TEACHING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN MAINSTREAM PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE EDUCATORS' SENSE OF COHERENCE

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STATEMENT

I, Meagan Mathilda Miché Jacobs, declare that the dissertation submitted by me for the Magister Societatis Scientiae degree (Psychology) at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university or faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the dissertation in favour of the University of the Free State.

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Dedicated in love and gratitude to my late father, Andrew Jacobs, my late brother André Jacobs, my late grandmother, Mathilda Swartz and my mother Mary Jacobs.

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Abstract

South Africa's education system has undergone dramatic changes the last ten years resulting in an increase in the levels of stress reported by educators. Changes, such as the introduction of Inclusive and Outcomes Based Education as well as the new culture of human rights in schools, created extra responsibilities for educators. Today, educators don't just have to adjust to these changes, but also have to deal with the rise in behavioural problems displayed by learners. This study attempted to explore the experience of educators teaching students with learning difficulties in the mainstream classroom. The purpose of this study was to obtain an understanding of these educators' sense of coherence by exploring and describing the everyday challenges educators' face. The coping resources and the coping strategies used by these educators in dealing with these challenges were also described.

A mixed-method approach was used which allowed the researcher to combine the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. The Sense of Coherence Scale was administered to educators teaching learners with learning difficulties in primary schools in a metropolitan area in the Free State Province. Educators who scored high on the sense of coherence questionnaire were included in a qualitative part of the study. Five female educators, scoring high on the Sense of Coherence Scale, were purposively selected for inclusion in the qualitative part of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the interview transcripts analyzed by means of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The findings of the study suggest that educators experience high levels of stress from various environments, which include the school environment and aspects in their personal lives. Several support mechanisms were also identified, which included spouses, colleagues and friends. Religion was found to play a major role in

the comprehensibility, controllability and meaning that educators attached to their classroom situation.

Opsomming

Suid-Afrika se onderwysstelsel het die afgelope tien jaar dramatiese veranderinge ondergaan, met 'n gevolglike toename in die stresvlakke wat deur opvoeders gerapporteer word. Veranderinge soos die bekendstelling van Inklusiewe en Uitkoms-gebaseerde Onderwys, asook die nuwe kultuur van menseregte in skole, het ekstra verantwoordelikhede vir opvoeders meegebring. Opvoerders moet vandag nie net meer by hierdie veranderinge aanpas nie, maar moet ook die toename in gedragsprobleme wat deur leerders openbaar word, hanteer. Hierdie studie het gepoog om die ervaring van opvoeders wat studente met leerprobleme in die hoofstroomklaskamer onderrig, te ondersoek. Die doel van hierdie studie was om 'n begrip van hierdie opvoeders se sin vir koherensie te verkry deur die daaglikse uitdagings waarvoor opvoeders te staan kom, te ondersoek en te beskryf. Die hanteringshulpbronne en -strategieë wat deur hierdie opvoeders gebruik word, is ook beskryf.

'n Gemengdemetodebenadering is gebruik wat die navorser in staat gestel het om die sterktes van sowel kwalitatiewe as kwantitatiewe navorsing te kombineer. Die Sin van Koherensie-skaal is toegepas op opvoeders wat leerders met leerprobleme in primêre skole in 'n metropolitaanse gebied in die Vrystaat Provinsie onderrig. Opvoerders wat hoog op die Sin van Koherensie-vraelys toets, is ingesluit in die kwalitatiewe deel van die studie. Vyf vroulike opvoeders wat hoog op die Sin van Koherensie-skaal getoets het, is doelbewus vir insluiting in hierdie studie gekies. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gevoer en die transkripsies van die onderhoude is by wyse van 'n Interpretatiewe-Fenomenologiese Analise geanaliseer .

Hierdie studie het bevind dat opvoeders hoë vlakke van stres vanuit verskillende omgewings ervaar, wat die skoolomgewing en aspekte in hulle persoonlike lewe insluit. Verskeie ondersteuningsmeganismes is ook geïdentifiseer, insluitend eggenotes, kollegas en vriende. Daar is bevind dat godsdiens 'n belangrike rol speel in die begrip en beheerbaarheid van, en betekenis wat opvoeders aan hulle klaskamersituasie heg.

Sleutelwoorde: Stres, hantering, hanteringsmeganismes, hanteringstrategieë, inklusiewe opvoeding, Interpretatiewe-fenomenologiese analise, leerprobleme hoofstroomklasse, fenomenologie, sin van koherensie, stres, fenomenologie.

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OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study and highlights the problem statement, aims of the study, and the conceptualisation of the constructs under investigation.

1.2 Orientation and Problem statement

Internationally, research studies have confirmed that teaching has become one of the more stressful occupations in recent years (Billingsley, 2004; Borg 1990; Eloff, Engelbrecht, Swart & Oswald, 2002; Pithers & Soden, 1998). Worldwide, the traditional role of the educator has changed dramatically, mainly as the result of the introduction of inclusive education (Forlin, 1997, Olivier & Venter, 2003; Van Dick, Phillips, Marburg & Wagner, 2001). Results from studies conducted in Australia, (Forlin, 2001) and the United Kingdom (Phillips, Sen, & McNamee, 2007), for example, indicated that the introduction of inclusive education in these countries was reported to be primarily responsible for elevated levels of stress amongst educators. Educators today are also under more pressure than before to deal with the higher number of learners with a divergent range of abilities in their classrooms (Robinson, 2003).

Education in South Africa is considered to be an important instrument in the socio-political development of the country and its youth (Jackson, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2006). However, many changes have taken place within the South African education system that is negatively influencing the productivity of educators today. Newspaper headings such as, *"More than half of teachers considers quitting"* (*Pretoria News*, 2005) are indicative of the extent and the impact that stress has on educators.

South Africa's school education system accommodates more than 12 million learners, 26 099 primary and secondary schools and 395 542 educators (Department of Education, 2007). Apartheid education produced a dual system of education in that it divided the system of education into a mainstream and a special-needs education component (Naicker, 2000). Learners with learning problems and difficulties were often placed into the special-needs education system. Special support and services, provided along racial lines, were then only provided for a small number of learners with special education needs (Department of Education, 2002). The implementation of Curriculum 2005 and Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), which included inclusive education in 1998, caused a major shift in the South African education system (Department of Education, 2007). The rationale for the implementation was based on the premise that when education is learner-centred, as in the OBE approach, the needs of all learners are addressed (Boschee & Baron, 1993). The main emphasis of inclusive education was to make it possible for all learners, including learners with learning difficulties, to access the curriculum (Kochhar, West & Taymans, 2000). However, the unforeseen result of these changes was that the role of educators in previous mainstream schools became more varied and challenging (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; Poppleton & Williamson, 2004), resulting in an increase in the number of educators reporting feelings of being stressed and overworked (Kassiem, 2007).

Today, educators in South Africa are faced with various stressors, which include learner behavioural problems, the new curriculum approach, role conflict, unsatisfactory working conditions, inadequate salaries and time constraints (Olivier & Venter, 2003). Innovations such as inclusive education, the abolition of corporal punishment, additional mediums of instruction, large learner-educator ratios, redeployment and the retrenchment of educators further contribute to this higher levels of stress reported by educators (Mpya, 2007; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; Olivier & Venter 2003; Saptoe, 2000). Educators are also faced with unique challenges when teaching learners with diverse needs that call for fundamental changes in the organisational structures of schools and in the roles and responsibilities of administrators and educators (Mpya, 2007).

Learning difficulties crop up in the teaching situation when a child experiences more problems in learning new material than what is considered the norm (Kapp, 1991). According to Heward (2002), learners struggling with learning difficulties often experience a discrepancy between their intellectual and their academic ability resulting in a need for special education services. The main categories of learning difficulties, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) include the following areas: Problems with reading, problems with mathematics, problems with written expression and learning problems not otherwise specified. Various research studies (Bester & Swanepoel, 2000; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff & Harniss, 2001) have found that special education is more demanding than mainstream education. Learners with learning difficulties often require more attention and help with their work, resulting in educators not spending sufficient time with the rest of the class. Furthermore, educators in South Africa are now expected to teach heterogeneous groups, which create further challenges for the educator who are often not equip to deal with such groups (Poppleton & Williamson, 2004).

Several studies have investigated various aspects of educators' stress, for example, the prevalence of educator stress (Adams, 2001; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002), the effects of educator stress (Abell & Sewell 1999; Conley & Wooseley, 2000; Jeena, 1998; Saptoe, 2000) and the strategies that educators can use to cope with stressful situations (Bemansour, 1998). However, few South African studies (Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs, 2009; Eloff, Engelbrecht & Swart, 2002; Olivier & Venter, 2003) have focused on the Sense of Coherence of educators teaching learners with learning difficulties. Sense of Coherence refers to an individuals ability to find stressors understandable, that these stressors are manageble and that these stressors makes sense on an emotional level. Sense of Coherence is important because ultimately it leads to an individuals well-being. This is surprising given the stressful nature of working with children with special needs. According to Antonovsky, Sense of Coherence (SOC) is a crucial concept in understanding why people stay healthy. Antonovsky (1993) define SOC as "*a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring, though dynamic*

feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable; (2) resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges worthy of investment and engagement" (p. 19). Most South African studies conducted among educators (Conley & Wooseley, 2000; Eloff*, Engelbrecht, Oswald & Swart, 2003; Wood, 2007) have focused on the pathogenic aspect of educator stress.

However, very few studies have focused on the salutogenic functioning of educators. In a study conducted by Brown, Howcroft and Jacobs (2009), which focused on the Sense of Coherence teaching learners with intellectual disabilities educators reported an average level of coping resources and a high Sense of Coherence. In another study (Eloff, Swart & Engelbrecht, 2002), educators did not experience stress when including learners with physical disabilities in their classrooms. However, these educators reported stress relating to communication with these learners with physical disabilities.

Despite being bombarded by multiple stressors in everyday living, there are individuals, including educators, who cope well with these stressors and remain healthy. Contextualising educators' experience of working with learners with learning difficulties within Antonovsky's (1979) salutogenesis model might provide a better understanding of why and how certain educators cope better in dealing with learners with learning difficulties. This paradigm looks at the functioning of the individual under stressful conditions and it is postulated that developing a strong Sense of Coherence facilitates effective coping in dealing with stressful events (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987).

When confronted with a stressor, the person with a strong Sense of Coherence will wish to, or be motivated to, cope with the stressor (meaningfulness); believe that the challenge is understood (comprehensibility); and believe that the resources to cope are available (manageability) (Antonovsky, 1996). Rothmann (2003; 2001) confirmed

that a person's Sense of Coherence is an important facet of one's health and well-being. Previous studies (Rothmann, 2001; Strümpher & Mlonzi, 2001) reported a positive correlation between a strong Sense of Coherence and job satisfaction. In addition, Coetzee (2004) establishes a correlation between Sense of Coherence and quality of work life. A positive relationship was also established between Sense of Coherence and effective coping (Redelinghuys & Rothmann, 2004).

1.3 Focus of the research

The overarching aim of this study is to explore and describe the Sense of Coherence of educators teaching learners with learning difficulties. Special attention will be given to the challenges educators face, as well as the psychological resources needed in dealing with these challenges. The focus of this study will primarily be on the psychological strengths (fortitudes) that play a role when educators teach learners with learning difficulties.

The following research aims were formulated:

1. To explore and describe educators' perception of whether their challenges are being understood or comprehended by the education management system and by themselves and what enables them to make sense of their challenges (comprehensibility).

2. To explore and describe educators' perceived ability to cope with the demands of their profession, whether the perceived necessary resources (manageability) are in place to help them cope, and what these resources are.

3. To explore and describe educators' sense that their efforts of working with learners with learning difficulties will make a difference in the learners' lives and whether it is a worthy investment for themselves (meaningfulness) that makes it worthwhile.

1.4 Research design and methodology

A mixed-method approach was used which allowed the researcher to combine the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. Quantitative data were only utilised to identify educators who scored high on the Sense of Coherence questionnaire for the purpose of including them in the interview phase of the study, and not for inferential purposes. The main focus of this study was, however, on the qualitative analysis of data collected in the semi-structured interviews. An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was used to explore participant's subjective experiences of the stressors they experience in their work environment (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Willig, 2001). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis offers a clear methodological approach, is based on a solid theoretical foundation, and provides a detailed description of the analytical process to be followed which has allowed IPA to become an increasingly more attractive choice of research method with psychologists (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The IPA lends itself well to applied research because it shares with the social cognitive paradigm a belief in, and concern with verbal feedback, cognitions and physical state (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). Limitations identified within the IPA as a research method are linked to issues such as the role of language and suitability of accounts. According to these concerns, language is viewed as a restrictive tool in that one's language determines how one relates one's experiences, while limited language further impoverishes how an experience is related.

1.4.1 Data Gathering

The data gathering took place in the second and third term of the 2009 school year with the permission of the Free State Department of Education. The Sense of Coherence questionnaire was personally distributed to the educators who completed it in their own time. Questionnaires were scored and five educators who scored high were purposefully selected to partake in the interview section of the study. IPA

proposes a small sample size for up to ten participants (Smith *et al.,* 1999). Interview transcripts were analysed by means of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA).

1.4.2 Measuring Instruments

Antonovsky's (1987) Sense of Coherence questionnaire was used to gather the quantitative data. This questionnaire was developed by Antonovsky (1987) and assesses the theoretical concept, sense of coherence, as a global life orientation. The Sense of Coherence (SOC 29) scale consists of 29 seven-facet items. Participants are assessed according to three dimensions, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987). Only the total score was used. According to Wissing and Van Eeden (1997), the average score for SOC for the South African population is 136.52. A high score represents a strong Sense of Coherence. Antonovsky (1993) reported Cronbach-Alpha coefficients of the SOC in 29 research studies, varying between 0.85 and 0.91. Test and retest reliability studies found coefficients between 0.41 and 0.97 (Antonovsky, 1993).

1.5 Ethical considerations

Permission was obtained from the Free State Department of Education as well as from the principals. Participants were selected on a voluntary basis and informed consent was obtained from the participants both verbally in writing. The confidentiality of the study was also explained to the participants.

1.6 Value of the research

The value of the study will be in the identification of psychological strengths, (meaningfullness component of SOC) specifically the factors that promote a healthy SOC and that play a supportive role with educators teaching learners with learning difficulties. Results of this study can further contribute to the establishment of guidelines for the support of the educators enabling them to handle the task more

efficiently for the sake of preservation of their own physical and psychological well being.

1.7 Concept clarification

This section provides a short definition of concepts frequently used in this dissertation, including, coping, coping strategies, educator stress, inclusive education, learning difficulties, Sense of Coherence, stressors.

1.7.1 Coping

Coping refers to perceptual, cognitive or behavioural responses that are used to defuse situations regarded as frustrating or problematic (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Moos, 1994).

1.7.2 Coping strategies

Coping strategies refers to efforts used to alleviate stress by either focusing on solving the problem (problem-focused strategies), or to regulate emotional responses brought on by the stressor (emotion-focused strategies) (Judge, 1998).

1.7.3 Educator stress

Kyriacou (1989) defines educator stress as the experience by educators of unpleasant emotions such as anger, tension, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness as resulting from aspects as their work as educators. In the context of this study, educator stress will be defined by the demands placed on them when teaching learners with learning difficulties.

1.7.4 Inclusive education

Inclusive education refers to the educational provision for learners with special needs which are integrated over time into what are currently considered to be 'ordinary schools' (Department of Education, 2001).

1.7.5 Learning difficulties

For the purpose of this study, learning difficulties will be defined as learners who encounter problems with reading, spelling and mathematics

1.7.6 Sense of coherence

Antonovsky (1987) developed the Sense of Coherence construct, which refers to an individual's ability to perceive various environments and life situations as Meaningful, Comprehensible and Manageable.

1.7.7 Stressors

A stressor refers to any event or object that is subjectively perceived as stressful by an individual (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). It is associated with either a) a threat to the loss of resources, b) the total loss of resources, or c) the lack of resource gain following the investment of resources (Hobfoll, 1988).

1.8 Delineation of the chapters in the dissertation

Chapter 2 will review the available literature on educator stress, as well the causes and impact of stress on the educator. Several stress models will also be explored. Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory will be used to provide a framework for the discussion of available sources in this section. Chapter 3 explores the concepts of salutogenesis, coping and Sense of Coherence. Sense of Coherence will be discussed in terms of its development, definition, critique as well as results from previous studies conducted on it. Chapter 4 will be the exposition of the research methodology used in this study. In Chapter 5 the results of the study will be discussed and integrated with existing literature. The key themes that emerged in the analysis relating to the educators experience in the inclusive classrooms will be discussed within Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence construct. Finally, Chapter 6 will re-examine the literature in the light of the research findings, consider the limitations of the current study, and offer recommendations relevant to future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

EDUCATOR STRESS

2.1 Introduction

South Africa and its workforce have undergone dramatic changes since the emergence of the new democracy in 1994. Education especially has been confronted with a series of complex changes, challenging the traditional practices and organisational structures of schools. South Africa's school system is constantly undergoing a process of transformation in an attempt to move away from inherited apartheid practices (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001; Engelbrecht, Oswalt & Forlin, 2006). Although these changes were meant to have a positive impact on the education system, it ultimately resulted in higher levels of stress among educators. More specifically, the role of educators in the inclusive classroom has become more varied and challenging. The focus of this chapter is to discuss factors contributing to the high levels of stress in the South African educator in the inclusive classroom.

2.2 Stress and educator stress

Throughout time, different definitions of stress have been proposed. According to Selye (1976), stress is the cause of the body's physical response to a demand, whether or not the demand is positive or negative. Selye (1976) suggests that stress can be divided into good stress (i.e. eustress) and bad stress (i.e. distress). According to Keiper and Buselle (1996), positive or good stress, referred to as eustress, can act as a motivating agent for achievement. Distress, on the other hand, is damaging or unpleasant, and negatively impacts on cognitive and behavioural performance. Where Selye (1976) distinguishes between good and bad stress, Hobfoll (1989) conceptualises stress in terms of the reaction to the environment, which could be attributed to three possibilities: the actual threat of a net loss of resources, the net loss of resources or the lack of resources gain. The Conservation of Resources Model (Hobfall, 1988) views stress as a process initiated by the

presence of real or potential threat to the person's resources. According to Hobfall (1988), resources are objects, personality traits, circumstances and energies that individuals view as useful in obtaining their desired goals. In addition, Coyne and Holroyd (1982) claim that stress can be defined in three basic ways, namely: (a) the response-based model, (b) the stimulus-based model, and (c) the interactional model.

The three models will now be discussed in more detail.

2.2.1 Response-based model

The focus of the model is on the specification of the particular response or pattern of response, which can be taken as evidence that the person is under pressure from a disturbing environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The response syndrome represents a universal pattern of defence reactions serving to protect the person and preserve integrity (Selye, 1976). Seley defines stress as a state manifested by a syndrome, which consists of all the non-specific changes in a biological system. This response system is known as the General Adaptation Syndrome. Three stages are represented by the General Adaptation Syndrome (Selye, 1976), namely:

1. The alarm reaction – the body displays changes as a result of stressors during this phase. The body's resistance is reduced and death may occur if the stressor is too severe.
2. The resistance phase – the alarm reaction disappears and is replaced by changes marking the person's adaptability to the situation, while his/her resistance rises above normal.
3. The exhaustion phase – prolonged exposure to the stressor may result in exhaustion causing a collapse.

Monat and Lazarus (1977) criticise this model by emphasising that the same response pattern may arise from different stimulus conditions, for example, an increased heart rate does not necessarily represent stress; it could be the result of heavy exercise or an extreme fright.

2.2.2 Stimulus-based model

Where the response model's focus is on the response towards a stressor, the stimulus-based model refers to the disturbing environment or external stressors that are disruptive for the person. Experiences under this model are deemed stressful if they lead to a stressful response such as breathlessness, anxiety and heart palpitations (Mulhall, 1996). Stress may not be objectively defined as the level of the environmental conditions without referencing the characteristics of the person.

2.2.3 Interaction model

In contrast to the stimulus-based model, which focuses on the disturbing impact of the environment on the individual, the interactional model suggests stress is the result of the imbalance between the environment and the person. Stress is a dynamic system of interaction between the individual and the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Mulhall, 1996). According to this theory, the impact of the stressor is mediated by individuals' appraisal of the stressor in terms of the risk to the person and their ability to cope with the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Today, the most widely accepted and used definition of stress in literature is that of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). According to them, stress can be conceptualised in terms of: "*a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well being (p. 19)."* Lazarus and Folkman (1984) indicate that the impact of the stressor is mediated by an individual's appraisal of the stressor in terms of the risk to the person and his/her ability to cope with the situation.

2.3 Educator stress

Educator stress, a more specific form of stress, can be described as a complex process that involves an interaction between the educator and the environment that includes a stressor and a response (Eloff, Engelbrecht, Oswald & Swart, 2003).

Educator stress occurs when there is an imbalance between situational demands and his/her ability to respond adequately to the demands (Nhundu, 1999). For the purpose of this study, the definition of Kyriacou (1998) will be applied. Kyriacou (1998) defines educator stress as the negative or unpleasant result of tasks or demands that educators face in performing their professional roles and responsibilities. According to Kyriacou (1998), there are various factors in defining educator stress, which include the following: to use the concept in terms of the level of demands placed on the educator or, should it refer to the emotional state rendered by the demands. Furthermore, the inclusion of both negative and positive demands as stress factors, the relationship between a teacher's perception of a situation and the perception of their ability to cope with the situation were also regarded as factors relating to the defining of educator stress.

2.4 Factors associated with the level of stress individual's experience

Several factors influence how an individual perceives stress. These factors include certain personality characteristics and personality types, social support, gender, sense of self and self-efficacy. The personality characteristic an individuals possess may moderate the levels of stress they experience (Eloff, Swart & Engelbrecht, 2002). Examples of such personality characteristics include Type A and Type B personalities, hardiness and optimism. Type A people are often described as hard-driven and very competitive. They tend to strive to achieve more and more in less time. People with these characteristics often tend to respond more with agitation to stress. Type B people, on the other hand, are people that are less demanding on themselves (Harris & Hartman, 2002). Type B personalities work at a steady and relaxed pace. They are much more confident about their work and colleagues and they also feel less anxious about time (Friedman, 1969). Hardy individuals will handle stress better compared to those who do not possess those characteristics. Hardiness refers to an individual's ability to stay committed; to stay in control and to be challenged, rather than threatened by stress (Goleman, 1998). For example, when two individuals are faced with the same stressor, one may see it as an invigorating challenge, whilst the other may see it as a devastating threat. Optimism refers to how an individual interprets setbacks (Goleman, 1998). Individuals who

display optimism will see setbacks as being the result of factors over which they have power and control. These individuals believe that although the present circumstances are bad, they can turn things around with enough effort and input.

Social support is an important variable in the stress response (Rout & Rout, 2002). Social support provides emotional concern through liking, love and empathy. It can also be described as instrumental, for example, providing goods or services as well as information to individuals in need during a stressful time (Buunk, Doosje, Jans & Hopstaken, 1993). People who lack social support often report more physical and psychological symptoms of stress, compared to those who do enjoy social support. In a study conducted by Wenzel, Buys and Mostert (2008), educators reported that support and understanding from their spouses and important others helped them to deal better with the negative aspects of stress. However, studies conducted by Jonas (2001) and Jacobsson, Pousette and Thulefors (2001), found that support networks and social resources can also be a source of stress for educators because when individuals experience lack social support, they tend to stress more.

