An appreciative inquiry into mothers’ experiences of their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor in Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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Acknowledgements

“Dance. Smile. Giggle. Marvel. TRUST. HOPE. LOVE. WISH. BELIEVE. Most of all, enjoy every moment of the journey, and appreciate where you are at this moment instead of always focusing on how far you have to go.” – Mandy Hale

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Summary

An appreciative inquiry into mothers’ experiences of their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry; low socio-economic environment; mother–child relationship; experiences; positive perspective, World Café Method

A low socio economic environment poses a number of problems, such as low income, unemployment, learning disabilities and poor education, resulting in mothers often experiencing stress and depression. The emotional state of mothers contributes to the quality of the mother-child relationship. This study explored the experiences of mothers and their relationships with their children, while living in a low socio-economic environment. The study was undertaken from a positive psychology perspective, using appreciative inquiry (AI), a strength-based approach to change that uses a four dimensional consecutive cycle (referred to as the 4D cycle), namely discovery, dream, design and destiny phases. With the use of the AI approach attention is shifted away from the problem and focussed on existing strengths in order to enhance and build on these strengths. Understanding the unique experiences of mothers through AI provides insight into the unique qualities and strengths of mothers and how existing strengths contribute positively to their relationships with their children. In the process of identifying strengths and focusing on what works (the positive) excitement and eagerness to be ‘better’ is often created, and building on these existing qualities, ultimately leads to a more positive relationship between mothers and their children.

In order to address the gaps in literature from a South African perspective, indigenous research is needed to gain an enhanced knowledge and understanding of mothers’ lived experiences. In order to achieve this, the present research was undertaken in three phases, each having its own particular focus. The main focus of this research was to use AI to explore
and describe the experience of mothers from an LSEE in relating to their children. The study is presented in the format of three research phases and is reported in three articles.

The first article reports on the first phase of the research, using a qualitative phenomenological design that explores and describes mothers’ experiences of their relationships with their children in an LSEE. The appreciative discovery process (best of what is) was used for the first phase of the 4D cycle of AI. The sample consisted of eight participants (mothers) from the East Rand of Gauteng who live in an LSEE. Three of these mothers participated in one-to-one interviews and the remaining five participated in a focus group discussion. The results indicate that despite hardships and challenges experienced as a result of living in LSEE, the mothers were still able to verbalise their experiences and emotions with regard to their relationships with their children on a very personal level. The mothers expressed great affection for and appreciation of their children, and shared positive stories. Even though positive stories were shared, the mothers voiced feelings of insignificance as mothers; fears of being criticised with regards to their parenting; and challenges experienced in dealing with misbehaviour, especially pertaining to typical adolescent behaviour. Secondly, through the discovery phase of AI, mothers were able to share experiences of their relationships with their children and were also able to ascertain existing strengths. In an LSEE little opportunity exists to share experiences. Being provided with such an opportunity seemed useful as mothers seemed to feel that they were not alone: they felt heard and realised that they were enduring the same or similar types of hardships as other mothers.

The second article reports on the second phase of the research. This phase used a single instrumental case study that incorporated the last three phases of the 4D Cycle (dream-, design and destiny phase). The case study used AI to provide a better understanding of how mothers experience their dreams (what might be?) in order to design (what should be the deal? co-constructing) their destiny (how to empower, improvise, sustain?) in relation to their
relationships with their children. A qualitative phenomenological design from an interprevistic approach was implemented. The sample consisted of eight mother participants from the East Rand of Gauteng who lived in an LSEE. Two focus group discussions as well as two individual interviews were conducted. During this phase of the research data was collected through the use of the World Café method (WCM). The results indicate that the mothers found it difficult to envision their dreams for their future relationships with their children: for some it was due to a lack of a mother role model in their childhood, and for all it was due to their own unsatisfied current needs as well as stress related to living in LSEE. The results indicated that, despite their challenges regarding envisioning the future, they could still design plans in an attempt to make their dream a reality, such as spending quality and special time with their children. The implementation of these plans seemed to bring about change in their relationships with their children.

The aim of the third article was to make known the findings, challenges and valuable lessons learned from the facilitation and application of AI and WCM in an LSEE. Data was gathered from literature on the use of AI and WCM in communities, from the three focus group discussions and from the five individual interviews in the initial two phases of the research. Although many benefits can be related to the use of AI and WCM combined in an LSEE, challenges were encountered. However, if these methods were to be applied in similar environments the challenges could be overcome if the recommendations are taken into consideration. Of significance was that through AI and WCM mothers in LSEE felt supported, heard and understood. It created a support system for them to return to once the groups had disbanded.

The main conclusion from this thesis is that the use of AI and WCM in this environment can provide a profound understanding of mothers’ own unique experiences of their relationships with their children. The researcher identified core issues that hindered the ability of mothers to focus on the positives and strengths of their relationships, thus enabling pathways of support to aid this vulnerable population group. Further the application of AI and WCM provided insight
into mothers’ needs and brought about change, even though the positive outlook seemed short-lived as they returned to a stressful environment. This indicated that there is a need for long-term support. The benefits of using AI and WCM in combination are not only to understand mothers’ experiences but also to bring about change. Due to the complexity of people living in LSEE, recommendations such as those discussed in article 3 should be considered when applying AI and WCM in similar settings.
Opsomming

‘n Waarderingsondersoek op moeders se belewenis van hulle verhouding met hulle kinders in ‘n lae sosio-ekonomiese omgewing

Sleutelwoorde: Waarderingsperspektief, lae sosio-ekonomiese omgewing, moeder-kind verhouding, waarderingsondersoek, belewenis; ‘World Café’ metode

Talle uitdagings word geassocieer met ‘n lae sosio-ekonomiese omgewing (LSEO), onder andere: lae inkomste, werkloosheid, leerprobleme en beperkte onderrig. Hierdie uitdagings vermeerder die stres van moeders wat in so ‘n omgewing woonagtig is en lei dikwels tot depressie. Die emosionele toestand van hierdie moeders kan die kwaliteit van die moeder-kind-verhouding beïnvloed.

Die studie ondersoek moeders in ‘n LSEO se belewenis van hulle verhouding met hulle kinders vanuit ‘n positiewe sielkunde perspektief, deur middel van ‘n waarderingsondersoek internasionaal bekend as, “Appreciative Inquiry” (AI). Die waarderingsondersoek gebruik vier dimensionele opeenvolgende fases (die 4D-siklus) naamlik, die ontdekkings-, droom-, ontwerp- en bestemmings- of volhoubaarheidsfase. Die waarderingsondersoek (AI) volg ‘n sterkpunt-gebaseerde benadering, waarin die aandag vanaf die uitdagings verskuif en die fokus op die mens se bestaande sterkpunte val om dit te verbeter en uit te bou. Met die gebruik van AI om moeders se unieke belewenis te begryp, word ‘n beter begrip oor die unieke kwaliteite en sterkpunte van moeders verkry en hoe hierdie bestaande sterkpunte positief kan bydra tot die moeder-kind-verhouding. Gedurende die proses om die sterkpunte of potensiaal te identifiseer en met die fokus op dit wat werk (die positiewe), word ‘n gretigheid gekweek om die bestaande kwaliteite te verbeter, wat uiteindelik tot ‘n meer positiewe moeder-kind-verhouding lei.
Plaaslike navorsing is nodig om meer kennis, sowel as beter begrip rakende moeders se belewenis van hulle verhouding met hulle kinders, te verkry. Sodoende sal die leemtes wat in die literatuur bestaan, vanuit ’n Suid Afrikaanse perspektief, aangespreek word.

Hierdie navorsing het in drie navorsingsfases verloop, elke fase met sy eie spesifieke fokus. Die hooffokus van die navorsing was om die belewenis van moeders in ’n LSEO se verhouding met hulle kinders vanuit ’n waarderingsperspektief (AI), te ondersoek en te beskryf. Hierdie studie se resultate word in drie afsonderlike artikels aangebied.

In die eerste artikel word die belewenis van moeders se verhoudings met hulle kinders in ’n LSEO ondersoek en beskryf deur die gebruik van die waarderingsperspektief se eerste fase naamlik die ontdekkingsfase. ’n Kwalitatiewe fenomenologiese navorsingsmetode is gebruik en die steekproef het bestaan uit agt deelnemers. Almal moeders wat aan die Oos-Rand van Gauteng in ’n LSEO woon. Drie van hierdie moeders het deelgeneem aan een-tot-een-onderhoude en die oorblywende vyf deelnemers het deelgeneem aan ’n fokusgroep bespreking. Die resultate dui daarop dat ongeag die uitdagings en swaarkry wat moeders in die LSEO beleef, hulle steeds hulle positiewe belewenis van hulle verhouding met hulle kinders op ’n baie persoonlike vlak kon verwoord. Die moeders kon hulle liefde en waardering vir hulle kinders verbaliseer en het positiewe stories oor hulle kinders met mekaar gedeel. Alhoewel hulle positiewe stories vertel het, het hulle ook hul gevoelens van onbevoegdheid as moeders, hulle vrese om gekritiseer te word met betrekking tot hul ouerskap en die uitdagings om die kinders se gedrag, geral gedurende adolessensie, te hanteer, uitgespreek. Met behulp van die ontdekkingsfase van die waarderingsonderzoek (AI) kon die moeders hulle belewenis, aangaande hulle verhouding met hulle kinders deel en ook so vasstel wat hulle positiewe kwaliteite en sterkpunte is. In ’n LSEO is daar min geleentheid vir moeders om hulle ervarings te deel. Die voorsiening van so geleentheid was nuttig en die moeders het gevoel dat iemand na hulle luister en besef dat hulle dieselfde of soortgelyke uitdagings ervaar.

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Die tweede artikel het met die gebruik van ’n enkele instrumentele gevallestudie en die laaste drie fases van die waarderingsondersoek (AI), naamlik die droom-, ontwerp- en bestemmingsfase, gepoog om inligting rakende moeders se belewenis van hul drome (wat kan wees?); die ontwerp (hoe kan dit wees? herkonstruksie) en die bestemming (om te bemagtig, te improviseer en in stand te hou) te versamel, om sodoende dit wat ontwerp is toe te pas in hul daaglikse omgang met hulle kinders. ’n Kwalitatiewe fenomenologiese ontwerp met ’n interpretatiewe benadering is gebruik. Die steekproef het bestaan uit agt moeders wat almal in ’n LSEO aan die Oos-Rand van Gauteng woon. Data is ingesamel deur twee fokusgroepbesprekings, sowel as twee individuele een-tot-een- onderhoude, met die gebruik van die ‘World Café’ Metode (WCM) in die eerste fokusgroep. Die resultate het aangedui dat die moeders dit moeilik vind om te droom oor ’n toekoms vir hulle kinders, as gevolg daarvan dat hulle nie ’n aktiewe moederrolmodel gedurende hulle kinderjare gehad het nie, Die konstante stres, wat veroorsaak word deur die lewe in die LSEO, dra ook daartoe by dat hul nie toekomsdrome vir hul kinders het nie, aangesien hulle eie behoetes nie altyd bevredig word nie. Die resultate het getoon dat ongeag hierdie uitdagings en onvermoë om te droom, die moeders tog (alhoewel beperk) toekomsplanne ontwerp om hul drome te bewaarheid, soos om spesiale en kwaliteittyd saam met hulle kinders deur te bring. Die implementering van die planne wat hulle ontwerp het, het ’n verandering in hulle verhouding met hulle kinders teweeg gebring.

Die fokus van die derde artikel was om die bevindinge, uitdagings en waardevolle lesse wat gedurende die fasilitering van AI en die WCM geleer is, in samehang met die LSEO, bekend te maak. Data is ingesamel vanuit die literatuur oor die gebruik van AI en die WCM in gemeenskappe, sowel as inligting verkry van die drie fokusgroepbesprekings en vyf individuele onderhoude in die eerste twee fases van die navorsing. Alhoewel die gekombineerde gebruik van AI en WCM in samehang met LSEO baie voordele inhou, is daar wel uitdagings en kan hierdie uitdagings oorkom word deur die aanbevelings in ag te neem wanneer hierdie metodes in ’n soortgelyke omgewing gebruik word. Wat betekenisvol is, is dat deur AI en WCM, moeders in ’n LSEO gevoel het dat hulle ondersteuning kry, dat hulle gehoor en verstaan word.

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Dit het vir hulle 'n ondersteuningsisteem geskep waarna hulle kon terugkeer, selfs nadat die fokusgroep ontbind is.

Die hoofgevolgtekking van die studie is dat met die gebruik van AI en die 'World Café' metode in LSEO, die navorser 'n beter insig en begrip aangaande moeders se unieke belewenis van hulle verhouding met hulle kinders kon bied, en ook terselfdertyd kern kwessies kon identifiseer wat moeders se vermoë om op die positiewe, sowel as op hulle eie kwaliteite te fokus, belemmer. Hierdie gevolgtrekking kan betekenisvol wees wanneer hulpverlening aan hierdie weerlose moeders verskaf word. Die toepassing van AI en die WCM het nuwe insig gebring in die moeders se behoeftes en kon dus veranderings teweeg bring. 'n Behoefte aan langtermyn ondersteuning was duidelik, aangesien die moeders teruggekeer het na 'n stresvolle omgewing en die positiewe uitkyk van korte duur was. Die voordele van die gebruik van AI en die “World Café” metode in kombinasie, was duidelik, maar as gevolg van die kompleksiteit van mense wat in LSEO lewe, moet die aanbevelings wat in artikel 3 gemaak is, in ag geneem word wanneer die twee metodes in soortgelyke omgewings gebruik word.
Preface

- This thesis is submitted in article format as described in rules A5.1.1.2 and A5.1.1.2 as prescribed by the North-West University.

- The first article was be submitted as a brief report to the Journal of Psychology in Africa (Appendix F). The second article will be submitted for possible publication in the Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk Journal, in South Africa. The third article's abstract was approved for presentation at the Alara World Congress and the research presented on the 5th of November 2015 (Appendix G). Article 3 will be submitted for possible publication in the Alar Journal.

- For purposes of examination the articles are presented as part of a single document consisting of three parts that include an introduction, three articles and the conclusions and recommendations, followed by a single reference list.

- The articles have been formatted according to the guidelines for authors of the Journal of Psychology in Africa (pp. 76), Social Work Journal of South Africa (pp. 105) and the Alar Journal (pp. 144).

- References are formatted according to the American Psychology Association (APA) guidelines (6th edition), throughout the document. Where in-text references refer to three to five authors, the names of all the authors were used the first time the reference appears in each of the four articles as each article is viewed as a separate unit.

- Dr S. Jacobs and Prof. A. W. Nienaber co-authors of the articles have provided their permission for the submission of these articles for examination purposes.
Letter of Permission

We, Dr Susanne Jacobs (promoter) and Prof Alida Nienaber declare that the input and effort of Elmari Botha Verhage in writing these articles, reflects the research done by her. Permission is hereby granted for the submission by the first author, E. Botha Verhage of the following three articles for examination purposes, towards the attainment of a PhD degree in Psychology:

- Article 1: Mothers’ experiences of their relationships with their children in a low socio-economic environment.
- Article 2: Towards and understanding of mothers dream, design and destiny processes in their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment: An appreciative inquiry.

The role of the co-authors was as follow: Dr S. Jacobs and Prof A. W. Nienaber acted as promoters and assisted in the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data.

Dr S. Jacobs  
Promoter and Co-Author

Prof. A. W. Nienaber  
Co-promotor and Co-Author
DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the PhD dissertation of ELMARI BOTHA VERHAGE was properly language edited.

Title of dissertation: An appreciative inquiry into mothers’ experiences of their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment

Dr Jean Mitchell
South Africa
November 2015
SECTION A

Part 1: Orientation to the Research

I believe there is no possibility of existing without relationship. Relationship is a necessity of life. - Loris Malaguzzi –

1. Introduction

According to Trickett (1996:213) human activity does not develop in a social vacuum, but rather it is rigorously situated within a socio-historical and cultural context of meanings and relationships. The quality of relationships, including those between mothers and children, are influenced by the nature of the socio-economic environment in which they exist. Mothers living in low socio-economic environments (LSEE) have to cope with multiple challenges such as low income, overcrowded and poor living conditions, among others. Their limited resources unavoidably trigger stress, and as a result the pressure and anxiety experienced by mothers influence their relationships with their children. In this study the researcher aimed to explore how mothers, who live in an LSEE, experience their relationship with their children. Experiences were collected using an appreciative viewpoint, referred to as Appreciative Inquiry (further referred to as AI) and are explained from a positive psychological perspective. By utilising a positive perspective, prevalence is given to positive experiences of lived realities instead of to negative practices. The researcher used AI in an effort to discover and understand existing positive experiences mothers have in their relationships with their children, exploring these experiences creatively (Lewis, 2011: McKergow & Clarke, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) rather than focusing on problems.

An overview and statistics of the problem of poverty in South Africa is provided, after which the types of difficulties experienced and the impact of poverty on mothers who live in LSEEs are explained. The rationale and theoretical framework underpinning this study are discussed. Part 1
concludes with an overview of other important literature that focuses on underlying theories and models suitable for studying the experiences of persons in LSEEs.

In Part 2 the researcher elaborates on the research methodology (empirical investigation) used to collect and describe data.

2. **Problem statement and rationale for the study**

   2.1 **Poverty**

   2.1.1 **What is poverty?**

   No single definition of poverty is available because definitions need to be understood in relation to a particular social, cultural as well as historical context (Lister, 2004). As various definitions of poverty are available in the literature, Sachs (2006) recommends distinguishing between different degrees of poverty: extreme poverty, where basic needs cannot be met, moderate poverty, where basic needs are just barely met, and relative poverty, where low household incomes are compared to average incomes. According to the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (2007) poverty is a combination of concepts that are captured in different meanings. The institute refers to the most important aspects to be considered when defining poverty as 1. Material lack, especially lack of resources essential for survival; 2. Giving up self-respect, when unable to fulfil minimal social obligations; and 3. Subjective experience, implying that people are considered poor if they experience forms of lack that lead to suffering. As can be seen from the above, poverty is a multifaceted concept which cannot easily be defined.

   2.1.2 **General and global information on poverty**

   *How does poverty manifest, what are outcomes of poverty?* Poverty...shows itself in different ways. ...It is not always easy to make a clear distinction between facts or symptoms of poverty and its origins. Not only are there several different dimensions of material and non-material
poverty but there is also a complex interaction between, cause and effect, which makes it difficult to describe a state of poverty without considering those factors, themselves aspects of poverty, that causes further misery (Wilson & Ramphele, 1989, p. 14).

The quotation above captures the complexity of poverty which manifests in a number of ways. Poverty may develop due to a change in a country’s economy, low income, lack of education, high divorce rates, overpopulation, diseases such as AIDS and malaria, and environmental problems such as drought (Lusted, 2010; Rath & Odekon, 2006). As poverty is complex and is experienced in varying degrees, the causes are also compound and differ from country to country. In White, Killick, Steve and Kayizzi-Mugerwa (2001) the causes of poverty in Africa are grouped in four categories: 1. Economic (such as market failures and slow job creation), 2. Situational (such as environmental degradation and location); 3. Social and demographic (such as household composition and weak social services); 4. Political (such as social exclusion).

Poverty in South Africa is said to be caused by various factors that are mutually interactive and context-specific. They include socio-economic, political and environmental factors that pertain to the distribution of wealth, income and societal power in terms of race, gender, age, locality and environmental factors such as poor environmental conditions and access to available natural resources (Theron, Davids & Maphunye, 2005).

Poverty has an impact on the family as a whole and can lead to family stress, and has an influence on the emotional well-being and mental health of the parents that could in turn lead to harsh and controlling parenting (Gutman & McLloyd, 2005; Zevalkink & Riksen-Walraven, 2001). In addition, limited economic resources may cause marital distress, and that, in turn has an impact on the relationships within the family and subsequently on parenting. Children exposed to prolonged poverty can be at risk of poor physical as well as socio-emotional outcomes (Fiese & Winter, 2008). Research focusing on the effects of poverty on child development has found that it is not the lack of money that causes vulnerability, but rather the environment and other aspects that accompany poverty, such as overcrowded living conditions, violence, poor communities and lower parental educational levels (Fiese & Winter, 2008). Thus it is evident that poverty is a widespread, worldwide phenomenon and its impact on the family has been highlighted in the literature.
2.1.3 Poverty World Wide

The most recent estimate by the World Bank (2014) made in 2011 predicted that about 17% (just over one billion people) from the developing world live in poverty (i.e. they live below $1,25 per day). The United Nations report estimates that more than 2.2 billion people worldwide are either near or living in poverty (United Nations, 2014) and “Almost 1.5 billion people are multi-dimensionally poor. With overlapping deprivations in health, education and living standards, close to 800 million people are vulnerable to falling back into poverty when setbacks occur” (United Nations Development Programme, 2014, p. 1). A discussion regarding poverty in South Africa provides a broad picture regarding the prevalence and causes unique to the country.

2.1.4 Statistics of poverty in South Africa

While various statistics on families living in poverty are available, there are no specific statistics on the number of mothers living in LSEEs worldwide and thus in South Africa. In South Africa the latest statistics indicate that approximately 45,5% of South Africans were living below the poverty line in 2011. Despite Gauteng having the lowest number of people living in poverty, it had the fourth highest number of poor people (11%) in 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). Living in poverty seems to be a global issue and the matter should be taken seriously. Even though the poverty rate in South Africa dropped from 57,2% in 2006 (to 45,5% in 2011) the dilemma remains.

Poverty is often also referred to as low socio economic status (Bergin & Bergin, 2015). This can be seen in rural areas of South Africa where poverty stems from historically generated power inequalities (Francis, 2006). Another cause is unemployment that is influenced by global and national production strategies (Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute, 2007).

2.1.5 Low socio economic status

To understand the interaction between the environment and individual, the context of an LSEE needs to be described. An LSEE is marked by limited income due to low earning or unemployment, poor living conditions, and overcrowding in small dwellings, often without water,
electricity and sanitation (Bergin & Bergin, 2015; Friis & Sellers, 2009, p. 59; Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009). People living in LSEEs are often regarded as being from a lower socio-economic status, which is described as the level of family income, parent education, family structure and the neighbourhood in which the family lives (Bergin & Bergin, 2015; Msall, 2009; Okafor, 2012). Socio-economic status can also be defined as “one’s social position as well as the privileges and prestige from access to economic and social resources” (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005, p. 372). Berns (2010) describes people who are of low socio-economic status as those who are poorly educated and thus have low incomes from low-skilled or semi-skilled jobs. Such families are mostly poor. For the purpose of this study, LSEE is defined as an environment with limited income due to unemployment or low-earning employment, poor living conditions (overcrowding, small rooms, domestic violence, and alcohol abuse), poor education, elevated levels of early adolescent pregnancy and learning disabilities. In particular, mothers who live in LSEEs are a common phenomenon all around the world. As will be explained in the next paragraph, being a mother means that a relationship of some kind needs and will be established, especially between her and her children.

2.2 Relationships

According to Cicirelli (1991) a relationship involves the total history of the interaction between two individuals. Everyone, from childhood onwards, develops several relationships during the course of their lives. However, the mother–child relationship is unique, intimate and fundamental for the forming of future relationships (Lehman, 2005; Sigelman & Rider, 2009; Taylor, 2012). The relationship between mother and child that starts in infancy and progresses into childhood is important for a child’s social, emotional and personality development (Shaffer, 2009; Seibert & Kerns, 2009). Thus the initial relationship that a child has sets the stage for future relationships. The literature emphasises the importance of consistent relationships between infants and young children with a particular person, such as the mother, in order to thrive and develop (Kobak & Madsen, 2008). This does not mean that the relationship is important only during
infancy, but rather that the interactions between mothers and their children remain essential as children grow older, and as interactions feed into the mother-child relationship (Posada, 2008).

However, various factors, such as poverty and related stress, may have an impact on the relationship between mothers and their children and affect other aspects such as parental support and marital relationships. These contextual factors have an influence on how people live and how they interact. Thus, relationships between mothers and their children cannot be viewed in isolation, but are influenced by the broader socio-economic environment. According to Trickett (1996, p. 213) “human activity does not develop in a social vacuum, but rather it is rigorously situated within a socio-historical and cultural context of meanings and relationships”. Thus, the nature of a socio-economic environment has an influence on the quality of relationships, as well as those between mothers and children living in an LSEE.

2.3 Challenges of living in LSEEs

An LSEE poses a variety of challenges. Domestic violence, substance abuse, overcrowding, low educational level, poverty, unemployment and teenage pregnancy are often associated with LSEEs (Leon-Guerrero, 2013; Mullner, 2009; Wang, 2010). Having to cope with challenges such as low income, overcrowded, poor living conditions and limited resources, unavoidably leads to stress which could influence relationships between mothers and their children. The reason for this is that challenges posed by living in LSEE have an effect on mothers’ emotional well-being as well as on their parenting.

2.4 Impact of LSEEs on emotional well-being

Mothers living in poor conditions and LSEEs become prone to emotional problems, and are disposed to experience anxiety and depression (Jankovic, 2008; Letherby, 2010; McLoyd as cited in Jarvela, 2011). According to Kelley, (2008) and O’Reilly (2010) poverty has an impact on mothers across the world, and it has been found that due to the stress that an LSEE poses, mothers show signs of anxiety, leading to withdrawal, feelings of being incompetent to parent,
having little energy to parent and, consequently, being more critical in their interactions with their children. Since mothers are also inclined to become depressed, feelings of hopelessness are “accompanied by a negative attitude to life” (Kelley, 2008; Uddin, 2011; Worell & Goodheart, 2006). A mother’s well-being has an impact on her ability to parent, when she experiences stress or anxiety she can easily become upset or impatient with her children.

