

GESTALT GUIDELINES ASSISTING PARENTS TO ENHANCE PSYCHOSOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN

by

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submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF DIACONIOLOGY
(DIRECTION: PLAY THERAPY)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: MRS IF JACOBS

JUNE 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My husband, Riaan, for his love, constant support and encouragement.

My lovely daughter, Brigitte, for sacrificing many hours of play.

My supervisor, Ms. Issie Jacobs, for her excellent guidance and the many hours devoted to this project.

My parents for their encouragement and the example of perseverance they set.

Julie Xantho for her hours of transcribing the manuscript and Catherine Murphy for her technical care and grammatical enlightenment when needed most.

My friends and family for their patience and support.

Myself for persevering in spite of many sleepless nights (teething).

“But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven’” (Matthew 19:14, New King James Version).

I hereby declare **GESTALT GUIDELINES ASSISTING PARENTS TO ENHANCE PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN** to be my own work and that all references used or quoted were indicated and acknowledge comprehensively.



SIGNATURE

12 June 2006
DATE

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the development of Gestalt guidelines to assist parents to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. The researcher made use of the four stages of the intervention research process, namely project planning, information gathering, design, and early development of the guidelines to complete this research study. For the purposes of this study middle childhood is defined as male and female children between the age of seven and twelve years. Some areas of psychosocial development and relevant Gestalt principles are highlighted in this study. Functional elements of existing parenting programs are discussed and utilised along with the views of the respondents in this study, those of experts, and literature reviews to design Gestalt guidelines with an observational system.

KEY TERMS

Gestalt approach; Parenting; Enhancing psychosocial development; Child development; Middle childhood; Parenting support; Parent-child relationship; Quality time with child; Discipline in middle childhood; Parenting values.

*To Jesus Christ, the King of kings, the Saviour and Lover of my soul without whom
neither I nor this project would be here today.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | II |
| DECLARATION | III |
| ABSTRACT | IV |
| KEY TERMS | V |
| RECOGNITION | VI |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | VII |
| LIST OF TABLES | XV |
| LIST OF FIGURES | XVI |

CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND PROJECT PLANNING

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| 1.1 | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.2. | MOTIVATION FOR THE CHOICE OF TOPIC | 3 |
| 1.3 | PROBLEM FORMULATION | 4 |
| 1.4 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY | 4 |
| 1.5 | WORK PROCEDURE | 5 |
| | 1.5.1 <u>Project analysis and project planning</u> | 6 |
| | 1.5.1.1 <i>Identifying and involving clients</i> | 6 |
| | 1.5.1.2 <i>Gaining entry and co-operation from settings</i> | 7 |
| | 1.5.1.3 <i>Identifying concerns of the population</i> | 8 |
| | 1.5.1.4 <i>Analysing concerns or problems identified</i> | 9 |
| | 1.5.1.5 <i>Setting goals and objectives</i> | 10 |
| | 1.5.2 <u>Information gathering and synthesis</u> | 11 |
| | 1.5.2.1 <i>Using existing sources of information</i> | 12 |

| | | |
|--|--|----|
| 1.5.2.2 | <i>Studying natural examples</i> | 12 |
| 1.5.2.3 | <i>Identifying functional elements of successful models</i> | 14 |
| 1.5.3 | <u>Design</u> | 16 |
| 1.5.3.1 | <i>Designing an observational system</i> | 16 |
| 1.5.3.2 | <i>Specifying procedural elements of the intervention</i> | 16 |
| 1.5.4 | <u>Early development</u> | 17 |
| 1.5.4.1 | <i>Development of a prototype or preliminary intervention</i> | 17 |
| 1.6 | DEFINITION OF MAIN CONCEPTS | 18 |
| 1.6.1 | <u>Psychosocial Development</u> | 18 |
| 1.6.2 | <u>Children in middle childhood</u> | 19 |
| 1.6.3 | <u>Enhance</u> | 19 |
| 1.6.4 | <u>Gestalt guidelines</u> | 20 |
| 1.7 | ETHICAL ASPECTS | 20 |
| 1.8 | CONCLUSION | 22 |
| CHAPTER 2: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS | | |
| 2.1 | INTRODUCTION | 23 |
| 2.2 | IDENTIFYING AND ANALYSING CONCERNS OF THE POPULATION | 24 |
| 2.3 | IDENTIFICATION OF CONCERNS UNDER MAIN AND SUBTHEMES | 24 |
| 2.3.1 | Main theme 1: <u>Parents’ and professionals’ opinion of the parenting problems experienced when dealing with children in middle childhood.</u> | 27 |

| | | |
|--|---|----|
| 2.3.1.1 | <i>Guilt- driven parenting</i> | 27 |
| 2.3.1.2 | <i>Consistency</i> | 33 |
| 2.3.1.3 | <i>Support</i> | 33 |
| 2.3.2 | Main theme 2: <u>Parents’ and professionals’ opinion of the individual problems children experience when parented in middle childhood.</u> | 38 |
| 2.3.2.1 | <i>Behavioural problems</i> | 38 |
| 2.3.2.2 | <i>Emotional problems</i> | 42 |
| 2.3.3 | Main theme 3: <u>Parents’ and professionals’ opinion of the environmental problems experienced when parenting children in middle childhood.</u> | 46 |
| 2.3.3.1 | <i>Safety</i> | 46 |
| 2.3.3.2 | <i>Lack of resources</i> | 48 |
| 2.3.4 | Main theme 4: <u>Parents’ and professionals’ opinion of the needs when parenting children in middle childhood.</u> | 50 |
| 2.3.4.1 | <i>Specific and simple disciplinary system</i> | 50 |
| 2.3.4.2 | <i>Skills development</i> | 53 |
| 2.3.4.3 | <i>Support system</i> | 55 |
| 2.4 | SETTING THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES | 57 |
| 2.5 | CONCLUSION | 57 |
| | | |
| CHAPTER 3: PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES INFLUENCING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD | | |
| 3.1 | INTRODUCTION | 59 |
| 3.2 | DEFINITION OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT | 59 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 3.3. PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT | 60 |
| 3.3.1 <u>Children’s ability to motivate themselves</u> | 60 |
| 3.3.1.1 <i>Greater independence</i> | 60 |
| 3.3.1.2 <i>Keeping the balance in development</i> | 63 |
| 3.3.2 <u>Children’s level of empathy and respect for others</u> | 65 |
| 3.3.3 <u>Children’s ability to delay gratification</u> | 67 |
| 3.3.4 <u>Children’s ability to take responsibility for their actions</u> | 68 |
| 3.3.5 <u>Children’s ability to negotiate positively with their environment</u> | 70 |
| 3.3.5.1 <i>Family structure and function</i> | 70 |
| 3.3.5.2 <i>Peer group</i> | 72 |
| 3.3.5.3 <i>Coping with problems</i> | 73 |
| 3.4 CONCLUSION | 74 |

CHAPTER 4: GESTALT PRINCIPLES TO ENHANCE PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

| | |
|--|----|
| 4.1 INTRODUCTION | 76 |
| 4.2 THE DEFINITION OF GESTALT | 76 |
| 4.3 THE GESTALT PHILOSOPHY | 77 |
| 4.4 GESTALT PRINCIPLES | 78 |
| 4.4.1 <u>Dialogue</u> | 78 |
| 4.4.2 <u>Boundaries</u> | 79 |
| 4.4.3 <u>Contact / Boundary disturbances</u> | 80 |
| 4.4.4 <u>Here-and-Now</u> | 81 |
| 4.4.5 <u>Awareness</u> | 82 |
| 4.4.6 <u>Confluence</u> | 83 |
| 4.4.7 <u>Children’s processes</u> | 84 |

| | | |
|---------|--|----|
| 4.4.8 | <u>Empowerment</u> | 84 |
| 4.4.9 | <u>Relationship</u> | 84 |
| 4.4.10 | <u>Unfinished business</u> | 85 |
| 4.4.11 | <u>Organismic self-regulation</u> | 86 |
| 4.4.12 | <u>Responsibility</u> | 87 |
| 4.5 | THE USE OF GESTALT PRINCIPLES IN PARENTAL GUIDANCE | 87 |
| 4.5.1 | <u>Relating to children</u> | 88 |
| 4.5.1.1 | <i>Accepting children as unique</i> | 88 |
| 4.5.1.2 | <i>Communicating with each other</i> | 89 |
| 4.5.1.3 | <i>Play</i> | 89 |
| 4.5.2 | <u>Quality time</u> | 90 |
| 4.5.3 | <u>Guidelines to enhance self-esteem</u> | 90 |
| 4.6 | CONCLUSION | 91 |

CHAPTER 5: FUNCTIONAL ELEMENTS OF EXISTING PARENTING PROGRAMS

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 5.1 | INTRODUCTION | 92 |
| 5.2 | <i>1-2-3 MAGIC</i> BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION PROGRAM | 92 |
| 5.2.1 | <u>Parenting philosophy</u> | 92 |
| 5.2.2 | <u>Elements of parenting</u> | 93 |
| 5.2.3 | <u>Process of the program</u> | 94 |
| 5.3 | THE PARENTS PLUS POGRAMS | 94 |
| 5.3.1 | <u>Parenting philosophy</u> | 95 |
| 5.3.2 | <u>Elements of parenting</u> | 95 |
| 5.3.3 | <u>Process of the program</u> | 96 |

| | | |
|--|---|-----|
| 5.4 | THE NURTURING PARENTING PROGRAMS | 96 |
| 5.4.1 | <u>Parenting philosophy</u> | 97 |
| 5.4.2 | <u>Elements of parenting</u> | 98 |
| 5.4.3 | <u>Process of the program</u> | 98 |
| 5.5 | FILIAL THERAPY | 99 |
| 5.5.1 | <u>Parenting philosophy</u> | 99 |
| 5.5.2 | <u>Elements of parenting</u> | 99 |
| 5.5.3 | <u>Process of the program</u> | 100 |
| 5.6 | CONCLUSION | 101 |
| | | |
| CHAPTER 6: DESIGN AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT | | |
| 6.1 | INTRODUCTION | 102 |
| 6.2 | OBSERVATIONAL SYSTEM | 102 |
| 6.2.1 | <u>Recording sheet no.1 – Targeted psychosocial behaviour to be changed</u> | 103 |
| 6.2.2 | <u>Recording sheet no.2 – Building the parent-child relationship</u> | 105 |
| 6.2.3 | <u>Recording sheet no.3 – Household rules and consequences</u> | 106 |
| 6.2.4 | <u>Recording sheet no. 4 – Disciplinary system</u> | 107 |
| 6.2.5 | <u>Recording sheet no.5- Self-support for the parent</u> | 108 |
| 6.3 | PROCEDURAL ELEMENTS OF THE INTERVENTION | 109 |
| 6.4 | GUIDELINES ASSISTING PARENTS TO ENHANCE PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT | 110 |

| | | |
|-------|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 6.4.1 | <u>Awareness</u> | 111 |
| 6.4.2 | <u>Boundaries</u> | 113 |
| 6.4.3 | <u>Children's processes</u> | 116 |
| 6.4.4 | <u>Confluence</u> | 117 |
| 6.4.5 | <u>Dialogue</u> | 118 |
| 6.4.6 | <u>Empowerment</u> | 119 |
| 6.4.7 | <u>Organismic self-regulation</u> | 121 |
| 6.4.8 | <u>Responsibility</u> | 122 |
| 6.4.9 | <u>Relationship</u> | 124 |
| 6.5 | CONCLUSION | 126 |

CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 7.1 | INTRODUCTION | 127 |
| 7.2 | THE INTERVENTION RESEARCH PROCESS | 127 |
| | 7.2.1 <u>Problem analysis and project planning phase</u> | 127 |
| | 7.2.1.1 <i>Identifying, involving clients and gaining entry</i> | 127 |
| | 7.2.1.2 <i>Identifying concerns and analysing identified problems</i> | 128 |
| | 7.2.1.3 <i>Setting goals and objectives</i> | 128 |
| | 7.2.2 <u>Information gathering and synthesis phase</u> | 129 |
| | 7.2.2.1 <i>Using existing information sources</i> | 129 |
| | 7.2.2.2 <i>Studying natural examples</i> | 131 |
| | 7.2.2.3 <i>Identifying functional elements of successful models</i> | 131 |
| | 7.2.3 <u>Design</u> | 132 |
| | 7.2.3.1 <i>Designing and observational system</i> | 132 |
| | 7.2.3.2 <i>Specifying procedural elements of the intervention</i> | 132 |
| | 7.2.4 <u>Early development and pilot testing</u> | 132 |
| | 7.2.4.1 <i>Developing a prototype or preliminary intervention</i> | 132 |

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 7.3 | RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS STUDY | 133 |
| 7.4 | LIMITATIONS EXPERIENCED DURING THE RESEARCH | 134 |
| 7.5 | ASPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH | 135 |
| 7.6 | CONCLUSIONS FROM THE RESEARCH | 136 |
| 7.7 | CONCLUSIVE SUMMARY | 137 |
| | BIBLIOGRAPHY | 138 |

OTHER SOURCES CONSULTED

ADDENDA

A1 Form of consent for respondents

A2 Letter of information to School Committee

LIST OF TABLES

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----|
| Table 2.1 | MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM THE EMPIRICAL DATA | 58 |
| Table 3.1 | PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD | 62 |
| Table 3.2 | ERIKSON'S STAGES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT | 64 |
| Table 6.1 | RECORDING SHEET NO. 1– TARGETED PSYCHOSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR TO BE CHANGED | 104 |
| Table 6.2 | RECORDING SHEET NO.2 – BUILDING THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP | 105 |
| Table 6.3 | RECORDING SHEET NO. 3 – HOUSEHOLD RULES | 106 |
| Table 6.4 | RECORDING SHEET NO. 4 – DISCIPLINARY SYSTEM | 107 |
| Table 6.5 | RECORDING SHEET NO. 5 – SELF- SUPPORT FOR PARENTS | 108 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| FIGURE 2.1: SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM EMPIRICAL DATA: MAIN THEME 1 | 26 |
| FIGURE 2.2: SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM EMPIRICAL DATA: MAIN THEME 2 | 37 |
| FIGURE 2.3: SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM EMPIRICAL DATA: MAIN THEME 3 | 45 |
| FIGURE 2.4: SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM EMPIRICAL DATA: MAIN THEME 4 | 49 |

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM ANALYSES AND PROJECT PLANNING

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study sought to assist parents in how to enhance the psychosocial development of their children. The results of this study enabled the researcher to establish parental guidelines from a Gestalt perspective as to how to enhance children in middle childhood's psychosocial development.

The researcher chose the principles of the Gestalt Play Therapy approach to enhance psychosocial development because there is such a marked resemblance between the outcomes of Gestalt Play Therapy and enhanced psychosocial development. It is the researcher's opinion that Gestalt specifically worked well as a model of intervention, for the reason that psychosocial development recognises that children develop into total individuals through interaction with others in the environment. (Compare Corsini, 2002:788.) Clarkson (1999:7) agrees in stating that Gestalt focuses on enhancing children's level of awareness and helping children to have good contact with themselves, others and the environment in the present. Gestalt Theory also emphasises that clients take control of their own lives and emotions and be able to live life to the full. Clarkson (1999:27) states that the essence of Gestalt Therapy is taking responsibility for your own life.

The whole study was conducted with the psychosocial development in middle childhood as focus. Psychosocial development refers to children's psychological and social development. (Compare Reber & Reber, 2001:585.) As psychosocial development is quite a broad term, the researcher focused specifically on the following aspects of psychosocial development in the middle childhood:

- Children's ability to motivate themselves;
- children's level of empathy and respect for others;
- children's ability to take responsibility for their actions;

- children's ability to delay gratification;
- children's ability to negotiate positively with the environment (family, peers and coping with problems).

The researcher specifically considered the following questions during this study: What are the factors that influence children in their psychosocial development during middle childhood? What are the needs of parents regarding the psychosocial development of their children in the middle childhood years?

Children in middle childhood regularly experience challenges concerning a variety of things, such as emotional awareness and independent decision-making, which are closely related to the characteristics of psychosocial development (Dariotis, Kauh & McHale, 2003:251). Berger (2005:315) is of the opinion that psychosocial development is an essential part of middle childhood as this is the time when children learn the skills they will need as adults. It is the researcher's opinion that the foundation for psychosocial development is essentially being established at the ages of 6-12 years because of the increased intellectual development and socialisation caused by schooling, peer groups, family involvement and friends.

Timoney (2005) states that some childhood pressures are more easily withstood when parents have a set of guidelines, rules and values, enjoy healthy, open relationships with their children, and discuss with them the reasons why certain boundaries are set. Michelangelo (in Morrissey, 2000) supports the need for parenting guidelines by stating that the greatest danger for most people is not that they aim too high and then don't achieve their goals for their children, but that they set their aim too low and then become complacent with the way they raise their children.

Appropriate Gestalt principles to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood were applied to developing parental guidelines. The purpose of this study was to provide data from the perspectives of parents and professionals, as well as experts working with children on a daily basis, regarding psychosocial development in middle childhood. This study highlights some of the problems with and factors not beneficial for children's psychosocial development. The researcher drew certain conclusions from the research study (see 7.6). The

purpose was to use intervention research to design Gestalt guidelines for parents to enhance the healthy psychosocial development of their children.

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE CHOICE OF TOPIC

The interest of the researcher in child advocacy, psychosocial development of children and guidance to parents, served as a precursor to the interest in working with the psychosocial development of children. The researcher has been working as a social worker in the child protection field for eight years and as a play therapist for the past three years. In the course of these years the researcher has experienced that parents seem to be in need of guidance to support them in raising their children. Many child protection issues, such as child neglect, and childhood problems that were referred for play therapy such as lack of discipline, low self-esteem or lack of self-control seem to be related to the way in which a child is parented. Parents seem to need guidance, for instance as to how to set boundaries, build a relationship, discipline and guide their children to become responsible members of society. The development of guidelines to assist parents in enhancing psychosocial development is therefore an attempt to address this obvious need.

The researcher found that the concern for sound psychosocial development in raising children, and for enhancing it from a Gestalt perspective, is a neglected area in literature. Until now, it has not been the focus of researchers or writers in Ireland. In Ireland, research concerning children has mainly focused on education, poverty, youth suicide, relationships and epidemiology. (Compare Health Research Board, 2004.) There seems to be numerous projects that provide parental guidelines for children with different needs, for instance autism (compare Hamilton, 2000:248; Richman, 2001:106), Down's syndrome (compare Pueschel, 1990:230), HIV/AIDS (compare Chinouya-Mudari & O'Brien, 1999:27), or narcissism children. (Compare Imbesi, 1999:41). A few research articles were found that discuss children's psychosocial, character or moral development but no parental guidelines were given. (Compare Namka, 1997; Marella, 2000; Chadwell, 2000; Carr, 2004.)

The researcher also found several resources that provided general information on children's physical, emotional and psychosocial development through life, but these resources either didn't give specific parental guidelines (compare Development through Life, 1996; Society

for Research in Child Development, 2004; Durkin, 1995), or did give parental guidelines but not from a Gestalt perspective. (Compare Handbook of Parenting, 1995). Oaklander (1988) and Clarkson (1999) do give advice and directions from a Gestalt perspective, but although these authors touch on elements of psychosocial development, specific parental guidelines for psychosocial development are not given.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION

Psychosocial development, like the ability to delay gratification, to have empathy for others, to take responsibility for their own actions and to positively negotiate with the environment, are all eminent abilities to nurture in middle childhood. This point is highlighted by Berger (2005:315) who states that middle childhood is the time when children learn the psychosocial skills they will need as adults. As a result, it is important that parents are aware of the factors influencing and enhancing psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood.

As mentioned before, in the course of the researcher's experience in the field of child protection the need was identified for guidelines to assist parents in enhancing their children's psychosocial development. The researcher considers the following aspects of the Gestalt approach as specifically helpful when establishing parental guidelines to enhance children's psychosocial development: the importance of the relationship to establish change, confluence, taking children's leads, refraining from interpreting what children are doing or saying, play, acceptance, not being judgmental, allowing children to take responsibility for their actions, and setting boundaries. The researcher hasn't found any parental guidelines to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood from a Gestalt perspective. (Compare Gestalt Journal Press, 2000.) Therefore, the answer to the need that has been identified is to develop guidelines for parents from a Gestalt perspective to enhance psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When guidelines are being developed in research, **intervention research** would normally be conducted. The Design and Development model, a research model directed towards developing innovative interventions, was designed by Rothman and Thomas and forms part

of developmental and intervention research. (Compare Fouche, 2002:112.) Schilling (in De Vos, 2002:396) describes intervention as "...an action undertaken by a social worker or other helping agent, usually in co-operation with a client or other affected party, to enhance or maintain the functioning and well-being of an individual, family, group, community or population". The aim of this study was to develop guidelines to assist parents to enhance psychosocial development in their children from a Gestalt perspective and therefore intervention research was the most appropriate model to be used.

The goals of professional research can either be **applied** or **basic**. Fouche (2002:108) explains that applied research focuses on solving specific problems in practice or helping practitioners accomplish tasks. Babbie (2004:28) agrees that applied research seeks to produce recommendations on or solutions to some problem that applies to a specific group of people in a particular situation. The aim is to apply theoretical insights to real-world situations. In this research applied research was used because this study sought to produce specific guidelines to help parents to enhance the psychosocial development (that they struggle with) in their children's middle childhood. The Design and Development model is used in research studies that systematically design and develop interventions (De Vos, 2002:396).

De Vos (2002:397) explains that the Design and Development intervention research is a phase model that consists of six phases, each comprising a series of steps or operations. For the purpose of this study (which is a dissertation of limited scope), this model was only completed up to the fourth phase, step one, which entails developing a prototype or preliminary intervention. These phases and steps will be discussed under the work procedure of the study.

1.5 WORK PROCEDURE

The first phase of the Design and Development model of intervention research is problem analysis and project planning.

1.5.1 Project analysis and project planning

In problem analysis and project planning it is important to determine what is considered the problem for the research study. Problems can be either personal, for instance when a person is having marital problems, or a social problem, for instance when hundreds of people are having marital problems (Hastings in De Vos, 2002:397). Hastings proceeds to define social problems as "...a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable". For the purposes of this study the problem identified was the need for parental guidelines from a Gestalt perspective to enhance psychosocial development in their children. The first step of the project analysis and project planning phase was to identify and involve clients.

1.5.1.1 Identifying and involving clients

De Vos (2002:398) is of the opinion that intervention research involving clients or the population has a greater chance of receiving support from the community, the target population and the sample. De Vos (2002:398) further states that in research there is always the simultaneous existence of a population and a universe. (Compare Babbie, 2004:110.)

“Universe” refers to all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested (Arkava and Lane in Strydom & Venter, 2002:198). In this research, the universe were all parents living in the northern suburbs of Dublin, Ireland, as well as professionals working with children in the northern suburbs of Dublin, Ireland.

“Population” refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics. A population is the total set from which the individuals or units of the study are chosen (Arkava & Lane in Strydom & Venter, 2002:198). A population is also a set of entities in which all the characteristics of interest to the practitioner or researcher are represented (Strydom & Venter, 2002:198.) The entities of the population for the purpose of this study were parents and professionals. Parents with children between the age of 6 and 12 years living in the northern suburbs of Dublin and involved in play therapy were selected from the researcher’s caseload at St. Helena’s Resource Centre. Professionals with whom the researcher is

acquainted and who are working with children aged 6-12 living in the northern suburbs of Dublin, Ireland were also selected.

“**Sampling**” is described as taking a sample of a population or universe and ensuring that it is representative of that population or universe. Seaberg (in Strydom & Venter, 2002:199) defines a sample as a small portion of the total set of objects, events or persons that together comprise the object of study. (Compare Babbie, 2004:181-189.)

There are two kinds of sampling, namely probability sampling based on randomisation, and non-probability sampling done without randomisation (Strydom & Venter in De Vos, 2002:203). Non-probability sampling can further be divided into accidental, purposive, quota, dimensional, target, snowball and spatial samples. Purposive sampling is based on the judgment of the researcher, because it is composed of elements that contain the most characteristics and typical attributes representative of the population (Singleton in Strydom & Venter, 2002:203-207). The researcher deliberately used **purposive sampling** by selecting four parents from her caseload at St. Helena’s Resource Centre, North Dublin. These four parents with male and female children between the age of 6 and 12 years were referred for play therapy and sought parental guidance for their children’s psychosocial development. Two professionals who have daily dealings with psychosocial problems and sometimes refer children to the play therapist were selected. Thus, a total of six respondents who complied with the specific requirements and elements of this study were involved.

1.5.1.2 Gaining entry and co-operation from settings

De Vos (2002:399) states that successful intervention researchers form a collaborative relationship with representatives of the setting by involving them in identifying problems, planning the project and implementing selected interventions. Conversations with key informants help researchers understand what they have to offer and how to articulate the benefits for potential participants.

For this research it wasn’t necessary for the researcher to obtain special permission to contact the parents since the researcher practised in the community centre and were known to most of the parents as well as the staff. The manager of the centre and the researcher’s supervisor

were both aware of the research objectives, process and the development of guidelines. Verbal consent and support were given to the researcher by the manager of the centre, as well as by all the respondents involved in the research study. Still, all respondents (parents and professionals) were thoroughly informed of the purpose and process of the research study. This was clearly explained via telephone conversations and individual preparation. All respondents signed a written contract in which they were informed of the process and consented to take part in the research (A 1 refers).

1.5.1.3 Identifying concerns of the population

In Chapter 2 (see 2.3) more information can be found on the identified concerns of the population. The researcher used informal personal contact methods to attempt to understand the issues of importance to the population. Fawcett, Suarez-Balcazar, Balcazar, White, Paine, Blanchard & Embree (in De Vos, 2002:402) agree that intervention researchers should avoid projecting external views of the problem and its solution.

In order to understand the issues of the population, the researcher used the **qualitative approach**. With this approach the researcher attempted to gain a first-hand, holistic understanding of the phenomena of interest, by means of a flexible strategy of problem formulation and data collection. (Compare Reid & Smith in Fouche & Delport, 2002:80.) The qualitative approach mainly aims to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life, and therefore the qualitative approach seemed appropriate for collection and data analysis in this research. (Compare McRoy in Fouche & Delport, 2002:79.) Intervention research can either be qualitative or quantitative, as both these approaches can be used in intervention research (De Vos, 2002:368).

The researcher used two different **semi-structured interview schedules** to **collect data** in order to determine the concerns of the population for this study, one interview schedule for the parents (first sample) and another one for the professionals (second sample). The researcher tested the actual semi-structured interview schedules on a sample of one parent and one professional who did not form part of the research sample. In the course of this **pilot testing**, which served to investigate the accuracy and appropriateness of the questions, no

difficulties with these questions were identified. The pilot testing also allowed the researcher to determine the respondents' likely response to the interview schedules. Greeff (2002:302) maintains that a semi-structured interview schedule can help researchers to gain a detailed picture of a particular participant's beliefs about or perceptions of a particular topic. Additionally De Vos (2002:302) states that semi-structured interviews, as a data collection method, give the researcher and participants much flexibility and the opportunity to gather information first-hand. According to Greeff (in De Vos, 2002:302), an interview schedule is a questionnaire that provides the researcher with a set of predetermined questions to guide the interview. It was the aim of the researcher to initiate and guide the gathering of first-hand information from participants in a flexible manner, and therefore the semi-structured interview schedule worked especially well in this study.

As a result of discussions with experts, personal work experience and a brief study of appropriate literature, the researcher determined, the overall issues that were to be addressed during the interview. The most appropriate questions were then arranged in sequence.

Apart from the interview schedule, a dictaphone was used to record the information. During the semi-structured interviews the respondents were regarded as the experts on the subject and were therefore allowed maximum opportunity to tell their stories.

1.5.1.4 Analysing concerns or problems identified

The following step of the project analysis and planning was to **analyse** the concerns or problems identified. This is discussed in Chapter 2. De Vos (2002:339-341) suggests that as the concerns of the population are identified and gathered, they should be analysed in order to bring order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. The following questions, as suggested by Fawcett, *et al.* (in De Vos, 2002:403) were asked during data analysis:

- What is the nature between “ideal” and “actual” conditions that define the problem?
- For whom is the situation a problem?
- What are the negative consequences of the problem for affected individuals?
- How would affected persons want things to be different?