Several studies have found that stress are often experienced differently among men and women (Rout & Rout, 2002; Van Zyl & Pietersen, 1999). Women are reported to have high levels of stress as they are often expected to meet domestic commitments and conflicting work and family demands (Rout & Rout, 2002). Men, on the other hand, experience lower levels of stress. In a study conducted by Jonas (1998), men reported higher perceived social support from families and friends, which explained their lower levels of stress.

A person's self-esteem can further contribute to the level of stress they experience. Self-esteem refers to how people perceive themselves (Harris & Hartman, 2002). Educators with a high self-esteem cope better with stress in the workplace (Adams, 1999). Self-efficacy, on the other hand, refers to people's ability to produce certain actions and to make them believe they are able to perform the task or to cope with stress (Chaplain, 1995). When educators have little confidence in their classroom management skills, they will probably give up easily when confronted with disruptive learner behaviour (Motseke, 1998).

2.5 Causes of educator stress

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) will be used to provide a framework for the analysis and integration of the available sources on the causes of educator stress. This model focuses on the interaction between the individual and the environment, claiming that behaviour is the result of interplay between these systems. Boemmel and Briscoe (2001) describe this theory as a rock thrown into a river, where the rock represents the individual and the ripple effects around the rock are the environment. When educator experiences stress, various factors, such as support systems, contribute or are affected by it. .

An illustrative view of Bronfenbrenner's systems is provided in Figure 1.
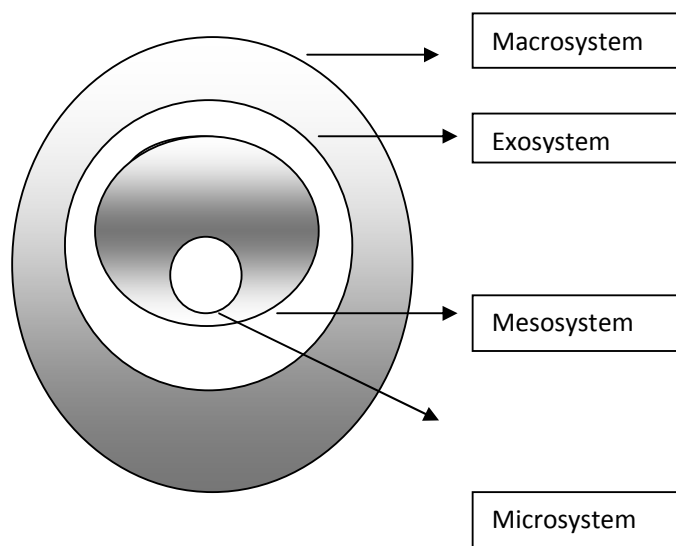
Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's systems

Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains the interplay between the person and the environment by identifying several social systems that humans form part of, including:

a) The microsystem

The microsystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1977), refers to the "… complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person" (p.514). These include interpersonal relationships, activities, and roles the person is directly involved with.

b) The mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to the relations within the broader environment of an individual and represents interactions between different systems the person is part of, such as work, neighbourhood, and social life.

c) The exosystem

The exosystem refers to the social settings that affect the person but do not include them, for example, the workplace of the spouse, or health services in the community. It is indirect but can have a huge effect on the person. For instance, if the spouse would get retrenched, the partner suffers.

d) The macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to the outermost layer which envelopes the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem. These are the things that influence and sometimes support the person within the environment, such as cultures, norms and laws. According to Berk (2003), the priority that the macrosystem gives to individuals' needs affects the support they receive at inner levels of the environment.

2.6. Changes within the South African education system

Bronfenbrenners ecological model will be incorporated in the literature to provide an understanding of how the model functions with regard to the educator. The model

will be discussed starting from the outer layer namely the macrosystem, working towards the inner layer namely the individual.

2.6.1 Education in South Africa prior to 1994

The macrosystem refers to the outermost layer of the system, which are the things which supports the educator within the enviroment. The acceptance of the new Constitution of South Africa in 1996, together with the introduction of new education legislation and policy, based on the principles of human rights and equity, provided a framework for the recognition of diversity and provision of quality education for all learners within an inclusive education system (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001). However, prior to 1994, education in South Africa consisted of 19 racially divided education departments, with each department having their own policy regarding learners with special education needs (Jansen & Taylor, 2003; Botha, 2002). Not all education departments made provision for these learners and the disadvantaged communities were totally marginalised. Extreme disparities, including race disparities, and discrepancies often existed in the provision for specialised education with white learners being better off then their black, Coloured and Indian counterparts (Department of Education, 1997; Naicker, 2000). As a consequence of this dual system, large numbers of learners were often being excluded from the mainstream of education. Specialised education and support were predominantly provided for a small percentage of learners with learning disabilities within special schools and classes. However, most learners with learning disabilities have either fallen outside of the system or have been "mainstreamed by default" (Naicker, 2000). Furthermore, the nature of this education was of a very poor quality and lacked effectiveness (Botha, 2002).

The next two layers, the exosystem and mesosystem will be discussed simultanously in this section.The mesosystem refers to the relations with the broader community or enviroment and the interaction between these systems and the educator. The exosystem on the other hand refers to the social settings which affects the educator, but do not include them. Since 1994 significant educational reforms have taken place in South Africa. The creation of a single national education department from 19 racially, ethnically and regionally divided departments was a significant accomplishment in the early years of democracy (Jansen & Taylor, 2003;

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Botha, 2002). Key policy documents and legislation such as the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education, 1995), the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Department of Education, 1997) and the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996) have articulated the new goals of equity, redress, quality, efficiency and the right of all learners to equal access to the widest possible educational opportunities. As part of this comprehensive process of transformation to a more democratic and inclusive education system in South Africa, the South African Ministry of Education released *Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Department of National Education, 2001) in July 2001(Engelbrecht, Oswald & Forlin, 2006).

In Education White Paper 6, the differences between mainstreaming and inclusion are set out as follows: Mainstreaming is about letting learners "fit into" a particular kind of system and by giving extra support to be integrated in the "normal classroom", whereas inclusion refers to the recognition and respecting the differences among learners and building on similarities. The policy proposals described in the White Paper were aimed at developing an inclusive education and training system that will ensure that educational provision for learners with special needs is largely integrated over time into what are currently considered to be 'ordinary schools'(Education White paper 6, 2001). It recognises that developing learners' strengths and empowering and enabling them to participate actively and critically in the learning process involve identifying and overcoming the causes of learning difficulties (Engelbrecht, 2004).

Another change that was implemented was the notion of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE). OBE received a lot of support and it was regarded as the most ambitious curriculum policy ever that would address future education needs more satisfactorily (Jansen, 1998). The initial idea of Outcomes-Based Education was to assist educators in helping learners create a definite and reliable evidence of achievement; that is, it focuses on the outcomes of the education process. However, Outcomes-Based Education created more administrative burdens, often leading to higher levels of stress among educators.

2.6.2 The impact of inclusive education on the South African school system

Finally the last layer is known as the microsystem. These include the educators direct involvement with interpersonal relationships, roles as well as activities.The introduction of inclusive education in the schooling system called for fundamental change in the organisational structures of schools and in the roles and responsibilities of administrators and educators (Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2002). Despite a high work load, educators in mainstream education are expected to teach learners with barriers in learning. For the purpose of this study, barriers of learning will refer to difficulties learners experience during the learning process. Learning difficulties refer to learners having difficulty with reading, mathematics and writing. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), the main categories of learning difficulties cover the following areas: Problems with reading, problems with mathematics and problems with written expression and learning problems not otherwise specified.

The traditional role of the remedial educator also changed dramatically as they were called upon to provide greater assistance to mainstream educators in developing intervention programmes for learners with learning difficulties (Mpya, 2007). This resulted in some schools experiencing chronic shortages in remedial educators to assist in dealing with learners with learning difficulties. A further result of these changes was that educators were forced to attend to bigger and even overcrowded classrooms. This often prevents educators to form close relationships with learners resulting in an inability to assist those learners who needed help the most (Mpya, 2007).

In 1998 Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) was introduced (De Waal, 2004). OBE included the process of continuous assessment where the educator was required not to only mark the work, but assess different kinds of written and oral work for examinations and tests (Department of Education, 2001). The introduction of OBE caused frustration among educators who struggled to adapt to the new teaching methods, assessment and the jargon of Outcomes-Based Education (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002). Although the Department of Education revised the curriculum and brought in a new form of assessment twelve years ago, educators are still

experiencing pressure because they have to adapt to the new syllabi and learners with learning difficulties (Wood, 2007).

The introduction of a human rights culture in education has resulted in the banning of corporal punishment in schools (Republic of South Africa, 1996) However, several studies suggest that this banning might have resulted in an increase in behavioural problems reported among learners (Olivier & Venter, 2003; Saptoe, 2000). Research (Mpya, 2007; Olivier & Venter, 2003) has shown that learners who display behavioural problems are often the ones who have learning problems. According to educators, it is very difficult to control these learners in the classroom as it is apparent that these learners have problems concentrating (Mpya, 2007). This is often frustrating for the educator because it disrupts normal teaching (Paulse, 2005). Behavioural problems among learners can result in educators experiencing their classrooms as unbearable (Olivier & Venter, 2003).

2.7 Factors contributing to educator stress

As the demands on educators and schools increase, so does the incidence of stress in the teaching profession (Schulze & Steyn, 2007). Educators are exposed to high workloads, with a resultant increase in stress and strain (Boyle, Borg, Falzon & Baglioni, 1995).

Research has shown that casual factors for stress include role overload, poor learner behaviour (Schulze & Steyn, 2007), lack of resources (Kyriacou, 1998), the number of individuals educators are responsible for (Mpya, 2007), diversity in individuals with whom they have to work (Olivier & Venter, 2003), resistance and lack of motivation of co-workers (Smylie, 1999), and a lack of motivation from learners (Olivier & Venter, 2003).

2.7.1Macrosystem

Educators' work is becoming more complex and demanding. The new education approach of Outcomes-Based Education, the management style of principals, new governing bodies for schools, the high crime rate in the country, coping with current

political change and corruption in state departments are causing stress to educators (Marais, 1992). Research (Van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2007) indicates that educators are not very happy with Outcomes-Based Education. According to them, educators state that the system does not work and the workload has increased dramatically. The result is that educators are under more pressure to perform.

The introduction of certain policies, specifically which of inclusion, makes additional demands on educators (Forlin, Douglas & Hattie, 1996; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000; Soto & Goetz, 1998). Research (Eloff, Engelbrecht, Oswald & Swart, 2003; Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982; McManus & Kauffman, 1991) reveals that these demands are excessive administration and lack of support; isolation from colleagues and dissatisfaction with parental support, are consistently cited as sources of stress amongst educators in inclusive environments. Poppleton & Williamson (2004) claim increased administrative demands due to OBE assessment are being made on educators. Similar findings were reported regarding the inclusion of learners with Down's syndrome (Engelbrecht, Forlin, Eloff & Swart, 2001), as well as the coping orientation and resources of teachers educating learners with intellectual disabilities (Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs 2009). In their investigation Eloff, Engelbrecht, Swart & Oswald (2002) and Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs (2009) reveal that overall the most stressful issues for educators regarding the implementation of inclusive education are related to educators' perceived professional self-competence, administrative issues and those related to the behaviour of learners. Administrative issues, involving taking full responsibility and accountability for educational outcomes of learners, as well as adapting the curriculum and adjusting the unit plans to support the learners' needs in an inclusive environment, are also contributing factors to the high levels of stress experienced by educators (Eloff, Engelbrecht, Swart & Oswald , 2002). However, it appears from a survey conducted in both the Gauteng Province and the Western Cape that educators regard the inclusion of physically disabled students in their mainstream classes as relatively easy, and in many instances do not experience stress (Eloff, Engelbrecht, Swart & Oswald, 2002). Research (Brown Howcroft & Jacobs, 2009; Poppleton & Williamson, 2004) indicate that lesson preparation has become more demanding and time consuming and they have to be more creative and innovative.

2.7.2 Mesosystem and Exosystem

In South Africa, previous studies have linked educator stress to a lack of discipline among learners, unmotivated learners, redeployment and retrenchment of educators, large learner-educator ratios (Mpya, 2007) and new curriculum approaches (Saptoe, 2000). However, some research projects were limited by the fact that they were carried out in relatively small geographical areas. For example, Motseke (1998) investigated stress among educators in township secondary schools in the Free State to identify organisational, personal, interpersonal, and environmental stressors. Jeena's (1998) study in Pietermaritzburg indicates high levels of stress for all respondents irrespective of age, gender and post level in comparison with other studies; Olivier and Venter (2003) investigated educator stressors in five secondary schools in the George region (Southern Cape), to reveal that educators experienced moderate to high stress levels and that low salaries were a significant stressor. Other studies focused on certain cultural groups only. In one example Van Zyl and Petersen (1999) used 66 white secondary school educators in two predominantly white schools and found that the educators' high stress levels were related to changes in the structures of teaching, retrenchments, syllabi and the medium of instruction. Apart from the limitations of previous studies mentioned above, the teaching context in post-apartheid South Africa is continuously transforming. Educator stress is therefore an ongoing important issue (Schulze & Steyn, 2007).

2.7.3 Microsystem

The roles of educators are not easily defined and are growing more complex (Greenberg, 1984). During the last decades, teachers have had to face new challenges when dealing with heterogeneous populations posing radically different educational, social, and psychological demands. Mesthrie (1999) highlights changes in the South African education environment and society that contribute to the experience of stress by educators. As a result of current political and social changes and the influence of these changes on education structures, very high demands are made on educators. These demands include population increases, greater diversity in school populations, increases in the cost of living, crime and its effect on learner behaviour, conditions of service, new rules and regulations of the Department of

Education, curriculum changes, performance appraisal systems, and demands of unions (Robinson, 2003). Apart from broad changes such as affirmative action, democracy, diversity, retrenchment and redeployment of educators, some of the more specific changes that educators have experienced include the transition from 19 departments of education to one national and nine provincial departments of education, as well as the change from mono-cultural schools to multicultural schools (Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2002; Jansen &Taylor, 2003). Another change that has been made to the curriculum is the so-called Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) (Robinson, 2003). Educators have indicated that their levels of stress have increased dramatically as a result of changes in the education system (OBE) (Poppleton & Williamson, 2004).

Mainstream educators have to contend with large class sizes (e.g. 50-80 children in some classrooms), limited educational resources, language diversity, and the direct effects of HIV/AIDS on families, teachers and the children themselves. Overcrowding makes it difficult to control learners in the classroom (Mpya, 2007). Despite these systematic constraints, educators must also find ways to include learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Big classes result in educators feeling frustrated and a sense of incompetence because they do not have enough time to attend to all the needs of the students (Olivier & Venter, 2003).

The lack of remedial educators in schools also causes a sense of frustration, because remedial educators create programmes that could assist other educators, thus alleviating learning difficulties that learners experience. By the very nature of their work, educators with children with special education needs spend large amounts of time in interaction with students who have significant learning, social and or emotional needs. Consequently, educators of learners with special education needs may be especially vulnerable to heightened levels of stress (Male & May, 1997). Male and May (1997) argue that educators are under a lot of stress because they are not acquainted with the principles and management of inclusion. From this, one may conclude that educators' lack of competency in managing their inclusive classrooms is a serious problem, which makes them feel stressed and less confident. In general, education teachers do not always feel confident in their ability

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to fulfil the tasks that are needed to support inclusive education (Buell, Hallam & Gamel-McCormick, 1999).

Lack of effective in-service or pre-service training regarding the implementation of inclusion and special needs like learning problems reinforces the high levels of stress associated with adapting the curriculum to meet the learners' needs and sustaining an effective learning environment for all learners in their classrooms. Research (Biersteker & Robinson, 2000; Department of Education, 1997; Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001; Natasi, Varjas, Bernstein & Pluymert , 1998; Wedekind, 2001) has indicated that many South African educators do not have the knowledge, experience, or in some cases the disposition to address matters of race and culture in their classrooms. Factors contributing to the stressors educators have to cope with – the working load in terms of hours on the job – is heavier, and educators' personal and emotional involvement with their learners is higher (Tatar, 1998). Participation in extramural activities such as sports (coaching and refereeing) also increases the likelihood that the service of educators would be needed after hours and over weekends (Jackson & Rothman, 2006), with the result that educators neglect their families and end up with feelings of guilt (Van Wyk, 2006). Educator stress may also increase if educators' work causes inconvenience to family members. The educator may feel trapped between dedication to the job and responsibility towards the family (Wood, 2007). According to Ngidi and Sibaya (2002), the changes in the education system are apt to take their toll on the well-being of South African educators because they create changes in the social life as well as school practices, which could create serious psychological adjustment problems for educators.

2.8 Previous studies on educator stress

Several studies have focused on educator stress. Milner and Khoza (2008) focused on a comparison of educator stress and school climate across schools with different matric success rates, while Schulze and Steyn (2007) focused on stressors in the professional lives of South African secondary-school educators. Results from these studies indicated that educators are experiencing high levels of stress attributed to the following factors: parents' and learners' poor attitudes toward learning, disciplinary problems in schools and the changing conditions (in and out of school).

Findings from a study conducted by Jackson and Rothmann's (2006) on occupational stress, organisational commitment, and ill-health of educators in the North-West Province suggested that, although organisational commitment had major effects on physical and psychological ill-health, it only moderated the effect of one occupational stressor, namely job insecurity, on the physical and psychological health of educators. On the other hand, a study conducted by Eloff, Swart and Engelbrecht (2002) indicated that educators' stress is limited or non-existent. This is an indication that educators are coping well with learners with physical disabilities in their classrooms. Similarly, Eloff, Engelbrecht and Swart (2002) and Olivier and Venter (2003) studied the extent and causes of stress in teachers in the George region. Results obtained in these studies suggested that educators do experience stress, although they are coping fairly well.

2.9 The impact of stress

One of the major consequences of stress is burnout (Nelson & Simmons, 2003). Burnout can be described as a chronic type of stress whereby the limits of a person's ability to control or cope with stressors and its harmful consequences are exceeded (Schaufeli, 2003). Maslach and Jackson (1981) define burnout as a "syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind".(p. 99) *People work* refers to caring professions like health care, teaching and clergy, where the focus is on the well-being of another individual. Emotional exhaustion is the feeling of exceeding one's emotional limits and feeling drained by contact with other individuals. Depersonalisation can be describe as a lack of feeling towards people, usually the ones for whom the individual is caring. Reduced personal accomplishment means that the individual feels that he/she is incompetent and unsuccessful in his/her own work. Burnout among educators often results in educators having a negative and even callous attitude towards the teaching profession, the management of the school where he/she is employed or even the provincial/national education department. Furthermore, burnt out educators often displays negative and even callous attitudes towards learners (Montgomery, Mostert & Jackson, 2005). Other consequences of stress include problems with anger, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, an inability to concentrate, and behavioural

reactions that include alcohol and drug abuse, over- and under-eating, aggression, absenteeism and poor interpersonal relationships (Harris & Hartman, 2002).

The stress that educators experience can have serious implications for their physical and mental health. Today, more and more educators complain about low morale and stress-related illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, ulcers and heart attacks, while others plan to leave the profession or go on early retirement (Olivier & Venter, 2003). Results of a national study, conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, 2005), indicated that the high levels of stress reported by educators are often related to the large number of days educators are absent from work. Furthermore, it is estimated that the average number of educators in the education system has dropped by 20 000 over the past seven years due to low morale and high stress levels. The study also indicated that 10,6% of educators were hospitalised during the previous year, 7% more than the general population. Simiarly, an investigation into the number of sick days used by educators in the North-West Province, the number of educators using such leave and the number of resignations have revealed that between 2001 and 2002 the use of such leave increased by 339,27% (or 57 666 days); the number of educators using such leave by 170,88% (or 3 686 educators); and the number of resignations by 82,74% (or 139 resignations) (North-West Education Department Statistics, 2004).

Educator stress is seen mainly as a negative effect with diverse psychological (e.g. job dissatisfaction), physiological (e.g., high blood pressure) and behavioural (e.g., absenteeism) correlates (Harris & Hartman, 2002; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). In the long run, these negative stress effects could lead to physiological and biochemical changes, accompanied by psychosomatic and even chronic symptoms, such as coronary heart disease (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Other levels of strain include cognitive (e.g. poorer quality decision-making, lower levels of creativity and impaired memory) and interpersonal changes (e.g. reduced levels of sensitivity, warmth, consideration, altruism and tolerance).

Coping with stress in the work environment can, however, be less effective because many aspects of the work situation that are stressful tend to lie outside the educator's control (Kyriacou, 1981). Furthermore, prevailing difficulties at schools, including ineffectively trained educators and a lack of a positive teaching and

learning culture contribute to the stressors learners and educators have to cope with (Biersteker & Robinson, 2000; Natasi, Varjas, Bernstein & Pluymert, 1998). In addition, inclusive education requires all educators to deal with children with learning difficulties in their classrooms (Schulze & Steyn, 2007). By the very nature of their work, educators of children with special education need to spend large amounts of time in interaction with learners who have significant learning, social and/or emotional needs (Male & May, 1997). Bothma, Gravett and Swart (2002) contend that educators have a negative attitude regarding inclusion, due to the fact that they were not trained to cope with learners who experience barriers to learning and that their schools did not have the facilities or equipment needed by these learners. Research has highlighted that high stress levels are associated with adapting the curriculum to meet the learners' needs and sustaining an effective learning environment for learners with Down's syndrome. This is attributed to the lack of effective in-service or pre-service training associated with the implementation of inclusion and special needs (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001; Engelbrecht, Forlin, Eloff & Swart, 2001). Educators have to cope with demands such as the rationalisation of personnel, increased specialisation, the growing scope of syllabuses and a higher number of learners per class (Niehaus, Myburgh & Kok, 1996; Schulze & Steyn, 2007).

It is interesting to note that educators are the key force in determining the quality of inclusion; therefore it is without doubt that they can, if given support, play a crucial role in transforming schools, or with no support, bring any change at all. As the key figures in the implementation of an inclusion education policy, their competencies in this field are of the outmost importance (Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff &Pepttifer, 2002).

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter the concept *stress* was discussed as well as the different sources of stress. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was used as theoretical framework to discuss the relevant literature on the sources of educator stress. The education system in South Africa were investigated, specifically all the changes that took place, which in turn had an effect on educators experiencing stress. The historical overview of *positive psychology, salutogenesis, coping* and *sense of coherence* will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

COPING, SALUTOGENISIS AND SENSE OF COHERENCE

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, sources of educator stress were discussed. This chapter will explore the coping orientation of the educator and focusses on various definitions of coping and coping resources. The salutogenic paradigm will also be explored with special attention being given to the construct of Sense of Coherence. The focus will be on the definition, the different components, the development and critique thereof. The relationship between coping and Sense of Coherence will also be discussed.

3.2 Historical overview

Human weaknesses and various psychological problems, experienced by individuals have been the focus of research for many psychologists over the past years. Gradually, however psychologists have became dissatisfied with the problem-orientated nature of their discipline. This deficit approach excluded the acknowledgement of people's strength and resources. According to Sheldon and King (2001, p. 216) despite all the difficulties, the majority of people manage to live their lives with dignity and purpose. This awareness of the restricted scientific and professional domain of Psychology lead to a time readiness (zeitgeist) which ultimately resulted in two new sub-disciplines in Psychology, namely psychofortology (Wissing & Van Eeden, 1997; 2002) and positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). These two sub-disciplines have in common the development of a new approach to science and practice in Psychology, which focuses on people's strengths, optimal functioning, overall well- being, building of positive qualities and their realising of human potential.

