team is so imperative.

##### **6.2.2 How the learners conceptualized their experiences of Peer Support**

One of the most exciting events that contributed towards the experiences that the learners have of the Peer Support Team is the fun activities that they have with them. These activities take place during classroom interventions where the peer supporters would pay a visit to each class and spend time with the learners. The learners found this to be quite a joyful experience as not only did they find this fun, but it also taught them valuable lessons such as being careful of

how they spoke to others, developing patience, good communication skills and being mindful of their temper.

Another reason as to why the learners experienced more of the Peer Support Team is due to the presence of bad situations. Often these bad situations that the learners experience puts them in a position where they need to talk to someone about it. Learners would usually go to their parents, however, sometimes their parents were busy or had problems to deal with, which is why the Peer Support Team was there, so the learners could talk to them when they had no one else to talk to. The learners also expressed that sometimes their parents were the problem. They experienced conflict with their parents and did not confide in them because they did not want to be compared to anyone else or judged.

Learners also relied on the Peer Support Team in moments of anger. Learners experienced strong emotions, such as anger, which could affect their work and they could potentially do something to hurt themselves, which is why they needed The Peer Support Team so they could get assistance in controlling their anger.

Learners usually confide in their teachers; however, teachers were sometimes busy due to their academic obligations, which made it difficult for the learners to speak to them. This reaffirms the necessity of the Peer Support Team, so learners always have people that they can talk to.

One of the most stressful times that learners experience at school, is the stress of assessments. The learners often get overwhelmed during examination time. The Peer Support Team is seen as a source of coping as they could provide the learners with strategies on how to deal with stressful academic situations. There is also an understanding that the learners know that the peer supporters are still in school themselves which means that they have a better understanding of their situation because they can relate to it.

### **6.2.3 Why learners conceptualize their experiences the way they do**

The reasons behind the way learners develop these experiences, can be attributed to the outcomes of the interactions with the Peer Support Team. The main attribute that learners have of the peer supporters is that of being helpful. The most common description that surfaced during data collection was that of help. The learners viewed the Peer Support Team mostly as being helpful. There is a sense of the peer supporters always being there to help the learners, especially in times when the learners were sad and distressed.

The Peer Support Team is also non-judgemental. This entails that the learners did not fear expressing their feelings and talking about their situation because they did not feel judged by the Peer Support Team. Thus, the Peer Support Team is also open. This means that they are approachable, and the learners felt comfortable enough to speak to them.

Another quality that the learners noticed about The Peer Support Team was that they are loving. This means that the Peer Support Team display a deep sense of care and respect for the learners.

Another positive quality that stands out with relevance to the Peer Support Team is that of happiness. The Peer Support Team plays an important role in the happiness of the learners. If learners were feeling sad, they could count on the peer supporters to comfort them. This is also indicative of the overall positive view that the learners have of the Peer Support Team. The peer supporters are also very caring.

There was also a sense of understanding expressed by the learners of the Peer Support Team. This is because the Peer Support Team are still school-going learners themselves and can therefore relate to their situation to a certain degree. They, therefore, have a shared environment and shared feelings that can be attributed to this understanding.

The Peer Support Team is also a source of encouragement. When the learners faced challenges and needed to be motivated, they can count on the Peer Support Team for encouragement. The Peer Support Team is also seen as kind; this is because they do good things for other people. The Peer Support Team also listens attentively which is very important in the peer support context. In this way, they are paying attention to what is being said. The Peer Support Team also encouraged growth. This means that through interacting with them, they can impart valuable lessons that lead to growth and maturity.

#### **6.2.4 Expectations of the Peer Support Team**

Although the learners mostly had a positive experience with the Peer Support Team, they also expressed their views on what they felt could make the team function better.

The first was the regularity of the classroom interventions; learners felt that more frequent visits to the classes would contribute to building a better relationship with the learners as well as reaching more learners in the school. The learners also understood that the peer supporters were students themselves and had work commitments. The Peer Support Team was also difficult to locate. They felt that the team should be in one place so that they were easier to find.

The learners felt that the Peer Support Team should consider recruiting more learners so they have a bigger group that could reach more learners in the school.