- What needs to happen for clients to consider the problem solved?
- Who would have the responsibility to “solve” the problem?
- What aspects have respondents highlighted as necessary for the development of guidelines?

These questions helped to clarify the concerns of the respondents, as well as the factors that need to change in order to enhance psychosocial development in children. De Vos (2002:341) states that, in a qualitative study, data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously at the research site, although data analysis can of course only take place after data collection. Informal notes, as suggested by De Vos (2002:343), were written down by the researcher to reflect on the information gathered, and files containing the information were organised into keywords and key sentences. Information gathered by means of a semi-structured interview schedule with respondents was transcribed into defined categories and marked units for data analysis.

The researcher further analysed the information by repeatedly reading through the data to get a sense of the information as a whole. The information was then classified by taking the information apart and sorting them under four main themes. (Compare Creswell, 2002:344 and Babbie, 2004:376.)

The researcher presented the four main themes and subcategories in four schematic figures (Figure 2.1- 2.4). The above-mentioned steps in the method of analysis helped the researcher to understand the concerns and needs of the respondents in order to establish Gestalt guidelines to assist parents in enhancing psychosocial development in children.

1.5.1.5 Setting goals and objectives

A clear problem analysis helps to establish clear targets for change. De Vos (2002:404) states that broad goals and specific objectives clarify the proposed ends and means of the intervention research project. The primary goal of this proposed study was to provide guidelines for parents from a Gestalt perspective to assist them in enhancing the psychosocial development of their children in middle childhood. This goal helps the reader to understand

what the researcher wanted to achieve. Objectives are the steps one has to take, realistically and at grassroots level, within a certain time-span, in order to attain the dream (Fouche in De Vos, 2002: 107-108). The objectives for this study were the following:

- To undertake an in depth empirical study, using semi-structured interviews to collect and analyse data, to determine what the concerns and problems are as identified by the respondents;
- to undertake a thorough literature study of developmental theories and the Gestalt approach as they relate to psychosocial development in middle childhood;
- to determine functional elements of existing parenting programs to be used when establishing Gestalt guidelines for parents to assist them in enhancing psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood years;
- to establish guidelines from a Gestalt perspective to assist parents to enhance psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood;
- to draw conclusions and make recommendations to assist parents and professionals in the field, as well as to point out aspects to be further researched in future.

These objectives were all completed and the effective completion of them are evaluated in Chapter 7.

1.5.2. Information gathering and synthesis

The second phase of the Design and Development model is the gathering of information and synthesis. Various existing sources of information can be useful when undertaking a research study. Fawcett, *et al.* (in De Vos, 2002:405) is of the opinion that it is essential in intervention research to discover what others have done to understand and address the problem and not to “reinvent the wheel”. Sources of information provided by others are to be found, for instance, in existing literature, the insights of various social disciplines, and previous research specifically focused on this field.

1.5.2.1 Using existing sources of information

De Vos (2002:405) is of the opinion the study of existing information such as literature relevant to the particular concern can be very useful when undertaking a research study. For this study a literature review were therefore undertaken to discover what others have done in regard to the research problem, specifically literature relating to child development theories, psychosocial development in middle childhood, and in the Gestalt approach. Intervention research also have to look beyond the literature of the particular field of social work, as societal problems do not confine themselves only to specific disciplines (De Vos, 2002:406). The researcher therefore studied previous research and societal questions from a variety of social disciplines. Official research material and contemporary international magazines were consulted. The Internet was used extensively and relevant literature from development theories, the Gestalt approach, the social sciences, child psychology, clinical social work, sociology and history were studied.

The researcher used some references in this study that were more than ten years old. These references were from the *Dictionary of Keywords in Psychology* which provided a very clear definition of psychosocial development and books by Latner (1986) and Zinker (1978) on Gestalt Therapy. Violet Oaklander (1988) gave some parental advice from a Gestalt perspective on different aspects of children's well-being and was also consulted (see 4.5).

1.5.2.2 Studying natural examples

De Vos (2002:405) states that a particular useful source of information is to observe how community members faced with the problem in question have attempted to address it. Experts too can provide valuable insights and advice from their own experience as to how they perceive the problem and how one should deal with it. Consultation with experts in the field of Gestalt Therapy, parental guidance and psychosocial development in middle childhood thus provided valuable insights and information. The following experts were consulted:

Audrey Gregan, play therapist at St. Paul's School, Dublin

Audrey Gregan worked as a teacher in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Dublin before she trained in Gestalt, person-centred, client-centred and transactional analyses therapy. Audrey has been working as a play therapist for the past 26 years and with a community play group in the northern suburbs of Dublin for eight years.

Patricia Timoney, educational psychologist, Dublin

Patricia is an educational psychologist who daily interviews and assesses children with different psychological problems and developmental needs. She has been working with children for the past 18 years and specifically conducts educational psychological assessments on children from the age of 6-16 years in the northern and southern suburbs of Dublin.

Dr Hannie Schoeman, Gestalt expert, South Africa

Dr. Hannie Schoeman worked as a senior lecturer in the Department of Social Work at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Dr. Schoeman has specifically trained in the Gestalt approach. She has a private practice as a Gestalt play therapist, is a lecturer in Gestalt Play Therapy for UNISA (University of South Africa) and as such gives extensive supervision to students around the world.

Dr. Thomas Phelan, clinical child psychologist, Illinois, USA

Dr. Phelan is an internationally renowned expert and lecturer on child discipline and Attention Deficit Disorder. He frequently appears on radio and television and has been engaged in private practice since 1972. Dr. Phelan has written many parental guidance books on discipline, self-esteem and Attention Deficit Disorder. He wrote a book called *1-2-3 Magic* relating to effective discipline for children 2-12 years old.

All the experts were in agreement that this research study would be valuable in addressing parenting needs regarding the specific psychosocial developmental issues of setting

boundaries, giving children choices, teaching children how to be responsible, and enhancing children's self-esteem in general. Strydom and Delpont (2002:337) propose that the interviewing of professionals as key informants is important in research. The following professional was consulted and interviewed to help prepare the investigation and establish the needed parental guidelines (see A 2 for letter of information written to School Committee):

- A school principle, Mr. McCarthy of St. Malachi's Primary School, Finglas, Dublin, who worked in his field for 25 years. Mr. McCarthy, who is also a parent, showed a clear understanding of the psychosocial developmental needs of children within the age group of 6–12 years in the northern suburbs of Dublin. He used to on a regular basis, refer children with these kinds of needs to the play therapist at St. Helena's Resource Centre, and had a clear sense of the importance of such a service for children.

Professionals and experts working with children were a valuable preparatory source in establishing parental guidelines to assist in enhancing psychosocial development in children. These persons brought experience and objectivity to the study. Apart from the respondents, parents who do not form part of the sample were consulted to understand how they were addressing these needs. Besides existing sources of information as discussed under 1.5.2.1, functional elements of successfully utilised parenting programs were also helpful in establishing Gestalt guidelines to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood.

1.5.2.3 Identifying functional elements of successful models

The researcher followed up on the suggestion by De Vos (2002:407) to investigate whether a model, program, policy or practice does actually exist that has been successful in changing targeted behaviours and what the successful outcomes could be attributed to. By studying and critically analysing successful and unsuccessful models or programs attempting to address the problem, researchers discovered potentially useful elements of such interventions.

The researcher did not succeed in finding any guidelines or models that were specifically developed from a Gestalt perspective to assist parents to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. There are however, many functional elements in the Gestalt approach,

even though these are overlapping with psychosocial development, for instance the importance of self-awareness.(Compare Gestalt Journal Press, 2000.) This is an important functional element in the Gestalt approach that was useful in enhancing psychosocial development in middle childhood. Other Gestalt concepts and principles were identified as well, that were useful for this study. These are discussed under 4.4.

Another useful source proved to be Violet Oaklander (1988), a Gestalt play therapist who mainly works with children. Oaklander sometimes has dealings with parents in the context of family therapy with children. In her book *Windows to our Children* (1988), Oaklander makes some suggestions and give ideas about how parents can more effectively relate to their children, spend quality time together and enhance their children's feelings of self-esteem. Some of these suggestions were very useful in establishing Gestalt guidelines for the purpose of this study (see 4.5).

The researcher also found some functional elements of existing parenting programs that were useful for the purpose of this research, although none of these programs were designed from a Gestalt perspective. They were the following:

- A behaviour modification parenting program called *1-2-3 Magic*, developed by Dr. Phelan (compare Phelan, 2003). This program is specifically aimed at guiding parents in setting boundaries and discipline (see 5.2);
- the parents plus programs (compare Sharry & Fitzpatrick, 1998), are comprehensive video-based parenting courses for managing and solving discipline problems in children aged 4–11 years and adolescents aged 11–16 years. These programs contain some functional elements that respondents, during the empirical study, identified as such, that were also used in setting up guidelines for parents in this study (see 5.3);
- the Nurturing Parenting Programs (compare Bavolek, 2005) are programs especially designed for parents of neglected or abused children from birth to eighteen years, the aim of these programs being to prevent further maltreatment and juvenile delinquency. The functional elements of these programs are discussed in Chapter 5 (see 5.4);
- another parenting program that seemed quite effective for enhancing psychosocial development in middle childhood is Filial Therapy (compare Reynolds & Schwartz, 2003).

This program was specifically designed to teach play therapy techniques to families at risk of neglect or abuse, but it contains some functional elements that could be used in the proposed parental guidelines to enhance psychosocial development. These elements are discussed in Chapter 5 (see 5.5).

1.5.3 Design

When the guidelines of the Development and Design model are followed, issues such as designing an observational system and specifying procedural elements of the intervention should be considered. (Compare De Vos, 2002: 408.)

1.5.3.1 Designing an observational system

De Vos (2002:408) states that the researcher has to design a method of detecting the effects following the intervention. De Vos further explains that the purpose of the observational system is to measure the outcomes of intervention through direct observation, self-monitoring or self-reporting of events that may be difficult to observe directly.

Respondents have specified a variety of problems and conditions calling for change when parenting their children in middle childhood (see 2.3). The researcher has used this information to create observational tools to be used in conjunction with the established parental guidelines (see 6.4). These tools or recording sheets (see Tables 6.2.1 - 6.2.5) can be used to evaluate or self monitor the changes in the specific areas of psychosocial development and conditions addressed in the parental guidelines (see 6.4). In the opinion of the researcher parents are perfectly positioned to self-monitor and self-record the impact of the intervention and could therefore use this observational system to great effect as a means of evaluating change. The use of these recording sheets are discussed in Chapter 6 under 6.2.

1.5.3.2 Specifying procedural elements of the intervention

De Vos (2002:409) states that the researcher should specify procedural elements for use in the intervention. These elements have to be in place for further effective use of the prototype

or preliminary guidelines. The specific procedural elements for using the guidelines to enhance psychosocial development of children in their middle childhood years are discussed in Chapter 6 (see 6.3).

The researcher has specifically established the Gestalt guidelines for the use of a professional facilitator. It is recommended that these guidelines should be presented in a group setting to approximately six pairs of parents. There is no preference for the number of group sessions to be held, but it would be essential that parents receive homework (as recommended by respondents themselves) in order to practice specific skills in between group sessions. The further details of presentation are left to the professional facilitator's discretion. The professional facilitator should have a sound knowledge and understanding of the Gestalt approach. Formal training in the Gestalt approach would be most effective.

1.5.4. Early development

In this phase a prototype or preliminary intervention is developed and a pilot test conducted. Fawcett, *et al.* (in De Vos, 2002:410) state that during the early development and pilot-testing phase a primitive design is evolved to a form that can be evaluated under field conditions. For this study, the researcher only developed preliminary parental guidelines but no pilot-testing of these proposed guidelines was conducted.

1.5.4.1 Development of a prototype or preliminary intervention

Barnes-September (in De Vos, 2002:410) states that during the development of a prototype or preliminary intervention a “draft” intervention is drawn up that consists of, for instance, a detailed description of the intervention tasks, underlying principles of the protocol, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the role players. Different suggestions for parental guidelines were gained not only from the respondents in this study, but also from Gestalt and Play therapy experts, literature and functional elements identified from existing parenting models. From these suggestions, the researcher has drawn up preliminary guidelines to enhance psychosocial development in the middle childhood years. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 6 under 6.4.

The researcher drew conclusions and made recommendations from the results of this research for future implementation and further research (see Chapter 7).

1.6 DEFINITION OF MAIN CONCEPTS

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:29) state that it is necessary to define clearly all the main concepts used and determine these concepts variables and their relationships. Barnes-September (2002:410) agrees that the description of the key elements and concepts of the research is helpful when developing a program of intervention. The main concepts of this study include the following:

1.6.1 Psychosocial development

There are various definitions for psychosocial development. The following variations will be discussed:

Lee (2002) describes **psychosocial development** as follows: “ This domain includes the growth, change, stability and diversity of human emotions and affect, life span, personality traits, self- and social awareness and identity, and the ability to create and maintain positive relationships with others”. The importance of self-awareness in psychosocial development is emphasised by Lee (2002) who explains it as an “...increased awareness of self, interaction with biological and cognitive development”, including “ issues of attachment and temperament”.

Bruno (in Dictionary of Keywords in Psychology, 1986:183) highlights a social self in his definition of **psychosocial development** as “...the growth of the personality in relation to other persons and as a member of a society from infancy throughout life. It is the formation, over time, of a *social self*, a self that identifies with the family, the culture, the nation, and so forth”.

Corsini (in The Dictionary of Psychology, 2002:788) emphasises the importance of social interaction in his description of **psychosocial development** as “...recognition of the

existence of others as total individuals that occurs in late infancy, evolving into independent interaction with others on the basis of reciprocity about age three into sophisticated relational patterns in adolescents and adulthood”.

Reber and Reber (in *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 2001:585) describes **psychosocial development** as follows:

A term that may be used loosely and literally to refer to an individual’s psychological /social development but is more commonly associated with Erik Eriksson’s characterization of personality growth and development, which stresses the interaction between the person and the physical and social environments.

Psychosocial development in this study refers to children’s ability to motivate themselves, to delay gratification, to have empathy and respect for others, to take responsibility for their actions and to positively negotiate with their environment (their peers, family and coping with problems).

1.6.2 Children in middle childhood

Corsini (2002:272) defines **middle childhood** as children’s chronological age from 6-11 years. **Middle childhood** is referred to by Berger (2005:G-8) as the development period from seven to eleven years.

In this study the researcher refers to **children in middle childhood** as young people (both male and female) in the developmental period from 6-12 years who need the care, guidance and protection of an adult.

1.6.3 Enhance

Enhance is defined as “...heighten, intensify, increase value or attractiveness” (Collins Reference English Dictionary, 1993, s.v. “enhance”) and as “...to increase in value,

importance, attractiveness” (Geddes & Grosset (eds.), 1999: English Dictionary, s.v. “enhance”).

Enhance, as used in this study, refers to improving or creating conducive conditions for psychosocial development in all the areas where children interact with others, for instance at school, at home, among peers, family or friends, or when playing sports.

1.6.4 Gestalt guidelines

The researcher first defines **Gestalt** and then **guidelines**. Clarkson (1999:1) describes **Gestalt** as “...the shape, pattern, the whole form, the configuration. Gestalt connotes the structural entity that is both different from and much more than the sum of its parts. The aim of the Gestalt approach is for a person to discover, explore and experience his or her own shape, pattern and wholeness”.

Corsini (2002:413) defines **Gestalt** as “...a unitary, integrated, articulated perceptual structure or system whose parts are in dynamic interrelation with each other and with the whole”.

Guidelines are defined as “...directions that point the way forward, leads or direct others’ (Geddes & Grosset (eds.), 1999: English Dictionary, s.v. “guidelines”).

Collins Reference English Dictionary (1993, s.v. “guidelines”) refers to **guidelines** as “... set principles for doing something”.

For the purpose of this study, **Gestalt guidelines** mean the directions or principles given from the perspective that every person is a whole form with the ability to discover, explore and experience his or her own shape and wholeness in relation to the surrounding environment.

1.7 ETHICAL ASPECTS

When a research project is undertaken, it is important that the entire project should run its course in an ethically correct manner (Strydom in De Vos, 2002:69). Ethical guidelines serve

as standards and the basis according to which each researcher ought to evaluate his/her own conduct.

Strydom (in De Vos, 2002:63) states that ethical principles should thus be internalised in the personality of the researcher, to such an extent that ethically guided decision-making becomes part of his total lifestyle. The following ethical aspects were kept in mind for the purpose of this study:

- The researcher was aware that this research project could potentially be very invasive. Respondents were not subjected to this research unless they fully agreed to it. Participation was voluntary and respondents could decide how much information they wanted to volunteer. Written consent for participation was obtained from all respondents and was kept confidential (see A 1 for form of consent for respondents).
- Strydom (in De Vos, 2002:64) states that the responsibility to protect respondents against harm reaches further than mere efforts to repair such harm afterwards. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:103) therefore suggest that respondents should be informed beforehand of the positive and negative aspects of the research, for example that the research might cause stress, discomfort or harm to the respondents. All respondents were informed beforehand of what the research would entail. They were also made aware that their own personal expectations of the research study, for instance an immediate change in their circumstances, would not necessarily occur and could not be guaranteed.
- Anonymity was considered to avoid any bias on the part of the researcher. Names of respondents were omitted on the interview schedules – only a number identified a respondent. Data were exclusively used for the purpose of the research. All aspects and questions on the interview schedule were explained to the respondents so that they might not be deceived. A written contract was employed to ensure all of the above. (Compare Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:103.)
- Respondents were allowed to ask as many questions about the project as they wanted to, and could discuss any preconceived ideas they might have about participating.

- The researcher completed the intervention research process and this research report as accurately, clearly and objectively as possible, as suggested by Strydom (in De Vos, 2002:73-74). The information was formulated accurately, data were interpreted correctly, and the limitations of the research (see 7.4) were clearly noted in this report. Proper recognition was given to all sources consulted and to people who collaborated. Respondents were made aware that guidelines would be drawn up from this research study, and that this information would be freely available to them. (Compare Babbie, 2004: 487-491.)

According to Strydom (in De Vos, 2002:69), researchers are ethically obliged to ensure that they are competent and adequately skilled to undertake the proposed investigation. The researcher was confident of meeting all requirements to undertake this study, and it was done under the official control of a qualified supervisor. The researcher is a qualified social worker who has specialised in play therapy for the past three years and who understands the sensitivity needed when dealing with people. The researcher offered debriefing to all respondents and allowed time for discussion after each interview. This was done to minimise emotional harm and to tone down unrealistic expectations. There was no need for referrals for further counselling to be done.

1.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the project analysis and planning for this research study was explained. Attention was given to various aspects of the research, for instance the research methodology, defining the concepts and the ethical aspects entailed. In the next chapter the empirical findings of this research will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this research study it was proposed to establish Gestalt guidelines to assist parents in enhancing the psychosocial development of their children in middle childhood. As discussed before, the researcher made use of the Design and Development model as part of the intervention research in this project. The first part of the first phase of intervention research, namely project planning, has been discussed in the previous chapter. In that chapter attention was given to the following steps of the first phase: identifying the concerns of the population, analysing the concerns of the population and setting goals and objectives (see *1.5.1.3-1.5.1.5*). Identifying and analysing the concerns of the population formed part of the empirical findings of this research as these steps were instrumental in exposing the extent of the existing psychosocial problems children in their middle childhood experience.

The empirical data highlighted some of the problems experienced with children's psychosocial development and include discussions on the factors not beneficial for psychosocial development.

The researcher focused on specific aspects of children's psychosocial development (see 1.1), involving children's ability to:

- motivate themselves;
- delay gratification;
- have empathy and respect for others;
- take responsibility for their actions; and
- negotiate positively with their environment (their peers, family, and their ability to cope with problems).

Semi-structured interview schedules were used to gain empirical data from the two sample groups namely the parents and the professionals. These were parents and professionals selected by means of purposive sampling (see 1.5.1.1).

2.2 IDENTIFYING AND ANALYSING CONCERNS OF THE POPULATION

The researcher then carried out the next step of the first phase of intervention research, namely to identify the concerns of the population (see 1.5.1.3). In order to understand the issues of the population, the researcher used the qualitative approach, by means of which the researcher attempted to gain a first-hand and holistic understanding of the phenomena of interest, utilising a flexible strategy of problem formulation and data-collection. The sample for this research project comprised two types of respondents, namely parents as well as professionals. The researcher will therefore distinguish between the respondents by referring to them as professionals or parents respectively. The researcher used two different semi-structured interview schedules, one for the parents and one for the professionals (see 1.5.1.3).

The following step of the first phase of intervention research was to analyse the concerns of the population. Information gathered from the semi-structured interviews were organised into key words and key sentences and then transcribed into defined categories and marked units for data analysis. The concerns of the respondents were then sorted under four main themes as discussed under the next heading.

2.3 IDENTIFICATION OF CONCERNS UNDER MAIN AND SUBTHEMES

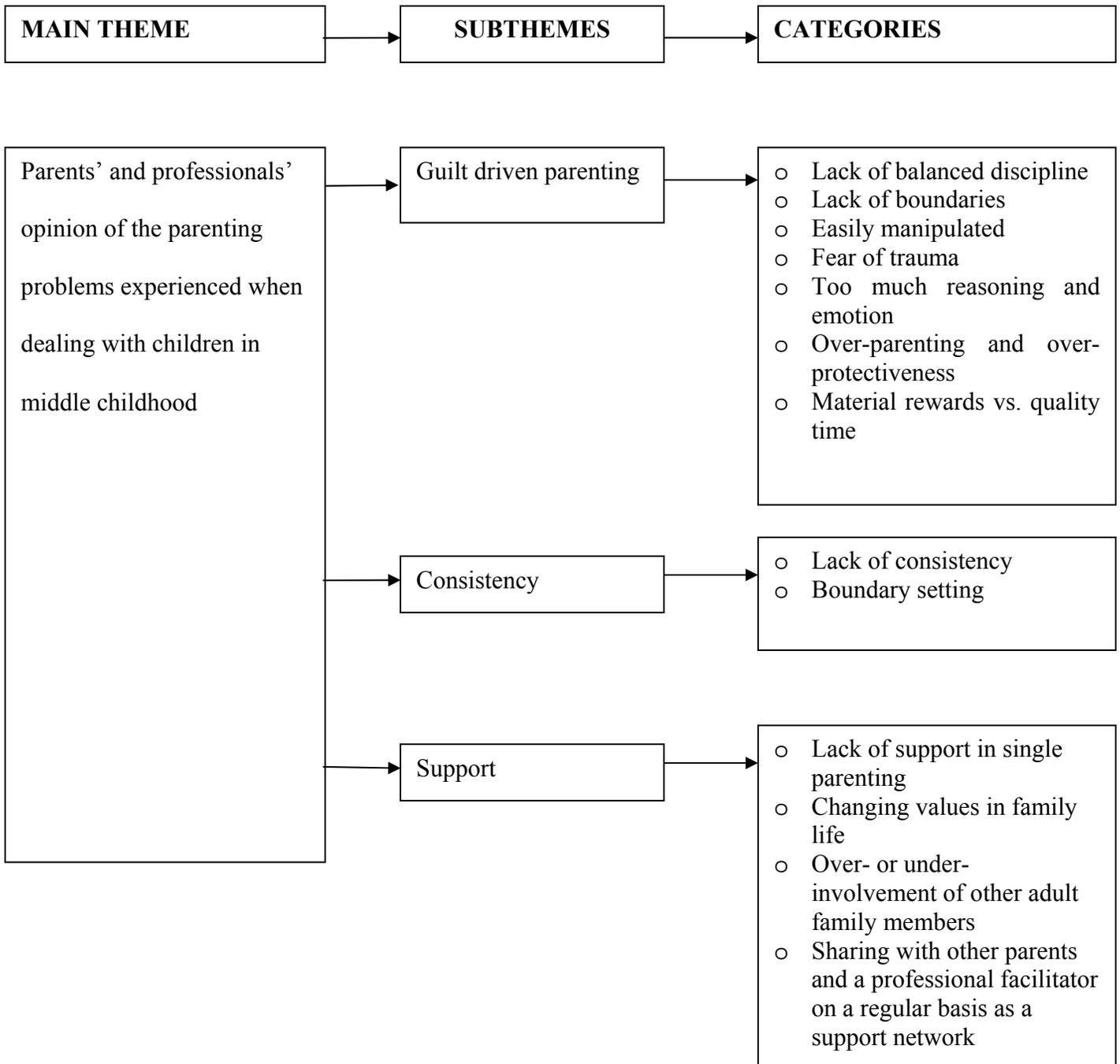
The following main themes were identified from the collected data:

- Parents' and professionals' opinion of the **parenting problems** experienced when dealing with children in middle childhood;
- parents' and professionals' opinion of the **individual problems** children experience when parented in middle childhood;
- parents' and professionals' opinion of the **environmental problems** experienced when parenting children in middle childhood; and

- parents and professionals' opinion of the **needs** when parenting children in middle childhood.

The main and subthemes were schematically outlined in Figures 2.1- 2.4. In what follows, each main theme with its subthemes will be presented and discussed separately.

FIGURE 2.1: SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM EMPIRICAL DATA: MAIN THEME 1



2.3.1 Main theme 1: Parents' and professionals' opinion of the parenting problems experienced when dealing with children in middle childhood.

The first main theme identified from the empirical data is the problems parents and professionals experience when dealing with their children in middle childhood. The researcher is of the opinion that parents as main caregivers are also the main disciplinarians in their children's lives and therefore might experience most of the parenting problems with their children in middle childhood. Different authors agree with this viewpoint. Berns (1997:25) states that the parents and family are the primary socialisers of their children, in that they have the most significant impact on children's development. Bandura (2001:13) describes parents as mediators and the most influential models for their young children. Vygotski (in Berger 2005:221) expresses the opinion that parents, child-care providers and teachers are the most common influences in developed countries. Phelan (2003:2) views parenting as one of the most important tasks, but also warns how easy it is to get it wrong.

The three subthemes presented in Figure 2.1 and considered as resorting under this main theme, are guilt-driven parenting, consistency and support. These subthemes and their respective categories will subsequently be discussed.

2.3.1.1 Guilt-driven parenting

Parents seem to experience a variety of problems linked with guilt-driven parenting as found in the empirical data. Phelan (2003:189-190) states that one of the many reasons why parents may feel guilty is that they do not like their children because of their negative behaviour. It is the researcher's opinion that parents who start parenting from a perspective of guilt seem to be at a loss and would experience endless problems with parenting and their children's psychosocial development. The following problems linked with guilt-driven parenting were identified from the empirical data.

- **Lack of balanced discipline**

A professional remarked that she does not question the fact that all parents love their children. She is of the opinion, however, that there are two sides to love, namely caring and

discipline, and that parents find the discipline part the hardest. Another professional agreed that “parents don’t want to say no to their children because this make them unpopular, they would rather give them what they demand”. One of the parent respondents attributed this lack of discipline to the fact that the community she lives in frowns upon discipline and would rather see children been given what they want without any discipline. Two professionals agreed in their statement that “...parents across the social divide find it hard to say no”, and another remarked that parents generally want the best for their children but do not necessarily have the parental capacity. Timoney (2005) is of the opinion that parents are afraid of being unpopular if they discipline their children and in the process inhibit their children’s psychosocial development.

Respondents’ experience of children’s lack of discipline seems to correlate with literature. Phelan (2003:2) states that parents often find discipline the hardest part of parenting. He goes on to say, though, that without discipline there is a lot of chaos in the home and as a result a weak parent-child relationship that hinders psychosocial development. Bee and Boyd (2004:363) concur by affirming that the authoritative parenting style, where both parents are warm-hearted, have firm control, set clear limits, expect and reinforce socially mature behaviour, and at the same time respond to the children’s individual needs, can consistently show more positive results regarding their children. The researcher agrees that even when parents do discipline, they find it hard to be consistent in setting boundaries, yet this is essential in parenting and for sound psychosocial development.

