

**A HISTORICAL EDUCATIONAL ANALYSIS OF STRESS IN  
THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

by

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**I declare that**

***A Historical Educational Analysis of Stress in the Pedagogic Situation* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.**

.....

**Mrs M L Klos**

.....

**DATE**

**Dedicated to my husband,  
Gerhard  
and  
my children,  
Michael and Tamara**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **A HISTORICAL-EDUCATIONAL ANALYSIS OF STRESS IN THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

**BY:** Maureen Lilian Klos  
**SUBJECT:** History of Education  
**UNIVERSITY:** University of South Africa  
**PROMOTER:** Prof. S.L.H. van Niekerk

### **SUMMARY**

A modern "disease", stress is a universal and eternal problem in the pedagogic situation, where the child becomes an adult, under adult supervision. Stress - a feeling of pressure or strain - is a problem for contemporary South African children, who automatically respond to stressors (causes of stress), in the same way as children of the past, since human beings have not changed psychobiologically over the millennia.

Our bodies and minds should return to a calm state, after our initial stress reaction, but we often remain under stress, which results in emotional/ physical symptoms of *distress*. Yet history has shown that children can be helped to handle stress, making it a stimulus for growth. Although past societies were not directly conscious of the concept of *stress*, they taught coping mechanisms to their children. Some of these are generally valid, and provide us with solutions to the problem of stress in the pedagogic situation.

# **‘N HISTORIES-OPVOEDKUNDIGE ANALISE VAN STRES IN DIE PEDAGOGIESE SITUASIE.**

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**PROMOTER:** Prof. S.L.H. van Niekerk

## **OPSOMMING**

Die moderne “siekte”, stres, is eintlik ‘n universele en altyddurende probleem in die pedagogiese situasie - die situasie waar die kind besig is om onder volwasse begeleiding ‘n volwassene te word. Stres - ‘n gevoel van druk en oorspanning - is ‘n probleem vir hedendaagse Suid-Afrikaanse kinders wat maar, net soos die kinders in die verlede, outomaties reageer op “stressors” (faktore wat stres veroorsaak). Die afgelope millenniums het immers bewys dat die mens nie psigobiologies verander het nie.

Ons liggaam en gees behoort rustig te word na ‘n aanvanklike stres reaksie. Die probleem is dat ons meestal onder stres bly leef met emosionele/ psigiese simptome van angs as die resultaat daarvan. Tog het die geskiedenis bewys dat kinders gehelp kan word om stres te hanteer en dit eerder as ‘n stimulus vir ontwikkeling te benut. Ten spyte van die feit dat samelewings in die verlede nie so bewus was van die konsep van stres nie, het hulle tog sekere tegnieke aan hulle kinders oorgedra om hulle te help om hulle stres te hanteer. Sommige van hierdie tegnieke is algemeen geldig en voorsien ons dus van oplossings vir die probleem van stres in die pedagogiese situasie.

## **KEY TERMS**

**Stress; contemporary South African pedagogic situation; stressors; symptoms of stress; stress-coping mechanisms; prehistoric pedagogic situation; pedagogic situation of ancient Greece; medieval pedagogic situation; the child in the transitional/ traditional stage; teaching stress management.**

## **KERNBEGRIPE**

Stres; hedendaagse pedagogiese situasie in Suid-Afrika; "stressors" (faktore wat stress veroorsaak); simptome van stres; tegnieke om stres te hanteer; prehistoriese pedagogiese situasie; pedagogiese situasie in antieke Griekeland; middeleeuse pedagogiese situasie; die kind in die oorgangs/ tradisionele fase; die onderrig van streshantering.

# CONDENSED TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

## CHAPTER ONE

<b>ORIENTATION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	2
1.2 ACTUALITY OF THE RESEARCH.....	2
1.3 DELIMITATION OF THE FIELD OF RESEARCH.....	6
1.4 FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM.....	6
1.5 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH.....	7
1.5.1 General aims.....	7
1.5.2 Specific objectives.....	8
1.6 ELUCIDATION OF THE TERMS OF THE TITLE.....	8
1.6.1 Analysis.....	8
1.6.2 Historical-educational.....	9
1.6.3 Stress.....	9
1.6.4 Pedagogic situation.....	10
1.7 METHODOLOGY.....	10
1.7.1 Approach.....	10
1.7.2 Method.....	11
1.7.3 Techniques.....	12
1.8 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH.....	14
1.9 SUMMARY.....	15

## CHAPTER TWO

<b>STRESS IN THE CURRENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	20
2.2 STRESS MODELS.....	21
2.2.1 The stimulus model.....	21
2.2.2 The response model.....	23
2.2.3 The transactional model.....	26
2.2.4 General Comments.....	26
2.3 CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE CURRENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	28
2.3.1 Stressors at macro-level, in the outside world/ society.....	29

2.3.2	Stressors at meso-level in the family and school.....	35
2.3.3	Stress at micro-level within the child's self.....	43
2.3.4	Summary.....	44
2.4	<b>SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE CURRENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....</b>	<b>45</b>
2.4.1	Symptoms of stress at different ages.....	45
2.4.2	Symptoms of stress in general.....	47
2.5	<b>FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHILD'S RESPONSE TO STRESS.....</b>	<b>50</b>
2.5.1	Factors within the child.....	50
2.5.2	Factors outside the child.....	52
2.5.3	Coping strategies.....	52
2.6	<b>PEDAGOGIC ACCOMPANIMENT AND STRESS MANAGEMENT.....</b>	<b>53</b>
2.7	<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>53</b>

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **STRESS IN THE PREHISTORIC PEDAGOGIC**

	<b>SITUATION.....</b>	<b>55</b>
3.1	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>58</b>
3.2	<b>THE PREHISTORIC PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....</b>	<b>59</b>
3.3	<b>THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE PRIMITIVE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....</b>	<b>60</b>
3.3.1	Stress as stimulus and response in early man.....	60
3.3.2	The transactional stress model and early man.....	61
3.4	<b>CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE PREHISTORIC CHILD.....</b>	<b>61</b>
3.4.1	Stressors at macro-level in society and the outside world.....	61
3.4.2	Stressors at meso-level in the child's family/ "bush school".....	66
3.4.3	Stressors at micro-level within the primitive child's self.....	70
3.5	<b>SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE PRIMITIVE CHILD.....</b>	<b>75</b>
3.5.1	Evidence of stress in the prehistoric child.....	75
3.6	<b>COPING STRATEGIES.....</b>	<b>80</b>
3.6.1	Being in control.....	80
3.6.2	Familiarity with stressors.....	82
3.6.3	Healthy life-style.....	82

3.6.4	Assertiveness/ appropriate venting of emotions.....	82
3.6.5	Community support/ unity.....	83
3.6.6	Adequate, relevant educational opportunities.....	85
3.6.7	Religion and values.....	87
3.6.8	Relaxation in creative/ aesthetic activities.....	90
3.7	SUMMARY.....	91

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

	<b>STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....</b>	<b>93</b>
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	97
4.2	THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	97
4.3	THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	98
4.3.1	The stress models as applied to the ancient Greek pedagogic situation.....	98
4.4	CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	99
4.4.1	Stressors at macro-level in society/ the outside world.....	99
4.4.2	Stressors at meso-level in the ancient Greek family and school.....	109
4.4.3	Stressors at micro-level within the child's self.....	120
4.5	SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK CHILD.....	124
4.5.1	Evidence of stress in the ancient Greek child.....	124
4.6	COPING STRATEGIES.....	133
4.6.1	Acceptance of stress/ endurance.....	133
4.6.2	Familiarisation with stressors.....	133
4.6.3	A life-style of balance, control and moderation.....	134
4.6.4	Assertiveness/ appropriate venting of emotions/ Verbal psychotherapy.....	134
4.6.5	Adequate/ relevant educational opportunities.....	135
4.6.6	Social support.....	138
4.6.7	Religion and values.....	140
4.6.8	Relaxation.....	143
4.6.9	Positive attitude to girls/ women.....	148
4.7	SUMMARY.....	149

**CHAPTER FIVE**

<b>STRESS IN THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE MIDDLE AGES.....</b>	<b>152</b>
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	156
5.2 THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE MIDDLE AGES.....	157
5.3 THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE MEDIEVAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	158
5.3.1 Awareness of perception as a factor in the stress-response.....	158
5.4 CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE MEDIEVAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	159
5.4.1 Stressors at macro-level in the outside world/society.....	159
5.4.2 Stressors at meso-level in the medieval family/ school.....	171
5.4.3 Stressors at micro-level within the child's self.....	188
5.5 SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE MEDIEVAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	193
5.5.1 Evidence of stress in the medieval child.....	193
5.5.2 Symptoms classified according to particular stressors.....	200
5.6 COPING STRATEGIES.....	204
5.6.1 Awareness and acceptance of stress.....	204
5.6.2 Being in control/ self-discipline.....	206
5.6.3 Familiarity with stressors.....	207
5.6.4 Health/ balance of humours.....	208
5.6.5 Adequate/ relevant educational opportunities.....	208
5.6.6 Social support.....	214
5.6.7 Play/ games/ carnivals/ festivals/ rest.....	216
5.6.8 Religion and ritual.....	217
5.7 SUMMARY.....	218

**CHAPTER SIX****THE CURRENT SOUTH AFRICAN TRANSITIONAL/**

<b>TRADITIONAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....</b>	<b>221</b>
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6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	224
6.2 THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE CHILD IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PHASE.....	225

6.3	THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE CHILD IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PHASE.....	226
6.4	CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE CHILD IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PHASE.....	227
6.4.1	Stressors at macro-level in the outside world and society/ culture.....	227
6.4.2	Stressors at meso-level in the family, peer group and school.....	239
6.4.3	Stressors in the child's self.....	253
6.5	SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL CHILD.....	255
6.5.1	Violence.....	256
6.5.2	Delinquency.....	256
6.5.3	Reduced motivation.....	256
6.5.4	Various affective disorders.....	258
6.6.	STRESS MANAGEMENT/ COPING MECHANISMS/ TECHNIQUES/ STRATEGIES.....	258
6.6.1	Family unity.....	259
6.6.2	Traditional rules.....	259
6.6.3	Religious beliefs.....	260
6.6.4	Play, crafts and arts.....	260
6.6.5	Music/ dance/ poetry/ song.....	263
6.7	SUMMARY.....	264

## CHAPTER SEVEN

	EVALUATION.....	267
7.1.	INTRODUCTION.....	268
7.2	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS REGARDING THE PAST.....	268
7.2.1	Past stressors.....	268
7.2.2	Past symptoms of stress.....	270
7.2.3	Past coping mechanisms.....	271
7.2.4	General remarks.....	271

7.3	<b>CONCLUSIONS REGARDING STRESS IN THE PRESENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....</b>	275
7.3.1	Causes of stress in the present pedagogic situation.....	276
7.3.2	Symptoms of stress in the present pedagogic situation.....	277
7.3.3	Stress management in the present pedagogic situation.....	277
7.4	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE.....</b>	280
7.4.1	Stress management programmes for children.....	280
7.4.2	Parental involvement.....	285
7.4.3	Community involvement.....	286
7.4.5	The general curriculum.....	287
7.4.6	Values education.....	287
7.5	<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS.....</b>	287
7.6	<b>SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM.....</b>	289
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	294
	<b>LIST OF INTERVIEWS.....</b>	307

## LIST OF FIGURES

		Page
Figure 1.1	Stress management in the pedagogic situation. Poster for youth course (Life Line/ Childline 1994).....	5
Figure 2.1	Automatic physiological response to a stressor (Burns 1988:5).....	24
Figure 2.2	Bodily changes during relaxation (Burns 1988:97).....	25
Figure 2.3	Distress or <i>eustress</i> ? (Stern 1993:56).....	27
Figure 3.1	Stressor of being a San child bride (Walters 1989:31).....	68
Figure 3.2	Ritual song and dance (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:121).....	70
Figure 3.3	Rite of passage (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:121).....	71
Figure 3.4	Early child abuse: deliberate deformation of the skull of a Neanderthal child (Gowlett 1984:104).....	72
Figure 3.5	Relaxed at the scene of the kill. San boys learning to hunt and cope with daily survival (Walters 1989:3).....	78
Figure 3.6	Social support in times of stress (Walters 1989:24).....	84
Figure 4.1	The stressful search for physical perfection under strict supervision: Scene in the <i>palaistra</i> . Decorated vase (Cole 1950:32).....	121
Figure 4.2	The stressful search for physical perfection under strict supervision: Scene in the <i>palaistra</i> . Decorated vase (Cole 1950:33).....	121
Figure 4.3	Adult responsibilities - Ancient Greek vase (Golden 1990:34).....	137

	Page
Figure 4.4	A family sacrifices a sheep to Asclepius (Golden 1990:32)..... 141
Figure 4.5	Coping with the stressor of school: Boys play school (Golden 1990:56)..... 144
Figure 4.6	Music for pleasure or as pressure: individual instruction under watchful eyes: School scene. Painted <i>kulix</i> (Cole 1950:29)..... 145
Figure 4.7	Music for pleasure or as pressure: individual instruction under watchful eyes: School scene. Painted <i>hydra</i> (Cole 1950:30)..... 146
Figure 5.1	Miniature adults: the stressor of not being seen as children (Larousse 1981:342)..... 167
Figure 5.2	Epitome of a medieval lesson? Boy being beaten by teacher with bat or broom, whilst three other children observe with smiling acceptance. Carving underneath a wooden church seat circa 1400 (Blyth 1992:2)..... 181
Figure 5.3	Stressful learning situation: uncomfortable seating; non vernacular teaching; stern teachers (Mialaret & Vial 1981:14)..... 182
Figure 5.4	Courtly role model in an age of violence (Larousse 1981:327)..... 185
Figure 6.1	Fatherhood in an informal settlement (NU Focus 1991 Vol. 2, No. 1: Cover)..... 229
Figure 6.2	Squatter camp in the Western Cape Picture by Terry Shean (in Bauer 1995:3)..... 230

Figure 6.3	<b>A dry time: Rural poverty</b> ( <i>NU Focus</i> 1992 Vol. 3, No. 4:6).....	231
Figure 6.4	<b>Transitional/ traditional wedding</b> (“On 8-9 December 1990, married Mr T and Evelyn Motswai” by Tommy Motswai [courtesy of Goodman Gallery], in Robertson 1995:14).....	243
Figure 6.5	<b>Transitional/ traditional motherhood</b> ( <i>NU Focus</i> 1991 Vol. 2, No. 1: Cover).....	245
Figure 6.6	<b>Traditional child in rural slum/ homeland</b> ( <i>NU Focus</i> 1991 Vol. 5, No. 1:11).....	246
Figure 6.7	<b>Relaxation in sport</b> ( <i>NU Focus</i> 1994 Vol. 5, No. 1:44).....	262
Figure 6.8	<b>Rest from stress in art</b> ( <i>NU Focus</i> 1994 Vol. 5, No. 3: 49).....	263
Figure 6.9	<b>Advertisement for publication concerning post apartheid youth policy</b> ( <i>NU Focus</i> 1994 Vol. 5, No. 1:45).....	264

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION: ORIENTATION

	Page
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	2
1.2 ACTUALITY OF THE RESEARCH.....	2
1.3 DELIMITATION OF THE FIELD OF RESEARCH.....	6
1.4 FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM.....	6
1.5 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH.....	7
1.5.1 General aims.....	7
1.5.2 Specific objectives.....	8
1.6 ELUCIDATION OF THE TERMS OF THE TITLE.....	8
1.6.1 Analysis.....	8
1.6.2 Historical-educational.....	9
1.6.3 Stress.....	9
1.6.4 Pedagogic situation.....	10
1.7 METHODOLOGY.....	10
1.7.1 Approach.....	10
1.7.1.1 Problem-historical approach.....	11
1.7.1.2 Metabletic approach.....	11
1.7.2 Method.....	11
1.7.2.1 Basic-scientific research method.....	12
1.7.3 Techniques.....	12
1.7.3.1 Interviews/ oral evidence.....	12
1.7.3.2 Analysis of primary sources.....	13
1.7.3.3 Analysis of secondary sources.....	13
1.7.3.4 Observation.....	13
1.8 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH.....	14
1.9 SUMMARY.....	15

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The pedagogic situation denotes the particular circumstances or conditions surrounding the helping of the child as an individual to learn (Crous 1991:22). These conditions determine the child's affective experience of the pedagogic situation and may cause stress. Stress, a feeling of pressure, strain or tension, is an affective condition that may have further positive or negative effects on the learner's experience in the pedagogic situation. Stress may also determine the child's understanding, and involvement in, the pedagogic situation, since these depend on the nature of his experience. The child's learning success, desire to experiment, becoming, development and self-concept formation will also be affected by stress.

The source of stress may lie within or outside the pedagogic situation, as well as the individual. The way the learner handles his stress determines whether his self-actualisation is hindered or enhanced. The emphasis in education, in today's fast-changing world, should be on teaching children stress-coping skills, to ensure the realisation of their potential.

In order to be able to help the child under stress in the pedagogic situation, more knowledge is needed regarding the causes, symptoms and management of stress. A study into the educational past may provide further insight into this theme.

## **1.2 ACTUALITY OF THE RESEARCH**

On reading the title of the research project, the question arises:

Why does stress in the pedagogic situation require analysis from a historical-educational perspective?

Hanna (1990:4) states:

A fact of modern society with its shattering changes, stress has been part of human existence from the time of our earliest records. Even though our social organisation, cultural artefacts and general technology have changed significantly over the millennia, there is little evidence that the human, as a member of a species with a psychobiological inheritance has changed. What works for one member of a human species just possibly may work in toto or

transformation for another, irrespective of environmental complexity. Perception (of stress) depends on individuals' personalities within the context of their social and cultural groups.

*Stress* is frequently mentioned in the pedagogic situation today. Teachers, pupils and parents blame pupil-stress for many problems previously labelled in various ways, and now subsumed under the term *stress* (Hanna 1990:xi; Kruger 1992:2,4-5).

There appears to be a general awareness that pupils are often already under stress, before they enter the secondary pedagogic situation, and this influences their activities, relationships and their becoming adult (Van Rensburg 1992:2). The stress acted out by these children, by means of aggressive or other anti-social behaviour, could increase as a result of the nature of their particular situation at home or at school (Ballard 1969:87). For example, an insecure teaching environment where fear is present, may be a cause for stress in itself. The child who feels threatened by the learning situation, his teacher or his peers; or is afraid of being punished, humiliated or of making a mistake, may suffer stress and be unable to learn (Mac Pherson 1992:8).

Whether the causes of stress lie inside or outside the primary or secondary pedagogic situation, stress appears to affect the motivation, learning and deeds of children in the current pedagogic situation. Kruger (1992:4) says that educationists should be involved with stress research because excessive stress, and the inability to cope with it, are detrimental to the becoming, development and learning ability of the child. Absenteeism, illness, underachievement, lack of interest in school, aggressive behaviour, eating disorders, affective disorders, burnout and substance abuse are just some of the symptoms of stress manifested in the pedagogic situation today (Kruger 1992:5; *Tyger-Burger*, 26 October 1994:1).

According to Hetherington (1995:91), Sher (1995:112) and Kruger (1992:2), the stress phenomenon is a chronic psycho-social condition characterising/endemic to modern life and the fast pace of the twentieth century, which affects children and adults of all sectors of society. Alvin Toffler (1970:xi) maintains that stress is caused by the particular challenges presented by our rapidly changing contemporary society. Political instability, fluctuating economies, rapid urban growth, the information explosion, ever-changing technology, divorce, relationship/ geographic/ job mobility are a few examples of the transient nature of

today's world (Toffler 1970:3,19; Jooste 1992:5; Field 1984:789).

During the latter half of this century, the problem of stress, has been a subject of considerable scientific research from different perspectives, including the psychological and educational; although the emphasis has been mostly on adult stress. Since the late eighties, the topic has even reached the point of becoming rather overworked, owing to its frequent appearance in magazines, popular non-fiction and the media: Slaby's book *60 ways to make stress work for you* (1991) was classified one of ten best sellers in February 1993, by the Central News Agency, in South Africa. Radio and television programmes often discuss the topic (Top Billing, SABC TVI, 3 March 1993; Radio KFM, 17 March 1995).

The knowledge thus gathered, as a result of this excessive interest in the topic, is currently being presented systematically to adults. In the modern workplace, Stress Management Seminars are often offered to staff, providing extensive information on the causes, effects and ways of coping with stress. These include questionnaires, that measure the individual's particular stress level (Bosman 1993b; Jooste 1992; Human Resources [Pty] Ltd 1993).

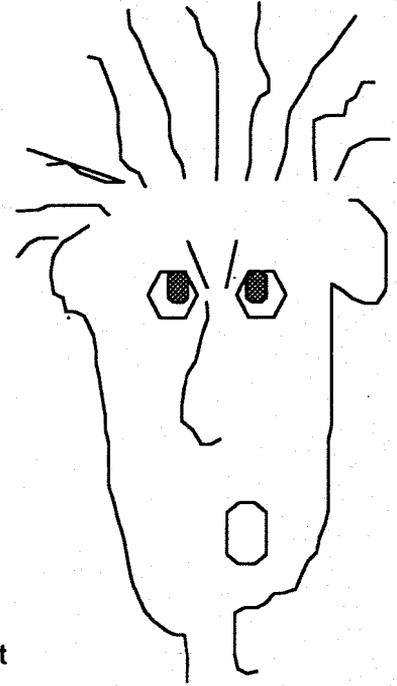
Some tertiary institutions such as UNISA, as well as a few secondary schools, welfare and religious organisations in South Africa, offer courses or literature on stress (Radio UNISA 1993; Buren High School 1994; Well done Westerford 1994; Dave 1994:14; Des 1994a:12; Van Niekerk 1994; Price 1994; Life Line/ Childline 1994; cf. Figure 1.1, page 5).

Programmes specifically aimed at stress management in the pedagogic situation, do not, however, yet appear to be outlined formally in the school-guidance syllabi of all the Departments of Education in South Africa, despite the extent and relevance of the problem (Provincial Administration of the Cape 1981).

Departments of Education have recently begun to prescribe Aids awareness programmes for primary and secondary school pupils and teachers, owing to the heightened awareness of this particular contemporary problem (Provincial Administration of the Cape 1993). This research project will hopefully highlight the need for provision for more systematic guidance for stress in the pedagogic situation.

# WHO AM I?

- **Communication**
- **Sexuality**
- **Conflict**
- **Stress**
- **Relationships**



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## **Age restriction?**

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**Figure 1.1 Stress management in the pedagogic situation  
Poster for youth course (Life Line/ Childline 1994).**

According to Kruger (1992:Summary), awareness and identification of stress in pupils should lead to prevention and assistance in coping with this problem. The researcher feels that an analysis of stress in the pedagogic situation from a time perspective, could unearth new insight into the phenomenon. Investigation into the past may reveal new, or confirm old knowledge, concerning solutions to this educational problem, so that children may be helped to cope with stress in the future.

### **1.3 DELIMITATION OF THE FIELD OF RESEARCH**

The field of this research project is confined to the historical-educational analysis of the problem of stress in the pedagogic situation. The pedagogic situation refers to the education of the child up to the age of about eighteen, and was chosen instead of the agogic situation. The latter refers to the education of both the child and the adult, and would have been too vast and unwieldy a field of research for a project of this size.

The research project will investigate the causes, symptoms and management of stress in the pedagogic situation, from a time perspective. Although the History of Education is concerned with the past, an examination of the problem of stress in the educational present, will first be undertaken, since the aim of this investigation is to understand this phenomenon, with a view to the present and the future. This will be followed by an examination of the past: the relevant data, followed by observations regarding changes that occurred over time, will be clearly stated. Similarities and differences between the past and present regarding stress in the pedagogic situation will be noted, whilst the problem is viewed as it occurred over time.

### **1.4 FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM**

An initial survey of the pedagogic situation today, reveals that stress may be a problem. In order to gain further understanding of this current problem, so as to be able to make recommendations for the future, the following questions need to be asked:

- \* What is stress?
- \* Do children suffer from stress in today's pedagogic situation?

- \* If so, what are the symptoms, causes and solutions with regard to stress in the current pedagogic situation?
- \* Is stress a purely modern phenomena or is it a timeless problem?
- \* Did children suffer from stress in the pedagogic situation of the past?
- \* Do pupils of the current post-industrial/ technocratic era suffer more stress than children of the pedagogic situation of the past?
- \* When and why did the problem originate?
- \* What are the causes, symptoms and solutions regarding stress in the pedagogic situation of the past?
- \* What recommendations can be made for future education regarding the teaching of children to cope with stress?

The problem addressed by this research project can be formulated as follows:

The researcher shall attempt to discover generally valid essentials regarding causes, symptoms and management of stress in the pedagogic situation, by studying the phenomenon from a time perspective. Knowledge of these essentials should provide insight into the current problem and lead to the recommending of guidelines for the future.

## **1.5 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

### **1.5.1 General Aims**

The general aim of this research project is to:

- \* Evaluate the present pedagogic situation in terms of the past.
- \* Describe and compare the pedagogic situations of the present and past.
- \* Find similarities and differences regarding the causes, symptoms and management of stress in the past and present pedagogic situation.

- \* Arrive at a greater understanding of the current problem.
- \* Find guidelines for the future.

## 1.5.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of each chapter of this project will be as follows:

- \* In Chapter One, a general orientation is achieved regarding the problem of stress in the pedagogic situation, as well as the nature of the research project.
- \* In Chapter Two, a study will be made of the current South African pedagogic situation in general.
- \* In Chapter Three, the objective is to scrutinise the pedagogic situation of prehistoric society.
- \* In Chapter Five, an analysis of the pedagogic situation of ancient Greece will be attempted.
- \* Chapter Five will involve an investigation of the medieval pedagogic situation.
- \* In Chapter Six, a specific study will be undertaken of the pedagogic situation of the South African child in the transitional/ traditional stage of his becoming.
- \* In Chapter Seven, an evaluation of the historical findings, conclusions regarding the current problem and recommendations for the future, will be made.

## 1.6 ELUCIDATION OF THE TERMS OF THE TITLE OF THIS PROJECT

### 1.6.1 Analysis

The term *analysis* refers to the process of separating something into its constituent parts, so as to examine or describe it (Heinemann 1979:36). This research project plans to do a critical investigation into all aspects of the problem under review, so as to arrive at valid conclusions and recommendations.

## 1.6.2 Historical-educational

The term *historical-educational* implies that the analysis of the educational problem under review is done from a time perspective. The education of the child in the past, is studied with a view to clarifying the educational present and laying down guidelines for the future.

## 1.6.3 Stress

According to Kruger (1992:2), the origin of the term *stress* probably comes from the Latin word *stringere* which means *to stretch*; and the word already appeared in 14th century English literature. The *Collins Latin-English Dictionary* (1972:317) gives another meaning, in terms of the *mind*, to this verb, which is *to affect* or *to pain*. According to the *Heinemann English Dictionary* (1979:1087), the word is derived from the Latin *strictus* meaning *tightened*. The same source gives one of the denotations of this word, as *emotional* or *intellectual pressure* or *tension*. The term is widely used today to describe any kind of demand, pressure, tension, strain, threat or force (real or imagined), that requires some kind of physical or emotional readjustment (Burns 1988:x).

Hans Selye (1907-1982), the pioneer of stress research, states that stress is:

the result of any demand upon the body be it a mental or somatic demand for survival and the accomplishment of our aims

(Selye 1980:vii).

According to Hanna (1990:7), stress is a response process that occurs when individuals have to cope with demands that require functioning above or below their habitual level of activity. Hanna (1990:7) also defines the concept *stressor*, as the force that produces strain when a person is pushed to the outer limits of a particular adaptive capacity.

The expression *stressed-out* has become a colloquialism in South Africa today; and is used by children and adults to describe feelings of being driven and compelled, which are more than their emotional capabilities, energy and pain-threshold can handle. Generally the condition has become common knowledge today, and a *cliché* in conversations and the media world-wide.

#### 1.6.4 **The pedagogic situation**

The root words of *pedagogic*, are the Greek words *pais* meaning *child*, and *agein* meaning *to lead* (Du Plooy *et al.* 1982:20).

According to Van Zyl, the term *agogy* implies::

...assistance while accompanying another person on his way to becoming more human.

(Van Zyl in Du Plooy *et al.* 1982:14).

The term *pedagogic* is part of the general agogic situation, and refers in particular to the situation where the adult responsibly guides/ supports the child to independent adulthood, (Du Plooy *et al.* 1982:88; Venter 1992a:2,4). The pedagogic situation may be found in the family or school situation, or any other situation where the child is being helped towards adulthood. According to Venter (1992a:3), the education phenomenon occurs in the pedagogic situation that not only gives rise to the compulsion for action, but also to the origin and motive for that pedagogic thought contained in it. In researching stress in past pedagogic situations, therefore, cognisance should be taken of the particular life-view that underpins each one.

### 1.7 **METHODOLOGY**

#### 1.7.1 **Approach**

Every researcher has a particular paradigm, a conceptual framework/ way of thinking that will determine the course of her project, as well as helping her to cope with and manage it.

During an interview (1) on 1 July 1993, Prof. S.L.H. van Niekerk, of the Department of History of Education at UNISA, stated that:

An *approach* reflects an attitude or point of view. The object of research (education phenomenon) is not present as a mere given, but has to be established by determined effort informed by a particular approach.

### **1.7.1.1 Problem-historical approach**

According to Van Niekerk, during the same interview, in July 1993, the problem-historical approach, which is used in this project, characterises the work of most contemporary historical educationists. This approach involves the selection of a problematic matter or theme in contemporary educational theory and practice, as the point of departure; and then the educational past is examined with a view to finding solutions offered in the past for similar problems. In this way, the past of education is "laid bare" by seeking answers to questions arising from actual educational problems, and not by indiscriminately collecting facts concerning the history of education (Venter 1979:167).

The point of departure of this particular research project, is the problem of stress in present-day educational practice.

### **1.7.1.2 The metabletic approach**

Education is always changing, and the metabletic approach, also used in this project, allows the researcher to trace the fundamental changes in education. Each era of the past is described and the changes are indicated. The word *metabletic* is derived from the Greek word *metaballein* which means *change* (Venter & Van Heerden 1989:156). Metabletics is the study of change; The metabletic approach allows the researcher to describe education reality as it really was and became, without any interference. (Venter & Van Heerden 1989:157). The realities are observed and stated from a time perspective, and then compared with one another.

The approach chosen by the practitioner of History of Education determines the method to be selected.

## **1.7.2 Method**

The derivation of the term *method*, is the Greek word *methodos* which means *a way of doing something* (Heinemann 1979:675; *Oxford Dictionary* 1969:506). A research method refers to the way in which the researcher questions the education phenomenon. Unlike an approach, which presupposes a particular viewpoint, a method is a formal and systematic procedure.

### **1.7.2.1 The basic-scientific research/ educational-history research method**

History of Education largely uses the basic-scientific method which this research project intends to pursue. Since the hypothesis formation was omitted as not being applicable in this study, six, instead of seven steps were followed:

- \* The choice, demarcation and formulation of a problem.
- \* The choice of approach, determination of what the theme comprises, and definition of the contemporary meaning of the relevant concepts.
- \* Investigation, examination and description of the problem in the educational past by means of primary and secondary sources, and according to the approach chosen for research.
- \* Critical evaluation of the data and selection of data relevant to the theme under review.
- \* Interpretation of data
- \* Writing the report. This comprises a factual part consisting of the introduction and historic survey, and the analytical part that is, in fact, the final evaluation (Venter & Van Heerden 1989:111-117).

### **1.7.3 Techniques**

The term *technique* refers to a particular procedure for doing something). The word derives from the Greek word *tekhne* meaning art or skill (Heinemann 1979:1131).

There are various practical skills available for collecting data for a research project as required by the basic-scientific research method. The following is a list of techniques that will be used for this particular project:

#### **1.7.3.1 Interviews/ oral evidence**

Interviews with pupils, teachers, teacher-counsellors, parents, religious, social workers and academics, in South Africa will be undertaken. Unstructured

interviews will be used, as this research project requires information of a sensitive and personal nature; questions should appear to arise spontaneously from the conversation, because interviewees should be encouraged to talk freely and voluntarily offer information. The interviews will aim to discover the causes, symptoms and attempts at management of stress in pupils, in the current pedagogic situation.

Other forms of oral evidence will be talks and sermons - delivered by various educationists, religious or other individuals - offering information relating to the topic in South Africa today.

#### **1.7.3.2 Analysis of primary sources**

This research project will describe relics and artefacts associated with people, groups or periods, such as: implements, fossils, toys, tools, weapons, buildings, food, clothing, jewellery, drawings, paintings and teaching aids. These should provide interesting information regarding stress in the past pedagogic situation.

Documents that are eyewitness accounts of present and past events are also primary evidence. Letters and newspaper reports are examples of this type of primary evidence, that will be used in this project (Venter & Van Heerden 1989:114).

#### **1.7.3.3 Analysis of secondary sources**

Various textbooks, encyclopaedias, dissertations, scientific journals, newspapers, documents and magazines will be consulted for reports and accounts of what is happening/ happened in the educational present/ past, during the search for data on the theme of this research project.

#### **1.7.3.4 Observation**

Information and deductions regarding stress in the current pedagogic situation, will be made by means of observing the behaviour of children over current time. An attempt will be made to define behaviour in specific and concrete terms, so as to be able to record observations systematically and objectively. The following questions will be asked by the researcher when noting down observations:

- \* What is stress?
- \* Can stress be observed directly?
- \* What is causing the stress and how can it be prevented?

## 1.8 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH

Venter (1992a:8-13) maintains that a research programme or strategy arises from a correct perspective on that aspect of reality which one wishes to control and analyse scientifically. The following is an attempt to give a clear outline of the contents of the seven chapters of this project:

**CHAPTER ONE:** Orientation consisting of an introduction; statements regarding the actuality of the research; delimitation of the field of research; formulation of the problem; aims and objectives of the research; elucidation of the concepts of the title; methodology; proposed development of the research; summary.

**CHAPTER TWO:** The causes/ symptoms of, and management strategies for stress, in children of the present pedagogic situation, are studied in the light of existing literature, interviews held and observations made.

**CHAPTER THREE:** A historical survey of the causes/ symptoms/ management strategies pertaining to stress, in the pedagogic situation of prehistoric society will be undertaken, with reference to both primary and secondary sources.

**CHAPTER FOUR:** The same study will be made of ancient Greece. This will also involve data from primary and secondary sources, in order to describe the problem of stress as it appeared during those epochs.

**CHAPTER FIVE:** By using the same categories and techniques employed in chapters three and four, an analysis of stress in the pedagogic situation of the Middle Ages will be undertaken.

**CHAPTER SIX:** A return to the current South African situation will take place here, providing a more detailed analysis of stress in the pedagogic situation of the child in the transitional/ traditional phase, so as to ensure a clearer picture of the

present situation.

**CHAPTER SEVEN:** An final evaluation will be made of the historical survey made in this research report. An attempt will be made to analyse the historical findings, arrive at conclusions regarding the current problem under review, and make recommendations with regard to the educational future. Recommendations will also be made regarding the practical application of these principles in the current pedagogic situation.

1.9

## **SUMMARY**

Stress as a modern phenomenon, has received considerable attention during the past twenty years. Stress-inducing factors, or stressors, present in both individuals and society, often appear to be negatively experienced as demands, threat, strain or pressure, rather than positively perceived as challenges for personal growth.

The many problems experienced by children today, attributed to stress, have made the researcher aware of the need to contribute to existing research on the theme. This project may emphasise the urgent need for a more systematic unfolding of knowledge regarding stress to all the participants of the current pedagogic situation, so that our children will be helped to more successfully cope with his feelings of stress.

By reviewing the past of education, one may discover clues as to why coping with stress appears to be a particular problem today, inhibiting the realisation of many children's potential. It does appear that there were successful coping mechanisms for stress in the past. There must have been, or mankind would not have progressed as far as it has done, for history has shown that:

The good news is that human beings have an extraordinary ability to adapt, and even triumph in tough conditions (Gordon 1992a:30).

It is possible that stress is not a new phenomena; its presence depends on the individual's inner state of mind and reaction to the outer state of his temporal milieu. The latter is determined by a particular life-view, life-style and heritage. This research project shall now examine groups and individuals in the educational present and past, to see if stress is indeed a general problem and not just a modern phenomenon. In the next chapter the search will begin for the roots, the signs and

techniques for the management of stress in contemporary children, as well as how stress is viewed in current thinking. The chapters which follow will examine the past, leading to a suggested strategy for successful coping with stress in children.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STRESS IN THE CURRENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION

	Page
2.1	INTRODUCTION..... 20
2.2	STRESS MODELS..... 21
2.2.1	The stimulus model..... 21
2.2.1.1	Life events..... 22
2.2.1.2	Everyday stressors..... 23
2.2.2	The response model..... 23
2.2.3	The transactional model..... 26
2.2.4	General Comments..... 26
2.3	CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE CURRENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION..... 28
2.3.1	Stressors at macro-level, in the outside world/ society..... 29
2.3.1.1	Stressors in the outside world..... 29
	(i) Natural disasters..... 29
	(ii) Man-made threats..... 29
	(iii) Television and the media..... 30
	(iv) Future Shock..... 31
	(v) Aids..... 31
	(vi) Stranger danger..... 32
2.3.1.2	Stressors embedded in a country's culture..... 32
	(i) Politics..... 32
	(ii) Social change..... 32
	(iii) Economic conditions..... 33
	(iv) Violence and crime..... 33
	(v) Sexual discrimination..... 34
	(vi) Religion..... 35
2.3.2	Stressors at meso-level in the family and school..... 35
2.3.2.1	Stress due to parents ..... 35
	(i) Adult stress..... 35
	(ii) Child abuse..... 36
	(iii) Divorce/ marital discord/ remarriage of parent(s)..... 36
	(iv) Isolated family units/ nuclear family..... 37
	(v) Frequent absence of one or both parents..... 37

	Page
(vi) Communication.....	37
(vii) Death/ illness in parent/ close relative/ friend.....	38
(viii) Parenting styles.....	38
(ix) Excessive expectations.....	39
2.3.2.2 Stress due to peers.....	39
(i) Peer pressure.....	39
(ii) Competitiveness/ rivalry.....	39
(iii) Forming heterosexual relationships.....	40
(iv) Loneliness.....	40
2.3.2.3 Stress due to school.....	40
(i) Excessively harsh/ forceful/ repressive discipline.....	40
(ii) Irrelevant or inappropriate subject matter.....	41
(iii) Unrealistic standards of tests/ marking.....	41
(iv) Too much/ too little school work/ homework/ tests.....	42
(v) Uninspiring/ uninspired teachers/ teaching environment.....	42
(vi) Lack of individual attention.....	42
2.3.3 Stress at micro-level within the child's self.....	43
2.3.3.1 Physical stressors.....	43
2.3.3.2 Search for identity/ self-concept formation .....	43
2.3.3.3 Personality.....	44
2.3.4 Summary.....	44
2.4 SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE CURRENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	45
2.4.1 Symptoms of stress at different ages.....	45
2.4.1.1 Symptoms of stress in infancy.....	45
2.4.1.2 Symptoms of stress in pre-schoolers.....	46
2.4.1.3 Symptoms of stress in primary school children.....	46
2.4.1.4 Symptoms of stress in adolescence.....	46
2.4.2 Symptoms of stress in general.....	47
2.4.2.1 Physical symptoms.....	47
2.4.2.2 Emotional/ behavioural/ psychological symptoms.....	48
2.5 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHILD'S RESPONSE TO STRESS.....	50
2.5.1 Factors within the child.....	50
2.5.1.1 Perception of a stressor.....	50
2.5.1.2 Resilience.....	51
2.5.1.3 Sex.....	51

	<b>Page</b>
2.5.1.4 Overall health.....	51
2.5.2 Factors outside the child.....	52
2.5.2.1 Degree of stressor.....	52
2.5.2.2 Supportive parents.....	52
2.5.2.3 Supportive teachers, adults, friends and, relatives.....	52
2.5.2.4 Religion.....	52
2.5.3 Coping strategies.....	52
2.6 PEDAGOGIC ACCOMPANIMENT AND STRESS MANAGEMENT.....	53
2.7 SUMMARY.....	53

## INTRODUCTION

During the period June 1991 to December 1993, pupils at Table View High School, in the Western Cape, South Africa, were observed and interviewed (2). This group revealed symptoms of possible stress. Physical symptoms included frequent complaints of headaches, stomach cramps and sore throats. Emotional reactions included forgetfulness, hypersensitivity, over-emotionalism, lack of concentration and a negative attitude to school in general. Behavioural symptoms included teenage crime, cigarette, drug and alcohol use, Satanism, disorganisation, aggressive and maladaptive behaviour. Certain pupils expressed their feelings of anger, anxiety, depression and frustration to their teachers and counsellors.

These interviews, as well as those with parents, doctors, ministers of religion, police officers, teachers and counsellors, during the same period - June 1991 to December 1993 (3) - revealed that external causes of stress in these pupils might have lain in the typically Westernised community, in which the school is embedded. The suburb of Table View, Western Cape, had become an unstable environment.

Many of the pupils came from "broken homes" in this relatively new suburb, that had been rapidly developing since its beginnings during the late 1970s. It was the fastest growing suburb in Southern Africa, at a rate of seven people per day (*Agenda*, SABC TV1, 3 June 1993). Houses are generally small and suit the income of single-parent families, or remarried divorced individuals, starting a "new" family. Often due to their parents' divorce, many of the pupils interviewed, had moved to the area from totally different parts of the country (the Transkei/ Gauteng) and world (Hong Kong/ the U.K.). Others came from homes where moving was a very frequent occurrence. Some were there because their parents feared future political changes in their previous homes. Generally, all these children commented on how different they found their new school and social environment. It was a potentially stressful and heterogeneous environment of diverse cultures and sub-cultures; a seaside town with metropolitan type shopping malls, crowded cluster housing complexes, near industrial-commercial areas and even a nuclear reactor.

Some of the causes of stress appeared to come from within the secondary pedagogic situation as well, because of harsh discipline meted out by some teachers, or a *laissez-faire* attitude, on the part of others. In the case of the primary pedagogic situation, parental control was often lacking, as the socio-

economic level of many of the families required that both parents worked full-time. An interview with a mother from Durbanville, another Western Cape suburb, in October 1993 (4), revealed that children from Table View, the suburb under investigation, were generally known by the colloquialism *latch-key kids*, the term generally used today to describe children who arrive home from school to an empty house.

The above brief description of a Western-orientated South African pedagogic situation shows that *crisis*, a time of danger/ threat, is a "normal" state for many children today. This is the case in both developed and developing economies/ First and Third World children (Buckland 1994:8). The contemporary child has to realise his potential in an increasingly, unpredictable and threatening world. It is the task of the educator in the primary and secondary pedagogic situation to assist the child under stress. The Chinese character for *crisis* is a combination of the characters for *danger* and *opportunity* (Slaby 1991:x); the child's self-actualisation could be enhanced by stress. To help him do this, the educator needs to understand the nature, causes and symptoms of stress.

Contemporary research into stress from different perspectives (anthropological, physical, psychological, sociological and others) has produced different models which attempt to describe this modern phenomenon. The following outline of some of these models may contribute to an understanding of stress in the contemporary pedagogic situation.

## **2.2 STRESS MODELS**

### **2.2.1 The stimulus model**

According to Stroebel (1993:22), the potential for stress lies in the external environment of the individual. Burns (1988:x) uses the term *stressor* to describe an event that might provide the stimulus for a stress reaction. This description of stress resembles that of physics; it views stress as an external force exerted on a system (Stroebel 1993:22). Kruger (1992:91) categorises potential sources of pedagogic stress into external environmental stressors in the outside world (macro-level); family, peer group and school (meso-level); and internal stressors in the physical/ cognitive/ affective/ social/ normative/ conative self (micro-level). Appley & Trumbull (1986:34) state that stressors can be eventful/ acute/ short-term or chronic/ cumulative/ long-term.

### **2.2.1.1 Life events**

Major, non-routine life-events have been considered by many researchers, as the main stimulus of stress. Stress scales, ranking these life-events that cause stress for children and adolescents, have been outlined by these researchers. The following is a list of stressful events that can affect the child, although they have not been ranked by this researcher, because opinions seem to vary on their order of significance.

Stressful events that affect children:

- \* Moving to a different house
- \* Father's changing job
- \* Mother's starting new job
- \* Serious or prolonged disagreement between parents and their own parents or in-laws
- \* Death of a close friend, close relative or parents
- \* Increased or serious financial problems of parents
- \* Father's unemployment or mother's, if a single parent
- \* Serious or prolonged argument between parents
- \* Divorce or legal separation of parents
- \* Reconciliation of parents after divorce or legal separation
- \* Parents' sexual problems
- \* Assault of mother by father
- \* Serious illness or accident suffered by either parent, sibling, or other family members
- \* Mother's pregnancy
- \* Arrival of a new baby/ addition of a new family member
- \* Hospitalisation
- \* Court case involving mother or father
- \* Jail sentence of a parent
- \* Starting school/ beginning a new standard
- \* Final examinations
- \* Academic failure/ learning problems in school
- \* Repeating a standard
- \* Changing schools/ suspension from school
- \* Acquiring a visible deformity/ speech/ hearing/ vision problems
- \* Becoming involved with drugs or alcohol

- \* Physical child abuse
- \* Frequent absence of one or both parents
- \* Foster home placement
- \* Change in child's acceptance by peers

(Beautrais, Fergusson & Shannon in Papalia & Old 1993:273; Coddington & Chandler in Kruger 1992:74-75; Burns 1988:36)

### 2.2.1.2 Everyday stressors

Lazarus (1981:62) finds that daily stressors - "hassles and uplifts" - have more impact than life events. He adds that stress does not reside only in the everyday situation, but also in the individual's reaction to the former, and depends on various factors, including how the rest of the day has gone.

### 2.2.2 The response model

The response model defines stress in terms of the individual's physiological response to stressors (Stroebe 1993:23). Selye defines stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it (Selye in Lau & Shani 1992:462). The twentieth century body reacts in precisely the same way to stress as primitive man (Saunders 1987:15; Slaby 1991:34).

When exposed to a stressor, a prehistoric physiological response or change, termed the *fight or flight* syndrome, attempts to return the body and mind to balance/*homeostasis*. Selye terms this physical response to stress, *general adaptation syndrome*, and divides stress into the *alarm*, *resistance* and *exhaustion* stage (Selye in Lau & Shani 1992:461).

*Alarm* entails bodily changes involving the blood supply, the digestion and chemicals such as adrenaline, that stimulate the body to cope with the stress (cf. Figure 2.1, page 24). If the body does not return to a state of relaxation, homeostasis or balance (cf. Figure 2.2, page 25), and continues to *resist* the stressor even after the latter has disappeared, it becomes susceptible to negative effects (Burns 1988:2). All internal resources for managing the stress become *exhausted*, resulting in physical and mental overload, against which the body will rebel in the form of physical, emotional and behavioural disorders (Burns 1988:8; Kruger 1992:62; Polson 1990:51).

- 1 The front of the brain receives stimulus from eyes, ears, etc., e.g. awareness of danger
- 2 The hypothalamus in the brain activates
  - (a) the pituitary gland to release hormones
  - (b) the involuntary nervous system, which then sends signals via nerves to various parts of the body
- 3 These in turn cause the adrenal glands to release the hormones adrenaline, nor-adrenaline and cortisone, leading to the following changes (see 4-12)

4 Mentally alert; senses activated

5 Breathing rate speeds up nostrils and air passages in lungs open wider to get air in more quickly

6 Heartbeat speeds up and blood pressure rises

7 Liver releases sugar, cholesterol and fatty acids into the blood to supply quick energy to the muscles

8 Sweating increases to cool the body



9 Blood clotting ability increases, preparing for possible injury

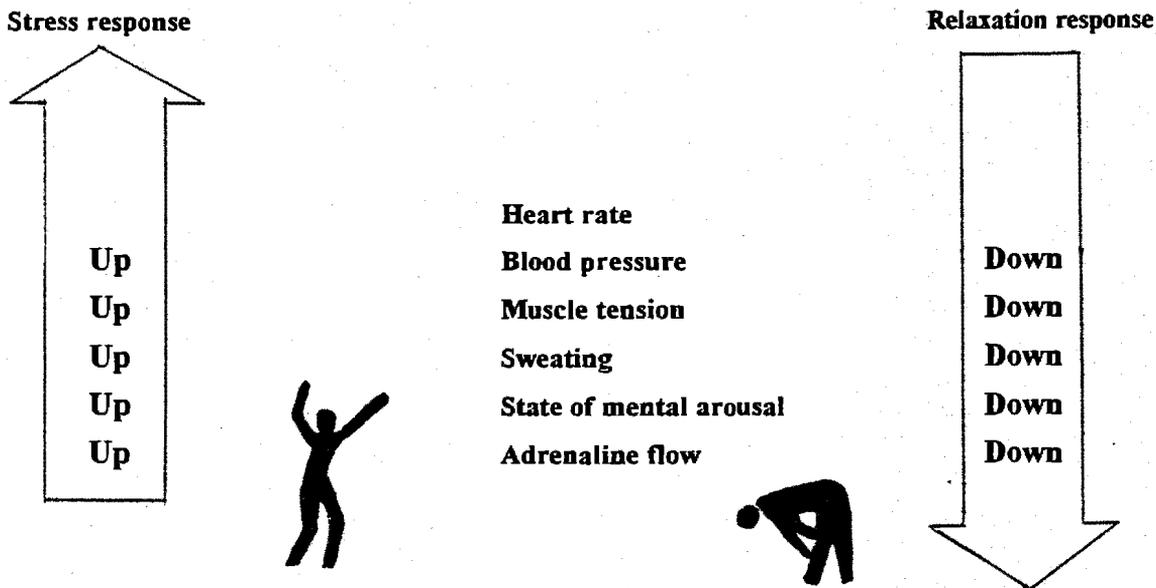
10 Muscles of bladder and bowel openings contract and non-life supporting activity of body systems ceases temporarily

11 Blood is diverted to muscles, whose fibres tense ready for action

12 Immunity responses decrease (useful in short term to allow massive response by body, but harmful over a long period)

- The “fight or flight” response is easily recognised in a fear-provoking situation
- Short-term arousal can be life-saving; long-term arousal can be damaging to health
- Long-term depression and feelings of being unable to cope produce slightly different changes, particularly in regard to hormones released, and this may have potential for damaging health.

**Figure 2.1 Automatic physiological response to a stressor (Burns 1988:5)**



The relationship between stress and relaxation. When the body responds to relaxation, the effects are opposite to those induced by stress.

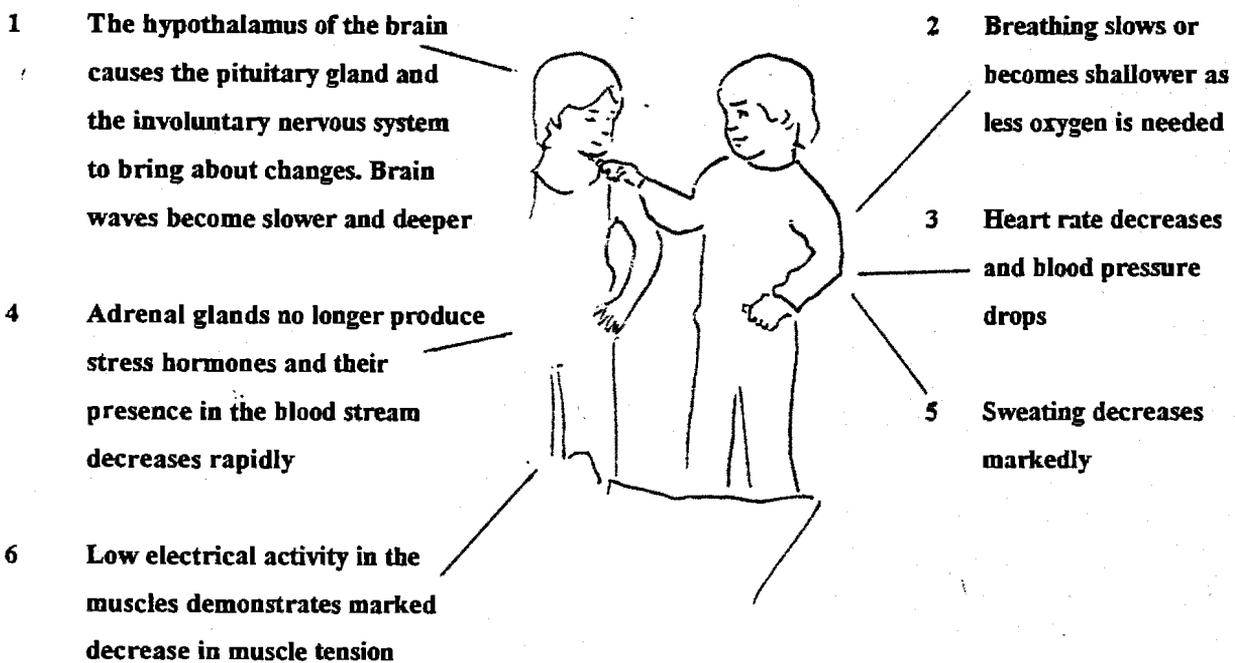


Figure 2.2 Bodily changes during relaxation (Burns 1988:97)

### 2.2.3 The transactional model

According to Stroebe (1993:23) and Kruger (1992:91), the individual's response to external stimulus is in transaction with many factors. Stress is defined as the outcome of the interactions between the organism and physical/psychological stressors in the environment. The nature of an individual's interpretation and experience of a stressor may be motivated by the following: cognitive evaluation of the stressor, personality, perception, past experience, needs, values, knowledge of stress, health, locus of control, sense of humour, the ability to make decisions/ relax/ manage time, social support, the self-concept, coping skills and the amount of stressors experienced in a short space of time (Lazarus & Leventhal in Appley & Trumbull 1986:44,48).

### 2.2.4 General comments

Stress results from a demand, real or perceived, beyond the real or perceived carrying capacity of the individual's physiological/ psychological/ social systems (Appley & Trumbull 1986:34). This demand/ stressor may be perceived in either or positive or negative light, depending on various factors within the individual, as well as in his present and past environment.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) said:

It is not the experience that happens to you, it is what you do with the experience that happens to you

(in Slaby 1991:vi).

Negative or positive stress can arise from the same social, psychological or physical situations. In the case of the former, stress is beyond our control. In the case of the latter, it is seen as a challenge, not a threat, and results in creativity and achievement. Stress in moderation is essential to healthy functioning and growth (Burns 1988:x).

According to Selye (in Appley & Trumbull 1986:7), complete freedom from stress is death. Selye distinguishes between *distress* (dysfunctional stress) and *eustress* (which promotes personal and social growth). Selye believed that stressful circumstances can stimulate a feeling of either negative *distress* or positive *eustress* in the individual (Selye in Hanna 1990:8-9; cf. Figure 2.3, page 27).

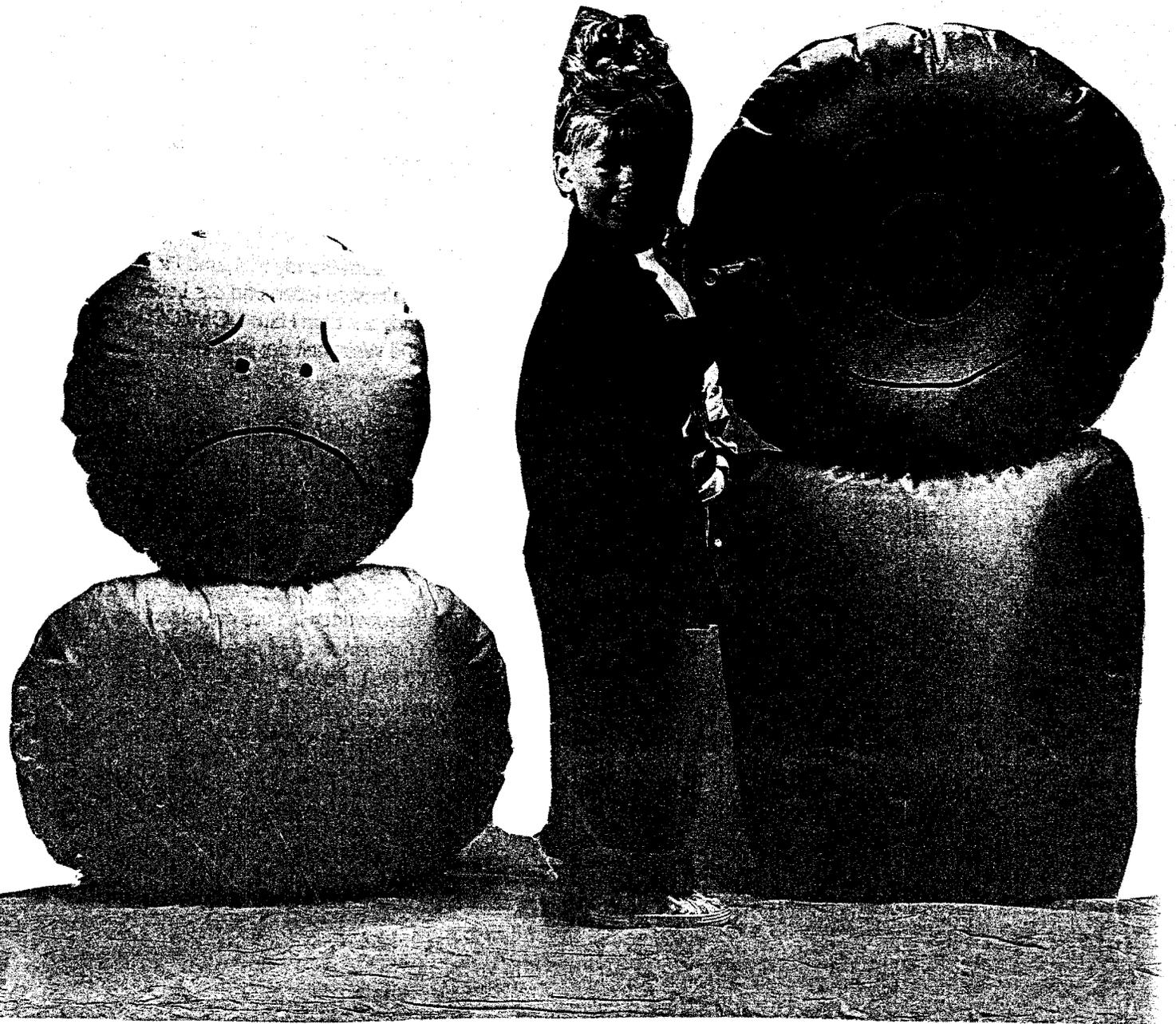


Figure 2.3 Distress or *eustress*? (Stern 1993:56)

It appears that *eustress* is necessary for the self-actualisation of the child in the pedagogic situation. According to Wingfield (1970:1), unless the child under four and a half receives sufficient stimulation in his environment, "his potential of intelligence and enterprise" will be wasted, "leaving him dull and inhibited". Lack of stimulus in certain institutions such as orphanages, and hospitals for long-term illness, leads to problems of personality development (Wolff 1969:90).

Stimulus and the stress-response are integral to life, which is fraught with crisis and change. According to Kokot, during a television interview (Kokot 1993), even giftedness, in a world designed for average people, may be a cause of stress for a child. The ecstasy of love is also stressful. Its symptoms (flushed skin, sweaty palms and heavy breathing) are the same as those of stress, since the "chemical pathways" are identical. (Toufexis 1993:54; Grey 1993:21).

Von Bertalanffy (in Burns 1988:211) says:

Stress is not only a danger to life to be controlled and neutralised by adaptive mechanisms; it also creates higher life. If life, after disturbance from outside, had simply returned to the so called homeostatic equilibrium, it would never have progressed beyond the amoeba, which after all is the best adapted creature in the world - it has survived billions of years from the primeval ocean to the present day.

Yet stress has been named the disease of the twentieth century and the problem of the nineties (Bosman 1993a). Medical practitioners are claiming that up to 75% of their patients are showing symptoms of stress. Excessive, maladaptive, negative and non-constructive stress restricts functioning and motivation in the contemporary learning situation; as opposed to a proactive, positive and adaptive response to stressful life events, which would ensure the child's self-actualisation (Kruger 1992:62; *Man's Body Manual* 1979:EO3; Slaby 1991:27). An understanding of the causes of this illness will contribute to its cure.

## 2.3

### **CAUSES OF STRESS/ STRESSORS IN THE CURRENT SOUTH AFRICAN PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

The following paragraphs will briefly discuss a few of the possible causes of stress/stressors in South African children in general, and the Westernised child in

particular. Chapter Six will describe the particular pedagogic situation of the child in transition between a traditional and a Westernised way of life.

### 2.3.1 Stressors at macro-level, in the outside world and society

Children in the South African pedagogic situation are subject to the pressures of the general world beyond their immediate family and school environment, as well as those embedded in their particular society and culture.

#### 2.3.1.1 Stressors in the outside world

##### (i) *Natural disasters*

Real or imagined catastrophic natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires, floods and drought, may cause stressful feelings in children. Interviews with primary and secondary school pupils in January 1994, in the Western Cape (5) revealed that disasters such as the recent Los Angeles earthquake (17 January 1994), caused anxiety in children, even as far away as South Africa. Their fear was increased by the knowledge of a similar fault in the region. In areas in South Africa, such as the Northern Transvaal, constantly threatened by drought, there are feelings of tension in the home and the classroom during the rainy season (Sexwale 1995).

##### (ii) *Man-made threats*

The possibility of man-made disasters causes stress in many South African children today. Examples of these potential stressors, that are human in origin, are: nuclear explosions/ fall-out; faulty nuclear reactors; chemical weapons such as *Agent Orange* used in Vietnam, during the Vietnam War (1962-1973); aeroplane crashes; disasters at sea, such as the sinking of the *Estonia* (20 September 1994); car accidents; oil spills from large oil tankers; pollution and war. Rapid urbanisation and overcrowding in cities or suburbs, is another stressor. *Shantytowns/ squatter camps/ informal settlements* are a feature of developing countries, and especially South Africa. The largest squatter sprawl in this country is in KwaZulu Natal, where informal settlements are home to an estimated 2,4 million people and half of Durban's population (Indicator Press 1995:39).

Children fear not only catastrophes, or experience stress as a result of these stressors which are caused by man, but also suffer the strain of physical illness/

deformities as a result of long-term exposure to some of these. Even overcrowding brings the threat of death due to the lack of hygienic conditions. According to the *Water Research Commission Report* (Umgeni Water 1995:43), over 200,000 South African children drink themselves to death, because they do not have access to safe drinking water.

Children interviewed in the Western Cape in March 1994 (6), felt threatened by potential danger from the Koeberg nuclear reactor in the region. A few recalled the Chernobyl disaster in Russia (30 April 1986), which added to their fears. They also spoke of their worry about pollution from a nearby petrol refinery in Table View, Western Cape. Children in the Vaal Triangle, are also under stress, owing to knowledge of air pollution that poses a serious health risk. According to a three-year study, conducted among children aged 8 to 12 years by the Medical Research Council, the CSIR and the Department of National Health and Population Development, the average levels of atmospheric particulate pollution in the region, are two-and-a-half times higher than the international health standard. Children in this region of South Africa, stand a very high risk of developing respiratory illness, which would imply additional stressors at micro-level, within the child's physical self (L'Ange 1994:174).

### (iii) *Television and the media*

Owing to the media, especially television, children in contemporary Westernised homes in particular, experience a world well beyond their immediate environment. They are consequently exposed to an excessive amount of stressors that they would not normally experience, such as the various disasters mentioned in the previous paragraphs, violence, crime and disease/ illness in South Africa and elsewhere (Naidoo and Fram 1994:11). Fictional films often also reveal an unnaturally stressful world to children. Interviews with children after two particularly violent and sexually explicit television broadcasts in March 1994, in the Western Cape (7), revealed an anxious preoccupation with these aspects of the films.

Television technology may also be stressful. Children observed during extensive exposure to violent television computer games such as *Mortal Kombat*, at home during school holidays, in April 1994, appeared to be particularly tense and aggressive. According to Kruger (1992:132-133), computer and television technology can be informative and relaxing, but also a source of stress. The child

is exposed to a world and feelings that he is not yet able to handle. Excessive television viewing and playing with television games, also reduces the child's reading skills and consequent ability to keep up with the modern information explosion, be motivated and succeed in the school learning situation. This results in a negative self-concept as a learner, a source of stress within the child's self.

(iv) *Future shock*

Toffler (1970:3,4,19) uses his own term *future shock* to describe the distress and disorientation that is result of too much change in today's world. The child in the contemporary South African pedagogic situation, is exposed to constant moving of home/ school, parental job mobility, the information explosion with its increasing/ changing body of knowledge (with which teachers and pupils struggle to keep up), changing trends in fashion (that cause financial stress in families), and changing family structures, due to parental divorce/ separation. Change is also a particularly demanding stressor for children today, because South Africa is going through a period of political, social and educational transition. According to Stonier (1994:6), the concept of *change* in South Africa, "has almost become a *cliché*", as well as calls to "face the changes". Stonier feels that pupils and teachers should move into, what he calls "anticipatory mode", in order to cope with what lies ahead and prevent stress due to fear of change.

