'DO WHAT YOU CAN WITH WHAT YOU HAVE WHERE YOU ARE': EXTRACURRICULAR PROVISIONING IN AN INNER-CITY ENVIRONMENT

Hettie VAN DER MERWE
Department of Educational Leadership and Management, University of South Africa,
Pretoria, Republic of South Africa

ABSTRACT

A growing body of scholarship links extracurricular participation as a supplement to the curricular programme to optimal learner development with benefits of increased retention for learners at risk of dropout. This article looks at how extracurricular participation is provided to learners residing in a constrained environment. A qualitative investigation was undertaken based on individual interviews conducted at five inner-city secondary schools in Gauteng. The findings show that structured extracurricular provisioning, albeit hampered by contextual constraint relating to scant finances, limited facilities and limited time, was beneficial to learners' holistic development. Perceived benefits for learners pertained to gained cognitive and social skills, a sense of belonging to the school, pastoral guidance, and the sheer joy of participation in the activities of their choice. The findings contribute to research which argues for sufficient implementation of extracurricular provisioning within context in view of the value of a holistic development of the child.

Key words: Extracurricular provisioning; Holistic development; School dropout; Retention; Inner-city environment.

INTRODUCTION

Learners' leisure time, once the school day is past, is as beneficial for development as participation in the formal curricular programme. Providing learners with a structured, context specific extracurricular programme that consists of physically and mentally stimulating activities contributes to their holistic development (Akos, 2006; Pitts, 2006). The fact that participation in extracurricular activities is voluntary influences the demand for intrinsic enjoyment in the activity while ensuring that applicable skill is developed with increased complexity and challenge under the guidance of competent adults acting *in loco parentis* (Gilman *et al.*, 2004).

Benefits for learners who participate in extracurricular activities relate to gaining life- and work-related skills while exploring their own identity and building resilience through effort and persistence (Hart *et al.*, 2007; Hellison, 2011). These benefits are acquired by learners being linked to supportive adults outside the classroom and belonging to socially recognised and valued groups (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). By minimising the time that learners are exposed to negative societal influences, the engagement in extracurricular activities, accompanied by the exposure to positive social networks, results in learners being less

involved in delinquent activity in the external environment (Gilman *et al*., 2004; Darling *et al*., 2005; Akos, 2006).

Extracurricular participation is especially beneficial to high risk learners in poor environments. High risk learners, due to their exposure to antisocial behaviour in environments with multiple societal problems related to economic disadvantage, are less likely to drop out of school when they participate in an extracurricular activity (Eccles *et al*., 2003; Bloemhoff, 2006). Within the South African context 60% of schools are regarded as poor schools. These schools serve high risk learners in that more than half of the children entering these schools never complete their education, but leave school with Grade 9, a major point of dropout (DoE, 2006; Bloch, 2009; CREATE, 2009). As a structured extracurricular programme arranged within the context of a poor environment can contribute to these learners remaining in school, the investigation of such provisioning is considered important for improved retention.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Several studies have been conducted within the South African context on the influence of specific extracurricular activities on learners' development (Chetty & Edwards, 2007; Burnett, 2010; Du Toit *et al*., 2011; Cowan *et al*., 2012). What has been less investigated is the extent and benefits of the extracurricular programme for pupils who are classified as high risk learners for school dropout due to the constraining conditions prevailing in their socio-economic environments. Therefore, this article focuses on the 'what' and 'with what effect' of the extracurricular programme for learners residing in a financially constrained environment. The aim was to elicit information regarding the activities that are contextually provided with the benefits of participation for learners. An understanding of the nature and value of an extracurricular programme that is provided in resource-constrained environments contributes to the discourse on extracurricular provisioning within context in pursuit of optimal learner development. The point of departure is ecological systems and self-efficacy theory as the theoretical framework underlying the qualitative investigation, which was based on individual interviews with 15 participants selected by means of purposive sampling. Findings from an analysis of the data are followed by a discussion of the nature of the extracurricular programme in terms of provisioning and constraints, with benefits for learners.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework underlying the focus on extracurricular provisioning is supported by a clarification of the nature of a typical extracurricular programme with benefits of participation for learners.

Ecological systems and self-efficacy theory as basis for extracurricular provisioning

Ecological systems theory proposes that human development occurs through an interactive, interrelated functioning of socially organised subsystems to support and guide, or hamper, optimal growth. Accordingly, learner development is seen as a process of reciprocal interaction between the individual learner and other human beings, objects and symbols in the

immediate and distal environment and over an extended timeframe to result in competence or dysfunction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Gilman *et al*., 2004).