- **Lack of boundaries**

One professional stated that parents do not set enough boundaries for their children. One parent was of the opinion that there is “...not just a lack of proper parenting and boundaries but no parenting at all”. She attributed this to the fact that some parents have never learnt how to be parents before they became parents themselves. She stated that the difference in clear and unclear boundary setting with parents in her community causes a lot of disagreement between families, which invariably confuses her own child. Another parent expressed the opinion that “some other parents just allow their children to play outside without supervising them, they’re not safe “.

This point is highlighted by Gregan (2005) who states that children who lack boundaries might display anti-social behaviour with their peers when they become adults. Imbesi (1999:41-51) emphasises that boundary setting will provide optimal frustrating experiences for children, which consequently will enable them to develop a more realistic self-image and view of their own human limitations and help them to feel secure.

It is the researcher's conviction that parents have a sacred duty to protect their children from themselves and their environment by setting boundaries. Boundary setting is one of the essential elements of psychosocial development, as this provides an opportunity for children to learn how to negotiate with their social environment. If children are uncertain about boundary setting at home, this will most probably, also inhibit their social development in their greater social environment. Parents often seem to find this hard because this might be frustrating to their children and thus make them unpopular with them.

- **Easily manipulated**

Respondents generally were of the opinion that children easily succeed in manipulating their parents when they are in middle childhood. One parent responded: "When my children want things, I have to give it because they wouldn't stop nagging". One professional questioned parents' ability to be in charge of their family because of children manipulating the situation at home according to their own likes and dislikes. She is of the opinion that parents are easily manipulated because they do not spend enough quality time with their children and therefore too readily give in to demands out of feelings of guilt.

Phelan (2003:2,18) states that parents often have a fear of not being liked by their children and that this could be a cause of being manipulated. When parents do discipline, their children will use testing and manipulation in response to the discipline. He mentions two purposes of manipulation. The first is children's attempts to get their own way, and the second, retaliation against the fact that parents are frustrating them from having their own way (Phelan 2003:81).

In the opinion of the researcher, when children learn to use manipulation at home, they would also use this as a means of negotiating in their greater social environment to get what

they want. Parents would often give in to their children's manipulation, as this is so much easier than being strict and refusing their requests.

- **Fear of trauma**

There seems to be a shift from authoritarian to more permissive parenting styles in contemporary society. One of the parents attributes this shift to parents' fear of causing trauma or psychological damage to their children if they should discipline them or do it too harshly. This seems to result in some parents not parenting or disciplining at all. Phelan (2003:15-18) states that some parents have the misconception that children are 'little adults' who comply with rules without any need for discipline, while in fact, they have to learn how to mature and negotiate as social beings. In order to achieve this, Imbesi (1999:45) emphasises that parents need to have strength of character and the ability to be firm without a fear of trauma or of causing anger in their children.

In the course of the researcher's work experience it has been observed that parents, in their attempt to enhance their children's self-esteem, can focus so much on the children's individual needs that they are afraid of discipline or being firm with negative behaviour. However, this could result in children being uncertain of their boundaries, as well as of themselves and what is expected of them.

- **Too much reasoning and emotion**

Parents seem to struggle the most with this aspect of parenting. Empirical data has shown that parents use too much reasoning and too much emotion when they are in the act of disciplining children in their middle childhood. One professional remarked that parents often shout at and have lengthy arguments with them when they discipline, and that this can only be harmful for the children's psychosocial development.

Talking and reasoning with children when parents are feeling positive about them is very sensible. However, reasoning when they are punishing children for bad behaviour and feeling irritated and angry with their children can be very destructive, especially if parents have uncontrolled aggression. Limited and purposeful discussion is critically important for the effectiveness of discipline, because talking, yelling and vehement arguing can only make the

situation worse (Compare Phelan, 2003:19-21.) Carr (1999: 357-358) suggests that parents should be encouraged not to hold grudges after episodes of negative behaviour to avoid negative mind reading, blaming, sulking or abusing their children physically or verbally when disciplining.

In the course of the researcher's work experience it has been observed that parents use emotional language when they discipline, with the intention of convincing children to behave in a certain way, but this often results in children distancing themselves from the parents. This certainly does not enhance their psychosocial development.

- **Over-parenting and over-protectiveness**

Empirical data has shown that some parents can be over-protective or can "over-parent" their children. One professional remarked that some parents try to overcompensate in parenting by continuously correcting their children or treating them like babies. She did, however, highlight that these parents were in the minority and that this behaviour can most probably be attributed to the fact that these parents only have one child. Gregan (2005) concurs that some parents over-protect, adding that single parents in particular are very protective of their children because they try to overcompensate for the missing parent.

Phelan (2003:184-186) states that over-parenting, meaning excessive corrective, cautionary or disciplinary comments made by parents to children, produces a negative affect, as it undermines their children's confidence and will cause anger through incompetence. The parents' task in parenting is to enhance their children's self-esteem by giving them greater independence and autonomy and if this opportunity is not given them their psychosocial development will be inhibited. (Compare Erikson, 1995:232.)

It is the researcher's opinion that one of the main tasks in parenting children in the middle childhood is to develop opportunities for greater autonomy. Children can feel small and inferior and want to make an impact on the world. They use their parents as an opportunity to explore and to build confidence so that they can negotiate at school, or with peers and friends. This is an essential part of their psychosocial development. Parents can unnecessarily

and unintentionally undermine their children's confidence in small, insignificant matters that could have a negative impact on their self-esteem (Compare Phelan, 2003:20.)

o **Material rewards vs. quality time**

All respondents agreed that parents give priority to material rewards instead of quality time with their children. One professional stated that: "We live in a society where parents work to pay for the material things they want and because they don't spend quality time with their children they give them material things to make them feel less guilty, it's a vicious circle". The same professional mentioned, when she started teaching years ago poverty and unemployment was the biggest need in the community, but that those same families now use monetary gifts as bribes to get their children to attend school. In this regard Santrock (2004:325) warns that "...excessive use of prizes, money or material goods can stifle creativity in children by undermining the intrinsic pleasure they derive from creative activities or completing a task". Children's motivation should be the satisfaction generated by the work itself.

One parent said: "Children have too much of the latest trends and things these days, I have to work to keep up with their material demands" and another: "Children have much more nowadays and aren't as content with what they have as we were when we were growing up". The danger of this situation, according to Cordell (1999:289), is the fact that parents are having too much without a realistic base to evaluate things. They therefore teach their children that love equates to giving them everything they want. In this manner children begin to consider material things more important than family life.

When material goods become the force of motivation for children, this could inhibit their psychosocial development. This point is reinforced by Imbesi (1999:52), who adds that parents who are apologetic and indulgent, model a lack of self-discipline to their children. Children then do not learn to regulate and control their own needs. It is the researcher's opinion that children value quality time with their parents far more than receiving a lot of material rewards. When asked, within the play therapy setting, what their greatest wish is,

children would often reply to the researcher that they would like to spend more time with their parents instead of receiving another expensive gift.

2.3.1.2 Consistency

The struggle experienced by parents to be consistent, also in setting boundaries in their parenting, was identified from the empirical data as a second subtheme. All respondents agreed that parents find consistent boundary setting difficult. This was attributed to various factors, for instance, parents not agreeing on house rules; multiple adults parenting one child; different rules when children visit their fathers over weekends; parents finding it hard to say “no”, or saying “no” but not meaning it; and parents yielding to constant complaining because of feelings of guilt.

Timoney (2005) states that parents have to apply the same rules to children all the time and be decisive and calm when parenting. (Compare Phelan, 2003:21.) In this manner, children will develop a better locus of control which is an essential part of their psychosocial development. In the researcher’s work experience, it has been observed that parents either do not have a set of rules, or get distracted easily by a number of things when parenting resulting in inconsistency. Inconsistency could also lead to children feeling socially insecure because of their uncertainty as to what to expect.

2.3.1.3 Support

From the empirical data it becomes clear that parents experience a variety of problems relating to support in parenting. The following problems have been identified:

- **Lack of support in single parenting**

The respondents were in agreement that there is usually a lack of support in single parenting. Two of the respondents were single female parents who felt that there was a lack of emotional support for single mothers. The lack of support for single parents is highlighted by Phelan (2003:ii) who describes single parents as “overloaded adults”. According to Parke and Stearns (1993:162), mothers in general act as the disciplinarian in the family, setting

boundaries for activities in the first two years of children's lives and thus are most in need of support. Although single parenting is difficult, most single parents are still able to overcome the obstacles and to provide the support and supervision their children need in order to develop psychosocially (Bee & Boyd, 2004:373). One single parent remarked that she has to work to keep up with the demands of her family. Berns (1997:101) points out states that single parents are exposed to the real danger of fragmentation between the responsibilities of their work-place, family, parenting and personal life. Although single parents may therefore have the ability and desire to enhance their children's psychosocial development, they might not always have sufficient time to do so (Berger, 2005:329).

One professional pointed out identified that some of the young parents actually are still children themselves. This professional also mentioned that in a number of families the father is not living with the mother or children, but is emotionally absent when he is most needed in the children's life. In regard to this, Gaffney (1996:160) remarks that because this generation of children are growing up without fathers, the result is that more responsibilities are being heaped upon the mothers. The researcher is convinced that single parenting is increasingly becoming a salient feature of contemporary society, raising the need for more support and resources to be implemented. With more resources and support available to these parents, this will indirectly enhance children psychosocial development.(Compare Bavolek, 2005:6.)

- **Changing values in family life**

The empirical data have shown that parents find the changing values in family life unsupportive when parenting their children in middle childhood. All respondents agreed that there has been a shift from placing a high value on family life to valuing material things and earning money instead. Parke and Stearns (1993:168) attribute the decline in family values to the lack of real commitment to parenting by both men and women. Gregan (2005) concurs by stating that parents nowadays are seldom laying the proper foundation for affection, love and attachment at home. As a result, children in their socialising look for affection and even negative attachments outside of the home and family.

Parents had various remarks to make about the changing values in family life:

- “Children learn too much about adult stuff too early on in life”;
- “...children are much more assertive and have more ‘attitude’ towards their parents than in my days”;
- “children don’t respect their elders anymore and have very high expectations for material goods”;
- “...people don’t value high morals anymore”;
- “...there are too high a tolerance for drugs, crime and fighting”.

Another parent remarked that the members of the community she lives in are all related or known to each other, and if her child said or did something to another child, the community would retaliate by harming her child or even damaging her car. She also remarked that there are a lot of teenage pregnancies and different fathers involved in one household in the community she lives in, and that this is very confusing for children. Children are therefore growing up in a social environment where these lower moral values are acceptable. This will have a serious impact on their psychosocial development.

One professional commented that the importance of the spiritual side of life is not valued by families anymore, with a feeling of hopelessness as a result. This point is highlighted by Scally (2003:1), who states that with the enormity and speed of cultural changes many of the family’s touchstones of meaning and values like religion and community life no longer seem to have the power they used to have. Emile Durkheim (in Jones, 2003:128) affirms the importance of family and community values in his research, arguing that in times of rapid social and economic change parents find themselves in a normless vacuum, adrift from the anchors of family and community that should offer support in life.

The researcher is convinced as well, that there is a shift in people’s priorities from family and community life to personal gain. Parents’ values might also be contrary to that which they grew up with, causing conflict with their own parents. This conflict is not conducive to enhancing children’s psychosocial development, because children learn that strife and disagreements appear to be a normal part of family life.

- **Over- or underinvolvement of other adult family members**

From the empirical data it became clear that parents find either an over- or underinvolvement of other adult family members in parenting. Overinvolvement was seen by parents in the case of male partners of single mothers, or members of the extended family “taking over and sticking their noses in my business”, and underinvolvement with the same people being unsupportive and absent in time of need. The lack of involvement from adult family members is highlighted by Berns (1997:110) who states that there seems to be either a particular lack of involvement on the side of the father as a parent, or his complete absence.

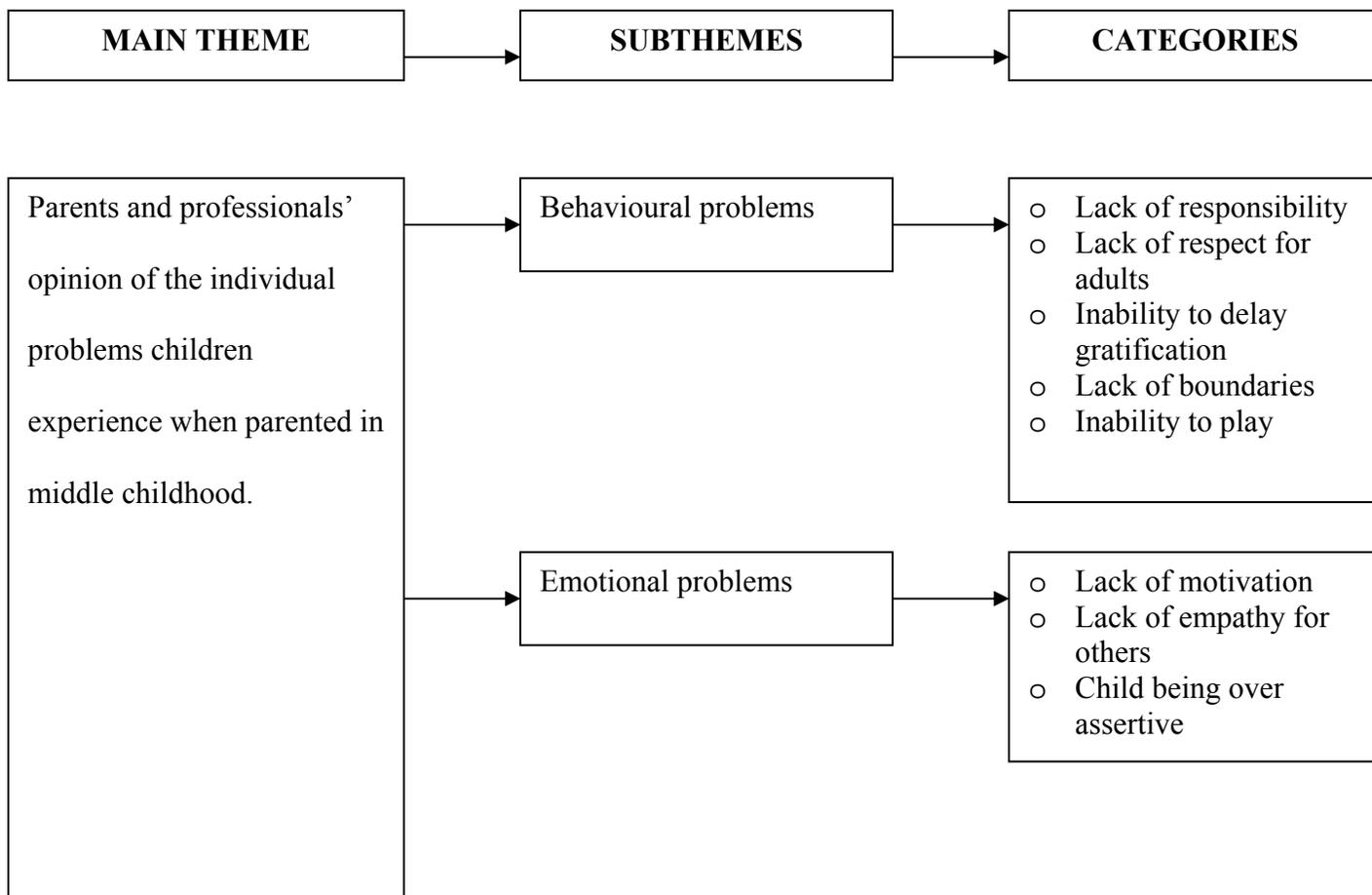
A third of the respondents in this study were living with their own parents and found this a strain on their relationship with their children. Other respondents confirmed that in the community they live in there are a lot of single parents and grandparents raising children together, and multiple generations living in the same house. The mixed messages children get as a result of different rules and values being enforced in the same household seem to be very confusing and unhelpful for children.

Literature seems to agree with the above-mentioned. The United States Bureau of Census has found in 2002 that more than seven percent of school-aged children under the age of 18 years lived with, and were being raised by their grandparents (Berns, 1997:111; Berger, 2005: 327, 333). This mixture of parenting styles and disagreements between parents cause a lot of frustration for both parents and children. Such a situation also creates confusion for children in middle childhood because they constantly have to adjust to a different set of rules (Compare Phelan, 2003:ii.)

- **Sharing with other parents and a professional facilitator on a regular basis as a support network**

Carr (1999:359) views other family members as a helpful resort and suggests that parents need to be encouraged to ask their spouses, friends and members of their extended family for support when they, for instance, feel the strain of implementing discipline. Parents agreed that they would prefer a support system of other parents in a similar situation as themselves as well as a professional facilitator as discussed under 2.3.4.3.

FIGURE 2.2: SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM EMPIRICAL DATA: MAIN THEME 2



2.3.2 Main theme 2: Parents' and professionals' opinion of the individual problems children experience when parented in middle childhood.

The second main theme to emerge from the research is the individual problems children experience when parented in middle childhood. The two subthemes presented in Figure 2.2 and sorted under this main theme are behavioural and emotional problems. These are discussed below.

2.3.2.1 Behavioural problems

The empirical data showed that parents as well as and professionals are of the opinion that children experience the following behavioural problems when parented in their middle childhood:

- **Lack of responsibility**

Respondents agreed that children in middle childhood are often reluctant to take responsibility for their actions. Various respondents remarked that children resort to blaming, name-calling or trying to be bribed when they do not get what they want. The ability to take responsibility for their actions and not resort to suchlike behaviour is one of the essential aspects of children's psychosocial development as defined in this study (see 1.1 and 2.1).

Relevant literature confirms that children in this period of life seem to lack the ability to take responsibility for their actions. Berns (1997:32) mentions that people live in a society where the lines of responsibility are often unclear because of modernisation. Santrock (2004:325) states that children who are overcontrolled and not allowed to learn from their own mistakes, feel inferior, lack responsibility and are inhibited in their creativity. Too much control or the unwillingness of parents to teach their children responsibility, may therefore be a cause for the lack of responsibility children display. Weeldon (1998) argues that young children who do not take responsibility for their own future not only feel inferior and inhibited but may also never learn how to be responsible as adults. (Compare Clarkson, 1999:27.)

In the view of the researcher, for children to take responsibility for their own actions is one of the main developmental tasks children should learn in middle childhood. (Compare Erikson, 2003; Berger, 2005:532; Boeree, 1997; Erikson, 1995:233; Sternberg, 2003:120-121.) When parents properly model responsibility to their children and give them choices, this should significantly enhance their psychosocial development.

- **Lack of respect for adults**

Respondents were of the opinion that children in their middle childhood do not appear to have proper respect for adults. All respondents agreed that children do not seem to have the same respect for adults that they as children used to have. Some respondents saw this as a positive sign of children's newly found assertiveness, while others viewed this as a negative developmental aspect.

Sternberg and Williams (1995:272) state that even though middle childhood is marked by self-centredness, also respect for others is still important for children's own success as individuals.(Compare Sternberg, 2003:122; Boeree 1997; Berger, 2005:241.) Schoeman (2005) argues that there should be a mutual respect between adults and children, and that it is not only children's responsibility to show respect. Parents respect children by giving them choices and allowing them to take responsibility for their actions.

During the researcher's work experience, it has been observed that some children tend to approach adult teachers with a superior attitude and to act in a self-centred way. Children are, however, are strongly influenced by their parents as to who is deserving of their respect. (Compare Goleman in Berger, 2005:241). They also tend to disrespect an adult who sets a negative example or who is unpopular.

- **Inability to delay gratification**

Respondents are of the opinion that children in middle childhood seem hardly able to delay gratification. According to them, this inability can be attributed to a variety of factors. All the respondents agreed that children find it hard to delay gratification because of the pressure from peers to have and to wear what is fashionable. One parent remarked that her child

would keep on “nagging, roaring, banging and throwing tantrums” until he gets what he wants. Another added that children expect so much more, specifically in regard to material possessions, than when she was growing up and will simply not accept “no” for an answer. On the other hand, a parent pointed out that her older children of 23 and 24 years did not demand as much when they were younger, that they were much more content with what they had, and accepted that she did not have more to give. Another parent was of the opinion that her child’s impatience to wait for gratification was age related. Gregan (2005) attributes the inability to delay gratification to the electronic society, with its inherent focus on instant gratification – and its conditioning effect on children. As a result, children are more motivated to play indoors, using electronic equipment (computer games, etc.) than playing outside in nature.

It seems, however, that it is not so much about children’s inability to delay gratification than about the fact that they do not like, and in fact are not expected, to delay gratification. This was clear from the following remarks by professionals: “We live in a society of self gratification, parents need to set the example to their children in how to delay gratification”; and: “...children are not asked by their parents to delay gratification, so they don’t”. Imbesi (1999:45,52) hold parents responsible for their children’s inability to delay gratification by stating that poor impulse control and poor frustration tolerance in middle childhood can be attributed to parents’ inability to be firm.

The ability to delay gratification is a very significant developmental task for children in middle childhood. It shows development of maturity (see 3.5.3) and enhances children’s ability to be successful in various aspects of life (Mischel, 1995:271). Berger (2005:298) concurs that all children have to learn to tolerate delays in gratification and to develop impulse control. In this respect, the researcher’s therefore concludes that parents need to be firm with their children in order for them to experience maturity and achievement in certain areas.

- **Lack of boundaries**

The empirical data showed that children in middle childhood seem to have a lack of boundaries. One parent remarked that her daughter would “...nag and nag and nag until she

gets her way”. Other parents commented that their children do not seem to understand that there are rules for everything and that they have to be content with this. Some of the professionals reckoned that this can be attributed to a change in values and a more permissive attitude towards discipline in general. One professional remarked: “Parents have to talk to their children about the limitations, rules and rewards that apply”, so that they can have an understanding of the necessity for boundaries.

Children not only seem to find it hard to adhere to boundary setting in relation to discipline, but also regarding their own personal safety. This point is highlighted by another professional who stated that the children in his school and community easily get involved in dangerous activities and confrontation because of the increased rate of violence and crime in the community. He added that children have to be directed away from the danger because they find it hard to protect them.

Some respondents remarked that it is the responsibility of parents to instruct their children in the setting of boundaries. This is also expressed by Gregan (2005) in her statement that it is the parents’ task to set boundaries at home. Failure to do this can result in boundary setting by others which can become a problematic issue when children are socialising. According to Imbesi (1999:142), the inability of children in middle childhood to set or respect boundaries leads to an inability to negotiate their own developmental stages. This is because children would find it hard to complete one developmental stage and move on to the next (Compare Child Development Institute; 2005; Clarkson, 1999:50-51.) Experts all agree that boundary setting is essential for psychosocial development.

The researcher is of the opinion that the lack or disrespect of boundaries displayed by children in middle childhood can primarily be attributed to the personal example that parents set in their deficient exercise of discipline, and secondly, to the changing values in the community, for instance in taking greater risks. If children in middle childhood lack the ability to set boundaries for themselves they would not be able to negotiate as they should within their relationships and environment. In this manner, they could either jeopardise their own safety or isolate themselves as social beings.

- **Inability to play**

One respondent expressed the opinion that her child, like other children in middle childhood in general, seem unable to play and entertain themselves. Other respondents felt that children do have the ability to play, but that they have varied their play from a creative to an electronic means of recreation. Berger (2005:273) is convinced that children of all ages worldwide have the impulse to play, although they may use different objects. The researcher agrees that children are still playing, but has observed in the course of her work experience that their creativity seems to be more inhibited by the kind of toys and electronic equipment they choose. In the current era electronic entertainment such as television and computer games is dictating play choices to children – and to adults as well.

Santrock (2004:325) states that to help children become more creative they should be surrounded by an environment that stimulates creativity. In the researcher's work experience, it has been observed that some children in middle childhood attending play therapy sessions, found it very frustrating at first to discover that a battery-operated toy was either broken or not functioning like their own electronic toys. Their creativity and imagination seemed more restricted by electronically operated toys or games with specific rules and expected outcomes. On the other hand, they seemed more spontaneous in using their imagination, creativity and initiative when playing with sand, clay, dress up clothes, puppets or when drawing. Electronic equipment can, however, also be used to stimulate creativity when children are encouraged to use their imagination or to alternate between electronic plays and toys that allow for greater creativity, for example drawing, building blocks or completing a puzzle.

2.3.2.2 Emotional problems

The empirical data showed that children in middle childhood seem to struggle with various emotional problems. The following psychosocial and emotional problems were identified from the empirical data:

○ **Lack of motivation**

The ability to motivate oneself is one of the essential skills in psychosocial development as defined in this study. All respondents agreed that their children in middle childhood find it hard to motivate them or to be motivated. In this regard, parents and professionals have made various remarks for instance:

- “My child will only do something if he is bribed to do it...”;
- “...the prize at the end is very important to him...”;
- “ at school he seems fine and would do what he is told but at home he wants his way and needs to be lead the whole time”;
- “...I find it very difficult to motivate my child to do anything”;
- “...my children will only do the things they like doing”; and
- “...girls are more motivated with school work than boys”.

These opinions seem to correlate with the literature consulted. Phelan (2003:111) states that even though self-motivation is an essential skill to be learnt in middle childhood (see 3.3.1), parents find it hard to control and motivate children to start doing something, especially an action they do not like doing. (Compare Berger, 2005:37; Santrock, 2004:339.)

Santrock (2004:342) describes the ability to self-motivate in middle childhood as a movement from an external to an internal locus of control as children grow up, develop and receive feedback from their environment and see the results of their efforts. This corresponds with one professional’s statement that there are different factors influencing a child’s motivation at school, for instance the size of the class, his family situation, the environment in which he is growing up, the feedback he gets from people around him, the school’s work ethic and the child’s own personality.

In her work experience, the researcher has observed that children in middle childhood would normally repeat the behaviour that was met with positive feedback, rather than behaviour that was met with negative feedback. It is therefore possible to encourage positive behaviour, for instance by using words of praise in order to encourage healthy psychosocial development.

- **Lack of empathy for others**

Some respondents were of the opinion that some children in middle childhood seem to have a lack of empathy for others. Most parents remarked that their children can recognise emotion in others, but would not necessarily do anything about it. One of the parents felt that empathy is an individual trait, because her daughter would show a little more empathy than her older son. Another parent remarked: “ ... he can realise that his friends can be cranky or sad, but would never show any empathy for other people”. One professional stated that the main rule in his school is that a person should treat others the same way he want to be treated, but that the children still struggle to comply with this rule.

Literature seems to agree with this empirical finding. Gregan (2005) is of the opinion that children in middle childhood are very self-centred because of their discovery that others have competing needs. (Compare Wheeldon, 1998.) Empathy, generosity and helpfulness as qualities to balance self-centredness can be enhanced in children if their parents model this (Eisenberg in Bee & Boyd, 2004:319).

