AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST’S PERSPECTIVE IN UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF RESIDENTIAL YOUTH-CARE WORKERS

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters in Educational Psychology (MEd Psych)

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December 2007
DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

As primary caregivers (such as residential youth-care workers) are the first teachers of children and spend much more time with the child than any other service provider, educational psychologists need to implement programmes that include primary caregivers in actively working with the youth in their care. This calls for educational psychologists to gain a rich understanding of the experiences of youth-care workers in order to work collaboratively in rehabilitating youth at risk within the youth’s ecosystem.

The study attempts to explore the experiences of youth-care workers in residential facilities, using the ecosystemic perspective. A proposed outcome of the research is to contribute to the skills and interventions educational psychologists can use in collaborating with and supporting youth-care workers in residential facilities to rehabilitate youth who are at risk successfully. Qualitative research within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm was employed as the research design. Research was based at two residential facilities in an outlying area of Cape Town, from which four youth-care workers and two youths were drawn as a sample. The data was collected through six semi-structured interviews, observations over a 10-month period at one of the facilities, and photographs of youth-care workers and children.

The review of literature and the findings of this research uncovered many experiences that appear to typify residential youth care. These experiences include the multifaceted nature of the role that youth-care workers fulfil in a residential facility; three types of emotional affect experienced by youth-care workers working in facilities; the significance of healthy youth-care worker-child relationships and the importance of these relationships in the successful rehabilitation of youth at risk; and the levels of support and training required in order to perform the task of successfully rehabilitating youth at risk in residential settings.
OPSOMMING

Omdat primêre versorgers die eerste opvoeders van kinders is en meer tyd met hulle spandeer as enige ander diensverskaffer, moet opvoedkundige sielkundiges programme implementeer wat die primêre versorgers ‘n aktiewe rol laat speel in die opvoeding van die jeug in hul sorg. Daar word van die opvoedkundige sielkundige vereis om ‘n goeie begrip van die wedervaringe van jeugwerkers te ontwikkel en sodoende samewerking te skep in die rehabilitasie wat plaasvind binne in die ekosisteem van die jeug.

Hierdie studie probeer om die wedervaringe van jeugwerkers, wat in residentiële inrigtings werk, uit 'n ekosistemiese perspektief te ondersoek. 'n Potensiële uitkoms van die navorsing is om 'n bydrae te lewer tot die verskeidenheid vaardighede en ingrypings wat die opvoedkundige sielkundige kan gebruik om samewerking met - en ondersteuning van jeugwerkers te bewerkstellig. Die hoop is dat dit die jeugwerkers sal help met die rehabilitering van kwesbare jeug in residentiële inrigtings. Kwalitatiewe navorsing in die interpretiewe/konstruktiewe paradigma is gebruik as die navorsingsontwerp. Twee residentiële inrigtings buite Kaapstad is vir die steekproef gekies. Uit hierdie twee inrigtings is vier jeugwerkers en twee kinders getoets. Die data is ingewin deur middel van ses semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude, observasies gedurende 'n periode van tien maande in 'n residentiële inrigting en fotos van jeugwerkers en kinders.

Bestudering van die literatuur en die bevindinge van die navorsing het baie wedervaringe opgelever wat blyk asof dit geheel en al deel vorm van die versorging van jeug in residentiële inrigtings. Hierdie wedervaringe sluit die volgende in: die meerdoelige natuur van die rol wat jeugwerkers in 'n residentiële inrigting speel; drie tipes emosionele invloed wat jeugwerkers in hierdie inrigtings ervaar; die betekenisvolheid van gesonde verhoudinge tussen jeugwerkers en die jeug en die belangrikheid wat hierdie verhoudinge speel in die suksesvolle rehabilitasie van die jeug; en laastens, die vlakke van bystand en onderrig wat benodig word om die taak van rehabilitasie suksesvol te verrig.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to the following people:

- My husband. It is completely beyond the scope of these acknowledgements to recognise and express my gratitude for all he has done which has enabled me to fulfil my academic aspirations. For all his time and financial assistance and, most of all, unending emotional support and undying faith in my abilities.

- My parents. I cannot thank my parents enough for all the years of support that have enabled me to take on this challenge. Mom for her sacrifices, love and support. Dad, for the scores of errands run on my behalf throughout the years and for the unseen sacrifices that even I will never know of, and for never doubting my abilities even for a moment.

- To my best friend Natalie for her support, encouragement, input and time that she has invested in me throughout this process.

- I would like to thank my supervisor for her interest, support, time and assistance, as well as for giving me the opportunity and the autonomy to make decisions and to learn from my mistakes.

- And finally, to the participants. Thank you for your enthusiasm and willingness to be a part of this study; to share and reflect upon your stories so openly even though you did not know me very well. A special thanks to all the youth-care workers at the facility under observation. I will never forget the ease with which I could walk into your work space, both as psychologist and researcher, any moment of any day and the welcome I received each and every time.
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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

You are an ambassador from the world of socialised order and reason in a land of troubled children; you are an ambassador from the world of deprived and dispossessed children in a land of often hard-nosed adults who don’t understand.

Bertolino, 1999

All youths deserve to be looked after by caring adults, to be assisted by these caregivers to grow and become autonomous and self-reliant (Alston & Lewis, 1999), and, Most importantly youth-care workers should become an ‘ambassador’ for children in need (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). Residential youth-care workers (RYCWs) have the daunting task of fulfilling these crucial needs, which requires that they undertake many responsibilities and tasks that involve the care of youth at risk in and out of residential settings.

Anglin (2006) defines youth care as working with youth in a holistic way to facilitate their development in a healthy and socially competent way. This is done by the RYCW by participating fully in the lives of the youth in their care and developing ‘therapeutic relationships’ with them. Anglin (2006) notes that there are many definitions of youth care work; one of which is youth care work as a profession, highlighting ‘commitment’, ‘integrity’ and ‘dedication’ on the part of those doing this work. In some European countries, RYCWs train to become ‘educateurs’ or ‘orthopedagogues’. Yet others regard youth care work as an applied branch of the social sciences. Gannon notes that many people regard youth care as “an art implying a creative occupation responsive to a malleable social environment” (Gannon, 2005c, p.2).

Keeping the above definitions of RYCWs in mind, one needs to further explore the role of the RYCW in a youth’s life. Randolph, Fraser & Orthner (2004) recognises that a youth’s success depends on an array of factors, some of which will be highlighted below. RYCWs attend to many factors in a youth’s development and work in a holistic manner (Anglin, 2006) with the youths to achieve developmental outcomes. According to Alston and Lewis (1999), when applying a holistic approach to youth care, careful attention should be given to youths as “complete beings” (p1.) with needs in various areas of their lives, and not just on one aspect of the youths’ context. This study will therefore use a holistic approach to the child’s development within an ecosystemic framework.
One of the underlying approaches of the ecosystemic approach is a shift from the medical model, which focuses on assessment, diagnosis and treating pathologies, to regarding a person as a part of an interactive system (Bonfenbrenner, 2002 in Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). A model arose in the early 1900s which made use of diagnosis and treatment as a means of dealing with people with so-called pathologies. This system failed to see the individual as a part of a greater system. The model, termed the medical model, emphasised pathology and sickness, and was not very useful in the social sciences where barriers were located both within an individual and within the social system (Swart & Pettipher 2005. This meant that children were rigidly tested and a diagnosis made to place them in special schools or institutions. This resulted in ineffective classification and labelling used as an attempt to fix the child so that he/she might fit into the system (Swart & Pettipher 2005).

The ecosystemic perspective arose out of a combination of ecological and systems theories. The perspective demonstrates how individuals in groups at different levels of the social context are linked in active, mutually supporting and interacting relationships. These relationships are seen as a whole in which every part is as important as another in sustaining the whole system. The individual is in an interactive relationship with different levels of organisations within a social context, and each of the levels can be seen as interacting with other levels within the total ecological system (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). For example, a residential care facility is a system with different parts consisting of youth at risk, social workers, psychologists, nurses, care workers and programmes. To understand the system as a whole, we must examine the relationships between the different parts (Donald, 2002 et.al), in this case at the interface between RYCW and youth.

1.2 Background to the study

I started my internship as an educational psychologist at a place of safety for youth at risk in January 2006. I had very little knowledge of the field of residential youth care when I arrived, but was quickly introduced to the life and experiences of the RYCWs working at the facility. Many of the youth they were working with were in need of educational and psychological support. These youths presented difficult problems that RYCWs were battling with on a daily basis. “Obviously if school experience is a significant part of the daily experience of teenagers in care, then the children’s home welfare agencies and the school itself need to work actively together, for the betterment of children” (Mudaly, 2005, p. 5).

I began to wonder what RYCWs would need to feel successful and motivated in the work they do every day. In talking to the RYCWs, I became aware that they felt they had the best knowledge of the youths they worked with but were often left out of decision making around matters concerning the youths, which left them feeling powerless. They also felt that, if they only knew what to do in certain situations and were allowed to do it, they would be able to offer the youths more support.
One of the most exciting moments I experienced as a psychologist working in a residential youth-care facility was when I realised that the RYCW spends more time with the youth than any other professional working with them. I began wondering how educational psychologists could support and collaborate with RYCWs in their daily work with youth at risk. This led me to explore the daily experiences of RYCWs in residential care facilities. It was only later that I realised there was a call for professionals such as educational psychologists, to understand youth-care workers "To this end then, it would help if principals, school psychologists and counsellors show a clear understanding and appreciation of the part played by social workers and child care staff in helping children in distress" (Mudaly, 2005, p. 5).

1.3 Problem statement

Bertolino (1999) notes that in the youth-care profession there are many devoted care workers who are eager to do all they can to be effective in their work with youths. He goes on to explain that this eagerness and devotion are often accompanied by much strain because of the very nature of residential care with drawbacks typical of the profession and those which are unanticipated (Bertolino, 1999). In order for an educational psychologist to collaborate with and support these dedicated RYCWs in this stressful work, an understanding of their day-to-day experiences is necessary. The literature, although abundant in descriptions of youth-care work and the professionalisation of the field (Benjamin, 2005), appears to be void of RYCWs’ rich descriptions of their daily experiences.

- This leads directly to the first problem: In order for educational psychologists to support RYCWs adequately, they need to know from RYCWs what they are experiencing in their daily work. One of the reasons for exploring this problem is to collaborate with and assist RYCWs in the children's daily programmes outside of the psychologist's sessions with youths. “Our major concern is the 23 hours outside the psychotherapy session – because that is when and where most of the milieu is” (Trieschman, et.al, 1969, p. 1).

- The second problem is uncovering the perceived roles RYCWs play in residential facilities. This may serve to inform psychologists of any vacant roles which need filling, or highlight discrepancies in perceived roles. Uncovering the RYCWs roles might inform educational psychologist of roles that may coincide with the perceived roles of other professionals working with youth at risk. Awareness of the overlapping roles may serve in avoiding friction within the multi-disciplinary team, as well as lessening the children's confusion about the many roles played by their caregivers.

- The third problem will be to attempt to ascertain the perceived level of competency RYCWs need in order to work with the multiple challenges of youth at risk. Currently, RYCWs differ greatly in experience and formal training.

- The fourth problem will endeavour to explore the nature of the relationships between RYCWs and youth at risk, and the impact of these relationships on the functioning
and rehabilitation of youths in need. Furthermore, an attempt will be made to uncover the positive and negative aspects of these relationships. This problem will be viewed from the perspective of the RYCW as well as the youth in their care.

- The fifth and final problem is ascertaining whether RYCWs feel the need to be supported in their work with youth at risk. This point will include the type of support needed, at what level in the ecosystem and from whom. This forms one of the main aims of the study: to serve to inform support services of levels and types of support which RYCWs may require in their personal and professional development.

1.4 Research question

Mertens (1998) claims that one of the methodological implications of having many realities is that it is difficult to define the research question in absolute terms at the outset of the study. Rather, the research questions will develop and transform throughout the study. Mouton maintains that it is the research question that sets the goals for the outcome of a research project (Mouton, 2003). With these views in mind, the research question was developed at the outset of the study with a view to being flexible as the study progressed. The research question is usually derived from some context or else is in response to a particular situation (Andrews, 2003, p. 5). In this instance, the following question was derived from both situation (researcher’s experience in a residential youth-care facility) and literature.

The proposed study will aim to answer the following question: What are the experiences of RYCWs working with youth at risk in residential facilities? This perspective on supporting youth at risk stems from the ecosystemic view which proposes that one need not examine youth at risk in isolation, but rather as a part of a system with many role players. One of the important role players in the lives of these youths is the residential care worker. As Bertolino & Thompson (1999, p. 7) points out, the personal characteristics that each RYCW contributes to the residential setting are important in facilitating changes in youths at risk. RYCWs thus bring to the table many tools and a variety of ideas with which they work, but perhaps the most undervalued ‘tool’ that they bring is themselves (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999, p. 7). This study will endeavour to uncover the experiences and relationships of these invaluable ‘tools’ called RYCWs, and attempt to understand how these experiences and relationships impact upon youths.

1.5 Aims of the research

In order to support RYCWs, an understanding of their day-to-day experiences in this field is necessary. It follows then that this study would aim to

- understand the daily role RYCWs play in the lives of the children they service to enable the educational psychologist to collaborate with and support them within a multi-disciplinary context;
• determine what training or competencies, as viewed by RYCWs, will most benefit the RYCW in successfully assisting youth at risk;
• uncover the types and levels of support needed to fulfil their duties; and
• discover the nature and importance of relationships between RYCWs and youth at risk, as viewed by RYCWs; because they spend more time with youths than other mental health professionals, the difference they can make in the lives of youth can be profound due to the devotion a caring, empathic RYCW offers to a youth and his/her family (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999).

1.6 Research design

This section outlines the plan according to which the research was conducted in order to provide satisfactory answers to the research problem (Mouton, 2003, p. 49). The objective of the research design is therefore to plan, structure and carry out the study in such a way that the validity of the findings are maximised (Morse & Richards, 2002). To achieve the main objective of this study, which is to explore the experiences of RYCWs, qualitative research, in keeping with the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, will be implemented as the research design.

Qualitative research is employed when rich, thick, subjective descriptions of the phenomenon under study are a desired outcome. The data collection methods associated with qualitative research, such as observations and interviews, emphasise the involvement of the researcher in the research process, and analysis of the data is usually interpretive (Wellington, 2000).

1.7 Research methodology

A research design, as discussed above, is a plan of how one is to carry out the research process, whereas research methodology refers to the various tools (such as sampling or data collecting) to be implemented in the study (Mouton, 2003).

Firstly, a literature study involving current literature on residential care facilities and RYCWs is needed to familiarise oneself with the topic and to generate ideas and themes that can be explored later in the research process. It would appear that the literature lacks studies containing rich descriptions of the experiences of RYCWs in residential settings and their relationships with youth at risk. For this reason it is proposed that the present study be conducted within the qualitative paradigm. Understanding people in terms of their own description of the world is one of the major distinctive characteristics of qualitative research. Rather than on an outsider-perspective, the focus is on insider-perception (Mouton, 2003). This approach may be useful since the complexities, depth (Mertens, 1998) and multiplicity of the experiences of RYCWs and their relationships with youth at risk can only be captured by relating what actually happens in their daily work with youth and incorporating the framework in which they operate, as well as their frame of reference (Mouton, 2003). This approach also
acknowledges people’s unique situations and interactions as part of a particular context (Merriam, 1998).

Secondly, attention to sampling will be given and thirdly, methods of data collection will be discussed. A qualitative approach to data collecting has the probability of supplementing our current understanding of the complexities of RYCWs which is consistent with the goals set out for this study.

The following literature review, focusing on educational psychologists and RYCWs within an ecosystemic perspective, will serve as a backdrop to understanding the problem of supporting youth at risk through understanding RYCWs.

1.7.1 Literature review

According to Sheridan & Gutkin (2000), ecological theory embraces the greatest potential as a valuable method of ‘school psychological service-delivery’. Sheridan maintains that, in order to be successful, one must find ways to come to grips with the intricacies of ecosystemic methods and demands. “If the professional problems we face addressing the multitude of children’s academic, behavioural, and social-emotional difficulties are the result of multiple and interacting systems, so too must be the solutions we generate” (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000, 485). The ecosystemic model may have a pivotal role in aiding educational psychologists to work more efficiently within certain intricate and often difficult contexts (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000), such as youth at risk within the social development setting.

Within an ecosystemic perspective, one must take a closer look at the interface between RYCWs and youth at risk in order to understand the phenomena under the microscope in this study. The responsibilities of RYCWs are numerous, as discovered in Alston & Lewis (1999) who outline some of these responsibilities as follows: The RYCW is responsible for making sure that youths are exposed to learning activities which further their developmental needs. The RYCW needs to value and maintain “the physical, social and emotional rights of the youth from a legal, moral and cultural perspective” (Alston & Lewis, 1999, p. 65). They must treat each youth as an individual and thus provide each youth with a tailored programme according to the youth’s unique needs (Alston & Lewis, 1999). The RYCW has to embark on the enormous task of fostering resourcefulness in the youth and the youth’s family, and provide the family with the chance to develop and make use of their own support system, make their own decisions and bear the consequences of these decisions. The responsibility for ensuring that the type and level of support are adapted as the youth and his/her family progress through the stages of treatment lies with the RYCW. On termination of treatment, the RYCW should ensure that support is continued where needed (Alston & Lewis, 1999).