A learner's own biology, understood against the background of self-efficacy theory, is a primary factor for fuelling the own environment. Self-efficacy, based on outcome expectancy, underlies individuals' belief in their ability to execute a particular behaviour successfully (Bandura, 1997). In this regard, outcome expectancy pertains to the learner taking part in the extracurricular activity with the subconscious expectation that participation will lead to a specific outcome, such as improved quality of school and personal life due to improved knowledge and skills. Efficacy expectations determine individuals' efforts with a task and how long they will persist in the face of adversity or setbacks (Bandura, 1997). Due to the interactive functioning of ecological systems, interaction between self-efficacy factors in learners' maturing biology, their immediate family and community environment, and the societal landscape in which they are placed, fuels and steers their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bandura, 1997; Mahoney, 2000; Bloemhoff, 2006). These interactions, contingent on self-efficacy levels, result in learners identifying with their schools to develop an internalised sense of belonging as a feeling of being discernibly part of the school environment, which serves a special moderating purpose for high risk learners prone to school dropout (Gilman *et al*., 2004; Akos, 2006; Pitts, 2006).

Nature and characteristics of extracurricular provisioning

Extracurricular provisioning primarily arose from historical changes in the labour force associated with compulsory education and the declining need for child labourers at the turn of the 19th century, when the idea was introduced that more structured play activities are beneficial for children's development (Durlak *et al*., 2010). Structured play was accompanied by the realisation that through positive engagement with peers in the supportive company of adult guidance, skills, knowledge and behaviour in various personal, social, cultural, artistic, civic and sports settings are acquired (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Educators realised that for academically gifted learners extracurricular participation served to enhance their scholastic performance, whereas for academically challenged learners extracurricular participation functioned as a support to achieve within the school setting (Darling *et al*., 2005). For high risk learners prone to school dropout, school identity through active participation in extracurricular activities serves a special moderating purpose (Akos, 2006).

Salient features common to a structured extracurricular programme include aspects such as regular participation schedules, rule-guided engagement, direction by adult activity leaders, emphasis on activity-related knowledge and skill development, activity performance based on sustained active attention, activity etiquette and clear feedback on performance (Darling *et al*., 2005; Reeves, 2008; Cowan *et al*., 2012). An adherence to these features enables participants to socialise with peers and adults through goal setting and outcomes achievement while practising proper behaviour relating to competing fairly, recovering with dignity from defeat and conquering with humility.

The format and functioning of extracurricular programmes vary with regard to location, size, funding, hours of operation, activities offered, structure of provisioning, and general mission and goals within the specific context. With reference to the work by Durlak *et al*. (2010) and

Reeves (2008), extracurricular programmes are based at school premises or various community facilities and, depending on school type and size, provide for fewer than 10 learners or up to several hundred learners of different ages. Extracurricular programmes are generally funded through a combination of government and local inputs with considerable variation in the amount of money available for activity offerings. In accordance with the curricular programme, the extracurricular programme is typically offered on weekdays during the normal school year, for several hours after the formal school day has ended. Depending on the specific context and goals with extracurricular engagement, some activities are offered on weekends with activity competitions and activity events typically scheduled for Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings.

Extracurricular offerings cover a wide spectrum of activities that are associated with some form of academic assistance, coupled with different types of personal, social, or cultural activities consistent with the goals of the specific extracurricular programme. Comprehensively considered, extracurricular activities are grouped into the following five categories (Eccles *et al*., 2003; Hart *et al*., 2007):

- Pro-social activities that include social welfare and community service type of actions;

- Performance activities that relate to music and drama;

- Team sport activities that include all the different kinds of sports provided within school context;

- School leadership involvement that pertains to learner leadership positions in extra-curricular activities; and

- Clubs and society involvement.

From these categories of extracurricular provisioning, a learner's voluntary selection and quality of participation remain contingent on the interrelated interaction between the activity, the social network that supports the activity and the personal characteristics of the participating learner (Gilman *et al*., 2004).

Benefits for learners

Participation in the school's structured extracurricular programme equips learners with competencies representing different categories of benefit, such as skill gain with prolonged effect, a sense of appreciation for belongingness and the ability to deal with challenges (Eccles *et al*., 2003; Darling *et al*., 2005; Akos, 2006; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Ratey & Hagerman, 2008; Du Toit *et al*., 2011; Hellison, 2011). These benefits are gained through participation in any of the five different categories of extracurricular groupings. The skills gain pertains to opportunities to increase interpersonal competence, school engagement, self-concept, academic performance and educational aspirations (Du Toit *et al*., 2011; Cowan *et al*., 2012). Due to habit formation, such as regular exercises that are needed for specific sport fitness or the prompting of logical argumentation through debate or chess games, future developmental trajectories are established. The result is that learners who actively participate in the school's extracurricular programme tend to experience better quality of life in the workplace with the inclination of continuous sport engagement, or a continuous focus on logical thinking resulting in improved adult physical and mental health (Chetty & Edwards, 2007; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008). These benefits apply in all scenarios including the scenario

where learners take part in the extracurricular programme of their inner-city school environment.

