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An exploration of Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex- model C school

A research report presented to the Faculty of Humanities (School of Education)

By

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Submitted in Partial fulfilment

of the requirement for the degree

Masters of Education by Coursework and Research

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

July 2019

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

_____

Lebohang Molefe

_____

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my cousin, my sister, my mother **Ms Michelle Baird** who has always been my role model in all things, and to my niece, my sister and friend **Pride Baird**.

To Pride, thank you for reinforcing my belief in the courage and determination that a person can possess.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I am to GOD for giving me the strength and courage through prayer to believe in myself. "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and He will make your paths straight*," Proverb 3: 5- 6.

I am deeply ***appreciative*** to my supervisor Professor Kerryn- Leigh Dixon, without whom this work would not have been completed. Her patience and support are highly valued. THANK YOU!

To my family, I am forever ***grateful*** to you for understanding and supporting my journey during the last couple of years. THANK YOU for understanding my missing of functions.

I am also ***grateful*** for my chosen family of crazies, their support has been invaluable. My buddies, Mr Wiseman Hlamulo Mbhiza, Ms Xolile Mazibuko, Ms Annie Mafunganyika, Mrs Nonhlanhla Kunene, Mrs Kharoon Grewe and Mr Siphamandla Zulu. Your presence in my life has been nothing but extraordinary.

Finally, to my partner "***I THANK YOU***" for nurturing my fire with your support, presence and love. For not being bigger then yourself andfor being the humble, loving soul that you are. I LOVE YOU "MSUTHU", "MZILANKATHA", "GASOLO"!! I am **"Greatfl".**

Abstract

This study explored Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills curriculum in one urban ex-model C school**.** The aims of this research were to understand learners' perceptions of the importance of being taught Life Skills and to examine their perspectives of the applicability of Life Skills in their lives. The research focused on what learners' understanding of the Life Skills curriculum is, to what extent they think it is relevant to their lives and what their experiences revealed about the curriculum. This was done to address the limited research available in South Africa on learners' experiences of the Life Skills curriculum. This research was conducted with children because they are thinking, agentic beings who are capable of expressing their views of the world and should be heard. It took place in an ex model C school located in an upper middle class suburb of Johannesburg. Considering that the study sought to understand learners' experiences, a qualitative research approach was used. The data were collected from a total of 15 learners by conducting four semi-structured focus group interviews, each interview comprised of 4 boys and 4 girls at a time. In order to analyse the data thematic content analysis was done in order to identify themes. From the analysis, themes were identified and findings from these revealed that children thought the Life Skills curriculum was important and helped them develop skills for their lives. They were able to identify topics that interested them or affected them, with safety being a major concern. They also showed an awareness of what it means to be socially responsible in their interactions with others. It is clear that teachers need to be more aware of how the curriculum supports children's everyday needs. More research may need to be done with township, rural and/ or private schools to further understand Foundation Phase learners' experiences with the Life Skills Curriculum.

Keywords: Learners, agentic being, Life Skills curriculum.

ABBREVIATIONS

DBE – Department of Basic Education (Republic of South Africa)

DoE – Department of Education (Republic of South Africa)

CAPS – Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement

FP – Foundation Phase

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Background to the study

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (1997) Life Skills help individuals, including children, to deal with various social and personal challenges in a critical manner. Life Skills also promotes self-awareness, problem solving skills and coping with emotions (Prajapati, 2017), which are all important for the development of Grade 3 learners who may experience complex social issues. As a Grade 3 teacher who engages with young minds, one of the subjects I teach is Life Skills, which aims to develop learners' social, emotional and cognitive development and engages with their psychosocial problems and issues (Roodbari, Sahdipoor, & Ghale, 2013). UNICEF (2013) states that Life Skills is a behaviour changing or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: Knowledge, Attitude and Skills, which are all important in the development of a child. While Life Skills has the ability to promote different skills. I am concerned about the nature of skills the subject teaches learners in relation to the experiences children have from the influences in their community. For example, I have observed children telling others that they will infect them with Ebola or AIDS, and there have also been incidences of sexual experimentation that are disturbing. All these are examples of the issues that children are dealing with in their everyday lives that Life Skills is supposed to prepare them for, but it is currently unclear whether and how the subject Life Skills does this due to it being under-researched in South Africa. It is for this reason the current study focused on this research, in particular to understand the learners' experiences of being taught Life Skills at the school at the suburban ex-model C school I teach in.

The Department of Basic Education describes Life Skills as a subject that is pivotal to the holistic development of learners (DBE, 2011). According to the CAPS document, the aim of Life Skills is to prepare learners for all the challenges they will be facing in life, and to equip them to live meaningfully and successfully in a "shifting and transforming society" (DBE, 2011, p. 32-33). The subject exposes learners to a range of knowledge, skills and values that aims to strengthen their holistic (physical, social, personal, emotional and cognitive) development, creative and aesthetic knowledge and skills, knowledge of personal health and safety, understanding the relationship between people and the environment and learners' awareness of social relationships, technological processes and elementary science (DBE,

2011, p. 33). To address the education of learners, Life Skills has been organised into four study areas, namely Beginning Knowledge, Creative Arts, Physical Education, and Personal and Social Well-being. Although each of these areas are important, the current research intended to understand the ways in which the emotional and social support children may need to navigate their lives intersects with the Life Skills curriculum, considering that the teaching of Life Skills is about helping children to develop skills for life. Given the above information, the current research focuses on Personal and Social Well-being from the learners' perspective. This is influenced by a belief that to be a responsive teacher, it is important to have input from the learners, despite their age, as they are capable of articulating their needs.

In general, learners observe and often experience issues in their lives around violence, sexual abuse and sexual experimentation, homophobia, xenophobia, stereotyping and prejudice. I believe that what learners learn at school during the Life Skills lessons, specifically the social well-being study area, should be linked to what is happening in their immediate environment. Given my informal observations of children as a Foundation Phase teacher, I have chosen to research learners' experiences of the Life Skills curriculum in one urban ex-model C school. I believe that it is important to understand how learners talk about and think of Life Skills topics such as Personal Safety, Good or Bad touch and Feelings because learners will develop skills to relate positively and make a contribution to family (DBE, 2011). Understanding what learners know, need to know, or are struggling to deal with, is a way of possibly helping them become aware of and manage their experiences as they navigate their way through their lives.

It is important that children are equipped as early as possible with set of skills for life (rather than just subject knowledge) to help them steer their personal lives. According to (Rooth, 1997, cited in Steyn, Schuld & Hartell, 2012), life skills are essential for successful living and learning. Similarly, Steyn, Schuld and Hartell (2012) believe that as a person develops more knowledge on life skills, they are better equipped to make meaning of and survive some of the trials they may experience in life, in particular, when the social contexts where children come from may not support the acquisition of life skills that provide healthy and productive means for managing their lives (Steyn et al, 2012). Thus, education and particularly Life Skills has a significant role to play in making children aware of the dangers and challenges they might have to face in the world they occupy but also provide them with some of the

skills and knowledge needed to navigate their lives. This, however, does not mean that Life Skills as a school subject on its own can address these challenges.

According to Nitecki and Chung (2016) schools should be safe spaces, and create environments that nurture, develop and support children as individuals (Nitecki & Chung, 2016). They are therefore not just spaces where children learn academically, but a space where children learn skills for life (Wilson, 2000). Thus, the Life Skills curriculum provides one very important space that develops and supports learners. Of concern in the South African school system, is the prioritisation of Languages and Mathematics by the Department of Basic Education, resulting in Life Skills being marginalised by some teachers, irrespective of the continuous social issues and learners' behavioural challenges in schools (Sheldon, 2014). Life Skills is equally important as Literacy and Mathematics because it ought to provide the foundation upon which children learn to make decisions, regulate their own behaviour, experience complex challenges and take responsibility for their actions (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

1.2 Research Question and Aims

This study engages with the following overarching question:

> ***What are Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex-model C school?***

From this question, the following sub-questions are addressed:

1. What are Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of being taught the Life Skills curriculum?
2. What aspects of the Life Skills curriculum do learners think are relevant to their lives?
3. What do the learners' experiences reveal about the Life Skills curriculum?

Given the above questions, the aims of this study are to explore Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Life Skills curriculum in one urban ex-model C school; to understand their perceptions of the importance of being taught Life Skills; and examine their perspectives to the applicability of Life Skills in their lives.

1.3 Rationale

Elliot and Davis (2009) argue that during the early years of development children demonstrate the greatest ability to learn and develop understanding, making it important to engage with them to make sense of the untapped world. In addition, it is also essential that we invest in our children as their teachers and parents, to help and equip them for future challenges. The CAPS document (DBE, 2011) requires teachers to "guide and prepare learners for life and its possibilities, including equipping learners for meaningful and successful living in a rapidly changing and transforming society" (p. 8). This is important in the African context where young people need to be "agents of change with the potential of taking a leading role in tackling Africa's future development challenges" (UNICEF, 2006, p. 11). Considering that young children are the future, they should be allowed to talk about the future they envisage for themselves as well as the challenges they will face in life. It is for this reason that interacting with learners was important to understand the Life Skills curriculum from their experience, as thinking and rational beings. I believe that interviewing young children may reveal important insights into their experiences, even though it may be a complex task (Clark, 2010). Clark and Moss (2011) assert that children should be treated as members of a community, because they also make meaning of the various issues as they are observed and experienced. Thus, seeing them as members of a community may lead to a deeper understanding of the complexities of their everyday lives.

While there is a growing body of research on maths and literacy in the early years, there is little published research on the Life Skills curriculum (Petersen, 2014). The researched areas focus on the teacher, or on institutions of higher learning, and some addressed Life Skills as a curriculum in general. There seems to be lack of research that focuses on learners' experiences of Life Skills in the Foundation Phase, especially Grade 3 and 4. There is a need to research learners' experiences of the Life Skills Curriculum, more specifically their emotional needs which are taught under the topic Personal and Social Well-being. Children are often the most affected by adverse circumstances because of their relative immaturity and their lack of social power. Conducting research with young children creates an opportunity to use their voice to express what they think, how they think, and why they think in a particular way about the phenomena (Camfield, Crivello & Woodhead, 2009). Children are frequently amongst the least visible groups in social research because of perceived immaturity, which leads adults to overlook and take for granted what they say.

There is a growing body of work that studies the value of doing research with young children, which allows us to understand their voices and the value of taking what they have to say seriously (Clark, 2010; Clark & Moss, 2011). Child-focused research positions children at the centre around which key research questions, descriptions, interpretations and analyses are made. Involving children at different points in the research process affirms children as competent social actors, the experts in their own lives, and therefore valid sources of data (Camfield et al, 2009). This particularly involves recognising their agency and vulnerabilities, as well as their potential for resilience in the face of adversity (Camfield et al, 2009, p 52). One of the areas where young children's views are increasingly being sought is in relation to their experiences around topics pertaining to their school development (Camfield et al, 2009). Thus, as a teacher, understanding children's responses to the question of their experiences with the Life Skills curriculum could enhance my interactions with learners, and provide the opportunity to improve how and what I teach in Life Skills lessons to meet their needs. Learners in the Foundation Phase should be equipped with skills that teach them ways of dealing with their emotions, and I believe they are the best people to talk about how they feel this should be done. Thus, this research makes a contribution to scholarship in early years' education, it adds to the growing work that uses participatory methods of research with children. Furthermore, it adds to the small body of research into the teaching of Life Skills in the South African education system.

1.4 Structure of the Report

The structure of the subsequent chapters of this research report is as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature in Life Skills generally, and research in Life Skills with children to locate the current study.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and the research instrument chosen for the data collection process.

Chapter 4 presents the collected data and the results of the analysed data with brief discussions.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research and the conclusion, and also provides a number of recommendations arising from the findings.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In order to engage with the focus of this study, this literature review is organised into three key areas. The first area engages with the conceptualisations of child and childhood, the second presents life skills as a concept and Life Skills as a school subject, and the third area discusses existing research on Life Skills in the Foundation Phase in South Africa.

2.2 Conceptualisations of child and childhood

There are different understandings of childhood and the conceptualisations of children have varied over time. Ariès (1960, p. 1) states that "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist", which means childhood is socially constructed and has different meanings, ascribes different roles and activities to children in different historical periods and in different cultures. During medieval times children were viewed as reduced versions of adults, having less significance to their parents. Ariès (1960) argues that children existed alongside adults, and once they passed infancy, they participated in the life of the communities around them, working and playing with adults, with no distinctive practices focused on them as children. Similarly, Wilson (1980) also states that all the conceptualisations of childhood were given from the point of view of an adult, and not of the child. They were not regarded as thinking members of the society, nor did they serve any particular role in the family they formed part of. Thus, children were understood from the perspectives of the adults, and constructed as voiceless beings, which could be perceived as an adult bias.

During the seventeenth century onwards, the conception of childhood in the modern sense began to develop and change (Ariès, 1960). Some children started going to school, specifically boys were singled out for special treatment. Over the course of two or three centuries, school attendance was eventually extended to middle class girls, then to some working class children. Noticeably, other children continued to work with their families, also as wage labourers for families' survival (Ariès, 1960). This study acknowledges that in some countries, such as India, Indonesia and African countries, children still play the roles of provider in their families, in particular girls as head of families in absent parent homes (Pillay, 2016). It is therefore unsurprising that boys were initially sent to school, and girls were delayed owing to the cultural conceptions of childhood in relation to gender roles and

expectations. Ariès (1960) work is important but it has been critiqued by Wilson (1980) for overlooking the role of the cultural, economic and political factors that influence his conceptualisations of childhood. Given the critique, this study realises the importance of considering that children are shaped by various factors in the 21st century, for example, the family structure influences who children are and are becoming, and the financial situations they live in which further shape how they think of themselves and the future.

In the 18th century the child was "discovered and rediscovered" as a person in their own right (Frijhoff, 2012), particularly in the bourgeois family. Within the family, children started taking on central roles, as parents began to recognise pleasure from watching children's antics and coddling them (Clarke, 2004). At this time, the idea emerged of the child as a fragile being that needed to be safeguarded (Clarke, 2004). Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century, children and youth were defined as subordinate and dependent upon adults. Subject to stringent monitoring and censure for engaging in adult pastimes, children have also been protected from corruption through adult influences (Hébert & Hartley, 2006). Consequently, Western society and in particular its social policies, tended to focus on what children will become, rather than children's being (Morrow, 2011). The focus is thus on what they will become in the future rather than the here and now of childhood, and their everyday lives as children which influence the future.