### **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Some strategies can be adopted by the Peer Support Team that could enhance their experiences with the learners in the intermediate phase. Although the intermediate phase learners generally have positive experiences with the Peer Support Team, these strategies could add to the experiences. The following recommendations can be adopted by the school under study to enhance the functioning of the Peer Support Team as well other schools could use these recommendations if they wish to start their Peer Support Team.

- Build rapport with the learners through familiarisation. This could entail placing posters around the school, with photographs of themselves on them, explaining what they do as a team.
- They could also host an assembly where they introduce themselves to the school and describe what they do as a Peer Support Team.
- They can formulate a timetable where they plan monthly class visits with the learners.
- Considering that they are still students themselves, they could assign a time and place, once or twice a week, where the learners can find them, should they need to talk.
- The Peer Support Team should also consider recruiting and training more members so that they can reach more learners in other grades.
- They could collaborate with the class teachers so that they are notified if learners are experiencing problems at school that require the services of the Peer Support Team.

### **6.4 CONCLUSION**

Learners have positive experiences of the Peer Support Team that is built through interaction with the peer supporters. This is established through class visits, bad situations when they need to speak to the peer supporters and the positive attributes of the peer supporter. However, to enhance the functioning of the team, the Peer Support Team should consider making more regular class visits, being situated in one place, and perhaps starting a larger group.

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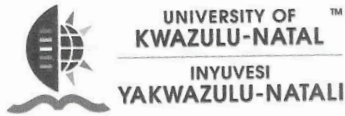
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# Appendices

# Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



27 October 2020

Miss Karen Lee Pitamber (219094219)  
School Of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Miss Pitamber,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002012/2020  
Project title: Understanding Learners' Experiences of Peer Support in the Intermediate Phase  
Degree: Masters

## Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 09 October 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL** on the following condition:

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

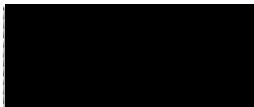
This approval is valid until 27 October 2021.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## Appendix B: Department of Education Letter of Approval to conduct research



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**  
EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201  
Tel: 033 3921062 / 033-3921051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za  
Buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma/Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/4188

Miss Karen Lee Pitamber  
49 Swapo Road  
Durban North  
4051

Dear Miss Pitamber

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"UNDERSTANDING LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES OF PEER SUPPORT IN THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 11 August 2020 to 10 January 2022.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma/Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

  
Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 11 August 2020



## **Appendix C: Letter of Consent to the Principal**

### **Permission Letter to the Principal**

**Date: 13 August 2020**

**Greetings**

#### **Request for Gate-keeper permission**

My name is Karen Lee Pitamber and I am a teacher at St Benedict School and a student at the University of KwaZulu- Natal, School of Education, Edgewood Campus. I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution.

The title of my research project is: Understanding Learners' Experiences of Peer Support in the Intermediate Phase.

The focus of my study is to understand learners' experiences of peer support, within the context of a primary school, particularly in the intermediate phase. The aim of the study is to therefore identify the types of experiences learners have towards the school Peer Support Team, explore how these experiences are conceptualized and understand why they conceptualize these experiences the way they do. The study is expected to enrol a total of six learners, 2 each from Grade 4, 5, and 6.

I am aware of Covid -19 regulations and prioritise the safety of the learners. I will therefore collect data virtually by means of Zoom Calls and email. The duration of the study will be a total of three days, one day per grade. The study will be funded personally by the researcher.

There will be no risks or discomforts posed to the learners as they will participate from the safety and comfort of their homes. We hope that study yield results that will prove beneficial to the existing Peer Support Team and that they will use these experiences to improve their approach as a Peer Support Team thereby improving the quality of experiences that learners will have in the near future.

All participants will be given a consent letter and will be provided with the option to decline participation at any point during the research process, without suffering any prejudice. The participants' responses will be treated with confidentiality and no actual names will be documented. Pseudonyms will be used to represent the names of the participants and of your school.

In order to facilitate this research project, your permission is required to gather the desired data at your institution.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at:

Mobile number: 0720315472

Email address: [klpitamber@gmail.com](mailto:klpitamber@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Dr Patrick Mveli

Supervisor's number: 0312603549

Supervisor's email: [mwelip@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mwelip@ukzn.ac.za)

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request

Karen Lee Pitamber – Researcher

Date

---

---

Dr Bowley

Date

---

---

School Stamp



## **Appendix D: Letter of Consent to the parents**

**Date: 12 August 2020**

**Greetings Parents**

**Consent for learners to participate in research study**

My name is Karen Lee Pitamber and I am a teacher at St Benedict School and a student at the University of KwaZulu- Natal, School of Education, Edgewood Campus.