Participation in pro-social activities, with as a primary goal the maintenance of a normative condition, extends school life as learners are capacitated with civic-related skills to coordinate efforts with others and interact with people from various backgrounds (Hart *et al.*, 2007). Actively taking part, for example, in the school's environmental association that is focused on wildlife conservation through keeping the river clean in the near proximity of the inner-city school environment, results in a wide variety of skills that are gained with prolonged effect. Civic knowledge and engagement manifests in the prolonged effect of promoting the tendency to continue working collectively for a common purpose and to voluntarily practise a responsible role in the adult community (Zaff *et al.*, 2003). Examples of such behaviour relate to scenarios, such as ensuring regular meals to the needy in an inner-city environment or taking responsibility for the sustained conservation of the immediate physical environment.

Membership of a socially recognised group through extracurricular participation results in connections with exemplary peers and the acquisition of social capital. The productive structuring of time through peer-established norms reflecting school and society-based values influences learners' personal perspectives and self-worth (Darling *et al.*, 2005; Ratey & Hagerman, 2008; Reeves, 2008; Cowan *et al.*, 2012). The fostering of belongingness and association with peers different from those encountered in the family life, such as peers from different ethnic groups that are typical of the heterogeneous nature of inner-city environments, enhances emotional connectedness to the school and promotes positive social relations across ethnic groups (Darling *et al.*, 2005; Pitts, 2006; Hatzigeorgiadis *et al.*, 2013). Interaction with competent adults serving as role models supports learner identity for enhanced social opportunity (Gilman *et al.*, 2004; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Durlak *et al.*, 2010).

Active participation in extracurricular activities provides opportunities to express personal talent and master challenging skills consistent with the encompassing school value system. Learners' commitment to the learning process embedded in the specific activity, accompanied by social support in the form of verbal persuasion, leads to their self-efficacy being motivated for conquering challenges to realise specific outcome expectancy (Bandura, 1997; Ratey & Hagerman, 2008; Cowan *et al.*, 2012), such as successful sports team performance, convincing drama productions or sustained green-living.

Benefits for learners at risk of school dropout

Learners from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, where parents are trapped in poverty, are often prone to involvement in antisocial behaviour (Eccles *et al.*, 2003; Chetty & Edwards, 2007). Factors such as physical neglect, psychological scars, live-for-the-moment mentality, teenage pregnancies, family disintegration, gang formation and peer pressure for substance abuse threaten these learners' development possibilities (Bloch, 2009; Burnett, 2010). These conditions relate to the fact that children who are raised in poverty are much less likely to enjoy the crucial needs of a reliable primary caregiver who provides unconditional love and support, harmonious and reciprocal interactions and enrichment through personalised and increasingly complex activities. The deficits resulting from this

negligence inhibit the production of new brain cells which alter the path of maturation, thus hampering emotional and social development to predispose the disadvantaged child to emotional dysfunction (Jensen, 2009). The result is a sustained reproduction of exclusion and marginalisation fuelled by delinquency, school failure and eventual school dropout (Swift, 2003; Gilman *et al*., 2004).

School dropout is also predicted by the degree to which learners feel connected to the social fabric of the school (Akos, 2006; Hatzigeorgiadis *et al*., 2013). Social exclusion based on SES-related factors such as families' evaluation of education, the non-availability of learning resources at home, and teachers' expectations of learner competency, causes learners from low SES environments to feel inadequate. Consequently, such learners often display a tendency to drop out of school (Hassan, 2009). This tendency is reflected in the socio-economic gradient that represents a gradual and increased feeling of isolation experienced by children from low SES families with these children encountering decreasing self-efficacy levels as they grow older (Caro *et al*., 2009).

In cosmopolitan inner-city environments there is a greater likelihood of school dropout associated with low SES conditions. Some of the reasons for this state of affairs are that children from minority groups often have to grow up in single-parent homes and ethnic minorities are vulnerable to mistreatment prompted by prejudice and xenophobia (Browne *et al*., 2009). In the Gauteng inner-city environment representing the conditions applicable to the circumstances of the conducted study, school functioning is related to provisioning to multi-ethnic working class expectations with poverty rates varying between 20% and 39% per year (Carnoy & Chisholm, 2008). Violence, which is closely related to poverty, is often modelled in schools in Gauteng inner-city environments by learners representing different ethnic groupings and who are exposed to violent behaviour at home. Feelings of inadequacy related to low SES conditions accompanied by an exposure to violence at school, combined with a lack of emotional and spiritual support at home, exacerbate learners' experience of isolation and insecurity with the obvious tendency to drop out of school (Van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2009). Participation in extracurricular activities conditioned by delinquent peer group support can increase retention through the facilitation of learners' school identity and improved quality of subjective well-being (Mahoney, 2000; Gilman *et al*., 2004; Hellison, 2011). The result is that learners at risk of school dropout form a positive connection with the school and its values through extracurricular participation, which may otherwise not be realised. These positive connections also apply to low SES circumstances prevailing in the multi-ethnic inner-city school environment of Gauteng (Chetty & Edwards, 2007; Bloemhoff, 2009).

RESEARCH DESIGN FOR EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

To understand the extent and value of extracurricular provisioning to learners residing in a financially constrained environment, an interpretive paradigm was applied using individual in-depth interviewing. Concurring with Henning *et al*. (2004) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the qualitative case study genre was selected for an in-depth understanding of the situation of those involved, as well as of the meaning they derived from their situation. Since the focus lay in the process rather than the outcomes, the study entailed a rich description of the context

and operation of the case (Johnson & Christensen, 2004), namely extracurricular provisioning in financially constrained conditions.

