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### Exploring the Role LO Plays in Preparing South African Learners for Life After Matric: A Case Study in Cato Manor

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EXPLORING THE ROLE LO PLAYS IN PREPARING SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS FOR  
LIFE AFTER MATRIC: A CASE STUDY IN CATO MANOR

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Advisor: Dr. Chris McGladdery

SIT: Social and Political Transformation

Spring 2023

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### **Acknowledgements**

I would first like to acknowledge my ISP supervisor Chris McGladdery. Thank you Chris for supporting me throughout this ISP process. Chris's guidance and advice allowed me to make the most out of this study, and it was truly a pleasure to be able to brainstorm ideas and strategies with her.

I would also like to acknowledge Imraan Buccus, whose guidance allowed me to focus my research idea and ensure the feasibility and practicality of my goals. I am thankful for Imraan's willingness to provide advice whenever I needed it.

Next, I would like to acknowledge a few people for whom the methodology would not have been possible without. Thank you to the individual who connected me with post-matric individuals in Cato Manor and whose willingness to support my research allowed me to collect significant amounts of data. Thank you to the director of the educational non-profit for who this project would not have been possible without. I greatly appreciate their support and willingness to sacrifice their own time to ensure my project ran smoothly. Thank you also to a senior member of the same educational non-profit who took time out of their own days to introduce me to LO teachers and staff members at the three Cato Manor schools, setting up meetings and ensuring each research participant followed through. It was a pleasure getting to know them and getting an inside look into the incredible work that the organization does.

Finally, thank you Sally Fales for supporting me throughout this project. Your willingness and excitement to talk through ideas, peer-edit my work, and keep me motivated was invaluable to the success of this project.

## **Abstract**

Recent surges in youth unemployment and limited access to higher education in South Africa suggests that schools are not adequately preparing learners for life after matriculation. Existing literature has addressed problems within secondary schooling as well as potential reasons for youth unemployment and limited access to higher education, however, very little work has focused on the role Life Orientation (LO) courses play in this societal crisis. In an effort to fill this gap, this study aimed to identify a disconnect between what content LO learners are receiving and what content is required to access these post-matric opportunities. This case study collected data through classroom observations and LO teacher interviews from three Cato Manor secondary schools in KwaZulu Natal (KZN), and interviews with post-matric individuals living in Cato Manor. Findings suggested that learners and teachers face several challenges in LO classes that are relevant to accessing higher education and employment. Ultimately, this study validates the experiences and challenges of LO teachers and learners in order to identify areas where the LO course can improve so that learners are adequately prepared for life after matriculation.

## Introduction

Education plays an important role in preparing learners to face the various obstacles of life after school. In South Africa, school becomes even more important for those living in poverty, as it can equip learners with the tools needed to achieve social mobility. In order to improve their own socioeconomic status, it is critical for learners to be able to access higher education and or employment. Access to these post-matric opportunities help indicate whether or not a learner is transitioning well from school to broader society, and can be a reliable predictor for improved socioeconomic status later in life (Francis & Webster, 2019). For these reasons, this study uses access to higher education and employment as the two main categories for which to measure student preparedness post-matric.

Despite the importance higher education and employment have in young South Africans' lives, access to both of these routes is limited. As a result, Black and poor South Africans are struggling after leaving secondary school to continue their schooling or begin their careers, compounding challenges related to poverty and marginalization that they already face. After dismantling Apartheid in 1994, South Africa has made efforts to use equitable schooling to combat generations of oppression and inequality. This study examined one distinct effort, the LO course, which was designed to equip learners with life skills that help them confront life's challenges. The examination focused on the role it plays in assisting learners with accessing higher education and employment. This study used a critical lens to analyze the content and the implementation of the Further Education and Training Phase of LO. The purpose of this research was to define the knowledge and skills gap between what LO classes teach learners and what learners require in order to be prepared for life after matriculating in grade 12. As a result of

defining this gap, this study contributes to existing literature by empowering the voices of LO learners and teachers in order to ensure the course is being effectively implemented.

The goal of this study was to explore the role the LO course plays in preparing learners for life after matric. In doing this, the first objective was to examine the LO classroom environment through non-participatory action classroom observations, semi-structured LO teacher interviews, and semi-structured interviews with post-matric individuals living in Cato Manor. The triangulation of these data collection methods highlighted LO class content, the backgrounds of, experiences of, and challenges faced by LO teachers, and the structure of how LO classes are taught such as the class pedagogy and time allotted to LO per week. By answering these questions, the research established a solid understanding of what LO looks like in Cato Manor secondary schools and how this differs from what is written in the curricular lesson plans. In order to better highlight the skills gap, the second objective was to collect data on the experiences of post-matric individuals living in Cato Manor. More specifically, the interviews conducted helped develop an understanding of whether or not these individuals knew about next steps after matric, what types of guidance they received, and what skills and or knowledge they lacked that inhibited them from pursuing these opportunities. The third objective was to highlight the skills gap between what learners receive and what they require, analyzing the role LO plays in widening this gap. The fourth objective was to then use this data to brainstorm necessary changes to the LO course that can narrow this gap and better support learners as they access higher education and employment. These changes were based on data collected from teacher and post-matric interviews where common challenges arose pertaining to LO. The fifth and final objective was more broadly to find shared experiences among post-matric participants and teacher interviews, and for these experiences to line up with certain observations

made in the classroom. In order to fulfill each of the five objectives, this study used thematic data analysis to recognize patterns across each of the three data collection methods.

Triangulating the data in this way validated the experiences of LO learners and teachers and highlighted important flaws in the implementation of LO. The data in this study suggested that South African education is falling short in its goals to “guide and prepare learners to respond appropriately to life’s responsibilities and opportunities” (Motshekga, 2011, p. 8).

This paper is broken down into five main sections: Literature Review, Methodology, Limitations, Findings and Data Analysis, and Conclusions. The Literature Review is broken down into two subsections. The first subsection includes information about the history and present-day struggles of Cato Manor, and provides important context for the challenges that young people face in the community. The second subsection pertains to the theoretical framework in which the study exists. This subsection begins with a discussion on South African education, first describing the quintile funding model and then moving on to the various challenges South African education faces with regards to learners, teachers, and school infrastructure. The Literature Review continues with an outline of LO including what the course looks like and the challenges it faces regarding curriculum and teachers. The section moves on to discuss the difficulties young people face when accessing both higher education and employment. In addition to outlining the causes of these two crises, the section concludes by discussing several challenges that young people face in response to lacking education and employment opportunities.

The second section of the paper is the Methodology section, which outlines how the study was conducted. This section discusses the research design and data collection, providing reasoning for each decision made. Moreover, this section includes an outline of the data analysis



used and an explanation for how this analysis helped answer the research question and objectives of the study. The Methodology section concludes with an explanation about how trustworthiness was ensured throughout the study according to the four measurements.

The third section of this research discusses the limitations related to the design and implementation of the study. The bias, identity, and past experiences of the researcher limited their ability to fully understand the experiences of participants, while the sample size and order of data collection limited the depth in which the research could go. Each limitation was addressed and challenged by the researcher throughout the study in order to mitigate its impact.

The fourth section is Findings and Data Analysis. Broken down into five subsections, Findings and Data Analysis uses a funnel approach to present data collected from post-matric interviews, LO teacher interviews, and classroom observations. The section replicates the order of the Literature Review by discussing the LO classroom environment before moving on to challenges faced when accessing higher education and employment. The section begins with the subsection titled LO Classroom Environment, which presents data from all three data collection methods to show several important themes related to classroom dynamics, teaching practices, and teacher-learner relationships. In subsections two and three, the data is narrowed to outline certain links between the LO course and post-matric challenges related to higher education and employment. The section concludes with a brief description of the consequences that occur as a result of the previously mentioned challenges, and a discussion on what the data highlighted as one of the biggest challenges facing LO: the devaluation of the course by South African society. Ultimately, the Findings and Data Analysis section aims to both establish the LO class context as well as highlight certain gaps between the implementation of the curriculum and the skills and knowledge post-matrices need to access higher education and employment.

The Conclusions section provides key takeaways that are important for future applications of the research, and summarizes future research that can build off of the findings of this study. Recommendations include expanding this research project to include schools from different socioeconomic backgrounds, focusing the study on LO teacher experiences, and analyzing the connections LO content has with content from other academic disciplines. The section concludes with the broader implications of youth struggles to access higher education and employment, and how these challenges exist within a larger South African society that continues to contend with systemic inequality and oppression.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1 Background to Cato Manor

This study takes place in Cato Manor, a community 5 km west of the Durban city center. Cato Manor is a historically black community in the province Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) where the most common spoken language is isiZulu (Dlamini, 2020). This Zulu identity has been maintained despite a dark history of Apartheid and other efforts to displace and oppress Black people in the area. Cato Manor has been the victim of violent segregation, forced removals, and discrimination. This history persists today as the community continues to face extreme inequality and poverty. Over the years, Cato Manor has been defined by controversy and protest. In 1949, soon after the Apartheid state took power, there were huge Black African riots in response to an Indian shopkeeper assaulting a Black youth. In response to the wave of violence and using the Group Areas Act of 1950, the newly appointed Apartheid government displaced thousands of Black Africans living in Cato Manor to other nearby townships. As the fight against Apartheid persisted throughout the second half of the 20th century, Cato Manor continued to be a marker of struggle, such as during the spontaneous protest in 1959 by working class Black Africans and ANC representatives. In the 1980s, economic and housing crises among Black Africans led to a boom of informal settlements in Cato Manor, and by the early 90s, Black Africans began moving back into the community. The 1990s also served as a period of intense political turmoil in Cato Manor as the fight for political power and land ownership split the community into different political factions (Gray & Maharaj).

Since 1994, efforts have been made to provide economic and social support to Cato Manor after years of injustice and abandonment, however, the community continues to face the harsh realities of inequality. In a 2017 report on Cato Manor residents' satisfaction with

community infrastructure, more than half of respondents reported being unsatisfied with the amount of schools, houses, and public parks and playgrounds. Moreover, the majority of respondents were unsatisfied with the quality of nearby government medical clinics. Informal and shack dwelling settlements continue to play an important role in the community as well, as NGOs such as Abahlali baseMjondolo make efforts to help impoverished South Africans in the community take ownership over their land and their lives (Gray & Maharaj).

Cato Manor continues to face several gender related challenges such as gender-based violence, rape, and teenage pregnancy. A report on the socioeconomic conditions of Cato Manor suggests that verbal and physical violence against women is highly prevalent. The study continues by finding that gender-based violence has become so ingrained in the culture of Cato Manor that many incidents occur with other people around, implying a lack of accountability among community members (Gray & Maharaj). 90% of the respondents in the study also reported that rape was very common in the community, citing the home as one of the most common spaces in which it occurs. Many of these cases and other forms of gender-based violence go unreported which remains a major concern when addressing this challenge (Gray & Maharaj). Incidences of gender-based violence are linked to issues related to teenage pregnancy, a problem with which the province of KZN struggles mightily. A 2022 News24 report noted that KZN has the highest rate of child pregnancies among all South African provinces. There were over 18,000 reported births for girls aged 10-17 in the year 2020 (Solomons, 2022). Although rates related to teenage pregnancy are difficult to access in Cato Manor specifically, the high rates of poverty and gender-based violence suggest teenage pregnancy remains a huge problem in the community.

Cato Manor, in addition to the entire KZN province, has faced a strenuous few years marked by three particularly significant challenges. The first was the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic that commenced in early 2020. Similar to the rest of the world, KZN residents dealt with the loss of jobs, steady income, and many government social services. As a result of the socioeconomic instability, many people were forced to sell their belongings and struggled to afford daily living expenses (Khambule, 2022). Shortly after the start of the pandemic, violent protests and looting broke out in July of 2021, in response to former president Jacob Zuma's prison sentence in the capital of KZN, Pietermaritzburg. The events that took place had a huge impact on the entire province, putting approximately 150,000 jobs at risk and costing small businesses billions of dollars of repair in order to start back up (Mundhree & Beharry-Ramraj, 2022). Finally, in April of 2022, Durban dealt with heavy flooding that debilitated the local infrastructure and service delivery. In an article written about the impacts of the event, Science News deemed it "the most catastrophic natural disaster yet recorded in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in collective terms of lives lost, homes and infrastructure damaged or destroyed and economic impact" (Witwatersrand, 2023). Today, Cato Manor and the entire eThekweni Municipality continue to face the socioeconomic consequences of these three tragic events. The current state of the location is important in contextualizing the literature review as articles written prior to these events, especially the Covid-19 pandemic, may be slightly outdated. It is also this context in which Cato Manor schools struggle to prepare their learners for higher education and employment after matric.

## 1.2 Relevant Literature

A crisis exists in South Africa where young people are struggling to access higher education and employment. Only about 50% of learners passing their matric enroll in university and as a result, only 6% of South Africans hold a university degree (Nkosi, 2021; Simpson, 2017). Additionally, youth (ages 18-34) unemployment rates have risen up to almost 50% (Stats SA, 2022). Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, gender-based violence, and family responsibilities exacerbate challenges related to accessing employment and higher education. Consequently, the literature suggests that the subsequent lifestyle which lacks structure and purpose is linked to higher rates of mental health issues (Cloete, 2015).