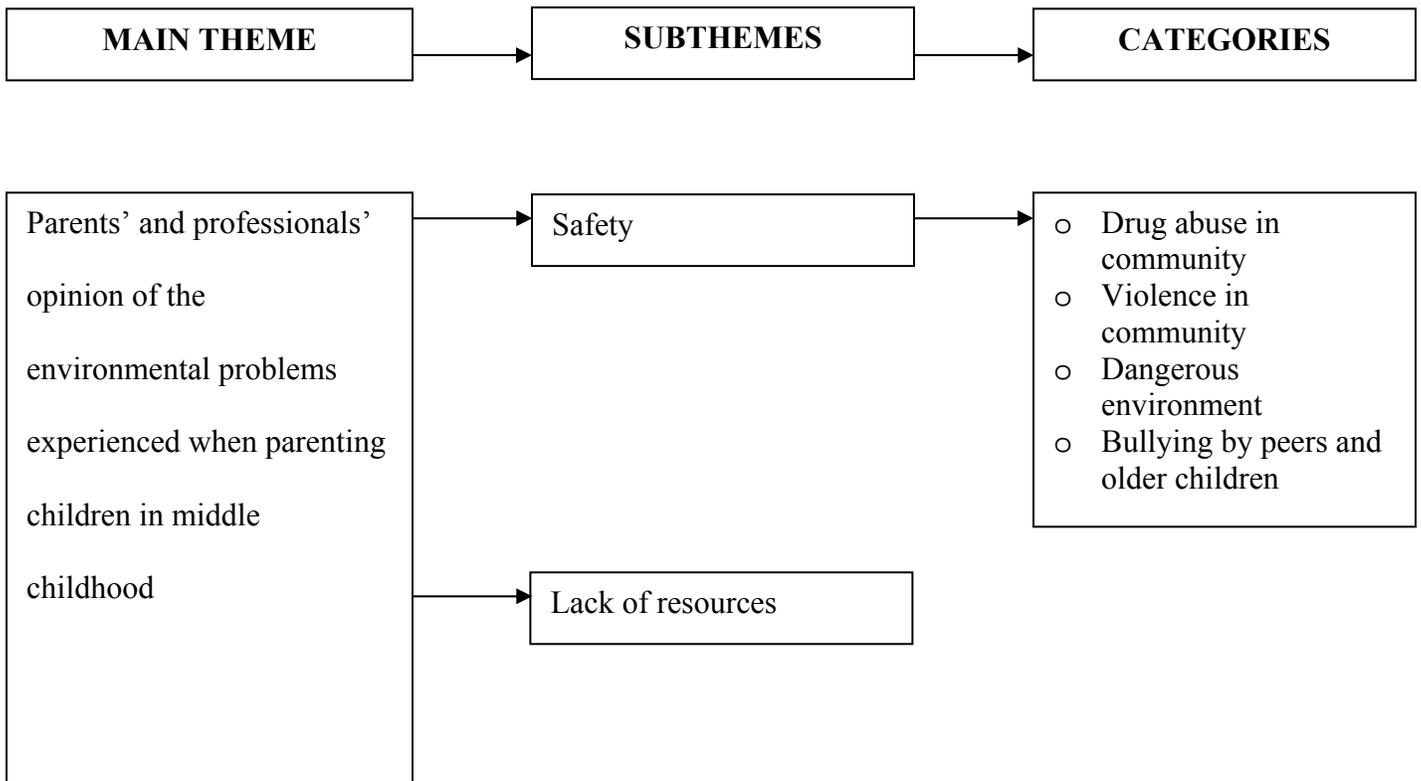
The researcher is of the opinion that the amount of empathy parents are modelling, as well as parental explanations about the consequences of certain actions and discussions of emotions, all foster empathy and would therefore enhance psychosocial development in children.

- **Children being overassertive**

Some respondents were of the opinion that children in middle childhood seem over assertive. A professional explained that children who are spoiled in infancy often show signs of being overassertive. Another professional remarked that this could also be a positive attribute because such children seem to be more confident. Imbesi (1999:42) argues that children can become overassertive and unaware of their human limitations as a result of parents’ struggle to set clear boundaries.

In the opinion of the researcher it is healthy for children to have a balanced sense of confidence but not to be so overassertive that they do not allow input from the environment. This will be an essential attribute during psychosocial development, because children have to negotiate their greater autonomy with their expanding environment.

FIGURE 2.3: SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM EMPIRICAL DATA: MAIN THEME 3



2.3.3 Main theme 3: Parents' and professionals' opinion of the environmental problems experienced when parenting children in middle childhood.

The third main theme identified in this research was the environmental problems experienced when parenting children in middle childhood. Latner (1986:7) states that we are inextricably linked to our environment and, as human beings, we constantly interact with and impact on the environment. It is therefore understandable that the environment would also impact on parents as they parent their children in middle childhood. Children in middle childhood can only develop as social beings when they interact with their environment.

The two subthemes identified under the main theme are safety and support. These subthemes will subsequently be discussed as follows.

2.3.3.1 Safety

Parents and professionals pointed out that lack of safety is an environmental problem. The following issues related to safety in the community were identified:

- **Drug abuse, violence and danger in the community**

Drug abuse, violence and danger in the community were three categories identified that all seem to be interlinked and pose a threat to the safety of the family and thus to parenting children in middle childhood. One parent remarked: "...I cannot trust the kids in this neighbourhood, they get into all kinds of trouble", specifically mentioning drug abuse. Another parent stated that parents and children need to be educated in a school program about the drug and crime problem in the community so that they can more effectively safeguard their children. A professional agreed that the need for a "Stay Safe" program in her school was recognised and implemented. She proceeded to explain that this program teaches children about physical, emotional and sexual safety, for instance, not to talk to or get into a car with a stranger, about "good" and "bad" secrets, and how to protect yourself from physical harm by, for instance by running away from a person who frightens you.

The increased use of alcohol and other drugs, especially by older youth, is a growing concern for parents in most communities (Berns, 1997:18). The Children's Defense Fund (in Berns,

1997:20-34) has found in 1995 that there is a loss of childhood because of the increase in substance abuse, violence, eating disorders and suicide in the community. Violence, drug abuse and crime has a detrimental impact on children in middle childhood as there seems to be a tendency for younger children to copy the behaviour of older children, especially those children from neglected families where poor monitoring can lead to delinquency and the forming of destructive relationships (Bee & Boyd, 2004:363).

In the researcher's work experience, it has been observed that there is an increase in alcohol abuse, crime, violence and drug abuse in the geographical area where the researcher is working. Children growing up in this hostile social environment may be inhibited in their psychosocial development by learning that they do not have to take responsibility for their actions. Parents and professionals are increasingly concerned about the safety of their children and family, and their fear has led them to greater isolation. This may also inhibit their children's desire for greater autonomy in middle childhood.

- **Bullying by peers and older children**

A further concern of parents for safety in the community was bullying by peers and older children. One parent said: "My son is very easily led and the children in our road are very rough, I have to check on him every half an hour...". Another commented that she "...cannot trust the kids in this neighbourhood". One professional stated that there exists a Bully Help Line in Ireland that parents can call when they need assistance for their children who are being bullied. One suggestion of this help line is that parents teach children how to block with their arms when somebody tries to hit them.

The occurrence of bullying is confirmed by literature. Berger (2005:320-321) defines bullying as repeated, systematic efforts to inflict harm through physical, verbal or social attack. In her opinion, bullying seems to occur in every school and community in every nation, although its frequency and type depend on the climate of the school and community, the culture and children's age and gender. She states that in most nations boys in middle childhood often bully through physical attacks. Girls in middle childhood tend to be above average in

assertiveness. They are more likely to use relational aggression, involving social exclusion and rumour spreading which can be destructive to any child.

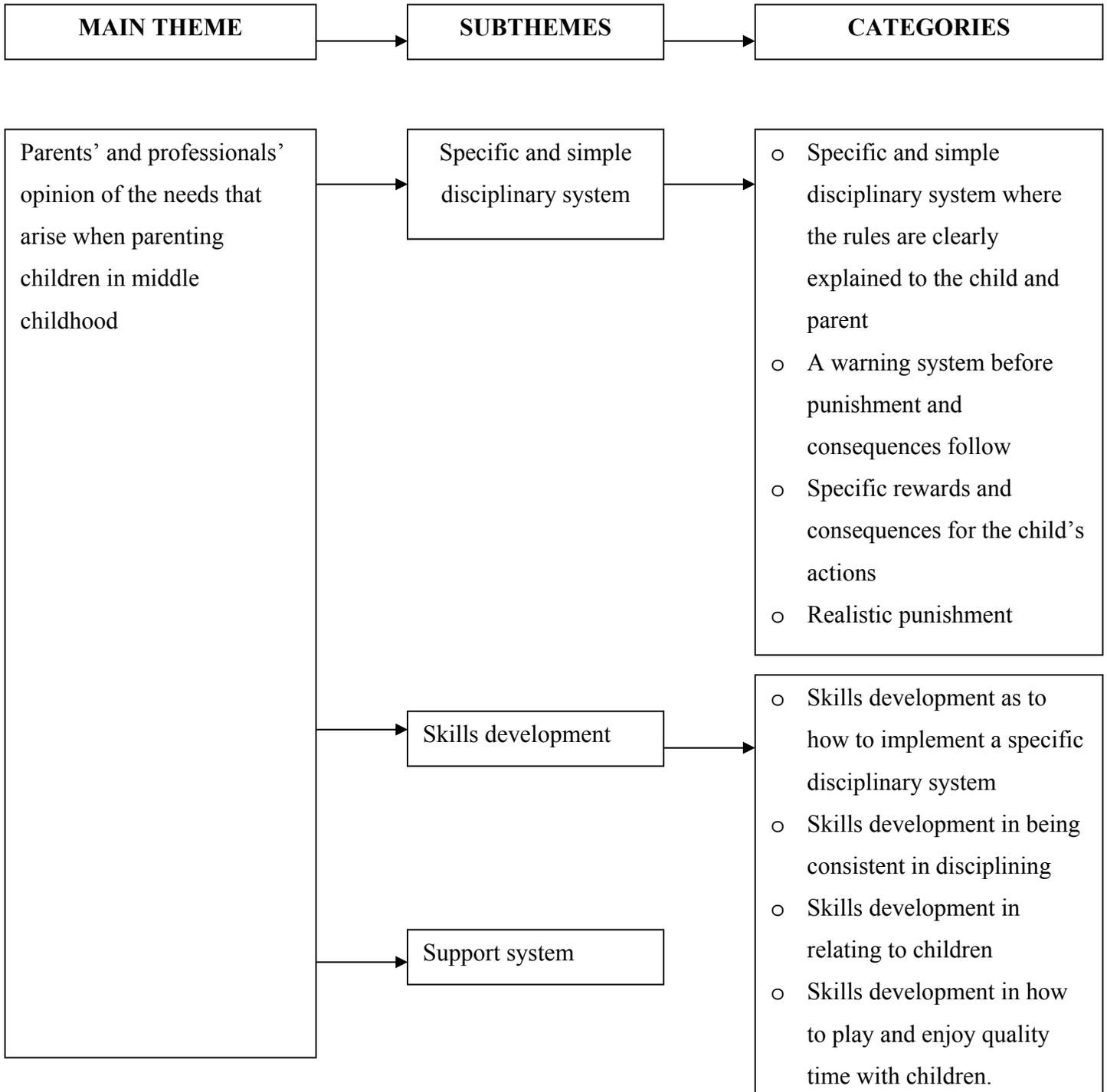
Berns (1997:33) highlights the destructiveness of bullying and violence in her statement that children who grow up in violent communities are at risk for emotional and psychological problems, because growing up in a constant state of fear makes it difficult to establish trust, autonomy and social competence. In the researcher's work experience it has been observed that boys in particular have either a fear of being bullied by older boys, or bully others as a means of survival. The people on the researcher's caseload also seem to encourage boys and girls to retaliate instead of walking away from the conflict or becoming victims of bullying. Different cultural communities have different sets of rules for survival, and for children growing up in a particular cultural environment this may be the only means of survival. Those same children would, however, encounter serious problems if they try to use physical violence and aggression to retaliate during a verbal argument in a community where aggression and violence is not considered proper.

2.3.3.2 Lack of resources

The empirical data clearly showed that parents and professionals find a lack of community resources a problem, for instance playgrounds for children, sports facilities, children's clubs, mother-child clubs and a safe playing field. These kinds of resources, they found, could be very helpful in parenting children in middle childhood. More than one respondent mentioned the need for more afterschool programs and groups for children, football clubs and recreational facilities. Other respondents have found that all these resources are already in existence, but that parents are not using their own initiative to utilise them to the benefit of their children. A professional and a parent both remarked that parents have to take responsibility to initiate more resources and make conscious efforts to use the existing ones.

In the researcher's work experience it has been observed that resourceful parents who use their initiative will find the appropriate resources for their children's needs, even if they have to travel outside of their community to find and make use of them. In this manner, children could imitate their parents' creativity and initiative in their own problem-solving, and in so doing develop more psychosocial skills.

FIGURE 2.4: SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM EMPIRICAL DATA: MAIN THEME 4



2.3.4 Main Theme 4: Parents and professionals' opinion of the needs that arises when parenting children in middle childhood.

The fourth main theme to emerge from the research was parents' needs when parenting their children in middle childhood. Presented as subthemes in Figure 2.4 are the three needs that were distinguished under this main theme. These subthemes will subsequently be discussed.

2.3.4.1 Specific simple disciplinary system

According to the empirical data parents have a need for a specific but also simple and clear, disciplinary system when parenting their children in middle childhood. Respondents identified the following essential categories for such a disciplinary system:

- **Specific and simple disciplinary system where the rules are clearly explained to children and parents**

Parents have the need for a disciplinary system where family-drawn-up rules are clear to themselves and can therefore be clearly explained to their children before the system is implemented. One professional stated that parents have forgotten what the basics of parenting are because their own lives are rushed and complicated by various personal matters. They should be able to identify one aspect of a specific problem and then take the time to discuss this with their children, along with direct practical guidance. Another professional was of the opinion that because parents are not consistent in disciplining they give up easily and then resort to negative means of exercising discipline, for instance bribing or shouting. One professional remarked that some parents have never learnt how to parent and do not have the ability or confidence to discipline. One of the respondents suggested that a simple and specific disciplinary system which can be easily implemented will be a very useful tool and source when teaching parents how to discipline their children. (Compare Phelan, 2003:8.)

Berger (2005:249) states that explaining such a disciplinary system and rules to children will help them to change their behaviour with some real understanding. The effectiveness of the explanation, however, partly depends on the children's temperament. Timoney (2005) suggests that the consequences of violating rules or disregarding roles and routines should also be made absolutely clear. Gestalt expert Schoeman (2005) states that people all live

within a system and have to function within the parameters of that system. Proper discipline provides children with a sense of emotional security.

It is the researcher's opinion that if parents give clear explanations to their children, this could only benefit them in future negotiations in their broader social environment. Without explaining rules clearly and simply to children before implementing them, deprives children of a clear understanding of the boundaries within which they have the room to operate. This would be exposing them to failure in future.

- **A warning system before punishment and consequences follow**

Respondents seemed to have a need for a warning system included in the disciplinary system before consequences would follow. Some professionals stated that parents need to talk with their children about the rules and the subsequent consequences when these rules are broken. Some parents would prefer to use rewards or punishments, for example refusing to take the children to a toy shop as promised if they did not behave. Professionals also suggested that parents should not take children to a toy shop if they do not display self-discipline in that shop. A parent suggested the use of counting as a means of warning children in advance before implementing the punishment (see 5.2.2). Another parent remarked that she wants her children to grow up as responsible adults and therefore always gives them choices so that they may learn to take responsibility for their actions (see 5.2.2).

The value of a clear warning system is emphasised by Eisenberg (in Bee & Boyd, 2004:319) who points out the importance of clear rules about what to do and what not to do before punishment is implemented. (Compare Sharry & Fitzpatrick, 1998:8-10.) The researcher is of the opinion that if children are given proper choices and warnings, they will learn early on to carefully consider their options and so take responsibility for their subsequent actions.

- **Specific rewards and consequences for children's actions**

Parents expressed the needs for a disciplinary system that includes specific rewards and consequences for children's actions when parenting their children in middle childhood. One parent commented that her child behaves much better and is more motivated at school than at

home. A professional responded to that as follows: “Motivation at school is hard but it works effectively, because of a clear set of rules and a specific reward system for behaviour”. Another professional stated that specific rewards and consequences would help children to feel secure because they know exactly what is expected of them.

Berger (2005:39) emphasises the need to spell out the positive or negative consequences of behaviour in her statement that the provision of a sufficient re-enforcer for desired behaviour might motivate children in middle childhood to repeat the desired behaviour. The true test, however, is the effect that consequence has on the individual’s future behaviour. In this regard, Schoeman (2005) warns that forced behaviour modification does not work, because then children are not changing their behaviour because they want to, but because they are being forced to do so. Yontef (1993:130) also views forced behaviour modification as ineffective for permanently changing therapeutic problems in children, because their previous experience has not been dealt with; consequently, change could not occur with children’s full insight and understanding.

Berger (2005:182) highlights the benefits of consequences for specific behaviour in her statement that consistency as to consequences, rules, direct response outcomes, and rewards and punishment is very important not only in disciplining, but also to form secure predictable attachments to parents. The researcher is of the opinion that specific rewards and clearly explained consequences will increase consistency and therefore enhance children’s sense of security and their psychosocial development.

- **Realistic punishment**

Parents have identified their need for a disciplinary system for children in middle childhood that includes realistic punishment. Most of the parents felt very despondent, because shouting and threatening did not result in the behaviour they required from their children. One professional suggested that the interruption of children’s activity for “time out” is very important when punishing them. Removing children from the television or playground for a few minutes allows them to reflect on their negative behaviour before returning to the interrupted activity. A parent remarked that placing her child on the “bold/naughty stairs” for

a few minutes for “time out” was very effective. (Compare Phelan, 2003:35-37; Carr, 1999:357-358).

The researcher is of the opinion that these are very effective forms of punishment because children will realise that positive behaviour is rewarded and negative behaviour is either ignored or punished. These forms of punishment, such as temporary withdrawal of affection, should not result in feelings of rejection, especially if there is an attachment to the parent, for the following reasons: it only occurs for a short time of punishment; there is a warning before the punishment; and the punishment is appropriate to the negative behaviour. (Compare Imbesi, 1999:45; Bee & Boyd, 2004:363, 318.)

2.3.4.2 Skills development

The second subtheme identified from the empirical data is parents’ need for specific parental skills when parenting their children in middle childhood. The following categories for skills development were distinguished:

- **Implementation of specific disciplinary system**

The first skill mentioned by the respondents is the skill to implement the disciplinary system. It is clear that parents would benefit greatly from learning the implementation of a disciplinary system by practical role-playing or practising the skill in a group setting with the help of a professional facilitator.

- **Being consistent in disciplining**

Parents also expressed the need to develop the skill to be consistent in disciplining. All the respondents were in agreement that this is the most difficult but also most essential factor in successful parenting. Gregan (2005) and Timoney (2005) reinforce this point in stating that parents struggle to be consistent, but they simply have to apply the same rule to children all the time and always to remain calm when parenting. Carr (1999:360) suggests for parents to share a strong alliance and jointly agree on household rules, roles and routines which specify what is and what is not acceptable behaviour for children.

It has been the researcher's experience that parents need to learn how to implement the skill of consistency in addition to receiving the information about the importance thereof. Many parents, when asked, showed that they understand and agree with this principle of parenting, but struggled to implement it, because of either a lack of confidence, mere laziness, simply their inability, or a feeling of being overburdened by personal problems and lack of support. A support group that meets regularly where parents can be informed on how to be consistent and where they can share with and encourage each other regarding their common struggle with the matter of consistency, can be very useful in developing this skill. The beneficial result of this will be helping them to enhance their children's psychosocial development.

- **Relating to children**

Parents have also identified the need for developing the skill to relate as parents to their children in middle childhood. One parent expressed the need for a parent-child group where she as parent can learn how to interact and relate to her children again. The importance of interaction with children is highlighted by Imbesi (1999:44) who states that a lack of response and attachment between parents and their children can have profound developmental consequences for children.

Phelan (2003:187) suggests that active listening; affection and praise are a few ways in which parents can effectively relate to their children. He is of the opinion that parents do not need to be taught how to praise their children, but that first of all they need to look at the barriers that prevent them from relating to their children. The added benefits of praise and encouragement is highlighted by Santrock (2004:339) who states that when children are encouraged in their efforts their sense of industry increases accordingly. The researcher is convinced that the busy schedules of families, the drive to earn more money to provide for the family, the change in family and community values and a lack of quality time spent together as a family—all of these contribute in ripping families apart. That this condition does not enhance the psychosocial development of children in middle childhood goes without saying.

- **Quality time with children**

Respondents further expressed the need to develop the skill of playing and enjoying quality time with their children in middle childhood. Some professionals remarked that parents and children often are too busy to spend time with each other. Another stated that families have to “...cultivate love and kindness again” and to “...build the parents and children’s self-esteem” by spending one-to-one time together. The researcher is of the opinion that some parents also feel uncomfortable or childish by, for instance, playing children’s games with them. It was suggested by one of the parents that a mother-child group might be helpful to enhance her children’s psychosocial development by practically showing parents how to relate and play with their children.

Gregan (2005) emphasises the need for and benefits of interaction by stating that there is a need for parents to learn how to interact and reconnect with their children by stimulating the five senses. This could occur, for instance, by reading a story, knitting, playing with clay or being creative together. (Compare Phelan, 2003:191-195.) Carr (1999:356,359) states emphatically that training parents to use behavioural techniques to discipline children and maintain a positive relationship with them is a core component of parenting. He therefore suggests that parents and other adults should have regular events of supportive play to provide a forum where their children receive unconditional positive attention and praise from parents. The researcher is convinced that such occasions are firmly interlinked with relating to children, because the more time parents spend with their children, the better they will get to know them. This cannot but result in children developing a stronger sense of security and therefore healthier psychosocial development.

2.3.4.3 Support system

The third and final concern expressed by parents was the need for a support system by means of sharing with other parents and a professional facilitator on a regular basis. One professional stated that the Parents Plus course she attended at a community centre proved to have many functional elements, such as the use of a professional facilitator and weekly group meetings (some of the functional elements of this program will be discussed in Chapter 5, under 5.3). She did, however, find that it would be even more helpful if the facilitator would

be a parent as well and if homework were given to parents in between group sessions. Predictably, parents with a low level of motivation to participate did not seem to benefit much. Still, such weekly group sessions would prove to be a strong support network for parents. More than one respondent suggested that parents should meet once a week for approximately six weeks in a small group where parents get the opportunity to list the concerns they have and discuss one aspect of that specific need in an open, direct and upfront approach. All the respondents considered it very important that there should not only be sharing of information from a professional, but that the parents themselves should also exchange ideas and learn from each other's experiences.

The need for support is highlighted by Phelan (2003:188-189) who states that it is extremely valuable for parents to make sure their own needs are met, otherwise they will have no energy to deal with their children. If parents' energy levels are low and their own needs are not met, they could easily become negative or resentful towards their children. Carr (1999:359) suggests that parents need to negotiate with each other for support concerning discipline. They might also have the need for family therapy and small group parent training which would act as a system of support. Furthermore, parents should spend time together without the children to talk about issues unrelated to the children. Respondents' observation that they need to make time for their personal recreation correlates with this viewpoint. Due to their circumstances, single parents are even in more need of support because they have to compensate for the absent parent. A support system for parents would undoubtedly have a positive impact on children's psychosocial development.

The empirical data highlighted several problems related to psychosocial development in middle childhood, namely: lack of responsibility, lack of respect for adults, inability to delay gratification, lack of boundary setting, inability to play, lack of motivation, lack of empathy for others, and children being overassertive. Respondents were in agreement that they have many needs in relation to children in middle childhood and that various forms of support such as a support group with a professional facilitator, community resources and family support could assist them in enhancing their children's psychosocial development.

2.4 SETTING THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

After the concerns of the population were identified and analysed, the researcher was able to set the goals and objectives for this study. This was also the last step in the first phase of the Design and Development model as discussed in Chapter 1. The goal of this research study was to establish guidelines from a Gestalt perspective to assist parents in enhancing psychosocial development in their children. The goal and objectives for this study are discussed under 1.5.1.5.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The focus of the empirical study was to establish the perspective of parents and professionals on the existing extent of the need for parental guidelines to enhance the psychosocial development of children in middle childhood. From the empirical data and the relevant literature a number of suggestions were made that could be helpful for parents in encouraging the psychosocial development of their children.

The four main themes established from the empirical data and the subthemes and categories identified under each main theme are summarised in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 MAIN AND SUBTHEMES AS IDENTIFIED FROM THE EMPIRICAL DATA

| MAIN THEMES | SUBTHEMES |
|--|--|
| 1. Parents' and professionals' opinion of the parenting problems experienced when dealing with children in middle childhood. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guilt-driven parenting ○ Consistency ○ Support |
| 2. Parents' and professionals' opinion of the individual problems children experience when parented in middle childhood. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Behavioural problems ○ Emotional problems |
| 3. Parents' and professionals' opinion of the environmental problems experienced when parenting children in middle childhood. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Safety ○ Lack of resources |
| 4. Parents' and professionals' opinion of the needs that arises when parenting children in middle childhood. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific disciplinary system ○ Skills development ○ Support system |

These main themes, subthemes and categories correlate with the literature and indicate a resemblance between theory and practice. In the next chapter psychosocial development and developmental theories will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES INFLUENCING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research study sought to establish Gestalt guidelines assisting parents to enhance the psychosocial development of their children in middle childhood. The focus of the empirical data in Chapter 2 was to complete the steps of the first phase of intervention research. From the perspectives of parents and professionals working with children the extent of the existing psychosocial problems and the need for such parental guidelines were established. Several problems relating to the psychosocial development in middle childhood were identified as discussed in Chapter 2 and summarised at the end of 2.3.

In this chapter the second phase of the Design and Development model of intervention research was carried out, namely to gather information from relevant literature. Several developmental theories and literature with a bearing on the psychosocial development in middle childhood were studied. For the purpose of this study, the main focus was on Erik Erikson's development theory and his definition of psychosocial development, although attention was also given to other developmental theories and the factors influencing psychosocial development in middle childhood.

3.2 DEFINITION OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Various general perspectives exist on the meaning of psychosocial development (see 1.6.1). Reber and Reber (in *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 2001:585) describe psychosocial development as:

A term that may be used loosely and literally to refer to an individual's psychological /social development but is more commonly associated with Erik Erikson's characterization of personality growth and development, which stresses the interaction between the person and the physical and social environments.

Lee (2002) expands on this definition by defining **psychosocial development** as follows:

“This domain includes the growth, change, stability and diversity of human emotions and affect, life span, personality traits, self- and social awareness and identity, and the ability to create and maintain positive relationships with others”. Lee (2002) further states that psychosocial development is characterised by three aspects, namely “...increased awareness of self, interaction with biological and cognitive development and it includes issues of attachment and temperament”.

Psychosocial development in this study was seen as the maturing of children in middle childhood as to the ability to motivate themselves, to delay gratification, to have empathy and respect for others, to take responsibility for their actions and to positively negotiate with their environment (their peers and family, and coping with problems).

3.3 PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

It is the viewpoint of the researcher that, to a great extent, the foundation for psychosocial development is established between the age of 6 and twelve years because of the increased intellectual development and socialisation brought about by schooling, peer groups, family involvement and friends. This point is highlighted by Berger (2005:315) who states that middle childhood is the time when children learn the psychosocial skills they will need as adults. It is the belief of the researcher that one of the most significant psychosocial skills needed in adulthood is self-motivation.

3.3.1 Children’s ability to motivate themselves

Children in middle childhood are inherently motivated and have an increased capability and independence to explore and learn about their world (Gibson in Miller, 2002:398). This greater sense of independence is discussed below.

3.3.1.1 *Greater independence*

All development theories recognise that children in middle childhood are more independent, capable and self-aware than younger children (see Table 3.1). Children can assess their own

unique traits, for instance whether they are bold or cautious, their own strengths and weaknesses and can work on their shortcomings, being newly aware of how they compare with others (Berger, 2005:316).

Sternberg (in Berger, 2005:526) emphasises the important role that greater self-awareness plays by stating that children in middle childhood, like and adults, "...attain success, in part, by finding out how to exploit their own increased patterns of strengths and weaknesses". Maturation and experience combined allow children in middle childhood to be articulate, reflective, active, able to understand themselves and to be effective and competent (Berger, 2005:314). The theories presented in Table 3.1 highlight the greater independence found in middle childhood.

Table 3.1: PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

| Developmental perspective/theory | Area of focus | Growth and Development | Most important event |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Freud- Psycho-analytical approach | Five psycho-sexual stages | Sexual latency | School |
| 2. Erikson- Psycho-social theory | Eight psycho social stages | Industry vs. inferiority Greater independence | School |
| 3. Piaget- Cognitive theory | Intellectual development in stages according to chronological age | More concrete operational thought More intellectual skills | School |
| 4. Vygotski- Socio-cultural theory | Children affected by their particular socio-cultural interaction and subcultures | Children as active apprentices, learning through interaction and guidance by adults Increase in independence | School, teachers, parents, culture |
| 5. Bandura- Behaviourism/Social learning | Conditioning Reinforcement Modelling and observation | Children’s behaviour is learned through observation and modelling of parents who provide the “scaffolding” for future learning More social skills | School |
| 6. Bowlby- Attachment theory | Caretaker is most important | Secure attachment with caregiver provides secure base and comfort for children’s future exploration | School |
| 7. Kohlberg- Moral developmental theory | Pre-conventional moral reasoning | Self-centred. Focus on avoiding punishments or getting rewards | School |
| 8. Gestalt theory | Contact with environment | Awareness | Environment like school, parents, significant others |

(Chart adapted from Beckett: *Human Growth and Development*, 2002:166)

3.3.1.2 Keeping the balance in development

It is the researcher's opinion that although children in middle childhood are more independent, it is important to keep the necessary balance in development. According to Erikson (in Boeree, 1997) children develop through the predetermined unfolding of their personalities in eight developmental stages (like the building of a house), and each stage has a certain optimal time for development (see Table 3.2).