3.3 Positive Psychology

According to Compton (2005), positive psychology can be described as:

> Nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues. Positive psychology revisits "the average person" with an interest in finding out what works, what's right, and what is improving. It asks, what is the nature of the effective functioning human being, who successfully applies evolved adaptations and learned skills? And how can psychologists explain the facts that, despite all the difficulties, the majority of people mange to live their lives with dignity and purpose? Positive psychology is thus an attempt to urge psychologist' to adapt a more open and appreciative perspective regarding human potential, motives and capacities" (p.31).

One of the major components of positive psychology is the emphasis on the character strengths contributing to people living the "good life". According to Seligman (2002), a good life refers to "using your signature strengths every day to produce authentic happiness and abundant gratification" (p. 13). These positive strengths include the following, cognitive, emotional and interpersonal strengths, that protects against excess and strength-like value clarification and principals of transcendence (Compton, 2005; Peterson, 2006).

The science of psychology has made great strides into understanding what goes wrong with people, families, groups and institutions, but these advances have come at the cost of understanding what is right with people (Gable & Haidt, 2005). The aim of positive psychology is thus to study the opposite side of the coin – the ways that people feel joy, show altruism, and create healthy families and institutions – thereby addressing the full spectrum of human experience (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Following, is a discussion of some constructs of psychological well-being from a positive psychology perspective:

- *Positive emotions*

Enjoyment, happiness and joy are regarded as positive emotions. Negative emotions are utilised for protection and human survival and positive emotions are necessary to enable people to form lasting relationships, which are also essential for survival (Carr, 2004). The "broad-and-build' model of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) suggests that positive emotions broaden our awareness and then build upon the learning to create future emotional and intellectual resources (Frederickson, 2001).

Positive psychology recognises two ways of obtaining positive emotions, namely hedonic and eudaimonic. Hedonic refers to seeking pleasure and avoiding pain at all costs (Peterson, 2006). In turn eudaimonic is centred in the self and based on the developing of one's talents, so that other people or the community can benefit from these talents (Peterson, 2006). Regardless of the contrast between these two principals, both are considered as important elements of happiness (Peterson, 2006).

- *Character strengths*

Positive psychology recognises the importance of character strengths like honesty, courage and fidelity. All of these strengths are important and no distinction can be made as to which comes first. Certain character strengths are universally considered as important; however, cultural differences may have an impact on the conceptualising of character strengths (Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This enables people to reach fulfilment as the results of these strengths are improvements in their lives (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Compton (2005) states, that in order for human traits to qualify as strengths, they should have the following effects:

- They contribute to fulfilment;
- They are valued at their own right;
- They are celebrated when present, but mourned when lost;
- They are taught to the younger generation by parents and social institutions
- Parables and morality tales teach them;
- People hold and express them in different degrees;

- They are malleable and learnable; and
- They prompt joyful responses

Character strengths can help individuals to be more positive towards life. As a result individuals who are faced with challenges may cope better.

- *Hope and optimism*

Hope and optimism contributes to psychological well-being. Hope is the person's belief that he/she can create realistic plans and master enough drive to reach the personal goals set (Carr, 2004). Hope also creates various benefits that contribute to people experiencing positive emotions and that includes a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence, the ability to deal with stress more successfully and to enjoy more social support (Carr, 2004). Optimism and hope are linked as both stress that a person's belief that his/her future goals will be reached through their actions and perseverance. Learned optimism states that people can be more optimistic about life by changing how they explain life events to themselves, whereas realistic optimism is optimistic thinking which is in line with reality (Compton, 2005, p. 51).

- *Forgiveness and gratitude*

The concept of forgiveness can be defined as a process of forgiving those who did us wrong and providing them with a second chance (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). According to Compton (2005), forgiveness is a "willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgement and indifferent behaviour towards someone who unjustly injured us" (p. 193). When holding on to anger and resentment about past wrongings, it creates stumbling blocks in the way to achieving good health. However, forgiveness can improve inter-personal relationships and strengthen our ties in humanity.

Gratitude can be defined "as being aware and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks" (Peterson, 2006, p. 145). Personal and transpersonal gratitude differs in that the former is aimed at a specific other person while the latter is gratefulness toward a universal/higher power (Peterson &

Seligman, 2006). Both forgiveness and gratitude enhance healthy relationships (Peterson & Seligman, 2006).

3.4 Psychofortology

3.4.1 Definition of psychofortology

"Psychofortology focuses on the nature, manifestation, patterns, origins, dynamics and enhancement of strengths on individual, group and community levels" (Wissing, 2000, p. 8). This concept is specifically used in the domain of psychological strengths and psychological well-being, health or wellness. The concept of psychofortology was first introduced as the study of human strengths (Wissing & Van Eeden, 1998). Wissing and Van Eeden(1998) developed this concept from the term salutogenesis as proposed by Antonovsky (1987) and fortigenesis, as introduced by Strumpher (2005).

3.4.2 Aspects of psychological well-being from a psychofortology perspective

3.4.2.1Salutogenesis

The term "salutogenesis" is derived from the Latin word *salus*, meaning health, and the Greek word *genesis*, meaning origin (Antonovsky, 1979). Aaron Antonovsky (1979) coined the term *salutogenesis*, which proposed a study of health rather than disease. He developed the construct Sense of Coherence which posed the question, "How do people stay healthy?" Aaron Antonovsky introduced salutogenesis as an alternative orientation with the intension of facilitating a greater understanding of health rather than disease (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987). The focus of salutogenesis is on coping and survival, therefore it differs greatly from the study of stress and ill-health. The emphasis is thus coping with stress through "Generalised Resistance Resources", which include strength of ego, financial means and social support (Van Eeden, 1996). Antonovsky further claims that people are not necessarily healthy or ill, but their health fluctuates on a continuum of poles of health and disease. Their health status are influenced by the utilisation of coping mechanisms instead of defence mechanisms, the productive use of affect instead of wasting emotional

energy, and mutual cooperation instead of misuse or abuse of other people (Van Eeden, 1996).

Research studies regarding stress among educators (Eloff & Kriel, 2005; Olivier & Venter, 2003; Paulse, 2005) have focused mainly on the pathogenic approach of stress, the extent of stress, sources of stress and the experience of stress. However, relatively few studies (Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs, 2009; Gu & Day, 2007; Howard & Johnson, 2004) have focused on the positive orientation of educators; that is, what are the factors in their working and personal lives which make their work meaningful, comprehensive and manageable. However, it is important to focus on the positive orientation of educators because it might be an indication of how well they cope with their daily stressors.

3.4.2.2 Resilience

Resilience according to Peterson (2006, p. 239) is "a quality that enables people to thrive in the face of adversity". Resilient people are in good health and adapt to stressful events in flexible and effective ways. Important components to resilience are hardiness, persistence, goal directedness, belief in the future, sense of purpose, as well as persistence and sense of coherence (Peterson, 2006, p. 239). Resilience can also refer to an individual's ability to recover after a traumatic event. The resiliency of an individual depends on his/her strength characteristics and the supportive relationships in their lives (Carr, 2004; Peterson, 2006).

According to Semmer (1996), there are three core characteristics of resilient people:

Resilient people tend to:

- interpret the world as basically benign and one in which they do not expect intentional harm from others,
- they also tend to view setbacks and failures in perspective and are not necessarily indicative of their own incompetence.
- to view life as something that can be influenced and acted upon with stressful events normally seen as a challenge.

3.4.2.3 Coping

Coping is a multidimensional construct encompassing a wide range of behavioural and cognitive strategies which can be directed towards changing, assessing or avoiding stressful situations (Parkes, 1994). It represents is a process of trying to maintain equilibrium in life, ensuring stability, overcoming stress and managing and reducing demands of stressful events with the help of self-efficacy (Der Kinderen & Greeff, 2003; Faure & Loxton, 2003; Strümpfer, 2003). Coping thus relates to the way in which an individual perceives a stressor (cognitive and behavioural), copes with the demands of the situation and the extent of the support structures that are available to the individual. (Frydenberg, 1997; Koeske & Kirk, 1993). Coping includes activities undertaken to master, tolerate, reduce or minimise environmental or intra-psychic demands perceived to represent threats. The combination of intelligences, abilities, non-intellectual factors, nurturing environment, and the utilisation and realisation of available chances determine how an individual copes (Frydenberg, 1997). According to Frydenberg (1997), coping can be described as a process rather than a static entity as it is made up of responses, thoughts, feelings, and actions that individuals use to deal with problematic situations that are encountered in everyday life and in the particular circumstances.

According to the classical definition of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping can be defined as: *"… constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person"* (p.141). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain coping as a process determined by cognitive appraisal and is context dependent. Coping relates to the way individuals appraise a stressor and how they cope with the demands of the situation, as well as the extent of the support structures available to them. Coping entails strategies that are implemented to assist the individual with handling stressors in the environment (Koeske & Kirk, 1993).

Kleinke (1991) defines coping as "the efforts we make to manage situations we have appraised as potential harmful or stressful" (p. 2). According to Kleinke (1991), this definition has been adapted from Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which contain three key features, namely: coping includes a certain amount of effort and planning; coping does not imply a positive outcome; and coping is a process which takes place over

time. These features are important in the conceptualisation of coping because it allows us to study different styles and strategies of coping and to evaluate which ones are effective in different situations (Kleinke, 1991). The purpose of coping is to remove the imbalance between demands and capacities (Appley & Trumbull, 1986).

Coping can be defined in terms of problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused strategies refer to cognitive and behavioural strategies people use to deal with the stressor or stressful situation and emotion-focused strategies deal with inherent negative emotions. Problem-focused strategies are used to solve problems or to confront the source of the stress, while emotion-focused strategies help relieve emotional distress, which is caused by, or associated with, the stressful situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). The type of coping strategy a person chooses is partially dependant on how an individual appraises the possibility for change in a particular situation, and in turn the impact of an event on an individual is largely determined by the type of coping strategy utilised by that individual (Endler & Parker, 1990; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Individuals engage in various activities to reduce stress and coping should ideally involve flexibility and access to various coping strategies suited to the specific situation (De Beer & Korf, 2004).

A number of coping dimensions have been identified, but specific broad categories of coping are found in many approaches such as: problem-oriented strategies, positive reappraisal, seeking emotional and/or instrumental support, acceptance/ resignation, avoidance and expression of emotions (Parkes, 1994).

According to Heim (1991), coping is mostly related to a specific situation and is goal directed, striving to maintain an emotional and/or physiological balance, which maintains health. Individuals engage in various activities to reduce stress and coping should ideally involve flexibility and access to various coping strategies suited to the specific situation (De Beer & Korf, 2004).

However, stressors do not always lead to stress, because the specific individual might have the ability to absorb and cope with pressure (Jordan, 2002). These individuals also live healthy lifestyles that protect and gear them for stressful

circumstances. Successful coping may be perceived as a kind of psychological growth (Wethington, 2003).

Coping is considered as an important mediator between negative life events and psychological well-being; consequently coping may be an important determinant of successful adaptation among educators (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Herman-Stahl, Stemmler & Petersen, 1995).

- **Coping resources and coping strategies**

Coping entails the utilisation of certain resources and strategies (Govender & Killian, 2001). Hobfall (1989) defines coping resources as "those objects, personal characteristics, conditions or energies that are valued by the individual, or that serves as means for attainment of those objects, personal characteristics, conditions or energies" (p. 516). Coping resources, which include interpersonal relationships and psychological services, can only be useful tools against stressors if it is utilised optimally.

Coping strategies, on the other hand, are consciously selected routines employed to manage situations in which there is a perceived discrepancy between stressful demands and available resources for meeting those demands (Carr, 2004). Dispositional models highlight the role of relatively stable personal characteristics and traits in determining the choice and effectiveness of coping strategies. On the other hand, contextual models hold that the nature of the stressor with which one must cope, together with one's appraisal of the stressor, determine the choice and effectiveness of coping strategies. Thus, in any occupational setting an individual's personal attributes are likely to interact with various situational factors (Bergh, 2006). Coping strategies are determined by the cognitive evaluation of the stressor, including the rationality and flexibility of the individual's judgement, as well as the expectation of a certain result (Moos & Schaefer, 1993).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping strategies can be divided into three categories, namely task-oriented coping strategies aimed at altering and managing events, emotion-oriented coping which seeks to modify emotional reactions to stress, and avoidance coping such as avoiding situations, denying

stress, loss of hope, distancing oneself and avoiding the problem. Carver, Scheier and Weintraub (1989), in turn, distinguish between five types of problem-focused coping, five types of emotion-focused coping and three lesser-used coping styles, namely focus on and venting of emotions, behavioural disengagement and mental disengagement. However, according to Carver, Scheier and Weintraub (1989), dysfunctional coping strategies are less often used and appear to be less effective than problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. According to Callahan (1993), the coping strategy an individual chooses is often affected by their coping resources. Callahan (1993) states that personality variables are internal coping resources, since the various aspects of the self provide people with personal resources that can help them handle adverse environmental events. Coping resources are the single units required for understanding stress.

According to the Life Span Theory of Control (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995), people use fewer problem-focused coping strategies as they age, because certain things become impossible to control, such as the death of a spouse, for example (Snyder, 2001). Therefore coping strategies change dynamically to meet varying and changing demands over the life span. However, some aspects of coping seem to remain stable throughout life and are unique to particular individuals regardless of age or stressor and can be considered a stable internal personality trait (Snyder, 2001). As people age, encouraging and maintaining activities that are meaningful or have personal value to them promote physical and psychological well-being. Finding meaning is an important factor in an individual's adjustment to negative life events (Antonovsky, 1987). By ascribing meaning to stressful events, people act on their experiences by means of approach coping. In this way, finding meaning is directed at the self and thus, enables the individual to cope effectively, it is important to gain a sense of mastery over stressful events which would otherwise seem uncontrollable and overwhelming.

Several studies on educator coping have been conducted. Research studies (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001; Stanford, 2001; Van Wyk, 2006) conducted among educators regarding their coping strategies and coping resources, found that educators reported colleagues as a source of support. Family and friends have also been documented as sources of support for educators (Stanford, 2001; Van Wyk,

2006). Religion played an important role in coping among educators. Studies (Stanford, 2001; Van Wyk, 2006; Wenzel, Buys & Mostert, 2008) found that educators draw from religion when times get tough and found religion to be a form of guidance. In a study conducted by Engelbrecht, Swart and Eloff (2001), results revealed that educators found it hard to directly intervene with sources of stress. Discussing and seeking support from others seemed to help them cope with the stress. Research studies (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001; Stanford, 2001; Van Wyk, 2006) listed the following sources of support for educators, teaching experience, exercise, being single and associations' cultural organisations. In the study, resilient teachers, resisting stress and burnout, protective factors identified included a sense of agency, a strong support group (including a competent and caring leadership team), pride in achievements and competence in areas of personal importance (Howard & Johnson, 2004).

Individuals defined with low coping resources have been defined as vulnerable and fragile, while those with high coping resources have often been characterised as resilient (Kessler & Essex, 1982; Peterson, 2006). Research has found that gender can serve as a possible dispositional influence in the coping process (Stanton, Parsa and Austenfeld, 2005). Carver, Scheier and Weintraub, (1989) find that women are more likely to use strategies such as seeking emotional support and venting their emotions than men. Men, on the other hand, are more inclined to use problem-focused coping strategies than emotion-focused coping strategies. A South African study conducted by Van der Bijl and Oosthuizen (2007) did a survey among 200 educators, and concluded that female educators reported higher levels of stress than their counterparts, while 90% of female educators reported feeling overworked. Females experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, perceptions of work overload and job dissatisfaction as they find it difficult to balance family life and a career (Wood, 2007). According to Van der Bijl and Oosthuizen (2007) and Wood (2007), combining family life with a career seems to be more straining on female educators.

3.4.2.4 Sense of coherence

The salutogenic paradigm of Antonovsky (1979) sought to explain the relationship between life stressors and health by what he calls Sense of Coherence (SOC). Sense of Coherence can be defined as a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive and enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demand are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement. (Antonovsky, 1993, p. 19). Antonovsky rejects the phrase "sense of control". The person with the strong sense of coherence is not necessarily in control, but there is awareness that the power to determine outcomes is where it is supposed to be (Frankenhoff, 1998).

Sense of Coherence is orientated toward a life development process and involves three major components, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. When individuals score high on these components, they can be identified as having a high Sense on Coherence, and when they score low, they have a weak Sense of Coherence. These components are as follows:

- *Comprehensibility*

Consistent experience provides the basis for the comprehensibility component. This is the sense that an individual's internal and external environments are viewed as structured, predictable, explicable and consistent and occurring events are also viewed as making sense (Antonovsky, 1979). It also implies that, on the basis of past experience, stimuli will also be ordered and predictable in future. It means that perceptions make cognitive sense (Van Jaarsveld, 2005). Accidents happen and terrible things will happen, but a person who rates high on comprehensibility will make sense of them (Antonovsky, 1979).

- *Manageability*

Van Jaarsveld (2005) states that a good load balance in life provides the manageability component. Manageability is also known as the behavioural

component (Skarsater, Rayens, Peden, Hall, Zhang, Agren & Prochazka, 2008), which is the extent to which the individual copes with stimuli and views the available resources as adequate to meet the demands posed by the various stimuli or environment (Antonovsky, 1979). In other words, there is no under- or overload. Even in extreme circumstances these individuals feel the situation is manageable and believe they can handle the consequences of any life event. Having resources at one's disposal refers to either one's own resources, resources under an individual's control, or resources controlled by God or others whom one considers to be trustworthy (Strümpfer, 1995). Individuals with high levels of coherence feel that they have the resources to meet demands, or feel that they know where to obtain help. A person with a high sense of manageability will not feel victimised by events or feel that life is treating him unfairly.

- *Meaningfulness*

Meaningfulness is the emotional identification with events in the environment and a feeling that life makes sense emotionally and that the individual plays a primary role in determining his/ her own daily experiences (Antonovsky, 1979). It includes the belief that these demands are challenging and worthy of personal investment (Flannery & Flannery, 1990). According to Skarsater *et al.* (2008), this component is also known as the motivational component. Although these individuals do feel grieved by death or illness, they respond to problems and challenges by seeking meaning and they believe the events should be overcome with dignity (Skarsater *et al.* (2008).

3.4.2.5 Generalised Resistance Resources (GRR)

Some resources are effective in help dealing with stressors and others in preventing demands from becoming stressors (Matheny, Aycock, Pugh, Curlette & Canella ,1986). This approach is similar to Antonovsky's (1996) Generalised Resistance Resources (GRR). The answer to how individuals maintain psychological health is expressed in the concept of generalised Resistance Resources (GRR), a term invented by Antonovsky (1979). He noted that the strength of SOC is connected to a

variety of coping mechanisms which he refers to as Generalised Resistance Resources. A GRR is described as: "any characteristic of the person, the group, the subculture or society that facilitates avoiding or combating of a wide variety of stressors" (p. 81).

Antonovsky identified Generalised Resistance Resources as artifactual, which include material resources (money, wealth), cognitive-emotional-intrapersonal and emotional (knowledge, intelligence, ego identity), valuative-attitudinal-rationality, flexibility and farsightedness; interpersonal-relational (social support systems) and macro-socio-cultural (cultural norms and rules which control societal and organisational behaviour).

Generalised Resistance Resources (GRR) are developed through life experience and can be a characteristic of an individual, group, subgroup or society that enables effective stress management. GRR enables the avoidance or resolution of stressors (Antonovsky 1979; Strümpfer, 1995). The availability of GRR also play a role in the individual's positioning on the health ease/disease continuum, which can either enhance the salutogenic construct or not, depending on the individual's past experiences with stressors (Antonovsky, 1979). The concept of salutogenesis led Antonovsky to the view that an individual's Generalised Resistance Resources situate him/her upon a "health ease/disease" continuum (Antonovsky, 1987). Whether a strong or a weak Sense of Coherence develops, depends on the availability of Generalised Resistance Resources.

Those with a high SOC bring GRR into play to deal with these stressors, with the end result that they define it as non-stressors and they can adapt to the demand. With the availability of coping resources, individuals choose the appropriate strategy from the available resources at their disposal (Anson, Carmel, Levenson *et al.*, 1993). The salutogenic approach differs from traditional theories of stress and coping in that it emphasises the fact that stress itself may not always be fundamentally detrimental (Antonovsky, 1979).

Antonovsky (1987; 1993) pointed out that the meaningfulness component is the most important of the three dimensions of the Sense of Coherence and also propose that

a high level of meaningfulness enables the individual to transform their coping resources or General Resistance Resources from potential to actual utilisation.

Research (Antonovsky 1987; Strümpher, 1995) has shown that people with a low SOC feel more distressed by, and find it harder to cope with life's conflicts. A weak SOC is likely to result in poor tension management and an inability to mobilise adequate resources, culminating in a health breakdown (Antonovsky, 1987). Low scores on the Sense of Coherence scale indicate the absence of these perceptions and are associated with poorer coping.

However, those with a high SOC tackle life's stresses because they are confident that, ultimately, things will work out well for them, and because they perceive the world as a place with rhyme and reason (McSherry & Holm, 1994). A strong SOC enables one to mobilise effective coping resources in the face of tension, predisposing one to move towards the health side of the health/disease continuum.

3.4.2.5 Development of Sense of Coherence

It is proposed that Sense of Coherence (SOC) develops from the time of birth until approximately the age of 30 years. This development occurs in relation to the individual's experience of the world as predictable and consistent, as well as his or her ability to shape life's outcomes (Antonovky, 1979; Antonovsky & Sagy, 1986). According to Antonovsky (1979), an individual's Sense of Coherence remains stable after the age of 30. SOC is said to influence the manner in which individuals cope with the experiences presented to them by the environment (Antonovsky, 1990). From early on we constantly go through situations of challenge and response, stress, tension, and resolution. The more these experiences are characterised by consistency, participation in shaping outcome, and an underload-overload balance of stimuli, the more we begin to see the world as being coherent and predictable; however, a measure of unpredictable experiences which call for unknown resources is also essential for a strong SOC to develop (Antonovsky, 1979).

This would ultimately lead to a strong Sense of Coherence and therefore generate good health, with health, in turn having a positive effect on well-being (Strümpfer, 1995). A high level of *meaningfulness* motivates individuals to search for order and to make sense of the environment (Korotkof, 1998). Strümpfer and Mlonzi (2001) argue that no significant relationship exits between age and Sense of Coherence; however, Naidoo and Le Roux (2003) found a significantly positive relationship between age and Sense of Coherence. Older participants obtained a high Sense of Coherence score and individuals who have been employed for longer periods of time possess a higher Sense of Coherence than others (Naidoo & Le Roux, 2003).

The SOC is believed to be a construct that is universally meaningful, cutting across lines of gender, social class, region and culture. It does not refer to a specific type of coping strategy, but to factors which are the basis for successful coping with stress in all cultures and times (Strümpfer, 1990). SOC is not a buffer variable for stress, but functions as a mitigator of life stress by addressing the general quality of an individual's behaviour and not the specific responses to specific behaviours (Flannery & Flannery, 1990). In summary, although Sense of Coherence was defined as a relatively stable disposition orientation and having educators teaching learners with learning difficulties, it is possible that the stress caused by learning difiiculties, may impact on the educators sense of coherence.

