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Attitudes and experiences of teachers and students towards life orientation : a case study of a state-funded school in Eldorado Park, South Johannesburg.

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Abstract

In this research I explore the attitudes and experiences of teachers and students towards Life Orientation. A case study method was employed based on a co-educational state school in Eldorado Park, South Johannesburg. The study sample was Grade 11 students and their Life Orientation teachers and the research was undertaken using semi-structured interviews of both the students and the teachers as well as classroom observations. The data were analysed using a Thematic Content Analysis. The research found that interactions in Life Orientation classes are influenced by the students' gender, race and sexual experience which all contributed to a particular set of power relations. Despite this, many of the students found Life Orientation beneficial and the limitations of the classroom interactions could be circumvented if the students entered what Goffman terms the 'backstage' of the lesson and spoke to the teacher individually. The success of the backstage interactions depended on the willingness of the students to enter the backstage and the openness of the teacher to deal with their issues. The research found that Life Orientation can be a successful platform for the counselling of young adults, but not in the formal, established structures of the classroom. However, it also found that the teachers did not receive enough support to effectively deal with all the students' issues. Furthermore, it found that Life Orientation was not able to instigate wider social change.