2.5 Impact of LSEEs on parenting

Parents who live in low socio-economic settings frequently face frustrating life events such as unemployment, low income and overcrowded living conditions; as a result the situation deprives them of patience and understanding essential to be responsive and nurturing towards their children (Bornstein, Hahn, Suwalsky & Haynes, 2003; Miller-Johnson, Moore, Underwood & Coie, 2012). Living in a low socio-economic environment for a long period of time has been shown to increase levels of stress in both parents and children. Besides experiencing emotional problems such as anxiety and depression, a more punitive parenting style is used, since children display behavioural and scholastic problems. This all leads to poor relationships with family members (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Bush & Peterson, 2013; Sigelman & Rider, 2015). The difficulties and stress in the environment of parents have an impact on how they treat and respond to their children. It is the researcher’s experience that when mothers are stressed and emotional due to their stressful home environment; they often become impatient with their children and do not always have the energy to parent. Research indicates that LSEEs can be associated with more negative parenting behaviours due to experiences of resentment towards their children, and consequently the exercising of inconsistent discipline (Conger, Conger, Elder, & Lorenz, 1992), as well as the showing of low levels of involvement (McLeod & Shanahan, 1993). All these factors cause poor relationships with family members (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). This negative environment and attitude again has an impact on the way that parents might view their lives as a whole; this point of view can be carried over to their children. Individuals who do not experience anything positive in their environment or upbringing become negative people (Uddin, 2011). The negative emotional
state of mothers and their inconsistent parenting could contribute to the quality of their relationships, in particular the mother–child relationship.

2.6 Previous research undertaken

Existing international research regarding mothers and their relationships with their children focuses on the attachment formed during infancy and its effects later in childhood (Fitton, 2008). Interventions are reported to include attachment-based psychotherapy with mother and child that focus on John Bowlby’s attachment theory and are founded on treatment and developing preventative attachment-based interventions for parents and children, adolescents and adults (Brisch, 2011). Other programmes focus on parenting training, educating parents on the different developmental milestones of children, effective communication, discipline and problem-solving. Examples of these programmes are the Parent Effectiveness Training programme (PET) and the Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (S.T.E.P.) programme. The STEP programme (Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1979) specifically focuses on how children grow and behave, misbehaviour that exists, and ways to deal with challenging behaviour. The STEP programme also emphasises listening to children and talking to them authentically. The PET programme (Gordon, 2000) teaches communication and conflict resolution skills for effective relationships. Another programme, referred to as the Pen State Family Intervention Program (Nezworski, Tolan & Belsky, 1988), focuses on (1) improving the mother’s negative views and perceptions of herself and her world; (2) exploring stressful parenting and family experiences; and (3) examining the emotional reactions of mothers in the parenting role (Teeter, 1998). The researcher could not find literature on more recent programmes, which is an indication of the huge gap that exists in assisting people who are living under stressful circumstances, particularly mothers living in LSEEs.

While the focus of the above programmes and methods described in the literature aims at identifying problems (quality of relationships) and providing parents with skills to solve or deal with problems, limited research is available with regard to mothers’ lived experiences in LSEEs.
myriad of difficulties associated with living in an LSEE forms important background information for promoting further studies with regard to: 1) experiences mothers from LSEEs have of the mother–child relationship and 2) the collaborative use of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the World Café Method (WCM) with mothers from LSEEs (to be discussed below).

2.7 Ecological systems theory

The ecological system theory was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), and views the “child’s development as occurring within a system of relationships that shapes his or her environment” (Martin, Fergus & Noguera, 2012, p. 60). The theory assumes that natural environments are the major aspect that influences the developing person. The developing individual can be seen as being in the centre and embedded in various environmental systems, from immediate, such as the family, to broader environments, such as culture (Shaffer, 2009). This theory also considers individual factors such as characteristics of the child or parent, the interaction between parents and children and the broader context such as support and resources (Budd, Clark & Connell, 2011) that have an impact on child development and relationships. All these systems interact with each other and with the individual and have an influence on the development of the individual (Shaffer, 2009).

According to Shaffer and Kipp (2010, p. 65) this “systems approach recognises that parents influence their children; but also stresses that (1) children influence the behaviour and child rearing practices of their parents, and that (2) families are complex social systems, that is, networks of reciprocal relationships and alliances (the microsystem) that are constantly evolving (the chronosystem) and are greatly affected by community (the excosystem) and cultural influences (the macrosystem)”. The ecological systems theory proposes that individuals are not only influenced by the environment but also simultaneously influence their environment. Therefore, living in an LSEE can, have an impact on the individual and the family, but also vice versa. The ecological systems theory further claims that the interaction between the parent and the child is affected by the parent’s experience outside the family (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The extent of stress that
...the mother experience with regards to the environment in which she lives has an impact on her interaction with her child. Furthermore, the ecological perspective focuses attention on examining an individual. Members of the family and their interaction within the larger environment also need to be investigated (Miller-Day & McManus, 2009). Consequently we cannot exclude the environment and the impact that it has on the relationship between a mother and her children. The ecological systems theory provides some insight onto the impact that the LSEE has on the mother-child relationship.

### 2.8 Relationship theory

Relationship theory with regard to mother and child is usually described in the literature as the attachment theory of Bowlby (1980), and refers to the relationship during infancy. Attachment is defined as the affectional bond that an infant forms with his or her caregiver (Ainsworth, 1979). Attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1988) emphasises the importance of the formation of a secure attachment between the mother and infant in the first year of infancy, which has an impact on the formation of future relationships with peers and other family members (Hirschy & Wilkinson, 2010). Huebner, Gilman and Suldo (2006) stress that the quality of the parent–child relationship (which includes the mother–child relationship) is one of the strongest interpreters of happiness during youth. Attachment in middle childhood has long been neglected by researchers, but recently there has been a steep increase in the research focusing on middle childhood attachment (Bosmans & Kerns, 2015). In this early writings Bowlby (1982) referred to the changes in attachment during middle childhood, such as the decline in attachment behaviours towards the mother (attachment figure) because the child is older and there is an increase in self-reliance and the child becomes less depend on parents (Marvin & Britner, 1999). More resent research suggests that even though peers are seen to be important during middle childhood, parents and not the peers remain the attachment figures. They further state that it is important for children in middle childhood to know that they have access to primary caregivers when needed (Bosmans & Kerns, 2015).
Research has shown that low socio-economic settings can be linked to the absence of positive parenting (Brody, Flor & Gibson, 1999). Living in poverty and, as a result, being faced with larger quantities of stress and negative life events, leads to emotional problems with mothers experiencing anxiety and depression. The Family Systems Theory is based on the idea that changes that occur in one member of the family affect the entire family (Ward & Hisley, 2009). The systems theory views the family as a complex and interactive social system where the needs and experiences of all family members have an effect on the others (Friend & Cook, 2002). Therefore a mother’s stress, anxiety and attitude can have an impact on her children. In a study undertaken by Kelley (2008) it was established that depressed mothers had more negative attitudes and were more hostile and critical towards their children. It was further found that negative views of the children’s behaviour created more negative views about how they viewed the world and themselves (such as viewing themselves as never being good enough, naughty and not loved), and as a result developing a low self-esteem. Their living conditions can also be associated with more negative parenting behaviours such as the experience of resentment towards their own children, exercising punitive and inconsistent discipline, showing low levels of involvement thus causing poorer relationships with family members (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; McLeod & Shanahan, 1993).

Owing to adverse circumstances mothers may have a stronger inclination to see what is wrong and negative instead of what is positive. It is important that the communication of mothers towards their children should be positive since it could improve the mother-child bond and spread parental values to their children, thus enabling them to develop a positive sense of self (VanderVen, 2008). Against the background of poverty, ecological systems and relationship theory, a positive psychology perspective and the AI method seem suitable and will be described next.
3. **Positive Psychology**

Positive psychology is referred to as “an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits and enabling institutions” (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005, p. 410). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) are the founders of positive psychology which is concerned with understanding and facilitating; happiness and well-being, positive traits in activities and the development of meaningful positive relationships and social systems (Sheridan & Burt, 2009). Positive psychology aims to recognise what is going right in life. This shifts the focus from repairing negative experiences of, and the preoccupation with the negative, to positive aspects (talents, traits, characteristics, coping skills) of individuals, groups and their environments, even though their circumstances may be difficult (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In positive psychology the focus when intervening, is shifted from searching for the problem to discovering existing strengths, achieving maximum wellbeing and ‘authentic happiness’. Seligman (2002) has identified three pillars of authentic happiness:

- The pleasant life – positive feelings and experiences.
- The engaged life – being absorbed by something you find deeply interesting.
- The meaningful life – what is over and above the self – relationships, service to others and spirituality.

Humans have an inner need for a relationship and a wanting to belong. Relationships are considered as the most important source of wellbeing and life satisfaction (Reis & Gable (2003). It is therefore considered important to invest time and energy into relationships in order to not only improve a relationship but rather to create a positive experience of the relationship.

4. **Summary and Rationale for the Study**

In summary, the problem that exists is that many mothers, due to poverty, are from or living in LSEEs in South Africa, and very little is known about their personal, subjective lived experiences
in this environment. In addition, not much is known about how they experience their relationship with their children within such a stressful environment. The literature identifies the stress that an LSEE places on the relationship between mother and child, but there is a lack regarding information pertaining to South African mothers' personal experience of their relationship with their children in LSEEs. It is therefore necessary to explore and describe these mothers' experiences in order to determine if AI could be utilised in similar areas. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a methodology grounded in positive psychology. AI is strengths-based research approach that shifts the focus from identifying problems to rather discovering and describing existing strengths within a system (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987; Kung, Giles & Hagan, 2013), therefore appreciating what works in a system. The appreciative approach is later described in further detail.

The overall focus of the study was to explore and describe mothers’ (from an LSEE) experiences of their relationships with their children from an appreciative perspective, and to make recommendations for other organisations and professionals working in similar environments. Against the above background the researcher sought to address the research questions:

1.) What are the experiences of mothers, from an LSEE of their relationship with their children from an appreciative perspective?
2.) What are the experiences of mothers towards their dream, design and destiny processes with regard to their relationship with their children in LSEEs?
3.) What are recommendations for practice for the use of AI and WCM, with reference to participants from LSEEs?

This study will be viewed against a phenomenological framework, as described below.

5. **Theoretical Framework**

The focus of this study was to explore and describe mother's experience of their relationship with their children living in LSEEs, from an appreciative perspective. By engaging with the mothers themselves, first-hand information was gathered on the experiences of mothers from an LSEE of
their relationship with their children; instead of relying on assumptions and perceptions from outsiders. Mligo (2013, p. 101) suggests that “phenomenology emphasises experience as lived or perceived by a person or group of people and the interpretation they give to that experience”. The phenomenological approach therefore allowed the researcher to focus on the “how” of the mothers’ personal experiences, feelings and convictions of their relationship with their children, at the present moment within an LSEE, rather than trying to interpret the reasoning or the “why” behind the lived phenomena (Joyce & Sills, 2010). Although each mothers’ situation was unique, (some are married, some single parents, some have a low income job, some are unemployed), differing but similar experiences exist.

In conjunction with the phenomenological approach, a positive psychology framework will form the theoretical framework for this study. Positive psychology comprises the scientific study of optimal human functioning. This approach does not deny problems or difficulties that people might experience (Peterson, 2006), but it embraces two dimensions, namely, well-being as well as pathology. The perspective of positive psychology is a suitable theoretical framework for this study, as it points to gaps in how circumstances and problems are seen and approached. Since the social-ecological approach is often used within the positive psychology paradigm and “emphasises the importance of identifying mismatches between personal capacity and environmental demands and identifying the supports needed to address these mismatches” (Shogren, 2013, p. 24), the social-ecological approach will form part of the theoretical framework for this study.

By exploring and describing as well as utilising AI, the experiences of mothers’ relationships with their children within an LSEE, first-hand information from the mothers themselves can be obtained to gain an understanding of how they experience the mother–child relationship. Information could be utilised to provide data on the use of AI with mothers in an LSEE in order to improve support provided for these mothers.
In the next section the background, theory and rationale of the methods of data selection (AI and WCM) will be discussed, as well as how data was collected in the three research phases of the study.
Part 2: Methodology (Empirical investigation)

1. Research Method and Design

A qualitative approach was considered to be the most appropriate methodology for this study, as the researcher was interested in understanding how mother participants interpret their experiences regarding their relationship with the children in an LSEE, and what meanings mothers attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that in qualitative research occurrences are studied in their natural setting and the researcher attempts to interpret or make sense of the phenomena or through finding the meaning that the participants give. In order to do this the researcher worked mainly from an interpretivistic perspective described as “getting out there”. The attempt to extract meaning requires the researcher to be empathetic towards mothers living in an LSEE (Pope, 2006; Erickson, 1986). The researcher was more interested in understanding the experiences mothers have of their relationship with their children, rather than attempting to acquire descriptive statistics. The research was concerned with the “specifics of meaning and action in social life that takes place in concrete scenes of face-to-face interactions” (Pope, 2006). This required observation of mothers in a group, to learn about their world and the issues they confront in terms of their relationships with their children and how they experience these relationships.

The phenomenological research design was therefore most suitable for exploring and describing the experiences of mothers from an LSEE as phenomenology is concerned with the human being as a whole and all the parts that contribute to the experience. Although it is possible that human beings experience related situations in similar ways, every person has different perceptions and interpretations of the shared world (Crocker & Philippson, 2005) and have their own individual reality of the lived experience (Grove, Gray & Burns, 2014). The phenomenological approach presents the best viewpoint for the current study, as it is concerned with human experiences and “concentrates its efforts on the kind of human experiences that are pure, basic and raw in the sense that they have not yet been subjected to processes of analysis and theorizing.”
(Denscombe, 2014, p. 95). Further, the aim of a phenomenological perspective is not to generate theories or models of the phenomenon being studied but to accurately describe the (lived) experiences of the mother participants (Van Manen, 1990). Merriam (2009) argues that a phenomenological research design is actual for studying intense human experiences containing effective and emotional components.

A basic as well as applied research approach was selected for this research. Basic research refers to empirical observation aimed at extending knowledge of the discipline and formulating theory rather than solving immediate problems (Fouché & De Vos, 2011; Monette, Sullivan, DeJong & Hilton, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2008). Applied research is “the scientific planning of induced change in a troublesome situation” (Fouché & De Vos, 2011, p. 94). Applied research mostly has a practical outcome in mind and an assumption that there will be a benefit for the participants or society as a whole (Monette, Sullivan, DeJong & Hilton, 2014). According to Fouché and De Vos (2011, p. 94) “basic and applied research are complementary – the advancement of knowledge and the solution of problems are both scientific necessities”. In this study the aim was to gain knowledge through the use of a basic research approach (Hall, 2008) of mothers’ experience of their relationship with their children, from an LSEE. In order to gain knowledge the aim was to utilise AI as a method, firstly to gain a basic knowledge of mothers’ experiences, and secondly to apply information gained in a practical way in a troublesome situation. AI as a method thus forms part of both basic and applied research rather than intervention research as will be elaborated on later.

In this research the use of AI was twofold: in the first instance it was used to gather data, and in the second instance it was used as a research method to facilitate change, based on the initial information and data gained, and thus is sequential in nature. AI as a method was developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) as a qualitative, action research methodology that challenges traditional problem-solving approaches by moving the focus away from the problems and weaknesses in the area being researched. AI entails and comprises of stages, therefore it is
commonly described as a four staged process. These stages are referred to as the Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny stage (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008).

Various ways on how data can be collected exist; observations, interviews, focus groups and engaged methods (Gobo, 2011). However, Silverman (2011) recommends when selecting a research method, the selected method should depend upon the research topic. As this study was conducted from a positive psychology perspective, AI seemed the most credible in choice of method as challenges that exist in the research, as well as in the context within which the research took place, are viewed from an appreciative Perspective. The appreciative perspective will be explained in more detail next.

2. Method, Theory and Rationale of AI and WCM

2.1 Appreciative inquiry

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a methodology grounded in positive psychology. AI is strengths-based research approach that was developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) in the late 80s as an alternative approach to traditional organisational development models (Kung, Giles & Hagan, 2013). As a qualitative and interpretive research approach, AI is underpinned by a social construct philosophy, viewing the social world to be created and co-constructed in dialogues through debates and the stories people tell each other (Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Howe, 2001; Merriam, 2009). The focus in the AI philosophy is not so much on history or on problems but rather on the things that matter (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2011). Therefore the major aim of the AI is to move away from looking for what is broken (Hammond, 2013) and rather discovering what is already working within a system. When searching for problems it is to intensify and strengthen by focusing on the problematic. The AI method has been used both internationally (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) and globally (Bester, 2011) for personal development, community and organisational change. Apart from facilitating change, the AI model is also utilised for analysis, decision-making and creation of strategic change (Bester, 2011; Hammond, 2013; McKergow & Clarke 2005; Whitney &
AI is not only an approach for change, but also entails deliberate change in thought processes, focusing intently on what works in a system (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

2.1.1 Principles of AI

AI is based on principles for enabling creativity, knowledge and spirit in an environment (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2011, McKergow & Clarke, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). According to Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2008) five principles are central to AI and form the theoretical basis in the organisation of positive resolutions for change and thus guides the application of AI. These principles are that

1. Reality is socially constructed through language (constructionist principle);
2. Change begins from the moment a question is asked (simultaneity principle);
3. The choice of what is being studied determines what is discovered (poetic principle);
4. The image of the future shapes the present (anticipatory principle);
5. Positive questions lead to positive change (positive principle).


2.1.2 Value and benefits of AI

AI aims to build on strengths already existing in the system, and to create an awareness of the positives within to bring about change (Lewis, 2011; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Therefore rather than spending more time and energy on searching for problems, the strengths and aspects that work in a system are explored through AI. In a study conducted by Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) they questioned individuals who are richly experienced in AI, on their thoughts regarding the values and benefits of AI. From the answers six
elements were identified, which were compared and associated or linked to “freedoms” when used as an appreciative approach in the community (Chaffee, 2005). ‘Freedoms’ according to Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010, p. 269) refer to AI “as a journey of liberation, from oppression to power and one of social emergence”. In other words, the journey was described as individuals moving from a position in a system or organisation, where they feel powerless, not being able to do something to bring about change, towards a point where individuals have the power to change matters. The researchers found that after application of the AI processes in a community, people experienced true liberation when they realised that they could make a difference in relation to others (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). From the research, six essential conditions were identified as liberating personal as well as organisational power. These are conditions which can be linked to elements of freedom (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) which include:

**The freedom to be known in a relationship:** AI offers people a chance to form and strengthen a relationship within the system where AI is used (organisational and community), due to the freedom experienced when being regarded as equal and unique, portraying the role of the normal self instead of just for instance the work role or mother role when participating in the AI process. AI offers people a chance to get to know one another within work setting or system, therefore building and strengthening relationships.

**The freedom to be heard:** If individuals do not feel heard, they often feel isolated and not able to bring about change to their environment. Through the process of AI people felt heard, recognised and valued, and have the opportunity to share information and ideas, therefore ‘opening channels of communication’.

**The freedom to dream in community:** AI affords people the opportunity to open their individual dreams to the organisation, putting the attention on the path ahead.
*The freedom to choose to contribute:* Through the AI process people are stimulated or inspired by a dream. When individuals choose to do something within a system they get excited, become creative, determined and committed.

*The freedom to act with support:* With the AI process people feel supported and acting within such a supportive environment creates a sense of self-confidence, learning and innovation.

*The freedom to be positive:* Through the AI process people move away from searching for the problem and towards focusing on the positives, therefore to what gives life and what works.

When AI is successfully applied it is said to unleash the six liberties or freedoms described, during application of the four dimension cycle, referred to as the 4-D Cycle (Chaffee, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). AI is dynamic and interactive and builds on flexibility and imagination for its success (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008).

### 2.1.3 Application of AI

AI is executed and implemented through four consecutive phases, steps or dimensions, thus four distinct stages forming a cycle, or a process. (See figure 1). The phases are: 1. Discovery, 2. Dream, 3. Design and 4. Destiny. Data may be collected during all four stages. Graphically the 4 D Cycle is illustrated through the following visual presentation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005):
The 4 four dimension cycle is used to implement AI within organisations or systems (Lewis, 2011; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006) and is also referred to as the 4 D-model (Cooperrider; Whitney & Stavros, 2008). Each phase offers a set of activities during which questions are asked as presented in the illustration (Van Tiem & Rosenzwieg, 2006). Guiding questions are created according to and around affirmative topics of relevance and of strategic importance to the system or organisation (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). These guiding questions are positive questions that focus the attention of participants on what works within the system. According to Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett, (2001) the more positive the questions are that guide an inquiry the more long-lasting and effective the change will be.

Each phase in the cycle of the AI process is represented by a core aim as described below:

**Discovery phase:** During this phase positive questions are posed to participants to find out what gives energy or life to the system or organisation, that is, what works. Stories and information about what is working well are shared. The aim is to start an extensive search through the questions to understand the “best of what is and what has been” in the particular organisation.
of a system. The discovery process results in rich descriptions and mapping of positive core, sharing of stories of best practice and typical actions. This enhances knowledge and collects wisdom and allows the appearance of unplanned changes occurring before implementing the remaining phases (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

**Dream phase:** The dream phase follows where participants share their thoughts about how they would like the system to function or be like in the future. During the dream phase the aim is to build on what has been discovered in the previous discovery phase projecting information into participants' wishes and hopes for the future (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2011). During the dream phase individuals are encouraged to share their own dreams with the group, assisting other participants in shaping and refining their own dreams while listening to those of others (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). According to Van Tiem and Rosenzweig (2006) it is not finding the problem but rather to create desirable visions, in order to move forward to the next phase, where designing the dream is envisioned.

**Design phase:** In the design phase participants work together to make plans for the future and make their dreams a reality. Discussions focus on how ideas can be put into practice and who will be involved. During the design phase strengths and dreams found in the earlier dream phase need to come together in order to achieve the desired vision (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006). The aim of the design phase is to build a bridge from the best of “what is”, that is, the present, towards a speculative “what might be”, of the future (Bester, 2011). The design phase is most often referred to in literature as a collective activity; however it depends on the topic and outcome and can therefore also be an individual reflective process (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010). As proposed for this research, mothers’ unique experience of their relationship with their children, reflects a more individual than collective process. As Lewis, Passmore and Cantore (2011) put it, the design phase is concerned with making decisions about action that will be taken in support of the delivery of the envisioned dream.
**Destiny phase:** In this phase the strategies are put into practice and participants are encouraged to take action and carry forward their ideas. The final phase of AI aims to transfer the new discoveries, positive attitude, insight and excitement acquired through the earlier phases of the AI process into life and to keep them part of everyday interactions (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Stratton-Berkessel, 2010). The destiny phase focuses on celebrating positive changes and innovations resulting from the AI process (Bester 2011) and making plans regarding personal commitments and paths forward (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). During the destiny phase the facilitator can invite individuals to explore what may contribute towards sustaining and amplifying energy and outcomes of the AI experience. However, the goals and action plans set in place during this phase become individuals’ own form of measurement of the AI process (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010).

The AI process can also be presented in a scheme as interpreted by Peters (2013).

**Diagram 1: A schematic presentation of the AI process in this research**

The schematic presentation provides a view of the type of questions that are asked within each phase of the cycle. When the 4-D Cycle is followed, AI becomes a tool for change with group
members actively taking part in the discovery and implication of their visions (Michael, 2005). Presenting the 4-D Cycle in a diagram provides an overall view of each phase of AI, as well as providing information as to what individuals will share and types of questions asked.

The focus of this research is to explore and describe mothers’ experience of the mother-child relationship in LSEE, from an appreciative perspective. Besides limited research on challenges South African mothers experience in an LSEE and the impact that these challenges have on relationships with their children, a void in the literature on the use of AI as a method, in particular with persons from LSEEs, in the South African context still exists. Making use of AI as a method of inquiry may be relevant since it focuses on positive rather than negative aspects of a person’s life (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In a study done by Shuayb, Sharp, Judkins and Hetherington (2009), participants provided feedback of their experience of AI and stated that since AI focuses on positives, it prevents people from focusing on the negatives and as a result participants feel energized after a discussion rather than tired and bad. The negative circumstances are known to remain the same but AI provides new ideas that can bring about new actions for change. Mothers from LSEEs experience numerous stressors, and as a result seem to focus on problems experienced. Focusing on the problematic has a negative impact on their relationships with their children. This study, by making use of AI as method of inquiry, will hopefully lessen the gap in research, as to the mothers’ experiences of their relationship with their children, and its use as a method in an “organisation or system” or as in this study where the system is an environment that can be termed as low socio-economic.

Appreciation as a method of inquiry provides a “process of discovery making it possible for individuals to ‘hear’ or discover ‘what they can do’. AI is regarded as a tool that can be utilised to empower individuals and systems to become self-sufficient and confident (Boyd & Bright, 2007). As well positive emotions like joy, excitement, pride and passion, excitement and motivation are experienced. The fundamental principles, described earlier, on which AI is based thus transmits its applicability to this particular study, by acknowledging the strengths of mothers from LSEE. It is possible to develop a positive image of a better future by the increase of existing positive qualities.
(Lewis, 2011; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006). AI is suitable for group discussions, since perspectives count and experiences can be shared. There is also room for understanding of each other, with new insights sought through exploration of questions in a community of “fellow explorers” (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2011).