(v) *Aids*

Although a general fear of disease and illness is a source of stress in all children today, Aids is a disease that appears peculiar to the twentieth century. Owing to its frequent exposure in the media, as well as school programmes, this disease has become a source of anxiety for many South African children. After a talk on Aids, at a secondary school, in September 1991, in the Western Cape, a fourteen year old pupil interviewed (8), expressed extreme anxiety regarding kissing a girl he wished to date, because he feared catching the disease from her saliva. A primary school child interviewed in February 1994 (9), expressed anxiety about sexual matters in general, as a result of his teacher's lesson on Aids. Prominent entertainment figures are often in the news for having this widely publicised disease/ epidemic, such as the singer Freddy Mercury, who died of Aids, in November 1991 and various others (Walker 1995:20; Royant & Manso 1994:46-57; St Leger 1994:3; Thamm 1994:174). This is another reason for anxiety in

children today. Further information regarding this particular stressor in the lives of contemporary South African children, will be given in Chapter Six of this project.

(vi) *Stranger danger*

Talks at school, publicity and media exposure, of the topic of “*stranger danger*”, cause stress in children whose exploratory nature is thus inhibited. Widespread publicity and articles on the *Cape Town Station Strangler* such as the one by Corfe (1994:8), warn children of a real danger, but also add to their feelings of tension. Parental paranoia also increases anxiety in children (Killian in Paterson 1994:9).

### 2.3.1.2 Stressors embedded in a country's culture

(i) *Politics*

The political situation has always a source of great stress for most South Africans, mostly as a result of *apartheid*. Many children and adults who may have lost their homes, were compelled to follow an urban life-style which led to poverty, crime, violence, school drop-outs and loss of self-esteem. With the disappearance of apartheid, the contemporary political situation appears to be still stressful in South Africa which is, as Contreras (1993:27) maintains, “in a state of political flux” and uncertainty regarding the country's leaders and potential tribal/ social conflict. Symptoms of stress, such as anxiety, lack of motivation, absenteeism, maladaptive behaviour and violence were very much in evidence in children in primary and secondary pedagogic situations, in all sectors of South African society, during the period prior to the first democratic general elections, in April 1994.

(ii) *Social change*

The changing political structure has accelerated the already changing South African society; another stressor for all children. Leoka (1992:16) writes about the challenges facing increasingly Westernised, but still traditional, black children, for whom school subjects are classified and conceptualised in terms of First World technologies to which they have no access. Removed from their traditional rural homes, these children are often unfamiliar with city ways and city violence, and the medium of instruction may be a language they do not use at home (Karstaedt 1993:23). Both black and white children are currently feeling culture shock due to

a changing society, owing to the lifting of the *apartheid* system, after its forty year reign.

(iii) *Economic conditions*

South Africa's current economic problems are potential stressors for children because of their parents' unemployment, financial difficulties and poverty. In the pedagogic situation, parents and teachers pressure children to succeed academically because of future job uncertainty and/ or desire to break the circle of poverty. This affects the children, who already feel tense about their occupational future. Children may also be under pressure to pursue careers for which they might not be suited because of economic uncertainty. In February 1994, a Standard Five teacher in the Western Cape, tried to persuade all his pupils to go to a technical high school the following year, so as to increase their employability, regardless of their individual interests or aptitudes. High school pupils observed and interviewed during 1993 (2), and an interview with a mother of teenagers in the Transvaal in March 1994 (10), revealed an general attitude of hopelessness and uncertainty regarding learning and going to school in South African children today, because of an uncertain job future.

Financial problems at home, as well as pressure to have money in a contemporary materialistic society, often lead to young people of all ages taking part-time jobs. This means less time for relaxation and study, and consequent lack of motivation and tiredness, in both the primary and secondary pedagogic situation. The child assumes the responsibilities of adulthood too soon, which adds to his stress. Some children pursue other (illegal) ways of finding financial support such as delivering drugs, prostitution, theft or begging. Economic necessity also means that both parents are often in full-time employment, and children lack parental support, are required to assume adult responsibilities at home, or turn to the streets (Papalia & Old 1993:471,530).

(iv) *Violence and crime*

Violence, a political and social disease, has reached enormous proportions today, resulting in an extremely stressful way of life for many children. Family violence (emotional, physical and verbal), as well as criminal violence, is a serious problem in South Africa today. During the months prior to the April 1994 General Election, children of all cultures and social backgrounds, interviewed by the

researcher in the Western Cape, expressed/ experienced anger and anxiety in this way. The spiral of violence in which children often take part, will be discussed more fully when the pedagogic situation of the transitional/ traditional child is discussed.

Violence often accompanies crime in South Africa, a “country of criminals” and a “gangster nation” (Carter *et al.* 1994:3). According to the editors of *The Sunday Times* (6 November 1994:24), South Africa's crime revolution has made it the “most murderously callous” nation in the world. The editor speaks of “the gratuitous rapes that accompany robbery and burglar, the easy use of firearms, the hacking and cutting - often served as a means to avenge humiliation”. He maintains that the new class of criminals began with political/ social revenge on the part of the former victims of apartheid who hunted policeman for political objective, but now hunt citizens for criminal purpose. He adds that violence is a result of an ineffectual police force - currently in a current stage of transition from being a formerly corrupt political organ - and that the anarchic situation has attracted syndicates and international criminals, which has increased crime. According to Carter *et al.* (1994:3), a serious crime is committed every 17 seconds in South Africa, including murder, house breaking, theft, assault and rape. By September 1994, 1,2 million cases had already been reported. in all areas of South Africa. Crime and the fear of crime could bring the democratisation process to a standstill, say experts at the Human Sciences Research Council (Ibid.). Media coverage of the situation, make the children who do not directly experience this stressor, aware of it too.

Children of the so-called *lost generation* (the term currently used in South Africa to describe children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who have “dropped out” of school), as well as those from less poor family backgrounds, have become part of this violent and criminal way of life - which is perhaps the most pressing problem and cause of stress, in the lives of South African children (Moleko in Carter *et al.* 1994:3).

(v) *Sexual discrimination*

Girls observed in the co-educational classroom situation and in the home, during the period January 1993 to March 1994, in the Western Cape, seemed afraid to assert themselves. They allowed the boys to verbally abuse them and belittle them. It appears sexual equality is still a problem and cause for stress. in the modern

Westernised, as well as traditional female. With regard to role models for girls, the media often makes the point that women do not often receive promotions or take part in politics today (Thamm 1994:174). Consequently girls from all societies faced with no future, often lack motivation in the learning situation, and feel stress.

(vi) *Religion*

A Standard 10 pupil interviewed in March 1994 (11), in the Western Cape, said that she found it stressful that there was such a variety of churches and religions in South Africa, and felt uncertain as to which one was "right". Many young people are attracted to the occult in South Africa today, during their search for religious identity during adolescence. Perhaps this is a result of a lack of ecumenical unity amongst the various religious, as well as the different denominations of each individual religion. Another reason for confusion regarding religious faith in contemporary South African children, is a lack of a firmly based faith, in many families, in today's materialistic and individualistic Westernised society.

Often religious values at school differ from those at home. This is a particular stressor for the traditional child who attends a Westernised school, although it is a problem for children from Westernised homes as well.

## **2.3.2 Stressors at meso-level in the family/ peer group / school**

### **2.3.2.1 Stress due to parents**

(i) *Adult stress*

According to an article in *Fair Lady* (23 March 1994:22) parental stress becomes the child's problem, even before birth. If a mother is in a stressed state during pregnancy, the baby will appear under stress at birth, and will also have colic for 16 weeks thereafter. Parents or teachers who have relationship problems - or other personal problems such as illness, depression, alcoholism, substance abuse and financial difficulties - are under stress and "infect" the children whom they are guiding towards adulthood (Papalia & Old 1993:3; Kruger 1992:112-114). Even small children are affected; the majority of accidental injuries of pre-school children have been found to occur during a time of family stress (Slaby 1991:5).

(ii) *Child abuse*

A result of ordinary people caught in stressful situations that are beyond their coping capacity, child abuse, has been a subject of intense research during the last ten years, and is a significant cause of stress in children in South Africa. According to a priest, a resident of Gauteng, interviewed on 6 January 1994 (12) - and a religious/ teacher/ social worker, who travels all over South Africa, in February 1995 (13) - child abuse is a serious problem in the country. It cuts across all boundaries of economic level, race, ethnic heritage and religious faith. Regional health minister, Ebrahim Rasool claimed (in Friedman 1995:4), that the country had experienced an "alarming growth - 36 percent - in reported child abuse cases over the past 12 months. Sexual abuse is a particular problem, that is becoming worse in the contemporary South African pedagogic situation (Epworth 1995).

A matric pupil interviewed in February 1993, in the Western Cape (14), complained of being under stress. She expressed feelings of being unable to cope with deadlines for various subject assignments. An interview with this pupil in September 1991 (15), had already revealed that she had been abused by her divorced mother's live-in boyfriend. Abuse is also emotional (Kruger 1992:115), and involves inadequate parental love, discipline, example and communication. With low self-esteem and poor relationship formation, abusers are often isolated, lack family and emotional support, have been abused as children, and do not know how to cope with stress or a crisis (Pick 'n Pay 1993:2). It may be also provided by siblings, for example when a brother beats his sister, because his father beats him.

(iii) *Divorce/ marital discord/ remarriage of parent(s)*

Teachers and counsellors interviewed in March 1992 (16) and June 1992 (17), at different schools in the Western Cape, spoke of the difficulty certain pupils experienced in coping with the demands of school-life, due to stress caused by their parents' divorce. Pupils interviewed in January 1994 (18), revealed distinct nervousness when discussing topics like marriage, divorce and family matters. Tension, friction, emotional/ verbal/ physical violence, the break-up of the nuclear and extended family, establishment of a new family and struggling single parents, are all stressors for the children involved. South Africa has a high divorce rate; 17 per cent of children live apart from their parents of which 1,8 million are due to maternal domestic work (UNCF 1994:6).

(iv) *Isolated family units/ nuclear family*

As mentioned in the section on child abuse, if family members have no close relatives in whom to find support, in times of stress, they find it difficult to cope. The modern family is often isolated from relatives (Pope John Paul II 1994:6). According to the Reverend R. M. Mkholo, at a seminar on *Socio-political changes and challenges to Christianity in South Africa*, at UNISA, on 7 and 8 September 1994 (in Greenberg 1994c:2), modern family life and values have disintegrated. He states:

...the church should help to revive family values because without these, the whole fabric of society might be put in serious jeopardy.

(in Greenberg 1994c:2)

Children who belong to these nuclear/ isolated/ fragmented family units, are often under stress, owing to the general strain and tension felt by families which lack the social support of extended families. According to Pope John Paul II (1995:5), the breakdown of the family lies at the root of social ills, especially problems such as *street children* and drug abuse.

(v) *Frequent absence of one or both parents*

Owing to their involvement with work or other interests, modern South African parents often do not give adequate support to their children. A social worker and a principal of a Western Cape school interviewed in October 1992 (19 & 20), mentioned the number of children left to their own (often illegal) devices. When the parent(s) are excessively absent, the child will lack adequate parental support, and a vital stress-coping strategy is not operational in his life (Fodor 1973:122; Pope John Paul II 1994:5; Stinnet 1993:11).

(vi) *Communication*

Although no family can function without some conflict (Yeats 1991:119), too many arguments between the child and his parents, or a lack of communication at home, can cause a stressful build up of anger and resentment in the child. With all the other pressures felt by families today, there is often a breakdown in communication. A Western Cape mother interviewed on March 9, 1994 (21), said that her fourteen year old son appeared to be struggling with some personal

problem, but the lack of conversation at home, meant that he was not venting his feelings and coming to terms with it. Traditional African children in particular, are taught that one is not allowed to confront or share one's feelings, but show a positive attitude all the time, even if one is not happy. This leads to a lack of closeness between parents and children and mistrust, unhappiness and stress (Des 1994b:13).

(vii) *Death/ illness in parent/ close relative/ friend*

According to Kruger (1992:102), the death of a parent seems the most devastating of all the stressors that a child may encounter in his life. The death of someone close, features in most of the life event ranking scales, although some do not rank it very high (Burns 1988:26; Papalia & Old 1993:273; Bosman 1993b). Familiarity with death may be a factor influencing the child's stress-response. If the child is sheltered from death, it may come as great shock when he is suddenly exposed to it. In certain South African societies, death as a result of violence or disease, has become a daily occurrence. This may be a stress-modifier, although it may also be a cause of chronic stress, because of over-exposure to this stressor.

(viii) *Parenting styles*

The wide variety of South African cultures means parenting styles differ, and some may be a source of stress. *Authoritarian* parents are too strict, and their inflexible rules take away the child's opportunity to make responsible choices. *Laissez-faire* parents are also stressful for children, because they appear indifferent, and do not offer the consistent guidelines, rules and high expectancies of *authoritative* parents, who create a more stress-free environment for the child to develop and test his independence. They reinforce good behaviour and ignore bad behaviour, but if necessary, reason, encourage, explain, persuade and suggest ways to right a wrong, or ask for their child's suggestions. They make the child feel guilty, if he is wrong, help him to see how others feel, or they withdraw approval and affection. If the child's behaviour is consistently bad, despite the above measures, then well-timed (soon or immediate), consistent discipline is meted out together with an explanation with punishment (Vrey 1979:96; Papalia & Old 1993:444; Van Niekerk, Van der Spuy & Becker 1994:286-287).

(ix) *Excessive expectations*

Too much pressure on a child to succeed academically, take part in too many extramural activities or take on too many family or financial responsibilities, means that the child is missing out on his childhood and may be under stress (Kruger, 1992:20; Scher 1995:112).

**2.3.2.2 Stress due to peers.**

The child's ability to cope with his or her peers is very important in the child's life, and particularly in adolescence, which has taken on a special identity since the 1950s, in Western society (Wilkinson 1994:8; Kruger 1992:117). In struggling with this stressor, he is often exposed to further stressors, such as excessive rivalry, materialism, sexual pressure, substance abuse, crime or Satanism.

(i) *Peer pressure*

An interview with a teacher - who is also the wife of a minister of religion - in the Western Cape, in March 1994 (22), revealed that peer group pressure to drink/ take drugs/ smoke/ have dates/ be sexually involved/ be involved in the occult/ be thin/ dress in a particular way/ listen to popular music/ to succeed/ not to succeed academically/ compete in sports, for example, is very strong particularly at high school level. Even younger children are exposed to this stressor; they tend to play the same games, watch the same television shows and want the same toys and clothes (Papalia & Old 1993:446; Van Niekerk 1994:1-9; *Tyger-Burger*, 26 October 1994:1

(ii) *Competitiveness/ rivalry*

Children often feel stress as a result of parental, peer and school pressure, to compete with their peers in the spheres of possessions, dress, academic achievement, sexual prowess and even the earning of money, for example. This rivalry can result in feelings of inadequacy on the one hand, or conceit on the other, and lead to a lack of interest in school work (Van Niekerk 1978:30). Competitiveness is inherent in contemporary Westernised society, where materialistic and career success are important for many individuals, adults and children alike. The *rat race* is a characteristic of the 20th century, and one of the reasons for the awareness of the concept of *stress*, as a sense of being in a hurry to

achieve, evident in many adults and children today. Elkind speaks of today's "hurried child" (in Papalia and Old 1993:472).

(iii) *Forming heterosexual relationships*

The search for identity and success in heterosexual relationships is predominant in adolescence (Burns 1988:16,27). According to Toufexis (1993:54) love looks like stress because the chemical pathways are identical with the same symptoms: flushed skin, sweaty palms, heavy breathing. The teenager in love, may be spurred on to learn hard in school; but observation of pupils involved in an unhappy love triangle in January to March 1994 by the researcher, revealed a lack of motivation to learn, as a symptom of their stress. Breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or beginning to date, are rated stressful life events on the scales mentioned in paragraph 2.2.1.1.

(iv) *Loneliness*

Loneliness can be very stressful for a child, when peer group acceptance is all-important. It can be felt as a mild discontent or, at the other extreme, a persistent ache similar to homesickness. It is part of the human condition; the more different we are, the more lonely we are likely to be.

Gifted children, or someone who has actualised exceptional talent, may exhibit loneliness. An outstanding achievement can be a source of stress because the child is rejected owing to the jealousy of his peers, and taunted, if he does not maintain his success (Kokot 1993; Keech 1985:95).

### 2.3.2.3 **Stress due to school**

School is a source of insecurity for many children because it is so important in their lives, and they fear failure. Moreover, inadequate pedagogic accompaniment still flourishes in the contemporary South African secondary pedagogic situation.

(i) *Excessively harsh/forceful/repressive discipline*

Owing to the system of caning and authoritarian teaching styles, harsh discipline and intimidation are a feature of many contemporary South African schools. Stressed or inefficient teachers is often a contributory factor (Vrey 1979:201-216).

This generally causes stress and a lack of involvement in the learning situation. According to Mac Pherson (1992:7-8), modern learning researchers point out that fear interferes with, and may even prevent learning. This is because the neocortex (the most recently evolved thinking part of the brain), does not function properly in situations which are threatening. The older parts of the human brain are similar to those of animals, and are concerned with basic survival. In a situation of danger when fear is aroused, they take command and silence the neocortex so that we can function to protect ourselves instantly without needing to think. They enable us to flee, fight or hide in order to survive. For this reason children who fear the teacher, punishment, making a mistake, or humiliation and scorn by their classmates may be unable to learn or to remember what they have learned. The environment is not secure; fear is present, and it is not the best environment for learning. If rivalry is encouraged by overuse of the system of reward and punishment at home and school, a child also may feel threatened and under stress.

(ii) *Irrelevant or inappropriate subject matter*

Motivation is an important factor in persuading children to use their brains in the learning process. If the learning process is interesting and enjoyable as well as relevant, there will be an even greater desire to learn (Mac Pherson 1992:7).

Gifted children may not be adequately catered for in the school learning situation. After observing several schools in the Western Cape region, the researcher has found that certain schools offer assistance of a remedial nature to many of its pupils in the contemporary South African secondary pedagogic situation, but often leave the "bright" child to manage on his own. On the other hand, subject matter is sometimes too abstract for many children. The lower socio-economic classes, may be culturally alien to academic subjects, which may also not be suited to the child's level of becoming. As a result, the entire school situation is one of overwhelming stress and boredom (Frease 1973:449).

(iii) *Unrealistic standards of tests/ marking*

The setting of too high/ or too low academic standards may lead to negative stress, and consequent fear, boredom and lack of motivation, on the part of pupils. This is a stressful situation for both pupils and teachers who may "infect" each other further with their stress (Mc Donald & Van der Linde 1993:141-142).

(iv) *Too much or little schoolwork/ homework/ tests*

A work overload, or insufficient work, can cause stress in adults and children alike (Mc Donald & Van der Linde 1993:141). During interviews held in March 1994, in the Western Cape (23), a secondary school teacher/ mother of a nine year old child expressed her anxiety at her son's constant worry and fatigue due to daily tests, and excessive amounts of homework given by an over zealous teacher. The child was developing school phobia and was also suffering from insomnia. He used to enjoy school and did well, before coming into this teacher's class. On the other hand, if the child is not sufficiently extended or stimulated in the actual classroom situation, or in the form of tests or homework, he may lose interest in his work, fail to achieve learning success through lack of work, unless motivated and encouraged in the primary pedagogic situation of the home. The researcher has observed this lack of stimulation from the school in her own children, during their primary school years between 1990 and 1994, when their ages ranged between six and twelve years old.

(v) *Uninspiring/ uninspired teachers/ teaching environment*

Teachers play an indispensable role in the creation of an inviting classroom. If a child is already under stress and lacking motivation, it is the teacher's role to involve him in the learning situation. If the teacher does not try to make the teaching environment physically attractive, or uses a boring drill approach in the lessons, the child's stress will increase through continued lack of involvement and self-actualisation in the classroom situation (Steyn 1993:132). An inadequate teaching environment as well as uninspired teachers, is often a stressful problem in the South African pedagogic situation, for various reasons, such as teacher stress, unqualified or overworked teachers.

(vi) *Lack of individual attention*

If a teacher does not ascertain the individual child's abilities, limitations, experience and previous knowledge, or treat children as individuals with the ability to think independently according to their developmental level, negative feelings might build up in pupils, causing further stress in the pedagogic situation (Mc Donald & Van der Linde 1993:142). Increasingly large classes make it difficult for teachers in the South African pedagogic situation to pay attention to individual learning needs.

### **2.3.3 Stress at micro-level within the child's "self"**

The following paragraphs deal briefly with stressors that may originate within the child's self. The description offered could apply to children of all eras and environments, including the present South African pedagogic situation.

#### **2.3.3.1 Physical stressors**

The stage of a child's physical development may be a source of stress. A younger child may experience stress, if he is clumsy or does not meet the physical standards set by his age-group (Vrey 1979:66,88). The adolescent may find it difficult to adjust to his bodily changes and feel stress because of rapid or slow development, in comparison with his peers. Illness and deformity may also be a cause for stress in children, and affect their becoming and emotional development. The physical effects of substance abuse or eating disorders, will also contribute to a child's stress.

#### **2.3.3.2 Search for identity/ self-concept formation**

According to Kruger (1992:97), stress is often due to a struggle to find a meaningful and worthwhile self-image in the world. This search for an independent physical/ social/ intellectual/ emotional/ conative/ cultural/ religious "self" takes place at all stages of the child's development (Vrey 1979:89,90-91,103,112-115, 185). Today's child and adolescent in particular, has to learn to handle many other pressures (including academic and peer group pressures), whilst already straining to find his identity. The search for a positive self-concept is particularly stressful for the particular South African child who is in transition between a traditional and Westernised world. The formation of the child's self-concept is central to his general susceptibility to stress. Vrey (1979:169) states:

Self-concept is inversely proportional to anxiety. The weaker the self-concept, the greater the anxiety. The greater a person's self-acceptance, the fewer the frightening situations he anticipates or encounters, since he has fewer doubts about his ability or acceptance.

The poorer the self-concept, the less effective will be the strategy, the child uses to cope with anxiety or tension. If a child has a negative social self concept, he may become shy, inept at communicating with parents, peers, family and teachers and

find it difficult to be assertive. He will feel threatened by other people, unable to express his feelings and handle them successfully, resorting to negative coping strategies such as substance abuse or promiscuity (Keech 1985:77).

### **2.3.3.3 Personality**

A child's reaction to a stressor may depend on his personality. According to the Type-A and Type-B personality theory of Friedman and Rosenman (in Burns 1988:30; in Lau & Shani 1992:463), the Type-A personality is a high-stress person, as he exhibits intense drive and ambition, aggressiveness, competitiveness, restlessness and impatience. The Type-B personality is a low-stress person, as he is more easy-going, patient, makes time to appreciate leisure and beauty, is not particularly competitive and does not feel the need to set deadlines. Perhaps the "rat-race" First World life-style of the twentieth century creates a Type-A personality in children, whereas the slower Third World life of rural societies tends to produce the Type-B personality.

According to Burns (1988:78), one can also classify personalities into Mode-X, Y, or Z. Mode-X people are similar to Type-A personalities; in addition they never admit to being under stress or having any weakness. Mode-Y people have high self-esteem and admit when under stress, and take setbacks in their stride. Mode-Z people are almost saint-like and blame themselves for negative emotions such as anger; they succumb to stress which often leads to disease and depression.

### **2.3.4 Summary**

In this section, the researcher has mentioned a few of the contemporary child's stressors. It is beyond the scope of this project to offer further details, and only those the researcher considered important were included. Some of the stressors mentioned, affect children of all ages and social groups, others a specific age-group or society. Yet according to Yamamoto *et al.* (in Papalia & Old 1993:472) children of different ages are often afraid of the same things. Some of the causes mentioned are often referred to in the contemporary pedagogic situation by parents, principals of schools, teachers, counsellors and educationists in South Africa today. Many children are exposed to an excessive amount of stressors and, as Slaby (1991:4,5) and Burns (1988:8), point out: stress accumulates and "explodes in anger" thereby causing further problems at home and school; and if it persists, severe damage to the personality. The following is a general description

of contemporary findings regarding symptoms of stress, which if noticed by parents/ teachers, will lead to adequate assistance to the child under stress.

## **2.4 SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE CURRENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

In medical terminology, *symptoms* are observable changes in the bodily or mental condition, indicating the presence of disease (*Heinemann English Dictionary*:1979:1116). In the case of stress, this disease could be temporary or chronic, physical or emotional disorders that arise with prolonged, unsuccessfully managed stress reactions (Wolff 1969:35,40). A teacher/ Standard Head, interviewed in January 1994, in the Western Cape (24), spoke about a parent who claimed that his child had a gastric ulcer because of stress.

Researchers into the biochemistry of stress are seeing symptoms such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorders and eating disorders, as a “disregulation” of the brain's reaction to stress; they link these disorders to a state of hyperarousal, a kind of permanent *flight-or-fight* response due to constant release of stress-inducing chemicals in the brain (Elmer-Dewitt 1992:52).

Basic symptoms of stress and affective disorders are generally similar from childhood through adulthood, although some are age-specific. Yet children of the same age may react differently to the same stressor, and an individual may not even experience the same situation in the same way at different times, depending on factors such as personality, prior experience and physical/ mental health. Before providing a list of symptoms of stress which children in the South African pedagogic situation may experience, the researcher will briefly discuss a few that appear to be particular to different ages (Papalia & Old 1993:469,472).

### **2.4.1 Symptoms of stress at different ages**

#### **2.4.1.1 Symptoms of stress in infancy**

According to Papalia & Old (1993:121), human beings experience stress very early, even in the womb and definitely during birth, with which the baby generally copes owing to the release of stress hormones. Papalia & Old (1993:21) says that at birth, the stress-response occurs because it is really necessary at this time. She adds, however, that babies born through elective Caesar deliveries, do not experience this surge of hormones, which are triggered by contractions of the

mother's uterus. The effect and symptom of their stress, is troubled breathing when born. Babies also experience severe anxiety when wet, cold, hungry or alone, and express their feelings of stress by crying or developing colic (Burns 1988:17; *Fair Lady* 1994:22). Another symptom and effect of stress is a nonorganic failure to thrive, which occurs in babies who are adequately nourished, but are under stress because of emotional neglect (Papalia & Old 1993:284-285).

#### **2.4.1.2 Symptoms of stress in pre-schoolers**

Stress in the pre-schooler may reveal itself in new habits such as bed-wetting, excessive thumb-sucking, reverting to baby ways (Burns 1988:17; Wolff 1969:25). Papalia & Old (1993:273-274,279), mentions the following symptoms of being under stress in children up to age 4: respiratory illness, stomach and intestinal problems, accidental injury, behavioural problems, aggression towards themselves, having morbid ideas, running away and even suicide that appears as accidents. She also mentions (1993:279) sleep problems due to family stress, such as accidents, illness, depressed mothers and absent parents. These sleep problems manifest themselves in bedtime struggles, frequent waking up in the night, frequent night terrors and persistent nightmares, fear of the dark/ bedtime, and bed-wetting (in children who have had the problem before, and who are experiencing a life event upset, such as a birth of a new baby or entering school). Spock (1976:371,532,392) mentions temper tantrums, asthma and stuttering, amongst other symptoms of stress in toddlers.

#### **2.4.1.3 Symptoms of stress in primary school children**

The symptoms of stress in middle childhood may resemble those of younger children such as bed-wetting and regression, or those of adolescents and adults such as insomnia, chronic anxiety, depression and eating disorders (Burns 1988:19-11). Today's "hurried child" (Elkind in Papalia & Old 1993:472), faces the same stressors as older people, and may reveal the same symptoms. As a result of the pressures of modern life, their childhood is shortened, and life may be as stressful as any adult's.

#### **2.4.1.4 Symptoms of stress in adolescence**

According to Wolff (1969:53), Burns (1988:20), Kruger (1992:44) and Papalia & Old (1993:525), adolescence (approximately the period between the ages of twelve

and twenty) can be a time of “stress and storm”, of multiple challenges/ demands and physical, emotional and social adjustment. Burns (1988:21) states that adolescents are particularly prone to sudden and sometimes quite severe emotional disturbances and behavioural disorders. Wolff (1969:54) says that this is the peak age for delinquent conduct. Symptoms of the adolescent's stress may include depression, aggressive behaviour, school or examination phobia, suicide, casual and indiscriminate sex and substance abuse. Many of the general symptoms displayed by adults under stress may be observed in adolescents. The early onset of puberty and menarche in contemporary adolescents, is a particular symptom of stress, ascribed to TV or electronic stress (Kruger 1992:132), and also to emotional disorders (Papalia & Old 1993:472).

## **2.4.2 Symptoms of stress in general**

Burns (1988:25) states:

It is an over-simplification to separate the different age groups according to the demands made on them, and according to the characteristics that may create tension situations in these groups. Human life cannot so strictly be divided into different phases, as some phases overlap.

Based on the above statement, the researcher feels that the following list of symptoms of stress, applies to all ages. Some of the symptoms may also be regarded as stressors or even unsuccessful coping mechanisms. The list is based on the following sources: Kruger 1992:xxiv,143; Burns 1988:ix; Bosman 1993b; Jooste 1992; Herbst 1992:20; Radio Good Hope 1994; Isaacson 1994:8; Slaby 1991:40-41; Kruger 1994:231-232; Papalia & Old 1993:469.

### **2.4.2.1 Physical symptoms**

- \* Heart beating fast, pounding or racing
- \* Trembling / shaking
- \* Grinding of teeth/ nail biting
- \* Asthma
- \* Menstrual problems
- \* Stomach pains/ hollow stomach/ indigestion/ heartburn
- \* Headaches/ migraines/ tension headaches
- \* Fatigue/ constant tiredness/ waking up feeling tired

- \* Constipation/ diarrhoea/ flatulence
- \* Nose-bleeding
- \* Loss of appetite/ craving for food
- \* Excessive sweating without exercising/ sweaty palms
- \* Dizziness/ wobbly legs/ fainting spells
- \* Listlessness
- \* Nauseousness
- \* High blood pressure/ hypertension
- \* Muscle pain (back/neck/shoulders/chest/limbs); arthritis
- \* Muscle weakness/ tightness/ cramps/ spasms
- \* Frequent crying or desire to cry
- \* High-pitched, nervous laughter
- \* Tachypnea (rapid, shallow breathing)/ hyperventilation
- \* Frequent urination/ wetting pants
- \* Frequent vomiting
- \* Throat irritations
- \* Difficult breathing/ breathlessness without exertion
- \* Inability to sit still without fidgeting
- \* Skin disorder/ intense itching/ hives
- \* Dry mouth/ lump in the throat
- \* Dental problems
- \* Nervous twitches/ thumb-sucking
- \* Impotency or frigidity
- \* Peptic ulcers
- \* Compulsive ear tugging, hair pulling, eyebrow plucking
- \* Frequent infections/ susceptibility to illness
- \* Speech problems, stammering, stuttering
- \* Accidental injury/ accident proneness
- \* Excessive blinking

#### **2.4.2.2 Emotional/ behavioural/ psychological/ symptoms**

- \* Lowered self-confidence/ feeling inferior or inadequate
- \* Absent-mindedness/ forgetfulness/ memory loss
- \* Irritability/ getting angry quickly/ aggressiveness
- \* Suicide/ suicide attempts/ thoughts/ self-destructiveness
- \* Pessimism/ being unhappy
- \* Jealousy/ envy

- \* **Moodiness/ mood swings or changes**
- \* **Feelings of depression**
- \* **Anxiety**
- \* **Uncertainty/ indecisiveness/ insecurity**
- \* **Withdrawal/ unusual shyness/ socially inept**
- \* **Extreme self-consciousness/ self-criticism**
- \* **Setting of unrealistic goals**
- \* **Feelings of frustration/ quickly frustrated**
- \* **Sensitivity/ touchiness**
- \* **Feeling panicky, panic disorders**
- \* **Use of denial and avoidance**
- \* **Suspiciousness**
- \* **Anger (chronic)/ awareness of suppressed anger**
- \* **Emotional deprivation, does not laugh or cry readily**
- \* **Reduced motivation/ loss of interest in things**
- \* **Impaired concentration**
- \* **Reduced initiative/ lack of risk-taking behaviour**
- \* **Feeling overwhelmed by demands/ unable to cope**
- \* **Dread of getting out of bed/ of the future/ of disease**
- \* **Hysteria**
- \* **Obsessions**
- \* **Phobia/ fear of failure**
- \* **Academic failure, lowered academic performance**
- \* **Nightmares/ insomnia/ sleeping badly**
- \* **Less involvement with others/ shyness/ social ineptitude**
- \* **Inability to complete tasks before beginning the next**
- \* **Impulsive behaviour**
- \* **Restlessness/ inability to relax**
- \* **Unnecessary/ excessive checking of work**
- \* **Poor judgement**
- \* **Feelings of guilt**
- \* **Mental confusion/ confused thoughts**
- \* **Increased alcohol intake/ smoking/ substance abuse**
- \* **Inability to show feelings**
- \* **Hypersomnia (oversleeping)/ increased time spent sleeping**
- \* **Use of tranquillisers, sleeping pills, etc.**
- \* **Incessant talking/ talking quickly**
- \* **Daydreaming/ retreats from reality**

- \* Procrastination
- \* Wasting time on irrelevant activities
- \* Reduced productivity/ inefficiency
- \* Easily startled/ jumpy
- \* Argumentative behaviour/ screaming/ swearing
- \* Verbal and physical aggression
- \* Overreactions/ acting out
- \* Maladaptive, inappropriate and regressed behaviour
- \* Relationship/ interpersonal problems
- \* Tardiness
- \* Loss of sense of humour
- \* Burnout/ unable to continue
- \* Absenteeism/ truancy/ running away
- \* Eating disorders/ anorexia nervosa/ bulimia nervosa/
- \* A feeling of being the target of other's animosity

## **2.5 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHILD'S RESPONSE TO STRESS**

The transactional stress model suggests that stress is due to more than a simple stimulus-response mechanism. The following is an attempt to outline some of the factors that determine the child's stress-response, as a background to the search for successful management strategies in the educational past.

### **2.5.1 Factors within the child**

#### **2.5.1.1 Perception of a stressor**

Individuals may perceive stressors differently. An individual's self-concept, his perception of his ability to deal with stress, his emotional state/ mood, his expectations, needs, motives, family attitudes, cultural values, attitude towards failure, interpretation of past experience, physical/ mental health, and whether he is already under stress, all influence his perception of a stressor (Burns 1988:44; Kruger 1992:137). Experiments have shown that these factors that influence perception, can be manipulated/adjusted/changed, suggesting that the individual can be motivated to attribute positive meaning to a stressor and turn it into an experience of growth (Belcher 1993; Louw 1994).

### **2.5.1.2 Resilience**

Individuals who feel in control of their own lives, and are not at the mercy of external forces, are empathetic, sympathetic, tolerant, assertive, independent, decisive, self-confident, responsible, sure of their values, prepared to meet future changes, intelligent, patient, optimistic, able to relax/ solve problems/ manage their time well, able to manage their stress and have a sense of humour (Belcher 1993; Kruger 1992:137-140; Burns 1988:29-43; Slaby 1991:88).

Rutter (in Papalia & Old 1993:474) states the following qualities that make a child resilient to stress: self-esteem; good relationships; adaptability; ability to solve social problems. Saunders (1987:1) describes the resilient child as being a well-balanced and self-confident child, who copes with pressure. The question is what strategies can be used in the pedagogic situation to develop these qualities? Of course, such children do already exist, but as Kruger (1992:140) points out, even the most resilient child may be overtaxed and need extra help at times.

### **2.5.1.3 Sex**

Girls are especially vulnerable and react more negatively than boys to stress in adolescence, because they enter puberty and begin to date earlier than they. They suffer from "life-change overload". There is also more emphasis on looks and popularity at this age. Boys are more vulnerable in early and middle childhood because parents may be less supportive (Papalia & Old 1993:525; Kruger 1992:136).

### **2.5.1.4 Overall health**

Adequate diet, exercise and sleep will help a child cope with the pressures of life. Needs vary according to age regarding the amount of sleep, but children who go to bed at a reasonable hour, generally show less symptoms of stress, and are more motivated in the pedagogic situation than those who do not.

A fit body due to sufficient exercise and a well balanced diet is important. According to Yuill (1995:10), during a stressful period the body requires more energy. Stress hormones are produced that alter the metabolism to meet this increased energy need, and the hormonal balance of the body is upset. Prolonged

stress, aggravated by an unbalanced diet can cause us to get sick, in the form of minor or major diseases.

## **2.5.2 Factors outside of the child**

### **2.5.2.1 Degree of stressors**

If stressors arrive in bunches, too quickly or too early in life, then even resilient children will find it difficult to cope. This is the case for many children in the transitional contemporary South African pedagogic situation.

### **2.5.2.2 Supportive parents**

If parents are sensitive to a young person's need for comfort, security, approval, acceptance, friendship, tolerance, encouragement and praise, the child will cope better with stress (Yeats 1991:155).

### **2.5.2.3 Supportive teachers, adults, friends and relatives**

Choosing the right companions with whom the child can share his problems and find support, is a buffer against stress. This social support may be instead of, or in addition to parental support, although the latter is of primary value to the child (Slaby 1991:57).

### **2.5.2.4 Religion**

The Judeo-Christian belief is that Jesus gives one rest from burdens and stress; that peace lies in doing God's will, and that one can do all things through God who lives within one (Van Heerden 1994b; Hulgraine 1994; Mt. 11:28; Phil. 4:13). Slaby (1991:112) and Kruger (1992:142) state that being a member of a secure spiritual community helps the child actively handle and cope with his stress (Kruger 1994:232).

## **2.5.3 Coping strategies**

Contemporary stress management programmes and literature on the topic of coping with stress - that are mainly adult-oriented - list the following successful stress-coping strategies: knowledge of stress; relaxation activities and techniques;

adequate diet; exercise; positive health habits; self-concept enhancement; positive thinking; relationship building skills; assertive behaviour; time management; decision making skills; a sense of humour; problem solving skills; being prepared for change; and an accountable philosophy of life (Burns 1988:75-211, Slaby 1991:47-115; Bosman 1993b; Jooste 1992; Gordon 1992a:52; Young 1986:39; Volin & Phelan 1972:24; Acres 1994:164). Contemporary South African children may, however, more often resort to negative stress-coping mechanisms that become symptoms or stressors such as substance abuse, eating disorders, maladaptive behaviour, Satanism, sexual promiscuity and crime.

## 2.6 PEDAGOGIC ACCOMPANIMENT AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

According to Rutter (in Papalia & Old 1993:474), the parent or the teacher may be able to help the child build a repertoire of positive stress-responses and develop the ability to experience *stress without distress* - the title of Selye's pioneering book on the subject (1976). The child could learn to be in control of the stress that arises from the social, psychological, or physical stressors that face him; his body will not overreact, and the stressful situation will be seen as a challenge, not as an upsetting threat. It will motivate him to achieve greater success (Burns 1988:28). The learner will experience *eustress*, in other words stress with positive results; he will find it easier to adapt, to be productive, creative and solve problems (Hanna 1990:8). Even though he is pushed to the outer limits of his usual particular adaptive capacity, he will cope. The subjective and objective nature of the pressure he feels, will have a positive effect on him.

## 2.7 SUMMARY

According to Mc Donald & Van der Linde (1993:141), each era in history is characterised by physical diseases: The Middle Ages by black plague and leprosy, the Renaissance by syphilis, the Baroque era by scurvy, the eighteenth century by tuberculosis, the nineteenth century by smallpox, diphtheria and enteric fever, and the twentieth century by stress-related diseases (50-80 percent). It appears that there are many demands made at one time, on many children to emotionally readjust today. Research shows that, "depression is on the rise, and the young are the most vulnerable". Reasons given are: war, breakdown of family structures, increased drug use and more people living in cities (*It's a sad, sad world* 1992:18). According to Dr Benjamin Spock (in Laurence 1994:23), our present society is not working, and children are exposed every day to its ills such as instability of

marriage/ rise of single and step-parenting; over-competitiveness leading parents to neglect their children and communities; materialism triumphant over spiritual and ethical values; the deadening effect of mindless labour; failures in schooling; coarsening of attitudes to sexuality; and an increase in violence.

In addition, developed and developing countries are undergoing a period of change as traumatic as the Industrial Revolution itself (Ball 1993:38). According to Prinsloo (1993:38), one effect of the radical changes taking place in South Africa in particular, is increased pressure on family life in all communities in this country. Education should thus teach contemporary children to cope with the stressor of change in particular (Wilkinson 1994:8).

Educators should also be made aware of stress in children. If the symptoms of stress are not observed by the primary or secondary educator, it is likely that stress will continue to have a negative effect on the overall development of the child, as it restricts his motivation, functioning and success in the learning situation. He will find it difficult to pay attention, to comprehend, to think and solve problems, to be creative and imaginative, and to memorise the learning matter. The child will not feel like being involved in the learning situation; he will not realistically attribute meaning to the learning material. His experience of the learning situation and his self-concept as a learner, will be negative, inhibiting his self-actualisation.

There is much evidence of stress in children today, but was the situation similar in the past, with regard to stressors and symptoms? Were coping strategies successfully used in the past pedagogic situation, and could they be used in the present South African situation, to help our children actualise themselves? As Dale Carnegie, once said (in Gordon 1992a:29):

if life serves you a lemon, make lemonade.

Everyone has the potential to cope with stress that is a constant part of contemporary life. Stress management deserves systematic unfolding as a body of knowledge to the participants of the pedagogic situation. The following study of the educational past may reveal this body of knowledge.

## CHAPTER THREE

### STRESS IN THE PREHISTORIC PEDAGOGIC SITUATION

	Page
3.1	INTRODUCTION..... 58
3.2	THE PREHISTORIC PEDAGOGIC SITUATION..... 59
3.3	THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE PRIMITIVE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION..... 60
3.3.1	Stress as stimulus and response in early man..... 60
3.3.1.1	Daily stressors..... 60
3.3.1.2	Life events..... 61
3.3.2	The transactional stress model and early man..... 61
3.4	CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE PREHISTORIC CHILD..... 61
3.4.1	Stressors at macro-level in society and the outside world..... 61
3.4.1.1	Stressors in the outside world..... 62
	(i) Natural and eco-environmental threats..... 62
	(ii) Population pressure..... 62
	(iii) Frequent moving as a result of seasonal change..... 62
	(iv) Injury, disease and death..... 63
	(v) Fear of the unknown..... 63
3.4.1.2	Stressors embedded in society/ the tribe..... 64
	(i) Infanticide..... 64
	(ii) Social change..... 64
	(iii) Sexual discrimination..... 65
	(iv) Subordination of the individual to the group..... 65
	(v) Animistic fears..... 65
	(vi) Religious and other ceremonies..... 66
3.4.2	Stressors at meso-level in the child's family/ "bush school"..... 66
3.4.2.1	Stressors in the prehistoric family..... 66
	(i) Changing family structure..... 67
	(ii) Polygamous unions..... 67
	(iii) Shared parenthood..... 67
	(iv) Marriage..... 68
3.4.2.2	Stressors in the prehistoric "school"..... 69
	(i) Rites of passage..... 69

	(ii) Adult tasks.....	69
3.4.3	Stressors at micro-level within the primitive child's self.....	70
3.4.3.1	The physical self.....	70
	(i) Physical change.....	70
	(ii) Physical deformation.....	72
3.4.3.2	Identity/ self-concept formation.....	73
3.4.3.3	Personality.....	74
3.5	SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE PRIMITIVE CHILD.....	75
3.5.1	Evidence of stress in the prehistoric child.....	75
3.5.1.1.	Archaeological evidence.....	75
	(i) Stress at birth.....	75
	(ii) Violence.....	75
	(iii) Physical injury.....	76
	(iv) Rock art.....	76
	(v) Religious relics and rituals.....	77
3.5.1.2	Symptoms of stress in modern hunter-gatherer societies.....	77
	(i) Suspiciousness of / lack of involvement with strangers.....	79
	(ii) Fear of harmful spirits.....	79
	(iii) Stress during rituals.....	79
	(iv) Excessive emotional reactions.....	80
3.6	COPING STRATEGIES.....	80
3.6.1	Being in control.....	80
3.6.1.1	Planned routine and responses.....	80
3.6.1.2	Problem solving.....	81
3.6.1.3	Manageable body of knowledge.....	81
3.6.1.4	Small bands.....	81
3.6.2	Familiarity with stressors.....	82
3.6.2.1	Exposure to the realities of life.....	82
3.6.3	Healthy life-style.....	82
3.6.3.1	Health and diet.....	82
3.6.4	Assertiveness/ appropriate venting of emotions.....	82
3.6.4.1	Conflict management.....	82
3.6.5	Community support/ unity.....	83
3.6.5.1	Social support.....	83

	<b>Page</b>	
3.6.5.2	<b>Egalitarianism.....</b>	<b>85</b>
3.6.6	<b>Adequate, relevant educational opportunities.....</b>	<b>85</b>
3.6.6.1	<b>Relevant tasks.....</b>	<b>85</b>
3.6.6.2	<b>Authoritative discipline/ gradual teaching.....</b>	<b>86</b>
3.6.6.3	<b>Early learning in a simple environment.....</b>	<b>86</b>
3.6.7	<b>Religion and values.....</b>	<b>87</b>
3.6.7.1	<b>A world of spirits.....</b>	<b>87</b>
3.6.7.2	<b>Burial rites.....</b>	<b>87</b>
3.6.7.3	<b>Ritual.....</b>	<b>88</b>
3.6.7.4	<b>Ancestor worship.....</b>	<b>88</b>
3.6.7.5	<b>Myths and legends.....</b>	<b>89</b>
3.6.7.6	<b>Magic and charms.....</b>	<b>89</b>
3.6.7.7.	<b>Homogeneous value system.....</b>	<b>89</b>
3.6.8	<b>Relaxation in creative/ aesthetic activities.....</b>	<b>90</b>
3.6.8.1	<b>Art.....</b>	<b>90</b>
3.6.8.2	<b>Dance.....</b>	<b>90</b>
3.6.8.3	<b>Music.....</b>	<b>91</b>
3.6.8.4	<b>Time for recreation.....</b>	<b>91</b>
3.7	<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>91</b>

A fact of modern society with its shattering changes and demands, stress has been part of human existence from the time of our earliest records; although not always directly referred to as such and differing from, for example, urban stress (Leakey & Lewin 1982:2). According to Hanna (1990:ix), people have found various means to cope with stress since early history. She also says (1990:4):

We find common underlying patterns in history as a result of diverse peoples' common humanity. ...Even though our social organisation, cultural artefacts, and general technology have changed significantly over the millennia, there is little evidence that the human, as a member of a species with a psychobiological inheritance, has changed. What works for one member of a human species just possibly may work in toto or in transformation, for another, irrespective of environmental complexity.

With this aim of tracing "essential continuities" between the past and present in mind, the researcher will now attempt to scrutinise how stress was prevalent in the prehistoric/ hunter-gatherer pedagogic situation, which accounts for ninety-nine percent of human time on earth (Lucas 1972:6; Wilkinson 1989:26). During an interview (25), on 11 March 1994, Prof. T.L. Verster, Head of the Department of History of Education at UNISA, stated that it is useful to go back as far as possible in time, when researching a contemporary problem from a historical perspective. Early man and his modern equivalent, like the *!Xu* for example, is studied in this project, which hopes to trace the history of pedagogic stress, from its roots in primitive society, through to its current state in contemporary Westernised society, which in South Africa, is both traditional and Westernised. Many South African children, including many *!Xu* children, are brought up in a traditional environment where customs that have prevailed from generation to generation are taught, as the body of knowledge necessary for survival in adult society. Yet these same children must survive in a Westernised world as well, and are being forced to adapt to an increasingly Westernised way of life as a result. In order to understand the nature of their stress, due to this transition/ change from traditional to Westernised circumstances, it is important to understand the phenomenon of stress in both traditional/ tribal and Westernised society. Perhaps the former society -which has lasted, in the case of early man, for so long - holds clues regarding coping strategies for stress in the pedagogic situation, which can be employed by all contemporary South African children.

Early man lived a life, typical of hunter-gatherer societies (of which there are a few modern counterparts), from about 700,000 to 10,000 years ago. These primitive societies were a tribal training ground for their children. They had to learn to cope directly with the daily pressures and problems of survival in a prehistoric hunting community, by means of real experience of a threatening world. It appears that they were also taught successful coping mechanisms, because primitive man managed to survive. Even our earliest ancestor, *Australopithecus afarensis*, the currently recognised single original forerunner of modern *Homo Sapiens* - who appeared about 200,000 years ago, and is exemplified in the 4 million year old fossilised Lucy, and her recently discovered "grandson", 200,000 years her junior - was an extraordinary long-lived species. It was able to cope with stressors and adapt to environmental change - such as global warming - ensuring its survival for over 9,000 centuries (Weaver 1985:599). According to the laws of natural selection, its genes of adaptability were passed on to the next evolutionary generation, and ultimately developed in primitive man - *Homo Sapiens* - who followed *Homo Erectus*; the latter preceded by *Homo Habilis* (Lemonick 1994a:51). With increasing brain power, the beginnings of speech and social organisation, primitive man was able to solve problems, invent tools and discover ways of turning feelings of pressure into positive adaptability and behavioural flexibility that, as a life-force, pushed evolution ever upward. These strategies for coping with a life haunted by cruel death - the average age was 22 years - were passed on to each successive generation by definite teaching, such as the skill of painting on cave walls, ritual, folklore and life-skills, conveyed in initiation ceremonies or daily living (Boyd 1980:1; Butts 1973:23; Weaver 1985:587,596, 599,600,605).

Since man has lived by hunting animals and gathering plants for by far the longest part of his existence ( $\pm 700,000$ -8,300 BC), and still continues to do so today in some societies, successful strategies for coping with life (and stress), must have been built into his traditional culture. These mechanisms, that were taught to the prehistoric child for thousands of years, should, therefore, be scrutinised. Knowledge of how early man learnt to handle the pressures and emotional tensions of life, may thus provide valuable insights into our own contemporary problem of stress.

In this investigation of stress in early man, the researcher will focus on *Palaeolithic/ Old Stone Age* man ( $\pm 700,000$ - $15,000$  BC) and *Mesolithic/ Middle Stone Age* man ( $\pm 15,000$ - $8,300$  BC) of which knowledge has been gained from archaeological discoveries, as well as the study of fundamental features of modern hunters-gatherers, such as the San - who have been living in southern Africa for 20,000 years - and the Aborigine, in Australia. With due caution, we may use such evidence when examining how early man handled the stressors in his life (Walters 1989:28; Tubb 1991:7; Gowlett 1984:10,11; Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:45).

### **3.3 THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE PRIMITIVE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

#### **3.3.1 Stress as stimulus and response in early man**

The stimulus for stress in early man lay in the very nature of his way of life and the harsh environment, against which he was pitted. Survival as a hunter-gatherer meant directly facing a threatening and hostile natural environment, from which he had to wrest his food; as well as human or animal predators who sought to take his life or his food. Yet the child of *Homo Sapiens*, the first evolved form of modern man, was biologically equipped to respond to adversity and other stressors, by means of the *fright, flight or fight* syndrome (Lucas 1972:6). This enabled him to adapt to the threats, traumas, pressures and challenges that faced him. Whether his stress-response was chronic or acute, *eustress* or *distress*, and how quickly his body returned to a state of balance, depended on his ability to manage his initial response, and the coping mechanisms that he had learnt from the group's elders and his own learning experience.

##### **3.3.1.1 Daily stressors**

Apart from major life-events such as death of a family member, or separation from other tribe members, the daily hassles of survival made up early man's quota of potential stress stimuli. The daily pressure to provide food, shelter, clothing and defence, involved every member of the early hunting community; and the mostly informal, but sometimes formal primitive pedagogic situation, was an integral part of these daily activities. Children had to help in the daily struggle for survival (Gowlett 1984:11). According to Beck (1965:7) primitive children did more than merely imitate: they were taught. Fairly difficult skills such as flaking stone - to make cutting tools and arrowheads - have been thought too complicated for

mastery by unsupervised imitation. The study of the tools found at the Old Stone Age site at Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, reveal their complex shapes, including polyhedron and spheroid forms (Gowlett 1984:38). Attitudes and knowledge necessary for coping with social problems, such as that of kinship relations for example, must also been taught to the children of early man. These preliterate groups must have had "bush schools" which taught skills for coping with the stress of daily existence, and constant worry about meeting basic needs (Beck 1965:7). There was a constant threat of the food supply - that they gathered - being limited; the ever present danger of natural predators was also a problem (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:38).

### **3.3.1.2 Life events**

Like modern man, the children of early man had to face the same non-routine stressful life events, such as birth, death, marriage and "divorce", as well as predictable, but difficult, moments in one's life, such as initiation/ coming of age (Venter 1992d:102). Some of these stressors will be referred to again in this chapter.

### **3.3.2 The transactional stress model and early man**

The response of early man (and his child) to potentially stressful stimuli, was in transaction with his learnt, but limited, repertoire of responses to environmental challenges (Lucas 1972:9). The primitive child belonged to an existing hunting culture with its knowledge of tool/ fire-making, butchering, migratory systems and fighting, inherited from more ape-like ancestors. Other factors, like family/ group relationships, tribal rituals, a cyclical view of time and previous experience, also played a role in the primitive child's response and management of stress (Gowlett 1984:11; Lemonick 1994b:50; Weaver 1985:605; Venter 1992d:102).

## **3.4 CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE PREHISTORIC CHILD.**

### **3.4.1 Stressors at macro-level in society and the outside world**

Since the prehistoric child was involved in all efforts at obtaining the basic necessities of life (small children accompanied/ watched family members; older children helped), he was directly affected by the stressors prevalent in the world, where primitive man's daily struggle for survival took place. All activities,

including the pressing daily need to obtain adequate supplies of food, as well as religious practices and story-telling, were part of total social, family and band activity.

#### 3.4.1.1 Stressors in the outside world

##### (i) *Natural and eco-environmental threats*

The tribe to which the prehistoric child belonged, struggled to maintain itself against formidable odds and had to contend with an environment fraught with peril. It had to protect itself from wild animals, natural catastrophes such as plagues or floods, ecological upsets that led to the exhaustion of the food supply, and climatic problems. Although they probably perceived it as normal, life was generally very brutal and insecure for both children and adults (Lucas 1972:9,14).

At certain stages of the Stone Age, such as during the approach of the Ice-Age, deteriorating climatic conditions, led to increased conflicts between groups competing for scarce resources. This led to children being possible victims of violence and warfare (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:36).

##### (ii) *Population pressure*

As populations grew, too many people tended to hunt and gather in the same area; this led to a threat of starvation, and a need to find alternative techniques of providing food. The resulting strain of frequent moving - so that the hunters and gatherers could exist at a low population density, and that the land could support them - might have caused stress in early children and adults. Another threat, resulting from population pressure, was that of conflict. Population growth would have also generated friction between groups, who were obliged to compete for land and other resources (Gowlett 1984:153; Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:45).

##### (iii) *Frequent moving as a result of seasonal change*

For a part of the year, our early ancestors were on the move, travelling regularly through a fairly well-defined territory, on seasonal migrations in search of food, between their summer and winter camps, or because of unexpected seasonal change, and resulting scarcity of food supply. The reindeer hunters, for example, would spend the winter months sheltering in caves of the Dordogne area of France,

and then follow the migrating herds to their summer pastures, at the coast. Often on the move, young children were carried, and others would have to walk long distances; a possible cause of stress, especially since children had to learn to walk early under the circumstances, as studies of contemporary San societies, reveal (*Reader's Digest* 1992:17; Perrot 1992:75).

(iv) *Injury, disease and death*

Although early man did have some knowledge of herbal medicine and of anatomy, disease, injury and toothache must have been among his and his children's principal sources of pain and stress (*Reader's Digest* 1986:20). Neanderthal bones, preserve evidence of a hard life, showing that their sturdiness was necessary. Traces of lesions, and even of healed fractures are common (Gowlett 1984:105).

It is doubtful that widespread diseases such as plagues and epidemics were a problem, since these diseases usually spread because of high population densities, polluted water supplies or unsuitable diet; and ancient man would rarely have been affected in this way. Yet the mortality rate was high, especially of women during childbirth, and of small babies/ young children who died from natural causes or infanticide. Hunting accidents would also have been a frequent cause of death, as would have disease and starvation. Life expectancy was short and few people lived into their thirties. This sense of the fragility of life may have been a source of stress for the primitive child (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:44; *Reader's Digest* 1986:20,24).

(v) *Fear of the unknown*

Although his group would move in an annual cycle, developing a deep knowledge of its territory, one of the main sources of stress for the primitive child must have been the general sense of unease he felt. He never knew when animal or human attack, natural disaster or disease might arrive. He had to learn to cope with being constantly alert to the threat of danger (*Reader's Digest* 1986:23). One might say that they were permanently under stress, which was a natural state of life for them. Constant familiarity with this emotional and physical state, made it appear less stressful perhaps, in the long-term. They did not worry about matters, merely rose to the occasion, when danger struck.

### 3.4.1.2 Stressors embedded in society/ the tribe

#### (i) *Infanticide*

Overcrowding led to the pressure of social population controls such as infanticide. Since most women would be pregnant or nursing at any one time, a high proportion of each group would be children. Infanticide was normal practice in band and tribal societies, such as today's San (Perrot 1992:75). Infants who were weak, or difficult to feed or carry, would have been simply redundant. If today's San mother is too old to give the required milk, already has an infant, or has twins - and cannot carry or nurse both at once - or if the baby shows birth defects, she will throw down her new-born, or allow it to be killed by other women. In the absence of efficient contraception, infanticide is the usual method in primitive societies. Mostly female infanticide is carried out, because population growth is controlled almost exclusively by the number of women who reach child-bearing age; it is the most effective means of population control available - since abortion involves an even chance of killing a male child whose future hunting skills are valued. (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:38,48,164; *Reader's Digest* 1986:24; Gowlett 1984:65).

Despite it being an accepted custom, infanticide is still stressful for those involved. Van der Post (1988:204-205) describes this stress in the Kalahari San:

If a woman had conceived in a fall of rain that was not maintained and bore a child in a period of drought which threatened the survival of all, immediately at birth, the child was taken from her...it would cry in her heart... and was killed by other woman. The anguish and bitterness with which those who loved children performed this deed, proved how necessary it was.

#### (ii) *Social Change*

The emergence of an incipient elite in hunting societies, often resulted in a change in the way food was regarded. There was now the added pressure of food being regarded as privately owned, and an indicator of wealth, where previously, it had been thought of as public property, to be shared. There was a often a pressing need to find food that could be stored (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:48). This source of stress in the lives of tribal members may have affected the children's lives.

(iii) *Sexual discrimination*

For female adults and children, a possible stressor was that of sexual discrimination and feelings of being helpless and not in control. Men were made to seem stronger and not allowed to appear imperfect. For example, the fact of male defecation is a secret kept for a time from the opposite sex in some primitive societies (Lucas 1972:13). It was a patriarchal society - women lived with their husband's family after marriage and children grew up among their father's relatives. Even amongst today's San, when the man must first help the wife's parents for many years, they eventually join his tribe (Walters 1989:8). Ever available for child rearing and bearing, the primitive woman did not participate in hunting; although she did have, along with young girls, the special role of gathering nuts, berries, roots, birds eggs, young birds/ animals, honey, grasses, leaves and flowers. Perhaps the early female child would have felt negative stress, as a result of being considered a less important and more dispensable member of the band (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:44; *Readers Digest* 1992:15).

(iv) *Subordination of the individual to the group*

In primitive societies, a requisite for survival is conformity to the group's norms - either the child masters the rules for survival or he dies. This puts extreme pressure on the child to conform, and education means rooting out variations in thought or practice, while stamping group characteristics upon the youth. He becomes an individual only insofar as he subordinates himself to the group, which does not tolerate deviance from the norms. The social pressure on those who do not conform, are considerable. Children would have felt the continuous pressure of deliberate or sub-conscious adult/group approval and disapproval; as they lived and learned according to approved traditions of tool-making, hunting/ gathering, war skills, myths or special training as a medium or medicine man (Lucas 1972:14; Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:161; Butts 1973:27-29). UNISA Prof. J.H. Coetzee - a Major in the S.A.D.F., working with the *!Xu* for many years - told the researcher, on July 11 1994 (26), about how this group pressure inspires such guilt in a *!Xu* child who has transgressed a norm, that there is never a need to punish him.

(v) *Animistic fears*

Social traditions in primitive societies involve learning rituals, believed essential for propitiating unseen powers that are thought to lurk behind every phenomenal

reality. There is a constant feeling of pressure related to animistic fears, that determines values, attitudes, day-to-day actions and rigidly prescribed modes of behaviour. Spirits are everywhere: "in the animals hunted, in the sky above and within the shadows of the night" (Boyd 1980:4). Early man was a slave of natural phenomena, as well as of the medium/ witch doctor, through whom alone, the spirits controlling nature could be approached (Lucas 1972:14; Boyd 1980:4).

(vi) *Religious and other ceremonies*

Many ceremonial attempts at propitiating various supernatural powers, such as those responsible for crops, reproduction, rain and war, demanded elaborate rituals and sacrifices, that may have caused fear, anxiety and stress for the prehistoric children observing them. These were constant worrying reminders to them, that spirits influence every aspect, both good and bad, of everyday affairs which, according to Marshall Sahlins, "is where the action is, and the problems" (in Lucas 1972:14; Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:115).

Other rituals witnessed, would have also been a stressful experience for the children. Examples of these are: the mutilation of corpses, the ritual eating of brains (alleged to impart the qualities of the deceased person), trephination and infanticide (Gowlett 1984:106).

### **3.4.2 Stressors at meso-level in the child's family and "bush school"**

#### **3.4.2.1 Stressors in the prehistoric family**

The family of the primitive child was an extended family. The nuclear family lived and moved around within a larger group. The child's peer group was part of this group-oriented society, and unlike today's children, did not exert pressure on the child that differed from that of any other part of the whole group. Although some people may have lived at times in groups of over 50 or even more, most early men lived in close-knit groups of two or three related families (*Reader's Digest* 1986:25). This situation was often advantageous from the point of view of security and social support - the people could congregate, and carry out their social business as a community - but this state of affairs may also have contained sources of potential stress.

(i) *Changing family structure*

The family/social structure of early man was flexibly organised, so as to allow the concentration and dispersion at different times, as necessary, for the efficient exploitation of food resources. At times of lean resources, the group had to break up and disperse. The nuclear family of male and female usually stayed and worked together, aided by their children and close relatives. This contrasted with times of plenty, when the group increased with relatives and people who offered co-operation and protection (Gowlett 1984:11,64). According to Bannister (1989:4), babies and children of groups like the San of the Kalahari, are shown physical affection, cared for, taught and included in all activities by all members of the groups. The frequent changing of family structure and separation of members of the group, may have, however, also been a source of stress for prehistoric children, who may have created bonds with certain individuals who were no longer with the group, when its structure changed .

According to Walters (1989:28), San children are betrothed at early age (a stressor in itself), but can divorce and remarry if the couple is not happy according to tribal tradition, which indicates that unhappy marriages often do occur. This is another example of the stressor of change in the prehistoric family structure.

(ii) *Polygamous unions*

The prehistoric child often experienced a lack of permanence in his family structure. Stress may have been a result of constant pressure to emotionally adjust to this situation. An additional stressor may well have been the polygamous unions of his parents. Although men and women formed fairly stable unions, they were not necessarily monogamous, and children did not always have the same parents (*Reader's Digest* 1986:16).