Challenges exist at the levels of learner, teacher, and school infrastructure that fuel an education crisis in South Africa and exacerbate challenges young people face with accessing higher education and employment (Mouton et al., 2012). The LO course, mandatory throughout the Further Education and Training Phase (grades 10-12), is no exception. The class was originally designed in the late 1990s to prepare learners for life after matric. The curriculum is designed to teach learners about self-identity, environmental and societal issues, and strategies needed to combat life challenges such as future employment, mental and physical health, and applying to higher education institutions. Given the challenges young people face post-matric, it is clear that LO is struggling to achieve these goals. In addition to the various challenges learners face in South African schools, LO teachers are often ill-equipped to effectively teach the curriculum and schools do not have the necessary resources to implement the course effectively (Mabusela et al., 2020). Because the purpose of LO is to equip learners with skills required to face life post-matric, it is critical to evaluate the LO curriculum when addressing the challenges youth face after leaving secondary school.

### ***1.2.1 Education Quintile Structure of South Africa***

Before outlining the various challenges that face the South Africa education system, it is first important to describe the way in which South African schools are categorized based on the socioeconomic status of the communities in which they exist. After becoming a democracy in 1994, South Africa wanted to combat particular Apartheid laws that heavily funded White schools while marginalizing Black, Coloured, and Indian schools. In an effort to achieve education equity, South Africa categorized each school into quintiles with the first quintile representing schools in the poorest 20% of communities and the fifth quintile representing schools in the wealthiest 20% of communities. Based on their quintile category, schools with the poorest student-bodies receive the most government funding and schools with the most affluent student-bodies receive the least government funding. The majority of schools in Cato Manor and historically black townships all fall in the bottom quintiles and continue to face the harsh realities of inadequate funding. Moreover, many challenges that South African education continues to battle are most prevalent at lower-quintile schools (Quintiles 1, 2, and 3) such as those in Cato Manor. Although strategies like the quintile system were designed to provide more support to the most disadvantaged and marginalized South African populations, government corruption and other major implementation flaws prevent poor South Africans from accessing high quality education (van Dyk & White, 2019).

### ***1.2.2 Education Crisis in South Africa***

Although limited access to these post-matric opportunities can be attributed to a number of factors related to socioeconomic status, corruption, and the lingering effects of Apartheid, some of the blame must also be placed on schools for not adequately preparing learners for life after matriculation. The low quality of schooling given to poor youth exacerbates inequality as

these young people often lack the social support, career guidance, work experience, and entrepreneurial skills to find sustainable higher education and quality employment opportunities. The literature suggests that South Africa should invest more in schools in order to address an education crisis that is failing to equip learners with the necessary skills to succeed in life post-matric. The education crisis in South Africa poses challenges for learners and teachers as well as broader problems pertaining to school infrastructure.

School violence, high dropout rates, and absenteeism represent three important challenges that impact learner experiences in the classroom. School violence is a partial result of the porous boundaries that exist between schools and their surrounding communities. Unemployment and poverty has led to increases in violence that has inevitably entered the school context. Gangs and other community factions create social divisions in school based on the lives of learners outside of school. As a result, learners are afraid to go to school in fear of confronting members of rival gangs. Moreover, high rates of weapon carrying and incidents of rape, sexual violence, and several forms of bullying make school an unwelcoming environment for many young people (Mouton et al., 2012).

A second challenge learners face is high dropout rates which is highly related to school violence. A report released in 2021 by Statistics SA stated that almost 3 in 10 18 year-old pupils and almost 4 out of 10 19 year-old pupils had dropped out of school (Stats SA 2022). These ages represent common ages of matric learners, suggesting that a huge proportion of young learners are not making it to their final year of secondary school. In addition to school violence being a deterrent for school attendance, reports show that financial pressures, teenage pregnancy, and substance abuse are all factors contributing to high dropout rates (Mouton et al., 2012).



Finally, late coming, absenteeism, and truancy also pose huge challenges for learners and their ability to find work after matriculation. These issues are greatly impacted by factors causing school dropout. Additionally, though, there seems to be an aura of disrespect around school and a lack of accountability among learners and their families ensuring that they consistently attend school. This is especially true during examination periods when school days lack structure during periods when learners are not writing tests. This results in learners coming and going as they please, deeply impacting the school culture and potential learning that occurs at school (Mouton et al., 2012).

In addition to learners, educators also face a variety of challenges that impact their ability to effectively teach. In a 2020 article published in the *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, researchers identified three major challenges that, according to educators in South Africa, greatly hinder their ability to effectively teach. The first big issue is the impact of the several curriculum revisions implemented by the South African government over the last 30 years. Educators in the study highlighted the change to outcome-based education in 2005 and the change to the CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Policy Standards) curriculum in 2012 as the most impactful revisions (du Plessis & Letschwene). Both of these shifts came with startling changes to content and pedagogy, however, there was little teacher input given about whether the changes would be effective. The lack of consent from those who have the best understanding of learners' needs was met with huge criticism from educators across the country. Moreover, these educational changes were supplemented with very little teacher development and support which left educators lacking the knowledge and resources to properly educate learners under the new requirements (du Plessis & Letschwene).

In addition to challenges faced because of curriculum changes, teachers also must contend with the huge problem of overcrowded classrooms and the lack of learner discipline. As of now, the teacher-pupil ratio in South African schools sits at 40:1 which makes it very difficult for educators to teach effectively and control classrooms (du Plessis & Letschwene). Learners oftentimes will not listen to educators and will not answer their questions, making educators focus their time on discipline rather than learning. Moreover, reports of learners bringing weapons to school, learner-learner violence, learner-teacher violence, vandalism, theft, and the possession of prohibited substances pervade South African schools. To combat the toxic school culture that encourages these behaviors, schools must implement effective discipline procedures which are necessary to control behavior. However, many schools do not have a clear protocol in place. This forces teachers to handle these issues on their own, once again diverting their attention away from learning (du Plessis & Letschwene).

Another challenge that South African teachers face, one that is unique to the national context, is the fact that there are eleven official languages in South Africa and yet at almost every school, the language of instruction is English. Many learners will come into school having never heard English at home and yet they are expected to have a strong enough foundation to be taught with it. As a result, teachers report language barriers as huge obstacles hindering learners' ability to perform well academically. Moreover, cultural differences exist in the classroom too as teachers often do not share the same cultural backgrounds as their learners (du Plessis & Letschwene).

Finally, the problems underlying many of the aforementioned issues related to learners and teachers are the challenges pertaining to school infrastructure. Once again, challenges at this level of education can be broken down into three main categories. The first is the lack of

community support schools receive. Because South African education is standardized, oftentimes what is happening in schools does not reflect the culture and identity of the local community. As a result, parents and community members either do not know or do not care about what is happening in the classroom. The disconnect between communities and schools leaves learners conflicted and unsure about what messages and lessons to believe. Whether it is differences in language or differences in perspectives on political issues, young people will often hear two different messages which can confuse them in a way that negatively impacts their growth as learners (Mouton et al., 2012).

In addition to disconnects among communities and schools, the politics of schools establishes gaps between those making broad education decisions and the schools themselves. The bureaucratic nature of the education system makes it so that government officials who have their own political agendas are making decisions that may not have the learners' best interest in mind. Political unions also divert attention away from learners' needs and towards labor force needs and the motivation by many individuals to upstart political careers. This often leads to the reality that schools are not receiving the necessary resources they need to support their learners. For example, in 2012, due to political corruption and insufficient resources, government schools in Limpopo did not receive their textbooks in time for the start of the school year. Ultimately, 70% of the grade 10 learners did not pass their June 2012 exams which was directly correlated to the inability for the government to get important materials to schools (Mouton et al., 2012).

Finally, a third problem pertaining to school infrastructure is the socioeconomic factors that hinder many schools' ability to adequately provide for their learners. A lack of school resources disproportionately impacts schools in the lower three quintiles and creates a huge divide between wealthier and poorer schools. Insufficient resources impact everything from

laboratory facilities to classroom materials which all affects a teacher's ability to teach effectively. (Mouton et al., 2012). Although through the quintile system South African has made efforts to reduce disparities of school resources, challenges persist. Schools in higher quintiles rely more on school fees paid by families which tends to mean better resourcing because of the affluence of the community. To the contrary, schools in lower quintiles rely heavily on funding from the government which is limited due to corruption and flawed implementation. This results in schools in lower quintiles getting less overall funding while schools in higher quintiles are much better resourced (Maistry, 2020)

### ***1.2.3 Challenges With the Life Orientation Curriculum***

Narrowing the scope to LO, there are important challenges that impact both learners and teachers. Although many of the challenges discussed on a national scale are highly relevant to LO, there are specific characteristics of LO that spur new and unique challenges for all stakeholders. Before diving into these challenges, it is first important to establish what LO is. According to the official LO curriculum document, LO “aims to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful in their own lives” (Motshekga, 2011). In doing this, LO “addresses issues about self, healthy living, social engagement, responsible citizenship, physical activity, careers and career choices, productive living, and the environment” (Mabusela et al., 2020). After graduating the senior phase of LO in 9th grade, learners move onto the 10-12th grade curriculum in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase of secondary education. The curriculum is based on six topics: development of the self and society, social and environmental responsibility, democracy and human rights, career and career choices, study skills, and physical education. The full outline of topics can be found in Appendix D. Each of these themes is taught in grade 10, 11, and 12 as to create an important continuity between grade

levels. This curriculum is standard for all South African learners as each person must take LO up until and including their matric year. However, according to many LO teachers and learners, many learners are not receiving enough material from the curriculum guide that would allow them to take advantage of the necessary knowledge and skills (Mabusela et al., 2020).

Literature that focuses on challenges pertaining to the curriculum and implementation of the curriculum is largely around the career and career guidance component of LO. The challenges of career guidance actually start before the FET phase as at the end of grade 9, learners must make the important decision of what electives they will take for the following three years. Reports show that learners are not given enough guidance to choose electives that best fit their future career goals, setting them up to fail once they have passed matric (Mabusela et al., 2020). Moreover, because of huge class sizes and the challenges South African teachers face, it is difficult for educators to personalize the career guidance to each learner at this stage. Educators must resort to broad statements about career goals and opportunities which may not apply to each learner. One simple and important recommendation teachers could make is the fact that South Africa is in need of plumbers, electricians, and mechanics, all jobs that pay well and that could sustain a happy fulfilled life (Mabusela et al., 2020). Once learners get to the final phase of career guidance in LO, some schools offer career fairs and other programs to connect learners with local employers. However, these programs are rare and most of them are centered around STEM (Science Technology Engineering Maths) learners. These individuals make up a small portion of learners and, more importantly, STEM jobs make up a small percentage of the amount of jobs available to learners post-matric. Rather than narrowing the focus of career opportunities, it is important for the LO curriculum to focus on a wider range of jobs that appeal to all learners. Moreover, recommendations have been made to expand the number of mediums

in which career guidance is taught, using a number of forms such as radio, print media, telephone, face-to-face contact, website, and social media. In this way, learners can not only be exposed to a number of different work opportunities but also interact with them in different ways to make the process more engaging (Mabusela et al., 2020).

In addition to the broader challenges of curriculum uncertainty, overcrowding in classrooms, and insufficient resources, LO teachers also face unique challenges when attempting to effectively educate their learners. The most significant of these challenges is that most LO teachers are simply not qualified to teach LO. The way most schools are structured, LO teachers are commonly teachers with other specialties (Math, English, History, etc.) who are told to teach LO as a school requirement. Several reports show that as a result, “LO teachers are often untrained, overwhelmed by other aspects of the curriculum and learners’ personal needs, and have little knowledge of, or connection to, the world of work” (Mabusela et al., 2020, p. 250). The lack of passion and respect from teachers deeply impacts how the material is taught. Many LO teachers lack a love for the subject, seeing it as a filler subject that fulfills a job requirement. It is these negative attitudes that make learners see the subject as less important and can greatly hinder a learner’s preparation for life post-matric. Compounded with the lack of experience and expertise among LO teachers is the insufficient amount of time and resources they have to teach the curriculum effectively (Mabusela et al., 2020). For example, LO teachers have two hours a week to get through wide ranging themes related to the self and society. Teachers report being simply unable to teach LO topics effectively with the allotted time. Teachers must stick strictly to the assigned curriculum without giving enough time to personalize the material to each learner. Furthermore, because the curriculum often only consists of one government textbook, teachers have very few resources with which to work. Recommendations offered to better support

teachers include making LO teachers accredited career practitioners as well as creating better communication networks for teachers to get access to local employers and work professionals (Mabusela et al., 2020).

#### ***1.2.4 Access to Higher Education in South Africa***

Contributing to the crisis among young South Africans are the difficulties with accessing higher education institutions. Firstly, there are 26 universities in South Africa that accept just over 160,000 applicants each year. This is in response to the over four million college applicants universities receive each school year. This disparity and high exclusivity among universities is mainly due to the fact that the structure of South African higher education was built before 1994 when most Black learners were refused entrance into White universities. After democracy was achieved in 1994, the rate of learners applying to university has steadily increased disproportionate to the increase in the number of open spots (Regenesys, 2018).

In addition to the limited number of spots, there are several boundaries that inhibit many South African learners from accessing higher education. A South African Journal of Higher Education study on these challenges breaks them down into hard and soft barriers. The biggest hard barrier contributing to the inaccessibility of higher education is the financial burden young people must overcome. Over 50% of South Africans aged 18-24 reported not being able to afford higher education (Stats SA, 2019). Moreover, Black students have an even harder time overcoming these financial barriers because of a dark history of racial and socioeconomic oppression. The various Apartheid laws that placed restrictions on Black people owning land, owning businesses, and attending schools limited their ability to acquire capital and accrue generational wealth (Hlatshwayo, 2020). Today, Black families lack the necessary resources to pay steep higher education fees. Academic barriers also impact access as many learners from low

socioeconomic backgrounds lack the qualifications and adequate secondary schooling to get into higher education institutions (Mseleku, 2022). In addition to those that cannot afford university, Stats SA also reported that about 18% of people aged 18-24 were not attending educational institutions due to poor academic performance (Stats SA, 2019). Lower resourced secondary schools also often do not adequately provide their students with important information regarding financial aid packages and other university application materials. Therefore, even the learners who can afford university and whose grades are sufficient may not know how to apply (Mseleku, 2022).