2.1.4 AI in research and data collection

Norum (2008, p. 21) stated that “AI relies on collecting data through conducting interviews, making it well suited for qualitative research methods.” AI in research is mostly associated with action research, case studies, narrative, evaluation methods and portraiture (Norum, 2008). Action research and AI are forms of applied research. The goal of action research is to address a specific problem by means of investigation, action planning, piloting of new practices and evaluation (Somekh, 2008). In this study the design was applied research and should not be confused with that of an intervention research design. According to De Vos and Strydom (2011, p. 475) “intervention research is carried out for the purpose of conceiving, creating and testing innovative human services approaches with the aim of preventing or ameliorating problems or to maintain quality of life”. Intervention research follows a Design and Development (D&D) model, and comprises of the following six phases: 1. Problem analysis and project planning (IR1), 2. Information gathering and synthesis (IR2), 3. Design (IR3), 4. Early development and pilot testing, (IR4), 5. Evaluation and advanced development (IR5), and 6. Dissemination (IR6). (Fraser, Richman, Galinsky & Day, 2009; Rothman & Thomas, 1994). When conducting intervention research the problem is identified, information is gathered through literature reviews and natural examples, an intervention is designed, and implemented to a pilot group in order to refine and redesign. The designed intervention is evaluated and in the last instance guidelines are prepared for distribution (De Vos and Strydom, 2011; Fraser, Richman, Galinsky, Day, 2009; Rothman & Thomas, 1994). Thus, intervention research as D & D entails identifying and analysing a problem in order to address the problem with a suitable intervention which is then applied and evaluated. AI
as a method differs from Intervention research as AI moves away from searching for the problem, while searching instead for what already works in a system. AI also follows steps; these steps are sequential and follow a process of data collection, where the follow-up phase builds on information gathered in the previous phases.

In this research AI is infused throughout the design of the study (Norum, 2008), utilising all four phases of the 4D Cycle. The process was implemented from the initial meetings (one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions) through to the final interaction. No outcomes had to be evaluated, therefore this study does not entail Intervention research. Data was collected by making use of the 4 D Cycle of AI, for all phases of the research. According to Reed (2007) using AI in research provides an opportunity for an open and supportive relationship between the researcher and the participants, where they feel safe to share their dreams and aspirations.

The procedure for this study entailed three main phases for data collection, referred to as RP1 RP2, RP3, each with its; own research question, aim, procedures, sample and participation, data collection and data analysis described in detail below.

The World Café Method (WCM) as manner of data collection is thought to encourage positive conversation in a system when used in conjunction with the AI (Holman, Devane & Cady, 2007). In order to facilitate appreciative inquiry and create a relaxed environment where mothers could share freely, the WCM was chosen to collect data from mothers in the context of an LSEE.

The WCM will be described next.

2.2 The World Café Method

The WCM was developed by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005) and is a strengths-based approach that has been developed to engage groups of people in a conversation where a topic that is important to the group is discussed (Bridger, 2015; Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005). WCM is based on a viewpoint
that no matter whom the individuals are, people have the capacity to work together (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005). As Bridger (2015) states the WCM is based on the understanding that conversation is the core process that drives personal, business and organisational life and is more than a method, a process or a technique. It is a way of thinking and being together sourced in a philosophy of conversational leadership. Even though the WCM was first introduced to larger groups within organisations, it is a user-friendly, flexible, creative and adaptive method proven effective in different circumstances. It is often used with participants faced with different challenges to create meaningful and cooperative dialogue around questions about these challenges (Schieffer, Isaacs & Gyllenpalm, 2004). WCM is aimed at producing multiple perspectives on a topic to support a group discussion, where the intention is to brainstorm and problem-solve (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005; Bunker & Alban, 2006; Lambe & Tan, 2008). WCM is used to generate input, share knowledge, stimulate innovative thinking and explore actions in settings such as business, education, government, community organisations, globally and internationally as well as in the collection of qualitative data (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005; Koen, Du Plessis & Koen, 2015). The WCM is also useful as a qualitative research method for exploring the viewpoints of a group of people (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2013). WCM can thus be seen as a valuable technique that facilitates communication about a particular topic that is either recent or a matter of concern to a group of people or a community.

2.2.1 The core design principles of the World Café

Since the WCM is flexible in its approach it can be modified in terms of context, number, purpose, location and question choice. Seven core design principles comprise the basic model; the setting of the context creating a hospitable space for participants, posing explorative questions on issues that matter regarding the theme, encouraging everyone’s contribution, cross-pollinating and connecting diverse perspectives, listening together for patterns, insights and deeper questions,
2.2.2 The World Café process

A Café host needs to be assigned to run a WCM. According to Schieffer, Isaacs and Gyllenpalm (2004) the Café host is not a facilitator or an expert consultant but rather the host fulfils specific duties such as welcoming, orientating participants regarding the process, managing the process and provide a structure to the conversation. The Café host instructs participants to; focus on what matters, contribute to their thinking, speak their mind and heart, listen in order to understand, connect ideas, listen together for insights and deeper questions, and play and draw on tablecloths (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005; The World Café Community Foundation, 2007). These practices enable the participants to support each other and to speak and listen and to be more aware of how other participants contribute to the collective whole.

Practical aspects such as the allocated time for table round discussions must to be addressed prior to commencement. Each round is between 20 and 30 minutes, in duration. During sessions the host is required to assist the group to focus on issues that really matter by posing the question to be explored around the table. The host should motivate everyone to participate, write, doodle or draw ideas on the tablecloths. Upon completion of the initial round, the host asks one person at a table to remain as the ‘table host’ while other members blend with other groups to form new groups at other tables. The World Café Community Foundation (2007) provides a hosting guide and the following procedures when running a WC. Four people are seated at a café style table to explore a question or issue that matters to them. Other participants are seated at other tables and explore similar questions at the same time. After an initial round participants are invited to change their tables and travel, carrying new insights that emerged from the prior dialogue into a newly formed group conversation. This process can be repeated two or three times and is followed by a whole-
group discussion where ideas, insights, actionable ideas and recommendations are shared. Guidelines are recommended by experts for hosting a World Café discussion.

### 2.2.3 Guidelines for hosting a World Café

Guidelines are provided for use in combination and in an order to assist in the fostering of shared dialogues, active engagement and to construct possibilities for action (Bridger, 2015) when hosting a WCM. The guidelines presented as seven design principles to be followed, (Bridger, 2015; Bunker & Alban, 2006; Brown, Homer & Isaacs, 2007;) are:

1. **Clarify the purpose:** The emphasis is on what the reason is for bringing the people together; for instance an issue at hand, and what the facilitator aims to achieve with regard to the issue and the discussion. Clarifying the purpose means that the facilitator plans and voices important elements such as; the goals for the session, who should be part of the conversation, themes that will be discussed and questions that are relevant.

2. **Create a hospitable space:** To create an environment that is non-threatening, safe and inviting, where participants feel comfortable to be themselves, to speak and share, as well as listen.

3. **Explore questions that matter:** Questions need to be framed, pre-planned by the facilitator to support a logical progression of discovery throughout several rounds of dialogue. Participants explore and brainstorm questions to find effective solutions.

4. **Encourage everyone’s contribution:** The facilitator needs to motivate everyone in the meeting to contribute their ideas and perspective.

5. **Connect diverse perspectives:** When moving between tables and questions, participants meet new people, contribute their thinking and exchanging perspectives for new insights.
6. **Listen to insights and share discoveries:** Through listening and paying attention to themes, thoughts and insights, a sense of being connected to a larger group is created.

7. **Share Collective Discoveries:** Conversations held at one table are connected to conversations at other tables, when participants travel to new tables and share what they have discovered previously. During a large group discussion following the table discussions the whole group needs to be made aware of collective discoveries.

### 2.2.4 The value of the World Café Method for this study

The WCM is regarded as a suitable method for data collection for a number of reasons:

#### 2.2.4.1 Value for participants

Persons from an LSEE environment are often isolated and have little or few opportunities to share anything about their lives, let alone their experiences with regard to their children and how they experience their relationship with their children. WCM is effective in settings where individuals are very conservative and need to participate with each other to hear different perspectives on a situation (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005; Bunker & Alban, 2006; Lambe & Tan, 2008). Due to the fact that WCM provides a relaxed meeting format (Lambe & Tan, 2008) where participants can share freely (Bunker & Alban, 2006), the WCM was seen to be a suitable method for participants from an LSEE to voice their experiences, share and interact. Mothers from an LSEE who participated in this study were thus granted an opportunity, during a focus group discussion, to participate to voice and share their experiences of their relationship with their children, and, at the same time listen to other participants’ experiences. WCM was found useful when exploring real life issues and questions and to engage people in authentic conversations, whether they have established a relationship with each other or meeting for the first time (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005; Bunker & Alban, 2006; Lambe & Tan, 2008). WCM is suitable and applicable to this study as it is the researchers’ experience that mothers from this LSEE are often embarrassed about their circumstances and do not always feel comfortable to
share information about the challenges and issues they experience. The WCM seemed suitable to create a comfortable environment where mothers could explore and share their real life experience regarding their relationship with their children.

2.2.4.2 Valuable data collection method

The WCM as a data collection method has been found to be even more effective when combined with traditional qualitative data collection techniques such as interviewing, drawing and narratives, as it allows participants to reflect and share (Koen, Du Plessis & Koen, 2015). The WCM has shown great potential as a qualitative data-collection technique since it has been found that it allows for a great amount of data to be collected within a short period of time. The WCM potentially creates meaningful interactions between the participants, to explore their experiences, as the WCM has the potential to provide a better understanding regarding participants’ unique experiences (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005). It seemed a suitable choice for this study as the needed interaction between participants may create understanding with regard to participants’ own experiences.

2.2.4.3 Value of the World Café Method for the research study

The value of the WCM for this research becomes evident and was twofold:

First, due to the WCM’s applicability for participants from LSEEs as this user friendly method creates a relaxed atmosphere where participants can easily share; it can be utilised with groups who are from various and diverse settings. WCM creates meaningful interactions between participants to understand their unique experiences and insights.

Second, it is valuable as a method of data collection, especially where the nature of the study is qualitative and focuses on describing mothers’ unique experiences.
In Part 1 the background for the study was indicated, in which the problems pertaining to international and global poverty, the challenges and impact of living in LSEEs on parenting and the mother-child relationship were discussed. The literature describes problems that mothers may experience; however, a gap exists in exploring the unique experiences of mothers’ relationship with their children from an appreciative perspective. Secondly, although literature is vast on the application of AI in various settings it is not discussed as a method in conjunction with WCM with a vulnerable population such as mothers living in LSEEs in South Africa.

From the research perspective, the experiences of mothers’ relationship with their children, living in LSEEs have not been described from an appreciative perspective. The question that guided the research is, What are the experiences of mothers, from an LSEE, of their relationship with their children from an appreciative perspective? The aim was to explore and describe experiences in a phenomenological way against Ecological Systems theory and positive psychology.

In the second part of this chapter the AI approach, is described against the backdrop of positive psychology chosen as part of applied research and combined with WCM as a data collection method. The aim was to explore mothers’ experiences with regard to their relationship with their children in an appreciative manner rather than focusing on problems existing in an LSEE. Following this, an overview will be provided of the research methodology, phases of the research and the structure of the research study.

3. Research Phases and Overview

The research was conducted in three sequential research phases referred to as RP1, RP2 and RP3. The process and sequence of how data was collected during all phases is described below. The overall research methodology for all three phases remained the same and was applicable to all phases. The research methodology followed and pertained to: the qualitative research design, the context of the research, sample and participants, selection criteria, data
analysis, ethics and trustworthiness. These will be described below. How the methodology was utilised and the procedures followed is described next.

3.1 Qualitative research design

The study followed a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research approach is utilised to study people or events in a natural setting (Fouché & Delport, 2011; Punch, 2014). This approach seemed to be appropriate for this study as the main focus of this research is to explore and describe the experiences of mothers’ relationship with their children in LSEEs in South Africa. A phenomenological methodology was employed, and according to Burns and Grove (2008) it is aimed at describing particular phenomena as lived experiences. The task of phenomenological research is to see the meaning or logic of a unique experience, for any participant, rather than to discover casual connections or patterns of correlation.

3.2 Context of the research

As previously described in Section A, poverty and living in LSEEs is a global and international issue. People living in an LSEE are often regarded as being from a lower socio-economic status. A lower socio-economic status is described as the level of family income, parent education, family structure and the neighbourhood in which the family lives (Bergin & Bergin, 2015; Msall, 2009; Okafor, 2012). In the context of this research, LSEE was defined mainly as an environment with limited income due to unemployment or low-earning employment, poor living conditions (overcrowding, small rooms, domestic violence, and alcohol abuse), poor education, elevated levels of early adolescent pregnancy and learning disabilities. In this context many individuals living in this specific area, in the East Rand area of Gauteng, received special education (remedial or vocational) as there are three schools in a radius of five kilometres that offer special education. This community is poor, surviving on low earning or “piece jobs” with high unemployment.
3.3 Background of the mother participants

It is important to describe the context that the participants come from carefully to be able to have a better understanding of the characteristics that are common to LSEEs, as described in Part 1, that people are mostly poor. Characteristics representative of the participants were the following: attending one of the special schools (vocational or remedial), having children at an early age (between 15 and 20), and having had between two and eight children. The mothers are financially dependent, rely on organisations and the school for food, support and clothing, and are mostly unemployed. Often the mother is either a single parent living on child grants or else, if in a relationship, their husbands or partners receive low incomes, have had several different cohabitating relationships over a short period of time. They tend to experience constant anxiety with little support. These mother participants live in the East Rand of Gauteng and they have children in middle childhood who attend a remedial school in the area.

3.4 Background of the researcher

The researcher has been working as a therapist at a government remedial school situated in the East Rand of Gauteng in an LSEE environment, for the past five years. The researcher works with learners with learning difficulties and epilepsy. Her work concerns the assessment of learners in order to determine placement as well as managing the welfare of learners.

3.5 Sample

The participants from the described context were purposefully selected from a government remedial school, which their children attend, situated in the East Rand of Gauteng. All the mother participants have access to primary health care clinics that are within walking distance of their houses. All houses have piped water, however, not all mother participants have access to
electricity. Although unemployment and illiteracy is common, the highest grade passed is Grade 12 (one mother), four mother participants passed Grade 10. The highest qualifications of the remaining three mothers were Grade 7, Grade 9 and Level 4 (NQF level at a special school). Four mothers were married, one widowed, two divorced and three cohabited. One mother who cohabited was divorced and the other one was still married but lived with another partner. Most mothers received either a child disability grant or a child grant from the government.

3.6 Participants

The selection of the participants took place by taking a portion of the population as representative of the total population who have particular characteristics (Denscombe, 2010). Purposeful sampling (Struwig & Stead, 2001) was initially used to select participants according to the criteria. Twelve mothers were purposefully selected, and participation was voluntary (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011). Of the twelve mothers who initially agreed to participate in the study, eight remained and four cancelled, because they were not available as they had to attend to unplanned personal circumstances.

3.7 Selection criteria

The mother participants were selected on the basis of the following criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

- Mothers from a low socio-economic environment;
- Mothers who were unemployed or had limited income;
- Mothers who had the ability to communicate either in Afrikaans or English;
- Mothers who volunteered to participate;
- Mothers who understood the meaning of informed and written consent;
- Mothers who had children in middle childhood attending the remedial school.
Exclusion criteria:

- Mothers who were earning an income by working full time and were not struggling financially;
- Demographic circumstances not representing the LSEE status;
- Mothers not having a child that attended the mainstream schools.

The research question was kept in mind when participants were selected. The rationale for the selection was that the literature identified the negative impact that living in LSEEs has on mothers' relationships with their children, but a gap was identified in exploring and describing their unique experiences from an appreciative perspective. The sample size was twelve mothers, but only eight participated. According to Cottrell and McKenzie (2011) a sample size in qualitative data allows for much more detailed data to be gathered. The rationale for the inclusion and exclusion criteria was that the research question would not be answered if the mothers were not from an LSEE. It has come to the attention of the researcher that mothers who have children in this particular school often voiced a need with regard to relating and parenting their children. As the WCM and AI process required mothers to interact with one another during the focus group discussions it was important that mothers could communicate with one another and would therefore be proficient in the same language. Mothers’ availability was important during this study as AI is a sequential cycle and mothers would need to attend all the group discussions.

3.8 Recruitment process

Participants were purposefully selected and the recruitment of mother participants was as follows: Educators of children attending the school where the researcher works identified mothers who would often voice and be negative towards their children. It also seemed as if stress related to the living conditions contributed towards the mothers often being impatient and negative towards their children. Teachers were seen as gatekeepers in this section of the research project and the researcher requested these mothers to become participants. Participants were contacted
telephonically. The research aim and process was explained. Mothers were advised that they would receive letters about the research. Mother participants were required to indicate on these letters if they would participate in the research, and were informed about their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Clarity regarding the benefits of the study was provided, which was that their participation would contribute to a better understanding of mothers’ experiences of their relationships with their children in an LSEE. The research would also provide valuable information to other professionals working in the field when providing support to mothers in similar settings. It was made clear to participants that there were no financial benefits to participating in the research. Mothers were then provided with the informed consent forms, and given a week to decide whether they wished to participate in the research project or not.

3.9 Data analysis

Textual data was studied after being transcribed using thematic analysis to identify, analyse and report patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). The six steps for thematic data analysis of Braun and Clarke (2013) were utilised for the two phases of data collection. In the first step the researcher familiarised herself with the data. This included reading and rereading the data to make sense of it and to note key interesting ideas. During step two, initial codes are generated by systematically coding interesting features of the data. According to Monette, Sullivan, DeJong and Hilton (2014:429) “coding is a process of categorising sections of the data; a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph. Coding is a way of seeing which parts of the data are connected to one another in terms of issue, concept, theme or hypothesis.” The third step involves searching for themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2013) themes are mostly driven by the data, rather than by theory. During step four themes are reviewed, which entails the revising of identified themes to ensure that they do not just link with one another but that there is a distinction between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In step five, themes are defined and named in order to identify the essence of each theme and to specify which data each theme represents (Braun &
Clarke, 2006). During the last step, step six, the report is produced where the researcher writes up the data in order to produce a coherent story about the data by relating back to the research question as well as the relevant literature (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thematic analysis was an appropriate analysis method for this study as it is used to develop a detailed descriptive account of a phenomenon, or aspect of a phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The steps provided by Braun and Clarke (2013) were used in this study as they offer clear steps and guidelines to utilise thematic analysis. This makes for high quality which ensures that all aspects are covered for the data analysis.

3.10 Ethical considerations

According to the Department of Health of the Republic of South Africa (further referred to as DHRSA, 2015) reviewing ethics in research is essential in order to: ensure that ethical and scientific standards are maintained; protect participants from potential harm by minimising harm; hold the researcher accountable for the research activity; and encourage strong social and ethical values. According to Gravetter and Forzano (in Strydom, 2005:56) researchers have two categories of ethical responsibility to both human and non-human participants. That is to adhere to the discipline of science, and to be honest and accurate when reporting the research. When conducting research in South Africa researchers are expected to adhere to the principles provided by the DHRSA (2015) which accentuate researcher responsibility and ethical conduct.

Ethical consent was obtained from the North West University (NW-00125-11-S1) and the School Governing Body (SGB). In this section the ethical principles that were considered are discussed as well as considerations regarding the vulnerable population that participated in this research. The vulnerable population is part of the ethical considerations.
3.10.1 Ethical principles

The broad ethical principles as prescribed by the DHRSA (2015) are: Beneficence and non-maleficence, distributive justice (equality), and respect for persons (dignity and autonomy). These principles are regarded as important and are discussed in relation to how they were applied in this study:

a.) Beneficence and non-maleficence (do no harm)

This principle refers to the ethical obligation of researchers to maximise the benefit and minimise the harm to participants (DHRSA, 2015). The document further states that this requires that the risk of possible harm posed by the research should be reasonable in the light of anticipated benefits. In order to do this the researcher should be competent to carry out the research and utilise a sound research design. To ensure that no harm will be done to the participants the researcher will respect participants and keep their shared experiences and stories confidential. Care and support will be provided to participants if they may be harmed by the research. Data was collected through focus group discussions as well as individual interviews in order to gather data relating to the mothers’ experiences of their relationships with their children. These discussions could possibly elicit emotions that might have been reminiscent of hurtful relationships. If emotions had emerged the researcher would have acknowledged these and referred the participant to an organisation that could render therapeutic services in the form of emotional therapy.

b.) Distributive justice (equality)

Equality refers to the fair balance of risk and benefit amongst all involved in the research; this included participants, communities as well as the broader South African society (DHRSA, 2015). The aim should be that the population from which the participants have been selected will benefit from the research even if this may only occur in the future.

c.) Respect for persons (dignity and autonomy)

Participants should be respected and vulnerable participants who lack the ability to make choices must be protected against harm from irresponsible choices. “Respect for persons
recognises that dignity, well-being and safety interests of all research participants are the primary concern in research that involved human participants (DHRSA, 2015:15).” As respect for the dignity, safety and well-being of the participants was the primary focus in this research, according to the National Department of Health Guidelines, participants were respected. Prior to the research, participants’ dignity and autonomy was taken into account (Monette, Sullivan, Dejong & Hilton 2014:50), by being provided with enough information to participate voluntarily, through letters as well as telephone calls inviting and informing participants. Participants were informed that the study would entail participation in individual interviews (only three participants) as well as interactive focus group discussions, where the experiences of their relationships with their children would be explored through questions posed. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

3.10.2 Key norms and standards

Nine specific norms and standards are provided by the DHRSA (2015) to ensure that ethical standards are maintained. A description of each and an explanation of how the standards were applied in the study are provided.

Relevance and value: “Research should be significant and responsive to the needs of the people of South Africa” (DHRSA, 2015:15). Needs of vulnerable populations, especially in poverty-stricken areas and such as mothers living in an LSEE, should be identified as it has an effect on the emotional wellbeing as well as on mothers’ parenting. The sample that participated in this study was all mothers from an LSEE. Since very little is known about mothers’ experiences of their relationships with their children, especially from an appreciative perspective in an LSEE, the exploration and description of these mothers’ experiences may provide insight into their lived experiences in order to provide information regarding the utilisation of AI in similar areas. It should be noted that research undertaken was non-therapeutic; thus it did not include interventions and would not hold direct benefit, but could produce positive generalisable results.
Scientific integrity: To be able to conform to scientific integrity, literature and previous studies that made use of sound design and methodology was reviewed to ensure reliable and valid data to address the research objectives. AI is a well-documented action research approach (Norum, 2008). It is said that the use of AI provides opportunities for the researcher to form open and supportive relationships with participants, making them feel safe to share their dreams and aspirations (Reed, 2007). Both AI the WCM were utilised. The WCM was not originally developed for data gathering in research but has been used in many qualitative research studies as method of data collection (Benade, 2013; Wagner, 2014). Clear guidelines on hosting a World Café are provided (Bridger, 2015; Brown, 2005; Bunker & Alban, 2006) which makes for easy application.

Role-player engagement: Key role players should be engaged at various stages of the research (DHRSA, 2015). Permission was granted by the School Governing Body as well as the principal of the school to conduct the research on the school premises. Supervisors provided assistance in the following: mediation of the research process (research phases), planning of focus group, discussions and individual interviews, forming appropriate questions for the different phases of AI for focus group discussions and individual interviews. A literature review was consulted as background for the type of questions to be asked. Shared experience in the facilitation of AI and WCM provided guidance during the thematic analysis.

Fair selection of participants: In the guidelines provided by the DHRSA (2015:16) it states that “persons should not be unfairly targeted for research merely on the basis of one or other of these grounds” referring to race, age, sexual orientation, disability, education, religious belief, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, conscience, belief, and or language. Even though participants were purposefully selected on the basis of the inclusion criteria, they voiced a need for support and would be able to benefit from the research and the results.

Fair balance of risks and benefits: When conducting research the benefits should always outweigh the risk for participants for the study to be considered ethical. Questions were formed to elicit positive experiences that mothers have, but due to their living situation, interactions in focus
group discussions with other mothers living in the same environment with constant exposure to stress, mothers might have shared experiences regarding current challenges that they faced. Mother participants were made aware of the possible risks associated with their participation in the study, the primary one being possible emotional distress that may be evoked when they shared experiences that may be painful. In addition to this, the participants were informed about the availability of psychosocial support services, if needed, as well as their right to terminate participation in the study at any time. Potential benefits from this research would be that mother participants would have the opportunity to have their voices heard and to share their experiences on their own terms. The benefits for the participants would be that they were given an opportunity to share their experiences of their relationships with their children with other mothers who faced the same challenges. The information provided by these participants may assist in the generalisation of knowledge, as well as in providing recommendations regarding the facilitation of AI in combination with the WCM in an LSEE to other professionals working in the same or similar areas, in order for other communities to benefit.

**Informed consent:** Informed consent must be voluntary and necessary information should be provided to participants in order for them to provide their consent. This means that the researcher had to engage with participants before they decided to participate in the research (Department of Health, 2006; DHRSA, 2015; Greeff, 2015). Informed consent was then obtained from mothers. During initial meetings with mothers verbal explanation regarding consent and what this entailed was provided. In addition to this, adequate information was also provided about the study in a language which the mothers were able to understand. The information was both written and verbal. Opportunity to ask questions, ensuring that they gave consent willingly without intimidation or undue influence was provided (Wasunna, Tegli & Ndebele, 2014). Care was taken not to pressurise mother participants to provide their consent. After the information had been provided, mothers were given a week to submit their written consent to participate in the study. This gave them the opportunity to think about the participation, discuss their decision with significant others and come back with questions if there were any uncertainties. In a focus group
confidentiality can never be guaranteed, and participants were informed of this in the initial focus group discussion with the researcher. Group rules, in a narrative (Appendix C) that was practical and easy for participants to associate with were created. This was to encourage the group to keep shared experiences and discussions confidential. Identifiable information obtained in this study about the participants or the school was kept confidential. This was achieved by using a number system rather than names, locking away records in a safe place, and only disclosing information with the permission of the participants or if required by law.

**On-going respect for participants, including privacy and confidentiality:**

Research participants have the right to privacy and confidentiality. This was managed during and after completion of the study (DHRSA, 2015). Participants were informed that their names would remain anonymous in order to protect their identity and information shared. Data from semi-structured interviews and focus groups would be stored by the researcher at her home in a locked cabinet until all data had been analysed. Only the researcher, researcher assistant and supervisors had access to recordings of interviews that will be destroyed five years after the completion and reporting of the research. All reports, personal information and findings will be stored on the researcher’s personal computer and guarded by a password restriction. After the reporting of research findings data will be stored on a USB memory stick and archived for the recommended period. The publication of the research results will be in scientific journals and presented at professional congresses. The results include findings and limitations of the study and identifying names and details of participants are not included in the reporting of the research.