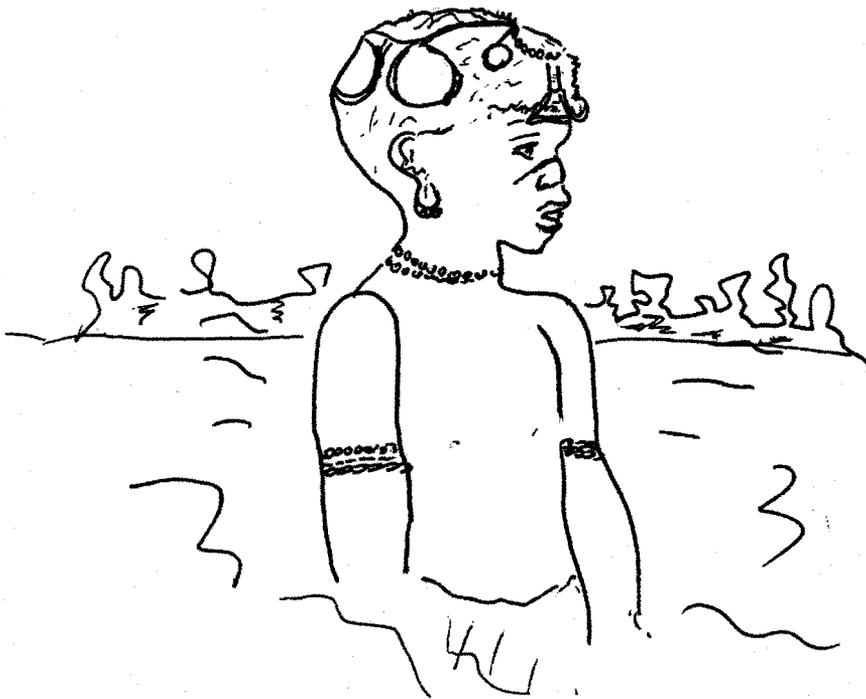
(iii) *Shared parenthood*

Even though the child of early man was suckled for three or more years by his mother, he had many more care-givers. There were several "fathers" or "mothers" concerned with his upbringing. All of these, by right could admonish, encourage, punish, or reward in ways that uncles and aunts in contemporary cultures, would rarely presume to do (Herskovits 1955:182). Studies of the Kalahari San (Bannister 1989:4; Walters 1989:28) reveal that babies and children were looked

after, carried, kissed, hugged and passed from one tribe member to another. On the one hand, this meant the child had constant support and care, but on the other, it may have also have been a stressful experience. It may have confused/ disturbed the mother-infant bond/ social unit, which is the basis of social orders (Leakey & Lewin 1982:51). Critics of this argument might well maintain that the primitive child knew no other, except for this shared relationship structure. The researcher does believe, however, that, just as the contemporary child needs a secure bonding relationship with a single mother/ mother substitute, so did the primitive child, whose psychobiological make-up was the same as the modern child (Hanna 1990:4). Stress may have also been caused by the child's being confronted and constrained by a continuously united front of adults (Herskovits 1955:183).

(iv) *Marriage*

A possible source of stress for primitive children, as is evident in young San children, is their betrothal at an early age, often to total strangers from another group. They are married when they are about twelve to fourteen years of age, and receive little preparation for marriage apart from brief rituals and ceremonies marking the occasion (Walters 1989:28; cf. Figure 3.1, page 68).



**Figure 3.1** Stressor of being a San child bride (Walters 1989:31)

### 3.4.2.2 Stressors in the prehistoric "school"

Although the early child was taught to hunt, gather and make tools, and other life-skills, by his parents and other elders, his "bush school" was also a systematic and often ritualistic experience which was possibly a cause of stress at times.

#### (i) *Rites of passage*

Rites of passage or initiation ceremonies - typical of all early societies, and in which studies have revealed a uniformity in their fundamental characteristics, may have been particularly stressful for the child. During these ceremonies, (s)he was taught to endure mocking, hunger, pain, hardship, flogging, loss of teeth or finger parts, circumcision, drinking of one another's blood, purification of the body, long periods of silence - often ending with a pretended burial and re-birth - and demonstrate a mastery of adult skills. The prehistoric child was probably anxious about these ordeals, as he moved towards the age of transition into adulthood/puberty/ marriage (Lucas 1972:14; Boyd 1980:8; Butts 1973:29).

#### (ii) *Adult tasks*

Another stressor for the primitive child was the fact that had to master adult skills for survival. He learnt by trial and error, and a mistake might have meant death. He was required to know a limited repertoire of responses and knowledge, but the risk of failure was serious (Lucas 1972:14). These daily tasks were task-oriented and not child-orientated. A modifying factor may have been that the child learnt the skills gradually, according to his level of skill development. Yet boys practised the adult tasks of making and using of tools and weapons, and learned the lore of hunting. Even small girls were "mothers" responsible for younger children, and followed the older females learning the business of food gathering and many other tasks: cooking, scraping and treating animal skins, turning the cured hides and furs into clothes, containers and tents, weaving baskets, the correct ways of storing food for the winter, and brewing herbal medicines (*Reader's Digest* 1992:17).

The hunter-gatherer child did not only work hard, however - there were times of leisure: sitting around the fire, playing, singing, dancing, chanting, clapping, listening to stories and music and watching artists at work. But these activities were probably always in the presence of adults, as pictures of contemporary !Xu of the Kalahari, for example reveal. These gatherings were probably always

expressions or imitations of the adult's world of animals, hunting, agriculture, spirits, fertility/ reproduction and fighting (Bannister 1989:9; *Reader's Digest* 1986:24; Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:121; Van der Post 1988:181-183; cf. Figure 3.2, page 70).



**Figure 3.2** Ritual song and dance (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:121)

### **3.4.3 Stressors at micro-level within the primitive child's self**

#### **3.4.3.1 The physical self**

##### **(i) *Physical change***

Psychobiologically not much different from modern man, the prehistoric child also had to suffer the potential stress of bodily changes. This was possibly made more stressful by the initiation rites the pubertal girl, at menarche, or the adolescent boy would have to undergo, to mark the important transition from childhood to

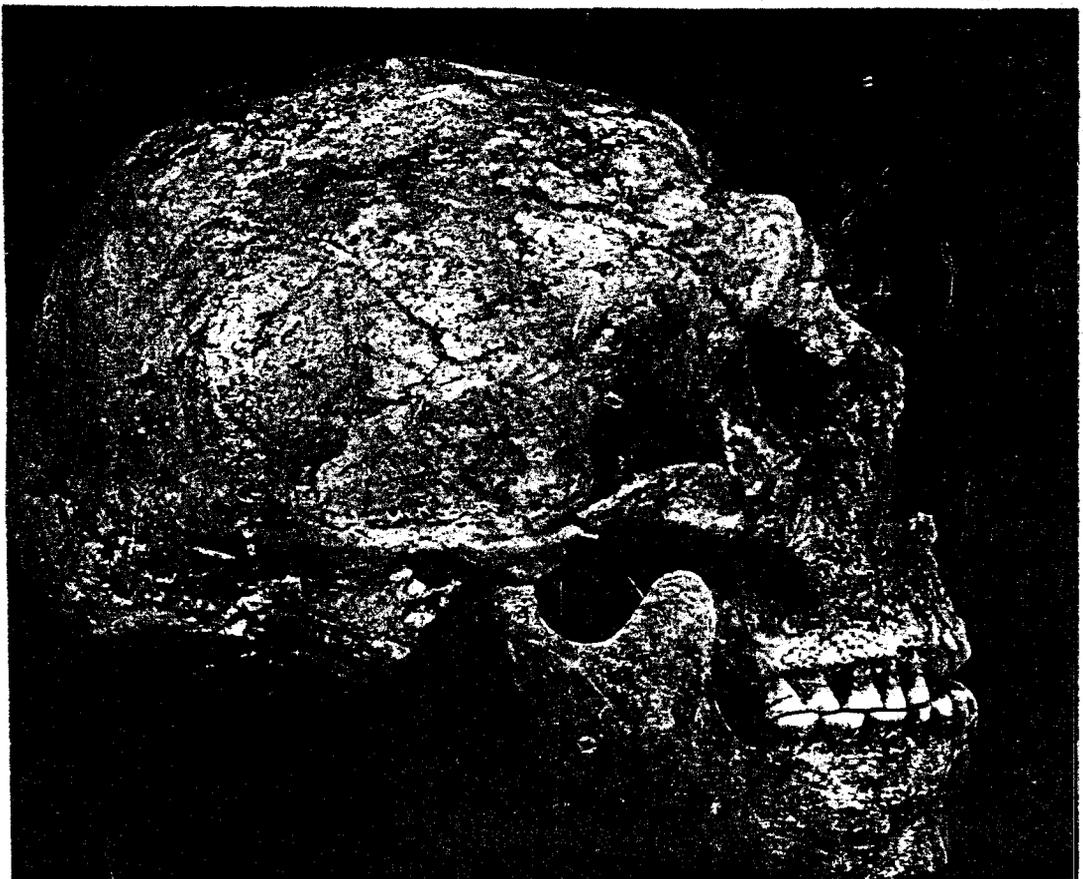
adulthood. Either the rites would be difficult, painful or stressful, in that the child's "changed state" would embarrassingly be the focus of the whole tribe's attention. An example of such a ritual would be the first menstruation ritual of the *!Xu*, which involves the older men holding branches over their foreheads. This represents the horns of gemsbok, whose mating behaviour the men mimic and ridicule, whilst the rest of the tribe follow, dancing, singing and laughing. This occasion may signify fertility for the group, but makes fun of the girl and her future life of burdens and suffering (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:121; cf. Figure 3.3, page 71).



**Figure 3.3** Rite of passage (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:121)

(ii) *Physical deformation*

It was customary among certain prehistoric tribes to deform the child's body. Not only would this have caused stress and discomfort, it also would have made future coping with natural bodily changes more difficult. An example of this unnatural deformation of the child's physical self, is the archaeological discovery of two crania found in Shanidar Cave, Iraq, that were artificially deformed (cf. Figure 3.4, page 72).



**Figure 3.4** Early child abuse: deliberate deformation of the skull of a Neanderthal child (Gowlett 1984:104).

Since there is no alternative explanation, a recent study indicates that the peculiar shape of the back part of the skull is the result of deliberate cranial deformation, which was perhaps achieved by strapping with a board or bandages during childhood. These squashed skulls of Neanderthal (subspecies of *Homo Sapiens*) children, are presumed to have been caused by hard pads that were strapped to the head throughout childhood. These may have been intended to match up to a concept of beauty (Gowlett 1984:104). Such deformation is known from similar discoveries belonging to more modern times, such as the skull dated around 700 AD, currently in the Stuttgart Landesmuseum, Germany.

#### **3.4.3.2 Identity/ self-concept formation**

In early societies, all activity and behaviour was aimed at survival of the group of which the individual was a member (Lucas 1972:9). Self-identity was group identity. Education including religious and other ceremonies related to the group not the individual. They involved groups of people and were designed to ensure the well-being and continuity of the tribe (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:115). Freedom in personal behaviour and choice was restricted by the force of public opinion, in simple societies. Regarding the choice of marriage partner for instance, if men had little, women often had none at all (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:160). A miniature adult, the primitive child had to master and conform to the group's rules; his self-identity was derived from the family group, and learnt in his relations with others and territorial attachment (Lucas 1972:13). Obedience, reverence and submission during the tribal training period was required (Lucas 1972:14).

It is possible that some of the children did not tolerate this lack of regard for the individual in tribal society; there must have been variations in personality types in early man, despite social pressure to eliminate this possibility. Some individuals were more creative than others - one thinks of those who were singled out to be artists or mediums. Others were natural leaders. Gowlett (1984:149) states:

In those times, as today, there were probably individuals who saw what was necessary before it became imperative, and who could lead the way.

These individuals had probably suffered stress as children, under the pressure to conform entirely to the group's norms. The discovery of the personal ranges of four men, during a study of the group movements of Kalahari San in the Dobe area, also revealed a lack of conformity in hunter-gatherer society: Individual

members within a band, frequently exploited slightly different areas; often according to their place of birth and relationships with other groups. It is possible, therefore, that some children did suffer stress as a result of an unsuccessful struggle for personal identity within the tribal band. On the other hand, as Whitehouse & Wilkins (1986:161) state:

This is not to suggest that primitive societies are full of individuals seething with frustration through lack of personal choice in their lives. On the contrary, what you never know, you never miss, and in the main people seem happy to act out their lives within the limits laid down by society.

### 3.4.3.3 Personality

According to Whitehouse & Wilkins (1986:88), the distinctly human characteristic of aggressive competition (known as the rat-race or Type-A personality) appears evident in primitive man, and between members of different tribes, competing for the same territory. The opposite attitude of the Type-B (less aggressive, more subdued and stress-free) personality, is also evident within primitive egalitarian hunting societies, where bossiness, boasting and showing off are intolerable. In avoiding prominence, the San for instance, will have no possessions, giving away everything that comes into his hands.

According to Leakey & Lewin (1982:9,198) humans are innately non-aggressive. and if recent human history is characterised by conflict, it is because of the change in a way of life, 10,000 years ago, from hunting and gathering to farming. This change involved a dramatic alteration in the relationships people had with the world around them, and amongst themselves. The hunter-gatherer is part of the natural order; the farmer distorts this; the farmer collects possessions and needs to protect them. This is the key to conflict, which is exaggerated in the modern material world.

One can conclude, therefore, that the primitive child was basically a Type-B personality, but had to learn to cope with conflict situations and feelings of aggressiveness as well, depending on circumstances. Leakey & Lewin (1982:198) maintain that modern hunter-gatherer societies, such as the Polynesian Ifaluk and New Guinea Kurelu, display these coping strategies, and deal with aggression in individuals as well as the group.

### **3.5 SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE PRIMITIVE CHILD**

#### **3.5.1 Evidence of stress in the prehistoric child**

Apart from what a study of the behaviour of modern hunter-gatherer societies may reveal, there is little evidence of symptoms of emotional stress in primitive children, unless it is indicated in archaeological discoveries, including bodily remains, artefacts and artistic legacy. Only from these can one find possible proof. The following is an attempt to discover this latter evidence.

##### **3.5.1.1 Archaeological evidence**

###### **(i) *Stress at birth***

Studies of skeletons reveal that, as early man developed larger brains - his cranial size was about as large as modern man's, judging from skeletons of the middle/ late *Palaeolithic* period - there was a greater likelihood of risks in birth. It is possible that although it did eventually become larger, the prehistoric mother's pelvis was slow to adapt to this bigger headed infant, as a larger pelvis meant less efficiency in running, in young and mature women. It is likely that the early child, in many cases would have shown symptoms of pain or even deformation as a result of the stress of a difficult birth (Gowlett 1984:100). Perhaps these children were the ones who cried a lot, were colicky in infancy, refused to eat, were generally difficult and were prime candidates for infanticide.

###### **(ii) *Violence***

Although a stressor in itself, violence in prehistoric man - as well as extreme aggressiveness - is a symptom due to the stress experienced as a result of population pressure and/ or deteriorating climatic conditions, which result in friction between groups.

Evidence of a high level of violence applied indiscriminately to men, women and children, is revealed starkly by the discovery of a Late *Palaeolithic* cemetery at Jebel Sahaba, north of Wadi Halfa, in Egypt. It has been suggested that this was a special cemetery set aside for victims of violence, and that it indicates a time of great tension (Gowlett 1984:153).

(iii) *Physical injury*

There is archaeological evidence of frequent or long-lasting physical injury, as a result of accidents or deliberate inflicting of bodily harm, which must have been most stressful for the prehistoric child and adult. Traces of lesions and healed fractures in bones of Neanderthals, give evidence that life was very hard and stressful. One of the bones of two humeri of an elderly man found at Shanidar, is completely withered and shows that the whole arm was crippled from childhood. Even though this individual was handicapped, he survived the resulting stress, probably because others in the group helped him.

Another example of physical injuries suffered by early children, is the deformed skulls of Neanderthal children also found at Shanidar (Gowlett 1984:105). Examples of *trephination* (removal of part of the skull believed to relieve many medical conditions) have also been found in skulls where the bone has healed, indicating that the patient survived the operation, but must have suffered great stress during and after it. (Adkin & Adkin 1989:79). This procedure was probably performed on adults and children alike.

(iv) *Rock art*

According to Cooke (1969:68), stressful feelings of disturbance/ resentment at any interference with his way of life, and a sense of frustration or urgency in the face of war/ conflict, gave prehistoric rock artists the impetus, which brought about change and experimentation in their paintings. The stress that they felt and expressed in their work, was probably symptomatic of the feelings of the whole group, including its children; although artistic endeavour may also be viewed as a coping mechanism for stress too. It was then a form of relaxation, expression of feelings and part of religious ceremonies.

According to Cooke (1969:88), many rock paintings depict the features of trance dancing - with people bending forward, sweating hard and with bleeding noses - which is symptomatic of a stressed (if self-induced) state, due to a feeling of, and attempt to, rectify physical/spiritual ill-health/ danger. The general stress felt by the tribe (including the children), is expressed in ritual, which is a symptom of, as well as an attempt to, cope with its stress.

The rock art that proliferated in prehistoric times - and provides evidence of the life of early man - was a religious activity in itself. For instance, the prehistoric artist painted the animals he was going to hunt, for good luck; or the act of painting formed part of the actual initiation rites. Children would watch this activity, which on the one hand, was symptomatic of the tribe's anxiety and fear, and on the other, an attempt to manage it at the same time (Wilkinson 1989:24).

(v) *Religious relics and rituals*

Archaeological finds, such as charms, amulets, figurines and other objects, provide evidence of attempts to protect the prehistoric wearer/ user from evil, or to tell him the best times/ places to hunt, and the best ways to cure illnesses. These may be interpreted as symptoms of his, and his children's, fear of the spirits, that he believed caused misfortunes, such as illness and accidents (Wilkinson 1989:36-37).

### 3.5.1.2 Symptoms of stress in modern hunter-gatherer societies

Walters (1989:27), shows a photo of two small San boys squatting, relaxed and smiling beside a stunned antelope lying down, with his foot caught in a metal trap (cf. Figure 3.5, page 78).

The suffering animal does not appear to affect the San children emotionally. They are used to the stressors of the hunt and the subsequent killing of the animal. This is not surprising, seeing that the buck meant that the tribe would eat well that day.

Hunter-gatherer adults and children react to the physical and emotional demands of their search for survival, but do not necessarily perceive their stress-response in a negative light, with negative effects or symptoms of stress. The stress reaction is essential for survival in tribal society.

According to Walters (1989:28; cf. Figure 3.5, page 78), San children generally do not appear to show feelings of distress, and lead a happy, outdoor life. According to Fr M.J. van Heerden, a former chaplain with the S.A.D.F, during an interview in July 1994 (27), the *!Xu* has a different concept of time to that of the Western world. He lives for the moment, in a deliberately relaxed way. Generally hunter-gatherer societies only work some 30 hours a week (*Reader's Digest* 1986:24), spending most of their time at leisure. This probably contributes to a relaxed frame of mind in members of the tribe.



**Figure 3.5** Relaxed at the scene of the kill. San boys learning to hunt and cope with daily survival (Walters 1989:3)

It is, possible that primitive adults and children, were not always relaxed, and did face threats that may have caused them to experience negative stress symptoms. They may have managed, however to cope with these. The following are a few examples of these symptoms.

(i) *Suspiciousness of/ lack of involvement with strangers*

Although this may also be seen as a way of coping with stress, the dominant role of family/ kinship relations in small-scale simple/ primitive societies - to the exclusion of strangers - may be seen as a symptom of fear and stress. All members of society in general are slotted into some kinship category in relation to any individual, and most social behaviour is regulated by these relationships. So pervasive is this principle, that when a total stranger, such as an anthropologist appears on the scene, it is often necessary for a kinship tie, however fictitious, to be discovered before he or she can be accepted (Gowlett 1984:155).

(ii) *Fear of harmful spirits*

Early man attributed the difficulties he experienced in life, to harmful powers that control the world. Constant distress and fear of spirits lurking behind every phenomenal reality - especially the "bad" powers in the spiritual world, which was part of the fabric of everyday life - is revealed in the various rituals, rites, wearing of charms and belief in different religious myths and legends. These religious practices were a symptom of their stress, but also, perhaps, an attempt to cope with their feelings of powerlessness, when faced with the problems of life (Perrot 1992:88).

(iii) *Stress during rituals*

The men, women and children of the Kalahari San tribes, frequently take part in trance cure-dancing. They work themselves into a deliberately stressful state, sweating, trembling and sometimes with bleeding noses, until they fall into a trance. They believe that *n/um*, a substance supposedly in the stomach, is activated by the heat of their stressed state, and this will pour out through their hands, if laid upon a sick person, whose illness - due to harmful spirits - will then be drawn out. They also believe that this state of mind and body enables them to communicate with harmful spirits, whom they tell not to cause further harm (Walters 1989:40).

According to Williams (1990:34), only the *shamams* or witch-doctors, actually fall into the trance and have healing powers. These could, however, be male or female youths who show symptoms of great fear of the *n/um* and cry out in distress/ pain.

(iv) *Excessive emotional reactions*

Van der Post (1988:257) describes a young girl crying, soundless, with grief, because, in pouring out some precious water from an ostrich-eggshell container, she had spilt a spoonful. This extreme emotional reaction in a primitive child, was probably due to the intense stress felt, and fear of making a wrong move, thereby risking the group's survival. It is possible that early children showed similar symptoms of their stress due to group norm pressure, or threat of extinction.

### 3.6 COPING STRATEGIES

According to Gowlett (1984:60) it appears that once early man found a mechanism for coping with his environment, such as the hand-axe - an efficient tool, perfected by *Homo Erectus* as representative of true men about 1,5, million years ago - he used the same technique for a long time. Finds at Olduvai, at Gadeb in Ethiopia are 1.2 million years old, and are three times as ancient as those found at St Acheul in northern France. Early man may have lived with the familiar stress of not knowing what disasters might have befallen him, but there was also security in knowing that he belonged to a group, which had repetitive stereotyped ways and tools to deal with daily circumstances and an immediately obvious goal - to survive. He had the capacity to create, sustain and perpetuate culture, in the form of learned behaviour patterns characteristic of his society. He had adaptive techniques that were passed on to each generation (Lucas 1972:7,8,14).

The following is an attempt to outline some of these stress management strategies that were passed on to the children of early man. One must bear in mind that some of these may also be interpreted as stressors or symptoms of stress.

#### 3.6.1 Being in control

##### 3.6.1.1 Planned routine and responses

Although they repeatedly moved to new environments, early people always returned to the same favourable place, and were in control of their lives. They

stayed more or less in the same area, such as a particular site discovered in Kenya, where a special plant food was prepared, and where they also abandoned old hand-axes and shaped new ones.(Gowlett 1984:65,69; Lemonick 1994b:50)

They also coped with the stress of finding sufficient food because they moved in an annual cycle - developing a deep knowledge of their territory (*Reader's Digest* 1986:24). Early man also had a standard method of making tools, set rituals and other well-used - and generally accepted - methods of response to stressors, passed on to each generation for millions of years. This fixed repertoire of tried and trusted coping mechanisms gave early man confidence in his coping ability, necessary for successful management of stress (Appley & Trumbull 1986:25).

#### **3.6.1.2 Problem solving**

Early man "had the smarts" and was able to reason, process information, plan, solve problems and be creative, thereby being in control of his environment and his stress. It was difficult to wrest sustenance using primitive methods, such as the making of a stone age knife, but he coped because the goal of culture was survival - he figured out how to adapt to the rigours of prehistoric life. His ability to solve problems was also due to his ability to transmit knowledge - such as standard methods of making stone tools - to his children. This was done by visual copying and early use of language, leaving them ready to efficiently plan and carry out other tasks which presented greater problems (Gowlett 1984:71; Butts 1973:21; Lemonick 1994b:48).

#### **3.6.1.3 Manageable body of knowledge**

Early man had a small and simple body of knowledge - which was generally easy to master, such as stone-flaking. There was a limited repertoire of responses to environmental challenges, unlike today's proliferation of knowledge (Lucas 1972:9). This tendency to be conservative and rely on established skills, facilitated coping with the pressures of new problems as they arose.

#### **3.6.1.4 Small bands**

As mentioned earlier in this project, the prehistoric tribe often kept their numbers small, to be in control of their vulnerability to starvation, and ensure freedom from

this stressor. Unfortunately, some of the methods used, such as infanticide, or separating group members, were in themselves very stressful (Gowlett 1984:11).

### **3.6.2 Familiarity with stressors**

#### **3.6.2.1 Exposure to the realities of life**

Stress due to growing sexuality, was eradicated in the primitive child because the subject and reality were not taboo/ hidden from the young (Lucas 1972:13). Children were equally and frequently exposed to the harsh reality of other life-events such as birth and death, so they knew what to expect. The life expectancy of primitive man was less than 20 years, so death was around the child at all times. This probably diminished the stressful impact of this and other stressors, and enabled the child to deal with them, when witnessed in others or personally experienced (Van Zyl 1989a:155,157).

### **3.6.3 Healthy life-style**

#### **3.6.3.1 Health and diet**

Early man was not totally helpless against injury, disease or illness. Most tribal bands have a wide knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants, and know something of anatomy, based upon their observations made while cutting up meat. The prehistoric diet was also much more varied and balanced than our modern diet, and there were very few sweeteners, except for honey. A better diet meant better health and ability to cope with stressors. (*Reader's Digest* 1986:20; Wilkinson 1989:8; Yuill 1995:10).

### **3.6.4 Assertiveness/ appropriate venting of emotions**

#### **3.6.4.1 Conflict management**

According to Leakey & Lewin (1982:198), since humans are "learning animals par excellence", techniques for coping with potential conflict are taught to hunter-gatherer tribes like the Polynesian Ifaluk, for example. Real violence is so thoroughly condemned amongst this tribe, that ritual management of conflict is taught in childhood. Children may play boisterously, as normal children, but if one individual behaves unfairly, then the others will show their disapproval by throwing

pieces of coconut at him, yet deliberately missing. Children of the Kurelu tribe in New Guinea, are taught that the continual warfare against neighbouring tribes is superficial, and arrows are fired from such a distance that they do not often cause injury. It is likely that primitive children were also taught to manage their feelings of aggression, that are often symptoms of stress in conflict situations.

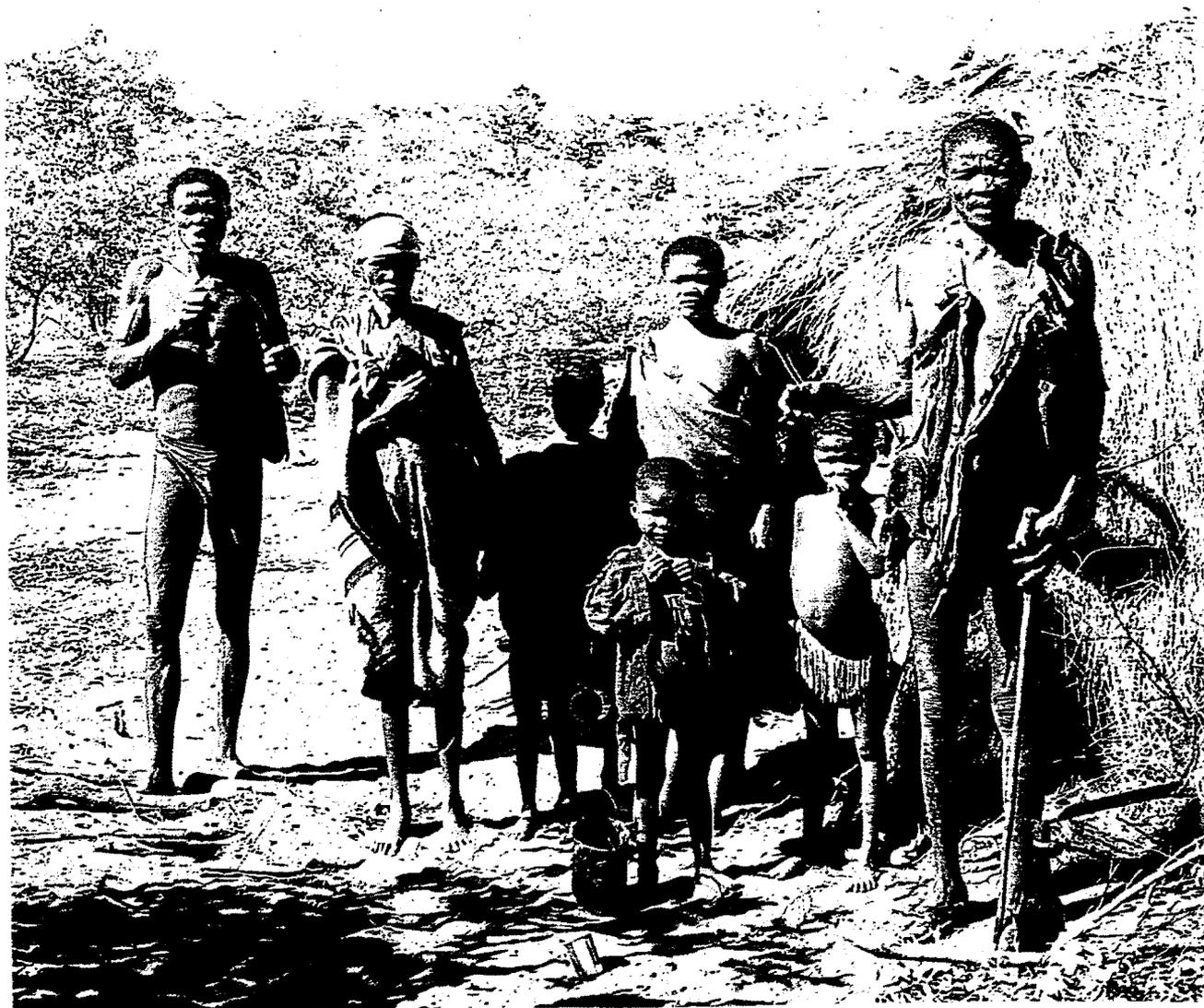
### **3.6.5 Community support/ unity**

#### **3.6.5.1 Social support**

Leakey & Lewin (1982:198,209) point out that humans have a deep-seated non-aggressive urge to work as a group, which is a stress-management technique, manifested in the ritual management of conflict taught to childhood in modern hunter-gatherer societies. Studies of the San reveal that children and babies are included in every activity - they watch, copy and help adults (Bannister 1989:4,7,9). The social wealth of the Australian Aborigines is evident in their complex kinship systems and ancestral religious concepts (Lucas 1972:7) All activities of primitive society take place within the family band, are kinship-based and part of total group activity. There is no specialisation of labour in this egalitarian society, where not even religion/ cult practice has a separate existence. Authority which exists on a very modest scale, is vested only on family heads (Gowlett 1984:11; Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:44). Men and women who formed fairly stable unions and prolonged partnerships, though not necessarily monogamous, ensured that their group would naturally tend to survive more successfully; and ensured the feeding, protection and training of children and adolescence (*Reader's Digest* 1986:25). Mothers who survived child-birth, breast-fed their babies for at least three years, or until the infant had teeth that could cope with adult food (*Reader's Digest* 1992:17).

All these aspects of family support given to all members of the tribe, was a buffer against stress. The many hours of leisure to talk and think together, that early man had at his disposal, once he had gathered his food for the day, meant that problems and stressors could be effectively dealt with through communication and sharing of ideas. The discovery of fire would have reinforced the social bond. As well as providing warmth, cooked food, and protection against predators, it stretched social intercourse into the hours of darkness. It became the focus of the group - the hearth - which provided the opportunity for the realisation of other coping strategies: telling stories, creating myths and rituals, planning mundane tasks for

the following day fire, making tools and garments (Leahey & Lewin 1982:143; cf. Figure 3.6, page 84).



**Figure 3.6 Social support in times of stress (Walters 1989:24)**

A study of prehistoric records caves, bones and implements reveal that early man and primitive society developed speech and language to express thoughts/ feelings and thereby relieve stress, if social norms allowed.

Because everyone learnt the same attitudes/ values/ ways of accomplishing tasks, primitive culture was homogeneous. This added to a generally stress-free society; there was no tension due to differences or differentiation (Lucas 1972:10,11). There was no doubt as to which cultural values to subscribe or teach to the children.

The constant attention given by elders who guided, supervised and corrected the primitive child, ensured that he felt no stress that may result from pedagogic neglect. Prehistoric primitive society calls on the resources of constant social persuasion and compulsion to develop the young into the kind of individual it holds desirable (Herskovits 1955:184).

#### **3.6.5.2 Egalitarianism**

According to Whitehouse & Wilkins (1986:89) aggressive competition - a distinctively human characteristic, perversely known as the rat-race - is dominant in modern society; but we also encourage the opposite attitude in some situations and groups, in the family or in team games. Among egalitarian hunting societies, such as the San, humility and self-effacement are prime virtues. If we are right in arguing that *Palaeolithic* hunters would have been similarly organised, then our ancestors lived in a less stressful egalitarian style. As a result excessive competitiveness, or desire to achieve, did not stress early children, as they do the modern child (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:44; Butts 1973:26).

#### **3.6.6 Adequate, relevant educational opportunities**

##### **3.6.6.1 Relevant tasks**

Prehistoric children must have felt useful; they were part of the adult world. They learnt and helped their parents a great deal (Gowlett 1984:67,56). All members of the band, regardless of age or sex, could contribute to an expedition such as salmon gathering (*Reader's Digest* 1992:15). Learning was relevant because children learnt from life, by trial and error. Knowledge was not specialised; and the child saw how and why it was necessary for him to acquire certain basic skills -

through unsheltered and intimate exposure - for his own and the group's survival. There was no stress due to a lack of motivation or insight, regarding the relevance of the learning situation (Lucas 1972:11-12).

### **3.6.6.2 Authoritative discipline/ gradual teaching**

Walters (1989:28) states that San children are not punished very often, and they do not have to do work that is too difficult for the child's level, although it may be an adult task as such. They are constantly accompanied and guided by adults. When the women go to look for plants and roots, they take the babies with them; older, small children stay in the camp with grandparents and other adults, playing or listening to the older people's stories. Older boys go hunting; the girls learn to find edible plants and roots. Herskovits (1955:184) points out that the Kgatla tribe say:

a growing child is like a little dog, and even though it may annoy grown-ups, it must be taught proper conduct with patience and forbearance.

The prehistoric child, like his modern tribal ancestors, probably did not suffer from stress due to harsh authoritarian discipline, nor allowed to grow up without guidance and correction by *laissez-faire* parents. He was gradually guided until he mastered the relevant techniques such as hunting with a bow and arrow. He was disciplined through approval and made to feel shame for wrong-doing rather than punished (cf. Interview 26). Shahaar (1990:110) says:

There are primitive societies...where the beating of children is not accepted, although there also are parents who are often exasperated by their children and experience frustrations.

### **3.6.6.3 Early learning in a simple environment**

From anthropological studies we know that, in some primitive societies, children are taught some motor-skills and cautioned against danger most meticulously and at a very early age (The child usually acquires these skills at the age of 3). He can then display initiative and explore the world without risk to his life. In more complex societies - where the material environment is more varied and complex, means of preventing accidents are very limited, and accordingly, the dangers facing the child are more numerous (Shahaar 1990:144).

### 3.6.7 Religion and values

#### 3.6.7.1 A world of spirits

To turn his distress, feelings of powerlessness into *eustress* and feelings of being in control, early man used religion and ritual as a coping strategy. Despite the threat of potentially stressful events - such as war, raids, natural disasters and life-events such as birth, initiation ceremonies, marriage and death - the people of early primitive civilisations faced these events with a sense of certainty, because they felt that they could influence the spiritual powers behind all these events, in their favour, if they did what was required. Everything had clear and simple emotional connotations of being “good” or “bad”, “favourable” or “unfavourable” (Venter 1992d:102). Primitive religion, as a system of ideas (beliefs) and a body of action (ritual), also involved supernatural spirits with distinctive and comprehensible/manageable personalities. There were: tribal supreme spirits, lower-level spirits influencing every aspect of life, and ancestral spirits or spirits of the dead (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:115; Lewis-Williams 1989:13). Early man ultimately felt in control of the greater powers that controlled him, and conveyed that confidence to his children, who supposedly knew less than he. The fact that the wearers of ceremonial masks in dancing rituals are men, not gods, is kept from children in certain tribal groupings (Lucas 1972:13).

Yet for the San, religion was not a separate part of life to be indulged in only on ritual occasions. It was a means of coping with everyday life. Most sacred shrines of rock art, were also places where people lived and conducted their daily affairs (Lewis-Williams 1989:36).

Since early man may well have worked only some 30 hours a week, spending the rest of his time sleeping, playing games and telling stories, he had a great deal of time to talk, think and develop complicated ideas of the meaning of existence. This led to ritual and religious ideas, which helped him feel secure in coping with the stressors of his life (*Reader's Digest* 1986:20).

#### 3.6.7.2 Burial rites

According to Gowlett (1984:106), human beings are unique in having religious feelings, and in knowing that one day they will die. Deliberate and careful burial of whole bodies prepared in special ways and accompanied by selected objects - such

as the oldest known cemetery of about 100,000 years old - excavated at La Ferrassie, France, testifies to the prehistoric belief that the dead may have another journey before him. This idea was taught to the children of early man by means of careful burials. This part of his upbringing, was also a coping mechanism against the grieving sorrow and the stress of loss, due to death, of a loved one (Weaver 1985:614).

### **3.6.7.3 Ritual**

An air of predictability pervaded every area of life; a belief that one could face all potential stressors comfortably, if one observed certain patterns of behaviour, such as painting animals on rocks, often in a dark, mysterious part (back) of the cave. Sinnigen (1981:15) states that the rock art of the primitive world was not a picture, but an act of painting and potency that counted to create sympathetic magic. The adults and children who watched, believed that the ritual - usually performed by a *shamam* or medicine man/woman - might ward off dangerous animals, produce good luck regarding the food supply, facilitate healing, rain-making and animal control, or be part of an initiation ceremony, where the children often met harsh treatment as a preparation for life's stressors. Initiation rituals and ceremonies in themselves were not only a means of preparing the youth to cope with marriage or reproduction for example, it also gave the group cohesion, and the individual social support, because the whole tribe assembled on these occasions, at regular assembly points of religious significance (Lewis-Williams 1989:32,36; Sinnigen 1981:16; Butts 1973:29). Other rituals such as trance cure-dancing were used by early man, as depicted in rock paintings (Perrot 1992:88). This ritual is still used by the modern San, and involves the children, who learn yet another technique of coping with harmful spirits.

### **3.6.7.4 Ancestor worship**

Early people found security in worshipping ancestral spirits. Evidence of this was found in Jericho, near the northern end of the Red Sea, in the form of sensitive treatment of a skull that had been removed from the skeleton of a dead person. This artefact belonged to the New Stone Age period; the facial features were recreated in plaster, and the eyes were painted, as well as the hair that was painted red or black (Tubb 1991:9). Evidence of careful burials, also indicates the prehistoric following of an ancestor cult (Gowlett 1984:106).

### **3.6.7.5 Myths and legends**

The stories told mainly for the entertainment and education of the children in early societies, were usually traditional tales of hunting, fighting and playing, in this world and the next. These were also ways of preparing the child for, and teaching him to cope with the stressors of daily life (*Reader's Digest* 1992:16). Story-telling is one of the rewarding loves of life, along with music, dancing and painting, for the Kalahari San. It is also a religious exercise, (Van der Post 1988:23,195).

### **3.6.7.6 Magic and charms**

Among primitive societies such as those of early man, magic and witchcraft, as a way of dealing with life, are part of everyday life for adults and children. It is likely that the very earliest humans practised magic, using it to tell them the best times and places to hunt, and the best ways to cure illness; but little evidence survives (Wilkinson 1989:37). In modern hunter-gatherer societies, bones for instance, may be thrown to foretell the future. Charms or amulets, common in modern tribal societies, such as the fish charm worn by people in Papua New Guinea, were probably worn by prehistoric man too, to protect the wearer from evil. This like magic, was perhaps another means early humans had of coping with the fear and tension they felt, as a result of the belief that misfortunes, such as illness and accidents, are caused by harmful spirits. A small plaque of mammoth ivory was found in Tata, Hungary, which is about 100,000 years old and one of oldest objects, apart from stone tools, which demonstrates the early human aesthetic sense. This object was probably worn as a lucky charm by a child to protect herself and find comfort from stress (Gowlett 1984:98).

### **3.6.7.7 Homogeneous value system**

Peer pressure to deviate from social norms, was not a problem in primitive children, because each new generation of early man had the same values as the old. Tribal culture was conservative and traditional; and the same laws, customs, norms and beliefs were held by all members of the tribe, past, present and future. Children had to learn and conform to the group's norms for survival. Variations in thought or practice were rooted out. There was no possibility of stress due to conflicting values in the child's life. He learnt through participation in rituals, imitation of his elders and instruction in familial groups. Peace for him, lay in unquestioning obedience to his elders (Lucas 1972:14; Groenewald 1976:23).

### **3.6.8 Relaxation in creative/ aesthetic activities**

#### **3.6.8.1 Art**

Leakey & Lewin (1982:130) write that there is much evidence of the aesthetic sense of early man. Early hunter-gatherer rock paintings, such as those in the Leo Frobenius Collection of reproduced rock paintings, Zimbabwe Museum of Natural History, Bulawayo, reveal attempts to ward off feelings of tension by the painter and his audience - who were also children - during the ritual act of painting. This activity performed by primitive man during his leisure hours, has already been discussed in this project, in the section on rituals. As signs of personal protection, paintings, as well as carvings of animals or magic charms - evident at every major site settled by prehistoric man - offered early man and children, a form of emotional stress release. Art was a means of coping with the pressures of life, and of controlling/ coming to terms with their world (Lewis-Williams 1989:35; Cooke 1969:20; Van der Post 1988:27).

#### **3.6.8.2 Dance**

Hanna (1990:xi) finds that cave paintings and artefacts with images of dance, document its antiquity as an approach to handle stress, amongst other forms of exercise or passive approaches. Like rock art, dance is generally associated with religious ritual in early man, such as trance cure-dancing (a means of coping with stress due to illness) - and rain dancing (a means of coping with stress due to drought). Dance served to reduce stress in early man (Hanna 1990:10). It was a religiously sanctioned "time out" to gain relief from stressful situations. Like the Old Testament's referring to rejoicing with a person's entire being, dance helps to develop the strength to ward off the debilitating effects of stress, as well as to reduce its impact (Hanna 1990:3). Van der Post (1988:148-149) describes how the San cope with life-events through dance, as well as the stressor of being exposed to an alien culture:

The Bushman danced birth, he danced adolescence; he danced marriage and many another event of life and spirit...and finally he danced out the agony of dying...even by dancing kept alive in their blood the natural Bushman, which the "white man" way of living inhibited in them by day...enduring our exacting presence.

### 3.6.8.3 Music

As in modern hunter-gatherer societies, the child of early man was probably exposed to music as a source of comfort, emotional release, relaxation and pleasure, during his upbringing. A bone whistle found at Haua Fteah in Cyrenaica, Libya, may be the first musical instrument. About 60,000 old, it may have been played for pleasure and stress-release, but was also a practical life-coping strategy: it was used for imitating the calls of birds or animals, to assist in decoying them (Gowlett 1984:115). Bone instruments resembling flutes, whistles, drums, castanets, rattles and xylophones have also been part of archaeological finds in France and the Ukraine (*Reader's Digest* 1992:17).

### 3.6.8.4 Time for recreation

According to Gowlett (1984:156) and Whitehouse & Wilkins (1986:45) recent studies of traditional hunters and gatherers, such as the Aborigines of Australia and the San of the Kalahari Desert, have shown that many of them rarely spend more than three or four hours a day looking for food, or they gather food only every other day. The hunters' way of life is not always difficult; they have plenty of spare time, which they spend mostly in sleeping, talking, playing games, taking part in rituals and enjoying the creative activities already described. Prehistoric man and his children probably also had more leisure than most of his descendants. They were not always faced with the threat of starvation, or preoccupied all day looking for food. They had time to relax and cope with stressful feelings as well.

## 3.7 SUMMARY

Early man taught his children the various coping mechanisms that he used for stress, as he taught them other survival skills and adaptation mechanisms. It is possible that prehistoric children learnt to be in control of most potentially stressful situations and feelings, even of their fear of the spiritual powers, that were believed to control their lives. They positively and creatively acted out their stress, whether it was by means of daily tasks, magic, stories, ritual or other routine patterns of behaviour. They turned their initial general adaptation syndrome of *fright/ fight/ flight* into positive solutions and buffers against stress (Gowlett 1984:98).

At times, life was stressful for primitive man, but he learnt to handle it. Cro-magnon man, who survived longer than others, such as Neanderthal man, was

quick witted and dextrous. This gave him the edge over competitors in fighting for survival, in a harsh and demanding world. He had the eye to the main chance, exploiting every opportunity that came his way, with his sharp mind, graceful body and superior tools. He taught his children to have the ability to adapt to life's stressors and invent stress-coping skills (*Reader's Digest* 1992:12,13; Leakey & Lewin 1982:12,34,194).

Yet the hunting way of life was eventually abandoned - there are no more than 30,000 hunter-gatherers left in the world today - and it is unlikely that many of them will survive at the end of this century. Once population increases, it is impossible to maintain a hunting and gathering life-style, since the family-based subsistence practices and organisation, based on kinship relations that characterise small-scale societies, can not support large communities. This leads to farming and a settled way of life, which was the way most of our ancestors also learnt to cope with the stress of excessive over-population. They eventually had to face new stressors in their life, stay put and exploit the animals and plants, in order to survive and prosper (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:46; Van Schalkwyk 1988:3).

Even though early tribal society does not easily survive in a modern world, many of its stress-coping strategies are still relevant today. Those of other early civilisations may also be generally valid as well. In this chapter, the researcher attempted to reach the roots of stress in the pedagogic situation, by looking at the traditional tribal society of early man. The ancient Greeks will be the subject of the next chapter, since they greatly influenced Western education, which forms the basis of the contemporary South African pedagogic situation. The traditional South African child is currently in a stage of transition, and faced with the stress of adapting to a Westernised way of life and education system. Knowledge of the roots of both traditional and Westernised societies, may provide clues and generally valid essentials regarding the pedagogic assistance that will enable traditional and Westernised children to handle their stress.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION

	Page
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	97
4.2 THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	97
4.3 THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	98
4.3.1 The stress models as applied to the ancient Greek pedagogic situation.....	98
4.4 CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	99
4.4.1 Stressors at macro-level in society/ the outside world.....	99
4.4.1.1 Stressors in the outside world.....	99
(i) Natural stressors: disasters/ agriculture/ geography.....	99
(ii) Man-made stressors: conflict and war.....	100
4.4.1.2 Stressors in society and culture.....	101
(i) Social change.....	101
(ii) Lack of individualism.....	102
(iii) Low opinion of children.....	102
(iv) Infanticide and abandonment.....	103
(v) Adultlike responsibility for wrong doing.....	103
(vi) Religion, ritual, magic, charms and mythology.....	103
(vii) Restrictions on social relationships.....	104
(viii) Sexual abuse/ homosexuality.....	105
(ix) Hetairai.....	106
(x) Sexual discrimination.....	106
(xi) Marriage.....	107
(xii) Social discrimination.....	108
(xiii) Constant supervision by society and caregivers.....	108
4.4.2 Stressors at meso-level in the ancient Greek family and school.....	109
4.4.2.1 Stressors in the family.....	109
(i) Parental neglect.....	109
(ii) Paternal neglect.....	110
(iii) Pressure of responsibility for parents' marriage.....	111

	Page
(iv) Slaves as substitute parents.....	111
(v) Conflicting feelings about mothers.....	111
(vi) Domineering mothers.....	112
(vii) Changing family structure.....	112
(viii) Sibling rivalry/ peer pressure.....	113
4.4.2.2 Stressors in the ancient Greek school.....	113
(i) Lack of education for the majority.....	113
(ii) Pressure of physical education.....	114
(iii) Lack of compulsory education.....	114
(iv) Harsh treatment and discipline.....	115
(v) Lack of child-orientated learning material.....	116
(vi) Irrelevant education.....	117
(vii) Uninspiring teaching methods.....	117
(viii) Competition and contests.....	118
(ix) Unbalanced and narrow curriculum in Sparta.....	118
(x) Overloaded curriculum in Athens.....	118
(xi) Inferior teachers.....	119
(xii) Lack of state subsidised, fixed secondary schools.....	119
(xiii) Shifting school venues.....	119
(xiv) Children of different backgrounds in school.....	120
(xv) Absence of the vernacular in the curriculum.....	120
4.4.3 Stressors at micro-level within the child's self.....	120
4.4.3.1 The physical self.....	120
4.4.3.2 The sexual self.....	122
4.4.3.3 The self-concept.....	122
4.4.3.4 Stress due to suppressed feelings.....	123
4.4.3.4 Personality.....	123
4.5 SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK CHILD.....	124
4.5.1 Evidence of stress in the ancient Greek child.....	124
4.5.1.1 Plato and stress symptoms.....	125
4.5.1.2 Aristotle and stress symptoms.....	126
4.5.1.3 Stress symptoms in ancient Greek drama.....	126
4.5.1.4 Stress symptoms and ancient Greek medicine.....	126
4.5.1.5 Miscellaneous stress symptoms in ancient Greek children.....	127
(i) Violent actions/ chronic anger/ aggressiveness.....	127

(ii)	Delinquency.....	128
(iii)	Hostility towards teachers.....	128
(iv)	Obsessions.....	128
(v)	Criminality.....	129
(vi)	Fear and anxiety.....	129
(vii)	Deviant behaviour.....	129
(viii)	Substance abuse.....	129
(ix)	Doubt/ speculation/ uncertainty.....	130
(x)	Marriage distress.....	130
(xi)	Depression/ tearfulness.....	130
(xii)	Withdrawal/ reduced initiative.....	131
(xiii)	Shyness and lack of involvement with others.....	132
(xiv)	No creative thinking.....	132
(xv)	Disorientation/ lack of sense of identity.....	132
(xvi)	Fear of mothers.....	132
(xvii)	Narcissistic self-absorption.....	133
4.6	<b>COPING STRATEGIES.....</b>	<b>133</b>
4.6.1	Acceptance of stress/ endurance.....	133
4.6.2	Familiarisation with stressors.....	133
4.6.3	A life-style of balance, control and moderation.....	134
4.6.4	Assertiveness/ appropriate venting of emotions.....	134
4.6.5	Adequate/ relevant educational opportunities.....	135
4.6.5.1	Varied curriculum.....	135
4.6.5.2	Basic literacy.....	135
4.6.5.3	Individual instruction.....	135
4.6.5.4	Utilitarian education of the lower classes.....	136
4.6.5.5	Responsible tasks.....	136
4.6.5.6	Relevant education.....	136
4.6.6	Social support.....	138
4.6.6.1	Community involvement.....	138
4.6.6.2	Nationalistic pride/ spirit of conflict.....	138
4.6.6.3	Sibling support.....	138
4.6.6.4	Extended family.....	139
4.6.6.5	Role models.....	139
4.6.6.6	Competitions.....	139
4.6.7	Religion and values.....	140

4.6.7.1	Directly accessible anthropomorphic gods.....	140
4.6.7.2	Ceremonies.....	140
4.6.7.3	The special role of children in religious ceremonies.....	142
4.6.7.4	Puberty rite.....	142
4.6.7.5	Moral training.....	142
4.6.7.6	Homogeneous value system.....	143
4.6.8	Relaxation.....	143
4.6.8.1	Play/ games.....	143
4.6.8.2	Music.....	145
4.6.8.3	Dance.....	147
4.6.8.4	Athletic training.....	147
4.6.8.5	Drama.....	148
4.6.9	Positive attitude to girls/ women.....	148
4.7	SUMMARY.....	149

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The ancient Greek pedagogic situation ( $\pm 1000-140$  BC), which has had a formative influence on Western education, should be investigated in the search for solutions to the problem of stress in the contemporary South African pedagogic situation, which is both Westernised and traditional. Western education is rooted in that of ancient Greece, whose theory and practice spread throughout Europe via the Romans, were promoted during the Middle Ages and are still in evidence in the current Western-oriented South African pedagogic situation (Boyd 1980:2; Sommerville 1982:24,28). In Chapter Two, the researcher discussed the problem of stress in the contemporary South African pedagogic situation. The Western-oriented child was mentioned, as well as the child who is currently in transition between a traditional and Western way of life (Groenewald 1976:2-3). An analysis of stress in the ancient Greek pedagogic situation, one of the cradles of Western civilisation, may help us in our understanding of contemporary Westernised children, as well as transitional/ traditional South African children, who are currently exposed to both traditional and Western customs and educational practice (Verster *et al.* 1982:59).

In the search for solutions to the problem of stress in the pedagogic situation of ancient Greece ( $\pm 1000-140$  BC), the researcher will examine those of Sparta ( $\pm 776-338$  BC) and Classical Athens ( $\pm 800-338$  BC), although mention will be made of the Homeric period ( $\pm 1000-850$ ). The following prominent personalities and educationists will be referred to, in this chapter: Plato (428-347 BC); Aristotle (348-322 BC); Socrates (470-399 BC); Xenophon (430-355 BC); Hippocrates (460-377 BC); Solon (640-558 BC). Other personalities will also be mentioned in the course of this report, and dates will be provided as far as possible, as in the case of the various events and periods mentioned.

## 4.2 THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION

Throughout the era of ancient Greek education ( $\pm 1000-146$  BC), pressure was exerted on the participants involved in the pedagogic situation, to achieve a certain educational aim, which was to produce the ideal citizen of the *polis*/ state (Venter 1992b:20). Although the exact nature of this citizen varied during different periods - namely the Homeric ( $\pm 1000-850$  BC), Spartan ( $\pm 776-338$  BC), Classical Athenian ( $\pm 800-338$  BC) and New Athenian ( $\pm 450-146$  BC), it was always a sociocentric ideal, that overshadowed any notion of the child as an individual

(Beck 1965:9; Coetzer 1994:8). How much was demanded of the child, as he was led towards this goal, also varied. During the Homeric period, described in the poems of Homer and Hesiod, education was informal and practical in the home and camp, whereas in Sparta and in Classical Athens. it was more self-consciously goal-orientated and formal (Tucker 1906:40). The closed Spartan military state depended on the education system for its efficiency (Boyd 1980:11,12). Boys were forcibly educated purely for military service, and girls for patriotic motherhood (Venter 1992b:20; Verster *et al.* 1982:27; Sommerville 1982:24). Athens strained to develop physical and spiritual harmony in its male children for the good of the state. The *palaistra* or *gymnasium* (schools of athletics), the music and the literacy school, all aimed at forcing the child into a particular mould: that of a well-balanced individual whose intellectual, aesthetic, physical and military faculties were in perfect harmony, as befitted a citizen-soldier destined for a life in an open democratic *polis* (Butts 1973:76,85-86).

In studying the ancient Greek pedagogic situation, this chapter focuses on Spartan education - that extended from 776-338 BC (when the Macedonian conquest of Greece ended the Classical Greek period); and Classical Athenian education (800-338 BC) - that endured after Athens' military defeat by Sparta (in 404 BC), until the gradual breakdown of Athenian society, influenced by foreign cultures (Coetzer 1994:7; Verster *et al.* 1982:3). The distinctive features of Spartan education were common to all the Greeks of the Homeric period. After the Homeric period, Athenian education was fundamentally the same as everywhere else in Greece, except Sparta, who - cut off by mountains and the coast from the outside world - had clung to the old ways, long after they had been outgrown by the rest of Greece (Boyd 1980:11,15).

### **4.3 THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

#### **4.3.1 The stimulus, response and transactional models as applied to the ancient Greek pedagogic situation**

The main stimulus for stress in ancient Greece may have been inherent within the harsh Spartan or demanding Athenian primary and secondary pedagogic situation. In Sparta, the individual child was under extreme sociocultural pressure to be a stereotyped member of the military state. Athens tried to mould the individual male child, according to a sociocentric image of an ideal democratic citizen, whose

body and *psyche* were both fully and equally developed and thus in perfect balance (Coetzer 1994:8; Hailman 1973:18; Aigrisse 1960:48). The ancient Greek child was often taught adaptive responses to the stressors inherent in his demanding education, which was probably supposed to help him cope with other stressors at macro, meso and micro-level. His response to feelings of stress was, therefore, in transaction with factors such as familiarisation with suffering through harsh discipline (particularly in Sparta), strenuous physical training, intensive music and literary education (in Athens), the inculcation of patriotism and other coping mechanisms devised in the pedagogic situation. The ancient Greek child's personality and perception were manipulated and forged by the state/ society, which directly controlled/ conditioned his emotional, physical and social development, in particular, in the hope of producing well-adjusted citizens. Whether ancient Greek society succeeded in these attempts to assist their children in coping with their stressors and stress, and become ideal citizens, is a problem that will be examined in this chapter, beginning with the nature of their stressors.

#### **4.4 CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

##### **4.4.1 Stressors at macro-level in society and the outside world**

Natural and environmental stressors largely determined ancient Greek history, and ultimately affected the lives of its children. These factors often were interrelated with stressors in society, especially that of conflict with other European cultures. The stressor of war appears to have determined much of the nature of ancient Greek society and its pedagogic situation, which was, in the opinion of the researcher, often stressful for the child.

###### **4.4.1.1 Stressors in the outside world**

###### **(i) *Natural stressors: disasters/ agriculture/ geography***

A volcanic eruption on the island of Thera, with resulting tidal waves, earth tremors, flooding and destruction of crops on nearby Crete, is believed to have caused the downfall of the Minoan civilisation (during the third millennium BC), the first Greek civilisation, about which the Greek historian Thucydides (460-400 BC) wrote. Even a vague awareness of a history of such natural disasters in the

vicinity of the Aegean Sea, may have caused stress in ancient Greek adults and children (Peach & Millard 1990:5,9; Dimokratia 1989:204).

The agricultural situation of ancient Greece was another possible cause of general stress in its inhabitants. About three-quarters of the land area in Greece was mountainous, barren and of little use for agriculture. Land could only be farmed on the coastal plain and in some inland fertile areas. There was good pasture land only in a few areas. Very little rain fell in summer, so crops were grown in winter. This made farming stressful for ancient Greek families, most of whom made their living from working the land, along with hired hands and slaves. Even citizens of towns often had a farm in the country, which provided their income and only enough food to support a single family. Food was, therefore, very simple, and wild animals were hunted to supplement the food supply. Bees were kept for honey, as the only form of sweetening. Only the very rich ate fish, meat and wheat bread. Plants such as the olive tree were so precious that it was a criminal offence to uproot one. This stress due to the barren soil of their homeland, led to Greek settlements throughout the Mediterranean region, and the need to employ large numbers of slaves to work the land. This led to the stressors of war with neighbours, and class struggles within society (Dimokratia 1989:204; Peach & Millard 1990:24-25).

The geographic position of Greece and the mountains of Greece acted as a barrier to communications, resulting in regional differences and war. The frequently inhabited coastline and the many islands that opened Greece out to the rest of the world, also caused conflict, as well as invasions of foreign cultures. These eventually threatened the status quo, and caused growing numbers of slaves (who were usually prisoners of war or slaves bought from the foreigners), and *metics* (free men who were foreigners) (Dimokratia 1989:204; Peach & Millard 1990:20).

(ii) *Man-made stressors: conflict and war*

The inability of the ancient Greeks to live in peace with neighbouring Greek states or other cultures, meant that war and conflict typified the political situation in Greece. The situation was chaotic and anarchic for centuries, as each city-state fought against others. Plato (428-347 BC) grew up in the period when the long struggle between Athens and Sparta was creating partisan conflict throughout the Greek world. In 445 BC, an uneasy peace had been declared between both states, but a terrible new war broke out, and Athens surrendered in 404 BC (Allen

1974:15; Boyd 1980:27; Butts 1973:90,94). Although the children would not have directly witnessed the war and its violence within their particular state, the general atmosphere must have been very tense, and it directly influenced the education of ancient Greek children. Even Plato, the first great educational thinker, maintained that the virtuous mind and harmonious soul was to be created primarily for strength and bravery in war (Cole 1950:40). Even in peace time, the Spartans, were always rehearsing for war (Allen 1974:31).

The stressor of war and a sense of their culture being under siege, influenced both the Spartan and Athenian aims of education. The former was to produce a race of hardy, strong, courageous, obedient and patriotic warriors who dwelt in the midst of hostile peoples (Graves 1936:29). The latter was to mould the ideal citizen-soldier in whose physical/ intellectual strength and emotional balance, lay the survival of the *polis*. The attempt to realise these aims often gave birth to other stressors within society and the pedagogic situation.

#### 4.4.1.2 Stressors in society and culture

##### (i) *Social change*

Towards the end of the classical Greek era, Athens was experiencing a time of crisis, accompanied by its defeat by Sparta (404 BC) and Phillip of Macedonia (338 BC), and eventual overpowering by the Romans (146 BC), when "the problem of right living" became more than ever acute (Boyd 1980:27). The sophists, in the 4th century BC, with their freer views of life had helped to loosen all the ordinary social bonds and communal life. Together with Socrates (470-399 BC) - who was accused of corrupting the youth - they emphasised individualism and contributed to the disintegration of the old social order (Cornford 1941:189). Material intellectualism and free discipline reigned. Society was in a state of flux. As the fourth century wore on, it produced an increasingly wide gap between the economic fortunes of the lower and upper classes, and there was constant conflict between them. The class of noncitizens increased, and led to the weakening of patriotic zeal throughout ancient Greece. Military preparedness rested with an army of hired mercenaries, resulting in the ultimate conquest of Greece by the Macedonians. The child's stress at this times of cultural stress and conflicting values must have been very difficult to manage, and Plato (428-347 BC) and Aristotle (348-322) attempted to offer solutions to educational problems at this

time of social upheaval (Duggan 1948:27; Verster *et al.* 1982:4,94-96,120-121; Venter 1992b:21).

(ii) *Lack of individualism*

According to Hailman (1973:20), before the unleashing of an awareness of individualism in children and adults, "all individuality was crushed in the iron grasp of the social fabric" of ancient Greece. There was conflict between self-identity and national identity because every detail of the child's life was directly or indirectly controlled by the state (Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:22,161,163,165). In Sparta, he was the property of the military state that shaped his personality from birth. Every free-born child was examined by the local elders, and if found weakly was abandoned in the dung-pit or on cold slopes of Mount Taygetos, left to die of exposure or given over to the *helots*/slaves; so that only a strong race would grow up. From seven, the Spartan boy, passed from his home into the custody of the State who educated him for a military career and unthinking obedience to the state, until he was 20 (Coetzer 1994:5,7; Boyd 1980:12-13; Allen 1974:16; Peach & Millard 1990:23; Sommerville 1982:24).

Although Athenian education was the outcome of private enterprise, and not a direct creation of the State, the aim was to prepare the boy to be a citizen-soldier of the *polis*. He was trained not only for war - as in Sparta - but also for peace. Athenian children were social beings almost from the beginning of life. Being born, a biological event, was insufficient to make a child a member of a household - even if the child had two citizen parents. He had to be accepted by the *kyrios*, the household head, depending on various factors, including gender - girls were rejected more often - and size of family. Ceremonies marked this acceptance, which indicated that Athenian children belonged not only to the family, but to the *polis* (Golden 1990:23,40; Ogden 1950:348; Boyd 1980:16-17).

(iii) *Low opinion of children*

Although characters in ancient Greek tragedy occasionally envy children their freedom from the burdens of adult life, the ancient Greeks were not generally nostalgic for childhood. They believed it was a privilege of the gods to pass through childhood quickly and, to be born with adult powers. Greek education was simply a process of training adults, and society saw childhood as a regrettable state to be got through as quickly as possible. Adults showed no interest in

children or their emotions, and it was taken for granted that the process of growing up would be a stressful and painful one (Ballard 1969:77). Children were regarded as limited, physically weak, morally incompetent, mentally incapable, inhuman, irresponsible and incomplete citizens (Golden 1990:4-5,39). The use of the *paidagogos* - the slave who accompanied the Athenian boy everywhere - shows the low opinion the Greeks had of children/ boys, before they had been through the "taming" process. The status of the *paidagogos* was low. He was usually a slave, often old or otherwise unfit for anything else, and probably led and disciplined the child in an abusive way. Society also had a rather callous and sentimental attitude to children; defendants used to bring their weeping children to trial with them, in hopes of swaying the jurors. (Sommerville 1982:28,29,32). At times, children were seen as simply cute and entertaining. Generally (along with their mothers) not allowed to attend dinners, after the meal, children were expected, to make an appearance, solely in order to entertain the guests. They were also used for menial tasks to free slaves (Golden 1990:11,37). This negative attitude to children may have caused much distress and negative self-concept formation in them.

(iv) *Infanticide and abandonment*

In Athens and Sparta, weak babies (especially cripples and girls) were exposed to the elements to die, to be tested, or to be adopted by slaves or childless couples (Duggan 1948:18; Peach & Millard 1990:50). This reveals another dimension of the belief that children were expendable [cf. paragraphs 4.4.1.2 (ii); 4.4.2.1 (ii)].

(v) *Adultlike responsibility for wrongdoing*

Despite being considered incomplete citizens, children were liable for crimes like involuntary homicide, on the same basis as Athenian adults. Age did not diminish their responsibility; and they were also able to testify in Athenian lawsuits. This contradictory attitude on the part of society, must have caused stress in the child (Golden 1990:41). Plato was aware of this problem; in *The Laws* (1970:376) he says that children are unfit to plead in court.