Compounding the hard barriers that prevent South African youth from attending higher education institutions are soft barriers that are more subjective and subtle yet are equally influential. In the same journal article, the author argues that improved school resources will not solve these problems alone. A lack of motivation and aspiration among learners from disadvantaged backgrounds also impacts access to higher education. The factors that most often motivate learners to attend tertiary institutions are the perceived opportunities a higher education degree would create. However, with a lack of knowledge around the benefits of higher education and the recent rise in unemployment, many young people are uninterested or unaware of these potential opportunities. These “information and knowledge barriers” limit higher education accessibility not because of a lack of spots or funds but rather a lack of motivation (Mseleku, 2022). These barriers lead to further challenges that come with a lack of aspiration, self-confidence, and self-esteem that has been shown to lead to decreased motivation to attend tertiary schools. Therefore, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds feel that they are inferior or that getting a higher education degree is unproductive for future career aspirations (Mseleku, 2022).



Ultimately, the struggles South Africans from low socioeconomic backgrounds face when accessing higher education have significant consequences. South Africa tertiary education has exceptionally high returns on investment, compounding the financial disparities that exist when accessing higher education (Bhorat, 2014). As a result, access to higher education creates a cycle of privilege where the most affluent youth are equipped with the sociocultural capital needed to maintain their privilege while poorer individuals are often confined to low-paying and temporary employment (Francis & Webster, 2019). This gap exacerbates existing inequality and makes it more difficult for poor youth to achieve socioeconomic mobility.

### ***1.2.5 Youth Unemployment in South Africa***

Cato Manor accurately represents the province of KZN and the country of South Africa in that a disproportionate amount of youth (ages 15-34) are unemployed. As of the 2022 South Africa Statistics quarter 1 report, 64.9% of individuals aged 15-24, and 42.1% of individuals aged 25-34 were unemployed. Moreover, the NEET (Not in Employment Education, or Training) measurement was about 37% in 2022 (Stats SA, 2022). Unemployment is even more impactful for individuals who come from impoverished backgrounds and lack the human and sociocultural capital to find a job.

In a 2018 UKZN study, Masters student Sibusiso Blessing Ntshiza suggested that there are several main causes of youth unemployment in South Africa. She reinforces these causes with qualitative research she conducted on several Cato Manor community members. Firstly, a lack of demand for labor caused by changes in the global market impacts the entire South African workforce but especially the poor youth. This subgroup tends to have less work experience and less education, two factors that are important in finding long-term employment. Furthermore, corruption within big employing companies causes the most well-deserving and

best workers to be laid off/not hired in favor of those who have connections with powerful business people and government officials (Ntshiza, 2018). Impoverished learners coming out of secondary school also lack the qualifications and skills needed to find employment. Whether this is due to poor secondary schooling or a lack of guidance about what classes often lead to employment, poor young individuals are left without the necessary credentials to find work. A lack of entrepreneurial skills and the motivation to start new businesses also limits employment options for young people. This is partially due to the government's unwillingness to give out credit loans for young people, making it riskier to start a business, risks many young people can ill-afford to take given their fragile socioeconomic statuses. Moreover, the entrepreneurial culture that does exist in South Africa is often in the informal workplace which is already financially unstable (Ntshiza, 2018).

Finally, underlying many challenges of South Africa's unemployment crisis is that there are significant racial and class disparities between young people who do and do not have prior work experience. Work experience is a reliable indicator for a person's employability in South Africa and makes this disparity hugely important for helping learners transition from school to work. Ntshiza also suggests that work experience develops important soft skills such as reliability, self-confidence, communication, and punctuality that are important for future employment. Skepticism among employers around the quality of South African secondary schooling makes work experience even more important to being a successful job applicant. As a result of the importance of work experience and the challenges that persist in lower-resourced South African schools, there is a substantial gap between the soft skills young people receive from school and the knowledge needed in the workforce (Ntshiza, 2018, 18).

In a South African journal article, Anita Cloete outlines a number of societal and psychological consequences of being unemployed, which heighten the significance of inaccessibility. She argues that “A job can engender a sense of purpose and value and shape a person's identity and self-esteem” (Cloete, 2015). As a result, being unemployed strips people of structure and purpose in their lives that can damage one's mental health. She suggests that unemployment for young people in South Africa can lead to lower self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness, isolation, uselessness, and self-estrangement. Moreover, the unstructured lifestyles of widespread youth unemployment can also deeply affect communities as violence, crime, and social instability often stem from these psychological symptoms. (Cloete, 2015).

#### ***1.2.6 Conclusion***

Access to higher education and youth unemployment in South Africa are pressing issues that impact young people in meaningful ways. Despite the challenges that South African schools face, LO continues to play a critical role in preparing learners for these two post-matric routes. The literature shows that obstacles at the levels of learner, teacher, and school infrastructure hinder schools' ability to effectively equip learners with the skills needed to face societal challenges that exist post-matric. Because LO was designed to address these struggles, it should be this course that the South African government reforms when attempting to address the challenges that young people face. This study highlights the major flaws in the implementation of LO in Cato Manor schools in an effort to identify necessary areas of improvement. If LO can equip learners with the knowledge and skills currently present in its curriculum, young people will be better prepared to transition into society.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This research used an exploratory case study design where the experiences of individuals living in Cato Manor were used to gain a broader understanding of the challenges youth in Cato Manor face. Creswell, J. W. (2013) describes a case study research design as a method that uses in-depth data collection in order to define the themes, problems, and boundaries of a particular group of people. This study used exploratory-descriptive qualitative research. McCallum and Howes (2019) define this research method as a valid approach and say that its purpose is to provide an overview of the world from the perspective of the participants while also describing the particular problem being analyzed. The sampling method used was convenience sampling which Julia Simkus (2023) describes as a form of non-probability sampling that is based on what is most convenient to the researcher. The researcher had access to one community member in Cato Manor who gathered the post-matric interview participants. Additionally, the director of a Cato Manor based education non-profit organization connected the researcher with all LO teachers interviewed for this study. The sample size of 6-12 for each population was deemed a large enough number to highlight significant themes and patterns from the data.

### **2.2 Data Collection**

The data collection period took place in two periods that occurred within the same two weeks. During the first period, which occurred on consecutive days, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with post-matric individuals ranging from ages 20-30. Among the participants, five were women, two were men, and all were Black. This study identifies the participants by the order in which their interview occurred (Participant 1, Participant 2,

Participant 3, etc.) The interview guides are listed in Appendix A. Each interview occurred outdoors in the community of Cato Manor and lasted between 20-45 minutes. Each interview participant gave written and verbal consent for the researcher to take notes and to audio record the interview. The interview consent forms can be found in Appendix E. Each interview was split up into two sections. The first addressed individual experiences related to higher education, employment, civic engagement, family responsibilities, and other interests or hobbies. Part two asked participants to take time and review the LO topic list provided by the interviewer (Appendix D). After reading through the curriculum, focusing on the topics related to higher education and employment, participants were asked to reflect on their own experiences. Questions referred to specific gaps in what they saw on paper and what they remember learning and the ways in which LO content has impacted their lives post-matric. The structure of this interview was designed to highlight a clear connection between post-matric challenges and the LO course, gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of interview participants.

The second period of data collection occurred on three consecutive days at three different Cato Manor secondary schools the following week. During this period, four LO teachers participated in semi-structured interviews and three classes were observed using non-participatory classroom observation. The interview questions can be found in Appendix B and the classroom observation guide can be found in Appendix C. Interviews were broken down into four parts: background information, teacher experiences, perceived learner experiences, and proposed changes to LO. Each observation occurred during a 50 minute grade 11 class, and each interview lasted between 20 and 40 minutes following the observation. The teachers consisted of two Indian women, one Black woman, and one Black man. Each interview participant gave written and verbal consent for the researcher to take notes and audio record, while the teacher of

each classroom gave verbal consent for observation. The written consent form can be found in Appendix E. Both the data collected from semi-structured interviews and from the non-participatory classroom observations were combined to achieve the first objective, to explore the classroom dynamics and environment of the LO course.

At the first quintile 2 school, one senior LO teacher (Teacher 1) was interviewed in a classroom while class was in session and another senior LO teacher (Teacher 2) was interviewed outside of their classroom in the hallway. Prior to the interviews, Teacher 1's classroom (classroom one) was observed although a university learner TA led the class while the teacher sat behind them. The class topic was 'Study Skills'. At the second quintile 2 school, one senior LO teacher (Teacher 3) was interviewed in the staff room and their class (classroom two) was observed prior. The class topic was 'Democracy and Human Rights'. At the third school, a quintile 3 school, a newly appointed LO teacher (Teacher 4) was interviewed in the staff room and their classroom (classroom three) was observed prior. The class topic was 'Unequal Power Dynamics'.

### **2.3 Data Analysis**

This study conducted thematic analysis which Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012) define as a form of data analysis that highlights patterns and themes of a given data set and argue that it is an "accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data" (Braun et. al., 2012) Quotes from each of the seven post-matric interviews and four LO teacher interviews were transcribed using the website Cockatoo, the handwritten classroom observations were typed up and organized, and the following subsections were defined:

1. Life Orientation Classroom Environment
2. Higher Education (Inaccessibility and how LO relates to these challenges)

3. Employment (Inaccessibility and how LO relates to these challenges)
4. Consequences of Inaccessible Post-Matric Opportunities
5. Valuing Life Orientation

This study conducted thematic analysis on each of these subsections to highlight patterns within the LO context and how they relate to post-matric challenges. In subsection 1, data from all three data collection methods was triangulated to provide a holistic understanding of LO classroom environments. In subsections 2, 3, and 4, data was only taken from post-matric interviews. Finally, in subsection 5, data was taken from both sets of interviews. The combination of these three data sets also provided a strong understanding of how LO is taught in the three school environments, challenges and struggles LO teachers face in teaching LO, and finally the struggles post-matric individuals face when applying to higher education institutions or finding jobs.

#### **2.4 Trustworthiness of Research**

The trustworthiness of this study was also ensured according to its four measurements. First, credibility was ensured both during the data collection period and after. During interviews, participants were asked to repeat or clarify their comments if the researcher did not understand. Moreover, the observations made in the classroom were discussed with the teacher after the interview to ensure the accuracy of each reflection. During transcriptions, the researcher read along with the written transcription produced by Cockatoo while listening to the audio recordings and reviewing their notes. By using all three mediums, the researcher confirmed the accuracy of the data used for the study. Second, the transferability was ensured because of the detailed methodology section as well as the accessibility of all participants in the study. Third, the dependability of this study was ensured because of the long time period the data covers. The

common experiences among the post-matric participants who ranged in age from 20-30 aligned with the classroom observations. This suggests that the data collected is not unique to a certain school or moment in time but rather is consistent among many people in Cato Manor. Finally, the confirmability of this study was ensured through the literature review where the findings of peer-reviewed academic journal articles aligned with the results of this study.



### 3. Limitations

There were several limitations with the design and implementation of this study that may have impacted the final data collected. As a white American university student, there were inherent gaps in the researcher's understanding of South African culture and the experiences of the participants in the study. Although the researcher had been living in Durban for two months and had a solid understanding of the historical and present South African educational landscape, there were aspects of the researcher's own identity that made him unable to fully grasp the challenges South African learners face. In an effort to mitigate the impact of these cultural differences, in each of the interviews, the researcher acknowledged these shortcomings and did his best to clarify any statements or references he did not understand. Additionally, the researcher's bias as a result of his identity was reflected upon and challenged in order to ensure the collection of reliable qualitative data.

In addition to gaps in cultural knowledge, language barriers also may have impacted data collected in both interviews and the classroom observations. Although all participants spoke English, issues with comprehension of the questions and the ability to articulate points may have limited the amount of information participants could share. To mitigate the impact of this limitation, thought went into developing simple research questions and the researcher clarified any questions that the participants did not understand. During classroom observations, two of the three teachers used isiZulu at times during their lessons. Although textbook content was all shared in English, teachers seemed to use isiZulu to connect with learners and ensure comprehension, something the researcher was unable to pick up on with his limited understanding of the language.

Furthermore, the identity of the researcher in classroom observations may have impacted the behavior and engagement of both the teacher and the learners. At several points in the lesson plan, learners stared at the researcher which diverted their focus away from the class content. It is possible that the behavior of the teachers may have also changed knowing the researcher was evaluating classroom dynamics. Ultimately, this limitation was partially addressed when the researcher introduced himself at the beginning of class in isiZulu and announced what he was evaluating, but the effects of his presence alone remained.

Two limitations of the methodology of this study also may have impacted the final data collection. First, although the literature deems a least six interviews as a sufficient number for significant and reliable qualitative data, only four teacher interviews were conducted. Because of limited access to the teachers and the hectic schedules they each had, the researcher was unable to conduct an appropriate number of interviews. Although the researcher gained a solid understanding of the experiences of and challenges faced by LO teachers, the insufficient number of interviews made it more difficult to draw larger conclusions. Finally, the order of how the data collection methods were conducted may have limited the depth in which the interview questions were able to go. The researcher hoped to conduct classroom observations first in order to gain a better understanding of what LO looks like before conducting post-matric interviews. However, due to the fact that Cato Manor schools were on holiday break at the beginning of the data collection period, the researcher had to conduct post-matric interviews first before entering the schools. Ultimately, although each of these limitations may have impacted the final data collection, the researcher attempted to address and mitigate the effects of each one. As a result, the potential impact of each limitation was minor and the data collected remains reliable.