**Researcher competence and expertise:** According to Greener (2011) when conducting research researchers should only undertake tasks which they are qualified to perform. The researcher holds a BA Honours degree in Psychology, is registered with the HPCSA as an Independent Psychometrist, has a Master’s degree in Gestalt Play therapy (which included a research study, thesis and publication of an article in an academic journal), and is also trained in Trauma Incident Reduction, Tomatis (Solisten practitioner), Edu-Kinesiology, Neuro feedback,
Interactional analysis, Play attention and Parent Effectiveness Training. She has nine years’ experience in working in a school environment and especially with vulnerable families. The BA degree in Psychology was combined with Social Work as second major. The researcher’s aim was to obtain practical experience of court procedures while working with vulnerable families and communities and abusive contexts. She also has knowledge of therapeutic tools and play therapy and in that regard is able to develop therapeutic tools, games and techniques for health care professionals to utilise in emotional therapy with children. Tools she has developed are widely used. The researcher conducts accredited training on therapeutic techniques, standardised tests and parents’ guidance for mental health professionals. Academic qualifications, technical experience, combined with involvement in vulnerable communities form part of the researcher’s scope of practice. Due to experience the researcher is qualified to conduct individual interviews and focus groups, and to ensure professional competence. She currently works in a multi-disciplinary team that consists of a psychologist, occupational therapists, speech therapists and social workers who provided necessary support when needed. She is the author of published journal articles, both academic and non-academic.

3.10.3 Ethical considerations of vulnerable populations

Vulnerable populations are referred to as those populations that are in need of special protection, such as women, children, the elderly, homeless, people with disabilities, and those living in poverty or low-income situations (Camp, 2014; DHRSA, 2015; Greeff, 2015). Women have been excluded from research for many years due to their vulnerability and this has resulted in a lack of data required to promote women’s health (DHRSA, 2015; Denny & Grady, 2008). The participants selected for this study are representatives of a vulnerable community, being women living in conditions of low income and having low intellectual abilities. The mother participants were seen as vulnerable as they live in an LSEE. They had limited income due to unemployment or low-earning employment. Many of them lived in poor conditions: overcrowding, small rooms, domestic
violence, and alcohol abuse, poor education, elevated levels of early adolescent pregnancy and learning disabilities. They had limited emotional support and opportunities to voice their needs and challenges that they faced, and showed a great need for assistance. According to Sieber and Tolich (2013) vulnerable populations should not be excluded in research because of their vulnerability as these populations are most in need of being served and understood. Many of these mothers were single mothers or cohabitating with partners who were not their children’s biological fathers. Thus their children would rely on their mothers for support. Due to the challenges in an LSEE as well as having learning difficulties mothers often felt overwhelmed and unsupported.

Due to their vulnerability it was important for the researcher to be sensitive to the needs of this population, and as suggested by Horn, Sleem and Ndebele (2014) she was actively engaged with these participants on an on-going basis during the research. In terms of classifying the level of harm that participants might experience it would be classified under low likelihood of trivial harm, and may be a temporary discomfort (Greef, 2015) experienced, if any. Informal group sessions with mothers continued after the research at their request to deal with other issues identified during the study. These pertained to issues such as the on-going need for mothers to meet in order to share similar experiences and provide guidelines on how to deal with adolescents and challenging behaviour in children. Further support was rendered to some of the mothers by referring them to welfare organisations to provide services and support where needed. The researcher identified and addressed the risks of harm or discomfort to which the participants may be exposed when participating in the research. The mothers’ need for a support system and an opportunity to share their experiences were addressed. By sharing experiences in the group and hearing about other mothers’ experiences challenges could be generalise and support group for mothers could be provided. Potential discomfort or harm identified was recalling traumatic or distressing events thus possibly being re-traumatised. Participants were entitled to receive free counselling from a counselling support group as needed. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the research at any time. The decision to include the particular participants was that the benefits of this study would outweigh the risks as the participants had the time to participate in the group and as was
found later showed the need to share their experiences and to be heard. At follow up interviews mothers expressed gratitude and relief at being able to share and become aware of others in similar situations. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were found to be more appropriate for participants as they allowed the mothers the freedom to share experiences regarding their relationships with their children who were important to them (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) rather than using in-depth open ended questions.

3.11 Trustworthiness

The criteria for ensuring trustworthiness; credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Heppner, Wampold & Kivlighan, 2008) were applied in this qualitative study.

*Credibility* represents the authenticity of the research findings derived from the experiences of the participants studied (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). In the initial planning of the research, the supervisor and co-supervisor, who are experienced researchers in psychology and education, were consulted on the proposed methodology. Through the engagement with participants in an informal manner in focus group discussions and individual interviews, a clear picture emerged of how mothers experienced their relationships with their children in an LSEE. Concrete and detailed descriptions of the research project were reported to the best of the researcher’s ability. Credibility was also ensured through triangulation, which according to Shenton, (2004) involves the use of different methods of data gathering such as observations, focus groups and individual interviews. During this study data was collected through three focus group discussions, five individual interviews as well as through observation, with the use of AI and WCM.

*Transferability* refers to the extent to which the findings of the research can be applied to a larger population (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2011). In this qualitative study the researcher aimed to provide detailed descriptions of the research process, participants, settings, and the time frame,
in an attempt to allow readers to make a sound decision about the degree to which any findings could be applicable to individuals in other settings (Hays & Singh, 2012).

*Dependability* relates to the importance of the researcher’s description of the changing context and circumstances fundamental to qualitative research (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2011). Data collection in multiple forms such as literature review, interviews, observations and the use of various methods in group sessions (Flick, 2009) was used to enhance the dependability of the study.

*Confirmability* denotes the extent to which others can confirm the research findings (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2011). To enhance confirmability potential areas of bias were identified and a professional statistician was consulted to assist with the analysis of raw data and the identification of core themes in the data. The researcher attempted to report data as directly as possible as stated by Hays and Singh (2012). To monitor the safety and competence during the data collection, the supervisor was part of the group activities and acted as an assistant.

4. **Research Phases**

The research was undertaken in three research phases, referred to R1, R2 and R3. Each research phase is based on a particular research question and aim, stemming from the overarching research question that guided the research. The main focus was to explore and describe the experiences of mothers from an LSEE in relating to their children, using an AI perspective. The 4D Cycle of AI is a sequential cycle where one phase builds on the next. In order to further explore the dream phase, data gathered in the discovery phase had to be analysed first, to enable participants to build on what had been explored and discovered during the discovery phase (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2011). The 4D cycle, consisting of the discovery, dream, destiny and design phases was used in the three phases of the research. In the first phase of the research, the *discovery phase* of AI was used. The aim was to explore and discover positive experience of mothers’ relationship with their children. The results were reported in an article ‘Mothers’ experiences of
their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment’. The second phase of the research used the following three dimensions of the 4D cycle, dream, design and destiny. The aim was to allow mothers to envision how they would like their relationships with their children to be in the future (dream). This provided them with an opportunity to design strategies to achieve their desirable goal (design), and to implement their action plans (destiny). The results and findings were reported in a second article ‘Experiences of mothers from low socio economic environments towards their dream, design and destiny process in their relationship with their children: An Appreciative Inquiry’. The third and last phase of the research, where the aim was to provide recommendations for other professionals working in similar environments regarding the use of AI in combination with WCM in LSEEs, are reported in a third article ‘Facilitating appreciative inquiry in combination with the World Café method in a low-socio economic environment’. The 4D cyclical AI process was thus completed during phase two. In the third phase data collected during phases 1 and 2 gave rise to findings regarding the facilitation of AI and WCM in LSEEs as it took place in this research.

An overview of the research phases are graphically presented below:

**Research Phase 1**

**Research Question:** What are the experiences of mothers, who are from an LSEE of their relationships with their children from an appreciative perspective?

**Aim:** To explore, discover and describe, phenomenologically, mothers’ experiences through the appreciative Discovery process, (the best of what is) of AI.

**Data collection method:** AI discovery phase: One focus group discussion and three individual interviews.

**Research Phase 2**

*In-depth instrumental case study*

**Research Question:** What are the experiences of mothers’ towards their dream, design and destiny process with regards to their relationships with their children?

**Aim:** To gain and understanding towards how mothers experience their DREAM (what might be, what is the world calling for, envisioning results) for and DESIGN (what should be the deal, co-constructing) their DESTINY (how to empower, improvise, sustain) processes of relationships with their children, through AI

**Data collection method:** AI dream and design phase: One focus group discussion through the WCM
Although the overreaching aim of the study was to explore and describe mothers’ experiences of their relationship with their children in LSEEs, some aspects of the research methodology regarding the study were unique to each phase. Similar to the three phases were the qualitative design, context of the research, population and sample selection, selection criteria, data analysis, ethics and trustworthiness. Each research phase had its own research question, aim, design, sample, and procedure and data collection method. The unique and differing aspects of each phase will now be elaborated on and the unique findings that emanated from each set of data of each phase are presented separately in three articles.

4.1 Research Phase One (RP1)

Unique aspect of phase 1 is the research question, objective and aim, design, procedure, sample and data collection method and findings.

The research question for RP1 was: How do mothers from an LSEE experience their relationship with their children? The objective for the first research phase was to explore, discover and describe mothers’ experiences of their relationships with their children in an LSEE through the appreciative discovery process (best of what is) of AI.
Procedure for research phase 1

Entry was gained through the School Governing Body and school principal (Appendix B), after which permission was obtained (Appendix A) from the Ethical Committee of the North West University (NWU 00125-11-S1) to undertake the study.

- Participant mothers were initially contacted through telephone calls, informing them about the topic of the study and inviting them to participate.
- During telephone calls prospective participants were informed that they would receive letters that provided information and details about the study, therefore no uncertainties could exist. A tear-off slip was attached to the document which indicated consent to participate. Letters were sent home with learners with the request to hand the letters to their mothers.
- After indicating consent to participate in the study on the returned forms, the mother participants were contacted a second time and given a choice to participate either in the one-on-one interviews (semi-structured), or focus group discussions (semi-structured). The mothers were advised of dates, times and place for three one-on-one interviews as well as one focus group discussion a week later.
- Before starting the interviews and focus group discussions, mother participations’ rights and roles within the study regarding participation and withdrawal were discussed. Mother participants were given an opportunity to ask questions.
- Written consent (Appendix C) was obtained before the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. The purpose of the study was thoroughly explained to the mothers.
- Demographic questionnaires were completed prior to starting the first interviews and focus group discussion. Questionnaires had to be completed by the researcher individually with each participant as some participants were not able to complete the forms on their own.
- Data collection started one week after information regarding the study was provided.
One-on-one interviewing took place in the researcher’s office with three mothers.

A week later the focus group discussion took place with the five remaining mothers in the school hall. These were not participants who had taken part in the one-on-one interviews.

**Data collection**

Data was collected in three ways, making use of a demographic questionnaire, one-on-one interviews and a focus group discussion.

The **demographic questionnaire** was used to provide background information on the context and living environment of the participants who were from a particular LSEE. Questions were based on literature and guidelines were provided by the research supervisor. Mother participants were assisted with the completion of the questionnaire to make sure all questions were understood.

Data was collected from **one-on-one interviews** using open-ended questionnaires (Greeff, 2011) with three participants.

A **focus group discussion** was undertaken with five mother participants who were not part of the one-on-one interview. Focus groups are understood to assist the qualitative researcher to acquire exploratory data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

The three overarching questions that were posed for individual interviews as well as during the focus group discussion were:

- Q1: “Please describe your relationship with your child/children?”
- Q2: “What do you and your child/children talk about?”
- Q3: “What influences your relationship with your child/children?”

Audio recordings of all conversations (interviews and focus group discussion) were later transcribed and analysed for data analysis in order to formulate questions for the next AI phases, namely the dream, design and destiny phases.
The recorded data was transcribed verbatim, coded and analysed accordingly.

Field notes contained observations of participants’ non-verbal reactions and possible activities or discussions that took place after leaving the focus group or individual interviews.

**Sample Selection: Participants**

As previously mentioned the mother participants were from a government remedial school, situated in the East Rand of Gauteng attended by their children. Twelve mothers were purposefully selected, and participation was voluntary (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011). Eight of the twelve mothers who initially agreed participated in the study, four cancelled, because they were not available as they had to attend to unplanned personal circumstances.

**Findings**

The findings of the first phase of the research are reported in Article 1: *Mothers’ relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment*.

The principles of transferability, discussed above, were applied, as it was applicable to all phases of the research.

4.2 Research Phase Two (RP2)

The research question for RP2 was: What are the experiences of mothers’ towards their dream, design and destiny processes with regards to their relationships with their children in an LSEE? The objective for the second research phase was to gain an understanding of how mothers experience their dream (what might be, what is the world calling for, envisioning results) in order to design (what should be the deal, co-constructing) their destiny (how to empower, improvise, sustain) of their relationships with their children, through AI (described phenomenologically).

A single instrumental case study design was utilised in this study in order to gain knowledge about a specific social issue (Fouché & Schurink, 2011). According to Punch (2014) an instrumental case study is utilised when a particular case is examined and in order to provide
insight into a specific phenomenon, generalisations, or to refine or build a theory, for a person, specific group, occupation, department or organisation. The purpose is more likely to be known in advance and designed around established theory and methods. In this study the researcher wanted to gain knowledge of how mothers experience their relationship with their children in an LSEE. She specifically wanted to find out how they dream about their relationship, how they design this dream and implement their plans (destiny phase). The intention of the researcher regarding the single case study was to develop an in-depth description of this particular case. The closeness of the case study to the real situation allows for a view of the reality as experienced by these mothers.

Procedure

First focus group discussion

- Mothers who participated (individually and in group) in the first phase were again invited via telephone calls and letters to attend one focus group.
- Letters were sent home with learners, indicating time, date and place of the focus group discussion.
- The second focus group was held in a classroom away from other school activities to ensure a disturbance free environment.
- Initially the WCM process and how it works was explained and questions about any uncertainties were answered.

Second focus group and individual interviews:

- Mothers who participated in individual interviews during the first phase were invited to attend a second follow-up interview individually at the school.
- Telephone calls were made to mothers as well as letters sent home with learners in order to provide details regarding the dates and times of the individual interviews and focus group discussion.
- Two of the three initial mother participants attended the individual interview, as the third mother withdrew from the study due to logistical issues.
- Mothers who participated in the focus group discussions in the first phase were again invited to attend this focus group discussion at the school.
- Individual interviews were held in the researcher's office and the focus group discussion in a classroom free from disturbances.
- The recorded data from research phase 2 was transcribed verbatim, coded and analysed and to utilise the information to build on findings obtained during phase 2.

**Sample and participation**

- Two focus group discussions as well as two individual interviews were conducted, with the same mothers that participated in the first research phase.
- There were eight mothers who participated in the first focus group discussion. This group size allowed the researcher to use the WCM and each mother could participate fully (4 mothers at a table), and still produce a range of responses (Greeff, 2011).
- During the second focus group discussions five mothers participated.
- In the same week that the focus group discussion were held two mother participated in follow up one-to-one interviews.

**Data collection**

Two focus group discussions were held during the second research phase, focus group A and focus group B. Focus groups are known to provide an opportunity for the observation of interactions; access verbal expressions of views, opinions, experiences and attitudes; can produce quick results (Levers, 2009, p. 383).

Data for the focus group A was collected from eight mothers, by means of the WCM, and AI. Discussions were around exploring the process of the dream and design phase of AI, how mother envisioned their desired future with regards to their relationship with their children in order
to co-constructing this desired future. The group was divided into two groups of four, in order to facilitate the WCM. De Vries (1995, p. 387) states that “multiple focus groups provide useful means of determining what is initially going on and later in checking what the results of interventions have been.” Notes from mothers, written on paper table cloths, in response to questions asked about how they experienced their relationships with their children, were collected during the WCM.

The questions that were posed to the participants during focus group A were:

- Q1: “How would you like (dream) your relationship with your child/children should be?”
- Q2: “What can you do to envision this dream?”

During the focus group B and individual interviews, the destiny and final phase, of AI, was implemented, in order for mothers to implement strategies obtained through discussions in the design phase, in order to make the desired future regarding their relationship with their children a reality.

However, only two individual interviews were conducted, as one of the mother participants could not attend the second and third phase of the research.

The three overarching questions that were posed to the participants during the individual interviews as well as in the focus group discussion, were the same as those posed to mothers in RP1:

- Q1: “How would you describe your relationship with your child/children?”
- Q2: “What do you and your child/children talk about?”
- Q3: “What influences your relationship with your child/children?”
- Q4: “Tell me about your experience of the group sessions?”

These questions were asked in order to provide descriptions and a better understanding, from an appreciative perspective, of how mothers experienced their relationship with their children in an LSEE.
**Data analysis**

Data was analysed to determine what mothers’ experiences were of their dreams, design and destiny processes with regards to their relationship with their children. The data was again thematically analysed according to the six steps (Braun & Clark, 2006). Visual data (notes written on the paper table clothes as written text of mothers’ experiences with their children and responses to posed questions) was analysed, with audio recordings that were transcribed and analysed.

**Findings**

The findings of the second phase of the research are reported in Article 2: *Towards an understanding of mothers' dream, design and destiny processes in their relationship with their children in LSEE: An appreciative inquiry*.

**4.3 Research Phase Three (RP3)**

The research question for this phase was: How can AI and WCM be facilitated in LSEE? The aim was to make recommendations regarding the facilitation of AI and WCM in an LSEE.

**Data collection:**

A literature study was conducted by searching and integrating literature on the use of AI and WCM in communities, with especial reference to rural and poor communities. Data collected from the focus group discussions and individual interviews in RP1 and RP2 was utilised.

**Findings**

The findings of the second phase of the research are reported in Article 3: *Facilitating Appreciative Inquiry in combination with the World Café Method in a low socio economic environment*. 

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5. **Summary and Conclusion**

The three major contributions that this study makes are:

1. Discovery of the experiences of mothers’ relationships with their children in an LSEE, in SA (the discovery process of AI).
2. Discovery of dream, design and destiny of mothers in an LSEE regarding their relationship with their children.
3. Provision of recommendations regarding the facilitation of AI in combination with the WCM in an LSEE. Providing a literature review and recommendations regarding the facilitation of AI and WCM in LSEEs.

6. **Structure of the Research**

The article-format was followed and included:

- Section A: Part 1: Orientation to the research
  
  Part 2: Methodology (Empirical investigation)

- Section B: Articles

This study will be viewed against phenomenological framework, as described in:

- Article 1: Mothers’ relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment
- Article 2: Towards an understanding of mothers dream, design and destiny processes in their relationship with their children in LSEE: An appreciative inquiry
- Article 3: Facilitating Appreciative Inquiry in combination with the World Café Method in a low socio economic environment

- Section C: Summary, Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations
- Complete list of references
In Section B that follows, the research findings will be presented in three articles, each presented and written in the format required for the prospective academic journals.
References


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development and treatment of girlhood aggression (pp. 75-95). USA: Canada: Psychology Press.


Section B

Article 1

Mothers’ relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment.

Submitted for possible publication in the Journal of Psychology in Africa (Appendix E)
Guidelines for authors: Journal of Psychology in Africa

Instructions to authors

The Journal of Psychology in Africa includes original articles, review articles, book reviews, commentaries, special issues, case analyses, reports, special announcements, etc. Contributions should attempt a synthesis of local and universal methodologies and applications. Specifically, manuscripts should: 1) Combine quantitative and qualitative data, 2) Take a systematic qualitative or ethnographic approach, 3) Use an original and creative methodological approach, 4) Address an important but overlooked topic, and 5) Present new theoretical or conceptual ideas. Also, all papers must show an awareness of the cultural context of the research questions asked, the measures used, and the results obtained. Finally the papers should be practical, based on local experience, and applicable to crucial development efforts in key areas of psychology.

Manuscripts

Manuscripts should be submitted in English. The manuscripts should be typewritten and double-spaced, with wide margins, using one side of the page only. Manuscripts should conform to the publication guidelines of the latest edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) publication manual of instructions for authors.

Submission

Manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Psychology in Africa, Elias Mpofu, PhD., DEd, CRC, Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney, Cumberland Campus, East Street, PO Box 170 Lidcombe NSW 1825, Australia, email: elias.mpofu@sydney.edu.au. We encourage authors to submit manuscripts via e-mail, in MS Word, but we also require two hard copies of any e-mail submission. Before submitting a manuscript, authors should peruse and consult a recent issue of the Journal of Psychology in Africa for general layout and style. Manuscripts should conform to the publication guidelines of
the latest edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) publication manual of instructions for authors.

**Manuscript format**

All pages must be numbered consecutively, including those containing the references, tables and figures. The typescript of a manuscript should be arranged as follows:

- **Title**: this should be brief, sufficiently informative for retrieval by automatic searching techniques and should contain important key-words (preferably <13 words).
- **Author(s) and Address(es) of author(s)**: The corresponding author must be indicated. The author’s respective addresses where the work was done must be indicated. An e-mail address, telephone number and fax number for the corresponding author must be provided.
- **Abstract**: Articles and abstracts must be in English. Submission of abstracts translated to French, Portuguese and/ or Spanish is encouraged. For data-based contributions, the abstract should be structured as follows: *Objective* - the primary purpose of the paper, *Method* - data source, participants, design, measures, data analysis, *Results* - key findings, implications, future directions and *Conclusions* - in relation to the research questions and theory development. For all other contributions (except editorials, book reviews, special announcements) the abstract must be a concise statement of the content of the paper. Abstracts must not exceed 150 words. The statement of the abstract should summarise the information presented in the paper but should not include references.
- **Text**:
  1. Do not align text using spaces or tabs in references. Use one of the following:
     (a) use CTRL-T in Word 2007 to generate a hanging indent; or
     (b) MS Word allows author to define a style (e.g., reference) that will create the correct formatting.
  2. Per APA guide-lines, only one space should follow any punctuation.
(3) Do not insert spaces at the beginning or end of paragraphs.

(4) Do not use colour in text.

- **Tables**: Tables should be either included at the end of the manuscript or as a separate file. Indicate the correct placement by indicating the insertion point in brackets, e.g., `<Inset Table 1 approximately here>`. Tables should be provided as either tab-delimited text or as a MS Word table (One item/cell). Font for tables should be Helvetica text to maintain consistency.

- **Figures/Graphs/Photos**: Figures, graphs and photos should be provided in graphic format (either JPG or TIF) with a separate file for each figure, graph or photo. Indicate the correct placement by indicating the insertion point in brackets e.g., `<Inset Figure 1 approximately here>`. Provide the title for the item and any notes that should appear at bottom of item in the manuscript text. Items should be cropped to avoid the appearance of superfluous white space around items. Text on figures and graphs should be Helvetica to maintain consistency. Figures must not repeat data presented in the text or tables. Figures should be planned to appear to a maximum final width of either 80 or 175mm (3.5 or 7.0”). Complicated symbols or patterns must be avoided. Graphs and histograms should preferably be two-dimensional and scale marks provided. All lines should be black but not too heavy or thick (including boxes). Colour only in photos or colour sensitive graphic illustrations. Extra charges will be levied for colour printing.

**Referencing**

Referencing style should follow latest edition of the APA manual of instructions for authors.

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  References should be cited as per the examples below:

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**Book**


**Edited book**


**Chapter in a book**

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Newspaper article

(unsigned)


Unpublished thesis


Conference paper


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MOTHERS’ RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR CHILDREN IN A LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

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DECLARATION:

This manuscript has been edited for language correctness, has not been published previously, and is not under simultaneous review elsewhere.
Mothers’ experience of their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry; low socio-economic environment; mother–child relationship; experiences; positive perspective

Abstract

The study explored, through the discovery phase of appreciative inquiry (AI), the experiences of mothers’ relationships with their children in a low socio-economic environment (LSEE). A qualitative phenomenological approach was followed using a positive psychology paradigm. Eight mothers from an LSEE in the East Rand of Gauteng participated. Three individual interviews were conducted, these were followed by one focus group interview with five mothers in which demographic questionnaire were completed and three open-ended questions were posed. Mothers reported affection towards their children and closer relationships when hardships were shared. Communication between mothers and children were described to be around day-to-day events, but when there was physical touch more meaningful conversations where shared. Mothers clearly expressed challenges dealing with their adolescent children’s behaviours. Most participants doubted their competency to be good mothers. The discovery phase of AI created an increased awareness of the importance of the mothers’ relationships with their children. This motivated mothers to share positive experiences about their children.

Introduction

Children have various relationships in their lives but the one with the mother is unique, intimate and fundamental for forming others that follow (Lehman, 2005; Sigelman & Rider, 2009). The relationship between mother and child, which starts in infancy and progresses into childhood, is important for a child’s social, emotional and personality development (Bornstein & Lamb, 2005; Reis & Sprecher, 2009). Posada (2008) reports that the interactions between mothers and their
children remain important: as children grow older, interactions continue to feed the mother–child relationship as it develops. Furthermore, to Huebner, Gilman and Suldo (2006) the quality of the parent–child relationship (which includes the mother–child relationship) is one of the strongest interpreters of happiness during youth. The quality of the mother–child relationships is also influenced by the broader socio-economic environment.

**Problem statement**

Socio-economic status is described in terms of the level of family income, parent education, family structure and the neighbourhood in which the family lives (Okafor, 2012). It can also be defined as ‘one’s social position as well as the privileges and prestige from access to economic and social resources’ (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005:372). Berns (2010) describes people with low socio-economic status as poorly educated and with low incomes from skilled or semi-skilled jobs. While specific statistics on the number of people living in LSEEs in South Africa are not available, various statistics on poverty are, and about 45,5% of South Africans were living below the poverty line in 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). For the purpose here an LSEE was defined as an environment with limited income or low-earning employment, poor living conditions (overcrowding, small rooms, domestic violence, and alcohol abuse), poor education, elevated levels of early adolescent pregnancy and learning disability.