3.5 Sense of coherence and coping

Sense of Coherence (SOC) is not a coping style; rather a disposition, which allows individuals to select appropriate strategies to deal with stressors confronting them (Strümpfer, 1990; 1995). SOC is a way of appraising the world both cognitively and emotionally which is associated with effective coping health enhancing behaviours and better social adjustment (Strümpfer, 1990; 1995). This theory assumes that stress producing experiences are ubiquitous, but also that people have an array of resistance resources for coping with them (Strümpfer & Mlonzi, 2001). A strong SOC is thus essential for coping with stressful events that form part of everyday life (Antonovsky, 1987; 1996). The strength of an individual's Sense of Coherence is paramount to the regulation of ongoing tension generated by constant tension and

stressors. These individuals are also capable of combining a range of coping responses and resources of their cache of specific and Generalised Resistance Resources.

Individuals with a weak sense of coherence perceive stimuli as unpredictable and chaotic; feel victimised by events that are perceived as uncontrollable (Strümpfer, 1993). They also feel events has little meaning or purpose in their lives and tortured by unwelcome burdens and difficult demands in their lives (Antonovsky, 1987). According to McSherry and Holm (1994), individuals are more psychologically distressed before the event and unlikely to believe they have the resources to cope with the stressors. However, individuals with having a high SOC enjoy positivity, which aids them in dealing with these challenges. SOC affects cognitive appraisal and secondary appraisal (Lazurus & Folkman, 1984) and thus of coping orientation or orientation to life (Antonovsky, 1987). Antonovky (1987) distinguishes between resistance resources as a potential asset and the actual mobilisation and utilisation of resources. The mobilisation of resources in the face of a stressor is the real strength of an individual with a high sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987). While Sense of Coherence is not a coping strategy in itself, individuals with a high Sense of Coherence may be more likely to flexibly adopt adaptive strategies, appropriate to the needs of the specific situation (Antonovsky, 1992). In a study conducted by Pallant and Lae (2002), persons who had higher levels of coherence tended to have higher self esteem, felt more in control of their lives and adopted a more positive and optimistic outlook.

Sense of Coherence has many similarities with the concept of coping, as effective coping increases manageability and information-seeking coping strategies increase comprehensibility (Strang & Strang, 2001). Coping is also more clearly related to meaningfulness by the introduction of meaning-based coping processes. In these strategies even spiritual beliefs and practices are included. Meaning is a central component not only in Sense of Coherence, but also in the spiritual/existential dimension; spirituality can in that sense be related to Sense of Coherence. Spirituality is also related to the other two components of Sense of Coherence, namely comprehensibility and manageability, as religion and faith provide explanations of existential questions and result in increased manageability, as the

individual accepts the situation. Thus, the concept of meaning is emphasised in spirituality as well as in Sense of Coherence, although partly from different points of view.

Studies (Antonovsky, 1987; 1993; Oosthuizen, 2005; Rothmann, 2003) have confirmed that a person's Sense of Coherence is an important component of one's health and well-being. The concept of SOC is not based on particular coping strategies, but it is rather an estimate of the ability individuals (groups) have in coping with difficult situations (Skarsater *et al.,* 2008). Research has also indicated that people who have been employed for longer periods have a greater Sense of Coherence (Naidoo & Le Roux, 2003).

3.6 Criticism against Sense of Coherence

Antonovsky's (1979; 1987) theory has been criticised by several researchers (Geyer, 1997; Pallent & Lae, 2002). The three components of Sense of Coherence are described as interrelated concepts (Geyer, 1997). One criticism of the Sense of Coherence construct centres round whether it should be considered as a whole or in its components. Although Antonovsky (1987) concedes that people may have high scores on one aspect of Sense of Coherence and low scores on the other two, he claims that Sense of Coherence ought to be seen as a globally consistent construct. He gives the example of a middle-class housewife who may be high on Comprehensibility and Manageability, but low on Meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987). Given the above example, there is an indication that referring to one's overall, global sense of coherence may be somewhat misguiding. However, Antonovsky (1987) argues that it is better to look at a person's overall Sense of Coherence as opposed to looking at the subscales individually (Geyer, 1997). This seems to be major contradiction in Antonovsky's (1979; 1987) theory and a major criticism of his work.

Antonovsky (1993) explains his theory further by looking at the role of boundaries. On the one hand, Sense of Coherence is referred to as being a "generalised, long lasting way of seeing the world and one's life in it" (Antonovsky, 1987, p. 26). On the

other hand, Antonovsky (1993) argues that even people who have a strong Sense of Coherence do not necessarily see their entire objective worlds as coherent. He explains this by elaborating on the role of boundaries as he claims that all individuals set boundaries. Antonovsky (1993) argues that what goes on outside of a person's boundaries is not important, even if the events are comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. Individuals differ in terms of what they include within these boundaries; some are narrow and others are broad. The boundary theory suggests that people do not need to consider all of life as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful in order to have a strong Sense of Coherence. People can thus choose to be cognitively and emotionally invested in certain things, while showing little concern for other realms of life. These individuals however are still considered to have a strong Sense of Coherence. Antonovsky (1979) emphasises the importance of people having areas of life which are of subjective importance to them. Some spheres, he argues, are essential and these are an individual's inner feelings, one's immediate interpersonal relations, one's major activities, and existential issues such as death, failures, weaknesses, conflict and isolation (Antonovsky, 1987). If an individual sees any of these spheres as unimportant, by default they are low on meaningfulness.

One aspect of the boundary theory is attention, in that individuals may choose to exclude certain events at a particular time or include life areas at another. This may be temporary. This concept may be criticised because it seems to contradict the idea that sense of coherence is stable and consistent. However, Antonovsky claims that although there is some flexibility of boundaries, the four crucial components discussed above must be taken into account (Antonovsky, 1987).

A critique against SOC is the idea that a strong Sense of Coherence may result in individuals feeling more optimistic and in control of their lives, is the proposition that individuals who already have a positive outlook and who feel good about themselves and their lives may report high levels of coherence on the Sense of Coherence scale (Pallant & Lae, 2002). Levels of optimism may thus influence scores on Sense of Coherence. A second point of criticism is the concern that the SOC measure is too broad in terms of measuring resilience, which indicates that it may simply measure emotional calm and serenity which lies on the opposite end of the continuum from negative affect (Johnson, 2004).

Geyer (1997) notes several problems and inconsistencies related to the Sense of Coherence theory. Firstly, he claims that Sense of Coherence is not the only theory that explains the concept of salutogenesis. Secondly, he points out that mixed results regarding the stability of sense of coherence have been found. Thirdly, Geyer (1997) argues that in defining the dimensions of the Sense of Coherence concept, Antonovsky (1979; 1987) failed to acknowledge the affective side. For example, seeking to achieve goals, coping and active behaviour are rationally motivated and emotionality only plays a small part.

Geyer (1997) lastly postulates that Antonovsky's (1987) definitions for what may be construed as health and illness are vague, and says that consequently, health-preserving factors are also vaguely defined. Geyer (1997) further notes that these shortcomings can be resolved by observing the work of Lazarus (1993), in which he focuses on the integration of emotions as aspects of stress and coping behaviour. Antonovsky (1987) claims that the most important consequence of the salutogenic orientation is that it enables and in fact compels individuals to formulate and advance theories of coping.

3.7 South African studies on Sense of Coherence

The Sense of Coherence construct has been used in various South African studies. Rothmann, Jackson and Kruger (2003) focus on the moderating effect of Sense of Coherence with regard to stress and burnout in the local government. The results indicate that Sense of Coherence combined with job stressors are related to exhaustion, cynicism and professional efficacy. In similar studies, conducted by Basson and Rothmann (2002) and Wissing, De Waal and De Beer (1992), results indicate the same findings. Sense of Coherence, job demands, and a lack of organisational support were strongly related to exhaustion. SOC has also been used in studying job stress and work wellness in an electricity supply organisation (Rothmann, Steyn & Mostert, 2005). The results indicate that job stress because of job demands and lack of support leads to burnout. In a study on personality, Sense of Coherence and the coping of working mothers (Herbst, Coetzee & Visser, 2007), results indicate that several personality dimensions and Sense of Coherence

variables correlate significantly with coping styles. Redelinghuys and Rothmann (2004) also establish a positive relationship between Sense of Coherence and effective coping.

However, very few studies (Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs, 2009) have focused on the Sense of Coherence of educators. Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs (2009) was the first with a study conducted in South Africa to focus on the Sense of Coherence and coping resources of special needs educators. Results in their study indicate a positive relationship between Sense of Coherence and coping resources. These positive correlations confirm the importance of coping resources in the development of a strong Sense of Coherence.

Even though criticism has been expressed against the Sense of Coherence construct, it is evident that the concept is still successfully operationalised in various studies. Furthermore, research (Hutchinson, Stuart & Pretorius, 2007) suggest that intervention strategies that encourage individuals to search for meaning and strengthen Sense of Coherence may be effective in facilitating coping and may contribute positively to the overall health of young people.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter focused on coping and the different definitions thereof as well as coping resources and coping strategies. The historical development of positive psychology was also explored together with the concepts of psychofortology where the main focus was on Sense of Coherence, the definition, its development and the critique thereof. Other positive psychology constructs were also discussed. Chapter 4 will focus on the research methodology.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

An exploratory, qualitative framework has been used to capture the perspective of the Sense of Coherence experienced by educators teaching learners with learning difficulties. This study is located within an interpretivist paradigm (Lynch, 2005), which assumes that there is an "internal reality of subjective experience" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 6). In this study, the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was utilised (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

This chapter proceeds as follows: firstly, the aims of the study will be described. Thereafter, the reader will be introduced with the theoretical underpinnings of IPA. Following that, a description of the processes of participant selection will be provided. This will be followed by a description of how data were collected and analysed. Lastly, the issues of reliability, validity and ethical considerations will be addressed.

4.2 Aims of the study

The overarching aim of this study was to conduct an idiographic exploration of the experience of the Sense of Coherence of mainstream primary school educators in the context of teaching learners with learning difficulties. The following specific research aims were formulated for this study:

a. To obtain a nuanced, understanding of educator's Sense of Coherence.
b. To explore and describe the challenges educators face every day. These challenges refer to daily stressors that may have an impact on the well-being of educators and which in turn influence their ability to teach learners.

c. To explore and describe how educators cope with these challenges.

4.3 Theoretical foundations of IPA

The term *phenomenology* originates from the Greek word *phainemenon,* which means *appearance* (Spinelli, 1989). *Phainemenon* defines and distinguishes the appearance of things from things as they are in reality. Edmund Husserl, the founder and initiator of phenomenology as a school of thought, used phenomenological reduction to introduce the notion of objects or states as they exist in consciousness as opposed to reality (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Husserl used the term *phenomenology* and developed a rigorous science of phenomena free from presupposition and biases (Brennan, 1998).

''Phenomenology is the study of essences'', according to Merleau-Ponty (1995, p. 7). Essences are not the outcome of interpretation or the meaning the researcher awards to a phenomenon. It is not something that only lies within the realm of the object itself. Essence is disclosed in the relation between the researcher and the phenomenon. In this way human beings gain knowledge of the world around them. Phenomenology acknowledges different approaches to the world and it argues that certain forms of knowing may be more constructive than others. Willig (2001) states that phenomenology is more interested in the meanings of individuals' experiences and perceptions of the world than in generalising truth claims about the world.

Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) describe phenomenology as "seeking the psychological meanings that constitutes the phenomenon through investigating and analysing lived examples of the phenomenon within the context of the participants' lives" (p. 27). seen as relationist, an individual form of knowledge about the world.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is one of several methodological approaches situated in this field (Willig, 2001). Other qualitative methods offer greater methodological precision and epistemological certainty; their circumscribed territories may actually provide a safer option for the novice researcher to explore. Problems arise, however. A lack of engagement with phenomenological theory can

only perpetuate the expectation of 'simply descriptive' outcomes. IPA not only describes but tries to understand the participant's world and then develop an overtly interpretative analysis. This approach emphasises the meaning specific experiences, events and states have for the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

This initial description is then contextualised in relation to the wider social, cultural and perhaps even theoretical context of the individuals' experience (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Smith & Osborn (2003) state that this second-order account provides a critical and conceptual commentary on the participants' personal way of making sense of their world. This method allows the researcher to be more speculative with the data, to think about what it means for the participants to make such claims and express certain feelings in this particular situation (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). IPA attempts to go beyond what people say. Relating to what participants say, IPA aims to uncover what people think and feel. Therefore more emphasis is placed on cognitions (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In this, IPA diverges from mainstream psychology when it comes to deciding the appropriate methodology. Mainstream psychology is still strongly committed to quantitative and experimental methodology. IPA employs in-depth qualitative analysis. Thus, IPA and mainstream psychology converge in being interested in examining how people think about what is happening to them but diverge in deciding how this thinking can best be studied (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Interpretive phenomenological analysis is derived from three theoretical approaches: phenomenology (as discussed above), hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism (Smith, 1996). The hermeneutics of phenomenology suggests that exploration of participants is complicated by the "researchers' own conceptions, which are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity" (Smith, 1996, p. 264). According to Smith and Osborn (2003) hermeneutics holds that while the researcher attempts to understand the world of the research participant, this cannot be achieved without interpretation by the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA employs two forms of hermeneutics: interpretative instances which are empathic hermeneutics and questioning hermeneutics. Empathic hermeneutics concerns' elucidating what life is like from the participants' point of view and questioning hermeneutics involves the researcher asking critical

questions of what is being said by the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In both cases double hermeneutics are involved: the participant who is trying to make sense of his or her world and the researcher who is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith & Eatough, 2007). Lastly, symbolic interactionism refers to meanings individuals attach to their experiences. In consistency with the origins of phenomenology, IPA is concerned as to stand as far as possible in the shoes of the participant (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

IPA explores a person's lived and personal experience, and tries to examine how these humans make sense of their worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2003). These methods also acknowledge research as a dynamic process. Special reference is made to the researcher, focusing on the active role, he/she plays in the process. The end result depends a lot on the researchers' own conceptions of the participants experiences. Where IPA attempts to explore the participant's experience from his or her perspective, in doing so, IPA recognises that exploration of a participant's experience must implicate the researchers own view of the world. Both participant and researcher are part of the interaction that phenomenology is interested in. Therefore the analysis produced by the researcher can be regarded as an interpretation of the participant's experience (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

The aim of IPA is not simply to describe phenomena, but to examine cognitions and emotions underlying descriptions of subjective experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). The IPA researcher realises that chains of connections are not straightforward and sometimes people have difficulty in expressing their feelings and emotions. Therefore the researcher has to interpret from the participant's emotional and mental state what he/she is saying (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

IPA is an idiographic mode of inquiry, i.e. it utilises a case-by-case approach. This process usually starts with a detailed analysis of case studies and then moves on to more general statements about groups of individuals (Smith, 1996). It can then be written up as a case study or the researcher can utilise the same approach in the next case. Themes are abstracted from the interviews. The focus is on the participants' meaning-making and interpretation, a concern with identity and their sense of self and an attention to bodily feeling within lived experience (Smith &

Eatough, 2007).The method is restricted to a small number of participants as the method illuminates an intimate interpretation of an individual's experience (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

4.3.1 Benefits of using interpretative phenomenological analysis

IPA is flexible and open-ended in its data analysis methods and allows the participant to discuss aspects of their experiences that may be unexpected for the researcher (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Shaw, 2001). Brocki and Wearden (2006) point out the IPA's ability to engage with both new areas without a theoretical pretext and existing theoretical framework is a particular strength. It is therefore beneficial as it can potentially lead to the uncovering of constructs which were not known. This circumstance makes IPA is an exploratory tool, which is data-driven. Another benefit of IPA includes its capacity to investigate human experiences within their cultural context. This acknowledges the contextualising factors which are at work in the individuals' life. Factors may directly or indirectly play a part in the meaning-making process (Shaw, 2001). IPA therefore seeks to capture subjective, unshared aspects (idiosyncrasies) and the shared aspects of experience that are constructed by external forces within the context of contemporary culture.

A number of qualitative datagathering tools, such as diaries, semi-structured interviews and personal accounts can be used to gather data within an IPA method. Of these three possibilities, the present study uses semi-structured interviews as a method. Semi-structured interviews are less formal (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999), flexible and useful for gaining insight into people's personal beliefs and perceptions (Smith, 1996). Semi-structured interviews also tend to produce richer data (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to get to know people closely and to gain insight into what they feel and think (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). Although semi-structured interviews are used by guiding questions, the questions need not dictate or control the flow of the interview. This type of interview method is valuable when dealing with complex emotional processes and personal issues (Smith, 1996).

In contrast to the benefits, this form of interviewing reduces the control the investigator has over the situation. It also takes longer to carry out, and is harder to analyse (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

4.3.2 Limitations of interpretative phenomenological analysis

IPA has drawn some criticism mainly from Willig (2001). Smith (2008), however, states that these "limitations" would be better termed as "issues" or "questions". Larkin (2008), in turn, expresses counter-explanations for these limitations. These views will be discussed, because they highlight some potential difficulties in presenting IPA results.

4.3.2.1 The role of language and eloquence

IPA is dependent on the participants' ability to express their views and the researchers' ability to record them correctly. Willig (2001) claims that language constructs reality instead of describing reality. The same event can be described using many different ways, using different words. She highlights that interview scripts tells us more about the eloquence of the participant than about the experience they describe. Willig (2001) also questions the participants' ability to use language in a way to capture the subtleties and nuances of their physical and emotional experiences.

Larkin (2008), however, claims that IPA does not claim to directly access another person's experience but rather claims to access an account of their experiences. He further states that IPA is an analytical process that is based on close engagement with the participants' language use: the meanings of words are not only interpreted but the added meaning is also provided by the context of the participants' world (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

4.3.2.2 Explanation versus description

According to Willig (2001), IPA only describes the lived experiences of participants but do not explain it. IPA therefore disregards the origin and in this process limits any

understanding of the phenomenon. Kvale (1996) and Smith, Jarman and Osborn, (1999) argue that the rich descriptions of how the participants perceive the world do not further our understanding of why such experiences take place.

Larkin (2008), like Willig (2001), agrees that IPA is not explanatory, but he states that it's true for all in qualitative psychology. Larkin (2008) argues that IPA is explicitly interpretative and explanatory: it develops from a descriptive core but proceeds to be interpretative. Lemon and Taylor (1997) claims that a phenomenologist approach provides a perspective that cannot be obtained through other means and it is therefore a useful framework for understanding experience.

4.4 Participants' selection

A purposive sampling method was used to select appropriate participants to participate in the study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Purposive sampling is a sampling method used when participants need to be selected to meet a specific criterion (Neuman, 2000). Inclusion criteria stipulated that educators should currently be in the teaching profession and should have been teaching learners with learning and behavioural difficulties in Grade one to three for at least three years. These educators also needed to have at least three children with learning difficulties in their classes. Participants needed to speak either Afrikaans or English fluently and had to be willing to share their story openly with the researcher.

4.5 Procedure

The gathering of data consisted of two phases. The first phase entailed the administering of the Antonovsky's *Sense of Coherence* scale (see Appendix D). This questionnaire is used to measure those personality factors which promote coping and well-being (Antonovsky, 1987). This questionnaire was used to identify educators who score high on the construct of Sense of Coherence. Questionnaires were made available in English and Afrikaans. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Free State Department of Education (see Appendix A).

Questionnaires were personally delivered by the researcher to the respondents, who completed it in their own time. The researcher distributed 130 questionnaires to eight different schools and 81 questionnaires were received after completion. Of these, 73 completed questionnaires were used for further analysis.

The biographical data of the participants were as follows: The mean ages of the participants were 47 with a standard deviation of 11,12. In reporting their language, 6,8% reported English as their home language, 90,4% were Afrikaans and 1,4% Sesotho. Percentages not mentioned accounted for missing values. In reporting their marital status, 75% were married, 11% were divorced, 5,5% were separated and 2,7% were involved in common-law marriages. All the participants were females. In reporting their years in the teaching profession, 23,3 % stated they had been in the profession for 1-5 years, 6,8 % for 6-10 years, 26% for 11-20 years and the majority (39,7%) indicated they had been in the teaching profession for more than 20 years.

Five participants were randomly selected from the sample of participants who scored high on Antonovsky's SOC questionnaire for inclusion in the second phase of the data gathering process. These participants were telephonically contacted to set up in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow for rapport to develop and enable complex data to be elicited, and allow the freedom to pursue unforeseen areas. They also enable the researcher to be active in promoting and guiding discussion while simultaneously permitting participants the freedom to tell their story in their own way (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

An interview schedule (see Appendix E) was constructed based on the domains identified in the literature. Brocki and Weardan (2006) point out that while IPA studies base their interview schedule on established literature, reflexivity is important in order to be aware of potential biases that this may incur. Smith and Osborn (2003) maintain that the interview schedule should be followed as far as it is useful in bringing about an understanding of participants' experience. However, they stress that this should be flexible rather than a rigid guide. They further point out that unforeseen areas sometimes emerge that are worthy of investigation. Therefore, how much leeway is permitted in diverging from the interview schedule is suggested to be determined at the researcher's discretion (Acheson, 2008).

One semi-structured interview of one and a half hour was conducted with each of the participants. The interview focused on allowing participants to share their story in full and to clarify and explore certain themes. Participants were asked permission to tape record the interview. Once verbal permission for taping was obtained, interviews were audio-taped. Interviews were then accurately transcribed. Following IPA procedure, the pages were divided into three columns (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The transcribed text was positioned in the central column, and a column was left open on each side of the text for subsequent analysis.

4.6 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is an ongoing process that often begins when relevant literature is read during the data collection phase and/or while interviews are being transcribed (Kvale, 1996). The IPA methodological approaches (Smith & Osborn, 2003) were utilised in this study. Smith and Osborn (2003) argue that interpretative phenomenological analysis is a flexible rather than prescriptive methodology and they acknowledge that it may be necessary to adapt this method to best suit a particular topic.

4.6.1 The process of IPA data analysis

The interview transcripts (see Appendix F) were read a number of times because the meaning in text takes time to grasp. The left-hand margin was used to annotate what is interesting or significant about what the participant said. It is vital in the first stage of the analysis to read and reread the transcript to become familiar with the content of the interview. There are no rules about what is commented upon, and some parts of the interview were richer than others. Some of the comments were attempts at summarising or paraphrasing; some were associations or connections that came to mind, and others were preliminary interpretations. As the researcher progressed through the transcript, she commented on similarities and differences, echoes, amplifications and contradictions on what the participant was saying (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

This process was continued for the entire transcript. The right-hand margin was utilised to document the tentative/emerging themes. This was done by converting the initial comments that were in the left-hand margin into more precise phrases that encapsulated the core meanings of the text. Initial notes were transformed into concise phrases. These phrases involved a "slightly higher level of abstraction and may invoke more psychological terminology" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 68).