#### **4. Findings and Data Analysis**

Much of the literature related to this study focuses on challenges impacting LO and the ways in which young people struggle to access higher education and employment, but few articles link these two crises. The data collected in this study represents experiences of both learners and teachers inside the classroom and post-matric individuals in order to highlight the role LO plays in overcoming obstacles faced after graduating secondary school. The data analysis is broken down into 5 subsections. The first subsection looks specifically at LO classroom environments. Using data collected from teacher interviews, classroom observations, and post-matric interviews who represent the learner's voice, this section aims to outline important themes that contribute to a strong classroom environment. Many of these themes align with the literature that discusses the challenges LO teachers and learners face, further validating the experiences of participants in this study. Understanding the challenges and classroom dynamics that influence LO learners and teachers highlight important ways in which schools can better prepare their learners for life after matric.

After establishing a solid framework of the LO classroom context, the data analysis section narrows the focus to the crux of this study, discussing the connections between LO and accessing higher education and employment. Subsection two focuses on challenges post-matric individuals face accessing higher education and the role LO plays, and subsection three does the same with employment. Finally, after a short section on the consequences of inaccessibility to these two post-matric opportunities, data analysis concludes with the section titled Valuing Life Orientation. This section draws from all three data collection methods to determine that one of the biggest challenges facing LO is the devaluation of the course by South African society.

## **4.1 Life Orientation Classroom Environment**

The literature has found that many challenges impact LO that can lead to an ineffective implementation of the curriculum. The overcrowding of classrooms and insufficient LO class time particularly impacts teachers who struggle to effectively transfer LO knowledge and skills to learners (Mabusela et al., 2020). Through a triangulation of data collected from LO teacher interviews, classroom observations, and post-matric interviews, this study found several aspects of LO implementation that may be linked to challenges post-matric individuals face with regards to access to higher education and employment. This study recognized patterns in LO teacher experiences in order to link particular challenges to both how the curriculum is being taught and how learners are receiving it. Five themes related to teachers and teaching practices were recognized across the three sets of data collection: LO teacher's passion and excitement for teaching, the respect LO teachers have for the class curriculum, the importance of quality teaching practices, the value of individual and personal relationships between teachers and learners, and the importance of teacher guidance and support in LO. Although there is not a causal relationship between these five themes and the challenges post-matric individuals face, each one is linked to building a positive LO classroom environment in which learners can adequately retain the knowledge and skills that can prepare them for life after secondary school.

### ***4.1.1 Passion for Teaching***

The particular teachers interviewed and observed in this study did not align with the literature that found that LO teachers often lack the passion and desire to be teaching LO (Mabusela et al., 2020). This is because three out of the four LO teachers interviewed held senior positions in the LO department and had been teaching the subject for a long time. Teachers 1, 2,

and 3 had all been teaching LO for at least 8 years. As a result, each of them self-identified as the go to people within the department in which other LO staff members would come to for advice. Teacher 4 had recently become an LO teacher but had been teaching Maths for over 20 years and remained passionate about teaching LO despite their lack of experience. In their interviews, each teacher spoke about their passion and love for LO. Teachers commented on the relevance of the LO curriculum and how they enjoyed teaching LO because of how much they learned from it. Additionally, teachers spoke about the importance of this passion when effectively teaching LO. Teacher 2 stated, “Yes, it has to start with the teachers. They have to enjoy, they have to have that passion within LO. Then, it's easier for them to transfer to the learners" (April 17th, 2023). LO teachers have huge amounts of complex material to get through in any given class period, and Teacher 2’s comments suggest that an eagerness to transfer the material is hugely important in being an effective LO teacher. Teacher 1 reinforced this idea saying, “I just feel that teachers who do teaching must have a passion. And that's what's lacking. There's no passion, there's no drive, it's so boring” (April 17th, 2023). This individual mentioned the important detail of how a teacher’s passion can translate to an exciting and engaging classroom environment. Moreover, their comments aligned with the literature, exposing other LO teachers at the school for not being passionate about LO curriculum.

Although it was difficult to pinpoint distinct examples of passionate teaching through classroom observations, certain qualities of the teacher’s body language suggest the importance of passion to learner engagement and retention of the material. For example, in classroom one, the TA led the class and often struggled to engage the learners. When reading from the textbook, learners seemed distracted, and when asking questions to the class, learners spoke all at once with an abundance of side conversations. During the entire class, the TA leaned against the

teacher's desk in the front of the classroom, speaking quickly with a low tone of voice. During periods when the TA asked questions, they maintained their relaxed body language, laughing along with many of the learners. This unenthusiastic body language and the corresponding behavior of the class suggest the TA's lack of passion for the class was linked to difficulties in transferring the content. Teachers 3 and 4 in classrooms two and three, respectively, continued to walk around the classroom during their lesson, making eye contact with learners nearby. Smiling occasionally and changing up the speed and intonation of their voices also seemed to engage the learners. In these two classes, learners were much more willing to listen and participate in classroom discussion. Ultimately, it is unclear how the teacher's body language impacted the learners. However, it was clear that the teachers with more energy and willingness to interact with learners in a serious but personal way led classes that were more engaged with the material.

This link aligns with sentiments made by post-matric individuals who spoke about the importance of teacher passion in LO classes. For example, Participant 3 commented:

“In matric, I did like [my LO teacher] because he was just like that bubbly person, open person, speak about everything, just out there. Because besides knowing yourself, the industry outside, like after high school, after learning, he was pushing that it's important to learn. Anything that you do, just stick to learning, stick to your career...” (April 4th, 2023).

In this quote, the interviewee mentioned words such as bubbly and open, suggesting a sense of joy the teacher had when teaching. Later in the quote, Participant 3 discussed their teacher's emphasis on the importance of learning and perseverance. Most importantly, their comments suggest that their teacher's passion for LO motivated them to better listen and absorb the content, pinpointing the significance of passionate teaching. Participant 5 spoke about some of their teachers who were less passionate, stating, “They were coming to work to get paid. Do the particular thing at this particular period and they're done. That's what they did" (April 5th, 2023).

From Teacher 5's comments, it seemed like this approach to teaching was common among many former LO teachers who merely came "to work to get paid," showing a lack of excitement for the material.

Overall, LO teacher interviews, classroom observations, and post-matric interviews all reflected the importance of passionate LO teachers. Although the particular teachers in this study showed passion for the content, their comments about other staff members and general views of the LO curriculum suggest that there is little passion among LO teachers. Additionally, classroom observations identified moments when learners seemed disengaged and unattentive in class. This behavior may be linked to the teacher's lack of passion, adding significance to comments made in teacher interviews. Finally, post-matric interviews reinforce this link suggesting that LO teachers who seemed to be most excited about the content were also more effective in teaching and connecting with learners. Ultimately, the literature suggests that it is this excitement for teaching that can welcome learners into class discussion and activities in a way that improves retention of material (Mabusela et al., 2020). It also creates a fun and uplifting classroom environment in which learners want to be. These qualities further benefit a learner's valuing and comprehension of the content.

#### ***4.1.2 Respect For Curriculum***

In addition to being passionate about LO, the literature also discusses the need for respect of the class curriculum in order to most effectively teach. The lack of respect LO teachers have is often related to the reasons for a lack of passion which is that many teachers are forced into LO positions because of teacher shortages in the department (Mabusela et al., 2020, p. 250). Therefore, a similar sentiment arose in teacher interviews where the interview participants themselves seemed to heavily value the material. However, many of them spoke about how other

teachers and school administrators do not place the same value on LO, impacting the course's implementation. Moreover, although the teachers spoke about valuing LO, some of their comments were not aligned with their behavior in the classroom. Post-matric interviews also show how teachers' disrespect for LO curriculum may impact successful learning.

Many of the LO teacher interviews highlighted certain qualities of LO that make it so important. For example, Teacher 2 commented:

[LO is] very important. Because the learners, they gain skills and learn how to behave in class as well as in the community. They learn the respect, they learn the responsibility, so LO is very important to them. So it's building them and it makes them mature. And it gives them that opportunity to face their life (April 17th, 2023).

The teacher's respect for the material is clear in this quote as they discuss the importance of molding good people. Learning qualities such as proper behavior, respect, and responsibility are all critical to life after matric. Teacher 1 also spoke about important qualities such as good-citizenship, sound decision-making, and an understanding of South African history that are developed in LO and that make the content valuable.

Many teachers in their interviews discussed how the value they place on LO is not in line with how learners, other teachers, and school administrators view the course. Each teacher spoke about how other LO teachers do not take the class seriously, treating it as a supplementary subject. Reasons for this include the low difficulty of the class, the low frequency of the class (often only two hours a week), and the inability for teachers to understand the true significance of the curriculum. Teacher 3 felt they were the only LO teacher to value the course, and, as a result, the only teacher to teach it correctly, indicating links between respect and effective implementation. Moreover, Teacher 1 mentioned that "if the teacher takes it like a joke, then the learners are going to take it as a joke. But if you are serious, they will see that," further



suggesting the importance of how teachers view LO (April 17th, 2023). Teacher 4 offered a unique perspective as well because of the recent transition they made from Maths teacher to LO teacher. They stated:

I do [value LO]. Many people don't give it the credit it deserves. But the time allocation is not enough. The children don't treat it as a serious subject because they know how it's calculated. It is a serious subject and a lot is required but it's not given that value as it's supposed to. Not by the teachers, not by me until now because I didn't know... (April 19th, 2023).

In this quote, Teacher 4 highlights the gap between how certain LO teachers view the course and how the school, other teachers, and learners view the course. The rarity in which people tend to understand the significance of LO further contributes to the flawed implementation of the course. According to Teacher 4, it often takes someone to actually teach, experience, and learn about LO for them to understand how impactful it can truly be.

Classroom observations conducted in this study further support the importance of respecting the curriculum. There were moments when teachers in classrooms one and two began laughing with the learners about certain aspects of the class topics. Although it was unclear how the learners felt about this, to the observer, it seemed as though the classroom climate became less serious and learners began to lose respect for the material. During classroom observation two, Teacher 3 stated several anecdotes related to the class topic, 'Human Rights and Democracy' and asked learners to determine whether the incident was right or wrong. One anecdote discussed a Somalian man who was beaten because he was not South African, to which some boys in the back responded "that is right!" Both Teacher 3 and the learners broke out into laughter. In addition to demonstrating a deep-seated xenophobia, this moment represented a lost opportunity on the part of Teacher 3 to use it as a learning experience. Instead, the teacher

reinforced a sentiment that directly contradicted LO themes that were covered in the same class period, suggesting a devaluing of the course curriculum.

A teacher's use of classroom discipline or lack thereof can also imply a sense of respect for the class content. Teacher 4 spoke about its relevance to valuing LO, stating:

You don't want a clown in the class taking away the importance of what you're saying. They start giggling and they're laughing and you know, then you take away the seriousness of what you're actually trying to say. So I called them out on it...discipline is part of our job (April 19th, 2023).

In classroom observations one and two, teachers made little effort to focus the class when side conversations broke out or learners seemed disengaged. Teachers seemed content with much of the class not listening, suggesting at least one of two conclusions. First, little effort put into discipline may demonstrate the teachers' resignation as a result of large class sizes, insufficient resources, and other education challenges discussed in the literature (du Plessis & Letschwene). Secondly, their responses to poor behavior may also suggest a devaluation of the curriculum where the information they are teaching is not important enough to require learner discipline and engagement. Furthermore, Teacher 4 worked in similar classroom environments to the other teachers, however, in their classroom, classroom observation three, they made several efforts to refocus the class. When disciplining learners, usually for talking with each other, Teacher 4 often said, "Hello, if you are having your own conversation do you want to share it with the class, I am happy to listen." Following each disciplinary interaction, the learner either stopped talking or shared their comment with the class, showing a sign of respect to the teacher and the class.

In the post-matric interviews, Participant 6 was the only interviewee who spoke directly about their teacher, however, many participants discussed a lack of value they placed on LO (Refer to subsection 4.5). In their interview, Participant 6 stated:

Even by the teachers, it's not implemented as a serious subject like Maths or Physics. Everybody just looks at LO, like what are you going to do with LO? How is it going to help you? You don't need points for the course of university. so LO is just a free period. Even the teachers, when it's time to teach, they don't mind drinking tea and stuff. It's just a free lesson for them. Like I'm saying, that's what you get in the school...less dedication from the teachers...And sometimes in LO teachers never came because they felt like they were not doing anything (April 5th, 2023).

Participant 6 highlighted a key link between teacher respect and learner respect for the material by recognizing the teacher's lack of dedication and passion. Therefore, as explained in the literature, the significance of little passion holds true for lacking respect as well: when teachers do not value the curriculum it suggests to the learners that the class is not important, limiting their motivation to work hard and retain valuable material for life post-matric (Mabusela et al., 2020).

#### ***4.1.3 Importance of Quality Teaching Methods***

A critical component of effective LO implementation is the teaching practices used, which teachers often have the freedom to decide. The most relevant discourse around teaching practices pertains to personalized learning. The literature finds that many teachers struggle to deviate from LO lesson plans because of the limited amount of class time. Moreover, much of the literature regarding personalized learning relates to career guidance and the importance of exposing learners to career paths that align with their goals (Mabusela et al., 2020). The data in this study suggests that personalized learning and ensuring that each individual can relate to the content is relevant to many aspects of the LO course. Teachers tend to have different perspectives on the importance of personalized learning and how far teachers should stray away from textbook content in order to engage learners. Teacher 1 felt strongly about the importance of personalized learning stating:

I don't like to stick to the book. I always tell my learners, I don't stick to the book. But I bring in a whole host of stuff, and we have to bring it to their level so that they understand...But I notice that most other teachers, I've got to be honest, they always stick to textbook. I don't stick to book (April 17th, 2023).