In different developing countries such as Brazil, Angola and Malawi, children's roles are different because of the importance of child labour to many household economies, which means they are involved in various forms of production (Morrow, 2011). For instance, as briefly mentioned earlier, girls often play a central role in domestic labour and sibling care-taking, which are considered as responsibilities and part of their obligations to their families. Because child labour is prevalent in some countries such as India, Asia and Burundi, for many children, education has to fit around work commitments. This contrasts with the developed West where children's work has to fit around their educational commitments (Morrow, 2011). Given the different conceptualisations of childhood, it means different aspects of children's lives are prioritised, and thus their childhoods are also different. This information is important to consider in this study, because even though learners could be perceived as coming from South Africa, their childhood experiences are not homogenous because of different family background.

2.2.1 Sociological Conceptualisations of child and childhood

The traditional conceptualisation of children and childhood in the social sciences has been aligned to development, for example, natural maturation and socialisation theory (Jenks, 1996, as cited in Prout and James, 1997), and has subsequently been the key element in mainstream theories on children and childhood. The child is seen as not mature enough and needs an adult to function, which links with Ariès' (1960s) conceptualisation. This understanding has been challenged by the sociology of childhood authors. James and Prout (1995) have argued that childhood and children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, and not just in respect to their social construction by adults. This means that children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they grow up. Children are active social agents who participate in the knowledge construction and daily experience of their childhood (Uprichard, 2008), and therefore should be given the space and place to talk about their experiences. They are not simply the passive subjects of structural determinations, hence the significance of interacting with children as the participants in my study. It is essential that if we want to understand different experiences of children, it should be through children's voices and not only through the adults who teach them. The importance of this is that children should not be considered the "muted group" or receptacles of adult teaching but regarded as people to be part of the study and not only studied (James & Prout, 1995).

The social construction of children provides an interpretive frame for contextualising the early years of human life (Prout & James, 1995). Childhood is distinct from biological immaturity; it is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups, but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies. From this perspective childhood is a variable for social analysis which can never be entirely divorced from class, gender or ethnicity (Prout & James, 1990). Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives; they are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes (Prout & James, 1990). Young children should be considered as competent knowers of childhood; as such it is important for a researcher to adopt a specific way of listening and to make sense of the meanings that children are making (Ebrahim, 2008). Work that focuses on the sociology of childhood acknowledges that children, like adults, are in a combined state of 'being' and 'becoming' as they exist and experience their lives in the moment, and they are capable of being forward looking and future-orientated (Prout & James, 1990). If this is the case, it means learners are able to talk about their

experiences of learning Life Skills and discuss the importance of the Life Skills curriculum. The study acknowledges that learners' experiences and making sense of them, whether consciously or unconsciously, do "not occur in isolation 'inside' the human mind but culture also provides humans with particular tools and resources to mediate their thinking" (Lancaster and Flewitt 2015, 139). Learners' ways of talking about the Life Skills curriculum and its importance do not happen in isolation, but in relation to different social and every day incidences in and out of school.

2.2.2 African Conceptualisations of child and childhood

While the African conception of a child is not unique from other conceptions already mentioned earlier, there are some particularities that seem exclusive to African communities (Ndofirepi & Shumba, 2014). Like some western views, the traditional African world view of childhood holds that the child is delicate and needs protection, and can only become a fully recognised person through some processes of incorporation by ritualization, training and socialisation (Ndofirepi & Shumba, 2014). Even though to be a child is to need the aid of parents or an adult, in South Africa a child is also viewed, to some extent, as a saviour child, noble and responsible for others around him or her (Sorin, 2005). This means that in developing countries such as South Africa, children's roles differ owing to various socio-economic situations that make it important for some children to engage in labour to support families. For example, in some developing countries such as Zimbabwe and Burundi, social distinctions are made by the work children do and this determines their relationship with the world (Imoh, 2016). Children take on considerable responsibilities and see this as part of their obligations to their families (Morrow, 2011), because of the way they are raised and the home situation. Interestingly, some upper middle class children are not generally viewed as providers, as compared to the working class children whose lives are characterised by work. Ridge (2007) suggests that children who live in families where there is unemployment or low wages, are at risk of being care takers, similarly with children who have many siblings or live in lone-mother households. Even though this might not be the case for learners in my study, it is still important to be aware of the different situations that children experience in different homes and communities.

This research further recognises the importance of studies that explore the lives of children who experience difficult circumstances and live in extreme poverty, to understand the need for life skills to survive their environment (Imoh, 2016). However, Imoh (2016) explains that

foregrounding experiences of the marginalised child and those living under difficult circumstances may create a false dichotomy between childhoods that are located in the diverse contexts that exist in Sub-Saharan Africa, which includes South Africa. For instance, though some children maybe custodians of their families, other children still get to be children who play freely and the dynamics of these children are not explored enough. Also, some of the assumptions that children from marginalised families are particularly caretakers or caregivers in their families is not always the situation in our diverse communities, making it important to constantly research with children to understand the complex situations they experience. Constantly focusing research on marginalised childhoods may contribute to the negative and might prevent the emergence of a more holistic picture of childhoods which considers not only the lives of the poor and marginalised, but also the lives of those who do not experience difficult circumstances. In this study interviewed learners come from diverse homes with vast experiences that are given from different point of views, and their responses indicated such variety.

According to Ndofirepi and Shumba (2014), there is a gap in the conceptualisations of the child in African contexts, because the child who is agentic and viewed as a capable actor and who shares power with adult members has not been prioritised. Agency is a concept that is fundamental for the survival of the children in general, or for the children who carry responsibility beyond their years in their social surroundings. Morrow (2011) elaborates on the agentic child when she adds that the term agency underpins the notion of children who are social actors in their own right. It is children, who are thinking and developing in their surroundings, make sense of it to survive their future by making the necessary choices. Giddens (1984) says that agency refers not to the intentions people have in something, but to their capability of doing the things in the first place. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. Thus, children are capable of doing different things, resulting in the ability to make decisions about what they want and need. They are able to convince those around them to get what they need, relying on their experiences. Given that children grow up in societies and are exposed to different situations, good and bad, as agents they make various decisions about their lives. It is the different experiences and decisions that are unknown in Foundation Phase, especially in Life Skills research as a marginalised area of research.

This study also considers that childhood cannot be regarded as an unproblematic descriptor of a natural biological phase, rather the idea of childhood is seen as influenced by cultural, historical, and contextual background (Flewitt, Jones, Potter, Domingo, Collins, Munda & Stenning, 2018). Thus, the ways in which childhood is interpreted, understood and socially institutionalised by adults through their engagement with children and childhood varies considerably across and between cultures. It is therefore important that the social and cultural diversity of children's lives is considered significant in research with children (James & James, 2001), which was seriously considered in the current study as no responses were taken for granted during the analysis but were understood from the dynamic backgrounds and exposures.

In this study, as much as learners are considered agentic beings and social actors in their own right, I also recognise that they may be susceptible to complex power relations in school, home and community and these influence "the freedom to develop the voice worth hearing and freedom to have one's voice heard" (Flewitt et. al, 2018, p. 374). (See chapter 3 where I discuss the piloting phase of this research where I noticed that some learners were silent and didn't make any contribution, which might have been influenced by the power imbalance between teacher and learner.) Unfortunately, Flewitt et. al (2018) point that the balance of power may shift and develop across time and place, and research participants can wield power by opting for silence, absence or dissent. This was also evident during the focus group interview, irrespective of trying to motivate learners to speak freely during piloting, there were still some learners who did not respond to questions and some just kept quiet. While it is not easy to conclude that this addresses power shift, I realise that children might also speak from the position they may have acquired at school or home in relation to power relations.

2.3 The concept of life skills

This section outlines the concept of 'life skills', which is denoted in the lower case to refer to 'skills for life'. There are different understandings of what these life skills are, depending on contextual background. Life skills can be viewed as "abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (Munsi & Guha, 2014, p. 97). In Malawi, life skills are defined as "the skills that enable learners to understand themselves, the world and their place in it" (Malawi Ministry of Education in Chirwa and Naidoo 2014). Bosman, Davin, Esterhuizen, Govender, Jordaan, Joubert, Koen, Krog, van Vrede, Westraadt and Wood, (2016, p. 13) state that life

skills aim to guide and prepare learners for life and its possibilities, including equipping learners for meaningful and successful living in a rapidly changing and transforming society. There is commonality from authors that life skills is about preparing individuals or learners to engage and make meaning of life and its complexities, at the same time understand themselves within it to succeed. Thus, learners could develop various skills to relate positively and make contributions to family, community and society, and be social actors in their own right. With the necessary life skills, learners should be able to make informed and responsible decisions pertaining to their lives. It is important to mention that the teaching of some of these skills should commence at home, as early as possible in a child's life. It continues at school in a more structured way in the Foundation Phase, and be sensitive to children's development (Bosman et al, 2016). It is therefore important for teachers to consciously link the knowledge learnt in school, society and home during Life Skills lessons, and allow learners to participate actively to know whether and how they make sense of the subject.

2.3.1 Life Skills Education

The WHO (1999) argues that Life Skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of social skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way. This means the facilitation takes into consideration the nature of child development and the cultural background, considering that the child comes from a family. The Malawi Ministry of Education (2000) (cited in Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014) defines Life Skills education as an interactive process of teaching and learning which allows learners to acquire knowledge and to develop attitudes and skills. They continue to add that Life Skills education aims to continue and extend the development of the skills that learners bring from home, with a focus on the promotion of the holistic development of the learner. If Life Skills is an interactive process it should thus take learners' active involvement in the learning and discussion of topics into consideration, through dialoguing about information from home in relation to the knowledge in school. In addition, Life skills education is also regarded as "the practice and reinforcement of psychological skills that contribute to personal and social development and the prevention of health and social problems" (UNICEF, 2002, p. 4). UNICEF adds the aspect of health to the different definitions of Life Skills already mentioned above, given the importance of enhancing learners' knowledge to the healthy living. Thus, Life Skills education lays an important foundation for the development of individual (learner)

capabilities with the development of a high level of skills, attuned to an empathetic disposition (Bosman et al., 2016).

For individuals to live in harmony they may need to be taught certain skills, particularly for the purpose of interacting peacefully with each other. Teaching children to be conscious and reflective of their behaviour is crucial because they can use some of the skills they learn at school to make learned and responsible decisions. For this to happen, teachers need to be well prepared for the implementation of the curriculum. According to WHO (1999), the implementation of the Life Skills curriculum requires input from the school and education authorities, to ensure that teachers have appropriate content knowledge and an understanding of what they need to teach for proper implementation of the subject matter. Errecart, Walberg, Ross, Gold, Fielder and Kolbe (1991) insist that teaching Life Skills could form a base of life skills education for the promotion of mental well-being and healthy interaction and behaviour. In the South African context, Life Skills education has a social justice aspect and addresses issues such as HIV/AIDS, respect for and acceptance of difference and diversity, religion and culture, and an understanding of South Africa's transition to democracy in particular (DoE, 2002; Sheldon, 2014).

Fullan (1993) and Pratt (1980) have noted that the success of any curriculum includes investigating the challenges during its implementation stage, especially its impact on the learners. No matter how well designed a curriculum might be, it is useless if it does not yield the intended results of enhancing learners' knowledge and make the Life Skills curriculum relevant to the everyday experiences and situations. Hence, it is important for teachers to understand and know what topic is to be covered and why it is to be taught to the learners in order to attain the desired outcomes. Fullan (1993, p. 32) further argues that if the implementation perspective is understood authentically, it can be a "powerful resource for accomplishing real improvements in classrooms". This means that when teachers understand what the subject matter in the curriculum is intended to achieve, then they will be able to apply the content successfully in their classrooms. Sanders (2002) views experience as an inspiration of the current lived moment between what the individual has encountered in the past and is still yet to encounter. In this study, experience refers to a learner's motivated action in engaging with activities and the perceptions of what is taught in the Life Skills class, guided by their previous encounters in learning at home as well as in class.

2.3.2.1 Life Skills in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)

Life Skills is seen as a cross cutting subject that should support and strengthen the teaching of other core Foundation Phase subjects namely Languages (Home and First Additional) and Mathematics (DBE, 2011). According to the CAPS document, the subject Life Skills is central to the holistic development of learners because it is concerned with the social, personal, intellectual, emotional and physical growth of learners and with the way in which these are integrated (DBE, 2011). The subject Life Skills in Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) has been organised into four study areas which are Beginning Knowledge, Personal and Social Well-being, Creative Arts and Physical Education which is shown in Figure 2.1. Life Skills has been organised in this way in order to ensure that the foundational skills, values and concepts of early childhood development of the subjects offered in Grades 4 - 12 are taught and developed in Grades R-3 (DBE, 2011). However, in the Intermediate Phase Beginning Knowledge falls away and Personal and Social Well-being is expressed as a study area containing three topics (DBE, 2011). The three topics are development of the self, health and environmental as well as social responsibility. Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being are integrated into one study area in Foundation Phase. As outlined above, the CAPS document draws an integrated curriculum system of instruction that should be taught to learners. For the purpose of this research because of the scope of a Master's report, Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being from Foundation Phase is the focus area. But it is important to acknowledge that in their discussions, some of the children's experiences will be shaped by the Grade 4 curriculum.

