We are at the end of a challenging year. Optentia improved its functioning and results during 2017. In this way, we contributed to make the entity a better place. Highlights of 2017 include:

- A record number of peer-reviewed manuscripts have been accepted for publication. The throughput of master’s and PhD studies was good.
- Optentia researchers became involved in various international research projects.
- External funding for research projects increased.
- Optentia researchers developed new competencies.
- A thesis for the first joint PhD between the North-West University and KU Leuven was submitted.
- Four extraordinary professors presented prestige lectures.
- Collaboration among disciplines increased.
- Optentia recruited high-quality master’s and PhD candidates.

It is vital to study the optimising of potential of individuals, relationships and institutions. James Heckman showed that both cognitive and noncognitive capabilities determine the social and economic success of countries. Therefore, studying ways to optimise potential are relevant for communities and countries. Also, consider the following factors that will reshape human resource management in organisations:

- First, research shows that organisational improvements have four times the impact on organisational results as talent investments. Institutions should implement an organisational (and leadership) focus in addition to a talent focus. Leaders shape both the talent and organisation by modelling the right behaviours.
- Second, while individuals’ competence and commitment are essential, sustained flourishing (e.g. autonomy, engagement and meaning in life and work) are crucial.
- Third, organisations have been viewed as hierarchies with clear roles, rules, routines and responsibilities. However, they are now seen as bundles of capabilities of what the organisation is known for and good at doing.
- Fourth, collective leadership rather than individual leadership should be promoted. Moreover, emotional intelligence and learning agility (resilience and perseverance) have been stressed.

We should remember the words of Lord Jeremy Ashdown, who represented the international community in Bosnia Herzegovina after the war in the country: “I can build and rebuild as many institutions as I can but if I can’t change the hearts and minds of people it will not matter.”
Performance of the Optentia Research Focus Area: 2017

It is the end of 2017 and time to reflect on Optentia’s outputs (see the scorecard below). First, we produced 122 peer-reviewed articles, 49.87 article equivalents) and peer-reviewed chapters (16.03). More than 87% of the article equivalents accepted are in international journals with impact factors.

During 2017, 27 permanent research staff members, 5 support staff members, 6 postdoctoral fellows, and 26 temporary staff members (23 extraordinary professors and 3 extraordinary researchers) participated in Optentia. A total of 23 internationally renowned experts are extraordinary professors. A total of 18 master’s and 3 PhD students graduated in 2017. Also, 38 master’s students and 16 PhD students have defended their research proposals. Moreover, a total of 58 master’s and 16 PhD students are currently working on proposals. Finally, 20 master’s students and 11 PhDs have submitted their mini-dissertations, dissertations and theses for examination during November 2017.

The Optentia Scorecard by Prof. Ian Rothmann

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Output</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed publications</td>
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<td>73</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>122</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed articles*</td>
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<td>40.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed publications (ISI/IBSS)*</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Papers: International conferences</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers: National conferences</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of NRF rated researchers</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Master’s students</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>42 (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Master’s students</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18 (16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participating PhD students</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>21 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed PhD students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-doctoral fellows</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of workshops presented</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of workshop participants</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Outputs as on 1 December 2017 * Expressed in terms of equivalents
Encouraging Individuals to Work to Full Potential by Prof. Ian Rothmann

Potential is the capacity to develop capabilities with effort, good strategies and contextually-sensitive resources over time. How do we go about to encourage individuals to work to full potential? Key is to foster a growth mindset (in contrast with a fixed mindset). It is vital that they focus on the learning process and show how hard work (i.e. effort), good strategies, and proper use of contextually appropriate resources lead to better thinking and learning. While one wants individuals to put in effort, they should know that if they are stuck, they should not just redouble their efforts with the same ineffective strategies. Instead support the individual in finding another strategy. You also want them to know when to ask for help and when to use resources that are available.

Institutions can become efficient and productive if they encourage individuals to work to full potential. Research shows that as much as 70 percent of employees are not showing up to work fully committed to deliver their best performance. Furthermore, 52 percent of those workers are basically sleepwalking through their day, and 18 percent of them are busy acting out their unhappiness. But how do we promote sustainable flourishing so that people will work to their full potential?

Research shows that the quality of managers is the single most important reason for employees not working to their full potential. Exceptional managers possess five key talents:

- They motivate every single employee to take action and engage employees with a compelling mission and vision.
- They have the assertiveness to drive outcomes and the ability to overcome adversity and resistance.
- They create a culture of clear accountability.
- They build relationships that create trust, open dialogue, and full transparency.
- They make decisions based on productivity, not politics.

For a worthwhile existence
Optentia regards competence building as one of its strategic thrusts. The following workshops were presented so far during 2017:

- The Short Learning Programme in Research Design
- Fostering metacognition and self-regulated learning
- Preparing research funding applications
- Statistics using R
- From boredom to flourishing
- Flourishing through learning
- Positive Psychology: State-of-the-art
- Writing scientific articles
- Data carpentry
- eResearch
- The work of music in unequal Times
- Atlas Ti
- Appreciative inquiry
- Academic boredom
- Research in inclusive education
- From job insecurity to job satisfaction, high quality learning and career success.
- On enhancing the cross-cultural comparability of Likert-scale personality and value measures: A comparison of common procedures

The following workshops are planned:

- Data analysis with Mplus 8
- Longitudinal analysis in Mplus
- Short Learning Programme in Research Design

Optentia has been involved in three conferences this year: IACESA, Inclusive Education, and Pathways to Resilience IV.

Follow Optentia on Facebook and Twitter

Optentia’s Facebook page is used to disseminate research results. But it is more than that: it creates an opportunity to join a community of researchers and practitioners who are passionate about enabling the expression of individual, social and institutional potential.

Optentia’s Twitter address is @Optentia. Click on the image (see the picture below) to go to Twitter.

The Optentia website is a source of information for researchers. Take note of the following resources on the website:

- **Research projects** regarding the optimisation of potential. Click on Projects.
- **Slideshows, videos and reading material about research methodology.** Click on Research methodology and type the password. Contact Marinda Malan or Lynn Booyse to obtain the password.
- **Information about the procedures of the ethics committees.** Click on Ethics Committees. Type the password. Contact Marinda Malan or Lynn Booyse to obtain the password.
- **Optentia’s approach to research.** Click here to download.
- **The 2016 Annual Research Report.** Click here to download the report.

Note that a page exists for each Optentia research project on the website. You will find a description of the project, downloads, links, and project news on the link to a specific project. Note that the list has now been adapted to appear in alphabetical order to allow people to find specific projects with ease.

People from many countries in the world visited the Optentia website over the last 23 months. Although the website received visits at almost all hours of the day, most visits took place between 08:00 and 16:00. Over the last 6 months, 7298 people visited the website for a total of more than 19085 sessions.

"Take note of the resources on the Optentia website.”
What is Next in 2018? *by* Anjonet Jordaan

This time of the year most of us are quite tired and looking forward to the coming December holidays and a well-deserved rest with friends and family. Everything is winding down as student exams finish, postgraduate applicants are evaluated for admission and year-end parties are held.

In our quest to complete the activities and projects we are responsible for this year, we often postpone planning for the coming year and sometimes never get around to it when January’s new demands confront us. It is therefore essential that we put time aside to plan ahead for 2018.

As Optentia’s project manager, I am responsible for seeking resources to aid researchers’ endeavours. Too often Optentia members ask my help to find funding for a project or a conference when time has already run out to get funding in time.

Therefore, I appeal to Optentia members to put some time aside before leaving for the December holidays to plan your research-related activities for 2018. Draft a basic funding plan for your activities and communicate these to me early in 2018 so I can search for specific funding needs. Contact Anjonet for assistance: 016 910 3517.

Ethical People and Unethical Choices *by* Prof. Ian Rothmann

Research ethics is an important consideration for Optentia. However, sometimes ethical people make unethical choices. Consider the following reasons for such choices:

- It is psychologically unsafe to speak up.
- There is excessive pressure to reach unrealistic goals.
- Conflicting goals provoke a sense of unfairness.
- Ethical behaviour is not part of routine conversations.
- A positive example is not being set.

Let us promote a climate which supports ethical people to make ethical choices!
What I Learnt from Writing a Mini-dissertation by Elizabeth Bothma

Completing my honours in Psychology through Unisa in one year was tough, and I still had not recovered when I registered for a master’s degree in Positive Psychology. The course work was fascinating and the assignments enlightening. However, little did I realize how little I really knew about the meaning of tough – until I embarked on the writing of the mini-dissertation...

• It is complicated to write the same thing in five different ways: once for each chapter, once for the abstract, and once for the summary. And then a sixth, seventh, eighth way, ad infinitum, as you try to explain the whole thing to your friends and family.
• APA likes commas in strange places.
• Seasons change unnoticed, months pass unobserved. No, your birthday is only next week. Isn’t it?
• Swearwords can serve as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, and more. If you’re unsure how, email me.
• Your children are confused that you have to spend so many hours studying, but you’re not even writing an exam?
• Time off becomes time to wash your hair, the dishes, and sometimes the laundry. But if you want to spend your break time buying groceries, searching for your husband’s wallet and keys, or keeping the children from killing each other, it also counts.
• Coffee becomes cold so quickly. Didn’t I just make that? And someone steals your snacks when you’re not looking, because I did not finish that box of Smarties by myself.
• Like everything else in life, it also passes. And you can start putting a semblance of your life together again.
• Oh, and never use bullet points where you could have written a paragraph.

Introducing Dr Jacqueline Bosman

Dr Jacqueline Bosman was appointed as a Senior Lecturer in the School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resources on 1 November 2017. She previously lectured at the Vaal Triangle Campus and was the first student to complete a PhD in Industrial Psychology at the Campus. In 2007, she decided to temporarily leave the academic world to gain corporate experience, with the intention to return once she has broadened her experience. She worked as an organisation development specialist and a learning and development manager. However, she spent the greater portion of her career over the last eight years specialising in the application Industrial Psychology principles and interventions aimed at improving an organisation’s safety climate and performance. Jacqueline is thankful for the privilege to have come full circle, and is thrilled to be able to once again practise her love of teaching and learning, as well as re-establishing herself in the research arena.
Optentia House: A New Home for Researchers

As social scientists, we know that the physical work environment, as a job resource, provides psychological benefits in terms of attention restoration, stress reduction, and well-being. Therefore, Optentia recently moved their operations to Building 22 on the Vaal Triangle Campus.

Optentia is a multidisciplinary research entity with five full-time researchers, four research support staff, six post-doctoral research fellows, more than 20 staff members from schools who conduct their research in the research entity and more than 20 extraordinary professors. Given the growth of Optentia, the physical space available to do our work was inadequate. With the support from university management, the Optentia facilities were upgraded as follows:

- A house on the Vaal Triangle Campus of the North-West University that became available was changed to provide collaborative work spaces.
- The Optentia’s Indaba Room in Building 7 is equipped with technologies that support research and innovation, including wireless internet, lecture capturing facilities and 15 large computers.
- Adjacent to the Optentia Indaba Room is a small conference room, as well as two offices used by master’s, doctoral and postdoctoral researchers.