Throughout the above tasks, it is expected of the RYCW to provide services of the highest quality and to consistently conduct him/herself in a professional manner reflective of the ethical principles governing the profession (Alston & Lewis, 1999). Some of the tasks RYCWs
are involved in on a daily basis include interviewing and assessing newly admitted youths, working in a multi-disciplinary team and looking after the safety and needs of a specific number of youths at a given time (Bertolino & Thompson 1999). Other tasks include carrying out household duties, such as supervising youths, offering emotional support, disciplining the youths, facilitating meetings or group work (such as managing conflict, learning social skills, etc.), preparing youths for extramural activities and sometimes taking them to the activity, homework supervision and assistance, general maintenance of the facilities and crisis management. RYCWs are also responsible for administering medication where applicable and delivering first-aid care when the need arises (Bertolino & Thompson 1999 and Allsopp, 2005a).

The tasks and responsibilities of RYCWs are clearly numerous and often daunting. It leaves one wondering how RYCWs experience these tasks and responsibilities in residential care settings. In Alston & Lewis (1999), one such RYC (Molly) describes her experience of living and working full time in a residential care facility as being exceptionally tiring. She experiences the hours as long and exhausting, and notes that she does not have much privacy. It is also expected of her to be dedicated to her profession with no consideration for her personal needs. She longs to spend more time with her own family whom she has left behind. Molly is expected to be knowledgeable and skilful in her work, but feels that there are too few opportunities for professional development, while the expectations to provide competent care are high (Alston & Lewis, 1999). Providing competent care is one of the chief principles of youth-care work: “The child and RYC will place importance on his /her continued personal and professional growth and on the enhancement and expansion of the child care field as a developing profession” (Alston & Lewis, 1999).

Voices like Molly’s may be useful for the educational psychologist who works within the ecosystemic model to understand the challenges and demands faced by RYCWs and their needs as individuals and professionals.

1.7.2 Sampling

Participant selection means the identification of people to take part in research and the word sampling is synonymous with participant selection (Graziano & Raulin, 2004). The proposed method of selecting a sample in this study is a type of non-probability sampling called purposive sampling; this will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

1.7.3 Methods of data collection

1.7.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

This study will make use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with four RYCWs from two youth-care centres in an outlying area of Cape Town. Individual topical interviews, which are narrowly focused on a particular event or process and which are concerned with what happened, when and why, will be used to gain information about the RYCWs’ experiences of
caring for youth at risk. The emphasis will fall on the importance of giving the subjects a voice (Mouton, 2003). According to Mertens, the voices of different types of people must be acquired during the study (Mertens, 1998). In order to acquire this peripheral data, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with two youths currently residing in a place of safety.

With the permission of the participants, the interviews will be tape-recorded. These recordings will then be transcribed verbatim and the text will be analysed according to specific methods as outlined below.

1.7.3.2 Observation

“Observation is the empirical process of using one’s senses to recognize and record factual events” (Graziano & Raulin, 2004, p. 32) This form of data gathering will provide essential information not provided during an interview, such as observing the verbal and non-verbal interaction between RYCWs and youths. This data can be used to verify the data captured during interviews.

1.7.3.3 Field notes

In the realm of qualitative research, it is imperative to keep extensive field notes of observations during the research process (Mouton, 2003). Such notes will be taken during observing the interaction between RYCWs and youths at family conferences, multi-disciplinary meetings, RYCW forums and observations during interviews.

1.7.4 Data Analysis

The data will be analysed using Strauss’s approach of thematic analysis (Strauss, 1987). As mentioned above, the interviews will be tape-recorded and formally transcribed. The analysis of the data will focus on the content of the various participants’ subjective experiences as RYCWs in terms of the study’s goals as well as any other themes which may arise during the interviews.

1.8 Clarification of terms

1.8.1 Residential youth care workers

RYCWs have been given many different titles depending on the type of programme they are involved in. They are sometimes called ‘resident or youth counsellors’, ‘psychiatric technicians’ (techs), ‘child or RYCWs’, or ‘house managers’. “The responsibilities and tasks of RYCWs may vary from facility to facility and program to program, however, there are some common factors which run through all of these positions (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). These include working as part of a multi-disciplinary team; being responsible for the safety and care of a specified number of youth at any given time; being in charge of household tasks; supervising youth; providing emotional support and discipline; facilitating meetings or
groups about topics such as conflict resolution; psycho-educational assistance and help with homework; preparing and taking youth to recreational events; and maintaining the upkeep of the facility and the structure of the programme. Over and above these daily tasks, RYCWs conduct intake assessments regarding admittance of youth to the facility. They are responsible for dealing with crises or emergency hotline calls. RYCWs are also responsible for distributing medication and providing first aid where necessary (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999).

1.8.2 Youth at risk

The term ‘at risk’ has appeared frequently in literature and is used by psychologists to describe individuals who suffer emotional and adjustment problems. Educators sometimes use the term to refer to youth who are at risk of dropping out of school or who are not learning the necessary skills to succeed after matric (US Department of Education, 1993).

The term ‘risk’ is also used to denote a set of presumed dynamics that place the youth in danger of negative future events. Experts at the US Department of Education (1993) maintain that the following characteristics are risk indicators for poor school outcomes: children of migrant workers, adjudicated youth, limited English-speaking youth, pregnant minors, children in single-parent families, children who live in poverty, children with school attendance and/or behavioural problems, and homeless children. Many of these youths at risk underachieve, experience learning difficulties or disabilities, or at best make painfully slow progress in the curriculum (US Department of Education, 1993).

1.8.3 Residential care facilities

“The truth is, however, that most children who come into a children’s home end up spending many years there” (Mudaly, 2005, p. 4). Youth in out-of-home placements, be they short or long term, are served in a variety of settings, including residential treatment facilities (Brown, et. al, 1998). In the Western Cape, there are five levels of support to prevent or resolve the challenges associated with youth at risk. The type of support and the restrictions that may be placed on the learner is determined on an individual basis depending on the nature of the particular youth’s problem. Interventions such as educational, therapeutic and/or residential support services may be employed (Capegateway. doc).

1.9 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been to outline the intentions of the research as well as to familiarise the reader with the topic at hand. The following chapters will proceed with theory relevant to the research question, methods of data collection and analysis, and finally results and interpretation. More specifically:

• Chapter 2 of this paper will focus on giving a theoretical background to the proposed study;
• Chapter 3 will encompass research design and methodology;
• Chapter 4 will contain a report on the findings; and
• Chapter 5 will contain interpretation of results and recommendations.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Since many youth at risk come from difficult backgrounds, they can have significant emotional, biological, neurological, cultural, social, psychological, interpersonal and physical obstacles to overcome. The deficit/pathology-based paradigm has resulted in RYCWs often inadvertently finding themselves in a dilemma because they become prisoners of systems that bring out the worst in youth rather than the best (Maier, 2000). It is paradoxical that there are so many youths in need and so many fine and able RYCWs, but the way their relations are structured often prohibits quality child care (Maier, 2000). What is clear, however, is the impact that RYCWs can have of the lives of youth in need (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). When RYCWs believe that change is possible and begin to pay attention to what makes a difference for youth, possibilities and opportunities for positive change can be created (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999).

This chapter will explore the role of the educational psychologist in supporting youth at risk at a specific point in the ecosystem (see Figure 1), namely the interface between the RYCW and youth at risk. The ecosystemic model is an integration of system theory, ecology and cybernetics (Meyer, et. al, 1997). This theory and its application to care workers and youth at risk will be explored below.

2.2 The ecosystemic model

For educational psychologists to achieve success in remediation or prevention work with youth, it might be necessary to link services directly to the various ecosystems within which the child functions (Nastasi, 2000; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000;).

Ecological theory is based on the interdependence of and relationships between different organisms within their environment, with the relationships being viewed as a whole. To ensure the survival of the system, each part is as important as the others are in sustaining the cycles of birth and death or rebirth and decomposition. Balance is an important factor in sustaining ecosystems because when there is disharmony and disturbance the relationship and interdependence may become distorted and recovery as a whole is threatened (Donald, et. al, 2004).

Systems theory can be seen as different levels and groupings of the social context as ‘systems’, where the functioning of the whole is dependent on the interaction between all parts (Donald, et.al, 2004). A residential facility for youth at risk, for example, can be seen as a system with different parts, consisting of programmes, administration, social workers, teachers, care workers, other staff members and children. To understand the system, one
must examine the relationship between its different parts (Donald, et. al, 2004). A fundamental principle in systems is the dynamic cause and effect relationships that are taking place in cycles. Because of the interrelationship between the parts, an action in one part of a system cannot be seen as the cause of an action in another part of the system in a ‘one-directional’ way. In systemic thinking, actions are seen as triggering and affecting one another in cyclical, often repeated patterns. Such repeated patterns can come to be experienced as unwritten rules that govern the system as a whole (Donald, et. al, 2004).

Cybernetics describes the principles underlying the control, regulation, exchange and processing of information. The influence of cybernetics is clearly apparent in the ecosystemic approach because it stresses relations and connections, and highlights the study of interactional, recursive patterns between and within systems (Meyer, et.al, 1997). Coming from an ecosystemic perspective, an educational psychologist studying youth at risk in residential settings therefore focuses not only on the interactions between youths, but also on the interactional patterns with other role players such as care workers and teachers, family members and the wider community. This form of cybernetics is known as first-order cybernetics (Meyer, et. al, 1997).
2.3 Supporting youth at risk

Youth from volatile situations need extra help to improve their situation because without this help many of them may drop out of school, engage in substance misuse or even end up in jail (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2002). In the following discussions, we will explore many facets involved in supporting youth at risk with the view of preventing the abovementioned outcomes.

2.3.1 Exploring the concept of youth at risk

In the past, literature for working with youth at risk in residential settings was based chiefly on the deficit model and on promoting the ‘specialist’ stance of the professionals diagnosing deficits within the child. That is to say, the emphasis was on identifying what was wrong with
An understanding of the concept ‘youth at risk’ is crucial to the exploration of the support given to youth at risk by RYCWs and the relationships established between youth at risk and RYCWs. As outlined in the first chapter, there are many ways of describing children and adolescents in need of special support and care. One of the terms used to describe these children is “children in difficult circumstances”, which refers to those children who are denied their most basic human rights and whose growth and development are consequently impaired (South Africa, 2001). These conditions may be caused by different factors or a combination of factors, such as parents who abuse drugs and alcohol (such behaviour often leads to social dysfunction, unemployment, the loss of housing and the loss of dignity and self-esteem) and divorced and divorcing parents (South Africa, 2001). Youths at risk are also learners who are battling with drug or alcohol misuse and/or are in trouble with the law. This often results in emotional and/or behavioural problems that then become barriers to their learning and development (Capegateway.doc).

2.3.2 The role of resilience in supporting youth at risk

Insight into ways in which resilience can be fostered can be used as a framework to construct successful strategies to aid youth at risk.

The historical basis for the concept ‘resilience’ was established in the early 1970s (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). An investigation of specific populations of resilient children and adolescents followed. In these later studies, adolescents where classified as being at risk of psychiatric disorders, delinquency and other negative life outcomes because of a variety of individual, family and environmental factors. The focus was on children who had not succumbed to negative factors, instead of on those children who were casualties of such negative factors. A new approach focused on individual strengths and the concept of resilience was born. Some of the characteristics of resilient children are social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose (Giroux & McLaren, 1986).

Many studies have identified protective factors present in resilient youth, including successful school experiences, development of reading skills above the third grade and associations with caring adults outside the family (Gilliam & Scott, 1998; McEvoy & Welker, 2000 in Paternite, 2005).

Even though the literature on resilience has documented a wide range of ecological factors that correlate with the healthy functioning of high-risk children and families, this body of
knowledge cannot help in the prediction of which specific high-risk child will endure and which will experience developmental and behavioural problems.

It is believed that resilient youth are characterised by individual, social and environmental qualities that have come to be associated with resilience (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). Reflecting post-modern interpretations of the construct, a constructionist approach to resilience in both research and practice provides different accounts of resilience-related phenomena that increase understanding of how at-risk learners discover and foster resilience in ways that are often unseen by providers (Giroux & McLaren, 1986).

Paternite (2005) defines resilience as a class of phenomena characterised by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development. Resilience may refer to either the state of well-being achieved by an at-risk individual or to the characteristics and mechanisms by which that well-being is achieved. As Paternite (2005) has observed, the resilience construct has come to mean both behaviour and internalised capacities. RYCWs following a non-deficit model would be more inclined to focus on the youth’s resilience and thus follow a more solution-based model to assist youth at risk (Bertolino & Thompson 1999). RYCWs see crisis as opportunity and problem situations are redefined so they are no longer viewed as trouble but rather as opportunities for growth. It is believed that assessment is ecological – behaviour is understood as part of the child’s total life-space, including transactions between adults, peers and the education system. The least restrictive and most reclaiming environment for all residents is strived for. Belonging, mastery, independence, generosity, recognition and new experiences are viewed as essential to human development and are acknowledged throughout the organisation and facilitated in numerous ways (Alston, et al., 1999).

2.3.3 The relationships between care workers and youth at risk

Some educational psychologists believe that the development of positive relationships is an essential element in fostering valuable partnerships with families (Christenson & Sheridan, in press, in Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000), and by extension ‘families’ in residential care. These psychologists view important factors such as building trust and understanding as necessary in such relationships with families (Christenson & Sheridan, in press, in Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000), and they maintain that these factors are likely fundamentals in achieving certain outcomes which are important to children’s educational, social and emotional development (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000).

RYCWs hold a similar view to these psychologists in that they too view relationships as primary and consider the quality of human relationships as the most powerful determinant of successful programmes for the development and education of troubled children (Alston & Lewis 1999; Maier, 2000; Trieschman, et. al, James & Brendtro, 1969). Youth-care work is considered a process by which safe relationships with others are cultivated in order to change children’s seemingly hopeless stories into positive narratives. This cannot be done at a
distance or in an office, but needs to be done in the therapeutic milieu in which the child functions (Phelan, 2007).

Another important aspect of relationships as viewed by RYCWs is communication (Trieschman, et al., 1969). The aim is for RYCWs to create non-threatening situations in which youths are made to feel safe and where staff are trained to listen without interruption. RYCWs need to value youths as people in their own right who are in need of support and understanding from caring adults. This may encourage children to disclose the things that truly matter to them (Mudaly, 2005).

### 2.4 The evolution of youth care

#### 2.4.1 Historical overview of youth-care work

Change is taking place at a rapid rate, resulting in many RYCWs being caught off guard as they try to cope with the effects on childcare and the future implications for childcare service delivery (Alston & Lewis, 1999). These changes are not confined to South Africa, however; many changes in youth care have taken place abroad since the 1800s.

Before 1800, there were a mere six institutions in the United States providing services to children (Tiffin, 1982 in Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). During the nineteenth century, almshouses, penitentiaries, juvenile reformatories, and mental and orphan asylums mushroomed rapidly. The governing approach during this time was treatment through seclusion, submission, routine and discipline, together with moral and religious instruction. The children were often looked after together with adults in large congregate institutions and treated the same as the adults. During the nineteenth century, 104 institutions for children opened their doors (Tiffin, 1982 in Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). Correctional institutions for juveniles, based on adult prisons, began to appear in the 1820s (Levine & Levine, 1970 in Bertolino & Thompson, 1999), with cottage care following in the 1850s, where one cottage mother was in charge of looking after as many as fifty children (Mayer, Richman & Blacerzak, 1978; Tiffin, 1982 in Bertolino & Thompson, 1999).

It was only in the early twentieth century that a move from custodial care and rehabilitation toward residential, psychotherapeutic treatment programmes began. In the early part of the century, several states developed standards for licensing programmes and professionals created standards for official recognition later in the century. Professionals began to develop measures for thorough assessment and classification of childhood disorders, and programmes to assist children were created based on principles of psychoanalytic and learning theory. The goal changed to one of integrating the children back into their communities (Stein, 1995 in Bertolino & Thompson 1999).

During the early 1900s, as a result of the Chicago juvenile court’s concern with the repeated lying, stealing and sex offences of children, William Healy was chosen to carry out scientific
research into the causes of these problems. He established a research project which focused on the origins of this so-called ‘delinquency’. A clinic was founded in 1909 and, because of the prevailing psychiatric opinion that acute antisocial behaviour implied severe pathology, it was named the Juvenile Psychopathic Institute (Levine & Levine, 1970, in Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). Soon afterwards, however, Healy arrived at the conclusion that his previous opinion was inaccurate. He began devising exhaustive and methodical measures for assessment, which included gathering data about family histories, social environments, mental and moral developmental functioning, educational backgrounds, friends, interests, occupational efforts, bad habits and contacts with law enforcement agencies or institutions (Levine & Levine, 1970, in Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). A comprehensive medical examination, including psychiatric and neurological standpoints and anthropometric and psychological studies, was also completed (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999).

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, licensing hoisted the benchmark for institutions and increased control. During this time, government agencies also developed programmes for visiting and inspecting institutions. The following two decades saw the beginnings of the evolution of treatment. In 1935, the Jewish Protectory and Aid Society put into practice a new treatment programme to create a total therapeutic situation, with amplified use of psychiatrists and social workers. A momentous event during this time was the opening of Boys Town in Nebraska in 1917 by Father Flanagan. In the 1930s, new facilities opened and many custodial programmes became residential treatment centres. The concept of a therapeutic milieu (which is based on psychoanalytic theory) was introduced. Behaviour modification began to appear in the 1960s in residential programmes (Adler, 1981 in Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). The tendency was that of moving toward smaller, community-based programmes (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999).