Bandura (in Berger, 2005:42) states that children become more motivated if they develop the belief that they are effective/self-efficient through being encouraged that what they are doing is significant and will make a difference. (Compare Miller, 2002:452; Sternberg, 2003:116.) In this manner, Erikson (in Boeree, 1997) argues that children might feel that if they do not succeed at first they should never try again and they may develop the malignancy that he calls inertia. Children might therefore feel inferior or inert/immobile. Bandura (in Miller, 2002:453) therefore encourages perseverance in children with his statement: "Human betterment has been advanced by more persistence than pessimism".

On the other hand, Erikson (in Berger, 2005: 36, 37) describes that too much industry may lead to the maladaptive tendency that he calls narrow virtuosity. This happens with children, for instance, who are pushed by their parents or teachers to be high achievers without having time just to be children. According to Erikson (in Boeree, 1997), children could also become compulsive if they experienced too much shame and doubt as toddlers (see Table 3.2). He states that compulsive children, like children who are pushed to achieve, feel that everything must be done perfectly.

Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development are presented in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: ERIKSON’S STAGES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

| Stage | Age | Basic conflict | Important event | Summary |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Infants (oral-sensory) | Birth to twelve/eigh-teen months | Trust vs. mistrust | Feeding | Infants must form a first loving, trusting relationship with the caregiver, or develop a sense of mistrust. |
| 2. Toddlers (muscular-anal) | Eighteen months to three years | Autonomy vs. shame/doubt | Toilet training | Children’s energies are directed toward the development of physical skills, including walking, grasping, and rectal sphincter control. Children learn control, but may develop shame and doubt if not handled well. If a positive balance of autonomy and shame/doubt is maintained, the virtue of willpower or determination develops. |
| 3. Preschoolers (locomotor) | 3-6 years | Initiative vs. guilt | Independence | Children continue to become more assertive and to take more initiative, but may be too forceful, leading to guilt feelings. During this period, healthily developing children learn: (1) to imagine, to broaden their skills through active play of all sorts, including fantasy; (2) to cooperate with others; (3) to lead as well as to follow. |
| 4. Middle childhood (latency) | 6-12 years | Industry vs. inferiority | School | Children must deal with demands to learn new skills or risk a sense of inferiority, failure and incompetence. |
| 5. Adolescents | 12-18 years | Confusion | Peer groups, role models | Try to integrate many roles into a self-image under role model and peer pressure. |
| 6. Young adulthood | 19-40 years | Intimacy vs. isolation | Love relationships | Young adults must develop intimate relationships or suffer feelings of isolation. Learn to make personal commitment to others as spouses, parents or partners. |
| 7. Middle adults | 30-65 years | Generativity vs. stagnation | Care | Seek satisfaction through productivity in career, family, and civic interests. |
| 8. Older adults (maturity) | 50 + years | Integrity vs. despair | Wisdom | Review life accomplishments, deal with loss and preparation for death. |

(Chart adapted from Erikson: *Childhood and Society*, 1995:244)

Erikson (Child Development Institute, 2005) emphasises that if satisfactory learning and resolution of each stage occurs, subsequent stages would be managed satisfactorily and children will develop a psychosocial strength that will help them through the rest of the stages of their lives. He proceeds to say it is therefore neither healthy to rush children into adulthood, as is common among people who are obsessed with success, nor to slow the pace and try to protect children from the demands of life. Piaget (in Malim & Birch, 1998:462) concurs that children's development cannot be hastened; children must be maturationally ready before progressing to the next stage. If they do not manage this stage well, they may develop "maladaptations and malignancies", as well as endanger their future development. A malignancy involves too much of the negative aspect of the task, such as children who cannot trust others, cannot motivate themselves or who have no boundaries as found in the empirical research (see 2.3.2.1).

Erikson (in Miller, 2002:154) therefore argues that in middle childhood a good balance is needed because this leads to the psychosocial strength of purpose. The need for balance and purpose is highlighted by Erikson's (1995:234) statement: "If the child accepts work as his only obligation and what works as his only criterion of worthwhileness, he may become the conformist and thoughtless slave of his technology and of those who are in the position to exploit it". The ideal is for children to develop a sense of industry with just a small amount of inferiority to keep a balanced sense of competency (Boeree, 1997).

In the course of the researcher's work experience it has been observed that children's perception of themselves can limit or enhance their level of self-motivation and risk taking. They seem to develop a much more realistic sense of themselves in middle childhood if they have a strong sense of security and attachment at home.

3.3.2 Children's level of empathy and respect for others

Another psychosocial skill and attribute that children in middle childhood would later need as adults is the ability to have empathy and respect for others. Respondents in the empirical research have pointed out that their children seem to lack respect, empathy and understanding for others (see 2.3.2.1 & 2.3.2.2). The reality of a lack of empathy is highlighted by Berger

(2005: 241) who states that children in middle childhood can either feel empathy for another person, truly understanding that person's emotions, or antipathy, disliking or even hating someone else. According to Goleman (in Berger, 2005:241), parents can use children's natural attachment to teach them, through greater self-awareness, when to express the correct feelings. He states that balance and empathy is a result of children's ability to regulate their own emotions, which he calls emotional intelligence.

Sternberg (2003:122) is of the opinion that many intelligent and potentially creative children never achieve success because they do not develop practical or social intelligence which includes understanding and respecting and responding to other people's points of view. Thorndike (in Sternberg, Forsythe, Hedlund, Horvath, Wagner, Williams, Snook & Grigorenko, 2000:77) emphasises the need for children to have a social intelligence. He defines social intelligence as "the ability to deal with people, knowledge about people, an ease with other people, insights into the states and traits of others and the ability to judge correctly others' feelings, moods and motivations".

Bee and Boyd (2004:363,318) state that the amount of empathy children in middle childhood show varies in relation to both their ability to regulate their own emotions and the way they have been reared. For example, children who have been reared in an authoritative environment with warmth, security and strong attachments may display more empathy for others than children in middle childhood who were reared permissively with no strong attachments. Emotional reliability, security and a strong attachment therefore seem essential in the development of empathy.

In the opinion of Sternberg (2003:164), children's moral stance or stage and set of values have a great impact on their acquisition of wisdom and vice versa. He argues, however, that in practice, intelligent behaviour is viewed as a function of what is valuable in a society or cultural context. Boeree (1997) is therefore of the opinion that children in middle childhood would develop greater social intelligence and an understanding and empathy for others if they grow up in a mainstream adult culture that is worthy of their respect, one with good adult role models and open lines of communication.

3.3.3 Children's ability to delay gratification

The ability to delay gratification is another important psychosocial skill that children need to develop in middle childhood. According to Erikson (see Table 3.2), children should already as toddlers start developing will-power and the determination to delay gratification. Greater control prevents impulsiveness which in later childhood and even adulthood leads children to jump into things without proper consideration of their abilities (Boeree, 1997). Erikson (1995:244) explains that toddlers develop physical skills, including walking, grasping, and rectal sphincter control. Children learn control, but may develop shame and doubt if not handled well. If children get the proper positive balance of autonomy and shame/doubt, they will develop the virtue of will-power or determination.

Sternberg (2003:117) is of the opinion that children who learn to delay gratification and not expect immediate rewards, become more creative. According to him, hard work does not bring immediate rewards, but with parental support children can learn the value of making increasing efforts for long-term gains. He therefore advises that parents and adults should model delayed gratification in their own lives and point out this quality in the lives of other creative and successful individuals.

Erikson (1995:233) states that the work principle of middle childhood teaches children the pleasure of work completion by steady attention and by observing diligence. He agrees that children should receive some systematic instruction and modelling from more skilled people like teachers, adults or parents in order to be able to delay gratification.

It is the judgement of the researcher that the ability to delay gratification, as is evident in the empirical part of this study, is one of the most essential skills children in middle childhood should develop (see 2.3.2.1). Contemporary society promotes instant gratification and children are not encouraged to wait for rewards and develop self-control. For this ability to develop, a conscious and sustained effort by parents, educators and therapists is needed.

3.3.4 Children's ability to take responsibility for their actions

The ability to take responsibility for one's actions is another psychosocial skill that children need to develop in middle childhood. Erikson (in Malim & Birch, 1998:545), considers it a favourable outcome of middle childhood when children have developed a sense of competence, achievement and confidence in their own abilities to make and do things by taking responsibility for their actions.

Berger (2005:263) argues that almost all developmentalists (see Table 3.2) refer to middle childhood as the "school years", because every culture worldwide takes advantage of children's readiness and eagerness for education. The important event at this stage is attendance at school, and as learners the children have a need to be productive and do work on their own. They are both physically and mentally ready for it. It is essential for children at this stage to discover pleasure in being productive, the need to succeed and to take responsibility for their work (Erik Erikson's Stages, 2003). According to him, if children can discover pleasure in intellectual stimulation, being productive, and striving for success, they will develop a sense of competence and responsibility. If they don't discover pleasure, or if others react unfavourably, this may cause feelings of inadequacy and inferiority (Malim & Birch, 1998:545). The importance of success and responsibility is emphasised by Boeree (1997) who states that children must learn that there is pleasure not only in conceiving a plan, but also in taking responsibility to carry it out.

Erikson (2003) is also of the opinion that in middle childhood children try to develop a sense of self-esteem by refining their skills. It is in this respect that children learn to master the more formal skills of life, for instance:

- Relating with peers according to rules;
- progressing from free play to forms of play that may be elaborately structured by rules and may demand formal teamwork, such as baseball; and
- social studies, reading and arithmetic.

It is the researcher's belief that all of these activities involve rules, requiring children to take responsibility for their actions. Children in middle childhood should therefore, as suggested in the empirical research, benefit by and respond well to a specific and simple disciplinary

system which includes distinct rules, sufficient warning beforehand, consequences, and realistic punishment (see 2.3.4.1).

Erikson (1995:233) states that other responsibilities children in middle childhood have to adhere to are homework and self-discipline, as an integral part of schooling. He is of the opinion that children in middle childhood have the desire to produce work on their own and therefore should be held responsible for their actions. He further argues that children who are trusting, autonomous and full of initiative because of their successive and successful resolutions of earlier psychosocial crises, will learn easily enough to be responsible and industrious. On the other hand, mistrusting children will doubt the future. Children who are full of shame and guilt will experience defeat and inferiority and therefore struggle to accept responsibility for their actions.

According to Boeree (1997) children cannot learn responsibility if they are given unrestricted freedom and no sense of limits. If adults do things for children that they themselves are able to do, this would also undermine their sense of responsibility. Parents need to be patient in allowing children to learn, for instance, how to tie their shoe-laces, even if they make mistakes, otherwise they will never learn to tie them and will assume that this is too difficult for them. This point is highlighted by Schoeman (2005), saying that parents should empower children to take responsibility for their actions. Parents show respect for children by giving them choices and allowing them to take responsibility by facing the consequences of their actions.

Berger (2005:532) and Sternberg (2003:120) both concur that children should be allowed to make their own choices, learn their own lessons, make mistakes and then analyse them to enable them to become successful in their attempts. In this regard, Sternberg (2003:121) points out that when children learn to take responsibility for both their successes and their failures, they will learn to understand themselves better, criticise themselves and take pride in their best creative work. He strongly opposes the idea that parents or teachers should teach children to look for an enemy on the outside to blame for their failures.

The researcher agrees with these authors that children in middle childhood should be allowed to learn from their own mistakes and the natural consequences of their behaviour. Children

cannot be shielded from real life. Yet, they will become even much stronger psychosocially if, in the process of learning, they are assured of the support of and attachment to their parents and family.

3.3.5 Children's ability to negotiate positively with their environment

According to Erikson (in Miller, 2002:149), the main theme of life is the quest for identity, and identity is the understanding and acceptance of not just the self but also one's society. Children therefore need to develop the psychosocial skill to negotiate with their environment. According to Boeree (1997), children in middle childhood socialise with peers, teachers, parents, other family members and the community at large.

Erikson (Child Development Institute, 2005) is of the opinion that children's psychosocial development functions by the epigenetic principle, that is, the principle that children develop through a predetermined unfolding of their personalities. The epigenetic perspective emphasises the interaction of genes and the environment, implying that each human being is born with genetic possibilities that should be nurtured in order to grow (Berger, 2005:48–49). All developmentalists agree that nature (hereditary make-up) and nurture (environmental influence) interact to produce every specific characteristic of children (Berger, 2005:54; Compare Malim & Birch, 1998:468; Miller, 2001:14-15,137).

Socialisation in middle childhood, particularly that with family and peers, and children's ability to cope with problems will subsequently be discussed.

3.3.5.1 Family structure and function

Children in middle childhood need a family, ideally a supportive family, as a base for further socialisation. Berger (2005:333) highlights the need for a supportive family by stating that a strong bond with loving though firm parents can see children through many difficulties. She is of the opinion that a secure attachment to parents who have been consistently present since infancy tends to allow children to be resilient despite their stress or unfavourable environment. The importance of attachment is also emphasised by Ainsworth (in Miller, 2002:298,307) who states that parental attachment forms a lifelong bond that acts as a secure base for children's future exploration, but adds that attachment is viewed as a lifelong

process of forming affectionate bonds with various people and not just the parents. Berger (2005:184), however, argues that attachment status is changeable and does not necessarily determine future emotional development, although an insecure attachment can indicate that something is amiss.

Berger (2005:335) enumerates the five functions of a supportive family as follows:

- to satisfy children's physical needs;
- to encourage them to learn,
- to help them develop friendships;
- to protect their self-esteem; and
- to provide them with a safe, stable and harmonious home.

She expresses the opinion that most one-parent, foster- or grandparent- families are better than families in open conflict, but that a family with two loving and agreeing biological parents where a sound parental alliance can form is generally by far the best. Borland, Laybourn, Hill, and Brown (in Berger, 2005:334) view a variety of people, for instance grandparents, unrelated adults, peers and even pets as better support than just one single person. These supports can be very helpful to children under stress in middle childhood. The need for support from a variety of family members and individuals has also been identified by respondents in the empirical research (see 2.3.1.3).

According to Erikson (in Boeree,1997), children at the age of 3-6 years are already learning to take initiative, that resulting in them having a positive response to the world's challenges, taking on responsibilities, learning new skills and feeling purposeful. In his opinion, parents are a crucial factor in the development of initiative in their children by encouraging them to try out new ideas. He therefore argues that parents should accept and encourage fantasy, curiosity, and imagination.

The importance of family in middle childhood is further made clear by Berger (2005:335) who states that any change in family structure, including divorce and remarriage, is likely to impede child development, at least for a few years, particularly reducing scholastic achievement. In the researcher's work experience it has been observed that children are

mainly influenced by their parents and families who act as the core for interaction with the wider environment. Therefore, any disruptive changes in the family will have an decidedly negative impact on children's functioning.

3.3.5.2 Peer group

Interaction with peers at school plays a crucial role in psychosocial development in middle childhood. According to Erikson (2003), children healthily interacting with peers, for the first time have a wide variety of events to deal with, including academics, group activities and building friendships. He therefore argues that difficulties with children's ability to move between the world at home and the world of peers or peers who reject them can lead to feelings of inferiority and incompetence.

Ethologists argue that children are innately predisposed toward interaction with family, especially parents and the peer group, in adaptive ways (Miller, 2002:307). Berger (2005:334) agrees that peers are crucial for social learning and social interaction in middle childhood. Friendships become increasingly close and influential because this allows for companionship and development of social skills. Vygotsky (in Berger, 2005:289) regards instruction by others such as peers and teachers as highly important in building a bridge between children's innate development potential and the skills and knowledge education brings. Whether children in middle childhood grasp certain concepts depends greatly on the particulars of the instruction and on the influence of their peers (Sternberg in Berger, 2005:291).

The powerful influence of a peer group on the individual is highlighted by Carr (1999:362) who states that children who display conduct problems are typically isolated, having difficulty to join a peer group, or they are members of a deviant peer group and have difficulty leaving this and joining a non-deviant peer group. The incidence of bullying by peers can therefore cause obvious damage over the years – to the bully as well as the children being bullied. Berger (2005:334) is of the opinion that in most nations boys are bullies more often than girls, and would use physical attacks, where girls are more likely to use relational aggression involving social exclusion and rumour spreading. Respondents have empirically

substantiated this when they identified bullying in the form of intimidation and aggression as a problem for their children in middle childhood (see 2.3.3.1).

Additional causes of inferiority regarding peer relations are mentioned by Erikson (in Boeree, 1997), namely racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. If children believe that success is related to the colour of their skin or their sexual identity, those having the “wrong” colour or gender would be greatly discouraged in spontaneously relating to their peers or being successful in life. Sternberg (2003:114,123), however, praises children’s ability to take the risk to do something differently to the way their peers do it regardless whether they succeed or not. He therefore suggests that parents enhance their children’s self-esteem by encouraging them to reduce their concern about over peers’ opinion of them.

In the researcher’s personal view this is probably a very difficult task for children in middle childhood, but if role models or respectable adults like teachers encourage this as well, it would be possible for children to accomplish it. In the work experience of the researcher, it has been observed that peers play an increasingly important role in middle childhood. The impact peers have in children’s lives seems to depend largely on the supportiveness of their families.

3.3.5.3 Coping with problems

The expanding social world in middle childhood brings along many different problems (see 2.3.3.1). Children in middle childhood therefore need resilience and the support of parents and other adults to cope with these problems. Masten and Coatsworth (in Berger, 2005:334) state: “Successful children remind us that children grow up in multiple contexts –in families, schools, peer groups, baseball teams, religious organizations and many other groups – and each context is a potential source of protective factors as well as risks”.

Berger (2005:335) maintains that the innate drive toward competence and independence keeps most children in middle childhood from being overwhelmed by problems. Sternberg (2003:114-116) attributes this resilience to the encouragement children receive and to the opportunities given them to face and overcome obstacles like performance anxiety or the bad

opinion of others. In this way they can become more creative and persistent in their efforts than others lacking such encouragement and opportunities. He also adds that children need to be taught that uncertainty and discomfort are simply part of living a creative life. The importance of support in coping with problems is highlighted by Berger (2005:334,337) who states that during middle childhood parents need to buffer children from problems in school and the community by meeting their basic needs, encouraging learning, enhancing their self-esteem, nurturing their friendships and providing stability and harmony at home.

Garmezy (in Santrock, 2004:336) distinguishes three factors that will help children in their middle childhood to become resilient to stress and disadvantage:

- Good cognitive skills, especially attention
- A family characterized by warmth and a caring adult and
- External support, such as a teacher, a neighbour, a mentor or a church.

To these, Johnson (in Berger, 2005:334) adds religious faith as a factor contributing to psychological protection in difficult circumstances.

Boeree (1997) states that socialisation within the family, peer group and the wider community, and in learning to cope with problems, is a learning and teaching process that results in children moving from their infant state of helpless but total egocentricity to their ideal adult state of sensible conformity coupled with independent creativity. It is the researcher's opinion that children who have established a strong attachment to a caregiver and who are constantly encouraged to greater risk taking will experience a positive self-esteem and psychosocial development when socialising and coping with problem situations.

3.4 CONCLUSION

All child developmentalists would agree with Erikson that psychosocial development in middle childhood is characterised by a greater sense of industry and independence which comes along with increased socialisation as children's social world of school, peer group and community expands. Although peers become a more influential factor in children's lives,

parents have an increasingly important role to play in encouraging their children and facilitating greater risk taking as they explore their wider social environment.

It is essential for children in middle childhood to develop the skills needed for adulthood. These include the ability to delay gratification, taking responsibility for their actions, self-motivation, empathy and respect for others, negotiation with family and peers, and a necessary measure of resilience. Parents and other adults, role models and supportive people in children's lives have the responsibility to encourage the development of these psychosocial skills. From the literature and the empirical data some suggestions were made that could be helpful for parents when encouraging their children's psychosocial development. The Gestalt philosophy and perspectives that underline these suggestions will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

GESTALT PRINCIPLES TO ENHANCE PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research study was to assist parents, from a Gestalt perspective, to enhance psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood. In Chapter 3 the second phase of intervention research, namely to gather information from existing sources was completed. Information regarding the psychosocial development in middle childhood was gathered from various developmental theories and from literature. In this chapter information about the Gestalt approach is presented. The researcher reflected on how this approach could be used in the establishing of Gestalt guidelines assisting parents to enhance their children's psychosocial development in middle childhood. Attention is given to the definition, philosophy and concepts of the Gestalt approach as it relates to psychosocial development in middle childhood.

4.2 THE DEFINITION OF GESTALT

Although there are several descriptions defining the Gestalt approach (compare Latner, 1986:4; MacKewn, 2003:10; Yontef, 1993:124-128), they all emphasise that every person is a whole entity with different abilities and shapes within a bigger environment. Clarkson (1999:1) defines Gestalt as "...the shape, pattern, the whole form, the configuration. Gestalt connotes the structural entity that is both different from and much more than the sum of its parts". The idea of a structure or system is highlighted by Corsini (1999:413) who defines Gestalt as "a unitary, integrated, articulated perceptual structure or system whose parts are in dynamic interrelation with each other and with the whole".

For the purpose of this study, the Gestalt perspective views every person, including children in middle childhood and their parents, as whole entities with the ability to discover, explore and experience their own shape and wholeness in relation to the surrounding environment.

4.3 THE GESTALT PHILOSOPHY

The Gestalt approach can only be fully understood if the underlying philosophy of Gestalt is grasped. MacKewn (2003:15) explains when a person looks at individual items and incomplete patterns he spontaneously try to complete them by guessing the missing parts. In the same manner that person has the urge to make patterns, wholes or meaning of his own experiences, usually via his perceptual abilities. Psychologically, a person organises his world (field) in a similar fashion and try to make meaning of his emotional life. He wants to see completed emotional “figures” or *Gestalten* against the background of the rest of the field and will be moved to make change toward completeness. When the person does this, he experiences closure, emotional satisfaction, integration and insight, or alternatively he can experience grieving, insight, release and subsequent closure. If that person is unable to organise his experience or make sense of it he may feel dis-ease or discomfort. The parent of children in middle childhood who becomes aware of or experience a lack of support in single parenting (dis-ease), may therefore be moved by this discomfort to ask for more support from a partner or family member in order to relief the dis-ease (see 2.3.1.3 & 2.3.4.3).

MacKewn (2003:16) proceeds to explain that people tend to remember unfinished situations better than finished ones, and that they have a natural tendency to resume and complete unfinished tasks and make meaning out of incomplete information (see 4.4.10). Latner (1986:4) therefore argues that the foundation of the principles of Gestalt is holism. He adds that “the organic and inorganic elements of the universe exist together in a continually changing process and in itself forms a part of a larger whole universe”. Latner (1986:7) mentions because people are constantly interacting with and form part of their environment they have to be aware of themselves. Clarkson (1999:1) therefore states that the aim of the Gestalt approach is “...for a person to discover, explore and experience his or her own shape, pattern and wholeness”. Parents who become aware of being easily manipulated when parenting children in middle childhood, may therefore decide to become more strict and set clearer boundaries for their children (see 2.3.4.1).

Passons (in Clarkson, 1999:14-17) summarises the philosophy of the Gestalt approach as follows:

- “A person is a whole and is a body, emotions, thoughts, sensations and perceptions – all of which function inter-relatedly;
- a person is part of his environment and cannot be understood apart from it;
- people are proactive rather than reactive. They determine their own responses to the world;
- people are capable of being aware of their sensations, thoughts, emotions and perceptions;
- people, through self-awareness, are capable of choice and therefore responsible for their behaviour;
- people possess the potential and resources to live effectively and to satisfy their needs;
- people can experience themselves only in the present;
- the past and the future can be experienced only in the now through remembering and anticipating;
- people are neither intrinsically good or bad”.

The Gestalt approach suggests that every individual should be aware of the different aspects that form part of his functioning in order to make meaning out of it and to exist as a complete, healthily functioning and whole person. (The researcher will refer to a single person in the male version from here on. This is not meant to be gender discriminatory).

4.4 GESTALT PRINCIPLES

The Gestalt Approach consists of different principles describe the approach. These are helpful toward a clearer understanding of it. These principles include dialogue, boundaries, boundary disturbances, here-and-now, awareness, confluence, the child’s process, unfinished bussiness, organismic self-regulation, relationship, empowerment and responsibility. This preliminary selection of Gestalt principles to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood will subsequently be discussed.

4.4.1 Dialogue

Yontef (1993:39-40,127) describe dialogue as the process during which the person communicated to remains an independent person accepted with all his uniqueness. The aim is

not to manipulate the outcome or try to change the person being contacted, but to be warm, accepting, self-responsible, respectful, genuinely interested and confirming of the person as he is. Dialogue is more than mere communication, it is allowing contact to happen without trying to control the outcome. MacKewn (2003:86) adds that the person communicating must in the same manner know himself, be aware of who he is and chooses to show his real responses.

Clarkson (1999:38) adds that the sensory and motor functions (seeing, hearing, feeling, moving and touching) are potentially the functions through which dialogue occurs and contact is made. She suggests that seeing and hearing alone are no guarantee of good contact, but that the quality of contact – a full absorption of focused attention – makes the difference in an experience lived to the full. Clarkson (1999:39-40) further suggests that good contact during dialogue is the core idea in Gestalt, because if a person doesn't allow himself to be whole-heartedly engaged in an experience or process, he might feel that something is incomplete or amiss.

An example of this is respondents' view in this study that although they spend time together with their children, they do not feel that they are relating well to them (see 2.3.4.2). It might be argued that they are not making good contact (“full absorption of focused attention”) with their child, due, for instance, to incompletely listening, hearing, playing and experiencing him with all their senses.

4.4.2 Boundaries

There always exists a boundary between a person and his environment (for instance, other family members, peers, parents or other adults). According to Polster and Polster (in Yontef, 1993:203-204), the two functions of a boundary are to differentiate a person from other people and to connect him with others. In order for the person to make good contact with his world, he has to risk reaching out and discover his own boundaries.

Yontef (1993:136) highlights the function of boundaries by stating that the boundary between self and environment must be kept penetrable to allow interaction and exchange, but also

firm enough for independence. (Compare MacKewn, 2003:26.) Every person regulates the contact he makes with his environment and other people, and in effective self-regulation the person assimilates that which is nourishing and rejects that which is not (see 4.4.11).

It is the opinion of the researcher that parents or adults can help children to discover and develop their own boundaries by setting limits as a protective factor. In this manner children will realise that there are unhealthy factors in their environment that they have themselves from, and that there are healthy factors that can enhance their psychosocial development.

4.4.3 Contact/ boundary disturbances

MacKewn (2003:27) explains that in Gestalt counselling the therapist studies the boundary the individual has between himself and his environment. When the boundary between self and others becomes unclear, lost or impermeable, this results in a disturbance (Latner, 1993:137). This failure to make good contact with others is described as contact/boundary disturbances. Some of these disturbances are explained below.

- Projection – denying or repressing a quality or feeling and attributing it to other people, for instance, blaming other people of being selfish when you are the one being selfish.
- Confluence – when two people or two parts of the field flow together with no sense of differentiation, for example, a child permanently dressing, talking, eating or copying everything of an older role model on a permanent basis without a clear sense of his own likes and dislikes.
- Egotism – the slowing down of spontaneity by deliberate introspection and self-vigilance to make sure that there is no risk of making a mistake or being foolish, for example, a child who is so focused on not making mistakes and be ridiculed in the classroom that he becomes unaware of the lesson the teacher is trying to teach (MacKewn, 2003:28).

Clarkson (1999:57-62) expands that a certain level of contact disturbance may be part of coping and healthy living. Confluence in relationships can for instance be valuable – for

example when a parent has empathy with a child's bereavement. This, however, becomes negative when the parent is permanently empathic without encouraging the child to move on from bereavement.