In this quote, the teacher distanced themselves from other LO teachers and discussed the need for bridging the gap between the textbook content and the learners' experiences. Teacher 2 had a different approach to personalized learning commenting:

Yeah, we stick to the textbook. It's important because we have the [textbook] that is there, it's guiding us. We have to teach this and that, so we don't have that time to generalize, so we have to stick to the syllabus (April 17th, 2023).

This teacher highlighted an important influence on teaching practices which is the amount of class time allocated to LO. In this way, Teacher 2 felt that personalizing the learning would come at the expense of getting through all of the material, a sacrifice they were unwilling to make.

The classroom observations in this study suggest that personalizing the learning and bridging the gap between content and learners' experiences tends to improve overall learner engagement. During the class, teachers in classroom observations one and two rarely engaged the class and tended to strictly stick to the textbook and lesson plan. Both teachers did not take any questions from their learners, and the answers learners provided were never responded to by the teacher. In classroom observation one, learners were told to follow along with the textbook as the TA read aloud a chapter on study skills. The chapter discussed the importance of studying and the various study skills learners can use. After each section, the TA would stop to ask questions to the learners such as "Do you all study," "Do you all work in groups," or "Do you all watch TV during the week?" Learners would answer these questions all at once, often answering no to studying at home as a result of other family obligations or a lack of necessary school resources. The TA would listen before returning back to the textbook. The structure of the class made it so that the content being shared from the textbook was disconnected from the

experiences of the learners. The suggestions made by the textbook were not in response to the experiences and as a result, many of the learners seemed disengaged with material that may not have been relevant to the challenges of their own lives. No learners were taking notes during the lesson and many of them were talking to the people next to them. Although there are many factors that may contribute to this lack of engagement, it seems that more effort by the teacher to bridge the gap between content and learner's experiences would have improved learner retention.

From their comments in the interview, Teacher 4 preferred using the textbook and learner's individual experiences to teach their class. They said, "I take the [textbook] as it is, but when I allow the children to speak, then their own stuff will come out and then it opens up discussion about the experiences of the children " (April 19th, 2023). This sentiment was backed up in the way Teacher 4 ran their classroom. The teacher used several different iterations of the same content to teach the learners. First, the teacher wrote a content map on the board which outlined the themes for the day and which the students had to copy down in their notebooks. In addition to this, the teacher used the textbook and complimentary printed out PowerPoint slides which included bullet points and graphs of the content for the day. The back-and-forth discussion between teacher and learner occurred a few times throughout the class period. In each instance, the teacher took a question, answered it, and followed up with a new question that was opened to the entire class. Although it was small, the follow-up question seemed to add a lot to student engagement suggesting that learners felt heard and seen by their teacher.

In the post-matric interviews, participants discussed LO teachers they did not enjoy learning from and how this was connected to effective teaching practices. For example, Participant 3 commented:

The grade 11 teacher was more quiet. He was more of the HOD so he was like teaching and also outside the class. It was just notes, notes, notes. So since it's

Life Orientation, it's supposed to be more active, you know, but we just learned ourselves (April 4th, 2023).

In this example, a lack of personalized learning and an overemphasis on notes seemed to disengage this learner from the class material. Although it is just one example, it suggests the importance of bridging the gap between content and learners' lives, aligning with both Teacher 4's approach and the observations made in the classroom.

#### ***4.1.4 Development of Personal Relationships with Learners***

In a peer-reviewed analysis of the qualities of keystone LO teachers in several Gauteng Schools, findings suggest that emotional counseling skills and the ability for teachers to provide support to their learners greatly benefits the learner's acquisition of LO content. These counseling skills include a deep understanding of the individual struggles learners experience related to problems at home, in the community, or anywhere else outside of the classroom (Pillay, 2012). These findings imply that it is important for teachers to have personal relationships with their learners, something that was indicated in this study. In interviews, teachers continued to highlight the importance of individual and personal relationships with their learners outside of the classroom both during the school year and once they have graduated. The continuous connection and understanding of struggles learners face outside of the classroom occurs inside the classroom too. As a result, learners can feel closer to their teachers which creates a classroom environment that harbors effective learning. Moreover, as highlighted in several teacher comments, this added personal support can directly benefit a learner's ability to access higher education and employment. Teacher 2 spoke specifically about the higher education guidance they provided, stating:

Because if you are teaching in LO, you have to have that bond with your learners... Because when they are in their community, there are challenges that they are facing... So it's very important to guide them when they are outside of the classroom.... Even I help them to apply for the higher institutions (April 17th, 2023).

In this quote, Teacher 2 referenced both guidance with struggles in the community and guidance regarding higher education, suggesting a link between earlier learner struggles and later access to higher education. It also provides a blueprint for the types of support LO teachers can provide for learners. This support system does not necessarily entail having all of the answers, but rather providing emotional and psychological support to young people faced with numerous community challenges. Teacher 1 spoke about not having all of the answers in their comment about providing career guidance. They commented:

And sometimes if you don't know something, you'll be like, okay, you know what, come to me break time. We'll Google it together, and then we'll see. Because now the information is changing. And I'm not afraid to say, come and meet me break time, we'll do it together (April 17th, 2023).

It is this type of guidance that can assist learners in accessing higher education and employment. Moreover, this teacher takes time out of their day and fulfills duties outside of their job description in order to support learners. As discussed by Participants 2 and 3, this support can extend beyond secondary school when LO teachers can provide guidance pertaining to higher education and employment post-matric. Teacher 2 discussed their relationships with former learners, stating:

And I have a relationship with [former learners]. They phone me when they are progressing in their life. They phone me, hey Missy, I'm doing this now... Even others, they invite me in their wedding day (April 4th, 2023).

The connection this teacher has with their former learners is apparent by the life updates and continued relationship. Once again, this does not represent all LO teachers but rather provides a blueprint for the role LO teachers can play in learners' lives.

A comment made by Teacher 4 and their behavior in the classroom related to how these personal connections can exist inside the classroom. In addition to the dense LO curriculum, LO teachers have the opportunity to empower and enlighten their learners. In the following extended quote, Teacher 4 discusses the importance and impact of a strong connection between teacher and learner. They commented:

That's what I speak to them about, which is not here... space, what's out there, deep sea diving, going on a ship, working on a cruise ship. Now all that stuff is not in this book. Like I don't want children to think that they're only supposed to stay in Bonela for the rest of their lives and be in the same place, in the same house. They must be able to know that they can go out, buy a new house, buy a new car, stay in a different place, or buy their parents a house, and move. Now they don't really know that, especially the smaller ones... Now that's what we need to expose these children to... And if we can expose them to enough, then they'll be able to have bigger dreams... (April 19th, 2023).

Teacher 4's comments imply a deep understanding of how little learners in Cato Manor may receive outside of the classroom. This only increases the importance of what LO teachers can be for their learners if they can develop a strong relationship with them. This message also deeply depends on past themes of passion and respect for the curriculum as a lack of desire hinders a teacher's ability to support their learners in the classroom. This sentiment was supported by Teacher 4's behavior in the classroom. This teacher ended their class saying, "All of you are important to someone. You make a difference to others. You make people smile" (April 19th, 2023). It was an empowering and uplifting message with which to leave learners. Although the impact was not directly observed, the classroom environment which these messages can create can only benefit a learner's ability to respect and understand the significance of the LO material.

In classroom observations one and two, teachers occasionally used isiZulu to reinforce textbook material and connect with learners. The literature finds that South African teachers often have a difficult time overcoming language barriers in the classroom. Although the majority



of South African schools use English as the main language of instruction, many learners struggle to fully comprehend class material in English. As a result, teachers in classroom one and two using isiZulu may have added a lot to the comfortability of the learners, many of whom spoke isiZulu as their first language.

The post-matric interview participants aligned with teacher interviews and classroom observations as they spoke about the particular LO teachers that empowered them. Participant 5 reflected:

My teacher discovered that, no you love art, try writing something...He was the only teacher who had faith in me. No one else. That's when I discovered that I could write... I started collecting things. I started to have a library card in grade 10 because he told me about it. He had hope in me. No one else (April 5th, 2023).

In this way, LO teachers can motivate learners to follow their passions and find careers that best fit their wants and needs. Similar to how the gap between content and learner's experiences must be narrowed, the need to relate class to a learner's passions and interests is also important. Not only does it make learners more comfortable with their LO teachers and in LO classrooms, but it boosts self-esteem which, according to the literature, is hugely important when accessing higher education and employment (Mseleku, 2022).

#### ***4.1.5 Teacher Guidance and Support***

Data collected in teacher interviews and classroom observations support a fifth and final theme related to the guidance and support LO teachers receive. As mentioned in the Literature Review, LO teachers often struggle with a lack of training and knowledge of how to teach LO and can be “overwhelmed by other aspects of the curriculum and learners’ personal needs” (Mabusela et al., 2020). Both of these realities presented in the literature held true in this study. In their interview, Teacher 1 talked about the few workshops LO teachers receive at their school

remarking, “[The workshops] just tell you about the latest information and they try and guide people. But then I don't always stick to that. I just do my own thing” (April 17th, 2023). As highlighted in this quote, workshops may not be helpful to the LO teachers. This teacher continued by stating how workshops often focus on new content rather than relevant and effective teaching practices. As a result, teachers may be left on their own to decide how best to teach a very complex and dense curriculum. Compounding the struggle to independently find effective teaching practices is a lack of time allocated to LO which makes it difficult to cover all of the material. When asked about whether or not they connect learners with possible employers and outside organizations, several teachers said they would if they had the time. Teacher 3 spoke about the desire to bring an NGO to class but how, because of time constraints, it rarely occurs. Teacher 4 spoke about using Whatsapp with their students to send job materials to them outside of class. However, the school does not provide the funds or resources to get learners to certain events or open days at universities which makes it difficult for learners to take advantage of these resources.

The classroom observations further suggest that teachers have insufficient time and resources to properly support learners. In addition to impacting a teacher’s ability to connect learners with job opportunities, time constraints were shown to hinder a teacher’s ability to cover the material in the textbook. The topic for classroom observation 2 was ‘Democracy and Human Rights’ and the class covered concepts such as discrimination, voting rights, importance of following laws, free education, the South African Bill of Rights, and corporal punishment. Because of the wide range of topics, Teacher 3 quickly covered each one and struggled to unpack the depth of each issue. In reality, each of these topics could have taken an entire term to unpack and as a result, the learners were seemingly unable to truly grasp the content. The structure of the

class consisted of a joint reading of the textbook by Teacher 3 and their learners. Ultimately, it seemed as if the words they were speaking held little weight and were not properly comprehended by the learners. As a result of the disconnect between the amount of content and the class time, this important material was not transferred to the learners in an effective manner. These observations suggest that LO teachers are given little guidance and insufficient time to teach LO properly, and as a result, learners are not benefiting from the valuable material in the textbook.

Finally, as mentioned in the literature, curriculum covered and discussions in LO can be quite emotionally draining and overwhelming for not only the learners but the teachers as well (Mabusela et al., 2020). Teacher 4, who was newly appointed to be an LO teacher, spoke about this, commenting:

I'm supposed to be able to help them, but for me, I can't deal with it emotionally myself, because it hurts me to hear that...Now this is going to give me nightmares, because I'm not doing enough, or I can't do enough, or I can't be involved enough, and it bothers me. Yeah, absolutely, it's hard. It's hard, because you want to be there. Psychologically, you want to be there for your student. For me, psychologically, it's hard (April 19th, 2023).

This quote reveals another important flaw in LO which is the lack of support teachers are given to deal with and respond to intense conversations. Especially for this teacher, who represents many LO teachers that were never properly trained in LO, it can be quite emotionally and psychologically taxing to teach such a personal course. The blueprint provided in previous subsections relating to passion for teaching, respect for the curriculum, personalized learning, and the development of personal relationships all require LO teachers to be fully present and engaged with the challenges their learners face. Therefore, it is critical that schools support their teachers in ways that not only preserve their mental well-being but also that improve the overall level of teaching ability in the classroom.

## 4.2 Access to Higher Education

The literature finds that there are several barriers that make it difficult for young South Africans to access higher education institutions. As seen in the data collected in this study, young post-matric students in Cato Manor struggle accessing further education due to informational and cultural barriers. Because of the legacies of Apartheid, older people in the community rarely have higher education degrees and with a lack of resources in the community, learners must rely solely on schools to learn how to apply to higher education (Hlatshwayo, 2020). Moreover, expectations to go to university in Cato Manor are often set low for individuals post-matric. As a result, high self-esteem and self-motivation are often important qualities for learners to feel like they are capable of continuing their education (Mseleku, 2022). These barriers put immense pressure on LO teachers to support and equip learners with the skills and knowledge to apply and succeed in higher education institutions. The space in the LO curriculum for higher education is under the career and career choices topic. In grade 11 LO, learners are meant to evaluate potential higher education options, better understand the credentials needed to attend these schools, and acquire the knowledge pertaining to the higher education degrees that lead to particular careers. In grade 12, learners take these skills and use them to apply to higher education institutions with the support of LO teachers. According to the data, the LO teachers in Cato Manor are doing an adequate job preparing learners for the logistics of applying to higher education, however, post-matric participants highlighted a need for more self-esteem support in the classroom.