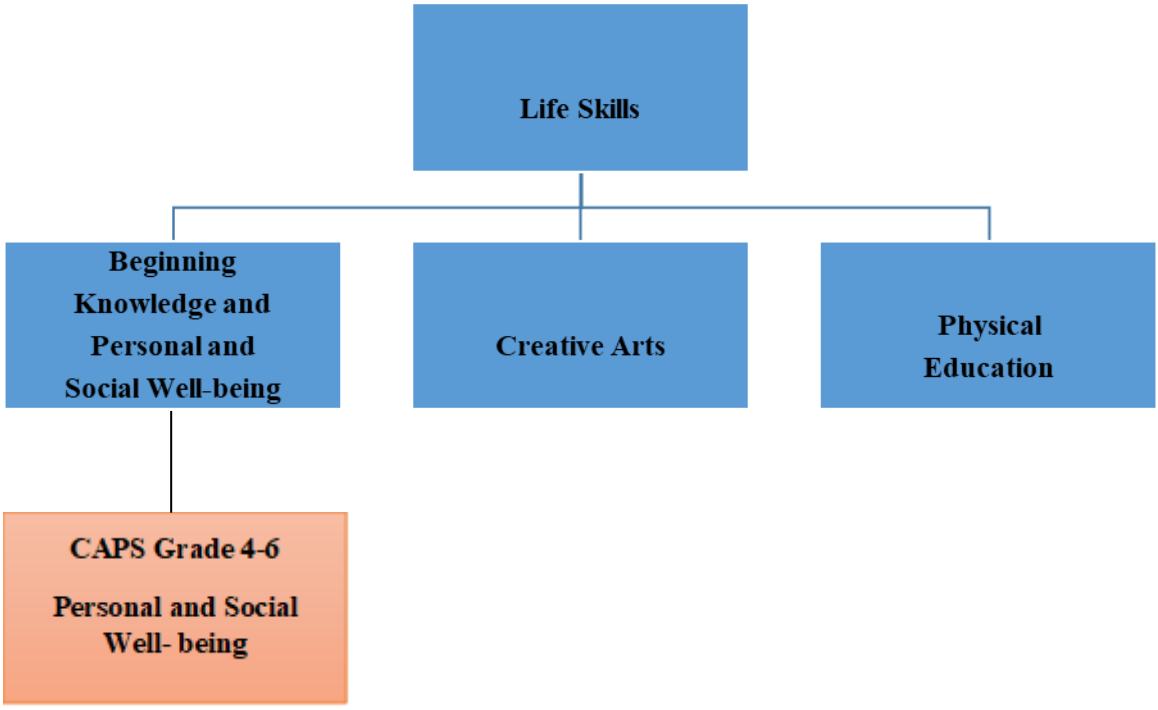


Figure 2.1: Study areas for the subject Life Skills

2.3.2.2 Life Skills focus area Personal Social Well-Being

For the purposes of this research, the Life Skills study area, Personal and Social Well-being, is the primary focus. This study area aims to understand how learners make sense of and use the study area within Life Skill curriculum, to make learned, responsible and accountable decisions about their health and the environment. It addresses issues relating to nutrition, diseases, safety, violence, abuse and environmental health (DBE, 2011). Figure 2.2 outlines the specific topics covered in the Life Skills curriculum in Grade 3. The CAPS document clearly states that the Grade 3 time allocation for Life Skills is 70 hours per term, which means that in a 5-day week cycle, Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being is taught 3 times a week. Thus, Personal and Social Well-being, as the focus of this study, is allocated 3 hours per week (DBE, 2011). This could be considered insufficient time considering the importance of this study area. It is also important to note that in the Intermediate Phase Life Skills curriculum time allocation is 40 hours per term which is a decrease compared to the Foundation Phase time allocation (DBE, 2011).

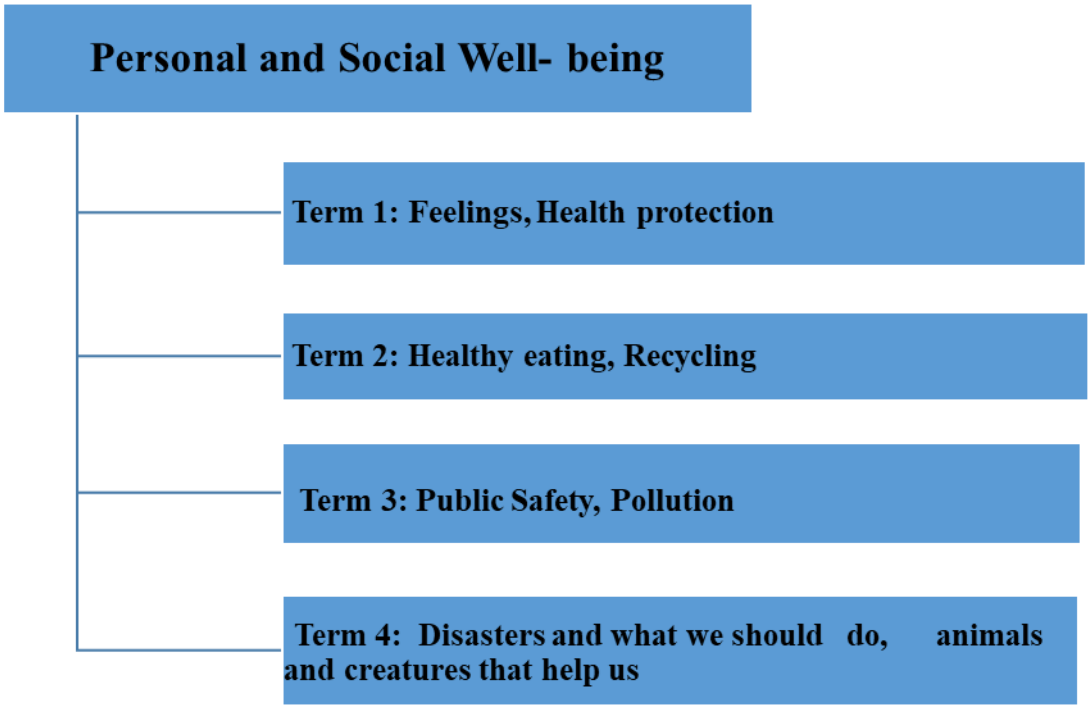


Figure 2.2: Topics covered under Life Skills study area in Grade 3, sub-section Personal and Social Well- being.

Sheldon (2014) argues that some schools may have experts in the fields of Art, Music and Physical Education but Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being have to be dealt with by the classroom teacher. The focus does not imply that the other topics are not important to the holistic development of a learner (Profeta, 2012). For 'Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being' teachers are expected to cover a range of issues, topics and skills, and there are guidelines for teachers on how to teach the topics in the Foundation Phase Life Skills curriculum (Sheldon, 2014). "This part of Life Skills endeavours to cultivate positive cultural, societal and patriotic attitudes and values by educating children to know about their inherent rights and responsibilities based on the Constitution" (Dixon, Janks, Botha, Earle, Poo, Oldacre, Pather & Schneider, 2018, p.10). Personal and Social Well-being in the Life Skills curriculum are organised in topics. The use of topics is suggested for teachers as a means to integrate the content from the different study areas where possible and appropriate. Teachers are encouraged in the CAPS document to adapt the topics so that they are suitable for their school contexts.

Teachers are also encouraged to choose their own topics, should they judge these to be more appropriate (Sheldon, 2014). It could be argued that this section of the document gives teachers flexibility in terms of their choice of topics they feel are more relevant or

appropriate. However, the teachers are given themes to follow as laid out in sections such as Personal and Social Well-being which draws from sociology (social health), psychology (emotional health and relationships with people) and natural science and geography (human relationship with the environment) (DBE, 2011, p. 9). Considering the topics teachers need to follow, as laid out in the curriculum as well as the time that is stipulated for work coverage, it is challenging for a teacher to choose different topics to include in the day to day teaching that have not been outlined in the CAPS document. Even though it could be possible to link the existing curriculum topics to the current relevant issues for learners to make sense and meaning of what they learn.

Bearing in mind the complexity of the CAPS curriculum, Dixon et. al (2018) have done a critical analysis of the Life Skills curriculum. They use Bernstein to analyse and critique the curriculum. Bernstein (1996) describes two types of knowledge which are everyday knowledge and specialised knowledge. Everyday knowledge is context dependent based on local events and practices, and is steered by subjective opinions rather than facts or established truths. Specialised or school knowledge, as it is called, goes beyond people's feelings, experiences and perceptions (Dixon et. al, 2018, p. 2). Specialised knowledge thus differs from everyday knowledge in the specificity of its language. It is considered to be more powerful than everyday knowledge because of its greater explanatory power and its ability to work at increasing levels of abstraction that can account for a wide range of lower order phenomena (Dixon et. al, 2018, p. 3). They have argued that the Life Skills Curriculum has content that requires the teacher to be a subject specialist, for example, the teaching of Life Cycles which is linked to Life Science (Biology). Taking into account that this research concentrates on the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum, there is a high probability of having teachers who lack subject specialist knowledge. It means there is possibility that learners may not get deep curriculum coverage, considering the importance of teacher's content knowledge to promote learners' intellectual growth.

Dixon et. al (2018) have also shown that Life Skills has become the curriculum container for all the subjects which are neither Mathematics nor English (Literacy). Their argument is that the change began during Curriculum 2005 (C2005) and continued in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for the Foundation Phase. The particular change included History and Geography, Biology and Physical Science, Art, Drama, and Music, Physical Education, Health education, and personal and social development apparent in the apartheid curriculum.

They were reconfigured into four Learning Areas as Social Sciences in C2005 entailing: Natural Sciences, Arts and Culture, and Life Orientation. The authors further noted that in CAPS all these subjects were compressed into Life Skills thus distorting the boundaries between them. Dixon et. a's (2018) analysis has shown that in losing the specificity of disciplinary knowledge within the different study areas, particularly the Beginning Knowledge, and also by collapsing Personal and Social Well-being into one study area, including all the creative arts into another component, the boundary between every day and specialised knowledge, has been weakened.

In addition, the compression of these disciplinary areas into Life Skills creates pressures and tensions, which further affect how teachers work with knowledge and pedagogy. Teaching Life Skills efficiently requires an in-depth understanding of several disciplines, each with its own internal logic or grammar, specialised language, methods of enquiry and rules (Dixon et. al, 2018). As a Foundation Phase teacher myself, I cannot claim to know what the subject specifics of specialised knowledge are of a topic. However, as a teacher who is interested in the learning of her learners, I make sure that I research a topic as much as I can to be able to link some of the everyday knowledge to specialised knowledge during lessons. It is very likely that as Foundation Phase teachers we are not using the language that is specific to the teaching of some of the subjects in this complex learning area of Life Skills, and the reason for this could be that none of us are subject specialists. This is an aspect for future research, considering the importance of the Life Skills curriculum, at the same time, the aspect of specialists may explain why Life Skills has a more marginal position compared to Mathematics and Languages/Literacy. The Grade 4 Life Skills curriculum issues which are dealt with in each topic as outlined in figure 2.3 below are related to the issues covered in the other two topics of the study area. It is clear that the topics in this study area are interrelated. Due to the interrelated nature of the study area, the three topics of Personal and Social Well-being function interdependently, and therefore, are considered to be of equal importance (DBE, 2011).

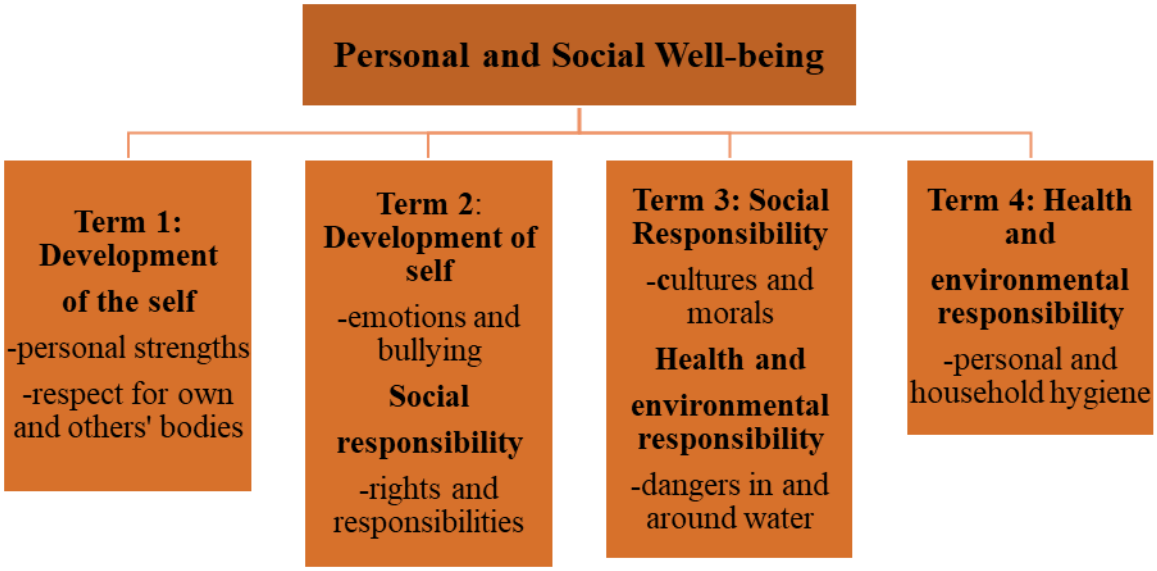


Figure 2.3: Topics covered under Life Skills study area in Grade 4, sub-section Personal and Social Well- being.

2.3.3 Research on Life Skills in South Africa

Literature and research on learner experiences of the Life Skills curriculum in the South African context are not as readily available as for Languages and Mathematics (Sheldon, 2014). However, there is some research on aspects of the Life Skills curriculum. Sheldon's (2014) research looked at how Foundation Phase teachers practice the subject of Life Skills. She also looked at consistencies and/or the disjuncture between the Life Skills curriculum and teachers' practices. Her research found that teachers agreed that Life Skills is a subject not equal in importance to Languages and Mathematics, which may be due to the lack of assessment and that teachers, did not consider Life Skills an important subject (Sheldon, 2014).

Krishna's (2013) study focused on how educators experienced curriculum change in South Africa, particularly how they experienced the new Life Skills curriculum in the Foundation Phase. Her research was conducted with Grade 1 teachers who discussed how they experienced challenges in terms of the content, planning, preparation, assessment and dealing with contextual factors in the classroom. She also found that teachers further experienced a lack of training and support in implementing the new Life Skills curriculum. However, they mentioned a positive experience which was enjoyment of teaching Life Skills and also

embraced curriculum change. Beni, Stears and James' (2017) study explored the degree to which four Foundation Phase teachers interpret the life skills programme by using an adapted version of a theory of implementation. Their findings showed that Foundation Phase teachers have great difficulty interpreting the curriculum, because the foundation phase curriculum does not give clear guidance with regard to the teaching of science.

Although not located in the Foundation Phase, Bender's research is useful. Bender's (2002) research developed and implemented a personal and interpersonal Life Skills programme for Grade 7 learners (boys and girls) in the senior phase of a traditionally African school, and evaluated whether participation in the life skills programme would lead to personal growth (self-empowerment) and social competence and thus contributed to the optimal social functioning of children in the classroom, school, family and community. The findings show that girls had a greater improvement in their personal life skills than boys, and also that the personal and interpersonal Life Skills programme had a statistically significant effect on the personal and interpersonal Life Skills development of the Grade 7 learners.