The issue is that a low socio economic environment impacts on the relationship between parents and children as it is associated with greater stress, depression in parents, disadvantaged living conditions, uninvolved and inconsistent parenting (Conger & Conger, 2002). Economic pressure on parents can lead to emotional distress and problematic forms of parenting for example inconsistent discipline, parents being disengaged and punitive. Most mothers in this study also have not completed their formal education or received special education, and their children tend to share equivalent levels of schooling experience. Low socio-economic status is correlated with learning difficulties, such as ‘greater impulsivity; lower intelligence; lower parental educational levels; families with five children or more; poor home
climate; lack of variety of sensory stimuli; minimal encouragement of scholastic success within the home, and less time spent on homework tasks’. Many of the children living in LSEE also display behavioural challenges and are associated with behavioural problems, resulting in parents struggling to discipline them; owing to the fact that they often get involved in fights, and have a poor attention span, all of which adversely affect their school performance (Bush & Peterson, 2013: p 279).

The emotional state of mothers also contributes to the quality of the mother–child relationship. Mothers who suffer from depression and anxiety have been found to be withdrawn, feel incompetent as parents, have little energy for parenting and are more critical in interactions with their children (Kelley, 2008; O’Reilly, 2010). According to Uddin (2011), depression is often the result of poverty and is accompanied by a negative attitude to life, which in turn can undermine relationships between mothers and their children.

This study explored the experiences of mothers from a positive psychology perspective through Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which endeavours to recognise and emphasise what is going right in life, shifting attention away from preoccupation with the negative. This is also a way to restore negative experiences by focusing on positive aspects such as talents, traits, characteristics, coping skills, of individuals, groups and their environments, even though their circumstances might be difficult (Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). AI ‘is a positive, strength-based, participatory methodology that seeks to discover the best in people and their organizations’ (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010:2). The AI belief and philosophy is that all living systems already have something that works well, where success, satisfaction and positives are experienced (Lewis, 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

The research question pertained to what the experiences of mothers from LSEE regarding their relationships with their children are. The goal of the study was to utilise AI in an attempt to discover through the appreciative discovery process- (the best of what is) and
describe existing experiences that mothers encounter in their relationships with their children in the context of an LSEE, interpreting relationships from a positive psychology perspective.

Using AI is of relevance since it first focuses on understanding unique experiences, here first to provide more insight about mothers' unique qualities and strengths and second, to create awareness on how existing strengths (positive) contribute to mothers' relationship with their children, although from a community with limited resources, ultimately to support in building on these existing qualities leading to more reciprocal positive relationships. Insight gained could be useful to other professionals providing support in similar environments.

Method

Research design

The present study used a qualitative phenomenological research approach, focusing on how life is experienced (Denscombe, 2010), to gain a better understanding of the experiences, as perceived by mothers from an LSEE, of their relationships with their children within their unique context. According to Hall (2008) basic and applied research is complementary, the advancement of knowledge and the solution of problems are both scientific necessities. Basic research refers to empirical observation aimed at extending knowledge of the discipline and formulating theory rather than solving immediate problems. Applied research is ‘the scientific planning of induced change in a troublesome situation’ (Monette, Sullivan, DeJong & Hilton, 2014:429). A basic and applied approach was used through AI as a method, to firstly gain basic knowledge of mothers' experiences, and secondly to apply information gained in a practical way in a troublesome situation.
Participants and Setting

A total of eight mothers in an LSEE within the East Rand of Gauteng participated. All were proficient in Afrikaans; had children in middle childhood, attending the same special education school in this area. Five were unemployed and three worked part time in a low income job. Participants were purposively selected on the basis of willingness. Participating mothers’ demographic information is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of mother participants’ demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
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<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education (highest level)</td>
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<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
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<td>Level* 4</td>
<td>Grade 10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Cohabitating*</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married &amp; cohabitating*</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Divorced &amp; cohabitating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of individuals in household</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Part time</td>
<td>Part time</td>
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<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>Pension None CDG* &amp; CG*</td>
<td>CG</td>
<td>DCG</td>
<td>CG</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 8

* Grade: “means that part of an educational programme which a learner may complete in one school year” (South African Schools Act. 1996, Act No. 84 of 1996).
* Level 4: Refers to NQF level in special education.
* Cohabitating: Living with partner but not married.
* Married & cohabitating: Not divorced and living with new partner.
*CDG: Child Disability Grant
*CG: Child Grant

Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the North West University’s ethics committee (ethics number NW-00125-11-S1) and written informed consent was obtained from participants, the children’s school governing body and the school principal. Mothers were invited through telephone calls, informing them about the study and inviting them to participate, informing them
to expect information/ letters in writing with a tear off slip, to indicate willingness to participate. Only 10 mothers indicated that they wanted to participate. Those willing were then contacted a second time; individual meetings were scheduled with three mothers, and a week later a focus group was scheduled with the remaining seven participants. On the scheduled day for the focus group two participants indicated that they could not participate owing to personal issues, therefore only five attended.

**Data Collection**

This article reports on an initial exploratory study (basic research) that is part of a larger study (applied research) in which, using the phenomenological approach, aimed to discover what and how mothers in the sample, experience their relationships with their children. The principle outlined by Patton (1990, p. 290) was followed: ‘The purpose of qualitative interviewing is to understand how the subjects studied see the world, to learn their terminology and judgements, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences…’

Data were first collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with three of the participants; a week later the remaining five participated in a focus group discussion. Participants were assisted in completing a demographic questionnaire to record their living conditions. The three questions posed in the individual interviews and focus group discussions were: “How would you describe your relationship with your child/children?” (Q1); “What do you and your child/children talk about?” (Q2); “What influences your relationship with your child/children?” (Q3).

**Data Analysis**

Data collected during the focus group discussions and individual interviews where thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78) in six steps (reading, coding, looking for and naming and reviewing themes and writing up data to produce and interpret a coherent story). The flexible
usefulness of the tool provides rich, compound and comprehensive material, developing a detailed descriptive account of an aspect of a phenomenon.

Credibility was ensured by the researcher’s prolonged engagement with the community as therapist and with the participants individually. Transferability was accommodated by providing detailed descriptions of the research process, participants, setting and timeframe, so as to enable readers to decide about the extent to which any of the findings may be applicable to individuals in other settings (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Findings

Two main themes, supported by subthemes emerged: 1) Affectionate, appreciative and reciprocal relationships; and 2) Matters influencing the relationship, presented in Table 2. Findings also pertained to AI as method (Theme 3).

Table 2: Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>SUBTHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affectionate, appreciative and reciprocal relationship</td>
<td>Expressions of love and affection.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication via physical contact eliciting closeness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unexpected show of affection.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different loving relationship with each child.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communication: frequency, quality, topics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 2:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matters that Influence relationships</td>
<td>Relationship viewed in terms of good mothering and self-perception- negative spiral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children and adolescent disobedient behaviour.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sharing of hardships- positive spiral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation of mothers in AI</td>
<td>Preferred way of participating: Focus group discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opened up, shared personal hardships moved from own problems to listening, to offering help and support and follow up.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Theme 1: Affectionate, appreciative and reciprocal relationship**

*Expressions of love and affection.* When mothers were requested to describe their relationships with their children they expressed strong affection and that they would do anything for their children. A mother demonstrated this by stating what she had done to try to protect:

...they are my everything. Our relationship is good, we understand one another. I'll give my world to them. (P, 5, 6)

...I really love and care for my children very much. I even hid in a veld once with my children. (P5)

*Communication via physical contact eliciting closeness.* Three mothers stated that mutual communication tends to take place during times where there was some sort of closeness or physical contact, often initiated by the child, especially when the child is worried about something:

At night before bedtime...we will lie and talk. (P7)

Many times I will sit in the bath and my daughter will ask if she can bath with me. I will comb her hair and she will tell me mom, today this and this happened at school. (P2)

My son will tell me that he wants to massage my back...then he says something happened at school today. (P3)

*Unexpected show of affection.* Two mothers felt that their children’s sudden show of affection, which happens regularly, make them feel closer to their children:

...if they just suddenly give you a hug and tell you that they love you. (P2)
...my oldest child normally writes a letter to tell me he is sorry. He puts it on the fridge so that I see it when I cook. Afterward I give him a hug and he is very happy... (P7)

*Different loving relationship with each child.* Mothers have a different, however loving relationship with each child; it also differs according to gender and birth order:

I have a good relationship with my children, especially with my daughter, she usually looks at the mother and the boys look at their father. (P1)

My oldest son and I have a very special relationship…it differs from that with my daughter and youngest child. (P3)

Interactions are consistent with literature, which suggests that parents (including mothers) have a different relationship with each of their children, treat them differently according to their ages, cognitive levels, personality characteristics, gender, or other personal experience (Bornstein, 2005).

*Communication: frequency, quality, topics.* In order to elicit proper communication time needs to be spent together:

You have to spend time with your children; I know it is hard for mothers that work. (P3)

Conversations relate to general topics, most mothers did not distinguish, and stated that they talk about everything, everyday activities and especially regarding school and series on television:

…it does not matter what. (P6)

…daily things that happened at school and with them, or on taxi, what they did, what I did and what dad did at work. (P8)
Overall it seemed as if the focus of mothers’ communication pertained more to daily happenings, regarding children’s successes and challenges they encounter at school.

**Theme 2: Matters that influence relationships**

Of significance is that relationships are influenced positively and negatively.

*Relationship viewed in terms of good mothering and self-perception- negative spiral.* Four mothers described their success as parents to be threefold: in terms of the quality of motherhood, what they do for their children and whether and how they are able to discipline:

…I really try to do the best for my children. (P1)

…my relationship with my children is very nice, I talk once, the second time then I start giving hidings and then they jump. (P2)

A woman mentioned that she grew up in an orphanage, therefore without a mother as a role model. Mothers mentioned fears of failing as a mother, which could possibly lead to the welfare removing their children; due to being jobless not being able to provide for their children with some of their basic needs (food, bath and clothes). It was found that fears of losing guardianship prohibit mothers from applying for grants. Mothers felt unsure about their ability to be effective mothers and seemed to lack self-esteem and questioned themselves.

*Children and adolescent disobedient behaviour.* When children are ‘naughty’ it affects the relationship:

…they should not be around me…I am angry with them. (P2)

…his temper… (P6)

…when she doesn’t listen. (P7)
One woman’s child displayed behavioural problems and she felt that this had a very negative impact on their relationship:

…during the time when he wanted to burn the outside room, or tried to, his two brothers was in the room and since then I could not stand him, I just wanted to send him away. (P4)

Even though disruptive behaviour was viewed as negatively influencing their relationship and leaving mothers angry or resentful towards their children, they shared that at times they would feel challenged by their children’s behaviour but still felt close to them:

They make me very mad, I can’t explain it, there is nothing that they can do, they are close to me. (P6)

Participants found interactions with their children in adolescence years especially challenging:

…the relationship with my eldest child is up and down. (P7)

…my eldest son is a bit of a rebel at the moment, he is in his teenager stage. (P2)

**Sharing of hardships- positive spiral.** Some mothers experienced their children as support through difficult and tough times endured together, which seemed to define and strengthen, thus positively influence their relationship and describing how her children would motivate her to persevere:

I am very attached to my children and we have been through tough times together. (P5)

…he is my blue eyed boy, I don’t know if it is because he was my first or if it is because he had so much drama with his father…

A participant described how her child had helped her to pull through during times:
…I had a ‘depression attack’… oh mommy don’t worry…he always tried to comfort me…if it wasn’t for my children I wouldn’t have gotten out. (P2)

Discussion of the findings

What is of significance is that, in spite of hardships, mothers that feel greatly affectionate towards their children, are able to share positive stories, how they love each child, and express the need to upkeep communication and nurture relationship by spending quality time. Mothers appreciate reciprocal affection. In order for relationships to grow regular communication is required, and can weaken without. Even though most of the conversation between mothers and children were about day to day activities, mothers experience communication on a deeper level when ‘triggered’ by physical touch, either by the parent or child. Touching is associated with feelings of emotional and physical well-being (Lederman, 2005). It could be argued that when a sense of closeness and touch (physical interaction) is presented between the mother and child, the child finds it easier to discuss problems on the foreground. By touching the child or the mother ensures full attention. This finding however seems to be inconsistent with literature that states that mothers in poverty are less likely to show affection towards their children, and communicate ineffectively.

Even though mothers experienced much stress and frustrations it became evident that a disproportionate co-dependence on their children, through their expressions of appreciation is experienced. The fact that children endure similar hardships elicits understanding within the child. Little research has been reported describing dependence on children in these particular circumstances. It could be argued that these mothers feel motivated and inspired by children to persevere during difficult times, and due to a lack of support they rely on each other.

What influences a relationship negatively is that mothers seemed to experience much self-doubt regarding parenting skills which is consistent with literature. Literature states that factors contributing to self-doubt experienced by mothers in poverty are related to their inability to provide and care for their children, feelings of failing as a parent and the depression and
anxiety associated with poverty, leading to being more critical in their parenting and having low energy to parent (Kelley, 2008). Mothers in this study tended to be disengaged, feeling overwhelmed, low in mood, frustrated, stressed and pressured from living in LSEE. Aspects such as lack of access to resources, poor home environment; unemployment; poor communication skills; lack of knowledge about parenting skills; disabilities; depressions and unwanted or unplanned pregnancies have a great impact on parenting (O'Reilly, 2010), causing more stress and frustration. Mothers battle with self-acceptance and inner conflict about their responsibilities, experiencing shortcomings, admitting towards feeling ashamed, and fear of being criticized.

Contributing towards feelings of self-doubt was directly related to children’s behaviour and their view of being a successful parent. Mothers felt that it was important to be viewed in a positive light by society for instance to be viewed as a ‘good’ parent. Adolescents and children who display behavioural disorders pose even a greater challenge which contributes to mothers’ stress and frustration. Literature reveals that mothers in general seem to experience their relationship with their children as good if they viewed themselves as being good mothers, which also involves being directive, socialising and guiding children, monitoring and controlling their activities to ensure children behave well, perform effectively and fit into society (Ribbens, 1994). Mothers from LSEE experience the same stressors regarding parenting of adolescence but elicit greater difficulty in parenting these adolescents as well as children displaying behavioural challenges. Parents living in poverty have been connected to decreased attentiveness and responsive parenting and children growing up in poverty have a greater risk in displaying behavioural and emotional challenges (Linver, Brooks-Gunn & Kohen, 2002). Adolescents are more likely to display more challenging behaviour, due to the poverty-related stressors that hampers social and emotional development (Wolff, Wadsworth & Santiago, 2012). It can be argued that mothers in LSEE already find parenting in general challenging and adolescent behaviour seem to cause extra stress and pressure, which contributes to an inability to cope.
Poverty weakens the ability to cope with problems and stressors as well as the ability to utilise numerous types of social support (Coiro, 2001).

Significant is that in discussions, mothers constantly reverted back to their own childhood, indicating unresolved issues. Discussions were inundated with mother role models that did not exist and this has a definite influence on their own perception of motherhood. Attachment history and trauma history has a direct influence on the quality of the parent-child relationship that mothers share with their own children (Riser, 2009).

The sharing of new knowledge gained can be useful to professionals and organisations when planning interventions regarding mother—child relationships in similar settings. Support groups for mothers from LSEE, as mothers expressed a need for, could create awareness and development of strengths. The ultimate aim would be to contribute towards strengthening the family as a unit, as confidence in parenting could increase feelings of successful and assertive parenting, and ultimately lead to a closer bond with their children, being a role model to their children. According to Riser (2009) how parents adapt to the stress of poverty will influence how family poverty will influence children. If parents are able to maintain positive parenting behaviours, despite added stress, the negative effects of poverty might be buffered for the child. The application of AI is recommended as a supportive method for the enhancement of positive strengths in a context such as LSEE, creating an awareness of existing strengths and eagerness and excitement to build on these strengths and parental skills.

The term ‘relationship’ was difficult to conceptualise by the participants. The concept was too complex and understood very broadly: once explained, mothers seemed more able to express their perceptions of their experiences. Contextual factors (Fiese & Winter, 2008) contribute towards an inability to verbalise needs and pinpoint challenges. What must be kept in mind is that mothers who are from an LSEE have very little or no access to support in assisting to address challenges they experience, and when granted an opportunity to voice needs, they feel overwhelmed.
In the past women were regarded as too vulnerable, therefore excluded from research. Sieber and Tolich (2013) however, state that women as vulnerable populations are most in need of being served and understood. The need for support in elevating stress and trauma in LSEE communities seems great, not only with regards to mothers’ emotional well-being and outlook on life, but also in the sense that mothers’ emotional states have a direct impact on their ability to parent and on the quality of their relationship with their children (Kelley, 2008; Uddin, 2011; O’Reilly, 2010).

It was significant that mothers participated more during the focus group discussions than in individual interviews. According to Babbie and Mouton (2010), during focus group discussions the group dynamics often brings out aspects or topics that would not have emerged during individual interviews. Mothers were given an opportunity to share their views and also hear views of others, thus refining their own views in light of what they have heard giving way for more discussion and insight in the topic (Hennink, 2014). The most positive outcome was derived from the interactions in the group discussions, even though faced with numerous challenges (financial hardship, poverty and little support); the focus group discussion provided an opportunity to share similar hardships experienced. Mothers became aware of the normality of their children’s adolescent behaviour, supported one another and began to reflect on their own parenting practices (Routt & Anderson, 2015). Through descriptions of challenges they offered parenting skills and shared ideas of how they dealt differently with some situations, which gave hope and seemed to allow them to feel as if they were contributing, demonstrated by efforts to provide advice to each other and asking for assistance. Promises were made to support one another and to share and provide suggestions to alleviate the challenges faced, but mostly in order to remain positive and motivated.

The positive approach does not deny problems or difficulties that people might experience, but embraces two dimensions, namely well-being as well as pathology (Peterson, 2006). Even though experiences shared were not all positive, through discussions they felt
heard, supported, problems and hardships were generalised, creating a feeling of relieve and well-being.

The qualitative study was undertaken with a limited number of participants due to restricted access to mothers from LSEE, as many of them experienced challenges regarding traveling and lacked a support system to care for younger children during group discussions. The results of the study should therefore be cautiously interpreted in light of the context limitation and small sample size. Further research should address the replication of this study in a larger sample size in various LSEEs.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrated two important matters with regards to the aim of the study to explore experiences and rich data was elicited. Despite experiencing issues and hardships, sometimes even dreadful, that form part of living in a LSEE, mothers were able to verbalise their perceptions of their relationship and emotions on a very personal level. Deeper issues came to the fore, for instance feeling insignificant as mothers, fear of being criticized on the one hand as competency to parent and on the other side on behaviour or misbehaviour that their children display. Despite being inundated with hardship, mothers expressed great affection and appreciation for their children; of significance is the sharing of positive experiences which form part of the discovery phase of AI.

As the discovery phase of AI was utilised to explore mothers’ experiences of their relationship with their children, it could be argued that the method motivated mothers towards shifting the focus to positive experiences.

In an LSEE, little opportunity exists to share. Mothers disclosed feelings of inferiority with regards to parenting, which directly influences relationship with their children. Being provided with the opportunity seemed useful as they expressed gratitude to share with others who live in the same environment and endure the same types of hardship.
The issue raised at the start is that an LSEE, associated with stress, depression, and disadvantaged living conditions, impacts on the relationship between parents and children, as parents practice more problematic forms of parenting. Little literature is available on research undertaken in LSEE communities, with regards to relationships. The facilitation of AI in a research setting is very different from the organisational context for which the method was designed, and for this particular vulnerable population in an LSEE environment. The novelty is that experiences and feelings of mothers who are living in poverty, on issues that cause emotional strain, can be verbalised in a setting that AI offers. Practitioners such as social workers, psychologists and researchers might find AI useful, not only as a measure of support, but also as method to undertake research in disadvantaged communities. Future research for possible interventions could include support groups for mothers focusing on and building on strengths; which could encourage feelings of successful parenting and closeness enhancing their relationship with their children.
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Towards an understanding of mothers’ dream, design and destiny processes in their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment:
An appreciative inquiry

Will be submitted for possible publication in the Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk Journal, South Africa
Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk

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ARTICLE 2: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF MOTHERS’ DREAM, DESIGN AND DESTINY PROCESSES IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR CHILDREN IN A LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT: AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

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TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF MOTHERS’ DREAM, DESIGN AND DESTINY PROCESSES IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR CHILDREN IN A LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT: AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract: This paper provides a deeper understanding towards eight mother participants in low socio-economic environments with regard to future perspectives of their relationship with their children, through appreciative inquiries in the dream, design and destiny phases. This was obtained through a single instrumental case study. Mothers were purposefully selected and data were collected through two focus group discussions and two individual interviews. The findings revealed the particular difficulties that mothers experienced regarding envisioning a future, due to own childhood unfulfilled needs and current pressing issues pertaining to living in LSEE. This highlights the specific support needed that can be met by professionals or organisations working in such environments.

INTRODUCTION

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a strength-based approach to change used both globally and locally, in various settings, originally in organisations, but now also widely used in settings such as communities, education and tourism (Abdul, Aziz & Rahman, 2013; Ashford & Patkar, 2001; Blitzer & Botha, 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Appreciative Inquiry consists of a four-dimensional cycle (4-D cycle) that provides procedures for the application of this method (Lewis, 2011). The AI, 4-D cycle consists of four phases, the discovery-, dream-, design- and destiny phases (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stravos, 2008; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006). The discovery phase is aimed at identifying existing strengths through the sharing of
stories (Lewis, 2011). The aim of the dream phase is to encourage participants to imagine a desired future, regarding a specific topic and to share these aspirations (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stravros, 2008). To dream means to envision the future, imagine, focus and think about future possibilities beyond what is in the current present moment.

An LSEE is marked by limited income due to low earning or unemployment, poor living conditions, overcrowding in small dwellings, often without water, electricity and sanitation (Bergin & Bergin, 2015; Friis & Sellers, 2009:59; Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009). The issue is that little is known about how mothers, who live in LSEE, a stressful and challenging environment, in South Africa dream; thus how mothers from LSEEs envision their future for their children and how they plan on fulfilling their desired dream. By exploring and describing how mothers dream, through the method of AI, first-hand information from the mothers themselves can be obtained to gain an understanding on how they envision the future with and for their children.

According to Trickett (1996:213) human activity does not develop in a social vacuum, but rather is rigorously situated within a socio-historical and cultural context of meanings and relationships. Mothers living in low socio-economic environments (LSEE) have to cope with multiple challenges such as, among others, low income, overcrowded and poor living conditions with limited resources, unavoidably triggering stress. The challenges posed by living in LSEE have an effect on mothers’ emotional wellbeing, motivation as well as on their parenting. Pressure and anxiety experienced by mothers’ influences their outlook on life, motivation as well as their ability to encourage their children. Individuals who do not experience anything positive in their environment or upbringing become negative people (Uddin, 2011).
The ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) provides some insight onto the impact that the LSEE has on the mother and their children. It views the “child’s development as occurring within a system of relationships that shapes his or her environment” (Martin, Fergus & Noguera, 2012:60). Natural environments are the major aspect that influences the developing person. The developing individual can be seen as being in the centre and embedded in various environmental systems, from immediate, such as the family to broader environments such as culture (Shaffer, 2009). This theory also considers individual factors such as characteristics of the child or parent, the interaction between parents and children and the broader context such as support and resources (Budd, Clark & Connell, 2011) that have an impact on child development and relationships. According to Shaffer and Kipp (2010:65) this “systems approach recognizes that parents influence their children; but also stresses that (1) children influence the behaviour and child-rearing practices of their parents, and that (2) families are complex social systems, that is, networks of reciprocal relationships and alliances (the microsystem) that are constantly evolving (the chronosystem) and are greatly affected by community (the excosystem) and cultural influences (the macrosystem).” The ecological systems theory proposes that individuals are not only influenced by the environment but also simultaneously influence their environment. Living within a LSEE can therefore have an impact on the individual and family but also vice versa. Interaction between the parent and the child is affected by the parents’ experience outside the family (Bronfenbrenner, 2013; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2015). The extent of stress that the mother experiences with regard to the environment that she lives in has an impact on her interaction with her child.

This article reports on a single instrumental case study, providing insight through the use of AI, into the experiences of mothers living in LSEE regarding what they dream their future relationship with their children would be like, how mothers plan on making these dreams a
reality (design), and finally live and implement their envisioned dreams (destiny). It is important to know how mothers dream for their children, because LSEE circumstances have an impact on mothers’ ability to parent as well as their emotional well-being and motivation. In order to motivate their children to persevere through challenges posed by LSEE, mothers need to be motivated themselves and able to envision a positive future for their children. The aim of this study was to understand what the future perspectives of mothers from an LSEE are, through AI’s dream, design and destiny phases. The objective is ultimately to gain an understanding towards how mothers experience their dream (what might be), what the world is calling for (envisioning results), in order to design (what should be) their destiny (to empower and sustain) of their relationships with their children in LSEE, through AI.

First a theoretical overview of AI’s dream, destiny and design phase will be presented, followed by an overview of the research context, method, findings and recommendations.