Your child is invited to consider participating in a study that involves research in peer support.

The title of my research project is: Understanding Learners' Experiences of Peer Support in the Intermediate Phase.

The focus of my study is to understand learners' experiences of peer support, within the context of a primary school, particularly in the intermediate phase. The aim of the study is to therefore identify the types of experiences learners have towards the school Peer Support Team, explore how these experiences are conceptualized and understand why they conceptualize these experiences the way they do. The study is expected to enrol a total of six learners, two each from Grade 4, 5, and 6.

I am aware of Covid -19 regulations and prioritise the safety of the learners. I will therefore collect data virtually by means of Zoom Calls and a task on Microsoft Word, which will be emailed to me. The duration of the study will be a total of three days, one day per grade. The Zoom call is expected to be 30 minutes in duration and the Microsoft Word task around 30 minutes. The study will be funded personally by the researcher.

There will be no risks or discomforts posed to the learners as they will participate from the safety and comfort of their homes. We hope that study yield results that will prove beneficial to the existing Peer Support Team and that they will use these experiences to improve their approach as a Peer Support Team thereby improving the quality of experiences that learners will have in the near future.

All participants will receive letters of assent where they are provided with the option to decline participation at any point during the research process, without suffering any prejudice. The participants' responses will be treated with confidentiality and no actual names will be documented. Pseudonyms will be used to represent the names of the participants and of your school.

In order to facilitate this research project, your permission to allow your child to participate in this research study is required.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at:

Mobile number: 0720315472

Email address: [klpitamber@gmail.com](mailto:klpitamber@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Dr Patrick Mweli

Supervisor's number: 0312603549

Supervisor's email: [mwelip@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mwelip@ukzn.ac.za)

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request

Karen Lee Pitamber – Researcher

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, parent of \_\_\_\_\_ in Grade \_\_\_\_\_,  
hereby give /do not give permission for my child to participate in the research study.

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

## Appendix E: Letter of Assent to the participants

Good Day SBS Learner \_\_\_\_\_ (name).



My name is Miss Pitamber. Many of you would know me as the

Grade 6 teacher at school.

I am also a student at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal.



I am currently doing research as part of my degree.

Research means that I will conduct a careful study and



investigation so that I can discover and explain new knowledge.

I am currently researching peer support.



I'm sure that you have had the opportunity to speak to someone

from the Peer Support Team or had a class intervention by the

Peer Support Team. I would like you tell me more about what

you think and feel about the Peer Support Team. In other

words, how have you experienced the Peer Support Team?

Firstly, I would like to have a Zoom call with you where we can have a discussion and each learner will have the opportunity to tell me more about what they have experienced with the Peer Support Team. I will also record our session because the information you provide is important for research.



The Zoom Call will be 30 minutes long. The second thing I would like you to do, is to make a collage for me on Microsoft word. It should be one page, and contain a minimum of eight pictures.

You can search for different pictures on the internet that tell me more about your experiences with the Peer Support Team.



You can choose a new name for yourself and I will not use your name in the research writing. Are you happy or sad to be part of my research study? Please mark with an X in the box.



## Appendix F: Data Collection Instruments

**Name:** Karen Lee Pitamber

**Research Title:** Understanding Learners' Experiences of Peer Support in the Intermediate Phase

### Data Collection Instrument

---

#### 1. Talking circles schedule

The data collection method that will be employed in my research study are talking circles. In this particular method, the participants are seated in a circle to discuss a specific topic and each has the opportunity to respectfully provide their input without being interrupted. The discussion should flow with minimal interruptions on part of the researcher. Should the conversation stagnate, I will use prompts. I am aware of the Covid pandemic and the importance of social distancing, therefore, the talking circles will be adapted to take place on Zoom, which is an interactive, video conferencing application.

#### ***Theme Question:***

- Elaborate on the Peer Support Team program conducted with the school.