Helleve, Flisher, Onya, Mũkoma and Klepp (2011) explored the topic of HIV by asking the question "Can any teacher teach sexuality and HIV/AIDS?" to Life Orientation teachers. They investigated the perceived desirable characteristics of South African Life Orientation teachers for teaching sexuality and HIV/AIDS, the extent to which these can be understood as parts of a role script for teaching HIV/AIDS and sexuality. They found that teachers emphasised the importance of personality and life experience as important characteristics for teaching sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Additionally, their findings showed that the teachers felt that it was challenging to create an open dialogue in the classroom, and at the same time maintain classroom discipline. Teachers did not perceive that teaching about sexuality and HIV/AIDS was a role that a teacher could step in and out of. Other research done by Steyn, Schuld and Hartell (2012) focuses on the teaching of Life Skills at higher education institutions. They explored how the Foundation Phase subject area of "Life Skills" is being offered in higher education institutions. They did this by identifying similarities and differences in the curricula offered at these institutions and established the extent to which the different modules attend to the various aspects of Life Skills according to the most recent national curriculum. Their findings showed that although higher education institutions use the CAPS document as a guideline for structuring their curricula in teacher education programmes, some participants indicated that they followed an integrated approach (Steyn,

Schuld & Hartell, 2012). Considering the different studies done in Life Skills, this study addresses the existing research gap with Grade 3 learners' perceptions of the importance of the Life Skills curriculum, given little existing information in this area of research.

2.4 Conclusion

The reviewed literature indicates some research that has been done on the teaching of Life Skills in the South African context. However, it was not easy to find any research that focuses on the experiences of learners in the Foundation Phase. This speaks to a problem raised by September (2002), who believes that the lack of child specific data has been a significant variable in the exclusion of children in social and economic discourse. It was concerning that the literature shows that data and research that exists is relatively fragmented and largely obtained through secondary processes. Subsequently, the generation of knowledge on children's rights and well-being is under-resourced, which impacts negatively on the development and implementation of effective policies and services for children.

This chapter further discussed the sociological construction of child as an agentic being as a conceptual framework for this research because it considers childhood as a social construction. The chapter also distinguished between life skills and Life Skills education and raises some of the challenges for the subject matter and of providing quality input. The CAPS Life Skills curriculum was presented in relation to the existing research, and interrogated some aspect with the purpose of clarifying the identified research gap. Some of the existing body of research that has been done in South Africa was also discussed.

Chapter 3
Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The chapter discusses the methodological design which was used to explore Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex-model C school. The chapter presents a detailed process and methods that were used to collect, organise and analyse the qualitative data which were gathered using semi-structured focus group interviews. It also explains the processes involved in the study and outlines the ethical concerns to be considered.

3.2 Research Approach

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach which focuses on the everyday lives of different groups of people and communities in their natural and contextual settings (Myers, 2009). The current study examines learners' experiences of the Life Skills curriculum in their natural school setting, which could be considered everyday experiences that are unknown. According to Domegan and Fleming (2007, p. 24), "qualitative research aims to explore and discover issues about the problem at hand, because very little is known about it, which is the same for the current study as already mentioned in the two previous chapters. There is sometimes uncertainty about dimensions and characteristics of the problem, thus qualitative research uses 'soft' data to get 'rich' data", by engaging in detailed conversations with participants. A qualitative research design is particularly useful to study educational processes; in this study, the nature of learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex-model C school. This is because qualitative research involves interpretation that attempts to make sense of the phenomena, that is, the meanings people make of them (phenomena) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Using child-centred research with children is still a relatively new approach to the study of children's lives, and the development of appropriate, ethical and meaningful research methodologies presents a challenge for researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Coyne (1998, p. 413) notes, "allowing children the freedom to talk about their lives and views help[s] them relax and enable[s] the interviews to proceed smoothly". As a teacher-researcher I took this statement into serious consideration during the interviews with learners, as I allowed them to talk freely about their experiences of the Life Skills curriculum, in particular their ability to

express themselves openly, because I realised the importance of listening to what they are saying as young people that form part of an ever-changing system. Ebrahim (2008) refers to listening as a process of active communication which encompasses hearing, interpreting and constructing meaning in a spoken way. This process was also important in this study, not only to hear learners but also make sense of their experiences that are dynamic. O'Brien, Alldred and Jones (1996) argue that children are seen as 'creators' and social actors who are active in creating themselves in different social contexts. This, according to James and Prout (1990) is a shift away from an emphasis upon structure to that of agency, where children are recognised in their 'own right'.

Children are therefore seen as having a perception and experience of childhood that greatly enhances our understanding of childhood. Childhood is seen as a negotiated process where children are active in constructing their own social worlds, reflecting upon and understanding its meaning and significance to their own lives (Scott & Morrison, 2007). It is important to recognise that children's competencies can help adults react to the limitations of their understanding of children's lives (Tolfree & Woodhead 1999), because children are able to talk about experiences in their own ways that make sense to them. Holt (2010) states that children are the gatekeepers to their own discussions and can allow or deny adults participation, a point I continuously thought about as I engaged with learners. As researchers, especially focused on children in the Foundation Phase, we should be constantly interested in children's perspectives to education or subjects they learn in school as active participants in research itself.

3.3 Research Site

The research was carried out in one ex-model C school situated in an eastern suburb of Johannesburg. Station Primary (not the real name) is a fee-paying school, and it offers Grades R to seven with approximately 800 learners coming from different socio-economic backgrounds. The school community is made up of multi-cultural and diverse teachers and learners with a wide range of linguistic heritages which include isiZulu, Sesotho and Shona. Some learners at the school come from working class families whose mothers or grandmothers are domestic workers in the surrounding suburbs, while others are from middle class families, representing teachers, nurses and police. Some learners are transported from the under privileged community of Alexandra in the North of Johannesburg, or from Soweto located in the South of Johannesburg and some from Hillbrow in central Johannesburg. The

school is populated by learners whose home language is not English, though due to the history of the school the language of teaching and learning is English. I am a Grade 3 teacher at Station Primary.

3.4 Research Participants

The study used a child-focused perspective that acknowledges that children are diverse in their capacities (Crivello, Camfield & Woodhead, 2009), and can provide dynamic experiences and understandings of the Life Skills curriculum in one urban ex-model C school. It is for this reason I purposively chose to work with Grade 3 and 4 boys and girls, because purposive sampling allows a researcher to make informed decisions about who to include in the study. The assumption is that the participants will be able to engage with research questions, considering their experiences and knowledge of the subject (Scott & Morrison, 2007). I chose Grade 3s because of their three-year engagement with the Foundation Phase Life Skills curriculum to talk about their experiences and what could be added in the curriculum. Similarly, Grade 4 learners have more experiences of the Life Skills curriculum and could reflect and link what was done in Grade 3 to what they have been doing in their new grade. The Grade 4 learners have more experience of the curriculum because they have been introduced to both the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase Life Skills curriculum, which gives them the advantage when talking about topics, new as well as old, which can inform the research questions. The Grade 4s have been taught a continuation of the curriculum and could give more specific examples of the content they felt should have been covered in Grade 3. Having said this, it does not mean that the learners will not make reference to what they have been taught in their current grade.

A total of 15 participants were selected, 8 girls and 7 boys (see Table 3.1), representing a diverse group of learners that offered rich data. It is important to note the power-relationship between the learners and me in taking on the role as teacher-researcher. I cannot ignore the fact that learners may have agreed to take part in the research because I am or was their teacher. However, it was made clear that they were not forced to take part in the study and this was not related to their academic and school performance. I was aware of this fact during the focus groups and attempted to create an environment where they felt able to make their own informed decision to participate and express their views.

Table 3.1 List of participants

Participant	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Grade
1	**Carrot**	Female	9	3
2	**Peas**	Female	9	3
3	**Cabbage**	Female	8	3
4	**Onion**	Female	9	3
5	**Cucumber**	Male	9	3
6	**Pumpkin**	Male	9	3
7	**Cauliflower**	Male	9	3
8	**Tomato**	Male	9	3
9	**Cherry**	Female	9	4
10	**Blueberry**	Female	10	4
11	**Strawberry**	Female	10	4
12	**Orange**	Female	11	4
13	**Banana**	Male	10	4
14	**Pineapple**	Male	10	4
15	**Mango**	Male	10	4

A child-focused perspective recognises that, as a social group, children possess a broad range of capacities and preferences for expressing themselves. The study acknowledges Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead's (2009) argument that sometimes combining learners from different genders may produce limited responses, a reason learners were separated according to their gender and grade. Piloting the study proved it true that grouping the boys and girls together would not be useful (as I explain in 3.5.1), due to different challenges during these interviews. For this reason, because I prioritised comfortability in this study, for learners to talk as openly as possible, I grouped boys and girls separately according to their respective grades. At the beginning of the interviews I explained to the learners that they were free to say anything, and also explained that I would not be using their real names during the focus group interviews. Blueberry came up with the idea of using the names of fruits and vegetables as their pseudonyms, so all the children chose names related to these categories.

The voluntarism showed me that learners can be involved when they feel safe and comfortable, by displaying a willingness to make a choice about their pseudonyms.

3.5 Research Methods

In order to answer the main research question, I conducted semi-structured focus group discussions with the participants (see appendix A). Scott and Morrison (2007) state that there is support for the use of focus groups as an appropriate method for conducting research with children and young people. Table 3.2 outlines the process followed during the focus group discussions and appendix D outlines the types of questions the learners addressed during the data collection process. Freitas**,** Oliveira, Jenkins and Popjoy (1998) explain that focus group discussions are a type of in-depth interview, where the participants influence each other through their answers to the ideas and contributions during the discussion. Focus groups are particularly suited when the objective is to better understand how people consider an experience, idea, or event, and the discussion is effective in supplying information about what people think, or how they feel, or how they act (Freitas et al, 1998). As mentioned earlier, focus group interviews were used to understand Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Life Skills curriculum in one urban ex-model C school, to know what they think and how they think about the role of Life Skills in their lives. The focus groups were constituted using the advice from Hoppe, Wells, Morrison, Gillmore, Anthony and Wilsdon (1995) that the optimal number of children in a group should be between 4 to 6, to encourage all learners to take part.

In this study the focus groups consisted of four children per group. Hoppe et al (1995) advocate that smaller groups are better to get a lively discussion going because sometimes it is difficult for the interviewer to hold the attention of all the children and draw out the quieter ones in larger groups (six or more). During the pilot study I discovered that the talkative learners gave responses most of the time and the quieter learners were often left out. From this experience I made a conscious decision to change the size of my sample by having only 4 children per focus group during the interviews I held. This made it easier to manage the sessions and be able to draw the quieter children into the discussion. Scott and Morrison (2007) also caution that the length of the interview with children under the age of 10 should not be more than 45 minutes, while this may be extended to 60 minutes for older children. For the present study the longest focus group session took 34 minutes. Focus group discussions provide a method to break down the power imbalance between adults and

children, by allowing learners the opportunity to communicate openly and freely. While this is not easy to achieve, especially with children, considering that I am their teacher and have taught some of the learners, to soften power imbalance, I made sure that learners were comfortable talking to me by creating a space which enabled them to speak up and be heard. Table 3.2 summarises the group composition and times that were taken to conduct the focus group discussions.

Table 3.2 Summary of the composition and times of the focus group discussions

Focus Groups	**5**	**3**	**2**	**4**	**1**
Participants	**Grade 3 Girls**	**Grade 3 Boys**	**Grade 4 Girls**	**Grade 4 Boys**	**Combined (grade 3 boys and girls) pilot**
Number of Learners	4	4	4	3 (one absent)	8
Date of Interview	03/07/2017	23/06/2017	21/06/2017	27/06/2017	5/06/2017
Duration of Interview	27:18	23:24	33:24	27:53	15: 49

3.5.1 Pilot Study

As mentioned above, the study piloted the interviews before final interviews. Janesick (1994) describes a pilot study in qualitative research as an experiment which allows the researcher to make use of actual qualitative interviews. Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006) view a pilot study as a small test conducted before the larger piece of research to determine whether the methodology, sampling and instruments are adequate and appropriate. To overcome the disadvantage of being an untrained interviewer, I piloted the focus group interviews in order to practice my interviewing techniques in a group, to evaluate the effectiveness of my questions as well as to get a sense of the pacing. Welman, Kruger, and Mitchell (2009) and De Vos, Strydom, Schulze and Patel (2011) summarise the purpose of the pilot study as a way to identify possible flaws in the measurement process like the children's understanding of the questions. It is also to identify unclear or vaguely formulated questions, which means

actual questions are asked to the participants and they indicate how they have interpreted the formulated questions. This presents the opportunity for researchers to notice non-verbal behaviour that may possibly signify discomfort or wording of the questions (Welman et. al., 2009).

The pilot study was carried out with a group of Grade 3 boys and girls on the 5th June 2017. This process led to the conclusion that interviewing girls and boys separately will be better. I came to this conclusion because the boys joked about the questions and the girls spent most of the time laughing at the disruptive behaviour of the boys. During the pilot study I also discovered which questions the learners seemed unable to answer or were not well articulated. This meant that I had to adjust my questions in a way that the learners would be able to understand better, which means the language and choice of words changed. I further found that holding the focus group interviews in an empty classroom was too cold and distant, which made the space uncomfortable for the learners and it was difficult for me to make out what the learners were saying. They sat on chairs away from me and could not look at each other. I then decided to move the focus group interviews to the library which is more intimate and comfortable. In the library learners were able to relax better by sitting on bean bags in a circle and I also sat on one to make them feel comfortable with me at their level, making the space comfortable and familiar.

3.6 Data organisation and analysis

Data analysis begins during the process of interviews rather than after interviews, and Bogdan and Biklen (2003, p. 115) define qualitative data analysis as "working with the data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesising them, and searching for patterns". The data collected were audio recorded and used to analyse the group's responses. Audio-recording the data during the focus group process was important to allow me to transcribe the data, and be able to go back and check the participants' responses in the recordings for accuracy which adds credibility to the findings. Thus after transcription, the data were organised according to the grades and gender, considering the process of data collection.