The research was conducted in three research phases, where the findings of each phase were reported in three separate reports. The main focus of the research was to explore and describe the experiences of mothers from a LSEE in relating to their children, using an AI perspective. In the first research phase the aim was to explore, discover and describe phenomenologically, mothers’ experiences through the appreciative discovery process, (the best of what is) of AI. This article reports on the second research phase where the aim was to explore and describe how mothers experience their dream (what might be, what the world is calling for, envisioning results) in order to design (what should be the deal co-constructing) their destiny (how to empower, improvise, sustain) of their relationships with their children, through AI. The outcomes are interpreted phenomenologically.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Appreciative inquiry (AI)

AI is a methodology grounded in positive psychology which aims to recognise what is going right in life, thus shifting the focus from repairing negative experiences of and the preoccupation with the negative, to positive aspects (talents, traits, characteristics, coping skills) of individuals, groups and their environments, even though their circumstances may be difficult (Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). AI is a change management approach, developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) in the late 80’s to provide an alternative approach to traditional organisational development models (Kung, Giles & Hagan, 2013) utilised for analysis, decision-making and facilitating change (Bester, 2011; Hammond, 2013; McKergow, 2005; Whitney, 2010). AI is underpinned by a social construct philosophy, viewing the social world to be created and co-constructed in dialogues through debates and the stories people tell each other (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2000; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Howe, 2001; Merriam, 2014). AI aims to build on strengths already existing in the system, to create an awareness of the positives within to bring about change (Lewis, 2011; van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Therefore rather than spending more time and energy on searching for problems, the strengths and aspects that work in a system are explored through AI. AI is executed and implemented through four consecutive phases, steps or dimensions, thus four distinct stages forming a cycle, or a process. The Phases are: 1. Discovery phase, 2. Dream phase, 3. Design phase 4. Destiny phase
The discovery phase

During the discovery phase the aim is to start an extensive search through the use of questions posed to participants to understand the “best of what is and what has been” in the particular situation. As this article reports on the dream, design and destiny phase, these phases will be discussed in more detail.

The dream phase

During the dream phase the aim is to build on what has been discovered in the previous discovery phase projecting information into participants, wishes and hopes for the future (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2011). Individuals are encouraged to share their own dreams with the group, assisting participants in shaping and refining their own dreams while listening to those of others (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2011; Homan, 2016; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). According to Van Tiem and Rosenzweig (2006) it is not finding the problem but rather focusing on creating a desirable vision, in order to move forward to the next phase, where designing the dream is envisioned.

The design phase

The aim of the design phase is to build a bridge from the best of “what is”, the present, towards a speculative “what might be”, and the future (Bester, 2011). In the design phase participants work together to make plans for the future and make their dreams a reality. Discussions are around how ideas can be put into practice and who will be involved. Strengths and dreams found in the earlier dream phase need to come together in order to achieve the desired vision (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006). The design phase is most often
referred to in literature as a collective activity; however, it depends on the topic and outcome and can therefore also be an individual reflective process (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010). As proposed for this research, mothers’ unique experience of their relationship with their children, reflects a more individual than a collective process. As Lewis, Passmore and Cantore (2011) state the design phase is concerned with making decisions about action that will be taken in support of the delivery of the envisioned dream.

**The destiny phase**

The destiny phase focuses on celebrating positive changes and innovations resulting from the AI process (Bester 2011) and making plans regarding personal commitments and paths forward (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Strategies are put into practice and participants are encouraged to take action and carry forward their ideas. This final phase of AI aims to transfer the new discoveries, positive attitudes, insights and excitement acquired through the earlier phases of the AI process into life and to keep them part of everyday interactions (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Stratton-Berkessel, 2010); focussing on celebrating positive changes and innovations resulting from the AI process (Bester 2011) and making plans regarding personal commitments and paths forward (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The facilitator can invite individuals to explore what may contribute towards sustaining and amplifying energy and outcomes of the AI experience. However, the goals and action plans set in place during this phase become individuals’ own form of measurement of the AI process (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010). Combined with the AI approach the World Café method (WCM) was used to collect data.
RESEARCH QUESTION AND GOAL

According to Blaikie (2010:57) “a research project is built on the foundation of its research questions”, providing focus and direction of the research towards which methods will be utilised for data gathering and analysing. The research question pertained to: What are the experiences of mothers’ towards their dream, design and destiny process with regard to their relationships with their children? The goal was to explore, describe and gain insight into how mothers dream (what might be, what is the world calling for, envisioning results) and design (what should be the deal, co-constructing) their destiny (how to empower, improvise, sustain) with regard to their relationships with their children, through AI.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Research design

A phenomenological qualitative research approach (Merriam, 2014) was utilised, in order to study occurrences in their natural setting. Merriam (2009) argues that a phenomenological research design is authentic for studying intense human experiences containing affective and emotional components, the design therefore is most suitable for exploring and describing mothers’ dreams with their children in a LSEE, as it is concerned with the human being as a whole and all the parts that contribute to the experience. To make sense of meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) the interpretivistic perspective, described as “getting out there” was used. To extract meaning requires the researcher to be empathetic towards participants (Pope, 2006; Erickson, 1986), living in LSEE.
According to Fouchê and De Vos (2011:94) “basic and applied research is complementary – the advancement of knowledge and the solution of problems are both scientific necessities”. A single instrumental case study design was utilised in order to gain knowledge and insight about a specific social issue (Fouche & Schurink, 2011). In this study the researcher wanted to gain knowledge about how mothers experience their relationship with their children in LSEE but specifically regarding how they dream about their relationship, how they design this dream and implement their plans (destiny phase). Figure 1 provides an outline of the qualitative research design.
FIGURE 1: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH PHASE 2
Participants

Participants were eight Afrikaans-speaking mothers with children who attend a local Government remedial school on the East Rand of Gauteng, who live in an LSEE. Participants were purposefully selected and participated in all four phases of the AI method.

Data collection

World Café Method (WCM)

The WCM, a strengths-based approach, was developed by Juanita Brown (2005) to engage groups of people in a conversation where a topic that is important to the group is discussed (Bridger, 2015; Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005). “The WCM is based on the understanding that conversation is the core process that drives personal, business and organizational life and is more than a method, a process or a technique – it’s a way of thinking and being together sourced in a philosophy of conversational leadership (Bridger, 2015).” WCM is aimed at producing multiple perspectives on a topic to support a group discussion, where the intention is to brainstorm and problem-solve (Brown & Isaac, 2005; Bunker & Alban, 2006). WCM encourages positive conversation in a system when used in conjunction with the AI (Brown, Homer Y Isaacs, 2009). In order to facilitate appreciative inquiry and create a relaxed environment where mothers could share freely, the WCM was chosen to collect data from mothers in the context of a LSEE.

Data was collected through two consecutive focus group discussions and two individual interviews. Focus groups are known to provide an opportunity for the observation of interactions;
access verbal expressions of views, opinions, experiences and attitudes; can produce quick results (Levers, 2009:383).

The first focus group discussion, with eight participants was conducted making use of the WCM. The focus was on implementing the dream phase of AI with the questions: What do you dream your relationship with your child would be like in the future? The question in the design phase pertained to: In which way can you make your dream regarding your relationship with your child become a reality? The group was divided into two groups of four, in order to facilitate the WCM. Notes from the discussions were written on paper tablecloths.

In the second focus group discussion and individual interviews, with two new participants, three overarching questions, the same as for phase one, were posed, with the emphasis in the first question on ‘now’. How would you describe your relationship with your children now? What do you and your children talk about? What influences your relationship with your children? De Vries (1995:387) states that “multiple focus groups provide useful means of determining what is initially going on and later in checking what the results of interventions have been.”

**Ethical consideration**

Ethical consent was obtained from the North West University research committee (NW-00125-11-S1), the School Governing Body, Principal and the participants. Of importance was: information to participants on the background of the study, freedom to withdraw, aims, use of information, benefits and risks, time-frames, confidentiality, their written consent and willingness to participate, to be recorded, and that information would be used to be disseminated
in a report to the DOE and possibly in a scientific journal. Benefits of this study would outweigh the risks. Direct benefits communicated to participants were that they had an opportunity to voice their opinions concerning the topic, and had a chance to grow in awareness.

The participants selected for this study were representative of a vulnerable community. Vulnerable populations are referred to as being in need of special protection, such as women, children, the elderly, the homeless, people with disabilities, and those living in poverty or in low-income situations (Camp, 2014; Department of Health Republic of South Africa, 2015). Due to their vulnerability it was important for the researcher to be sensitive to their needs. According to Sieber and Tolich (2013) vulnerable populations should not be excluded in research because of their vulnerability as these populations are most in need of being served and understood.

Data Analysis

The data, visual and audio, were thematically analysed according to the six steps (Braun & Clark, 2006). Visual data (notes on the paper tablecloths as written text while talking and discussing questions) were also analysed. Data collected during the focus group discussions and individual interviews were thematically analysed according to the flexibility, usefulness of the tool and as a thematic analysis providing rich, compound and comprehensive material (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). Thematic analysis was further seen as an appropriate analysis method as it is used to develop a detailed descriptive account of a phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2013). First the researcher familiarised herself by reading and making notes of interesting ideas. Next initial codes were generated by categorising sections of the data into phrases (Monette, Sullivan, DeJong & Hilton, 2014:429). Next the researcher searched and reviewed themes with the
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analytical process yielded a number of prominent themes of relevance to the research study. These themes are presented below along with extracts from the mothers’ stories that are considered to be a representative of the themes. As questions asked to mother participants were focused on consecutive phases of AI, the themes will also be discussed in this order as presented in Figure 2.
Dream phase

During the dream phase mothers were asked to envision a future where their relationship with their children functioned at its peak. The dreams that mothers shared are presented in various themes.

Theme 1: A mother’s dreams for her child start when the child is in the womb

Pertaining to their relationship with their children mothers emphasised that their dreams for their children started prior to birth. Some of the mothers’ remarks were: “It starts from the beginning, from birth.”; “From when you have him.”; “Even from the day that you hear that you are pregnant.”

One mother further shared: “…ahh and then you think about this little bundle inside of you and you think…how will I bring up this bundle? I always wondered what will happen with this bundle, how will he or she be like, how will he or she look one day and already here a bond starts to form.”

The literature indicates that the process of bonding, which refers to the forming of a close personal relationship between mother and child, starts before birth (Stewart, 1999). After conception parents start to form expectations, and hopes not only for their child and themselves as parents but also for their future relationship with the child (Fahlberg, 2012).
**Theme 2: Dreaming of open and respectful communication between mother and child**

Various mothers’ dreams of their relationship with their children were based on good, open and honest communication with respect. One mother stated: “Yes good communication …like you want to laugh together and talk about things together.” Each of these mothers had different features that they envisioned communication to be like. Mothers wanted their children to feel comfortable and trust them enough to share anything with them. More comments envisioning their communication included: “Honesty….she needs to feel that she can trust you and that you can come to her and know you trust her.”; “It has to be open. Like your child can come to you and talk to you…she needs to know what is bothering you. You have to have a friendship relationship.”; “Talk about anything that bothers her. Talk to me straight.”

One mother expressed her wish to maintain good communication when her children are grown up and live far away: “If he for example sits in Cape Town, he must still phone me and talk to me.”

Various mothers felt that communication is a way of showing respect, but also felt that respect is reciprocal and emphasised the importance of modelling respect. Two participants shared: “She needs to have respect for you.”; “This needs to be reciprocal because if you don’t have respect for your child you cannot expect that your child will have respect for you, because I have seen many times that parents and children talk to each other however they please and that those children do not have any respect for nobody.”
A few mothers wanted their children also to share happy moments, as one mother reported:

“Happiness, happiness between me and my child. For me personally this is when she comes to me and says mom I achieved this and then I say to her jay!”

In Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) the microsystem represents the child’s environment and includes family members referring to the communication between the child and the family members as mesosystem. Wilmshurst (2009) highlights the importance of good communication and healthy exchange between parent and child, as well as bigger systems such as home and school.

**Theme 3: Setting an example**

Throughout dialogues shared, mothers dreamed to set the right examples for their children, as children imitate and closely watch parents; this was emphasized by a mother stating: “Yes what you do...they say a child follows in his parents footsteps. I won’t say that the child will do everything that you do, but many of the things that you do the child sees (laugh), but I believe that the child looks at everything.”

**Theme 4: Effective Discipline**

Most mothers stressed the importance of discipline. Mothers dreamed of improving their ability to discipline their children effectively, but struggled to implement it effectively. One mother stated: “At times you have to discipline them if they do something wrong. ‘My mother loves me but I am wrong’...if you are not going to discipline him, he will think that he can think and do what he pleases.” For mothers effective discipline would present in their children listening, paying attention and adhering to requests. One mother felt that the teenage years are especially
challenging, another mother struggled with disciplining her child who displayed severe behavioural challenges: “Discipline and (silence)... No he needs to listen if you talk to him, but he does not really do this.” She further reported: “…but if he could just listen once you have spoken, but now lately he doesn’t care. You talk to him but it goes in to the one ear and out the other.”

One mother dreamt that her adolescent child will listen to her as he did when his father spoke to him. Her words were: “My child is a rebel at this age. He will do everything for his father, but nothing for me. He will jump when his dad talks to him, but if I talk to him he does not listen, I struggle to get him to do anything...I’ve been trying everything in my power to show him that I love him. I give him space, he can go and play, he can do as he pleases, but he still does what he wants.”

According to Green, McGinnity, Meltzer, Ford & Goodman (2005) possible causes of behavioural problems include poverty, families having more than four children, and stemming from a low socio-economic background. Further the literature states that living in LSEE imposes extraordinary burdens on mothers, such as struggling financially, poor support, household conditions and limited access to resources. The literature indicates that mothers living in poverty are prone to higher levels of depression and anxiety, having an impact on their ability to parent and are often associated with ineffective and inconsistent discipline (Conger, Conger, Elder, & Lorenz, 1992; Petterson & Albers, 2001).

**Theme 5: Availability intertwined with mother’s own need for a mother figure**
Two mother’s dreams were based on what they envisioned for their own relationship with their mothers who were not present when they were growing up: “A mother needs to be there for her daughter to assist her when she struggles...she needs to be able to come to you for support and say ahh mom this happened today and then you try and assist her and suggest that she should try this or that and see if it might not work out.”; “I did not have this with my own mother, I was adopted. For me a mother is someone that can help a child when he is sick, the mother is there.”

The dream phase was followed by the design phase.

**Design phase**

During the design phase mothers were invited to discuss strategies about how they could make their dreams a reality (Lewis, 2011). A theme that stood out was the importance of support for children and was distinguished as emotional, physical and cognitive support.

**Theme 1: Providing support for children**

In order to develop a supportive and positive relationship with children, parents in poverty should create an environment that is supportive of the children’s needs in order to reduce possible developmental risks associated with economic hardships (Cowen, Wyman, Work & Parker, 1990; McLoyd, 1990). Parents living in poverty experience much stress which has an impact on their attentiveness and responsiveness, therefore being supportive towards the needs of their children (Jackson, 2000; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, Kohen, & McCarton, 2001).
With regard to emotional support, parents felt that it is important not to set unreachable goals, but rather to motivate their children: “You shouldn’t set unreachable goals for your child...you know what your child can do...”; “You must tell him that he can...and when he does it and he does not get to eighty but he gets to sixty, then you say ‘well done!’”

Parents also emphasized the importance of making time in order to spend quality time, doing activities that children enjoy together. Mothers reported the following: “You need to make time and put an effort in.”; “Spending time with your child...quality time.”; “Make time to talk to them.”

Part of the design phase is to apply action into plans. When asked when they would be able to create special time they responded as follows: “Early in the mornings when you make coffee and breakfast for them.”; “When they come from school and you sit with them while they do their homework.”; “More during the night...when they have eaten and bathed...me and my daughter have lots of time, because she baths with me and my son more during bedtime.”; “Play together.”

Mothers also voiced the importance of showing affection: “Show love, give hugs, give kisses.”; “Sometimes I get so overwhelmed with love and then I give her a hug... ‘ouch mommy’...you know then I hugged that child so hard.”
In order to cognitively support children, mothers felt that it is important to allow children’s opinions to count: “For example, if you move to another flat ask the child ‘what do you think?’ I think this is how you build a relationship with your child, because they see that their mother cares about what they think.”

They further voiced the importance of allowing children to make choices: “Children need to see that they can choose what they want...then they can see, I have to make choices in life.”

Mothers also want their children to be strong for the future, and in order to do so they often have to stand back and allow children to solve problems themselves, in order to learn from situations: “I want them to be strong, against the things that life poses.”; “I think they need to experience things... in life before they can learn from it.”; “…but not when something has got him under and he is down and out, they need to be able to get up.”; “You can give advice but you can’t tell them what to do.” This correlates with the literature, emphasising the importance of providing children with the opportunity to make choices and solve problems, which provides them with the chance to practice decision-making and learn from the consequences of their choices. This all is said to have an impact on a child’s autonomy, sense of self, feelings of control over their life and not being provided with the opportunity to make choices could result in behavioural problems (Johnson & Dinger, 2015).

One mother felt that it was also important to support them through this difficult time by not emphasising their mistakes: “It is important not to throw rocks. Don’t say ‘I told you so... see
what has happened’ This is not what your child wants to hear! Yes and help him to get a solution for things that went wrong, don’t solve it for him. Give him advice.”

After the destiny phase mothers were provided with an opportunity to go home and implement their plans regarding their envisioned future in order to further explore during the design phase in the second focus group discussion.

**Destiny phase**

The destiny phase focuses on putting plans created in the design phase, into action, and then reviewing the effectiveness of these plans.

**Theme 1: Appreciation**

During the destiny phase mothers shared their new appreciative views with regard to their children. They also gained insight into the problems of others: “I appreciate my children more, my children are not naughty… there are worse things out there.”; “It’s good to hear that other parents have problems and that you are not alone, and there are other parents whose situations are worse.”; “Since I’ve been coming here, from the first time, I became closer to my son.”; “I realised that it does not matter how dark things seem for me, there is always other people that have more sorrows and problems as the little that I have, mine looks small compared to others.”

**Theme 2: Effectiveness of special time**
Mothers reported back on the implementation of special time with their children and one mother stated: “Me and my husband we do the following, he takes our oldest son and I take the other two and then they will just go and sit somewhere and play together, not as a group but man to man. It helps, this is what we talked about last time special time, it works; now he plays with us where he never did before.” When parents spend special and quality time with their children they build on the quality of the relationship between parent and child (Bloomquist, 2013).

**Theme 3: Hardships and problems, reverting back**

With regard to hardships and problems, especially regarding disciplinary issues mothers stated the following: “He is just getting worse, he does not want to go to school, I have to pull him out of the car.”; “This morning I felt like a bad mother because sometimes it feels that I can’t control my children. I try my best.” Throughout the study mothers voiced their challenges and frustrations regarding disciplining their children and voiced a need for guidance and assistance.

**DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS**

This article promotes understanding of what mother’s dream their future relationship with their children would be like, how mothers plan on making these dreams a reality, live and implement their envisioned dreams. The effects of poverty on families are clear. The shortage of economic capacities spreads much wider throughout a person’s life than merely affecting the availability and quality of food, shelter, clothing, medical care and participation in loving relationships providing security and other social activities (Lötter, 2011). Through discussions it was noted that for mothers from an LSEE to dream and design a future relationship with their children was problematic. Difficulties were experienced in conceptualising their understanding of their future,
consequently voicing their vision. Referring to dreaming one mother said: “I don’t know how you can declare how to dream your relationship with your child should be, because it is a dream that a mother has that is so deep, and lies so far... “You yourself don’t even know yet what it is. You can’t even explain it to yourself...how can you explain it to someone else.”

During Phase 1 of the research it was found that mothers have difficulty in conceptualising broad concepts such as relationship. Here it became clear to be able to dream and to voice wishes for the future is even more difficult for mothers living in LSEE. For needs to be addressed it is essential to be granted opportunities to voice needs. In an environment filled with stress, such as LSEE, emotional, financial, social and physical needs are seldom fulfilled. The implication is that to dream and envision the future and think about possibilities beyond what is in the current moment are limited. Schein (1995) conducted a research study on single mothers in poverty, and found that many mothers appeared not to have any dreams for the future, those that had dreams described them as impossible ones; others found it difficult to dream. She reported that these women could not see that their lives would change and dreaming is risking wanting what you cannot have, setting yourself up for failure, for this reason they experienced dreams being broken and found it too painful to dream. According to Stavros and Torres (2005:122): “Some people have a difficult time dreaming; they have spent a lifetime limiting themselves by what they think is not possible. Some have been taught to consider dreaming a waste of time.” Much of the literature recommends that exercises need to be done in order to assist participants to dream, such as visualisation exercises (Ashford & Patkar, 2001).

During the discussions it was clear that mothers’ relationships were intertwined with those of their children, consequently finding it challenging to separate their own future from that of their
children. This finding ties in with a co-dependency between the mother and the child, depending on each other in a harsh environment with limited support. An enmeshed family pattern refers to a pattern in which family members are over involved with each other’s affairs and over concerned about each other’s welfare (Wilmshurst, 2011). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) emphasises the impact that the environment has on the parent as well as on the child and influencing the relationship between parent and child.

Due to the lack that mothers have regarding emotional support their own childhood issues have not been addressed. Dreams are inundated referring to the past tense, reverting back to own childhood needs and missing out on solid relationships, especially those that exist between mothers and daughters. The value for mothers of relationship is to be available to fulfil your child’s needs. According to Edelman, Kudzma and Mandle (2014) parents living in poverty have so many of their own unfulfilled needs that they often cannot meet even their infant’s needs. In addition present unfulfilled needs inhibit mothers’ ability to dream about the future. According to Lötter (2011) poverty makes it difficult for people to engage in profound, meaningful relationships with loved ones, therefore poverty hinders the fulfilment of a fundamental human need to relate. Lötter (2011) further emphasises that poverty has an impact on relationships; is a ‘dangerous mix of stress and inadequate resources’. Negative self-image formed from many poor people’s feelings of personal powerlessness can wreak havoc on interpersonal and social relationships.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Practitioners working in similar settings should consider appropriate activities, with more time spent assisting mothers to practise and exercise dreaming and envisioning a positive future. In the provision of assistance it is recommended mothers’ own unfulfilled needs and perceptions with regard to their own relationship with their mothers are addressed first. Mothers need to be helped to recognise images that they are holding, that they don’t have to submerge negative feelings in order to appreciate. Mothers need to be helped to reframe situations appreciatively, formulate what they want and to understand that by not focusing on dreams impedes their creation. Mothers need to learn to take care of themselves and that children must decide on and create their own future.

Future research should focus on providing effective ways of addressing challenges that mothers experienced as identified in this study. More studies on similar environments with larger samples should be conducted, also exploring how the use of exercises for instance envisioning could assist mothers to design the future of their children.

LIMITATIONS

Since literature on mothers’ experiences regarding their relationship with their children in LSEE and South Africa is scarce, this study was basic. Data from this study represented the experiences of mothers from a LSEE in South Africa and excludes the application of these experiences to mothers in more affluent communities. Findings were obtained from a single instrumental case study with a small group of mothers in LSEE and cannot be generalised to the population at large; however, based on the deep, rich descriptions provided, the findings might be transferable to similar settings by readers and professionals.
CONCLUSION

On a theoretical level, the study provided new knowledge regarding how mothers in LSEE dream for their future relationship with their children. The aim was to answer the research question, which directed the research process of AI and WCM: to explore, discover and describe phenomenologically, mothers’ experiences through the appreciative dream, (what might be, what the world is calling for, envisioning results), design (what should be the deal, co-constructing) destiny (how to empower, improvise, sustain) process of AI, with regard to their relationships with their children. The study in particular promoted a deeper understanding and insight, indicating how difficult it is for mothers to dream when they have unresolved childhood issues regarding their own relationship with their mother, as well as unfulfilled present needs, impacting on designing of and envisioning their dreams. Insight gained can enable practitioners to create pathways to support this vulnerable population group.
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Section B

Article 3
Facilitating appreciative inquiry in combination with the World Café method in a low socio-economic environment.

The findings of this article were presented at the Alara World Congress on the 5th of November 2015 at the St Georges Hotel, in the 16:30 to 17:00 time slot. This article will be submitted for possible publication in the Action Learning, Action Research Journal (ALARj).
Guidelines for authors: Action Learning Action Research Journal (ALARj)

ALARj

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• On a cover sheet, please include contact information including full name, affiliation, email address, small photo (.jpeg) and brief, biographical note of up to 100 words

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Peer review can be either transparent or blind. A transparent review involves the reviewers knowing the identity of the author/s, and the author/s knowing the identity of the reviewers so that a dialogue can ensue. A blind review preserves the anonymity of both the author/s and reviewers. A blind peer review is the more conventional approach and preferred by academic institutions. Author/s preferring blind peer review must indicate so when emailing their submission. Blind reviews also require the author/s to strip any identifying information about themselves from their text. All contributions for review should fit the following structure (only include those sections that are appropriate to your article):

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Body of Article – e.g. introduction, background, literature review, main argument or research question, research methodology, research results, discussion, conclusions and future work (see formatting template)

Useful links (if referring to web links, include these in full)

Acknowledgements (up 100 words)

Reference list

Appendices (use sparingly)

Biographical notes of authors (up to 100 words)

Optional small photo image of author(s) (.jpeg/.jpg - no larger than 150 pixels)

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- be explicitly and actively participative: research with, for and by people rather than on people;
- draw on a wide range of ways of knowing (including intuitive, experiential, presentational as well as conceptual) and link these appropriately to form theory;
- address questions that are of significance to the flourishing of human community and the more-than-human world;
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Facilitating appreciative inquiry in combination with the World Café method in a low socio-economic environment
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Declaration:

This manuscript has been edited for language correctness, has not been published previously, and is not under simultaneous review elsewhere.
Abstract

This article highlights the use of combining appreciative inquiry (AI) and the World Café method (WCM) to facilitate change and gather information in a low socio-economic environment (LSEE), and provides recommendations that can be employed for maximum effectiveness when using these two methods together in similar settings. AI and WCM have been successfully applied in rural communities globally but limitations were reported regarding the facilitation of these methods. A combined use of AI and WCM in LSEEs has not been reported. We report on a qualitative study in which AI and WCM were facilitated to enable eight mothers to describe and explore their experiences of relationships with their children in an LSEE during focus group discussions and individual interviews. Our application of these methods yielded recommendations on their use in combination with participants in LSEEs. These recommendations could be of use to other professionals and organizations working in similar settings.