Click here to watch a video about the facilities at Optentia House. Optentia also developed a software application (Optentia Dashboard) to provide information about our facilities. Click here to see the Optentia dashboard.
News from the Master’s in Positive Psychology by Dr Marita Heyns

The fourth study week of the 2017 Master’s Programme in Positive Psychology at Optentia was presented from 13-17 November. During this week, our core theme — the flourishing of individuals, teams and organisations — was further explored by an invited guest speaker, Dr Johan Schoeman, who presented a workshop that focused on ways in which South African organisations can flourish and prosper in extraordinary ways.

Dr Schoeman completed his PhD research in 2012 and attended the Executive Programme on Positive Organisational Scholarship at the Stephen Ross School of Business at Michigan University USA in 2013. Dr Schoeman, now managing director of Sea Everest and champion of Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) in Africa, explains that this exciting new movement in organisational life draws on path-breaking research that seeks to understand what represents the best of the human condition in organisations.

POS does not deny the existence of negative phenomena found in organisations, but attempts to augment existing research by focusing on those aspects of organisational life that reveal possibilities, create abundance, vitality, collaboration and fulfillment. In short, POS focuses on systems, processes, procedures, practices and behaviours that are associated with “positive deviance” as these indicators steer organisations toward a more successful, positive course of human and organisational welfare.

As an introduction to the workshop, Dr Schoeman shared some disconcerting findings obtained through his Sea Everest consultancy service, such as that only between 5-10% of individuals in major cities in South Africa (6% in Johannesburg and 10% in Port Elizabeth for example) report that they are infectiously positive about their work. Imagine what could be accomplished in our economy if these numbers indicated the precious few who were desperately unhappy in their work! While much work remains to convince South African business leaders of the strategic advantages of positive organisational practices, the top 60 companies in America already require their senior leaders to enlist in a Positive Organisational Scholarship course as a prerequisite in order to lead.

A major part of the workshop was spent on case studies, interactive discussions and the outlining of practical strategies that could be implemented to reach beyond the ordinary to achieve “a 12 inch higher” vision and “off the charts success.” What an uplifting experience it was!

“POS does not deny the existence of negative phenomena found in organisations...”
Prof. Sufen Chen: Integrating the Philosophy of Science and Psychology

Sufen Chen is a professor in the Graduate Institute of Digital Learning and Education at National Taiwan University of Science and Technology (NTUST), Taiwan. She received her BS and MS in physics from National Taiwan University and PhD in science education from Indiana University, Bloomington. Her research interests are in the area of science education, technology-enhanced learning, metacognition, achievement emotions, and social media. Dr Chen has published in Journal of Research in Science Teaching, Computers and Education, Science Education, Physical Review Physics Education Research, New Media and Society, Computers in Human Behavior, and Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, among others.

She is Past-Director of the Graduate Institute of Digital Learning and Education and Teacher Education Center at NTUST, founder of the doctoral and international programmes of the institute, and co-advisor of doctoral students at University of Helsinki and Aalto University, Finland. She has been actively involved in several international projects with researchers from South Africa, India, Finland, Thailand, and United States, from which she continuously gains momentum, curiosity, a sense of self-fulfillment, and a wider perspective for research. She has shared her experience with students. As a result, the college students around her have started international collaboration since 2010 and the middle schools around her have coordinated international science projects for students since 2013.

Sufen is living in Taipei with her husband, Caleb Liang, the Chair of the Department of Philosophy at National Taiwan University, and two adolescent children. The couple, although never co-author in papers, intrigues each other. Caleb is a philosopher in white lab coat and publishes empirical articles, whereas Sufen has written quite a few position papers.

Click here to read Paul Wong’s writing about Taiwan.

She has integrated the fundamentals of philosophy of science and psychology into research in science education and digital learning, developed curricula and teaching modules for STEM education, and conducted activities for teacher professional development. Her most recent work includes investigations of academic boredom in science, mathematics, and English among secondary school students, collaboration with the Faculty of Engineering to prepare creative engineers for the age of Industry 4.0, and proposing new models to look at excessive Internet use.

She is currently leading the Metacognitive Special Interest Group under the Ministry of Science and Technology in Taiwan. She has implemented metacognitive scaffoldings to enhance low achievers’ science learning. She will continue developing her framework of self-regulated digital learning, which incorporates metacognitive strategies and technology, to raise low achievers’ learning enjoyment and achievement, and to tackle the fields that are less penetrated by digital learning such as motor skill learning.
Teaching Positive Psychology in Nature by Dr Laura Weiss

This October, I taught positive psychology in a forest. But let me start at the beginning. A study friend of mine, Thomas, moved to Italy. A while ago, he stumbled upon a house in an arboretum, a forest with trees from all over the world. It was an old farm, which was completely renovated into a training centre funded by the European Union. But once built, it was never used. My friend Thomas convinced the major to let him use it. The made a deal: he will bring people into the little town, but is allowed to use it, only paying for water and electricity.

So ever since, he organises workshops and courses, often around the topic we both studied: positive psychology. We applied for funding from the European Union to organize a one-week workshop for youth workers to teach them how they could use positive psychology in their daily work with adolescents. The saying "Third time’s a charm" was true in our case, as we received the funding when applying for the third time. Travel costs, board and lodging for both trainers and participants were financed by the EU Erasmus programme.

Together with two colleagues from my former workplace, the University of Twente, we went to Italy for a week. The group of youth workers we trained were 26 people from Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Finland and Wales.

We combined theoretical knowledge on well-being, resilience and self-determination theory with practical exercises, group discussion and mindfulness meditations. Small groups worked on solutions for problems they experienced in their daily work, using the theories they have learnt. We could see that they made the theories their own, coming up with practical, yet innovative ideas to increase autonomy, competence and relatedness for the young people they are working with.

The learning experience was even more enhanced by the beautiful location and surroundings. We stayed in the tiny village Sale San Giovanni, which only has 181 inhabitants and lies remotely in the mountains of Piedmont. It has a lovely church and a medieval fortress and is surrounded by hills and forest. As it was autumn in Europe, the woods were bright red, orange and yellow.

To get to the training centre, we had to walk 20 minutes through the forest, accompanied by the sound of cowbells. During the training, we made use of the surrounding nature, such as having group discussions outside and doing some of the exercises under the trees. Three people from the village were hired to cook for the group, so the people living in the village profited by having an extra income and we profited by being able to fully enjoy the Italian cuisine. During the evenings, we learned about the different cultures of the participant’s home countries. The spirit of European exchange even must have inspired Ugo, Thomas dog, as he secretly walked with my co-trainer Jochem to the train station when he headed back at the end of the week and jumped into the train just before the train doors closed…

As trainers, we learned as much from the participants as they did from us. Science and practice joined hands, which resulted in amazing outcomes. By teaching them the theory, we got back ideas of how positive psychology actually use it in practice. And finally, isn’t that what science should actually be about: add to knowledge to improve practice?

“During the training, we made use of the surrounding nature…”
Towards Greater Happiness by Prof. Ruut Veenhoven

We all want a satisfying life for ourselves and our children. Individually, we seek ways to achieve a more satisfying life and this quest is manifested in the soaring sales of ‘how-to-be-happy’ books and in the ongoing development of life-coaching businesses. Collectively, we call on our governments to improve the social conditions for happiness.

This call for greater happiness has instigated a lot of research on conditions for happiness, much of which is gathered in the World Database of Happiness. To date, this source hosts some 25,000 research findings on happiness in the sense of life-satisfaction. It is not easy to distil practical recommendations from this research literature. Not only are the findings too numerous to digest for an interested layperson, but findings are context dependent and not seldom contradictory.

One way to extract recommendations is to do a review study, that is, to inspect all the available studies and consider the strengths and weaknesses, and propose a list of best ways to greater happiness. This takes a lot of time, and typically results in a book, which is then added to the pile of existing advisory literature. An alternative way to separate the grain from the chaff among these many recommendations is to pick the brains of several experts and gather their views. That approach is followed in this Delphi study, which was subsidized by National Geographic magazine.

In the first round of this Delphi study 14 experts suggested strategies for improving life satisfaction. In a second round, experts rated these strategies for a) effectiveness, b) feasibility and c) cost-effectiveness. They considered 56 strategies that policy makers can use to raise average happiness in a nation and 68 ways in which individuals can raise their own happiness. Experts were informed about the average ratings made by the panel and about the arguments advanced. Then, in a third round, experts made their final judgements. Summed ratings for average effectiveness and feasibility of the strategies ranged between 8.4 and 4.9 on scale 2-10, which means that most of the recommendations were deemed suitable.

Agreement was slightly higher on policy strategies than on individual ways to greater happiness. Policy strategies deemed the most effective and feasible are: 1) investing in happiness research; 2) support of vulnerable people, and 3) improving the social climate, in particular by promoting voluntary work and supporting non-profits. Individual strategies deemed most effective are: a) investing in social networks, b) doing meaningful things and c) caring for one’s health. An overview of the policy strategies is presented in the table on the next page.

Policy Strategies to Promote Happiness
- Investing in happiness research
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Improving the social climate, in particular by promoting voluntary work and supporting non-profits.

Individual Strategies to Promote Happiness
- Investing in social networks
- Doing meaningful things
- Caring for one’s health.
## Ways to Greater Happiness for a Greater Number of Citizens

### Strategy

**Sum of effectiveness and feasibility**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look for What Works for Whom</td>
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<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Voluntary Work, Civil Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess How Much of the Above is Optimal</td>
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<td>Reduce Loneliness</td>
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<td>Monitor Happiness in Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on the Least Happy</td>
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<td>Combat Discrimination</td>
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<td>Increase Support for Non-Profits</td>
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<td>Foster Freedom to Choose</td>
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<td>Bring Life Skills to Schools</td>
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<td>Invest in Education</td>
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<td>Support of Fairs and Festivals</td>
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<td>Encourage Healthy Living</td>
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<td>Support Families</td>
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<td>Foster Ability to Choose</td>
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<td>Promote Good Government</td>
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<td>Improve Work Conditions</td>
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<td>Prioritize Prevention</td>
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<td>Empower and Involve Citizens</td>
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<td>Maintain Order in Schools</td>
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<td>Be Explicit About Focus on Greater Happiness</td>
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<td>Provide Minimum Income Security</td>
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<td>Reduce Unemployment</td>
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<td>Provide Free Healthcare</td>
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<td>Promote Sports</td>
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<td>Prioritize Mental Health Care</td>
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<td>Support Happiness Education</td>
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<td>Top-up Wages Program</td>
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<td>Monitor Happiness in Schools</td>
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<td>Invest in a Greener Environment</td>
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<td>Limit Urban Sprawl</td>
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<td>Educate Parents</td>
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<td>Favor Economic Stability Over Economic Growth</td>
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<td>Increase Foreign Aid</td>
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<td>Facilitate Internet Access</td>
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<td>Favor Saving Over Consumption</td>
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<td>Get People to the Dentist</td>
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<td>Improve Happiness Advice/Coaching</td>
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<td>Reduce Use of Cars</td>
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The Art of Asking Life-giving Questions by Dr Marita Heyns

Prof. Freddie Crous recently trained MAPP students at Optentia in the art of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). It once again became clear that this collaborative, strength-based approach to effect positive change has applicability across a diverse range of contexts and disciplines that extends well beyond its initial use as a change management tool within organisational contexts only.