This transformation of initial notes into themes was continued through the whole transcript. Similar themes emerged as the researcher went through the transcript; therefore the same title is repeated. At that stage the entire transcript was treated as data and the number of emerging themes reflects the richness of the particular passage (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

4.6.2 Connecting the themes

Once emergent themes were listed on a sheet of paper, the researcher looked for connections between them. Initially themes were chronological – it was based on the sequence in which they came up in the transcript. Themes were then organised into a more theoretical and analytical order as the researcher was trying to make sense of the themes that emerged. Some themes were clustered together and labels were assigned to each cluster.

In the next stage attempts were made to cluster themes together. The aim was to arrive at a group of themes and to identify superordinate categories that suggest a hierarchal relationship between them (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003). During the last stage, a summary list was compiled. This contained a table of structured themes, together with quotations which illustrated each theme. The table only included themes relevant to the phenomenon under study, meaning that some themes that emerged during the previous phases were excluded (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Willg, 2001). The researcher's decision to retain or abandon themes was inevitably influenced by her interest and orientation (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Willg, 2001). Whichever approach is adopted; it is important to be disciplined to discern repeating patterns but also acknowledge new issues emerging as one works through the transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The researcher had different options to analyse the rest of the transcript. The first option was the use of the master list of themes from the first interview to identify more instances in subsequent interviews, while also being alert to the possibilities of new themes. A second approach was to start the process afresh with the second interview and therefore produce a new list of themes (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The second option was used because it was deemed imperative that recurring patterns and the new issues in the transcripts be recognised.

In summary, the IPA is a process where the researcher proceeds through several stages:

- Stage 1: first encounter with the text
- Stage2: preliminary themes identified
- Stage 3: grouping themes together as clusters
- Stage 4: tabulating themes in a summary table

In presenting and discussing these IPA themes, it was important to clearly differentiate between the participant's words and the researcher's own reflections (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

4.7 Reliability and validity

IPA acknowledges the active and constructive role of the researcher and denies the possibility of an objectively perceived reality. The researcher made an attempt to minimise bias and uphold the trustworthiness of the analysis as far as possible.

4.7.1 Reliability of the study

The researcher strived to maintain reliability by IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Verbatim comments were used throughout the analysis in order to transparently demonstrate how interpretations were linked to the data. Brocki and Wearden (2006) state that several studies have strived to attain interrater reliability. This study also utilised the strategy, which is whereby an independent researcher

checks that the interpretations and themes that were attained are grounded in the data. An independent expert and the researcher's supervisor also looked at the themes.

4.7.2 Validity of the study

Prior to the interviews, sense-of-coherence questionnaires were administered to detect educators who scored high on the scale. Interviewers were then selected from that group to ensure participants obtained a high score on personality factors that promote coping and well-being. Participants were told that the focus of the research is to determine their psychological strengths, especially when teaching learners with learning difficulties. The interviews included stress-related questions to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they had to face every day and from that to see how well they coped. Every participant had to tell her story as authentically as possible.

Brocki and Wearden (2006) state that IPA guidelines do not specify to what extent the researcher should share her interpretations with the participant during the interview. During the interviews, the researcher tried to put tentative interpretations and reflections across to them so that they could be clarified and checked. In particular, efforts were made to clarify where aspects of perceived stressors attributed to successful coping. These efforts were made in order to try to ensure validity.

4.8 Ethical considerations

A number of ethical issues needed to be addressed in this study. Firstly, ethical clearance to conduct the study were gained from the ethical committe of the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State. Secondly, since the study was conducted among educators, consent had to be requested from the Free State Department of Education, as well as from principals from each school. Thirdly, participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and on the basis of informed consent. Informed consent was obtained both verbally and in writing from

participants. Participants were explained the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study. In addition, signed consent for permission to tape the interviews was also obtained. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any point. In the event that participants became distressed during the interviews, participants were made aware that they could be referred to a registered psychologist for possible counselling. Care was also taken to ensure that the content of the audio-taped interviews and the interview transcripts remained confidential.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter started by clarifying the aims of the study. The theoretical foundations of IPA were then discussed. The researcher described the process of participant selection, the data gathering process, and demonstrated how IPA was used to elicit themes. Reliability, validity and the ethical considerations of the study were also attended to. Chapter 5 will focus on the results and the discussion thereof.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to determine the Sense of Coherence of educators in mainstream primary schools when teaching learners with learning difficulties. Specific attention was given to the challenges educators face as well as their psychological resources and strengths that are in place in dealing with these challenges. In this chapter the key terms that emerged in the analysis of the data are presented. Areas that were addressed included an exploration of the current challenges educators is faced with in the school system; how these challenges affect educators; an exploration of strategies educators uses to deal with these challenges and the meaning educators attribute to teaching.

Antonovky's (1987) Sense of Coherence construct will be used as theoretical framework against which the data will be interpreted. This construct consists of three components, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987). Sense of Coherence is referred to as a psychological personality trait which suggests certain responses to different types of stress situations. The perception of the world as coherent and predictable is derived from the extent to which a person experiences equality (evenness) of stimuli intensity, a firm heading towards personal objectives and underload and overload of stress (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1986; Oosthuizen, 1994). A strong Sense of Coherence is related to a better possibility of maintaining a position on the health/disease continuum. This causes the individual to have a better understanding of the stressor and interpret the stressor as something which should not be given way to. As a result, the impact of stress on the individual is relieved (Antonovsky, 1987).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the transcripts. IPA describes and tries to understand the participant's world, and then develop an overtly interpretative analysis. The focus is on the meaning particular events have for the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The information gathered from the interviews was interpreted and themes relevant to the aims of the study were extracted by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. Interesting and important information were marked and eventually themes emerged. The researcher made a list of master themes and the original themes became subthemes, which she clustered under several headings. During the final step she produced a consolidated table of themes and subthemes for the group of participants as a whole.

5.2 Themes

Six primary themes emerged from the analysed data, namely:

a) Work-related stressors

b) Personal distress

c) Protective factors

d) Passion for teaching

e) Personal and professional investment

f) Personal meaning

The identified themes were divided in relation to the components of Antonvsky's Sense of Coherence concept (Antonovsky, 1987). Table 1 presents a summary of the components and the primary themes under which it has been placed.

Table 1: Division of component and themes

Component	Theme
Comprehensibility	Theme 1: Work-related stressors Theme 2: Personal distress
Manageability	Theme 3: Protective factors
Meaningfulness	Theme 4: Passion for teaching Theme 5: Personal and professional investment Theme 6: Personal meaning

Theme one and theme two will focus on the comprehensibility component of Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence construct. The manageability component will be covered in theme three. Meaningfulness will be discussed in themes four, five and six.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Work-related stressors

According to Antonovsky (1987), comprehensibility is the extent to which individuals perceive the stimuli that confront them as making cognitive sense. When these individuals experience future stimuli, they expect it to be predictable, even when these stimuli come as a surprise; stimuli will be perceived as ordered and explicable. This, however, does not mean that when an individual goes through life- or death-changing transitions, they will not be affected by it. What it does mean, is that the individual will make sense of the event.

Sense of Coherence (SOC) indicates a positive dispositional orientation to the environment where individuals with a high Sense of Coherence experience lower levels of stress and burnout (Basson & Rothman, 2002; Coetzee, 2004; Naidoo & Le Roux, 2003). SOC implies that stressors are viewed as positive and meaningful

challenges which can be managed in such a way as to result in optimal outcomes. People who function with such a perception on life will have resistance to the effects of stress (Antonovsky, 1993).

Educator stress is a global phenomenon (Crute, 2004; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). South Africa educators not only have to cope with the normal pressures of teaching, but they also carry a heavy burden with regard to the implementation of Curriculum 2005 and Outcomes-Based Education. As a result, many educators feel overburdened and overwhelmed (Olivier & Venter, 2003).

Participants in this study all expressed their concern regarding the lack of understanding and empathy displayed by the National Department of Education. They all agreed that the Department had no idea what was going on in classrooms. Similarly, when asked about the challenges or frustrations they faced in their profession, the same themes emerged, namely dissatisfaction and disappointment towards the Department of Education. Nine main stressors namely unrealistic expectations from the Department of Education, administration, assessment, behavioural problems, extra-mural and other activities, large classes and heavy workload, long hours and multiple roles, poor remuneration and learners with personal problems were identified by the participants and will be discussed in the following section.

5.2.1.1 Unrealistic expectations from the Department of Education

All the participants interviewed in this study displayed a negative attitude towards the Department of Education regarding the process of decision making as well as the unrealistic expectations from educators. These educators expressed a sense of frustration and claimed the Department of Education lacked insight into the effects of decisions on them. Participant 2, for example, appeared emotional when stating that the Department of Education really did not understand what they had to go through. She felt officials at the department had to experience it for themselves by standing in front of a class and maybe then they would revise their unrealistic decisions: "*Weet jy, ek dink nie hulle weet nie, ek dink hulle moet miskien in die klasse kom staan dan*

sal hulle nie onrealistiese eise aan 'n onderwyseres of onderwyser stel nie. Want op hierdie stadium, neem hulle net besluite en hulle weet nie regtig of hulle besef nie dat dit nie kan werk nie." (par 2).

The frustration expressed by these participants is similar to frustrations expressed by a group of participants in a study conducted by Van der Bijl and Oosthuizen (2007) among 200 educators in the northern suburbs of Cape Town.

Furthermore, participants in the current study expressed a sense of frustration with what they perceived as a lack of understanding by administrators in the department. Participant 3 claimed that some of these administrators had been educators in the past, but that the curriculum had changed and things were no longer the same as when the administrators had been in the occupation. According to Participant 3, the Department has set unrealistic demands which are not possible to achieve. "...*Soos die kurrikulum verander het, ek dink party het lank terug hier gestaan, maar nou sit hulle daar en neem besluite en hulle is nie daar om die praktiese uitvoerbaarheid daarvan te sien nie...*" (par 2) and participant 1 adds: "*They have not got a cooking clue. Yes, they are trying to assist us, they have no idea. Yes, some of them have been teachers before, in the past but things are different. Teaching are no longer the same...*" (par 2)

These aspects highlighted above confirm research findings of Van Wyk (2006). In her study, educators expressed that their biggest frustration was to put up with all the changes and demands of the Department of Education. Educators in Van Wyk's study further contended that they were expected to accept all changes proposed by the department without sufficient support and training to implement it. Similarly, Wood (2007) found that educators that participated in her study were so disturbed by the decisions the department made that they threatened to write a letter to the Department of Education to express their feelings. Educators felt left out when it came to decision making. These findings highlight the fact that educators face stress in implementing change without being part of the decision making.

The introduction of Outcomes-Based Education by the Department of Education, imposed more responsibility on educators ultimately resulting in higher levels of stress for the educator (Van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2007). Participant 5, for example,

describes Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) as a big problem, comparing it to a nightmare. *"...I mean, OBE made everything a nightmare. Not even the people who tell us what to do, the facilitators, they don't even know what it is to implement the system. What they doing are unrealistic..."* (par 2). Furthermore, Curriculum 2005 with its Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) and continuous assessment of learners' performance has created more administrative responsibilities for educators (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002). Van der Bijl and Oosthuizen, in a study conducted amongst 200 educators in 2007 concluded that educators are currently very dissatisfied with the system of OBE. The general view of participants taking part in their study was that OBE was an unworkable system and their workload increased so much with no prospects of improved results. Furthermore, these educators stated that their levels of st ress have increased dramatically as a result of these educational changes (Poppleton & Williamson, 2004).

5.2.2 Administration

The introduction of Outcomes-Based Education has placed additional administrative demands on educators. These demands range from formulating rubrics to putting portfolios together for learners. According to Van Wyk (2006) and Wilson and Hall (2002), the amount of paperwork educators have to deal with in most cases is linked to OBE. Educators in these studies identified administration as the one of the biggest frustrations they had as there was inadequate time for preparation and unrealistic deadlines were imposed upon them. Administrative issues, involving taking full responsibility and accountability for educational outcomes of learners as well as adapting the curriculum and adjusting the unit plans to support the learners' needs in an inclusive environment, were also contributing factors to the high levels of stress experienced by educators (Eloff, Engelbrecht, Oswald & Swart, 2002).

The high amount of administration expected from educators is a huge source of stress for participants interviewed in this study (Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs, 2009; Eloff, Engelbrecht, Oswald & Swart, 2003). All the educators reported that too much time goes into the administration part of their work. These educators claim that teaching time is often limited and they are unable to conduct all the administration at

school, with the result that they had to do it at home. *"...Nou sê almal dis 'n halfdagwerk, jy moet dit in die middag doen, maar nou vergeet hulle in die middag is daar sport, papierwerk..."* (participant 3, par 2)

The constant changes in the system affect administration because it disrupts educators' planning. Educators expressed a sense of frustration because the majority of them entered teaching to work with the learners, but now they are so busy with administration they neglect the learners. Participants 1 and 3 add as follows: "...*It's just too much administration. Sometimes I look at my table and there's no way that it can be clean...*" (participant 1, par 5) "...*Dit is baie onrealisties veral as dit by die administratiewe gedeelte van die werk kom...*" (participant 3, par 2). Engelbrecht, Swart and Eloff (2001), in their study regarding the stress and coping skills of educators teaching learners with Down syndrome, found that administrative issues to be a big source of stress.

Participant 3 furthermore suggested that an assistant be appointed to assist them with the administration and that would help them to focus on the learners. "...*Ek dink ons moet teruggaan soos die oorsee se mense wat 'n assisstent het, wat net jou administrasie kan doen...*" (par 2). According to participant 3, there is no time for learners and she always feels rushed and pressured by time and the tasks that need her attention. "...*Jy wil tyd aan hulle gee, maar dan is jy so gedruk oor die ander goed wat jy moet doen, ... laat dit vir my voel ek kom nie by hulle uit nie, soos ek wil nie, want dit is eintlik wat ek wil doen...*" (par 3)

A further frustration expressed by educators is the inability of learners to return forms on their due dates. Participant 1 describes the time pressures: "...*Like now we gave out forms two weeks ago, I still haven't received all of them, every day we remind the children. Some of them have mistakes on them...*" (par 5). Participant 4 stated that the constant changes to the system left educators even more stressed, because it added to the administration and it interfered with their planning. *"...Ons het nou ons hele beplanning vir verlede jaar, ons is nou goed met ons beplanning, toe kom hulle nou weer met die nuwe goed, die mylpale, die vlakke het verander, die persentasies het verander, nou moet ons al ons goed weer verander..."* (par 2). According to this educator, the younger educators who started to teach now do not cope so well with the administration because they are not used to it. "… *omdat ek dalk al oud is, en*

langer in die onderwys is, weet ek hoe om die administrasie te hanteer. Ek kan dit dalk beter doen as die jongetjies wat nou begin..." (par 2). Naidoo and Le Roux (2003), in a study conducted with educators, conclude that individuals who were employed for longer periods of time obtained a higher Sense of Coherence. Participant 4 states her primary reason for studying teaching was to work with learners and now she suffers from work overload as a result of the volume of administration, not only at school, but at home as well. *"...Nou doen ek soveel administrasie by die huis en in die klas dat ek nie regtig by die kind uitkom nie, wat die primêre doel daarvan is nie. Baie keer verloor jy die kinders omdat jy aandag gee aan die klomp werk moet gee..."* (par 2).

5.2.1.3 Assessment

The amount of time spent on assessment has previously been identified as a big source of stress for educators (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; Wood, 2007). Similarly, participants in the current study concluded that assessment took up too much time. According to the participants, this placed educators as well as learners under a considerable amount of pressure to perform.

Participant 2, for example, expressed how frustrating assessment was nowadays; compared to before the changes took place. *"...Kom ons sê die gewone assessering; Jy het net jou voete gevind. Toe kom hulle nee, ons moet van tyd tot tyd evalueer en van tyd tot tyd assesseer. Dit wil sê jy's nou so besig om te evalueer en te assesseer. Toe kom hulle en sê die evaulering val nou heeltemal weg en jy moet nou twee keer 'n kwartaal assesseer. Ek gaan vir jou nou wys. Jy het twee weke tyd om jou werk aan te bied in die klas en dit vas te lê. Dan moet jy vir 'n hele week assesseer. Dis 'n nagmerrie...* (par 4). The above statement highlights similar findings found in a study conducted by Wood (2007). Educators in Wood's study found it frustrating to deal with the constant changes of assessment techniques. Wood concludes by suggesting that this is a huge source of stress for both educators and the learners.

Another concern expressed by participants was that they had to sit with preparation and assessment after hours. Additionally, it is also expected of educators to work over weekends, with the result that there no time for family or time to relax. *"… so daar is regtig nie 'n naweek wat verbygaan wat jy nie gesit het met skoolwerk en voorbereidings en beplanning nie* (par 4). *"When I go home, I can't go and relax; in teaching there is always preparation to do* (participant 5, par4). According to Poppleton and Williamson (2004), the main reason educators found their work "difficult and time consuming" was because of the demands concerning lesson preparation, preparation for meetings and the demands of OBE assessment placed on them. These findings are similar to those of Jackson and Rothman (2006) that suggest that lesson preparation, the marking of assignments and class tests all contribute to stress among educators.

5.2.1.4 Learner behavioural problems

The educators interviewed in this study all claimed that learners are undisciplined. According to these educators, learners who often disrupted classes were not necessarily the ones that had learning difficulties. "...*I also think children are not as disciplined as they used to be* (par 2). *Behaviour problems are also a concern..."* (par 12). Studies (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001; Paulse, 2005; Van Wyk, 2006) conducted among South African educators suggest that learner behavioural problems are a major source of stress for educators. According to the interviewed educators, having learners with behaviour problems in big classes are often disruptive to the learning process, since a positive relationship exists between class size and behaviour problems (Van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2007). According to Greydanus,Ptatt, Spates, Blake-Dreher, Greydanus, Gearhart and Patel, (2003) many educators perceive disciplinary problems as the results of the abolishment of corporal punishment, resulting in insecurities and stress among educators. Accordingly, educators end up feeling disempowered, frustrated and even abused because they feel that no adequate measures are in place to enforce discipline.

5.2.1.5 Extra-mural and other activities

Participants in this study often felt that people were wrongly under the impression by thinking teaching was a half-day occupation. Most of the educators interviewed for this study were involved in extra-mural activities which took place after school. Participants complained that these extra-mural activities took up a lot of their time. Participant 4 explains her situation as follows: "...*Die buitemuurs ook, ek is nou vanmiddag af, maar die buitemuurs. Op 'n Maandag byvoorbeeld kom ek skool toe, net na skool het ons tennisliga, dan kom ek eers vyf uur, half-ses by die huis..."* This comment confirms similar findings reported by Jackson and Rothman (2006) in a study conducted amongst educators. Results of their study indicate that long hours are a source of stress and participation in extra-mural activities increases the chances that the services of educators would be needed after hours. According to Oliver and Venter (2003), working long hours often entails helping out with extra-mural activities like sports, coaching and refereeing.

Some of the educators interviewed in this study also encountered problems with students with learning difficulties who had to attend remedial classes. Participant 4 states: "...*Hy cope nie met die werk nie en dan kry hy ekstra Remediërende Onderrig, die onderwyser onttrek hom uit die klas uit..."* (par 10). According to Participant 1, learners are never present in class, and they fall behind with the work that she does with the other learners. "...*Most of the time children are outside the class, They come to class, they settle down, you with them for 15 minutes, they go to the library, they come to class for 10 minutes, there's no stability, teacher-child time is minimised..."* (par 2). According to the educator, she often ends up repeating the work to them although there is no time to do so. "...*Students going for private music lessons, I've got three and they go to lessons, now I can't go on with the lesson. Got 7 children for remedial. What can you do?..."* (Par 12)

5.2.1.6 Large classes and high workload

All of the interviewed educators suggested that classes were too big. According to these educators, big classes result in educators not having enough time to address

the personal needs of every learner. "...*I also think our classes in South Africa are too big, overseas they say the ideal size is 18...*" (par 4). "*... you haven't got time to individually and it's a pity you know, dis 'n onreg wat ons die kinders aandoen because the classes are so big...*" (participant 5, par 10). In a study conducted by Olivier and Venter (2003) results indicate that educators are suffering with large classes (sometimes up to 60 learners) and the demands (not having enough time to attend to learners need) related to that. A concern expressed in this study (Olivier & Venter, 2003) is that these big classes lead to more behavioural problems from learners. This could leave an educator with feelings of helplessness and frustration.

Having to teach learners with learning difficulties in a big class creates a challenge. Additionally, having a big class on its own creates frustration, because it is not always possible to control the learners. Learners with learning difficulties need extra help from the educator with their work. This may cause stress to the educator, because the educator must control the entire situation by helping the learners with learning difficulties as well as managing the rest of the class. According to the participants, it is often difficult to have such a heavy workload, incorporated into a big class and having learners with different levels of functioning. Learners with learning difficulties also take so much longer to master the work compared to other learners in the class: *"… om jou sterk kind altyd te motiveer en altyd extra werk vir hom te hê en om jou swak kindjie ook te akkommodeer, in 'n klassituasie met dertig kinders, dit is die heel grootste uitdagin*g..." (participant 4, par 4). Research studies (Kinman & Jones, 2003; Mariarty, Edmonds, Blatchford & Martin, 2001) have found that educators do not have enough time to achieve the standards of teaching and learning they want, which include the time to attend to the needs of the learners. According to Participant 2, the amount of work that she has to cover in a term compares to the amount having to be covered in a matric class. There is no time for the amount of work that has to be covered. According to her it is too much for the learners to handle. "...*Ek kry net nie tyd nie. Jy kan self sien met 'n 2-weke fase, nuwe werk aan te leêr en vas te lê, en hulle is kinders, dis erger as matriek. Blaai deur daar die boek, dan kyk jy, en onthou hulle moet dit binne 'n week se tyd klaar kry* (par 4). *Dis verskriklik. Die arme klein kinders, hulle kry swaar. En weet jy dis hoekom ons kinders so aan stres ly...*" (par 5)

Participant 3 expresses frustration when there is a lot of work to cover for the day and learners take too long to complete the work. This educator also expresses getting frustrated with repition of work, not because learners don't understand, but because they do not listen or pay attention. She says the workload is too much for the time attributed to it, *"… en baie keer kry jy jou frustrasies want dan het jy die volume werk wat jy vandag moet afhandel en daar die een is besig om te lank te vat, en dit kan ook frustreerend wees as hulle dieselfde ding honderd keer wil weet na die tyd en jy weet dis nie oor hulle nie verstaan het nie, dis net oor hulle nie geluister het nie, hier is so vyf in my klas wat daagliks by my is wat ek moet help en dit voel vir my, by die ander kom ek net nooit uit nie..."* (par 11)

The impact of heavy workloads and time pressures on educators has been well documented in several studies (Motseke, 1998; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001; Wilson & Hall, 2002). According to an article in the *Sunday Times* (1 January 2006), 75% of educators believe that their workload has increased. Not only does high workload and pressures have a negative effect on educators but learners also have to cope with the overburdened educator. The stressed learner cannot cope with the demands of the work, and then ultimately creates a stressful environment in the classroom, which affects the stress level of the educator even more.