I used thematic content analysis to organise and analyse the data (Smith, 2000). Stake (1995) describes thematic content analysis as a method of analysing data by organising it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features. The focus group interviews were first coded into themes and differentiated using different colours, which were further

categorised to identify emerging sub-themes. Smith (2000) states that coding is the process of dividing or segmenting data into topics or categories, thus the different colours represented different categories and consequently themes (see appendix E). The coding procedure assisted in reducing and categorising a large quantity of data into more meaningful units for interpretation. Some of the specific themes that emerged were: Life Skills as skills for life; Learners' perceptions of the importance of the Life Skills curriculum; Safety practices for the learners with the sub- theme *Safety in public spaces*; Healthy habits its sub- theme is *First Aid* and the final theme is Social Responsibility it has four sub-themes broken down as follows *Family Responsibility*; *Bullying; Environmental Cleanliness and Recognition of Own Emotions.*

3.6.1 Trustworthiness

Shenton (2004, p. 73) outlines the 'strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects as credibility, transferability, and dependability. This study observed and adopted these aspects. Denscombe (2008) argues that the credibility of qualitative research is difficult to establish given that repetition of the research is unlikely to have the same or similar outcomes. It becomes important in any experiential research for the researcher to ensure that the findings of the study are a true reflection of the information provided by the participants. Regarding this, for Anney (2014) credibility of the study refers to "the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings" (p. 276). Thus credibility in this study was achieved by sharing and engaging in detailed discussions with my supervisor, and the process included moving forward and backwards to make sense of the emerging findings before making final decisions. Consequently, I believe that the findings are a sound reflection of learners' experiences of the Life Skills curriculum in one urban ex-model C school. The strategies for ensuring transferability include providing "detailed descriptions of data" and using purposive sampling (Babbie & Mouton, 2007, p. 277), which was considered in the current study where detailed descriptions and thorough transcriptions of the data are provided. To address issues of dependability of this study, my supervisor acted as the inquiry auditor. The role of an inquiry auditor is to examine "the data, findings, interpretations and recommendations" (Babbie & Mouton, 2007, p. 278) of the study to establish whether or not they connect. During our supervision meetings and submission of several drafts, my supervisor continually challenged me to think deeper about each and every component of this study to ensure that no information was treated at a surface level.

3.7 Ethics

There are ethical considerations to think about when conducting research with people especially when conducting research with young children. Creswell (2003) states that the researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the participants. I applied for ethical clearance from the Wits Ethics Committee (protocol number **2017ECE003M)** and from the Department of Basic Education (see appendix F) and was granted permission to conduct research by both institutions. As I initiated this research, I asked for informed consent from learners' parents and voluntary assent from learners (see appendix G). A letter introducing myself with an explanation of the aim of my study and of consent were hand-delivered to the principal, parents as well as learners. The participants and parents were invited to take part in the research. Learners were given a consent letter to take home for their parents or guardians to give consent for their children to participate in the study. Another ethical consideration I adhered to during the course of the study was that participants and parents of the participants could withdraw from the research at any time without any penalty held against them. The participants were told that they were not obliged to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable answering. They were also told that their responses and involvement in the research would remain confidential at all times and that pseudonyms would be used instead of the school and/or their real names.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

What could be considered a limitation in my study is the fact that I was the one who conducted the focus group interviews. This could mean that the learners' responses were for my benefit as their teacher. Perhaps if an individual who was not the learners' teacher had done the interview, we could have had different findings. Another aspect is that the focus group interviews were done over a week and when I carried out follow up interviews to clarify some of the responses the learners gave no new information. Also, the number of participants is small and if all Grade 3s and 4s were interviewed different themes could have emerged. This is also a study from children in one school, and the findings may differ with children from other contexts. Another limitation to consider is the role that Creative Art and Physical Education play in developing life skills, and their value in the holistic development of individuals. Due to the scope of this project these learning areas were not focused on despite their importance.

3.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I described the processes and methods that were used to collect, sort and analyse the qualitative data which were gathered by means of focus group interviews. These descriptions include explanations and justifications of the choice of participants and data analysis techniques as well as processes for this study. This chapter also outlined the ethical considerations for this study. Chapter 4 presents detailed findings of this qualitative research.

Chapter 4
Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this study, which explored Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex-model C school. In particular, learners' experiences of being taught the Life Skills curriculum, the relevance of the curriculum to their lives as well as understanding what their experiences reveal about the Life Skills Curriculum. I discuss these findings in relation to the existing literature on this topic and the conceptual framework. While interpreting and discussing the findings of the study, I use learners' excerpts as evidence of their utterances during interviews. Hébert and Hartley (2006) argue that consideration should be given when thinking about the changing conceptions of children in terms of their sense of agency, voice, and social roles. They should have the freedom to express themselves because there is honesty in their talks that is unique.

Before I present the findings, I outline the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the data as discussed in the prior chapter. The first major theme that emerged from the analysed data is ***Learners' awareness of life skills as informing their skills for life***. The second theme that follows is ***learners' perceptions of the importance of the Life Skills curriculum*** which highlights the value they attached to the subject, and the identified sub-theme is *important topics learners identified in the Life Skills curriculum*. The third theme is ***Safety practices for the learners*** and the sub-theme is *safety in public spaces*. The fourth theme addresses health matters such as ***healthy habits*** and the sub-theme is *first aid*. The final theme addresses issues of ***social responsibility***, and the emerged sub-themes are *family responsibility, environmental cleanliness, bullying* as well as *feelings*.

4.2 Learners' awareness of Life Skills as informing their skills for life

This first theme addresses learners' awareness of Life Skills as important in the development of skills for life in their everyday lives. The findings have revealed that learners consider life skills helpful and important in their lives as they support them to develop the faculties necessary for directing their existence. During the focus group interviews learners expressed their understandings of what they believe life skills prepares them to face in life. For example, Cauliflower, a Grade 3 boy, focused on the importance of having life skills to manage everyday events successfully: Life Skills helps "… to learn for your future, if you

like get hurt, burnt and bleed out of your nose, learn how to stop it". There was also a realisation that life skills enables one to interact better socially and manage social interactions. For example, Cherry, a Grade 4 girl, said "when you are in a conflict, life skills teach us how to avoid that". Blueberry, a Grade 4 girl, recognised that life skills provides insights into one's own dispositions: it is "… important to learn life skills because when you grow up you may need some, because it tells you about, maybe like your strengths, your weaknesses, something like that". These responses suggest that learners understand the need of Life Skills to be able to make responsible decisions in future, make sense of situations and changes in their surroundings to be able to survive. Clark and Moss (2011) assert that children should be treated as members of a community because they also make meaning of the various issues as they are observed and experienced.

Life Skills conscientised learners to make sense of different ways to use the knowledge for forthcoming personal and social events, either to avoid conflict or to be aware of one's strengths or weaknesses, which indicate particular ways of meaning making. It is therefore encouraging that some learners are able to link the Life Skills curriculum with the real life experiences, whether currently or in future, because the skills prepare them to manoeuvre and make sense of life. Kolucki and Lemish (2011) talk about the importance of thinking about the "children as being in the process of becoming fully grown adults, rethinking them as full human beings in their own rights" (p. 4). This was evident in the learners' manner of thinking and talking about the knowledge they learn in the Life Skills curriculum, and the ability to use it to make meaning of social situations outside the school context. The findings suggest that Life Skills does promote self-awareness and problem solving skills (Prajapati, 2017), and equips learners to make sense of the transforming society (DBE, 2011). Thus, the Life Skills curriculum information is not only to pass the subject, but to understand its relevancy to everyday life. The findings further suggest learners' recognition of the demands they might need to cope with in their life generally (macro environment of the society), as well as family (micro environment).

4.3 Learners' perceptions of the importance of the Life Skills curriculum

This theme revealed that learners perceive the Life Skills curriculum as important in their everyday lives, which is linked to their personal experiences of what they watch or hear about the world. For example, Cabbage a Grade 3 girl said:

> *… it (Life Skills) is important, I think about what's going on in the world, it hurts me when I see people getting hurt, getting abused, getting stolen and burnt.*

Peas a Grade 3 girl extends this response by saying

> *Life Skills helps us to know about what is happening in the world so that we can be safe and protected.*

While the responses mentioned "… in the world…", they suggest that learners have used the Life Skills information to understand and link the relationship between what is happening in their immediate environment and the world. The findings seem to suggest that the learners' alertness towards incidences is informed by the media, specifically television. This is in addition to teaching and learning and of interest for this study is the learners' connection with their Life Skills knowledge. Authors (Gentile, 2011; Hofferth, 2010; Rideout, 2013) recognise that television serves as one of the most central socialising agents, informing behaviours, attitudes and world views, and also provides an array of sources of information for all ages in all cultures around the globe. It is therefore motivating that some learners are aware of the knowledge they have learnt in school and are also able to connect that knowledge with the global incidences. James and Prout (1995) posit that children are capable of speaking about their understanding and meaning of what life is if they are provided the opportunity.

In addition to the above responses, Cucumber a Grade 3 boy adds that "*you want to know about your life, good and bad touch*", which is more personalised and addresses the ability to make important judgements about challenges of other people interfering with personal space, which may happen in any space and place. This awareness is important in South Africa as research shows serious concerns with the increase and continuing violence against children, especially since it occurs in private and public settings like homes and schools (Van der Merwe, Dawes & Ward, 2011; Richter & Dawes, 2008; Dawes, Borel-Saladin & Parker, 2004). It could therefore be argued that learners' responses suggest their ability to link what they are learning in the Life Skills curriculum to their own lives, reflecting upon it and make decisions which demonstrate a sense of agency (Mayall, 2002). Considering the findings in

this theme, it is important to recognise that developing life skills is a lifelong process, and it is encouraging that learners seem to be aware that the Life Skills curriculum plays a role in their continuous learning process. Thus, if Life Skills is a tool that equips learners with the information and skills to protect themselves, then the findings suggest a sense of consciousness and an integral part of transformative praxis (Smith, 1999). This links with Freire's (1972) argument that "only human beings are praxis, which is the reflection and action which truly transforms reality, and the source of knowledge and creation" (p. 73). Thus, knowledge must have a close and living connection to learners' reality, experience and concrete existential situations (Freire, 1994a), given that it is not fixed in an abstracted, static, mystified and inaccessible ivory tower in the mind, but emerges through human practice, action and interaction with an ever-changing world over time.

In this theme, other learners did not only focus on global or everyday events, but referred to Life Skills as teaching them about specialised knowledge. Several children referred to learning about the life cycle:

> *We learn life cycle of a cat, of a butterfly and of a frog.* (Onion, Grade 3 girl)
>
> *The life cycle is important because I like to know how things grow.* (Cucumber, Grade 3 boy)
>
> *I saw a cat, it had kittens and the kittens were suckling on her, and the kittens changed and grew up to be a cat.* (Pumpkin, Grade 3 boy)

These responses suggest that the knowledge learnt in the classroom is not context constrained but is extended beyond the classroom. Learners' awareness and understanding of the different steps of life cycles suggest that they have made links between their school knowledge and everyday knowledge. Specialised knowledge differs from everyday knowledge in the specificity of its language, and the learners combine specialised language and everyday language in their responses (Bernstein, 1999). Specialised knowledge is considered to be more powerful than everyday knowledge, because of its greater explanatory power and its ability to work at increasing levels of abstraction that can account for a wide range of lower order phenomena (Bernstein, 1999). Considering this information, some learners have used the school knowledge to make sense of their everyday knowledge as they describe life cycles. Christie (2008) posits that school knowledge is not necessarily valuable on its own. However, when it is linked to everyday knowledge there is a better connection for the learners, which is how learners are able to share their knowledge of life cycles. Of importance to also note is

that the way learners understand and speak about the topics may have been shaped by how they have been taught, addressing the power of a teacher's influence in providing the conceptual understandings that accompanies more specialised knowledge.

4.3.1 Important Topics identified by learners in the Life Skills curriculum

In this sub-theme learners identified various topics as important in the Life Skills curriculum, they have learned in their current grades (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.3.1.1 Topics learners felt were important and frequency with which they occurred

Topic	Learning Area in CAPS	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Safety	Personal and Social Wellbeing	20	8	**28**
Feelings	Personal and Social Wellbeing	8	14	**22**
Health	Personal and Social Wellbeing	15	4	**19**
Social Responsibility	Personal and Social Wellbeing	13	6	**19**
Working in groups	Personal and Social Wellbeing	1	7	**8**
Bullying	Personal and Social Wellbeing	0	4	**4**
Environmental cleanliness	Personal and Social Wellbeing	2	1	**3**
Creative Art	Creative Art	0	1	**1**
Physical Education	Physical Education	0	1	**1**

While the above-mentioned topics that the Grade 3 and 4 learners repeatedly spoke about were recently taught in their respective grades, they were also identified as important. The topics were taught in term one and two, and there were some differences by grade in terms of which children talked about which topics. The main topics that learners identified as

important were: **safety (28), feelings (22), health (19) and social responsibility (19)**. The topics that the **Grade 3** learners frequently spoke about are **safety** which they mentioned **20 times** in their responses, **health** was mentioned **15 times** and learners made reference to **social responsibility 13 times** during the focus group interviews. Alternately, **the Grade 4s** mentioned **feelings 14 times, safety 8 times** and **working in groups 7 times**. While learners spoke about different topics during conversations, it is interesting that the highest occurring number of topics fall under Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being, which is the focus of this study. This possibly highlights that learners are becoming mindful of the nature of their social environment and its impact in their personal growth.

Further analysis of the data shows that there was a clear gender difference in the selection of topics. Girls talked more about safety concerns (16 mentions) and boys mentioned their health concerns (12 mentions). The girls' preoccupation with safety may be influenced by their personal concerns, the social and media discourses that is sensitive to girls' security in a violent society. Girls are generally fetched at school more than boys, which might be influenced by the higher risk of being abused and harassed than boys (King & Winthtop, 2015; Prinsloo, 2005). Without stereotyping boys' harassment, the study acknowledges that boys are also harassed, even though the society's discourse foregrounds girls. It was interesting that boys foregrounded health anxiety, although it is not clear what influenced their specific responses. Graham, Hochfield and Stuart (2018) provide a possible reason when they argue that boys are often concerned with their body weight, because self-perception is an imperative characteristic of a healthy lifestyle and plays a critical role in physical appearance. Along the same line of discussion, Shisana, Labadarios and Rehle (2014) indicate that 2014 figures suggest that 28% of children are considered to be overweight in South Africa. Even though gender specificity is not mentioned, and considering the literature that shows girls' concerns with weight (Jones, Bennett, Olmsted, Lawson, & Rodin, 2001; Madanat, Lindsay, & Campbell, 2011; Tsai, Chang, Lien, & Wong, 2015), it is interesting that boys appears to be concerned with health issues. It is however important to also mention that even though girls did not prioritise weight concerns, it does not necessarily mean they are possibly not worried, similarly with boys' under-mentioning of safety.