(vi) *Religion, ritual, magic, charms and mythology.*

Although considered a coping mechanism by adults, the tying of charms around babies and children to ward off the *evil eye* must have caused stress in children, since it generally heightened awareness of stressors and fear. The telling of stories

involving wolves and bogeys - who take shape and eat people - and other legends of frightening mythological characters and creatures, including some of *Aesop's Fables* (written between the 7th and 6th century BC), must have frightened children. Plato and Aristotle approved of *Aesop's Fables*, but looked with disfavour upon the mental effects of "old wives tales" that impressed the young child negatively (Tucker 1906:119). In the poems and stories of Hesiod (who lived during the 8th and 7th centuries BC), which children were made to memorise, mention is made of frightening ceremonies of magic and purification, beast-worship, stone-worship, ghosts, anthropomorphic gods, human sacrifice and of the peculiar powers of women (Boyd 1980:7). Girls witnessed and took part in female rituals that involved abuse, scourging and mocking ridicule (Golden 1990:76). The flogging of Spartan boys before the statue of the goddess, Artemis, is another example of the stressful effect, religion and ritual may have had on ancient Greek children [cf. paragraph 4.4.2.2 (iv)]

(vii) *Restrictions on social relationships*

Children's lives in classical Athens were generally circumscribed within the circle of the family and its connections. Girls and very young children knew little of what went on outside the household. Only boys, as they aged, began to move out into the community and to make friends (Golden 1990:51). This disregard of the child's developmental need to form social relationships with both sexes, particularly in the case of adolescents, and girls - who hardly ever left home - must have caused stress. According to the Van Niekerks (1994:28) the need to experience healthy intimate friendships, as well as communication, is the most basic social need. This was denied to children of classical Athens in particular. Boys and girls were kept apart, outside the home. Plato sets the age for them to go their separate ways at six (*The Laws* 1970:279). Yet he also said (*The Laws* 1970:250):

Boys and girls must dance together at an age when plausible occasions can be found for their doing so, in order that they may have a reasonable look at each other; and they should dance naked, provided sufficient modesty and restraint are displayed by all concerned.

Although a rather unusual suggestion for any era, this statement inspired by Spartan practice of a similar nature, recognises the need for Athenian teenagers to socialise, so as to avoid uninformed choices of marriage partners.

Ancient Greek adults did already, however, take an interest in their sons' sex lives, and identified them as sexual beings from an early age. Greek drama and great writers, such as Aristotle (348-322 BC) and Xenophon (430-355 BC), mention this social attitude. Yet there was no allowing the child to develop to wholesome sexual maturity. Ancient Greek boys were introduced to homosexual activities from an early age. Adolescent boys were permitted only limited promiscuous heterosexual outlets (perhaps sexual relationships with the household's female slaves, as the prerogative of its master and other citizen males) (Golden 1990:53, 72).

(viii) *Sexual abuse/ homosexuality*

In Classical Athens, community standards influenced the boy's choice of friends and the form of friendship, especially with regard to the conventions that shaped homosexual relations among boys and young men. It was in homosexual relationships, that Athenian boys achieved sexual intimacy with other Athenians, and demonstrated their success in attracting their peers. Regular intimacy with an older member of the citizen elite, provided an Athenian boy with a mode of what was considered appropriate attitudes and behaviours. These homosexual relationships were a source of wisdom and political/ social value for the boy and his family; it was a sort of rite of passage. The boy eventually outgrew his role as a junior partner, taking on an active role, as a model for a younger *protégé*. He then assumed a new, though not exclusive sexual identity, as the husband of an Athenian citizen woman and *kyrios*/ household head. The socially sanctioned homosexual relationships that the boy was forced to maintain, may have caused tension in the sexually maturing child. His stress may have been aggravated, if the boy had the wrong partner from the point of view of social advancement, or if he developed habits of "womanish" or "slavish" passive homosexuality, considered inappropriate for adult male citizens (Golden 1990:57-61).

According to Coetzer (1994:8), the custom of forcing boys over the age of seven to live in dormitories with older companions, as part of the Spartan system of public education and military training, led to early sexual awakening. This resulted in pederasty and homosexuality being a social norm in Sparta, as it was in Athens. This sexual abuse of children must have caused much stress in ancient Greece. Girls were also forced into early sexual relationships in arranged marriages, or as *hetairai*/ courtesans.

(ix) *Hetairai*

Not every girl was brought up to be a virtuous wife in Athens. Some girls, usually from the lower classes or foreigners, were forced to become *hetairai*, or companions. They had to be pretty and clever, and were carefully trained to be skilled musicians and witty, interesting speakers. They took wealthy lovers who could support them in comfort, and were invited to men's dinner parties. This must have been a stressful experience for the young girl who was "chosen" by society for this way of life, regardless of her feelings on the matter (Peach & Millard 1990:51; Golden 1990:73).

(x) *Sexual discrimination*

According to Xenophon (430-355 BC), (in Tucker 1906:102) the ideal educational career of a girl was to train her:

To see as little as possible, to hear as little as possible, and to ask as few questions as possible.

Athenian free-born girls from wealthier families led sheltered lives, were treated with contempt, and were not seen outside the middle door which separated the women's quarters from those of the more open house - except for religious festivals or family celebrations, and then they were accompanied by a slave. They received no formal education, but occasionally did learn to read, write and play an instrument, from a mother or attendant. Their education mostly involved learning to spin, weave, embroider, cook, care for the sick, manage servants and household stores, and be a virtuous (if dull) wife/ mother who would spend her life in Oriental seclusion and subordination to her husband.

Only males of Spartan birth were destined to be regarded as citizens, although females were held in higher esteem than in Athens, and were spared domestic chores, receiving gymnastic training instead (Peach & Millard 1990:23,51; Tucker 1906:102-103; Hailman 1973:28; Allen 1974:13; Cole 1950:26).

Although Plato supported education of girls (*The Laws* 1970:294), he considered them inferior, like Aristotle who said (*Politics* 1962:530):

For rule of free over slave, male over female, man over boy are all natural...the deliberative faculty in the soul is not present at all in a slave; in a female it is inoperative, in a child undeveloped.

In ancient Greece, girls were lifelong minors; they were often rejected at birth. They were also given names that were simply feminine forms of boys. Other names were abstract nouns: *Euphrosyn*, "happiness", *Philia* "friendship" sending stereotyped messages about women. Others were diminutives - grammatically neuter in gender - revealing a tendency to depersonalise and objectify women as insignificant beings (Golden 1990:24,38). With the exception of *hetairai* and priestesses, girls married at a very early age to men who were over 30, whom they often did not know before the day of the wedding, and for whom they were to be mere bearers of offspring. Ancient Greek girls were not allowed to compete in the same athletic competitions as the men, not even the Olympic Games - the oldest and most important of the athletic competitions. A separate festival for women, called the *Heraia*, was held every four years in honour of the goddess Hera (Peach & Millard 1990:58). Perhaps this was an attempt to compensate for stressful feelings on the part of Athenian girls, due to their being left out of the important games, and society in general.

(xi) *Marriage*

Marriage in classical Athens and Sparta was a burden and an embarrassment for girls. The conditions surrounding marriage for a Greek girl followed the accepted social norm, however, and the girl would not expect otherwise. A girl was only about 12 to 15 when she was married, but the bridegroom was likely to be much older, about 30 to 35. Plato, in reference to marriage and childbirth, said (in *The Republic* 1941:157):

...a man should beget (children) when he has passed the racer's prime in swiftness, and continue until he is fifty-five.

A girl's father chose her husband and provided her with a dowry. This was to be administered by her husband, but would return to her father, if she were divorced or left a widow without children. In a divorce, the husband kept the children and sent his wife back to her nearest male relative. The girl would have to be a virtuous and faithful wife to a man, who controlled her completely, but did not have to be equally chaste himself. If her husband wanted to divorce her, he just

made a formal statement in front of witness. It would be much more difficult for a wife to end an unhappy marriage. She could not take any legal action herself (Tucker 1906:103; Peach & Millard 1990:50-51).

Marriage marked a stressful change in a girl's life; it was a swift transition from girl to woman, dramatically highlighted by the marriage rituals themselves, which bore many similarities to those of funerals. On the day before her wedding, a bride sacrificed her toys to the goddess Artemis, as a sign that her childhood was ending. Other rituals, celebrations and sacrifices marked the event before and on the wedding day. The bride probably met the groom for the first time on the wedding evening when, at the groom's family home after the sharing of food, the bride was led to the bedroom amidst much laughing and joking. This must have been an embarrassingly stressful experience for an adolescent girl, and one she must have fearfully anticipated for many years. A marriage of convenience was a responsibility that a girl raised entirely within her own household, might have been unwilling, or psychologically unable to take on (Golden 1990:48-49).

(xii) *Social discrimination*

The ancient Greek state had no interest in compulsory elementary education or mass literacy, and there must have been much tension in society due to the unrealised potential of the poor. Although every free-born Athenian male could work his way to the highest office by means of education, children of slaves were excluded from education or public life (Cole 1950:26; Hailman 1973:27). Athenian wealthy children began school earlier and attended for longer, than sons of artisans, who stopped their formal education at about thirteen, and were apprenticed to their father's trade. In Sparta, children of serfs were raised to replace their parents at the base of the Spartan economy, doing the agricultural work, while free-born Spartans were educated as citizen-soldiers (Golden 1990:64; Cole 1950:37).

(xiii) *Constant supervision by society*

Ancient Greek children were under continually stressful and authoritarian surveillance. From infancy, Spartan children were under constant supervision according to the dictates of the State. For the first seven years, those who had not been abandoned, were put under the control of mothers or nurses, who began making Spartans of them. After seven, they were under a hierarchy of officers in

the army barracks: the boy leader of the group, the *eiren* - who trained the boys - and the *paidonomus* (the State inspector) assisted by attendants/ whip-bearers. Moreover, it was the task of every freeman to train, mould, approve or chastise children in the absence of the usual officials.

In Athens, there was also constant supervision by the mother and other attendants until the child was seven and, thereafter, by the *paidagogoi*, a male servant, who was the child's constant companion until his late teens. He took the boy to school each day, carrying his books and other material, and remained with him every minute during his hours in school. He saw his charge home at night, waited on him at home, and was empowered to punish him. He made a major contribution to the child's moral training, seeing to it that he did not mix with anyone who might corrupt his morals, and even determined his choice of homosexual partner. Often just an uneducated slave, fit for no other task, the *paidagogoi* let out his frustrations in harsh beatings, and did not himself embody the values of the boy's parents.

The ancient Greeks considered children to be untrustworthy. Even their interaction with their peers was organised and controlled by the adult community by means of religious festivals, in which boys competed as performers and athletes. Playmates were mainly relatives and family connections. Laws exerted supervisory pressure on the Athenian boy, preventing unauthorised persons from being in the *palaistrai*, and restricting schools to daylight hours, so that the boys might be safely home before dark (Sommerville 1982:24-26,29; Boyd 1980:18; Cole 1950:35,36; Allen 1974:16; Golden 1990:53,61).

#### **4.4.2 Stressors at meso-level in the ancient Greek family/ peer group and school**

##### **4.4.2.1 Stressors in the family**

###### **(i) Parental neglect**

During the Heroic age ( $\pm 1000-800$  BC), as depicted by Homer, the family was responsible for its children's education. Fathers taught their sons by example and precept, imparting to him physical skills and a religious disposition. Mothers educated their daughters to be skilful and virtuous housewives. Later, family life and education were lost to state education (Hailman 1973:29). The Spartan state

did not want strong family bonds to develop, as the state was to be the focus of loyalties. That is why the boys were sent away from home at seven (Sommerville 1982:25). According to Coetzer (1994:8), infants and young children were treated with indifference in ancient Greece, and after the Persian wars of 479 BC, were increasingly left to foster mothers and wet-nurses, because marriage was usually a loveless business arrangement, and mothers felt little love for their children.

(ii) *Paternal neglect*

Love, marriage and children were not synonymous in ancient Greece, where men were taught that it was their patriotic duty to get married and father sons. In Sparta, penalties were imposed on men who stayed single for too long. Spartan children often did not know their real father, as women were encouraged to practice *eugenics*: the breeding of the best possible children. If it did not seem likely that a married couple would have strong children, it was their duty to allow someone else to impregnate the wife (Sommerville 1982:27). Ancient Greek fathers had no particular emotional bond with their children.

In Athens, men married, but continued to lead separate lives that included sexual infidelity. When a baby was born, the mother presented it to her husband. If he did not believe that it was his child, or if the baby was handicapped, a girl, or he did not want/ could not afford another child, he could reject, abandon and leave it to die. In some cases, unwanted babies were left in a specific place. People could go there, adopt a child and bring it up to be their slave (Peach & Millard 1990:52). Athenian and Spartan fathers paid almost no attention to the child's first seven years. The upper-class ideal was for Athenian children to live in separate apartments, away from the men's part of the house. (Sommerville 1982:28,29,30). Spartan fathers spent most of their time at the barracks, and just visited their wives and families. With the exception of older boys in Sparta, who were allowed to attend the men's meals in the barracks, and Athenian youths who were occasionally allowed to sit at male dinner parties, children hardly knew their fathers or other men, except for slaves. Boys would lack a role model, and girls would not know what to expect in a husband; both a possible source of insecurity and stress in the child. Boys, social inferiors, mostly ate with mothers and sisters, yet were destined to inherit the father's dominant role, with privileges to come. This ambiguous position in the Athenian upper class boy, may have caused further chronic conflict and stress. Generally there was little communal activity in the family due to the

father's absence; this tended to express and reinforce cleavages within it (Peach & Millard 1990:23,53,55; Golden 1990:147,380).

(iii) *Pressure of responsibility for parents' marriage*

According to Golden (1990:143), relations between a husband and wife in ancient Greece, were thought to be cemented on occasion, by the birth of children. Marriage in Athens was often spoken of as being contracted specifically for the birth of legitimate children, if not for love. Just as marriages were made for children, children made marriages. Even a quarrelling couple might be reconciled because of, and through their children. Children were often drawn into family feuds, and this placed undue pressure on them.

(iv) *Slaves as substitute parents*

Slaves were generally a source of stress in the ancient Greece household, where they were often employed as nurses or *paidagogoi* who replaced neglectful parents. Aware of this stressor, Aristotle, believed that youths should spend a minimum of time in the company of slaves, who were often unfit companions (in Coetzer 1994:9). Even if the mother breast-fed her own child, slaves were closely associated with children. The word *pais* is commonly used for both child/ slave; and they shared a number of social characteristics and liability to physical abuse. Since the slave may have been a supportive, if inadequate, pedagogic influence and regarded with affection by the child, his role as care-giver may have been a source of tension in the child: slaves were regarded as intellectually and morally inferior to free citizens. Ironically the Athenians, who believed that association and imitation, were essential elements of upbringing and education, entrusted their children to slaves, although they were unsuited to be models and mentors for future citizens of the *polis*. Sometimes slaves undercut a father's authority and example, causing further inner conflict in the child. At other times, they may have resented their position and vented their hostility on the child. Cruelty to slaves may have also introduced feelings of frustration, insecurity and violence within the child, causing much negative stress (Golden 1990:145-150).

(v) *Conflicting feelings about mothers*

Sommerville (1982:32) describes the characteristic tensions which must have born heavily on the ancient Greek child, owing to another contradiction in his life: that

between his mother's almost powerless position in society, and her psychological dominance during his early years due to his father's absence. According to Sommerville (1982:32):

It appears that Greek boys grew up to be hostile towards women and yet obsessed with them.

The fact that male-dominated ancient Greek society created important female figures in Greek mythology, despite the low social position of women, is symptomatic of this particular stressor of its childhood.

(vi) *Domineering mothers*

Upper class, Athenian husbands neglected their wives who were forbidden to go out, except to religious observances, and then with a chaperone. Their sons, therefore, became substitute husbands; and mothers focused all their attention, envy, resentment on them during their first impressionable years. Mothers intruded on their sons' sexual awareness, so as to create lifelong fears and stress. Analysing this tension, in boys of ancient Greece, Sommerville (1982:33) refers to the notion of the *Oedipus Complex*, conceived by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), as a possible cause of neurosis in individuals, due to conflict between erotic love of a parent and accepted moral norms. Sommerville states:

Following Freud's analysis, one would conclude that such pressure during a normally narcissistic period would tend to arrest psychological development at that state.

(Sommerville 1982:33)

(vii) *Changing family structure*

Although the extended Athenian family provided some social support to the often neglected child, households were often very fluid. Death and remarriage caused frequent changes, bringing in new parents, children and distant kin. Sometimes those who had left home, would return, such as daughters whose marriages had ended. Households had occasional members, regular visitors, apprentices, adopted children and free children who came for protection, in times of crisis, such as when Athenians evacuated their wives and children to other states, at the time of the Persian invasion of Attica. This constant changing family situation may have

caused stress in the child, affected his psychological and social development, diminished the intensity of his emotional ties, and increased his levels of insecurity. It may have caused children to experience conflict regarding loyalty to individuals, family, values and the state (Golden 1990:142-147).

(viii) *Sibling rivalry/ peer group pressure*

Because of the closeness of bonds between brothers and sisters who led a sheltered life at home in classical Athens, and knew little other social relationships with their peers; it may have been all the more stressful when there was conflict between them. Enmity between siblings may have arisen from rivalry for parents' affection, differences in ability or achievement, competition for honours or childhood squabbles over care of animals (Golden 1990:118). The lack of a peer group with its own social identity, meant that there was little other peer pressure.

#### 4.4.2.2 Stressors in the ancient Greek school

(i) *Lack of education for the majority*

Slaves and lower classes received little if no education, and they constituted approximately ninety percent of the population, maintaining the fabric of society (Boyd 1980:25; Duggan 1948:18). Even sons of artisans started school later than boys from wealthy Athenian families (Cole 1950:26). This elitist attitude that helped shape higher education of the Western world to come, was endorsed by Plato and Aristotle, who exerted a greater influence upon the philosophy and educational ideals of Western civilisation than that of any other ancient figure. They both accepted that all citizens should serve the state, ruled by an intellectual elite (Butts 1973:95). Plato in the *Protagoras* (in Cole 1950:40) also advocated that all-round literary, moral, physical and musical education, be:

done by those who have the means, and those who have the means are the rich; their children begin soonest and leave off latest.

Education had to be paid for, and the children of the poorer citizens received only a very basic schooling, which must have been a source of stress for the disadvantaged members of ancient Greek society (Peach & Millard 1990:53).

(ii) *Pressure of physical education.*

The emphasis on physical fitness and sport may have been a source of stress in ancient Greek children Cole (1950:40) states:

The extraordinary stress put upon citizens in all Hellenic cities to keep themselves in good physical condition is quite understandable. The effects of such training were dramatically demonstrated at the battle of Thermopylae, when 300 Spartan citizen soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder in a narrow defile, fought off thousands of Persian attackers, were not overcome until a traitor showed the Persians a path around to their rear, and then died in their tracks to the last man - still fighting.

Spartan and Athenian schooling emphasised physical fitness. In Sparta, the most important subjects were athletics, dancing and weapon training. Very basic literacy, patriotic songs/ poetry, Spartan law and heroic poetry were the only academic subjects. The aim of the Spartan system was an efficient military machine made up of tough, healthy soldiers that would form the infantry, and mothers of soldiers. Spartan girls were trained in gymnastics, to keep fit, so that they would give birth to strong babies. For hundreds of years the physical education of their children was a source of security and strength to the Spartan state. The absence of a defensive wall to protect Sparta was one of the wonders of the ancient world (Peach & Millard 1990:23,52-53; Boyd 1980:13; Sommerville 1982:24;26). The Spartans stressed agility and strength as the aim of education, whereas the Athenians emphasised plastic beauty as well. This, in addition to the teacher's whip contributed to the Athenian boy's stress, as he had to mould his body into the right shape and appearance, including the perfect suntan! (Hailman 1973:28; Cole 1950:203).

(iii) *Lack of compulsory education*

Education was not a state concern in Athens or financed by the state, and this may have been a source of stress for those who could not afford to pay for private tuition. Attendance was purely voluntary, and the state used no compulsion, except for military training; yet it did hold intellectual, athletics and music competitions to encourage boys to attend school, in the hope of winning honour and prizes. Amongst the upper classes, however, there was social pressure on the father to have his boy educated. Solon (640-558 BC), whose laws established

Athenian society, said that any man who did not ensure this, did not deserved to be looked after in his old age (Duggan 1948:20; Tucker 1906:121; Cole 1950:37,38). Plato advocated compulsory education in *The Laws* (1970:293); he was aware of this stressor in the lives of children who lacked education.

(iv) *Harsh treatment and discipline*

Harsh treatment in the school situation, was a successor to that begun in the Athenian primary pedagogic situation, in the form of *spargana* or swaddling clothes, used on Athenian babies. This stressful custom was advocated by Plato who recommended that children be swaddled until the age of two. The ancient Greeks regarded the tight wrappings important for the modelling of the infant's body, for about forty or sixty days after birth. The bonds were often drawn most tightly at the knees and ankles (to produce finer joints). Spartan children were unique in Greece in not being swaddled, yet received the harshest treatment in later childhood years (Golden 1990:17).

According to Coetzer (1994:10) cruelty to children was common in ancient Greece, and infanticide by exposure or murder, was not punishable. Ballard (1969:12,80) speaks of the use of the hard leather strap and the teacher's savage threats in the ancient Greek classroom, that was a source of fear, distrust and anxiety in children.

Even Plato (1970:298;1906:90) said that passers-by must punish any boy who misbehaved, and he believed in discipline from infancy. Spartans, whom Plato admired, took a very hard line with children. From the age of seven to eighteen, Spartan boys went through a graduated course of training, which became more severe at each new stage, and was always under very strict discipline. There was also the annual flogging of boys entering manhood, at eighteen, at the altar of Artemis, as the supreme test of endurance. A prize was awarded to the boy who could endure the greatest number of stripes without flinching or uttering a sound. Some boys died during the thrashing. All superintendents in the troops and companies, had teams of "floggers" to make sure that the boys behaved. Boys were generally expected to take their beatings with good grace. Spartan boys had to go barefoot and bare-headed in all weathers, and were clad in a single garment all year round. The food was coarse, beds hard - they had to make them from rushes - they had no covers, as befitted those who were to spend their lives in fighting, and they bathed in the river. Every day, they were kept busy at work at

gymnastic exercise and outdoor pursuits, like swimming and hunting; all to make them strong and hardy. There was never enough food for the boys, who were encouraged to steal from nearby farms, provided that they were not caught. This was to encourage and pressure the boys into learning craftiness. If they were caught, they were severely flogged for being careless, and were deprived of food (Boyd 1980:10-14; Peach & Millard 1990:52-53; Allen 1974:16). Another example of severely abusive treatment during training in being quick-witted, is recorded by Plutarch (50-125 AD) who says:

After supper, the Eiren used to order some of the boys to sing a song. To others he addressed some question that required a judicious answer. A reason had to be given briefly with the answer. The boy who made a mistake had his thumb bitten by the Eiren by way of punishment

(in Boyd 1980:14).

From birth, the Spartan child was taught to eat every kind of food without complaint, not to be afraid of the dark or of being alone and not to cry. He was starved, exposed to all kinds of weather, exposed to ridicule and flogging (Sommerville 1982:25). The stress of discipline and punishment also reflects the goal of Athenian schooling, which was to produce citizens with the virtues of courage and self-control. Relatively cohesive to begin with, students might be made more so by the harsh discipline of the classroom in Athenian schools; teachers imposed their authority through beatings. Plato believed that teachers deserved respect, and the pupils should obey them and their *paidagogoi*. The Greek term *paideuo*/ I teach, also has the meaning *I correct/ I discipline*, in classical Attic (the dialect of ancient Athens (Golden 1990:64). Plato in *The Protagoras* says:

Education and admonition commence in the first years of childhood and last to the very end of life...and if (the child) obeys, well and good; if not, he is straightened by threats and blows like a piece of warped wood

(in Cole 1950:40).

(v) *Lack of child-orientated learning material*

From the very beginning, during early informal education, Athenian school children were introduced to adult culture, via Aesop's fables and stories about the gods and

heroes of Greece (Allen 1974:40; Cole 1950:26,40). As soon as they could read, they were given the Homeric epics and the works of the other poets and tragedians, all containing tales of famous men (Boyd 1980:18). This was the only literature used in the pedagogic situation, for constant drilling in the stories of ancestors, which were to be memorised (Graves 1936:29; Duggan 1948:23). The ancient Greeks believed all wisdom was contained in these adult-centred works, that trained the child's emotions and mind (Sommerville 1982:31). Spartan children were also taught only stories of war heroes (Allen 1974:41). This lack of understanding of the child's world may have hindered the development of his unique potential, according to his particular development level, and caused him stress.

(vi) *Irrelevant education*

When the late classical Athenian upper class child became aware of the notion of individualism, there was no longer a need to learn to be the ideal citizen for the good of the state. The wealthy child also did not have to learn how to struggle for survival. All material needs were met; practical skills were irrelevant. Education was no longer dictated by economic or military considerations, or even by any need to bolster a shaky social status for this particular ancient Greek child. When the notion of the life of the individual devoted to the welfare of the state was forgotten, education was no longer for civic duties, but for personal advancement and pleasure. It involved training in speech and rhetoric; this was the only way to find influence in civic political life. The old form of schooling became irrelevant. Awareness of this fact, meant that athletic training eventually disappeared, and music was no longer taught for its character forming potential, only for pleasure. (Sommerville 1982:30; Golden 1990:64; Duggan 1948:25-29). Education became, as Aristotle puts it, "the older child's rattle" (Aristotle 1962:310).

Sparta's military educational aim also became irrelevant when it achieved its ultimate goal of conquering the rest of Greece.

(vii) *Uninspiring teaching methods*

Methods of instruction, in ancient Greek schools seemed tailor-made to stifle stress-releasing originality and self-expression, relying as they did on mimicry and memory. Boys learned to write by following the furrows of an inscribed alphabet and tracing letters, lightly sketched in wax. They also concentrated on memorising

texts from lists of words, from the works of Homer and other poets (Golden 1990:65; Tucker 1906:122). Plato also advocated "learning by heart" so that the child may emulate the heroes of the stories. Xenophon, the Athenian historian, mentions adults still being able to repeat *The Iliad and the Odyssey* learnt by heart in childhood. (Graves 1936:29; Cole 1950:26,40,41).

(viii) *Competition and contests*

Contests, along with rewards and prizes, in sport, recitation and music were an important feature of Athenian education, and may have been a cause for stress, especially since the programme for boys in the games, paralleled that for men. The *pankration*, one of the most dangerous events, combined elements of each of the other combat sports, and forbade biting and gouging, but allowed kicking and any other means to overcome one's antagonist. Other competitions were also very demanding and required great strength and endurance. Boxing contests could go on for several hours, and were only decided when one athlete lost consciousness or conceded defeat. Athletes aimed most of their punches at their opponents' heads. Virtually any blow with the hand was permitted. The pressure to win must have been strong, as the prizes were substantial; and winning meant personal glory and social mobility for the boy and his family, amongst the city's elite, as well as prestige for his city or *polis* (Golden 1990:65-71; Peach & Millard 1990:59; Graves 1936:29; Cole 1950:38).

(ix) *Unbalanced and narrow curriculum in Sparta*

The beauty of art and architecture did not feature in Spartan education, only music and suitable patriotic songs. Although Spartan training did develop mental alertness and heroism, it left the children with a very narrow outlook on life. Reading, literature and art were held in small esteem and formed a very small part of Spartan education. Whilst the rest of the Greeks were developing a wide range of aesthetic and intellectual interests, the Spartans remained stubbornly attached to their narrow ways and oppressively austere way of life (Boyd 1980:15,20).

(x) *Overloaded curriculum in Athens*

In the attempt to produce the well-rounded citizen, Athenian free-born boys had three teachers: one for reading, writing, arithmetic and for learning the poets by heart, one for athletics and one for music, which consisted of playing the lyre and

singing the lyric poets (Sommerville 1982:30). Athenian boys had a long full day, every day except for feast days (Cole 1950:35). They went to school from sunrise to sunset, with a break, only for a midday meal. After the evening meal, they collapsed into an exhausted sleep, as a result of so much pressure (Allen 1974:12; Boyd 1980:19; Cole 1950:35).

(xi) *Inferior teachers*

The fees charged in Athenian elementary schools were not large, because even poorer people could afford to send their sons there, although only for a few years. As a result, the stick and strap was much in evidence with the poorly paid, little respected elementary teachers, considered to be members of the most miserable of occupations. They let out their own stress and frustrations by beating and taunting pupils, and giving them menial tasks (Tucker 1906:122; Sommerville 1982:32; Cole 1950:35; Ballard 1969:12)

(xii) *Lack of state subsidised, fixed secondary schools*

For some centuries, schooling stopped at a relatively elementary level in classical Athenian society. Even before the age of Pericles (461-430 BC), however, a desire for further education developed, and private secondary schools were opened. These had a fluid quality because they depended upon wandering teachers, who simply arrived in a community and lectured. They followed no syllabus or lesson plan and taught *ad lib*. They remained until they had said all they had to say and their enrolment began to drop. The subjects taught, varied with the interests of the teacher. Socrates was unusual because he did not wander about, except within the confines of Athens; nor did he accept fees (Cole 1950:37). This lack of permanence in the school structure, may have been a source of pupil stress.

(xiii) *Shifting school venues*

More than one subject could be taught at the same spot, in classical Athens, but physical training often required special facilities. Generally a boy attended three schools. The first was run by a teacher called a *grammatistes*, who taught reading, writing and arithmetic. The pupil was taught music by the *kitharistes*; and dancing and athletics by the *paidotribes*, who took his pupils to a *gymnasium* (a training ground) or a *palaistra* (wrestling school) (Peach & Millard 1990:53).

Boys had to visit more than one locale in the course of their day's schooling. Yet the need to travel between schools, would have brought them into the community more, which perhaps compensated for the strain (Golden 1990:64; Cole 1950:26).

(xiv) *Children of different backgrounds in school*

Athenian schools would be rather like contemporary neighbourhood schools, in bringing together free-born children of different social and economic status who lived in the same region of the city. Pupils may have been poorer than their peers, have come from rural areas to live in the Athenian metropolis - or from other Greek states - or been sons of *metics* (free-born non-citizens) born outside Athens. These differences may have caused stress in pupils, whose home values differed from those of urban Athenian society, which determined the aims, content and teaching methods of the city school curriculum (Golden 1990:64; Peach & Millard 1990:20).

(xv) *Absence of the vernacular in the curriculum*

The children of ancient Greece had to read and memorise the writings of Hesiod - who wrote his poems and other works during the 8th century BC - and Homer - the author of *The Iliad and the Odyssey*, in the 9th century BC, written down after his death. The Greek of these 400 year-old works, would have been archaic, foreign or a different dialect to the pupil's home language; although he would have understood the general meaning. Spartan children had also to memorise and chant the laws of Lycurgus (circa 900 BC), the legendary founder of Spartan institutions, which had probably been written down in an archaic language (Peach & Millard 1990:23,86; Evans 1992:8; Graves 1936:29).

#### 4.4.3 **Stressors at micro-level within the child's self**

##### 4.4.3.1 **The physical self**

According to Duggan (1948:19,22), the training of the body was as important as the training of the mind, in ancient Greece, and was aimed at making the body its efficient instrument (cf. Figures 4.1/ 4.2, page 121).



**Figure 4.1** The stressful search for physical perfection under strict supervision:  
Scene in the *palaistra*. Decorated vase (Cole 1950:32)



**Figure 4.2** The stressful search for physical perfection under strict supervision:  
Scene in the *palaistra*. Decorated vase (Cole 1950:33)

In many cases the emphasis on physical education might have helped the child in his physical development and general mental/ physical health; but the exaggerated emphasis on physical perfection and muscle development, may have also caused unnatural physical development and stressful physical and emotional problems. Further physical stress may have resulted from the tendency for the masters in physical culture and other lessons, to use the whip or cane continuously.

Whilst an adult Greek citizen regarded it as an intolerable outrage to be struck or assaulted, he took all this corporal chastisement in his young days, as a matter of course (Tucker 1906:124). Physical abuse occurred frequently in the primary and secondary pedagogic situation in ancient Greece [cf. paragraph 4.4.2.2.(iv)].

#### **4.4.3.2 The sexual self**

Early sexual awakening due to the forcing of boys into homosexual relationships, and girls into early marriages or lives as *hetairai*, would have made pubertal change and the sexual maturing process traumatic and unnaturally hastened. This may also have had stressful and problematic consequences on the physical and emotional self. Moreover as Coetzer (1993:164) states:

Sexuality (in ancient Greece) was portrayed not as a mutual enterprise, but as an action performed by the social superior upon the socially inferior

This sociosexual attitude of treating children as subordinates, would have harmed the formation of a positive self-concept in the child, and inhibited his potential for a healthy sexual relationship, in a committed relationship of love and trust.

#### **4.4.3.3 The self-concept**

Because of the notion of the individual compelled to devote his life to the welfare of the state, there was not much concern for the child's positive self-image or individual potential in ancient Greece. Children were considered less than human and frequently abused. The awareness of the personal self and a change in the relation between individual and state arrived in classical Athens, with the advent of the sophists and Socrates, as well as the exposure to the diverse customs, religions, social and moral views of the foreigners that came to Greece mainly during the 4th century BC. Education then began to train the boy for personal advancement in

society. Care for the child as a unique affective, physical and intellectual being was still not yet the aim, however, only the child's ultimate social aggrandisement.

The emotional self of the ancient Greek child was especially ignored. All stress was to be endured and tolerated in a taciturn manner; not acknowledged or handled by the child in appropriate ways. Plato was aware of the child's emotional life, and pondered on the topic of control of the passions; but to the ancient Greeks, children were mere objects of social exploitation (Duggan 1948:28; Coetzer 1993:164).

#### **4.4.3.4 Stress due to suppressed feelings**

The "bottling up" of negative feelings due to the child's affective response to a stressor, often leads to symptoms of stress such as sleep disorders (Papalia & Old 1993:278-279). This stress from within, may have occurred in the Spartan child - who was taught to accept extreme hardship without showing signs of distress - and the Athenian child who was expected to endure his hardship with, in the words of Plato (1906:115):

the silence of the younger before the elder .

#### **4.4.3.5 Personality**

In Chapter Two, the researcher referred to contemporary categories of personality types, that may be the cause of stress within the child. Hippocrates (460-377 BC), the ancient Greek doctor and philosopher, was also aware of this phenomenon and divided character/ behaviour/personality/ temperament into similar types, each depending on the dominant presence of four types of bodily fluids in the individual. He spoke of: the sanguine (expressive, lively type); the choleric (go-getter, energetic type); the melancholic (analytical, gloomy type); the phlegmatic (good-natured, relaxed type) (Vorster & Van Niekerk 1994:201). Hippocrates choleric personality may resemble the Type A (stress prone) character and the phlegmatic, the Type B (stress free) personality, mentioned in Chapter Two of this project. The sanguine personality suggests a positive character, able to handle stress; the melancholic temperament suggests an individual prone to depression, a symptom of stress. According to Vorster & Van Niekerk (1994:212) the sanguine personality is, however, inclined to be a "people pleaser" which leads to unassertiveness and stress. The choleric type, according to Vorster & Van

Niekerk (1994:216) is inclined to be impatient, and the melancholic type withdrawn. Both characteristics carry the potential for stress within the individual. The phlegmatic type, however, has a high tolerance for stress, is balanced and calm, avoids stressful situations, manages his emotions and has a good sense of humour. On the other hand this type tends to avoid challenges and the possibility for positive stress and growth (Vorster & Van Niekerk 1994:209).

Bearing all the above in mind, it appears that Hippocrates was indirectly touching upon the problem of stress in his behavioural analysis of people. We assume that he included children and their potential for stress, in his thinking on the subject of human behaviour and emotions. His theory of different personality types, reflects an early awareness of various symptoms that might have been due to stress in the individual.

## **4.5 SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK CHILD**

### **4.5.1 Evidence of stress in the ancient Greek child**

Since ancient Greece had a collective *psyche*, characterised by rationality as the predominant psychological attitude, Athenian and especially Spartan children, were not really allowed to develop as individuals. They were, therefore, probably not very aware of their own emotions or any stress that they may have experienced, let alone able to express their feelings. What they did consciously and intentionally, always conformed to reason externally, in their search for harmony/ balance/ homeostasis/ integrity; but what happened internally and unconsciously may often have been irrational, immature, unbalanced (Aigrisse 1960:14-15,16). Brett (1963:93) speaks of chaotic feelings being reduced to order, by daily life in ancient Greece. Ancient Spartan children were taught to be tough, and Athenian children, to accept the demands made on them. Whether they really managed to prevent a stress-response or merely suppressed all signs of their stress, is debatable. Symptoms of stress were, nevertheless, evident in the children of ancient Greece. The great philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, and the dramatists and medical practitioners of the time, refer to various psychological and physical symptoms which often resemble those outlined in Chapter Two of this project.

As stated earlier, stress is basically a feeling of being overwhelmed by an emotional reaction that arises in response to a stressor of some sort. It is a state of emotional

imbalance, which may spur one on to greater activities/ thoughts/ feelings, or inhibit one, in the form of numerous negative emotional or physical disorders. This concept of balance/imbalance, preoccupied the Athenians in particular; and the researcher feels that they were indirectly trying to solve the problem of stress, in their search for harmony of body and soul in the ideal citizen, by means of their education system, and in the writings of their philosophers. These attempts at solutions may have, however, often increased the child's stress levels. The following is an attempt to briefly describe a few symptoms of stress in the ancient Greek child, as they appeared to various writers (both ancient and modern). These are the "morbid irregularities" and extremes of emotions, to which Plato refers (in Hailmann 1973:36; *The Laws* 1970:197), and which he hoped to prevent through education, as "conversion and redirection" of the whole personality (Curtis & Boulwood 1977:8). The fact that ancient writers were aware of stress, is also perhaps a symptom in itself.

#### 4.5.1.1 Plato and stress symptoms

Brett (1963:106-108) maintains that, according to Plato, the essential element in many diseases of the mind, is a lack of balance, due to the tension between diverging impulses and acquired forms of restraint: desire versus reason. It appears that Plato was aware of the concept of *stress* as *tension*. In the 8th and 9th books of *The Republic*, Plato gives an elaborate account of the way in which "abnormal types" (stress symptoms) are developed through faulty education/ circumstances/ environment (Curtis & Boulwood 1977:7). For example in Book Nine of *The Laws*, he speaks of crimes committed in childhood, and mentions that crimes are generally due to uncontrolled passions such as anger - which suggests an understanding of the effects of negative stress build-up, in individuals (Plato 1970:407).

Plato praised the Spartans for their temperance, orderliness, easy-going temperament, greatness of spirit, self-discipline and endurance. This sounds as if he envisaged the Spartans as stress-free personalities, who managed to turn stress into *eustress*. He believed that the Athenian was like a child, however, and lacked self-discipline and stability of character, since he was ruled by his emotions (Curtis & Boulwood 1977:10). Plato (in Golden 1990:20) speaks about childhood stress in the pedagogic situation:

The new-born, beginning life in grief, weeps because of need or cold or heat or a blow, not yet able to say what he wants and able only to cry to indicate discomfort. But when he turns seven, he drains sorrow's cup to the dregs, tyrannised by *paidagogoi* and teachers, and as he grows older he takes on still other instructors as his masters.

Plato was conscious of the need for individuals to be in control of their "passions", and of how an overload of negative emotions due to stress, can result in symptoms such as suicide attempts. In *The Laws* (1970:392) he refers to suicide as the sometime result of "the *pressure* of some excruciating and unavoidable misfortune".

#### **4.5.1.2. Aristotle and stress symptoms**

Aristotle was also aware of the presence of stress in children, due to certain customs such as dipping newly-born infants in cold river-water and swaddling (to prohibit small children from crying and dilating the lungs). Like Plato, he also thought that children lacked emotional control, were not yet complete or stable, and prone to stress. He acknowledged the stressful effect of slaves as parental substitutes (1962:296). He mentions symptoms of stress such as biting of nails and the tearing of hair (in Brett 1963:115), and (1962:314) speaks of music "for education and cathartic purposes, and an intellectual pass-time, as relaxation and for relief after *tension*". Aristotle also mentions the severity of training, strenuous forced hardships and heavy dieting which had ill-effects on Spartan children, and were to the detriment of the appearance and the development of the child's body and mind (1962:304).

#### **4.5.1.3 Stress symptoms in ancient Greek drama**

Characters in Greek drama, such as *Oedipus*, *Phaedra*, and *Orestes* all seem examples of morbid and stressed personalities (Brett 1963:112,115). As examples of stress in the young, they reveal a preoccupation with stress in the minds of their artistic creators and society.

#### **4.5.1.4 Stress symptoms and ancient Greek medicine**

Greek writers on medical matters such as Thucydides (460-400 BC), the Athenian historian, describe affective disorders and nervous complications as being frequent

amongst patients in general. The following is a list of some of these conditions which sound like stress symptoms: less involvement with others; forgetfulness; lethargy; mood swings; melancholia; depression; listlessness; impaired concentration; reduced motivation; mental confusion; tearfulness; anxiety; itchy rashes; sweating; insomnia; breathlessness; mental gloom; trembling; dry coughs; lethargy; melancholia/ depression; dizziness/ giddiness; migraine headaches; heaviness in the brows; ringing in the ears; inexplicable bodily pains; numbness in the legs; bladder problems; heavy sleep; irrational terrors and menstrual problems (Panayotatou 1923:58; Flashar 1971:167-168; Phillips 1973: 71-72,132-133).

Phillips (1973:48-49,71-72,179) speaks of how ancient Greek medicine ascribed physical illness, as well as mental illness - emotional disorders, temperament and morbid (gloomy or mentally unwholesome) conditions - to the imbalance of the humours in the body. Humours were considered to be permanent constituents of the body, such as blood, phlegm, bile and other liquids produced by particular organs. Plato (in Hailmann 1973:36) also speaks of imbalance and fatal morbid irregularities. This concept of the dominance of one or other humour, is akin to contemporary notions of: unresolved/ dysfunctional stress; emotional overload or feelings of pressure; and failure of the body to return to a state of *homeostasis*.

Phillips (1973:167) mentions a medical manual, the *Midwife's Catechism*, which was used by the ancient Greeks. This work stresses the importance of an even-tempered, charming and gentle wet-nurse for the upbringing of the child, and suggests that a tense care-giver leads to a stressed child.

#### 4.5.1.5 Miscellaneous stress symptoms in ancient Greek children

The previous section reviewed awareness and symptoms of stress, as found in ancient Greek writers, including Plato and Aristotle. The following is an outline of various symptoms in the situation of the ancient Greek child, some of which are also based on the observations of the above-mentioned great thinkers.

##### (i) *Violent actions/ chronic anger/ aggressiveness*

Young Athenians appear to have been violent, especially to their slaves. According to Golden (1990:160) boys often refused to go home when fetched from school by the *paidagogoi*, and beat him. Athenian law court speeches from the fourth century, reveal that Athenians grew up to be full of chronic anger,

quick-tempered and violent. Ill-treatment of slaves, on the part of children and adults, was a symptom of the stress of being bound together in an ironic and tense relationship [cf. paragraph 4.4.2.1 (iv)].

Symptoms of stress due to parental neglect, are also evident in ancient Greek drama. One character, *Pheidippides*, repays his father for past beatings, by killing him. Social norms insisted that a father was owed respect; yet this feeling coexisted with resentment or hostility, because of pedagogic neglect. References to matters, such as father-beating in drama, was a safe outlet for violent personal emotions and stress, that came into conflict with the community's customary attitudes (Golden 1990:158-164).

(ii) *Delinquency*

Most Athenian fathers, did not share their table with their sons; rather letting them go their own way (Golden 1990:38). These less attentive fathers found their sons forming gangs and gathering together in anti-social activities. According to Aigrisse (1960:17) the only way for older children to escape the constraints imposed upon them by authoritarian fathers and the social system, was by means of conflict with the establishment, revolt and delinquency. This was their way of dealing with the stressful conditions of their life, especially with the advent of Socrates, who encouraged free-thinking and individuality in youths. Younger children dealt with their stress more passively (Duggan 1948:26).

(iii) *Hostility towards teachers*

Judging by the story in Greek mythology of *Heracles* (the son of *Zeus*) - who repaid his music teacher, *Linus*, by killing him with a stool - it appears that harsh discipline in ancient Greek schools, instilled hostility in boys towards their teachers. Boys sometimes helped the teacher administer a beating, joining in the general violence; a tactic of divide and rule (Golden 1990:64).

(iv) *Obsessions*

Plato spoke of this symptom of stress as being "the darkness of the soul" and an extreme of emotion, that he hoped education would ultimately prevent. He regard education as the turning about of the soul by various means including art, music, dancing and emulating past Greek heroes (Brett 1963:109,152; Plato 1970:197).

(v) *Criminality*

Plato spoke of this stress symptom as a "madness begotten in men by ancient and undisputed crimes" (in Brett 1963:109). This suggests that he believed that childhood stress was a cause of criminal activity later in life.

(vi) *Fear and anxiety*

Plato, in *The Laws*, refers to children, who manifest severe anxiety, confusion, lack of self-confidence and a general lack of self-actualisation, as a result of stress and fear due to very harsh discipline. He states (in Coetzer 1994:9):

...unduly savage repression turns children into cringing slaves and puts them so much at odds with the world that they become unfit to be members of the community".

Aristotle also was aware that very strict discipline would inhibit (emotional) growth as a result of stress. He said (1962:304):

...the Spartans...by severity of treatment they render (children) like animals.

(vii) *Deviant behaviour*

Plato in *The Laws* (in Coetzer 1994:9) was conscious of the various forms of decadent behaviour, that were symptoms of the pressures brought to bear upon the Athenian child, by society. He saw the need for children to be protected from negative influences, as well as negative and destructive feelings in the pedagogic situation. He was probably thinking of the negative effects of the child and sexual abuse, that were common in ancient Greece. He said (1978:86):

I call education the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred, that well up in his soul are channelled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why.

(viii) *Substance abuse*

Ancient Greek doctors were aware of the ill-effects of alcohol in children, which suggests that it was given to them, perhaps indirectly, to relieve stress.

Hippocrates said that it is harmful, causes weakness of organisms and weakens the minds and bodies of children.

Plato comments on the abuse of alcohol, and its effect on children - even babies at birth, via the mother - that prevents them from being strong in mind and body or calm. It appears that it was used as a tonic and calmant in ancient Greece, (the mother of *Hector* gives it to him in *The Iliad*). Plato forbids children from using it before the age of eighteen (Panayotatou 1923:240-242; Plato 1906:91).

(ix) *Doubt/ speculation/ uncertainty*

At the end of the Classical period, the freeing of the wealthy Athenian child/scholar from the need to learn to survive as a soldier/ citizen, led to an emphasis on speculation, philosophy, search for self-knowledge and knowledge of the universe as liberal education. This could have led to the inner stress typical of young people in a state of intellectual quest, like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, who reveals a symptomatic self-doubting and suicidal attitude (Sommerville 1982:30)

(x) *Marriage distress*

Euripides (480-406 BC) created the dramatic character of *Medea*, who speaks of the trauma of marriage for girls, who are not prepared for it (in Golden 1990:49):

We women are the most wretched of creatures... A wife comes to new customs and habits, and she has to be a prophet to tell how to treat her husband. She doesn't learn at home how to cope .

Stress due to marriage was a problem that found expression in ancient Greek drama which was, therefore, a symptom of this stress in ancient Greek girls.

(xi) *Depression/ tearfulness*

Aeschines (390-314 BC), the ancient Greek orator, says that children are easily frightened and quick to tears. (in Golden 1990:7-9). This is another example of an awareness of symptoms of distress, in ancient Greek children, who must have had the same response to stress as modern children; although they would not have not been able to discuss their feelings, as today's Western oriented children. The former's response to a stressor was in transaction with the overt, outward

responses he was rigorously taught to produce, by educative forces that moulded him into the ideal citizen, according to "a conscious and consistent plan" (Sommerville 1982:27).

(xii) *Withdrawal/ reduced initiative*

According to Boyd (1980:13) the effect of repressive discipline was evident in the whole bearing of the Spartans. Alone in a land of light-hearted people, they were stern and unbending in their manners. Their taciturnity was a byword amongst the rest of the Greeks. Xenophon commented on the "spirit of discipline and obedience that prevailed at Sparta," where the youths:

walked along the streets with their hands folded in their cloaks, proceeding in silence, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, but with their eyes modestly fixed upon the ground

(in Boyd 1980:13).

According to Aigrisse (1960:17), younger children in ancient Greece, accepted the social organisation of absolute authoritarian (paternal) discipline with "sad conformism". Cole (1950:35) quotes a description of an Athenian schoolboy's day that also makes the researcher sense a certain depressed, unassertiveness in the child, who was educated in a controlled and pressurised system. The passage was written later in history by Lucan (39-65 BC) a Latin epic poet, who said:

(The boy) gets up at dawn, washes the sleep from his eyes, and puts on his cloak. Then he goes out from his father's house, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, not looking at any one who meets him. When he has laboured diligently at his intellectual studies, and his mind is sated with the benefits of the school curriculum, he exercises his body... Then a bath, not too prolonged; then a meal, not too large... For the schoolmasters are waiting for him again... When evening sets a limit to his work, he (eats) and retires to rest.

Spartan boys were marked by their obedience to their elders and a quiet modest bearing at all times. Athenian boys spoke to no-one on their way to school, were silent in the presence of elders and rose from their seats when they entered the room. Good manners were more important than reading writing and playing music, resulting perhaps in repressed feelings and stress (Cole 1950:35).

(xiii) *Shyness and lack of involvement with others*

Spartans had as little to do with foreigners as possible (Sommerville 1982:26). This was possibly a symptom of unresolved childhood stress, the result of being shut off from the rest of Greece, and from a free and broad-minded existence.

(xiv) *No creative thinking*

By the end of the Classical Period (338 BC), Sparta had become the strongest military power in Greece, and its soldiers were famous for their bravery. However, this was achieved at the expense of its cultural development. There were no philosophers or artists in Sparta. This was the ultimate effect of its oppressive education system (that turned the individual child's stress into cultural stress), and a very terse, narrow, tense, stern and uncreative society (Peach & Millard 1990:22).

(xv) *Disorientation/ lack of sense of identity*

Other Greeks noted that the Spartans grew up with certain character deficiencies; they had "narrow and brittle personalities". When they were sent abroad, perhaps as ambassadors, they were easily corrupted by foreign customs. It was said that they could not resist bribes and easily became dissipated. Their education had not fostered individual character. In fact it was designed to eliminate individualism, to teach obedience rather than initiative. Without the guidance of their community, Spartans became disoriented. They lacked an internal locus of control, and became paralysed by stress (Sommerville 1982:26,27).

(xvi) *Fear of mothers*

According to Sommerville (1982:33) there are symptoms in Greek culture that the researcher feels may relate to childhood stress. The common image of woman in Greek literature, the literature that boys later read, or commissioned from their poets, is a figure of determination or terror. Female monsters of Greek mythology appear in much the same way, as they appear in the dreams of those who suffer through similar family situations, today. While *Zeus* wanders aimlessly, philandering and throwing tantrums, his wife *Hera* works out her resentments through her many stepchildren. The same occurs in Greek tragedies. Mothers are menacing figures, killing their children or getting them to avenge wrongs done to them. Even the bogey persons of Greek folklore were female, and were

characterised by ravenous sexual appetites. Boyhood stress due to a dominating maternal influence, may have led to these fictitious characters as symptoms of childhood stress.

(xvii) *Narcissistic self-absorption*

The arresting of psychological development at an early stage, by the mother's intruding on her sons' sexual development, may have led to the vain self-absorption - as well as the exhibitionism, competitiveness and homosexuality - of ancient Greek society. In this way, it sought to sublimate the tensions and stress of psychologically repressed sexual energies in childhood (Sommerville 1982:33,34).

## 4.6 COPING STRATEGIES

Ancient Greek society built various mechanisms into its education system, so as to enable the child to cope with its demands, and ensure the realisation of its aim to mould the ideal citizen/ soldier. The following are some strategies:

### 4.6.1 Acceptance of stress/ endurance

A Spartan child was trained to endure pain and suffering without complaint, as well as demonstrate absolute self-control. A well-known story is told of a young Spartan who had stolen a fox, which he hid under his tunic. When questioned by his superintendent, he allowed the sharp claws of the animal to tear at his body, rather than admit he had been caught stealing (Allen 1974:17). From birth, children were taught to eat every kind of food without complaint, not to be afraid of the dark or of being alone, and not to cry. (Sommerville 1982:25). Their stress was forcibly endured and suppressed/ "bottled up", but perhaps not really managed in the long term.

### 4.6.2 Familiarisation with stressors

According to Appley & Trumbull (1986:42) a perceived threat can also be reduced by familiarisation and practice, to reduce the impact of the new, the strange, and/or the unexpected. The ancient Greek aim of continuous training for physical fitness and war, would have been such a coping mechanism. Aristotle agreed that the child could be trained to cope with physical stressors. He said (1962:303):

Since it is obvious that education by habit-forming must precede education by reasoned instruction (as that of the body precedes that of the mind), it is clear that we must subject our children to gymnastics and to training in wrestling and fighting; the former produces the condition of the body, the latter its actions.

#### **4.6.3 A life-style of balance, control and moderation**

Children were brought up with the greatest simplicity during the first seven years in Sparta; and later only the bare essentials were provided with regard to material possessions and the rudiments of learning - apart from physical training, which was thoroughly comprehensive. Generally the Spartan young were taught simplicity and brevity of expression (*laconism*), simple, clear and accurate ideas about their surroundings, and absolute self-denial (Hailman 1973:22). This helped them manage the pressures of their otherwise emotionally and physically demanding and harsh life. Cole (1950:35) describes the routine, moderation and balance that was supposed to form the tone and basis of the Athenian schoolboy's day of varied studies, meals, bathing, sun and rest at night.

Plato (1970:304) states how "conflict and confusion makes learning difficult" and the need for the music taught to pupils, to be kept simple and easily/ quickly learnt. Plato believed that "one should avoid a life of extreme pleasure and pain...(taking) the middle course between them" (1970:277).

Panayotatou (1923:238,168,185,198,202,168) speaks of how Hippocrates (460-377 BC) advised moderation in food, drink, sleep and bathing, and a well balanced diet for mental/ physical health.

In the Athenian school room, furniture was sparse, equipment simple and the room was modestly decorated with busts of gods or heroes, and beautiful vases. This would have also reduced stress for the pupils (Cole 1950:260; Duggan 1948:20).

#### **4.6.4 Assertiveness/ appropriate venting of emotions**

Entralgo (1970:xvii,xix) speaks of myths, fairy tales, prayers, incantations and charms used in ancient Greece, either alone or in conjunction with other forms of medical treatment. These were much like those of primitive societies, and were a form of "therapy of the word"/ verbal psychotherapy that can lay bear emotional roots of problems, and help with emotional/ mental/ soul disturbances, which

influence health and cause bodily problems. Phillips (1973:17) also speaks of the calming influence produced in the injured, by the singing of incantations over wounds as mentioned in *The Odyssey*. This indicates an ancient awareness of the connection between emotional stress/distress/*eustress* and physical health.

Literary (and musical) training enabled ancient Greek children to give expression to the feelings contained in the text; although this did not teach them to come more directly to terms with their current emotions (Duggan 1948:23). Socrates aimed to develop the individual's power to think for himself and express his feelings; but this was not the ancient Greek way of passive and receptive learning.

#### **4.6.5 Adequate/ relevant educational opportunities**

##### **4.6.5.1 Varied curriculum**

The child was carried along with the momentum of the demanding Athenian school day and mental tedium, by means of a varied curriculum of literature, music and physical education that aimed to mould the versatile citizen, who embodied the concept of *kolakagathia*, or balance between physical beauty and spiritual perfection. This variety may have numbed the Athenian child, who had no time to be aware of his stress, and helped him to cope with the learning pressure, in the short-term (Duggan 1948:20; Golden 1990:62; Verster *et al.* 1982:3).

##### **4.6.5.2 Basic literacy**

The fees charged in elementary schools could not have been large because even the poorest people could afford to send their sons for a few years to the elementary school (Cole 1950:35). This was one compensation for stress felt by the marginalised lower classes of Athenian society. Some Athenians regarded equality in education for rich and poor as a mark of democracy (Golden 1990:64).

##### **4.6.5.3 Individual instruction**

Although the Athenian school day was full and long, drawings on vases reveal that instruction was generally on a one-to-one basis. This was perhaps another way of easing stress in the pupil, and helping him to cope with the demands of the curriculum (Cole 1950:28-31; Duggan 1948:20).

#### **4.6.5.4 Utilitarian education of the lower classes**

In Athens sons of lower classes were usually taught some trade, by their fathers or through apprenticeship. Solon (640-588 BC), the Athenian statesman whose social and political reforms formed the basis for later Athenian democracy, forced less wealthy freemen to take their educational responsibilities seriously by declaring, that if a son were not taught a trade, he would not have to support his father in old age (Sommerville 1982:29; Larousse 1980:1699).

This emphasis on practical education for the less wealthy, was perhaps a coping strategy for their stress at not receiving the education received by the upper classes.

#### **4.6.5.5 Responsible tasks**

Religious and secular activities gave boys and girls in Athenian society, a chance to compensate for the stress of being made to feel socially inferior. Child care was a major responsibility of girls, as well as food preparation; and they took part in certain religious ceremonies.

Sons of artisans helped out in father's workshop, observing. Boys at the top of the social scale, did not generally perform chores. If children of slave-owning families did menial occupations, it was as a substitute for slave labour - to release slaves for other tasks - or as a form of discipline and training, and a source of stress instead of a successful coping strategy for any stress felt due to their lack of secondary education (Golden 1990:33-35).

#### **4.6.5.6 Relevant education**

Before social changes in ancient Greece, education was relevant: mainly physical training for future soldiers and mothers of a strong nation, in Sparta; and learning by doing (performing adult tasks, gymnastics, reciting, singing, playing of instruments and witnessing of real-life intellectual debates at the gymnasium, civic assembly and law courts) for Athenian future male citizen-soldiers.

This informal education and participation in adult/ real life affairs meant that learning was not too academic and stressful (Boyd 1980:20; Duggan 1948:25; cf. Figure 4.3, page 137).



**Older girls mind smaller girls while they swing.**

**Figure 4.3 Adult responsibilities - Ancient Greek vase (Golden 1990:34)**

## **4.6.6 Social support**

### **4.6.6.1 Community involvement**

Everyone was involved with moulding the next generation of Spartans (Sommerville 1982:26). Perhaps this support helped the child to endure, if not adequately handle his feelings of stress [cf. paragraph 4.4.1.2 (xiii)].

### **4.6.6.2 Nationalistic pride/ spirit of conflict**

Spartan and Athenian children learnt to cope with different stressors, especially that of war, because a strong feeling of nationalism, general pride in their cultural heritage and heroic duty was instilled in the young, from an early age onwards. The spirit of conflict was socially sanctioned and a war-like spirit was aroused in children Ogden (1950:348). This helped them to adapt to the military spirit and pressures of their harsh education. In addition they were made to memorise laws, the epics and histories of their people. The upper class of Athens also did not need the utilitarian urging of the lower classes, to see that their sons went to school and learn to be ideal citizen-soldiers. It would have been considered shameful, if they neglected their national duty to the culture, that their children were supposed to receive there (Sommerville 1982:25,29).

### **4.6.6.3 Sibling support**

Close and cordial relations between brothers was a widely recognised ideal in Athens, that was possibly fostered in childhood. Boys and girls of the same family, more or less of an age, were often together. These bonds were often maintained in later life. These relationships were perhaps buffers against the stress of paternal neglect, and of the lack of heterosexual friendships and social contact in general. The only time children could be with members of the opposite gender was in the *gynaikonitis*/ women's quarters, with siblings and female relatives. Siblings also played an important role in child care (as in modern times; when parents are absent, and the mother's role is supplemented to a significant extent by others). Older children looked after infants, giving adults freedom to pursue other tasks, with slaves often acting in the supervisory role (Golden 1990:115,120-128).

#### **4.6.6.4 Extended family**

In the wealthy Athenian home, the nuclear family lived with relatives of the husband's family. This extended family was a perhaps a buffer against stress due to various social customs such as parental/ paternal neglect or maternal dominance. Outsiders, such as adopted children, step-parents and slaves also contributed to the extended family and support for the pedagogically neglected child (Golden 1990:136). The fluctuating structure of the family may, however, also have been a stressor [cf. paragraph 4.4.2.1 (vii)].

#### **4.6.6.5 Role models**

Plato in *The Protagoras* (Cole 1950:41) said that children should learn the "tales and praises of ancient men by heart in order that he may imitate or emulate them and desire to become like them". He aimed to cultivate the stable character by "familiar contemplation of great examples and high deliverances" (Tucker 1906:122; Cole 1950:400). This presenting of examples of ideal citizens, was a means of helping children to cope with the pressure of conforming to the desired social image.

#### **4.6.6.6 Competitions**

Sports competitions set as they were, amidst the city's celebrations of its gods, must have given the boy a chance, not only to identify his place within the community, but perhaps also to widen it. In local competitions for Athenians, they set themselves against their fellows in individual sports, or joined with their tribesmen in team events. At the *Panathenaea* and the great *Panhellenic* games, they found themselves on a wider stage - Athenians among Greeks from all over the Mediterranean world. The choral competitions must have given the boy singers a powerful sense of belonging to the community and contributing to its welfare. It brought boys face to face with their peers from elsewhere in Greece, at the same time that it introduced them to the community as a whole. In this way, a boy's circle of acquaintances could extend beyond his family and neighbours (Golden 1990:67). Thus stress due to a lack of individualism in an sociocentric society, as well as that of living in a very confined social environment, was reduced by these competitions.

## **4.6.7 Religion and values**

### **4.6.7.1 Directly accessible anthropomorphic gods**

Religion, in ancient Greece, helped adults and children to feel more in control of their stressors, as they took part in the rituals that were not exclusive to the priest/medium. Moreover, the ancient Greeks saw their gods as having the same needs as humans; they were not examples of high morality in many cases, and were more human than primitive spirits. The ancient Greeks felt more readily in control of their own lives, as the gods were brought nearer the worshipper's level. The priesthood was reduced to insignificance as occasional agents in certain rites and ceremonies (Boyd 1980:4,5; Duggan 1948:19).

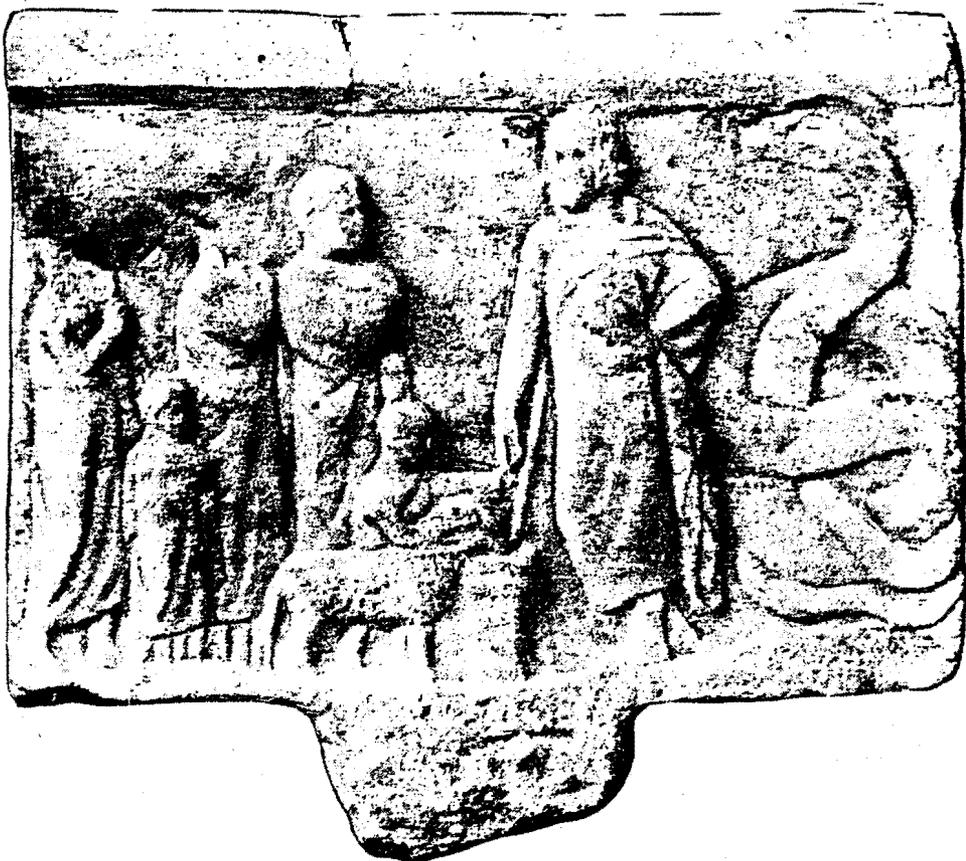
### **4.6.7.2 Ceremonies**

Greek religion was mainly ceremonial. The ancient Greeks held many religious festivals in honour of their gods to please and persuade them to grant wishes, such as making crops grow or bringing victory in war, both stressors in their lives. The ceremonies also involved athletic competitions or theatrical performances.