5.2.1.7 Long hours and multiple roles

The role of the educator in South Africa has changed significantly when compared to a few years ago (Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2002; Van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2007). Educators are not just expected to spend more and more time at school but also have to fulfil multiple roles (Olivier & Venter, 2003; Wood, 2007). According to the educators that participated in this study they spend an enormous amount of time at school and with schoolwork and preparation. After school they have to attend to extra-mural activities and sometimes attend meetings. Participants complained that even when they got home, they could not relax, because they had to prepare and still do assessments as well as attend to their families. Preparation takes more time because educators must be more creative and inventive to accommodate learners with learning difficulties (Mpya, 2007). "...*When I go home, I can't go and relax, in*

teaching there is always preparation to do, the job doesn't stop. I don't have my weekends, at the same time, I always feel like a juggler, keeping all the balls in the air, or like I'm walking a tight rope..." (participant 5, par 4).

According to participant 2, having grown children, who have left the house can be regarded as beneficial, because one does not have responsibilities towards them and one can do one's work after school at school without disturbance. According to this educator, educators with small children do experience problems because those children still need care and attention, which is not always possible, considering the amount of work, that is being done after hours. "...*Ek is in die gelukkige posisie, my kinders is al uit die skool uit. My kinders is getroud en uit die huis uit. Maar mense met klein kindertjies sukkel nog al, soos ek merk my werk in die middae na skool en ek doen my ander werke na skool..."(par 4).*

According to Olivier and Venter (2003), long working hours entails educators spending long hours at school, help with extra-mural activities, or are involved with meetings after hours. Married females often experience more stress than the single ones. In the evening most females take care of the family before doing three hours of marking, preparation and setting test and exams (Wood, 2007).*"...Dis baie sleg, jy sit naweke, mense wat nie weet nie, se dis net 'n half dag werk, maar hulle verstaan dit nie altyd nie, jyt 'n uur sport dan het jy 'n half uur af en dan moet jy weer na die volgende aktiwiteit toe, in die half uur is dit om die sport toerusting te gaan bêre, die kind weer by die mamma te kry, dan gaan jy gou kafee toe om jou goeitjies te gaan kry, en as jy by die huis kom is dit die kos en die wasgoed, wat enige ander mens het,* (par 4).*... dis wat baie ook nie besef nie Vrydae het jy die middag 'n ding om bytewoon, die Saterdag oggend het jy 'n ding om by te woon, en as jy weer sien is die naweek daarmee heen, en Sondag sit jy en doen die nasien werk wat Vrydag gebeur het, om die maandag weer te begin, so daar is regtig nie 'n naweek wat verbygaan wat jy nie gesit het met skoolwerk en voorbereidings en beplaning nie..."* (participant 3, par 4). According to Wood (2007), being an educator may infringe on time spent with family and friends on social and recreational activities in the evenings and over weekends.

On the other hand, Participant 4 states that she is used to the long hours. The school is currently busy with fundraising, thus being an educator is not the only role.

She also expresses the restrictions placed upon her when needing to organise things concerning her other roles. Once again, time is a problem. She explains as follows: "...*Die skool is besig met geld insamel, so jy hou nie net skool nie, nou moet jy gou geld insamel vir die ding, dan moet jy gou gou, ek wat aktiwiteitshoof is van die tennis, jy het baie ander dingetjies wat jy het om te doen in die klas situasie ...* (par 4) *dan vyfuur, half ses kom jy vir die eerste keer by die huis, en ek wat op die bestuurspan is, en op die beheerliggaam, so daar is ook nog ekstra vergaderings wat jy moet bywoon ..."* (par 4). Educators not only do the normal teaching; they are also expected to collect money for trips, fill in forms and participate in fundraising. Lesson preparation has become more demanding and time consuming because it requires the educator to be more innovative and creative (Poppleton & Williamson, 2004). Research (Mpya, 2007) has confirmed these findings. Where educators used to teach homogenous groups, they now teach heterogeneous groups and learners are not at the same level of functioning. This requires the educator to spend more time on work that the educator assumes learners to have mastered.

5.2.1.8 Poor remuneration

A poor professional status, a lack of promotion progress as well as poor salaries contribute to educator stress (Wood, 2007). Most of the educators interviewed in this study felt their salaries were insufficient. Some of these educators expressed they would even leave the profession for a better paying job if the time should come.Participant 1, for example, claimed: "*I can teach till I'm sixty, but we all know teacher are not getting enough money....*" (par 11). Participant 5 adds: "...*Lets be honest, there is a financial aspect. I resign every year, and I thought an option, but no, with the economic climate, that option is gone...*" (par 5). South African educators feel they are undercompensated, especially taking into account the long hours they put in in comparison with the private sector and other government departments (Olivier & Venter, 2003; Wood, 2007). In a study conducted by Van der Bijl and Oosthuizen, (2007), 90% of the 200 educators who participated in the study felt they were underpaid.

5.2.1.9 Learners with personal problems

According to research studies (Nhundu, 1999; Motseke, 1998), educators often have to play the role of nurturer, counsellor and mother to learners due to family work factors or divorce or other personal problems learners may encounter. This, however, could result in role ambiguity and role conflict which are both predictors of stress. According to Participant 3, it is often impossible to teach learners without considering their personal circumstances. According to this educator, a learner's personal circumstances do have an influence on the learner's academic progress. Sometimes learners do not perform well at school because circumstances at home aren't good and they are unable to concentrate in class. Participant 3 explains that it is important to understand where the child comes from, their environment at home, because that could have an effect on what happens in the class and how the child behaves. *"...Nog 'n uitdaging is dit wat die kind van die huis af skool toe meer kom, veral in ons daaglikse lewe, hul omstandighede, baie kinders kom uit 'n gebroke huis, dan moet jy nou in die klas nou dit probeer in ag neem ..."* (par 4)

Theme 2 will explore how the stressors mentioned in theme 1 impact on educators personal lives.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Personal distress

The long hours educators have to put in definitely impact on their lives outside theschool (Wood, 2007). One aspect of concern is that educators often neglect their families as a result of these long hours and work they have to take home.

5.2.2.1 Negligence of own family

According to the educators interviewed in this study, high workload often leads to less time spent with their families, c

onfirming similar results found by van Wyk (2006) in a study with educators. Participant 1, for example, states that she is so tired and irritated from all the stress during the day, she does not have the patience to deal with her own child. "...*I have a two-year-old boy and I find that you cannot be dealing with children for the whole day, especially with these ones that don't listen...*" (par 6). According to Participant 4, the long hours are really problematic because she still has a responsibility towards her family. She emphasise again, having grown-up children really helps the situation. "...*Baie keer het ek nog 'n vergadering in die aand of dan begin jy eers, jy het nogsteeds 'n huisgesin. Soos ek gesê het, dit is vir my lekker, maar jy skeep jou huisgesin af. Dis ma wat gebeur, nou goed ek het nie regtig meer jong kinders in die skool, nee almal is uit die huis uit, hulle is al getroud. Dit help baie as jy nie kinders in die skool het nie.*" (par 4).

Participant 3 views motherhood as very important to her. According to this educator, she would have preferred to be a stay at home mom for a few years. She further adds it woud have been ideal to have a nine to five occupation, where you know once you get home, it is family time. "...*Ek het 'n 2-jarige by die huis, wat vir my 'n groot aanpassing was so as ek by die huis kom moet al my aandag na hom toe gaan... As ek moet weet ek werk tot 4-uur en ek doen my werk klaar, op die stadium het ek vir my man gesê ek verkies dit so, dan weet ek ek is klaar, en ek het naweke...*" (par 4). Wood (2007) confirms the findings. She states educators often feel trapped between their dedication of their jobs and their responsibility towards their families, which does impact on their stress levels. Participant 5 emphasises the multiple roles she must fulfil and how the long hours of teaching impacts on it. "...*When I go home, I can't go and relax, in teaching there is always preparation to do, the job doesn't stop. I'm still a wife, I must look after the food, after the house, the four dogs and four cats and im still a mother...*" (par 4).

5.2.2.2 Stress-related illness

The result of being exposed to prolonged periods of stress often leads to physical and mental illnesses Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, 2005). In a study conducted by the HSRC (2005), 10.6% of educators that partook in the study had

been hospitalised the previous years as a result of stress. Similarly, research studies (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006; Van Wyk, 2006) conducted among educators indicated very high scores on symptoms such as headaches, feeling sick and muscular tension/aches/pains, A result of physical and mental illnesses are prolonged periods of absenteeism from their jobs or if the educator takes leave, it creates a heavier workload for the other educators that have to stand in.

Two of the educators that participated in the current study reported that they got physically ill, as a result of stress and overstraining themselves. According to Participant 1, as a result of screaming in class, she strained her voice. She explains it as as follows: "...*This year it has affected me physically my voice, I had to scream, my voice pitch goes up. For the past two months, my throat was fine, but come during the week, I walk into the classroom, how can I say, how high your voice is. My throat was always aching, sore and scratching...*" (par 6). Participant 5 experienced stress and trauma in her personal life, which causes her to use anti-depressants. "...*Last year when my son left home to go to university I completely had emptiness syndrome.That's why i'm back on anti depressants, I could not handle it, you know my divorse was bad...*" (par 6).

5.2.2.3 Discrimination

Discrimination still prevails after 16 years post apartheid. According to an article by Akwani (2008), racial discrimination is a reality is South Africa. In South African schools, educators and learners are continiuosly facing incidences of racism. In a newspaper article (The Mercury, 2008), incidences of racism made headlines in Kwazulu- Natal. In this article, two educators were victimised by their colleagues and in another instance, educators were attacked by their learners. According to one of the educators interviewed in this study, she's having challenges at school because of her skin colour. According to participant 1, being the only black educator in a school can be very traumatising. This educator is currently facing discrimination from her colleagues. She explains as follows: "...*In the primary school I'm the only black, black educator. It gets lonely at times there are those that really try to make you feel*

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comfortable. But you just feel incompetent; you are made to feel incompetent..." (par 7).

She experiences feelings of loneliness, frustration and colleagues make her feel incompetent. She is really hurt by the situation because it feels as if they don't trust her and therefore does not entrust her with a lot of responsibility. She feels left out of the group because her colleagues don't include her in activities. "...*You are not given enough responsibility because they don't trust you, It is that frustration and I can also say, in most of the things that involves the whole staff, I'm not an assistant, I'm a teacher like the rest. 80 percent of the time if there's something that involves the whole staff, I'm left behind or my name is left out...* (par 7).

According to this educator, she gets unfair treatment compared to the rest of the staff: "...*There are quite a lot of frustrations, and sometimes the things you are told to your face, by colleagues and I also feel our manager is not attending to the situation. I think some of the other staff members get away with..."* (par 7). However, through the struggle and unfair treatment of colleagues, she reminds herself of the reasons she became an educator: *"...I think the most difficult is being a black teacher amongst whites in a school like this I know I'm here for the children, the minute I get upset and I walk back in my classroom I forget about it..." (par 7).*

In a article in The Gardian (2006), a study conducted at the London Metropolitan University (2006) among 60 educators, results indicated that black educators feel worn down by the circumstances. Educators in this particular study reported they feel unsupported and marginalised. According to these educators, they feel obliged in many cases to endure the unfair treatment.

Despite the traumatic experience, Educator 1 still remains positive when she says: *"...Other than that, that's life. I'm here for the children". (par 7).*

The following section will focus on factors which act as buffer against stress.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Protective factors

Theme 3 will cover the manageability component of Sense of Coherence. Manageability refers to an individual's belief that the resources needed to cope are available to them. According to Antonovsky (1987), individuals who have a high sense of manageability will not feel victimised by events or feel that life is treating them unfairly. Manageability provides a balance between available resources and the demand placed on individuals. Individuals feel that when events happen which are beyond their control, they will be able to cope with it.

Protective factors are factors which help educators cope with stress. These factors are similar to the Generalised Resistance Resources (GRR) as proposed by Antonovsky (1987). General Resistance Resources can be described as "any characteristic of the person, the group, the subculture or society that facilitate avoiding or combating of a wide variety of stressors" (Strümpfer, 1995, p. 81). GRRs may be material such as money or food, cognitive such as intelligence or knowledge, interpersonal such as social support and even macro-social such as religion. These resources lead to life experiences which promote the development of a strong SOC, a way of seeing the world, which facilitates successful coping with the innumerable, complex stressors confronting us in the course of living (Antonovsky, 1991). GRR provides individuals with life experience which are characterised by consistency, a balance of stimuli and determining outcomes. They foster experiences which help one to perceive the world as making sense cognitively, instrumentally and emotionally (Antonovsky, 1987).

By regularly experiencing the availability and utilising General Resistance Resources, coping are enhanced when introduced to complex life stressors and moving toward the health side of the health/disease continuum. GRR play a facilitative role through the repetitive experience of making sense of the constant bombarded stressors. Overcoming stressors reinforces the Sense of Coherence and therefore a stronger Sense of Coherence develops and that affects the overall quality of the person's perception of stimuli (Antonovsky, 1987, 1991; Strümpfer, 1990, 1995).

In this theme the researcher explores the protective factors participants draw on when they are exposed to stress. An individual's perception of stress is influenced by factors such as personality characteristics, personality types, social support, gender, age, sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Harris & Hartman, 2002). That is an indication that a situation that causes stress in one person may not necessarily cause stress in another (Adams, 2001). Therefore the responses to stressful situations may vary greatly depending on the complex interaction between their personalities, values, skills and the relevant conditions (Ngidi & Sabaya, 2002).

Educators that took part in the study identified several sources of support. These include colleagues, friends, religion, personal characteristics, resilience and conflict resolution and confrontation.

5.2.3.1 Colleagues and family

All the participants interviewed in this study regard their colleagues as major support systems in their lives. Participant 5 compares the principal to a mother figure:"...*She is my surrogate mother, she just understands me, and she is incredibly supportive...*" (par 6). Participant 2 emphasises that the support at school is amazing. She describes the relationships among her colleagues as those of a big family. According to her they help one another when work gets too much or when something bad things happens with someone else. She further claims that the principal leads by example because he organise prayer meetings where they pray for one another.*"...By die skool werk ons baie goed saam. En as ons sien iemand het nou te veel werk, dan sal ons vra, is daar nie iets waarmee ek nou kan help nie. Ons help regtig mekaar en ons ondersteun mekaar ... Omdat jy saam werk, jy's eintlik 'n groot familie saam, julle ondersteun mekaar as daar iets slegs met mekaar gebeur. En ons vorm gebedsgroepe om vir mekaar te bid. Die skoolhoof inisieer byvoorbeeld een keer 'n week of sekere dae 'n gebedsessie vir mans..."* (par 14).

Research (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001) confirms that educators prefer talking to their colleagues regarding problems and seek help and resources from other educators. In a study conducted by Van Wyk (2006), it was established that the

support of colleagues was beneficial for the effective functioning and improved wellness of educators. Not only did they help practically but at an emotional level they rendered much-needed support.

According to educators who were interviewed, support from their partners/spouses was very good, especially if the husband was also in the teaching profession. Participants' husbands seem to be really supportive towards their wives. Participant 2 claims her husband and two children are very supportive and understanding. *"...Ek het 'n baie goeie man en ek moet vir jou sê sonder my man sal ek dit nie kon doen nie..."* (par 7).

Participant 5's husband helps out with the cooking at home and he also drives their daughter around when she is unable to do it. "...*He will help me with all the administration on the computer. Yesterday he went shopping, he would cook and then he would taxi can our daughter around, which is very nice...*" (par 5). Participant 3 suggests that it is helpful that her husband comes from a family of educators and he himself is also an educator. According to this educator, her husband appears to be more understanding compared to the husbands of colleagues whose husbands aren't educators. She further explains that most men have expectations of one as a wife, especially when one comes home from work, but she does not have problems because her husband is very understanding. "...*Dat my man ook uit 'n onderwys familie kom, sy ma is 'n onderwyser en hyself in hierdie stadium in die onderwys staan, maar hy verstaan absoluut baie van my goeters, baie van my kollegas wie se manne nie in die onderwys is nie,verstaan nie altyd nie, as ek nou vannaand huis toe gaan en se ek het baie werk, en al die werk moet more skool toe gaan, dan sal hy sê ag wat ons maak 'n braai broodjie en ons eet 'n worsie daarby, waar ander mans verwag as hulle by die huis kom die huis moet reg wees, die kinders moet reg wees, die kos moet klaar wees, baie se as hy gaan slaap dan moet die vrou ook gaan slaap. Baie van my vriendinne het dit swaar by die huis, want hulle wil weet hoekom het jy stres, maar dis oor hulle self nie in die beroep staan nie, dit het ek nie met my man nie...*" (par 7).

5.2.3.2 Friends

Participants in this study revealed that friends are also a source of support to them. "...*My best friend, we have coffee every Friday, and I drink my savana...*" (participant 5, par 6). "*...I also have a very good friend that I talk to...*" (participant 1, par 8). Research conducted by Stanford (2001) and Van Wyk (2006) confirms that educators regard friends as a source of support during stressful times.

5.2.3.3 Religion

According to educators who were interviewed in the study, religion plays a key role in their lives especially when things are tough. Participant 1 turns to God during times of despair: "...*Religion plays a big role in my life. You know when I'm really going through a tough time than I ask God did you really put me here for a reason...*" (participant 1, par 8). Participants 2, 3, and 4 confirm as follows: "*Ek dink afgesien van 'n mens se godsdiens, want ek dink jy dra maar jou goed op na die Here en hy moet dit deur jou dra...*" (participant 2, par 5). "*...My hulp kom van die Here as ek in 'n druk tyd kom, en dit gaan maar moeilik, dan gaan ek maar terug na sy woord toe...*" (participant 3, par 7). "*...Jong weet jy, ek dink ek dink nou ek wat 'n Christen is, 'n kind van die Here, ek dink as jy nie naby die Here leef nie, sal jy nie cope nie. As die Here jou nie elke dag die krag gee nie, jy weet jy begin tog elke dag met Bybel te lees en te bid en om vir die Here krag te vra vir die dag, so ja ek dink dis ma die grootste kragbron wat ek het...*" (participant 4, par 5)

In a study conducted by Stanford (2001), religion seems to be one of the key areas of support identified by educators. Educators specifically draw on their spiritual lives when things really got bad: they would pray and believe things would get better. Similarly, Van Wyk (2006) and Wenzel, Buys and Mostert (2008) find religion to be a form of guidance for educators.

However, Jonas (2001) finds that lack of support systems can also be a source of stress. According to Jonas (2001), support systems refer to resources available to an individual during a stressful time and in his study he found a relationship between

support systems and stress. His study reveals that educators that experience a lack of support suffer from higher levels of stress. As a result, educators who do not have a support system are more likely to experience stress, compared to those who have a support system. Sources of support identified by Stanford (2001) are colleagues, family and friends, and their religious and spiritual lives.

5.2.3.4 Personal characteristics

Educators interviewed in this study were very realistic when they explained how they went about managing their classrooms. Participants identified certain personal characteristics which help them to reduce stress and assist them in managing their classes effectively. These personal characteristics help them every day when it comes to decision making and coping with their classroom duties. Participant 1 tries to organise things in her head. According to her, it is impossible to do everything which is expected of one, and one can only do one's best. *"...I'm not very big on planning, I'm a last minute person, yet still organised. I don't overload myself with a lot of planning; I keep things in my mind. Do your best and leave the rest, do what you can do, what you can't do, leave it..."* (par 10). Participant 2 believes it is important to plan and organise your tasks well. According to this educator it is important to feel in control because that will reduce stress. "...*Ek dink 'n mens moet jouself maar net organiseer, en die middae se werk by skool, gewoontlik die wat so sit, en organiseer en regmaak. Ek dink as jou goed redelik georganiseer is, het jy minder stres..."* (par 6).

Research (Wenzel, Buys & Mostert, 2008) has found planning ahead is very important. In turn, Shaw (1999) viewed planning as problem-focused coping. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest problem-focused coping attempt to deal with the problem actively.

According to Participant 4, being a naturally positive person tends to make other people also positive. "...*En ek dink ek is 'n positiewe mens van natuur, en ek hou nie daarvan as die klomp so negatief praat oor die werk nie, mens moet dadelik sê, nee kom..."* (par 6). According to Carr (2004) and Peterson (2006), important constructs

of positive psychology include character strengths, hope and optimism, positive emotions and forgiveness and gratitude. The broad and broaden model (Frederikson, 2001) suggests positive emotions broaden our awareness and build on learning to create future emotional and intellectual resources. Furthermore, optimism refers to an individual's belief that their future goals will be reached through their actions and perseverance (Compton, 2005).

Participant 5 feels it s a matter of mind over matter, how one perceives things. This educator refers to the prayer of serenity as part of her belief system: "… *its part of that sayin...God help me to accept the things I cannot change … then there the other saying, if you cant change it, leave it. I think its all in the mind. Its how you look at things..."* (par 5).

In conclusion, these educators do portray salutogenic characteristics as described by De Beer and Korf (2004). According to these authors, characteristics of a salutogenic individual can be described as follows: They:

- have an optimistic life view
- experience the environment as understandable and meaningful
- actively engage with the environment as understandable and meaningful
- are willing to tackle challenges
- view demands as an aspect to be handled against available resources
- view resources as an aspect under own control or under the control of meaningful others
- are convinced of his/ her own ability to control/ influence events

5.2.3.5 Resilience

All of the educators who were interviewed in the study considered themselves to be resilient. Reasons attached to being a resilient individual ranged from being a positive individual to taking responsibility for one's actions.

Participant 1 considers herself to be fighter because she does not give up hope, when she is confronted with challenges. According to this participant, it is important

to take responsibility for one's actions: "*Yes, I'm not the kind of person that don't give up easily, I would not blame certain circumstances, I'm doing this because of this. I'll be sad and angry now and just like that I will smile again...*" (par 9).

A few of the participants claim one must be resilient if one wants to be in the teaching profession. According to these educators, individuals who are not resilient will have a negative perspective on events. "*Ja ek dink jy moet so wees om in die onderwys te kan bly anders gaan jy al die negatiewe dinge sien, en jy gan in 'n gat verval en daar is nie 'n toekoms nie...*" (participant 3, par 8). "*Ja ek dink so, ek dink dit is maar as jy positief is, is jy veerkragtig, so ja ek sal myself as veerkragtig beskou, omdat ek myself gedurig motiveer, ek gaan sit nie maklik in 'n hoekie en sê tot hier toe en nie verder nie, ek kry my nie maklik self jammer nie. Ek is net een wat aangaan...*" (participant 4). Resilient people have the ability to succeed when faced with stress and uncertainty (Coutu, 2002).

Participant 5 experienced a few traumatic events in her life. Despite these events, she regards herself as stronger than ever: "*...The divorce was very traumatic, and she said to me one day, you're just like a rubber ball, you always bounce back. But I know that from myself too...*" (par 7).

Resilient individuals have strong connections with others and know that there are people who care about what happens to them. All of the educators have diverse, caring networks of family and friends outside school. In general, resilient people use effective coping strategies, have a firm understanding of reality, a deep and meaningful belief system, and the ability to improvise (Coutu, 2002). The resiliency of an individual depends on his/her strength characteristics and the supportive relationships in their lives (Carr, 2004; Peterson, 2006). In conclusion, Semmer (1996) views resilient individuals as people who view the world as good, and they do not intentional harm from others; they view setbacks and failures in perspective and as a challenge.

5.2.3.6 Conflict resolution and confrontation

In a study conducted by Kossuth and Cilliers (2002), results indicate that salutogenic individuals have the psychological strength to act as learners and cope well with problem solving. Participant 1, for example, claims that she always takes challenges head on. She believes that they all grownups and if there is a problem, it needs to be confronted: "...*I mean, we are grown ups, I mean, I always tell them don't be afraid to look them in the eye and say this is what's happening, can we talk about it. I'm known for it, to go and confront people. We grown ups we don't have to hide, want to solve things and sort them out...*" (par 10).