2.4.2 The changing face of youth care work

Over the past four decades, several new approaches to youth-care work have arisen. However, no sole theory presently dominates the field of residential treatment and although behavioural and developmental theories remain the standard, many programmes employ a variety of models, principles and techniques. Given that youth and their requirements are unique and require accommodating and innovative methods, this approach to treatment is paramount. Unfortunately, despite the accommodating nature of most programmes, the principal method for assisting youth at risk has typically remained pathology focused or problem focused up until the late 1980s, as was also the case in the field of psychotherapy. However, over the past ten to fifteen years, psychotherapists have experienced an interesting evolution in that there has been a shift from ‘pathology- and problem-focused’ methods to more ‘competency-based’ methods, such as ‘solution-focused’, ‘solution-orientated’, ‘narrative’, ‘reflective’, ‘possibility’ and ‘collaborative language systems therapies’ (Anderson, 1997; Berg, 1994; De Shazer, 1985, 1988; Eron & Lund, 1996; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Furnman & Ahola, 1992; Hoffman, 1993; Miller, Duncan & Hubble, 1997; Ohanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989 in Bertolino & Thompson, 1999, p. xviii).
The concept of competency-based practice has generally been filtered through chief treatment providers in residential settings, leaving RYCWs out of the picture. This is a concern as RYCWs generally spend more time with youth than so-called ‘chief’ treatment providers do and are in charge of ‘holding the fort’. They are the ones usually responsible for the implementation of treatment plans and conducting therapy.

RYCWs should constantly find new ways to construct treatment programmes and employ social forces to provide positive and therapeutic experiences to youth in need of such care (Phelan, 2007, 1). According to Bertolino & Thompson (1999), instead of always letting theories determine what can and cannot be done, the more collaborative, competency-based model takes a different view. This view focuses on possibilities and changes without ignoring the realities that youth at risk face, but instead acknowledge and attend to them. It is believed that such a focus ‘can breathe new life’ into attitudes and can promote a hopefulness that theories sometimes sap from RYCWs (Bertolino & Thompson 1999).

Another major development in the field of child and youth care is the recent professionalisation of child and youth care in South Africa and the establishment of the national diploma. For most RYCWs, lack of recognition of the work they do has caused much suffering and indignity. In countries such as France, the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia, however, youth care has long been recognised as a profession (Karth, 2006).

### 2.4.3 Current trends in youth care in South Africa

Whereas the previous approach to welfare service delivery was concerned with different fields of services which related to specific social problems and needs, there is now a movement toward social welfare interventions being “comprehensive, generic, family-centred, community-based and developmental” (South Africa, 2001). This quest is for more inclusive, integrated, supportive, people-centred and developmental social welfare strategies (South Africa, 2001).

There will also be scope, on a more limited scale, for the delivery of particular specialised therapeutic services for defined target groups and for meeting certain types of needs. Organisations delivering ‘expert’ services should be required to provide capacity-building programmes to support and enhance the basic services. The Department of Welfare is also committed to being involved in the operation of reform schools, especially for children under the age of 18 years. Residential care models that are cost-effective will be explored and a diversity of approaches to residential care will be promoted. Pilot programmes will be developed to test these alternatives. The training and retraining of childcare and youth care workers in residential facilities will be provided. Such training programmes will aim at improving the capacity of these workers to render both preventative and protective services in co-operation with social workers. Appropriate non-formal education programmes will be provided for children in residential placements, which will promote social competence and integration into community life. Existing facilities must be utilised more effectively and multi-
purpose programmes will be promoted. Appropriate strategies are needed to support young adults over 18 years of age who have been discharged from children's homes. Training programmes for parents, staff and other caregivers in alternative forms of discipline and behavioural management of children will be promoted (South Africa, 2001).

The government is committed to giving the highest priority to the promotion of family life and to the survival, protection and development of all youth at risk in South Africa. This is also a chief principal of RYCWs:

We believe that children’s needs are best met within a context of family life: to this end we work towards returning children to the care of the biological or adoptive parents or finding new placements, with families within the shortest possible time period. (Alston, et al., 1999, p. 65)

Efforts will be made to involve families and children in decisions which affect their lives as far as this is appropriate. The aim of family and child welfare services is to preserve and strengthen families so that they can provide a suitable environment for the physical, emotional and social development of all their members. According to the White Paper 6 (2001), ‘family-based policies’ and programmes should reflect the changing nature and structure of families, and should be devised to strengthen and reunify families and should strengthen work responsibilities. Significant efforts need to be made to transform family relationships that currently contribute to the subordination of women and children. A range of social services should be made available to all families in need and to promote and strengthen family life. Special attention must be given to families who are vulnerable and at risk, and who are poor and involved in child rearing and caring for their members at unacceptable social cost to themselves (South Africa, 2001).

A multi-disciplinary team, including RYCWs, would be needed to address all of the above intentions. According to Nastasi (2000), educational (‘school’) psychologists are in a key position to participate in the comprehensive health care of children and adolescents. The role of the educational psychologist in supporting RYCWs and other role players in the carrying out the intentions in White Paper 6, South Africa, 2001 may be invaluable.

2.5 The role of residential facilities

The gap between function in theory and function in practice often leaves RYCWs bemused and anxious and, as a result, the following questions arise: Who needs residential care? For what reasons? What type of care is needed? For how long? With what supporting or additional services? In the process of considering such questions, the different functions of residential care become apparent and interventions are seen in the context of their relevance to different points in children’s care careers (Brown, et. al, 1998).
Youth in out-of-home placements, be they short or long term, are served in a variety of settings, including emergency and runaway shelters, residential treatment facilities, in-patient psychiatric hospitals and units, detention centres, correctional centres, independent living programmes, group homes and wilderness treatment programmes. Within each of these settings, RYCWs can be found and, although most of the programmes mentioned employ a multi-disciplinary team of psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, social workers, case managers and juvenile officers, RYCWs spend by far the most time with the children and youth (Bertolino & Thompson 1999).

The five levels supporting youth at risk in the Western Cape (Capegateway. doc) introduced in Chapter 1 will now be discussed in more detail:

- The first level, implemented in schools, is an “early-warning system” intended to detect youths and families who may be especially vulnerable. Efforts are made within the classroom to prevent emotional and/or behavioural difficulties from occurring or becoming aggravated (Capegateway. doc).
- For children who are battling emotional or behavioural barriers to learning in the classroom, the next level provides emotional support and guidance (Capegateway. doc).
- At the third level, school-based support programmes, youth development programmes and deliberate interventions are provided for learners who are at risk of being expelled from school, being placed away from home, or entering the criminal justice system, and for whom temporary removal from the classroom is necessary (Capegateway. doc).
- Level four concerns the learner who does not benefit sufficiently from the above-mentioned support. Such a learner may then be referred to a residential programme at a youth-care and education centre. Youth at risk are referred to such programmes in keeping with the applicable legislation. These residential care centres provide accommodation and structured programmes for the youths. In these residential settings, the principle of using the least restrictive and most empowering environment applies, and the framework for good practice is based on the principles set out by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Capegateway. doc).
- The final level (level five) involves special care provided to young people who are in conflict with the law or in severe emotional turmoil, and who may need to be physically, emotionally and/or behaviourally contained and supported. Young people are referred to these centres by the courts under the relevant legislation for compulsory residence. Each young person is provided with an individual development plan to help him/her to be rehabilitated. A psychologist, occupational therapist, professional nurse and social worker are available at the centre for consultation. The educators are specially trained in child-care theory and practice (Capegateway. doc).
Providing services and development programmes aimed at youth with special needs remains the primary target of the Department of Welfare’s programmes. Addressing the needs of youth and making preventative measures available (mainly education) are also integral to the National Programme of Action for Families, Children and Youth, as is providing access to appropriate services for youth at risk. Co-operating with government and with non-governmental organisations in community-based development initiatives to promote the meeting of the needs of the youth is paramount (South Africa, 2001).

Residential facilities will be multi-purpose, more flexible and less formal. The approach to children in residential care and to families will be focused on the individual in the context of his or her social environment. The Department of Welfare is also in the process of negotiating with the Department of Education about the implementation of social support and development services in residential settings, including life-skills training programmes which could be run throughout the school-going years and could be incorporated into the programme. This training should include personal relationship skills, education regarding sexuality and substance abuse, and other appropriate programmes. It should be aimed at teaching interpersonal skills, the development of self-esteem, and decision-making (South Africa, 2001).

2.6 The role of youth-care workers

There are many ideas surrounding the nature of youth-care work and this study will endeavour to add to these ideas, but one needs an to explore some existing ideas on the nature of youth-care work in order to understand the role of youth-care workers. Anglin (2006) mentioned the following five characteristics of child and youth care which will be used as a overview to understanding the intricate field of youth-care:

- Youth care is mainly concerned with the growth and development of youth
- The profession is also concerned with the child’s functioning as a whole
- Rather than the pathology-based model to child and youth development, youth care has developed a model of social capability
- Youth care is conducted within the therapeutic milieu of the child instead of at arms length

2.6.1 Challenges for youth-care workers

Many RYCWs have come across dedicated colleagues who are eager to “do what it takes” to be effective RYCWs. However, this eagerness to make a difference brings high stress levels. Combining daily occurrences such as arguments and fighting amongst youth, with pathology- or problem-focused approaches can become discouraging and lead to a sense of hopelessness (Bertolino & Thompson 1999.).
One of the youngsters that I worked with once shared an observation that the child care workers come in happy, enthusiastic, and enjoying the work and that the kids came in messed up, depressed, strung out on drugs, in and out of foster homes or jail, and so on. In a few years, the kids left feeling better and doing better, and the staff left drinking heavily, wrecking their cars, getting divorces, and flunking out of school. To a great extent, staff burnout is at least exacerbated by the real needs of therapeutic child care work. (Gannon, 2000)

In childcare, there seems to be a long way to go in order for youth care to be recognised and valued as a profession that can make a desperately needed and important contribution to the lives of children and youth (Gannon, 2000).

RYCWs have long known their place in the hierarchy. They carry out the day-to-day tasks of caring for young people, organising them, entertaining them, disciplining them and so on. When a young person has particular difficulties (or other people experience particular difficulties with a young person), then the experts are called in. The RYCW prepares the young person for seeing this counsellor or therapist, often takes him/her there and waits outside, and helps pick up the pieces afterward (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999).

2.6.2 The experiences of youth-care workers

The RYCW not only encounters challenges in caring for the children, but also faces the many challenges that arise from working with other professionals. In a letter from one RYCW to another (Brian Gannon writes to Sam): “You have set yourself an awesome task, ‘taking on’, as you put it, both the children and the system!” He goes on to tell Sam that it is hard enough to try and direct all one’s energies ‘downward’ towards the children, listening to them, trying to understand them, offering them alternative ways of coping, teaching them to master new things, being with them through the agonies of failure and doubt, which is all in the nature of childcare work. However, to feel that one must also direct your energies ‘upwards’ towards the senior staff and the management committee places a RYCW at quite a crunch point in the organisation. He goes on to explain that many childcare workers experience being unheard and misinterpreted by supervisors and principals. Gannon describes this as being at the coalface of the child-care profession, and getting to experience deeply the hurts, the fears and the angers of the youths. He also describes this as the main purpose of the RYCW, as the other important adults in their lives “didn’t stick around for them when the going got tough” (Gannon, 2005b). This, Gannon writes, is the first task: The RYCW is there for the children, to help them through the tough times, to help them untangle their feelings and stop being whipped by them. However, Gannon also warns of the danger that RYCWs can over-identify with these feelings, and can lose perspective and status as a helping professional, someone who helps the children to make sense of their lives (Alston & Lewis, 1999).

Gannon further explains to Sam that the senior and management committee are similarly placed as their task is to represent the ordered community out there. It is important that they
do this, or else they will deceive the children by promising them something other than the real world. It can happen that they, too, over-identify with the outside norms, become judgemental and unforgiving towards the children, and in turn lose their perspective and their status as a human service organisation. RYCWs are therefore in a unique position between the two, between confusion and order, between the children’s pain and their health – it is this transition that the RYCW must manage. RYCWs are the people who make it possible for the children to cross from one to the other; they must therefore know and be known by both sides. “You are an ambassador from the world of socialised order and reason in a land of troubled children; you are an ambassador from the work of deprived and dispossessed children in a land of often hard-nosed adults who don’t understand” (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999).

The second task of the RYCW is to represent the plight, condition and feelings of the children. The more dispassionately, objectively and diplomatically the RYCW does this, the more effective he/she will be. Like most ambassadors, the RYCW is also a translator. Child-care workers are in the unique position of being able to speak and understand both “the vernacular of troubled children and the more polite, technical idiom of [the] profession and [the] organisation.” In one’s advocacy for the children, it is not enough simply to relay what they say – one has to relay what they mean, which is where the special skills of a child-care worker are important. RYCWs have learned to reflect back to the children what they mean when they express themselves awkwardly. This ability allows the RYCW to convey this same meaning to senior staff members and the management committee, which is probably the best way for RYCWs to ‘take on’ the system by scrupulously and objectively reporting the children’s needs, progress and continuing problems. The professional message should be that the RYCW is concerned about the children, not working against the system (Alston & Lewis, 1999 & Maier, 2000).

Child-care workers should be assured of their rights as workers in society. Children in society, especially children in care, also have basic rights that are not negotiable and adults have a responsibility to protect, not compromise, these individual and collective rights. The interrelatedness of human rights, worker rights and children’s rights has to be acknowledged, understood and respected (Alston & Lewis, 1999).

2.6.3 The role of supervising youth-care workers

There is overriding evidence to support the fact that supervisors need to play a positive role in supporting front-line youth-care workers in order for these youth-care workers to perform optimally. A supervisor who is ineffective lowers the standards of excellence and creates weakness in both the establishment and the staff. Supervisors need to be good leaders and good leaders do not simply order subordinates around, but rather build positive climates of responsible decision making. In time, this leads to RYCWs and children being able to think for themselves, ask questions, consider alternatives and learn more from their experiences (Samjee, Makan, Myeza, MacKay, 2005). When the RYCWs feel that they come first with their supervisors, the children will feel that they come first with their care workers. Samjee et.
al (2005) maintains that when employees are not asked for their opinion (or their opinions are not taken seriously), they become detached from the ultimate vision and do not fully participate in the future of the organisation. Creating opportunities for personal growth is also an important function of good supervisors (Phelan, 2007 and Samjee, 2005). Samjee et.al (2005) notes, “Never let them feel that the lid on their career or profession is on tight. In those circumstances people lose personal vision, they stagnate and languish” (Samjee, et.al, 2005, 8).

2.6.4 The role of the National Association of Child-Care Workers

The NACCW is the only non-governmental organisation operating solely in the unique area of training and developing partnerships (it interprets policy initiatives into practical interventions for implementation and replication by those working at service delivery level), and supporting and developing those who work with young people at risk. The NACCW is an internationally linked, specialist education, training and consultancy organisation. It equips adults whose educational backgrounds range from semi-literate to post-graduate with the skills needed to intervene in the lives of children and youth at risk.

Gamble (2007) notes that the NACCW has played an important advocacy role in informing and contributing to the process and development of the Children’s Bill.

2.7 The role of the educational psychologist

Like many other child care workers, as much as I enjoyed the work I felt I had to leave. As it is today, unfortunately, child-care was not much of a career opportunity. Academically, I remained interested in how one devises a therapeutic setting that can bring out the best in people and raise and treat children. For personal and professional reasons I never felt quite comfortable as a psychologist despite my Ph.D. in psychology. I find it somewhat ironic that as I worked my way back into child and youth care, I passed so many people going the opposite direction (Gannon, 2005a).

It has long been believed that the ‘important’ therapeutic work in residential facilities is done by the clinical staff composed of psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, social workers, etc. (Bertolino & Thompson 1999). However, it is the RYCW who spends more time with youth than other mental health professionals do (Bertolino & Thompson 1999). Bertolino & Thompson (1999) considers RYCWs to be the chief contributors in helping youth to continue with their lives. This therapeutic work, because it requires expert knowledge and training, and can only be undertaken by those who are a member of the so-called ‘professional societies’, has a certain air of mystery about it. Since it only includes those who are qualified, have the credentials and the affiliated status, it excludes others whose status is therefore inherently inferior (Bertolino & Thompson). Sheridan & Gutkin (2000), however, argues that educational (school) psychologists cannot bring about substantive and positive improvements in the lives
of children unless ways are sought to work successfully with educators, parents and other community-based professionals at all levels within the ecosystem. In this way, the so-called professional’s role is demystified and power returned to all role players who work closely with the child.

2.7.1 Working within an ecosystemic model

Donald (in Sharratt, 1995) proposes the training of mental health workers who could operate across boundaries between psychological, educational, social and medical work within a community psychology model. Many professionals from different disciplines, including psychology (e.g. Adelman & Taylor, 1998; Dryfoos, 1995; Kolbe et al., 1997; Robers & Hinton-Nelson, 1996 in Nastasi, 2000), are recognising the need to integrate service delivery, such as educational, mental health and social services, within the ecological context of youth at risk and to take an effective stance in the inclusive care of youth at risk (Nastasi, 2000).

2.7.2 The role of the Department of Education

The Inter-ministerial Committee on Children at Risk recommended, as early as 1996, that the Department of Social Development take responsibility for providing education at the facilities run by this department, which include places of safety. From 1 September 2004, the Department of Social Services in the Western Cape took over responsibility for the provision of education programmes at places of safety from the Department of Education. The curriculum of the Department of Education is not used at several residential facilities mainly due to practical constraints, such as the fact that many of the learners stay in the facilities for short periods. The Department of Social Services should dedicate sufficient time and resources to fulfil its expanded mandate with regard to providing education at the facilities under its control. There needs to be clear channels of communication and collaboration between the Department of Social Services and the Department of Education in this regard. An area that requires special consideration is curriculum development for facilities that typically cater for short-term learners. The continued assistance of the Department of Education, particularly in curriculum development and design, is essential because it is its core function and area of specialisation, rather than that of the Department of Social Services (South Africa, 2001).