The nursing profession, which is confronted by the adversities and problems of the health care system, can for instance employ AI to discover what is working and is healthy in this system. Daleen Koen is of the opinion that this more positive paradigm can be valuable in all the disciplines of Nursing, namely, general, community, midwifery and mental health. Participants can also be from different areas like professional nurses in management, theatre, mental health hospitals, old age homes and other facilities. The focus can also be on the training of student nurses to build on what is working in the two areas of their training, namely practice and theory.

As a Research Psychologist and Registered Counsellor who works predominantly within a tertiary education environment, Vicky thinks she could use AI to bring about positive change and solve problems with groups of students or academic colleagues. Appreciative inquiry could also be a useful educational tool to promote creativity and innovation and to facilitate teamwork work in groups of students. With a strong interest in qualitative research, she will also be able to apply appreciative inquiry as a research method.

Suzanne, a career counsellor, intends to incorporate a strength-based approach to career development using the process of Appreciative Inquiry. The approach would be grounded in the theories of positive psychology and focus on building the strengths that clients already possess as a way to create positive change. She sees an opportunity in applying Appreciative Inquiry to optimally integrate AI with a traditional career development approach to deliver a unique approach to fit the needs of the client.

Philippa, who works within an organisational environment on a consultative bases, explains that a portion of her day-to-day context involves mediation, an area where Appreciative Inquiry would not only be of relevance but extremely helpful. Added to this, problem solving occurs within organisations on a daily basis and most often the focus is on the ‘need to fix’ organisational challenges. She thinks AI changes this paradigm through its requirement of contextual thinking to “viewing organisations as living social systems to be nurtured and affirmed and not as mechanistic operations with problems to be solved” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999).

Ian values the fact that the technique generates stories and ideas that allow for the inclusion and expression of individual needs in ways that invite participation from others and eventually promote collective engagement. AI can thus serve as a motivational tool and a means to strengthen goal attainment.

Celestine, who is working in the Human Resources profession and currently on a project with the Department of Higher Education (DHET), finally mentions that AI can be used for change management, for strategic planning in formulating objectives and as a positive approach to performance management in her work environment. Indeed, AI clearly offers a useful approach to problem solving that resonates well with MAPP students from diverse professional backgrounds. Their mastery of this technique will surely serve to bring theory and practice together in many new, creative and exciting ways.
Visit to NTUST in Taiwan

Prof. Ian Rothmann was invited to visit the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology (NTUST) in Taipei from 26 October to 3 November 2017. He presented training programs in Mplus and participate in the analyses of data for an academic boredom research project. Prof. Rothmann set three objectives for his visit to National Taiwan University of Science and Technology (NTUST), namely to learn more about Taiwan, to learn about NTUST and to connect with Prof. Sufen Chen.

On 30 October 2017, Prof. Ian Rothmann met experts in digital learning at the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology. Digital learning might be an important pathway to promote learning in South Africa.

“Digital learning might be an important pathway to promote learning in South Africa.”

On the photo are Heidi Lammassaari (PhD candidate - Helsinki University), Dr Amandeep Dhir, Prof. Sufen Chen, Prof. Shirley Chen, Prof. Gwo-Jen Hwang (Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences), Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Cathy Weng Yang (Chair of the Graduate Institute of Digital Learning and Education), Prof. Sy-ying Lee (Chair of the Department of Applied Foreign Languages), Prof. Gloria Lo, and Prof. Thomas Tseng.
Global Constructive Journalism by Prof. Hans Henrik Knoop

In parallel to much of the work being done within the field of positive psychology, with its aim at a more balanced focus on the bright and darker sides of life, and its ambition to intervene before the damage is done rather than after, global journalism is meeting the same challenges as psychology. Also in journalism, negativity has long been predominant, known under the slogan “If it bleeds, it leads.” This has first left large parts of humanity with the impression that just about everything is getting worse, while indeed most things are improving. Recently, as it is becoming clear that the negativity-skewed news picture of the world is indeed highly misleading, and as the news media have increased their mutual accusation concerning the production of “fake news”, trust in journalism has plummeted to an all time low. As the news media are responsible for much of our collective consciousness, and as democracies, indeed everyone depends on truthful information in order to make good decisions, the media crisis has a huge impact on the world.

In recognition of this, a new initiative called Constructive Journalism has been launched and its first major manifestation is the opening of the Constructive Institute at Aarhus University, founded by former head of Danish Broadcasting Cooperation, Ulrik Haagerup and Co-Founder, COO, Maarja Kadajane.

They state how constructive journalism is a response to increasing tabloidisation, sensationalism and negativity bias of the news media today; that it is an approach that aims to provide audiences with a fair, accurate and contextualised picture of the world, without overemphasizing the negative and what is going wrong. While a healthy dose of negativity in the press is undoubtedly necessary, the chronic overexposure of negative constitutes a hidden media bias that has an erosive effect on the societies we live in. The aim of constructive journalism is to combat the trivialization and degradation of journalism by media that often is more interested in entertaining and creating controversies than informing the citizenship. Constructive journalism is calm in tone, being less focused on scandals, conflicts and outrage. It reports on important societal issues, setting them in the bigger picture and in their relevant context. Constructive journalism takes journalism’s democratic function seriously, building on the idea that journalism is a feedback mechanism that helps society self-correct. It holds, however, that awareness about a problem alone is unlikely to bring about corrective action. Constructive journalism, therefore, seeks to facilitate public debate not only around important problems, but also around possible solutions to improve the quality and the tone of public discussions. Constructive journalism is not about the “nice and cute”, nor is it positive or soft news that ignores problems. It is “two-eyed journalism”, balanced reporting on both good and the bad in society. Constructive journalism is not activism or advocacy and will never attempt to define the best solution to a problem. In short, constructive journalism can be thought about in two layers. The first one is the editorial aspect of picking a calmer tone and not giving into the excess of negativity and sensationalism. The other layer focuses on reporting on responses to social ills.

On October 26th and 27th the first Global Constructive Journalism Conference was held at Aarhus University with almost 500 participants from 37 countries. All the talks and panels from this conference are available here, including a session with Prof. Steven Pinker, Harvard University, and Prof. Hans Henrik Knoop, Optentia, North-West University. It is quite fascinating, how the optimising of human potential thus takes form in journalism also.
Towards One University: High Quality Connections with Colleagues

On 6 September 2017 academic and support staff working in the disciplines of Industrial Psychology, Human Resource Management and Labour Relations at the three campuses of the North-West University (NWU) gathered for a research day hosted by Optentia. Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Lene Jorgensen, Prof. Nicole Barkhuizen and Dr Elrie Botha organised the research day. The themes were summarised as four strategies, namely connecting, resourcing, capacity building and delivering.

Theme 1: Connecting
- Building rapport and relationships through face-to-face interaction, establishing intercampus days twice a year (each semester)
- Using existing systems (e.g. efundi) to create an interactive forum for discussions about teaching, research and community involvement.
- Creating interactive teams (e.g. round table discussions) to share knowledge on experiences/challenges/solutions on teaching, research and community services.
- Accessing the talented pool of younger scholars who we can groom to become the next generation of seasoned researchers.
- Implementing inter-campus colloquiums for research.

Theme 2: Resourcing
- Accessing multi-disciplinary researchers.
- Acknowledging the successes of colleagues across campuses and celebrating wins.
- Capitalizing on opportunities to co-supervise; co-publish, co-funding and access to various technologies.
- Accessing seasoned researchers who can act as mentors for novice researchers.
- Accessing the talented pool of younger scholars who we can groom to become the next generation of seasoned researchers.
- Starting a blog for academics whereby we can interact more freely with one another.
- Arranging an annual get-together where seasoned researchers may share some insights and where we can have round table discussions with colleagues working on similar research topics to identify opportunities for collaboration.
- Making active decisions to involve colleagues from other campuses for e.g. examination of theses, co-supervision, and co-authoring papers.

Theme 3: Capacity building
Using and building strengths and resources in the following ways:
- Improving methodological expertise (eResearch).
- Conceptualizing research problems.
- Managing research (funding applications/project management)
- Internationalization and cross-campus collaboration.

Theme 4: Delivering
- Implementing a web-based platform where each faculty member’s research focus, academic CV, and current projects are available.
- Starting a blog for academics whereby we can interact more freely with one another.
- Arranging an annual get-together where seasoned researchers may share some insights and where we can have round table discussions with colleagues working on similar research topics to identify opportunities for collaboration.
- Making active decisions to involve colleagues from other campuses for e.g. examination of theses, co-supervision, and co-authoring papers.

“We find our humanity - our will to live and our ability to love - in our connections to one another” (Sandberg & Grant, 2017, p. 141)
Anette du Toit: My varied interests have led me to study different fields, including Human physiology, Psychology, Criminology and Education. I hope to work alongside organisations to create a working environment which empower, challenge and stimulate their employees.

Natasha De Oliveira: Having the ability to help someone help themselves comes with getting to know yourself first. A beautiful and continuous journey. I’m Natasha de Oliveira I love Yoga, Meditation, Eurythmy, Mountain Biking, learning and I hope to make some sort of a positive difference.

Refiloe Digoamaye: I believe that a healthy dose of optimism, a good sense of humour, and wit are key ingredients to living a life directed towards achieving a true state of happiness. Not one afraid to challenge the status quo, I treat every unique experience as an opportunity to discover something new about myself and my environment.

Thembelihle Lobi: I am a product of my community, considering my background which was and continues to be challenged by a lot of challenges: lack of education, unemployment and poverty. Due to these factors, one had an interest in understanding how South African communities can overcome these challenges. I am of the view that MAPP/PhD OP-TENTIA will equip me with relevant skills which are centred on cutting edge research based approaches to address challenges faced by our country and the world.

Dolly Constance Magadzi: I am 37 years of age. I live in Polokwane. Currently I work as a generic social worker where-in I do foster care which involves foster care placement of children, family preservation, group work where I facilitate life skill programmes, parenting programme and community work. The reason why I chose positive psychology is that I needed to focus on what is right rather than focusing on what is wrong with the client all the time. My wish is to see clients flourish in their lives by capitalizing on their strength, what works for them and what contributes in making them happy towards their journey of optimal development.