Keywords

Appreciative inquiry, low socio-economic environment, positive psychology, World Café method

Introduction and problem statement

This article reports on the use of appreciative inquiry (AI) and the World Café method (WCM), two popular new approaches that were used as a methodizing combination in a larger qualitative study. The goal of the larger study, which consisted of two research phases based on the (AI) process, was to discover, explore and describe mothers’ experiences regarding their relationships with their children in a low socio-economic environment (LSEE). The goal of this article is not to report on the larger study, but rather to make known the findings, challenges and valuable lessons learned that emerged and stood out during our facilitation and application of AI and WCM in an LSEE. LSEEs are inundated with challenges and problems, and “research for change” needs to be conducted.
We applied a positive psychology approach in this study, using AI to identify existing strengths of people living in an LSEE, especially those pertaining to mothers and their experience of their relationships with their children. We also used AI to provide a process that allowed for change within the mothers. The WCM is a strength-based approach to engage people in conversations, (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005) was combined with AI to encourage positive conversations among participants. In this article we report on the facilitation of AI and WCM in LSEEs and provide recommendations that can be utilized by professionals and researchers when applying these methods in similar settings.

Until recently, researchers addressing problems regarding people in poor communities first tried to find and understand the issues these individuals faced, (often emphasizing the problems) then addressing identified problems by teaching a skill or providing a service. Here our approach was rather to apply a positive psychology approach emphasizing aspects such as “assets, strengths, well-being, positive character traits, talents, potentials, motives, capabilities, positive emotions, virtues and positive institutions” (Kalata & Naugle, 2009, p.445), of mothers and their environments, giving prominence to what is going right in life, in place of the traditional focus on pathology (Peterson, 2006).

AI is a research method and a solution-based management approach (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005) at the heart of positive psychology, offering a way of acting, thinking and seeing for purposeful change in a system such as an organization or family (Lewis, 2011). As an exploratory method, AI moves away from searching for the problem, aiming instead to generate new awareness of strengths that can be made available to members of that system, more positive views about ways in which they perceive the system and how they might be able to envision a desired future (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005; Lewis, 2011; McKergow & Clarke, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

Poverty is a global issue. The most recent statistics provided by the World Bank (2014) based on research conducted in 2011, estimated that just over one billion people in developing countries (around 17% of their populations) live in poverty (on below $1.25 per day). In 2011 nearly half
(45,5%) of South Africans were living below the poverty line, and even though the poverty rate in South Africa dropped by 11,7 % from 57,2% in 2006 to 45,5% in 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2014), the numbers remain unacceptably high. Although statistics on families living in poverty are available, the number of mothers living in low socio-economic environments (LSEEs) worldwide is not known.

An LSEE is marked by limited income due to low earning or unemployment, poor living conditions, and overcrowding in small dwellings often without water, electricity and sanitation (Bergin & Bergin, 2015; Friis & Sellers, 2009; Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009). An LSEE has been characterized as an environment where people are vulnerable to domestic violence and alcohol abuse, where education is poor, and where there are elevated levels of early adolescent pregnancy and learning disability.

As many problems are experienced in LSEEs, ‘research for change’ needs to be conducted. Understanding the dynamics of life in an LSEE at the individual level can assist in understanding how to design and facilitate research and support methods most effectively in this kind of environment. Thus, appropriate methods of investigating people living in LSEEs are necessary in order to gain greater clarity on their living conditions and to find out more about their lived experiences.

During the study it became clear to us that there is a great need for support of mothers living in an LSEE, especially regarding their relationships with their children. As mentioned before, support usually focuses on teaching parents a skill rather than providing an experience.

WCM and AI are valuable tools to use when gathering research data and addressing issues in different systems. However, recommendations on the facilitation of AI and WCM specifically in an LSEE in South Africa have not been reported. In the present article we report on the third aim of a bigger study whose main focus was to explore and describe the experiences of mothers from an LSEE in relating to their children. In this article our aim is to report on AI and WCM that are widely used, but have not been combined and used with mothers against the background of LSEEs in South Africa. We used an AI perspective and selected WCM as a data collection method in order
to create a relaxed environment where mothers could share freely. We learned valuable lessons in the combined facilitation of AI and WCM with the particular population in the LSEE and wanted to share these lessons by providing recommendations regarding the facilitation of AI combined with the WCM in South African urban LSEEs that could underpin the work of organizations and professionals working in similar environments. We felt that these suggestions could be useful to community psychologists, social workers and researchers who could use these methods to a great effect and thus generate data of good quality.

First a theoretical overview of AI and WCM is presented, followed by an overview of the research context and the method used. Findings focusing on the usefulness of AI and WCM in an LSEE, referred to as lessons learnt, are the basis of the recommendations presented.

**Appreciative Inquiry**

AI is a strengths-based approach developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) that originated in organizational development. Since the late 1990s it has been applied globally to wider settings such as course evaluation for education (Kung, Giles & Hagan, 2013). AI is not only an approach to change but also offers a different way of thinking about issues and addressing problems. It is a proven tool used internationally (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) and globally (Bester, 2011) for personal development, as well as community and organizational change. The use of AI aims to liberate positive emotions such as joy, excitement, pride and passion; create positive communication; generate a positive image of a better future by increasing existing positive qualities (Lewis, 2011; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006); and heighten energy, vision and action for change (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). The focus of AI is to move away from searching for what might be ‘broken’ (Hammond, 2013) and rather to discover what is already working within a system, therefore focusing on existing strengths by creating awareness of the positives within to bring about change (Lewis, 2011; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). AI is a tool that can be utilized to empower individuals and systems to become self-sufficient and confident (Boyd & Bright, 2007). It is grounded on principles that enable creativity and knowledge within the
study environment (McKergow & Clarke, 2005; Lewis, 2011; Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). According to Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2008) five principles are central to AI and form the theoretical basis in its application:

1. Reality is socially constructed through language (constructionist principle).
2. Change begins from the moment a question is asked (simultaneity principle).
3. The choice of what is being studied determines what is discovered (poetic principle).
4. The image of the future shapes the present (anticipatory principle).
5. Positive questions lead to positive change (positive principle).


Process of AI

A four-dimension cycle is used to implement AI (Lewis, 2011; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006): Cooperrider’s 4-D model (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) provides four phases: Discovery, involving story-telling about experiences in order to identify existing strengths of participants (Ashford & Patkar, 2001). Participants then enter into the Dream phase where they imagine a future and share their wishes and hopes for the future regarding the topic (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Lewis, Passmore & Contore, 2011). During the Design phase participants are better aware of their strengths and vision for the future and share specific strategies to achieve their desired vision. In the final phase (Destiny) participants implement their action plans (Ashford & Patkar, 2001), celebrate positive changes and innovations resulting from the AI processes, and make plans for personal commitments towards change going forward (Whitney & Trosten Bloom, 2010).
**Value and benefits of AI as indicated in the literature**

Research undertaken by Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) in organizations that have applied AI, identified six elements linked to “freedoms” when used as an appreciative approach in an organization (Chaffee, 2005). “Freedoms”, according to Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2005), depict AI “as a journey of liberation, from oppression to power and one of social emergence”, in other words, as a journey for individuals moving from a position in a system or organization in which they feel powerless and unable to effect change, towards a point where they are empowered to generate change. The researchers found that, after the application of the AI processes in a community, participants experienced true liberation when they realised that they could make a difference in relation to others (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) and Graham and White (2015), identified six essential conditions generated by AI that were linked to elements of freedom.

Freedom to:

- **be known within a relationship**, thus being offered opportunities to get to know one another within a work setting or system, building and strengthening relationships;
- **to be heard**, be recognized, to reduce isolation and inability to change the environment and to share information and ideas ‘opening channels of communication’;
- **to dream in community**, to open their attention towards the future;
- **to choose to contribute**, inducing excitement and being creative, determined and committed;
- **to act with support**, creating a sense of self-confidence, learning and innovation;
- **to be positive**, by moving away from searching for problems, focusing on the positive, what gives life, and on what works.

**Application of AI in communities**

AI has previously been applied in rural communities in India and Malaysia (Ashford & Patkar, 2001; Yuliani, Adnan, Colfer & Indriatmoko, 2014), and it has been reported as a powerful tool for building self-confidence and self-reliance, empowering communities, stimulating creative and innovative strategies, and motivating active participation (Abdul, Aziz & Rahman, 2013; Yuliani, Adnan, Colfer
& Indriatmoko, 2014). While it was found to be effective when it was applied in a rural community in India, limitations were recognized. The limitations were derived from the challenges posed by complex language used, which made some communities experience the process as overwhelming. Specific suggestions were made by the researchers in the 2001 study regarding ways in which questions should be posed to such communities (Ashford & Patkar, 2001), and, although the effectiveness of the method itself has not been in question, during this study further critiques of AI were reported concerning the facilitators’ understanding and experience of the application of the method. According to Nyaupane and Poudel (2012) AI could be an appropriate method to assist in empowering rural communities as it does not make use of technology or require participants to read text-based instruments (Abdul, Aziz & Rahman, 2013). In 2013 the same authors reported on the use of AI as a research approach when they conducted research on tourism in rural communities; they argued that AI is a significant tool to empower local people by offering positive, strengths-based approaches to community development.

The WCM has often been used in conjunction with the AI approach to collect data and encourage positive conversation in systems and group work. As a means of collecting data, the WCM has been reported to encourage positive conversations in a system (Holman, Devane & Cady, 2007).

**The World Café Method**

WCM was developed by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005) as a large group facilitation method around a chosen topic (Lambe & Tan, 2008). The WCM is a strengths-based approach that was developed to engage groups of people in conversations about topics that are important to the group (Bridger, 2015; Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005) in order to support the group in the task of brainstorming and problem-solving (Bunker & Alban, 2006; Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005; Lambe & Tan, 2008). “The WCM is based on the understanding that conversation is the core process that drives personal, business and organizational life and is more than a method, a process or a technique – also a way of thinking and ‘the being together’ sourced in a philosophy of
conversational leadership” (Bridger, 2015). WCM aims to produce multiple perspectives on a topic, a flexible approach that can be modified in terms of the context, number, purpose, location and question choice (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005).

**WCM principles**
The seven core design principles or procedures comprising the basic method (Bridger, 2015; Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005; Bunker & Alban, 2006; Lambe & Tan, 2008), when it is implemented or hosted in a group discussion is visually presented below.

*Figure 1: The World Café principles for hosting*

![Figure 1: The World Café principles for hosting](Available from www.theworldcafe.com)

The first is “Setting the context”, where the purpose is clarified and parameters are considered within which the dialogue will take place. The second is “Creating hospitable space” in a welcoming and relaxed café setting to encourage sharing. The third is “Exploring questions that matter” where participants’ attention is brought to bear on a powerful question in order to generate collaborative engagement. The fourth is “Encouraging everyone’s contribution” by inviting participation and fostering listening and speaking. The fifth is “Cross-pollinating and connecting diverse perspectives”, whose aim is to enable the emergence of new insights by designing
conversations that can generate multiple points of view but still remain focused on the core question. The sixth is “Listening together for patterns, insights and deeper questions”, which requires the facilitator to guide the conversation in a way that will reveals deeper patterns and common perspectives without losing the uniqueness of individuals’ contributions. The seventh is “Harvesting and sharing collective discoveries” where the facilitator makes the knowledge and insights gathered so far visible and actionable. The process of WCM, based on its principles and easy-to-use guidelines, is provided in order to illustrate the application of this powerful method, and is described next.

Process

Conducting a World Café requires a café host to be assigned. According to Schieffer, Isaacs and Gyllenpalm (2004) this host is not a facilitator or an expert consultant, but someone who fulfils specific duties such as welcoming, orientating participants to the process, managing the process, and providing structure to the conversation. The host instructs participants to: focus on what matters; contribute their thinking; speak their mind and heart; listen to understand; connect ideas; listen together for insights and deeper questions; and play and draw on tablecloths (Brown & Isaacs, & The World Café Community, 2005; The World Café Community Foundation, 2015). It is significance that these practices enable the participants to support each other and to speak and listen and become more aware of how other participants contribute to the collective whole. However, practical aspects such as the allocated time for round table discussions need to be addressed beforehand as each round takes between 20 and 30 minutes. During sessions the host is required to assist the group to focus on issues that really matter by posing the question that will be explored around the table. The task of the host is to motivate everyone to participate, write, doodle or draw ideas on the tablecloths (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005; The World Café Community Foundation, 2015).

The World Café Community Foundation (2015) provides a hosting guide that includes the following procedures to follow when one is running a World Café. Various groups of four people are seated at café-style tables to explore a similar question or issue that matters to them. Upon completion of
the initial round one person assigned as the “table host” remains at the table while other members ‘travel’ and blend with other groups to form new groups at other tables allowing traveling participants to carry new insights that have emerged from the previous dialogue to a newly-formed group conversation. The duties of the table host when stationed at the table are to: welcome the new “travellers” for the next round of the conversation; share key insights from the initial conversation for new participants to link and build on from their prior conversations; gently encourage people at the table to join in and write down key connections, ideas, discoveries and deeper questions as they emerge. It is suggested that the same person should not be assigned as table host for more than one round. The WCM process can be repeated two or three times and is followed by a whole-group discussion where ideas, insights, actionable ideas and recommendations are shared.

**Research context**

The mothers in our study all lived in the same LSEE and were selected parents of children attending a government remedial school situated in the East Rand of the province of Gauteng, South Africa. All the mother participants had access to primary health care clinics, which were within walking distance of their houses. All their houses had piped water, but did not all have access to electricity. Although unemployment and illiteracy was common in the area, the mother with the highest school qualification in the group had passed Grade 12 (the highest grade in secondary school), four other mothers had passed Grade 10, and the remaining three had passed Grade 7, Grade 9 and Level 4 (a National Qualification Framework level at a special needs school). Most of the mothers had attended one of the special needs schools (remedial or vocational schools) in the area. Their educational levels meant that these mothers struggled to express themselves verbally and had difficulty in understanding broad concepts. Most were unemployed and were either single parents living on child grants, or, if they were in a relationship, had husbands or partners with low incomes. Most of the mothers were financially dependent and reliant on organizations and the school for food, support and clothing. They seemed to experience stress
regarding their living conditions and financial situations; they had all experienced past traumas, and were receiving limited emotional support. The stresses and issues pertaining to living in their harsh LSEE seemed to create deeply complex crises in these mothers and left them emotionally battered. This also affected their ability to view life in a positive manner.

We provide recommendations and share lessons learned with researchers in the field as well as practitioners (psychologists and social workers) regarding the facilitation of AI and WCM in LSEEs, can offer solutions for richer and better data collection and for better facilitation when intervening for change, specifically when working with this vulnerable population.

METHOD

Design

We used a qualitative research approach in this study. AI in research is mostly associated with action research, case studies, narrative, evaluation methods and.portraitures (Norum, 2008). Action research and AI are forms of applied research. In this study AI was used as the method of both the basic and applied research. We utilized AI first to gain basic knowledge of mothers’ experiences, and second to apply information gained in practical way in a troublesome situation. During our study findings emerged in the application of AI combined with WCM in an LSEE. We learned valuable lessons that we wanted to share by making recommendations to other professionals working in similar environments.

Aims

The aim of our study was first to integrate literature on the use of AI and WCM in communities, especially rural and poor communities. The aim of this article is to report on two methods, AI and WCM, that are widely used but have not been combined, used and facilitated with mothers from LSEEs in SA. This article sought to answer: How can AI in combination with WCM be facilitated in
LSEEs? Our objective is to ultimately make recommendations regarding facilitation of AI and WCM in combination, in LSEE settings.

**Participants**

Twelve mothers who were all proficient in Afrikaans and English and between the ages of 30 and 55 were purposefully selected on the basis of their willingness to participate. They were mainly unemployed or had limited income and lived in an LSEE in the East Rand of Gauteng Province. They all had children in middle-childhood attending the same special school in the area. A total of ten mothers participated; two of the ten did not attend all the focus group discussions.

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical consent was obtained from the North West University (NW-00125-11-S1) and the School Governing Body (SGB). Special ethical considerations had to be applied during this study as participants selected for this study were representatives of a vulnerable community due to: being women, their poor living conditions (overcrowding, small rooms, domestic violence, and alcohol abuse), low income and intellectual abilities. In addition, the mother participants had limited emotional support and opportunities to voice their needs and the challenges they faced, and revealed a dire need for assistance to be provided. Women have been excluded from research for many years due to their vulnerability and this has caused a lack of data needed to promote women’s health (Department of Health Republic of South Africa, 2015; Denny & Grady, 2008). However, it is important to note that vulnerable populations should not be excluded from research because of their vulnerability as these populations are most in need of being served and understood (Sieber & Tolich, 2013) and the need for support and assistance is exceptionally great within these communities.
Data collection and Procedures

We collected data through a literature study that was conducted as we searched and integrated existing literature on the use of AI and WCM in communities, especially focusing on rural and poor communities. We further collected data from three focus group discussions and five individual interviews in the initial two phases of our research. This article focuses specifically on outcomes and experiences regarding our facilitation of the methods, as observed during our data collection process. We provide the findings according to the principles underlying AI and WCM.

Findings and discussion

Our application of a combination of AI and WCM provided the groundwork for lessons that could be learnt by researchers working with vulnerable communities such as mothers living in LSEEs in South Africa. We worked with the mothers over a period of ten weeks and conducted five individual interviews and three focus group discussions. In our findings we discuss several key lessons that were learnt regarding the logistics, LSEE participants, participation and familiarity with the contextual background; here recommendations are made.

1. Lessons learned regarding logistical constraints in the facilitation of AI and WCM

AI as a sequential step-method

Difficulties were experienced with the application of a method, such as AI, that requires sequential steps. AI is designed to follow a customized and sequential 4-D process with each phase building on the next (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Thus a process is followed that requires participants to participate in all phases for outcomes and methods to be meaningful. Mothers found it difficult to keep their commitments to attend focus group sessions even when issues they had, such as travelling difficulties and supervision of younger children, had been resolved. This meant that some mothers would attend the first session but not the middle or last one.
A vast amount of evidence exists in the literature indicating the successful application of AI in rural communities (Ashford & Patkar, 2001; Kevany & MacMichael, 2014; Yuliani, Adnan, Colfer & Indriatmoko, 2014). In a research study conducted by Kotzé, Seedat, Suffla & Kramer (2013), recommendations and limitations regarding the application of community conversations in a South African context were made. Challenges regarding attendance were also experienced. No recommendations were made regarding the facilitation of a sequential method when attendance is poor, as are made here. A possible solution would be to provide participants with activities in the form of “homework” (practical and on the level of participants) setting the stage for the next phase of AI and to provide an overview of the previous session before starting the a new one, thus allowing participants who did not attend the previous group discussion to share their experiences and insights with the group. It is significant that professionals and researchers who apply AI as a method in LSEEs or similar settings should be cognizant of problems that participants might experience in committing to consecutive discussions. Attempts should be made to accommodate participants with regards to mentioned challenges.

*WCM table seating*

It is suggested that groups should not be smaller than twelve participants and at least four participants need to be seated at a table (The World Café Community Foundation, 2015). Because mothers found it difficult to attend sessions and had to cancel shortly before a discussion, seating arrangements were compromised. This also had an impact on the number of smaller groups, as only two could be formed, and the establishing of new groups around tables. The WCM guidelines state that after a conversation around a table has been completed the participants should ‘travel’ to form new groups at other tables allowing them to carry new insights that have emerged from the previous dialogue to a newly-formed group conversation (Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005; The World Café Community Foundation, 2015). The World Café resource guide (The World Café Community Foundation, 2015) further recommends that when a group is smaller than twelve participants, other small group approaches should be considered. Even though challenges were experienced, the researcher found that due to the complexity of LSEE
participants, the smaller group was easier to manage. Thus it is recommended that facilitators consider keeping groups small when applying WCM.

2. Lessons learned involving the LSEE participants

Questions posed to mothers

Challenges were experienced as the mothers had difficulty conceptualizing and understanding concepts in questions posed during the AI and WCM facilitation process, even when the concepts had been chunked down. Ashford and Patkar (2001) recommend that questions should be constructed around “who, what, where, when, how and why” in some communities as these types of questions are more easily understood.

Participants as table hosts of World Café

Brown, Isaacs and World Cafe Community (2005) state that the duty of a table host is to share the essence of the previous conversation with new participants who arrive for the next table discussion motivating participants to draw and write on the tablecloth. Challenges were encountered with regards to hosting as mothers struggled to summarize information, were reluctant to draw on the paper tablecloths and found it difficult to focus on the questions. Reynolds and Fletcher-Janzen (2002) correlate low socio-economic status with learning difficulties, which implies low reading levels, inadequate verbal skills and difficulty to focus. Despite literature indicating that each participant should take equal responsibility for hosting themselves and others (The World Café Community Foundation, 2015), the mothers found it difficult to summarize information. This could have been due to them struggling to focus on the topic and being hesitance to write on tablecloths. Research conducted by Farr (2013) found that in undergraduate programs limitations were centered around misconceptions about statements made, especially when students had not written or animated their ideas clearly on the tablecloths. Farr (2013) recommends that the host should be given the responsibility to provide feedback and to make own notes to ensure accurate feedback. It is recommended that when applying the World Cafe, the researcher or professional should have
assistants who are familiar with the setting, and who perform the duties of the table hosts to ensure accurate feedback. Even though the literature states that the duties of the table host is not to facilitate but rather to engage in the conversation with participants (Brown, Isaacs & Café Community Foundation, 2015), in an LSEE more facilitation is required.

3. Lessons learned regarding participation

The WCM provides a hospitable and relaxed environment that makes it easy to participate in dialogue (Brown, Isaacs & The Café Community Foundation, 2005). As these mothers were not familiar with a supportive environment and having the opportunity to share and voice their experiences, the comfortable environment that was created led to them sharing difficulties they had experienced even when these were unrelated to the topic. This had an impact on the time spent focusing on the question as time allocated was for individual rounds. One of the principles of the WCM is to encourage everyone to contribute (Bridger, 2015; Brown, Isaacs & The World Café Community, 2005). In order to keep conversations on track, the researchers recommend that participants should be refocused on the topic, but care should be taken as we found that mothers seemed to need to share their current issues. Their contributions elicited responses that they were being heard, supported and allowed to contribute (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003; Graham & White, 2015). The researchers suggest that in communities where there is a great need to voice challenges and where a lack of support exists, that group discussions should be held prior to starting the topic of focus. This could provide participants with the needed opportunity to talk about matters on their foreground as it is difficult for them to focus on a topic when they are distracted by the many pressing issues they experience in LSEE.

4. Lessons learned regarding familiarity with contextual background

After Ashford and Patkar’s (2001) applied AI in a rural community in India, they emphasized that creative and energetic facilitation is required for the successful application of AI, and that energy
levels should be kept high during the conversations. Stories shared by mother participants were overwhelming and facilitating such a process could become very tiring and emotionally draining if the researcher is not familiar with the types of issues that mothers in an LSEE face. Challenges with regards to time management and focusing on the topic arose. It is strongly recommended that when facilitators or researchers plan to facilitate the AI or WCM in LSEEs they should first familiarize themselves with the individuals and the context before conducting group discussions.

When AI and WCM meet in LSEEs

We created a visual presentation during this study to indicate how well AI and WCM work in conjunction as the principles are intertwined (Figure 1). Essential conditions (freedoms), as noted in the literature, clearly came to the fore. The comfortable café environment that was created through WCM allowed mothers to share with ease. This is significant as usually mothers from an LSEE are not used to talk in a group and are even less comfortable to share their problems in the presence of other people. The relaxed environment was especially suitable for these mothers; they easily participated in the conversations, they learnt to get to know one another and learned from
each other, and thus insights were shared. Shared experiences contributed towards the realization that they were not alone in their hardships and insight into the complexity of the problems of others. This correlates with the freedom to be known and heard (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Two mothers stated:

*It is good to hear that other parents also have problems and that I am not alone and that there are other parents that have worse situations....* (Participant 2)

*I am not the only one that has big problems, there are others... when you listen to someone else you realize that that person has bigger problems that you do.* (Participant 7)

The next freedom that was addressed was the choice to contribute as mothers were excited and willing to share positive stories about their interactions with their children. Instead of focusing on challenging issues and complaints, their approach became more positive; they showed enthusiasm to be equipped with knowledge to be able to deal with issues. These attitudes correlated with the freedom to be positive. In addition, mothers opted to render support to one another by making suggestions or sharing what they found worked in situations they encountered earlier. Contributing towards the relationship with her son a mother mentioned:

*Now that we have lately as I’ve mentioned spend special time with each child, it helps... For me this works and now he plays with us where he never used to play with us* (Participant 3).

In addition, mothers started a cell phone message group to be able to share inspirational quotes every morning. This also further correlated with the freedom to act with support (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

Most of the freedoms were found to be liberating and strengthening. The only freedom that was not addressed was to dream in a community. This could have been because the focus was on each mother’s unique experience rather than on reflecting on a collective goal for the community.

The theoretical principles on which AI is based were found to be enabling creativity, knowledge and spirit in the environment, based on the constructionist, simultaneity, poetic, anticipatory and positive principles (Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006; Whitney, D. & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).
Limitations

We realize that the findings obtained from a single case study with a small group of mothers in an LSEE cannot be generalized to the population at large. However, based on the deep, rich descriptions provided, the findings might be transferable to similar settings by readers and professionals.

Conclusion and future work

Use of AI and WCM alone, or in combination is becoming increasingly popular beyond organizational settings. Facilitating this combination of approach and data collection has not yet been analyzed in the literature in terms of problems and recommendations for LSEE areas. What we found of significance and highlighted in this article is that other than existing research, AI and WCM have not been used in combination in an LSEE environment before, particularly in South Africa. Although problems were encountered with the facilitation specifically with mothers in an LSEE, the methods provided valuable lessons for future application. Nevertheless, we found that challenges can be overcome with regards to research in which AI and WCM are used in conjunction to allow for rich data collection, provided recommendations are taken into consideration. We also found that the combination of the approaches is useful for interventions and support provided by practitioners working with vulnerable populations. We suggest that this should be further researched and that more recommendations are needed regarding the facilitation of these methods in LSEEs.