2.8 Conclusion

Although child-care workers of today still do not receive the professional respect they have earned, there has been some improvement (Phelan, 2007). If a society values its children, then the people who care for these children will be valued and respected for being important role players in the lives of the children, in the institution and in society.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Whilst the previous chapter focused on the available literature on RYCWs, Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and methodology implemented in this study.

3.2 Research aim

Educational psychologists have an important role to play at the interface between RYCWs and youth at risk. The aim of this study is therefore to explore and document the experiences of RYCWs to enable educational psychologists to understand the needs of RYCWs better, thus facilitating a collaborative relationship in rehabilitating youth in residential facilities.

3.3 Research paradigm

According to Mertens (1998) and Wellington (2000), a research paradigm refers to the manner in which one looks at the world. This then guides and directs the researcher’s thinking and action. Researchers must be conscious of their beliefs and working paradigm, and of the way these might impact on the research process and outcomes (Mertens, 1998). This study employs the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, one of the key doctrines of which is that reality is socially constructed (Mertens, 1998 & Kumar, 1999). To address the absence of RYCWs’ voices in the literature, this study required a research paradigm that would facilitate the expression of their opinions to the researcher. The researcher should then attempt to understand the experiences of the subjects under study from the subjects’ point of view (Mertens, 1998).

In keeping with the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, this study made use of qualitative methods, specifically interviews with open-ended questions in which participants were able to express their point of view on various subject. This method intended to enable RYCWs to express their specific socially constructed views on issues under study.

3.4 Research design

This study used qualitative research for the following two reasons: Firstly, this design is appropriate for uncovering rich descriptions of the phenomena under study; and, secondly, it is in keeping with the interpretive/constructivist view (Mertens, 1998) employed in this research. Qualitative research involves an interpretive method of studying subjects and is therefore a suitable design for gaining a rich understanding of the constructions held by RYCWs in residential settings.
The following is a summary of the main tenets of qualitative research:

- It involves an interpretive approach to the phenomenon (Mertens, 1998; Mouton, 2003)
- The type of reasoning applied is inductive (Mertens, 1998; Mouton, 2003) and a-theoretical (Mouton, 2003)
- Methods of data collecting are predominantly qualitative and participatory, which might include methods like participant observation and semi-structured interviews (Mertens, 1998; Mouton, 2003)
- The strength of this design type includes high construct validity and an ‘insider’ view of the phenomenon under study; due to its participatory nature, trust and credibility are often increased (Mouton, 2003)
- Weaknesses include difficulties in making causal inferences, the lack of rigorous control and observation/interviewer bias (Mouton, 2003)

There are many types of qualitative research. This study used phenomenological research because it emphasises the need to explore the subjective experiences (Tesch, 1990 in Mertens, 1998) of individuals. Understanding and describing the participant’s point of view is fundamental to this type of research (Mertens, 1998 & Melville & Goddard, 1996). Since the study’s goal is to understand the experiences RYCWs, this approach is vital to achieving this goal.

### 3.5 Research methodology

Research methodology entails the methods, design and procedures employed in a particular study (Wellington, 2000). Wellington (2000) however, further argues that research methodology does not only entail the selection of methods, but also the reflection, evaluation and rationalisation of the chosen methods.

Predominant in the interpretive/constructivist paradigm are qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations (Mouton & Marais, 1994) which were employed in this study. These methods were applied in keeping with the assumptions about the social construction of multiple realities and achieved through interaction between participants and researcher (Mouton & Marais, 1994). Mertens (1998) describes this interactive approach as a ‘hermeneutical’ and ‘dialectical interchange’. Interviews were conducted with RYCWs and youth in residential facilities and their unique experiences were further captured through visual data (photographs, see addendum H) and observations.

The various methods used in the study will now be discussed in detail with the focus on the rationalisation, evaluation and application of the chosen methods.
3.5.1 Participant selection

There are many different ways of selecting participants. This study made use of non-probability sampling.

In qualitative research, non-probability sampling can be practical. Non-probability sampling such as purposive sampling could therefore be practical in overcoming problems like access and gaining entry (Wellington, 2000). This type of sampling entails selecting a sample with a specific purpose in mind (Wellington, 2000); that is, it serves the objective or purpose of the investigation. In this study, observing and interviewing the participants in the institution in which the researcher was working, as well as interviewing members of the neighbouring institution, allowed the researcher access to the subjects on a daily basis. This proved invaluable for selecting the participants and allowing for maximum observation of the subjects.

The first institution from which participants were selected is a facility for boys awaiting trial. This facility accommodates approximately 200 individuals. They are provided with stimulating programmes, including formal education and skills training. The participants from this institution were selected by the auxiliary control RYCW (supervising RYCW). The researcher stipulated that participants could be male or female, should have a command of English or Afrikaans and could be of any nationality. The auxiliary control RYCW proceeded to select RYCWs who were willing and available at that point.

The institution at which the researcher was employed is a facility that houses 40 Child Care Act children, 20 girls and 20 boys. This institution offers stimulating and relevant programmes, including formal education and skills training. The researcher proceeded to select two willing and available respondents based on the criteria used at the first institution.

3.5.2 Methods of data collection

3.5.2.1 Literature review

The literature review usually provides the information necessary for understanding the nature of the topic under study. It also provides the opportunity to examine how other researchers and writers have already thought about the topic (Mouton & Marais, 1994).

This study made use of a literature review to explore two main phenomena:

- the nature of youth-care work
- the role of the educational psychologist working within an ecosystemic framework

3.5.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

The data was collected over the period from February to November 2006. The first two semi-structured interviews with RYCWs were conducted at a facility in the outlying area of Cape
Town. The next two semi-structured interviews were conducted at the facility where the observations were taken. Finally, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with two children at the second facility. The participants were coded as follows: RYCWs (RYCW1, RYCW2, RYCW3, RYCW4); children (C1 and C2). According to Mertens (1998), a researcher employing an interpretive/constructivist view should include information concerning certain particulars pertaining to the research participants; thus a profile of the participants is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RYCW No</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No years as RYCW</th>
<th>No years in current facility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RYCW 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYCW 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYCW 3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYCW 4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child No</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time residing in current facility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Participant details

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews with RYCWs was to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences in child and youth care within a residential setting. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews with the two child participants was to gain peripheral data to increase the richness of the data gained from the RYCWs.

A semi-structured interview guideline (interview schedule) was used to direct the interviews. The questions were mainly open questions to allow respondents to express their views and experiences in a rich and comprehensive manner (Wellington, 2000).

The questions were developed from themes that emerged during the process of developing the literature review and from deficiencies evident in the available literature. Simultaneously, questions were being added and adapted in accordance with the daily observations made at one of the facilities under study. Finally, the questionnaires were tested on volunteers who did not form part of the six selected participants.
3.5.2.3 Observation

Observing is the most natural way of collecting data, but observing unobtrusively is extremely difficult. Researchers may be able to gain an understanding of some behaviour only through observation, as it may not be possible to interview some participants (Morse & Richards, 2002). Observations were made at one of the facilities under study, two Youth-Care Forums and after each interview between February and November 2006.

Observations at the facility were made in various settings:

- during daily multi-disciplinary team meetings
- inside the girls' and boys' dormitories
- at the skills centre
- at various functions such as modelling shows and sports days

The observer's perspective may be different from those of the participants, or there may be a very weak link between reported behaviour and actual behaviour. For these reasons, observation is a primary strategy for collecting data even in situations where interviewing would be easy. The assumption behind most observational strategies is that they enable the researcher to learn what is taken for granted in a situation and to discover what is going on by watching and listening (Morse & Richards, 2002). In order to facilitate and streamline this process, an observation guide was created based on the literature, and implemented (Addendum D).

One's own observations must be linked theoretically with those of the participants if the study is to achieve validity and abstraction (Morse & Richards, 2002). This was achieved through linking the observations with the interviews and current literature (discussed in Chapter 4).

3.5.2.4 Field notes

According to Morse & Richards, “[t]raditionally, researchers have recorded their observational data along with their own interpretations, in the form of field notes” (2002, p. 96–97). The researcher observes a location or situation for a short time and then leaves to record the observations and sometimes reflect on them. Data does not consist of a single type, Morse & Richards (2002) points out, but rather consists of observational data (which is recorded as field notes), interviews (recorded as field notes or audio taped and transcribed) and the researcher’s ongoing theoretical notes.

Since the researcher was in the employ of one of the facilities under study, she was able to observe the RYCWs working in a multi-disciplinary team and directly with the children, which was done with the knowledge of the facility manager, auxiliary care control and RYCWs. Notes were taken of these observations from February to November 2006, and are coded as such (Field notes: Month: FF, FM, FA, FM, FJ, FA, FS, FO and FN).
Researchers also commonly use photographs to support their observational data, analysing them to gain additional insights into the setting (Morse & Richards, 2002). The researcher took photographs throughout the year and many of these depicted interactions between RYCWs and the children, which provided illustration to some of the observations made. The photos are coded as (Photo: number: PH1 – PH18).

3.5.3 Data analysis

Categorising is the first step to abstracting, but it is often also an end goal. For some projects, it is a first step toward creating theory. The ability to offer ‘thick description’ or to locate a surprising pattern may transform complicated data into a story that makes sense – but doing that requires categorisation. Coding always requires categorising; the researcher needs to identify it as a topic or idea on which he or she will gather material. Coding generates categories. During coding, the data ‘make’ categories as the researcher is alerted to concepts, themes, patterns and surprises with new meanings (Morse & Richards, 2002).

This process of categorisation comprised the following (Strauss, 1987):

- The semi-structured interviews of the RYCWs and children were transcribed verbatim.
- Open coding, which entailed that interview transcripts be read several times and key issues mentioned by participants, noted.
- Selective coding: Key phrases, statements, and comments were labelled and categorised based on both content and objectives of the research and literature review.
- Comparison and categorisation: The participants were categorised according to age, ethnicity, gender, experience as a RYCW and time employed in current facility.
- Similarities and differences in the content of the statements labelled were compared.
- Re-reading and modifying: The findings were confirmed by means of re-reading the original narratives and modifying the analysed data accordingly.

An example of the process of categorisation can be found in Addendum F.

3.6 Position of researcher

The researcher was stationed at the facility under observation for a period of one year to complete an internship as a requirement for the Masters Degree of Educational Psychology. It was only after entering the facility and working as an intern psychologist that the researcher decided to study the topic of youth-care workers. The position of the researcher at the facility for the above-mentioned period was therefore both an intern educational psychologist and researcher.
3.7 Validity and reliability

3.7.1 Credibility

‘Internal validity’ is a term usually found in positivist research and refers to how well a study or a procedure measures what it is supposed to measure (Wellington, 2000). In qualitative research, however, the term used is ‘credibility’ and is used to find out whether there is a correspondence between the way in which the participants understand social constructs and the way in which the researcher depicted their viewpoints (Mertens, 1998).

One fundamental task of research is to ensure the validity of research procedures by including appropriate controls (Graziano & Raulin, 2004) or, as in the case of qualitative research, strategies to increase credibility (Mertens, 1998). Control is any procedure used by the researcher to counteract potential threats to the validity or credibility of the research (Graziano & Raulin, 2004). Mertens (1998) proposes that one provide evidence from many sources. The method employed in this study was triangulation. This method is discussed below.

3.7.2 Triangulation

According to Mertens (1998), combining several methodological techniques may offer the researcher a better, more complete picture of reality and richer theoretical concepts, as well as a means to verify these elements. Using several methodological techniques in a single investigation in the above-mentioned manner is often referred to as triangulation. Denzin (1970, in Wellington, 2000) postulate that triangulation not only include a combination of different kinds of data, but also of investigators, theories and methods. This study made use of different data sources and different data methods. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with RYCWs and peripheral information was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with children currently in a youth care facility. Observations, including photographs, were made at a youth care facility and at two youth care forums. Field notes were taken throughout the process and a literature survey was included, incorporating journal articles, government documents, books and handouts.

3.7.3 Reliability

In the positivist paradigm, ‘reliability’ indicates the degree of confidence in the data (Wellington, 2000) and also stability over time; that is, the extent to which findings can be replicated (Mertens, 1998). The terms used in qualitative research to indicate the extent to which the findings can be replicated are ‘dependability’ and ‘consistency’. During the process of this study, care was taken to describe in detail how the data were collected and analysed; this process was then documented and examples of each stage provided.
3.7.4 Transferability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989, in Mertens, 1998); ‘transferability’ is the qualitative equal to post-positivist’s ‘external validity’. External validity is the extent to which one can generalise the findings or conclusions of a study to other contexts or situations (Mertens, 1998, Wellington, 2000). In qualitative research, however, the onus is on the researcher to provide ample detail in order for the audience to make a judgement (Mertens, 1998). Such extensive description of factors as time, place and context is known as “thick description” (Mertens, 1998). These thick descriptions were obtained during interviews, observations and the gathering of visual descriptions (photographs).

3.8 Ethical considerations

3.8.1 Informed consent

According to Graziano & Raulin (2004), many writers maintain that research participants must be protected against deception, dangerous procedures and invasion of privacy. These writers argue that participants have a right to know how the study is going to be conducted and to be given enough information to freely consent to or refuse to participate. Participants have the right to make their own decisions; however, they can only make these decisions if they have adequate information on which to base their decisions. This is known as informed consent (Graziano & Raulin, 2004).

In order to comply with the requirements of informed consent, permission was sought and granted by both the Department of Social Development and a private company. A proposal outlining the objectives was presented; this included an outline of the intended methods of data collection. Both facilities granted permission. The participants at the first facility were identified by the auxiliary control care worker and the participants at the second facility were identified by the researcher. The participants were all informed that their participation was voluntary. During each interview, I introduced myself to the participant, explained the nature of the study and the data capturing method (semi-structured interview). The participants signed a form indicating that they understood the nature of the research, what is required of them and that they are free to end their participation at any point in the research.

3.8.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

It is the responsibility of the researcher to maintain strict confidentiality of information collected about participants. This is of utmost importance when the research deals with sensitive personal information about participants or information derived from confidential personal records (Graziano & Raulin).

Participants were ensured that the information they gave would remain confidential and that their personal particulars would not be coupled with the information given. This confidentiality was maintained throughout the study by keeping personal particulars (including the institution
in which the participants worked) separate from the interview tapes and transcriptions. According to Graziano & Raulin (2004), researchers sometimes use codes, rather than participants’ names, to protect participants’ confidentiality. This study made use of codes which were assigned to each RYCW (e.g. RYCW 1) and to each child (e.g. C 1).

3.9 Limitations of the study

The small sample size and the composition of the sample are acknowledged as limitations in this study. It is possible that, if more youth-care workers were interviewed from a variety of residential settings, the study could have yielded a richer description of the experiences held by RYCWs. Furthermore, this study is contextually bound which makes generalisation difficult.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research design, methodology, participant selection, data collection and data analysis were described. The use of these methods pertaining to this particular study were discussed, evaluated and rationalised. The chapter was then concluded with a discussion of validity, reliability and ethical consideration relevant to this study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 focused on research design and methodology, and discussed validity, reliability and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 will consist of a report of findings that emerged from this process and will proceed to elaborate by interpreting and discussing the findings of the research.

4.2 Findings

What follows is a discussion of the findings of the data analysis, which will be presented by using the research aims and certain aspects of the literature review. Since this study aims to obtain a rich description of the RYCWs experiences of rehabilitating youth at risk within youth care centres, the findings of the study will be represented in a narrative form to capture the authentic voices of the RYCWs.

Through content analysis of the data, the following five major themes emerged: the role of RYCWs; the emotional effects of working with youth at risk; the relationship between RYCW and youth at risk; support received by RYCWs; and skills, training and education. Each of these themes will now be presented as it emerged.

4.2.1 The role of youth-care workers in a residential facility

This section is dedicated to uncovering RYCWs’ roles as expressed by the RYCWs interviewed in this study.

RYCWs experienced their daily roles in the lives of the youths in their care in various ways, with little correspondence between the ways in which they described these roles. However, all interviewees described their role as multifaceted, with the different facets being regarded as less or more important. This is depicted in Figure 2, which will be discussed below.

As seen in Figure 2, some of the RYCWs viewed their primary role as a supervisory one (RYCW1:3), which entailed looking after the children’s physical wellbeing (RYCW1:3, RYCW2:9). This role entailed providing clothing and a place to sleep in (RYCW1:3), also noted during observations, and the supervision of meals and snack times (O: F – O: N). The supervisory role was further observed as the physical presence of RYCWs with the children at all times (O: F – O: N). They accompany the children during times of relaxation, play time, sports events and functions, both at the facility and at other locations. One of the RYCWs described their supervisory role in the daily lives of youths as a routine though which they
have to walk youths every day. This included getting the youths up each day to have breakfast, getting them off to school, commencing recreation programmes after school, ensuring that the children get to their sessions with the social workers, taking the children to supper in the evening and finally supervising television time, programmes or play before bedtime (RYCW 1: 10–11). The RYCW described this routine as positive because these youths have not had routines before. He went on to say that the structure offered in these routines was important to youth at risk (RYCW 1:11).