The central theme of Gestalt is that each person is the expert on his own personal situation because he chooses what he accepts and what meaning he gives to his experiences. (Compare Yontef 1993:130.) The researcher is of the opinion that, for instance during parental guidance, the Gestalt facilitator can help parents find the meaning they give to their parenting experience or help them become aware of any possible contact disturbances they might be experiencing when parenting their children.

4.4.4 Here –and-now

Yontef (1993:124) is of the opinion that the Gestalt approach focuses more on process (what is happening) than on content (what is being discussed), so that the emphasis is on what is being done, thought and felt at the specific moment rather than on what was, might be, could be or should be. Lewin (in Clarkson, 1999:9) emphasises the importance of the present in his statement that behaviour is determined by the psychological present (the here-and-now) more than by the past or the future. People can experience themselves only in the present. The past and the future can be experienced in the now only through remembering and anticipating.

In setting parental guidelines it would therefore be important to highlight that parents' experience of past events or parenting situations with their children can only be viewed in the context of the question how that experience affects both the parents and the children in their current functioning. Parents also have to be made aware that although past experiences might have been hugely significant in their children's behaviour, the question is what meaning these experiences have for their children's and their own current functioning.

Perls (in Latner,1986:50) concludes that Gestalt therapy emphasises two integrated principles: "The absolute working in the here and now", and "the full concern with the phenomenon of awareness".

4.4.5 Awareness

Yontef (in Clarkson, 1999:37) describes awareness as a form of experiencing or a process of being in vigilant contact with the most important event in your life, with full sensory motor, emotional, cognitive and energetic support. The importance of awareness and insight is also highlighted by Yontef (1993:124) in his statement that the goal of Gestalt therapy is for clients “to become aware of what they are doing, how they are doing it and how they can change themselves, and at the same time, to learn to accept and value themselves”. Change can therefore only occur when parents become aware of the conflict and discomfort (for instance, concerns they experience when parenting their children) inside themselves. MacKewn (2003:17) states that closure can also be achieved by acknowledging the unfulfilled need and experiencing and expressing the emotions (like frustration, grief or disappointment) evoked by the impossibility of meeting the need (for instance, to be effective in parenting the psychosocial needs of children).

Clarkson (1999:78) is of the opinion that the client’s awareness of unfulfilled needs or experiences is a process of discovery and development. It is therefore difficult in Gestalt field theory to isolate beginnings in human processes. The individual child and parent will set the pace for how much change, personal development and awareness will occur during parenting and within the parent-child relationship. Schoeman (2005) states that it is very important in parental Gestalt guidelines that parents should have an increased awareness and understanding of their children’s behaviour and psychosocial development.

People experience awareness of situations through their five senses (hearing, touch, smell, taste, sight). Levine and Shefner (in Schoeman & Van Der Merwe, 1996:41) define sensation as ‘a process of detecting a stimulus ... in the environment ... from which perceptions are made ...’. Even if a person’s eyes were closed he can sense another person’s presence, feel his own hands or smell his body odour. Schoeman and Van Der Merwe (1996:41) explain that the human sensory mechanism was created to skillfully experience all the different physiological functions inside and outside the body. A change in any of a person’s sensory faculties such as a lack of sight will then be compensated by another sense such as smell. The human sensory system is highly complex to enable human beings to experience their world,

and therefore it is essential that children's sensory skills be developed in order for them to make meaning of their surroundings.

Parents can enhance their children's sensory awareness by stimulating smell-, audio-, taste-, touch- or visual perceptions. Schoeman and Van Der Merwe (1996:41-57) give various suggestions for exercises parents can use with children to stimulate these senses, for example peeping through fingers; looking through a piece of paper; banging household articles together; playing musical chairs; allowing children to smell different aromas; doing body massage with different aromatic oils; tasting food of different taste and textures; playing with sand, water, play dough, paint, clay or bubbles.

Parents can also be made aware that children can block their awareness via their sensory modalities when they experience difficulties in their psychosocial development (see 4.4.3), and that they are then no longer aware of their feelings and needs. (Compare Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996:41-53.) Parents also have to be empowered to make their needs known to their children/other individuals and their environment.

4.4.6 Confluence

Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996:32) are of the opinion that confluence is the appreciation of sameness. They suggest that the play therapist, or for the purpose of this study, parents should be in confluence with children and not the other way round. This means that parents would follow children's lead when they, for instance, tell them about an incident of bullying at school. It would be important for parents not to jump to conclusions about what happened at school before the children have finished relaying the incident. Parents should also determine how the children themselves were influenced by this incident. Parents should not rush their children or use clichés such as "you should", otherwise children will instinctively follow their parents' subtle manipulation when communicating themselves. (Compare Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996:31.) If adults use clichés, their children might also experience this as judgemental and as the parents not being accepting of them. This will immediately place the parent back into the role of educator and authority, which is not conducive to open communication.

4.4.7 Children's processes

MacKewn (2003:108) states that the ability to describe a person's process, unique behaviour and current functioning in relationship to other people and the environment is central to the Gestalt approach. During interaction with children, it is important to be aware of their specific process. Yontef (1993:136) states that a person exists by differentiating self from others. This implies everything that makes a person different from others, for instance his personality, his intellectual, emotional and physical abilities, his sense of self-worth, his experiences, relationships and communication skills. Children's process also determine how they act in everyday life, how they assimilate events and behave towards others. It is important therefore that parents or adults dealing with children should not try to conform them to their own personalities or processes, but allow them to be their unique selves within certain boundaries.

4.4.8 Empowerment

MacKewn (2003:80) states that change and the potential for self-development, and thus empowerment, arise not through the therapist or children in isolation, but through the interaction, dialogue and relationship between them. Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996:180) add that the following relational elements are essential when empowering children: a supportive relationship between children and adults, an atmosphere of trust, encouragement and communication.

Oaklander (1988:282) suggests that children's feelings of self can be enhanced, and children thus be empowered, by, for instance, listening to them, treating them with respect, praising them, accepting their feelings, giving them responsibilities and giving them independence. These are all aspects of empowerment that parents should keep in mind in order to enhance psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood.

4.4.9 Relationship

Yontef (1993:126) states that the relationship between the change agent and children are the most important aspect of the Gestalt approach. MacKewn (2003:80) adds that relating to

another person as a change agent is the heart of the Gestalt approach. According to her, it provides the medium for the growth of awareness, learning, problem-solving and self-development. Relating to another person can take place in silence, laughter or play as much as in words. Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996:180) are of the opinion that an established warm, trusting and supportive relationship can be used as a tool to empower children to take responsibility for themselves. Thus, there should be a relationship where children can feel that they are trusted and accepted unconditionally.

To the researcher it makes good sense that relationship is regarded by experts as the core of the Gestalt approach, seeing that change can only occur when there is an established relationship where acceptance, care, warmth, dialogue and awareness can flourish. It is therefore essential for parents to spend time with their children in order to improve this relationship and to really get to know their children on their level of functioning.

4.4.10 Unfinished Business

MacKewn (2003:16) explains that people tend to remember unfinished situations better than finished ones and that they have a natural tendency to resume and complete unfinished tasks and make meaning out of incomplete information. Clarkson (1999:21) emphasises that in Gestalt theory the healthy person has to differentiate between all his needs and consequently he would respond first to that need that could restore his psychological balance. He then would give attention to the next important emerging need. If children rush into something new without completing the present *Gestalt*, this will result in unfinished business. This correlates with Erikson's concept of an optimal time for development during every developmental stage of life (see 3.3.1.2). It is not healthy to rush children into adulthood or to try to over-protect them from life; they have to be ready and mature before they can move on to the next step (see 2.3.1.1).

Clarkson (1999:50-51) argues that in Gestalt theory when people do not complete previous experiences and these experiences remain incomplete for them. This individual then struggles to make good contact with himself, others and his environment, because he is constantly focusing his energy and attention on trying to complete these incomplete experiences. This is a similar concept to Erikson's maladaptations and malignancies that can endanger future

development because children do not manage a certain psychosocial developmental stage effectively (see 3.3.1.2).

4.4.11 Organismic self-regulation

Clarkson (1999:21) states that in Gestalt a person is seen as having a natural or organismic tendency to maintain his whole functioning. This is called organismic self-regulation. In order to grow and develop people strive to maintain a balance between meeting their needs and eliminating the tension of trying to meet these needs. Clarkson (1999:22) further explains that organismic self-regulation therefore depends on a person discriminating (usually through his five senses – smell, hearing, touch, taste or sight) what is nourishing to him (for example, food, people, stimuli) and to reject what is not nourishing. The Gestalt approach is therefore a need-based approach stressing that every person has needs, knows on some level what is good for him and therefore have to focus on motivating himself to meet these needs himself. MacKewn (2003:17) therefore finds it important that every person needs to be aware of his own pattern of meeting these needs and to learn how to deal with them effectively if they are not met in a healthy and balanced way.

According to Yontef (1993:179), people who can regulate themselves are neither too rigid nor too flexible in picking what is nourishings (e.g. clear boundary setting and discipline) and rejecting what is toxic from the environment around them (e.g. bullying or violence) in order to keep a healthy balance (see 2.3.3.1).

The researcher views creativity as an important aspect in self-regulation. Clarkson (1999:29) stresses the importance of creativity in her statement that the Gestalt theory supports and values creativity, spontaneity and the relationship. In order for children in middle childhood to meet their needs in adverse conditions such as violence, drug abuse or bullying they need to be creative in learning how to meet their needs (see 2.2.3.1). Parents can help children find creative ways of meeting their needs by advising them regarding coping strategies (see 6.4.6). Zinker (1978:3) states: “ Creativity is the breaking of boundaries, the affirmation of life beyond life – life moving beyond itself. Out of its own sense of integrity, life asks us to affirm our own intrinsic nature, our essence as human beings”. Creativity is therefore an act of bravery where individuals choose to take risks. The ability to change one’s environment

where violence, crime, racism or lack of resources exist, requires creativity (see 2.3.3.1& 2.3.3.2). Negative behaviour can also be changed and transformed.

4.4.12 Responsibility

Clarkson (1999:27- 28) is of the opinion that the Gestalt approach is profoundly based on the notion that each person is responsible for the experience of his own life. Every moment the individual therefore makes choices to act or not to act in a certain manner, he is responsible for all these choices. Perls (in Clarkson, 1999:14) highlights the importance of self-responsibility in his statement that “ awareness of and responsibility for the total field, for the self as well as the other, these give meaning and pattern to the individual’s life”. The importance of responsibility is also emphasised by Frankl (in Clarkson, 1999:28) who states that even when a person is not personally responsible for the circumstances in which he finds himself, he is still responsible for the meaning he gives to his life as it is he who chooses his attitude towards and his behaviour in such situations.

Perls (in MacKewn, 2003:124) often spells this word response-ability to emphasise the point that individuals are active in making choices and in organising their lives and reality, and are able to take existential responsibility for themselves and for the meaning they give to their life. Yontef (1993:130) emphasises the importance of responsibility in his statement that in Gestalt therapy the power and responsibility is in the hands of the person who wants the change.

Schoeman (2005) views the essence of Gestalt theory as making choices, taking responsibility for your actions, and setting boundaries. This correlates with the purpose of parenting and disciplining children in their middle childhood. Children in middle childhood should be allowed by parents to learn responsibility by making their own choices and mistakes and to learn perseverance and the delay of gratification.

4.5. THE USE OF GESTALT PRINCIPLES IN PARENTAL GUIDANCE

The researcher has found a variety of parenting programs (compare Phelan, 2003; Carr, 1999; Sharry & Fitzpatrick, 1998; Reynolds & Schwartz, 2003; Bavolek, 2005), all aimed at

parents of children from all age groups. These programs are focused on different problems, for example sexual, juvenile delinquency or drug- and sexual abuse problems. Extensive information was found on parenting conferences and other training events and resources in Gestalt Family Therapy (in Gestalt Journal Press, 2000). However, no useful information on Gestalt parenting programs was found. Although one or two Gestalt parenting courses were advertised, no further information about the content of these courses were given.

Although Oaklander does not actually provide Gestalt guidelines, she does make valuable suggestions for parents to relate to their children, to spend quality time with them and to enhance their self-esteem. Oaklander (1988) is a Gestalt play therapist who mainly works with children, sometimes having dealings with parents as well in the context of family therapy. These suggestions were made in her book *Windows to our Children* (1988) (see 2.6.4.2). Some of these suggestions will be discussed briefly.

4.5.1 Relating to children

4.5.1.1 Accepting children as unique

Oaklander (1988:309,311) argues that parents who truly want to relate to their children are often shocked to discover how biased and unaccepting they are of their children's individuality – their likes and dislikes, their desires, friends, life-style, opinions, *etcetera*. They may have difficulty acknowledging that children are a separate, unique kind of people with tastes of their own, not necessarily corresponding to those of parents. They may view them as the children of five years old they once knew, or the children they assumed would be just like them'. In the empirical part of this study, respondents identified the need to relate to their children in middle childhood (see 2.3.4.2).

Oaklander (1988:304) warns that parents can easily scapegoat children as the problem because of parent's unwillingness to work on their own contribution to a problem. Parents can also become so identified with their children that they have trouble to recognise that their children are separate people (confluence), or they can project their own feelings onto their children (projection) without acknowledging that it is their own feelings (see 4.4.3).

Oaklander (1988:305) considers it important that parents learn to give clear messages to children and to acknowledge and respect them as separate and unique and to be regarded as entitled worthwhile individuals. This will promote their children's own feelings of self-esteem and self-support, and will enhance their children's contact skills and abilities. As parents master the ability to view their children in all their uniqueness and separateness, they would enable their children to sharpen their own abilities to experience their environment and cope with it.

4.5.1.2 Communicating with each other

Kempler (in Oaklander, 1988:307) suggests that parents and children should enhance their communication with each other by giving clear messages of self-expression to the person they are speaking to, for instance, "I'm feeling very sad right now" instead of "You make me feel very sad". Parents and children need to be expressing and hearing each other's good and bad feelings. Parents and children both have to learn to give specific messages and not generalised statements that hide the true meaning of what they are trying to convey to each other.

4.5.1.3 Play

Various child developmentalists agree that play is an important element in working with children. Not only do children communicate through play, they also use play to make sense of their environment. Erikson (in Thomas, 2000:155) proposes that children play at each stage of development as a tool to help them solve the psychosocial conflict they experience in every developmental stage. He believes that play is not an activity limited to childhood, but should be pursued throughout the entire life span. According to Erikson, play also marks a life-long human tendency to create model situations in which aspects of the past are relived, the present represented and renewed and the future anticipated.

Parents can also use play at home to relate to their children in middle childhood. Oaklander (1998:3-20) suggests that fantasy help children achieve a greater sense of self and awareness. Because children in middle childhood have more concrete operational thought, parents need to take into account fantasies with more concrete than abstract objects. Parents can, for

instance, ask their children to close their eyes and imagine themselves being an object or an animal of their liking. The purpose of this exercise would be for both the children and the parents to get to know each other better. It is important for parents to take part in this activity, for instance by taking turns. The goal of this fantasising would not be therapy in itself, but could be therapeutic if the parents and children need to “connect” more often (see 4.5.1.2).

4.5.2 Quality time

Oaklander (1988:310) suggests that parents regularly make time for their children every day, for instance at bedtime, to allow them to talk about what has upset or made them happy that day. Children should be allowed to choose the activity, and the parents should give them undivided attention. This does not include normal bedtime rituals. This suggestion correlates with the *1-2-3 Magic* program of Phelan (2003:194) in which he suggests that parents regularly spend fun time on a one-on-one basis with a child and not just with the family as a whole (see 5.2.2). Phelan (2003:194) adds that the best parent-child bonding occurs when children feel cherished and have one-on-one fun with a parent.

As discussed before, Gregan (2005) emphasises the need for parent-child interaction that stimulates the five senses (see 2.3.4.2). She is of the opinion that this will help parents to reconnect with their children. Schoeman (2005) states that apart from parent-child interaction children should at other times, be actively encouraged to use their five senses and to have heightened awareness through these senses (see 4.4.5).

4.5.3 Guidelines to enhance self-esteem

Oaklander (1988:282) views children’s self-esteem as a very important aspect of development. She therefore makes the following suggestions to parents for enhancing their children’s feelings of self:

- Listen to, acknowledge and accept the children’s feelings;
- treat the children with respect and accept them as they are;
- give children specific praise;
- be honest with children;

- use “I” messages rather than “you” messages for instance, “I am irritated by that video game you play” instead of “You always ...” Or “You never ...” ;
- children need opportunities to take responsibility for themselves; give them responsibilities, independence and the freedom to make choices;
- involve children in problem-solving and decision-making relative to their own life; respect them to experiment on their own, to pursue their own interests, to be creative or not;
- remember the uniqueness principle: they are wonderful and amazing in their own uniqueness, even though it may be very different from the parents’ uniqueness;
- be a good model in thinking positively about oneself as a person and doing things for oneself;
- realize that it is good to appreciate oneself within limits, to feel satisfied with accomplishments and to find pleasure for oneself;
- avoid being judgemental, giving children many prerequisites and needless advice;
- view children as people and accept their judgement on certain aspects, like when they are hungry or not.

These suggestions made by Oaklander to parents can be very effective in improving the parent-child relationship as well as children’s psychosocial development.

4.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the definition and philosophy of Gestalt and the various Gestalt principles relating to psychosocial development were discussed. Attention was also given to the use of Gestalt in parental guidance. From these discussions it becomes clear that awareness, taking of responsibility and the use of the five senses are essential in establishing Gestalt guidelines to enhance psychosocial development. In the next chapter, functional elements of existing parenting programs that could be utilised for the purpose of this study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5

FUNCTIONAL ELEMENTS OF EXISTING PARENTING PROGRAMS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed before, the second phase of the Design and Development model is to gather information. The first two steps of this phase, namely to study natural examples and to use existing information sources were discussed in the previous chapters. The third and final step of this second phase is for the researcher to identify functional elements of successful models or programs (see 1.5.2.3). Although this research focused on the Gestalt perspective, the researcher found functional elements in various other parenting programs which do not specifically focus on the Gestalt perspective, but are still useful in establishing Gestalt guidelines for parents. In this chapter attention will be given to the functional elements of the following parenting programs: A Behaviour Modification program called *1-2-3 Magic*; the Parents Plus programs; the Nurturing Parenting programs and Filial Therapy.

5.2 *1-2-3 MAGIC* BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION PROGRAM

Phelan (2003:7) developed the *1-2-3 Magic* program to assist parents of 2-12 year olds as to how to discipline negative behaviour, encourage good behaviour and strengthen the parent-child relationship. Some of Phelan's suggestions for parenting, like disciplining, boundary setting and overparenting have been discussed in Chapter 2.

The *1-2-3 Magic* program focuses on the aspects discussed below.

5.2.1 Parenting philosophy

The *1-2-3 Magic* program is based on the principle of behaviour modification. According to Phelan (2003:17, 21), the parents have the final authority and control. Children are not "little adults" and the desired behaviour must be learnt. When it comes to discipline, parents should be consistent, decisive and calm. Children will then learn that for every action there is a consequence.

5.2.2 Elements of parenting

Elements of parenting covered by the *1-2-3 Magic* program involve the following:

- Firstly, parents use the counting method 1-2-3 to help stop unwanted behaviour without talking or reasoning with their children. In this manner parents would give their children one warning by counting “one”. If the behaviour continues, the parents count “two” and if the behaviour still hasn’t ceased, parents would count “three” and give the children “time out” in relation to the age of the child (one minute per year of the child’s life). For instance, a four year old will get four minutes “time out”.
- “Time out” alternatives are, for instance, loss of a privilege or toy for a period of time, bedtime fifteen minutes earlier, sitting on a step away from the activity he was last busy with, deduction of pocket money, or no electronic entertainment for two hours.
- Parents do not have long discussions or reasoning after the “time out” period. The children have already suffered the consequences. Explanations are appropriate though when children’s misbehaviour is new or unusual.
- The parents and children decide together on the rules for and consequences of certain behaviour before this complete disciplinary system is implemented.
- Secondly, when parents have used the counting method to stop unwanted behaviour for a while, they can then focus their attention on the behaviour they want to encourage or start.
- Wanted behaviour can be encouraged by using different methods, such as positive reinforcement; phrasing simple requests; kitchen timers to motivate compliance or a docking system (children forfeit some of their pocket money if they neglect their chores). Other methods are the use of natural consequences (children suffer the consequences, for instance being punished at school if they neglect their homework); star charting (using a weekly calendar to chart the desired behaviour and giving a reward at the end of the week), or brief counting (1-2-3) if children do not want to do the desired behaviour, for instance hanging up their coat. This correlates with the fact that adults also have to suffer the consequences of their actions. Children who have to

face the natural consequences in life might therefore be better equipped for adulthood.

- Thirdly, parents should strengthen the parent-child relationship by being realistic and honest with their children; trusting children to make decisions and take responsibility for the consequences; not being anxious or overparenting (unnecessary corrective or disciplinary comments); giving affection and praise; having one-to-one fun, or active listening (Phelan, 2003 193; Phelan, 2005).
- Phelan (2003:194) further suggests one-on-one fun activities between a parent and child, such as finger painting, baking cookies, board games, giving the dog a bath, bike riding, staying up twenty minutes later on a school night, reading together, just talking, or teaching an inexperienced parent how to play a video game. Phelan also emphasises the importance of shared fun with communicating, like talking and expressing affection.

5.2.3 Process of the program

Phelan (2005) suggests that parents can learn the *1-2-3 Magic* program on an individual basis by studying the book or video material, or can join a support group led by professional facilitators in their community. In the support group the same material is used, but parents have the opportunity to discuss their difficulties with other parents or the professional. This group can meet over a determined number of weeks until the book or video material has been fully discussed. Parents then have the opportunity to go home and practice the different skills learned.

5.3 THE PARENTS PLUS PROGRAMS

The Parents Plus programs were compiled by John Sharry and Carol Fitzpatrick from the Department of Child and Family Psychiatry, Mater Hospital in Dublin (Sharry & Fitzpatrick, 1998:5). Although this parenting program does not focus on the Gestalt approach, there are some functional elements that respondents referred to as useful when the empirical study was undertaken, and thus can also be useful in establishing guidelines for parents. These programs include the following:

5.3.1 Parenting philosophy

The Parents Plus programs are comprehensive video-based parenting courses for managing and solving discipline problems in children aged 4-11 years and in adolescents aged 11-16 years. The parenting philosophy entails that good parenting is built on the quality of the parent-child relationship, and that no amount of technique used in disciplining will work unless such a responsive and open relationship exists (Sharry & Fitzpatrick, 1998:3,8).

5.3.2 Elements of parenting

Elements of parenting covered in the Parents Plus programs are as follows:

- Parental attention is used to change behaviour. Parents use the Praise-Ignore formula, that is, parents are encouraged to provide lots of loving attention when children are behaving well and reducing the reward of their attention when children are behaving badly.
- Active listening is encouraged as a way of providing powerful positive attention.
- Play and special time with children. The importance of play is described and how it can build the basis of a good parent-child relationship. Particular topics include: following children's leads, going at children's pace, using running commentary and planning special time.
- Encouragement and praise. Effective encouragement is described as a way of life and as a means to promote positive behaviour in children. Topics include: skills of clear, specific and positive praise, encouraging effort and small steps of improvement, doubling praise, and the need for parental self-encouragement.
- Using reward systems effectively (star charts or point system), that is, how to use rewards such as prizes to increase the impact of parental encouragement.
- How to set rules and help children keep them. The skills of giving children clear and assertive commands are discussed, as well as how to build co-operation in children and how to follow through on commands by giving children choices and setting effective consequences.

- How to use active ignoring to reduce misbehaviour. Ignoring should be applied consistently over a short period and within the context of a positive relationship. Attention is given to the particular difficulty of public misbehaviour.
- Using “Time Out” and other sanctions. Attention is given to the use of “time out” as a means of handling inexcusable misbehaviour and for parents to use for themselves to interrupt cycles of rising conflict and anger.
- Solution-building with children. This discussion follows that on the skill of active listening to look at ways of talking misbehaviour through with children, helping them think of alternative means of responding to conflict and of solving problems (Sharry & Fitzpatrick, 1998:8-10).

5.3.3 Process of the program

This program is run by a professional facilitator. Approximately five to fifteen individual parents meet every week for eight weeks in a group setting. Parents have the opportunity in a group to learn not just from the video and course material but also from each other. Parents are also given recording sheets for self-monitoring at home (see Tables 6.1-6.5). The facilitator is not seen as the expert on the various subjects. The following activities are included in the program: introductory exercises, icebreakers, ground rules, video material, group discussions, role-play, and feedback at the end of each session (Sharry & Fitzpatrick, 1998: 3-7).

5.4 THE NURTURING PARENTING PROGRAMS

Bavolek (2005) developed parenting programs he called the Nurturing Parenting programs. These programs were especially designed for parents of neglected or abused children from birth to 18 years of age, with the aim of preventing further maltreatment and juvenile delinquency. Although this program is not specifically aimed at psychosocial development in the middle childhood years, there are functional elements that can be used in parental guidelines to enhance psychosocial development. Only the functional elements of this program will be discussed.

5.4.1 Parenting philosophy

Bavolek (2005:5) states that the foundation of the Nurturing Parenting programs is that parenting is learnt. The six assumptions of parenting on which this program is based, correlate with the principles of the Gestalt approach and involve the following:

- The family is a system. Involvement of all family members is essential to change the system. Parents and children in the Nurturing Parenting programs participate together in group- or home-based interventions.
- Empathy is the single most desirable quality in nurturing parenting. Empathy is the ability to be aware of the needs of others and to value those needs. When empathy is high among family members, abuse is low – the two are essentially incompatible. The Nurturing Parenting programs seek to develop empathy in all family members by teaching them about each other's developmental phases and giving family time for sharing.
- Parenting exists on a continuum. To some degree, all families experience healthy and unhealthy interactions. Building positive, healthy interaction between family members is an important key to reducing family violence. Parents therefore spend positive time together with their children in support groups where they can learn to enjoy them again.
- Learning is both cognitive and affective. To be effective, education or intervention should engage the learner on both the cognitive (knowledge) level and the affective (feeling) level. Therefore, parents meet on a regular basis where they practice different skills with their children and sometimes without them.
- Children who feel good about themselves are more likely to become nurturing parents themselves and more capable than children with low self-esteem of being nurturing sons and daughters. A major goal of the Nurturing Parenting programs is to help both parents and children increase their self-esteem and develop positive self-concepts (Bavolek, 2005:5).

5.4.2 Elements of parenting

The elements considered useful from the perspective of this study are:

- Develop positive self-concept and self-esteem in all family members;
- build an empathic awareness of the needs of others;
- increase family members' awareness of their own and each other's needs, strengths, and weaknesses;
- increase family members' awareness of the developmental needs of other family members;
- increase communication and expressiveness within the family;
- teach family members to promote healthy physical and emotional development for themselves and others;
- build family support and cohesion;
- help family members learn to have fun together (Bavolek, 2005:6).

5.4.3 Process of the program

Bavolek (2005:7) suggests that there are different contents for the needs of the different groups. However, the general rule is that the group meets on a weekly basis. Twelve to fifteen individual parents attend the group with a professional facilitator to lead the group. Time is given to an icebreaker, to discuss parenting skills and self-nurturing activities, home practice of skills, family nurturing time and parent-child interaction. Some of the useful subjects being discussed are:

- Discipline – philosophy of discipline, alternatives to spanking, rewards and punishment, family rules, time-out, loss of privilege, restitution, being grounded;
- nurturing – needs and self-esteem, developing empathy, ways to nurture others, praise, nurturing routines at home, communicating with your children through touch;
- communication – redirecting, ignoring, communicating age-appropriate expectations, recognizing and understanding feelings, “I”- statements;
- spoiling children;
- establishing morals, values and rules.

Bavolek (2005:8,9) states that each parent evaluates the success of the program once they have completed it. These elements can all be taken into consideration when parental guidelines are drawn up from a Gestalt perspective to assist parents to enhance psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood.