Our suggestions for further research are that the use of AI and WCM should be explored in other similar environments with larger samples over a longer period of time. Suggestions for practitioners of support groups based on the principles of AI and WCM facilitation should continue and community members should be trained in these skills and empowered to conduct group sessions themselves.
Although we found that many benefits can be related to AI and WCM used in conjunction in LSEEs, it must be remembered that challenges that people and mothers from LSEEs encounter are constant; circumstances do not change and problems cannot be solved easily. In addition, lasting effects of a positive outlook might be short-lived since trying constantly to survive in the context makes it difficult for mothers to stay positive and focus, especially when they do not have the necessary support. Going back to an environment that is stressful and exhausting could diminish energy and the focus on problems. Constant follow up sessions and long-term support to develop empowerment skills, assist families and create awareness of possible strengths are recommended.

What we found that is significant is that throughout this study mothers felt that they were not alone, felt heard, understood, and supported. A support system was created to return to once the groups had disbanded. We found that mothers felt they belonged in a community of mothers, problems were generalized, and a sense of well-being was created, “I am okay I’m not the only one, I can talk to someone who understands”.
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SECTION C

Summary, Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

1. Introduction

This research study was viewed against a phenomenological framework, followed a qualitative research design, with a basic and applied approach and consisted of three research phases. The article-formatted research report included the following:

- Section A: Part 1: Orientation to the research
  Part 2: Methodology (Empirical investigation)

- Section B:
  Article 1: Mothers’ relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment.
  Article 2: Towards an understanding of mothers’ dream, design and destiny processes in their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment: An appreciative inquiry.
  Article 3: Facilitating appreciative inquiry in combination with the World Café Method in a low socio economic environment.

- Section C: Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overall conclusion regarding the results of this phenomenological study. Conclusions are drawn with regards to the research objectives. Furthermore, limitations of the study are discussed. Finally, recommendations for professionals working in LSEEs are made and research opportunities that emanate from the research are presented. The chapter ends with a final conclusion of the thesis.
2. Conclusions with regards to the Objectives of the Study

The research consisted of three phases each with an unique objective. The purpose of this research study was as follows:

- To explore, discover and describe mothers’ experiences of their relationships with their children in an LSEE through the appreciative discovery process (best of what is) of AI. The aim was also to explore and discover the lived experiences of mothers and their relationships with their children in an LSEE from their own perspectives and perceptions.
- To gain an understanding of how mothers experience their dream (what might be, what the world is calling for, envisioning results) in order to design (what should be the deal, co-constructing) their destiny (how to empower, improvise, sustain) of their relationships with their children, through AI (described phenomenologically).
- To describe the facilitation of AI and WCM in collaboration with mothers living in an LSEE, in order to make recommendations for practical applications and practice about the use of AI and WCM in an LSEE environment.

The results in the first article, “Mothers’ experiences of their relationships with their children in a low socio-economic environment”, demonstrate that the discovery phase of AI can be used to explore mothers’ experiences of their relationships with their children in LSEEs. The findings indicate that, despite being inundated with stress and hardships due to limited income and poor living conditions marked by an LSEE, the mothers expressed great affection and appreciation for their children and shared positive stories about their children. The focus on the positive created an environment where mothers were able to share their experiences, produced an excitement between the mothers and set the stage for the next phase of AI to follow. Living in an LSEE with limited resources unavoidably leads to stress, having an impact mothers’ emotional well-being and influences the relationship between mothers and children. The findings highlighted the immense need for mothers to share their experiences in a group setting with other mothers living in the same environment and conditions. It seemed as if mothers were given the opportunity to share, they
released some of the stress and pressure experienced, which could have a positive impact on their sense of well-being. A significant finding was that a strong need seems to exist with regards to addressing underlying issues, such as the challenges of parenting adolescents, and feelings of inferiority as parents as a result of living in difficult conditions that created demanding life experiences. Possible interventions could include support groups for mothers that focus and build on strengths, and develop and create an awareness of strengths. Such support groups could increase feelings of successful parenting and closeness to their children, as the mothers indicated that they wanted to learn more to enhance their relationships with their children.

The second article provides a deep understanding of how mothers living in LSEEs envision their future relationships with their children, and how they design this future and implement their destiny to make their dream a reality. The findings highlight the impact that mothers’ own relationships with their mothers have on their ability to dream. The findings also highlight how the stress and challenges of living in an LSEE and not being able to fulfil their own needs make it difficult for mothers to envisioning a future. Even though the mothers found envisioning difficult, they were still able to design plans to fulfil their future dream relationships with their children by spending quality and special time with them, and noticing the changes it brought about in their relationships. Dreaming is important as it motivates for the future and unfortunately mothers in LSEEs often have a negative outlook on life. Thus support for these mothers is needed. It is recommended that mothers should practice dreaming, more time should be devoted to this and facilitators should consider which exercises would be best to assist mothers to dream.

The results of the third article indicate that a combination of AI and WCM is a useful method; however valuable lessons were learned with regard to facilitation in an LSEE. Through the application of AI and WCM lessons were learned regarding logistical constraints. The AI process is sequential and is implemented by following the 4D Cycle, which consists of the discovery phase, dream phase, design phase and destiny phase. In each phase questions are posed to the participants. In the discovery phase the aim is to direct questions to elicit stories regarding what works in a system. In the dream phase that which has been discovered is built on
and participants are encouraged to share their dreams for the future regarding the topic. This is followed by the design phase where participants create plans to make their dreams a reality and also consider actions that need to be taken in order to deliver the envisioned dream. In the final phase strategies are put into practice and participants are encouraged to implement their envisioned dream and take action. This phase is on-going and participants are encouraged to monitor their change and progress. When following an AI process it is required that participants participate in all the phases. However, because mothers from LSEEs are not always able to attend consecutive group sessions because of logistical constraints, following a sequential process becomes challenging. Researchers and professionals should consider giving mothers activities to do at home, such as building collages that do not involve writing, to strengthen the focus on the positive. This will afford those mothers who are not able to attend all the group sessions the opportunity to still participate in all phases, because they will be able to return to the group to share their collages. Further logistical constraints had an impact on the WCM table seating, as well as the mixing of the groups during ‘traveling’. Table seating could be organised only once the mothers had arrived and only two small groups of four mothers per table could be formed, whereas three tables are recommended. Even though the size of the group was smaller than recommended the researcher found that the smaller group was easier to manage due to the complexity of the mothers from the LSEE.

Another lesson learned involved the participants. It was found that when applying AI in an LSEE questions posed should not include broad concepts. The topic under discussion needs to be broken down into simple questions to make it easier for participants to answer. In addition, participants from LSEEs seemed to find it difficult to fulfil the duties of a table host during the application of a World Café. They struggled to focus on the topic discussed, were reluctant to draw and write and would therefore struggle to provide a summary of insights shared at the table with new participants when the group mixed. Even though it is recommended that a participant should take the role of table host in the application of the WCM, it seems as if a facilitation role as table
host would be preferable. The researcher found that having research assistants to host at each table was required to endure that the topic was discussed and insights shared.

More valuable lessons were learned regarding the participation of mothers from LSEEs. Mothers from LSEE are not used to share their experiences with a group. However, the relaxed and supportive atmosphere that was enhanced by the WCM allowed mothers to express issues that were currently on their foreground, often sharing challenges and experiences that were unrelated to the topic of discussion. Care should be taken when redirecting mothers on the topic, as they seemed to have an immense need to share, making them feel part of the group as though they were contributing. It is recommended that before applying AI and WCM, various group sessions should be held prior to starting the topic of focus to allow participants to voice their needs.

A further lesson concerned the facilitator’s familiarity with the contextual background. Stories of hardships shared by mothers were overwhelming and a facilitator could become tired and emotionally drained if not familiar with the issues that mothers in LSEEs face. Challenges with regards to time management and focusing on the topic also arose. Therefore it is recommended that when facilitating participants from LSEEs, the facilitator should first familiarise him/herself with the participants and their context. Even though challenges were experienced, the benefits of the application AI and WCM combined was clear as it provided an opportunity for mothers to share with ease; they learned to get to know one another, and felt heard. Through discussions they realised that they shared similar hardships and gained insight into the complexity of other people’s problems. They chose to contribute and felt part of the group. Instead of focusing only on problems they showed a need to better themselves, wanting to learn the skills to deal with the problems they faced.

Aldred (2009) argues that struggling communities may often be locked into negative views of themselves and struggle to break out of and imagine a more positive future. It is important to note that challenges that people in LSEE encounter are constant and the lasting effects of a positive outlook might be short-lived. Therefore, in order to produce change it is important that the application of AI and WCM should take place over an extended period of time. Mothers should be
equipped with practical skills to apply this positive outlook at home in order for change to ripple through them to the larger community.

The results also indicated that mothers from LSEEs who tend to have limited support, have a need to voice their experiences and challenges. They need support to address their own unfulfilled needs and traumas as these factors have an impact on their well-being, parenting and relationships with their children. The group sessions provided a space where mothers felt heard and could share their stresses and challenges with other mothers experiencing similar or the same hardships. Mothers also voiced the need for guidance regarding dealing with challenging behaviour that their children displayed, especially during their adolescent years.

The study also indicated that benefits can be related to the application of AI and WCM used in conjunction in LSEE. Even though the outcomes might be on a smaller scale than when utilised in organisations, changes were evident.

In terms of the practical implementation of the theory, the application of the AI and WCM methods, specifically with mothers in an LSEE, provided valuable lessons for future application. If the recommendations are taken into consideration, challenges that were encountered can be overcome. This could result in richer data collection when utilising a combination of AI and WCM in research.

Mothers provided valuable information that enabled the researcher to make certain suggestions regarding future research. These suggestions include:

- Exploring and describing the impact of support groups that implement an appreciative approach for mothers in LSEEs could improve the mother-child relationships.
- The AI and WCM approach could also be implemented with groups of children.
- Using dream activities and exercises over an extended period of time in LSEEs could improve mothers’ dream processes and overall outlook on life.
• Basic guidelines for the implementation of the AI process and WCM for facilitation in poor communities should be provided.

• Aspects of AI should be built into a parent’s guidance course, where dialogues on important aspects could be facilitated with WCM.

3. Reflecting on the Research

3.1 Personal reflection on the research

During the course of this study the researcher experienced a change with regards to her own outlook especially on how problems are addressed. Initially it was difficult for her to change her outlook, as traditionally, in research, the process seems to be to search for the problem and try to find a solution. This was especially evident when working in an environment where individuals struggled to voice their needs and identify problems or strengths. The positive outlook and approach as well as the research methods used (AI and WCM) enriched the researcher with a new way to bring about change. It was a mind shift and provided a new outlook on life and on working with clients.

During the course of the research the researcher developed a deeper insight and new-found understanding of the challenges and issues that mothers have to endure. She also realised the huge need that exists with regards to support, especially support pertaining to emotional well-being and parenting. Children in this LSEE face many challenges including learning challenges and support from their mothers is needed for them to cope with the stresses that this environment poses. If mothers are burnt out they cannot provide the necessary support that their children so desperately need.

The fact that the researcher was pregnant with her first child during the gathering of the data contributed to a positive outlook and created excitement. Mothers easily connected with her as they shared their experiences regarding their own pregnancies - even though they voiced that these pregnancies were not planned. In the sharing of pregnancy experiences it was interesting
that mothers could not comprehend the planning of the researcher's pregnancy. This provided more insight into how the participants could often focus only on the here and now, trying to survive, rather than planning. Thus a future perspective was very limited.

The researcher felt fortunate to be part of this research as the findings and experiences during the study, created excitement to assist in bringing about more change and reconnecting with her passion to work in less fortunate communities.

3.2 Reflecting on the trustworthiness of the research

In order to ensure trustworthiness, the researcher reflected on 'strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative research projects' as provided and suggested by Shenton (2004). A key criterion addressed is that of internal validity, which seeks to ensure that the study measures what it actually intends to. The findings were congruent with those that were reported in the literature. A further criterion is to adopt the research method by incorporating correct operational methods for the concept being studied. Specific procedures (combining AI and WCM) were employed.

Another criterion for trustworthiness is the development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating communities before the first data collection dialogues takes place. This was achieved through a prolonged engagement between the researcher and the participants in order for both parties to gain an adequate understanding of the issue at hand and in order to establish a relationship of trust. A further criterion to ensure trustworthiness is illustrated by the sampling method employed. In this study purposeful sampling was deemed to be the most appropriate due to the nature and context of an LSEE. Another criterion for trustworthiness is triangulation which involves the use of different methods such as observation, focus groups and individual interviews forming the major data collection strategy for qualitative research. The distinct characteristics of focus group discussions and individual interviews resulted in individual strengths (Shenton, 2004) through the use of strength-based approaches, namely AI and WCM. To further ensure
trustworthiness the criteria of tactics to ensure honesty in participants were applied when contributing data. This was ensured by informing participants that they had freedom to withdraw, thus only involving those who were genuinely willing to take part. From the outset of the study participants were encouraged to be frank, with the researcher aiming to establish a relationship in the opening moments indicating that there were no right or wrong answers to questions. The researcher made use of probes to elicit questioning and extracted related data by rephrasing questions. Scrutiny of the study by colleagues, peers and academics were welcomed. Advice rendered enabled the researcher to refine her methods, develop the explanation of the research design and strengthen her arguments. The researcher continually reflected on her study as it developed. The researcher was adequately qualified to be the major instrument of data collection and analysis. Member-checking was applied to ensure the accuracy of the qualitative findings by referring findings to selected participants to determine their accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). A thick description of the phenomenon took place under scrutiny (Shenton, 2004). Previous research findings were studied to assess the degree to which the study's results are congruent with those of past studies.

Transferability of the study entailing validity, dependability and conformability are discussed in Section A. With regards to transferability the researcher attempted to demonstrate that the work at hand can be applied to a wider population, however, as Shenton (2004) notes generalisability is never possible as all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur. Information on the following issues as set out by Cole and Gardener, Marchionini and Teague, and Pitts (as cited in Shenton, 2004) were considered prior to data collection: first, the number of organisations (communities) taking part in the study and where they are based; second, any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data; third, data collection methods; forth, the length of the data collection sessions; and finally, the time period over which the data was collected. In order to ensure dependability the process in the study was reported in detail, thus enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, not necessarily to gain the same results. In terms of conformability the researcher attempted throughout the study to take steps in order to ensure
that the study’s findings and results of the mothers’ experiences were those of the participants and not the preferences of the researcher. In order to do this the researcher relied on peer researchers and supervisors to act as auditors ensuring that interpretations were supported by the data. The researcher also constantly reflected back to the participants information that they had provided in order to make sure that their experiences were understood. In addition, direct quotations from mothers were used in the findings in order to enable other researchers to obtain insight into the logic that was employed to interpret the raw data.

4. Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study give an account of the experiences that mothers have regarding their relationships in their specific context and should not be generalised to other ethnic groups or mothers in other contexts. However, it does provide valuable insight into their lived experiences and changes that can occur when utilising AI and the WCM.

- Another limitation was that purposeful sampling was used in this research. According to Shenton (2004) random sampling procedures provides greater insurance that participants selected are a representative sample of the larger group. Nevertheless, the researcher rather selected purposeful sampling in order to have better control over the choice of informants.

- The findings obtained from a single case study with a small group of mothers in an LSEE cannot be generalised to the population at large, and larger studies need to be conducted to provide more insight and recommendations. However, as Shenton (2004) recommends, triangulation provided the opportunity to inspect snippets of information across informants.

- Further studies should include insight into children’s experiences in LSEEs, regarding their relationship with their mothers. This research did not explore the child’s experience of the relationship.
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Sage.


Appendix A: Ethical approval and clearance

26 November 2013

To whom it may concern

Faculty of Health Sciences
Tel: 014-298 2092
Fax: 014-298 2089
Email: Minnie.Greeff@nwu.ac.za

Dear Dr. Jacobs

Ethics Application: NWU-00060-12-A1 "Developing sustainable support to enhance quality of life and wellbeing for children, youth and families in South Africa: A trans-disciplinary approach"

All ethical concerns have been addressed and your request to include the sub-study, entitled "An appreciative inquiry into mothers' experiences of their relationships with their children in a low socio-economic environment" under the above mentioned umbrella project has been approved.

Yours sincerely

Prof. Minnie Greeff
Ethics Sub-committee Vice Chairperson

Original dated: Prof. Minnie Greeff(0147309) C:s|Users|S21H52Document|E|EHG02012 ETHC00060-12-A1 Add request 1.doc
26 November 2013

File reference: NWU-00060-12A1
ETHICS APPROVAL OF PROJECT

This is to certify that the next project was approved by the NWU Ethics Committee:

Project title: DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE AND WELLBEING FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: A TRANS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH
Project leader: Dr. H. Grobler & Prof V. Rees
Ethics number: NWU-00060-12-A1

The Ethics Committee would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Committee for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

The formal Ethics approval certificate will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Me. Marietjie Haqlryn
NWU Ethics Secretariat
Appendix B: Permission to perform research project School Governing Body and school principal

Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies
Faculty of Health Sciences
North-West University; Potchefstroom
0027 21 864 3593 (tel) 0027 21 864 2654 (fax);
www.nwu.ac.za

20 May 2013

School Governing Body & The Principal
XXX School
26 East Geduld road
Geduld, Springs

Dear Sir / Madam

PERMISSION TO PERFORM RESEARCH PROJECT

I (ELMARI BOTHA/VERHAGE) am currently enrolled for the degree PHD Psychology at North-West University (proof of registration attached). I am conducting a research project on mothers’ perceptions of their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment. My research topic is:

An appreciative inquiry into mothers’ perceptions of their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment

XXX school has been selected as the school where the research study will take place. I humbly request your permission to conduct this research in your school.

The research will involve twelve mothers of learners currently in XXX school. It entails individual interviews with these mothers, as well as group sessions. I also request that these interviews and group sessions take place at the school.

The inputs received from mothers will provide valuable information in order to convey the
necessary findings and recommendations to professionals and the school for assisting mothers in low socio economic areas. This could also form part of our community outreach program. Should you have any questions or desire further information in the process of considering the request, please contact me at the contact details below.

**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:** If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, please contact me and/or my study supervisor at the following contact details:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCHER</th>
<th>STUDY SUPERVISORS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Elmari Botha/Verhage</td>
<td>DR. Susanne Jacobs</td>
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<tr>
<td>CELL: 072 600 7612</td>
<td>WORK: 082 783 7474</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>EMAIL: <a href="mailto:Susanne.Jacobs@nwu.ac.za">Susanne.Jacobs@nwu.ac.za</a></td>
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<td>Prof. Alida W. Nienaber</td>
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Hope to receive your favourably reply to carry out this research project.

Yours sincerely,

____________________________________

__________________________

Mrs Elmari Botha/Verhage

____________________________________

School Principal

____________________________________

School Governing Body Representative

Name & Surname:

Signed at xxx school on __________day of ____________ 2013.
Appendix C: Informed consent, mother participants.

INFORMED CONSENT: MOTHERS

PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER: ELMARI BOTHA/VERHAGE

STUDY SUPERVISOR: DR. S. JACOB'S & PROF A. W. NIENABER

INTRODUCTION: You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Elmari Botha/Verhage – a student currently enrolled for the degree PHD Psychology at North-West University. Your participation will contribute to the conduction and finalization of a research study on the topic entitled:

An appreciative inquiry into mothers’ perceptions of their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment

Please read, review, and ask any questions that you might have concerning this research project.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to discover with an appreciative enquiry mothers perceptions of their relationship with their children in a low socio-economic environment. This study will be aimed to discover the positive aspects that you as a mother perceive in your relationship with your children.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL: Participants can withdraw from this research study at any time without any consequences. You are not compelled to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering. The researcher may ask you to withdraw from the study if circumstances should render it necessary.

PROCEDURES: Every mother that agrees to participate in this research study will be asked to do the following:

The study will consist of three phases (Pre-test; Intervention; Evaluation):

Phase one - Pre-test:

- Individual interview – the participant mother will be asked, with the assistance of the researcher, to complete a demographic questionnaire. Three mothers will be requested to participate in individual interviews.
• **Focus groups** – Six mothers will be requested to be part of a focus group.

**Phase two - Intervention:**

• **Focus groups** – All mothers will be requested to be part of a focus group that will consist of four sessions. These sessions will be between an hour and a half and two hours.

**Phase three - Intervention**

• **Individual interview** – The three mothers that were selected for the first phase of the research will again be requested to participate in individual interviews.

• **Focus groups** – The six mothers that participated in the first phase of the research will again be requested to be part of a focus group.

All the informants will be given as much time as they feel necessary to respond to questions asked during the course of the research study. With the expressed permission of each mother participant, the interviews and focus groups will be audio and video recorded. The researcher will transcribe these audio and video recordings. Copies of transcribed data will be available upon request. If participant’s names are mentioned during the recordings, these names will be protected by codes such as Mrs P and will not be published in the research articles. In no way will the identification code be used to determine participant identity.

**POSSIBLE RISKS / DISCOMFORTS:** Some of the questions asked in the demographic questionnaire during the individual interview or during the focus group may make the participant feel uncomfortable or may be difficult to answer. Informants are free to terminate their participation in the interview without prejudice at any time, and may choose not to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable. If you should at any time feel uncomfortable or have any questions, please feel free to discuss it with the researcher.

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS AND/OR COMPENSATION:** No participant benefits or forms of financial compensation are included in this research.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** The researcher will keep any information or identifying particulars about participants obtained during the course of this research study confidential. It will be disclosed only with your consent, or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained in that no identifying particulars such as names or surnames will be used. The researcher will refer to participants by means of numbers in the research report. The results of this research will be published and/or presented without naming the informants. All information obtained during this
research study will be locked away and will only accessible to the researcher. Audio and video recording files used for this research will be disposed of immediately following transcription and verification of the transcription.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS:** Consent to participate in this research study may be withdrawn at any time and participation discontinued without consequences. Should discomfort surrounding particular questions arise, they can go unanswered without discontinuation of your participation in this research study. Should any questions regarding your rights as research participant arise, please feel free to contact the researcher and/or study supervisor.

**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:** If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, please contact me and/or my study supervisor at the following contact details:

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Thank you for your cooperation, time and support. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Kindest regards.

________________________________________

ELMARI BOTHA/VERHAEGE

(PHD.PSYCH. Student : NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY)
INFORMED CONSENT

MOTHERS

The information above was described to me by the researcher, ELMARI BOTHA/VERHAGE in Afrikaans / English and I am in command of this language. I had the opportunity to ask questions. All questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I ________________________________________ (full name of participant), educator at ________________________________________ (participant school), hereby consent to participate in this research study.

I have been given a copy of this form.

________________________________________  ____________________________
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT            DATE

________________________________________
SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER
Appendix D: Group rules narrative

Lessons from Geese

(Applied to focus group discussions to provide rules and discuss confidentiality)

As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird flying behind. Flying in a “V” formation adds about 70% greater flying range than if the bird was flying alone.

Lesson: People who share a common direction can get where they are going quicker and more easily by getting a ‘lift’ from others in the team.

Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone, and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front.

Lesson: It is wiser to stay ‘in formation’ with those who are headed where we want to go, and be willing to accept their help as well as give ours to theirs in the group.

When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into formation and another goose takes the lead.

Lesson: It benefits all in the team to take turns doing the hardest task and sharing the leadership.

The geese at the back of the “V” honk to encourage those up in front to keep up their speed.

Lesson: Only give your leader positive honking – no one likes a backseat driver!

If a goose gets shot down or becomes sick two others drop out of the formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stand with it until it is either able to fly again or dies.

Lesson: We too should stand by each other in the difficult times as well as the prosperous ones.

John Adair
Appendix E: Submission to Journal Psychology in Africa

>>> Elias Mpofu <elias.mpofu@sydney.edu.au> 06/25/15 13:30 >>>
Dear Susanne: Many thanks for the submission. This shall be reviewed for Dec 2015 or Feb 2016 publication date if accepted. Expect feedback in about 12 weeks time. Thanks for your patience. All the same. Elias

From: Susanne Jacobs [Susanne.Jacobs@nwu.ac.za]
Sent: Thursday, 25 June 2015 8:54 PM
To: Elias Mpofu
Cc: elmaribotha@nashuisp.co.za; Alida Nienaber
Subject: BOTH JACOBS NIENABER ARTICLE FOR JPA AS ON 25 JUNE 2015

Good day Prof Elias,

Please accept the article: "Mothers' experiences of their relationship with their children in a low socio economic environment" for perusal for possible publication,

The weblink for author guidelines as we found it was: http://tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=rpia20&page=instructions.

Kind regards, Susanne Jacobs

Dr Susanne Jacobs (SL)
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2603@gmail.com )

Dear Dr S Jacobs & Mrs E Botha/Verhage

Thank you for submitting your abstract, ALARA2015038 (Integrated use of Appreciative Inquiry and the World Cafe Method in Low Socio Economic Environments: Practical Application) for consideration and inclusion in the programme for the ALARA 9th Action Learning Action Research and 13th Participatory Action Research World Congress to be held at St. George Hotel and Conference Centre, Centurion, South Africa from 4 – 7 November 2015.

This is to confirm that your abstract has been approved for presentation at the World Congress. I congratulate you and invite you to register and attend the conference and present the paper (oral presentation).

If you have not provided the proof of payment by the due date, your presentation will be removed from the programme.

Please find attached a Delegate Registration Form, which contains the guidelines for registering.

Regards

Ms Petra Lawson
Conference Administrator (ALARA 2015)
E-mail: conferencepl@gmail.com
Cell: (27) 63 231 6538