A secondary role identified by RYCWs was that of catering to youths’ emotional needs and adjustment to residential life. One of the RYCWs expressed this in terms of integrating shy children with others and/or helping them cope with his/her current situation (RYCW1:3). One of the child participants said that when they fall the RYCWs are always there to pick them up (C2). The researcher also frequently observed the youth-care workers tending to emotional needs. An example was noted when a RYCW noticed and tended to the distress of a terminally ill child (O: J).
Another secondary role identified by RYCWs was the responsibility to refer youths to appropriate professionals and/or other service providers. For instance, one RYCW mentioned that it was up to them to ensure that children who have specific problems that need the attention of a counsellor should refer the child (RYCW1:3). It was observed on several occasions that RYCWs approached the educational psychologist to refer children in need of counselling (O: F – O: N). It was further noted that each morning, during the multi-disciplinary meetings, RYCWs brought the children’s needs to the attention of the team for referral to appropriate centres (O: F – O: N).

The RYCWs interviewed in this study agreed that education is of vital importance in the rehabilitation of youth at risk. They also agreed that the role of educating these youths lie predominantly with the educational staff. RYCWs however believed they had a role to play, but that it was in motivating and inspiring children instead of providing a formal education. One of the motivational roles played in this process was encouraging children to attend school (RYCW 1:5). This was also observed on a daily basis as RYCWs attempted to encourage defiant youths to attend classes (O: F – O: N).
An inspirational role played by RYCWs was showing youths the importance of education and literacy (RYCW 2:9). Another inspirational role pointed out by a child participant was that her RYCWs inspired her to never give up on what she wants to become one day; even when she felt that she might not be successful, the RYCWs encouraged her to keep going (C: 2). Child participant one said that she wanted to finish school one day and would like to look back and think that the institution also helped her to achieve that. She went on to say that the RYCWs were positive and told her to try harder and harder every day, and that she was getting there (C: 1).

Only the RYCWs interviewed in the first institution noted that they might have a role to play, together with educators, in the classrooms. For example, one of the RYCWs stated that it is sometimes required by the educator to be present in the classroom to assist a disruptive child (RYCW 1:7). Those interviewed at the second institution maintain that they had no direct role to play in the formal education of youths (F:F/Mar). RYCWs previously had a direct role in skills training, which was a part of the programme immediately following formal classes. This function is presently performed by the educators (F:F/Mar). Although RYCWs are not present during academic classes, they are present in the skills centre after school time, but have no formal function – only a supervisory role (O:F-N). This has left RYCWs feeling disempowered and of no use to youths’ acquisition of skills (F:F/Mar).

4.2.2 The emotional effects of working with youth at risk

The data produced three facets of emotional affect pertaining to RYCWs working in residential facilities. The first one was the RYCWs’ constant concern and anxieties related to the youths’ wellbeing. For example, one RYCW stated, “My worry was always with the children” (RYCW4:1). It was further noted that these RYCWs harbour these anxieties even when off duty (F:F-N).

The second facet was the emotional toll experienced by RYCWs while on duty in the residential setting. For example, one RYCW stated during an interview, “I was very emotional” (RYCW 4:1). The emotional toll on RYCWs was also observed; on one occasion a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) member brought RYCWs’ need for help to the psychologist’s (researcher’s) attention by noting that a particular RYCW was found hitting his head against the wall in frustration. Furthermore, during September, a distressed RYCW approached the team for assistance as he felt that he was not equipped to deal with particular crises he had to face in the dormitories (FN: S). Other crises experienced by RYCWs were also observed to have a negative emotional effect. One such observation was made during February when a RYCW and the state vehicle he was driving were attacked by a youth. The RYCW attempted to physically restrain the youth, but gave up in distress and drove away from the situation without resolving the incident (O: F). Yet another RYCW was observed saying to a youth: “Jy dryf my tot drank. My kop is seer! My kop is seer!” (O: N).
Two aspects observed and noted during interviews, namely the lack of regular daily breaks (RYCW1:15) and the perceived high ratio of youths to RYCWs (1:13), seemed to affect the emotional wellbeing of RYCWs whilst on duty. The RYCWs believed that the emotional impact could be alleviated by the addition of more staff members at crucial times.

A third facet was the effect of the emotional strain some RYCWs experienced in their personal lives on their professional lives. An MDT member mentioned that there were RYCWs experiencing troubles at home, which put additional emotional strain on them (FN: F). This facet did not emerge during the interviews, although it was noted during observations.

It was noted that not all emotional experiences were negative, but that some were experienced positively. One RYCW explained that, over the years, a RYCW could have a bad experience “that makes you alert or always on your guard”, but also many good experiences “that you will carry with you for the rest of your life” (RYCW1:17). Some RYCWs noted during the interviews that they sometimes managed to deal with the emotional crises they face. For example, one RYCW said, “We are coping” and went on to explain that to cope with the challenges you need to know that you are working with a problematic child and not a normal child (RYCW 3:2). Participant one also noted that one learns how to cope by not taking things personally, and “not taking things with you”, but to make use of colleagues and friends to bounce back (RYCW 1:2).

4.2.3 The relationship between youth-care workers and youth at risk

The relationship between RYCWs and youth seemed to be considered important unanimously, with subtle variations on how components of the relationships were viewed. All RYCWs however viewed their role as parental, consisting of various components. The most important components of these relationships, as indicated by the RYCWs, were trust, communication, confidentiality and discipline.

As mentioned above, the participants agreed that having a good relationship with the youths concerned is paramount to the youths’ further development and rehabilitation (RYCW 1:8, RYCW 3:17). Another RYCW stated that without a relationship with the child there is no way you can help him or her (RYCW 3:17). Although RYCWs view relationships as important, this did not feature during observations of the multi-disciplinary team. In all encounters with the multi-disciplinary team from January to December 2006, no mention was made of the importance of relationships between staff and children.

RYCWs described their relationships with youths as parental (RYCW 1:7, RYCW 3:5). One of the participants noted that her role was to play both a mother and a father to the child (RYCW 3:2). She went on to say that it is part of her role as a mother to be understanding (RYCW 3:2-3). Another RYCW said that they preferred to use women RYCWs in the dormitories so that the children can have a mother figure (RYCW 1:12). This RYCW went on to say that the children who came in often do not have mothers and many others had neither a mother nor a
father (RYCW 1:13). Participant three stated that the RYCW was there to be a mother and a
good role model for the children (RYCW 3:5). One of the participants said that the children
must feel that they were cared for (RYCW 3:1), and one of the children stated that it was
important to know that the RYCWs cared (C1).

Some RYCWs noted that, although one must be able to exercise discipline, the most
important thing was to be with the children and to start relationships with them (RYCW 1:8).
Child participant one said that the care workers were nice and made her laugh, but that they
were also strict – which she said was important – and that made her think about a lot of things
and made her feel better (C1). However, RYCWs felt that in order to achieve discipline,
successful communication was necessary.

The communication process was considered one of the most difficult for RYCWs and youths.
One RYCW noted that the youths came into care with many problems and in a very emotional
state. They were sometimes closed and found it difficult to discuss personal matters with the
RYCW. After much time, some youths may open up and tell the RYCW deep secrets
including “things that you would never know” (RYCW 1:7). One of the child participants
described a good relationship as one in which they are able to freely talk to someone and be
listened to (C2). This child also noted that her care workers were mostly kind and
understanding and if she saw “something wrong”, she could tell them (C2). Participant three
believed that care workers should concentrate on the manner in which they talk to the
children, not to be provocative, but to tell the child “I am here to help you” (RYCW 3:2). She
said that the RYCW must know when to leave the child alone and when to talk to her later:
“Just take your time, come to me when you are ready to talk” (RYCW 3:5). Child one said that
she could talk to her care workers, could laugh with them and sometimes even share things
(C1).

A factor in achieving successful communication within a relationship was to establish trust.
One RYCW explained that once you have a relationship with the child you can interact with
him/her; he/she can ask for you, trust you and know that you are always there (RYCW 1:10).
Trust was also an important factor in a relationship for one of the child participants (C2).

Confidentiality was viewed as being cardinal in gaining the youths’ trust. Some members of
the multi-disciplinary team discouraged confidentiality, saying that the team members would
be ineffective in their work with youth if they did not all share the same information about
them. The importance of confidentiality was highlighted during observations of RYCWs and
during an interview with one of the child participants. This child noted that it was very
important to her that the RYCWs maintained confidentiality and did not tell other staff
members about personal conversations. This, she felt, would enable her to communicate with
RYCWs without fear of judgement from others. One of the children mentioned that the
RYCWs attempted to assure anonymity. This made them feel free to go to the RYCWs when
they saw something wrong (C2).
4.2.4 The support experienced by youth-care workers

It came across in the interviews that RYCWs needed and welcomed support (RYCW 3:15). Participants spoke of support coming from many different sources. Internal sources included other RYCWs (RYCW 1:2), members of the multi-disciplinary team (RYCW 1:8) and supervising staff (YWC 3:17). External sources included psychologists (RYCW 3:15-16), churches and God (RYCW 3:16, RYCW 4:4).

Participant one spoke about making use of colleagues and friends to cope and “bounce back” (RYCW 1:2). This RYCW noted that with good team support one could successfully perform the tasks required of the profession. Without this support, this participant maintained that the work could be “dangerous” (RYCW 1:8). Participant one also noted that the work is difficult during the times when his/her partner is absent (RYCW 1:14). Participant three agreed that when the atmosphere is “tense”, more care staff are needed (RYCW 3:4) and noted that the work became more difficult when one was alone at work (RYCW 3:11). This RYCW stated that all staff (from various disciplines) are supposed to be working as a team and that staff undergo courses that explain how to work as a team to the benefit of the child (RYCW 3:15).

Two types of outside support were mentioned by the RYCWs (RYCW 3:15). Firstly, they mentioned psychological support for youths who need it (RYCW 3:15-16). Secondly, they mentioned the need for psychological support for themselves. These facets will be discussed below.

A participant mentioned that the children were aware that psychologists are skilled individuals and that psychologists understand all types of behaviour. Participant three also felt that it would be beneficial to see a psychologist once a week or once a month, or, alternatively, if they could assist “with the work of the child”. This participant expressed an appreciation for the help already received from the educational psychologist at the facility. She explained that the help was useful because the psychologist was willing to work with the child and the child was willing to see the psychologist. The participant also said that she could see that the children were enthusiastic about seeing the psychologist as the children regularly enquired about their appointments (RYCW 3:15-16). Participant four agreed that the main element the institution lacked was a psychologist and that it was the “best thing” having one because “I get excited now!” (RYCW 4:4).

All of the RYCWs said that they benefited from discussing the content of the interviews and that they would appreciate further opportunities confidentially to express their feelings about the work they do. One RYCW referred to the psychological help he/she had already received and said that, given the opportunity, he/she would like to receive on-going counselling. It was noted during observations that RYCWs often sought out the psychologist to talk about personal matters and work-related stressors that were bothering them (O:F-N).
Participant three also believed that help must come from other sources, such as churches (RYCW 3:16). This RYCW noted that sometimes a child who is taken to church becomes emotional as he/she is moved by the word of God. This participant believed that it would also benefit the children for the members of that church to come and visit the institution (RYCW 3:16).

All RYCWs interviewed maintained that the most important support came from their supervisors or senior staff members. One of the interviewees stated that, if one is not happy in one’s work, the salary alone will not be enough to make a RYCW perform. She believes that being motivated and respected by seniors, and not undermined, keep a RYCW performing (RYCW 3:17).

As seen above, support was welcomed from different areas. This was noted by participant three who claimed that support cannot come from the same area, but that all these types of support were needed simultaneously; that “the combined effort will help” (RYCW 3:16).

4.2.5 Skills, training and education

RYCWs maintained that they are only able to carry out their tasks effectively with adequate and relevant training (RYCW 1:8). Some of the RYCWs received formal education from academic institutions with the exit point in professional child- and youth-care work (RYCW 1:5). Other RYCWs entered the field with no prior training and received both on the job training and formal courses (RYCW1:3). Those who had been in youth-care work for many years were still required to attend certain courses and some chose to attend courses of their choice over and above the mandatory training (RYCW 4:3). Some of the courses offered that were mentioned by the interviewees included RAP training, developmental assessment, counselling (including HIV/AIDS counselling), anger management (RYCW1:8–9), youth development and adventure programmes, as well as child-care training through the church and first-aid training (RYCW 2:3). Some in-house/informal training consisted of individual development programmes (IDP) and rape courses (RYCW 2:4). IDP training was also offered during one of the two youth-care forums attended by the researcher (F:Jun). The supervisory role that RYCWs play every day (as mentioned in 2.4.1) was one of those skills that the RYCWs believed was gained through experience and not formal training (RYCW 1:8–9). In spite of these many forms of training, RYCWs mentioned that they were not particularly equipped with skills with regards to assisting in educational/skills training of youth (RYCW 3:14).

RYCWs maintain that attending courses on certain topics, such as behaviour problems youth at risk might display, helped them to stay calm on the job. One such RYCW said that, before he attended a course on child and adolescent behaviour, he would scream at the children until they listened, thereby worsening the situation. The RYCW explained that “once you go at the child, he will never co-operate” (RYCW 3:9).
RYCWs also believed that what made training particularly valuable is when one was already working/practicing in the profession: “you learn something and you don’t practice it, it doesn’t go into your mind, you tend to forget” (RYCW 3:10). RYCWs believed that whilst one is learning about a topic one can identify it in the youths one is working with and apply the learnt skills to manage the situation: “Because, what you learn you go and practise tomorrow on the child, once you go back to them!” (RYCW 3:10). Whilst the RYCWs are learning the theories in the class time, they take notes relevant to the children in their care at the time: “You even write the name of the child next to it” (RYCW 3:11).

There are two types of training that RYCWs feel they urgently need. The first is relevant up-to-date knowledge on how to manage drug-related problems, especially the methamphetamine epidemic. The second type of training RYCWs feel they lack is training in administrative tasks, more specifically computer training. They are required to perform certain tasks that necessitate adequate knowledge of computers and relevant computer programs. They either feel that the exposure to this training is insufficient or that the training given did not address the required needs (RYCW 3:10). Interviewee three also mentioned that it might be more appropriate to do on-the-job and individual computer training “with somebody who can come and work with you if you are on duty” (RYCW 3:10).

4.3 Discussion of findings

4.3.1 The role of youth care workers in residential facilities

Mark Gamble (2007) describes RYCWs as a gifted group of people playing a vital role in the lives of children and creating ‘a net of protection and support’ around children. The roles of RYCWs, as described in the findings, are not dissimilar to Gamble’s description of the vital role that RYCWs play. Although authors such as Alston & Lewis (1999), Bertolino & Thompson (1999) and Gamble (2007) all describe the same essential role, there are differences in the ways in which they describe the many facets of a RYCWs role.

Some of the literature pertaining to the role of RYCWs contains very little detail (Phelan, 2007), while other sources describe the roles in greater depth (Alston & Lewis, 1999) and (Bertolino & Thompson, 1999). Some authors describe the importance of particular roles (Alston & Lewis, 1999), while other authors do not highlight any role as being more or less important than another is. The in-depth descriptions that some authors give are not consistent with other authors’ descriptions. The sources consulted during this study are not consistent with the descriptions of the role of youth-care workers given by the interviewees in the study. However, some roles highlighted by the various sources do overlap with each other, as well as with the findings of this study. Another phenomenon uncovered in this study was the apparent hierarchy of roles as outlined in Figure 2. (Anglin, 2006) describes the roles of the YCWs as linear and not hierarchical, yet the YCWs in this study referred to main roles and subsidiary roles.
All sources in the literature and in this study point to the multifaceted nature of RYCWs’ roles, but also highlight the inconsistencies in the roles of RYCWs. The reason for the discrepancies in the roles may be caused by many factors. Firstly, the field of youth care was only recent professionalised. In the past, there was no governing body to standardise elements of the youth care profession, forcing individuals and institutions to implement their own sets of requirements for RYCWs. Secondly, because of this lack of professionalisation, no set curriculum to educate or guide RYCWs in rehabilitating youth in residential facilities existed.

There is much literature describing the nature of the role of youth-care workers (Alston & Lewis, 1999; Bertolino & Thompson, 1990; Gamble, 2007 and Phelan, 2007), yet there is a lack of literature pertaining to the RYCW’s role in the education process. This lack of information was also reflected in this study. Although interviewees mentioned that they have a motivational and inspirational role to play in the education process, their involvement did not exceed these parameters. However, if it is the youths’ primary purpose to be educated (White Paper 6, South Africa, 2001) and youths spend most of the day in the education process, it might be beneficial for RYCWs to play a supporting role in this process. After much research, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) concluded that parental involvement in youths’ education generally benefits children’s learning and school performance. Sheridan & Gutkin (2000) also agrees that primary caregivers are the first teachers of children.

It might follow then that RYCWs could play a similar supporting role in the educational development of the youth in their care, especially since they see themselves as performing a parental role. A possible explanation why they do not play a supportive educational role, as indicated by the findings, is that the RYCWs believe that education lies predominantly with educators. Furthermore, as pointed out in this study, the function of skills training and development was withdrawn from RYCWs (after they performed this role for several years) at one of the institutions and transferred to educators, which left RYCWs feeling disempowered. This study did not produce evidence that this phenomenon occurred at other such facilities. It is nevertheless significant because some RYCWs would like to take a more active role in the education of the youths in their care but do not possess the expertise.

The task of facilitating the education process should however be left to qualified educators who are the best practitioners for this complex and challenging work. This should however not exclude RYCWs from playing an important role in the education process. The vital motivational and inspirational role that RYCWs already play can be utilised by involving them after school hours in facilitating homework, projects and study schedules. This function is in line with the parenting role they feel they play and it would not infringe upon the formal education role played by educators.

4.3.2 The emotional effects of working with youth at risk

The findings produced three facets of the emotional effects of working with youth at risk that could lead to anxiety, frustration and distress on the part of the RYCW. One of the causes
could be due to the dysfunctions and traumas that youth at risk present. The behavioural problems, substance misuse and crises that are part of the lives of youth at risk pose many difficult challenges to their caretakers. The literature has also shown that the very nature of this work leads to burnout (Biderman & Gannon, 1989).