Participants in the study

Five secondary schools from an inner-city environment in Gauteng were selected as research sites. All 5 schools fell under the category of low-fee private schools catering for learners from black middle-class families with a large component from black working-class families. The schools were fully accredited and registered with the Department of Education and, apart from school fees from private households, are financially supported by contributions from charity organisations. The 5 research sites have, on average, 900 learners and 25 teachers per school. The selection of the specific 5 schools was largely pragmatic as they cater for learners who are exposed to socio-economic constraints typical of inner-city environments. The selection was also motivated by convenience in terms of accessibility (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Other schools, including township schools, would face different challenges in providing an extracurricular programme within a socio-economically constrained environment; but this does not diminish the achievements of the 5 selected schools in terms of extracurricular provisioning within constrained environments, or the validity of the research. This investigation acknowledges the distinctiveness of any school environment in providing a viable extracurricular programme based on doing what is possible within context to ensure optimal learner development.

Purposive sampling of information-rich participants entailed an active involvement in the management of the extracurricular programme of the school in terms of being ultimately accountable for the programme or facilitating the functioning of extracurricular provisioning. On this basis, the following persons participated in the investigation: the 5 school principals of the selected research sites; the 5 teachers (1 per school) who were in charge of organising and coordinating culture-related extracurricular activities; and 5 teachers (1 per school) who were coaches in charge of organising and coordinating sports. All of these participants shared a common indicator for selection, namely that of being actively engaged in ensuring the proper functioning of the extracurricular programme at the respective schools.

The suggestions by Toma (2011) on rigour in the research approach and being aware of the threat to content validity when organisers of the extracurricular programme make effect claims about benefits experienced by learners participating in the programme. Thus, the judgement claims of the 15 managers in terms of each participant's response to the same question asked was triangulated. With follow-up prompts for increased clarity was arranged through intensive engagement (each interview lasted at least 1½ hour), which served to distinguish between specific and vague statements. This eliminated inconsistencies in pursuit of determining the participants' objective opinions of what they observe, on a continuous and prolonged basis, as perceived benefits for learners participating in the school's extracurricular programme. In line with the suggestions made by McMillan and Schumacher (2006) on observer bias, the accuracy of the sources were assessed by considering the researchers personal assumptions and predispositions with regard to the benefits of extracurricular participation in ascertaining the accuracy of participant responses in terms of being observant and thoughtful. There were regularities and recurring patterns in the data as a result of the comparison of the data from the 15 interviews that represented different participants from

different situations and with different interpretations of reality. This rigour produced a comprehensive and context-rich set of findings relevantly linked to theory. All 15 interviews were guided by the same themes, namely the scope and magnitude of extracurricular provisioning, the perceived benefits for learners and the challenges with provisioning.

Qualitative analysis procedures

The qualitative content analysis based on Tesch's model to ensure that all the perspectives and issues that arose from the data were included in the report. In brief, this meant that each interview was transcribed for an immersion into the data and as an initial segmentation of the data into units of meaning (De Vos, 2005). This was followed up with open coding by reading and re-reading each interview to ensure an overview of as much contextual data as possible, so as to achieve an inductive selection of codes determined at sentence level (Henning *et al*., 2004). After axial coding, selective coding was used to ensure that themes from the labelled categories were constructed and extracted to represent the interpreted and rationalised data as research findings (Henning *et al*., 2004). Based on Guba's trustworthiness model as explained by De Vos (2005), the authenticity of the findings in terms of truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality was ensured. The research findings from the empirical investigation were triangulated with the research findings from literature. The anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of their disclosures were guaranteed at all times during the research project.

FINDINGS

The categories that emerged from an inductive analysis of the data from the interviews transcribed verbatim are subsequently presented under themes as research findings. These themes concur with factors relating to the extent and value of extracurricular provisioning as identified in the literature. The themes pertain to the scope and magnitude of offerings; the preference for culture-related activities; parent involvement with the extracurricular programme; benefits for learners; and challenges with provisioning. A discussion of these themes was substantiated by verbatim excerpts from the interviews. For the sake of confidentiality and authenticity, the 10 teachers are distinguished as T1, T2 and so on, and the 5 school principals as P1, P2 and so on.