Nanette Minnaar: I am a programme developer and trainer. I’m going to study positive psychology because I think it could greatly enhance the development work my company is doing thus creating a ripple effect in the lives of the programme beneficiaries, their families and communities. For me happiness is not a place but a process of fresh challenges and it takes the right attitude to continue to be happy.
Prinisha Naidoo: For the longest time I have had a need to ‘give back’, to help others in some way. I am hoping that by studying this degree it will allow me to do just that; it will open my mind and broaden my horizons, that it will both teach and fulfill. My goal is to aid others and to leave a legacy where I will be remembered not only for who I was but more so for what I did. We all die. The goal is not to live forever, the goal is to create something (Chuck Palahniuk).

Deoni Oosthuizen: I completed my BA and Honours in Psychology (Professional Contexts) part time through UNISA. I am currently registered as a counsellor at the CCSA and provide art therapy workshops and other more conventional counselling to children and adults. It is also my passion to help people with disabilities to reach their full potential. I decided to do this Master’s in Positive Psychology because I want to specialise and make counselling more attractive and interesting and gain more practical skills. And also because I believe that psychology is starting to modernise and that positive psychology and art therapy is the future and can be combined very well.

Inge Potgieter: I am 24 years old and from Pretoria. I completed my BA (HSSS) Counselling Psychology degree at Unisa and BA Honours in Psychology at the University of Johannesburg. I am passionate about psychology and excited to start the MAPP program. I enjoy horse riding, crossfit and reading. I spent 6 months in China at the beginning of 2017 and I am happy to be home in South Africa.

Mel Schilder: The following is a brief profile of who I am, no frills: BA Hons. Psych. PGCE. I am constantly trying to understand myself and others better. Fixed- and growth-mind-sets fascinate me. I am looking forward to growing and thriving.

Christine Scott: I have been living in Graaff-Reinet for the last 17 years, married for 32 years and have two daughters aged 19 and 27. I am an educator and school counsellor at Union High School, teaching Music and Life Orientation, and I am also actively involved in the Assemblies of God Church. The field of Positive Psychology echoes my own personal views on how all aspects of life should be approached and the MAPP programme will equip me with the knowledge, skills and tools needed for my development and to bring about effective, positive changes in my workplace and within the community I am involved in.

... the MAPP programme will equip me with the knowledge, skills and tools needed for my development ...
News: Flourishing in Institutions by Prof. Ian Rothmann

On 17 August 2017 Prof. Ian Rothmann presented a paper at a conference for consulting psychologists at the University of South Africa. The title of the presentation was: “Making a meaningful contribution towards the psychological understanding, health and well-being of our nation: What must Psychology do?” Prof. Rothmann referred to the challenges that social scientists, and more specifically psychologists face. He defined meaningful contribution in terms of three components, namely comprehension, significance, and purpose. A meaningful contribution can be made by improving the well-being of all through science by informing people what they ought to do to live the best lives possible and using our resources to make the world a better place (Peter Singer). More specifically, he pointed out 10 roles for consulting psychologists, namely:

- Changing attitudes, motivation and behaviours
- Understanding the biological perspective
- Considering the context and culture
- Building strengths through education
- Understanding sustainable flourishing
- Capitalising on diversity
- Collaborating with other disciplines
- Building positive institutions
- Building developmental organisations
- Developing people and institutions to master technology.

On 6 October 2017, Prof. Ian Rothmann and Dr Angelique van Rensburg attended a planning session for a research project “Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments” in Pretoria. The project leaders are Prof. Linda Theron (the University of Pretoria and extraordinary professor in Optentia) and Prof. Mike Ungar (Canada). The project aims to better understand how oil and gas production and climate change impact the social, economic and environmental systems that affect young people’s mental health and overall well-being.

On 18 October 2017, Prof. Ian Rothmann addressed employee health and wellness practitioners on mental health in the workplace. More than 250 practitioners attended the presentation. Keyholders with the message “How are you?” were distributed to the participants. The presentations during the day can be downloaded here.

Prof. Ian Rothmann Visited Statistical Expert

Prof. Ian Rothmann visited the Netherlands during November 2018. The aim of the visit was to learn more about dealing with missing values in longitudinal studies. Prof. Van de Schoot also introduced a computer software (Jamovi) which can be used to investigate data relations using correlations and multiple regression analysis. Prof. Rothmann also met with Prof. Ype Poortinga (cross-cultural psychologist).
The End of the Road Less Travelled: What We Have Learnt

In 2015 I shared my very first thoughts at the onset of my PhD journey. Two years later I am at the end of this road – a time for reflection on my learning. And I did learn a lot. Most importantly, I have learnt about the experiences and motivation of unemployed in South Africa from a person- and variable-centred perspective. More specifically, we set out to evaluate the generalisability of a psychosocial typology of unemployed people; to explore their motivational profiles and differential outcomes thereof; and to determine whether motivation relates to the experiences, attitudes and behaviour of the unemployed over time through basic need satisfaction and frustration. To achieve these aims, participants were recruited from the North West and Gauteng Provinces.

Person-centred results indicated “the unemployed” are not one homogeneous group. Variable-centred results indicated both amotivation and controlled motivation were detrimental because they thwarted the experience of basic psychological needs. Results also showed that basic psychological need satisfaction was beneficial for experiential outcomes in unemployment six months later.

The study highlighted several concerns: less desirable psychosocial and motivational profiles are more prevalent which means that the majority of these individuals are psychologically at-risk. It also illustrated that more optimal forms of motivation are perhaps not able to foster optimal outcomes in contexts where their goals (of finding employment) are continuously being frustrated. The study also highlighted an opportunity: psychological need satisfaction plays an important role in the well-being of the unemployed.

Our findings have some clear implications for practitioners. Interventions should be tailored to the needs of different groups as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach. Given that psychological need satisfaction can lower the negative experiences of the unemployed, psychological interventions could focus on enhancing the satisfaction of the psychological needs. Our results also emphasise the need for combined interventions. Such combinations focus on occupational skills training (reducing the prevalence of personal amotivation) and psychological interventions (enhancing experienced psychological need satisfaction) and are effective for enhancing psychological well-being. These interventions would be more successful if jobs are created or support is provided for self-employment (reducing the prevalence of structural amotivation). Alternatively, the unemployed should be encouraged to participate in other activities that can provide them with a sense of psychological need satisfaction while searching for (self)employment opportunities.

I submitted my thesis for examination recently and I want to thank Profs. Anja, Ian, and Hans for their guidance and support on this incredible journey. It has been and continues to be a huge privilege to have you as passengers (and sometimes as drivers) on this trip. The journey would of course not be complete without a road map for the future, another road less travelled. While I am anxiously awaiting the outcome of the evaluation, I should be “mapping” (i.e. writing grant applications)
Experiences of Unemployment by Melinda du Toit

Since March 2014, I am part of a team investigating the experience of unemployment of black township residents. Data for my research consisted of a literature review of qualitative studies on the experience of unemployment as well as a qualitative analysis of 22 semi-structured interviews with unemployed individuals and township entrepreneurs. Three aspects of context directly affect the experience of unemployment.

On the level of context as structure: The unemployed person experiences the attitudes and perceptions of the broad society as unsympathetic, without any understanding or respect and a denial of their value as equal citizens of society. They also experience an inability to be visible to or get access to these groups in the larger social order deemed respectful and worthy.

On the level of context as relations: Instead of being a support network around the unemployed person, the community surrounding him/her offers, in the majority of the cases, little to no safety net. A major contribution to the exacerbated negative experience of unemployment is the lack of support from the unemployed person’s immediate community. Stigmatization, gossip, mistrust, labelling and social withdrawal cause the unemployed individual to face a life without diminished or no social support. Research done in the USA and Europe have shown that support groups of like-minded persons or people in the same dire and challenging situation, buffer the individual against the emotional trauma of labelling and stigmatization from the broader society and community. Often respondents will reveal that family will not even understand them and that a support group of individuals in the same situation will become a safe haven and alleviate some of the stress and emotional trauma of living a life seen by society as ‘not the norm’.

On the level of context as agency: It became apparent that the vast amount of unemployed individuals adapt with strength, creativity and buoyancy in their counter-reaction to the negative responses towards them. Whether this response is socially acceptable to the wider society or not, the unemployed individual makes plans to survive and/or create conditions in which they find ways to deal with their circumstances.

Some counter-reactions to the frustration of being misunderstood and negated, the unemployed would sometimes present with so-called anti-social or unacceptable behaviour (termed and judged against the norms and values of the society who does not understand these individuals).

The findings of the empirical study done in the townships of Boipatong and Orange Farm show that the respondents are suffering, not only because of the hardship of poverty brought on by a life without a stable income but also by a community and broader society which judge and stigmatize them. They too would be influenced by the predominant stereotypical depiction and would, therefore, show diminished self-confidence and negative self-stereotypical presentation of themselves and others like them in the community. However, the unemployed individuals in Boipatong and Orange Farm demonstrated an optimism towards the future and they voiced a belief that the future will bring an improved situation for them and their families. This belief is based on two premises, namely: a) either an external force, such as God or the ancestors, or a change in the socio-political or economic system will bring relief; and/or b) their strength and amazing ability to have survived until now against all odds have taught them survival skills which will serve them further into the future.

Ongoing, long-term investment should be made in terms of coaching, mentoring, leadership development within community support groups. A focus should be on building a vibrant, modern, healthy space and environment with a caring, supportive community. Further research could additionally focus on what programmes or interventions will be the most appropriate to use in order to strengthen these individuals’ potential and resilience and help them to withstand the negative implications of their challenging situation, while also building support groups within the community.
My PhD Journey by Rachele Paver

Once again I had the opportunity of visiting Belgium from August to October. This time around it was more work than play. Fortunately, we (Melinda and I) managed to squeeze some adventures into our working schedule. I am excited to share that during this time I managed to finish my first article, which has now been submitted for publication. The objective of this study was to identify employment programmes in Boipatong and Orange Farm, communities with whom we have worked closely during the project. Two major findings were evident.

First, information regarding programmes for the unemployed is, in general, either unavailable or difficult to access. Involved stakeholders function in isolation and are usually unaware of each other. Second, important interventions aimed at increasing unemployed people’s experience of unemployment (coping with being unemployed, increasing their level of psychological needs satisfaction, motivational regulation, and well-being) are limited. This study provides evidence that serves as a basis to justify that employment interventions should have a more prominent focus on the psychological aspects of unemployment.

During this visit I also often thought of this project, and how it started with the supervisors who had an idea, and how amazingly everything has (and is) falling into place. It may have started as a small endeavour, with only three students, but even in its infant stages it has the potential to make a difference in the communities we work with. With Leoni who has already submitted her thesis and Melinda who will be submitting in early 2018, and seeing how the results of their studies overlap with our idea for the intervention, much of the groundwork has been done. I believe that together we are starting to lift some stones, with the aim of eventually moving mountains.