Mudaly (2005) argues that, in order to support youth, RYCWs need to be emotionally strong. This factor was also highlighted in the findings by RYCWs who maintained that they felt they needed emotional support themselves in order to emotionally support youth at risk. Although RYCWs mentioned their own coping skills and sources of support, they used these to enhance the wellbeing of the youth in their care, but did not for their own emotional needs. This could possibly be due to an instinctive parental need to put one’s children’s needs before one’s own.

The third facet included constant anxieties about the youths’ wellbeing. This had a negative emotional effect on RYCWs and these anxieties remained with the RYCWs long after their shifts had ended.

4.3.3 The relationship between youth-care workers and youth at risk

This study, like those by Sheridan & Gutkin (2000), Alston & Lewis (1999), Phelan (2007) and Mudaly (2005), highlights the importance and nature of sound relationships between RYCWs and youth at risk. Factors such as trust and understanding highlighted in the study are viewed as playing a vital role in a youth’s educational, social and emotional development (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000).

This study highlights the RYCWs view that they play a parental role in the lives of the youth in their care. This is viewed as significant as special attention to the importance of a parental role for troubled youth was a vital topic of discussion at the World Summit for Children in 1990 (UNICEF, 1990). RYCWs see their parental role as important because, firstly, those who are parents understand children and instinctively play a parental role to the youth in their care; secondly, these youths have no other parental figure present to them at the time; and thirdly, the various roles highlighted in this study mirror the roles played by most parents in everyday life. The results of this study also emphasise the RYCWs’ belief that a maternal figure, particularly, is important to youths because many lack this apparently significant figure.

Communication was viewed as vital in a sound RYCW-child relationship. However, there were also concerns about confidentiality and anonymity within the channels of communication. These concerns seemed to be as a result of mistrust on the part of the child who had not built up a strong relationship with other members of staff. RYCWs proposed keeping certain details private, but were met with opposition from other members of the multi-disciplinary team. Sharing of private information is sometimes necessary, especially if the child is in imminent danger. If this is not the case, sharing of youths’ most intimate thoughts with others may be potentially problematic, especially seeing as the other team members,
with best intentions, wish to raise these intimate thoughts with the youths in question. Phelan (2007) agrees that this might not be conducive to a successful and therapeutic relationship between RYCW and child. He goes on to explain that youth-care work is a process of creating a safe relationship with another so that the “experiential message can be communicated and absorbed” (Phelan, 2007, p. 5).

Ultimately, both the literature and this study maintain that if RYCWs are not committed to a caring adult-child relationship, then even the most advanced methods and programmes implemented in rehabilitating troubled children will seem remote, emotionless and of little worth (Phelan, 2007).

4.3.4 The support experienced by youth-care workers

As mentioned previously, due to the very nature of child- and youth-care work, RYCWs sometimes experience distress, anxiety and even burnout. This study highlighted some of the ways in which youth-care workers gain support to alleviate or prevent the stresses associated with this work. When discussing forms of support during the interviews it was interesting to note that most interviewees alluded to two types of support: support for themselves and support for the youths. However, support for the youths may be an indirect way for RYCWs to alleviate some of their own stress. A sense of helplessness, expressed in the need to be supported and have the children supported by other professionals, may be connected to burnout (Bell, 2004). When RYCWs feel unskilled and unable to assist youth adequately, they would prefer to be supported by other professionals. This could be for two reasons: Knowing that the youths’ needs will be appropriately addressed by the relevant practitioner is reassuring, or, if the youths are in the care of others, it frees up the RYCWs time and frame of mind to address other crises that are within his/her scope of practice.

One of the main forms of support for RYCWs highlighted in this study was assistance from colleagues, mainly other RYCWs on duty. Such support includes the following: supervising the youths when one partner is busy with administrative tasks; supervising the youths when one partner needs to take a break; assisting a RYCW who is dealing with a difficult youth; being available to new youths and having a partner who can give attention to the rest of the children. Without this assistance, RYCWs may become overwhelmed and drained. It may therefore be more helpful and preventative if support were given at the level of on-the-job assistance by providing the ideal ratio of RYCWs to children.

Not all symptoms of lack of support, or burnout can be prevented, even with additional staff. The RYCWs felt that they needed support in the form of counselling from a psychologist. They also felt that they could benefit from simply discussing the nature of their profession with others. It was interesting to note that all the interviewees mentioned the positive effect the interview process had on them. They all said that they are rarely offered the opportunity to talk about various aspects of their profession. This experience, they said, gave rise to feelings that only emerged when prompted by the questions posed by the researcher. It is possible
that these RYCWs have not had exposure to counselling as an option to alleviating some of their stressors. This could be due to the preoccupation and prioritisation of counselling for the youth in their care, thereby dismissing their own need for therapeutic support.

The study highlighted the RYCWs’ view that the supervisory role played by their superiors is of paramount importance to enable them to carry out successfully the necessary tasks for rehabilitating youth at risk. “If one is to give one’s best to youths in need, one has to give one’s all to the RYCWs caring for the youths” (Masud Hoghughi in Alston & Lewis, 1999). Gannon notes that this poses a challenge to leaders in child- and youth-care to be competent practitioners and role models to front-line RYCWs (Gannon, 2005b).

4.3.5 Skills, training and education

Phelan (2007) maintains that in order to develop as a professional in child- and youth-care both training and on-the-job experience is necessary, a theory borne out by the findings of this study. However, in the recent past, successful training and experience may have been difficult for RYCWs to achieve. This could partly be attributed to youth-care workers coming from different sections of society, for example teachers and artisans, and even from various levels of high school. They needed to have some grounding in a number of relevant disciplines such as psychology, child development, education, nursing, counselling and life skills. However, their core training differed vastly. Difficulties in training could also be the consequence of the lack of professionalisation that existed over the last decades (Karth, 2006). After many years, professional recognition has now been achieved in South Africa. With this came the first National Diploma in Child and Youth Care in 1999 (Karth, 2006), which may go a long way to provide standardised, relevant and up-to-date training.

There are two unrelated phenomena that have been highlighted by RYCWs as being ‘new’ (the methamphetamine epidemic and the information and technology age) and which RYCWs feel need to be addressed in training programmes. More up-to-date and relevant training would be necessary to empower RYCWs to take on these, and other current challenges. It was pointed out in the study that such relevant and up-to-date training is lacking in the field of child- and youth-care. RYCWs felt that training in dealing with substance misuse (specifically but not only the methamphetamine epidemic) and training in information communication technology to fulfil administrative tasks were important. Youth-care workers noted that they were better able to provide adequate and professional services to the youth in their care if they had been sufficiently trained in the relevant areas. Furthermore, it is noted in the literature that many staff members are unwilling to work with new ‘classes’ of troubled youth because of fear related to a lack of training in how to approach these youths. Consequently, many youths remain unsupported and unnecessarily detained in institutions and even prisons (Samjee, et al., 2005).
One could start to address this lack of training through the bodies created in the professionalisation of child- and youth-care, such as the National Association of Child and Youth Care Workers, the institution offering the National Diploma (University of South Africa) as well as other training institutions that might now be in a position to develop relevant programmes as necessitated by their members’ needs or suggested by research studies, such as this one.

Another aspect pertaining to skills, training and education found in this study is that training and on-the-job experience cannot be effective in isolation. RYCWs believe that training on its own would be less effective if not applied with hands-on experiences in the workplace. A possible reason for this could be the disjunction between theoretical knowledge and the practical challenges posed by fieldwork. That is, RYCWs feel they have the greatest success with training programmes when they can relate the theory to the current cases in their charge.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings were presented as the themes emerged from the data. This was done in keeping with the aims of the study and research question as set out in chapter 1. The chapter was then concluded with a discussion of these findings in relation to the relevant theory. The following and final chapter will concentrate on summarising these findings and making relevant recommendations based on the findings.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Meyers and Nastasi (1999, in Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000) maintain that educational psychologists should be more concerned with preventative measures and wellness promotion than with measuring, diagnosing and remediation. This calls for a move on the part of educational psychologists to function successfully within an ecosystemic model and to radically revise or replace the traditional medical model with techniques in line with more contemporary systems models (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). In keeping with the aims of this study, an attempt was made to find techniques within the ecosystemic model for educational psychologists to understand RYCWs’ experiences and to collaborate effectively with them in rehabilitating youth at risk.

5.2 Summary of findings

The aim of the research project was to explore the experiences of RYCWs working with youth at risk in residential facilities. More specifically, it sought to understand the daily role RYCWs play in the lives of the youths; determine how RYCWs experience training or competencies necessary to performing their work; uncover the types and levels of support needed to fulfil their duties; ascertain the emotional affect of working with youth at risk; and discover the nature and importance of relationships between RYCWs and youth at risk. The rationale for this in-depth exploration of RYCWs is to enable educational psychologists to understand the nature of RYCW in South Africa with the view to facilitate collaboration with and support for the care workers within a multi-disciplinary context.

What follows is a summary of the main findings that emerged from the study:

The participants experienced their role as multifaceted. They expressed these many facets in terms of three main roles with many subsidiary functions. The main roles experienced were a supervisory role, emotional support role and, to a lesser degree, a role in the educational development of youths. Although the RYCWs interviewed in the study agreed that they were coping with the challenges of being a RRYCW, the study uncovered three types of emotional affect experienced by RYCWs. Firstly, RYCWs experienced constant anxieties about their youths’ wellbeing. Secondly, for various reasons, RYCWs experienced great stress whilst on duty. Thirdly, RYCWs experienced emotional strain on their professional lives when faced with personal crises at home. This study also uncovered the great importance of healthy RYCW-child relationships. All RYCWs interviewed agreed that they experienced healthy relationships as conducive to rehabilitation and a vital component of their work with youth at risk.
risk. Although RYCWs identified two types of support in this study (support for youths and support for themselves), it was evident that the support actually implemented was for the children and not support for youth-care workers themselves. Finally, it was noted in this study that training and education for RYCWs have been inconsistent in the past, which has created a variety of difficulties that youth-care workers now face.

5.3 Implications for educational psychologists

Sheridan & Gutkin (2000) agrees that primary caregivers are the first teachers of children and that they spend much more time with the child than any other service provider. Educational psychologists should therefore implement programmes that include primary caregivers in actively working with the youth in their care. The following outlines the proposed function of the educational psychologist working collaboratively with RYCWs within an ecosystemic model in a residential setting.

As school psychological services are designed to address a range of concerns, such as emotional, cognitive, behavioural and social concerns, care should not be restricted to traditional service delivery (i.e. provided by medical personnel), but rather include a variety of services offered by a range of professionals (Nastasi, 2000), including RYCWs working together in a multi-disciplinary team. Thus, educational psychologists should not work in isolation, but rather together with RYCWs and other professionals to make sure that services are comprehensive and integrated within the ecosystem of the child (Nastasi, 2000). Educational psychologists should assume a pivotal position in co-ordinating and sustaining systems changes and comprehensive health-care processes (Nastasi, 2000 & Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). Furthermore, educational psychologists should strive to bring about changes in levels of the ecosystem, such as schools, families and communities, that permeate the lives of youth at risk. Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000) maintains that this is the only meaningful way to address prevention strategies.

Kriegler (1988), De Jong (2000) and Engelbrecht (2004) see the educational psychologist of the future as “a key member of the mental health team of tomorrow” (p. 84). In her later paper (Kriegler, 1993), she grounds her arguments for a changed practice of psychology in schools on a concern with the extension of primary health facilities in South Africa – she sees the possibility of the integration of educational and health structures and services (Sharrat, 2000).

Educational psychologists should become proactive in defining the scope of practice and determining their own professional identity. To participate effectively as health-care providers requires an extension of current conceptions of practice with concomitant development of new areas of expertise (Nastasi, 2000). The school psychologist is identified as a partner in the comprehensive system of health care. Consistent with an interdisciplinary approach to comprehensive health care, the school psychologist of the 21st century is a collaborative learner who invites ideas from others and investigates theory, research and methods from
other disciplines, for example sociology, anthropology, public health (Nastasi, 2000) and the field of child and youth care.

5.4 **Recommendations for educational psychologists**

5.4.1 **Supportive and collaborative role**

Educational psychologists working with RYCWs in residential settings should have a sound knowledge of the role of residential facilities as well as the role of RYCWs. Educational psychologists might do this in several ways, including the following:

- Review literature pertaining to the role of RYCWs in residential facilities;
- Subscribe to the National Association of Child and Youth Care Workers, thereby receiving monthly journals on pertinent issues pertaining to youth at risk and the child and youth care profession;
- Attend the quarterly child- and youth-care forums with the RYCWs in the MDT, which will demonstrate involvement and make it easier to work in a united manner with RYCWs in tackling the challenges of youth at risk;
- Interview RYCWs periodically to establish what their current goals and roles are, which will have the added benefit of demonstrating one’s involvement and interest in uniting as a team; and
- Read documents, such as this one, which pertains directly to the educational psychologist’s role in understanding residential youth-care workers.

5.4.2 **Therapeutic role**

Educational psychologists may have a role to play in the emotional support of RYCWs in terms of the following services:

- Psychotherapy for RYCWs suffering symptoms of burnout: Offering support at this point in the ecosystem may have a positive effect on other parts of the ecosystem, such as on the youth in the direct care of the affected RYCWs;
- Periodically facilitate group-counselling sessions for RYCWs to enable members to express their feelings to one another: Discussing experiences and emotions with colleagues might highlight differences and similarities in the way RYCWs experience their work, which in turn may bring some comfort and reassurance to those who feel isolated in their feelings about the challenges of youth-care work; and
- Encourage RYCWs to belong to associations such as the NACCW, which offer literature, support and forums to all interested RYCWs at a nominal annual cost.

5.4.3 **Role in assisting the development of sound relationships**

Educational psychologist may have a role to play in fostering good relationships between RYCWs and the youths in their care. Furthermore, by means of research, psychologists might
consider close examination of certain aspects of the relationship between children and their youth-care workers, as well as the fostering of good relationships between psychologists and youth-care workers.

5.4.4 Role as change-agent

Finally, much research is needed in the area of educational psychologists working as agents of systems-change in the field of child- and youth-care work. Further research in this regard could also include a wider study of the experiences of youth-care workers at all levels of the system including youth-care workers working within communities and in various types of residential facilities.

5.5 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to give voice to the experiences of youth-care workers in order to support youth at risk in residential settings. Youth deserve opportunities to learn the skills, behaviours and attitudes that will equip them to become independent, responsible and self-sufficient adults and to feel proud of their accomplishments. They also deserve support when they make mistakes and assistance so they may learn from their mistakes. Ultimately, they deserve an opportunity to live in a healthy environment where their physical and emotional needs are addressed and nurtured (Alston & Lewis, 1999). As the findings of this study reveal, this can only be done in an environment where they are cared for by well-trained, emotionally strong and efficiently supported YCWs. Masud Hoghughi’s statement rings true: “100% for our children means 150% to our child care worker” (Alston & Lewis), 1999, p. 187–188).
REFERENCES


Capegateway. *Interventions for youth at risk.*


INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
RYCW

Date of first interview________
Respondent___________________________________________
Date of birth _________________ Nationality________________
Home language_______________
Institution__________________
Physical address______________________________________

- Welcome and purpose of study
- Anonymity, confidentiality and dissemination of results

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. How long have you been working as a RYCW?
2. Describe your experiences as a RYCW. Describe the type of youths you have worked with.
3. Describe your role as a RYCW.
4. What is the ratio of care workers to children on your shift? How do you think this impacts the youths?
5. Describe your relationships with the children?
6. What effect do these relationships have on the children?
7. How have you been equipped to carry out your role effectively?
8. What is the most challenging part for you in caring for youth at risk?
10. Describe the educational facilities offered at this institution. How do you perceive your role in youths’ education?
11. How are you currently being supported in assisting youths’ educational needs? Emotional needs? What support do you receive/require to assist youth with their needs?
12. What type of support would you like to receive as a care worker?
13. What do you think are the most important factors needed in order to achieve your goals of supporting youths in your care?
INTerview SChEdule
Child

Date of first interview__________
Respondent_______________________________________
Date of birth __________________ Nationality____________________
Home language________________________
Institution________________________
Physical
address___________________________________

- Welcome and purpose of study
- Anonymity, confidentiality and dissemination of results

Interview QUESTions

1. For how long have you been at this facility?
2. Tell me about your experience here.
3. Tell me about the RYCWs. Tell me about your relationships with your care workers?
4. Do you have a special/favourite care worker? What do you think makes him/her special?
6. What is most important to you about your relationship with the care workers?
7. What are some of the goals you would like to reach here at the facility and in the future?
8. Tell me about some of the ways in which the RYCWs help you to reach your goals.
ADDENDUM C

OBSERVATION GUIDE

- Observe the type of youth looked after by the RYCWs.
  - Behaviour, educational needs, resilience factors, substance misuse.
- Accompany a RYCW going about their daily work.
  - Note their responsibilities, tasks and routines
- Note the ratio of care workers to children on a shift, observe and document any similarities and differences in having more or less staff members on duty.
- Document interactions/relationships between RYCWs and children.
  - Note what prompted the interaction, by whom it was initiated, the context of the interaction and the outcome of the interaction.
- Observe the effect of the above relations/interactions on both RYCW and child.
- Observe differences and similarities in the way the different RYCWs work with the children in their care.
- Note when RYCWs appear more or less relaxed or anxious during a given day.
  - Are there points during the day which are more challenging to RYCWs?
  - Do most RYCWs appear to share the same periods of relaxation or anxiousness, or is it different for each RYCW?
- Observe the RYCWs role in getting children ready for school, assisting with their school day and helping with school-related tasks after school.
ADDENDUM D

Transcription of RYCW

Respondent: RYCW1

Date:

Interviewee: Participant 1, interview 1 15/08/2006. Ok, so your name is XXX.
Participant: That's right
Interviewee: Ok, what is your nationality?
Participant: South African coloured ()
Interviewee: South African ya
Participant: ok
Interviewee: () and your institution?
Participant: XXX
Interviewee: XXX
Interviewee: Ok and you live in ()
Participant: ()
Interviewee: What is the physical address of this institution?
Participant: XXX
Interviewee: And what is your home language?
Participant: Afrikaans
Interviewee: oh, well I wouldn't have said. And your date of birth?
Participant: 2nd of June 1955
Interviewee: () ok, um, we discussed just a little bit () of the study and what I'm
Here for and who I am. And I also discussed with you that anything you say
will be held totally confidential as well as your anonymity will be respected
and with the dissemination of the results. When the results are out there will
be no name attached to the results. The first question I'd like to ask you Keith
is for how long have you worked as a residential RYCW?
Participant: I started in 1976 but I've been out for about 5 years but I started in 19… in
2005. It's about…….I've just been out since 1999 to 2003 about ()
Interviewee: So over all you've been a youth care for many, many years.
Participant: Ja
Interviewee: () sjoe! How can you describe some of your experiences in a residential
facility? Have you been working predominantly in residential facilities?
Participant: yes I've worked in residential facilities and more than once I've () quite a few
systems. () like for instance the family system, the peer group system,
different culture, self governing system, behavior modification um, and now we working on the…um, ya behavior modification ()

Interviewee: Sjoe! Um, what are the experiences within the residential facilities? Are they very different in experiences?