Scope and magnitude of offerings

Although participants viewed teaching and learning as their primary purpose and the major focus of their attention, the extracurricular programme was considered to be important insofar as being *'a supplement to assist the learner to be a well-rounded person'* (P5). School principals agreed that the limited availability of outdoor facilities in the inner-city environment determined the extracurricular programme in terms of the kind of activities offered and the time schedules made available for those offerings. In this regard, School Principal 2 echoed the attitude and approach prevailing at all 5 research sites, namely that of *'do what you can with what you have where you are'*. Extracurricular offerings pertained to the culture-related indoor activities of drama, music, dance and the school choir. Other indoor activities represented debating, chess and table tennis. Pro-social activities represented a soul buddy club with extended actions within the inner-city environment, such as *'visit an orphanage regularly'* (T3) and *'collect money for meals for homeless adults'* (T1). Apart

from athletics, outdoor sport included netball and soccer *'because it is easy to secure pitches and teams to compete against in these two activities'* (P2). The offering of soccer was motivated by learners who have *'a natural preference for soccer rather than rugby'* (T7), and the financial constraints hindering the offering of cricket of which *'the sports equipment is expensive'* (T10).

All 5 research sites rented the same municipal stadium situated in the inner-city environment on a yearly basis to offer these sport activities. Each school had 2 one-and-a-half hour sessions, 2 afternoons per school week, in which these sport activities were offered with class teachers acting as team coaches. The convenience of the municipal stadium whose '*grounds are not so far from our school'* (P5) enabled learners to safely participate in the sport activities offered. Two sport tournaments, 1 for athletics and 1 for soccer and netball, were organised every year with each school having participants for all the sports items agreed upon by the participating schools. Teacher participants felt strongly about measures *'to tap the financial support which companies are willing to provide'* (T8), to arrange for extra funding so as *'to extend the range of extracurricular activities'* (T6) and *'to hire professional experts to present the extracurricular activities'* (T9). If this were feasible, it would improve the quality of extracurricular provisioning and *'release teachers to focus on their teaching'* (T9).

Preference for culture-related activities

Learners preferred participation in culture-related activities rather than sport offerings. Consequently there was much enthusiasm for dance and music due to *'a culturally-oriented natural affinity for song and dance'* (T3). For that reason and to enhance intrinsic motivation for participation in these activities, research sites focused on exciting provisioning as *'learners ENJOY dancing and singing'* (T1). Considering that *'the school environment can become boring if you close the entrance to the school and not allow learners to go on the streets'* (T2), the value of participation in the school choir was considered constructive to *'occupy many learners'* (T4). Music as an extracurricular activity was also incorporated into the formal school day for remedial purposes. Since many of the learners experienced constrained conditions at home, music was used as a soothing strategy to ease learners' emotions and to get them receptive to formal instruction. In this regard School Principal 1 explained: *'You find that many learners come with stress from home and just with that little song it puts their emotions at ease, now they can focus.'*

A highlight of the extracurricular programme– and something that was celebrated at all 5 research sites – was the annual heritage day of traditional folk dance and song with learners designing their own costumes to depict the cultural demographics of South Africa. Under the supervision of teachers and learner leaders *'the school hall [was] decorated as a cultural village'* (T5) where learners showcased the different cultures in terms of customs, food, dress, language and beliefs, accompanied by song and dance. Learners competed in their different grades and *'the overall best costumes and expression of cultural knowledge win the competition'* (T5). At 1 research site, and thanks to the teacher in charge, a fashion design enthusiast who arranged for external support, learners attended classes in costume design and modelling techniques. Casting agencies who attended the school's annual heritage day provided promising learners with after-school modelling and fashion design contracts. Teacher 1 emphasised that *'many companies and businesses are willing to donate money for*

fashion designing skills' to contribute to the development of a *'pool of future designers'*. Apart from gaining constructive competencies and enjoying the heritage day celebrations, learners were introduced to the reality of a multicultural society because *'learners grow up in city flats, they seem to lose touch with the real roots and backgrounds of their ancestors, so this is their only opportunity to get to know about the different cultures in South Africa'* (P1).

Parent involvement with the extracurricular programme

Parents were informed about their children's participation in the extracurricular programme by means of *'a written memorandum'* (T7) and they were requested to give *'their signed approval for their children's participation'* (T7), especially when participation *'involves travelling from the school premises'* (P4). Some parents of Grade 12 learners preferred their children not to participate in extracurricular activities, but rather focus on preparing for the final Grade 12 examinations to achieve good results which were considered to be *'a gateway to labour market propositions ... bursaries for further studies'* (P3).

Although parents were financially responsible for their children's commuting to and from the extracurricular activities, many parents *'struggle to pay the fees for their children's transport'* (T9). A feasible arrangement entailed a subsidised extracurricular fee which, '*combined with the money from fundraising efforts'* (T9), provided for viable extracurricular possibilities. The primary contribution of parents to the extracurricular programme remained their encouragement of their children to participate in these activities. In this regard, it was stressed that *'a supportive parent allows his child to participate in the activities of his own choice and then supports ... encourages his choices'* (T10). Participant school principals reported parents' approval of the extracurricular programme offered at their respective schools since *'parents are happy that their children have activities to choose from'* (P3) and *'parents are satisfied with the variety of activities at our school'* (P1).