4.4 Safety practices for the learners

The third theme is *Safety practices for the learners* and the sub-theme is *safety in public spaces*. Most children are protected and cared for by their family. However, another reality is that some learners have to protect themselves because they may not have a family to protect them (Mturi 2012; Human & Kganakga, 2010). It is therefore unsurprising that learners are concerned with personal safety considering that children's vulnerability within families and society make them easy targets of abuse. An important part of Life Skills is to equip children to identify potentially dangerous situations, to know what support is available and to know they are not the cause of abusive situations. In the current study, learners showed concerns with their personal safety, and are mindful of their basic rights and safety needs. For example, Cabbage, a Grade 3 girl, is attentive to the treatment of learners and stated that *"personal safety, because it's not nice when you see someone get hurt, I see people getting hurt, it's not nice to see them getting abused"*. This does address concerns of safety in general, which has affective consequences, but it might also address worries with personal safety given that the hurts and abuse are observed in specific spaces, even if it is not mentioned. It is concerning that children experience violence or unsafe spaces at home, because they could become desensitised to violence (Steven, 2014), and Life Skills plays an important role in providing children with a voice to talk about such real life experiential issues. From Cabbage's response, it appears that she is taking note of what is taught at school and linking it with incidents that are experienced in the community.

Other comments about knowing what to do in case of abuse were expressed by Blueberry, a Grade 4 girl, who said *"when someone abuse you go tell your parents, you should not be afraid"* and Cauliflower, a Grade 3 boy, who declared that *"When you maybe have a nanny and he or she doesn't treat you right, you can call child line, it is important"*. The responses seem to suggest the importance of being alert of the surroundings so that if anything happens there is an opportunity to act appropriately by telling or reporting to the correct individuals. Blueberry and Cauliflower's responses suggest that they have been made aware during Life Skills lessons that there are people who might take advantage of children, and if that happens they need to remember that there are people to tell. Of interest is that learners were aware whether to report at home or call Child Line, and they were able to distinguish who to report to, which hopefully proposes common information between home and school.

Safety does not end with spaces, learners also acknowledged that there is dangerous behaviour which they need to be aware of and careful about for their physical safety. Banana, a Grade 4 boy said that teachers *"teach us how to not do dangerous things, like smoking and taking drugs"*, which are presumably some of the things learners are exposed to within the communities and their danger is reinforced in the school context. Similarly, Mango, a Grade 4 boy named the dangerous behaviour they should not engage in for their safety. He says *"You must not play with fire or the plugs anywhere, it's dangerous, anytime"*. It is therefore important that teachers consciously link school knowledge and everyday knowledge, even though their structures are not the same, to make learning relevant and for learners to see the extension of everyday information with school knowledge. While it could be possible that such caution also happens at home, because it is considered 'common-sense' (Bernstein, 1999), at school this information takes a different form because it is explained using specialised language in a formal context (Bernstein, 1999). It is, however, interesting that learners do not only learn about certain dangerous things in school, but the knowledge is also linked with everyday information to show learners the relationship.

4.4.1 Safety in Public Spaces

The learners' responses have shown that they have learnt that safety does not end at home, but they need to be safe all the time at home, school and most of all in public spaces. The children expressed a real fear of being kidnapped, some of the information they have learnt is:

> *how to be safe around the world because there's many people that will try to steal you…always be with a group of friends, if I walk alone someone might steal or do something bad to me.* (Peas, Grade 3 girl)

> *When you don't know someone and that person asks you to get in, you must not get in because maybe he will want to kill you.* (Banana, Grade 4 boy)

> *If you ask a person to call your mother he won't call your mother he will just take you*. (Onion, Grade 3 girl)

These fears are understandable for the learners, in particular if they are exposed to communities or media that continue to report on this, it possibly raises their awareness of the importance of safety. Media played a particular role in this instance because one of the learner's aunts went missing around this time and missing children was a topic of media discussion. The media coverage around these events was prevalent to alert communities to

keep themselves and their children safe when in public spaces. Here the everyday knowledge and experiences influenced the learners' responses. The responses also suggest that learners understand the concept of stranger danger, which is what Banana is signalling in his response. This also suggests learners' agency on issues of safety and making decisions about what is dangerous and not. Uprichard (2008) states that children are active social agents who participate in the knowledge construction and daily experiences of their childhood and should be given the space and place to talk about their experiences. Thus, learners value the necessity of being always careful about who they talk to, and also about being cautious no matter where they may be. They seem to realise the difficulty of knowing who wants to harm you, making the teaching, possibly through dialogue, of safety practices vital. The learners are mindful of what they want to learn in order to be able to protect themselves while they are traveling or walking to home. To add to this discussion, most of our learners at school travel by public transport, which is a taxi or bus, and the former collects them from home and also fetches them after school. There were 12 learners from the focus group who travel by transport, two are fetched by their parents and 2 travel by bus. They were concerned about their safety while they are in public spaces and expressed that they value what they had learnt in Life Skills, in relation to public safety.

Not only are the children scared of being stolen and abused, there is demonstration of fear of getting lost, another reason they want to be safe in public spaces. Carrot, a Grade 3 girl, says you "*learn about getting lost, or hurting someone or them beating someone to make others laugh and taking care of yourself",* which address different aspects of caring for others and for oneself. It is notable that the fear of being lost is linked with being stolen and treated badly, which, could be linked with the discourses in the community and home, making them conscious of this issue. The World Development Report (2011) highlights the fate of children who live in communities that are "trapped in vicious cycle of legacies of violence, [which] increases their vulnerability to other forms of violence", which is clear from the learners' responses that they have continuous fear. In addition to general safety, Pineapple, a Grade 4 boy, who walks home, is also aware of the importance of road safety, something that learners travelling by cars or buses might not think about often due to being in the car or bus. He states that "*you must not cross on the street; you must cross on a zebra crossing, because it is safe there people must stop"*. It is interesting that Pineapple makes reference to work that was covered in Grade 3 the previous year. His response shows an awareness of Life Skills

knowledge as presented in the classroom, even though it seems not to address the challenges of reckless drivers in our communities, including close to the schools.

Road safety is designed to make the learners aware of cars and road signs while walking on the streets, so that they act in a safe manner. Also, for the learners who walk home when teachers are no longer there, Life Skills plays a role in equipping them with skills that may help keep them safe. Even though the Road Safety Act, 1989 (Act 29 of 1989) states that educators have an obligation to ensure that learners are transported safely, road safety is not only about transportation of the learners but also about their safety on the roads. The findings from the data exposed the fact that the learners' concerns with safety are not limited to general safety but reveal a real fear about being safe in public spaces, their interactions with others and an awareness that they need to be vigilant in their immediate surroundings.

4.5 Healthy habits

Healthy habits were one of the areas that learners raised during the interviews, in particular they mentioned issues relating to healthy bodies and eating habits. In the previous section (4.4) health was mentioned as one of the important topics by learners, especially male learners, and in this section learners elaborated on healthy bodies and healthy eating habits, which suggest making informed decisions on good food choices. For example, Cherry, a Grade 4 girl's response reflects back to work that was covered in the Grade 3 curriculum when she says "*eat healthy and take care of myself, the healthy body will be able to live for a long time on the earth"*, similarly Carrot, a Grade 3 girl, adds that "*we have to eat healthy, because when we don't we gonna die*". Tomato, a Grade 3 boy's echoes the girls' responses when he emphasised the importance of healthy eating that was linked with the prevention of illness. He said "*you must eat healthy to not get sick, if you eat unhealthy you will get very sick*." The learners are making links between healthy eating, healthy body and living longer, which is interesting because they seem to have some understanding that unhealthy eating result to sickness. Even though learners do not necessarily cook for themselves to ensure appropriate selection of food, it addresses the importance of selecting proper food when they buy food for themselves away from home.

I acknowledge that learners are still young and that although they mentioned the importance of healthy eating, they do not necessarily make the right choice when they have the opportunity. For example, during breaks learners buy food that is considered unhealthy:

sweets, potato chips, fizzy drinks, and their choices are sometimes influenced by the availability in the shop. This raises the question about the extent to which children internalise the knowledge they have been taught in the Life Skills curriculum and the challenges of disrupting behaviour that is identified as improper. Of importance, however, is that the eating habits are linked to the growing concern of the state of health in the children, society and its causes (Department of Health, 2015), considering that learners probably eat the same things at home or in the community. Sometimes healthy eating is linked with the socio-economic status at home, something that learners do not have control over.

Along the same line of discussion, while learners may not be able to exercise every day, it is valuable for them to learn about the importance of exercise at school, hoping that they can be cognizant of physical activity later in their lives. Again there is a need to link what we teach our learners at school in the Life Skills curriculum and what they actually learn at home for them to see the relationship and promote continuity. Blueberry, indicates that she knows exercise is important: *"to keep your body healthy and fit, you have to exercise every day"*, which suggests awareness that healthy eating on its own is not enough, it is also important to engage in particular activities to be healthy and fit. Of importance for the study is that learners recognised that the curriculum covers aspects that are of value to them even though, interestingly, none of them mentioned the type of food they eat at home or during breaks in school. This therefore means that though the curriculum introduces learners and presents knowledge about the importance of healthy eating, there might be a dissimilarity with home situations that constrains the provision of healthy food. A reason Dixon et. al (2018) noted there is a tension between what is stated in the CAPS curriculum and what is actually going on in South African schools in terms of what teachers teach learners.

It is also worth mentioning that within the group only one leaner mentioned unhealthy behaviour that can harm the body. Mango, a Grade 4 boy commented that that Life Skills "*tells you to not smoke and do those things that are dangerous in your body*". His response reflects work covered in the Grade 4 Life Skills curriculum during term 4, considering this, it is clear that he is speaking about the topic from his experience of the topic when he was in Grade 3. He is displaying awareness of health concern that goes beyond physical exercise and what is eaten, and recognises the dangers of harming the body through smoking. Although there is exposure to smoking people every day, there is at least identification of not smoking as another way the body can be kept healthy.

4.5.1 First aid

A sub-theme for healthy habits is *First Aid*, which is also covered under the area Personal and Social Well-being which learners mentioned as important. Learners realised that they need to make informed decisions about how to react under certain circumstances, like in an emergency. For an example Cabbage, a Grade 3 girl, says you need to "*know what to do when your nose is bleeding*", Cauliflower, a Grade 3 boy, says *"if you get hurt, burnt and bleed out of your nose learn how to stop*". They have knowledge of what should be done in such a situation, for themselves or for others, although it's unclear whether they know how to act in such a situation. There is a sense of agency that learners take on, because they know that "*one day if you get hurt who will you call, you must know what to do*" (Pumpkin, Grade 3 boy), suggesting the need to act quickly to prevent major damage rather than be ignorant. They have positioned themselves as being able to make informed decisions and take a course of action due to what they have learnt in the Life Skills curriculum. Considering the various roles that young children can take in their families, it is important for them to be equipped with the necessary skills to protect themselves as well as their families (Ridge, 2007). The findings suggest that learners take responsibility for their safety by being informed about the do's of first aid, which could allow them to take appropriate reaction should a crisis occur.

4.6 Social Responsibility

The final theme addresses issues of social responsibility. These issues of social responsibility are broken down into four sub-themes which are family responsibility, environmental cleanliness, bullying and feelings. Research with children contributes significantly to debates over agency and social competence, showing that they are valuable actors in intergenerational bargaining over care (Benders, 2002). The competency of children on the one hand and their dependence and vulnerability on the other are not opposite and irreconcilable attributes. Instead they are closely interdependent and fluid, characteristics which express the learners' ability to be thinking beings (Morrow, 2011). This was noticed in learners' responses that they have a sense of the norms and rules that are part of a democratic system and are aware of some of the practices that are important for participation in South Africa. Cherry, a Grade 4 girl, declares that learning about *"The Bill of Rights teaches the smallest child's that rights are the most important"*, and Pineapple, a Grade 4 boy, says "*Under 18 children couldn't vote"*, suggest understanding that voting is a social responsibility of a country's citizens even though is restricted to a specific age. This is work covered in term 2 of the Grade 4 Life Skills curriculum. It could be argued that children learn that in the society there are norms to be

followed and respected, to be able to work or live successfully as a productive member of a community.

Furthermore, learners have a sense of the importance of group participation and contribution, which is a reality they might experience in their future working environments. Cherry, a Grade 4 girl, states that *"when you're at work you need to work in a group and life skills did teach us about working in a groups."* Similarly, two Grade 4 girls, Strawberry and Blueberry, add the idea of working in groups equally and without conflict. Strawberry says *"working in a group you must work equally"* and Blueberry says, *"they taught us about working in groups and avoid conflicts"*. The responses suggest that the Grade 4 Life Skills curriculum has introduced learners to the reality of working life even though it could be argued that they are still young. The learners recognise that there are responsibilities that citizens of a community are bound by, and they are aware that Life Skills tries to formally introduce them to some of the duties. The findings suggest that learners are aware of the importance of being socially responsible and have an understanding of what it means to grow up to be socially responsible adults, which could also be linked with previous different themes. This understanding is also influenced by their interactions at home, which will be discussed in the next section. Considering that these grades introduce learners to the basic knowledge of Life Skills, it is hoped that Life Orientation in following grades will reinforce such knowledge because the learners appear to be aware that, to a certain extent, they are decision-makers (Wolk, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, there are four sub-themes that emerged during data analysis; the first to be discussed is learners' awareness of family responsibilities.

4.6.1 Family responsibility

Family responsibility is an ideological social construct that relates to functions and roles that individuals play in a family (Russell, 2013). The interpretation of the concept may be influenced by cultural differentiation, particularly relating to role categorisation among family members (Okon, 2012). It was interesting to note that none of the learners mentioned what their fathers taught them, irrespective of gender representation. Instead the mothers are dominantly mentioned as teaching learners about family responsibility. Although the literature argues that girls often play a central role in domestic labour (Morrow, 2011), the focus group discussions reveal that it was both the boys and girls who received lessons on

cooking and cleaning the house. For an example Cabbage, a Grade 3 girl, affirms that "*mom taught me how to cook*" and also adds that "*my mom said when you go and visit your friend you don't need to just sit there you need to help*". These activities are not different to those also mentioned by the boys. Cauliflower, a Grade 3 boy, indicates that "*mom taught me how to clean and help other people*". Tomato, a Grade 3 boy, further states that "*mother showed me how to bake*". It appears that for these learners there may be fewer gendered practices, in terms of what learners are taught to do at home. While it could be perceived as unsurprising that mothers are at the centre of teaching household chores, as explicitly mentioned by learners, it might also address single parenting in some homes resulting to genderless practices. Considering the dynamics of households and family responsibilities in teaching children responsibility in families, and the need to work together to understand how family work requires relationships to be formed between schools and communities (Shumba, Kasembe, Mukundu & Muzenda, 2008) so that what is learned at home is strengthened by what is taught at school.