### *4.2.1 Post-Matric Challenges*

The experiences participants in this study had regarding access to and enrollment in higher education varied. Two participants never even applied to a higher education institution while five participants either were or still are enrolled at university in some capacity. Among these five participants, two participants enrolled in university but dropped out before completing their degree and three participants were currently enrolled. One university student was enrolled at an online university, one participant was enrolled at a local performing arts college, and the final participant was enrolled at university and is planning on getting a degree in supply chain management. Each one of these experiences comes with its own challenges, many of which were discussed in the interviews.

As shown in the interviews, the lack of knowledge about education in the community puts more pressure on schools to provide this knowledge. In the literature, articles discuss the importance of sociocultural capital when finding employment (Ntshiza, 2018). This capital is also critical for accessing higher education, as the knowledge around schooling as well as the expectations communities have for their youth can inform learners about next steps after matric. Participant 3 discussed the consequences of not having this community knowledge, stating, “Because as our rural area, we're not advancing or being told about education, because they don't know about education, until we get to school. So it's really just the school that knows, no one else knows” (April 4th, 2023). Aspects of a community that hinder a learner's ability to go to university forces schools to be the sole link between learners and higher education. The lack of knowledge also affects a learner's desire to attend university. Mseleku discusses this in her article on barriers to higher education, stating that “The availability of information and knowledge about educational opportunities also stimulates youth's interest to pursue higher

education” (Mseleku, 2022). In this way, the lack of desire compounds with the lack of knowledge making it even more difficult for learners in Cato Manor to attend higher education.

In addition to what the literature discusses about the barriers of applying, interviews also highlighted challenges that exist in education once learners have been accepted. The decision to enroll in a higher education institution can be quite difficult, especially for first-generation university students for whom university is far away from home. Participant 4 discussed this in their interview, stating:

I did apply.... [but] I feel like I can't take their offers because it's so far from my family and I want to do something that I like so it's going to be easy for me. Some of the schools they offered me the subjects that I don't even know like engineering, training, and teaching, so I didn't even take their offers. (April 5th, 2023)

This quote highlights the difficult choice many young people in Cato Manor confront between leaving home to attend university or staying home to protect and provide for their families. This learner talked about choosing family over university, while others may choose differently. This quote also highlights another important aspect of access to higher education: even if individuals may have the knowledge to be accepted into university, they may feel like they do not have the social and academic tools to excel once enrolled. This participant had enough insight to know that they were not prepared in particular subjects such as engineering or teaching. However, many young people do not have this insight, going to school and facing these challenges. As a result, South African university dropout rates are incredibly high; only 40-50% of university learners in 2022 made it past their first year (Fundiconnect Reporter, 2023). Participant 3 discussed some of the challenges they face as a current university student, commenting:

Because I'm in the online institution, it's actually difficult as the day-to-days. Certain things you just have to tackle on yourself. You have to learn certain things where you just fight or whatever. It's just the learning. You have to push (April 4th, 2023).

Although this study focuses more on access to education than experiences in higher education, this quote shows how difficult surviving higher education is for many individuals in Cato Manor, which contextualizes the possible lack of desire for young people to continue their schooling.

As seen in the Mseleku article on barriers to higher education, low self-esteem serves as a meaningful soft barrier for learners to attend higher education. This study concurs with the findings in Mseleku's study as post-matric individuals spoke about the importance of self-esteem. Three main themes came out of the interviews regarding self-esteem: the importance of believing in oneself, the need to see beyond current challenges, and the importance of growth in the face of adversity. In their interview, Participant 4 noted:

[it is] very important to know about yourself, to have self-esteem, because no one's going to believe in you if you don't have self-esteem. If you don't take yourself seriously, you can't do anything that you want to do (April 5th, 2023).

In this quote, the interviewee discusses self-knowledge and self-respect as key components of high self-esteem. These qualities can also lead to a learner having high aspirations for themselves, benefiting their ability and desire to attend higher education. According to the Mseleku article, these high aspirations are correlated with a higher likelihood in enrollment in university.

Additionally, Participant 5 spoke about the need for hope in Cato Manor, reflecting:

I don't see myself as a typical kid from here because I always know that I'm destined for greater things. If I'm not going to change my life, who will? I always say that. Because if I wake up in the morning, I have to brainstorm my life today, what I'm going to do. It's my life today, what I'm going to do (April 5th, 2023).

Shown here is Participant 5's capability of seeing beyond their challenges. This form of hope is also a key component of high-aspirations and can motivate learners to want more for themselves after matric. Finally, Participant 7 commented:

Especially for me, with that self-esteem thing, I love a lot for that. I will struggle a lot. When I speak, I do that naturally. That's how I am. I think it's my ability.

Things like that I used to get teased. But as time went by, I started gaining confidence (April 5th, 2023).

Once again this point about self-confidence and overcoming challenges falls in line with Mseleku's finding that "youth with higher levels of self-confidence were more capable to pursue tertiary education" (Mseleku, 2022). Ultimately, these three themes related to self-esteem that were highlighted in post-matric interviews suggest that self-esteem is a highly regarded trait in the community. Furthermore, using the context from the literature, self-esteem is a meaningful indicator of access and enrollment in higher education. Therefore, it is important for schools and teachers to build off of this emphasis so that learners can be equipped with an image of themselves as people capable and deserving of attending higher education.

#### ***4.2.2 How LO Relates to Post-Matric Challenges***

With regards to the informational barriers that the literature discusses as being important to a learner's access to higher education, the interviews suggested that LO is doing a satisfactory job preparing learners. Although participants did not have a lot of memories about discussions regarding higher education in their LO classes, they remembered it being helpful for providing them with the necessary information to apply. For example, when Participant 5 was asked about if LO teachers helped them apply to school, they stated:

Yeah, they did. We had to have like 38 points or 37 points. They told us, in order to get in most varsities, you have to have a CAO number. So if you don't have a CAO number, it's hard getting in. And if you don't have good points, you're not going to get in. Make sure you post your matric in order to get in. Because if you don't, it's going to be hard. It was very helpful...(April 5th, 2023).

In this quote, Participant 5 talks a lot about the logistics LO provided that impacted their ability to apply to college. They reference the CAO (Central Applications Office) number, which is an ID needed to upload any necessary documents for university applications. It was information



they would not have gotten elsewhere which backs up an earlier sentiment made by Participant 3, who argued that school was the only place to gain this knowledge. This quote also suggests that the school had a sense of urgency that helped motivate the participant to apply to college. These seemingly high expectations can help build a learner's self-confidence and belief in themselves.

In addition to a school's urgency impacting self-confidence, interview participants also spoke about the importance of building self-esteem into the LO curriculum. As mentioned in the literature, high self-esteem is crucial in motivating young South Africans to apply to university. Especially in a highly impoverished community like Cato Manor where most young people are not attending university, learners must be receiving messages of hope that they can attend higher education and succeed once they're there. When asked about what they wished they learned about in LO, Participant 3 commented:

Self-esteem. So if like in terms of more of the prevention and stuff. If we were more advised in about maybe what males actually do or how we are supposed to respond to males, it would be easier because I didn't think in terms of virginity I'd lose it at that age. Well, it was late, but it was just fast and going along, I didn't know what to do after. It was like I just lost myself (April 4th, 2023).

Although the participant talks about self-esteem in the context of gender-based violence and sexual relationships, the importance they place on self-esteem remains relevant in the discussion on access to higher education. By discussing self-esteem in this context, the participant suggested a connection between confidence in oneself and withstanding the challenges faced outside of the classroom. This strength and empowerment is important with regards to gender-based violence as well as with applying to higher education institutions and the high aspirations these applications often require.

As mentioned in subsection 4.1.4, the literature suggests that LO teachers can play a large role in supporting learner self-esteem by building positive relationships. By

taking interest in learner's lives and the unique challenges they face, teachers can provide important support systems for learners (Jacobs, 2011). These support systems can both impact academic success in the classroom and a learner's ability to believe in themselves. It is also important to identify the distinction highlighted in this study. While according to Participant 5, LO did well with overcoming informational and logistical boundaries, according to Participant 3, LO did not do well with equipping learners with the emotional tools necessary when accessing higher education.

### **4.3 Access to Employment**

The interviews suggest that it is very difficult to find employment after passing the matric exam. As described in the literature, due to a lack of demand for jobs in South Africa, huge corruption in many of the big employing companies, and a society still enduring the legacies of Apartheid, the workforce in South Africa seems to be unprepared to provide young generations of workers with employment (Ntshiza, 2018). The data collected from the interviews contributes to this literature by exposing various challenges post-matric individuals face when accessing the limited jobs that are available. Specifically, individuals in this study struggled overcoming barriers related to technology, knowledge of application materials, finances, and a lack of work experience. LO has an entire topic centered around careers and career choices which includes 11 hours of class time in grade 10, and eight hours of class time in both grades 11 and 12. Content covered over these hours relates to knowledge about the self and the various career paths that fit the needs and desires of the learners. Moreover, LO teachers are meant to teach learners how careers develop, the general trends of the job market, and how careers fit in with other life responsibilities such as marriage and parenting. Finally, the topic concludes with lessons on the

logistics of employment such as job contracts and career portfolios. The data from this study suggests that LO is falling short with regards to knowledge about career options and strategies to access employment. Moreover, participants highlighted a lack of personalized learning and development of entrepreneurial skills that would have been helpful for them to acquire.

#### ***4.3.1 Post-Matric Challenges***

One challenge that often came up in the interviews was access to technology and the internet when looking for employment. Participant 1 stated: “Well, I applied using a phone. It was very hard to apply, actually” (April 4th, 2023). Participant 6 reinforced this saying: “I was on the internet, I was an agent, I sent my CV there. Well if there's a post somewhere, advertise, I apply” (April 5th, 2023). In both of these quotes, the internet plays a role in both finding employment opportunities as well as applying to these opportunities once found. Unfortunately, access to technology is not common in Cato Manor and as a result, depending on technology becomes a significant barrier. Participant 5 discusses this in the quote below:

At the time I didn't even know how does a resume look like. Because I was always studying, I didn't even know what's an interview. I don't even know what it is because you find here, especially here, you can't even use a laptop, you can't even use a mouse (April 5th, 2023).

Participant 5 talks about their lack of knowledge with resumes and interviews, blaming their inability to use computers as a reason for this challenge. It is also important to note that they blame their studies in school for why they do not have this knowledge, feeling as though spending time on their studies inhibited them from learning more valuable skills.

Later in their interview, Participant 5 discussed several financial barriers they face that inhibit them from accessing employment. Living in Cato Manor, a community plagued by

poverty and inequality, this individual struggles to find the finances necessary to get a job. They commented:

Yeah it's very hard. I recently got a job in Umhlanga. It's a cool thing. I couldn't start it because I don't have money to go to work. You're gonna borrow 50 Rands a day, what you wanna do tomorrow and the other day. That's what I do... Having to go to whatever location, looking for a job, you have to take transport, and it's very expensive. Approximately, you have to have 100 Rand. You can't have 100 Rand every day to look for a job. It's very hard (April 5th, 2023).

In this quote, Participant 5 highlighted a few areas where financial barriers are present. First, they discussed the difficulties of paying for transportation once employed. In this way, obstacles do not only hinder an individual's ability to find a job, but also sustain one. Finding employment also requires transportation which can be too expensive for individuals in Cato Manor. Even if a person can afford it a few times, sustaining a job search may not be feasible. One other financial barrier Participant 5 mentioned was the price of a CV, stating "it's hard making a CV. It's very expensive. It's like 50 Rand" (April 5th, 2023). Many of these financial and technological barriers are not directly shown in the literature, however, they represent challenges faced by impoverished individuals who may not have the resources to work themselves out of poverty.

One theme brought up in the interviews that is also represented in the literature is the importance of work experience to finding future employment. Participant 4 struggled with this stating: "I did want to get a job. I've been told for interviews, but they say I have no experience" (April 5th, 2023). Participant 5 reinforced this message with the quote below:

And looking for a job is hard because I don't have experience. I was studying, you know... Some occupations they're looking for experience. They're talking about ten years experience for this and you think, where are you going to get it because you never worked? (April 5th, 2023)

As discussed in the Literature Review, race and socioeconomic status impact a young person's ability to gain work experience. In her dissertation, Master's candidate Sibusiso Blessing Ntshiza

suggests that white affluent young people have the time, resources, and connections to experience the workforce for themselves through internships and temporary positions. To the contrary, poor and Black individuals often do not have access to these same privileges. Moreover, her research implies that for young South Africans, prior work experience can help young people develop important soft skills such as reliability, self-confidence, communication, and punctuality that make them more successful job applicants and future employees (Ntshiza, 2018). This lack of job experience that Participants 4 and 5 alluded to is also relevant to the role LO plays in accessing employment, as the course is meant to and has the potential to facilitate these opportunities.

#### ***4.3.2 How LO Relates to Post-Matric Challenges***

The literature suggests that one of the biggest challenges LO teachers face is with regards to career guidance which often requires resources, connections, and support that schools such as the ones in Cato Manor simply do not have (Mabusela et al., 2020). The data collected in this study reflected the literature in that post-matric participants tended to be dissatisfied with the career guidance they received from LO. In addition to general complaints about the curriculum and support given, participants highlighted two specific areas of improvement for LO career guidance: the importance of personalized career guidance and the development of entrepreneurial skills.