Perceived benefits for learners

Participants agreed that their prolonged observation of learners who participated in extracurricular activities was that these learners developed healthy bodies and minds that contributed to constructive routines and abstention from substance and alcohol abuse. Extracurricular participation improved discipline among learners, which influenced the school's image positively in that *'learners acquire new skills and restrain from acts like fighting, sex and alcohol abuse'* (P4). Added to a healthy body and a disciplined mind was the perceived feeling of well-being and pure joy experienced by learners who participated in extracurricular activities. In this regard a soccer coach declared, *'My players LOVE their soccer'* (T7). The soccer coach based this observation on the fact that players were never absent from practices and always wanted to continue practising even when the practice time had expired. Participants agreed about the perceived positive influence of the extracurricular programme on learners' quality of school life because learners' good memories of school related to *'their participation in music and sports'* (P2), which contributed to *'learners becoming truly fond of their school'* (P3). One participant explained that their school offered table tennis in the school hall for 1 hour after school every school day. The '*boys enjoy staying after school to play a game or five'* to such an extent that '*we* [teachers] *have to chase them to eventually go home'* (T6). As a result of their participation in extracurricular activities the learners became permanently attached to their school, as demonstrated by school leavers

who regularly returned to enquire about the well-being of *'the present choir'*(T4) or to ask, *'how does the chess team perform now?'* (P2).

With regard to perceived self-worth, extracurricular participation enhanced self-actualisation in that learners who struggled with the curricular programme were often recognised through excelling in extracurricular performance. In this regard it was pointed out that '*if a learner cannot concentrate in class, you may find that the same learner is a champion on the soccer pitch'* (T9). The same applied to culture-related activities, such as drama which developed learners' creativity for clear expression so as to *'use their imagination to visualise what they do not see'* (T2) and which served as an alleviating strategy *'to transcend inner-city sombreness'* (T2).

Participants also emphasised the perceived pastoral value of extracurricular participation in that learners approached their coaches for life guidance and counselling. Through extracurricular participation learners were encouraged to persevere and to stay focused. In this way they were equipped with competencies *'to survive in life'* (T7) and *'to deal with their problems in a better way'* (P1). In many instances the fact that *'learners have problems and cannot open up in class or come to the office, but can talk to you* [coach]*openly during sport sessions*' (T10) resulted in teachers liaising with parents in a mutual effort to improve learners' well-being. The extracurricular environment also created opportunities for teachers to provide advice on problems learners experienced in their private lives. In this regard Teacher 6 explained, *'Two boys were about to fight on the pitch; I pulled* them apart, *we talked and I found out that they were fighting about a girl. We resolved the problem there and then because it was just a misunderstanding between two boys'* (6).

Challenges with provisioning

A main obstacle with extracurricular provisioning related to the challenge of balancing constrained finances and the available facilities with the demand *'to ensure that Grade 12 pass rates are successful'* (P3). The ideal of the school principals, with their staff, was to have a school environment in which learners could participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities with ample and sophisticated facilities and sufficient attendance to the curriculum programme for optimal learner development. However, School Principal 4 explained the reality of constrained funds linked to the demand to adhere to standardised academic outcomes as follows: '*Our hands are tied, we are independent, but poor, without any subsidy from the Department we have to use the resources we collect from learners' fees wisely because we deal with the first goal of paying teachers and buying text books to achieve a desired pass rate for matric'*.

Participants were aware of their learners' low SES circumstances and the threat that these conditions hold for learner retention and optimal development. Participants acknowledged the high levels of violence in the inner-city environment to which their learners were exposed and the lack of critical support and stimulation at home. All the participants were under the impression of the intensified demand of these SES conditions on curricular and extra-curricular provisioning to cater for learners' proper holistic development. In this regard, they emphasised that linked to limited extracurricular provisioning was the prevalence of high levels of learner absenteeism due to *'boredom with the school environment'* (T8) as a result

of an apathetic approach to life associated with *'home background greyness'* (T2). Participants felt that sufficient provisioning in terms of the time spent on the extracurricular offerings – however limited these offerings might be - could contribute to ameliorating learners' negative circumstances associated with low SES conditions. However, to remain viable with regard to the core function of teaching and learning, the schools were compelled to limit the time spent on the extracurricular programme in order to cover the curriculum and achieve acceptable pass rates. In this regard, School Principal *2* admitted their dilemma: *'Sports would have kept learners around, but the congested school curriculum does not allow more emphasis on sports.'* As is the case at all schools worldwide, the contribution of extracurricular offerings to learners' holistic development needs to be balanced with maintaining sufficient emphasis on academic achievement. However, for learners from low SES environments, academic achievement is even more crucial as it is a means of gaining social mobility in order to end prolonged exclusion and marginalisation.

It was found that the functioning of the extracurricular programme at the research sites' inner-city environment was inhibited by scant funds, limited facilities and limited time as additional time needed to be spent on the curricular programme.

DISCUSSION

As a supplement to the curricular programme, participation in the extracurricular programme benefited learners' holistic development. For learners, extracurricular participation went beyond physical and cognitive skill acquisition to include psycho-social resilience and the emotional security of a sense of belonging. For learners at risk of school dropout, emotional resilience contributed to the forming of positive connections with the social fabric of the school, thus encouraging perseverance and retention. In line with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and with extracurricular provisioning as a case in point, the school principals and staff of the researched sites managed viable provisioning with the structured extracurricular programme. Participation in the inner-city school's extracurricular programme enabled learners from low SES conditions to develop optimally within the specific context.