4.6.2 Environmental Cleanliness

Environmental cleanliness is the second sub-theme under social responsibility and learners were aware of the importance of keeping the environment clean. From the questions asked during the focus group interview, the learners revealed that they are concerned with what is going on in their environment. Cabbage, a Grade 3 girl, says that she is concerned with the "*garbage being thrown on the floor, I think about cleaning it up*". The children are aware that they have a responsibility towards the environment. Banana, a Grade 4 boy, says Life Skills "*teaches you how to take care of nature*" and Pumpkin, a Grade 3 boy, stated a need "*To learn how to take care of the earth".* The responses suggest that the Life Skills curriculum makes learners aware of environmental care and hopefully understand the effects of their actions and the community at large towards the cleanliness of the society. From the responses, the curriculum appears to have taught learners to aspire to be better citizens who care about their surroundings, as learners were mindful of the environment. For Bangay and Blum (2010) it is children who will be hardest hit by the effects of climate change because they are the future of the society, thus instilling the culture of respecting the environment is important. Although the learners are aware of the environment and the need to make responsible decisions about it, questions arise as to whether this knowledge translates into practice and whether there are opportunities that are provided in the school environment for children to enact what they have learned.

4.6.3 Bullying

One of the unsurprising issues that concerned the learners was bullying, which is a concerning issue globally. Bullying is "when a student is exposed repeatedly over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). Of interest is that during the focus group interviews none of the Grade 3 learners made reference to bullying, which possibly suggests a lack of understanding of the concept. The Grade 3 and 4 learners seem to all have experienced some form of bullying as seen from their responses. For example, Mango, a Grade 4 boy, distinctly remarked that Life Skills "*taught me to not bully people because they also have feelings too, and they feel bad when we are bullying them*". Mango's response relates to the act and the outcomes of bullying to feelings because it involves a human being. Orange, a Grade 4 girl, adds that Life Skills "*teaches you so that when you grow up you can know what is bullying*". The responses suggest personal and general knowledge about bullying, which are both important in relation to raising learners' consciousness. It is important to note that the learners may have mentioned this particular topic because it is fresh in their memories considering that bullying was covered in term 2 of the Grade 4 curriculum which is prior to the start of the focus group interview. However, this does not suggest that the Grade 3 learners are not aware of bullying, they just did not use the specific language to talk about it. The findings further suggest that as learners grow in age and grade, they are able to start distinguishing certain behaviour and manners of interaction with friends in class or on the playground. Sharp and Smith (1994, p. 2) mention that bullying in South African schools is mostly based on an imbalance of power and considering that it is Grade 4 learners who are concerned with bullying, this seems true. The older learners have more physical strength and ability, have group status that is established, intelligence and/ or may feel the need to enforce their leadership role among the younger learners. It is evident that bullying is connected to the learners' feelings and this was another issue that was raised by the learners.

4.6.4 Recognition of own feelings and others

Feelings are linked to understanding an individual's emotional state, and Widen and Russell (2010) posit that distinguishing anger from sadness and from compassion is important. While this is important, I noticed during focus groups interviews that some of the learners were unable to discuss feelings easily even though they were willing to share their awareness of each other's emotional states. For an example, Carrot, a Grade 3 girl, says "*you feel happy, you feel angry, you feel uncomfortable, how do they feel sad".* She mentioned the types of

feelings that are experienced and can be expressed even though feeling uncomfortable might not be easily articulated. Cucumber, a Grade 3 boy, also understands the importance of considering other people's feelings, and said "*when you hurt others' feelings, you have to say sorry, it is decent to apologise otherwise they won't forget about it*". Cabbage, a Grade 3 girl, adds *"when I see someone getting hurt it's very hurting".* The responses suggest that children recognise the different emotions and are also aware when others experience some of them. Authors noted that when children are able to identify each other's emotional state, they should be able to express these emotions safely or regulate their internal experience (Cook, A., Spinazzola, J., Ford, J., Lanktree, C., Blaustein, M., Cloitre, M., DeRosa, R., Hubbard, R., Kagan, R., Liautaud, J., Mallah, K., Olafson, E., & van der Kolk, 2005). Similarly, learners in this study mentioned different emotions they might have experienced and noticed others going through, especially being happy, angry and sad that are relatively easily identifiable. It was also interesting that some learners acknowledged the importance of apologising when hurting someone, because it has consequences, even if they might not be immediate.

4.7 Conclusion

The findings show that the learners' experiences of the Life Skills curriculum link the home and school even though they were influenced by school knowledge. The findings suggest that learners were able to talk about what they learn at school in relation to what they are being taught at home, which places value in their school knowledge. The findings have also shown that learners have an understanding of the importance of the Life Skills curriculum, as they were able to link the knowledge with the global world. They further talked about Life Skills in a manner that indicates that they see its importance in their lives.

I have also established that some learners were explicit in their views of what Life Skills is and give specific responses, while some just gave one word answers. For example, most of the Grade 4 learners' responses concentrated on work which they had recently covered in terms 1 and 2. The learners understand the relevance of Life Skills as they talked about how it helps them deal with or navigate through different situations in their lives. As demonstrated by the learners they have particular concerns with safety which was mentioned a total of 28 times and health matters which was cited a total of 19 times. These concerns stretch beyond just being safe, they are able to state what they mean and how they can be safe. However, it seems that Life Skills has not managed to help relieve some of their most noticeable fears. These fears that arise from the school context, environment and that are affected by the media

are indicators of the real concerns that the children have and speak to a disjuncture between what is covered in the Life Skills curriculum and the life skills that children need to navigate their worlds.

Chapter 5
Lesson learned and the way forward:
Summary, Limitations and Recommendations of the study

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the findings, limitations and recommendations for this research. The study explored Grade 3 and Grade 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex-model C school. The purpose of this study was to understand the learners' perceptions of the importance of being taught Life Skills and to examine their perspectives to the applicability of Life Skills in their lives. The main research question for this study is "**What are Grade 3 and Grade 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex-model C school?**"

As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, the dearth of research in Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex-model C school motivated the conceptualisation of this study to gain insight into their understanding of the role it plays in their lives. The study was informed by a conception of childhood that is influenced by the scholarship from the sociology of childhood that sees children as agentic beings who are capable of making meanings and expressing the complexities of their lives. There were 15 boys and girls from Grade 3 and Grade 4 who participated in this qualitative study. Four focus group interviews were used to collect the data. The data were analysed using thematic content analysis of the focus group interview transcripts.

5.2 Summary of the findings

Before I present the findings, I begin by providing a summary of the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the data as discussed in the prior chapter. The first major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was ***Learners awareness of life skills they need to develop in their everyday lives that are developed in Life Skills***. The second theme that follows was the ***learners' perceptions of the importance of the Life Skills curriculum*** which highlights the value they attached to the subject. The final three themes arose from the topics that the learners raised as being important to them. The first was ***safety practices for the learners*** and a sub-theme *safety in public spaces*. The fourth theme addressed ***healthy habits*** as well as the sub-theme *first aid*. The final theme addressed issues

of ***social responsibility***. This is broken down into four sub-themes which are *family responsibility, environmental cleanliness, bullying* as well as *feelings.*

One of the major findings which is linked to the first theme, ***"learners' awareness of the life skills they need to develop in their everyday lives that are developed in Life Skills",*** indicates that the learners considered Life Skills to be relevant in their lives. The skills that learners perceived as important are those skills that enable them to comprehend life experiences, prepare them for the future and allow them to think positively about themselves. The learners were able to link the Life Skills curriculum with their real life experiences and recognised that they needed certain skills to equip them with the expertise to manoeuvre and make sense of their lives. The responses also suggested learners' self-awareness and recognition of the need for skills of life that are linked with growing up and drawing from them to make sense of oneself and also avoid future conflicts. Thus, the children see Life Skills as being able to help them develop their self-awareness, and understand what they are thinking and feeling.

The second set of findings relates to ***learners' perceptions of the importance of the Life Skills curriculum*** and highlights the value learners attached to the subject. One of the key findings is that learners demonstrated an understanding of the Life Skills curriculum, as they clearly talked about different topics and variations that exist in their application of it in their lives. Their focus highlighted the perception that they value Life Skills because it teaches them about survival skills. The learners' insights are related to the topics they considered most important to them. The issue of safety was mentioned by learners in both grades (28 mentions), health was a concern as were issues of social responsibility. Furthermore, findings show that topics had gender differences, as girls talked more about safety concerns (16 mentions) and boys mentioned their health concerns (12 mentions). Of interest is that as much as the learners were able to acknowledge what they had learnt in the Life Skills curriculum, there seemed to be no link from them between what they have learnt in Grade 2 to what they have acquired in Grade 3. The same applies with learners who are currently in Grade 4 who made no mention of links to work covered in Grade 3.

Findings from the third theme, ***safety practices for the learners,*** revealed that what learners learn at school informs what they do outside of school. They demonstrated their awareness of safety practices, for example, the dangers associated with smoking and of playing with fire.

But the major finding is the concerns expressed by learners about what they may experience in their immediate social surroundings. The findings highlight the fact that learners' concerns with safety were not limited to general safety, but were specific to areas such as being safe in public spaces, for example, when walking home being cautious enough to remember not to talk to strangers. They are expressing their fears in relation to their vulnerability when having to navigate their physical environment, and the need to be vigilant around adults. They used the acquired knowledge to think about what they could do to ensure their safety, for example, knowing who to call, when and what to do under certain circumstances. This is important for the study because learners did not construct themselves as powerless, but instead actively used what they have been taught to help themselves in an attempt to keep safe. That children do not feel safe is concerning.

The theme ***healthy habits*** is associated with looking after the body. Findings in this theme related to the learners' recognition of the need to be healthy in terms of what they consume, and also how they treat their body, for example, mentioning the importance of exercise. Learners appeared to know the difference between healthy and unhealthy food options but this does not necessarily translate into practice. The findings also suggest that learners understand the need to take some responsibility for their own physical safety by being informed about first aid, which may assist them to respond appropriately should a crisis occur.

The final theme addressed issues of ***social responsibility***. The findings reveal that learners are aware of the importance of being socially responsible members of society, and are decision-makers. Another important finding is that learners are concerned about environmental issues, and aspire to be better citizens who care about their surroundings specifically the environment. The four sub-themes, **family responsibility, environmental cleanliness, bullying, recognition of own feelings and others**, address various issues that link to social responsibility. It was evident that **family responsibility** is not only limited to girls. Boys are also taught how to be responsible members of the family unit by their mothers. Regarding **bullying**, the findings illustrate that as learners grow in age and grade, they are able to start distinguishing certain behaviour and manners of interaction with friends in class or on the playground. They become more aware of bullying behaviour. This finding is linked to **recognition of different emotions**, learners are aware when others experience some emotions whether it be when they are teased or when they are sick. They have an idea as to

when these experiences affect the learners' emotions because they state the importance of apologising when you hurt someone's feelings.

The overall findings indicate the need for teachers to teach Life Skills topics explicitly, and also to make stronger links between what is learnt in the Life Skills curriculum to what learners learn at home to deepen everyday knowledge so that it becomes more specialised. If learners' previous knowledge of Life Skills is engaged by teachers, it may be easier for the learners to identify links between what they learn at school with what is going on at home. The findings also highlighted a need for a better understanding on the parts of teachers of the children's home lives which may require developing stronger three-way relationships between the teacher, learner and parents.

5.3 Limitations of the study

There are limitations that have been taken into consideration while doing the study. It may be concerning that the data interpreted only used focus group interviews without another method. However qualitative research allows the use of one research method depending on the focus of the study. The research was also undertaken as an exploratory study due to limited research on learners' experiences with the Life Skills curriculum, and makes it impossible to generalise the findings. Another possible limitation is me their teacher as a researcher, which might influence learners' responses. This was one of the reasons I piloted the study to observe learners' interaction with me and see whether or not they would be relaxed during the research process.

5.4 Significance and Recommendations for future research

The implications of this study are that we need to listen to children so that we can hear their concerns as well as their interests. For children to just know about safety, for example, is not enough. They need to be given skills that will help them change their behaviour and know what to do in case of an emergency. For the policy makers in the Department of Education the implications of this study are to understand how learners view, experience and talk about Life Skills as a subject that seems not to be taken seriously. It also means teachers need to know how learners experience being taught Life Skills and where it falls short in developing and supporting the skills for life that learners need. It is noteworthy for teachers to understand the overloaded curriculum hampering the teaching and learning of Life Skills and to make conscious and careful choices about how they cover the curriculum. This means that teachers

need to ensure that Life Skills teaching and learning should not just be about transmission of information but acknowledge, develop and extend learners as responsive and active agents of learning. Furthermore, for teachers, the implications of these findings are that they need to think carefully about the content of topics they teach, which means topics should be carefully selected and meet children's real life needs in order to promote their Personal and Social Well-being.