“If you wish to move mountains tomorrow, you must start by lifting stones today.” - African Proverb

Taiwan Researcher Analysing Data at Optentia

A researcher working at the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology (NTUST), Chi Chi has visited Prof. Ian Rothmann from 6-12 December 2017. The aim of the visit was to conduct analyses on data regarding academic boredom gathered over four waves. Chi Chi studied psychology. He is working as research assistant for digital learning at NTUST. Chi Chi has a keen interest in digital learning and wants to learn more on the topic.

“... employment interventions should have a more prominent focus on the psychological aspects of unemployment.”
Experts Gather for a Job Insecurity Workshop

A group of dedicated researchers and practitioners gathered on 1 December 2017 for a workshop on job insecurity. The workshop which was partially funded by the National Research Foundation focused on the antecedents and outcomes of job insecurity. It also addressed ways of dealing with job insecurity. Dr Lara Roll, post-doctoral fellow in Optentia introduced the international speakers, including Prof. Hans De Witte (Belgium), Dr Lixin Jiang (New Zealand), Prof. Tahira Probst (USA), and Prof. Haijiang Wang (China).

Slides of the different presentations are available on the Optentia website. Go to Education, Workshops and type the password). The password is available from Dr Lara Roll. Three important topics that should (according to the participants) be on the job insecurity research agenda include contracts, technology and communication. Click here to watch a video about the workshop.

Recommendations of how organisations can deal with job insecurity

Participants in the workshop on job insecurity on 1 December 2017
Wave 2 Completed in the Extended Pathways to Resilience Project

Dr Angelique van Rensburg, Prof. Linda Theron, Stephanie Nowack (intern research psychologist in Optentia), Dumisani Nhlapo (field worker) and Simon Maeketsi (field worker), completed the second wave of data collection in the Extended Pathways to Resilience Research Project September 2017. During 2015, the team collected mixed method data (i.e. Pathways to Resilience Youth Measure and Draw and Write) from 424 Grade 8 learners in eight Quintile 1 schools in the Sedibeng District. The aim was to understand who and what contributes to young people doing well in life, even when their lives are hard and the longitudinal relationships that exist. In 2017, six Quintile 1 school agreed to participate in wave two and field workers collected data from about 147 participants, now in Grade 10. Dr Angelique van Rensburg aims to revisit these participants in 2018 for a third wave of data collection.

Workshop and Visit: Prof. Fons van de Vijver

Prof. Fons van de Vijver, cross-cultural psychology expert, visited Optentia from 6-8 December 2017. He presented a workshop with the title: “On enhancing the cross-cultural comparability of Likert-scale personality and value measures: A comparison of common procedures.

According to Prof. van de Vijver, self-reports are known to be susceptible to biases because of response styles, including acquiescent response styles, midpoint response styles, extremity response styles, and social desirable responding. Response styles refer to a systematic tendency to endorse certain response options on some basis other than the target construct.

We know from cross-cultural studies that cultural groups differ in their tendency to use such biases. He reported on a study that compared the most common procedures to deal with such biases in 16 countries. He pointed out that there is not a single procedure that improves comparability and validity. Anchoring vignettes, parceling, and treating data as ordered categories seem promising to alleviate incomparability, although each of these procedures also has its issues.

We asked Prof. van de Vijver the following five questions about response styles:

- How would you define response styles?
- What are the issues with response styles?
- Why is it important to consider response styles?
- Are there cross-cultural differences in response styles?
- How should researchers and practitioners deal with response styles?

Click here to watch a video in which Prof. Van de Vijver provided answers to the five questions. Click here to download the presentation from the Optentia website.
Sub-programme News: Strengths-based Interventions

The Bophelong Community Project (BTP) originated with youth within the community who wanted to give back to their community. They recognised learners’ needs for academic and psycho-social support, considering many schools in the area are disadvantaged and receive inadequate schooling. The youth who act as tutors and mentors are either currently completing degrees or diplomas at tertiary institutions, or have completed their studies and are in the process of pursuing their own careers. They offer their expertise and services voluntarily on an entirely free basis for the purpose of uplifting their community. Members of BTP contacted Dr Karen van der Merwe to discuss their aims in expanding their skill sets as well as the BTP to other communities. From these discussions, the learner development project was conceptualised.

Dr Karen van der Merwe (Principal Investigator) and Dr Tamlynn Jefferis are embarking on a research project “Learner development in the Bophelong Tutoring Programme” that aims to benefit both learners currently attending the programme, as well as Psychology Honours students registered for 2018.

It is widely acknowledged that our education system in South Africa is in crisis, and there is often a lack of psycho-social support for learners, particularly learners in underprivileged schools. This has a ripple effect that is seen in higher education as well. In light of this, our aim is to: (1) to develop a positive psychology-based intervention programme; (2) involve NWU students in service learning/experiential learning (3) to critically evaluate the programme and student learning; and (4) to critically evaluate the research methodology. This project has the potential to contribute towards the well-being of learners, as well as the personal and academic development of Psychology Honours students. Additionally, we aim to uncover insights in teaching and learning that can be utilised both for the benefit of our students, and shared with the tutors and learners in the BTP.

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” (Martin Luther King Jr.)
Childhood Sexual Abuse: Trauma Causing Factors by Marinda Henning

The main aim of my exploratory qualitative research study was to explore what is known from literature and practice about trauma causing factors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) in adult women survivors. I first conducted a systematic scoping review to identify available literature and provide a summary of evidence from a variety of studies on the trauma causing factors of CSA. I then presented the findings to a panel of experts during a focus group discussion for input and/or additional information regarding the trauma causing factors of CSA. Next, I explored the trauma causing factors reported by adult women survivors of CSA participating in a S2T collaborative strengths-based group intervention programme by conducting qualitative secondary analysis (QSA) on one existing data set.

Six trauma causing factors in the literature surrounding CSA that caused trauma in the lives of adult women survivors were identified, namely traumatic sexualisation, betrayal, stigmatisation, powerlessness, developmental arrest, and the nature and context of CSA. Traumatic sexualisation speaks to the impact of CSA on victims’ natural sexual maturity, where age-inappropriate sexualisation of a child by the perpetrator introduces her to sexual matters for which she is psychologically, physically, and emotionally not prepared. Their innocent bodies were objectified by the perpetrators who violated survivors’ personal boundaries for the satisfaction of their own obscure sexual needs. The trauma experienced by survivors of CSA also originated from significant others’ betrayal of their childhood needs of affection, safety and support, where important childhood relationships with attachment figures were damaged. The experience of CSA left survivors feeling stigmatised as well, as they perceived themselves as being different and isolated from their peers in childhood, where the internalised victim-blaming and self-blame for the CSA, contributed to victims’ negative self-concepts. This led to the non-disclosure of their childhood sexual trauma to others.

The traumatic experience of CSA left survivors feeling stigmatised as well, as they perceived themselves as being different and isolated from their peers in childhood, where the internalised victim-blaming and self-blame for the CSA, contributed to victims’ negative self-concepts. This led to the non-disclosure of their childhood sexual trauma to others. In conclusion, CSA left survivors feeling stigmatised as well, as they perceived themselves as being different and isolated from their peers in childhood, where the internalised victim-blaming and self-blame for the CSA, contributed to victims’ negative self-concepts. This led to the non-disclosure of their childhood sexual trauma to others.

Survivors’ powerlessness were documented as the power dynamics that existed between an adult perpetrator and child. This, and child victims’ inability to escape the abusive environment due to their dependence on the perpetrator, makes it difficult for the child to avoid or end the abuse. A disturbing finding was that in some unstable families, children might be sexually exploited to accommodate absence of mothers who do not satisfy the sexual needs of their husbands or partners. Embedded in evidence of developmental arrest is the damage to victims’ emotional development due to the suppression of emotions and feelings during and after CSA, and impairment to victims’ frame of reference which limits their self-understanding. Additionally, the loss of childhood specifically, often goes unnoticed in society since survivors grew up to be mature adults. Unfortunately, the trauma experienced in childhood cost survivors the most innocent and valuable experience of growing up. The nature and context of CSA was found to determine the degree of trauma experienced by survivors, which depended on a combination of several interrelated contextual circumstances under which CSA occurs. As such, the varying levels of trauma reported are rooted in the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, whether the victims experienced physical intrusion, and the level of support they received during and after the sexual abuse, especially upon disclosure.

During the discussions held with experts, a comparison between the identified trauma causing factors of CSA in literature and those factors observed in treatment practice, confirmed the findings from the scoping review. The QSA on one data set of the S2T collaborative strengths-based group intervention programme identified five trauma causing factors that corresponded to those documented in literature, with the exception of the nature and context of CSA.

The traumatic experience of sexual abuse in childhood caused enduring trauma in the lives of adult women survivors. It offers a deep understanding of the trauma caused by CSA which remains unresolved until survivors are afforded an opportunity of disclosing their experiences in a safe and supportive environment.
When Research Makes a Difference to Vulnerable Groups

The Survivor to Thriver (S2T) collaborative strengths-based intervention aiming at promoting resilience and enabling posttraumatic growth in women who experienced childhood sexual abuse is now in its fourth year. Dr Hayley Walker-Williams and Prof Ansie Fouché started pilot testing the programme with the first group of female survivors in 2013 and have recently commenced with the third group of survivors.

Annual follow-ups are conducted with survivors who completed the programme in 2013 and 2014. The preliminary data analysis suggests longitudinal benefits for the survivors who completed the programme. The following are extracts of annual follow-up feedback from survivors who completed the intervention programme in 2014:

• “I’m thankful for S2T. It has really opened me up to a whole new journey of self-discovery and growth. I wasn’t aware of how much pain I carried over my life from many traumas. But I’m glad I was introduced to a group of strong and dynamic women, all of you ladies, and I’m grateful for Ansie and Hayley without you I’d probably still be in the dark. It’s been a long and interesting journey... but I’m glad I met you all... Stay blessed and keep on thriving”.

• “I’m so thankful for Hayley, Ansie and Marinda. Thank you for all you have done for us and are still doing. The impact you are making with S2T is changing history in the whole world. There has been many times that I was able to help myself and others with the tools you gave us. You all inspire me so much. I am so happy here where I am in the United States. I have a passion for life and I am following my dreams”.

• “Thank you for guiding us to achieve freedom and help others too. I finally told my parents and sisters [about the sexual abuse]. I want to thank you all for having shown me that it is possible and liberating me not to hold a secret”.