Learners participated in the activities of their choice offered from an extracurricular 'menu' consisting of athletics, soccer, netball, drama, music, dance, school choir, debating, chess, table tennis, and the soul buddy club. In line with the synthesis of Eccles *et al*. (2003) and Hart *et al*. (2007), these offerings symbolised a balanced programme of extracurricular possibilities representing activities from all the different categories of extracurricular provisioning. From these offerings learners gained constructive knowledge, skills and behavioural competencies that included personal, social, cultural, artistic, civic and sport empowerment.

It was evident that the learners did not only gain skills through extracurricular participation. They also experienced a sense of belonging to the school setting, enjoyed receiving pastoral guidance and indulged in the sheer pleasure of participating in the activity of choice. The fun of participating in a cultural exhibition was accompanied by job-related skill attainment in fashion design and modelling with the benefit of exposure to societal multicultural functioning. Through expressing their own thoughts in drama-related activities they could conceptually interpret reality and accommodate diversity. Participation in pro-social activity

introduced them to the reality of their civic world and fostered an altruistic approach to life. Exposure to concerned and continuous pastoral guidance by adults acting in *loco parentis* enhanced the learners' well-being and their connectedness to positive school life. In many instances learners' challenges with the curriculum programme were counteracted by their giftedness in extracurricular activities, which resulted in an affirming of their self-value and positive self-concept. The constraints of low SES family background conditions and inner-city sombreness were alleviated by the pleasure of consistent whole-school participation in music-related activity.

In line with the findings of Gilman *et al*. (2004), the success of the extracurricular programme presented at the research sites was contingent on learners' intrinsic interest in the offered activities. Successes were largely inhibited by scant financial resources, limited facilities and limited time allocated to the extracurricular programme. Curricular demands in terms of sufficient time for teaching and learning to achieve acceptable standards of academic performance inhibited adequate extracurricular provisioning. However, regardless of contingencies and inhibiting factors, the extracurricular programme was presented viably to benefit learners who resided in an inner-city environment and were prone to high risk of school dropout.

CONCLUSIONS

With reference to the influence of ecological systems' interactive functioning on learner development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), participation in the extracurricular programme by learners residing in an inner-city environment was constrained by scant financial resources, limited facility availability and the demand for curricular-related academic achievements. Despite these constraints, it was found that learners benefited holistically from participation in the structured extracurricular programme which, albeit limited with regard to number and frequency of activity provisioning, still embodied a balanced 'menu' representing the different categories of extracurricular provisioning possibilities. Through an approach of doing what is possible within the context of an inner-city environment, extracurricular provisioning enabled learners to physical and cognitive skill-gain supplemented by emotional security and a sense of school belongingness. These benefits, which equipped learners with psycho-social resilience to persevere, resulted in improved retention that enhanced optimal development within the specific setting.

The findings have implications for extracurricular provisioning in constrained environments. Such school principals, together with their staff, face the challenge of ensuring a contextually viable extracurricular programme to benefit learners for optimal development. It is suggested that further research be conducted on extracurricular provisioning in environments with different kinds of constraints, with an exclusive focus on the perspective of the user, namely the learner, for a comprehensive understanding of this topic. Insights into extracurricular provisioning could contribute to the discourse on sustainable provisioning for securing an enabling environment for learners to realise their potential to the full.

REFERENCES

AKOS, P. (2006). Extracurricular participation and the transition to middle school. *Research in Middle Level Education*, 29(9): 1-9.

BANDURA, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: Freeman.

BLOCH, G. (2009). *The toxic mix: What's wrong with South Africa's schools and how to fix it*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

BLOEMHOFF, H.J. (2006).The effect of an adventure-based recreation programme (ropes course) on the development of resiliency in at risk adolescent boys confined to a rehabilitation centre. *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 28(1): 1-11.

BRONFENBRENNER, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

BRONFENBRENNER, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In T.N. Postlethwaite & T. Husen (Eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of Education Vol. 3* (2nd ed.) (534-548). Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

BROWNE, A.J.; MCDONALD, H. & ELLIOTT, D. (2009). *First Nations urban Aboriginal health research discussion paper.* A report for the First Nations Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organisation. Ottawa, ON: National Aboriginal Health Organisation.

BURNETT, C. (2010). Sport-for-development-approaches in the South African context: A case study analysis. *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 32(1): 29-42.

CARNOY, M. & CHISHOLM, L. (2008). Towards understanding student academic performance in South Africa: A pilot study of Grade 6 Mathematics lessons in South Africa. Pretoria: Human Science Research Council (HSRC).

CARO, D.H.; MCDONALD, J.T. & WILLMS, J.D. (2009). Socio-economic status and academic achievement trajectories from childhood to adolescence. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 32(3): 558-590.