5.5 FILIAL THERAPY

Filial Therapy is a parenting program that seems very effective when establishing parental guidelines to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. Although this intensive approach is not from a Gestalt perspective, it does correlate with some of the principles of the Gestalt approach. Reynolds and Schwartz (2003:22-26) explain that the Filial Therapy program is a creative psychotherapeutic approach to help children aged 3-10 years by teaching parents pertinent Play Therapy techniques. Although the aim of the program is to prevent further neglect or abuse in families at risk, the researcher found functional elements that can be used in parental guidelines to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. These elements will be discussed in briefly.

5.5.1 Parenting philosophy

Guerney (in Reynolds & Schwartz, 2003:23) asserts that most psychosocial problems experienced by children are not the result of parental pathology, but rather the product of the parents' failure to learn how to understand their children, appreciate their perspectives and use reasonable non-violent control when teaching them. The main objective of this approach is to help parents become the therapeutic change agents in their children's lives by using the naturally existing bond research studies (compare Glass in Reynolds & Schwartz, 2003:23) have shown that Filial Therapy can increase parental empathy and acceptance, as well as reduce parental stress.

5.5.2 Elements of parenting

Some of the useful elements of this program are:

- Parental problems are defined as learning problems, therefore teaching parents child-centred Play Therapy skills would ultimately help strengthen the parent-child relationship;
- the role of the play therapist is to use empathy, acceptance and unconditional positive regard, and to allow children to lead the way. Parents are therefore encouraged to do the same;
- the play therapist avoids the use of criticism, judgement, interpretation or questions, and has to set limits; parents are therefore encouraged to follow the play therapist's lead in this;
- the understanding is that children have the capacity to heal themselves when placed in an appropriately supportive atmosphere;
- one of the goals of Filial Therapy is to improve the parent-child relationship. Children and parents will experience more positive feelings toward one another after experiencing the Play Therapy sessions. This goal correlates with the principle of parents and children spending quality time and playing together in order to build the child-parent relationship (Reynolds & Schwartz, 2003: 24).

5.5.3 Process of the program

The six to eight individual parents attending this program meet in a support group on a weekly basis for two hours each week over a ten to twelve week period. During this time they follow an intensive four-phase course where they learn basic child-centred Play Therapy principles to use with their children in special half-hour weekly play sessions. This gives an opportunity for enhancing and strengthening the parent-child relationship in families at risk. In Filial Therapy the focus is the relationship between parents and their children, rather than the relationship between the therapist and children (Reynolds & Schwartz, 2003:23).

This program follows an extensive course with four stages of theory training, supervision, feedback and skill training. Parents learn to convey acceptance, empathy, and encouragement to their children, as well as to master the skills of effective limit setting. This new creative dynamic of empathic responding by parents becomes the creative process through which

change occurs both *within* the parents and the children and *between* the parents and their children (Reynolds & Schwartz, 2003:24).

Regular attendance and psychological availability of parents is a prerequisite for following this program. Guerney (in Reynolds & Schwartz, 2003:24) states that if parents are unable to attend on a regular basis, an alternative approach should be sought. In terms of psychological availability, parents who are psychotic, mentally handicapped, suicidal, homicidal, or substance abusers should be ruled out.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter was to identify and discuss the functional elements of existing parenting programs that can be used in establishing Gestalt guidelines to assist parents in enhancing psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood. Although none of these programs are specifically focused on the Gestalt approach of parenting, all of them correlate with and complement the principles of the Gestalt approach. The functional elements of these programs brought insight and objectivity to the research study and were very helpful in establishing Gestalt guidelines for parents. In Chapter 6 the researcher describes the process of designing and developing Gestalt guidelines to assist parents in enhancing psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood.

CHAPTER 6

DESIGN AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter attention was given to functional elements of existing parenting programs that can be used for the purpose of this research study. In this chapter attention will be given to the last two phases of the Design and Developmental model, namely the design phase and the phase of the early development of preliminary parental guidelines from a Gestalt perspective – this being the aim of this study. Attention will first be given to the design phase. The steps to be followed in this phase are to design an observational system and to specify procedural elements of the intervention.

6.2 OBSERVATIONAL SYSTEM

The purpose of an observational system is to measure the effect of the intervention on the identified concerns of the population through direct observation, self-monitoring or self-reporting (De Vos, 2002:408). For the purpose of this research, parents are in the perfect position to self-monitor and self-record the impact of the intervention and would therefore be using this observational system.

Respondents have specified a variety of problems, as well as conditions that need to be changed when parenting their children in middle childhood (see 2.3). The researcher has used this information to create observational tools to be used in conjunction with the established parental guidelines (see 6.4). These tools or recording sheets (see Tables 6.2.1 - 6.2.5) can be used to evaluate or self monitor the changes in the specific areas of psychosocial development and the conditions addressed in the parental guidelines (see 6.4). Parents can therefore use self-monitoring and direct observation on the recording sheets as a means of evaluating change. The use of these recording sheets as observational system is subsequently discussed.

6.2.1 Recording sheet no.1 – Targeted psychosocial behaviour to be changed

The purpose of this observational sheet (see Table 6.1) is to record what psychosocial behaviour of the children parents would like to change. Parents can record what obstacles are in the way or which resources are available to bring about change in, for instance, the children's level of independence. This observational sheet will help parents to reflect on the current parenting style being used, as well as to differentiate between the responsibilities of parents and children. Parents can take one week, to monitor the different psychosocial developmental changes, as well as the input they themselves and their children have made during these changes. This could act as a visible encouragement to parents to see the changes occurring.

Table 6.1 RECORDING SHEET NO. 1– TARGETED PSYCHOSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR TO BE CHANGED
Week 1 (e.g. Monday, 1st of January – Sunday, 7th of January)

| | Date/ Time | What specific aspect do your children struggle with? | What you as parents can do/did to help change occur? | What children can do/did to help change occur?(e.g. look at an action plan with the children to bring about change) | Other possible resources/help (e.g. teacher, a friend Mikey, Sunday- school teacher, grandfather to act as support to the children) | Evaluation of possible change. |
|--|-----------------------|--|---|--|--|---|
| Dependence vs. independence | | (e.g. helping them feel more confident about themselves) | (e.g. encourage and give them the option to walk halfway to school on their own this week) | | (e.g. older friend walking with them for company and safety) | |
| Taking responsibility for own actions | | (e.g. completing their homework) | (e.g. allowing them to face punishment at school if their homework isn't done) | | (e.g. schoolteacher, other adults keeping them accountable for their actions) | |
| Delaying gratification | | (e.g. waiting for a sweet until after dinner) | (e.g. giving them a star on their star chart if they finish their dinner before having a sweet) | | (e.g. parents or older siblings also not eating sweets before dinner) | |
| Self-motivation | | (e.g. doing an art project on their own) | (e.g. encouraging them to try their own creative ideas) | | (e.g. art teacher, family members to help the children to be self-motivated) | |
| Empathy for others | | (e.g. giving friend a sweet when he falls/assist a friend that is bullied) | (e.g. point out examples of empathic people or acts, or modelling empathy to somebody in the household) | | (e.g. any role model, peers, older sibling modelling empathy for others) | |
| Respect for others | | (e.g. saying “please” and “thank you”) | (e.g. modelling respect and insisting on “please” and “thank you” before giving in to request) | | (e.g. other role models, peers, older sibling modelling respect for others) | |
| Negotiation with environment | | (e.g. getting along or standing up to bullies) | (e.g. befriending the bully and family by inviting them over for dinner, or empower the children to work towards a plan of action to stand up to bullies) | | (e.g. school teacher, principal, bully's family, other children or parents. who can support the children when being bullied) | |

Chart designed for this research study by the researcher, January 2006

6.2.2 Recording sheet no.2 – Building the parent- child relationship

This observational sheet (see Table 6.2) can be used by parents to reflect on the reasons they struggle to relate to their children. Parents can also use this sheet to record how children responded when they did spend time together, what kind of activity they did together, what skills parents used during play, and how the children and parents responded individually to this interaction. This will give parents a visible picture of how frequent interaction, one-to-one time and play, *etcetera* can be used to build the parent-child-relationship. Parents can record this for as long as they wish. It is important for parents to notice the changes occurring over time and to give attention to the skills in play that they find hard to manage.

Table 6.2 RECORDING SHEET NO.2 – BUILDING THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

| What makes it difficult for you as parents to relate to your children? (e.g. too busy, do not like their behaviour, don't like playing children's games) | When does your children behave better than usual? (e.g. when praised, encouraged, listened to, when they spend quality time with us as parents) | Date/Time | Length of time spent together/ activity (e.g. 30 minutes) | Quality time spent together (e.g. reading, jigsaw puzzle, cycling, cooking, talking, listening) | What play skills did you as parents use? (e.g. followed the children's lead, running commentary, gave choices) | What children did → Your encouragement? (e.g. children asked permission before taking biscuit → “We appreciate it when you ask us before you take a biscuit”) | What happened? Children's response |
|--|---|------------------|---|---|--|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |

Table adapted from Sharry & Fitzpatrick: *Parents Plus Programme Manual. A Practical and Positive Guide to Managing and Solving Discipline Problems in Children Aged 4–11* (1998:7-9).

6.2.3 Recording sheet no. 3 – Household rules and consequences

The purpose of this observational sheet (see Table 6.3) is for parents to record all the household rules and the consequences if these rules are not adhered to. The parents can encourage all the family members, during a family meeting, to take part in the discussion and make suggestions for household rules and the consequences, if the rules are not kept. If the children take part in establishing rules and understands the rules and consequences the chances are so much better that they will keep them. It is important for the children to be clear about the rules. It might be helpful to put up the rules where the whole family can see them and are continually reminded of them. It is important that parents are consistent in implementing the rules with the whole family, that they act as role models in keeping them, and arrange for another family meeting in, say, for instance a month's time to assess how the rule system is working.

Table 6.3 RECORDING SHEET NO. 3 – HOUSEHOLD RULES

Household rules and consequences

For example: No hitting or fighting, bedtime at eight o'clock, no swearing, homework to be completed before outside play is allowed, toys to be put away after play. Parents should encourage the children to suggest consequences when this behaviour is not adhered to. For instance, if the children do not pack away their toys after play, they won't be allowed to watch television for twenty minutes.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Parents should take time at a family meeting with the children to discuss these household rules and agree on them. If the children are involved and understand the rules the chances are that they will keep them. Encourage them to make suggestions for some of the household rules (for instance, "You must ask permission before you take another family member's cold drink from the fridge"), as well as for consequences.

Table adapted from Sharry & Fitzpatrick: *Parents Plus Programme Manual. A Practical and Positive Guide to Managing and Solving Discipline Problems in Children Aged 4–11* (1998:9).

6.2.4 Recording sheet no. 4 – Disciplinary system

The purpose of this observational sheet (see Table 6.4) is for parents to record which behaviour needs changing. Parents can also record which form of discipline was used, what effect this had, which behaviour changed, and to look at things parents can do differently when disciplining. Parents can also record what aspects of disciplining prove to be an obstacle. It is up to parents' own discretion for what period of time they would like to record the disciplinary system used.

Table 6.4 RECORDING SHEET NO. 4 – DISCIPLINARY SYSTEM

| Date/Time | What behaviour do you want changed? (e.g.: We don't want our children to throw a tantrum when we ask them to make their beds) | What form of discipline does the children best respond to? (e.g. time out on stairs when naughty; rewards when homework finished; praise for obeying command) | Did this form of discipline have any effect on changing their behaviour? (e.g.: They didn't listen at first, but when we insisted they listened) | Did their behaviour change? (e.g.: They were much more pleasant and this time did not scream back at us) | What can you do differently next time? (e.g. not show any emotion and use kitchen timer) | What aspect of disciplining do you find the hardest? (e.g. being consistent, or agreement between us as parents about the household rules) |
|------------------|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

Table adapted from Sharry and Fitzpatrick: *Parents Plus Programme Manual. A Practical and Positive Guide to Managing and Solving Discipline Problems in Children Aged 4–11* (1998:10-11).

6.2.5 Recording sheet no.5- Self-support for parents

The purpose of this observational sheet (see Table 6.5) is for parents to record and reflect on what support they need when parenting. By utilising this sheet, parents can become aware of the existing support they already have, possible support they have not considered, determine what specific kind of support they need, and use it as an incentive to make time for personal relaxation and rest away from the children. Parents can decide for what period they want to record their self-support.

Table 6.5 RECORDING SHEET NO. 5 SELF SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

| Date/Time | Personal support systems (e.g. church, friend Ellen, mother, sister Mary) | Other possible support/resources (e.g. my aunt, ex-partner, local playground, parenting support group, individual counselling) | What kind of support do you need? (e.g. somebody to talk to, skills development, childminding, encouragement, relaxation, hairstyling) | Special reward planned for you this week ? (e.g. going out to the movies, getting hair cut, going for a swim on own, doing nails) | Where did you end up going this week? | Result (e.g. were much more relaxed this week, learned what other parents do to encourage their children to be more responsible, realised we struggle to be consistent in disciplining, enjoyed missing the children) |
|------------------|---|--|--|---|--|---|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

Table adapted from Sharry & Fitzpatrick (1998:7& 8) *Parents Plus Programme Manual. A Practical and Positive Guide to Managing and Solving Discipline Problems in Children Aged 4–11.*

In this section, the observational system, namely five different recording sheets to be used by parents to measure the outcomes of the intervention, was discussed. The effectiveness of these recording sheets are all based on parents self-monitoring and direct observation of the psychosocial development of children in middle childhood. It is important to note that children are included in setting rules and the consequences for negative behaviour, and agreeing with them.

6.3 PROCEDURAL ELEMENTS OF THE INTERVENTION

The purpose of the procedural elements in intervention research is to clearly specify the details of the intervention in order to be utilised by other typically trained change agents during intervention (De Vos, 2002:409). The procedural elements often become the eventual practice model which is the final product of the research. It would be essential for the person implementing the recommended parental guidelines to enhance psychosocial development to possess the following qualities:

- The ability and experience of professional facilitation;
- a sound knowledge and understanding of the Gestalt approach;
- a clear understanding of the developmental theories;
- a true desire to enhance psychosocial development in children;
- professional or personal experience in child development;
- experience in group-work if the facilitator should decide to present the Gestalt guidelines in a group setting;
- the firm belief that change can be brought about.

The researcher has established the Gestalt guidelines specifically for the use of a professional facilitator. It is recommended that these guidelines should be presented in a group setting, to approximately six pairs parents. The researcher has the following suggestions for the group sessions:

- Only parents with children in middle childhood would be allowed to attend the group sessions;

- when there are two parents involved in the children's lives, it is preferable that both attend the group sessions. If this is impossible and only one parent attend, it is important that this person then convey the information from the group sessions to the other parent;
- before the group sessions commence, the facilitator should make parents aware of their parenting needs and of meeting their personal needs so that in turn they can empower their children;
- helpful activities for the group sessions could be: introductory exercises, icebreakers, ground rules, video material, group discussions, role-play and feedback from each parent at the end of each session;
- approximately eight group sessions should be held to discuss all the relevant material and it would be essential that parents receive homework to practice specific skills in between group sessions (see 2.3.4.3);
- the facilitator is not the expert on all the subjects involved, and therefore should give parents the opportunity to interact with one another;
- after about two or three group sessions, parents should have the opportunity to list the concerns they have and address one aspect of that specific need in an open, direct and upfront approach within the group;
- the facilitator and participants in the Gestalt guidelines presentation can give feedback by means of an evaluation form that could be utilised for future analysis and research not covered by this study. This evaluation can occur either during each group session or at the last one.

Further details of the presentation are left to the discretion of the professional facilitator's with consideration of the specific needs of the group.

6.4 GUIDELINES ASSISTING PARENTS TO ENHANCE PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Various suggestions for parental guidelines were obtained not only from the respondents participating in this study, but also from Gestalt and Play Therapy experts, literature and the

functional elements identified in existing parenting programs. Out of these suggestions, the researcher has drawn up and is recommending the following guidelines to enhance psychosocial development in the middle childhood years.

6.4.1 Awareness

Awareness is a form of experiencing or a process of being in vigilant contact with the most important event at any given moment in your life, with full sensorimotor, emotional, cognitive and energetic support (Yontef in Clarkson, 1999:37). Various aspects of awareness are discussed below.

- Parents need to be aware of the barriers that prevent them from relating to their children. For instance, if parents are too busy to spend time with their children regularly, the children and parents might feel distant from each other and the children might become reluctant to talk to the parents about their well-being (see 6.2.2).
- Parents have a powerful influence on their children's behaviour, because children learn the behaviour that they observe. If parents have good awareness and are positive about themselves and their family, empathetic but firm, are generous and respect others, are motivated, able to delay gratification, expect responsibility, are encouraging and appreciative of their children, the chances are favourable that their children will model this behaviour.
- Parents should be aware that past events or parenting situations can affect children in their current psychosocial functioning. If parents do not live and act in open conflict with one another, but are loving and agreeing, their children will feel more secure.
- Parents should have an empathetic awareness of their children's changing needs as they enter into middle childhood. For instance, children in middle childhood for instance measure their own abilities by comparing themselves to their peers. This might result in children becoming less confident than before, or withdrawing themselves from others. Parents can stay aware of their needs by spending time with their children, so that they feel secure in sharing these feelings of inadequacy or competence. Parents should however, also be aware that the children might also want

to function more independently from their parents as they become more competitive with their environment.

- Parents should be aware of not becoming so identified with their children that they have trouble to recognise that the children are separate people from themselves. The view that children are the centre of the parents' universe, will not enhance the children's unique identity. The parents should therefore have their own interests and not rely on their children for personal support.
- Parents should be aware not to project their own feelings onto their children without acknowledging that it is their own feelings. An unhelpful remark in this regard will be, for instance: "I cannot punish my child for his negative behaviour because then he will feel as rejected as I feel and he will be traumatised by it". In this manner, children might learn to manipulate their parents instead of learning to take responsibility for their own actions.
- Parents should be aware that overprotection and overparenting (see 2.3.1.1) of their children do not enhance their children's confidence and independence. Unnecessary remarks in situations where children obviously know what is the right thing to do, for instance: "You must tie your shoelaces" or "Comb your hair before you put on your dress", might result in children feeling insignificant or overdependent on their parents.
- Parents should become aware of patterns of negative parenting, for instance parenting from a feeling of guilt. Children can resent parents or feel insecure if parents use remarks like: "I work hard to uphold my family's financial lifestyle and therefore cannot spend much time with my child. I should therefore give him everything he asks for, so that he doesn't resent me – he knows how much I love him".
- Parents should be aware that they act as a model to their children. If they think positively of and do things for themselves, the chances are that children might also think positively and imitate their positive behaviour.
- Thanks to children's natural attachment to them, parents need to teach their children when to express the correct feelings to others, for instance understanding, respecting and responding to other people's point of view. If parents model or encourage

empathy to other people their children might very well learn to have empathy for others.

- Parents should help their children discover what they are good at and in which areas they can improve. If parents encourage and motivate the creative child, for instance to take part in art classes or follow creative hobbies at home with parents, the child will develop the belief that what he does is significant. He might therefore become more self-motivated and willing to discover his creativity and to improve in other areas of development, for instance sports. It is important however that parents never push their children to take part in activities that they are clearly either not ready for or not interested in.

6.4.2 Boundaries

Children in middle childhood are strongly very rule-orientated and therefore parents need to set boundaries and limits that are clear and consistent. Parents should always have the final authority in the household. This will help children to feel safe and secure. The family is a unity, and it would therefore be helpful if all family members could agree on the household rules and the consequences for negative behaviour, say at a family meeting (see 6.2.3). Parents can set clear boundaries by being consistent with household rules over a period.

- Parents should be consistent, enthusiastic and committed in rule setting and discipline, otherwise their children become confused or receive mixed messages (see 6.2.4). All children in the household must therefore be punished for the same behaviour every time it occurs and not just when parents are in a bad mood (see 6.2.3).
- Parents should be assertive when issuing commands, and this should not be done in an aggressive or passive manner. For instance, parents should pleasantly insist and show assertive body language when issuing commands (see 6.2.4). It would help if parents sit down beside their children, wait until they get their attention and make eye contact before commanding, “Elana and Joey, could you please not speak so rudely to one another”.

- Parents can also discourage negative behaviour by using a warning system before consequences follow, for instance, counting one-two-three with time intervals to give their children enough time to consider, stop or change their behaviour before punishment follows. In this manner, parents would give children one warning by counting “one” and so forth, as spelled out under 5.2.2 (see also 6.2.4).
- Other forms of “time out” alternatives that can be used to stop unwanted behaviour are, for instance, loss of a privilege or a toy for a period of time, bedtime fifteen minutes earlier, sitting on a step away from the activity he was last busy with, deduction of pocket money or no electronic entertainment for two hours (see 6.2.4). Punishment should always be proportionate to the negative behaviour.
- Parents should discipline negative behaviour firmly without too much talking or too much emotion. Children might experience emotion and reasoning as an opportunity to get attention, even though it is negative attention, or to manipulate the situation in future if they don’t get their way. For instance, if children return home late from a friend, parents should not make them sit down and have a twenty minute discussion about why they are going to be punished if this rule has already been discussed and agreed on at the family meeting. Parents should simply meet out the punishment as agreed on. No explanations have to follow the punishment; the children have already suffered the consequences. Explanations are appropriate though, when children’s misbehaviour are new or unusual (see 6.2.4).
- Parents can also discourage negative behaviour by ignoring it and focusing instead on the positive behaviour, or even take time out themselves. For instance, if children refuse to do their homework and throw a tantrum, parents can ignore this behaviour and rather focus and praise other children who are doing their homework. Parents can alternatively also leave the room for five minutes, so that the child does not have an audience or attention for the bad behaviour (see 6.2.4).
- When parents have used the counting method to stop unwanted behaviour for a while, they can then focus their attention on the behaviour they want to encourage or start. They can encourage positive behaviour by using positive reinforcement and praising their children’s competence. For instance, when children are asked to make their own beds and they obey they should be praised and encouraged. Specific praise used in the

first person like, “I am so proud of you when you make your bed”, or “You are great at helping your younger sister with the dishes” will empower children and encourage future positive behaviour. In this respect a star chart could also be used (see 6.2.4). Parents should avoid negative means of encouraging positive behaviour, for instance bribing children to go to school.

- Parents can use their attention to promote positive behaviour in their children by watching carefully for the times their children are behaving well. For instance, if the children are playing together in harmony, parents can walk over to them and give specific praise – “We are really pleased to see the two of you getting on so well with each other” (see 6.2.4).
- Parents can use encouragement that is clear, specific and personal to enhance positive behaviour in their children. Parents must show that they are pleased through their body language and by looking at their children. Parents should also be specific about what they are pleased with, for instance, “We are pleased with you, Mary, for hanging up your coat when we got home”. Parents should use personal “I” or “We” when giving personal encouragement, for instance, “I am very pleased with you”.
- Parents can use star charts or rewards to promote positive behaviour in their children. It is important that parents and children are clear about the behaviour that will be rewarded. For instance, if a girl wants a Barbie doll the parents can allow the child to earn the doll by getting a star every time she changes specific negative behaviour like not hanging up her coat or being grumpy after school. The girl will earn a star every time she hangs up her coat after school and is pleasant to the parent. In this manner, the parents and the child can agree that she should earn ten stars before she can buy a Barbie doll. Parents can also use a weekly calendar to chart the stars children get every time the desired behaviour occurs and then award them at the end of the week (see 6.2.1 and 6.2.4).
- Positive behaviour can also be encouraged by using other methods, such as focusing on the positive instead of the negative (“Thanks for helping mummy clean the table, let me show you how not to get those crumbs on the floor”); phrasing simple requests (“Please pick up your clothes”); using kitchen timers to motivate compliance (“I am setting the kitchen timer for four minutes, let’s see if you can pick up your clothes

before the time runs out”). Other methods are the use of a docking system (children forfeit some of their pocket money if they don’t do their chores); natural consequences (children suffer the consequences, for instance being punished at school if they neglect to do their homework); giving alternative options (“Instead this television programme you are not allowed to watch, you can play your music in your room”); or rapidly counting (one-two-three) with an agreed consequence that follows if children do not want to behave as desired, for instance, hang up their coats.

6.4.3 Children’s processes

A person exists by differentiating self from others. Children’s processes are therefore everything that makes them different from others, for instance their personality, intellectual, emotional and physical abilities, their sense of self-worth, their experiences, relationships and communication skills (Yontef, 1993:136). Children’s processes also determines how they act in everyday life, how they assimilate events and behave towards others.

- Parents should be accepting of their children’s individuality, their likes and dislikes, in order for them to develop a greater self-confidence and independence in middle childhood. Parents can, for instance, encourage their children to choose the clothes or colours they like to wear, or highlight their uniqueness that might be different to the rest of their class or family. For instance, the fact that one has blond hair and green eyes, while the rest of the family have brown hair.
- Parents should avoid being judgemental, giving children many prerequisites and needless advice. Although parents have the final authority at home, they must also allow children to make decisions for themselves and live with the consequences. Parents should encourage children in middle childhood to take risks to enhance their independence (see 6.2.1). Parents can, for instance, encourage children to make new friends by inviting them to their house, to take part in outdoor activities that are new to them, like learning to play football or to use their creative skills to make an object of art they have never made before. Parents can encourage children individually or even praise their efforts publicly by telling another parent in front of them and other children.

- Parents should teach children that although they can have some control over their environment there are many limits to life as well. Uncertainty and discomfort is a part of taking risks and being independent. For instance, if a child fails at the first attempt at playing football, parents can explain to the child that learning a new skill takes courage, perseverance and time to practice.
- Parents can encourage their children's self-esteem by accepting them as unique, by communicating and encouraging them regularly, by giving specific praise and by modelling a good self-esteem themselves. For instance, if parents model a high regard for themselves, their children will learn the importance of having a high regard for themselves. If the self-esteem of children are enhanced in the ways mentioned above, they might become less concerned over the opinion of their peers.

6.4.4. Confluence

Confluence is the appreciation of the other person without, for instance, rushing him. Parents should be in confluence with the child and not the other way round (Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996:32).

- Parents should involve children in middle childhood in planning special fun time. Parents can, for instance, encourage the child to come up with as many ideas as possible for spending quality time together. Special time does not have to only be during playtime, but can also be lunchtime, bedtime or a day trip out (see 6.2.2).
- Parents can learn to relate to their children through play, because children use the relaxing environment of play to communicate their true feelings. It is important for parents to take part in the play and follow the children's pace and lead. For instance, parents should not just sit and watch children play a board game and ask them many questions, as this might put pressure on them to answer or they might not know the answer. Parents should rather sit close to the children, show interest, make suggestions, encourage them, allow them to explain the rules of the board game and to direct the parents as the game progresses. Parents do not have the final authority in play as in the case of the household rules (see 6.2.3). If the children are allowed to

- play the game according to the agreed rules and on their own terms, they might feel empowered (see 6.2.2).
- Parents can use running commentary during play as a means of giving the child positive attention and encouragement. Running commentary is where parents simply comment on what the children are doing while they are playing, for instance, “Oh, you are placing all the pieces of the puzzle together”; “Oh, you are putting all the blue pieces on top”; “Oh, we think you are building a mountain with a blue sky on top, that looks really good”. There is no pressure on the children to answer questions, but they enjoy the encouraging comments as they continue to play (see 6.2.2).
 - Parents should preferably choose non-competitive games requiring the use of imagination and creativity when playing with the child, so that the focus is on the time spent together instead of winning. For instance, parents can suggest children make up a new game with new rules with an existing board game and allow the children to lead. Remarks like, “ That’s not the way we play this game” should be replaced by remarks like “That’s a different idea, we’ve never thought of that, you are very creative” (see 6.2.2). If a competitive game is chosen, parents have an ideal opportunity to model by explaining to the children that in real life there are winners and losers, but when you lose, you have to lose with dignity.

6.4.5 Dialogue

Dialogue is the process during which the person communicated to remains an independent person accepted with all his uniqueness without being manipulated or changed (Yontef, 1993:39-40,127).