As researchers we have learnt that intervention research is challenging and time consuming, but very fulfilling. Not alone are we contributing to evidence-based practice, but are at the same time making a difference in the community and more specifically in the life of one of the most vulnerable populations in society namely victims of childhood sexual abuse. Our dream is to continue thriving in combining our research with community engagement. May the sun continue to shine on these women and the S2T research project.
SMILE: Living with Diabetes by Dr Elmari Deacon

Looking back on a busy year full of changes and challenges, we are proud to share a few of the highlights. In 2017 the project not only grew in numbers of researchers participating and projects that we are busy with, but it also provided opportunities to rethink and deepen the focus of the project. In the next few years the project will focus on thoughts about diabetes (illness perception), meaning and meaning-making as important variables to understand and develop interventions on.

We are proud to report on the progress made by the researchers working on the project: Two master’s dissertations and one PhD thesis were completed and were submitted for examination during the November examinations. All the best with this last step – We know that your hard work will be rewarded!

The projects still in process also made good progress with one proposal under ethical review, and the other ready for scientific review. We are also excited about two researchers who indicated interest in joining – one master’s student and one PhD.

One of the highlights of the year was a visit to the Netherlands to meet Prof. Maartje de Wit at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam to discuss trends in diabetes research as well as possible future collaboration. Several opportunities were identified that will be followed up by the researchers.

After meeting Prof. de Wit, we attended the 43rd Annual ISPAD conference that was held in Innsbruck, Austria from 18 to 21 October 2017. Smile was represented by Dr Deacon and Prof. van Rensburg who presented posters. The topics of the posters were Illness perceptions of adolescents living with well-controlled diabetes, and The lived experiences of adolescents living with well-controlled diabetes. The conference was a great networking opportunity and important contacts were made.

"Her passion, however, is in conducting research that is meaningful to communities ..."

Dr Tamlynn Jefferis Joins Sub-programme

Tamlynn Jefferis has recently joined the Strengths-based Interventions sub-programme at Optentia. She completed her doctorate in 2016 which focused on resilience among Sesotho-speaking girls living in contexts of structural adversity, using participatory visual methods. Tamlynn is a Research Psychologist and has experience in academia as well as the private sector, where she completed a variety of projects for both national and international organisations. Her passion, however, is in conducting research that is meaningful to communities. She works mainly from the transformative paradigm, and is passionate about research methods that have the potential to act as intervention, resulting in a research process that is enabling for participants. Her future research plans are to replicate her doctoral study in an urban context to further understandings of how culture and context shape resilience processes. She is also in the process of planning a project that will focus on understanding resilience in the face of ambiguous loss. Her specific research interests include: resilience, understanding how culture, context, and gender shape resilience processes, resilience in the face of ambiguous loss, and community-based participatory methodology.
Research Activities of Prof. Norah Keating

In July 2017, Prof. Norah Keating presented an invited keynote address at the British Society of Gerontology Conference, Swansea, UK entitled, “Do not go gentle: Global environments and a good old age”.

Also in July 2017, she presented an invited keynote symposium to the World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics, San Francisco, entitled, Beyond Rhetoric: Taking Global Action on Ageing. It included co-presenters Prof. Isabella Aboderin (Kenya), Dr Du Peng (China) and Dr John Beard (World Health Organization).

At the opening ceremony of the World Congress, Prof. Keating was presented with the International Association on Gerontology Presidential Award in recognition of her “countless efforts to promote international gerontology worldwide”.

In September 2017 she was invited to a symposium on community exclusion of the EU Funded research network on social exclusion of older persons. This is a network of researchers from 39 EU countries. At the symposium she chaired a Policy Panel Discussion on Challenges and Opportunities in Space and Place.

In October 2017 she was in Kobe, Japan as an advisor to the World Health Organization Kobe Centre on Community-Based Social Innovation. At that meeting case presentations were made by representatives from low and middle income countries on community interventions to improve quality of life of older people. The goal is to scale up the innovative aspects of these programs so that they reach a wider group of older people.

During her visit to Optentia in November 2017, she worked with Optentia members to develop a plan for capacity building among post-graduate students in social gerontology in sub-Saharan Africa. The plan will be incorporated into the capacity building and networking agenda of the Global Social Issues on Ageing that will be presented to the executive meeting of the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics in early 2018.

Anniversary of the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing

The Oxford Institute of Population Ageing (University of Oxford), where Prof. Jaco Hoffman is Senior Research Fellow, celebrated its 20th anniversary this past September with not only a lovely celebratory dinner at Balliol College but also with a conference celebrating a next generation of scholars. The “Demography, Ageing and Health” conference brought together researchers and academics, representing 16 countries, to cover a range of disciplinary perspectives.

“Prof. Keating was presented with the International Association on Gerontology Presidential Award.”

Dr Adela Balderas Cejudo (Spain); Ms Claudia Azevedo (Portugal); Ms Nana Nanitashvili (Georgia); Dr Francesca Ghillani (Italy); Dr Sara Zella (Italy); Mr Paul Ayernor (Ghana) and Dr Katsiaryna (Katia) Padvulkava (Belarus)
New PhD Study: Kalashni Narainsamy

Kalashni Narainsamy, Project Manager: Better World at the South African Breweries will register for a PhD study at Optentia in January 2018. Over Kalashni is working on a research proposal under the guidance of Prof. Ian Rothmann and Prof. Jaco Hoffman. The study will focus on sports as a social intervention to create an environment conducive to the flourishing of learners and their social networks.

News from the AGENDA Sub-programme by Prof. Jaco Hoffman

The last few weeks was a busy period for members of the Ageing and Generational Dynamics in Africa (AGenDA) sub-programme. On 25 October 2017, Prof. Jaco Hoffman and Prof. Vera Roos participated in a webinar “Transcending disciplines towards healthy generations” organized by the Post-Doctoral Research Fellows Committee of the Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research (AUTHeR), NWU.

Prof. Jaco Hoffman presented a paper “Intergenerational Pathways to Sustaining Individual Health and Wellbeing” based on a recent book “Intergenerational Pathways to a Sustainable Society” that he co-authored with Prof. Matt Kaplan (Penn State, USA) and Prof. Mariano Sanchez (University of Granada, Spain).

Prof. Vera Roos shared with the audience her well-known Mmogo-method®, which she operationalizes across generations: “The Mmogo-method®: An exploration of meaning using self-constructed visual representations.”

On 26 October 2017, Prof. Jaco Hoffman delivered a keynote address at the Age-in-Action Conference on the occasion of their 60th Anniversary celebrations. His topic was: “Beyond the annual Christmas Party — Service Delivery for Older Persons by Local Authorities”

Prof. Jaco Hoffman and Prof. Vera Roos also participated in Open Access week at NWU on the 27th October and shared their thoughts on open access based on their experiences with research on service delivery to older persons: “Open Access: we Deliver for a society of all ages.” This was followed by visits by two extraordinary professors: Prof. Norah Keating (1–10 November 2017) and Prof. Isabella Aboderin (4–7 November 2017). These visits pivoted around their prestige lectures where Optentia celebrated their appointments.

Prof. Keating looked into a broader international perspective during which she engaged with the Sustainable Development Goals in relation to older persons “No one left behind: Global environments and a good old age.”

Prof. Aboderin focused on the ageing research endeavour in a pan-African context: “African Research on Aging: Four arcs toward transformation.”

New PhD Study: Kalashni Narainsamy

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The we-DELIVER project aims to develop Information and communications technology (ICT) solutions to make service and resource information available that will appropriately address the care needs of older persons (60 years and older) in multi-generational settings. The project is funded through Tlhalo Bosha - a public service improvement programme through a partnership between the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and the Belgian Development Agency. The project has a tight timeline and runs over an 18-month period. In the first phase, which is reported about here, a baseline assessment is conducted to identify older persons' needs for existing services and resources, as well as to determine their use of ICT (attitude, knowledge and skills). Even though a baseline assessment of community needs in three communities close to the three sites of the North-West University (NWU) namely, Sebokeng, Ikageng and Lokaleng were conducted in 2016 and reported on in the NWU community impact study report, this baseline assessment was too general and did not provide sufficient insight in the needs of older persons specifically. A questionnaire was developed, translated to Setswana and subjected to reliability and validity assessments.

The project involves undergraduate and postgraduate students and researchers from various subject disciplines across the three sites of the NWU and the Sustainability and Community Engagement Division of the NWU’s institutional office. In preparation for data collections, students receive training in how to engage in communities; obtaining informed consent, conducting a semi-structured qualitative interview and to use survey analytics.

The we-DELIVER project aims to use ICTs in both the planning and implementation of the research. Various platforms are used and students use tablets or their smart phones to collect data from the older participants. In reflecting on the project, students said they found the project interesting and a good research experience. They also indicated that they have realised through this research that older people struggle to access services. Interesting is how perceptions differ: while some students felt the questionnaire was too long (25 minutes), the older people enjoyed talking to the young people and said they would not mind if the students can spend more time with them every week.

This is a truly intergenerational endeavour that will hopefully translate into service delivery for the benefit of all ages Click here to read more about the project.
World-renowned Socio-Gerontologists Join Optentia

The AGenDA sub-programme is privileged to have been joined by Prof. Norah Keating and Prof. Isabel-la Aboderin.

Isabella is a social gerontologist who has, over the past 15 years, centered her work on advancing the research endeavour on ageing in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). She is currently Senior Research Scientist and Head of the Ageing and Development Unit at the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in Nairobi, Kenya and Visiting Associate Professor of Gerontology at the University of Southampton. She currently serves as Regional Chair for Africa of the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG).

Norah has a long history as a researcher in ageing and as a family gerontologist particularly interested in issues faced by older adults and their families. As Director of IAGG’s Global Social Initiative on Ageing, her research and capacity-building focuses on families and ageing, liveability of older adults, and care. She is engaged in international research on the liveability of communities for older adults in Australia, Canada and South Africa. She is often called upon to consult with or advise provincial, national and international governments and NGOs on policy related to the social inclusion of older adults and family caregiving. In 2014 she was awarded the Alberta Association on Gerontology Mary Morrison Award for her longstanding commitment to the field of gerontology and in 2017 she received the Presidential Award of the IAGG at the 21st IAGG World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics in San Francisco.

In her lecture, Norah gave us a global perspective and addressed the important issue of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that challenge all world regions to reduce inequalities within and among countries – to leave no one behind. This is the first global international development agreement that recognizes older people as stakeholders in their countries’ development. As a result, the SDGs have the potential to drive positive change for older people that goes beyond traditional sector-specific ageing policies.

Indeed, every person should be able to live the best life that they can, no matter their age and gender and also with dignity and freedom of choice. The pledges of the SDGs that “no one will be left behind” and “to reach the furthest behind first” reaffirm a human development approach. The SDGs advocate for older people to be given the opportunities to lead the lives they value and that will enable them to realize their potential as human beings, for their own well-being, as well as for the prosperity of the countries in which they live.