#### ***Support/ Prompt Questions:***

- What do you expect from the Peer Support Team?
- How do you feel about the Peer Support Team?
- How could the Peer Support Team improve their services to learners?
- Why is the Peer Support Team the way it is within the school?

#### 2. Collages

##### **Background**

The second instrument that I will use are collages. It is a participatory visual method that entails learners choosing, arranging and pasting pictures from magazines and newspapers onto a backing, which is usually a page.

I have chosen to use this method because it is age-appropriate and learners are able to communicate their feelings and ideas. It is an effective way of providing the learners with the opportunity to contribute their ideas to the research process. It provides insight as to how the learners experience and interpret the world. Once again. Due to Covid regulations, learners will ensure social distancing by doing their collages at home on Microsoft Word which can then be emailed to me.

### **How the research will be conducted**

Each learner will sit at a computer which has Microsoft Word on it.

They will then have access to Google, where they can research, copy and paste images onto Word.

The researcher will then pose a question to the learners. For example, "How do you feel about the Peer Support Team at school?"

Learners will then select images from Google that answer the question.

The learners will be given 1 hour to complete their collages.

Once complete, the researcher will collect and analyse the data.



## Appendix G: Participant Collages

(Puppy's Collage has not been included as it contains pictures of the learners from the school under study. This is to protect the privacy of these learners.)

### Africa



Anne

## PEER SUPPORT TEAM

The Peer support team makes me feel happy and I love how it's open to everyone who is feeling upset or down about something or if somebody needs a person to talk to. They're always there for you.



...  
you'll  
NEVER  
walk  
ALONE



I think we should get more students to participate in Peer support and I think it should happen more often.

Peer support is helpful because it can make someone who came to school angry or upset, feel relaxed and calmed down.



I like the fact that you don't have to pay to talk to somebody for Peer support. They are always there without a fine being needed to pay.



I think Peer support should go on forever only because you always need those people who are always there to talk to you. We need people like those because we can't guarantee that everyone is happy every single day.





shutterstock.com • 476109628



PEER  
SUPPORT IS ALL ABOUT TEAMWORK.



There is love and support all around you.



CARE  
&  
LOVE  
TALK TO ONE ANOTHER



peer support

Sophia

# Peer support team

THEY ARE HELPFUL



THEY ARE KIND



THEY ARE CARING



THEY ARE SWEET



THEY ARE FRIENDLY





THEY ARE NICE





# NICE PEOPLE™

THEY ARE CONSIDERATE



©Cartoonists









## Appendix H: Editors Letter

25 Maple Crescent  
Circle Park  
KLOOF  
3610

Phone 031 – 7075912  
0823757722  
Fax 031 - 7110458  
E-mail:  
[dr1govender@telkomsa.net](mailto:dr1govender@telkomsa.net)  
[sathsgovender4@gmail.com](mailto:sathsgovender4@gmail.com)

### Dr Saths Govender

---

3 FEBRUARY 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

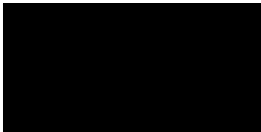
#### LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

This serves to inform that I have read the final version of the dissertation titled:

**Understanding Learners' Experiences of Peer Support in the Intermediate Phase** by Karen Lee Pitamber.

To the best of my knowledge, all the proposed amendments have been effected and the work is free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am of the view that the quality of language used meets generally accepted academic standards.

Yours faithfully



DR S. GOVENDER  
B Paed. (Arts), B.A. (Hons), B Ed.  
Cambridge Certificate for English Medium Teachers  
MPA, D Admin.