Participant 3 views communication as very important, especially when conflict arises, According to her, being open, honest and confronting the problem will resolve problems among colleagues This educator also believes it is important to keep relationships amongst each other positive at all times. "...*Hanteer jou ander kollega nog steeds soos jou vehouding was, jy moet baie versigtig wees, dis net om die verhoudings tussen almal positief te hou, kommunikasie is belangrik, as daar iets nie lekker is nie gaan na die person toe en speel oop kaarte...*" (par 9). Kossuth and Cilliers (2002) believe that the salutogenic functioning individual will demonstrate the appropriate psychological strength to cope with conflict between people will act constructively as a leader in negotiations, and will at the same time be aware of the differences in cultural beliefs that influence individuals' perceptions of work performance, satisfaction and productivity.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Passion for teaching

"Teaching is not an occupation, it is a calling" (Wentzel, Buys & Mostert, 2008)

Themes three, four and five will focus on the last component of sense of coherence namely meaningfulness. *Meaningfulness* refers to an individual's perception that life make sense emotionally, or that these demands are challenges worthy of investment and engagement. According to Antonovsky (1987), finding meaning and purpose in circumstances plays a central role in determining whether stressful events produce

desirable outcomes. Antonovsky views the relations among the components as intertwined; however, he views meaningfulness as the most crucial component, because it serves as motivational factor and measure of energy.

According to Antonovsky (1987; 1993), meaningfulness can be regarded as the most important component of the three dimensions of the Sense of Coherence construct. It provides motivation to search for order in the world, those available resources and to seek out new resources for managing a demand (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987; 1996; Oosthuizen, 1994). It is also proposed that a high level of meaningfulness allows people to transfer their coping resources of GRR from potential to actual utilisation. Meaningfulness also refers to the degree of commitment one has various life domains and the importance of shaping, not only in one's destiny, but also in the life experiences (Antonovsky, 1984). The individual will therefore be equipped with a strong Sense of Coherence and generate good health, in turn having a positive effect on well-being (Strümpfer, 1995). Research (Korotkov, 1998) suggests that a high level of meaningfulness motivates individuals to search for order and to make sense of their environments. However, experiences that are characterised by unpredictability, uncontrollability and uncertainty will lead to a weak Sense of Coherence (Ortlepp & Friedman, 2001).

Strümpfer (1990) states that Sense of Coherence not only refers to how people stay healthy, but also impacts on how work is approached and performed. Some problems and demands are experienced as welcomed challenges which motivate a person to invest energy in it. Intrinsic motivation does not necessarily act as driving force when it comes to work. Individuals may find little joy in their work, but if they feel the work has meaning, because it is how they support their families, and keep functioning smoothly and happily, they still have a strong Sense of Coherence. Antonovsky (1987) indicates that when a task is ambiguous and complex, a strong SOC will be a contributing factor for the motivated person to see the task as a challenge.

Teaching provides daily opportunities to feel good about what you do. Building of trust and forming relationships with learners as well as making a difference in the lives of learners were emphasised by the educator. The years the educators were in the teaching profession ranged from 7 to 30 years. All the participants entered the

teaching profession because of their love for children. A few of the educators interviewed left teaching for other occupations or for motherhood. However they did return to teaching. All the educators enjoyed teaching extremely: "*Wel ek geniet dit baie … maar ek geniet die onderwys verskriklik baie, elke dag met die kindertjies is anders.*" (participant 3, par 3).*"Ek moet jok as ek vir jou se, dit is sleg om skool te hou, ek geniet dit, dis vir my lekker."* (participant 4, par 3)*."...I will do the job for free, I really enjoy it so much..."* (participant 5, par 5).

It is very clear that educators who were interviewed in this study find pleasure in what they do*.* According to participants, they do experience stressful times; however, they do not allow these stressors to get them down. Participant 1 explains: *"...Doesn't matter how frustrated I get, I remember each and every day how blessed I am, to be doing what I love. And how blessed I am to be working at this school. And at the end of the day it's not about me, or the parent or the management, it's about the children..."* (par 6). According to Participant 3, most occupations come with its own stresses and she chose education because of the satisfaction that she gets from it. "*...Maak nie saak watter werk jy het nie en ek is seker in jou werk het jy stres en jy het jou negatiewe goed...dis my beroep wat ek gekies het en dit wat ek daaruit kry is vir my satisfaksie..."* (par 6).

Throughout the interviews educators repeatedly emphasised how much they loved teaching and how much the learners mean to them. Participants in this study claim it is very rewarding to know that one contributes to the learners' lives and their futures. Research (Stanford, 2001) confirms educators seem to have endured so long and so well because they found deep meaning in their work. The teachers' commitment about making a difference in their learners' lives and learning was a prominent motivation.

5.2.5 Theme 5: Personal and professional investment

Educators who participated in this study did more than what was expected of them, to accommodate both the stronger and the slower learner. In the once instance, the music educator discovered learners with learning difficulties have difficulty with the

music notes. She took the initiative to develop a different system based on the alphabet to make it easier for them to understand. *"...And what I found is that remedial children found it hard to read notation, it is like a nightmare for them, ek het dit vir hulle verander, in 'n lettersisteem sodat hulle net met die alfabet werk en op gehoor en dan laat ek hule maatjies hulle help..."* (par 10).

Participant 4 puts extra work in a basket for the stronger learners so that when they finish their first task they know where to get more work. At the same time she spends time with the slower learners. According to this educator, it is important not for the slower learner to realise that he/she is slow, and at the same time, the stronger learner must not get bored while waiting for the slower learner. *"Weet jy, as juffrou, as jy nou jou sout wil werd wees, moet jy nou vir daar die sterk kindertjies, jy gee vir hulle 'n blaadjie en binne tien minute sê hulle maar juffrou ek is klaar, vir daai kind moet jy baie ekstra werk gee om die swak outjie te akkommodeer, hy moet eintlik nie eers agterkom, dat hierdie sterk outjiie, dis hoekom daardie boks daar voor, hulle staan op en gaan haal dadelik vir hulle ekstra werk, terwyl jy met hierdie swakketjie werk..."* (par 4).

Participant 2 makes it her duty to help the slower learner progress. This educator stays after school to help her learners. She gives them extra excises until they reach the level of the other learners. When the learners show no progress, she informs the parents and together they try to find solutions. *"Ons het nie so baie kinders in die klas nie, ons het ses- en- twintig kinders, maar jy kan nie want as daar verskillende vlakke kinders in die klas is, kan jy nie soveel aandag aan 'n kindjie gee, in klastyd, wat sukkel nie en daarom reël ek nou maar met hul ouers en vat hulle sekere dae, net vir 'n halfuur, na skool dan sit ek met die een en twee kindertjies, en dan sit ek net met daai een of twee kindertjies en ek oefen die werk met hulle en leer dit vir hulle en ons doen ekstra werkies aan totdat ek kan sien hulle verstaan..."* (par 4)

Participant 3 feels the conditions in class are unfair towards the stronger learner because most of one's attention goes to the slower learner. According to this educator, the stronger learner suffers, as a result of time limits and big classes. *"Weet jy wat vir my 'n probleem is, ek voel dat die vinnge kinders trek agter..."* (par 11). According to Participant 3, it is possible to overestimate the capabilities of the stronger learner. She further states educators assume that the faster learner

understands the work because most of the time they do and because of them not asking questions. *"...En soos jy weet nou al as jy die werk verduidelik Jan gaan nie verstaan nie, en dan sal jy vra Jan verstaan jy, en hy sal se hys nie seker nie en dan gaan help jy en omdat Piet altyd verstaan gaan jy nie vra nie en dalk verstaan Piet nie en dis waar jy die fout maak, en baie keer kry jy jou frustrasies want dan het jy die volume werk wat jy vandag moet afhandel en daai een is besig om te lank te vat.."*

According to participants, repetition of class work is also a concern because there is no time.*"… en dit kan ook frustrerend wees as hulle dieselfde ding honderd keer wil weet na die tyd en jy weet dis nie oor hulle nie verstaan het nie..."*

Participant 3 took the initiative to attend to learners during her art period, which she did not get to in the previous period: *"...Ek probeer maar in die kuns periode die een roep en vra hoe gaan dit nou, en hoe gaan dit by die huis..."*(par 11).

5.2.6 Theme 6: Personal meaning

Korotkof (1998) indicates that a high level of meaningfulness motivates individuals to search for order and to make sense of their environment. Participants in this study complained how stressful their work is; however, there are things that keep them motivated, make them happy and make them feel good about themselves and their profession. Despite the stressors that educators in this study experience, there are things which are meaningful to educators and they carry it with them on a daily basis.This implies that the good outweighs the bad. Participants interviewed in this study claim they feel good when their learners show progress, when the learners' parents acknowledge the hard work educators put into their children and when learners excel at other activities.

Participant 3 expresses her satisfaction when her learners show progress. She explains in an example: *"… ek het twee jaar terug 'n seunjie gehad wat ongelooflik gesukkel het, ek het naderhand moedeloos gevoel, dit het gevoel ek bereik niks, en*

hier by die vierde kwartaal was sy punte soos ek gevoel het dit moet wees, en hy het heeltemal weer as mens begin blom, en dit het vir my baie beteken... " (par 12).

According to Participant 2, she appreciates the fact that parents acknowledge the good work you put into their children or when learners excel at sports. "… *as die ouers kom en dankie se en se hulle kan die vordering met my kind sien of hulle raak opgewonde as hul kinders kan lees, sulke tipe goed,dit beteken baie vir 'n onderwyseres."* (par 12) *Selfs as jy atlete het wat na die SA's toe gaan dit beteken baie, dit het alles met die kinders te doen..."* (par 12).

Participant 1 claims that being the first black educator at a school is definitely an achievement. She claims she was amazed by how the learners responded to her."...*My first year of teaching, I was the first black teacher here all the excitement. The biggest highlight is the children love me, I don't know, why but they do. Every year when we get new girls there will be about twenty girls crying because they want to be in my class..."* (par 13).

Stanford (2001) has confirmed receiving occasional thanks from former learners and parents was one of the sources of satisfaction for educators. Educators who participated in this study also stated that making a difference in learners's lives and seeing children make academic progress as sources of satisfaction. A sense of achievement in reaching and affecting learners was also regarded as important for educators.

Participant 3 helped one of her learners to have self confidence again. According to this educator, the learner was quite aware of his physical appearance and he was extremely introverted. She provided him with a sense of belonging and she went out of her way to make him feel part of the group. According her, this incident was very memorable and meaningful to her. She tells her story:*"...En die ander ding is, ons het laas jaar 'n operette by die skool gehad en ek het 'n seunjie in my klas, 'n groterige oorgewig seunjie, is 'n baie senuagtige kind en ... die enigste tyd wat ek sy stem gehoor het was toe hy by die bank gestaan en lees het, en so kom die operettetyd aan en sy ma stuur nie die goed terug nie, so bel ek haar en sê hy moet ook deelneem en sy sê hy weetie of hy moet nie en ek sê, nee man, almal moet deelneem dit gaan lekker wees, ma ek dink hy was biekie selfbewus oor sy liggaam*

wat so groot ons nou by die sand du plessis kom om die goed te gaan oefen, ry ons in die bus, en weer soos altyd gaan sit ek langs hom, want ek wou nou nie laat hy alleen tussen die maats want hy is altyd allen en die volgende oomblik begin die kind praat, en hy trek los en hy praat my ore van my kop af van hie tot by die saal, hy haal nie een keer asem nie en hy gee my nie een keer kans om te praat nie, en ek het hom netso gekyk en ek het daar besef hy gaan deelneem aan die ding nie vir een keer in sy lewe was hy nie die een wat eenkant toe gestoot was in sy lewe het hierdie kind net ontpop, vir die res van die jaar het hierdie kind net gepraat en gepraat, jyt 'n ander kant van hom gesien wat jy nog nooit gesien het nie en dit het vir my so baie beteken." (par 12).

When educators were asked what they considered to be valuable in their work and students the following responses were acquired.

5.2.6.1. Work

Participant 2 appreciates the holidays that come with the occupation. According to this participant, educators in general work hard and they need the holidays to recuperate. She also appreciates those afternoons when they don't have extra-mural activities: *"Wat ook lekker is in die onderwys is dat jy jou vakansies het want mense se altyd, jy is 'n onderwyseres, jyt vier keer 'n jaar vakansie. Dan het jy nogal daai rus kansie nodig, dit helpnet om jou batterye te charge. Sodat jy weer vars kan begin, of as daar iets sleg gebeur het in die vorige kwartaal help die vakansie om net van nuuts af te begin. En dan om in die middae vry te wees as jy nie buitemuurs het nie is ook lekker.* (par 13).

Participant 4 claims it is a joy when learners understand the work or they tell you they really enjoyed the lesson: *"...As ek die werk vir die kind verduidelik en hy snap die werk, en hy sê vir my juffrou dis lekker om die werk te doen. Dit is vir my 'n groot bevrediging..."* (par 12).

Participant 1 expressed gratitude to be part of the learners' development by contributing to the learners future. *"The fact that I'm moulding tomorrows leaders...*

when I'm a granny I'm going to say there's something in that child that could because of my influence." (par 14).

According to Participant 3, it is a learning process for her as well. She claims she is learning more about interpersonal relationships and how to have respect for other people. Learners help her to perceive things from a different perspective and to be sensitive to the needs of others. *"Ek dink dit wat 'n mens leer daaruit. Mense vehoudings wat jy leer, jy leer om goed op 'n ander vlak te sit, soos dai wat ek gese het, kinders sien goed op 'n ander manier en dit laat jou dit ook weer so sien, ek kan nie onthou hoe ek daai tyd gedink het nie? Maar dit leer jou net om sensitief te wees, as ek sien hoe sensitief hulle is dan leer dit my om sensitief te wees met my kinders by die huis..."* (par 13).

Participant 5 describes the satisfaction and joy she feels when she meets up with old learners. She further claims she feels proud when her learners excel locally and overseas. *"Die kinders, die kinders se reaksie, dis vir my absoluut wonderlik, as ek tien jaar later in die mall stap en hul kom so afgestorm op my en se mrs krige, en hul se hulle onthou nog daai les. Of ek onthou nog jy het vir ons hierdie stuk musiek gespeel. Of ek het kinderjies wat ver kom, daar is een in Amerika wat al twee cds klaar gemaak het, een het al op idols gesing, die ander een het idols gewen, kindertjies wat so klein in my koor gesing het en hul maak dit op die stage, dan voel ek dit was die moeite werd, ek het iets vir iemand beteken, ek doen dit glad nie vir myself nie, dis n ongelooflike voorreg om die talent in die kinders uit te haal..."* (par 12).

5.8.2. Learners

All the participants interviewed in this study really enjoy working with the learners. According to these educators, they just love the learners' sense of humour and their spontaneity.These learners also provided participants with a different view on life and how educators perceive things in general.

Participant 2 claims the Grade ones do not carry grudges; the one moment they are mad at you; the next they come and hug you. "...*Ek dink veral graad eentjie jy weet graad eentjies is nog baie spontaan en ek dink dit is hulle liefde want vandag kan jy met hulle raas en oor 'n halfuur sal hulle vir jou 'n drukkie kom gee. Ek dink nie hulle loop met 'n lelike hart rond nie. Ek dink dit is die liefde en spontaniteit van die kinders..."* (par 15). According to (Wentzel, Buys & Mostert, 2008), the only place where you get something back is from the children.

Participant 4 states that when learners acknowledge her input she has reached her goal."...*As 'n kind vir my sê, juffrou vandag was vir my 'n lekker dag, dan weet ek wel, ek het geslaag in my doel, al is dit net een kind wat vir my sê dit was 'n lekker dag, of die les wat juffrou gegee het, was lekker..."* (par 14)

Participant 1 said she learned a different definition of love. That is the feeling she gets when she is with the learners "*is where I learned true love".* (par 16)

According to Participant 3, the satisfaction she gets from the learners is better than any vitamin and it adds value to her life. She enjoys the compliments learners give her and she appreciates the uniqueness in the character of all children. *"… die manier wat hulle vrae sal vra, hulle laat jou goed net anders sien, dan dink ek net, ek het nog nooit daaraan gedink nie jy kry net kinders wat goed op 'n ander manier sien en dit verryk jou lewe so. Die mooiste ding onder son is die kind se lag, hulle kom hier in jy het gister baklei, hulle kom hier in, juffrou is die beste ons is lief vir juffrou, kyk dis briefies en hulle bring blomme, kyk ek kan nie vir jou se nie, en in hulle oë is jy die mooiste en wonderlikste ding, as jy nie lekker voel die oggend nie en jy kom hier en hulle vertel jou jys die mooiste en als dan voel jy weer lekker, dis beter as enige vitamiene wat jy kan kry." (par 15)*

Research (Katkus, 2007) confirms that teaching provides daily opportunities to feel good about what one does. Forging relationships and making a difference in the lives of learners ranked high as good aspects of being an educator. Educators appreciate the feeling of accomplishment that comes with learner success. In general, resilient people use effective coping strategies, have a firm understanding of reality, a deep and meaningful belief system, and the ability to improvise (Coutu, 2002).

According to Nelson and Simmons (2003), meaningful work leads to eustress, which would promote engagement even if the situation is demanding. Eustress reflects the extent to which cognitive appraisal of the situation is seen to either benefit or enhance an individual's well-being.

All the participants were over the age of 30. According to Antonovsky (1979), SOC remains stable after the age of 30 in relation to the individual's experience of the world as predictable and consistent. When stimuli are interpreted as comprehensible, meaningful and within one's coping ability, it can be attributed to causes lying within the individual and not to fate or luck. This enforces a belief in our own abilities, self-confidence, decision-taking and the implementation of action steps which lead to problem-solving and higher expectation of success in task undertaken. Ultimately, the strength of Sense of Coherence is shaped by life experiences related to consistency (Antonovsky, 1996).

In summary, Table 2 presents the themes and subthemes of this study

Table 2: Themes and subthemes

Theme	Theme name	Related sub themes
Theme 1	Work related stressors	- unrealistic expectations from the department of education - administration - assessment - Behaviour problems - extra mural and other activities - long hours and multiple roles - large classes and heavy workload - lack of remunerations Children with personal problems
Theme 2	Personal distress	- Negligence of own family - stress-related illness - discrimination
Theme 3	Protective factors	- colleagues and family - friends - religion - personal characteristics - resilience - conflict resolution and confrontation
Theme 4	Passion for teaching	
Theme 5	Personal and professional investment	
Theme 6	Personal meaning	- work - learners

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter involved a discussion of each of the Sense of Coherence themes that were presented. Work-related stressors, which include unrealistic expectations of the Department of Education, administration, assessment, behaviour problems, extra-mural and other activities, long hours and multiple roles, large classes and heavy work loads, lack of remuneration and students with personal problems were

discussed. Personal distress, which included negligence of own family, ill-health and discrimination were also explored. Educators' passion for teaching, their protective factors, personal and professional investment as well as the personal meaning teaching has for them were also discussed in this chapter. The meaning of each theme was explored in conjunction with the relevant literature.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter a brief overview of important contributions in the literature is presented. This is followed by a summary of the main research findings as well as the recommendations for future studies. This chapter concludes with comments on the limitations of the research study.

6.2 Perspective from the literature

In studies conducted by Van Wyk (2006) and Wood (2007) educators revealed that their biggest frustration was to put up with all the changes and demands posed by the Department of Education. One of the changes was the introduction of inclusive education, which resulted in heightened levels of stress among educators (Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2002; Olivier & Venter, 2003). Other stress factors include new initiatives such as Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) (Jansen, 1998). OBE resulted in excessive administration and assessment (Department of Education, 2001), and also contributed to educators experiencing rising levels of stress (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002). Educators were also faced with big class sizes and learners with learning difficulties (Mpya, 2007). The result was that more learner behavioural problems occurred, which could be attributed to the banning of corporal punishment (Olivier & Venter 2003, Saptoe, 2000), as well as to learners with learning difficulties who are difficult to control, because they have problems concentrating (Mpya, 2007). An increase in workload was also documented as a source of stress (Motseke, 1998; Wilson & Hall, 2002). This contributed to educators having to work long hours (working at home and after hours) and fulfilling multiple roles (Mpya, 2007; Poppleton & Williamson, 2004). Poor remuneration also added to stressors listed by educators (Van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2007).

The impact of stress on educators resulted in some educators experiencing stress-related illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, ulcers and heart attacks. Other educators planned to go on early retirement or they left the profession (Olivier & Venter, 2003). Literature also indicates that the number of sick days used by educators between 2001 and 2002 in the North-West Province has increased by 339% (North-West Education Department Statistics, 2004).

According to literature (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001; Van Wyk, 2006), educators relied on their colleagues for support. Educators also listed family and friends as sources of support (Stanford, 2001; Van Wyk, 2006). Other sources of support included religion (Wenzel, Buys & Mostert, 2008), teaching experience, exercise, being single and association cultural organisation (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, 2001). According to Eloff, Swart and Engelbrecht (2002), personality characteristics of an individual may moderate their stress levels.

A strong Sense of Coherence is essential for coping with stressful events (Antonovsky, 1987; 1996). Effective coping increases manageability and information-seeking coping strategies increase comprehensibility (Strang & Strang, 2001). South African research studies (Oosthuizen, 2005; Rothmann, 2003) have confirmed that SOC is an important component of one's health and well-being. Very few studies Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs (2009) regarding the Sense of Coherence of educators have been conducted. Results in their study (Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs, 2009) indicated that there is a positive relationship between SOC and coping resources. The most important component of Sense of Coherence is meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1979). According to Nelson and Simmons (2003), finding meaning in one's work results in eustress. Eustress reflects the extent to which the cognitive appraisal of a situation is seen to either benefit or enhance an individual's well-being.

6.3 Research findings

Six themes emerged from this study, namely: a) Work-related stressors b) Personal distress, c) Protective factors, d) Passion for teaching, e) Personal and professional

investment, and f) Personal meaning. These themes were divided into categories in accordance with Antonovsky's sense of coherence components. The next section will deal with the first objective of the study, namely to explore and describe educators' perception of whether their challenges are understood or comprehended by the education management system and by themselves and what enables them to make sense of their challenges.

6.3.1 Work-related stressors

The educators interviewed in this study reported a strong lack of insight into their problems from the Department of Education. According to these educators, unrealistic decision making by the Department of Education results in administrative officials having high expectations from educators, which are sometimes impossible to implement. The continuous changes imposed by the Department also left educators frustrated because, it interrupts planning. These findings confirm previous findings by Van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2007; Van Wyk, 2006; Wood, 2007. According to these authors, the Department of Education took unrealistic decisions which are practically impossible. Furthermore, the continuous changes in the education system leave educators frustrated because they place restrictions on their planning because the system changes continuously.

Outcomes-based education (OBE) is one of the changes implemented by the Department of Education. Educators feel the assessment that comes with OBE is very time consuming and adds to the administration. According to Ngidi and Sibaya (2002), the implementation of OBE has created more responsibilities for educators. These responsibilities include more administration (Wilson & Hall, 2002; Eloff, Engelbrecht, Oswald & Swart, 2003), more assessment (Wood, 2007) and longer working hours (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006). The working hours also become longer, because school time is insufficient for the heavy workload educators must deal with. Educators who have been employed in the education system for a longer time claim that they handle the pressure of excessive administration better than their younger colleagues. This finding is similar to findings made by Naidoo and Le Roux (2006). In their study educators stated that being long in the education profession makes an

individual more competent in dealing with administration. Educators suggested help with the administration part will help them focus on the learner, because that is what they wanted to do when they signed up to become educators.