Private worship of family gods, at the altar in the courtyard of the house, played an important part of Athenian daily life, thereby becoming a coping strategy for daily hassles, and one of the few links uniting the family.

Athenians also prayed to appropriate gods, as they went about their daily life. Children were taught to seek security during or before a stressful life event, by consulting oracles, soothsayers and reading omens. Elaborate funeral rites, sacrifice and initiation ceremonies also helped children with other stressful life events - although these may have been stressors in themselves as well (cf. Figure 4.4, page 141).

Cures for/ means of coping with illness were also sought in religious ceremonies (Panayotatou 1923:132; Peach & Millard 1990:69; Golden 1990:24). Although the pupils did not have long vacations, frequent religious festivals in honour of the gods provided many well-needed breaks and a stress release. Dancing, a release from stress, was a large part of religious rituals (Duggan 1948:20,22; Verster *et al.* 1982:121).



**Figure 4.4** A family sacrifices a sheep to Asclepius (Golden 1990:32)

#### 4.6.7.3 The special role of children in religious ceremonies

Perhaps to compensate for the children's being regarded as less than human, and for their pedagogic neglect, they were included in many of the ritual acts, and religion that pervaded ancient Greek life. Some even revolved around the children themselves; in others children had distinctive responsibilities. Families also sacrificed together; and the solemn significance of these rituals would bind children with those who shared in them, especially fathers with their sons. Religion provided the main direct avenue for children into social life; cult observance was perhaps the most important family activity, and might even have taken them outside the city. It was children's very marginality which made their religious role appropriate. Not yet fully integrated into the social world of the *polis*, they were outsiders, a status they shared with the gods of religious ceremonies. Rituals brought children into community life by preparing them for the future, especially in the case of girls whose ritual life was richer than that of boys. In many ceremonies, girls served the gods in ways women were to serve their household; this helped them have a sense of social identity. Marriage rituals were supposed to ease the stress of this great change in the girl's life (Golden 1990:30-31,41,44,46,48).

#### 4.6.7.4 Puberty rite

According to Sommerville (1982:270), the physical toughening, training in concealment/ survival and instruction in the dances and chants of the Spartan people resembled pubertal initiation rites. These were also supposed to be a preparation for the stressors of life, were begun at birth and continued throughout Spartan childhood.

#### 4.6.7.5 Moral training

Plato thought that Homer and Hesiod, the most revered of the poets, ought to be forbidden to children because they portrayed the gods as immoral - they had not coped with their lives (Sommerville 1982:30). For Plato, the aim of education was the moulding of the moral and well-balanced soul/ *psyche* who copes in times of stress, has self control, and is able to turn irrational feelings into rational (constructive/ positive) ones, thereby preventing distress (*The Protagoras*, in Cole 1950:40). The virtuous soul was Aristotle's educational aim too (Duggan 1948:41).

#### 4.6.7.6 Homogeneous value system

For Spartan children, the values inculcated in the home and the school were the same. There was no conflict in this regard in these children, who felt secure in the set traditions and the same education of their fathers, despite their being very stressful. On the other hand, some wealthy Athenian children experienced a conflict between the values taught in school and held by the state, and those of slaves, who were their main caregivers. Other Athenian children such as those from *metic* foreign homes, might have also found it difficult to manage the conflicting values of home and school.

#### 4.6.8 Relaxation

Aristotle (1962:283) believed that:

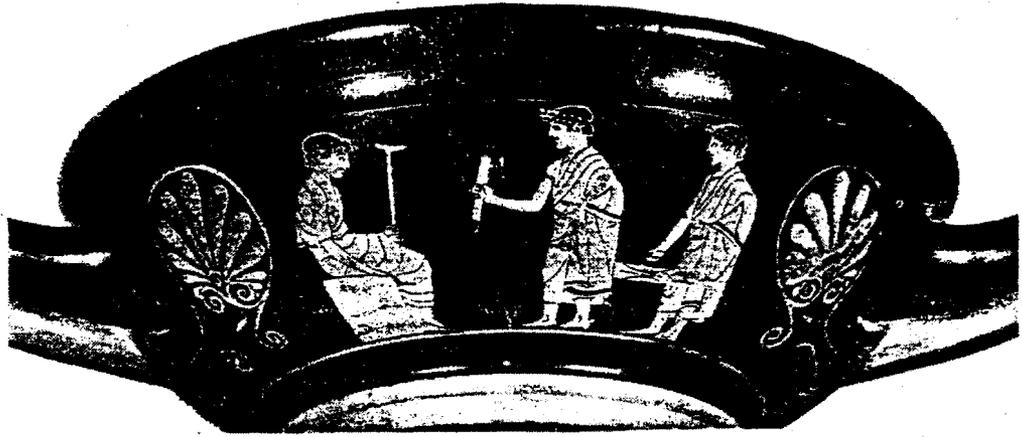
All life can be divided into work and leisure...these then are the targets at which education should be aimed.

Plato believed in the right use of leisure to ensure inner peace (1970:292). Children, in ancient Greece, enjoyed theatrical presentations, puppet shows, musical contests, recitation competitions; all relaxing fun and a possible cure for stress (Golden 1990:45).

##### 4.6.8.1 Play/ games

In play, Athenian children seem to have been free to do as they liked. Although they followed recognised patterns, and under adult eyes, they were, on the whole able to interact in ways that were their own.

*Pais*, the Greek word for *child*, shares the root of *paizo*, that means “*I play*”, and other words with the denotation of *play/ game/ sport*. Play characterised children to the Greeks, for whom they were also social subordinates, subject to adult authority and control. Some games gave children a chance to manipulate and deny the social categories and stressful situations of their world. In this way at least, they could feel in control, deal with their stressors, emotions and dysfunctional stress, as well as learn to cope with life. Figure 4.5 (page 144), for example, shows children playing “school” as a way of coming to terms with this particular stressor in their lives.



**Figure 4.5** Coping with the stressor of school:  
Boys play school (Golden 1990:56).

At home, in the evening in their mothers' quarters, the children of the Athenian elite, would play games such as the board "game of towns" (Allen 1974:40). Wealthy families gave their children many games and toys to amuse them in their leisure hours, such as dolls, hoops, balls, rattles, clay animals, small cymbals and noise makers, tops, knucklebones and yoyos. Play as a form of stress release, was continued into adulthood, in the form of - for example - knucklebone/ dice and board games, and even *cottabos* (the throwing of wine at a target) (Peach & Millard 1990:55; Golden 1990:55,56). Charades were invented to assist classical Athenian children in school. Other games were introduced to make learning the alphabet, reading and spelling less stressful. For example, each children would represent a certain letter, and sing a song about it, whilst assuming its shape and forming combinations with other "letters", for the benefit of the pupils watching.

Play also helped pupils cope with the stress of having to memorise Homer, whose Greek was already archaic during the classical period. The pupils would act out scenes, as they went along, according to the general meaning which they were able to grasp; and then they would discuss the background in great detail, thus learning

history, geography, and philosophy in such a way that learning was fun (Cole 1950:27).

#### 4.6.8.2 Music

Sommerville (1982:31) says that music was therapy for the body and its humours in ancient Greece. Music played a very important part in stress management in the primary and secondary pedagogic situation (cf. Figures 4.6/ 4.7, pages 145-146).



**Figure 4.6** Music for pleasure or as pressure: individual instruction under watchful eyes: School scene. Painted *kulix* (Cole 1950:29)



**Figure 4.7** Music for pleasure or as pressure: individual instruction under watchful eyes: School scene. Painted *hydra* (Cole 1950:30).

The aim of teaching music in the pedagogic situation, was the proper cultivation of feelings. The ancient Greeks generally saw it as able to calm the soul and the nerves/ nervous system, curing illness of body and mind, creating a strong morale and instilling forgetfulness of pain. Homer in *The Iliad*, in describing *Achilles'* anger, tells us that the hero - standing apart from the battle - was calmed by the music of flutes in a nearby camp. In Homer's *Odyssey*, music and singing was also used to calm *Ulysses'* distress and excessive negative emotions (Tucker 1906:123).

At home, the children's evening would often end with a dance, whilst the mother would play the flute (Allen 1974:40). Music was taught in the school for emotional stability, strength and harmony of the soul; qualities necessary for coping with stress. Boys learnt the lyre in particular (Boyd 1980:18; Cole 1950:40).

Harmony and rhythm were not irrational pleasures, but had a moral purpose. They had a therapeutic value for the body and its humours. Each of the musical modes (the types of scales ) was identified with a particular emotion. The ancient Greeks worried that whoever wrote the music for a society, could have as powerful an effect as those who wrote its laws, for musicians could influence even the *psyche* (Sommerville 1982:31).

Plato spoke at great lengths on the benefits of music, and in *The Republic* (1906:88) stated that education in music is "of the greatest importance", because it enables "measure and harmony... to enter into the inward part of the soul".

Aristotle also saw it as a release from tension and stress. He said:

Now in rhythms and in tunes there is a close resemblance to reality - realities of anger and gentleness....music heard does indeed cause an emotional change in us..

(1962:308)

#### **4.6.8.3 Dance**

Regarded as medicine for the body and soul, dance was part of religious festivals. Plato specifically referred to the "dance of peace"(1970:307) Along with gymnastics, it taught bodily and emotional endurance and bodily agility necessary in combat for man, and for childbirth in women. An indispensable part of education, dance was a form of emotional release as it depicted images of passion, sadness and happiness. It strengthened character, restored balance to the soul and calmed the nerves (Panayotatou 1923:107,109,112-113,115). Heroditus, the Greek doctor and historian ( $\pm$ 484-420 BC), said:

Dance is the most wholesome exercise, as much for the health of the emotions/ soul as for the body... it represents strength and joy of heart.

(Author's translation, in Panayotatou 1923:117)

#### **4.6.8.4 Athletic training**

Although also a source of stress, gymnastics was considered to relax and elevate the soul/ emotions, produce mental and physical well-being, be therapeutic, give

resistance to fatigue and regulate over-eating in ancient Greece. Hippocrates speaks of the relation between bodily/ psychic strength, although also mentions excess in physical exercise as harmful; as opposed to regular exercise, especially walking (Panayotatou 1923:262-272). Plato (1906:91) also advocates simple exercise.

In early childhood, the ancient Greeks saw to physical development through play and games, such as jumping rope, ball and leap-frog. Later more formal exercise took place: running, jumping, throwing and wrestling, which brought every muscle into play, and made the body an efficient instrument of the mind, will and heart (Duggan 1948:21-22). Athletic training was believed to ensure balanced perception and judgement, a positive outlook and courage/ emotional control, as well as physical strength in the face of mental and physical stress.

#### **4.6.8.5 Drama**

Various stressful themes of passion and conflict are dealt with in Greek drama such as: craving for the love parents could not give their children; conflicting feelings about mothers; decision making (whether to obey or defy the will of the gods. The masks worn by the actors showed particular feelings (Sommerville 1982:34; Peach & Millard 1990:56-57). Drama was a symptom of the fact that stress needed management in ancient Greece, and was an attempt to provide a coping mechanism, through indirect expression of negative feelings.

#### **4.6.9 Positive attitude to girls/ women**

Spartan girls and women occupied a much higher position than girls in the rest of Greece, who led a sedentary and secluded home life. The former were allowed a free outdoor life, and trained in much the same way as the boys, in order that they might be worthy mothers of brave and resolute men. The only difference was, that they were allowed to remain at home, instead of being segregated in packs, and that their exercises were less strenuous. This physical health and social prestige, must have ensured psychological health and the ability to cope with various stressors - including Sparta's continuous war situation - and the generally harsh life. Girls could look forward to a life with the same high reputation, as nurses and mothers, amongst the other Greeks, as the Spartan men had as soldiers; and Spartan women were spared housework and clothes-making. They had a greater sense of involvement in national life, than other Greek women, and probably had a

higher self-concept (Boyd 1980:15; Whitehouse & Wilkins 1986:166; Sommerville 1982:27; Hailman 1973:21).

Choruses and religious passage rites allowed girls to feel important in both Sparta and Athens, and served not only to integrate girls into the larger community, but also to form them into a community of their own, asserting their solidarity before onlookers, and especially men. They compensated for their low self-image by building up a positive female self-concept. Although ritual sometimes involved abuse and scourging and ritualised mockery, and it aroused strong negative emotions, such as resentment; these feelings were then put to rest, still maintaining and enhancing community feeling. Ritual became a sort of catharsis for stressful feelings in socially inferior females (Golden 1990:76-79).

#### 4.7 SUMMARY

Evidence regarding causes and symptoms of stress suggests that children were under stress in ancient Greek society that viewed them in a sociocentric light. Education of the child in the home and school attempted to train the child to cope with the pressures of life as a soldier-citizen, or mother of one, in the Spartan military or Athenian democratic *polis*. Sometimes these coping mechanism may have become stressors, and failed as strategies.

According to Ogden (1950:349) there was a decline of the military spirit and physical culture first in Athens and then in the rest of Greece. This was the inevitable result of economic and intellectual development, and made the pedagogic situation stressful for the child because the social aim for which it had been designed, was no longer relevant. Hailman (1973:22) suggests that Sparta laid so much emphasis on preparedness for war that, as soon as she had shown her power in the Peloponesian War, and satisfied her thirst for conquest, her education and social system seemed no longer relevant. The stress felt before, due to the harshness of their treatment of children, became less manageable for the child. The stress management strategies built therein, were no longer efficient. The result was a lack of motivation in the learning situation, leading to the (military) downfall of Sparta. In Athens, the education of the ideal citizen-soldier also became irrelevant, owing to conflict between the individual and the state. This led to apathy and lack of motivation in the pedagogic situation and society, and Athenians gave in to servitude, or bought themselves out, so as not to have to fight.

Plato had hoped to restore balance within the (stressed) individual as well as the state (the individual "writ large") by introducing the child to what is good, harmonious, graceful and reasonable. Plato was aware of stress in children. In *The Laws* (1970:276), he mentions negative "reactions" that resemble contemporary symptoms of stress in the child, and talks of:

...sheltering him from *distress* and fright and any kind of pain.

He even (1970:277) advocates keeping the expectant mother "calm and cheerful and sweet-tempered throughout her pregnancy", when the "seeds of the entire character, are most effectively implanted". Aristotle also saw the aim of education as teaching the child to control negative feelings in the irrational part of his soul (1962:286).

The contemporaries of these great thinkers did not heed their advice, however, and showed no sensitivity, regarding feelings of stress, neither in the individual child, in the pedagogic situation, nor in their culture.

Many of the strategies that ancient Greek society self-consciously contrived, to mould and manipulate the child - until he appeared to cope with his stressors, and behave as desired - reveal that it was cruel in its treatment of children. There is no evidence of the traditional African *ubuntu* (the universal spirit of "caring and sharing"), or Christian values of love, respect, kindness, sharing, healing and caring (Greenberg 1994a:5). This lack of humanity in ancient Greek society caused its collapse; they reared their children with the aim of creating a particularised Greek society, instead of a civilisation, that does not discriminate according to age, nationality, race, class or sex, and unites all individuals (Duggan 1948:39-41; Hailman 1973:29,32,36,40).

The researcher feels that the child in ancient Greece appears to have only suppressed his stress, by means of socially sanctioned coping strategies, but, in fact, remained under stress, not having dealt with it in an appropriate way. The excessive repression evident in both Sparta and Athens produced, as Plato said, "cringing slaves unfit to function as members of the community", and made the backlash of *laissez-faire* discipline - which came with the Athenian sophists' influence - cause a "wave of dissoluteness" and a "general regression in social life" (Verster *et al.* 1982:94-95). Plato also realised this and advocated discipline to teach the child to control negative reactions to stress, such as anger and irritability.

Compared with the ancient Greek child, the child of early man seems to have more successfully dealt with his stress, on a day-to-day basis, before it became a complex and deep-rooted problem, in his soul and in his society, as was the case with the ancient Greek child.

Because the roots of our psychobiological self lie in early man, and those of our Westernised society, in ancient Greece, this project has studied both situations, in its search for solutions to the problem of stress in the present South African pedagogic situation. This problem is currently being aggravated at the moment, by our present stage of transition, whilst we are attempting to reconcile both our Westernised and traditional roots. In the hopes of providing further insights into the problem, the next chapter of this project, will study the pedagogic situation of the Middle Ages. This was also an age of transition (in this case between ancient and modern times), when modern Westernised society was attempting to establish itself in Europe, after the collapse of Greco-Roman culture and the fall of the Roman Empire, which had been overthrown by barbarian tribes.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### STRESS IN THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE MIDDLE AGES

	Page
5.1	INTRODUCTION..... 156
5.2	THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE MIDDLE AGES..... 157
5.3	THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE MEDIEVAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION..... 158
5.3.1	Awareness of perception as a factor in the stress-response..... 158
5.4	CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE MEDIEVAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION..... 159
5.4.1	Stressors at macro-level in the outside world/society..... 159
5.4.1.1	Stressors in the outside world..... 159
(i)	War and violence..... 159
(ii)	Disease..... 160
(iii)	Population pressure..... 161
(iv)	Rapid urbanisation..... 161
(v)	Economic problems..... 162
(vi)	Low standard of living..... 162
(vii)	Famine..... 162
(viii)	Fear/ over exposure to death..... 163
5.4.1.2	Stressors embedded in culture and society..... 163
(i)	Suppression of individuality..... 163
(ii)	The Crusades..... 164
(iii)	Conflict between Church and society..... 164
(iv)	Labour disputes/ class struggle..... 164
(v)	Negative view of mankind and the world..... 165
(vi)	Elitist/Church-orientated/ male-dominated society..... 165
(vii)	Attitude to sexuality..... 165
(viii)	Sadistic and cruel society..... 166
(ix)	Child-image..... 166
(x)	Child labour..... 168
(xi)	Discrimination against females..... 168
(xii)	Marriage and girls..... 170
(xiii)	Fear of childbirth..... 170
(xiv)	Discrimination against the lower classes..... 171

	Page
(xv) Servitude of peasant class.....	171
5.4.2 Stressors at meso-level in the medieval family/ school.....	171
5.4.2.1 Stressors in the medieval family.....	171
(i) Large families.....	171
(ii) Maternal stress.....	172
(iii) Orphanhood.....	172
(iv) Child abuse.....	172
(v) Infanticide.....	173
(vi) Abandonment.....	173
(vii) Wet-nurses.....	174
(viii) Abrupt Weaning.....	175
(ix) Frightening tales.....	175
(x) Emotionally distant parents.....	175
(xi) Paternal harsh discipline.....	176
(xii) Paternal absence.....	176
(xiii) Conflicting attitudes regarding parenting.....	177
(xiv) Treatment at birth/ swaddling.....	177
5.4.2.2 Stressors in the medieval school.....	177
(i) Lack of preparation for secular life in Church schools.....	177
(ii) Lack of intellectual education.....	178
(iii) Forced education for service in the Church and monastery.....	178
(iv) Unsuitable teaching methods and conditions.....	179
(v) Lack of education for the poor peasantry/ lower classes.....	180
(vi) Inadequate teachers.....	180
(vii) Too early adult-centred education.....	183
(viii) The ascetic ideal.....	183
(ix) Lack of vernacular.....	184
(x) Lack of child-centred academic education for knights/ladies.....	184
(xi) Conflict in male chivalric values.....	186
(xii) Harsh treatment and child abuse.....	186
(xiii) Less education for girls.....	187
(xiv) Scholasticism and the beginning of universities.....	188
5.4.3 Stressors at micro-level within the child's self.....	188
5.4.3.1 The physical self.....	188
5.4.3.2 The sexual self.....	189
5.4.3.3 Self-concept formation.....	190

	Page
5.4.3.4	Personality types..... 190
5.4.3.5	Unassertiveness in pupils, especially girls..... 192
5.5.	<b>SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE MEDIEVAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION..... 193</b>
5.5.1	Evidence of stress in the medieval child..... 193
5.5.1.1	Susceptibility to infectious diseases..... 194
5.5.1.2	St Augustine and stress symptoms..... 194
5.5.1.3	St Thomas Aquinas and stress symptoms..... 194
5.5.1.4	Affective spirituality..... 196
	(i) Demons..... 196
	(ii) Rituals and charms..... 197
5.5.1.5	Miscellaneous stress symptoms..... 197
	(i) Street children..... 197
	(ii) Loneliness/ less involvement with others..... 197
	(iii) Delinquency..... 198
	(iv) Nightmares due to anxiety..... 199
	(v) Illness due to fear..... 199
	(vi) Shyness..... 199
	(vii) Mood swings/ extremes of mood..... 199
	(viii) Reduced motivation in pupils..... 200
	(ix) Sexual promiscuity..... 200
5.5.2	Symptoms classified according to particular stressors..... 200
5.5.2.1	Lack of stressors..... 201
5.5.2.2.	Orphanhood..... 201
5.5.2.3	Abandonment..... 201
5.5.2.4	Authoritarian fathers..... 202
5.5.2.5	Religious stress..... 202
5.5.2.6	Harsh discipline and intimidation..... 203
5.5.2.7	Early marriage..... 204
5.5.2.8	Oedipal tension..... 204
5.6	<b>COPING STRATEGIES..... 204</b>
5.6.1	Awareness and acceptance of stress..... 204
5.6.1.1	The cross of life..... 204
5.6.1.2	Christian character traits..... 206
5.6.1.3	Courage/ strength of character..... 206
5.6.2	Being in control/ self-discipline..... 206

	Page
5.6.3	Familiarity with stressors..... 207
5.6.3.1	Acceptance of Death..... 207
5.6.3.2	The art of dying/ familiarity with death..... 207
5.6.3.3	The Church's teachings on sexual matters..... 208
5.6.4	Health/ balance of humours..... 208
5.6.5	Adequate/ relevant educational opportunities..... 208
5.6.5.1	Child-centred education..... 208
5.6.5.2	Educational opportunities for the lower classes..... 209
5.6.5.3	Educational opportunities for girls..... 209
5.6.5.4	Technical-vocational apprenticeship training..... 210
5.6.5.5	Early learning..... 210
5.6.5.6	Real life learning for the peasantry..... 210
5.6.5.7	Gradual learning and adult accompaniment..... 211
5.6.5.8	Non-violent/ authoritative discipline..... 211
5.6.5.9	Folk tales..... 212
5.6.5.10	Quicke Bookis..... 212
5.6.5.11	Learning kept alive..... 213
5.6.5.12	Provision of free elementary education in the vernacular..... 213
5.6.6	Social support..... 214
5.6.6.1	Community spirit/ adult festivities and activities..... 214
5.6.6.2	Parental support/ family continuity..... 214
5.6.6.3	Family values and the Church..... 214
5.6.6.4	Family connections in the monastery..... 214
5.6.6.5	The feudal system..... 215
5.6.6.6	Role models..... 215
5.6.6.7	Group cohesion..... 215
5.6.7	Play/ games/ carnivals/ festivals/ rest..... 216
5.6.8	Religion and ritual..... 217
5.6.8.1	Belief in miracles..... 217
5.6.8.2	Baptism..... 217
5.6.8.3	Confession..... 218
5.6.8.4	Processions..... 218
5.7	SUMMARY..... 218

## 5.1

### INTRODUCTION

As we are currently experiencing an era of transition in contemporary South African society, which is both Westernised and traditional, the researcher feels that it is relevant to study the problem of stress in the pedagogic situation of the Middle Ages (500-1500 AD), an age of transition between the ancient and modern world, when the Western world started to take shape. Like contemporary South Africa, it was also a period which was in a state of flux, unsettling change and turmoil (Williams 1990:62). According to Lucas (1972:199), the Middle Ages was:

an interlude between the eclipse of Greco-Roman civilisation and the emergence of a dynamic humanistic culture.

The Middle Ages was characterised by the "oppressive exercise of authority" of the Church and the clerical monopoly of education (Venter 1992c:40). Having won the earlier struggle against Graeco-Roman polytheistic paganism, Christian monism had now to firmly establish itself in the Western world, that was under the influence of barbarian tribes, since the fall of the Roman Empire. In its striving to convert and educate the Teutons, the Church suppressed all freedom and individuality. This conflict between the Church and the individual was endemic to the Middle Ages, and a source of cultural and pedagogic stress, for which coping mechanisms, that were grounded in religion, were used. This state of tension, which lasted for more than a thousand years, was not resolved until the desire for human freedom found expression in Renaissance Humanism, when the culture of the Middle Ages became less devotional and more humanistic (Boyd 1980:101; Coetzer 1994:14; Venter 1992c:40-42).

The following is an attempt to analyse the medieval pedagogic situation - in a state of flux and tension - like the contemporary South African pedagogic situation, where children are having to adjust to a new political/ social order, as well as experiencing conflict between traditional and Westernised cultures (Contreras 1993:27). In the search for understanding of stress in the pedagogic situation of the Middle Ages, particular reference will be made to the ideas of the following great personalities and educationists: St Augustine (354-430); Alcuin (735-804); St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274); Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536); Martin Luther (1483-1546). Other personalities will receive mention, and their dates will be provided, as far as possible.

**THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE MIDDLE AGES**

The pedagogic situation of the Middle ages was sociocentric and subordinate to the dictates of the Church, for whom all educational aims, were directed towards the eternal. Formal education of future priests, monks and nuns took place in the monasteries and convents; but by the tenth century, church schools, cathedral and Bishop's schools, educated other children as well. A more secular form of informal and formal education of boys and girls, according to the chivalric code, came with the establishment of the institution of knighthood by the eleventh century - which, according to Venter (1992c:42), emphasised individualism and thus entered into the struggle against "medieval collectivism". The laity were no longer as passive as they had been, and there was an awakening of secular freedom in the worldly education of the castle and palace, which was in conflict with the Church's authoritarian control of society and family attitudes, as well as its monastic and cathedral schools (Logue 1960:44-45). With increasing urbanisation, children of artisans learnt a trade by means of an apprenticeship system, which was controlled by the various guilds, in most cases. During the late Middle Ages, these guilds also began to establish urban schools in the town. There was an increasing awareness of children's educational needs, which had been lacking previously.

The medieval child was generally not considered as an individual with natural rights and needs, but as a miniature adult, to be reared until ready to take his place and survive in a stressful world - plagued by stressors such as: war, pillage, cholera and famine - or suffer the tension of the harshly austere life of the monastery (Coetzer 1994:14). Not all medieval children received religious or chivalric education; many received no formal education at all, and illiteracy was another source of stress. The main characteristics of medieval life were, in fact, ignorance, poverty and disease (Logue 1960:37). The education that children did receive, was primarily religious, practical and rudimentary. The varied - and often intellectual - learning of the classical Athenian school, had been largely lost in Western Europe.

As the above description briefly indicates, the child of the Middle Ages found himself in a stressful pedagogic situation. The researcher will now attempt to examine his stressors and stress in further detail.

### 5.3

## THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE MEDIEVAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION

The medieval child's psychobiological potential and physical/ emotional response to stressors at macro/ meso/ micro-level, were generally in transaction with his religious "other-worldly" orientated perception of the world - as taught to him by a Church controlled society - as well as more worldly orientated perceptions, such as that of the chivalric education of the knightly order. By means of monastic education or chivalric education, the Church and society attempted to mould the child's personality into a ascetic heaven-orientated religious, a faithful member of a Church-oriented society, or a brave and altruistic man of action or his lady. The medieval adult-centred concept of the child, determined all its educational aims, which were like that of the ancient Greeks: to produce a specific type of member of society. The child had no value as a unique individual. Various strategies were employed in medieval society, in the family and in the school, to ensure that the individual child coped with this pressure to become the desired stereotype. These cultural coping mechanisms also determined his experience of stressors in the greater world, within himself, in his family and school, as well as the nature of his symptoms of temporary/ acute or permanent/ chronic stress (Venter 1992c:41; Verster *et al.* 1982:8-9; Shahar 1990:11).

#### 5.3.1

### Awareness of perception as a factor in the stress-response

St Augustine (354-430), the forerunner of much of the thinking of the Middle Ages - including that of St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) - indirectly spoke of the role of perception in the human response to stressors. St Augustine did not believe that sense experience is wholly passive, and maintained rather that it is an activity or "total reaction of the individual to sense impressions"; and includes feelings of pleasure or the reverse - plus his volition and actions that have to be taken into account. According to Curtis & Boulwood (1977:83) St Augustine said that:

Experience consists not only of the cognition of something external but also the meaning that (the individual) attaches to the situation and his reaction to it in the light of that meaning.

St Augustine was aware of the interrelation of the body and the soul/mind, which perceives any physiological changes or modifications in the nervous system (automatic physical adaptive response to a stressor), and raises to the level of

consciousness, the (affective) response, which is to be given. The fact that he believed that "the soul was ensconced within its own spirituality", probably led the way for the medieval Church belief that, by means of spiritual training, individuals could be taught to perceive the adversity, distress, pain, trauma and misfortune of human life in a positive light. Stress could be interpreted as God's will for us to share in the glorious passion and suffering of Christ, with the consequent hope of resurrection and eternal life. This was the Christian view that, although God intimately shares human suffering and stress, he does not remove it, but wills us to cope with it - not with mere resignation or self-pitying acceptance - but cheerful acquiescence and spiritual gladness. Children were taught this attitude that permeated much of medieval society, which believed that the evolution of the Christian soul involved accepting one's "cross" and facing the stressors of life, with patience, calm, trust in God's help, and fortitude. *Distress* was turned into strength, joy, spiritual growth and *eustress* (Catoir 1994:11).

#### **5.4 THE CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE MEDIEVAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

##### **5.4.1 Stressors at macro-level in the outside world and society**

Stressors in the outside world, made the Middle Ages an age of adversity and suffering. Society compensated for this largely by means of the Church, and its attempt to instil Christian coping values in children and adults. This sometimes led to further stressors at all levels for various reasons.

##### **5.4.1.1 Stressors in the outside world**

###### **(i) *War and violence***

The Middle Age began with the war cries of marauding barbarian invaders - ancestors of most Europeans - who developed an upper class warrior aristocracy. For hundreds of years, constant war was a natural state of affairs. Even after the permanent conquest of most of Christian western Europe, by the Franks in the 8th century - as the start of a new culture, synthesising Roman and Germanic elements - turmoil continued in the form of conflict between feudal lords and kings, and events such as: the Norman conquest of England, (1066), the Mongolian invasion of eastern Europe (1236-1242), the eight Crusades (1095-1099; 1147-1149; 1189-1192; 1202-1204; 1217-1221; 1228-1229; 1248-1254; 1270) and the Hundred

Years' War (1337-±1453) - the series of conflicts between the French and the English. (Larousse 1980:1217,1261,1375,1531). Civilisation remained in this perilous state for centuries, and the Church gave her blessing to military prowess, especially in the battlefields of the Holy Land.

Although children were not necessarily at the scene of battle, they still experienced much stress due to war and violence. Generally, as a result of this belligerent atmosphere, the Middle Ages was an era, characterised by cruelty and great brutality, murder, arson, rape and even sadistic public executions and torture. Apart from the death and other misfortunes of family members involved in fighting (both peasants and noblemen - as feudal vassals of their lord and king respectively - were obliged to be soldiers) war also brought pillage, disease and famine to everyone. It often took parents at an early age, leaving children on their own to take responsibility for themselves sooner than many modern children (Williams 1990:68; Coetzer 1994:14; Logue 1960:37,45; Sommerville 1982:60).

According to Sommerville (1982:63) the stressor of war and violence, also led to the medieval lack of interest in children:

With no assured future it would be perfectly understandable if society had given little thought to its children...Very likely there was no-one who could afford the luxury of enjoying or encouraging children simply for their own sake.

(ii) *Disease*

Epidemic outbreaks of various illnesses such as the *Black Death* (bubonic and pneumonic plague), influenza, cholera, small pox, leprosy and typhus - all referred to under the name of "pestilence" - caused thousands of deaths and ravaged the population of Europe in the 14th and 15th century. As much as a third of Europe's entire population died. Whole communities were destroyed. The worst and most famous outbreak was the *Black Death* - for which there was no cure. Spread by fleas from rats or contagious human droplets, it reached Europe from Asia in 1347, and scourged it until 1350, claiming at least twenty percent of the population. It recurred in 1361-2, this time claiming many more children than adults, and causing a devastating loss of livestock. The question is, why did the immune system of many children and adults resist these epidemics, as opposed to that of those who succumbed? In a programme, investigating the 1994 epidemic of the *Black Death* in India (Carte Blanche, *M-Net*, 9 October 1994), it was stated that many people

are able to recover spontaneously from the disease. Did those, who were overcome by the plague, during the Middle Ages, lack immunity because they were perhaps under stress, owing to an inability to cope with excessive amounts of stressors, in addition to malnutrition? The fact that many more children died than adults, during the second plague, makes one aware of the possibility of stress in these children. Were they experiencing *burnout*? According to Lau & Shani (1992:462):

The term *burnout* refers to a combined physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion arising from the cumulative effects of prolonged stress...a gradual wearing away of energy (and) physiological deterioration as the body's immune system fails to provide the necessary resistance to disease

Contemporary studies of infectious diseases, both with animals and human beings, bear out the effects of psychosocial stress in reducing resistance, increasing susceptibility, and lengthening the process of recovery (Lau & Shani 1992:478). As this chapter will show, children in the Middle Ages had to face many stressors at all levels, hence their possible susceptibility to the plagues and other diseases (Raidt 1987:82; Shahar 1990:Preface,13; Williams 1990:69; Stugrin 1986:147; Larousse 1981:370,387).

(iii) *Population pressure*

Despite death from disease, plagues, famine and war, there was much stressful overcrowding in the many tiny individual homes of the Middle Ages. Families were large, especially in the case of peasant families, who needed children as a labour force to work the land. From the twelfth century on, towns also grew rapidly in number, importance and size in all parts of Western Europe; and the population of Europe increased so rapidly, that it is estimated that by 1350, it was greater than it had been under the Roman Empire (Shahar 1990: Preface; Butts 1973:157; Browning 1963:49).

(iv) *Rapid urbanisation*

The rapidly progressing urbanisation and concentration of the population in the towns and cities caused an imbalance between population increase and food supply. This led to further stressors such as famine; while the lack of hygiene - and the resulting outbreak of contagious diseases - sometimes reached catastrophic

dimensions (Raidt 1987:72). Overcrowding in townships, would have been stressful for all.

(v) *Economic problems*

Economic problems often beset the Middle Ages, but the late Middle Ages, in particular, was a period of economic decline, that began with the great famine of 1315-17, and continued with the intermittent and serious disruption and loss caused by the Hundred Years War, which began in 1337. Economic depression also occurred amidst the Black plague, and led, for the survivors, to continual insecurity and terror. There was also a connection between economic plight and the abandonment and sale of infants (Stugrin 1986:147-148).

(vi) *Low standard of living*

Poverty and ignorance reigned amongst most of the population, which mostly lived like semi-civilised tribes. Food was rarely adequate, homes were single-roomed wattle-and-daubs - with a hole in the roof to allow smoke to escape - beds were piles of straw on the ground, and conditions of hygiene were abominable. Lashed by poverty, war, famine, epidemic and disease, the populace was terrorised by witchcraft and superstition, murder, arson and rape. Communications were extremely bad, and people were cut off from possible help. Twenty miles a day was regarded as a good rate of travel along the better roads. The overland journey from Canterbury to Rome took seven weeks (Logue 1960:37,43).

(vii) *Famine*

Due to population explosion at times, war at others, bad harvests and weather conditions, ignorance or the inability to farm in times of epidemics, famine was often a cause of stress in the Middle Ages, and led to other stressors. A society that lived in constant fear of famine, often overfed their children with negative physical effects. Famine also resulted in abandonment of babies and children in the gateways of churches and monasteries, or in holes in trees, as referred to constantly in chronicles describing famine years. Some parents, in their plight, sold their older children into slavery or forced their daughters into prostitution (Shahar 1990:80,122,125). Other parents resorted to eating their children in order to survive (Clare 1992:9).

(viii) *Fear of/ over exposure to death*

Death and dying, a daily, tangible, inescapable reality during the Middle Ages, was a painful reality which had to be coped with. It was an apocalyptic time. The stressor of death brought fear, despair, depression, rebellion and anxiety to the dying, to those who witnessed death, and to society in general. There was both a high child and adult mortality rate; only three or four children, out of a typical family of twelve to fifteen children, reached adulthood. The risk of post-partum death and death during the first five years of life was most high; but it continued to be high up to the age of 10. It was higher in times of epidemic, famine and war, when hunger claimed victims of malnutrition, that along with stress, probably weakened bodily resistance to disease. Towards the end of the 14th century, the death toll was so enormous, that one had to resort to mass graves and make-shift burials without the traditional ritual. Priests and monks could no longer cope with the demand for assistance to the dying.

Children were not insulated from these shocking and tragic occurrences; Experience of and reference to death, were daily realities to the child; extended families of 30-40 members meant death was frequently seen. Carts bearing uncovered corpses, daily traversed streets, filled with playing children. Intensely aware of the prevalence of death and grief, children must have felt a constant sense of mortal dread and stress, despite familiarity with this stressor (Verster *et al.* 1982:67; Raidt 1987:72; Shahar 1990:151; Coetzer 1994:19).

**5.4.1.2 Stressors embedded in culture and society**

(i) *Suppression of individuality*

Society and the Church suppressed all individuality in the Middle Ages, although institutions, such as the knighthood, fought back, and there were some glimmerings of freedom and human individuality (Venter 1992c:41). Any tendency towards the personal development of the individual (aesthetically or culturally) was generally ranked amongst the greatest of sins (Logue 1960:38). Children were usually forced into a way of life for which they may not have been suited. No account was taken of their individual potential, a potential cause of stress. Although educated from childhood for either the monastic, chivalric, urban artisan or peasant way of life, education was often not an effective substitute for a true sense of vocation, especially in the case of religious vocations (Shahar 1990:201).

(ii) *The Crusades*

During the Middle Ages, as the strength of Islam grew, the rich and powerful Church called on people to fight a "holy war". The Crusades were launched to free the Holy Land from Moslem control. They opened the eyes of Europe to new cultures, but were a failure, and caused much illness, disaster, suffering, death and stress in its population. They increased religious ardour, but weakened and impoverished powerful feudal lords, their vassals and their children. There were eight Crusades (1095-1099; 1147-1149; 1189-1192; 1202-1204; 1217-1221; 1228-1229; 1248-1254; 1270). There was also the disastrous Children's Crusade in 1212, which led to the death and slavery of hundreds of children (Browning 1963:46; *Catholic Link* 1994a; Williams 1990:69; Logue 1960:37; Larousse 1980:1261).

(iii) *Conflict between Church and society*

In the case of the peasant class in particular, there was a feeling of hostility towards an exploitative Church, which impoverished the peasants by extracting a tithe from all crops and flocks. This led to expressed derisive criticism of the clergy, and mockery of ritual and faith. The peasants were often criticised in turn, by the clergy for missing church on Sundays and not resting from their labours. This antagonism on both sides, was also in conflict with the general religiosity of society, that was inherent in the peasants themselves. There was still a desire for a religious life and satisfaction of religious emotions. All these tensions, pressures and strains in society, sometimes found an outlet in extreme piety and other symptoms of stress in children (Shahar 1990:249-250).

(iv) *Labour disputes/ class struggle*

With the labour shortage that resulted from the Black Death, came social changes. The feudal lords began to hire paid labourers, and as more people died, living costs rose, labour became more scarce and wages higher. As governments, tried to freeze wages and prices by acts, such as the *Statutes of Labourers* in England in 1351, so the class struggle between landlords and workers gained momentum, adding to the cultural stress of the time (Browning 1963:49)

(v) *Negative view of mankind and the world*

According to the fourteenth-century poet, Guillaume de Guilleville (in Lucas 1972:238) "human life is but a pilgrimage". This medieval view of earthly life, was one of man's soul struggling on a temporary and perilous journey towards heaven or hell, with many horrors of darkness and demons, even in the form of saintly men, ready to ensnare the unwary pious. The belief that mankind was overshadowed by his loss of innocence - as a result of the Original Sin and the Fall - and by a human propensity for sin, must have deeply affected children. They were under the generally stressful and pessimistic impression that the temporal world and human life were sad, futile, sinful and miserable. This life-view added emphasis to the adults' image of the pathos of children, who were helpless, born in sin, incapable of emotional control or of being happy. Since they were under such pressure, one would expect children to show symptoms of apathy, melancholy and reduced motivation in any situation (Logue 1960:38; Shahar 1990:15,164). Stugrin (1986:144) speaks of this medieval "cultural stress":

The popular taste of the Middle ages was conspicuously emotional, sensitive to the pathetic, and...preoccupied with the heavy costs of moving through the world en route, hopefully, to salvation. Such a sensibility scarcely masks a vulnerability and, as some people argue, an anxious uncertainty, about both temporal existence and eternal weal.

(vi) *Elitist/ Church-orientated/ male-dominated society*

The attitude that the clerical class were superior and more holy, may have been a stressor amongst other groups of society and their children. The laity became increasingly passive members of the Church; and the Eucharist was celebrated in Latin, a language not understood by the people. They came to "hear Mass". Private devotions to Mary and the saints grew up, as the liturgy became remote from the people. In addition, women were excluded from positions in the Church, other than as a nun, or head of convents (*Catholic Link* 1994a).

(vii) *Attitude to sexuality*

Society's attitude to sexuality was a stressor for children of the Middle Ages. They witnessed and learnt about sexual relationships at an early age, before they were able to cope with feelings of such early sexual awakening. Children often shared

the same bedroom - and often the same bed - with their parents. The only garment worn at night was the night-cap, and bath facilities were shared by both sexes, with no "excessive modesty". Babies were delivered with children looking on. Nothing was hidden from the child, because, as a miniature adult, he was considered to be merely a member of the group "as part of a greater whole", his feelings were not considered in this matter (Verster *et al.* 1982:67). Only by the early 15th century, did people realise that "sexual matters were an adult domain that should be kept from children." (Coetzer 1994:21) This tension - due to premature sexual awakening - was compounded by feelings of stress due to conflict between this sexual openness, and the Church's attitude that sexual relationships were necessary for reproduction purposes, but an obstruction to divine perfection and a source of sin; there were severe penalties for sexual licentiousness. On the other hand, this could have also been a coping strategy, in that children were made to see the sexual activity that they witnessed so much, as bad, although natural and necessary at times. It is, however, more likely that over-exposure to sexual matters led to sexual promiscuity (it was expected and allowed for boys and married men to have mistresses/ *barragana*). Young girls/ servants/ widows were often sexually promiscuous, although married women were expected to be faithful (Shahar 1990:10-13).

(viii) *Sadistic and cruel society*

Embedded in tradition, were children's cruel and popular games such as tying a string to the foot of a bird before freeing it, and tormenting of old, ugly or handicapped adults. This was a reflection of a generally cruel society. Adults too, were neither merciful nor delicate, and carried out cruel public executions - including those of knightly tournaments - which were a source of sadistic pleasure and emotional release for the spectators, which included children, who might have also found these experiences horrifying and stressful (Shahar 1990:238; Clare 1992:3).

(ix) *Child-image*

Dressed and seen as miniature adults, boys and girls of the Middle Ages wore long petticoats, cramped with stiff stomachers and weighed down with brocades (Coetzer 1994:18; Verster *et al.* 1982:68; cf. Figure 5.1, page 167) There was a lack of insight into the true nature of childhood, and no recognition and treatment of children as individuals with natural rights and needs. Especially after the age of

seven, they were viewed as troublesome, imperfect, inherently sinful and irresponsible adults - merely pieces of paternal property - or extensions of the larger family group.



**Figure 5.1** Miniature adults: the stressor of not being seen as children (Larousse 1981:342)

Only the "physical dependence, helplessness and different involvement with the world" of children, were sometimes recognised, and then only during infancy and very early childhood (Coetzer 1994:15). Subject to the demands made upon adults, the medieval child assumed responsibility for his deeds and misdeeds far earlier than is the case today. Childhood was brief. At seven the child of the Middle Ages, joined the adult community in work and play as a religious, page/ maidservant, or artisan. He was liable to exactly the same punishments as adults, being deemed so by law. The Church even supported this. In tenth century London, it was ordained that anyone over the age of twelve, who stole anything worth more than twelve pence, should be put to death (Verster *et al.* 1982:66-68).

(x) *Child labour*

As a result of the medieval inability to see the child's need for authentic pedagogic support, arose the custom of the children of the nobility changing places with children of other noble families, where they served as household pages/ apprentice knights or maidservants. Working class children were apprenticed to members of various guilds at about 11/ 12 or even 7, where they were taught different crafts and trades. Children of peasants, were sent to work in the fields, and those from the lowest stratum of urban society, were sent to serve in strange households - not to train them for a trade or educate them - but for them to earn their own living; foundlings followed such a path too. Often 30-40 percent of the servants in a wealthy household were children, sometimes aged 12/13, or even as young as 6. The training of children to be merchants, monks, priests and nuns also began at an early age, and girls married early. This perception of the child as potential labour, inspired a cultural drive to produce children for political-dynastic or economic reasons; which received support from the Church, which forbade any form of birth control or abortion. This led to stressors of large families, abandonment and infanticide (Verster *et al.* 1982:66; Coetzer 1994:22; Shahar 1990:12,19,232,234, 239-240).

(xi) *Discrimination against females*

The medieval attitude toward women, saw her as a vehicle of passive virtue, acted upon rather than acting, existing as a dependent complement to men, and who accepted God's (and man's) will (Marchalonis 1986:56). Medieval society adopted Aristotelian thinking and considered females as incomplete males or males *manqué*. Men wanted sons, and wives were divorced for not having any. In discussing the

first stage of childhood (0-7 years) medieval writers refer to both boys and girls; the second (7-12/14), they usually devote separate sections to boys and girls, but emphasise the former; the third stage (12-25) they devote a smaller section to girls, who are almost overlooked, in discussions of problems of transition to full adulthood.

In secular society, girls were not accorded higher education or protracted vocational training, and were barred from serving in public office or the secular church. Those who married, did so earlier than males in the same social class; they also generally entered convents earlier than males. At marriage, they forfeited full independence in civil matters, which they had enjoyed since reaching adulthood. The transition from childhood to married life with its responsibilities and duties, was rapid without the transitional stage undergone by boys from the nobility or urban class.

Other examples of discrimination were: it was believed that girls needed less food; that more female infants than males were handed over to wet-nurses, and cheaper wet-nurses; and more girls than boys were placed in foundlings' homes. To realise Christian values and character traits - which education was intended to foster - training of girls in obedience, piety, submission, devotion, forbearance and acquiescence to suffering/ fate and sexual chastity, was considered of greater importance than the disciplining of boys; since a woman, unlike a man, was destined to be obedient all her life - to parents, tutors, husband, or religious order.

Extreme misogynists opposed teaching girls to read and write, unless destined to take the veil; since such knowledge could acquaint them with sin and correspondence with lovers. They argued that, even the daughters of noble families, should be instructed only in weaving and spinning, as a remedy for idleness - which leads to sin - and in order to appreciate the labour of others. Girls who did receive schooling, attended only the lowest elementary schools. There, they learnt as little, academically, as candidates for the knighthood.

If girls were educated, it was to prepare them for their roles as wives and for running a household (women sometimes managed fiefs as heiresses or widows). Only in the labouring classes, were girls taught not only to be wives and mothers, but also workers. Not all trades were open to them, however, and they could not become apprentices in, or practise these crafts, outside the home; they were excluded from the guilds. Girls of medieval nobility were generally ignored by

their fathers, except when it became necessary to decide on a match for them. Marriage was yet another stressor that the female child of the Middle Ages had to face (Shahar 1990:29-30,43-44,81-82,167,175-176,221-224,240).

(xii) *Marriage and girls*

Girls were sometimes promised in marriage before the age of 2, others married at 12 or 13; the average in the Late Middle Ages was 17. It was usually arranged for economic/ financial/ political reasons, and forced on the girl, especially in the nobility or wealthy urban class. After the 12th century, the consent of both partners was required, but girls were often pressured into consenting. The Church often successfully intervened to stop forced marriage, if the girl had expressed interest in becoming a nun. Under such stress, it is possible that many girls preferred to join a convent instead.

The transition from middle childhood to adolescence - which meant marriage and a difficult move from the parental home to that of a considerably older husband, in the case of urban society - was very stressful and abrupt. Girls were not emotionally or physically ready for the burden of marriage, bearing children or the providing of love and understanding to them, which meant insecure children. Despite the cautions of medical scholars against premature motherhood, they bore their first child at an early age and continued to give birth at brief intervals, often producing more than ten children (Coetzer 1994:16; Sommerville 1982:60; Shahar 1990:230-231).

(xiii) *Fear of childbirth*

Since girls experienced childbirth at such a young age, it was feared beforehand, and very stressful for them when it occurred, especially as it was particularly hazardous for both mother and child during the Middle Ages. Twenty percent of women died in childbirth, and there was a lack of sophisticated medical supervision, antiseptics or anaesthesia. There was a high infant mortality rate during delivery, at birth, in infancy or during childhood. There was, ironically, also the anxiety of being barren, due to the theological and popular belief, that infertility in woman, who had not taken the veil, meant that she had failed in the central function assigned to her by nature (Gies 1969:58; Shahar 1990:32-38).

(xiv) *Discrimination against the lower classes*

The feudal system and society were based on land ownership and suppression of the serf class. The monasteries and higher orders of the Church in the central and late Middle Ages, were the domain of the nobility. Although open to serfs in theory, provided they paid the manumission fee (they were the only ones required to do so) in practice, few sons of the lower strata reached the higher echelons of the secular church or monastery. The number of girls from the lower section of society, who became nuns in female orders (as distinct from serving women or lay sisters) was even lower. The suppression of the commoners, by both the spiritual and secular upper classes, reached its peak in the Peasants' Revolution of 1381 in England, leading to the beheading of several religious and secular lords high in the King's council. The tension found amongst the members of the lower classes must have negatively affected their children (Hanks 1986:125; Shahar 1990: Preface, 185-186; *Catholic Link* 1994a).

(xv) *Servitude of peasant class*

As a coping mechanism against the harshness, cruelty and stress of life in the Middle Ages, the people had always banded together under the protection of strong leaders, or kings for safety and security under the feudal system. This was also a stressor, because it meant servitude and compulsory military service, in return for this protection (Williams 1990:68; Lucas 1972:206).

## 5.4.2 **Stressors at meso-level in the medieval family and school**

Since the medieval child's peer group had no separate child-centred identity, the stressors at meso-level lay in the adult-centred family and monastery/ convent/ court school.

### 5.4.2.1 **Stressors in the medieval family**

(i) *Large families*

The average medieval family was 12-15 children, which resulted in neglect, poverty and stress. Ironically, the number was less in poor families - who needed the hands for labour - owing to poor diet and living conditions, which affected fertility and childhood health (Coetzer 1994:19; Shahar 1990:110).

(ii) *Maternal stress*

The mother's and the family's anxiety regarding the birth and the infant's survival, the stressful birth, the peasant mother's continuing working afterwards, may have all affected medieval children, including other children in the family. According to Saint Damian (1007-1072), the post-partum depression of his mother - who ceased handling him for a while - affected him greatly (Gies 1969:58; Shahar 1990:42-43).

(iii) *Orphanhood*

Children were often orphaned at a very early age during the Middle Ages. The loss of a parent is very traumatic for a child, and during the Middle Ages, there was added stress because he was also condemned to poverty and want, since he may have lacked the support of relatives, and strangers seized his inheritance. In folktales, as well as in the *Lives of the Saints* - the didactic and religious work, promoted by the Church in the Middle Ages - the character of the wicked step-parent, who neglects or persecutes the orphan, is dominant. The medieval writers, Dante (1265-1321) and Boccaccio (1313-1375), appear to have also suffered at the hands of stepmothers (Shahar 1990:203).

(iv) *Child abuse*

Violence, beating and intimidation of small children was common in medieval society, which was violent as a whole. It was accepted that husbands beat their wives; and many children suffered the same, with serious consequences, if parents suffered the stressful effects of poverty, or were suffering from severe personality disturbances. Medieval Christian society also held the view that "he who spares the rod spoils the child". Corporal punishment as a means of instilling obedience to authority was the norm. Intimidation was used as a disciplinary measure (Shahar 1990:109-111; Kruger 1992a:66). Shahar (1990:121) states that:

It is indisputable that, in the Central and Late Middle Ages, children were sometimes abandoned, infanticide occurred, and certain customs and ritual were practised which, even if not deliberately intended to kill infants, almost always proved fatal.

(v) *Infanticide*

Infanticide was often regarded a better option than abortion or contraception, although the Church considered it a sin. Deformed children were especially killed as the devil's changelings, and twins sometimes murdered, on the theory that they were evidence of adultery. Infanticide occurred during famine, was committed by mentally disturbed parents, was a result of violence, or occurred at birth, because of poverty, or in order to conceal adultery and illegitimacy. At times infanticide was due to accidents and negligence, such as the infant's being stifled in an adult's bed, cot-deaths, drowning, fires and falling trees. The child of the Middle Ages was negligently given early liberty, without being taught to be aware of dangers.

Infanticide was also due to certain abusive customs, such as putting the infant on the roof or in the oven to reduce a fever, placing it in a pit to stop it crying, or rituals to fairies and demons sent by *Satan*, to return babies believed to have been replaced by changelings. These babies were often handicapped, retarded, sickly or mewling.

A general theme in medieval folklore, even *The Prioress's Tale* of Chaucer (1340-1400) (Chaucer 1966:375-381), infanticide was a dark reality in the Middle Ages, which the Church tried to stop, sometimes by burning women for the crime, but mostly only by asking for penance. Thus children were at great risk and suffered fear and stress because of the very real threat of being killed by their own parents (Sommerville 1982:59; Coetzer 1994:18-199; Shahar 1990:126,144). During the famine suffered by Europe for more than 25 years in the century after 1272, people even ate their children to stay alive (Clare 1992:9).

(vi) *Abandonment*

Elite families might not kill unwanted children, but they did send them to monasteries and convents to let the Church bear the burden; this was the main source of recruitment to the monastic life in the tenth and eleventh centuries

Deformed or illegitimate children, or one of twins (whom it was believed were conceived of different fathers) were often abandoned; Children of poor families who could not feed them, or children of a wet-nurse, who needed to feed an employer's baby, were also often left anywhere, from hollow tree trunks to church gateways; and most ended up in foundling homes. This was stressful for the child,

as he was deprived stimuli and care in such homes, became insecure and his emotional development was retarded. (Sommerville 1982:59; Coetzer 1994:18; Shahar 1990:11,132,122-126).

St Thomas Aquinas was particularly aware of the stress suffered by children as a result of removing them from the care of their parents. He said (1989:342):

...since children belong by nature to their parents, and to remove them from their parents' care or arrange things against their parents' wishes while the children are still without use of their own reasons is an offence against natural justice.

Even sending children to artisans for apprenticeship was a form of abandonment, although parental financial involvement and intervention in cases of abuse, meant a certain amount of contact was maintained, especially in the case of girl apprentices. Yet a child could be miserable in a strange house, even if he were not treated cruelly. Adolescents were sent away in all social strata, because it was believed that strangers could raise them better than parents. This was an added stressor at a developmental stage, destined anyway to be fraught with tension and parent-child clashes (Shahar 1990:235-239).

(vii) *Wet-nurses*

The upper and middle classes adopted the custom of entrusting children to a wet-nurse/ *balia* until weaned or later. Usually well-to-do couples who wanted to lead an active social life followed this custom. Wet-nurse's wages were low, and the mother wanted to be free of the burden and responsibility, especially if they were frequently pregnant. It was also a defence mechanism against emotional involvement with the child, which increased the child's insecurity and also led to his exposure to values and customs that were differed from that of parents, as well as possible physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse (sometimes the husbands of wet-nurses would also maltreat the child whom he resented). Confessors' manuals and secular didactic works of the Middle Ages were aware of possible stress in the infant, reared by a wet-nurse, and favoured maternal nursing that reinforces maternal emotion and bonding. But they also acknowledged and described the ideal wet-nurse that should be of congenial temperament, since her traits would be transmitted to the infant through her milk. The custom of wet-nursing meant maternal abandonment of the child sent to the nurse - generally from the lower

classes, in need of money - who had to abandon her own child in turn. If there were no relatives to suckle the wet-nurse's child, it was abandoned to strangers, sent to a foundling's home, or sent to another wet-nurse who was paid less than the mother received from her employer, and who probably treated the baby badly. Sometimes babies were transferred to other wet-nurses when their wet-nurse conceived. Under these conditions, it was highly difficult to foster basic trust and inner confidence in a child, through positive and continuous contact with one individual. Wet-nursing was also a very stressful experience for the young child-mother, who was to thus give away her first child. (Coetzer 1994:16-17; Shahar 1990:53-71; Gies 1969:61).

(viii) *Abrupt Weaning*

Weaning was often brutal and abrupt, for example by spreading bitter and repellent liquid like mustard or bitter aloes on the mother or wet-nurses's breast. Most medieval women lived under hard conditions, worked strenuously and could not find time for patient and protracted attention to their infants, including weaning. Once weaned, children faced another stressor in that they were overfed and forced to eat, because it was a society which lived in constant fear of famine, and believed that overfeeding would make children healthy and strong enough for survival. (Shahar 1990:79-80; Clare 1992:9).

(ix) *Frightening tales*

The telling of gruesome stories and shocking occurrences - an attempt to produce moral self-sufficiency, which should be slowly acquired - was stressful for the medieval child. Stories of spirits, monsters and other creatures of the dark, caused much dread and apprehension (Smith 1986:16-27; Verster *et al.* 1982:71)

(x) *Emotionally distant parents*

Because of the high child mortality, medieval parents were perhaps reluctant to become emotionally attached to a child that might die young. A French knight Chevalier de la Tour Landry (in Shahar 1990:43) wrote a manual of guidance for his daughters, and stated that one should not rejoice excessively at the birth of an infant, or celebrate it with "pomp and circumstance". The child was left to his own devices, and the stress of having no support (Coetzer 1994:19; Verster *et al.* 1982:68). According to Sommerville (1982:61) home life was so impersonal that

the sending away of a child to another court, to an artisan to learn a trade or to join a monastery, made little difference to parents emotionally.

(xi) *Paternal harsh discipline*

Medieval fathers, were authoritarian, in line with didactic writers of the time (mothers were often considered too lenient and admonished by preachers). The father was the authority figure in charge of disciplining and directing the child's behaviour, and he applied strict discipline and harsh corporal punishment mercilessly to children of all ages. In accordance with the Church's teaching concerning the sinfulness of human nature, the child needed to be made totally obedient and an heir of eternal life. The medieval child was also considered a *tabula rasa* to be moulded according to an adult image. Paternal strictness was often a cause of clash between father and child, and *oedipal* interpsychic conflict (Coetzer 1994:23; Shahar 1990:228,254-258; Kruger 1992a:66).

(xii) *Paternal absence*

Paternal absence was also a problem of which St Thomas Aquinas (1989:431) was aware, when he stated that human children need not only a mother to nurse them, but even more a father to protect and guide them internally and externally. Based on the words of St Paul (Eph. 6:4), it was the accepted medieval view, that it was the father's function to educate sons, while the education of girls remained the domain of the mother. Children were a trust from God bestowed on both parents. In reality, fathers were often absent from home, in noble and prosperous urban families, for lengthy periods. Fathers of the urban labouring and peasant class did establish more of a bond, but it was generally the mother who nurtured the small child. Medieval churchmen and others regarded her as being exclusively responsible for the infant's welfare and physical safety, and blamed her when accidents or ill-health occurred. Mothers were also expected to deprive themselves in times of famine, although it led to temporary infertility (famine amenorrhoea). It was also usually the mother's duty to inculcate religious and cultural values in early childhood - often not the case if the child was handed to wet-nurses or abandoned (Shahar 1990:112-116).

(xiii) *Conflicting attitudes regarding parenting*

At times a clash between so-called *laissez-faire* parenting styles and the Church's dictates, regarding *authoritarian* teaching, was a potential stressor for the medieval parent and his child. According to Shahar (1990:172), many parents were criticised for ignoring the "evil actions of their children, excessive indulgence and love according to the flesh alone...and material well-being of the child". The ritual of the *Boy Bishop*, in which a child gave a sermon in church, reading from a special book written the purpose, often outlined the excessive affection of parents who did not rebuke their children for fear of forfeiting their love, or causing them to lose their courage and energy. They rather allowed them to do as they wish - with the result of bad behaviour in the children (Shahar 1990:181)

(xiv) *Treatment at birth/ swaddling*

According to Gies (1969:60-61), when a baby was born, and the umbilical cord cut, the medieval midwife would immediately wash the baby, rub him all over with salt, then "cleanse" his palate and gums with honey "to give him an appetite". After drying him, he was wrapped so tightly in swaddling bands that he was almost completely immobilised. He remained thus bundled, until he was old enough to sit or later "lest his tender limbs be twisted out of shape". This was due to the belief in the wax-like state of an infant. From swaddling bands he would go straight into adult dress - another cause of stress.

The baby was usually baptised the day he was born, and carried as a bundle to the church, where he was undressed and plunged into cold water. All this harsh treatment must have been particularly stressful for a new-born infant (Gies 1969:62-63).

#### 5.4.2.2 Stressors in the medieval school

Since childhood had no particular identity, peer group pressure was not a medieval problem, as it is today. School was still, however, a source of stress.

(i) *Lack of preparation for secular life*

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, the Roman system of formal education had been lost, and it took several centuries before the Church felt secure enough to

incorporate secular learning into the schools it created. For many centuries, schooling actually restricted learning, within the limits defined by Church doctrines and institutional needs; it was merely clerical training for religious duties, and not preparation for secular affairs or coping with the stressors of ordinary life. The general tendency of monasticism was antipathetic to learning and intellectual elements at first - it was restricted to a little reading, prayer, meditation and manual labour (Sommerville 1982:62; Lucas 1972:201; Boyd 1980:103,121).

(ii) *Lack of intellectual education*

Education was at its lowest ebb for much of the Middle Ages -for about the first 1000 years. Only a few secular schools survived the political collapse, of Rome, mostly in Italy. The upper class in Western Europe, was a warrior aristocracy, who saw no need for literacy. It was no longer possible for education to be provided, even in the wealthy and upper classes, as in ancient Greece and Rome. Unless they sent them to monasteries, the nobility trained their sons by sending them as pages to other men's courts, to learn to serve at table and on the battlefield. As the aim of role of the priest was to pray and study religious works, so that of the knight was to joust and fight. His daughters entered convents, or learned the arts of needlework, healing and the graces of music and entertainment, at court. Urban children, who were send away to learn trades, also did not receive any academic formal education. Trade and government were in such a primitive state, that there was scarcely a demand for clerks. Only the Church felt the need to carry on a limited intellectual tradition, so that the religious could consult Scripture on matters of eternal importance. All that the children in monasteries were taught was for pious reasons. They learnt Latin (for the Latin Bible and the writing of the early Church fathers); music (for chanting the service) and astronomy (for calculating the date of Easter). Some scholars helped to keep ancient learning from perishing - if they happened to have the books - which they passed on, copied or compiled into histories and encyclopaedias. Generally, criticism or the free spirit of speculation did not exist in the Middle Ages. The rules of the orders crippled and confined the minds of the learners, old and young (Logue 1960:43; Cole 1950:1440; Sommerville 1982:62).

(iii) *Forced education for service in the secular Church and monastery*

In noble families, younger sons who were not due to inherit and daughters not destined for marriage, orphans, physically frail, handicapped, retarded and

illegitimate children were designated for the priesthood, monastic life, or convents by parents, relatives or guardians. Children were sometimes dedicated to these institutions by means of a vow at birth, or even before, for the good of the family, which could count on their prayers and influence in a Church dominated society. The Church hierarchy was filled with sons of the aristocracy, who were supposed to use their Church offices to promote their families' interests. The child had no choice in the matter, and this pressure to pursue a path in life from a very early age (sometimes at two, usually at seven) for which he may not have been suited, even in a Church-orientated society, must have been a great stressor in childhood and later in life (Lucas 1972:240; Shahar 1990:183-185,188; Sommerville 1982:60).

(iv) *Unsuitable teaching methods and conditions*

From a very young age and for many years, the child had to study if dedicated to the religious life; and eventually boys destined for a secular life also were included. The learning conditions of the secondary pedagogic situation for these children, were often inhuman, harsh, stressful and not conducive to adequate realisation of the child's academic or other potential (Kruger 1992a:78).