Many participants reflected on the lack of emphasis on career guidance in their LO classes. Participants 5 and 6 were both adamant about the lack of career guidance they received in LO, feeling as though it had little space in the curriculum. Participant 5 pointed out that LO emphasized STIs, HIV and AIDS, and other health related topics while spending little time on employment. This comment aligns with some of the literature that suggests that LO spends too

much time on health related topics. In a study on learner perceptions of LO, findings suggest that “learners felt these topics were ‘overtaught’” (Jacobs, 2011). Participant 6 added on by complaining that much of their knowledge about careers is based on research they did on their own outside of class. Additionally, Participant 3 spoke briefly about what more career guidance would have provided them, stating:

It would have helped me because I would have known more of the knowledge and skills about it and go to the work field, it would just actually be easier for me to know and not be hard on myself (April 4th, 2023).

In this quote, Participant 3 highlights the connection between knowledge and preparation for employment. This connection relates back to the literature on informational barriers and how having the knowledge about what's out there greatly benefits a learner’s ability to find employment (Ntshiza, 2018). This participant continued by discussing their favorite LO teacher and how even this individual did not provide much career guidance. It was outside organizations that ultimately gave Participant 3 the knowledge to find employment but without them, they would have had no guidance. According to Participant 3, it would have been important to learn these things in LO.

Participants also specified two distinct areas in which they hoped to see improvement with regards to career guidance in LO classes. The first area pertained to personalizing the career guidance so that the content fit the needs and desires of each learner. Participant 5 spoke about this concept in the following quote:

I wish they did. I wish they can organize shifts for us, maybe go, let's say since I was just becoming a radio presenter, could they take me to a radio station so I could experience the love of it? Okay, I can swim, right? Can I be a lifeguard? Can I do this because I know how to do swimming, I know how to dance. Because I know how to dance, can I be a contemporary dancer, can I be a ballet dancer? (April 5th, 2023)

A significant component of this quote references the importance of work experience when finding employment. Participant 3 felt work experience in particular fields of interest would inspire them to follow their career goals. The literature also discusses the emphasis on STEM subjects within career guidance which excludes many learners' interests from the curriculum (Mabusela et al., 2020). The quote aligns with this argument as Participant 3 felt their interests were never discussed (or even known) by the LO teacher. It also aligns with analysis in subsection 4.1.3 which discusses the value of personalized learning in the classroom.

In addition to personalizing the career guidance, Participant 5 also spoke about the importance of developing entrepreneurial skills. The literature suggests that developed entrepreneurial skills expand employment options for young people that may lead to socioeconomic mobility (Ntshiza, 2018). This is hugely important for young people living in a community like Cato Manor. Participant 3 reflected:

The only thing that was helpful in terms of jobs was business studies and economics, but not LO. Because business studies and economics taught us in making, creating businesses, and employment. In LO, they didn't touch the topic, but in other subjects like business studies, you find that, oh, you could have your own business and sell it by the street (April 4th, 2023).

This quote references other elective classes that are not mandatory for every learner to take as courses that teach entrepreneurial skills. Because the literature finds that these skills are important in accessing sustainable employment, it is critical that they are transferred to all learners regardless of their chosen electives.

#### **4.4 Consequences of Inaccessible Post-Matric Opportunities**

In the Cloete article about the consequences of unemployment mentioned in the Literature Review, she discusses the impact a lack of structure and purpose can have on a young person's life (Cloete, 2015). This is supported by the post-matric interviews in this study. Participants discussed the challenges they face as a result of non-enrollment to university and unemployment that can negatively impact their mental health. Additionally, comments made by many post-matric participants show the importance of voting in an effort to find a job, highlighting an unexpected consequence of unemployment.

##### ***4.4.1 Impact on Mental Health***

The data from this study suggests an unstructured lifestyle can lead to feelings of isolation, boredom, and depression. Participant 3 at times felt isolated from friends and family as they struggled to find things to do. Although this individual was currently enrolled at an online university, it was the weekends and the time between classes that made them feel isolated and overwhelmed. They said:

[living alone] It's actually difficult because I'm working in the morning, I'll be like, oh in the afternoon what am I going to eat?... I'm not a person that goes out like daily or goes out with friends or the clubs. So I'd be like, okay, it's a weekend, what I'm gonna do? (April 4th, 2023).

While enrolled in online classes, learners may lack the social lives that in-person learners experience. As Participant 3 looked for employment while taking these classes, they struggled to overcome the challenges this isolation created.

Participant 5 seemed to struggle more with the boredom of a repetitive lifestyle. They said, "It's a typical Wednesday. I wake up and clean, go out, sit, and then do work. I apply for jobs, when you look at it, it's very hard, it's very hard" (April 5th, 2023). In this quote, the



individual is frustrated by the repetition of their life and finds it difficult to find excitement in a life consumed by looking for work and taking care of household chores. Participant 5's tone of voice and their comment suggests a sense of powerlessness and uselessness discussed in the literature (Cloete, 2015).

Finally, for Participant 4, the lack of structure and purpose seemed to impact their mood, especially right after their matric exam when they dealt with self-identified depression for the majority of the year. They commented, "Last year I was always there sleeping, eating, watching TV. So it was hard for me. I'm not that person that is used to stay at home..." (April 5th, 2023). This participant highlighted an important aspect of youth unemployment which is the transition from a busy teenage life in secondary school to the unscheduled lifestyle of post-matric. This harsh change affected Participant 4's eating and sleeping schedules, making them act in ways to which they were unaccustomed. This individual also blamed some of this depression on the comparisons they made between themselves and their classmates, saying:

My friends last year, they went schooling. I was the one person who did not and that hurt me a lot, because I did pass my matric board. So, I was the only one. But I didn't want to show them that I'm not okay. Because then they say maybe I'm jealous of their schooling issues (April 5th, 2023).

The fact that their friends went away to higher education institutions left Participant 4 with a weaker social network that lowered their self-esteem knowing they could not do the same. These mental health factors compound with the lack of structure and can lead to a worsened self-image.

#### **4.4.2 Voting**

An interesting theme that came out of the interviews was the connections between unemployment and the perceived importance of voting. In five of the seven post-matric interviews, participants were told that they must vote in order to get a job. When pushed further,

they discussed being told by the government, family and community members, and employers that voting is important for finding employment. Participant 1 stated:

It's very hard for us to find a job, it's very hard to find something, so we must vote. It's a thing that we must do, so that if we apply for a job, they will see us on those computers, or also we are doing it (April 4th, 2023).

In this quote, voting is posed as a clear consequence of unemployment. Although it was difficult to determine from interviews why this message exists, there seem to be two possible explanations. The first is that according to Participant 3, proof that a person voted makes employers see them as someone involved in their community and in their country. This may be true for some employers, however, for many South Africans, voting is not representative of civic engagement. In fact, acts of protest, activism, and mobilization are more common forms of community and civic engagement in South Africa. Therefore, the government may be sharing this message to simply gain political support. Understanding that many unemployed people are desperate to find a job makes them easy targets for a message such as this one.

Individuals in Cato Manor believe this message and yet they still struggle to find employment, adding to the sadness and frustration they already feel. Participant 2 remarked, “Yes, I have voted. [The government] promised to give us jobs. They promised to give us jobs... I'm disappointed. I am still unemployed” (April 4th, 2023). It is a sad truth for many of these individuals that they put in so much work and are promised many things and yet employment continues to elude them. This contradiction seems to also leave young people in Cato Manor confused and conflicted. This was apparent in Participant 5's comments. They talked about how they were not voting because they felt their voice was not heard, yet they felt they should vote because of the possibility of employment. This tension indicates that young people have an

understanding that they are being mistreated by the government but may still have a sense of hope that the government's promises may still come true.

Voter turnout statistics from the 2019 election suggest that many young people do not ultimately believe the connection between voting and employment. In the South African Journal of Political Studies, Martin Bekker et. al. note that “less than 20% of the population aged 20–34 registered to vote, in contrast to over 90% of the population aged 40 and older” (Bekker et al., 2022). Although remarks in this study do not align with these statistics, they remain important. Participants' willingness to overlook government corruption and marginalization may expose the desperation for employment that youth in Cato Manor feel.

#### **4.5 Valuing Life Orientation**

Post-matric interviews suggested that learners are often unaware of LO's value. Similar to LO teachers as outlined previously, learners may not have the respect for LO that would make them work hard and acquire the important content that LO has to offer. Many participants highlighted this sentiment, reflecting that only after they graduated did they truly understand the importance of LO. These perspectives align with much of the literature around how South African youth view LO, finding that learners see the course as boring, irrelevant, and a “waste of time” (Jacobs, 2011). For example, Participant 6 commented:

I realized I was around 24, 25, how important LO was, what it was actually teaching us, that we didn't take into account. LO teaches you everything about life. It teaches you how to eat, it teaches you how to live your life, it teaches you how to discipline, it also teaches you how to structure yourself, I mean, choose your career. It's a very very important subject but you don't look at it that way (April 5th, 2023).

Participant 6 continued by discussing how many learners viewed LO in secondary schools, describing it as a “free period” that “kids don't take seriously” (April 5th, 2023). Participant 7

agreed with this even saying that they and their friends would do their math homework during LO classes.

Participant 3's brief comments highlight a critical component of this devaluation. They mentioned that in school, they saw LO as “just studying for another class” (April 4th, 2023). This perspective is one that is seemingly shared by many learners taking LO and yet it raises several concerns. In some ways, LO is just like any other class in that it exists on weekly time tables and the final exam score is included on the school-leaving certificate. However, in other ways, LO is quite unique. The class occurs less frequently than classes such as Maths and English and the curriculum itself has more of an emphasis on personal experiences. This results in limited amounts of rote memorization and intense studying which suggests to learners that the class is easier. Additionally, the LO scores are not officially counted towards higher education (although many institutions will still look at them) and pass rates are much higher in LO than in other subjects. Both of these factors contribute to learners’ perceptions that LO is an unimportant and low-pressure course (Jacobs, 2011). Consequently, LO is seemingly straddling a line between being a difficult highly pressured course like the other courses on the matric exam, and being a course that is meant to be relatable and engaging. As a result of attempting to do both, the data from this study suggests that it is doing neither one effectively, offering an explanation for why it is devalued. As stated in a 2019 article written by Tibolohelo Makatu, LO is simply too easy and too disengaging for learners to take it seriously (Makatu, 2019). As a result, the data suggests that LO must either be harder or more relatable for the class to truly be seen as serious and important by learners, teachers, and school administrators.

With regards to making LO more difficult, post-matric Participant 7 discussed this by commenting, “At the end of the day, you're going to pass LO... If it was harder, people would

actually try” (April 5th, 2023). They continued by arguing that if more of the exam was on objective material then learners would be forced to take it more seriously. Furthermore, many LO teachers continued by discussing the impact of making LO officially count for university. When asked about changes they would make to LO, Teacher 3 remarked, “I’d make it count, the points for Life Orientation, for someone who's going to university because I don't think Life Orientation is an easy subject” (April 18th, 2023). Teacher 3 felt that making the class more difficult relied on making the course count for university. Although this comment is not completely accurate as many universities will look at LO scores, the sentiment remains important as LO scores may not hold the same weight as other more standardized subjects. If LO scores were to be recorded in the same way as other subjects, Teacher 3 suggested that learners would take the class more seriously. These recommendations made by learners and teachers suggest that the class may have to become less personal and more difficult for people to value it.

To the contrary, other data in this study suggests the class move in the other direction, becoming more relatable, subjective, and based on personal experience. For example, in classroom observations, it seemed as though the learners were most engaged when content was directly based on their own lives. When teachers read from textbooks and other lesson plan materials, observations showed learners were often not listening. In teacher interviews, many individuals continued this sentiment discussing the importance of personalizing the learning. When asked about any changes they would make to LO, Teacher 1 suggested, “I think it would be if they introduced more material...stuff that is more serious... pictures, examples... real life examples” (April 17th, 2023). As mentioned in the classroom observation analysis, there seems to be a substantial gap between the content in the textbook and certain aspects of learners’ lives. In their recommendation, Teacher 1 is aiming to bridge this gap by making the textbook more

relatable to learners. Although these changes may make the curriculum more subjective and possibly easier with regards to memorization and fact-based learning, the significance of the course would be much clearer to learners who were seeing themselves in the content they were learning.

Ultimately, in addition to these structural recommendations and despite a limited amount of time and resources, the data suggests that schools and local governments must do more to support their LO teachers. In addition to contending with the devaluation of LO by learners, colleagues, and school administrators, LO teachers are responsible for teaching a highly complex course curriculum in a limited amount of class time. Despite the challenges these circumstances create, as suggested in the teacher interviews, LO teachers must independently develop and implement effective teaching practices to personalize the learning and ensure an adequate transfer of the LO skills and knowledge. These expectations are simply overwhelming for teachers, many of whom were not even trained in the course curriculum. Many of the recommendations made by teachers in this study reference increasing the number of teacher training workshops which would improve support systems. Ultimately though, the perception of LO and the significance of the course must change in order for teachers to receive the support they deserve. According to Participant 7, this change of perception must come from the community, the media, and the government because learners and teachers will only respect the subject as much as their leaders respect it. “LO's gotta be like smoking cigarettes...it must be cool” (April 5th, 2023).