From the findings, several recommendations are identified for future research. The study recommends the inclusion of teachers' pedagogical approaches of Life Skills topics and the nature of interactions between a teacher and learners for further research. This means exploring whether and how teachers link curriculum knowledge with learners' every day knowledge, to make it relevant at the same time encouraging learners to engage and identify the relationship between the knowledge acquired and its application in their daily lives. Future research with teachers is also needed to examine their perception of the importance of Life Skills in Foundation Phase and the factors that influence the perception, in relation to pedagogical practices in the classroom. Considering that the data were generated in an ex model C school, more research may need to be done with township, rural and /or private schools to understand Foundation Phase learners' experiences with the Life Skills Curriculum. In particular, a comparative study could be advantageous to make sense of learners' experiences from different school contexts. It would improve this study by highlighting the different ways teachers and schools position Life Skills.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

This study was undertaken to provide insights into Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex- model C school. It is important to emphasise that the aim of this study was not to criticise the Life Skills curriculum taught in our schools nor was it to criticise teachers' pedagogical practice. Rather, it was to stimulate educational debates about learning within our Life Skills classrooms in South Africa. This study has shown that young learners also have concerns and that they are able to speak out about them. This chapter has also outlined the recommendations for future research stressing the need for researchers to focus on learners' experiences of the Life Skills Curriculum on a deeper level.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Example of 'Transcripts'

Grade 3: Boys and Girls

1. Let's talk about Life Skills, what is it all about? What comes to your mind when you hear this word?

Name	Response
Carrot/ G	Feelings
Pumpkin/ B	Keeping your body safe. Not to swear
Cabbage/ G	Personal Safety. Never say bad stuff to people.
Cucumber/ B	Life cycles. Good and bad touch, when you call someone there is no need to tap them on the shoulder.
Onion/ G	Good and bad touch.
Cauliflower/ B	Helping you get through your life. Never call people funny names
Peas/ G	Personal Safety
Tomato/ B	Unhealthy things and healthy things

2. Do you think life skills is important? Why or Why not?

Name	Response
Carrot/ G	Yes, to not do the things that you are not that you are not supposed to do by the law
Pumpkin/ B	Yes, to know about your… if you are male or female.
Cabbage/ G	Yes, why it's important for us is like the how I said before. Let me make an example uhm, things that are happening in the world, uhm it just makes me think about everything.
Cucumber/ B	Yes, to know about your life…
Onion/ G	Yes, it's important because of Valentine's Day people must love each other because you have to love people some people don't love each other
Cauliflower/ B	Yes, to help you live your life. How to not get burnt
Peas/ G	Yes, life skills helps us to know about what is happening in the world so that we can be safe and protected.
Tomato/ B	Yes, to learn the skills… To know if you are healthy or unhealthy

3. What are some of the,things you have learnt in your Life Skills class?

Name	Response
Carrot/ G	Life cycle about….
Pumpkin/ B	To keep our body safe
Cabbage/ G	Uhm, your, you need to know what to do when your nose is bleeding
Cucumber/ B	Life cycle
Onion/ G	Life Cycle of a cat, butterfly and a frog
Cauliflower/ B	To learn about your future, your family and your friend
Peas/ G	Life Cycles, Healthy eating habits and….

Grade 4: Boys and Girls

1. Let's talk about Life Skills, what is it all about? What comes to your mind when you hear this word?

Name	Response
Cherry/ G	Life skills tells me about strengths, about what I like to do, my weaknesses the things I don't think I like to do.
Banana/ B	Life skills helps you to live a better life and it helps you to protect yourself.
Blueberry/ G	Life skills tells you all about exercise, you have to exercise every day.
Mango/ B	Life skills teaches you to not, to not do dangerous things.
Strawberry/ G	
Pineapple/ B	Under 18 children couldn't vote. Not to hurt other people's feelings.
Orange/ G	
Absent/ B	

2. Do you think life skills is important? Why or Why not?

Name	Response
Cherry/ G	I think life skills is good because it might help you in your life one day, for example when you're at work you need to work in a group and life skills did teach us about working in a groups
Banana/ B	It teaches you how to take care of nature
Blueberry/ G	Life skills tells, it is very important because it tells you all about bullying, maybe like you strengths your weaknesses like that
Mango/ B	Life skills is very important because it tells you to not smoke and do those things that are dangerous in your body.
Strawberry/ G	
Pineapple/ B	Yes, you have to share
Orange/ G	It teaches us emotions and how you feel
Absent/ B	

3. What are some of the topics/things you have learnt in your Life Skills class?

Name	Response
Cherry/ G	Social development like working in groups
Banana/ B	Bullying
Blueberry/ G	Strengths
Mango/ B	Emotions
Strawberry/ G	
Pineapple/ B	And Weaknesses
Orange/ G	
Absent/ B	

Appendix B – Focus group interview schedule

Interview questions:

Reiterate the Oral instructions: interview will be audiotaped, no names will be used, no academic implications, ask questions, participation is voluntary

Introductory questions:

1. Where do you live?
2. Who do you live with?
3. What is your favourite subject? Why?

Interview Questions

1. Let's talk about Life Skills, what is it all about? What comes to your mind when you hear this word? What kind of Life Skills do you think children need to have?
2. Do you think life skills is important? Why or Why not? (Depend on responses)
3. What are some of the topics/things you have learnt in your Life Skills class?
4. Do you think some of these things happen in our townships or homes? (To ask them about home things might be a bit tough – rather stick to the society for examples). From here continue with number 6 of your questions
5. I remember teaching you about personal safety, can you remember? What was important about that topic? What do you remember as not being very important for you? Why do you say this?
6. Let's think about a topic or topics that you enjoyed most – what was it? Which topic was the most interesting for you? Now, which topic(s) you didn't like? Why?
7. Let's think a bit again, are there any things that you have learned in the Life Skills classroom that you can use at home? What are they?
8. What kinds of things do you think we should be teaching you in Life Skills?
9. What Life Skills do children need to have?
10. "Think about what you have learnt in Life Skills, is there anything that you ever use or have ever used? Let's talk about it a bit, what is it?
11. If you are asked to teach Life Skills, how will you teach it?" It might be a difficult question for them, but ask it anyway.

12. If you had to give teachers advice about how to teach Life Skills better what would you tell us?

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Appendix C – Data Coding

Social Responsibility

-Not to swear (F2, Pum g3 boy) -when you call someone there is no need to tap them on the shoulder. (F2, Cuc g3 boy) - Under 18 children couldn't vote. (F3, Pin g4 boy) - not do the things that you are not supposed to do by the law. (F4, Car g3 girl) - not talking lies, or hurting someone or then beating someone to make others laugh and taking care of yourself. (F4, Car g3 girl) -The Bill of Rights, also the smallest child's rights are the most important (F1, Che g4 girl) - mom taught me how to greet people and guide people (F4, Car g3 girl) - your parents give you too much bread you share not throw it in the rubbish bin (F3, Man g4 boy) - More about responsibilities. (F3, Man g4 boy) - I would like them to teach children's rights. (F4, Ora g3 girl) - you have to share (F3, Pin g4 boy) **Subcategory- Family responsibility** - learn how to make popcorn (F2, Pum g3 boy) - mom taught me how to cook (F4, Cab g3 girl) - my mom said when you go and visit your friend you don't need to just sit there you need to help (F4, Cab g3 girl) - mom taught me how to sweep and wash dishes (F4, Oni g3 girl) - mom taught me how to clean and help other people (F2, Caul g3 boy) - mom taught me how to greet people don't just pass someone without greeting (F4, Pea g3 girl) - mother showed me how to bake. (F2, Tom g3 boy) - teach us more about kitchen things (F1, Blu g4 girl)	**Bullying** -tells you all about bullying (F1, Blu g4 girl) - Bullying (F3, Ban g4 boy) -taught me to not bully people (F3, Man g4 boy) -Bullying was interesting. (F3, Man g4 boy) Who they play with could be the issue, the Grade 4 learner are the only ones who showed an interest on the issue of bullying.

Appendix D – Ethical Clearance letters

Wits School of Education



27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Tel: +27 11 717-3064 Fax: +27 11 717-3100 E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za Website: www.wits.ac.za

02 August 2017

Student Number: 499375

Protocol Number: 2017ECE003M

Dear Lebohang Molefe

Application for Ethics Clearance: Master of Education

Thank you very much for your ethics application. The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate, has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

An exploration of Grade 3 and 4 learner's experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum

The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that **clearance was granted**.

Please use the above protocol number in all correspondence to the relevant research parties (schools, parents, learners etc.) and include it in your research report or project on the title page.

The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education Committee upon submission of your final research report.

All the best with your research project.

Yours sincerely,

M Mabetha

Wits School of Education

011 717-3416

cc Supervisor - Dr Kerryn Dixon

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	17 May 2017
Validity of Research Approval:	06 February 2017 – 29 September 2017 2017/100
Name of Researcher:	Molefe L.
Address of Researcher:	2307 Oasis Security Estate
	Crn Pyp Avenue and Oranjerivier Street
	Kempton Park West, 1619
Telephone Number:	082 438 1596
Email address:	molefe75@hotmail.com
Research Topic:	An exploration of Grade 3 and 4 learner's experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum
Number and type of schools:	One Primary School
District/s/HO	Johannesburg East

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

18/05/2017

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix E – Example of 'Letters of consent' 131

LETTER TO PRINCIPAL AND INFORMED CONSENT

DATE: 23 May 2017

Dear

My name is Lebohang Molefe (Student number: 499375) and I am a Masters student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. In order to complete my studies, I need to do a research project. The title of my research project is, "**An exploration of Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum.**

The reason why I have chosen your school is because it is the school in which I teach. I am familiar with the children, the curriculum and teaching and learning programmes. This will allow me to establish a good rapport and working relationship with the participants. Further, since the focus of the study is on Life Skills, I hope the diversity of the learner's knowledge, experiences with the life Skills curriculum and backgrounds would enrich the ways in which learners attribute meanings to life skills and how they experience it. The findings gathered through this study would help to better inform and guide my own pedagogy and in turn would work towards further strengthening teaching and learning in the school. My school is also optimal because we have more than one Grade 3 and Grade 4 class which would enable me to talk to a diverse group of students.

This research would involve me conducting four focus group interviews that would comprise groups of four or 5 learners from Grade 3 and Grade 4. The interview will be aimed at understanding Grade 3 and 4 learner's experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum. The focus group interview will be held during extra mural time, which will not interrupt teaching time. The interview would not take more than 45 minutes and will be held on the school premises. The focus group interview will be audio-recorded. This would allow me to check the recordings for accuracy and will add credibility to the findings. Transcripts will be the main source of data collection in this research.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. I am inviting your school to participate in this research. The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project

without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

The identity of the school and the names of the participants will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study through the use of pseudonyms. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. While the findings will be used for research purposes mainly, they may also be used for academic presentations or a written publication resulting from this study

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.
Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,
Lebohang Molefe

Lebohang Molefe
2307 Oasis Security Estate
Corner Pyp Avenue and Oranjerivier Street
Kempton Park East
molefe75@hotmail.com
082- 438- 1596

Supervisor
Dr Kerryn Dixon
kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za
(011)717- 3183

Principal's Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project called: "**An exploration of Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum".**

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

Permission to audiotape on school premises

I agree that audiotaping may take place during the interview or observation lesson
YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only
YES/NO

Permission to hold focus group discussions

I would like the school to be interviewed for this study.
YES/NO

I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to answer all the questions asked.
YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

LETTER TO PARENTS AND INFORMED CONSENT

DATE: 23 May 2017

Dear Parent

My name is Lebohang Molefe (Student number: 499375) a Masters student in the School of Education, at the University of the Witwatersrand. In order to complete my studies, I need to do a research project. The title of my research project is, "**An exploration of Grade 3 and 4 learners' experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum".**

The reason why I have chosen your child's school is because it is the school in which I teach. I am familiar with the learners and they are familiar with me, and this will allow me to establish a good rapport and working relationship with them. Although learners can interact with any researcher, it is advantageous to have a familiar face to ensure that they are comfortable during the interviews.

This research would involve me conducting focus group interviews with small groups of learners. I am interested in understanding your child's experience of how we have taught the Life Skills curriculum and how they think we can improve our teaching. The focus group interview will be held after school, so as not to interrupt the learners' routine. The interview would not take more than 45 minutes and will be held at the school. The focus group interview will be audio-recorded. This would allow me to check the recordings for accuracy and will add credibility to the findings. Transcripts will be the main source of data collection in this research.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. I am inviting you to allow your child to participate in this research. You nor your child will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. You may withdraw your permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks for your child in participating in this study. There will be no payment for this study.

The identity of the school and your child will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study through the use of pseudonyms. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. While the

findings will be used for research purposes mainly, they may also be used for academic presentations or a written publication resulting from this study

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.
Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,
Lebohang Molefe

Lebohang Molefe
2307 Oasis Security Estate
Corner Pyp Avenue and Oranjerivier Street
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molefe75@hotmail.com
082- 438- 1596

Supervisor
Dr Kerryn Dixon
kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za
(011)717- 3183

Parent's Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project called: "**An exploration of Grade 3 and 4 learner's experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum".**

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

Permission for my child to be audiotaped

I agree to my child being audiotaped during the interview or observation lesson YES/NO
I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only
YES/NO

Permission to be interviewed

I would like my child to be interviewed for this study. YES/NO
I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Oral Explanation to the children of the intention of my research

Part A

Would you help Ms. Molefe please? I am doing a project for Wits which is the university I attend. My project is on Life Skills and I want to find out what you think about it. I'm interested to know your experiences of being taught Life Skills for 2 years/3 years, what you think you have learned, and how you think teachers should or can teach life skills better.

I would like you to share your experiences about Life Skills in a small group. It will be like a short interview. I'm going to do the interview with you during extra mural time so that you don't miss your transport or you class work. Once the project is completed, I'm happy to come back and tell you what I have found out.

You helping me has nothing to do with your school work. If you feel uncomfortable at any point you can change what you say or said and it's absolutely fine. You can also tell me if there are any questions that you don't want to answer. And if you decide you don't want to do this that is also fine. I won't use your name, or school's name. I also won't tell any of the teachers what you said. I can show you the questions which I will ask if you want to see them. If you need to ask me any questions about what I am doing you can ask me before we start, if you are not sure about something in the interview you can also ask me during the interview, and if you think about something you didn't say afterwards you can come and tell me. I do not want you to feel uncomfortable, or scared, so you should tell me things that you are comfortable with.

Part B

Oral Explanation to the children of the intention of my research

I am doing my study for university and I need your help.
I am trying to find out what your experiences are with what we teach you in Life Skills.
I am going to ask you questions about what you think is important in Life Skills and what you think are the best topics for you to learn.
You don't have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with.
You can tell me when you want to stop at any time and we will stop immediately.
I will not use your real names or the school's name in my study, so that people do not know who you are I will make up names to keep you a secret

Leaner Assent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to willingly participate in my research project titled, **"An exploration of Grade 3 and 4 learner's experiences of the Foundation Phase Life Skills Curriculum in one urban ex- model C school ".**



I, _____ agree disagree to the following: Circle you response.

Permission to be audio taped



I agree to be audio taped during the interview /

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only



Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this project.



I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to



/



answer all the questions asked.

Informed Consent

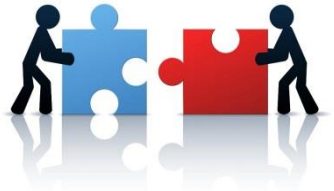
I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept a secret and safe, and that my name and the name of my school will not be shown.
- I do not have to answer every question and can pull out from the project at any time.
- I can ask not to be audio taped.
- All the information collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project.



Sign_____ Date_____





Thank you