- Parents can provide positive, approving attention to children by actively listening to them. If parents sit down, listen to children exclusively from the children’s perspective, and encourage them to express their feelings, the children will be more confident, understand themselves and others better and parents will develop a much closer relationship with their children (see 6.2.2). It is important that parents pay full attention to children by looking at them, show warm body language, comment on what they are saying, not asking too many questions, and repeat or rephrase what the

children are saying, for instance, “ It sounds as if you were very upset about that”. This allows children to express themselves and encourages them to look for their own solutions to the problem with the support of the parents.

- Parents should communicate with children through positive touch. For instance, if the children are very upset, parents can reach out to them and say, “It seems that you are very upset right now”. This will show the children that the parents really care, are affectionate, actively listening and interested in what they have to say. In this manner, parents can also act as a sounding board for their children.
- Parents and children both have to learn to give specific messages, for instance, “I feel hurt by the fact that you were selfishly drinking all the cold drink in the fridge without asking me first”, and not generalised statements that hide the true meaning of what they are trying to convey to each other, like “You always drink all the cold drink”. By giving specific messages, parents will model more expressiveness to children and they in turn, will gain a better understanding of their own and other people’s feelings.

6.4.6 Empowerment

Empowerment can be described as the development of all aspects of a person’s being. The potential for self-development, and thus empowerment, is being realised, not through the parents or children alone, but through the interaction, dialogue and relationship between the two (MacKewn, 2003:80). Guidelines in relation to the empowerment of parents and children are discussed below.

- Parents should take time to learn how to be good parents, decide on their values and what is best for their children, as well as how they want their children to grow up. Parents can set some time aside to discuss their views on parenting and to write down which areas they struggle with or would like to enhance. They should then take the time to learn and master the skills they need (see 6.2.5).
- Parents should know and understand their own needs and their need for support. Parents need to make sure that their own needs are met first; otherwise, they will have no energy to bestow on their children. If parents’ energy levels are low, they are

physically unhealthy, and if their own needs are not met they might easily become negative or resentful towards their children. Parents can negotiate with each other and other family and friends for support when rearing children, (see 6.2.5), for instance, asking a friend or neighbour to look after their children while they go to the doctor or the dentist.

- Parents need to make time for personal recreation and relaxation, if they are to ensure that their children are also content. Parents should occasionally spend time on their own as individuals and as a couple without the children being present. Parents can, for instance, visit a friend, go the coffee shop or the gymnasium while the children are in school. Or the couple can go out for an evening meal and ask a friend or family member to look after the children (see 6.2.5).
- Parents can use a parenting group or a child-parent group as a form of personal support. In these groups, parents could learn and practice how to interact and relate to their children in an effective way. Parents should be resourceful in this regard, looking out for resources in their community that they or their children could benefit from (see 6.2.5).
- It is impossible for parents to be truly encouraging towards their children unless they are encouraging themselves. If parents use self-encouragement and focus positively on the things they as parents are doing right, they will help themselves grow, become more confident about parenting and more positive about their children's behaviour. Parents should look out for the things they can praise in their own parenting, and will then also start looking out for things to praise in their children (see 6.2.4).
- Parents should set the example for their children and live a life worthy of their children's respect (see 6.2.1). Parents should model to their children the value of respect for other people. If parents are gracious and respectful to their children, neighbours and friends, their children might learn better the important value of respecting other people.
- Parents can teach children to find solutions for the problems they face. The following solution-finding process can serve as an example: the child who always gets into trouble at school should be actively listened to, so that parents can see the problem from his perspective ("What exactly happened at school today?"; "Do you know why

he hit you?”). Parents can help the child recall the times when things went well at school and he didn’t get into trouble, for instance the time when he kept away from certain boys in the class (“Can you think of some ways to handle it without hitting him?”). Parents can then help the child decide what solution he is going to use that will have the best results for everybody, and then recall this plan in future again (“Yes, you could stay away from those boys. Do you want me to talk to the teacher as well?”; “Let’s talk about this again tomorrow and see how you got on”). It is important that the child makes the final decision and takes responsibility for his actions.

- Parents can empower children by not being overcontrolling, by allowing them to learn from their own experiences (see 6.2.1). For instance, if children want to learn a new hobby the parents should encourage their imagination by helping them think of different hobbies (art, riding a bike or collecting stamps) that they could do at home. Parents can ask children to consider practical things, like how much room space, time or pocket-money they have available to pursue this hobby. Children and parents can then decide together whether the child will pursue this hobby or not.

6.4.7 Organismic self-regulation

In the Gestalt approach, a person is seen as having a natural or organismic tendency to regulate the self. In order to grow and develop, people strive to maintain a balance between gratifying their needs and eliminating the tension, these needs are causing. Organismic self-regulation therefore depends on a discriminating sensory awareness that allows the person to use what is nourishing to him (e.g. food, people, stimuli) and reject what is not nourishing. The Gestalt approach therefore assumes that every person knows at some level what is good for him and what support he needs (Clarkson, 1999:21).

- Parents should have an increased awareness of their own needs, strengths and weaknesses, so that they can regulate them, seeing that this will have an influence on their children’s psychosocial development (see 6.2.5). If parents do not have enough support or constantly feel tired, their children might become overly concerned,

overprotective of or, on the otherhand, distant from the parents. It might also affect the children's school performance.

- Parents should encourage children to also have external support, such as a teacher, a neighbour, grandparents, unrelated adults, peers, a mentor, somebody at church, or even a pet to help them cope with problems (see 6.2.1). A variety of people is better support than just one single person. Parents can, for instance, help children identify a person they already trust, and then look at the qualities that make that person trustworthy.
- Parents should share a strong alliance between the two of them and conjointly agree on household rules (see 6.2.1), roles and routines that specify what is acceptable behaviour for their children and what is not (see 6.2.3). Children will feel more secure if the parents act and advise in unison. If the children, for instance, want to go to the movies and ask one parent, it should always be understood that both parents first agree on the decision. Children should be aware of the fact that they cannot play off one parent against the other.

6.4.8 Responsibility

The Gestalt approach is firmly based on the notion that every person is responsible for the experience of his own life. The individual is responsible for every choice he makes or not to act in a certain manner Clarkson (1999:27-28).

- Parents respect and trust children by giving them choices and opportunities to be responsible, establishing consequences for negative behaviour and allowing them to take responsibility for their actions (see 6.2.1, 6.2.3 & 6.2.4). Parents should allow children to learn their own lessons, to make mistakes and afterwards analyse them to enable them to become successful in their attempts. If children, for instance, want to buy a pet fish with their pocket money, the parents should discuss the consequences of this with them, together looking at look at the practical matters involved, such as feeding and caring for the fish. If the children then make the decision to buy the fish, the parents should allow them to take full responsibility and expect of them to stick to

- their agreement by caring for the fish. Should they neglect the care and the fish dies, they will have learnt through these natural consequences.
- Parents should not give children unrestricted freedom with no sense of limits, for in this manner, children cannot learn to be responsible (see 6.2.1 & 6.2.4). For instance, children must have a curfew, be given small responsibilities around the house (making their beds or bringing their laundry downstairs to be washed), or be allowed to only watch the television programs their parents approve of. There should always be the same consequences if household rules (see 6.2.3) are disobeyed, so that the children can learn to take responsibility for their actions.
 - Parents need to be patient in allowing children to learn new skills (see 6.2.1). For instance, if children are learning to tie their shoe-laces, parents should reassure them by showing them once or twice how to do it and then allow them to learn by trial and error.
 - Parents should not teach children to blame outside factors when failing (see 6.2.1). For instance, if children have failed a spelling test, parents should encourage them to take responsibility for failing the test. Parents can sit down with the children in a loving manner and ask them to look at the reasons for failing, for instance maybe not studying hard enough, and to consider in what ways they can improve on their spelling. Children might need the parents or teacher to help them with their spelling. Parents should also model taking responsibility without blaming outside factors. For instance, if they get a parking ticket, they should not blame the parking attendant for giving them the ticket, but should admit that they neglected to pay the required amount and now have to suffer the consequences.
 - Parents should also teach children that even when a person is not personally responsible for certain circumstances he finds himself in, he is still responsible for the meaning he gives to his life by deciding on his attitude and behaviour in a situation like this. If children, for instance, get bullied at school they could choose to act like victims or take action by telling a teacher or their parents, or by walking away from the conflict. Parents should also model this value, for instance, should their car get stolen, they could act by calling the police instead of consistently sulking or being negative about the neighbourhood.

- Parents should model delay gratification in their lives and encourage their children to do the same (see 6.2.1). They can point out this quality in the lives of other creative and successful individuals like sports or movie stars, famous people like successful writers or their children's role models. Parents could explain that although the sports star is now successful, he did not always succeed and had to work hard to reap these rewards. Children can be taught to delay gratification in practical ways by helping out with tasks where gratification is slow to come, for instance planting seeds and watching the seedlings grow as they are nurtured, or by helping parents wash the car or paint a room. This will also help them develop a sense of success and competence. If children want a new toy, they can also learn to earn points or pocket money by helping with tasks around the house until they have saved enough money for it.

6.4.9 Relationship

The relationship with another person provides the medium for the growth of awareness, learning, problem-solving and self-development. Relating to another person can take place in silence, laughter or play as much as in words (MacKewn, 2003:80).

- Parents can assure that children have a secure attachment to them as parents by active listening to them, spending time together and giving them consistent positive feedback to their children. Parents can, for instance, use positive body language with remarks like "It's great spending some time with you after school. What would you like us to do together after you have finished your homework?", or "How was your day at school?" (see 6.2.2). If children feel secure, they will be more resilient in the face of stress from the environment and be more confident to further explore their environment.
- Parents should make to meet their children's basic needs in order for children to feel secure. That includes providing in their physical needs (food, clothing, curfews for their physical safety and seeing to their medical needs); encouraging them to learn (by using remarks such as "You can become a policeman but then you have to start studying really hard and doing your homework every day"); help them develop friendships (parents can use helpful remarks e.g., "It looks like you and Susie get on

- well, do you want to invite her over to play at our house one day?"); enhance their children's self-esteem (helpful remarks are e.g., "Hey, even though you didn't win that trophy today I am really proud of you for practicing so hard and doing your best today!"); and providing them with a safe, stable and harmonious home.
- Parents can learn to relate more effectively to their children by having an attitude of acceptance, unconditional love, avoiding undue criticism and judgement (see 6.2.2). For instance, if children should interrupt parents by disagreeing on golf, the parents might respond, "It is great that you have your own opinion about golf, it is important though, that all of us get an opportunity to listen to each other's opinions".
 - Parents can use Play Therapy skills to strengthen their relationship with their children and to become the therapeutic change agents in their children's lives by using the existing bond between them. Parents should therefore enter their children's world. Skills like showing empathy, acceptance, unconditional positive regard and allowing children to lead the way can be useful (see 6.2.2). For instance, if children are angrily colouring in a picture, parents shouldn't remark, "Hey, stop colouring in so hard, you will break the crayon and make a mess on the carpet!". Instead, parents could say "We see that you are using the red crayon to colour in the house. It seems like you are angry at that crayon or is something else bothering you?". Parents then do not criticise or interpret their children's actions and allow them to answer or explain their behaviour if they want to.
 - Parents should strengthen the parent-child relationship by playfully interacting with their children. They can stimulate children's sensory awareness by, for instance, reading a story, knitting, play with clay or being creative together. This shared fun will help children make positive associations about spending time with the parents (see 6.2.2).
 - Parents can also strengthen this bond by having one-to-one fun with an individual child. Suggestions for one-on-one activities between parent and child are: finger painting, baking cookies, playing board games, giving the dog a bath, bike riding, staying up twenty minutes later on a school night, reading together, just talking, or teaching an inexperienced parent how to play a video game (see 6.2.2).

In this section, various parental guidelines were discussed to enhance psychosocial development in the middle childhood years. The most important aspect of any of these guidelines is that parents should be in agreement with each other about their parenting style and their desires for their children before attempting to implement these guidelines.

6.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher described the design of observational sheets to be used by parents for self-monitoring and -recording of the changed psychosocial behaviour. The researcher also developed guidelines from a Gestalt perspective to assist parents to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. Specific attention was given to the different Gestalt concepts and principles as it relates to psychosocial development. In the final chapter recommendations will be made and conclusions drawn from for this research study.

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter attention was given to the last two phases of the Design and Development model, namely the design phase and early development of parental guidelines from a Gestalt perspective to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. The first purpose of this final chapter is to evaluate to what extent the goal and objectives of this research study have been achieved. Secondly recommendations will be made and conclusions drawn up from the findings of the research study.

7.2 THE INTERVENTION RESEARCH PROCESS

The Design and Development model was followed as part of the intervention research process, of which the goal and objectives for this study formed part. For the sake of continuity, the researcher, from the start of the study, integrated all the steps of this Intervention model into the research process in order for it to form a unity and not be discussed separately. In this manner, the researcher has made an innovative contribution to the process of Intervention research. In order to evaluate whether the goal and objectives for this study were achieved, it is necessary to review the intervention research process that was followed. This will briefly be discussed according to the four different intervention phases that was followed.

7.2.1 Problem analysis and project planning phase

7.2.1.1 Identifying, involving clients and gaining entry

The researcher identified and involved clients for this research study by a selection from her caseload through and contact with two professionals who had daily dealings with psychosocial development of children in middle childhood. The researcher was allowed access to the information needed, by the respondents and management of the centre where

she was working. These steps of the first phase were successfully completed by identifying and involving clients and by gaining entry into the community. This procedure is discussed under 1.5.1.1 to 1.5.1.2 in Chapter 1.

7.2.1.2 Identifying concerns and analysing identified problems

The researcher undertook an in depth empirical study. Discussions with experts, personal work experience and a synoptic study of appropriate literature, determined what the overall issues were that were to be tackled during the interviews. The most appropriate questions were then arranged in sequence and two different semi-structured interview schedules were used to collect data in order to determine the concerns of the population in regard to the topic of this study.

Information gathered from parents and professionals by using the interview schedules was analysed and organised under four main themes, namely parents' and professionals' opinions of the parenting, individual and environmental problems and the needs experienced when dealing with the child in middle childhood. The various needs identified under four categories were eventually taken into account when the parental guidelines were drawn up. This step of the first phase was successfully completed because the various needs and concerns identified by the different respondents correlated with each other as well as with the relevant literature. This procedure is discussed under 1.5.1.3 and 1.5.1.4.

7.2.1.3 Setting goals and objectives

The primary goal of this proposed study was:

- *To establish Gestalt guidelines to assist parents to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood.*

In order to achieve the goal of this study the research was done within the framework of applied research and the Design and Development model was followed as part of the intervention research process.

The objectives for this study were as follows:

- *To undertake an in depth empirical study, using semi-structured interviews to collect and analyse data, to determine what the concerns and problems are as identified by the respondents (this objective is discussed under 7.2.1.2);*
- *to undertake a thorough literature study of developmental theories and the Gestalt approach as they relate to psychosocial development in middle childhood (this objective is discussed under 7.2.2.1);*
- *to determine functional elements of existing parenting programs to be used when establishing Gestalt guidelines for parents to assist them in enhancing psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood years (this objective is discussed under 7.2.2.3);*
- *to establish guidelines from a Gestalt perspective to assist parents to enhance psychosocial development in their children in middle childhood (this objective is discussed under 7.2.4.1);*
- *to draw conclusions and make recommendations to assist parents and professionals in the field, as well as to point out aspects to be further researched in future (this objective is discussed under 7.3 and 7.6).*

These objectives were achieved through the completion of the whole intervention research process.

7.2.2 Information gathering and synthesis phase

7.2.2.1 Using existing information sources

The researcher *firstly* undertook a literature study in relation to psychosocial development in middle childhood, seeing that the main focus of this research study was psychosocial development. Attention was given to the different developmental tasks and theories (specifically Erikson's theory of psychosocial development) in relation to psychosocial development in middle childhood. Specific aspects of psychosocial development were covered: the child's ability to motivate himself (emotional self-regulation), his level of empathy and respect for others, his ability to take responsibility for his actions, his ability to

delay gratification, his ability to negotiate with his environment (family, peers) and his ability to cope with problems. The importance of parental influence, disciplining, role modelling and allowing the child to, for instance, take responsibility for his own actions to enhance psychosocial development were highlighted during this literature study. This information is discussed in Chapter 3. It is recommended that the parent or professional involved with children in middle childhood should have a profound knowledge of the psychosocial tasks and development needs of the child in middle childhood. When the parent has knowledge of the child's physical, emotional and social developmental, they would find it easier to communicate with the child when building a relationship by means of either quality time or having fun together. Another factor that was highlighted is that the child learns the behaviour it is modelled, taught and allowed. The parents as main caregivers should therefore decide and agree beforehand what values and behaviour they want their child to learn. They should then consistently apply the same boundaries in teaching (e.g. delayed gratification) and changing the desired behaviour. This information is discussed in Chapter 3

Secondly, the researcher undertook a literature study in relation to the Gestalt approach. The researcher attempted to explain the Gestalt approach by defining Gestalt, the underlying philosophy and the different concepts and principles of this approach. Attention was given to the use of Gestalt in parental guidance as used by Violet Oaklander. Various suggestions for the parent to effectively relate to the child, for instance accepting the child as unique, communicating with the child and playing together were discussed. The use of quality time was highlighted in building the parent-child relationship and guidelines to enhance the child's self-esteem were briefly discussed. This information is discussed in Chapter 4.

This objective was achieved because the researcher gathered information, with the help of the literature study and experts, for constructing a theoretical framework in relation to children in the middle childhood years. The researcher achieved this objective by investigating functional elements of an existing Gestalt program and consulting a Gestalt expert to construct a theoretical framework in relation to the enhancing of psychosocial development

in children in middle childhood through parenting from a Gestalt perspective. This information is discussed in Chapter 4.

The researcher is of the opinion that the Gestalt approach can be successfully used by parents to enhance the psychosocial development of their children in middle childhood. Parents should, however, accept the Gestalt approach and have a sound knowledge of it. Gestalt principles that would be especially helpful in building the parent-child relationship and enhancing psychosocial development are confluence, taking the child's lead, not interpreting what the child is doing or saying, playing together, acceptance and not being judgemental. It is recommended that Gestalt principles be used with great caution.

7.2.2.2 Studying natural examples

This step of the second phase was carried out by consultation with different professionals who are experts who are differentially experts in the field of the Gestalt approach, parental guidance and psychosocial development in middle childhood to learn how they were dealing with the problem. These consultations provided valuable insights and information. One school principal was also consulted to gain further insight into the needs of the community. Respondents as well as parents who did not form part of the sample were also consulted to understand how they were addressing the needs in question. Existing information resources, as discussed under 1.5.2.1 and functional elements of successful models (see 1.5.2.3) were also helpful in establishing Gestalt guidelines to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. Experts and professionals added valuable experience and objectivity to this research. This information is discussed under 1.5.2.2.

7.2.2.3 Identifying functional elements of successful models

This step of the second phase of the intervention process was completed by studying functional elements of the Gestalt approach (see 4.5), as well as functional elements of existing parenting programs that were useful for the purpose of this research (see Chapter 5). Although these parenting programs were not designed from the Gestalt perspective, they

were very useful for establishing parenting guidelines to enhance psychosocial development in children in middle childhood from a Gestalt perspective.

7.2.3 Design

7.2.3.1 Designing an observational system

This step of the third phase of the intervention research process was completed by compiling five observational systems in the form of self-recording sheets to be used in conjunction with the preliminary parental guidelines from a Gestalt perspective. Different aspects were highlighted on these forms for self-recording, for instance targeted psychosocial behaviour to be changed, building of the parent-child relationship, household rules and consequences, a disciplinary system and self-support for parents. This information is discussed under 6.2 in Chapter 6.

7.2.3.2 Specifying procedural elements of the intervention

The second step of this phase of the intervention research process was completed by establishing procedural elements for the intervention. The researcher specified several different procedural details pertaining, firstly to the person implementing the parental guidelines and secondly, to the group sessions where these guidelines would be presented. Some of these details are that the parental guidelines be presented by a professional facilitator, with a clear understanding of the Gestalt approach, in a group setting of approximately six pairs of parents. This information is discussed under 6.3 in Chapter 6.

7.2.4 Early development and pilot testing

7.2.4.1 Developing a prototype or preliminary intervention

This final phase of the intervention research process was completed by the development of preliminary parental guidelines. The researcher used the information gathered through the empirical study, the literature study, experts and functional elements of existing parenting programs to establish Gestalt guidelines to assist parent to enhance the psychosocial

development of their children in middle childhood. Attention was given to various Gestalt principles and concepts, for instance awareness, responsibility, here-and-now, unfinished business, organismic self-regulation, confluence, the child's process, dialogue, empowerment, relationship, boundaries and the use of play to relate to the child. This information was discussed under 6.4 in Chapter 6.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS STUDY

The researcher would like to make the following recommendations as they have emerged from the research. The first recommendation the researcher would like to make is that parents be committed to implementing the parental guidelines as recommended under 6.4 in Chapter 6. Unless the parents truly commit themselves to these guidelines, they will at the first obstacle they encounter, renounce their efforts to bring about psychosocial change. Commitment also implies that parents should be consistent in applying these parental guidelines over a period.

The second recommendation the researcher would like to make is that an awareness of the reasons and factors causing unhealthy psychosocial development will help to empower parents and professionals to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. Parents and professionals must therefore take the time to thoroughly orientate themselves as to these aspects of psychosocial development.

Thirdly, the researcher would like to recommend that if parents could develop and practice the skills to utilise the resources available to assist them in enhancing psychosocial development, they might become less frustrated. There are several resources available to parents, for instance potential personal parenting skills, personal relaxation, parenting groups, family support and recreation for the child, but parents often feel inadequate to exploit these resources for themselves. For this reason, a professional facilitator would be essential, not only to present these guidelines to a group of parents, but also to instruct them how to utilise them effectively in parenting.

The fourth recommendation the researcher would like to make is that the parent should be confident but also cautious when attempting to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. The parent can play a powerful and irreplaceable role in enhancing the child's psychosocial development by means of Gestalt principles. Gestalt principles that can be very useful are awareness, responsibility, here-and-now, unfinished business, organismic self-regulation, confluence, the child's process, dialogue, empowerment, relationship and boundaries. The serious and committed parent will benefit greatly from utilising these Gestalt guidelines to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood as established through this research study.

7.4 LIMITATIONS EXPERIENCED DURING THE RESEARCH

The researcher did not investigate the full extent of psychosocial development in middle childhood, as the focus of the study was on establishing Gestalt guidelines for parents. Attention was specifically given to the role of parents as main educators in their children's lives. The researcher focused only on some specific aspects of psychosocial development because psychosocial development is such a broad concept. The specific aspects chosen to be discussed were the researcher's choice and not necessarily all child developmentalists' interpretation of what is most important in psychosocial development or in middle childhood. This study focused specifically on psychosocial development in middle childhood, thus, the findings should not be generalised indiscriminately to apply to psychosocial development in children of all ages.

This research study established Gestalt guidelines to assist parents when dealing with psychosocial development. These guidelines only provide basic background information on the Gestalt approach. The researcher experienced a lack of information and Gestalt sources specifically applicable to assisting parents to enhance psychosocial development in middle childhood. Some important aspects and principles underlying the Gestalt approach might therefore have been neglected and not been included in these guidelines. A person with no knowledge and understanding of the Gestalt Play Therapy approach might find these

guidelines difficult to implement. These guidelines might therefore not be applicable to everyone or every parent eager to assist children in their psychosocial development.

The number of respondents used for the purpose of this research was limited, thus the generalisation of the findings will be limited as well. If more respondents were included, this study might have been more scientific and profound. The researcher would have liked to broaden the sample to include professionals like teachers, child therapists and children as well. Due to financial and time limitations, however, the researcher only involved a limited number of respondents in semi-structured interviews. The researcher only involved a limited number of respondents in semi-structured interviews due to financial and time limits.

The researcher only gave attention to some aspects of therapeutic treatment and parenting programs that can be used to enhance psychosocial development. These guidelines were also specifically designed with distinct requirements to be presented to parents only by a professional facilitator. The full extent of Gestalt parenting programs that can be used in parental guidance were not covered.

7.5 ASPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The researcher would like to recommend that a fuller extent or further aspects of psychosocial development as it applies to middle childhood be researched. Attention could be given to different roles of parents or to the roles of other adults involved in children's lives.

The researcher only gave attention to some aspects of the Gestalt approach as it pertains to psychosocial development in middle childhood. Further research could give attention to other important aspects or principles of the Gestalt approach as they pertain to psychosocial development.

This research study was of a limited scope. It is recommended that more respondents, especially professionals working with children, teachers and child therapists be included in

similar future research. There is also a need for further research to be done on more aspects of therapeutic treatment and parenting programs that can be used to enhance psychosocial development. Implementation of these guidelines by any person other than a professional facilitator is another aspect that could receive attention in future research.

These Gestalt guidelines are not standardised. There is a need for further research where these Gestalt guidelines can be tested, discussed in group format with parents for further feedback and analysed. Parents also need to apply and test the functionality of the self-reporting monitoring sheets. In future research it could be determined how successful these guidelines are.

7.6 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE RESEARCH

The researcher has concluded that parents have a powerful influence on all the aspects of their children's psychosocial development. What the parent teaches or neglects to teach children by way of boundary setting, consistency and role modelling are the values the children will learn or will have to do without. If children experience problems in respect of psychosocial development, this might impact negatively on all other areas of their development, for instance their educational development. Parents should therefore establish and agree on the values that they want to teach their children, like taking responsibility for their actions or respecting others, in order to safeguard children from insecurity and inconsistency. Parents should also start caring for their children by starting to care for themselves.

Other factors that influence the child's psychosocial development are peers, family, levels of support, teachers, and changing developmental needs. Parents can only truly be aware of deficiencies in the child's psychosocial development when they establish and foster a strong relationship with the child by spending time together, communicating and going in confluence with the child. Parents can help to build the child's resilience through this strong attachment and by teaching them solution-focused problem-solving. Parents should also be vigilant in building a strong support network for themselves as well as for the child.

7.7 CONCLUSIVE SUMMARY

The application of Gestalt guidelines might assist parents to enhance all aspects of psychosocial development in the child if parents diligently apply the various Gestalt concepts like awareness, responsibility, here-and-now, unfinished business, organismic self-regulation, confluence, the child's process, dialogue, empowerment, relationship, boundaries and the use of play to relate to the child.

This research study focused not only on the important role parents are playing in their children's psychosocial development, but also on the importance of children developing in all aspects of their psychosocial development. Parents might change existing negative patterns of psychosocial behaviour by changing the foundation of their parenting strategy. In this manner, they can enhance children's psychosocial development which in turn would help them to develop into confident and balanced adults in all areas of their future development.

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ADDENDA

A1 Form of consent for respondents



NORTHERN AREA HEALTH BOARD

Bord Slainte an Limisteir Thuaidh

CONSENT FORM

I am aware that Retha Brink is doing research for UNISA (University of South Africa) for the purposes of establishing a parenting programme drawn up from the community's needs. I am aware that this research is not done by Retha Brink as part of her work at St. Helena's Resource Centre although this attributes to her work there. I hereby acknowledge that the information gathered by this interview will be kept confidential and that I will remain anonymous. I am aware that a third party will process this information but that only the interviewer will know my identity. This research will be used to draw up a parenting programme or guidelines. I am aware that I am entitled to a written format of this interview should I require one.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

***St. Helena's Family Resource Centre, St. Helena's Road, Finglas, Dublin 11
Tel: 834 3558***

A 2 Letter of information to School Committee



NORTHERN AREA HEALTH BOARD

Bord Slainte an Limisteir Thuaidh

The Chairperson
School Committee
St. Malachi's Primary School
Finglas South
Dublin 11

16th of May 2005

This letter is to inform you that I am currently doing research for UNISA (University of South Africa) for the purposes of establishing parental guidelines from the community's needs. This research programme is not part of my work at St. Helena's Resource Centre although this contributes to my work here. Mr. McCarthy has agreed to be interviewed as part of this research project. All the information gathered will be kept confidential and the interviewee will remain anonymous.

If you should have an objection with this please do not hesitate to contact me at the given contact address.

Yours sincerely

Retha Brink

Therapeutic Social Worker

St. Helena's Family Resource Centre, St. Helena's Road, Finglas, Dublin 11
Tel: 834 3558