## 5. Conclusions

The goal of this study was to explore links between the LO course in Cato Manor Schools and the various challenges young people face when accessing higher education and employment. In doing this, the research aimed to validate the experiences of young people in Cato Manor and expose the role LO plays in preparing learners for the societal obstacles they may face. The data collected in this study suggests that a flawed implementation of LO classes in Cato Manor secondary schools is linked to the struggles of post-matriculant individuals. Post-matric interviews highlighted several challenges young people in Cato Manor face that are exacerbated by poorly resourced schools and the LO course that struggle to effectively prepare learners. Generally, data suggests that passionate LO teachers who have respect for the curriculum, use effective teaching practices, personalize their curriculum, and are motivated to build personal relationships with their learners tend to be most successful in engaging LO learners, engagement that may be important in successfully transferring LO content. Interviews and classroom observations in this study indicate that due to insufficient school resources and a lack of teacher support, many LO teachers in Cato Manor are struggling to fulfill each of these criteria. A focus on challenges related to accessing higher education and employment alludes to how these factors may be directly impacting individuals post-matric. The data regarding higher education suggests that learners are struggling to overcome soft barriers such as low-self esteem and are therefore lacking the motivation to continue their schooling post-matric. Furthermore, factors such as financial and informational barriers, a lack of work experience, and the difficulties LO teachers have with informing learners of career opportunities that fit their specific needs, hinder their ability to transition into the workforce. Because the experiences of post-matric individuals highlight challenges related to LO content, this data concludes that reforms to the LO curriculum

and implementation may benefit learners in their search for higher education and employment opportunities.

Findings gained in this study can serve as a platform for future research regarding LO. Due to limited time and resources, this study aimed to provide exploratory-descriptive qualitative research of LO courses in Cato Manor Schools. However, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the role LO plays in post-matric lives, it may be most effective to use a comparative model that analyzes affluent schools' LO implementation in relation to Cato Manor LO classes. This research would contribute even more to the existing literature by pinpointing possible areas in which LO classes can be more effectively implemented in Cato Manor schools despite limited resources. One other area for future research is narrowing the focus of this study to LO teacher experiences and teacher support. Findings in this study suggest that because LO teachers receive very little support from schools and communities, they look to each other, other colleagues, and online resources to determine the most effective LO teaching practices. Analyzing the various techniques LO teachers use to support themselves and their learners when abandoned by the school can provide important strategies for improving LO implementation in poorly resourced schools. Finally, comments made by Teacher 4 suggest that if LO content were to be referenced more in other classes such as Maths and English, the impact of the LO curriculum would expand. LO is meant to teach life skills, something that is relevant in all disciplines. Therefore, future research on the ways in which LO content appears in other classes can inform schools on how to establish links across disciplines in order to highlight the importance of LO.

Ultimately, the reality in Cato Manor and in South Africa is that young people are often ill-equipped to face the challenges that persist in their communities. The legacy of Apartheid and



high poverty rates complicate these obstacles as poor Black South Africans struggle to overcome generations of marginalization and oppression. Furthermore, the Black and poor youth are often doubly disadvantaged, attending schools that lack sufficient resources to equip learners with the skills to achieve social mobility through further education and employment. Although the purpose of LO is to prepare learners to confront life challenges, addressing larger crises of education inequity and unemployment requires structural reforms to the South African education system. It must take the strength and commitment of all levels of South Africa, from the learners to the government, for the country to truly reconcile the devastating inequality that persists today.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Post-Matric Interview Questions

#### Experiences of Post-Matric Life

1. What is your age?
2. What year did you complete your matric?
3. Are you currently employed or enrolled in a higher education institution?
4. If yes:
  - a. Can you tell me what you're studying /about your job?
  - b. How did you find out about this course /job?
  - c. Was it challenging to get this position?
  - d. Did you receive any guidance from your secondary school?
  - e. Did you receive any guidance from people outside of your school (parents, community members, NGOs, etc.)?
  - f. Are you satisfied with your job/studies? Would you rather be doing something else right now?
5. If no:
  - a. Have you tried applying to jobs or colleges/universities?
  - b. What types of jobs are you looking for?
  - c. If yes:
    - i. What has the process been like?
  - d. How difficult is it to apply for jobs / positions at college?
  - e. Did you receive any guidance from your school?
  - f. Did you receive any guidance from people outside of your school (parents, community members, NGOs, etc.)?
6. Besides for higher education and employment, what are there any other challenges you have faced since matriculating?
  - a. What family responsibilities do you have?
  - b. Are there any children, siblings, or other family members that you are responsible for supporting financially or in other ways?
    - i. (If yes to other ways), what other ways do you support your family?
  - c. Do you have any hobbies or interests you like to do?  
Have you had trouble finding time to do these things?
7. If you feel comfortable, did you vote in the last election and do you plan on voting in 2024? Why or why not?
8. Are you involved in any community organizations? Homeless shelters, NGOs, local schools, etc.
  - a. If yes, please explain what you do for this organization.
  - b. If no, are you interested in any community organizations moving forward?

### Reflections of Life Orientation

*Show page of LO curriculum that describes each theme (give the participant a few minutes to read it over. Focus on topic titles and sections three and 4)*

9. Do you have any initial thoughts about it?
10. Do you feel like you learned most, or all of the topics covered on this page (specify a few)?
11. Is there anything here that you would have liked to learn but did not cover in your LO Class?
12. Are there any topics that seem particularly relevant to your life now (list a few of the themes)?
13. Looking back on LO, how much do you value the knowledge/skills you learned?
  - a. Do you feel like it helped or prepared you for future employment?
  - b. Do you feel like it motivated you or taught you how to be more involved in your community (refer to earlier examples of community organizations)? Why or why not?
  - c. Do you feel like it impacted your view on politics and/or community engagement? Why or why not?
14. Did you feel close to your LO teacher? Why or why not? Have you stayed in contact with your LO teacher since matriculating?
15. Is there anything you wish was covered in the LO curriculum?
16. Any final thoughts about LO?

## Appendix B: LO Teacher Interview Questions

### Background Knowledge:

1. How long have you been teaching for?
2. Have you always been at this school? If not, how long have you been at this school for?
3. What is the subject area you focus the most on or have your expertise in?
4. (If the subject area is not LO) How did you become an LO teacher?
  - a. Were you told to teach LO by the principal?
  - b. Did you want to teach LO?
5. What made you want to become a teacher? (both in general and in this subject area)

### Experiences of LO Teacher

1. How many LO classes do you teach and to what grades?
2. Do you think LO is an important class for learners to take? Why or Why not?
3. Do you enjoy teaching LO? Why or Why not?
4. Are there any topics within LO that you particularly enjoy teaching?
5. Are there any topics within LO that you particularly do not enjoy teaching?
  - a. Are there any particularly challenging topics to teach?
6. Are there any challenges you face regarding your learners?
  - a. I.e., they are not understanding a topic, learner behavior/discipline, problems outside of the classroom
7. Are there any challenges you face regarding school resources and finances?
  - a. I.e., class materials, textbooks, teacher absenteeism
8. How much guidance do you receive to teach this class?
  - a. Guidance from the school?
  - b. Guidance from colleagues?
  - c. Guidance from outside organizations?
9. In your experience, do other teachers tend to value and see the importance of LO?

### Experiences of Learners

1. Are there certain topics that learners tend to be more excited by or have more interest in? (list any topics)
2. Are there certain topics that learners tend to be less excited by or have less interest in? (list any topics)
3. Do you think it is important for LO teachers to personalize the material to individual learners?
  - a. I.e., if they have specific interests or concerns related to LO topics
4. Do you think it is important for LO teachers to provide individual guidance to learners outside of the class curriculum?
  - a. I.e., individual career guidance, advice for problems at home or with friends
5. Do you think it is important for LO teachers to stay connected with learners after they pass their matric?



## Changes to LO

1. In several interviews I conducted with post-matric individuals, they spoke about how they recognized the value of LO only after they completed their schooling. In your experience, do learners tend to value and see the importance of LO?
  - a. If not:
    - i. Why do you think this is?
    - ii. What changes can be made to make them value it more?
2. Do you think schools value LO enough with regards to how much they fund the class?
  - a. What about with regards to how many hours per week LO is taught?
3. With regards to the content, many post-matric individuals also talked about wanting more field-trips or opportunities to see possible places of employment so that they could gain that experience. Are there any opportunities in LO for students to gain this type of exposure?
  - a. Do you think there should be more effort to provide these experiences to learners?
4. In addition to this, is there anything you think learners should be learning in LO that they are not already? Do you think the content of LO is sufficient?
5. Overall, what changes would you make to LO curriculum and implementation that could make learners more prepared for life post-matric?
6. Concluding thoughts?

## Appendix C: LO Classroom Observation Guide

### Initial Observations:

Class size:

Materials in the classroom:

TA?:

Class topic:

## How is the Material Being Taught?

### Teacher Body Language

Question	Yes	No	Thoughts
Is the teacher facing the class			
Is the teacher making eye contact with the students			
Is the teacher walking around the classroom			
Is there physical contact with the teacher and their students			

Is the teacher smiling			
Is the teacher changing the tone of their voice			
Is the teacher talking too fast			
Is the teacher standing			

### Teaching Practices

Question	Yes	No	Thoughts
Is the teacher reading off of something			
Are they asking questions			
Are the questions open-ended			
Are the questions			

comprehension based?			
Are they writing things on the board			
Are they taking questions			
Was the lesson introduced?			
Are there goals the teacher outlines for the day?			
Is it clear to the students what they will be learning			
Is it clear to the students why they are learning it			

## How is the Material Being Received?

### Student Participation

Question	Yes	No	Thoughts
Do the students look engaged			
Are the students looking at the teacher			
Are the students taking notes			
Are the students asking questions			

## Student Behavior

Question	Yes	No	Thoughts
Are they talking with each other			
Did any disciplinary interactions occur			
Verbal	Physical	Student Removal	
Did the student change their behavior			

## Class structure

Pedagogy used:      discussion                      lecture                      group work                      other

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Other Thoughts/Observations

## Appendix D: CAPS Curriculum Topics List

### LIFE ORIENTATION GRADES 10-12

#### SECTION 3

#### TEACHING PLAN

##### 3.1 Overview of topics

	Topic	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
1.	Development of the self in society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-awareness, self-esteem and self-development</li> <li>Power, power relations and gender roles</li> <li>Value of participation in exercise programmes</li> <li>Life roles: nature and responsibilities</li> <li>Changes towards adulthood</li> <li>Decision-making regarding sexuality</li> <li>Recreation and emotional health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan and achieve life goals: problem-solving skills</li> <li>Relationships and their influence on well-being</li> <li>Healthy lifestyle choices: decision-making skills</li> <li>Role of nutrition in health and physical activities</li> <li>Gender roles and their effects on health and well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Life skills required to adapt to change as part of ongoing healthy lifestyle choices</li> <li>Stress management</li> <li>Conflict resolution</li> <li>Human factors that cause ill-health</li> <li>Action plan for lifelong participation in physical activity</li> </ul>
2.	Social and environmental responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contemporary social issues that impact negatively on local and global communities</li> <li>Social skills and responsibilities to participate in civic life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental issues that cause ill-health</li> <li>Climate change</li> <li>Participation in a community service addressing an environmental issue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environments and services which promote safe and healthy living</li> <li>Responsibilities of various levels of government</li> <li>A personal mission statement for life</li> </ul>
3.	Democracy and human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diversity, discrimination, human rights and violations</li> <li>National and international instruments and conventions</li> <li>Ethical traditions and/or religious laws and indigenous belief systems of major religions</li> <li>Biases and unfair practices in sport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Democratic participation and democratic structures</li> <li>Role of sport in nation building</li> <li>Contributions of South Africa's diverse religions and belief systems to a harmonious society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsible citizenship</li> <li>The role of the media in a democratic society</li> <li>Ideologies, beliefs and worldviews on construction of recreation and physical activity across cultures and genders</li> </ul>
4.	Careers and career choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subjects, career fields and study choices: decision-making skills</li> <li>Socio-economic factors</li> <li>Diversity of jobs</li> <li>Opportunities within career fields</li> <li>Trends and demands in the job market</li> <li>The need for lifelong learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requirements for admission to higher education institutions</li> <li>Options for financial assistance for further studies</li> <li>Competencies, abilities and ethics required for a career</li> <li>Personal expectations in relation to job or career of interest</li> <li>Knowledge about self in relation to the demands of the world of work and socio-economic conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commitment to a decision taken: locate appropriate work or study opportunities in various sources</li> <li>Reasons for and impact of unemployment and innovative solutions to counteract unemployment</li> <li>Core elements of a job contract</li> <li>Refinement of portfolio of plans for life after school</li> </ul>
5.	Study skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study skills and study methods</li> <li>Process of assessment : internal and external</li> <li>Annual study plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study styles and study strategies</li> <li>Examination writing skills</li> <li>Time-management and annual study plan</li> <li>Goal-setting skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflection on own study and examination writing skills</li> <li>Strategies to follow in order to succeed in Grade 12</li> </ul>
6.	Physical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical fitness: programmes to promote well-being</li> <li>Skills in playground and/or community and/or indigenous games</li> <li>Environmentally responsible outdoor recreational group or individual activities</li> <li>Skills in traditional and/or non-traditional sport</li> <li>Safety issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement of current personal level of fitness and health</li> <li>Umpiring and leadership skills in self-designed and modified games (teach peers)</li> <li>Various leadership roles in a self-designed recreational group activity</li> <li>Umpiring and leadership skills in self-designed and modified sport (teach peers)</li> <li>Safety issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achievement of own personal fitness and health goals</li> <li>Long-term engagement in traditional and/or non-traditional sport or playground and/or community and/or indigenous games or relaxation and recreational activities</li> <li>Safety issues</li> </ul>

## Appendix E: Sample Interview Consent Form

## SIT Study Abroad

a program of World Learning



## CONSENT FORM

## 1. Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to explore links between the curriculum and implementation of Life Orientation courses in Cato Manor Schools and the challenges young people face in their lives post-matric.

## 2. Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

- a. *Privacy* - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
- b. *Anonymity* - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
- c. *Confidentiality* - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

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 Participant's name printed

Peter Cohen

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 Interviewer's name printed

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 Participant's signature and date

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 Interviewer's signature and date