Participant: Ya () I’m not sure you know, () um, some is good experiences some is not so good experiences um, a child coming into care with lots of problems in a very emotional state and after a couple of months or after a couple of weeks the child settles down and he’s probably closed won’t discuss anything and afterwards he tell you his deep secrets or things that you would never know, so those are some of the things that you do um…

Interviewee: What is it like going through it ()?

Participant: Um, it can also effect you emotionally because um, you () hope that the child could go through life’s () experiences um, but after hearing these kind of being in situations like that you learn how to cope, not to take things personally, not to take things with you, uh, to make use of your colleagues and friends so you can bounce back

Interviewee: So you’ve learned a particular coping styles as you’ve gone along?

Participant: Absolutely, I’ve had to.

Interviewee: What is your role; describe your role as a RYCW?

Participant: Um, over the years my role has also changed, I’ve been a front line worker to a supervisor () supervisor, I’ve actually been a supervisor for a number of years, so my role is basically to supervise staff and to support staff and to guide them and train them to do the job.

Interviewee: So as a RYCW yourself you are also providing support for frontline workers.

Participant: That’s right

Interviewee: ok, what are the tasks that you’re responsible for more specifically in your work when you work as a frontline or the tasks of the RYCWs what did it look like?

Participant: It’s, uh, basically caring um as a frontline care worker () your primary job is to care and to uh, supervise the children and um, make sure the kids are physically and emotionally, lets say physically ok of being out there. They obviously clothing that they () place to sleep in, physically that they are clean and that they are not () emotionally ensure that if they have a specific problem that we deal with that in terms of maybe counseling or referrals or if it a child that is most probably shy and don’t want to mix with others we make sure that he gets () play with him or get him involved with the other children so… in order for him to() or to cope or to integrate.

Interviewee: Where did you learn your counseling skills? To () counsel children?

Participant: Um, counseling is um, important to be able to counsel which means that you either get it from the job training or you have to go outside.

Interviewee: How did you get?
Participant: um, my counseling skills…I got on the job training as well as training as part of a course

Interviewee: Wow, what counseling keeps you ()

Participant: um, its various group counseling, individual counseling, um possibly at the aids counseling course. So in terms of that yes () it’s been over many years.

Interviewee: Do you feel that the counseling courses that you went through made a difference to your skills and added to your skills?

Participant: Yes it absolutely did uh improve my own interaction with people because I helped myself be able to cope with my own issues that I have to deal with.

Interviewee: So it had a dual purpose for you wow, yourself and then in your work

Participant: Ya

Interviewee: So you found that the skills that you are trained in counseling and () relationship skills with other people is something that you’ve enjoyed and that the experience is positive, ok. What would your daily routine as a supervisor () your daily routine () facility in this facility?

Participant: Well, the day would start by coming through here and to check that everybody’s on duty and that all the () are manned, that there’s enough child care workers and to see what support they need in terms of maybe they have some issue that is carried over from the previous () and that that child care worker cannot cope with all, cannot deal with it right away cause he’s just () today and I would then take on that responsibility. So it’s a dual purpose to make sure that um that the child care workers are ok, that they can work, and that if there’s any issues that we deal with them together or I will deal with it if any issues from the day before, otherwise its basic things like making sure kids go to court, making sure that they get the lesson for the morning and whatever other issue arises we’d deal with it. But I would basically be the person that run around while every body else is ()

Interviewee: And um, now the front line care workers here, which is the role you used to play as well, are they responsibly for getting the children ready for their scholastic training during the day ()?

Participant: That’s right, uh in terms waking up kids making sure they’ve got the uniform on, getting them in the right mood and spirit for school…

Interviewee: Yes I wanted to say.

Participant: Uh, get them to breakfast, those kind of things and then um, rushing them off to school because not all of them like school actually most of them don’t like school. It depends on the classes and on the teacher, the educators, if the educators are interesting, if the subjects are interesting ()

Interviewee: What struggles do the um, care workers go through in trying to motivate the children to go to school?

Participant: Kids who come into institutions, most of them don’t go to school, they’ve never been to school () all day. A lot of them not all of them don’t like school,
they have negative experiences with school, nobody encouraged them to go to school um, they have learning problems they might have other kind of problems, the drug problems and things like that, they cannot cope. So its () then its () responsibility for the child to () speak to them tell them to go to school and if you can’t then obviously you must refer them to the social workers or the occupational therapists.

Interviewee: What skills do you think a RYCW might need in order to motivate, encourage, to help children um to improve their scholastic life?

Participant: We do get training um, child-care training to (), all of us have to go () things like that, so all of them have a basic knowledge of child care and also in terms of preparing kids for school.

Interviewee: So there is some training that is required necessary to perform their function.

Participant: Absolutely.

Interviewee: Especially in () the needs of these children, often they are not motivated to go to school. Sjoe! What support do the caregivers offer after the have had their training sessions of educational development, () they need to support further?

Participant: They need the support; they don’t get them the support they most probably um they would need, but the signature of the worker would be a person that would give them any kind of...lets use an example. If a child has a problem and he has to be removed () timeout then the child-care worker cannot bring that child back unless the person from my () this is the guidance I give, you cannot bring the child back unless you've actually have a session with that child and discussed the behavior of the child and ask why and you know () contract with the child that kind of thing.

Interviewee: Wow!

Participant: So its not a matter of just disciplining or giving a child a timeout without explaining, checking and counseling the child in order to come back so that he can be ()

Interviewee: so if they are having problems in school or in their session, their scholastic session they are not just removed and back into the child workers...

Participant: They are not just removed, unless they are very disruptful, and they disrupt classes then they would get timeout but .......

Interviewee: But before that happens they would get counseled...

Participant: Ya, that’s right.

Interviewee: Before they get a timeout. Sjoe! So the RYCW they also play a role in the scholastic lives...

Participant: Absolutely

Interviewee: and development of the children.

Participant: Absolutely

Interviewee: Wow
Participant: um they are there; you would find them there all the time now, sometimes they in the classes sometimes they use their time to do something else, maybe um, the bedding of the child needs to be cleaned or uh changed or whatever or something’s wrong in the dormitory or whatever. They would use that time otherwise some of them are in the class but they don’t have to be there. And then because its also important for you to understand because if a child comes out of class in a bad mood then you must understand why.

Interviewee: What is their role within class?
Participant: No they have no role there, they not in the classroom with the children, they basically just go because the children are there, they don’t sit there () join the class or help with supervision in class if the class is really disruptive, otherwise, but they don’t have a specific class role.

Interviewee: Are they in the classes almost everyday?
Participant: Not all the classes, they don’t have to be in there, they don’t have to.
Interviewee: That’s only when they are not performing any other task they might be in the class
Participant: In the class or unless um a particular teacher has a problem with disruptive children in the classroom, then the child care worker will come in.

Interviewee: Does the teacher often call on then the support of the child-care worker to come into the class so that she can work with the children whilst the care worker works with the disruptive child?
Participant: Ya, often just the presence of the child care worker is works because they are like the parents of the child and they work in the dormitories with the child day and night and so their presence can also bring a bit of calm or order in the classroom.

Interviewee: How many children um to a teacher or lecturer?
Participant: () I’m not sure but I think its about 20 kids in a class.
Interviewee: Do you think that the care workers specifically of this facility, we’ll go into your experience over the years, but of this facility do you feel that they are equipped to carry out these tasks that you’ve ()
Participant: Well it’s just a provision, it’s because it’s extremely, it could be extremely difficult and dangerous () so if you have training and good supervision or good support from your team then yes. But if you don’t get good support and () supervision then it can be dangerous ()
Interviewee: So what you are saying is yes care workers can effectively carry out their task with training and good support.
Participant: With the necessary support.
Interviewee: Because of the nature of this particular job.
Participant: We do it once () with the whole dormitory which is about 56 boys at times and sometimes for a month, sometimes for three months
Interviewee: Wow
Participant: But they do it.
Interviewee: That is an incredibly stressful task.
Participant: Absolutely. As I say, if you have a relationship with the children and you have the necessary support you can do it.
Interviewee: So you are saying also a relationship with the children plays quite a role.
Participant: Absolutely, you cannot do this without that relationship.
Interviewee: What type of relationship?
Participant: Well at least has an open kind of spirit. The kids you must be able to be approachable but you must also be able to exercise discipline, firm.
Interviewee: Ya, you must still have boundaries whilst being open enough to communicate. What type of, and again we going into the skills and training a bit but, what type of skills and training do you feel that these care workers need in order to cope with these tasks effectively and ()
Participant: With child care training you know and also like because of the um, that we provide ya the rap course which teaches you to respond or child care workers to respond to problems and not to react and then also the developmental assessment where you understand a child, where he’s come from, where he’s going to, what is his needs those kind of things. Those are the kind of training...those are the specific training that we do here, and other courses is like the anger management course um...
Interviewee: Is that for the RYCWs or for them to...
Participant: That's for the RYCWs. We ya, whatever, and then also the other basic child care which is provided by the () government.
Interviewee: So you say there is the core training which is the training of the child care worker but then there’s the...its also necessary for them to under go optional extra training courses to develop themselves.
Participant: That's right.
Interviewee: Ok. What in your experience, your personal experiences, what experiences have you had that you feel were necessary for tackling your tasks, your experiences contributed to (), not training experiences but personal experiences in institutions
Participant: Ah, how to answer that question...
Interviewee: You said to carry out your tasks effectively there’s a certain amount of training you require...
Participant: Ya.
Interviewee: But what other personal experiences can we say () to carry out your tasks effectively. Any personal experiences that you might have had and learning that you might have, the on the job kind of learning that you’ve had, your experiences in past that you now
Participant: Yes, quite a few things that um will help me, but I think what it is I’m quite strong, most probably because I’ve () is supervision and I believe that if
you…like the institutions that I work in are basically institutions like this for kids can run away. So in order for you to do your work you have to be vigilant in terms of supervision, because if boys run away then all your programmes and everything that you do would mean absolutely nothing. So it’s important you for you to have good um, supervising skills in terms of um, making sure that the boys are (). The thing is if you not look after the kids see that as you don’t care for them, you sit in your office, always doing other things, but the important thing is to be with the children, to be there. So that is () starting relationships. So what I’m saying is, and this is what I tell my staff as well, ok, is if you are supervising you are interacting with children, make sure that they don’t run away, that’s important, but in doing that you are starting relationships with children. And once you have a relationship with the child what, what else do you need in terms of um, you can do it, you can interact with the child, you can ask him to do things, he can ask for you, he can trust you, he knows you always there. So if your supervisory skills are quite good then I would think that that could help you a lot in terms of child care cause the children know that you are always there, they don’t have to ()

Interviewee: So a primary focus in child care would be a () relationship ()
Participant: Absolutely, and in doing that is, as is, I don’t know if I’ve explained that correctly but to me supervision is () life, important, because that’s where you start your relationship, that is when children trust you because they know you are there that is where um, you learn, that’s where you () that’s () of the child because you are there with the child. Maybe the words supervision is not the correct words, but I use that words because I think that is true.

Interviewee: () physically present with the child () interacting ()() supervision, sjoe!
Participant: Exactly, you observe the child

Interviewee: What is the routine of the children everyday? What is their daily routine?
Participant: Daily routine is normal, it’s a, its consistent, its getting up in the morning, having PDP um, having breakfast, going to school, after school recreation programme whatever, whatever fancies them, some of them like to listen to music, some want to play soccer, some do whatever, um, the social workers normally have sessions with certain boys in the afternoon um, then at night we have breakfast….supper at the…lunchtime obviously in the lunch and then suppertime at the normal time and then at night the um, kids watch their normal TV programmes and some of them choose to play, we call it the spanga. It’s played down in the hallway, it’s a little courtyard, not a courtyard, a hall where they play, in the dormitories where they play or they visit each other and chat and things like that but they don’t, they cannot go out of their dormitories. So that’s basically the routine.

Interviewee: And it’s a consistent routine?
Participant: It’s a consistent routine.
Interviewee: Um...
Participant: Weekends we have special programmes, we have people coming in from outside playing with them um, dancing groups, sports recreation groups that come in, ah cultural groups that come in, so weekends we try and make it special for them.
Interviewee: Ya, interesting, the groups, a different ()
Participant: Sometimes in the week also but most times people can only come on the weekends.
Interviewee: What are the positives of a specific routine? What is the most positive aspect for you ()
Participant: Well the positive aspects, the first thing that comes to mind, these kids have never had routine, they just did whatever they want to do and its important to get some structure, they eat on time, they sleep on time, ya so those kind of things. So in order to get structure into their lives I think it’s important to () structure.
Interviewee: Are there any negatives that you can think about this routine? Anything that comes to mind?
Participant: I’m sure there could be some negatives as well um, normal kids would want to do, you know want to do something else, maybe go out late and go visit girlfriends and friends () those are kind of things they can’t do, so I’m not sure if that’s a negative but its definitely not normal. Its not normal, but they are incarcerated there so there’s no…we encourage their family and friends to come visit them so they get some visitors.
Interviewee: …they get some visitors, ok so there’s that as well. But ya no it’s good to also recognize that there might be negatives in routines that’s why I ask if there’s a negative point to the routine. One of them as you say is that maybe life outside of institution or visiting external () is a negative, but as you say it is also the nature of the child that you are dealing with () incarcerated.
Participant: That’s right
Interviewee: So you say that sometimes there is one care worker on a shift with all 54, how many are...
Participant: 56
Interviewee: 56 children. How many are usually, what is the norm?
Participant: The norm is 8, 2 in every section and one in the… its 2, 4,6,7,8 yes and one supervisor is the 8th person. There’s one section that’s only 28 boys.
Interviewee: Then there would be two care workers to that section?
Participant: Every section has two child care... every section ah, has got 56 boys have two child care workers and there’s one the orientation section where the new boys come, that’s only 28 boys so there will be…there’s only one child care worker there, who is an experienced child care worker and then um, but for
some reason we always use women in that section, because for the mother figure…

Interviewee: Sjoe!
Participant: I prefer to use Xhosa speaking person there because there’s a lot of Xhosa speaking boys that come in and its better to come into a new place to talk to somebody you can understand.
Interviewee: Yes, because if you’ve got that coming in with a communication barrier, what are you… you coming in at a disadvantage and you’ve already got a disadvantage which is why you here.
Participant: And they want to talk.
Interviewee: Yes, wow.
Participant: The person that they or that I prefer to have there is some Xhosa speaking and is also fluently English and Afrikaans ()
Interviewee: And you say a woman figure can…
Participant: To me, ya. Because they are caring, they are naturally caring and that’s then the () again.
Interviewee: Yes, as you say sometimes perhaps you know especially coming into an all boys institution maybe more of male personal that they might just be missed or absent. And the nurturing, I think what you saying the nurturing function…
Participant: Ya, some kids they come in, they don’t have parents, they don’t have mothers, that’s also another…most… a lot don’t have either mothers or if not the fathers.
Interviewee: What do you think the impact on the youth is um, with the amount of care workers to a shift? Does it impact them?
Participant: It does impact them but I don’t think there’s enough um, 50 is almost the size, 50 is…56 is almost the size of a normal child care centre and you only have two people. So it’s definitely not enough.
Interviewee: What could some of the impacts be on the youth?
Participant: Could be that some of them () their needs not being adequately because there’s not enough people to go around um, ya, I don’t think all their needs can be met, I don’t think all the needs of anybody can be met all the time () mere fact that there are not enough child care workers already tells me that everybody’s needs and mostly those who are () I wouldn’t say those who make their need, who can make their needs known would get the most attention and those who are quiet and withdrawn they most probably…but that is where the skill of the child care worker comes in, he is supposed to, or she is supposed to notice that this boys not saying anything, that this boys quite withdrawn I need to spend some time. And that’s we encourage but as a whole, yes uh, one thing about having so few child care workers is not everybody needs can be adequately met.
Interviewee: Do you think it also places extra stress on the care worker?
Participant: Yes
Interviewee: Not having a partner
Participant: No… the times when there isn’t a partner, but the thing is fortunately for us we work in shifts so for 8 hours there might be one person and for the next 3 hour shifts there might be two people working. And the person who does not get attention now, somebody else might notice and then pick it up, but consistency might be a problem but that is a negative about this system of ours.