CHETTY, J. & EDWARDS, S.D. (2007). An investigation into the use of exercise as a medium for mental health promotion among institutionalised children. *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 29(2): 1-10.

COHEN, L.; MANION, L. & MORRISON, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

COWAN, J.; SLOGROVE, C.L. & HOELSON, C.N. (2012). Self-efficacy and social support of academy cricketers. *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 34(2): 27-39.

CREATE (CONSORTIUM FOR RESEARCH ON EDUCATION, ACCESS, TRANSITIONS AND EQUITY) (2009). "No-fee schools in South Africa". Policy Brief, number 7, August. Hyperlink: [http://www.CREATE-rpc.org]. Retrieved on 30 March 2011.

DARLING, N.; CALDWELL, L.L. & SMITH, R. (2005). Participation in school-based extracurricular activities and adolescent adjustment. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 37(1): 51-76.

DENZIN, N.K. & LINCOLN, Y.S. (Eds.). (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DE VOS, A.S. (2005). Qualitative data analysis and interpretation. In A.S. de Vos (Ed.), *Research at grass roots: A primer for the caring professions* (3rd ed.) (333-348). Pretoria: Van Schaik.

DOE (DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION) (2006). National norms and standards for school funding. Government Gazette 494, No 29179. Pretoria: Government Printers.

DU TOIT, D.; PIENAAR, A.E. & TRUTER, L. (2011). Relationship between physical fitness and academic performance in South African children. *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, 33(3): 23-35.

DURLAK, J.A.; MAHONEY, J.L.; BOHNERT, A.M. & PARENTE, M.E. (2010). *Developing and improving after-school programmes to enhance youth's personal growth and adjustment*. *Society for Community Research and Action*. Chicago, IL: Springer.

ECCLES, J.S.; BARBER, B.L.; STONE, M. & HUNT, J. (2003). Extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59(4): 865-889.

FREDRICKS, J.A. & ECCLES, J.S. (2005). Developmental benefits of extracurricular involvement: Do peer characteristics mediate the link between activities and youth outcomes? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34(6): 507-520.

FREDRICKS, J.A. & ECCLES, J.S. (2008). Participation in extracurricular activities in the middle school years: Are there developmental benefits for African American and European American youth? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37(9): 1029-1043.

GILMAN, R.; MEYERS, J. & PEREZ, L. (2004). Structured extracurricular activities among adolescents: Findings and implications for school psychologists. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41(1): 31-38.

HART, D.; DONNELLY, T.M.; YOUNISS, J. & ATKINS, R. (2007). High school community service as a predictor of adult voting and volunteering. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(1): 197-219.

HASSAN, J.E. (2009). Parents' socio-economic status and children's academic performance. Report of Norwegian Social Research, NOVA Notat, 7/09. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Social Research Institute.

HATZIGEORGIADIS, A.; MORELA, E.; ELBE, A.; KOULI, O. & SANCHEZ, X. (2013). The integrative role of sport in multicultural societies. *European Psychologist*, 18(3): 191-202.

HELLISON, D. (2011). *Teaching personal and social responsibility through physical activity* (3rd ed.). Chicago, IL: Human Kinetics.

HENNING, E.; VAN RENSBURG, W. & SMIT, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

JENSEN, E. (2009). *Teaching with poverty in mind: What being poor does to kids' brains and what schools can do about it*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

JOHNSON, B. & CHRISTENSEN, L. (2004). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

MAHONEY, J.L. (2000). School extracurricular activity participation as a moderator in the development of antisocial patterns. *Child Development*, 71(2): 502-516.

MCMILLAN, J.H. & SCHUMACHER, S. (2006). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

PITTS, S. (2006). A case study of extracurricular participation in an English secondary school. Unpublished paper delivered at the 9th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition. University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy, 22-26 August.

RATEY, J.J. & HAGERMAN, E. (2008). *Spark! How exercise will improve the performance of your brain*. London, UK: Querqus.

REEVES, D.B. (2008). The learning leader: The extracurricular advantage. *The Positive Classroom*, 66(1): 86-87.

SWIFT, A. (2003). *How not to be a hypocrite: School choice for the morally perplexed parent*. London, UK: Routledge.

TOMA, J.D. (2011). Approaching rigour in applied qualitative research. In C.F. Conrad & R.C. Serlin (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook for research in Education: Pursuing ideas as the keystone of exemplary inquiry* (2nd ed.) (263-280). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

VAN DER WESTHUIZEN, C.N. & MAREE, K. (2009). The scope of violence in a number of Gauteng schools. *Acta Criminologica*, 22(3): 43-62.

ZAFF, J.F.; MOORE, K.A.; PAPILLO, A.R. & WILLIAMS, S. (2003). Implications of extracurricular activity participation during adolescence on positive outcomes. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 18(6): 599-630.

Prof Hettie VAN DER MERWE: Department of Educational Leadership and Management, University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa. Tel.: 083 442 1503, Fax.: 086 642 1647, E-mail: vdmerhm@unisa.ac.za

(Subject Editor: Dr Francois Cleophas)