Obviously there are challenges: we still have to establish who is actually being left behind, where they are, and why they are excluded. We neither understand much about the influence that older people can have on achieving wider societal objectives, nor the impact that government policies can have on shaping outcomes and inter-relationships between people of all ages.

Norah gave us a possible departure point in highlighting that we should look for a clue in linked lives across generations but also across the life course. If we are to engage successfully with the SDGs, we must also come to terms with the inter-linked nature of the different goals and targets and actively seek to understand how different policies influence outcomes. Both Norah and Isabella challenged us to critically engage with the question how shining a light on the ‘older generations’ can make the ‘new’ development agenda more inclusive and dynamic. Click here to watch the prestige lecture of Prof. Keating. You can watch an interview with her here.

Isabella specifically focused her Prestige Lecture on the research endeavour in SSA. She did this by propositioning four arcs, namely (i) incisive ‘homegrown’ conceptualizations and theorizing; (ii) clarifying the case for action on older persons at the nexus between ageing and care development agendas in the region; (iii) targeted, active policy engagement; and (iv) the expanded nurturing of capacity of a next generation of scholars. You can watch an interview with Prof. Aboderin here.

It is in terms of the fourth arc that the NWU is well-positioned to act as a potential hub for social science research on ageing in SSA. This is encouraged by the establishment of AGeNDA; the substantial contributions by the NWU in terms of funding of international research-policy dialogues and capacity building over the past years, and more so now that these two eminent scholars have joined the sub-programme to harness the potential of all generations.

“… we still have to establish who is actually being left behind, where they are, and why they are excluded …”
Life Orientation in the Senior and Further Education and Training phases (called Life Skills in the Intermediate Phase) is a compulsory school subject. The purpose of this subject is to empower learners to achieve their full physical, intellectual, personal, emotional and social potential. It is thus obvious that it is a crucial subject to develop and support learners to become fully functional individuals and responsible citizens of a democratic society, able to cope with life and all the challenges it presents. Life Orientation for South African teachers is a comprehensive textbook on the subject of Life Orientation as stated in the curriculum policy documents.

Life Orientation for South African teachers provides educators with in-depth knowledge as well as teaching skills to deal with the wide variety of themes within the subject. Besides a theoretical foundation there are case studies, reflective questions and activity boxes to assist with practical application of the topics covered in each chapter.

Contents include the following:
- Human rights and values
- Religion studies in education
- Cultural diversity
- Lay counselling
- Behavioural issues: aggression and violence
- Healthy living
- Sexuality education
- Life skills
- Resilience
- Relationships
- Wellness through indigenous knowledge
- Child abuse
- Careers
- Study skills

New Life Orientation Textbook by Prof. Mirna Nel

Pedagogical and assessment issues pertaining to Life Orientation

Life Orientation for South African teachers is aimed at pre-service as well as postgraduate students in education.
Building Teacher Capacity to Teach for Advanced Performance

During 2017, a first cohort of in-service teachers received training to equip them to create learning environments that would nurture advanced performance. Teaching for advanced performance focuses on empowering learners with skills and dispositions that enable them to be intellectually and socially confident, work place and life-ready with a global outlook and a concern for others.

The Cognitive Education Research Group (Optentia Research Focus Area) in Association with the International Association for Cognitive Education in Southern Africa (IACESA) presented a Short Learning Programme (SLP) as a one-year course for 25 SACE CPD points on 12 Saturdays (80 notional hours: 40 hours facilitation and 40 hours practical at own time), after which successful participants will receive a Certificate in Cognitive Education at NQF Level 6 endorsed by the NWU.

The final training session took place on 14 October 2017. Teachers were requested to reflect in writing about their experiences with the SLP. In essence, the teachers noted, among others, the following benefits about the training:

- The training was an eye-opener to see how the world has changed and how teaching should be transformed to equip learners better for the future.
- Realisation of the importance of cognitive education to achieve the objectives of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement.
- Becoming aware of the five minds of the future that learners need to acquire: the disciplined mind, the synthesising mind, the ethical mind, the creative mind, and the respectful mind.
- Grasping importance of stimulating the brain through teaching, and how stimulating experiences grow the neural networks in the brain that contribute to better receiving, manipulating and storing of information.
- Teachers noted that they understand their roles as teachers better in relation to explicitly nurturing thinking among learners to enable learners to become advanced performers.
- The training enabled teachers to realise the importance of cognitive education to help learners to cope with the challenges of the 21st century, and to be workplace ready and life ready.
- Teaching comprises more than just reading, writing and doing arithmetic. Teaching is enabling learners to learn and make meaning of information on their own.
- Becoming familiar with a variety of teaching strategies to nurture thinking skills and dispositions.
- Understanding that it is important to leave the learning process to learners.
- Realising the importance of dispositions and attitudes for quality work.
- Becoming aware of the fact that assessment lies at the heart of teaching, it guides teaching and should provoke thinking and not the mere recall of information.

The encouraging and positive feedback from the teachers prove that the SLP in Cognitive Education holds the latent potential to enable teachers to really understand what teaching to effect advanced performance implies, namely to facilitate thinking, to engage minds, to encourage questioning and taking risks, to support dealing with challenges, and in the first place, putting learners in the driver’s seat of learning.

“...for a worthwhile existence.”

“I never teach my pupils, I only provide the conditions in which they can learn.”
Albert Einstein
1879-1955

“For a worthwhile existence.”
Els Callens, the international coordinator for education at VIVES' campuses in Brugge, Kortrijk, Torhout and Tielt, Belgium, invited Prof. Mirna Nel to present a series of lectures for their students in education on the Brugge, Kortrijk and Torhout campuses, but also as part of an international and intercultural week at the Kortrijk campus. This international and intercultural week is organised by the Applied Social Sciences Department and is attended by students from different countries studying in Applied Psychology, Public Safety, Social Work and Socio-Educational Care Work. Her lectures focused on 'Global Inclusion', 'Inclusive Education in South Africa concerning policy development and the right to basic education', as well as the 'Labeling of vulnerable children as catalyst of exclusion'. Several other lectures were presented on a variety of topics by academics from all over the world during this week, which resulted in a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, multilingual and multicultural mix of sharing and collaboration.

A meet and greet was also held with a group of teacher educators who prepare themselves for an exchange and training programme in South-Africa with the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB) in the Free State and later on in KwaZulu Natal. Prof. Nel shared information about the needs of teacher training related to inclusion and curriculum differentiation in South-Africa. These meetings were conducted in Afrikaans and Dutch. On the 14th of November Mirna also attended a lecture in Brussels of Prof. Kwame Akyeampong from the University of Essex, England. This lecture was organised by the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB), who is a partner in a research project on teacher education for inclusion with Mirna. The theme of this lecture was 'Leerkansen voor kwetsbare leerlingen' (Learning opportunities for vulnerable learners).

An opportunity was also given to attendees to have a meet and greet with Mirna to share knowledge and expertise on inclusive education in South Africa.
Prof. Mirna Nel at the Largest Game Archive in the World

During her visit to the Vives University in Bruges during November 2017 Mirna was invited to visit the largest “Spellenarchief” in the world, existing from the year 2000. More than 20,000 game titles are held here and is used to motivate the use of board and other games specifically in education. The staff at the archive train students in education, teachers and teacher educators on how to use these games for different areas of development, learning, socialisation, as well as creative and critical thinking. Recently people working in health care have also started using these games for various intervention purposes. When walking into this archive the inner child takes over....

Prof. Mirna Nel at the Largest Game Archive in the World

Prof. Mirna Nel at the Play archive

Prof. Mirna Nel Conquers the Hills of Bergamo, Italy

Prof. Mirna Nel was invited by Prof. Giuseppe Bertagna, Head of the Department of Human and Social Sciences, at the University of Bergamo in Italy as a visiting professor from 1 to 15 December 2017. This university is situated in the beautiful old city of San’t Agostino, Bergamo and is rated among the best universities in the world.

During her visit she presented classes for undergraduate students and established collaborative research partnerships with Prof. Serenella Besio and Dr. Mabel Giraldo. In addition she was requested to speak at a symposium on epistemologies and epistemology of educational and pedagogical research: Prospects in comparison. Her focus was on the intersections between pedagogical and didactic research.

She also had the opportunity to establish a possible collaborative partnership with Prof. Harry Daniels from Oxford University whom she met in July in Salerno, also invited her as visiting professor in 2018 to the University of Salerno, Italy.


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Prof. Mirna Nel in San’t Agostino, Italy
In September 2017 Optentia extraordinary Professor Dr. Susanne Schwab (University of Wuppertal, Germany) started an interdisciplinary project on inclusive education in secondary schools. In cooperation with Prof. Dr. Kerstin Schneider (Wuppertal Research Institute for the Economics of Education, Germany), Prof. Dr. Umesh Shama (Monash University, Australia) and two PhD students (Janka Goldan and Lisa Hoffmann), the researchers brought together different scientific perspectives on inclusive education.

Current studies on inclusive education in Germany either focus on a micro- or a macro perspective. Studies that adopt a macro perspective generally analyse different legal, political, and economic matters, whereas a micro perspective analyses subjects on the level of individual schools, parents, pupils and/or teachers, for example. The recently launched project combines both perspectives, as it examines the impact of school resources, in terms of equipment and human capital, on teachers’ self-efficacy as well as students’ social participation in inclusive secondary education.

There have been few studies made on inclusive education in secondary schools. One main reason for this is that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was only ratified by the Federal Parliament eight years ago in March of 2009. Since then, it has taken quite a few years for local governments to implement the school reforms into their state laws. Hence, inclusive secondary education is at an early stage in Germany, and results of studies indicate that the classroom environment of inclusive schools varies significantly in terms of resources. On the basis of this variation, researchers hope to learn how resources influence successful inclusive education.

For the data collection, headmasters, teachers and students from 25 secondary schools and up to 80 classes in North Rhine-Westphalia are going to fill out questionnaires during the month of November 2017. First results are expected early next year. The joint project has a duration of two years. Extra funds were acquired at the School of Education (University of Wuppertal) by Prof. Schwab and Prof. Schneider.

Prof. Mirna Nel and Prof. Susanne Schwab were invited by Prof. Paola Aiello from the University of Salerno, Italy to speak at an international symposium focusing on teacher agency for inclusive education: An interdisciplinary perspective. This symposium was held from 6 to 7 July and was attended by 450 teachers, PhD students, academics and government officials. Other invited international speakers were from Australia, Austria, Sweden, Luxembourg and Germany. An outcome of this invitation was a possible collaborative research project between the Optentia sub-programme: Holistic Learner Development in Diverse Contexts and the inclusive education research team, under the leadership of Prof. Aiello, at the University of Salerno.
The Optentia sub-programme Holistic Learner Development in Diverse Contexts had the honour of hosting two prestige lectures of extraordinary professors this year, namely Prof. Susanne Schwab and Prof. Mary Grosser.