The study routine which these children were compelled to follow, involved exclusively verbal-reading and a great deal of rote learning, senseless repetition, boring drill and memorisation, because writing materials were expensive, and memory and oral exercises were indispensable. They wrote on oblong wooden tablets - coated with black or green wax - using a stylus of bone, ivory, or metal. They had to learn church ritual and words and sentences in Latin - without understanding their meaning - although acquainted with the sound of the language. The hours of study were long, beginning at 6 or 7 in the morning, and lasting until 5 or 6 in the evening, usually with two hours' intermission, one in the morning and one at lunch time. There was generally only one class in the school, divided into groups by level. Children were often whipped, and teachers sometimes went too far in their use of corporal punishment, witnessed by statutes stipulating that whipping should not be used excessively; and that other measures should be tried first. Children had to sit for hours, on the floor or hard wooden benches, and concentrate on complicated study material which was mostly unsuitable for their age - that was transmitted by tedious methods of instruction. The rooms reflected medieval indifference to bodily well-being, typical of the period. They were small, dark, draughty, unheated and sketchily furnished - if at all. Classrooms and schools were cramped in area and - although had a small number of pupils, which

could bestow a sense of security on a small child - the presence of older boys, over whom the teachers were unable to exert strict discipline, frequently in the same classroom, could be somewhat intimidating. All ages were together in the same class, and age-differences between the pupils were great. Some of the pupils were over 12, when they began their studies, while adults who were already in the service of the church, occasionally attended too. There was a lack of textbooks - books were so scarce, they were regarded with reverence - and often the teacher had the only book.

Owing to these stressful and uninspiring learning conditions, pupils lacked motivation and developed a lazy and careless attitude. This aggravated the teacher's harshness towards the pupils, as well as contributing to the degree of potential stress inherent in the pedagogic situation (Verster *et al.* 1982:38; Venter 1992c:41; Gies 1969:156-157; Shahar 1990:187,190; Butts 1973:154; Cole 1950:139,195).

(v) *Lack of education for the poor peasantry/ lower classes*

Monastic, cathedral and Bishop's schools, palace and castle schools were rarely opened to anyone besides the children of nobles and court functionaries. Later, guild schools started elementary and vernacular schools for the urban class, and at first, only a few poor or peasant children were included in these. The upper class objected to the education of the peasantry, and peasant children generally did not receive any education. The few who received tuition from the village priest, monks or town secular school, became clerks or monks; and a small number, scribes, in the service of feudal lords. It is unlikely that peasant girls received any education. There were no educational institutions, institutionalised training methods or apprenticeships for peasant children. This might have been a source of stress for the child who aspired to literacy. From an early age, the everyday life of being involved in and observing adult activities, was the peasant child's school, where they learnt to adapt to life only in their society (Shahar 1990:242; Lucas 1972:212; Logue 1960:46; Gies 1969:155).

(vi) *Inadequate teachers*

Despite the scarcity of teachers, the teaching profession - particularly in the lower school - was not considered a prestigious one; and for the more talented masters constituted an interim stage in their careers. Teachers were usually lowly church

functionaries, especially in elementary schools. Teaching monks also enjoyed a low status, although teachers at cathedral schools were of a slightly higher one. This resulted in frustration and cruelty in teachers who took full advantage of the whipping privileges granted to them. Even kindly teachers could not act as substitute parents for small children forced into the strict and stressful framework determined by monastic rule (Kruger 1992a:78; Verster *et al* 1982:38; Venter 1992c:41; Shahar 1990:190,196; cf. Figures 5.2/ 5.3, pages 181/ 182).



**Figure 5.2** Epitome of a medieval lesson? Boy being beaten by teacher with bat or broom, whilst three other children observe with smiling acceptance. Carving underneath a wooden church seat circa 1400 (Blyth 1991:2).

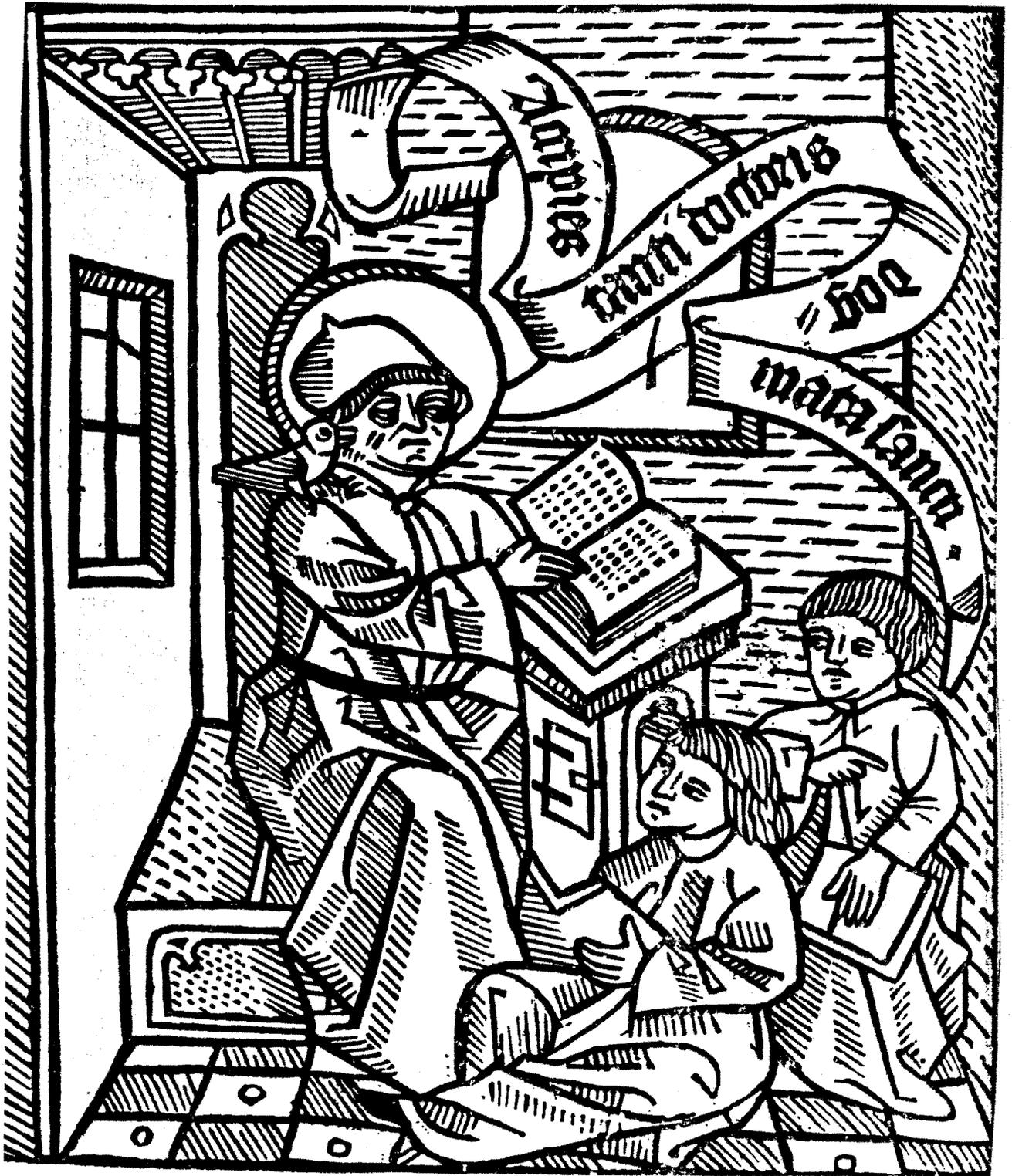


Figure 5.3 Stressful learning situation: uncomfortable seating; non vernacular teaching; stern teachers (Mialaret & Vial 1981:14)

(vii) *Too early adult-centred education*

Society stressed the obligation to commence education for adulthood as early as possible - be it training for priesthood or knighthood or labourers. Up to the twelfth century, it was customary to place children - especially unwanted elite boys and girls dedicated to the monastic life - in monasteries, at the age of 5-6, and sometimes even earlier (before the child was corrupted by the world). Boniface (680-754), became a monk at five years of age, and Bede (672-735), at seven. Such a child was donated *oblatus* (without having taken official vows), and was offered to God by his parents, at or before birth. It had been possible before, but after the eighth century, it was no longer accepted that, when a boy reached 14 (or a girl, 12), he could decide for himself whether to profess his religious vocation for life. The parental obligation became irreversible. After the twelfth century, oblation was again questioned and declared illegal. The child could again decide for himself; but there was the added stress felt by boys, or girls, who were not prepared for life outside the religious institution - especially girls, whose dowries had been invested in the convent on entering (Sommerville 1982:59; Shahar 1990:171,191,193; Cole 1950:139).

(viii) *The ascetic ideal*

The ideals of discipline, poverty, and abstinence - and subjugation of the material and the individual to things spiritual and to God - were adopted by monastic education in particular. In no other sphere of society, did education demand exertion of such great pressure on the child to suppress his natural drives, and no other group required such uniformity of conduct, in order to survive. Not even a curriculum, that established a certain grading in the stringency of the demands made upon the child monk - which showed a certain amount of understanding of child psychology - managed to lessen the stringency of these pressures. Although they had their own master and school, were exempt from certain fasts and handling of corpses, and allowed to play, in rare instances, these children took a full part in the daily routine of the monastery - which began with the first prayer at about 2 in the morning and ended with the last prayer at 8 in the evening. As with adult monks, "miscreant" children were whipped in public, and were all under constant supervision by adults and children, who informed regularly on deviants. Arduous physical and emotional effort were demanded of these children, in a highly disciplined way of life, in which there was no room for childish diversions and innocent amusement ( Gies 1969:135; Shahar 1990:195-197).

(ix) *Lack of vernacular*

For most of the Middle Ages, little or no literature or fund of knowledge was written in European vernaculars. All the knowledge handed down by the Church was in Latin; without Latin, a child could not broaden his horizons. The Latin of the Church was a foreign language to the Germanic and Celtic peoples of Western Europe. It was "whipped" into countless generations of children, who must have found the learning of Latin in schools, a difficult and tasteless task. The curriculum and method of studies of children earmarked for ecclesiastical service, did not differ essentially from those of other children. Secular administrative service also required knowledge of Latin, as it was the language of higher culture. The learning of medieval Latin was also difficult and stressful, as it was not really the ordered Latin of Roman times. It was often ungrammatical, and its vocabulary included many words and structures, which had been coined for the occasion (Shahar 1990: Preface, 191; Boyd 1980:100; Butts 1973:155; Curtis & Boulwood 1977:107; Cole 1950:139).

(x) *Lack of child-centred academic education in chivalric society*

Up to the beginning of the twelfth century, the upbringing and training of the future knight included almost no academic study. The level of instruction in court schools was primitive. Knowledge, traditions and culture were passed on orally. William Marshal, one of the greatest of English noblemen, who died in 1219, was illiterate. Later in the Middle Ages, Latin began to be taught to small children in the form of prayers and psalms by mothers, nurses and tutors.

When they went to the castle to be trained for knighthood or to be noble ladies, children received a small amount of literacy education from a clerk, chaplain or monk. Their main education lay in studying and embodying - already in childhood - the adult values, actions and personality, exemplified by their adult feudal seigneur/ lady. Emphasis was placed on learning courtly manners, heroism, brotherhood of warriors, fidelity to one's lord and the family honour, military and physical training, hunting and participation in all adult society and activities - including games, tournaments and, the courtly culture of lust and unrestrained urges. Older page boys and young knights were expected to have love affairs with the lady of the manor. The page wore adult male garb and rode a horse by 7 (cf. Figure 5.4, page 185).



**Figure 5.4** Courtly role model in an age of violence  
(Larousse 1981:327)

The child undergoing chivalric education, had to conform to adult/ group norms, and found approval or sanction, in the form of group pride, shame and pressure (Lucas 1972:212). These were all sources of stress for the child, whose child-being and individual learning potential was ignored and sacrificed to the ideal role model of the perfect (courtly yet violent) knight, which he was expected to become. There were children who were not suited to the knightly life, such as Hugh of Cluny, a future abbot, who preferred to read, and found difficulty in performing his knightly exercises (Shahar 1990:209-213; Logue 1960:43,52).

(xi) *Conflict in male chivalric values*

The knightly ethos was composed of three contradictory elements: the ecclesiastical ideal, where the knight was to be just, truthful, modest, merciful and a defender of the weak and the Church; the knightly ideal of being a skilled, brave warrior - capable of cruel slaughter and suicide in battle/ tournaments - loyal to his lord, devoted to duty and with a sense of pride in personal and class honour; and the courtly love ideal of faithful service to a lady, and respect for all noblewomen. This involved learning to take part in feminine activities, such as singing, chess, music, dance and extramarital love. Chaucer (1340-1400), (in Lucas 1972:213) speaks of the well-rounded knight :

He coude songes make and well endyte  
Juste and eek daunce, and wel purtreye and wryte

The child page and adult knight often experienced the tension of role-strain as a result of these conflicting roles, into which the child was moulded (Butts 1973:167; Shahar 1990:214). In addition the lack of emotional and sexual control as part of the courtly role, may have led to a general lack of emotional control and ability to cope with feelings of stress, which may have consequently become debilitating and dysfunctional

(xii) *Harsh treatment and child abuse*

Although it was generally agreed that small children could be left alone, after the age of 7, medieval children were also deliberately hardened. They generally ate coarse food, withstood arduous physical exercise, and made do with little sleep and infrequent bathing. Moreover, the Church and society of the Middle Ages advocated preventing the detrimental impact of a corrupt society and literature,

through explication, reprimand, and wielding the whip (Shahar 1990:172). Luther (1483-1546) mentions being caned 15 times in one day, as a school boy. In the home and school, corporal punishment was frequent and cruel - especially in the monastery school - despite St Augustine's writing of protest against this. Children religious were whipped at their chapter, were under strict supervision, and forced to inform on each other. The rules of St Benedict (480-547) decreed that boy-transgressors (including those who made mistakes in reciting a psalm/ singing a hymn/ reading/ writing), had to undergo strict fasts, or be punished with severe beatings. Boys in the schools of chivalry, suffered harsh discipline (including threats of death) so as to learn the ideals of obedience and service.

In urban society - where medieval working class boys received technical-vocational training by means of the apprenticeship system - child abuse occurred, despite the vigilance of guild inspectors. Some masters bypassed the apprenticeship training for their sons, by turning the business over to them directly. This meant that undue pressure was exerted on the son, who was not really ready to assume a master's role. Artisans also sometimes treated their apprentices harshly. Many children, including girls, were savagely beaten and cruelly treated, with tragic ends. In some cases, girls were exploited for prostitution, and received inadequate training.

The stressful, strict and brutally uncommunicative atmosphere of the classroom was generally accepted and approved of by parents and society. As the Church subjected their members to ecclesiastical authority, so the school subjected its population to unforgiving school discipline. Small children, in need of a father or mother figure, and of empathy, were the most helpless if treated harshly (Verster *et al.* 1982:38,68; Coetzer 1994:24; Shahar 1990:198,235,239; Gies 1969:154; Venter 1992c:42; Kruger 1992a:78).

(xiii) *Less education for girls*

If girls of the nobility and wealthy urban classes were educated (the lower classes were not) they were either sent to convents - where they may or may not have remained for life - attended mixed elementary schools, or had a private governess. They learnt only religion and etiquette, to read in the vernacular, write and to do basic arithmetic. Higher schools were closed to them, and their studies ended at 12 or 13. They spent their entire childhood at home (or the convent) and left only on marrying. They were trained neither for a profession or any social function. Education was intended to foster piety, modesty, and obedience and, apart from

the few literacy and numeracy skills mentioned above, prepare them as wives, mothers and to run a household. This involved learning weaving, spinning, embroidering, sewing, dancing, riding, games and story-telling. The ability to read and write was necessary only for management of the fief in the case of the nobility, or corresponding with travelling merchant husbands and sons, in the case of urban girls (Marchalonis 1986:57). This discrimination against girls may have caused stress in those who desired intellectual stimulation.

(xiv) *Scholasticism and the beginning of universities*

In the twelfth century, academic study and traditions of Greek learning, gained momentum, with the development of universities and study of the seven liberal arts of the Greco-Roman *Trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and *Quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music). This had begun before, to a very limited extent, in the cathedral, Bishops' and monastic schools. Although this was a positive impetus for learning, intellectual activity and a spirit of enquiry in Western education, it was a stressor, in that the students who entered university, were only thirteen or fourteen years old, when they were bound over to a master for seven years - until obtaining the baccalaureate, followed by the licence and masters. Being so young, they lacked self-control and pedagogic supervision, and often indulged in harmful activities after lectures, because the Church frowned upon healthy recreation such as athletics and games, even chess. In addition, the university studies were at first, unorganised for quite a while, until the curriculum began to develop a definite pattern. This was another reason for stress in the pupils. Moreover, there were no university buildings, classes were held in the masters' houses, and student lodgings, schools and brothels were often all in the same buildings. They lacked a stable (home) environment (Curtis & Boulwood 1977:93; Logue 1960:470; Gies 1969:157,164).

### **5.4.3 Stressors at micro-level within the child's self**

#### **5.4.3.1 The physical self**

The tendency of medieval adults to see children in terms of a desired mould, led to customs such as deliberate physical deformation - by means of tightly bound pads - of the child's skull, according to a social ideal of beauty, during the early Middle Ages. Evidence of a child's elongated skull, attributed to such binding, and dated about 700 AD, was seen in an exhibition on the Middle Ages by the researcher at

the Stuttgart Landesmuseum, in December 1993. This long-term discomfort must have been extremely stressful for an infant or small child. Swaddling and restrictive adult clothing - discussed earlier in this chapter - must have been another source of physical stress for the medieval child. Swaddling the baby's entire body in a cloth, was believed to keep the child warm, ease the transition from the womb, keep its limbs growing straight, and stop it from touching its genitals - owing to the medieval concept of sinfulness of the flesh. This lack of freedom of movement meant normal sensorimotor development was hindered, and too tight swaddling caused dislocations of the hip. The wealthy frequently changed the infant's swaddling clothes, but peasant children suffered from sores and carbuncles, as a result of the dirt on their bodies owing to a lack of bathing and changing of swaddling clothes and nappies. It is possible that it was believed during the Middle Ages, as it was during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that bathing was harmful, and that a layer of filth served as a shield against the evil-eye.

Overfeeding (and accompanying obesity), illness, disease, malnutrition and corporal punishment - all common stressors in the Middle Ages - would have caused further physical and emotional stress: bodily weakness, deformation, inhibited growth or permanent physical damage. These physical problems would have been a source of feelings of stress including fear, anxiety and strain in the child, especially when he was also faced with the physical and emotional demands of adult roles and tasks, very early in life, as was most often the case. They would have also made survival more difficult, and led to the child's being a victim of further stressful physical and psychological problems, such as vulnerability to stress, illness and disease, accidents and abuse, often inflicted upon the already emotionally and physically weak child.

Early marriage and childbirth - and their accompanying physical stressors - especially for adolescent girls (as young as 12 even) who were still developing physically, must have also been a great stressor, causing fear and emotional tension, as well as physical complications (injury/ disease/ illness) - before, during or after sexual intercourse and childbirth (Coetzer 1994:17-18; Shahar 1990:85-88).

#### **5.4.3.2 The sexual self**

Extremely early marriage and childbirth affected the child's early physical and emotional sexual awakening. This was a source of emotional stress because he

was perhaps not ready to cope - even though he had witnessed sexual relationships and childbirth throughout childhood, in the typical medieval environment. In fact this total exposure to sexual topics, in the young child, had probably caused an even earlier sexual awakening, than early marriage, and had already brought confusion, fear and stress, due to the pressure of having to handle sexual feelings too soon (Verster *et al.* 1982:67).

#### **5.4.3.3 Self-concept formation**

Owing to the adult-centred image of the medieval child, his self-image suffered. Deprived of self-actualisation, the child did not develop a unique sense of individual self. He was not regarded as an individual in his own right, with particular aptitudes and emotional needs; nor was there much child-centred awareness of the different developmental stages in the child's life. The child had just a religious or social identity, to be moulded according to the role adults foresaw for him: as a religious, a knight, a lady, a wife, a bearer of children, a labourer or an artisan. The Middle Ages had little concept of knowing oneself, having feelings about oneself, evaluating oneself, which are all dynamic processes throughout childhood and life. Medieval children were not helped to form a positive and realistic self-concept. They must have had a mostly negative self-concept, since they were forced into roles which did not match their aptitudes, abilities and interests. This must have been a source of much inner stress, tension and depression, because if a child has positive feelings about himself, the resultant good performance and positive feedback reduce the likelihood of stress. (Van der Spuy & Van Niekerk 1994:93-94; Verster *et al.* 1982:66; Kruger 1992a:78).

#### **5.4.3.4 Personality types**

Since humans have not changed as psychobiological beings since early man, it is perhaps justified to say that, like today, some children in the Middle Ages would have had more excitable, competitive Type-A personalities, and others more placid, tolerant Type-B ones - although to a certain extent, a child's environment, upbringing and experience will have determined his personality type. The Type-A child, who tends to be more stress-prone, would have denied his feelings of stress and its symptoms rather than admit his individuality in the repressive sociocentric world, in which he found himself. He would have unconsciously redirected his anger, frustration, tension, strain and emotional stress, in other directions, perhaps later in life, as an abusive parent or teacher; or his stress would have had other

long-term negative results. On the other hand, he might have attempted to cope with his stressors by perceiving them in the light of cheerful acquiescence, as according to Church teachings - if these values were in fact successfully transferred to him. The Type-B child would have more easily managed patience and fortitude in the face of adversity and stressors, as a successful coping mechanism. This was the child who probably turned his distress into *eustress*, and became one of the many saints of the period, who easily internalised the Christian ideals. On the other hand, if the Type-B personality, became too compliant and self-sacrificing, it would have perhaps tended to become unassertive, turn emotions like anger and rage inward and have had difficulty coping with the effects of stress.

Contemporary medieval opinion, however, did not always acknowledge the concept of personality, as being the individual's characteristics, determined to a large extent by his surroundings, circumstances, experience, abilities, intelligence, physical make-up, emotional development, perception, coping mechanisms and many other factors. Most authors of medieval medical tracts were inspired by Aristotle, who considered the new-born babe to be a *tabula rasa* (clear slate); didactic writers cited the image of wax. It was believed that the child was born with the burden of *Original Sin*, only forgiven in baptism, when the child could then be educated to develop the ideal Christian personality, in accordance with the values of society and the Church (Shahar 1990:162). Yet other medieval writers do also refer to personality types, like St Thomas Aquinas (1989:218) who speaks of different characters/ individuals with :

irascible temperaments (that) are quicker to anger (than) sensual dispositions are to desire.

In reference to the feeding of wealthy medieval children, authors of didactic works believed that children of different temperaments should be given different diets and not be forced to eat food which is not suited to them (Shahar 1990:80). Certain scholars recognised differences of temperament, that a child inherited from his parents, who if noble and pious, produced saintly children. Like the Greeks, the people of the Middle Ages believed that temperament was formulated by the composition of/ ratio between the humours in the child's body, which depended on the positions of celestial bodies at the time of conception. Four types of temperament were enumerated according to the bodily fluids: sanguine - bloody fluid; melancholy - black; choleric - yellow or splenetic; phlegmatic - white. The temperament, according to some contemporary medical writers, was already given

expression in infancy, and could not be altered either then or later; but was merely moderated by physical or spiritual counter-remedies. It was for this reason, that the authors of medical books recommended rubbing melancholy or phlegmatic babies with salt, while sanguine or choleric infants - who were hot and thin - were to be rubbed with oil. It was also considered essential to choose a wet-nurse whose temperament suited that of the infant. Some authors warned against administering wine to older children of sanguine or choleric temperament - since this could harm their health - but advocated giving it to those with melancholy or phlegmatic temperament. They also stressed that different foods suited different children, and were aware of certain stress symptoms in children of different temperaments such as: anger in the choleric; sloth and inactivity in the phlegmatic; fear and suspicion in the melancholic; sensitivity to love in the sanguine. St Hildegard (1098-1179) (in Shahar 1990:160) believed that only those of sanguine humour recall the harmonious human being of the days before the *Original Sin* and the *Fall*, while the other three types represent the loss of harmony, perfection and the frustration which is the lot of mankind. Other medieval writers were less deterministic and believed that, at least from the age of 10 onward, the child could be taught to choose good, develop a Christian personality and avoid tension and stress - especially the stress caused by being forced to do good out of fear of punishment (Shahar 1990:162-166).

Although there was awareness of personality types and their influence on the child's stress-response, during the Middle Ages, generally this knowledge was used for the sole purpose of assisting the adult in his moulding of the child according to the desired stereotype, and to ensure that the child adapted to the accompanying pressures and stressors of life with this aim in mind.

#### **5.4.3.5 Unassertiveness in pupils, especially girls**

Children of the Middle Ages were taught reticence, which is an expression of humility and discipline and, in girls especially, an additional means of preserving chastity. Generally submissiveness and obedience were qualities which the Church, society, parents and schools set out to instil in pupils. This was all part of the Medieval suppression of individuality and denial of worldliness. It was also part of the cultural need to cope with a particularly stressful era, by seeing and accepting suffering and adversity as part of God's will. In many cases, this passivity may have contributed to a child's stress, if the Christian perception of the world, as a mere temporary, if painful, sojourn - and part of God's plan (beyond human

understanding), was not truly internalised by the individual child or accepted with positive feelings.

Unassertiveness taught to medieval children, may have also caused stress and inner conflict, in curious and deep-thinking children. These were the potentially advanced scholars, who may have showed critical abilities, initiative, and originality, which were not qualities encouraged in the Middle Ages (Butts 1973:154; Shahar 1990:174).

## **5.5 SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE MEDIEVAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

### **5.5.1 Evidence of stress in the medieval child**

Many symptoms mentioned by medical writers of the Middle Ages, sound like those of typical infant diseases of the time - and the following centuries - but others sound like those stress symptoms, listed in Chapter Two of this project, such as: difficult breathing; shivering attacks; rashes; rheumatism and mental illness. Moreover, there was an awareness of the interrelationship between the physical and psychological self. Many medical writers, following the tradition of Aristotle, and the ancient medical system codified by the physician Galen in the second century AD, believed in the unity of the body and mind. They thought that distortions of the soul affect the state of the humours, the temperament and the body as a whole; and that the humours must be kept in balance. They appeared to make the connection between emotional stress and its physical and psychological symptoms. For example, they wrote of fear and dread causing melancholy; as well as of the need for moderation in dealing with a child, and to refrain from angering, saddening or excessively amusing or spoiling him. They also advocated diverting a child to avoid conflict, and providing him a healthy mental and physical life that included exercise fresh air and diet.

Medieval Christian philosophers such as St Augustine and his followers, like St Thomas Aquinas, also appeared to be aware of stress and its symptoms. The following paragraphs attempt to describe some of their findings as well as other evidence of symptoms of stress, in the pedagogic situation of the Middle Ages (Gies 1969:110; Shahar 1990:14,21-31,9-10,46,179; Brain (s.a.):25-26).

### **5.5.1.1 Susceptibility to infectious diseases**

In the first section of this chapter, the researcher mentioned that mostly children died at the hand of the Black Death and other infectious diseases, during the Middle Ages - possibly as a result of stress and its negative physical effects, exacerbated by malnutrition. This lack of immunity may, therefore, be perhaps also regarded as a symptom of stress in the medieval pedagogic situation.

### **5.5.1.2 St Augustine and stress symptoms**

St Augustine (354-430), from whom the central Middle Ages drew much of its thinking, emphasised stress symptoms such as jealousy, anger and aggressiveness, and focused on the sadness, futility and misery of the child's/ adult's life. Human distress was attributed to Adam and Eve's *Original Sin*, and was generally accepted by society (Shahar 1990:14).

Although Augustine was actually a forerunner of the Middle Ages, his own experience of stress symptoms, as a result of harsh treatment at school, were probably like those of many later medieval children. He was frequently whipped, and the blows caused him suffering and constant fear; as well as distress due to the mockery of, and amusement at, his suffering on the part of the adults in his household (Shahar 1990:14,16). In his *Confessions*, St Augustine admitted that if he were faced with the choice of death or returning to primary school, he would choose death. He detested the harsh educational discipline and "frightful enforcement" to which he was exposed (in Curtis & Boulton 1977:66).

### **5.5.1.3 St Thomas Aquinas and stress symptoms**

St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) directly and indirectly speaks of many symptoms of stress, including that of our automatic stress-response: the *flight or fright* syndrome - the rush of adrenaline and other chemicals. He refers to the "sense-appetite" which has an "aggressive (part) concerned with repelling and attacking dangers"(1989:128). He also refers to the transaction between our emotional response to a stressor and our perception of it, as well as negative and positive emotional symptoms of stress. He states (1989:201-202):

Affections, like feeling joyful or sad...are reactions to what we perceive as pleasurable or painful. Sometimes, however, taking pleasure in something or

avoiding pain from it is not within our immediate power and requires effort. To deal with such difficulties we are endowed with emotions that respond to challenges, like boldness, feeling afraid, hoping and other so-called aggressive emotions. But aggressive emotions react to what is arduously and difficultly pleasurable or painful, and we get both types of antithesis: hoping, attracted to the difficult because of its goodness, is opposed to despairing, which shuns good because of its difficulty, and feeling afraid, which shuns bad as such, is opposed to boldness, which confronts it as a (hard) way of avoiding greater evil; yet hoping and feeling afraid are also opposed because they are responses to antithetic objects, good and bad. Anger ...is provoked by evils already harming us but hard to repel. Such evils we either yield to sadly...or are impelled to confront angrily. The only thing opposed to being angry is its absence, calming down.

Aquinas speaks thus of the emotional response to stressors as being negative (anger, fear) or positive (hope). He also refers to balanced emotions (the ability to cope with stress and return to *homeostasis*), as being the effect of moral virtue, which is a disposition to choose a balanced course of action according to reason (1989:237-238). He dwells on the negative physical and emotional effects of distress, such as lack of motivation, confused thinking and depression (1989:213):

...sadness weighs (the heart) down so that it is held back from freely enjoying what it desires. We do the things that cause us sorrow less willingly and therefore less vigorously...emotions of repulsion are a sort of drawing back and so by their very nature injure the movement of life. Fear and despair are such emotions, and especially sorrow. Sorrow sometimes even deprives us of all reason, landing us in melancholy and madness.

With regard to anger as a symptoms of stress, Aquinas (1989:218) goes into some detail as to the physiology of this emotion:

The physical changes that accompany an emotion are suited to that emotion. In the case of anger, the heart is greatly upset, and that shows in our external behaviour: the body trembles, the tongue stammers, the face and eyes blaze; familiar acquaintances pass unrecognised; the lips make sound, but we have no idea what are saying.

Of apathy (1989:365), another symptom of stress, he says:

(It)...is a sort of depression which stops us doing anything, a weariness with work, a torpor of spirit which delays getting down to anything good.

He refers to suicide as a symptom of stress (1989:208) when he says that suicidal individuals see death as a “good end to wretchedness and grief”.

As one can see, St Thomas Aquinas, a great educationist, as well as theologian and philosopher, wrote about various physical and psychological symptoms characterising the response of the spirit/*psyche* and body to stress.

#### 5.5.1.4 Affective spirituality

According to Stugin (1986:144-150) the Middle Ages was a period of particular cultural stress and an age of adversity, symptomised by anxiety, uncertainty, and intensely emotional spirituality. Fervid religious emotion was a symptom of, and indicated an acute sense of human suffering and violent destruction of human innocence, in the world, on the part of both children and adults. Through religious euphoria, people escaped the rigours of daily existence. Spiritual writings reflected this symptom of stress, and participated in the readers' or listeners' structure of reality, and perception of the world. They also helped shape the medieval perception of stress, which was to be seen in a spiritual and transcendent light, accepted with patient cheerfulness, and not merely endured. Religious experience, as well as superstition, provided a means of explaining and expressing symptoms of stress. Stugin states:

Affective spirituality was a response to stressful human experience and a broadening, as well as an understanding of the centrality of human emotion, as a component of man's ability to exist in the world

(Stugin 1986:147).

##### (i) *Demons*

Just as stress symptoms found expression in medieval religiosity, various adult and childhood medieval stress symptoms were also attributed to demons or bad angels. These evil spirits were said to unsettle the senses, disorder life, cause alarms in sleep, bring diseases, fill the mind with terror and arouse passions (Cole 1950:117).

(ii) *Rituals and charms*

During the Middle Ages, the stress that young and older pregnant women experienced, was symptomised by the use of various religious rituals and charms. Before giving birth, they not only attended Confession and the Eucharist, but also prayed to special saints, visited shrines, relied on incantations and charms, wore talismans such as birth girdles and precious stones, and were anointed with consecrated oil. During a stressful labour, sympathetic magic was invoked, involving rituals and magic words and objects (such as a right foot of a crane, or water in which a hanged murderer had washed his hands). The stress of a barren woman, who was ostracised in medieval society, was revealed in drastic ritualistic behaviour, such as eating Host stolen from the Eucharist or the Tabernacle (Gies 1969:60; Tucker 1906:39-48; Shahar 1990:34-37). In December 1993, the researcher saw a display of a "blue-stone", in the Landesmuseum in Stuttgart, Germany, that was worn by children in the 8th century, as an amulet, believed to provide protection against the evil-eye.

**5.5.1.5 Miscellaneous stress symptoms**

(i) *Street children*

Coetzer (1994:21-22) writes of the distress and sad state of orphaned, illegitimate, abandoned and homeless children of the Middle Ages. The increasing number of "street children" became a problem that was partially addressed by the Church who provided asylums. Homes for foundlings were established during the 8th and 15/16th centuries in Italy and to a very small extent, in England. These street children, who were suffering stress on a personal level, were also generally symptomatic of an era of particular stress.

(ii) *Loneliness/ less involvement with others*

According to Sommerville (1982:62) the autobiography of the French abbot, Guibert of the 11th century, reveals an example of a medieval child's loneliness. This was a symptom of acute stress, which was a result of cruel treatment by his tutor. He was cruelly flogged and beaten for being cleverer than his classmates. In his solitary state, he attempted to find consolation in books, especially the poems of Ovid (43-17/18 BC) and Virgil (79-19 BC), and sometimes delinquent and

inappropriate behaviour, including swearing, as he reveals in the following statement (in Sommerville 1982:63):

Hence it came to pass that from the boiling over of the madness within me, I fell into certain obscene words and composed brief writings worthless and immodest in fact bereft of all decency.

According to Van Niekerk, Van der Spuy and Becker (1994:301) a child often uses bad language because he is unable to communicate his negative emotions and frustrations in any other way. This seems to be the case for children of the Middle Ages.

(iii) *Delinquency*

Apprentices often ran away and were considered irresponsible and recidivist; they drank, played wild games and gambled away any money they received. These boys were considered good-for-nothing, idle and insolent. They vandalised buildings and showed cruelty to animals, such as killing birds. Under stress, because of cruelty or neglect on the part of the craftsmen, whom they served, they revealed their feelings by means of this behaviour (Shahar 1990:236-238). There were probably other children who rebelled against a system for whom they were only a means to an end - as potential labour, breadwinners or heirs - and subjected to strict authority, so as to succeed for the sake of the family and community (Kruger 1992a:66). A possible example of a medieval "rebel", is Francis Bernardone (1182-1226), also known as St Francis of Assisi, who founded his own religious order. He had rejected his rich merchant father's life-style and heritage in 1219, and followed the "off-beat" life of a "shabby, hippy-like band of social peace-makers, made up of poor, peasants and a few other delinquents" from the wealthy class (Noonan 1994:12).

Although scholars of the later Middle Ages, usually entered university at fourteen or fifteen, their private lives were almost entirely unsupervised, they had no proper home and suffered the stress of pedagogic neglect. Since all forms of athletics, games and even chess, were prohibited by the Church, they were unable to work out their stress in healthy ways. Instead they showed symptoms of parental/ adult neglect, in delinquent behaviour, by turning to gaming, drinking, whoring and fighting with each other and the townspeople, and caused riots such as the one of 1250, at the University of Paris (Gies 1969:164).

(iv) *Nightmares due to anxiety*

According to the biographer of St Catherine (1347-1380), the saint played with dolls in the convent one day, and that night, dreamt of demons in the shape of dolls, who dragged her out of her bed, kicked and beat her. On another occasion, she was found fainting on the floor by her bed, after a dream of the Devil, in the shape of a bull, who butted her with his horns. These symptoms of negative stress suggest that like many medieval girls, the saint may have been stressed, as a result of her separation from her parents, and the nuns' constant warning about sin, the Devil and Hell (Shahar 1990:196).

(v) *Illness due to fear*

Another example of the inculcation of fear, in a young medieval child, can be found in the biography of the Cistercian monk, Adam of Locum. He was so intimidated by the threat of excommunication for a misdemeanour, that he fell ill and feared that he was going to die. The biography of Juliana of Cornillon, describes her paralysis with fear, after stringent punishment for a "sin". There is also a story told of a little girl who became deaf as a reaction to being placed in a nunnery (Shahar 1990:184,197-198).

(vi) *Shyness*

Probably due to the instilling of shamefulness, regarding bodily instincts, girls in convents, like St Colette (1381-1447), felt tense and ill at ease within her body, and, even though she was beautiful - if short in stature - felt herself to be ugly and worthless, when she was an adolescent. Lowered self-confidence, and feelings of inadequacy and a negative body-image were symptoms of her stress (Shahar 1990:203).

(vii) *Mood swings/ extremes of mood*

According to Norber Elian (in Shahar 1990:214) the conflicting elements of the knightly ideal caused fluctuations in mood and behaviour in the medieval child, brought up in an atmosphere of rough freedom, in the knight's castle. Elian maintains that, unlike the children in monasteries, and other (especially the peasant) children exposed to the cultural values of patience and forbearance when faced with adversity and life's stressors, the child in the chivalric pedagogic situation, was

not taught to curb and restrain his instincts, practise self-restraint or have a super-ego. A lack of moderation, frequent emotional outbursts, extremes of mood and conduct, unruliness, unrestrained satisfaction of appetites and experiences of religious ecstasy, were all symptoms of the role-stress experienced in the young child in the castle, who neither suppressed/ "bottled up", nor really dealt with his stress.

(viii) *Reduced motivation in pupils*

Teachers, during the Middle Age complained that, immediately after the lesson commenced, pupils began to ask for permission to leave the room on various pretexts - to go to the lavatory, to drink water, or to go home for some reason. Other complained of the unruliness of their pupils. This behaviour appears to be a symptom of the stress and lack of motivation in medieval pupils, for whom school was frightening, irrelevant and tedious (Shahar 1990:190).

(ix) *Sexual promiscuity*

St Thomas Aquinas (1989:242,546) wrote about sexual promiscuity, suggesting that it was a problem and even a symptom of stress. There was also a growing strength of opinion, during the Middle Ages that sexual matters should be confined to adulthood. For example, Giovanni Donimecia mentions that children older than three years, should not be allowed to see naked adults. This suggests that there was a general awareness that early sexual awakening was stressful to a child, and could lead to sexual problems, including promiscuity in adolescence and later life (Verster *et al.* 1982:69).

## 5.5.2 Symptoms classified according to particular stressors

There is a variety of symptoms that the researcher feels were a result of specific causes of stress in children, during the Middle Ages. The following is an attempt to classify these. Much of the information is based on Shahar's book, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (1990), in which the author describes her findings, that are based on a vast fund of reliable primary sources, including the works of didactic and religious writers of the Middle Ages, as well as the *Lives of the Saints*.

### **5.5.2.1 Lack of stressors**

In Chapters One and Two, the researcher mentioned that a lack of stressors can be a stressor in itself. Symptoms of such a state can be seen in the literary work *Parzival* of Wolfram of Eschenbach (1170-1220) (in Shahar 1990:165). The young noble, Parzival, suffers great melancholy/ depression despite his mother's raising him in the forest (so as to keep him far from the stressors of the knightly world) and without educating him - to keep him safe from sorrow and pain. When he encounters a group of knights one day, he nevertheless chooses to follow them, to learn to be a knight in the hardest way, so as to be able to realise his potential. He suffered stress as a result of a lack of stressors, and needed/ sought out the challenge of stress in order to grow.

### **5.5.2.2 Orphanhood**

The biographies of characters such as the various saints, often speak of their stress symptoms, like that of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), who mentions stress symptoms of depression and loneliness, as a result of his adolescent response to the death of his mother. He was distraught with grief at this disruption in their relationship, and the loss of the main object of his love at a time of identity crisis, typical of this particular developmental stage. A medieval author of a tale about Drogo, a twelfth-century Flemish saint, relates how the death of the saint's mother at the age of 10, was a traumatic event. He was a sensitive child with depressive tendencies, and never recovered from the shock. He became a pilgrim and a shepherd, and unlike other saints, who became part of the Church establishment and were active therein, he never tried to directly cope with life, and rather hid away from it (Shahar 1990:159).

### **5.5.2.3 Abandonment**

The stress of being separated from a beloved parent is expressed elsewhere in medieval literature. For example in the work *Tristan*, by Gottfried of Strasburg, the German court poet of the beginning of the 13th century, the hero is forced to leave his adoptive mother, who treated him with tender love, at 7. His anxiety is described in detail, as he experiences pain at the end of the happiest period of his life (Shahar 1990:65). The effect on the emotional development and subsequent personality of children who experience wet-nursing, was also negative, as various symptoms revealed. Shahar (1990:66) tells of the fate of Pagolo Morelli born in

1355, and sent to a wet-nurse immediately after birth. His mother died, and the father left him with the wet-nurse, until the age of 10 or 12, without ever visiting him. The wet-nurse was a harsh woman who beat him mercilessly. Even as a grown man, he would go into a rage, whenever he recalled this wet-nurse.

Medieval writers also mention that children were brought to shrines of saints because they were not yet speaking. This was perhaps a symptom of their trauma, and psychomotor/ verbal backwardness, due to parental neglect, or constant replacement of wet-nurses (Shahar 1990:66,95,209,216).

#### **5.5.2.4 Authoritarian fathers**

There are examples of stress in medieval children who were brought up by authoritarian fathers. The lives of various saints such as Gilbert of Sempringham and Hugh of Cluny (1024-1109), describe their fear, depression and even paralysis as a result of their distress due to overly strict fathers (Shahar 1990:218-219)

#### **5.5.2.5 Religious stress**

Religious fervour and extreme piety often found an outlet in children, as a symptom of the tensions and stress they experienced owing to the religious climate of the time. One thinks of the extreme religiosity ascribed to the many saints in childhood. These children came from the nobility, as well as the peasant class. Under extreme pressure, during their childhood, these children probably internalised the religious education received from the monastery, convent, parents, church ritual or religious individuals.

The tragic Children's Crusade of 1212 was an extreme expression of religious pressure, that motivated medieval children to acts of religious faith. Headed by two charismatic child-leaders, Nicholas and Stephen, two groups of children, set out, from the Rhineland and northern France, to conquer the Holy Land and redeem the Holy Sepulchre; they believed the sea would open for them. Some died on the way, others stayed behind in the towns they passed, others returned home, some drowned at sea, and the rest were sold into slavery in Islamic countries (Sommerville 1982:60; Browning 1963:46). The Children's Crusade was also a symptom of medieval children's general psychological distress, and hopes of release from their plight and stressfully unhappy lives, in a unavoidably suffering and evil, typically Medieval world. Shahar (1990:250) states:

The episode was born out of anarchic fervour and apocalyptic tension, and ended in catastrophe.

#### 5.5.2.6 Harsh discipline and intimidation

Biographers mention symptoms of this medieval stressor fairly often. The mother of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) was shocked at her son's emotional distress, when he returned from the home of his tutor, who had treated him too harshly. The mother of Gilbert of Nogent was also horrified to discover blue weals on her son's hands and back (Shahar 1990:179). Writers, such as Erasmus (1467-1536) and Luther (1483-1546) recognised the fear and lack of motivation felt by children as examples of symptoms of their stress due to merciless punishment. They realised that "good will, gentle advice and responsible and humane discipline" would make the best men, and not cruel pressure" (Coetzer 1994:24). Erasmus mentioned symptoms such as indifference and fear in children as a result of "hangman type" treatment; and Luther spoke of the reduced initiative, trembling, anger, tendency to be easily started/ jumpy and other symptoms of terror in cruelly abused children (Curtis & Boulwood 1977:127; Power 1970:372; Van Zyl 1989b:36; Brubacher 1966:187).

Other medieval humanists, such as Matteo Palmieri and Maffeo Vegio, said that beating caused slavishness, aroused resentment and hatred against the teacher, and, finally, caused the pupil to forget his studies (in Shahar 1990:173). Yet Aquinas describes suffering, as a result of beating in the pedagogic situation, as an integral part of the teaching of good qualities and the acquisition of knowledge, due to the inherently evil nature of the child (and man). He believed that the tears and suffering accompanying the gradual physical and intellectual development of the child, were the fruit of the punishment imposed on man, as a consequence of *Original Sin* (Shahar 1990:174).

Empathy for childish fears was also expressed in literature, and many medieval authors, including Luther, were aware of the problem of intimidation, as a disciplinary measure. They claimed that children should be neither saddened nor frightened. Yet folk-tales and other stories, mostly featured child-eating monsters or the Devil, who seized bad children, (Smith 1986:16-29; Brubacher 1966:187; Shahar 1990:11)

### **5.5.2.7 Early marriage**

Because of the discrepancy between their emotional development and the social custom, which burdened them with the yoke of matrimony and social demands at a tender age, girls who married very young usually continued, after marriage, to play with toys, friends and other games. This was probably a symptom of stress being worked out in a childlike manner. These young wives also longed for their mothers and homes, and were sad for a long time. Medieval dramas often focused on contemporary social and moral problems, such as loveless marriages of contract in young girls, giving further symptomatic evidence of this stressor in the lives of children of the Middle Ages (Taft 1986:108; Shahar 1990:224,231; Gies 1969:63).

### **5.5.2.8 Oedipal tension**

According to Shahar (1990:254-258), the literature of the nobility and the folktales of the Middle Ages, are often manifestations of stress, including *oedipal* tensions in medieval society. For example, the theme of a meeting of father and son in battle or tournament, appears to have been common in medieval literature. Other examples, are poems marked by fantasies of horror, and expressions of protest against the feudal world order of patrilinearity and primogeniture, as well as the harshness and tyranny of the medieval father. Generally the literature of the day, including oral and dramatic traditions, accompanied by the prevalent religious attitudes, may be regarded as a symptom of the cultural stress of the Middle Ages, with which children had to cope, at an early age, in the adult world. The following is an attempt at describing some coping strategies that society bequeathed to them for stress management.

## **5.6 COPING STRATEGIES**

### **5.6.1 Awareness and acceptance of stress**

#### **5.6.1.1 The cross of life**

One's response to a stressor is in transaction with perception, amongst other factors. The general attitude of the Church which it taught, and preached to children and adults in the Middle Ages, to help them cope with the worst that life can offer, was one of the glory of suffering, and of cheerful acquiescence to the cross of life, which was "a valley of tears", compared with the bliss of Heaven,

which was the hopeful destiny of Christians. The adoption of this belief, which pervaded education, Church services, popular literature, folk-lore, passion plays and drama, was a way of altering one's perception of a stressor - of transforming dysfunctional stress into *eustress* and a challenge of faith, in an era of stress. There was, however, the danger that too much resignation, reticence and submission would lead to suppression of individuality and internalising of stress, instead of management of it. This belief also sometimes led to the attitude that, it is better to be resigned, patient and live by tradition, or even welcome/seek suffering and hardship, than create, originate anything or progress at all. With this emphasis on giving into suffering, as a stress-coping strategy in a troubled world, came other (negative) mechanisms, such as the intense interest in the penitential experience as spiritual medicine, an intensification of pessimism, obsession with death and the macabre, escapism into cults, over-extensive playing of the Christ-drama "with subjectivity transformed into the hysterical" (Stugrin 1986:150).

On the positive side, patience in suffering - like that of Christ - and denial of self/human nature and a cheerful acceptance of pain and stress, positively dealt with the trauma of medieval life by giving spiritual meaning to it. In this way, it was less distressful (Stugrin 1986:144-152; Verster *et al.* 1982:9; Shahar 1990:13; Cole 1950:149)

Stugrin (1986:147) says that:

Children were taught to see themselves less as objects of attack by spiritual foes, and more as pilgrim seekers.

St Bonaventure (1221-1274) writes (in Stugrin 1986:147):

The true Christian... who desires to resemble the crucified Saviour completely, ought to strive above all to carry the Cross of Christ Jesus either in his soul or in his flesh in order to feel himself like St Paul, truly nailed to the cross with Christ... Now he alone is worthy to experience the ardour of such a feeling who, calling to mind with thankfulness the passion of the Lord, contemplates the labour, the sufferings and the love of Christ crucified.

### **5.6.1.2 Christian character traits**

The aim of ecclesiastical medieval education was to raise a Christian human being of good qualities, expressed in character traits and in basic attitudes - of faith, hope, charity, reason, moderation, and fortitude. This was a person of strong character who would cope with the stressors of his life, help others with theirs and not succumb to distress or the negative effects of dysfunctional stress, symptomised by anger and sloth, for example, which were also classified as two of the seven deadly sins. The aim of education was also to teach the child to accept and respect the current (Church-oriented) social order, which was considered a reflection of God's will and part of a harmonious order. This desire to perpetuate the existing hierarchical and social order, consequently emphasised obedience and submission to parents and authority in general, as emphasised by the *Ten Commandments*. Unfortunately this last-mentioned social coping strategy was, in itself, sometimes a stressor because it meant that the child was under great social pressure to conform to the status quo (Venter 1992c:41; Shahar 1990:166-169).

### **5.6.1.3 Courage/ strength of character**

St Thomas Aquinas also suggested coping strategies. He refers to the deliberate handling of stressors, as opposed to merely enduring them (1989:423):

Courage is primarily concerned with the fears of difficult situations that hold our will back from following reason's lead. Courage does not merely endure the pressures of such situations without flinching, by restraining fear, but also in a measure attacks them if future safety demands elimination of the difficulty.

For Aquinas the virtue of courage is a prerequisite for coping with stress; and he believes that some people's natural temperament inclines them to courage, which is an ability to remain steadfast in difficult conditions.

### **5.6.2 Being in control/ self-discipline**

Aquinas (1989:434-435,466-467,517) felt that reason could control one's vulnerability to stress. Following Aristotelian concepts, he believed that "reason introduces balance into our anger" and that "man exercises mastery of his behaviour by way of reasoned judgements". Yet he believed children below the ages of puberty (fourteen for boys and twelve for girls) may or may not yet have

use of their reason; but after puberty definitely have use of their reason/ God-given rational soul. This suggests that Aquinas believed children could be taught to be in control, and manage their emotions and negative reactions to stressors. Aquinas said (1989:565) that before a child can use its own reason, he:

..is in the natural order of things related to God through his parents' reason, in whose care nature has put him; so whatever is done to him (her) in relation to God must be decided by the reasons of his parents

### **5.6.3 Familiarity with stressors**

#### **5.6.3.1 Acceptance of Death**

The medieval attitude to death was designed to help children cope with this frequently experienced reality. Theologians and preachers expected adults and children to accept the birth and the death of children with the same composure: "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away". The death of a child was to be considered an act of divine mercy; all were expected to submit to fate. Coping mechanisms such as traditional mourning customs were encouraged, and people came to comfort the mourners. Masses and prayers for the souls of the dead were allowed by the Church to help people cope with bereavement. In this way children were helped to face the reality of death, as a necessary part of education for life. (Shahar 1990:15; Van Zyl 1989a:155).

#### **5.6.3.2 The art of dying/ familiarity with death**

According to Raidt (1987:72), since priests and monks could no longer cope with the demand for assistance of the dying, one turned to lay people for help in the Middle Ages. These people were expected to be with dying adults and children, and accompany them on their "last journey" in order to help them die a happy death, at peace with God and prepared for the four last things: death, judgement, heaven and hell. Children and adults had to learn and teach the *Artes Moriendi*, the Latin expression for *the art of dying*, in order to be prepared for death at all times, and to render pastoral assistance to others, as a companion of the dying. Knowing how to die/ help to die, was a way of coping with the harsh reality of death. Books were written and dramatised for the clergy, religious and laity as a result of this existential need to face and master death. These manuals enabled people (and children) to accompany the dying step by step, and thereby

learn/become familiar with dying themselves. Generally children saw death often because of the low life expectancy. This familiarity was a cause of stress but also a management strategy. They regularly saw carts loaded with corpses during epidemics and public executions. Death was frequently a subject of conversation and focus of thinking - along with concept of life after death, as the will of God - and general centring of people's view on the eternal, as opposed to the worldly. Children were encouraged to look forward to life after death - the fulfilment of a longing for resurrection (Coetzer 1994:19; Verster *et al.* 1982:67).

### **5.6.3.3 The Church's teachings on sexual matters**

The Church's attitude that sexual relationships were not to be for pleasure or to satisfy lust, but a natural part of marital duty in order to produce children, was perhaps a dampener on, and coping mechanism for, the early sexual awakening and promiscuity, in medieval society (Shahar 1990:131-132).

### **5.6.4 Health/ balance of humours**

Medieval medicine was aware of a moderate and balanced life-style, as a means of stress management. According to Galen (131-201), the Greek doctor whose medical system was followed in the Middle Ages, physical/ mental health and resistance to stress were interrelated. They all depended on a proper balance of extremes - a good mixture of the four humours and the four qualities (hot, cold, dry and wet) which reside in the humours (yellow and dark gall bladder, blood and phlegm). It was believed that disease could be avoided by a frugal mode of life - prevention is better than cure (Brain s.a.:27-29).

### **5.6.5 Adequate/ relevant educational opportunities**

#### **5.6.5.1 Child-centred education**

A few great thinkers were aware of the stressful adult-centred view of children in the Middle Ages, and offered solutions to the problem. Erasmus (1467-1536) commented on the cramping clothes that hampered children physically, and stopped them from feeling like children; he also advocated good will and gentle advice rather than harshness with children (Verster *et al.* 1982:69). Martin Luther (1483-1546) was also aware that there was little interest in children (Verster *et al.* 1982:69). Inspired by the Gospel, he was, however, aware, that children are

simple, naturally confident, generous, good, merciful, sympathetic and obedient, and should not be seen/ made to be adult too quickly. Alcuin (735-804) and St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) suggested instruction to suit the stage of development and talents of each child to be treated as an individual (Verster *et al.* 1982:100). Some didactic writers also advocated adapting education to the personality of the child; each individual should be encouraged in accordance with his abilities, predilections and existing traits (Shahar 1990:165).

#### **5.6.5.2 Educational opportunities for the lower classes**

The stress of unequal opportunities was relieved when members of the lower echelons were given the opportunity to become clerks in the church, and occasionally priests. Sometimes, the village priest chose one or two of the most talented and pious sons of free peasants, and gave them instruction. From the thirteenth century, when the vernacular became the foundation of basic education, the priest usually taught a few poor children, reading and writing in the vernacular, a smattering of Latin grammar, and the liturgy and hymns in Latin. In return, he benefited from their services in his home and church celebration. Boys from the urban lower class, had opportunities for studying at the schools, which mushroomed from the twelfth century onwards, and took in a number of non-paying pupils. The Church also established elementary/ reading/ song schools, subsidising poor pupils as an acts of charity. If these children studied for only a few years, they were accepted into the minor orders; if longer - going to a higher/ grammar/ secondary school at 10 or 12 - they could be ordained as priests (Duggan 1948:84-89).

#### **5.6.5.3 Educational opportunities for girls**

There were attempts to remove the stressor of lack of education for medieval girls. Life in a convent was an opportunity offered to women of scholarly ambition, desiring to combine religious piety and the pursuit of learning under formal auspices. There were, thus, learned women in the Middle Ages, such as St Odilia (660-720); St Hildegard (1098-1179); Gisla and Gundrad - the sister and cousin respectively of Charlemagne (742-814). In convents, domestic and academic education was provided for girls who did not expect to don a habit, as well as those who did. Girls of the noble class generally were given the opportunity to learn to read and write - only at an elementary level - in addition to basic instruction in religious and social customs, artistic accomplishments and various

handicraft and household skills. The education of girls in the castle did include social features that were neglected in the narrower convent education (Lucas 1972:210; Butts 1973:167; Duggan 1948:90; Mc Cormick 1953:240).

#### **5.6.5.4 Technical-vocational apprenticeship training**

Guilds in towns, provided advanced education and technical vocational training for the working class, and thereby removed the stressor of educational neglect in these children. Under rules, drawn up by the guild, a master would agree to provide food, lodging, clothing and rudimentary instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion for a young apprentice. The student would learn and work in return. This provided relevant education and a means of employment for many, although neglected the all-round, liberal education of traditional Greco-Roman education (Lucas 1972:217; Clare 1992:17).

#### **5.6.5.5 Early learning**

With the increasing practice of infant baptism, came the emphasis on the very young being introduced to the Church's teaching at the school of the mother's knee. This indicated an awareness of the need for early education, to help the child prepare for and cope with the stressors of school and life (Logue 1960:400).

#### **5.6.5.6 Real life learning for the peasantry**

From an early age, everyday life of being involved in, observing and helping in adult activities, was the peasant child's school, where he learnt to adapt to life in society. He witnessed interaction between the village community and representatives of the outside world of the castle nobility and town merchants. He took part in religious and popular festivals, learnt the cultural traditions, moral and social rules of conduct, which were transmitted orally from father/ mother to son/ daughter, and through stories and folk-songs. He attended church, festivals and pageants, watched travelling minstrels and generally took part in the work and world of the peasant community. Deviations from the norm were considered disgraceful by the community, and treated with disdain. The inducing of shame in the individual was the main form of censure. In this way, social education supplemented the limited religious education which the peasant children received from their parents and the village priest. All they knew were a few prayers from church attendance, learning life-skills from life itself (Shahar 1990:242-243).

#### **5.6.5.7 Gradual learning and adult accompaniment**

In urban society, children who were not sent away to serve apprenticeships for strangers, learnt the trade from their parents in a gradual fashion. This was a relatively stress-free way of learning work skills. The stress of forming a self-identity was less acute for these boys, who continued the trade of their fathers. There was also less conflict with fathers, who were not threatened by their sons outdoing them, as is often the case in modern Western society. (Butts 1973:165; Shahar 1990:232,235).

The peasant class also acknowledged child-being more than the other milieus, and did not make the same demands of children as of adults. The tasks and responsibilities demanded of them, were introduced gradually and adapted to their age, usually in the presence of adults, until the age of 14 when they completed their training. They were trained in a gradual informal fashion, without acute transitions, separation between the sexes or rites of passage. The training of knights who accompanied, waited upon and emulated the feudal lord at table, in tournaments, in the hunt and battle and in the stable, was also a gradual process. The page was only knighted at 21, unless earlier, on the field of battle, because of some particularly commendable act (Duggan 1948:90; Shahar 1990:242-253).

#### **5.6.5.8 Non-violent/ authoritative discipline**

As early as the end of the eleventh century, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), voiced vehement opposition to the beating of children in monasteries. In response to the complaints of an abbot that the more the latter beat the children, the worse-behaved and more savage they became, Anselm called for tolerant, non-violent education, by means of personal example, compassion, love, encouragement, and correction, only when necessary. He believed it was wrong to beat a child, not only because beating was ineffective, but because those who suffered violence and threats in childhood, would become stressed individuals, and symptomatically hate-filled, suspicious, violent, and bestial adults (Duggan 1948:85-86; Shahar 1990:172).

The training in the rudiments of "love and religion" in chivalric education had a beneficial effect in softening and refining the habits and customs of a hard age and the knight's brutality. If it were not for his training in courtly etiquette, the knight would not have been courteous to women and men, and would have been even

harder than he was. The knightly ideals of obedience/ service modified the selfishness and individualism of barbarian tradition, where the knight took violently what he wanted (Duggan 1948:90-91).

#### 5.6.5.9 Folk tales

Although there was no children's literature in the sense of stories written solely for children, folk tales, passed down through the centuries in many versions, were a great source of popular entertainment for adults and children alike. This was one way children had, of coping with the stress of being regarded as miniature adults and illiteracy. There was also a beginning of vernacular literature in the tales, ballads, and lyrics sung during the long winter evenings in the castle. This relieved stress in children brought up in the chivalric way, and was pleasantly comprehensible, being conveyed in their mother tongue (Gies 1969:66).

#### 5.6.5.10 Quicke Bookis

Medieval religious *Corpus Christi* drama/ cycle dramas that entertained and moved spectators, were often especially directed at transmitting values to children, and included children actors, in an age when schools and literacy were rare, and priests were often ignorant of the central tenets of their faith. Children could learn more of the Bible from these *Quicke Bookis* or *living books*, than from many other sources; even the bulk of the church service was in Latin, and sermons in the vernacular, especially on parish level, were infrequent. Children also learned a philosophical and theological concept of time - God's timelessness and a view of history - that was universal, providential and apocalyptic according to God's will - that led them to find the chief ideology of their age, that made sense of their universe and also made their universe a hopeful and less stressful one. The devotional stories of the dramas conveyed this ideology necessary for their developing self-concept.

They also thus learned and found a cathartic emotional release from a revolutionary and condemnatory attitude towards the contemporary spiritual and secular upper classes. The upper classes were portrayed as enemies of the commoners, as they were in reality. Not only were these dramas a means of coping with these and other stressors, such as illiteracy and lack of schools, they were also entertaining and a means of understanding and coping with frightening aspects of Medieval life - villains were of an entertaining and funny, but scary, frightfulness. Children were

portrayed and appeared on-stage, in several minor and one or two major roles; and children's games were incorporated into the plays. It appears that the *Quicke Bookis* were largely for the benefit of children's education for coping with life's stressors (Hanks 1986:118 -127).

#### **5.6.5.11 Learning kept alive**

Enlightened rulers such as Charlemagne (742-814) and Alfred the Great (849-899), tried to keep learning alive during an age of destruction, upheaval and constant warfare. Alcuin (735-804), who was a teacher in Charlemagne's palace school, enriched the curriculum according to a more classical tradition. King Alfred tried to require that all free-born boys learn to read English, if not Latin, and helped to translate a number of essential works into English, including the Bible. This may have helped solve the problem of stress due to a lack of academic motivation, in the medieval pedagogic situation. (Lucas 1972:201,205; Frost 1947:68; Sommerville 1982:62; Boyd 1980:100,103,121).

#### **5.6.5.12 Provision of free elementary education in the vernacular**

During the early Middle Ages, King Alfred (849-899) tried to stimulate the development of the native Anglo-Saxon language and literature. Alcuin (735-804) had also promoted the vernacular by speaking to his pupils in their own language.

During the later Middle Ages, after the 12th century, the Church continued to exercise control over schools, but secular agencies got into the act too. In the later Medieval period, more and more boys not intending to enter the orders, were included in monastery schools - they were called *externi* - but did not necessarily receive such detailed instruction, as the *interni*. Kings, guilds and towns also established and maintained municipal schools, whose numbers gradually increased. The groundwork was being laid for national systems which would eventually consist of vernacular elementary schools for the ordinary people, and classical or secondary schools for the upper class. The Third Lateran Council in 1179, decreed that every cathedral church and some church and monastery schools, should have a master, not only assigned to teach boys who wished to become clerics, but also to teach without fee, poor children whose parents could not afford to pay for the instruction. This showed interest in the social and educational upliftment of the masses, who suffered the stress of illiteracy and lack of education for their children. (Frost 1947:82; Butts 1973:163; Logue 1960:46).

## **5.6.6 Social support**

### **5.6.6.1 Community spirit/ adult festivities and activities**

Children joined adults in all activities: public executions; religious processions; en masse construction of churches; performances by jesters/ bear-tamers/ wandering minstrels; drama and street mime. The community spirit and inclusion of children in the festivities, generally relieved tension and helped medieval children come to terms with their stressors and stress (Hanks 1986:119; Shahar 1990:238).

### **5.6.6.2 Parental support/ family continuity**

According to Shahar (1990:251) peasants valued their children and loved them more than the other classes. They were an essential labour force, but they were attached to them, since they brought them up themselves. This perhaps helped the peasant children feel secure, as well as contributing to their ability to cope with the life of a peasant, that was hard, wretched and violent. Moreover they usually assisted in and emulated the daily existence and labour/ tasks of their parents and other family members. Life and learning were part of a continuing process, without change or rifts in the family structure.

### **5.6.6.3 Family values and the Church**

Devotion to the extended family was a heritage from the barbarian tribes, who had overthrown Rome (an urban economy supporting nuclear families) - and who lived in almost tribal situations. The Church admired and supported this devotion to the family and domestic virtues; idealising primitive society as opposed to Roman decadence. Although they believed that celibacy was the highest life, they also thought that the rest of the population was better served by the strong Germanic family, than by the rampant individualism of sophisticated Roman society. The Church wanted the family/ individual to be considered sacred: a partnership bound by charity, the highest of Christian virtues; a form of security/ confidence, guaranteeing less vulnerability to life's demands (Sommerville 1982:57-58).

### **5.6.6.4 Family connections in the monastery**

Like so many of the strategies employed to ease the child into the personality required by Church, sending a child, with a brother or sister, to a monastery -

which was founded by a family forefather, was the focus of family piety and endowment, or had a relative currently there, was a way of helping the child to cope with the stress of being forced into the religious life (Shahar 1990:199).

#### **5.6.6.5. The feudal system**

People in the Middle Ages accepted the pressure of the feudal system, because service and loyalty meant protection and land. Everyone had his place in the social order; and all activities were suited to this particular age of farming and fighting. This coping strategy built into the social structure offered the child a sense of safety and security too (Lucas 1972:206).