Assessment adds to the challenges educators face every day (Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs, 2009). When educators assess, they have more paperwork to complete, meaning there is an increase in administration (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006). Educators are frustrated because they see it as a vicious circle. Many educators entered the education system because they wanted to work with the learners, but now they spend so much time on administration and assessment that they neglect the learners. According to educators, learners are also suffering as a result of the workload placed on them. Learners end up with psychological disorders like stress and depression.

Behavioural problems amongst learners disturb the learning process. According to Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff, (2001) and Paulse (2005), learner behaviour problems cause stress among educators. Learners are not as disciplined as they used to be and educators claim that it is not necessarily the learners with learning difficulties that cause the problems. A possible reason for the increase in behavioural problems could be the abolishment of corporal punishment and learners who realised they had rights which protected them (Greydanus *et al.*, 2003; Saptoe, 2000).

Big class sizes make it impossible to control the learners who portray behavioural difficulties. According to Olivier & Venter, (2003) and Schulze & Steyn, (2007) it is difficult to control big classes and the demands they cause. Having learners with learning difficulties makes it more difficult for the educator because these learners constantly need the help from the educator to help them cope with the work, resulting in educators neglecting the rest of the class (Male & May, 1997; Mpya, 2007). Educators experience problems with learners' learning difficulties who must attend remedial classes to help them with their difficulties. Educators feel these learners miss out on work, because they attend these classes and the progress of the rest of the class also slows down.

Being an educator is not a half-day occupation. Even though they work after hours (which include the long hours) and at home, weekends are also spent on planning

and assessment. The long hours include educators spending time on extramural activities (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006). Besides being an educator, most educators have other roles to fulfil, which include being a wife and mother. These findings are consistent with Olivier and Venter (2003) and Wood (2007). According to these authors, educators spend so much time on teaching work that they neglect the rest of their roles, such as being a wife and a mother.

Insufficient remuneration causes frustration among educators. Educators are struggling financially, and they do have a responsibility towards their families. According to research studies (Olivier & Venter, 2003; Van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2007; Wood, 2007), educators feel that they are underpaid. According to Olivier and Venter (2003) and Van der Bijl and Oosthuizen (2007), educators feel their salaries are insufficient, which could explain why many educators take on a second occupation for additional income.

Educators also found that learners experience problems at home. These educators found it was important to acknowledge these problems, and help the learners. According to Motseke (1998) and Nhundu (1999), educators must play additional roles such as nurturer, mother and counsellor, due to problems learners may encounter.

6.3.2 Personal distress

Educators reported ill health as a result of stress. Physical conditions like loss of voice were reported, and discrimination occurred. Educators also reported neglecting their families as a result of the long working hours. According to Wood (2007), educators felt torn between their dedication towards their occupation and the responsibility towards their families as a result of the long hours spent on work. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Rout & Rout (2002). In their study (Rout & Rout, 2002), females reported higher levels of stress as they were expected to meet domestic commitments, conflicting work and family demands. A combination of school and stress at home results an educator using anti-depressants.

The next section will deal with the second objective of the study, namely to explore and describe educators' perceived ability to cope with the demands of their profession, whether the perceived necessary resources (manageability) are in place to help them cope, and what those resources are.

6.3.3 Protective factors

The protective factors explored here will refer to the manageability component of the Sense of Coherence. Manageability refers to an individual's belief that the resources needed to cope with a challenge are available to them. The protective factors identified in this study included colleagues, family, friends, religion, personal characteristics, conflict resolution and confrontation.

Educators report their colleagues being very supportive in all aspects. Colleagues were referred to as friends or as being one big family. Whether it was work-related or personal, educators had the necessary support. According to research studies (Engelbrecht, Swart & Eloff (2001) and Van Wyk, (2006), educators prefer their colleagues as a source of support. All the educators were married and they all felt blessed by the support of their spouses. Educators also indicated that the support could be attributed to the fact the most of the husbands are also educators. Husbands have a better understanding compared to those educators whose husbands are not in the teaching profession. Friends were also included in the list of support provided by educators (Stanford, 2001). Religion was regarded as very important to educators when things got too stressful. Studies by Stanford (2001) and Wenzel, Buys and Mostert (2008) confirm that educators regard religion as a form of guidance during challenges or stressful times.

Personal characteristics identified were being a good organiser and planner. Educators feel that when they plan properly, they stress less. According to Wenzel, Buys and Mostert (2008), planning ahead is an important predictor in reducing stress. Educators in this study also felt it was important to be a realist. By that, they claimed that there were only so much one could do; what one could not do, one had to leave. Educators also regard being positive as a way of reducing stress.

According to Carr (2004), positive psychology includes character strengths such as hope, positive emotions, gratitude and forgiveness. These strengths also include optimism, which refers to an individual's belief that his/her future goals will be reached through their actions and perseverance.

All the educators considered themselves to be resilient. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from adversity. No matter how bad the situation or the challenge seemed, they always had a positive outlook and believed things would work out for the best. According to Coutu, (2002), resilient people have the ability to succeed when faced with stress and uncertainty.

Educators reported that it was important to communicate with their colleagues. If there is a problem, it should be confronted and immediately resolved. Openness and honesty help to keep relationships amongst one another positive. According to Kossuth and Cilliers (2002), a salutogenic individual will have the appropriate strength to cope with conflict between people.

The last section of this chapter will focus on the third objective of the study, namely to explore and describe educators' sense that their efforts of working with learners with learning difficulties will make a difference in the learners' lives and whether it is a worthy investment for themselves (meaningfulness), which makes it worthwhile.

6.3.4 Passion for teaching

Educators love their occupation. Teaching is a way to feel good about what they do and making a difference in learners' lives (Katkus, 2007). Educators repeatedly expressed how much they loved teaching (one educator stated she loved it so much, she would do it for free) and how much the learners meant to them. According to Stanford (2001), educators have endured long with pressures and challenges because they find meaning in their work.

6.3.5 Personal and professional investment

Educators put much more in than what is expected of them. Some of the innovations include a different music notation for learners with learning difficulties. Another educator stayed after school to help learners with learning difficulties to catch up with their work, so they progress to the level of the other learners in class. Educators believed accommodating both the slower learners and the faster learners, by placing extra work for the faster learners in a basket in front of the class, so that when they have completed the first work they know where to find more work. In the meantime the educator spends more time with the slower learner. A learner's personal life away from school does have an impact on their academic performance. One educator felt it was important to know if learners experienced problems at home and help them with it, or accommodate them in some way.

On the other hand, in a study conducted by Olivier & Venter (2003), under the theme *professional investment* identified in their study, educators reported that they were not given the opportunity to voice their opinions or their opinions were rejected by principals, colleagues and learners.

6.3.6 Personal meaning

According to Stanford (2001), striving for meaning can be an essential survival tool for educators who work in challenging environments. Whether they do it for their community, or if they believe they can make a difference in the lives of their learners, educators empower themselves and therefore help their learners endure.

Educators reported it made them feel good when learners showed progress. They further reported a satisfying feeling when parents acknowledged the hard work they put into their children. Individual experiences reported by educators included being the first black educator at a very prestigious school and being promoted. Educators attached personal meaning, when their former pupils excelled after they had completed school. Having four holidays a year deemed valuable to educators, as it gave them an opportunity to recharge and plan for the following term. Learners have

a different perspective of things and educators were intrigued by the way learners viewed things. Educators mentioned they appreciated the learners' sense of humour and their spontaneous nature. According to the educators, learners did not bear grudges and one knew know exactly where one stood with them because they were non-judgemental. Educators found that the feeling one got from being with learners or when they complimented one was better than any vitamin.

In conclusion, educators perceived stressors as challenges that were worthy of investing their energy in. The presence of adequate support systems in their lives added to educators finding meaning in their work and experiences with learners.

6.4 Limitations of the study

The results of this study should be interpreted in light of the following limitations. A qualititative study depends on the participants' honesty in answering the questions posed to them. This has always been a limitation in any study where this method has been applied. By making sure the participants were comfortable and willing to participate, the researcher hoped that this would assist in this regard.

The semi-structured interviews were helpful in gaining knowledge in the subjective experience and pressures of educators in the inclusive classroom but as Sutton and Weatley (2003) contend, a semi-structured interview might result in educators selecting what they saw as salient experience rather that giving a full spectrum of daily experiences.

A purposive sample of educators who have been teaching learners with learning difficulties for the past three years and having at least three learners with learning difficulties in their classrooms has been included in this study. Only nine schools took part in the study. The sample of the study was very small and limited to Bloemfontein, and findings should not be generalised to the whole population of educators. The unequal distribution of males and females could have introduced elements of bias in the research findings.

A limitation of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is the role of language and eloquence. According to Willig (2001), different words can be used to describe different ways. Willig (2001) concludes that the interview transcripts give a better understanding regarding the eloquence of the participant concerning the experience the participant describes. Another limitation is that IPA describes the lived experiences of participants but it does not explain it (Willig, 2001). According to Kvale (1996) and Smith, Jarman and Osborn (1999), the rich descriptions of how participants interpret the world do not further our understanding as to why these experiences occur.

6.5 Recommendations for further research

Future research could incorporate larger sample sizes as well as longitudinal research designs to investigate the Sense of Coherence of educators teaching learners with learning difficulties in mainstream classes across time and circumstances.

The phenomenological experience of educators at special-education schools with special reference to their Sense of Coherence could be explored.

Teaching is a multidimensional and demanding profession, awareness and utilisation of salutogenic concepts such as Sense of Coherence, resilience and coping, can offer hope and optimism to these educators. It can allow for more successful coping with daily challenges and therefore moving to the positive end of the health/disease continuum.

It is recommended that the National Department of Education give greater acknowledgment to educators' physical and emotional health. Provision should be made for educators to have a balance their work programme.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter started by stating the purpose of the research which was explained in detail in the summary. Although there were limitations with regard to the study, it yielded useful information that can contribute to future research.

This study renders insight into the phenomenological experience of educators when teaching learners with learning difficulties. Reference were given to the stressors they face every day, the resources available to deal with these stressors and whether the stressors are worthy of investing energy in. Several findings were concurrent with other research, such as stressors and protective factors. However, new findings extracted especially in the South African context indicated that educators attached special meaning to their learners the experiences and perceptions they bring to the classroom.

In conclusion, I hope this research and findings will assist educators and departmental officials to develop a deeper understanding into the lived experiences of educators teaching learners with learning difficulties in mainstream classes and guide them to more efficient and appropriate interventions.

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Appendix A

Letter of Permission by the Department of Education

education

Department of
Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

Enquiries: Mr R Sello
Reference: 16/4/1/33 2008

Tel: 051 404 8932
Fax: 051 447 7210
E-mail: rsello@edu.fs.gov.za

2008 – 01 – 26

Ms MMM JACOBS

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

Dear Ms Jacobs

REGISTRATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

1.   This letter is in reply to your application for the registration of your research project.

2.   Research topic: **The sense of coherence of mainstream primary school educators teaching learners with learning difficulties.**

3.   Your research project has been registered with the Free State Education Department.

4.   Approval is granted under the following conditions:-

4.1   Educators participate voluntarily in the project.

4.2   The names of all schools and participants involved remain confidential.

4.3   The questionnaires are completed and the interviews are conducted outside normal tuition time

4.4   This letter is shown to all participating persons.

4.5   A bound copy of the report and a summary on a computer disc on this study is donated to the Free State Department of Education.

4.6   Findings and recommendations are presented to relevant officials in the Department.

5.   The costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility

6.   **You are requested to confirm acceptance of the above conditions in writing to:**

     The Head: Education, for attention: DIRECTOR : QUALITY ASSURANCE
     Room 401, Syfrets Building, Private Bag X20565, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9301

We wish you every success with your research

Yours sincerely

FR SELLO
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE

Directorate: Quality Assurance, Private Bag X20565, Bloemfontein 9300
Syfrets Corner, 65 Maitland Street, Bloemfontein
Tel: 051 404 8750 / Fax: 051 447 7218   E-mail: quality@edu.fs.gov.za

APPENDIX B

Tel: (051) 401 2419

Dep

Enquiries: Miss MMM Jacobs

The principal

Dear Sir/Madam

Permission to conduct research at schools in the Free State Province

I am a master's student and lecturer in the Department of Psychology, University of the Free State. The purpose of my study is to determine the level of emotional resources of educators when teaching learners with learning difficulties (determine their daily stressors). Furthermore the focus of the study will be on their strengths and how they manage to deal with these learners on a daily basis as well as the resources available to them. Results of this study can contribute to the establishment of guidelines for the support of the educators and the preservation of their own health and well being.

For the purpose of this study I am looking for **educators** to participate in this research. The focus will be on the grade 1, 2 and 3 educators who have at least 3 learners with learning difficulties in their classes. Participation in the study is voluntarily and not compulsory. Educators may withdraw from the study at any point without any necessary explanation. Should they wish not to participate or withdraw their responses, there will be no negative consequences. The study will take the form of a standardised questionnaire and semi structured interviews. Questionnaires will be made available in Afrikaans and English. Educators that score high on the questionnaires will participate in the interviews. The study will be ANONYMOUS and confidentiality and responses will be respected.

I request permission to conduct this research at your school and would greatly appreciate the participation of your staff in this study. Included are copies of the following documentation:

- Letter by the Department of Education, Free State province granting permission for the research to be conducted
- Letter of consent to the principal, giving us permission to conduct the study

The completion of the questionnaire will be done outside normal teaching hours. You are hereby respectfully requested to complete the consent form and send it back to the researcher in the enclosed envelope.

Should you require any further information, please feel free to contact me

Yours truly

Miss Meagan MM Jacobs

Junior Lecturer

Department of Psychology

University of the Free State

Bloemfontein

Tel: (051) 401 2419

Email: jacobsmm.hum@ufs.ac.za

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM TO CONDUCT

RESEARCH AT _____ SCHOOL

I, _____Principal of _____ have been completely informed regarding the nature of this study and consent the participation of the educators in this study conducted by Miss Meagan Jacobs a Masters. student in Pscyhology, under the supervision of Mr. Edwin du Plessis and Miss Chrisma Pretorius from the University of the Free State, on the condition that their participation is voluntary. I understand that by taking part in this study I incur no risk on the educators and recognise that the educators have a right to withdraw at any given time during the study, without any negative consequences.

Signed: _____   Date:_____

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO PARTICIPANT AND INFORMED CONSENT

Dear educators

Thank you for considering participation in this study. The purpose of this study is to determine the level of emotional resources from educators when working with children learning problems. Furthermore the focus of the study will be on their strengths and how they manage to deal with these stressors on a daily basis and the resources available to them.

The study will consist of 2 phases. First, educators will be requested to complete this questionnaire. The second part will consist of interviews with selected educators. Participation in this study is voluntary and any possible identifying data will be held in the strictest confidence. While the data obtained will be published, questionnaires will be completed anonymous. Should you wish to obtain individual feedback on your data, this will be available at your request.

Your participation in this study will help to identify coping strategies which will assist other educators in similar situation, to cope with the challenges facing them in the classroom.

This study has the support and backing of the Department of Education Free State Province, as well as the University of the Free State. As previously stated, participation is entirely voluntary and should you feel the need, you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Should you be willing to participate in this study, please complete the following!

_____   _____

Signature of the participant   Contact number

_____   _____

Name and surname   Date

Should you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me

Sincere

Miss MMM Jacobs

Dept of Psychology

University of the Free State

Bloemfontein

Tel: 051- 401 2419

Fax: 051 444 6677

Appendix E
THIS QUESTIONAIRE WILL TAKE ABOUT 30 MINUTES TO COMPLETE

		Office use only
Record number		
PERSONAL INFORMATION		1-3
1.	School: ……………………………………………………………………………	4-5
2.	Grade educator: Grade 1 Grade 2 Grade 3	6
3.	Age: ………………………………………………………………………………..	7-8
4.	Gender: Male Female	9

5.	Home language:		
		English	1
		Afrikaans	2
		Xhosa	3
		Zulu	4
		SeSotho	5
		Setswana	6
		Other (Specify) …………	7

Office use: 10, 11-12

6.	Marital status:

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	Married	1	
	Divorced	2	
	Single parent	3	
	Separated	4	
	Common law marriage	5	13

7.	Race		
	Coloured	1	
	Indian	2	
	White	3	
	African	4	14
	Other (Specify)	5	15-16

Office use only

8.	How long have you been an educator		
	1-5 years	1	
	6-10 years	2	
	11-20 years	3	
	More than 20 years	4	17
9.	Have you ever experienced any of the following problems during *the last 12 months*		
		YES	
	NO		18
a. Sleep disturbance			

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b. Aches/Pains			19
c. Impaired immune system			20
d. Loss of appetite			21
e. Loss/gaining of weight			22
f. Withdrawing self from others			23
g. Isolating self from world			24
h. Decreased interest in intimacy			25
i. Intolerance towards others			26
j. Overprotectedness			27
k. Loss sense of meaning/purpose			28
l. Feelings of emptiness			29
m. Emotional exhaustion			30
n. Prolonged periods of sadness			31
o. Reduced capacity to deal with strong emotions			32

p. Prolonged periods of negative emotions			33
q. Loss of enjoyment in previous pleasurable things			34
r. Irritability			35
s. Moodiness			36
t. Ineffective means in coping			37
u. Reduced productivity			38
v. Avoidance behaviour			39

10.	Have you ever been diagnosed with stress and tension as a result of your work?

Yes		
No		40

11.	What would you consider to be the causes of your work related stress? ……………………………………………………………………………… ……………………………………………………………………………… ……………………………………………………………………………
	41

12.	How do you deal with your work stress?	
	....	
	....	
	....	
		42

13..	Have you ever considered leaving your profession?		
		Yes	
		No	43
	If **YES**, when?		44-45
	If **YES**, why?		46-47

14.	In your opinion, do educators teaching children with learning problems, experienced more stress than those who do not have these learners in their classes?		
		Agree	
		Disagree	48
	Please motivate your answer.........………………………………....…		
	....		
	....		
	....		
	....		
		49

Office use only

15.	In a few sentences: Describe the factors that make you feel positive/good about yourself, your life and your future.	
	....	
	....	
	....	
	....	
	....	50
16.	In a few sentences: Describe those factors that cause you frustration and may contribute towards you being personally dissatisfied.	
	....	
	....	
	....	
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PLEASE TURN THE PAGE

ORIENTATION TO LIFE QUESTIONNAIRE									

Here is a series of questions relating to various aspects of our lives. Each question has seven possible answers. Please mark the number which expresses your answer, with numbers 1 and 7 being the extreme answers. If the words next to 1 are right for you, circle 1; if the words next to 7 are right for you, circle 7. If you feel differently, circle the number which express you're feeling the best. Please give only one answer to one question.

Indicate how much your reaction is described by each statement from:

1. When you talk to people, do you have the feeling that they don't understand you? 52

Never get this feeling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Always get this feeling

2. In the past when you had to do something which depended upon cooperation with others, did you have the feeling that it is: 53

Surely would not it get done	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Surely would get it done

3. Think of the people you come into contact with daily, aside from the ones you feel closest. How well do you know most of them? 54

You feel that they strangers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	You know them very well

4. Do you have a feeling that you don't really care about what's going on around you? 55

Very seldom or never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very often

5. Has it happened in the past that you were surprised by the behaviour of people whom you thought you knew very well. 56

Never happened	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Always happened

6. Has it happened that people you counted on, has disappointed you?									57
Never happened	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Always happened	
7. Life is:									58
Full of interest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Completely routine	
8. Until now your life has had:									59
No clear goal or purpose at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very clear goals and purpose	
9. Do you have the feeling that you are being treated unfairly?									60
Very often	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very seldom or never	
10. In the past ten years your life has been:									61
Full of changes without you knowing what will happen next	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Completely consistent and clear	
11. Most of the things you will do in the future will probably be:									62
Completely fascinating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Deadly boring	
12. Do you have the feeling that you in an unfamiliar situation and you don't know what to do?									63
Very often	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very seldom	

								or never

13. What best describes how you see life? 64

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
One can always find a solution to painful things in life								There is no solution to painful things in life

14.When you think about life, You very often: 65

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Feel how good it is to be alive								You ask yourself why you exist at all

15. When you face a difficult problem, the choice of a solution is: 66

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always confusing and hard to find								Always completely clear

16. Doing the things you do every day is: 67

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
A source of deep pleasure and satisfaction								A source of pain and boredom

17. Your life in the future will probably be: 68

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Full of changes								Completely

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
without your knowing what will happen next								consiste nt and clear

18. When something unpleasant happened in the past your tendency was: 69

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
" to eat yourself up about it"								To say,"ok that's that, I have to live with it" and go on

19. Do you have very mixed up feelings and ideas? 70

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very often								Very seldom or never

20. When you do something that gives you a good feeling: 71

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
It's certain that you will go on to feeling good								It's certain that somethi ng will happen to spoil that feeling

21. Does it happen that you have feelings inside that you rather not feel? 72

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very often								Very seldom or never

22. You anticipate that your personal life in the future will be:									73
Totally without meaning and purpose	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Full of meaning and purpose	

23. Do you think there will always be people that you can count on in the future?									74
You 're certain there will be	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	You doubt there will be one	

24. Does it happen that you have the feeling that you don't know exactly what's going to happen?									74
Very often	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very seldom or never	

25. Many people- even those with a strong character – sometimes feel like sad sacks (losers) in certain situations. How often have you felt this way in the past?									76
Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very often	

26. When something happened, you have generally found that:									77
You overestimated or underestimated its importan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	You saw things in the right proportion	

ce								

27. When you think of difficulties you are likely to face in important aspects of your life, you have the feeling that: 78

You will always succeed in overcoming the difficulties	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	You won't succeed in overcoming the difficulties

28. How often do you get the feeling that there's little meaning in the things you do in your daily life? 79

Very often	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very seldom or never

29. How often do you have the feelings that you not sure you can keep under control? 80

Very often	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very seldom or never

END

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

APPENDIX E

1. How long have you been in the teaching profession and why did you choose teaching

2. In what way do you think management (Department of Education) understands the challenges you must face in your classrooms?

3. How do you currently experience your job?

4. What are the daily challenges and/or frustrations that you face in your job? or What makes it difficult for you to cope in your job?

5. We know there is a lot of pressure on you, but somehow you cope, how do you do it? What is the secret?

6. Are there any resources (support systems) in place to help you cope with your daily challenges at school? What are they?

7. Do you consider yourself to be resilient? Why or Why not?

8. How do you think other educators, who find it difficult to cope, can benefit from your strengths? / What advice would you give to educators who find it difficult to cope?

9. How do you view the future of your job?

10. Why did you choose to work with children with special needs specifically? How do you handle the situation where students have learning difficulties in your class?

11. Tell me about something that made you feel proud of yourself (highlights in your career)

12. What do you value about :
    a. your job
    b. your colleagues
    c. your learners
    d. yourself
    e. your support systems

13. Tell me about a case in your class that fascinated you.

y can be very mean but I think it's the honesty coming out. And you always know where you stand with a child.