Prof Schwab is currently a full professor in the School of Education of the Institute of Educational Research at the University of Wuppertal, Germany. Her research is focused on methods and didactics for learners with learning disabilities and learners with emotional or social difficulties. She is involved in several research projects with Prof. Mirna Nel. Prof Mary Grosser has been a full professor in the School of Education on the Vaal Triangle campus until the end of February 2017. She is currently residing in Germany with her husband, but is still actively co-leading research projects with Prof. Mirna Nel. In addition she is also supervising several post-graduate learners within the sub-programme. Her main research focus is cognitive education, especially concentrating on improving critical thinking skills of learners at school level as well as learners at Higher Education Institutions.

On 26 September Prof Schwab presented her lecture on the Effects of inclusion on learners with and without special educational needs (SEN). In her presentation she first conceptualized inclusion and special education needs and then described the European scenario on the inclusion of learners with special needs in different countries, i.e. how it is understood and how it is implemented. She addressed the following research questions:

- How do the abilities of SEN children in inclusive classes develop compared to SEN children in special schools?
- How do the abilities of Non-SEN children in inclusive classes develop compared to Non-SEN children in regular classes?
- How is the emotional and social development of SEN children in inclusive classes?

In answering her first research question she concluded that interactions between learners with and without special education needs need more attention. She also argued that more positive attitudes are not automatically linked with more interaction, but that the quality of contact should be higher. However, she asserted that the causality of results is still unclear and must be investigated further. Her findings of the second research question indicated that attitudes towards learners with SEN varied according to ethnic background and cultural differences; female learners showed a more positive attitude compared to male learners; and learners in a culturally heterogeneous class showed a more positive attitude compared to learners who attend a culturally homogeneous class.

In response to her third question she asserted that teacher feedback could causally influence social peer acceptance in schools. It also seems that the impact of teacher feedback is greater than the impact of other information (UNO) about a learner. She views teacher feedback as a starting point for promoting student’s social acceptance. Yet she emphasized that social acceptance is influenced by more than one factor, e.g. peer feedback.

She closed with the following key message: “We all like to be loved and accepted, just the way we are. Being different should not lead to being less liked”. Click here to watch an interview with Prof. Schwab.
Prestige Lecture: Reviving the Quality of Teaching and Learning

Prof. Grosser presented a prestige lecture on 17 October 2017. The title was: “Advanced performance: Going beyond spoon-feeding to revive the quality of teaching and learning in schools”. The lecture suggested a possible solution for reviving the quality of learning in South African schools.

In the context of the lecture, quality of learning was conceptualised as effective processes through which trained teachers use learner-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools, as well as skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities. In addition, objectives that encompass knowledge, skills and dispositions/attitudes linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society should drive learning in the classroom.

Classrooms have the biggest influence on learners’ learning. Up to 40% of the variance in learners’ achievement can be linked to what happens in the classroom. The quality of education in South African classrooms is questionable given the large dropout rate of learners, legions of bored learners and small percentages of learners who start school that make it all the way to the Grade 12 examinations. Moreover, four social-emotional needs must be met in the classroom before quality learning can take place, namely (i) belonging: Fulfilled by loving, sharing, and cooperating with others; (ii) power: Fulfilled by achieving, accomplishing, and being recognized and respected; (iii) freedom: Fulfilled by making choices; and (iv) fun: Fulfilled by laughing and playing (Glasser, 1998). Finally, the academic learning environment should emphasise the meaningful discovery of information, and allow learners to question what they have been taught.

To eliminate the apparent divide that exists between academic achievement and advanced performance that exists in South African classrooms, High Performance Learning theory could be regarded as a proposition to attain the elimination and create quality learning environments. HPL identifies seven supporting pillars or routes to embed the teaching of thinking skills, dispositions and attitudes into the curriculum, namely: (i) a mind-set shift; (ii) the implementation of enquiry-based learning as teaching strategy; (iii) expertise development, (iv) practice and training, (v) feedback, (vi) parental involvement, and (vii) doing things with learners and not to learners (Eyre, 2016). The correct mind-set is a precondition for implementing the HPL framework. This implies a firm belief that ability is flexible, and can be nurtured through challenging teaching and learning opportunities (Dweck, 2006; Eyre, 2016). A strong focus is therefore placed on “how” subject content is taught. Enquiry-based learning places cognitive demands on learners that would encourage independent thought and build dispositions such as intellectual confidence.
Prestige Lecture: Reviving the Quality of Teaching and Learning

Teaching should involve developing expertise in the application of thinking skills and dispositions in a given subject domain, and focused, extended and deliberate practice is required from learners if they want to become experts in the application of thinking skills and dispositions. This will require hard work and perseverance from learners, but also from teachers who need to structure challenging opportunities for practice. Feedback should enhance learning and the focus needs to be on what the next steps need to be to become better at the application of the skills and dispositions, and not what the learners could not do. Strong parental engagement is an important cornerstone of the HPL framework, and parents should be kept informed and involved about the building blocks of advanced thinking and learning, in order to reinforce what is done at school. Learners should be encouraged to become progressively involved to take responsibility and make decisions for their own learning (self-regulated learning).

What is the status quo in relation to classroom-related practices in South African schools that support the actualization of advanced performance? An initial pilot study involving among others, descriptive survey research, examined teacher perceptions about advanced performance in selected diverse primary school contexts. Initial findings revealed that: (i) teachers appear to lack a comprehensive understanding that advanced performance is possible for all learners and that learners should be equipped with skills, knowledge and attitudes in order to achieve advanced performance; (ii) teacher responses indicated a limited and vague understanding of the skills and the attitudes and attributes required to become an advanced performer; (iii) teachers possess a limited repertoire of strategies to develop thinking skills and dispositions; and (iv) the majority of the teachers (69%) viewed the teaching of thinking skills, dispositions, and attitudes as challenging, and were divided in their opinions about the possibility to teach thinking skills and to develop learners’ potential.

In order to achieve advanced performance in South African classrooms teachers need to learn how to facilitate the development of thinking skills, dispositions and attitudes, how to engage learner minds, encourage risk and how to teach so that learning takes place and not mere content delivery. Teachers need to appreciate that inclusion is not simply about physical proximity. It is about purposefully planning to teach so that all learners experience success.

Teaching to achieve advanced performance among all learners is not an option but a moral responsibility. All learners have the right to receive quality education that accommodates their needs, will enable them to take charge of their own learning journey, push them to explore and discover, encourage them to ask questions, allow them to work through challenges and most importantly, give them wings to fly.

Lastly she emphasized: “A growth mindset that focuses on challenges and opportunities to foster ability or talent is fundamental to help all learners become advanced performers in school and life.”

Prof. Mary Grosser’s prestige lecture

“A growth mindset that focuses on challenges and opportunities to foster ability or talent is fundamental to help all learners become advanced performers in school and life.”

Click here to watch an interview with Prof. Grosser.
International Business Conference in Tanzania

The International Business Conference (IBC) has become a well-established academic conference. A total of 142 papers were presented during the 11th IBC in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. At this conference, four academic papers were presented by colleagues from Optentia.

The conference started on a high note by the keynote speaker Mr Theo Venter that talked about the use of scenarios to enhance political risk management in Southern Africa. A symposium was presented by Prof. Marius Stander, Dr Danie du Toit, Dr Ederick Stander and Prof. Leon de Beer (WorkWell). “Beyond leadership assessment and development: The power of Talent Development Centres. Case study from a major global energy company”.

The following papers were presented by the colleagues:

• Ms Diana van Jaarsveld and Dr Elsabé Keyser. “The influence of substance use on absenteeism amongst the employees at the power utility in Mpumalanga”.
• Prof. Marius Stander, Ms Desiree Zikalala and Mrs Annatjie Stander. “Leadership Empowerment as a positive leadership style: A psychometric evaluation”.

Paper at the Pan African Psychological Union Conference

During September Leoni van der Vaart and Dr Elrie Botha presented at the Pan African Psychology Union conference in Durban. Leoni’s paper aimed to provide a practical approach towards psychological ownership development within organisational contexts. More specifically, it attempted to draw research-informed theoretical lines between the respective dimensions of psychological ownership and positive psychological interventions on individual, team, and organisational level. Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl was co-author of the paper. Dr Elrie Botha presented about the mental health of Industrial and Organisational psychologists in South Africa. The co-authors were Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl and Prof. Marius Stander. A variety of presentations were available as all psychology disciplines took part in this conference. Exciting networks were confirmed and new interests were discussed.
Optentia Researchers Influence HR in Saudi Arabia

Prof. Marius Stander, Dr Danie du Toit and Dr Ederick Stander and Ian Rothmann (Jnr) were invited to present papers at the SABIC HR Forum 2017 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It was a prestigious conference (with a budget more than R50 million). The conference was attended by more than 600 delegates and is regarded as a very important event in the Saudi Kingdom. Saudi Arabia has a clear and detail strategic plan for 2030 that is supported by government, organisations, community and individuals.

The conference theme was “Transforming HR: Enabling Saudi 2030 Vision”. His Excellency Minister of Labour, Dr Ali Bin Nasser Ghafis, as well as the Vice Minister, addressed the conference. Other prominent speakers included Dr Dave Ulrich (world renowned management expert) from The Ross School of Business at Michigan University, Joseph Crenny, a world leader in change management and Mark Hatch, an expert on innovation and entrepreneurship, and very important a few members from the NWU. Dr Stander and Ian Rothmann (Jr) presented a paper with the title: “The future of the IDP: Unlocking the Possibilities of Bots, AI and Gamifications”. Dr Ederick, Stander, Dr Danie du Toit and Prof. Marius Stander presented the following paper: “The power of TDC: Talent development centres as hybrid tools for assessment and readiness development. Both presentations were well attended with positive feedback.

Optentia Research Starts with the Community

The 1990s concept of “giving psychology away” has come to life at Optentia in 2017 where research is being done with the purpose of “giving science away”. For Optentia, the community is the starting point for research projects. The “together with” approach to research can be seen in action at community advisory committees that Optentia engages to ensure that the community, their needs and their inputs are the top priority in Optentia’s research. Click here to read more.
22 January 2018: HHREC - Closing of the agenda

29 January 2018 - 2 February 2018: SLP in Research Design

2 February 2018 - 15 February 2018: Visit to Optentia - Prof. M. Hessels

19 February 2018: HHREC Meeting

25 February 2018 - 2 March 2018: Visit to Optentia - Prof. S. Kelders

Books


Optentia Contributions to Books in 2017


Upcoming Events (Click here to go to the Optentia Research Calendar)

- 22 January 2018: HHREC - Closing of the agenda
- 29 January 2018 - 2 February 2018: SLP in Research Design
- 2 February 2018 - 15 February 2018: Visit to Optentia - Prof. M. Hessels
- 19 February 2018: HHREC Meeting
- 25 February 2018 - 2 March 2018: Visit to Optentia - Prof. S. Kelders