#### **5.6.6.6 Role models**

Knighthood was taught by means of example to children, instead of meaningless punishment. Discipline was maintained by constantly reminding children of ideals of obedience and service. The child's role model showed him chivalric values; but education was adult-centred, and the role model was not usually a loving parent (Kruger 1992a:78-79; Verster *et al.* 1982:101).

#### **5.6.6.7. Group cohesion**

According to Shahar (1990:198) what probably helped children in monasteries, to cope with the negative results of stress such as fear, anger, loneliness, or anxiety, was the fact that they were part of a group of children, all experiencing the same way of life, and that the adults (especially those in the monasteries) led as repressive and stressful way of life as they. In this case support was provided by a adult and child peer group.

Death in the Middle Ages, was also a social event within the bonds of the family or community, and belonged to the social fabric as much as birth and marriage. This social support from the family, was a strong coping strategy for stress due to death, experienced by children and adults (Raidt 1987:73).

Gouveia (in Cowan 1994b:2) states:

Christians of earlier times, right up till the Middle Ages, relied on the support

they knew was there in their communities. In Renaissance times this seemed to diminish.

According to Gouveia, levels of stress are reduced when individuals seek support in "the community spirit" (in Cowan 1994b:2).

#### **5.6.7 Play/ games/ carnivals/ festivals/ rest**

Although the Church actually condemned games of all forms: - parlour games; play acting; dancing; cards; dice and even physical sports - games and play offered children and youth of the Middle Ages much pleasure, leisure and relief from the stress due to strict discipline, and other stressors. Children were encouraged to play various games, many with religious connotations, to teach the child to learn to appeal to God when in distress, and also realise that God also loves the losers. An example of such a game was to give a half-drowned chick as a plaything to a child, who would summon the aid of a saint to revive the chick. This was in line with the general other-worldly attitude of Middle Age society, as well as its typical cruelty (Shahar 1990:104; Gies 1969:63-64).

Although overly adult-centred in their view of children, the presence and participation of children in adult activities including accompanying their parents to church and theatrical performances, generally helped children to socialise with others within and without the family milieu, and to deal with life's stressors. According to anthropologists and historians, carnivals and festivals - during which a reversal of norms and unruliness are permitted - provide a safety-valve in a hierarchical society, divert attention from social problems, create cohesion in society and provide an outlet for release and a ritual protest of norms (Shahar 1990:112,181; Clare 1992:18).

Alcuin (735-804), one of the first educational reformers of the Middle Ages introduced the spirit of play into the work of the school room. He used puzzles, riddles, epigrams and joked, especially with the younger pupils. He led them on to greater effort by talking their language, by talking to them at their level and making the lessons enjoyable and humorous (Cole 1950:129).

Rest and relaxation were thus often acknowledged as strategies for stress in the Middle Ages, despite the Church's antagonism. St Thomas Aquinas (1989:213-

214) refers to the coping mechanism of rest from stress, as well as those of appropriate venting of emotions and bodily health:

Any rest of body relieves fatigue, ..and any sort of pleasure relieves sorrow...Tears also are a natural relief from sorrow; sleeping and taking a bath and whatever else restores the movement of life in the body also oppose and mitigate sadness, for getting the body into good condition benefits the heart, the beginning and end of all movements in the body.

The numerous religious feast-days were a compensation for the children's stress. On these days, the pupils and masters enjoyed fewer hours of study than usual or a full day's holiday. On major holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, they were able to travel home. Debates, contests, cock-fights, ball and other games also provided a break from the tedium of school life, on these days (Shahar 1990:190).

## **5.6.8 Religion and ritual**

### **5.6.8.1 Belief in miracles**

Physicians found it difficult to diagnose diseases, and they could not generally help, apart from giving advice regarding the balance of humours. They believed it dangerous to administer medicines to infants, and even blood-letting was forbidden. Only in the case of fractures and tumours, were they convinced that they could cure the child by operating. Here, mothers preferred to appeal to the saints and this was the sole medication for all other children's ailments. The many stories of miracle cures that resulted from supplications to saints, suggest that some illness may have been psychosomatic and due to stress, although many of the stories were inflated to enhance the reputation of a saint and the Church (Shahar 1990:145-148).

### **5.6.8.2 Baptism**

Baptism was a rite of initiation, the immersion of a child in water being the symbol of his becoming Christian, through an act of re-birth, and death to sin. This gave a sense of security to children, who witnessed the baptism and knew that they had been already baptised, as well as to their parents (*Catholic Link* 1994a; *Young Church* 1995:9; Shahar 1990:45-57). As Shahar says (1990:51):

Parents made every effort to ensure that their progeny were baptised, and the fact that they succeeded in baptising a child before it died was of solace to them. The death of an unbaptised infant not only caused grief but also raised fear.

### **5.6.8.3 Confession**

According to Shahar (1990:177) the act of going to Confession might have given the medieval child a sense of release from stressful guilt-feelings. Moreover, many advocates of Children's Confession recommended that young children be asked questions adapted to the psychology of the child.

Like the Eucharist (the eating and drinking of the Body and Blood of Christ in the material shape of bread and wine), the penance which followed the sacrament of Confession became a normal aspect of Christian life, spiritual medicine and a way of finding help, when faced with a stressor (Stugrin 1986:147; *Young Church* 1995:10).

### **5.6.8.4 Processions**

Medieval people fostered the idea of innocence and purity in childhood. Ritual expression of this view and its atoning power, was found in the custom of allotting a place at the head of many religious processions to children. This may have relieved the child's stress as a result of always being regarded in a negative adult-centred light, or simply ignored (Shahar 1990:17,19).

## **5.7 SUMMARY**

A period of chaos, social ferment, hunger, disease, war and many other stressors, the Middle Ages was also a culture "boasting such triumphs as the soaring Gothic spires, a rich literature and the finely honed philosophical subtleties of scholasticism" (Lucas 1972:200). Despite disasters and distress, acute and chronic physical and psychological stress, many medieval children learned to turn dysfunctional stress into positive stress. They grew up to become members of a society which managed to painfully rebuild a new Christian civilisation, under the domination of the Church, out of a world that was in a state of chaos and transition, after the individualistic and materialistic Greco-Roman civilisation had been overwhelmed by barbarian tribes.

Eventually learning spread from the cloistered monastic life to the secular mainstream. Great cathedrals were built, art developed, towns, universities and schools were founded, government became more settled, trade flourished and voyages of discovery began (Williams 1990:69; Lucas 1972:240).

Although there was a lack of early childhood cultural conditioning, aimed at emotional control, amongst the medieval courtly society, self-restraint was the monastic ideal for many other children. This attitude of forbearance and strength, when under stress, was embedded in the popular culture, and transmitted to children of the lower classes as well. Medieval stress was difficult to cope with on a daily basis, unlike the stress experienced in less complex societies. It was not, on the other hand, merely endured - in the sense of being suppressed, ignored, or "bottled up", for a purely social motive (as in the ancient Greeks). According to the Christian ideal taught by the Church, stress was acknowledged, accepted, positively welcomed and given an eternal and transcendent significance. This was a buffer against despair and darkness, in an unavoidably and overwhelmingly stressful world.

Yet a tendency for excessive resignation, acquiescence to one's fate, and submission in the face of stress, had a negative side, in that it could also have contributed to character traits typical of the individual, who does not manage to deal successfully with stressors. Examples of these traits are: suppressed individuality and initiative; passivity; unassertiveness and an external locus of control (inability to see oneself as being in charge of one's own feelings and behaviour). This might have been the case with some medieval children who were cast into such a personality.

Nevertheless, it was not the ecclesiastical, but the more individualistic chivalric way of life - with its lack of control - that completely fell away - to be replaced by a new (Renaissance) world of individualism, enterprise and commercialism. The age of chivalry was no longer relevant and, in addition to a general lack of emotional control, on the part of members of this society - which meant a general inability to cope with stress - there was the added stressor of social change, with which to deal. Members of chivalric society were not equipped to cope with stress, and particularly that of a changing world. On the other hand, the monastic life and Christian ideals of coping, remained in Western society - in a strongly surviving Catholic Church, as well as in the various Christian religions that grew out of the

Reformation (Statistical Yearbook 1992:4). It appears that the Christian ideal was a universally relevant strategy of stress management.

Having cast a brief glance at some aspects of stress in the pedagogic situation of the Middle Ages, the researcher hopes that further light has been shed on our own situation in South Africa, that is currently also in a stage of transition. Before evaluating the present in the light of all the past eras discussed in this project, the researcher should like to return to the contemporary situation and examine the particular situation of the South African child who is in a transitional/ traditional stage. This child is especially affected by the current change from the old apartheid society, to a new one of co-operation and reconstruction. Already under stress - owing to the old order, where he was historically and educationally disadvantaged - the child in the transitional/ traditional phase, is now facing the additional stressor of having to adapt to a Westernised society and education system. He should be adequately helped to handle this stress and actualise himself as an individual, in a new South African society that will, hopefully, emerge from its current stage of transition; just as the Renaissance grew out of the transitional stage of the Middle Ages, which provided the link between the ancient world and the modern era.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE CURRENT SOUTH AFRICAN TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION

	Page
6.1	INTRODUCTION..... 224
6.2	THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE CHILD IN THE TRANSITIONAL/TRADITIONAL PHASE..... 225
6.3	THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE CHILD IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PHASE..... 226
6.4	CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE CHILD IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PHASE..... 227
6.4.1	Stressors at macro-level in the outside world and society/ culture..... 227
6.4.1.1	Stressors in the outside world..... 227
	(i) Conflict/ violence..... 227
	(ii) Rape..... 228
	(iii) Population pressure..... 228
	(iv) Urbanisation/ township life..... 228
	(v) Poverty..... 231
	(vi) Disease..... 232
	(vii) Economic problems..... 233
	(viii) Unemployment..... 234
6.4.1.2	Stressors embedded in society/ culture..... 234
	(i) Socio-political change..... 234
	(ii) Conflict between traditional and Westernised values..... 235
	(iii) Ubuntu..... 237
	(iv) Different languages/ lack of communication..... 238
	(v) Drug-taking sub-cultures..... 238
	(vi) Discrimination against women..... 239
6.4.2	Stressors at meso-level in the family, peer group and school..... 239
6.4.2.1	Stressors in the family (including the peer group)..... 239
	(i) Parental neglect/ abandonment/ abuse..... 239
	(ii) Street children/ peer pressure..... 240

	Page
(iii) Parental/ paternal authoritarianism.....	241
(iv) Emotional coldness.....	241
(v) Maternal neglect.....	242
(vi) Large families/ nuclear family/ single parents.....	242
(vii) The generation gap.....	244
(viii) Parental expectations.....	244
(ix) Parental stress.....	244
6.4.2.2 Stressors in the school.....	246
(i) Inadequate secondary pedagogic situation.....	246
(ii) Rural education.....	248
(iii) Language.....	248
(iv) Learning styles.....	250
(v) Dualism between cultural and school background.....	250
(vi) Home environment/ early education.....	251
(vii) Meagreness of material milieu.....	251
(viii) Parental illiteracy.....	252
(ix) Lack of free elementary universal education.....	252
6.4.3 Stressors in the child's self.....	253
6.4.3.1 The physical self.....	253
6.4.3.2 The sexual self.....	253
6.4.3.3 The self-concept.....	253
6.4.3.4 Ineffective disassociation qualities.....	254
6.4.3.5 Personality.....	255
6.5 SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	255
6.5.1 Violence.....	256
6.5.2 Delinquency.....	256
6.5.3 Reduced motivation.....	256
6.5.4 Various affective disorders.....	258
6.6 STRESS MANAGEMENT/ COPING MECHANISMS/ TECHNIQUES/ STRATEGIES.....	258
6.6.1 Family unity.....	259
6.6.2 Traditional rules.....	259
6.6.3 Religious beliefs.....	260
6.6.4 Play, crafts and art.....	260

6.6.5	Music/ dance/ poetry/ song.....	263
6.7	SUMMARY.....	264

Many South African children are in *transition* between a *traditional* and a Westernised way of life. These children in particular, are currently experiencing stress in the *transitional/ traditional* pedagogic situation.

According to the *Heinemann English Dictionary* (1979:1171), the term *transitional* refers to a state of *passing or changing from one position or condition to another*. Many South African children are affected by transition/ change, in contemporary South African society, which is being transformed into a new order. Children, whose *traditional* way of life is becoming Westernised, in the pedagogic situation of both the home and the school, are especially affected by this *change*.

The term *traditional* may be used to describe customs, culture, beliefs and norms, which are passed down, virtually unchanged, from generation to generation (*Heinemann English Dictionary* 1979:1168). South African children, whose upbringing involves exposure to these old and established *traditions* on the one hand, and those of the post-modern Westernised world, on the other, in a society which is both Westernised and traditional, experience stress owing to the conflicting characters of these vastly different life-styles.

According to the *News* (SABC TV1, 14 October 1994) recent research has shown that black matriculants suffer more from abnormal stress than other South African matriculants; and that this is due to inadequate home and school (pedagogic) conditions. These children are not being adequately helped to cope with the particular demands and stressors of the *transitional/ traditional* pedagogic situation to which they are expected to adapt. Luthuli (1990:78) speaks of the black child's *distress*, as well as the need to encourage the desire to know more about plight of every South African child, and particularly that of the black child.

The problem of acute and chronic dysfunctional stress in the pedagogic situation of the child in the *transitional/ traditional* phase - whose traditional life-style is being transformed under the influence of a Westernised way of life - deserves special analysis, in this project, before a final evaluation of the current general South African situation. In this chapter, the researcher will highlight causes, symptoms and coping mechanisms regarding stress in the black child, that were not fully described in Chapter Two, which dealt with stress in the contemporary South African pedagogic situation in general, and the Westernised South African

pedagogic situation in particular. It is necessary to analyse stress in the current transitional/ traditional, as well as the Westernised South African pedagogic situation, in order to arrive at a complete understanding of this problem from a time perspective. For this reason, pedagogic stress in the traditional tribal/ hunter-gatherer society of early man was examined in Chapter Three; stress in the pedagogic situation of ancient Greece - which forms the basis of Western education - was viewed in Chapter Four, and stress in the pedagogic situation of the transitional era of the Middle Age - when the Christian world of the West established itself amongst the early barbaric tribes of Europe - in Chapter Five.

Like the Middle Ages, South Africa is currently in an era of "trauma, transition and transformation" (Baba 1994). "It is experiencing the crisis of rising expectations in black townships" as the apartheid system is replaced by a new collaborative dispensation (Holland in Ashton 1994:3). The child in the transitional/ traditional phase, is exposed to the traditions of his forefathers, as well as the customs of the Westernised world, and needs particular assistance with regard to coping with his changing world. As Holland (in Ashton 1994:3) says:

Like the medieval peasants who lived in unfriendly cities, on the outskirts of societies in Europe, South Africa's township dwellers are undergoing a necessary and extremely painful apprenticeship - a transition from rural to urban life.

South African transitional/ traditional children, who are urbanised as well, are faced with many stressors that are particular to their pedagogic situation. These will also be described in this chapter.

## **6.2 THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE CHILD IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PHASE**

According to Moulder (1994:22) and Van der Walt (1990:282) the majority of black South Africans are under 15 years old and this percentage is growing. Most have not mastered the concepts that govern technology and administration; and *individual initiative* is not a concept that their social structures encourage. The primary and secondary pedagogic situation of the South African child in the transitional/ traditional stage is currently often in conflict, because of often divergent values. In the former situation, traditional culture - generally blended with a degree of the so-called First World life-style - predominates; whereas in the

second, a Western-oriented educational approach has been the norm. According to Maimela (1994:1), education in South Africa has been in the hands of people with a Euro-American system of education and training perspective. In addition, owing to cultural segregation in South Africa, the secondary pedagogic situation of the majority of South African children was historically impoverished, disadvantaged and inadequate. These children have been adversely affected by the apartheid policy, which caused economic stress, political violence, cultural separation and educational impoverishment. In the current period of transition, initial efforts, are being made to transform and unify the system of formal training and education, and redress the social balance in the child of adversity's environment too; but matters are still in a state of reconstruction and development, and not yet adequate for the needs of this child. At times, the transitional/ traditional child does not cope with his emotional adjustment to the pressures, tensions and strains of his pedagogic situation at home and at school, and symptoms of his stress are evident (Bengu 1994:1; Schoemann 1994:5-6).

### **6.3 THE NATURE OF STRESS IN THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE CHILD IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PHASE**

The response of the child in the transitional/ traditional phase, to the many stressors in his life, is in transaction with various factors. The first is his particular perception of the world. According to Fr Dabula Mpako, Rector of St Peter's Catholic Seminary, Pretoria, interviewed on 14 July 1994 (28), this perception is that of the sociocentric African *psyche*. The child with such a perception, is more orientated towards experiencing stress in terms of the group, than as an individual. According to Mpako, emotional reactions and problems of the child from marginalised societies, are dependent upon his feelings as an individual, to a certain extent, but are much more interrelated with his sense of identification with his society. According to Mpako, the causes of this child's stress will be mostly found in society and the socio-economic conditions of his life, more than other stressors.

Another factor influencing his response to stressors, are his cognition and learning style, which is not traditionally the same as children of the intellectually oriented Western culture (Groenewald 1976:30). His experience of the world, dependent on a political system - which has often made his people victims of social conflict, injustice and historical disadvantage - is another example of the many factors influencing his stress-response, which are in themselves causes of stress, some of which the researcher will attempt to describe in the following section.

## 6.4 CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE PEDAGOGIC SITUATION OF THE CHILD IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL PHASE

### 6.4.1 Stressors at macro-level in the outside world / society/ culture

Although many of the stressors at macro-level, facing the child in the current South African pedagogic situation, were mentioned in Chapter Two, those of particular relevance to the majority of South African children, who are experiencing chronic poverty and adverse psycho-social conditions, will be the focus of this chapter. As Schoemann (1994:5) states:

A child's capacity to learn depends not only on his personal resources, but also the resources of his environment.

#### 6.4.1.1 Stressors in the outside world

##### (i) *Conflict/ violence*

According to the *News* (SABC TV1, 31 August 1994), 20,000 people were killed as a result of violence in South Africa in 1993. The high level of killing and brutality has been, and still is, a daily, indirect and direct reality in the lives of the children living in townships and other areas of violence (Goldstone Commission Report, on the *News*, SABC TV1, 10 August 1994). All South African children in the transitional/ traditional phase have been to some degree implicated in the imposition of apartheid and the struggle against it, including that of the *street revolution* in the townships. The latter refers to the violence and fighting amongst civilians, involving many children and members of the *lost generation* (the youth who have not completed their education, and are also unemployed). Hardly anyone has escaped being damaged, and children especially, need to be taught to cope with violence in non-violent ways. Families have experienced losses, lives damaged, outlooks warped and attitudes twisted, as a result of years of struggle against the old political system (Connor 1994b:7). According to Fr Noonan, a Franciscan priest, who has conducted surveys on the impact of violence in the townships, random killing still forms a pattern of life. He says (in Greenberg 1994e:2):

If you ask a congregation how many people have had family members killed or incapacitated by violence, fifty hands go up. The police are at their most

vulnerable at this moment. People are continually being hijacked ... There is still a culture of fear.

Children are particularly under stress because of violence as Mmuti of Soweto (in *Young Church* 1994:12) reveals, when he asks fellow South African children to pray for peace, because the violence in his town makes him "very scared and sad". Conflict, violence, death and fighting due to tribal conflict in black townships and rural Kwazulu Natal, have also caused much distress in the lives of children, whose emotional and spiritual growth is consequently inhibited, instead of being sustained and promoted (*G.M.S.A. SABC TV1*, 2 September 1994). They live in a community at war with itself, and there have been so many deaths that most people have lost their sense of weeping (Mkhize in Paterson 1994:9).

(ii) *Rape*

The fact that a rape takes place every 20 minutes in South Africa - 27 056 cases were reported in 1993, indicates a major stressor. One in four girls and one in nine boys in Natal have been sexually abused. Domestic violence against children occurs in all social groups (Cowan 1994a:3; Killian in Paterson 1994:9).

(iii) *Population pressure*

Social scientists have suggested that the high birth rate among poor families in South Africa, is a survival strategy in the face of a high mortality rate among children under five. The resultant excessive rise in the South African population has caused rapid urbanisation and overcrowding in townships and large informal settlements - owing to the lack of adequate housing facilities. Children grow up under stressful conditions, and experience a lack of facilities in the overcrowded home environment. There are 5 million homeless people in South Africa today, of which the majority are children (Slovo 1994).

(iv) *Urbanisation/ township life*

Rapid urbanisation has resulted in overcrowded and deprived townships, a harsh reality to its children. Services are non-existent, management is poor, financial and professional assistance is lacking, underground water supplies leak, sewers are open, stormwater drains are blocked, river gullies are used as toilets, and large

squatter areas/ informal settlements, are but few of the problems (cf. Figure 6.1/ 6.2, pages 229/ 230).

According to Mgoqui (in Weiss 1994:1):

We need to change the total human environment where women and men, the sick, the elderly, disabled and children can live, not in despair but hope; not in anger, but in peace. Each minute's delay is a social timebomb ticking away.



**Figure 6.1** Fatherhood in an informal settlement  
(*NU Focus* 1991 Vol. 2, No. 1: Cover)



**Figure 6.2** Squatter camp in the Western Cape.  
Picture by Terry Shean (in Bauer 1995:3)

(v) *Poverty*

Poverty and hunger are the causes of stress in children and adults, all over South Africa, in urban and rural areas (cf. Figure 6.3, page 231). In the words of Asmal (1994:1):

(People suffer) the daily indignities of the lack of the most basic of human necessities (and) have to stand in line for hours to collect water... Poverty maims and kills people... A lack of basic services is...an indicator of poverty. Unsafe water, poor nutrition because of water shortages and sanitation-related diseases, are literally killing people daily...



**Figure 6.3** A dry time: Rural poverty.  
(*NU Focus* 1992 Vol. 3, No. 4:6)

According to the Office of Multicultural Initiatives (in *Education Newsletter*, 1994b:7), 48 percent of African High School Students -in the PWV Urban Areas, live below the poverty line.

Groenewald (1976:29-30) maintains that the child's perception of, and meaning he attributes to his world depends on how "rich" or "poor" the environment is in everyday things. In the simple material environment -of the traditional rural world or impoverished township - where mere survival is the aim, the child's intellectual development is hindered, as he has insufficient opportunities for the adequate development of the perceptual and manipulative abilities that are required in the mathematical-geometrical world of the Western culture. Thus because of poverty (in addition to a language disadvantage), the black child may suffer stress owing to intellectual underachievement (verbally and non-verbally).

(vi) *Disease*

Poverty and its medical consequences scar the physical self and the individual *psyche*. Health costs extend far beyond the economic dimension, to encompass social and psychological suffering and pain (Jinabhai 1994:5). Among children, in KwaZulu Natal, the major health problems are diarrhoea, respiratory infections and undernutrition. Adolescent diseases and those of adults (whose death or illness cause much stress in their children) range from infectious diseases like tuberculosis, trauma associated with violence, diseases of life-style (like hypertension and heart disease) and reproductive health problems (abortions, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including Aids). Diarrhoeal diseases - associated with overcrowding and the lack of clean water, toilets and refuse removal - account for over a fifth of all deaths. Surveys in Cape Town, have shown that infant mortality rates were highest among low income households. The proportional causes of child mortality, range from intestine infections, (27 percent), acute respiratory infections (16 percent) and nutritional diseases (10 percent). Tuberculosis was the most common notifiable disease in South Africa in 1991 - and measles is another leading cause of child mortality and morbidity in South Africa. Researchers in Cape Town estimate measles cases in the region of 30 000, with 300 deaths annually. Typhoid fever, associated with the use of contaminated water, ranks fifth in the table of notifiable diseases, with the majority of cases occurring among Africans. Another water-borne disease, cholera, reached epidemic proportions during the 1980s Typhoid and cholera are endemic in KwaZulu Natal - the sprawling informal settlements provide a natural reservoir for

these infectious diseases. There are over two million South Africans who are nutritionally deficient, with childhood undernutrition being as high as 31 percent among pre-school African children because of rural poverty.

The social and psychological costs of this extensive ill-health, suffering and death are large. Children and adults feel the stress of anger, frustration and grief associated with having a sick child or adult in the family, and not being able to obtain affordable, accessible or appropriate health care (Jinabhai 1994:5-7; UNCF 1994:6).

Aids is a special problem. Hundreds of thousands of South African children will not only have this disease, passed on to them by their mothers, but will be orphaned by Aids by the year 2000, and will become a social time-bomb as they inevitably turn to crime and prostitution, being alone, destitute and homeless; and under stress, like the generation of children affected by township violence. In 1994, official statistics forecasted 10,000 Aids orphans by 1995. Department of Health figures showed that 15 000 HIV-infected babies were born in 1994, nearly 4000 people a day are being infected and that, by the year 2000, the annual death toll from Aids will be 150 000 (Caelers 1994a:2; St Leger 1994:3). As Fleming (in Caelers 1994a:2) says:

Children of HIV-infected parents have death stamped all over them. They have the pain of watching one or both parents die, perhaps even a grandparent and siblings.

Lamont (in Caelers 1994a:2) points out the extreme stress from suffering, in those children who are infected themselves. He states:

About 90 percent of HIV-positive families are unemployed, which created a roller coaster of effects - children are taken to hospital only once they are really sick, which means doctors don't get the opportunity to prolong their lives.

(vii) *Economic problems*

Poverty in South Africa is not being alleviated. Political crises has brought a lack of foreign investment, economic depression and the failure of many commercial and industrial enterprise resulting in rising rates of unemployment, exorbitant prices of food and other essential commodities, and the destabilisation of communities.

Lack of education and training has made it difficult for the country to face increasingly stiff world competition. This affects the ability of the individual and families of the child in the transitional/ traditional phase particularly, to function constructively in and outside the home. Hopelessness about the future and mounting financial difficulties are wrecking the home, often leading to the stressors of family violence and child abuse. Faced with little job prospects, children also find academic learning very stressful (Seale 1994:23)

(viii) *Unemployment*

Barbel Haldenwang, a researcher at the University of Stellenbosch's Institute for Futures Research says (in Caelers 1994b:6):

(a) restless community of nearly three million black and coloured youths is roaming the streets without jobs and with no prospects of employment. With no facilities to occupy their idle hours, many are being driven to lives of (violent and property) crime and despair as they face a (bleak) future.

According to Haldenwang, rapidly growing numbers of black youths are entering a rapidly growing school system, but are faced with a "stagnating labour market". In post-apartheid South Africa, only about eight percent of school-leavers were expected to find jobs. Their stress is exacerbated by unstable family lives and broken homes, which lead to feelings of anxiety/ helplessness and the seeking of safety with the peer group and its negative pressures. Children also suffer stress as a result of unemployed parents. Nearly half of the working population of South Africa is currently unemployed (Connor 1994b:7).

#### 6.4.1.2 **Stressors embedded in society / culture**

(i) *Socio-political change*

Owing to the rapid change in South Africa today, and the changing social situation in which they find themselves, there is particular pressure on black families to adapt to the current stage of transition, until a new order is reconstructed and developed out of the ashes of the old. The current atmosphere of waiting for a better future is tense for all South Africans, but especially black children -whose identity and life-style are in a particular state of flux (Seale 1994:23). Anim (1991:10,12) describes South Africa's current social change and its effect on education:

Indeed now tensions and *stress* are building up within all the component societies of South Africa, a sine-qua-non of every dramatic social change. But in this *stress* situation, I believe some creative effort will emerge to help us face ourselves in our quest for an education of relevance, to pull us from the murky waters...South Africa is a society in *transition*; and whereas in the previous educational phases of South Africa, education for the subordinate societies e.g. the black, was often designed and planned without prior consultation with or participation of the affected communities; education in this crisis-ridden *traditional* phase will of necessity have to be with their full participation.

Anim also (1992:14) describes the "Renaissance of the African Attitude" that is currently taking place in South Africa today, and is in conflict with the Westernised values that face the child in the townships, in his school and through the media, causing confusion, inner conflict and stress. This awareness of Africanness began with Léopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal, who after a long sojourn in the education of the West, rediscovered his *négritude* (his own French term for the *African personality*) which he considers to be *Homo Compasio*, the Latin expression for a *feeling being*, who is his brother's keeper, as opposed to the Latin term, *Homo Sapiens* which denotes the Western Cartesian concept of a *thinking being* (Van der Walt 1990:285).

(ii) *Conflict between traditional and Westernised values*

The Western-oriented transitional/ traditional child partially reveals an objective and individualistic attitude to life, which belongs to the world of technology, economy of money and competitive society, but is still characterised by his traditional world (Groenewald 1976:11). Traditional life is materially and intellectually less complex than typical Western life. Traditionally the black child is educated to ensure the survival of the tribe, and continue its customs, skills, knowledge, attitudes, folklore, ceremonies, religious beliefs and behaviour. There is no need for personal interpretation of tasks, inner conviction or understanding. Repetition and memorisation are more important, so that the child may learn social rules and its folklore, and fit into a mould which resembles that of adults and other children (Groenewald 1976:15-18).

Individuality, ambition, exploration, personal interest, initiative in relationships, have no place. Even the rightness or wrongness of behaviour is related to the

advantages or disadvantages which it may have for the tribe. Groenewald (1976:24) speaks of the

Conformity, conservatism and homogeneity of the views and actions...in a ...simple, stable and uniform world...

Groenewald (1976:8,24) and Mpako (cf. Interview 28) maintain that the individualism of Western-oriented society is incompatible with group interests. The tradition-directed personalities of traditional society is ruled by a collective unconscious which harbours inherent experiences of society - in the form of "permanent motives/ primeval types" as a whole - more than a personal unconscious, which harbours repressed personal experiences. Sisulu stated, during a television interview (Sisulu 1994), that the problem which black adults and children have with coping with modern Third World pressures is a social problem, because their traditional culture is used to a different way of life. She suggested that emotional problems such as stress in a child, are not due to the child's innate inability to cope, but due to the fact that he is made to cope with a foreign culture.

The materialism of the West, is also foreign to traditional cultures, that are exposed to it via the mass media, for example. Yet both materialism and individualism have pervaded the traditional *psyche*, that finds itself in a state of inner conflict. According to Hatugari (1993:6), this conflict begins today in children, who were formerly taught how to behave by the family, the peer group, the immediate community and society at large. Hatugari maintains that the media directly or indirectly influences the character, dress and mode of behaviour of both rural and urbanised children - who still have rural roots - and causes negative acculturation and "cultural deviants".

Leoka (1992:17) speaks of the "cultural colonisation" in society that does not allow blacks to assert their African culture. He also states how stressful it has been for those who had/ have to conform to a foreign culture. Lowen (1994:6-7) gives the example of folk tales: the *intsomi* (Xhosa) or *inganekwane* (Zulu) or *ditshomo* (Sotho) which tell children about the traditions and values of their traditional culture, and help them to cope with the stressors of life. Yet the impact of the mass media/ television has reduced the telling of these stories, and introduced another set of values - without replacing them with other coping mechanisms for the demands of a new life-style.

The detribalization of black families has caused them to lose their roots, identity and self pride (Klaaste 1994:7). Children and parents often feel insecure because traditional ceremonies such as those of the *sangoma* (witch-doctors) that heal and protect, are no longer part of their daily lives (Greenberg 1994d:4).

Families that have "migrated" from rural to urban settlements, often experience the strain of imposing their traditional way of life in a "foreign" environment, where traditional requirements struggle to be accommodated. For example, one may find the incongruity of initiation rites being carried out by a Zulu *sangoma* (witchdoctor), in a Langa *squatter camp* (informal settlement or *shantytown*) near Cape Town. These practising traditional healers are forced to search for much needed herbs for traditional remedies, in an ecologically unsuitable area (*Earthfile*, BBC, 1 September 1994).

Within families, there is often conflict because of contradictory values. A lady wrote to a "television lawyer", interviewed on the programme, *G.M.S.A.* SABC TV1 (17 October 1994), requesting advice regarding the taking of her child to a *sangoma* by her mother and sister, which was against her will, as she was a Christian. The power of the *sangoma* and witchcraft remains powerful (Holland in Ashton 1994:3).

*Lobola*, the traditional wedding payment from the groom's to the bride's family is another source of conflict today, in transitional/ traditional families. *Lobola* was formally a means of building the relationship between the two families, and a sign of respect given a woman under traditional law. Now the western view has taken hold, and it is increasingly seen as being deeply insulting to women. This creates stress and tension within families, affecting everyone concerned, including the children (Robertson 1995:14).

### (iii) *Ubuntu*

Like traditional healing, the ethnophilosophy of *ubuntu* - the Zulu expression for lived religious belief which implies caring, healing, sharing and accepting outcasts - is central to traditional life in South Africa. The spiritual concept of *ubuntu* involves Africa's way of seeing life from an ancestral point of view, and implies that each person is worthy of respect. Each person has dignity, as the ancestral spirit imbues a group of people who live together. The spirit brings harmony and peace of mind to the group. According to traditional belief, the individual who does not

have such a group experience, is lifeless, despairing and under abnormal stress (Alt 1994:3; Radio Metro interview, 25 July 1994). *Ubuntu* means that without human relationships, humans have nothing. According to Alt (1994:3), Westerners find it difficult to understand such an outlook, because the Western value of *achievement*, means “getting a task” done, even if human relationships are brushed aside and sacrificed. Alt states:

The implicit dichotomy between the African and Western approaches remains. What is more important: efficiency and profitability, or human life and relationships? African customs and ritual are there both to celebrate and respect humanness.

(Alt 1994:3)

*Ubuntu* is similar to the concept of *Ujamaa* or *familyhood* that overwhelmed Julius Nyerere, who tried to link African traditional culture and values to the process of revitalising education in Tanzania, during the 1960s. In studying his own society, he became aware of the concepts of sharing and hard work, freedom within unity, love and liberation of the African. For him *Ujamaa*, which crystallised his personal concept of the African society, involved: equality, self-help, co-operation within the community, the right of every individual to have dignity and respect (Anim 1992:16).

(iv) *Different languages/ lack of communication*

When it comes to effective communicating with each other, South Africans are faced with a complex situation. At present, most black South Africans do not have a good knowledge of English. A study undertaken by Market Research Africa for the SABC, found that only 19 percent of black South Africans are able to speak and understand English really well. Only 3 percent of other groups speak an African language. Since educational success depends on the mastery of a Western language, the majority of the population does not do well academically. 70 percent of the population, hold 9 percent of Degrees (Lowen 1994:6-7).

(v) *Drug-taking sub-cultures*

Owing to the many stressors facing South Africans in the transitional/ traditional phase, a sub-culture of drug-taking is entering the townships and the vacuum created by the collapse of the old police force and the institution of the new. This

has led to criminal actions, including violence, including family violence. Generally the abuse of drugs and alcohol is one of the largest destroyers of family life in South Africa (Greenberg 1994e:2)

Children are either drawn into drug-taking themselves, or suffer as a result of family involvement. Thousands of street children - including those of the former street revolution - abuse Mandrax sometimes, but mostly *dagga*, the South African local brand of *marijuana*, which is used in some tribal rituals, and is widely grown in township backyards and on vast rural plains. Since the end of *apartheid*, and the end of strict social control - foreign drug traffickers have moved in with cocaine and heroine. Normally affordable only to affluent whites, these are now offered to township children and youths too. This increasing social problem is yet another stressor for children (Macleod 1994:36-37).

(vi) *Discrimination against women*

Women in changing Africa, are currently fighting against a system that traditionally relegates them to the background, and does not accord them the same status as men in Africa. Illiteracy amongst women in Africa is particularly high. Women played a significant role in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism in Africa, and yet are not mentioned in recent history books. This leads to a lack of self-confidence, frustration, low morale, motivation, and general despondency, in female children and adults, compounded by the currently stressful political, economic and social situation in South Africa (Mthimunye 1994:2; Matsepe-Casaburri 1992:16).

## 6.4.2 Stressors at meso-level in the family, peer group and school

### 6.4.2.1 Stressors in the family (including the peer group)

(i) *Parental neglect/abandonment/ abuse*

A conservative estimate has been made that there are at least 15,000 abandoned children in the whole of South Africa. Many factors cause parents to abandon their children, but poor socio-economic conditions are probably the main cause. The lack of an adequate social welfare system means that unemployed and other poor people are unable to provide for their children. Some unmarried mothers, particularly teenagers, abandon their children, in toilets, drains etc. because they

are afraid of their family's reaction to an unplanned pregnancy. In the past, the extended family was able to care for such children, but with the breakdown of the traditional family structure, and increasing financial pressure on families, this is no longer so common. Some abandoned children live in places of safety and children's homes, others have nowhere to go, and resort to their peer group for support, as street children or members of street gangs. This results in their experiencing a new stressor in the form of negative peer group pressure (*Catholic Link* 1994:b).

(ii) *Street children/ peer pressure*

Inadequate parenting or abandonment, as well as secondary pedagogic neglect, force thousands of children to follow the stressful life of street children and gang members, in contemporary South African townships. They live in drains or parks, for instance; share the clothes they receive from charity or other means, amongst themselves; do not bath or eat a decent meal for months; beg at street corners; and often resort to crime for survival and revenge on society (Drysdale 1994:30; Van Heerden 1994a). The following are examples of street children interviewed in Kimberley (in *Street children* 1994:2): Lebogang Moraldai, 16, a street child since 1992, is the eldest of four siblings, who were abandoned by their father, after their mother's death. Patrick Sibiya, 18, went to the streets and dropped out of school in Standard Three, after his mother was killed and his father had neglected and then deserted the family. Elias Thlakiya, 18, took to the streets when he was ill-treated by his stepfather. On 25 July 1994, an eighteen year old boy named Jacob, together with his friend, Albert, were interviewed on Radio Metro, along with their social worker, "Ivida". Because their primary pedagogic situation had proved so stressful, they had each independently felt forced to leave their families in rural areas in the Transvaal, some years before. They had been battered by alcoholic parents, who had been under stress themselves; the one boy's mother was also a single parent. Both boys had left behind siblings, home and school, because their problem had seemed insurmountable - they could not communicate their needs or their feelings to their family, because as Jacob said:

Black children just do not say certain things to their parents.

There was no social worker in those areas to help them. All they felt they could do, was run away. They became yet another addition to the great number of street children living in the Johannesburg area today, under extremely stressful conditions: shelterless, hungry, forced to beg, seeking safety with gangs/ substance

abuse/ crime. According to the social worker, under whose care they eventually fell in Johannesburg, they were both victims of parental and emotional neglect, owing to the loss of traditional family values on the part of their parents, who were semi-Westernised as well. Unable to cope with the dual life-style, they resorted to substance abuse - and other negative coping mechanisms - and abused their children physically, or by withholding love, security and physical care. In an attempt to escape from the stress of parental abuse, these children also found acceptance and a sense of comfort in the peer group of street gangs, who unfortunately introduced further stressors into their lives, in the form of drugs, crime and other negative coping mechanisms, which became symptoms of their stress as well [cf paragraph 6.4.1.1 (viii); 6.4.1.2 (ii) & (v)].

(iii) *Parental/ paternal authoritarianism*

Groenewald (1976:18) refers to the harsh, strict disciplinarian attitude of traditional parents, for whom respect, unthinking obedience, conformity, humility and total submission to authority are expected from their children, after they are weaned in early childhood. Fathers are especially aloof, and are authoritarian in their discipline, which involves punishments and threats instead of discussions, persuasion or attempts to enter their children's interests and problems, that would help them gain insight into the reasons for the desired behaviour. Traditional initiation ceremonies reflect this paternal and parental sternness, in a society that expects absolute conformity to norms. Initiation rituals frequently involve ritual flogging or beatings, or other harsh treatment, such as half-drowning, whilst the child is expected to repeat rules of behaviour; an unbearably stressful experience.

(iv) *Emotional coldness*

According to Groenewald (1976:42), outward emotional demonstrativeness is not typical of the traditional way of life [also cf. quote in paragraph 6.4.2.1 (ii)]. There is a lack of open affection or communication in the traditional relationship between the child and his father - who gives the responsibility of child-rearing to the mother. When the father is home, there is tension, because of his stern and cold attitude towards the family. The traditional mother gives much physical attention in the early years, but with older children, there is very little sustained attention or personal relationship, because the weaning of one baby is often followed fairly soon, by the birth of the next child. This means that, although the traditional child has the security of the collective and closed community, he lacks the security of the

nuclear family including guidance and encouragement regarding orientation and exploration of the world.

(v) *Maternal neglect*

According to Groenewald (1976:17,19) traditional rural and urbanised mothers are indulgent and provide loving physical care to the small child until weaned, but neglect the child thereafter, because of lack of time due to having another baby and/or many children and/or having to work. Usually elder daughters take over the mother's obligations, while the mother has a younger child to look after. Traditional and transitional mothers are also often unable to provide the material conditions that promote intellectual growth, owing to economic poverty. Nor do they spend time playing or talking to their children, owing to lack of time or social acceptance of the need for this. In townships, working mothers do not always have or can afford day-care for their children who are left alone, and who often become involved in street gangs, crime or drugs, or become victims of various forms of violence or other dangers (UNCF 1994:6).

(vi) *Large families/ nuclear family/ single parents*

Many children of the traditional/ transitional phase do not receive much maternal attention, nor are treated as individuals because of their big families. In rural society, with the extended family and freedom from township peer pressure regarding crime and drugs for instance, they cope with this stressor (Mpako 1994/ Interview 28). This is not, however, the case in the case of the urbanised child, who is often part of a nuclear family and separated from his supportive rural extended family. Many children are of single parents too (Mthimunye 1994:2; *Education Newsletter* 1994b:7). These children generally do not have the support of a father and suffer much stress.

Yet the need to be with the supportive extended family, on the part of urbanised traditional families is great, and much expense and effort is put out, on the part of the child's parent(s) in order to return him and themselves, to rural areas for holidays, funerals, weddings or other important tribal/ family events (Groenewald, 1976:16,19; Robertson 1995:14; cf. Figure 6.4, page 243).



**Figure 6.4** Transitional/ traditional wedding (“On 8-9 December 1990, married Mr T and Evelyn Motswai” by Tommy Motswai [courtesy of Goodman Gallery], in Robertson 1995:14).

(vii) *The generation gap*

Parental illiteracy, compared with the reality that many black children are able to read and write, causes a gap between traditional parents and their children, who have had more educational opportunities than they. The generation gap is also widening because traditional children are being exposed to Westernised values through the media, in township life, in school and in the peer group, that differ from those of their ancestors (Lowen 1994:6-7). This conflict situation is a cause of much stress to the child in the transitional phase, symptomised by the forming of street gangs and living in the streets, for example.

(viii) *Parental expectations*

Sociocentric African culture sees education as means of escaping from poverty. Black societies prime their children towards community interests, and not to go to school to become self-sufficient successful individuals. Because of poverty, families can often only afford to send one child to study as far as matric, and that child is expected to become the breadwinner. Families make great sacrifices for this, so as to not perpetuate the cycle of poverty for the family. Thus great social pressure is exerted on the child to succeed, which must be a source of stress. His self-actualisation in the educational situation is not a priority, and his motivation is stressful and purely external (Lowen 1994:6-7). In traditional communities, intellectual ability, persistent and persevering scholastic diligence and achievement are not highly regarded by parents, whose lives are lived according to ancestral traditions, and who do not promote cognitive experience or inquiry in the young (Groenewald 1976:31-32,43). This means that the child is not oriented towards the cognitive experience of school and the problems of Western-orientated life, which become stressful for him.

(ix) *Parental stress*

At home, the transitional/ traditional child's parents are often also in a state of transition from their traditional world towards a more Westernised life-style. The way they handle this and other stressors, including political change, financial pressure and the pressure of finding time for their children, directly affects the children. Some parents and children cope with conflict situations, others use negative coping mechanisms such as substance abuse, alcoholism, crime or running away (Radio Metro, 25 July 1994; Seale 1994:23; cf. Figure 6.5, page 245).



**Figure 6.5** Transitional/ traditional motherhood  
(*NU Focus* 1991 Vol. 2, No. 1: Cover)

#### 6.4.2.2 Stressors in the school

(i) *Inadequate secondary pedagogic situation*

There are two million children not in school at present in South Africa. These children are not part of the institutional fabric of society. They are the shack dwellers and those in remote rural areas (cf. Figure 6.6, page 246); and are not included in the formal educational framework of the so-called developed countries, that South Africa has been following (McGurk in Greenburg 1994b:2).



**Figure 6.6** Transitional/ traditional child in rural slum/  
homeland (*NU Focus* 1991 Vol. 5, No. 1:11).

The stressor of educational neglect is a great problem and a cause of other stressors including violence, crime and homeless children. Recent statistics indicate that fewer than 1 percent of black school entrants actually passed matric (Lowen 1994:6-7). Education for the child in the transitional/ traditional phase is currently in a very distressful state.

A differentiated school system involving different education departments has resulted in a disadvantaged education system for disadvantaged communities, and less expenditure per capita on their children. In 1988 R2700 was spent by government for white children, whereas only R560 was given for children of the Department of Education and Training (black children) and R280 for rural (farm) children. The Bantu Education Act that set up the system, did irreparable harm to educational progress, over many generations, and it will take years to right the wrongs of the past (Sexwale in Theys 1994:3; Bengu 1994:1; Gordon 1993:9).

Dissatisfaction regarding inequalities has resulted in further stressors for pupils such as teacher boycotts. Generally there has always been a lack of well-qualified teachers for transitional/ traditional children, which is yet another stressor in the school situation, because these teachers lack wages, morale and motivation, thereby negatively affecting their pupils. Other causes of stress for pupils are: poor and overcrowded classroom conditions/ facilities; a lack of basic learning equipment, including text books; a chronic lack of finance for schools; a lack of parental/ community involvement; different age-groups in the same classroom; a lack of realistic and/or vocational orientation for pupils; development of skills; an over academically oriented curriculum; Westernised (irrelevant) subject matter/ content resulting in pure memorisation/ rote learning, encouraged because children do not really understand the material; lack of training in examination techniques, and a consequent inability to cope with the system; lack of pre-school education to prepare children for the school environment; lack of preparation of children from rural schools, who find urban schools different and stressful. There are also not enough schools for these pupils: whilst there was an excess of places in light of enrolment in 1993, for whites in the Cape Province, for example, there was a shortage of 250,632 places for African pupils (*Education Newsletter* 1994b:7; Steyn 1992:203; Mphahlele 1992:196-200; Groenewald 1976:51; Matsepe-Casaburri 1992:16-18).

(ii) *Rural education*

Although there is a vocal urban school sector in South Africa regarding the problems of the transitional/ traditional child, the rural sector is largely ignored, and presents a most stressful situation for its largely traditional children. Yet the rural sector is substantially larger. In 1992, 70 percent of black pupils received a rural education of whom seven percent attended farm schools. The standard of rural education is particularly low; there are fewer than 20 matriculation classes amongst the 5500 farm schools throughout the country. Minimally subsidised, these received a full subsidy for the first time in 1993. Rural communities are too poor to take over the full cost of education and need help. Their problems are different to those of urban schools and examples of these are: isolation of schools; lack of good health care; transport difficulties - children are often sent to school only when they are much older, because they have to walk such long distances - poor nutrition; only being able to study during daylight hours; overcrowded classrooms; lack of well-qualified teachers; inadequate resources; inefficient delivery of teaching materials. There are poor education facilities in towns, but the situation is worse in rural areas if they exist at all. Many farm children struggle to gain access to school, and the majority do not find placement beyond junior primary school. Schools are closed at the whim of farmers; there is no community involvement and parents play no role in governing bodies for instance (Gordon 1992:188-196; 1993:9). The transition to school is very stressful for a rural child.

(iii) *Language*

Amongst transitional/ traditional children there is Second Language paucity in respect of the language medium at school. These language-impaired pupils find it stressful to learn, and lack the motivation to master Western cultural techniques such as basic literacy and numeracy, that form the basis of the knowledge content in other subject fields. Deficient language control also hampers the teacher-pupil relationship/ communication. When the transitional/ traditional child learns via English, for instance, as a second language, he often feels insecure and fear, which is a disruptive affective experience for him. Learning in his own language makes him feel safe, accepted and confident enough for future learning (Groenewald 1976:iv,55-56). Learning in the mother-tongue proves less stressful, and helps the child confidently master basic techniques and knowledge, enables new knowledge to be integrated into the child's existing cognitive framework, leading to insight. It does not, however, prepare the child for secondary school/ higher learning,

because it is the "repository of the contents and concepts of his particular traditional way of life including social relations, moral and religious convictions" (Groenewald 1976:55). It lacks the vocabulary with respect to technical terminology, and in the case of advanced learning, prevents the necessary integration of new knowledge into the existing cognitive structure as well as adequate perception, insight and concept formation.

Language is, therefore, a source of stress for the transitional/ traditional child, whether it is first or second language, depending on the pedagogic situation. A former transitional/ traditional pupil of the 1960s, told the researcher, during an interview in July 1994 (29), how stressful she had found learning through a medium of a Westernised language, during her school days. She had dropped out of school. Since then, her daughter, who had found the transition from traditional to a rural life-style easier, had managed to complete her matric, and was a student at Natal University.

Language development is also poor and a stressor in the learning situation because there are limited libraries in black residential areas, a limited amount of books written in the vernacular, and very limited access to reading material. In addition, English language teaching is poor. The pupil is only exposed to 300 English words during the first three years of his schooling. He is then exposed to 3000, and all classes are taught in English, although many teachers are unable to do this. Most pupils drop out at this point, because of their inability to cope with the language shift. The accelerated pace after the third year of school - in addition to the lack of educational opportunity for older generations - results in the fact that 50 percent of black population have less than four years of education, which results in illiteracy.

Some say that necessitating the black child to learn an "official" language to facilitate his access into industrialised society, has proved to be one of the critical factors impeding their progress and perpetuating their poverty. Lack of mother tongue instruction is cited as one of reasons for the low pass rate; although from November 1993, black students may now write their matric examinations in their mother tongue (Lowen 1994:7). The "immersion" of transitional/ traditional children into a second language as their medium of instruction from early in the primary school has by and large been a failure, and extremely stressful for the child. In certain Anglophone African countries, who have adopted English as their medium of instruction; the "Straight for English" model has, nevertheless, found support amongst urban black South Africans (Macdonald 1990:93).

(iv) *Learning styles*

DJ van den Berg's research on the mathematical ability of African pupils (in Moulder 1994:21) has discovered that African pupils do not find mathematics more difficult than white students. What they find difficult, is the highly individualistic and solitary (northern hemisphere cultural) way in which it is learned. According to Moulder, the curriculum needs to be Africanised and changed, and teaching and learning organised to suit different learning styles, because it is a source of stress for the transitional/ traditional child. Senghor claims that there is a basic difference between the white man's apparatus for intellectual analysis (the main task of the school) and the black man's approach to intellectual perception and reasoning. The former is analytical and discursive through application, whereas the latter, is intuitive through participation (in Van der Walt 1990:285).

(v) *Dualism between cultural and school background*

Groenewald (1976:iv) points out this conflict of values, as a stressor in the lives of black school children in South Africa. They are often taught according to a Euro-American perspective of reality, instead of as Africans in an African context, who should accept their Africanness, as people in the West - who contributed to civilisation - accepted their Westernness (Maimela 1994:1).

Motala (1992:24-30) points out that the learning style in the black child is group orientated, in the sense that African communal society interprets relevance on the basis of the principal of communal life as a priority. Here one thinks of the stress of the black child in coming to a school, where the policy is child-centred individualism, competitiveness and the rationalistic, social neutrality typical of our First World Western Culture.

Van der Walt (1990:284-289) states that black education today is foreign to the culture and traditions of the black community: there is increasing incongruity between "home culture" and "school culture", and the Western school is a didactical-pedagogical island. Luthuli (1990:80) points out that the aim of education, as well as the image of adulthood in traditional society, is and should be a social value and a collective view of man.

(vi) *Home environment/ early education*

The lack of pre-school care to prepare the transitional/ traditional child for school, amounts to primary and secondary pedagogic neglect. The early years, crucial to early development, need adequate pedagogic care. In the case of African children, there is generally defective orientation towards school activities requiring intellectual effort, with resulting negative stress (Groenewald 1976:iv; *Slain priest* 1994:3; Mphahlele 1992:210-214). As Groenewald (1976:50) states:

The school situation is essentially a re-establishment of the original home situation in which the child is assisted, with the aid of particular learning contents, to constitute his own meaningful world of experience within his cultural environment. The learning child is confronted at school with the most fundamental cultural material and skills of his world

The transitional/ traditional child who has not had the necessary experiences during his pre-school years, will have problems interpreting and internalising what he perceives in the Western oriented school situation. This leads to feelings of stress, and stress symptoms like lack of motivation and learning success. The pedagogic situation of the school is thus inadequate - a mere practice in the memorisation of irrelevant facts (Groenewald 1976:51; Schoeman 1994:6).

(vii) *Meagreness of material milieu*

The black child's poor home environmental perception will generally not have prepared him for Western education (Groenewald 1976:iv). Karstaedt (1993:23), a teacher in a High School in Langa, in the Cape, paints the following portrait of a typical township child. According to her, the child was probably born in a room where about nine people lived, was continually surrounded by noise and movement, waking or sleeping, crawled and toddled to finally run in a street without his mother, who left for work before dawn 6 days a week and returned after dark, to clean, cook and instruct his big sister to feed him, before he slept, warm and huddled near his mother for a few precious hours before the day began again. She speaks of the frustration of the child, who tries to read and write with no background of perceptual and motor training, formal or informal, in that pre-school education is unknown in his culture. She mentions how he feels that his grimy classroom is clean, compared with the squalor of his township shack. She describes the fortunate child who has a parent or a grandparent, in the rural areas

to whom he returns, in the school holidays, leaving a week before term ends and returning two weeks after term begins again, due to distance and unforgettable expense. He sits, quiet and shy, in the township classroom, unfamiliar with city ways, and afraid of city violence; dreaming of childhood times, shepherding flocks or learning traditional ways of life in rural schools. Subjects are classified and conceptualised in terms of First World technologies to which he has no access. The medium of instruction is Standard English, a language he cannot grasp because the people who teach him are not Standard English speakers, and he does not use the language at home because of the racial and ethnic divide. He is a child of a culture whose traditional environment/ knowledge and poor material milieu are rendered useless in the township school where he finds himself.

(viii) *Parental illiteracy*

According to (Mphahlele 1992:210-214), there is a connection between the illiteracy of parents, their failure to enrol children in school and early primary school drop-out. Illiterate parents are unable to help their children with their school work, offer guidance, motivation or reinforcement. In the early years especially, they do not encourage curiosity, intellectual stimulation or optimum care. Traditionally oriented parents do not help their children with their stress in the learning situation because they believe that, even the learning achievement of the child has been predetermined (Groenewald 1976:20; Schoeman 1994:5).

(ix) *Lack of free elementary universal education*

Like other African countries, economic constraints and a decline of the modern sectors of the economy, may force South African schools to reconsider the education system. Without economic resources, it is unlikely that the universal provision of primary education in South Africa will become an attainable ideal. Many other African countries, such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and Kenya are struggling to keep their educational systems going. The system of universal education grew up in Europe at a time when it was industrialising. Literacy, punctuality, working to a timetable, disciplined attention, as well as advanced education were necessary for the work that school-leavers expected (Connor 1994a:9). The problem with Africa is, as Mazrui (in Behrens 1994:64) states:

...it has urbanised without industrialising...Westernised without modernising... borrowed the profit motive but not the entrepreneurial spirit...wear(s) the wristwatch but refuse(s) to watch it for the culture of punctuality.

According to McGurk (in Connor 1994b:7), unless heed is taken of the fact that relatively few jobs are available in a poor economy, South African schools will be turning out a large unemployable elite. Awareness of such a distressing future, is another stressor for children of the transitional/ traditional phases, who struggle through schooling which may prove not only currently stressful, but irrelevant to their future.

### **6.4.3 Stressors in the child's self**

#### **6.4.3.1 The physical self**

Hunger, malnutrition, lack of shelter from the elements, lack of health care and medical services cause physical problems and stress within the child in the transitional/ traditional phase (Mphahlele 1992:210-214). Normal bodily changes may also be more stressful for this child in adolescence when traditional ritual coping mechanisms, such as those for the first experience of menstruation, are not used in the township setting. Substance abuse and accompanying physical damage, is another physical stressor for the homeless child, for example [cf. paragraphs 6.4.1.1 (vi); 6.4.1.2 (v)]

#### **6.4.3.2 The sexual self**

Sexually transmitted diseases, early sexual awakening and activity, as well as rape and reproductive problems such as teenage pregnancy and abortion, are all stressors in rural and township life, that affect children [cf. paragraph 6.4.1.1 (ii)].

#### **6.4.3.3 The self-concept**

Underactualised from a traditional as well as a Westernised perspective, the transitional/ traditional child does not have a positive or clear self-concept. He is suffering an identity crisis, feeling the pull of both Western and traditional values, with resultant conflict with his parents. The adolescent in particular, shows symptoms of this stress, in worries over his physical appearance, and whether to adopt Western, Afro-American or traditional dress and hairstyles for instance.

In his current primary and secondary pedagogic situation, he is generally not offered much help in understanding himself and his current transitional position. Neither does he have much opportunity for cultural activities, leisure/ free time to think, to build up his self-confidence, and feelings of self-worth, or freedom to express his rights and needs in the basic tools of literacy, numeracy and fundamental skills for life. His morale lacks motivation. (Mphahlele 1992:210-214). The black child - including his family - has become detribalised. He has lost his roots, identity and self-pride. This loss of confidence in who he is and where he comes from, are factors that are an important cause of stress; and consequent symptoms such as violence and anxiety about his future role in society, including employment are the result of this stress (Klaaste 1994:7).

Extreme poverty, ill health and school failure contribute to the low self-concept of the black child. Far from the traditional environment, he also feels insecure because of the lack of tribal protection. The lack of parental affection/ interaction, stimulation, security through exploration and discovery, in the critical early and later years of development of his intelligence/ personality/ social behaviour - which does not affect him in the tribal environment - become all the more poignant in the transitional situation (Mphahlele 1992:210-214).

#### **6.4.3.4 Ineffective disassociation qualities**

According to Groenewald (1976:33-36), the traditional rural child in particular thinks in concrete terms (he has not been assisted to detach himself from that which is concretely perceptible) and cannot disassociate/ detach himself from his subjective experience, be objective and think more cognitively on an abstract level. In simpler terms, his emotions "get the better of him", and a lack of stabilised affective directedness inhibits the actualisation of his intellectual abilities. Biesheuvel (in Groenewald 1976:34) states:

...excessive emotionality is a disruptive factor since it gives rise to nervousness, dissatisfaction and even anxiety, if problems cannot be solved.

The child who is strongly traditionally (and affectively) oriented, finds intellectual directedness stressful, and his lack of success compounds his existing intense stress, which he is unable to control, leading to a negative self-image and anxiety.

#### **6.4.3.5 Personality**

According to Van der Walt (1990:285) the child in his tribal environment, is a happy and mostly carefree person in whose life, personal competition and achievement play no significant role; identification with the group and the family is more important. In other words the inherent Type-B personality of the traditional child, is in conflict with the typical Type-A personality of Western society. The pressurised life-style of the Western world, is not suited to the traditional child, who is used to a more relaxed rural way of life where he lives for the day, aims for a slow accomplishment of tasks, is less aggressive, more reticent and quiet, accepts life at face value, is in control of his simple routine life, and is a generally passive personality - which will not be truly actualised in a Western oriented society (Groenewald 1976:32; cf. paragraph 2.3.3.3).

The Western desire for personal actualisation, restlessness, energetic behaviour even in moments of relaxation, continuous intellectual directedness to utilise time as being precious, materialism and a future orientated time perspective, are not always compatible with the values of the society of the transitional/ transitional child. Although this society may have borrowed Western values, it may not have necessarily internalised them. For example, the Christian faith and traditional belief in ancestral spirits may exist side by side, but are not integrated. Inner conflict and stress result from this clash of different personalities expected by both worlds, which exert their demanding pressure on the African child, and form the ingredients of diseases of life-style later in his life, such as heart disease and cancer - which is evident today, amongst individuals in their forties, for instance (Groenewald 1976:iv,1,2,5,7; Greenberg 1994d:4; Interview 27).

### **6.5 SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN THE TRANSITIONAL/ TRADITIONAL CHILD**

Some of the symptoms of stress described in the following paragraphs, have already been mentioned in this chapter, as being stressors. A few other symptoms will, however, be outlined, in the light the general list, in Chapter Two, of possible symptoms of stress. The symptoms mentioned here regarding the child in the transitional/traditional phase, are based on observation of specific cases for the most part. It is, however, a brief description, as a more detailed one would require extensive and intensive empirical research, which is beyond the range of a project of this size.

### 6.5.1 Violence

A stressor in contemporary South Africa, where over 80 per cent of high school, and 40 per cent of junior primary children have witnessed it, violence is a symptom of stress as well as being a negative coping mechanism (Chikane in Paterson 1994:9). Five percent of high school pupils admit that they had been part of a group that had killed one person (Paterson 1994:9). Violent communities are reflected in children's art, for example at an open school, described on the *News*, SABC TV1 (10 August 1994). Violence also creates Type-A personalities, who are often chronically angry and aggressive because they become used to violence as an accepted part of life (Golden 1990:68).

### 6.5.2 Delinquency

According to Holland (in Ashton 1994:3), the lost generation, the uneducated, have formed themselves into township gangs. They steal cars and rob houses for a living, emboldened by the combination of *dagga* and Mandrax, known as white pipes, which virtually all unemployed youths and street children smoke. They frequently *psyche* themselves into the mood for robbery by watching the hedonistic life-style portrayed on television soap operas which persuade them to redress the balance and "get even". These child-criminals are generally beyond the control of the police - or the community which used to control crime - even in the face of acute poverty, in townships like Soweto. The parents are afraid of their children, and also often rely on their criminal gains in order to survive. Although these children may appear tough and content with their lives, the constant stress of a life of violence, crime and drugs, must be accompanied by acute distress and the fearful reality of a short life. During an interview (30) with Fr Declan Collins, a teacher and housefather at the Don Bosco Institute for Street Children, in Cape Town (on 14 October 1992), the following became apparent to the researcher: the distressed, maladaptive behaviour and inappropriate responses of these children, may be also regarded as a symptom of their stress, which is a result of an inadequate primary and secondary pedagogic situation, emotional deprivation and low self-esteem.

### 6.5.3 Reduced motivation

During the period 18 January to 30 May 1994, the researcher observed Lendiwe (not her real name) in the secondary pedagogic situation. She was 15 years old and in Standard Six. She had come from rural Transkei to live in an informal

settlement in the Western Cape, with her mother, a domestic worker, and two sisters. She said her father was not with them and her brothers were still in the Transkei. She attended what was then a predominately Westernised school, near her township. Due to the stressors in her home situation, as well as the conflict she experienced between the Western values of school and her family's traditional values, she showed symptoms of stress such as: absenteeism; low self-confidence; withdrawal; distress; impaired concentration; anxiety and reduced initiative.

Symptoms of her inner stress and conflict regarding body-image were revealed in her hairstyles, which varied from day to day, between her own natural style and African-American fashions. Feelings of loneliness and isolation were evident in her inability to relate to classroom conversations on even everyday topics, such as the holidays or shopping, with her remedial English group, whose materialistic individualistic perception was not the same as hers. She appeared "frozen" when confronted with Westernised textbooks, but related to a more traditionally oriented one. Generally Lendiwe was very shy, inhibited, unwilling to express herself, frequently absent, anxious and nervous because of her inadequacy regarding oral and especially written English. As was observed in primary children by the *Threshold Project* (Macdonald 1990:35), that researched the difficulties black children experienced with the change of medium of instruction in their fifth year of schooling, the effort Lendiwe had to make in expressing herself in English, appeared to cause her great stress during the lessons. The *Threshold Project* also found through individual testing of oral skills, that traditional children are not used to speaking spontaneously, and especially in English - that they often only hear from the teacher or the media; and that it is stressful for them (Macdonald 1990:34).

This emotional "block" regarding self expression in a foreign language, prevented her from further learning, and she lacked motivation and perseverance with regard to even simple assignments. She appeared to have given up hope and rarely smiled. She failed most of the terms tests, her marks reaching marks as low as 3 percent, even though she had passed Standard 6 in the Transkei and was repeating the year. As Groenewald (1976:44) states:

In test situations, according to Biesheuvel, demands are made upon the (traditional child) which require formative development which he does not have and which is not relevant in the particular world in which he lives - a degree of

formative development which presumes a future perspective and which is the basis for effective (affective) motivation.