# Appendix I: Turnitin Report

1/29/2021

Turnitin

<p><b>Turnitin Originality Report</b></p> <p>Processed on: 29-Jan-2021 8:25 PM CAT                  ID: 1497139838                  Word Count: 27573                  Submitted: 2</p> <p>Understanding learners' experiences of peer support By Karen Pitamber</p>		<p><b>Similarity Index</b></p> <p><b>10%</b></p>	<p><b>Similarity by Source</b></p> <p>Internet Sources: 9%                  Publications: 2%                  Student Papers: 4%</p>
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1% match (Internet from 30-Dec-2018) <a href="https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10413/12646/Muthusamy_Nirashnee_2015.pdf?sequen=">https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10413/12646/Muthusamy_Nirashnee_2015.pdf?sequen=</a>
1% match (student papers from 18-Feb-2020) Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal on 2020-02-18
< 1% match (Internet from 21-Oct-2015) <a href="http://www.klicksafe.de/fileadmin/media/documents/pdf/Ueber_Klicksafe/Youth_Panel/Setting_up_Peer_Support_Programmes_in_Schools.pdf">http://www.klicksafe.de/fileadmin/media/documents/pdf/Ueber_Klicksafe/Youth_Panel/Setting_up_Peer_Support_Programmes_in_Schools.pdf</a>
< 1% match (student papers from 10-Jun-2019) Submitted to The Robert Gordon University on 2019-06-10
< 1% match (Internet from 08-Sep-2018) <a href="http://www.asianonlinejournals.com/index.php/EDU/article/view/893/html">http://www.asianonlinejournals.com/index.php/EDU/article/view/893/html</a>
< 1% match (Internet from 17-Nov-2020) <a href="https://sajce.co.za/index.php/sajce/article/view/679/1092">https://sajce.co.za/index.php/sajce/article/view/679/1092</a>
< 1% match (Internet from 21-Feb-2017) <a href="http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2818052.2893362">http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2818052.2893362</a>
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< 1% match (Internet from 10-Dec-2017) <a href="http://scitepress.org/digitalibrary/AffiliationsProfile.aspx?Org=0PDZghZLWepRIOaEWGzGOj16+9nvPyDMzEzn5ubUS9sZgD6IP5SmcA%3D%3D&amp;t=1">http://scitepress.org/digitalibrary/AffiliationsProfile.aspx?Org=0PDZghZLWepRIOaEWGzGOj16+9nvPyDMzEzn5ubUS9sZgD6IP5SmcA%3D%3D&amp;t=1</a>
< 1% match (Internet from 28-Mar-2020) <a href="https://worldwidescience.org/topicpages/a/antenatal+peer+support.html">https://worldwidescience.org/topicpages/a/antenatal+peer+support.html</a>
< 1% match (Internet from 03-Dec-2020) <a href="https://ajod.org/index.php/ajod/article/view/363/745">https://ajod.org/index.php/ajod/article/view/363/745</a>
< 1% match (Internet from 24-Jun-2016) <a href="http://article.sapub.org/10.5923.j.ijap.20160603.04.html">http://article.sapub.org/10.5923.j.ijap.20160603.04.html</a>
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< 1% match (Internet from 19-May-2020) <a href="https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42380-019-00011-z?code=04a8acd3-fdf5-4af3-8910-934bb2a75829&amp;error=cookies_not_supported">https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42380-019-00011-z?code=04a8acd3-fdf5-4af3-8910-934bb2a75829&amp;error=cookies_not_supported</a>
< 1% match (student papers from 04-May-2018) Submitted to University of Wales, Lampeter on 2018-05-04
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< 1% match (student papers from 15-Nov-2019) Submitted to Mancosa on 2019-11-15
< 1% match (Internet from 26-Jun-2020) <a href="https://repository.nwu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10394/34873/Oelofse%20T%2029616689.pdf?isAllowed=y&amp;sequence=1">https://repository.nwu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10394/34873/Oelofse%20T%2029616689.pdf?isAllowed=y&amp;sequence=1</a>
< 1% match (Internet from 16-Nov-2020) <a href="http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/26831/thesis_moodley_g.pdf?isAllowed=y&amp;sequence=1">http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/26831/thesis_moodley_g.pdf?isAllowed=y&amp;sequence=1</a>
< 1% match (student papers from 10-Apr-2019) Submitted to Eastern Institute of Technology on 2019-04-10
< 1% match (student papers from 05-Jan-2007) Submitted to University of Surrey Roehampton on 2007-01-05
< 1% match (student papers from 20-Apr-2018) Submitted to University of Alabama at Birmingham on 2018-04-20
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[https://www.turnitin.com/newreport\\_printview.asp?eq=1&eb=1&esm=0&oid=1497139838&sid=0&n=0&m=2&svr=44&r=54.44360166894309&lan...](https://www.turnitin.com/newreport_printview.asp?eq=1&eb=1&esm=0&oid=1497139838&sid=0&n=0&m=2&svr=44&r=54.44360166894309&lan...) 1/22