Interviewee: ok
Participant: Everybody needs to get to the social worker and if the child is withdrawn he might never get to the social worker or he might take a long time to go or he might have to wait his turn which is, by the time it’s his turn he might not be here he’ll be gone because they don’t stay here for a long time.

Interviewee: How long do the children stay there for mostly?
Participant: Um, some kids stay for a day, two weeks, 3 months, 6 month, a year, almost two years but there’s no specific. Serious crimes boys normally stay longer but if you have a good ( ) you can.

Interviewee: Do the care workers get regular breaks, their lunch time and that?
Participant: They don’t get regular breaks I think that’s something one needs to work on. Yes they can get, supposed to get… excuse me……. They supposed to get a break everyday, like now this is my shift, we on duty from 7 o’clock till 3’o clock from 12:15 to 12:45 I would insist that all of them take time off because another shift would be on, I will tell them if they don’t take it it will be their problem, but I will insist that they go off from quarter past to quarter to, other shifts are not as, as uh, I insist that they go others might not do that. But it depends of the supervisor but yes everybody is supposed to take at least a half an hour break.

Interviewee: What are some of the reasons why they don’t take?
Participant: Um, now the children is at school so we don’t so there’s nothing really the child care workers can do if they don’t want to, if they don’t want to do something they don’t have to they can just like laze around and do whatever they, so they don’t really bother to take lunch. I insist that they get out, they get out of the institution, go out this side of the gate, the famous gate for, get them on that side so they can be away and they can do something there.

Staff ( ) I think ( )

Interviewee: So like you saying when even though you have nothing to do in the institution…
Participant: They still on duty. They are still there. Somebody can still call them they can still get stress from doing something so they need the time, so I insist on it.
Interviewee: They still need the time... How do you think that your relationships and this can be over the years and in your experience um, how have your relationships between you and children actually affected you ( )

Participant: I’m sure it affected me um, in which way?

Interviewee: Anyway you can think of, whether it is positive, whether it be negative, whether it be emotionally...

Participant: Ya emotionally in the sense because over the years we’ve learn that um, you can have a good relationship, you don’t know these children, you don’t know where they come from, you don’t know their backgrounds. You can have a good relationship with them but they could be, they could also be the ones that can get into trouble. An example, a child care worker is um, he has a very good () with a very good relationship with a particular child, the child care worker goes off duty and the child breaks into another child’s locker. When they discover that he said that the child care worker gave him that money, and why? The child care worker borrowed him the money and the child care worker gave it back that’s why he’s got money on him. Fact is the child care worker never gave him money, the child care worker never borrowed money either so that what I’m saying here is that child although he has a good relationship with the child care worker he didn’t worry, he wasn’t even concerned about the child care, he just used the child care worker’s name. So what has he learnt, what () what you learn over the years is really to get involved with the child but you must know your boundaries and that is important you need to know where your boundaries are. You can get intimately involved with the kids but at the end of the day um, that very same kid can also be the person that can be your downfall.

Interviewee: Sjoe! Are you saying that it can uh, that care workers in general are then at risk for hurt, for personal, emotional...

Participant: You can get that, on the other hand, you can have these kids um, the children that we have here could also be a blessing to you and they could be the people, like for instance if I, lets use an example, if I take you down here um, the child that I have a good relationship would be the child who could chat to you, talk to you and tell you about the place and tell you about these things and they could actually be a blessing to you all, they could, you know, the fruit of your relationship would actually come out there, because, and also for other reasons man (), like somebody said to one day these kids could be uh, sugar they could be honey or poison, the choice is certainly theirs and I think that’s the kind of thing. So there’s good experiences, lots of positive experiences, kids experience that who you will carry with you for the rest of you life, but there are also negative experiences that makes you um, alert or always on your guard.
Interviewee: Some…ya, somehow on guard even when you are in that relationship. I’d like to know how do you spend you time away from work, whether it be leave, your weekends, you days off, after your shift is completed?

Participant: Ya um, I do with a good uh, a good um, group of friends that I spend my time with. I like dancing, doesn’t look like it but I love dancing. I like socializing um, I like listening to music, I like renting movies and I like to go out. I travel when I have time, yes when I’m away from, I spend it, I have lots of friends that I operate with and over weekends I like to go to a nice lang-arm dance and dance there.
ADDENDUM E

Transcription of child participant

Respondent: C1
Date: 29-09-2006

Interviewee: …() today the fifth of the tenth 2006 and this is the interview of respondent number 2 of the interview schedule of the child. Ok for how long have you been at XXX (institution)?
Participant: About… since the eighth of July.
Interviewee: Eighth of July, gosh you remember the date too. Tell me about your experience here.
Participant: Am, my experience here, the first time I came here I was scared and I got used to the girls, and some of the girls were fighting and…like…
Interviewee: Ja, and what other experiences can you remember that you've had at XXX (institution)?
Participant: Am…
Interviewee: Have you got any experiences with care workers here?
Participant: Like… am… like the teachers, like am,
Interviewee: The teachers, but the care workers who are working with you in the sections. What are the experiences? From the beginning, from when you came in. What was it like for you?
Participant: They were really friendly and I could always talk to a teacher, the, the care workers.
Interviewee: Ok, what do you, what are your relationships like with your RYCWs?
Participant: Who’s that?
Interviewee: The RYCWs are what you call the teachers who are in the sections with you.
Participant: I have a very good relationship with one of the teachers, I can talk to her a lot and she understands me.
Interviewee: Ok. What do you think makes this care worker that you are talking about, what makes it your special care worker, the one that stands out in your mind.. as being your special care worker?
Participant: She, she always understands me; I can talk to her and sometimes she gives me stuff. Like if I ask her to buy me soap and stuff like that, she would buy me my own () and stuff like that.
Interviewee: Do you have experiences where you, where you have a least favourite care worker.
Participant: Yes.
Interviewee: Ok, what is that relationship like for you?
Participant: She, its almost like she, she tell the children not to hit me and stuff like that and the children hit me and she tell them, but she still, she mock a person sometimes and she calls me (water…) and stuff like that.
Interviewee: Ok. So there are some relationships that are not so nice for you. Some experiences that are also not so nice for you, and you also have positive experiences with some RYCWs. Ok. What is the most important thing to you about your relationship with the care worker?
Participant: That the teacher, that she wont go tell the other teachers what I tell her. That I can talk to her about anything.
Interviewee: So its important to you, I hear what you’re saying, to talk freely to somebody and know that they are going to keep that information to themselves.
Participant: Yes.
Interviewee: Ok. What is some of the goals you would like to reach here at XXX (institution) and in the future?
Participant: After I go out of XXX (institution) that I won’t smoke anymore. My behaviour will change and during the holiday there was at home my behaviour did change and I didn’t smoke, so that was a good reason for me coming to XXX (institution) so that I can know that, it’s almost like XXX (institution) helped me to get over my smoking.
Interviewee: What do you think actually helped you to get over your smoking? Or who helped you to get over your smoking?
Participant: I don’t know, I think its just my daddy’s health, he’s very sick and its because of the smoking and now I’ve got it in my head that I won’t do that anymore.
Interviewee: And you mentioned the other behaviour that you would like to get over. What behaviour is that that you’d..
Participant: … that would be my rudeness, that’s all.
Interviewee: And what kind of help do you think you need from the care workers to get over your rudeness?
Participants: (sighs) I don’t know.
Interviewee: Ok. What other way do you think RYCWs help you to reach your goals?
Participant: They inspire me they tell me never give up. The teachers tell me I must never give up what I want to become one day, even if I tell myself I can’t be successful. Teachers always tell me I must never give up.
Interviewee: So they give you motivation?
Participant: Yes.
Interviewee: Do they sometimes motivate you to go to school in the morning?
Participant: I () go to school. Not actually.
Interviewee: Ok, do you need motivation to be in the classroom?
Participant: Sometimes I walk out of the classroom and I’m not every time in the class.
Interviewee: Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your experience with the care workers who look after you.
Participant: My experiences are like, they are very kind and; the teachers sometimes understand, most of them understand and you can always talk to them, and if you see something wrong you can tell them and they won’t say: Tasneem told, Tasneem told them Weidaad did go on, she won’t say: Weidaad, Tasneem did go on, she just said, she just said: Weidaad, why are you going on like that.

Interviewee: Ok.
Participant: The teachers are like that, they don’t, they keep you almost like anonymous so if you see something wrong you can go tell them.
Interviewee: And that’s very important for you.
Participant: Yes because otherwise it will start a fight among the children.
Interviewee: Is there anything, if you had to say to a care worker, am…, I wish you could be like this or I wish that you would have done this or you would have told me that. What would that be? Is there anything you’d like to change?
Participant: I would just, that teacher that, that I least don’t like, I would just want her to stop telling me that I’m a ‘water (‘)’ am, that I smoke and that I’m a Rasta and … because I don’t want to be one.

Interviewee: Ok.
Participant: And that’s what makes me angry also sometimes.
Interviewee: so…
Participant: And she favours some children.
Interviewee: Ok.
Participant: She buys them sweets and stuff.
Interviewee: And sometimes you will feel left out if she doesn’t buy all the children sweets.
Participant: Yes.
Interviewee: Ok. So from you, what’s really important from your care workers is that they support you, and that they’re positive. Those are some of the things that are important to you.
Participant: Yes.
Interviewee: Ok. Sjo! Tell me how do you see a good relationship? What makes a good relationship?
Participant: A good relationship with my friends?
Interviewee: It can be friends; it can be mothers and fathers, people, what makes a good relationship between people?
Participant: I good relationship is people who don’t argue, and that they, am… how can you say? Don’t like talk behind your back like that. I can tell you, I have a good relationship with one of the girls here, and she like wont talk behind my
back and I can always talk to her and she can always talk to me when she feels sad and that makes us, just a good friendship. That you know you can trust that person and that person can trust you.

Interviewee: Sjoe, thank you very much for your participation. Thank you very much, I appreciate it hey.
ADDENDUM F

EXAMPLE OF DATA BEING SORTED INTO CATEGORIES AND THEMES

THE ROLE OF YOUTH CARE WORKERS

Daily routine is normal, it’s a, its consistent (RYCW1:10–11). These kids have never had routine, they just did whatever they want to do and its important to get some structure, they eat on time, they sleep on time, ya so those kind of things. So in order to get structure into their lives I think it’s important to have structure (RYCW 1:11).

It was noted during observations that it is the RYCWs daily task to make sure the children eat all their meals, receive snacks, dress adequately and have access to clean clothes and linen (O: F – O: N).

The supervisory role was observed as RYCWs being physically present with the children at all times (O: F – O: N). They accompany the children during times of relaxation, play time, to sports events and functions both at the facility and at other locations getting them in the right mood and spirit for school (RYCW 1:5).

rushing them off to school (RYCW 1:5)

because not all of them like school actually most of them don’t like school. A lot of them not all of them don’t like school, they have negative experiences with school, nobody encouraged them to go to school they have learning problems they might have other kind of problems they cannot cope.

unless um a particular teacher has a problem with disruptive children in the classroom, then the child care worker will come in.

Ya, often just the presence of the child care worker is works because they are like the parents of the child and they work in the dormitories with the child day
and night and so their presence can also bring a bit of calm or order in the classroom. (RYCW 1:7)

so you have to support the child because every child has to be at school at the time of school… (RYCW 2:9).

do everything that you have, that you can do in order to support him
show him how ...important to be educated, how important to be literate you see (RYCW 2:9)

And if you can’t then obviously you must refer them (RYCW 1:5)

On many occasions, RYCWs approached the educational psychologist to refer children in need of counselling (O: F – O: N)

Each morning during the multi disciplinary meetings RYCWs brought to the attention of the team, the children’s needs to be referred to a variety of centres to have their particular needs met (O: F – O: N)
THE SUPPORT EXPERIENCED BY YOUTH CARE WORKERS

you learn how to cope, not to take things personally, not to take things with you, uh, to make use of your colleagues and friends so you can bounce back (RYCW 1:2)

if you have training and good supervision or good support from your team then yes But if you don’t get good support and () supervision then it can be dangerous (RYCW 1:8)

With the necessary support as I say, if you have a relationship with the children and you have the necessary support you can do it (RYCW 1:8)

We need more people when the atmosphere is tense (RYCW 3:4)

when I am alone at work, it makes it very hard (RYCW 3:11)

Sometimes we are supposed to be working as a team. We undergo courses that tell you how to work, that even if you are not a child care worker, we are here for the benefit of the child. (RYCW 3:15)

A support from outside really helps (RYCW 3:15/16)

I think the Psychological support is a wonderful help mostly in this program (RYCW 3:15)

We need that help and also the help from the churches (RYCW 3:16)

Such help as well as from the academic as well as from the psychologists is what we need… it is the main thing that we lacked here and I think that will be the best thing for us because I get excited now! (RYCW 4:4)

It cannot come from the same area, but must come from all areas (RYCW 4:4)

Its what they all need. So if you come with your church and the other one comes with the psychologist and the other one with the care worker, the combined effort will help. (RYCW 3:16)

If you are not happy in your work, you will not perform right even though you are being paid for it. So I need to be motivated by my seniors. I need to be respected and not undermined. (RYCW 3:17)
THE EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF WORKING WITH YOUTH AT RISK

emotionally in the sense because over the years we’ve learn that um, you can have a good relationship, you don’t know these children, you don’t know where they come from, you don’t know their backgrounds (RYCW 1:16)

So there's good experiences, lots of positive experiences, kids experience that who you will carry with you for the rest of you life, but there are also negative experiences that makes you um, alert or always on your guard. (RYCW 1:17)

this because at first you need to know you are not working with a normal child, you are working with a problematic child (RYCW 3:2)

I was very emotional (RYCW 4:1)

My worry was always with the children (RYCW 4:1)

An MDT member brought to the psychologist's attention the RYCWs’ need for help by saying that a particular RYCW was found hitting his head against the wall in frustration. The MDT member mentioned that there were others experiencing troubles at home which were putting additional emotional strain on them (FN: F)

During September a RYCW approached the team for assistance as he felt that he was not equipped to deal with particular crisis he was having to face in the dormitories (FN: S)

Another RYCW was observed saying to a youth: Jy dreig my tot drank. My kop is seer! My kop is seer! (O: N)

We are coping (RYCW 3:2)

not taking things with you (RYCW 1:2)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUTH CARE WORKERS AND YOUTH AT RISK

afterwards he tell you his deep secrets or things that you would never know (RYCW 1:2)

because they are like the parents of the child (RYCW1:7)

if you have a relationship with the children and you have the necessary support you can do it (RYCW 1:8)
you cannot do this without that relationship (RYCW 1:8)

you must also be able to exercise discipline but the important thing is to be with the children, to be there (RYCW 1:8)

in doing that you are starting relationships with children (RYCW 1:8)

And once you have a relationship with the child … you can interact with the child, you can ask him to do things, he can ask for you, he can trust you, he knows you always there (RYCW 1:10)

we always use women in that section, because for the mother figure (RYCW 1:12)

My role is to play both a mother and a father to the child. (RYCW 3:2)

so I am supposed to be a mother and be understanding (RYCW 3:2/3)

I must try to be a good role model for them first (RYCW 3:3)

You are there to be a mother. (RYCW 3:5)

if there is no relationship, there is no way you can help a child. (RYCW 3:17)

They must feel that they are cared for (RYCW 3:1)
Whenever they can come to me with their problems and they need not be scared of me. They must just be free and just talk openly with me (RYCW 3:1)

You just want to tell the child “I am here to help you! ’ I can just talk to her, normally talking (RYCW 3:2)

you can leave her alone and talk to her later. “Just take your time! Come to me when you are ready to talk!” (RYCW 3:5).

they are like the parents of the child (RYCW 1:7)

That you know you can trust that person and that person can trust you (C 2)

most of them understand and you can always talk to them, and if you see some things wrong you can tell them (C2)

that I know that they care (C1)
they keep you almost like anonymous so if you see something wrong you can go tell them (C2)

I am here to help you (RYCW 3:2)

just take your time, come to me when you are ready to talk (RYCW 3:5)

I can talk to her, we can laugh, we can sometimes share some things, and all that (C1)

They were really friendly and I could always talk to a teacher, the, the care workers (C2)

I have a very good relationship with one of the teachers, I can talk to her a lot and she understands me (C2)

that she won’t go tell the other teachers what I tell her. That I can talk to her about anything (C2)
ATTENTION: XXX

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDIES AT XXX

I am currently working on a dissertation in partial fulfilment of the Masters Educational Psychology degree at the University of Stellenbosch.

I am researching the experiences of RYCWs in residential care facilities. The aim of the study is to gain insight into the experiences of the care workers in order to discover what type of support the RYCWs need in order to successfully reach their goals in assisting youth at risk.

The study will take place by means of interviewing 2 willing RYCWs from the facility on Monday 24 July 2006 (or on a more convenient date selected by the facility).

If you are in need of any information surrounding the study, please don’t hesitate to consult the proposal I have provided for you. Any other Queries and questions surrounding the study are most welcome and can be directed to me via one of the above mentioned methods of communication.

Yours sincerely

A CARSTENS
ADDENDUM H

PHOTOGRAPHS OF YOUTH CARE WORKERS
INTERACTIONS WITH YOUTH