#### 6.5.4 Various affective disorders

The researcher observed Thembo (also not his real name) from the period January 1992 to March 1992. Formerly from Lesotho, now in a very academic orientated school of over-achievers, Thembo felt out of his depth, unprepared and stressed. A lively and friendly boy when relaxed and alone with the researcher, in the class situation, he showed symptoms of stress such as: aggressiveness; forgetfulness; irritability; jealousy; moodiness; touchiness; suspiciousness; feelings of inadequacy; becoming quickly frustrated; restlessness; less involvement with others; incessant talking or daydreaming.

The traditional child often feels inner discord, tension and stress because he is expected to detach himself from the traditional world of his parents, when in the Westernised pedagogic situation. As a result of this dualism between traditional education and that of a Western oriented school system, he may feel symptoms of an unstable affective life such as: moodiness; hostility; anxiety; aggression; uncertainty; helplessness; as well as a lack of motivation regarding insight into abstract concepts that he merely memorises. He often receives little understanding and help with his affective experience, either at home or in the school situation. It is possible that he feels overwhelmed by the demands made upon him to adjust to the situation, and unable to take control and have a sense of personal responsibility for the task at hand (Groenewald 1976:52).

#### 6.6 STRESS MANAGEMENT/ COPING MECHANISMS/ TECHNIQUES/ STRATEGIES

According to Kruger (1992:150) *coping* includes all purposeful behavioural/ cognitive responses to stressful episodes and attempts to manage stress, whether they are successful or not. Although the analysis of stress in the contemporary South African situation of Chapter Two, did not discuss the topic of *coping strategies* in depth, it did mention a few factors that contribute to the child's ability to cope with stress, that if purposefully sought out, could become successful stress management techniques. The ultimate aim of this project is to find solutions and make recommendations regarding successful stress management strategies for the present, but the researcher also feels that it would be useful in this chapter, to

mention a few of the coping strategies already used by children in the transitional-traditional phase.

Some of these children appear to cope with their stress. The researcher interviewed a Standard 6 child at a Western Cape High School, on 27 May 1994 (31). Unlike Lindiwe, who was in the same class, this child was coping and doing fairly well at school; always cheerful and confident. The interview revealed that he had gone to a Westernised primary school in the area for a few years, as well as the fact that his mother was a nurse and, therefore, an educated woman. He was obviously orientated to the Western school system. There are many examples of transitional/ traditional children, some of whom are now adults, who managed to cope with their stressors and reached an advanced level of education and positions in Westernised society. They coped with the dualism between eurocentric individualism and African sociocentrism. The question is, however, whether they did properly deal with their stress or merely endure it. Did they simply put up with stressors such as being part of a very large family, their mothers going to work early and returning late at night, and being without parental care? One cannot be sure without further investigation into the matter; but it is important to discover coping strategies that really do handle stress in a positive way, so that it may become a source of growth for future children. Before a final evaluation and arrival at these solutions, here is a brief examination of a few strategies that have proved successful for the transitional/ traditional child.

#### **6.6.1 Family unity**

Group unity as part of *Ubuntu* traditional values is particularly strong still, in the transitional/ traditional child's society. Thabo Mbeki speaks of the collective will that made political change and peaceful transition possible in South Africa (Sawyer 1994:6). This tradition still remains as a positive coping mechanism for the transitional/ traditional child's stress: children still return to their rural families from the townships, during school holidays; whole families see each other as often as possible despite expense and distance, and return to their villages for important events such as weddings (Jones 1994:12-13).

#### **6.6.2 Traditional rules**

Traditionally, the African child has a set of prescribed rules of an ancestral faith to guide his life and relationships (Groenewald 1976:21-22). These include not only

everyday tasks and norms, but also a set of taboos and traditions that form part of his spiritual perception of the world, and are believed to have been created by a supreme being or by ancestral spirits. Many of these rules remain as part of the transitional/ traditional child's way of coping with life, although they may not always help with all the stressors of his semi-Westernised life.

### **6.6.3 Religious beliefs**

Another coping strategy is the traditional African belief in ancestors; especially ancestors who were *ubuntu* heroes - who cared, healed, shared, accepted the outcasts/ alienated/ gave people strength and courage/ who displayed courage which overcame all human fears. The spirit of *Ubuntu* means everyone belongs and no-one is excluded (Greenberg 1994d:4). It affects African family structures which include anyone who claims descent from a common ancestor (Mandela in Stengel 1994:47). This and other traditional beliefs offer security in stress, because they help individuals and the group to feel that, what they do and their behaviour, can directly deal with stressors. They believe that the family is under the direct guidance of ancestors, and that problems are overcome by supernatural activity as a direct result of requests addressed to the forefathers. The latter also confer distress (drought, cattle, plague, tribal or personal disaster, sickness or death) or blessings, according to whether tribal tradition is maintained. They feel that if they do as told by the witch-doctor - who can explain the cause of disaster and determine what should be done for reconciliation - then all will be well (Groenewald 1976:22).

### **6.6.4 Play, crafts and art**

Bell (1993:64) points out the value of play, toys and games as a coping strategy in African children who thus deal with their feelings and problems, releasing tension and relieving their stress. Bell maintains that traditionally African parents place very little value on their children's toys and games, and this is in fact, a sound child rearing practice, in that it allows for a little healthy neglect, which gives the child room to develop his own skills and imagination, and be in control of his own feelings. In the case of the rural African child in particular, play is exclusively the child's domain with adults taking virtually no part in it. Bell maintains that the resulting toys are a true reflection of what the children want to play with, and not what the adults think is cute, clever or educational (as is often the case in the West). The games and toys replicate reality and the child's daily experiences.

Usually the games involve role play and will reveal the influences of where the children live and the activities that their parents engage in. Status is attached to certain toys - in many areas a wooden AK47 is a desirable status symbol. The wider social context of the child is reflected in their play - where they deal with the stressors of their lives. Police chases have become one of the most common games involving wire cars. The political situation is reflected in the toys which become a way of dealing with various social stressors such as violence .

Play also takes on an informal educational role, as much of the culture's needed traditions and craft skills are passed from generation to generation in this way. Traditionally children learn how to control and make use of their environment by making toys of mielie cobs, rags, skins, sticks and mud. In townships, plastic, wire and tin are used. Also the influence of their friends and peers can be seen in the choice of toys made. A Westernised competitive element is introduced in that details on the toys become crucial to establish one-upmanship; a way of adjusting to stressful Westernisation.

The actual making of the toys becomes therapy and an important part of the whole process. Unlike those of Westernised children, traditional children's toys are not only fixed and finished objects around which to build fantasies and games, as are most commercial toys, which the child cannot improve, adapt or adjust - only break. For little boys, half the enjoyment of owning a wire vehicle is the hours spent repairing, adjusting and adding new features to it; while little girls get as much pleasure from moulding and decorating their mud houses as they do from playing with the finished article.

Play, toys and games are synonymous with relaxation and pleasure and release from stress. Unfortunately increasing urbanisation and material aspirations have detracted from the value of cultural crafts in the eyes of the urbanised child who is losing traditions and skills. Thus their play and aspirations become subject to the dictates of the Western world's materialism, and they yearn for commercial toys and games. Control of his own (stressful) feelings/ world, independence and inventiveness is thus being removed from his hands.

Nevertheless, transitional/ traditional children, in the contemporary South African pedagogic situation also currently benefit from the relaxation and rest from stress provided by relaxation activities typical of the Western world such as art and sport (cf. Figures 6.7/ 6.8, pages 262/ 263).



**Figure 6.7 Relaxation in sport**  
(*NU Focus* 1994 Vol. 5, No. 1:44)

According to Killian (in *Scars* 1994:20), children who are victims of violence in South Africa reflect the war happening around them, in their drawings. Killian maintains that drawings by pre-schoolers in a single study in 1992, depicted violence in progress - guns firing, spears, soldiers, police attacking people, burning houses, injured people being put into ambulances, corpses and parcels being carried to a new home. These drawings reveal their stress and the "scars" left by violence on their minds, to those engaged in helping them overcome it. The drawings also provide the children with a means of coming to terms with their stressors themselves. They vent their feelings of trauma in an appropriate way, and cope with their stress without resorting to further violence.

In the secondary pedagogic situation of the school, some of these children benefit from the therapy thus provided for their stress, provided the school has the facilities and material for these extra-mural activities. These are often lacking in township and rural schools.



**Figure 6.8** Rest from stress in art  
(*NU Focus* 1994 Vol. 5, No. 3: 49).

#### 6.6.5 Music/ dance/ poetry/ song

Participation in, listening to and watching musical art forms are particular ways of coming to terms with the stressors of contemporary life for children in the transitional/traditional phase. This is a continuation of traditional music as a coping mechanism. The following are some examples: *Toyi toyi*, the dance, actions and music of protest; the oral praise poetry of tradition that has been urbanised to become praise of political institutions and individuals; *Maskanda* - neo-traditional music played by Zulu-speaking migrant workers to children and adults as the modern day folk-singers of Kwazulu Natal - that deals with social, political and emotional issues (Crozier 1993:12); and modern commercial music that mixes traditional and Western rhythms, instruments and language, and deals with contemporary stressors including poverty, unemployment, the *lost generation* and hunger - such as the musical work: *Retrenchment* by the group *Bayete* (cf. Figure 6.9 page 264).



**Figure 6.9** Advertisement for publication concerning post apartheid apartheid youth policy (*NU Focus* 1994 Vol. 5, No. 1:45)

## 6.7

### SUMMARY

The researcher feels that the following table succinctly reveals how distressful the transitional/ traditional pedagogic situation is. The table, issued by the Office of Multicultural Initiatives (*Education Newsletter* 1994b:7), is entitled: *Profile of an African High School Student - PWV Urban Areas*.

<b>FACT</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Is one in a class of 72 pupils or more.....	56
Lives below the poverty line.....	48
Has both parents unemployed.....	52
Comes from a single parent home.....	56
Has no electricity at home/school.....	23/43
Has no-one home at home after school.....	89
Has been detained at least once.....	8
Older than 22 years in matric.....	18
Has no teacher in more than three subjects.....	42
Has no books in more than five subjects.....	68
Will not finish high school.....	82

The child in the transitional/ traditional phase is under great stress. He needs to be taught coping skills when his traditional strategies fail in his particularly stressful, complex world. He needs to be helped to take charge of his destiny and be in control, so as to turn stress into positive growth, creativity and progressive actualisation of his potential in an increasingly dualistic Westernised/ Africanised society. He can thus be equipped to devise/ invent opportunities/ work in an impoverished society. In a press statement, issued by a consultation - drawing representatives from different Christian denominations and religions, held in Johannesburg, 26 September 1994 - South Africa was described as having been through a painful chapter in its history. The consultation spoke of the "broken spirit of our nation" that "religious communities must work towards healing" (Connor 1994b:7). Children in the transitional/ traditional phase especially need to be helped work through their perplexity, frustration, let-down and pain, so as to be able to move forward into the future. By helping these children to cope with stress, as with helping other children to become future adults in our South African society, the researcher feels that we will be providing the psychological grounding essential for any further learning success be it academic, practical, technical or commercial.

If the child can be taught how to harness his stress, as a source of strength and evolution, he will be able to contribute to our hoped-for South African Renaissance. In the words of Van Heerden (1994a):

**Give a man a fish, and you kill his hunger for a day. Teach a man, to fish and you kill his hunger for life.**

**In other words, the child needs to learn how to handle stress. For even if some of the child's stressors (such as illiteracy, poverty, disease and inadequate schools) are removed from his life-world, he may still experience stress; since its existence is neither dependent on stressors nor the individual's response, but on the interaction of the two, that is also in transaction with many other factors, especially perception. Moreover, the child should not only be helped with his current particular stress, but also with his general ability to handle stress at all times.**

**The challenge facing education and teaching in South Africa today, as it tackles the problem of stress in children, is to undertake a paradigm shift from a narrow clinical, individual, teacher-counsellor-based perspective, towards a broader community and population-based mental health perspective. Parents, teachers and pupils should be made aware of the problem of stress, which is at the root of many psychological and physical health problems; and greater emphasis should be placed on teaching our children preventative and promotive mental health/ self-care, in schools and at home.**

**Finally, as Dr Dostal of the Institute for Futures Research in Stellenbosch has optimistically said (in Anim 1991:10):**

**Innovation is born out of a stress situation...is the creative response to stress, and societies with moral strength and determination tend to respond creatively.**

**Perhaps the South African child can be helped to know how to rise out of his extremely stressful situation, into a new age of personal and social growth. In learning how to deal with stress in the contemporary pedagogic situation, he will be able to "make lemonade out of a lemon" and make stress work for him, instead of letting it inhibit his self-actualisation (Carnegie in Gordon 1992a:29).**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EVALUATION

Page

7.1	INTRODUCTION.....	268
7.2	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS REGARDING THE PAST.....	268
7.2.1	Past stressors.....	268
7.2.2	Past symptoms of stress.....	270
7.2.3	Past coping mechanisms.....	271
7.2.4	General remarks.....	271
7.2.4.1	Stress in the pedagogic situation of early man.....	272
7.2.4.2	Stress in pedagogic situation of ancient Greece.....	273
7.2.4.3	Stress in the pedagogic situation of the medieval child.....	274
7.3	CONCLUSIONS REGARDING STRESS IN THE PRESENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION.....	275
7.3.1	Causes of stress in the present pedagogic situation.....	276
7.3.2	Symptoms of stress in the present pedagogic situation.....	277
7.3.3	Stress management in the present pedagogic situation.....	277
7.4	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE.....	280
7.4.1	Stress management programmes for children.....	280
7.4.1.1	Encouraging awareness of stressors.....	280
7.4.1.2	Awareness of symptoms.....	281
7.4.1.3	Learning coping strategies.....	281
	(i) Relaxation techniques.....	281
	(ii) Adequate health habits/ diet/ exercise/ sleep.....	282
	(iii) Being in control.....	283
	(iv) Realistic and positive self-concept formation.....	283
	(v) Polite assertiveness/ appropriate emotional ventilation.....	284
	(vi) Communication skills/ seeking support.....	284
7.4.2	Parental involvement.....	285
7.4.3	Community involvement.....	286
7.4.4	The general curriculum.....	287
7.4.5	Values education.....	287
7.5	CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	287
7.6	SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM.....	289

## **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

This research project has attempted to investigate the problem of stress in the contemporary South African pedagogic situation, as well as the pedagogic situations of early man, ancient Greece and the Middle Ages. The researcher tried to be as comprehensive and detailed as possible, in dealing with such a vast topic in a project of limited size. In Chapter One, a number of questions were formulated regarding the problem (cf. paragraph 1.4), and an attempt was made to arrive at answers to them, by means of the research described in Chapters Two to Six. The researcher hopes to be able to directly answer these questions, as a result of the findings made - and understanding gained - regarding the problem, in the course of the research conducted. Before providing these answers, however, the researcher will attempt, in this chapter, to give an evaluation of her findings regarding the past, conclusions regarding the present and recommendations for the future.

## **7.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS REGARDING THE PAST**

### **7.2.1 Past stressors**

If one views the past pedagogic situations discussed in this project regarding stress, one can see that children have always been exposed to certain stressors which seem endemic to human society. Examples of these, at macro-level in the outside world are: war; population pressure; disease; injury; famine/starvation; environmental/natural stressors; and a general fear of death. Medieval civilisation had the additional stressor of urbanisation; overcrowding; unemployment; and material poverty. Early man (and his children) had the added stressor of the fear of the unknown - he often could not predict when exactly adversity would strike - danger was ever present. He moved himself around to ensure survival, seeking the environment to which he was suited. Later civilisations stayed in one place, and had to adapt to changes in the environment, often increasing their stress because of the stressful social customs which they devised for their survival, in settled communities.

At macro-level within society/ culture, all three societies did not regard the child as an individual; but there were also other stressors for the ancient Greek and Medieval children which did not feature in the lives of hunter-gatherer children. Examples of these are: discrimination against the lower classes; class struggles; military pressure; a negative child-image; treating children as miniature adults; and

forcing girls into prostitution. Other stressors at this level, were unique to their time, such as the homosexuality and control of social relationships of ancient Greece; the negative attitude to sexuality and duality of social pressure (of Church/ State) of the Middle Ages. Social stressors common to all past eras discussed, were social change; sexual discrimination; subordination of the individual to the group; complete adult control of the child's self-actualisation; religious pressure; early marriage and child-bearing; and sadism/ cruelty to children.

In all three past eras researched, the following were evident at meso-level in the family: infanticide; abandonment; shared parenthood; substitute parents; parental emotional distance; parental neglect; polygamous parental unions (especially in males); large families; orphanhood; changing family structures; adult tasks; frightening rituals; and folklore. Parental and paternal absence; child abuse; harsh discipline (especially in later childhood) were prevalent in the Middle Ages and ancient Greece. Physical stressors such as: swaddling and head-binding appear common to both the prehistoric and medieval primary pedagogic situation.

In the school situation, adult-centred education towards a social/ tribal ideal or image, and harsh treatment, are common to all the past eras studied. Lack of basic education for the majority; lack of "State/ Church" financial support; lack of education of girls; lack of vernacular teaching; conflicting values; inadequate teachers and facilities; a narrow curriculum; lack of compulsory and relevant education for all; and children of different ages and backgrounds in the same school were all common to the medieval and ancient Greek school. Unique to ancient Greece was the extreme pressure regarding physical education, and the stressful/ overloaded curriculum, aimed at producing the perfect human (male).

At micro-level, the self-concept suffered in all three societies, because the individual did not count. Physical problems due to ill-treatment and/or disease and injury caused inner stress. Personality must have always played a role as a stressor in the past, because even though each society tried to mould its children into a particular type - usually a tolerant and relaxed Type-B or Mode-Y, certain creative individuals would have been naturally more assertive or aggressive (Type-A or Mode-X), or overly obedient, passive and unassertive (Mode Z), and would have suffered great inner tension. Not a problem in primitive society, social attitudes to sexuality in ancient Greece and the Middle Ages, would have also given rise to much inner conflict in the child.

### 7.2.2 Past symptoms of stress

The children of the past eras discussed in this research project, were psychobiologically the same, and probably responded to stressors with the same automatic emotional and physical stress-response. They were exposed to many similar stressors; and evidence suggests that they experienced similar negative symptoms of stress. This indicates that they did not always return to a state of *homeostasis*, after their initial response.

Unlike children of ancient Greece and the Middle Ages, there is no primary written evidence (educational, philosophical, didactic and medical) of symptoms in the children of early man; although we do have skeletal remains as evidence of the stressors of birth, death and violence. One must presume that emotional symptoms accompanied the prehistoric individual's stress-response. Rock art, burial relics and ritual remains are possible indicators of emotional stress, in early times. Observation of modern hunter-gatherer societies, provides more direct evidence of stress symptoms, although tribal children and adults generally appear stress-free and in control. Yet even though they appear to cope with their stress in their own determined and predetermined way, perhaps their shyness, perpetual fear of spirits, self-induced ritualistic stress and extreme emotional reactions, when things go wrong, are symptoms that have turned into deliberate strategies over time. In the same way, drama, mythology and religious activities symptomised stress, as well as being attempts at stress management, in ancient Greece and the Middle Ages.

Fear of a spiritual world, shyness and a lack of involvement with others, appear to be symptoms common to all three past eras described in this project. Delinquency; aggressive behaviour; maladaptive behaviour; depression; reduced motivation; low self-confidence; *oedipal* or *electra* complexes; sexual promiscuity; chronic anxiety; and fear appear to be symptoms experienced by children in ancient Greece and in the Middle Ages. Narcissistic self-absorption and substance abuse appear to be peculiar to ancient Greece; and street children, to the Middle Ages.

Despite the evidence of symptoms of stress, which inhibit motivation, personal growth and the self-actualisation of the child in the pedagogic situation - where he is learning to become an adult in society - there is also evidence of survival and creative growth in the past. At times, past societies successfully taught their children to turn stress into *eustress*. One thinks of the rock and other art forms of

early man; the literature, art and architecture of ancient Greece and the Middle Ages. At times, they knew how to make their stress work for them.

### **7.2.3 Past coping mechanisms**

Each of the three past societies analysed in this project, attempted to adapt to the stressors that faced them by means of various coping strategies. Depending on factors such as perception, personality and cognition, individuals and groups used these coping mechanisms, either merely to adjust to/ accept the negative stress that they felt, or to properly deal with it, and cause it to be no longer dysfunctional. Many of these strategies became stressors or symptoms of stress at times, although some could be universally valid and used successfully, today. The following is a summary of some of these:

Religion; ritual; magic; charms; superstition; and mythology were successful coping mechanisms common to all three societies. The researcher is of the opinion that during the Middle Ages, people were especially able to find relief from stress in religious faith and the Church's teaching of Christian courage, forbearance, self-discipline and acceptance of suffering and death. This medieval perspective on life gave stress a transcendent meaning and worth, in the face of life's inevitable adversity and the human condition. Other successful stress management strategies in common were: group/ social/ family support/ loyalty; initiation rites; familiarity with death and sexuality; adult-centred character building; various recreational activities (including music, dance, art, drama, play and athletics); routine; role models; real life learning; early learning; attention to health and diet; and a homogeneous value system.

Egalitarianism; small bands; conflict management; problem solving; and a controllably simple life-style were successful coping strategies in early society. Individual instruction; an aesthetically appealing school environment; Spartan sexual parity and deliberate exposure to stressors were in evidence in ancient Greece. The beginning of universal, elementary and vernacular education was particular to the Middle Ages.

### **7.2.4 General remarks**

The sum total of individual stress equals cultural stress, and the survival of a culture is perhaps indicative of the success of the individual's and society's coping

mechanisms. The following is a final global summary of the stress situation of each of the past eras analysed in this project.

#### 7.2.4.1 Stress in the pedagogic situation of early man

Early man led a stressful life, yet his children learned to cope with daily and other stressors, on a day-to-day basis. The simplicity and immediate relevance of his every activity motivated him to handle each stressor as it came along, and turn stress into *eustress* for survival. The tribe's survival depended on each individual's coping with his stressors; and the individual felt motivated to overcome adversity because he knew that the group depended on him. Built into tribal customs, were effective coping mechanisms for both important life events, as well as the more frequent everyday daily hassles, which according to Lazarus (in Lau and Shani 1992:463):

may even play a greater role in stress, and is a much better predictor of psychological and physical health.

The way of life taught to the children of early man has ensured the survival of their traditional culture for 99 percent of man's times on earth, and exists to this day, in tribal societies such as the South African *!Xu*. Almost half of the 50,000 South African San people still live in the traditional manner, as hunter-gatherers, organised into small groups, or bands (Armstrong 1989:47). Stressors were/ are many and constantly present in this culture, but children are taught to cope with them on a daily basis, according to their present-orientated life-view, and ability to live off the land, together with various coping mechanisms such as religion, music, dance and close-knit group social structure. There is much we can learn from this society regarding stress management and parenting (cf. Interview 26). It handles stress in ways that ensured its survival. Its simple, day-to-day/ directly relevant life, follows set rules that have always proved successful (although it has not changed its life-style or progressed as a result). Members of this society simply cope with life, and that suffices them. They move to environments which suit their way of surviving, and avoid those which do not. They are in control. Those who do not survive stress, are those who are forced to live outside their normal habitat, where they cannot rely on their automatic stress-response or learnt coping strategies. An example of such a group is the *!Xu*, formerly of Angola, who have been resettled at Smitsdrift, in the Northern Cape and are overwhelmed by, and showing symptoms of stress, in surroundings where they are unable to lead their

traditional way of life, with its once successful stress management strategies. Disorientated like their parents, children lack a positive self-concept, abuse alcohol and lack motivation in the schools, where they must learn a different language and value system (cf. Interview 26; Robertson 1994:13).

#### 7.2.4.2 Stress in the pedagogic situation of ancient Greece

The children of Sparta were exposed to many stressors and showed symptoms of stress. The researcher feels that they were made to endure it, if not handle it, by the adults who guided them, although their self-actualisation as individuals, was sacrificed to the making of ideal warriors/ mothers of warriors in Sparta, or the ideal citizen-soldier in Athens. It appears that dysfunctional stress was not dealt with successfully, despite coping mechanisms being built into the education system to "toughen" children. Sometimes these coping mechanisms became added stressors, such as the barrack treatment of Spartan boys, and the demanding curriculum of the upper class Classical Athenian school. Stress was accepted as a negative condition to be endured, and the child adjusted and adapted to acute and chronic stressors with further negative results. Distress was often merely bottled up and not dissipated by means of positive coping techniques.

The life-style of ancient Greece was more complex than that of the hunter-gatherer society, and its children were taught not only survival skills, but also how to ensure the supremacy of the group, state or *polis*. As a result, its adults contrived hard strategies, and applied pressure to themselves and their children, driven by their goals of physical perfection, absolute loyalty to the state and the perfect citizen. Devotion to these educational and social aims, was supposed to provide the desired resilience to stress, on the part of both male and female children, although the latter were relegated to a background role as "breeders". When these aims lost their relevance - Sparta had become the conqueror and reached its goal, and Athens had become "infested" with a new age of individualism and materialism - the individual (and collective) will to endure a stressful and contrived life-style, faded away. Without commitment to the ideals dictated by the State, the need for the individual to cope with his stress in the group's interests disappeared. Individual stress became cultural stress; and the disappearance of the individual's life-style, caused the culture to vanish. Spartan society did attain its goal of military supremacy; but it did not grow beyond being a rural, warring culture, and eventually disappeared, when the need to conquer no longer existed and its stressful way of life was no longer relevant. Despite stressful conditions, children

of Athens managed to grow up to contribute to the burst of cultural creativity that marked the Golden Age of Athens from about 500-300 BC. These children had been under a great deal of pressure to become the ideal all-round citizen - a harmonious/ balanced development of the intellectual, aesthetic, physical and military powers of the individual - who made up the state. Eventually, stress took its toll, here too, and the civilisation collapsed through lack of motivation on the part of its people, who began to focus more on their status as individuals than as citizens of the *polis*. Individualism at the expense of society, caused both the end of the Golden Age of Greece, and irrelevance of the main reason for enduring stress - the good of the state to whom the individual was subordinate. The demanding all-round education of Classical Athens became meaningless; the austere, militaristic/ communistic education of Sparta, proved too stressful, and lost its relevance for its citizens and children. Both civilisations collapsed, although the eventual dispersion and dissemination of Hellenic culture, knowledge and education, did cause it to become the foundation of future Western civilisations.

#### 7.2.4.3 Stress in the pedagogic situation of the medieval child

Children of the Middle Ages were under excessive stress during this formative and transitional period of Western civilisation and education. Life was extremely harsh. The individual child was of no importance; he was moulded to an adult image of what he ought to have been, and was taught to cope with his stress, in accordance with the teachings of the Church. The Christian ideal of bearing the "cross of life", of welcoming suffering and of cheerful acquiescence, when faced with the stressors of life (which was a "valley of tears", labour and sin, as opposed to the glory and joy of life after death, in God's Kingdom for the righteous) was a coping mechanism for stress. By means of the teachings and preaching of the Church, popular prose texts and dramatic representations of the Passion, people's perceptions were altered, and stress no longer seemed distressful. In this way, the stress of life was indeed turned into positive *eustress*, hence the creativity that did exist of a religious nature, prevalent in the Middle Ages. This was a way of transcending distress, in an age of adversity and stress, that St Augustine sums up in his observation about the dynamic and transcendent nature of the human mind:

I will soar therefore beyond this faculty of my nature, still rising by degrees unto him who hath made both me and that nature

(in Stugrin 1986:150)

The Church-orientated culture that established itself in the Western world in the Middle Ages, taught its children to survive throughout that stressful era. The Church's teachings often offered relief to the despairing and the oppressed. The medieval Church culture survived in European society, because of its ability to cope with stress, even when the individualistic materialism of the Renaissance reigned; whereas the secular courtly culture did not. Lack of emotional self-control, adequate coping mechanisms and relevant life-style, meant members of the latter society were overwhelmed by stress, heralding the end of the chivalric era.

In conclusion, the researcher would like to suggest that a study of the past regarding stress in the pedagogic situation, reveals that there appears to be a correlation between resilience to stress in a culture and its survival. In solving the problem of stress in the current South African pedagogic situation, and by teaching our children how to manage their stress, we will perhaps, therefore, be able to contribute to the survival of our society; and ensure its growth.

### 7.3

#### **CONCLUSIONS REGARDING STRESS IN THE PRESENT PEDAGOGIC SITUATION**

There are similarities between our current South African pedagogic situation, and the three past situations analysed in the previous chapters. As in the pedagogic situation of early man, some of our children are being brought up in a tribal society, including a very small group of hunter-gatherers, where animistic religion, group/ family/ *ubuntu* values and a present-orientated, fairly relaxed view of life prevail. As in the pedagogic situation of ancient Greece, our children are also being brought up in a Westernised social, political and economic order, a *polis*, intent on an educational ideal of producing the ideal well-balanced child/adult citizen (Venter 1992b:20). Like the society of the Middle Ages, when the old Greco-Roman order was replaced with feudalism, manorialism and the establishment of the Church - which attempted to reconcile native barbarianism, Christianity and remnants of Hellenism - South African society of the apartheid era, has also been destabilised, and is being replaced by a new one, that is attempting to synthesise Westernised thought and institutions, together with the traditional and tribal elements of our culture/ society (Gutek 1991:49). Becoming adult with adult help, and the transmission of cultural values in contemporary South Africa, is particularly stressful for all our children, both those used to Westernised/ materialistic/ individualistic society, as well as those who are in the transition from a traditional to a Westernised culture. Like children of the culturally stressed

Middle Ages, South African children are feeling stress as a result of the current state of social flux, disease, poverty, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, poor education and violence. The ability to manage stress is diminished, if a child has to face too many stressors at once. It appears that South African children may need a great deal of help with the stress *overload* that they are experiencing. Many of our children may be “emotionally flooded”; and one fears that their response to the flooding is to back away from demanding situations and act out impulsively and unpredictably, unless they are assisted within the pedagogic situation (Gibbs 1994:21). The following evaluation of current South African pedagogic stress, in the light of the past three eras studied in this project, will provide a background to final recommendations regarding the nature of this help to be given to our children.

### **7.3.1 Causes of stress in the present pedagogic situation**

It appears that children of the past were exposed to as many stressors, if not more, than children today - with the exception perhaps of children in the transitional/traditional phase. In our current Western individualistic, post-modern, technocratic and materialistic era, we may be more directly aware of the phenomenon of stress as a contemporary problem, than in the past - although there were occasional references to the phenomenon by writers of the past (cf. paragraphs 1.6.3; 4.5.1.2). Some of the contemporary causes of stress in the South African situation, are the same as those of some or all of earlier times, discussed in this project, such as: disease; poverty; unemployment; population pressure; famine; sexually related stressors including rape; conflict/ war; violence; natural disasters; socio-political change; conflict of values; sexual and social discrimination; religious stressors; parental stress; child abuse and infanticide; parental absence and neglect/ abandonment; the generation gap; over exposure to sex and death; poor parenting styles; unrealistic parental expectations; over emphasis on extramural activities; large families; harsh discipline; lack of vernacular teaching; irrelevant school curriculum; inadequate teaching/ school facilities; lack of child-centred individual attention in the secondary pedagogic situation; dualism between school and home background; parental illiteracy; lack of state financed education; physical stressors; the search for identity; and stress-prone personality types (sometimes created by the society and the education system of the time). Other stressors such as: man-made technological disasters; future shock; stranger danger; television stress; the nuclear family; single parents; negative peer pressure; a lack of a homogeneous value system; the information

explosion; and substance abuse (drugs) appear largely unique to the present. The contemporary South African child needs to be helped to cope with all these stressors, above all because we live in a fragmented society which is inclined to be a Western, materialistic and individualistic society for the most part, and thus lacks the group as a buffer against stress.

### **7.3.2 Symptoms of stress in the present pedagogic situation**

Like children of the past, the contemporary South African child shows many symptoms of stress in the pedagogic situation. This project has attempted to list all these possible symptoms of stress and specific symptoms, in the case of children in the transitional/ traditional phase in particular. More details regarding symptoms in general in our children, would require empirical research beyond the scope of a project of this size. Yet certain symptoms do stand out, despite the brevity of the survey: lack of motivation; inability to concentrate; anxiety; fear; inappropriate emotional responses; mood swings; depression; low self-image; confusion; shyness; and withdrawal. These are a few of the symptoms found in children today, that were also found in children of the past. Others such as: violence in children; delinquency; unsatisfactory religious practices; street children; and substance abuse are symptoms that have become social problems of significant proportions today; more than in the past perhaps. Meddling with the occult and drug abuse amongst children, appear to be particular contemporary phenomena, which are on the increase in all sectors of South African society.

Generally these symptoms point to the reality that the child is being inhibited in his self-actualisation, at home and at school. Under the negative effects of stress and experiencing symptoms of stress - which become stressors in themselves - the child is being prevented from learning how to become the member of society he could be. So much evidence of stress in our children, underlines the urgency of the need for education to deal with this problem, and teach children to find successful coping mechanisms for life's inevitable stress.

### **7.3.3 Stress management in the present pedagogic situation**

As mentioned in Chapter Two (cf. paragraph 2.5.3), contemporary stress management programmes and literature on the topic of coping with stress - that are mainly adult-oriented - generally list the following strategies: relaxation techniques;

adequate diet and exercise/ positive health habits; self-concept enhancement; positive thinking; being in control; relationship building skills; social support; assertive behaviour; appropriate ventilation of feelings; time management; decision making; problem solving skills; and an accountable philosophy of life. Many of these coincide with the strategies used by past societies, as described in earlier chapters. For example: relaxation; a healthy life-style; social support; appropriate ventilation of emotions; awareness of and familiarisation with stressors; and positive self-concept enhancement were evident in all three societies; whereas being in control was evident in the prehistoric and medieval world; problem solving (in early man); and an accountable philosophy of life (in medieval society).

A few contemporary factors contributing to the management of stress, as well as some coping mechanisms used by South African children today, were mentioned in Chapters Two and Six. More research is required regarding details of those actually used by contemporary children. The ultimate aim of this project is, however, to find which coping mechanisms suggested by contemporary literature and science - some of which are in current use - are generally valid, used in the past, and to be systematically recommended for the future.

Seeking support from significant others in society - including parents, teachers, peers, relatives and other adults - seems to be a strategy that was successful for stress management in the past, and is still so today. Religious beliefs; rituals and mythology; recreational activities; a well-balanced character; adequate exercise, health and diet; positive thinking; role models; child-centredness; relevant universal education; sexual parity; moderate exposure to the realities of life; early learning; time-management; awareness and acceptance of the phenomenon of stress; clarity regarding values; and a positive self-concept all also appear to be successful strategies common to the past and present. Contemporary emphasis on assertiveness and the desirability of expressing one's true feelings, seems to be unique to the present. Children of the past were not always encouraged to talk through their stress. They suppressed it or accepted it, but did not directly deal with it - only indirectly through drama or literature. Self-expression is a modern technique which should be reinforced; just as the universally valid techniques used in the past and present, need to be systematically structured into a programme, that should be applied in the South African secondary pedagogic situation, and allowed to pervade the informal primary pedagogic situation.

Contemporary awareness regarding stress in adults has resulted in a certain amount of stress management training in some urban schools in South Africa today, either as part of examination technique studies or life-skill programmes. Talks are also sometimes given to parents, on the matter. Certain educationists, welfare or religious organisations and churches include stress management in talks and programmes for parents, children and teenagers and in their literature (cf. paragraph 1.2). In the school guidance lessons of some schools, such as Westerford High, Table View High and Milnerton High in the Western Cape (observed in October 1993, January to December 1993 and January 1995, respectively), stress-related life-skills such as: relaxation techniques; assertiveness; relationship formation; decision making; positive self-talk; handling sexual pressures; substance abuse; and child abuse are directly or indirectly dealt with. In this way, pupils are helped to realistically know, accept and manage their feelings in the face of stress. Talk therapy and psychoanalysis are also used today by school psychologists and teacher-counsellors, to help individual children cope with stress. The problem of pupils stress is thus addressed as an ideographic matter.

The awareness of stress is there; and help is being given in the contemporary pedagogic situation, but it needs to be made available to all of South Africa's children in a systematic way. Specific programmes on stress management are not yet specified in the guidance syllabi of all education departments, despite the need to help children with unhealthy reactions to stress, as well as to prepare them for the inevitable stress of their future adult life. Many companies are frustrated by school leavers and their inadequate knowledge of handling situations and pressure (Van Rooyen 1992:12). Yet the problem is increasing and not being adequately addressed.

A very important point needs to be mentioned at this stage. Children in the South African pedagogic situation need to be helped not only to an awareness of their own stress, but also to that of other children (and adults) in their community. In this way self-help, social support, caring and sharing of knowledge of coping skills, would work together to alleviate the general tension within the individual and the group. Dysfunctional stress, which inhibits the self-actualisation of the individual and the growth of society, will thus be reduced.

Stress in the pedagogic situation is a universal and eternal problem, and contemporary awareness should be encouraged so as to enable children to deal with stress, and become the future adults that they are capable of becoming. The

following section offers recommendations in that regard, based on the generally valid essentials discovered in the present/ past.

## **7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

### **7.4.1 Stress management programmes for children**

If there had been universal awareness of individual and cultural stress in the ancient Greek and medieval chivalric pedagogic situation - which perhaps contributed to the disappearance of these societies - stress may not have been an overwhelming problem. Perhaps their situation will not be repeated today, if children are helped to an awareness and acceptance of the universal reality of both dysfunctional and positive stress, and to a positive attitude regarding stress management. Stress awareness and management, as a separate and complete section of life-skills training, should be offered to all pupils in primary and high schools, in all areas of South African society - both rural and urban. Departments of education should make provision for this training, as some individual schools and welfare/ religious organisations are currently doing.

#### **7.4.1.1 Encouraging awareness of stressors**

Pupil stress management programmes could include a course that involves three stages: The first would be a series of learner-involved lessons of possible and actual causes of stress in the children concerned. It is important for children to know the enemy that faces them, as was the case in early man, who consequently was able to handle his stressors and stress. The lessons could involve (depending on their appropriateness to the children's level): brief lectures from the teacher (to provide introductions, transitions and conclusions to the lessons); worksheets; questionnaires; role playing; art work (graffiti posters, filling in cartoon bubbles or collages); discussions (brainstorming, buzz groups, circular response, general discussions, film talk-back, panel discussions); and brief written exercises (diary entries, interviews, song lyric writing, poems, prayers, newspaper articles, open-ended stories).

These lessons could perhaps be integrated with other subjects in the curriculum, such as Language, Environmental or History lessons. The aim would be to help the child towards an awareness of his own and others' stressors, as well as an

acceptance of the truth that human life will always present stressors of one sort or another, as this project has demonstrated.

#### **7.4.1.2 Awareness of symptoms**

Children in the past, felt symptoms of stress but perhaps ignored them and did not know that they were under stress. Children today could, however, be helped to know and help themselves. The second stage of the programme would, therefore, involve the answering of suitable questionnaires regarding symptoms of stress. Personality awareness questionnaires could also be used by pupils at this stage. There are standardised questionnaires available, although many are for teenagers or adult-oriented. There is much room for further research in this field, regarding children of all ages. Nevertheless, these are to be used and kept by the pupil for his own self-understanding, although the parent or teacher may also find them useful for the identification of stress in the children. Children who wish to do so, may share their findings with the group in class discussions. Needless to say, the questionnaires for primary school pupils, would have to be simply structured/worded and visually motivating. With the very young or semi-literate children, oral questioning and discussion may prove the only way of dealing with the topic.

#### **7.4.1.3 Learning coping strategies**

The third stage of the programme would deal with coping strategies; and lessons could be planned along the lines of the first stage with regards to methods of presentation. As with the first stage, the aim is to: help the child to help himself; know when and where to seek help; and to be able to offer support to his peers and others in his life world. The following is an outline of some coping strategies which could be unfolded to the child in the pedagogic situation.

##### **(i) *Relaxation techniques***

Many children in past societies, used various forms of relaxation including music, play, art, physical exercise, prayer, drama, festivals and story-telling. Conscious relaxation or tension control could also be taught as a solution to stress in children. Contemporary literature can offer many ideas here (Burns 1988:95; Slaby 1991:107; Polson 1990:51). Edmund Jacobson appears to be the first to develop a technique of relaxation during the 1920s and 1940s. Various other forms became popular thereafter, such as autogenic relaxation and transcendental meditation

(T.M.), in the sixties (Burns 1988:97). T.M. is an Eastern practice, but has always been present in other cultures, as meditative and contemplative prayer. In the seventies, came the popularisation of yoga as a form of physical and mental relaxation to calm the nerves, improve circulation and health, and bring about a calmer/ easy going attitude to life and freedom from negative habits, such as worry (Volin and Phelan 1972:24). Westerford High School in the Western Cape, teaches relaxation techniques to pupils for use during examination sessions (*Education Newsletter* 1994a:8). Kruger (1994:237) suggests an exercise, where the child could learn relaxation through the methodically sequenced tensing and relaxing of his muscles, from the tips of his toes up to his forehead. There are many successful methods, and the teacher and pupils could explore and discuss these, so that the child could find the ones which suit him the best. The teacher should become familiar with the concept and techniques of conscious relaxation. Teacher workshops could perhaps be organised for this.

Other techniques used by children for relaxation, could be discussed in the lessons, such as: painting; writing; reading; films; television; going for walks; physical exercise; listening to music; playing a musical instrument and playing games like television games. The child could be made aware of how to use these as tools, and not become victims of their tendency to be sources of stress if abused, for example: if the playing of a musical instrument becomes a source of academic pressure; if television games or sport become an obsession (as in ancient Greece); if the child has too many extramural activities; or if television and literature expose the child to unnecessary violence and undesirable sexuality (cf. Interview (32); Kruger 1992:132). The stress management lesson, as well as other subject lessons, could become a relaxing experience in themselves, through the use of games, drama and play in the learning situation. Children should be made aware of this learning strategy and encouraged to ask for its realisation, during their lessons.

(ii) *Adequate health habits/ diet/ exercise/ sleep*

In the past, adequate nutrition, a moderate life-style and exercise were often used as coping strategies for stress. Contemporary writers on stress management generally emphasise the following as buffers against stress: regular meals with few snacks in between; seven - eight hours sleep; no smoking; no alcohol; a regular balanced breakfast; and gentle and regular exercise programmes. Children and adults are generally aware of these techniques today, due to popular media coverage, but a stress management course could possibly further highlight these, by

means of interesting questionnaires, discussions, films and attractive literature. Pupils should be made aware of the interrelation between bodily health, a positive perception of life's stressors and the body's and heart's susceptibility to acute and long-term stress. Children whose lives are materially meagre, and for whom undernourishment is a daily threat, could especially benefit from education regarding healthy, but inexpensive, food preparation; their parents could be included in these presentations. The child from a more Westernised home, could be made aware of possible abuse of medication that is often prescribed for stress in children today, such as tranquillisers, sleeping pills, bizarre herbal remedies and other so-called cures. Generally children should be helped to an understanding that stress should be handled in positive preventative ways.

(iii) *Being in control*

Our study of early man has revealed that he was in control of his (simple) world, and of his stress. The medieval Church advocated a philosophy of emotional control, courage and cheerful acquiescence to God's will, even if life was stressful. Members of the chivalric order and ancient Greek culture (which did not last) were not in control of their feelings and stress, although they may have sometimes appeared to be.

Since the modern Westernised child in particular, faces a life of increasing deadlines, demands and information, the stress management programme could, therefore, include techniques of being in control: time management (planning and anticipating one's time and future activities/ deadlines, the effective use of diaries); setting and drawing up priorities/ schedules/ routines; decision making skills (the drawing up of a pros and cons list for decision making); task-orientation (how to set about tackling each problem as it comes along, as in primitive society), and various other skills, that the child may find useful for being in control of his life. Again here, the teacher could use pupil participation to its fullest, not merely teach techniques she uses or has researched, but allow pupils to suggest their own organisational methods.

(iv) *Realistic and positive self-concept formation*

Children in ancient Greece and the Middle Ages were not regarded as individuals, and were merely moulded into society's image of the ideal character. They did not know themselves or their feelings, and could not deal with the negative emotional

symptoms of stress. The child of early man was also not treated as an individual, but his range of feelings were simple and manageable, along with his way of life.

Although there would be little place in a group stress management programme for in-depth study of each individual child's aptitudes, interests and abilities or for career guidance, the incorporation by means of various methods, could be made of the concept of accepting oneself with all ones faults and positive features, as well as knowing one's values (which is especially important for the child in the transitional/ traditional phase). Games, role-play, discussion, questionnaires, lists and many other methods could be used by an imaginative teacher.

(v) *Polite assertiveness; appropriate emotional ventilation*

Children in the past were not always allowed to appropriately assert themselves and express their needs, so as to come to terms with feelings of negative stress. In the contemporary situation, a few lessons could be spent on the difference between being passive, aggressive, passive/aggressive and politely assertive, through use of drama, cartoons and other interesting ways; as well as discussions on appropriate ways of venting emotional symptoms of stress such as anger or depression, by means of sport, music, hobbies, pets, humour and communicating with a supportive friend. Children should be made aware of these and other stress prevention techniques. Assertiveness training is especially important today, amongst children who are exposed to an inordinate amount of peer pressure, and especially that regarding drugs, substance abuse, Satanism and early sexual activity. Children should learn to be able to say "no" and to communicate and share their feelings, as well as to be able to express them through ways such as laughter or tears.

(vi) *Communication skills/ seeking support*

In the past, community support and universal directedness to the good of the group, was an important coping mechanism for stress. When group identity and goals failed, the ability to withstand stress diminished - as was the case in ancient Greece. Although not everyone is a natural leader or the "soul of the party" - and children should be made aware of the need to accept themselves realistically - contemporary children can be made aware of the importance of seeking/ giving positive social support. To do this they must be helped to overcome fears and anxieties regarding conversation and communication in general, but especially that

with others who can help one in times of stress. According to Rutter (in Papalia & Old 1993:474), if parents are unable to exhibit how to deal with a negative situation and make it positive, then other role models such as the teacher, social or church worker, may provide the needed help, regarding resilience development and the ability to overcome stress, by example and the way he handles stress himself.

Frequent verbal participation in the lesson, and group or pair discussions will help the child develop the skill of communicating his emotional needs, and talking through his stress. Transitional/ traditional children in South Africa particularly need to be taught ways of dealing with violence experienced as a daily stressor, without resorting to further violence.

Language classes could assist in this communicative approach to learning. Children - especially Second Language children - could practise real-life situations such as telephone conversations, what to say in the post-office, shop, at the doctor, to a social worker or to an employer; to name but a few examples of ways of increasing their communication skills. The fun involved in taking part in such activities, is a form of stress-release in itself for pupils.

Children in the transitional/ traditional stage will particularly benefit from group discussions, as a way of working through their stress; for the African *psyche* prefers healing as a group, not as an individual. These children may want to talk, express themselves and their needs and receive assistance with regard to their stress (*G.M.S.A. SABC TV1, 2 September 1994*).

#### **7.4.2. Parental involvement**

In the present and past, inadequate parenting is/was a major source of stress for children. Although children can be introduced to the idea of seeking positive support from significant others, the danger of negative peer pressure remains, if parenting is consistently inadequate for the child. Schools could offer brief talks and workshops for parents, so that they too can be aware of the reality of stress in their children (and themselves). An understanding parent will anticipate the child's worries and try to ease the child through each potentially upsetting situation as it arises, as well as boosting the child's confidence and helping him to cope. Papalia & Old (1993:472) state that adults can stem fears by respecting children, encouraging them to talk about their worries, and not expecting fears to simply disappear. Ideally the parents as primary care-givers are the ones to help the child

manage his stress and become resilient. Unfortunately this is often not the case, but the school or other educational or religious institution, could attempt to alter parental perceptions.

Parents could be given an outline of the stress management programme to be presented to their children. This would also heighten their child-centred awareness of the problem and of attempts at a solution, especially in the case of traditional sociocentric parents, for whom the individualistic concept of the individual child's problems is new.

Generally, parents could be made aware of their positive or negative influence on their child's stress threshold and motivation to learn in the pedagogic situation. They should understand that his response to stressors is determined by factors such as: personality; perception; cognition; and stress-management techniques, which are grounded in the primary educational situation of the home, and modified in the pedagogic situation of the school. Parents could be informed about different parenting styles and different personalities, and given a brief explanation of causes, symptom and solutions to stress. They could be offered a fairly detailed explanation of *authoritative* parenting which educationists and psychologists consider healthier than *authoritarian* or *laissez-faire* styles, which often cause stress symptoms of fear, anger, frustration, anxiety and aggressiveness [cf. paragraph 2.3.2.1 (viii)].

#### 7.4.3 Community involvement

Famsa (the Family and Marriage Society of South Africa) maintains that the family and social unit is the richest source of intimacy and security in a rapidly changing and traumatic society, such as South Africa. In poorer communities, where joblessness is common, and where people readily share their plight and resources with others, the effects of unemployment are often less severe (Seale 1994:23).

The study of the pedagogic past in this project revealed this universally valid essential, and the fact that community involvement could assist in the "fight" against the disease of stress in children. Awareness of this truth could be taught by welfare and church groups and educationists, who could for instance, give talks to the community, or write books and/or articles in the popular and especially free press, within reach of people of all sectors of society.

Children could meet in groups, at each others' schools, to care and share their "stories" - regardless of tribe, region, socio-economic group - so as to more intimately discover what engenders fears or stirs aspirations today, in themselves and in others (Connor 1994b:7).

#### **7.4.4 The general curriculum**

In the pedagogic situation of the past, as well as that of the South African present, education was/is not always adequate or relevant for all children, and, therefore, a great source of stress. To meet the educational needs of all sectors of South African society, school facilities and courses should be adequate and relevant, and this includes incorporating stress management programmes into the curriculum. Life-skills and stress management programmes should fit into the educational framework, along with early learning, normal academic as well as practical subjects (such as: nutrition; health; agriculture; everyday English; carpentry; food preparation; building; metalwork; garment making; and basic literacy/ numeracy). Children should be trained (in the words of Dale Carnegie) to "turn life's lemons into lemonade", along with building up work for themselves in an informal economy.

#### **7.4.5 Values education**

The stress management programme could involve discussions and questionnaires regarding universal social values such as caring, respect and sharing, that are common to different religious faiths. Other values could include healthy/ positive attitudes towards women; children; sexuality; and death, as well as religious/ social/ racial tolerance. In this way, children could become more aware of the stressors of: discrimination; lack of child-centredness; fear of death; and inappropriate sexual attitudes, which were evident in the past, and are still so today.

#### **7.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This research project has attempted to show that many causes and symptoms of psychological stress are universal and inevitable. Moreover, controlling stress and making it work can be difficult, but it was possible in the past, and it could be made to benefit our bodies, our minds, our friendships, our families and artistic/ entrepreneurial creativity today. In the words of Freud (in Slaby 1991:x):

Stress to the personality, allows us to better understand our biological, psychological, social, and existential parameters that converge to make us who we are, and provide an opportunity for growth that might not have been possible if the crisis had not occurred.

Stress, a post-modern and particularly South African disease, may allow us to reach great heights, if we successfully handle it. After all, if Africa was the birthplace of the earliest biped, then we can evolve beyond stress too. Although our life is much more complex than that of early tribal societies, we could follow their example and teach our children to systematically deal with stress day by day, as it occurs. We could also encourage our children to seek endurance and emotional balance, like the ancient Greeks (without ignoring or adding to our stress in the search); and courage, forbearance and constructiveness in our perception of stress, as taught by the Church in the Middle Ages.

Without stress and distress, the need would not arise for reconstruction, development and evolution. We should teach our children to make it work for them and work themselves up with continuous effort and courage. Although it is not a new "disease", stress is, however, a serious problem in contemporary South African children of adversity, whose learning and becoming are inhibited. Apart from poverty, disease, child mortality, abuse and separation from parents, that affect thousands of our children like those of the past, *violence* is a particular contemporary stressor (also a dysfunctional symptom/ coping mechanism for stress) that is destroying our society. It occurs at macro-level in a culture of fear - where it is directly witnessed - at macro-level in the domestic environment, and at micro-level as personal insecurity.

According to the *Natal Programme for Survivors of Violence* in KwaZulu Natal - where at least a third of all murders recorded in 1993 took place - 81 per cent of high school children have repeated a year at school, 20 per cent of children were repeating Sub A in 1991, almost a third suffered sufficient psychological symptoms to warrant a clinical diagnosis, and three quarters experienced five symptoms of either Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Major Depression - the older girls were most likely to have numerous symptoms. These symptoms included sleep difficulties, nightmares, poor concentration, always watching for danger, frequent pains and illness, regrets and suicidal feelings. On average, 17 per cent of the children wished that they were dead. Research regarding coping strategies is still being evaluated by the Natal project - currently under investigation for different

age groups are: counselling, therapy groups, using drama, lectures, music, sport, art and building self-esteem (Killian in Paterson 1994:10).

According to the UNCF report on *Children and Women in South Africa* (1994:6), there are 17,5 million children under 19 years of age, in our country. 80 per cent are African, 8,8, percent are white, 8,3 percent are coloured, and 2,3 per cent are Indian. Of these, approximately 1,7 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 could be suffering from some form of psychiatric disorder, with significant numbers exhibiting broader indicators of dysfunction. These facts indicate that the problem of stress in the pedagogic situation needs to be solved.

## 7.6 SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

In conclusion and in response to the problem formulated in Chapter One (cf. paragraph 1.4), the researcher will now give general answers to the questions asked at the beginning of the survey, as well as referring to the specific chapters which answered them in detail.

### \* What is the nature of stress?

In Chapter One an explanation of the term *stress* was given, and a further detailed description of this 20th century “disease”, as a general phenomenon, was made in Chapter Two. The chapters that followed examined the phenomenon from a time perspective, as it appeared to the researcher, in the contemporary South African, prehistoric, ancient Greek and medieval pedagogic situations.

Stress is an affective condition: a feeling of being strained, tense and under pressure. It involves a condition of increased activity in the body and mind, as a result of both emotional and physical responses to stressors and demanding elements in one’s environment, with which one attempts cope. The initial stress reaction is automatic, after which the mind and body should return to a normal and balanced state. If the stress-response continues because the stressor is still perceived as such ( and the individual has not dealt with it successfully), then various physical and affective disorders affect the body and mind. Not all stress is negative, however, and a certain amount of stress is essential, enabling us to tackle challenges with vitality and enthusiasm.

**\* Do children suffer from stress in today's pedagogic situation?**

Chapters Two and Six described the causes and symptoms of stress in children in the contemporary pedagogic situation. Oral evidence (interviews, sermons, seminars and talks), observation, primary evidence (letters, newspaper/ television/ radio reports and artefacts) and secondary evidence (popular and scientific textbooks, newspapers, journals and magazines), provided support to the fact that children do suffer from stress, which is endemic to modern society. Children growing up in South Africa today, are exposed to the stressors typical of the contemporary post-modern technocratic and fast-paced Westernised world. They also face those of a developing country in transition from a less hurried traditional way of life (with its own particular stressors), to that of a First World culture.

**\* If so, what are the causes, symptoms and solutions with regard to stress in the current pedagogic situation?**

Details regarding the causes, symptoms and solutions regarding stress in the current pedagogic situation were discussed in Chapters Two and Six. It suffices to say here, that stressors (causes of stress) in the modern pedagogic situation, include: those brought about by the misuse of post-modern technology; the fast pace and rapid change/ progress of First World lifestyles; the disintegration of family life and society; threats peculiar to the twentieth century such as *Aids*, adolescent peer pressure and excessive substance abuse (also a symptom of stress). South African children are not all Westernised; some are from a traditional background, and are in the process of becoming Westernised. These children suffer particular stress because of their situation, in a world which is often confusing, violent and historically disadvantaged.

The many and varied possible physical and emotional symptoms of stress in South African children were listed in Chapter Two of this project, and a brief description of symptoms observed in groups and individuals was given in this chapter, as well as in Chapter Six. A few examples of these symptoms are: a lack of motivation in the learning situation; low resistance to infectious diseases; substance abuse; maladaptive behaviour; and delinquency. A detailed empirical survey was not attempted, as this would have involved empirical research beyond the scope of a project of this nature and size. Much research could still be done in this area, however.

Due to the current awareness of the problem of stress today, in the South African pedagogic situation, certain schools, as well as various religious and child welfare organisations are attempting to help children handle their stress. Details of this pedagogic help were given earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter One.

Other stress management strategies that are built in our contemporary society, were mentioned in Chapters Two, Six and Seven. Examples of these are: traditional and Westernised recreational activities; including play, art, dance and music; and social support, an important buffer against stress, which is, unfortunately, often lacking in Westernised society, but is still strong in the traditional South African pedagogic situation.

**\* Is stress a purely modern phenomenon or is it a timeless problem?**

**\* Did children suffer from stress in the pedagogic situation of the past?**

Although contemporary society presents many stressors to children growing up in South Africa today - and many of these are particular to the modern Western world and to the current *new* South Africa - stress is not a purely modern phenomenon. Chapters Three, Four and Five revealed that children of the past were also exposed to many stressors, and experienced negative symptoms of stress. Some stressors were peculiar to the past, such as: the struggle for survival; total lack of identity as a child in an adult-centred and sociocentric world; and excessive exposure to death. Yet these stressors are not unknown in our contemporary South African society, and are especially present in the transitional/traditional pedagogic situation. Many causes of stress in the past, were the same as those facing modern children, such as: child abuse; war; disease; pressure to conform to adult expectations; and natural disasters. Although they also revealed symptoms of stress, it appears that prehistoric children were more resistant to stress than children of ancient Greece and the Middle Ages. Each era did, however, have coping skills which it taught to its children. Some of these helped the child successfully handle his stress.

**\* Do pupils of the current post-industrial/ technocratic era suffer more stress than children of the pedagogic situation of the past?**

The researcher does not feel that children in today's world necessarily suffer more stress than children of the past; even though modern technology allows us to accomplish tasks quickly, which often results in a feeling of being in a rush and under pressure. As the survey has shown, *stress* is a timeless problem, and feelings of pressure or strain may arise, even in a world where the pace is slower than that of the 20th century. Evidence suggests that negative symptoms of stress were exhibited by children of the past, but there was perhaps less awareness of the concept of *stress*, compared with modern times. Yet, the survey has also shown that early man, the ancient Greeks and medieval society deliberately sought and taught life-coping strategies to their children. This points to an awareness of the existence of stress in the pedagogic situation.

**\* When and why did the problem originate?**

Children suffered from stress in the past pedagogic situation, as the survey in Chapters Three, Four and Five revealed. The problem originated with the beginnings of human life, which was, psychobiologically, not very different from our own contemporary emotional and physical existence. The automatic *flight or fright* stress reaction is our initial and natural response to stressors and adversity, in a hostile world. It began with early man when he was faced with the threat of extermination by his natural environment and wild predators.

**\* What are the causes, symptoms and solutions regarding stress in the pedagogic situation of the past?**

The causes of stress in the past were not always the same. The worlds of ancient Greece and the Middle Ages, for example, presented different demands to children, growing up in dissimilar early Western environments. Yet these children did not always cope with their stress, and, as the survey regarding their stress symptoms revealed, they did not always return to a calm state of mind/ body after their initial stress-response.

The traditional hunter-gatherer society of early man, the ancient Greeks and medieval society, did attempt to teach their children ways to come to terms with stressful feelings and cope with the pressures of life. Some of these coping skills were successful. These often involved recreational activities (including play, art, music, dance and drama), social support and religious ritual. The Middle Ages, in particular, focused on *perception*, as a mediator of stress, and promoted the concept that stress and adversity can be seen in a positive light.

**\* What recommendations can be made for future education regarding the teaching of children to cope with stress?**

Although there is a general awareness of *stress* as a phenomenon in contemporary adult society, and - to a lesser degree - in the pedagogic situation, provision could be made for more systematic guidance regarding stress in the contemporary South African pedagogic situation. Departments of Education could, for instance, formally provide and outline a stress guidance programme in their syllabi. Earlier in this chapter, specific guidelines were outlined with regard to the teaching of children to cope with stress. These practical recommendations all point to the basic need for life-skills education in the current primary and secondary South African pedagogic situation. By means of literature, articles, lessons, talks, workshops and seminars, children, parents, teachers and other participants in the pedagogic situation, need to be made aware of the problem of stress, as well as acquiring scientific knowledge of stress management strategies.

Earlier in this chapter, the researcher described some stress prevention techniques that were based on findings, regarding stress-coping mechanisms used in the pedagogic situation of the past (cf. paragraph 7.4.1.3). If these generally valid essentials are applied in the contemporary South African primary and secondary pedagogic situation, the problem of stress will perhaps be solved.

It is possible that, like children of the past, today's children/ tomorrow's adults, will learn the ability to positively handle stress, which is inevitable and essential to life, having always been part of human existence.

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## LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY THE RESEARCHER

	Page
1. With Prof. S.L. H. van Niekerk, lecturer in the Department of History of Education, July 1993, at UNISA, Pretoria.....	10
2. With pupils of/ at Table View High School, June 1991 to December 1993, Table View, Western Cape.....	20
3. With parents, teachers, counsellors, doctors, police officers and ministers of religion, June 1991 to December 1993, at schools, at the Church of the Resurrection, and on the telephone, Table View, Western Cape.....	20
4. With a Durbanville mother of primary and secondary school children, October 1993, at Fisherhaven, Western Cape.....	21
5. With pupils, of Table View Primary, Blouberg Ridge Primary and Table View High school, January 1994, at the schools concerned, and at the researcher's home, Table View/ Blouberggrant, Western Cape.....	29
6. With pupils of/ at Table View High School , March 1994 Table View, Western Cape.....	30
7. With pupils of Table View Primary, Blouberg Ridge Primary and Table View High school, March 1994, at the schools concerned, at the Church of the Resurrection, Table View, and at the researcher's home in Blouberggrant, Western Cape.....	30
8. With a pupil, of/ at Table View High School, September 1991, Table View, Western Cape.....	31
9. With a pupil of Blouberg Ridge Primary School, February 1994, at the researcher's home, Blouberggrant, Western Cape.....	31

10.	With Prof. S.L.H. van Niekerk, a mother of teenagers, March 1994, at UNISA, Pretoria.....	33
11.	With a Standard 10 pupil, of/ at Table View High School, March 1994, at Table View, Western Cape.....	35
12.	With Fr M. J. van Heerden, Vice-rector of St Peter's Seminary, Pretoria, and supply priest in the Transvaal, the Western Cape, and the U.S.A., 6 January 1994, at the researcher's home, Bloubergrant, Western Cape. ....	36
13.	Sr Mary-Joseph of the international missionary order of the Holy Childhood, 25 February 1995, at the Church of the Resurrection, Table View, Western Cape.....	36
14.	With a matric pupil of/ at Table View High School, February 1993, Table View, Western Cape.....	36
15.	With the same pupil (14), September 1991, at Table View High School, Table View, Western Cape.....	36
16.	With teachers and the teacher-counsellor of/ at Westerford High School, March 1992, Rondebosch, Western Cape.....	36
17.	With teachers and teacher-counsellors of/at Table View High School June 1992, Table View, Western Cape.....	36
18.	With pupils of/ at Table View High School, January 1994, Table View, Western Cape.....	36
19.	With a social worker from Bothasig, Western Cape, October 1992, on the telephone and at Table View High School, Table View Western Cape.....	37
20.	With the principal of/ at Table View High School October 1992, Table View, Western Cape.....	37

21.	With the mother of a fourteen year old pupil of/ at Table View High School, March 1994, Table View, Western Cape.....	37
22.	With a secondary school teacher/ wife of a Parow minister of religion, March 1994, at Table View High School, Table View, Western Cape.....	39
23.	With a secondary school teacher/ Durbanville mother of a primary school child, March 1994, on the telephone and at Table View High School, Table View.....	42
24.	A teacher/ Standard Six Head of/ at Table View High School, January 1994, Table View, Western Cape.....	45
25.	With Prof. T.L. Verster, Head of the Department of History of Education, UNISA, March 1994, at UNISA, Pretoria.....	58
26.	With Prof. J.H. Coetzee of the Department of History of Education, UNISA, and a Major in the S.A.D.F., July 1994, at UNISA, Pretoria.....	65
27.	With Fr M.J. van Heerden, Vice-Rector of St Peter's Seminary, and former chaplain with the S.A.D.F., July 1994, Pretoria.....	77
28.	With Fr Dabula Mpako, Rector of St Peter's Catholic Seminary, Pretoria, July 1994, at St Peter's.....	226
29.	With an employee of St Peter's Catholic Seminary, who had been a transitional/ traditional pupil at school in the Northern Transvaal, during the 1960s, July 1994, at St Peter's Seminary, Pretoria.....	249
30.	With Fr Declan Collins, a social worker, teacher and housefather at the Don Bosco Institute for Street Children, in Cape Town, October 1992, at the researcher's home, in Bloubergrant, Western Cape.....	256
31.	With a Standard 6 pupil of/ at Table View High School, May 1994, Table View, Western Cape.....	259
32.	With a matric pupil of/ at Westerford High School, February 1992, Rondebosch, Western Cape.....	282