

GUIDELINES IN FACILITATING REFUGEE LEARNERS IN THEIR
SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT TO A FOREIGN SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

By

CARINA NAUDE

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- My friends and family for their patience and support.
- My supervisor, Issie Jacobs, for her dedication and guidance.
- My Saviour, Jesus Christ, without whom this project would not have been possible.

I hereby declare **GUIDELINES IN FACILITATING REFUGEE LEARNERS IN THEIR SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT TO A FOREIGN SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT** to be my own work and that all the references that were used or quoted were indicated and recognised.

Carina Naude

Date

Tel: (051) 5229992
Cell: 083 800 1874
E-mail: taniavanvuuren@vodamail.co.za

7 Hudson Drive
Fichardt Park
Bloemfontein
9301

18 November 2008

To whom it may concern,

DECLARATION

I, Tania van Vuuren, hereby declare that I have proofread the thesis in question, and that I have made all the necessary linguistic corrections and/or changes. Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information or experience any problems.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'T. van Vuuren', with a horizontal line underneath.

(N.Dip: Language Practice *cum laude*, The Central University of Technology,
Free State).

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop Gestalt guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners. These guidelines seek to assist teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. The researcher made use of the first four stages of the Design and Development model of intervention research. These stages included problem analysis and project planning, information gathering and synthesis, design, and the early development of the guidelines.

For the purpose of this study, semi-structured focus groups were conducted with teachers working with refugee learners. The social adjustment process was then viewed in the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Existing literature on the social adjustment of refugee learners in the South-African school system and literature on the Gestalt philosophy was used together with functional elements of existing social adjustment models to develop guidelines for teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment.

Throughout this research study, the refugee learner has been referred to as "he". This was done for practical reasons only and no gender discrimination was intended.

KEY TERMS

- Refugee
- Trauma and Loss
- Xenophobia
- Social Adjustment of Refugee Learners
- Gestalt Guidelines.

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.

~Henry Brooks Adams

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
DECLARATION	iii
DECLARATION FROM PROOF READER	iv
ABSTRACT	v
KEY TERMS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF ACRONYMS	xvi

CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND PROJECT PLANNING

1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY	2
1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	4
1.4 WORK PROCEDURE	5
1.4.1 Problem Analysis and Project Planning	5
1.4.1.1 <i>Identifying and Involving Clients</i>	6
1.4.1.2 <i>Gaining Entry and Cooperation from Settings</i>	7
1.4.1.3 <i>Identifying Concerns of the Population</i>	8
1.4.1.4 <i>Analysing Concerns or Problems Identified</i>	9
1.4.1.5 <i>Setting the Goal and Objectives</i>	10
1.4.2 Information Gathering and Synthesis	11

1.4.2.1 <i>Using Existing Sources of Information</i>	11
1.4.2.2 <i>Studying Natural Examples</i>	11
1.4.2.3 <i>Identifying Functional Elements of Successful Models</i>	12
1.4.3 Design	13
1.4.3.1 <i>Designing an Observational System</i>	13
1.4.3.2 <i>Specifying Procedural Elements of the Intervention</i>	14
1.4.4 Early Development and Pilot Testing	14
1.4.4.1 <i>Developing a Prototype or Preliminary Intervention</i>	14
1.5 DEFINITION OF MAIN CONCEPTS	14
1.5.1 Refugee	15
1.5.2 Trauma and Loss	15
1.5.3 Xenophobia	16
1.5.4 Social Adjustment For Refugee Learners	17
1.5.5 Gestalt Guidelines	17
1.6 CONCLUSION	18
 CHAPTER 2: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS	
2.1 INTRODUCTION	19
2.2 IDENTIFYING AND ANALYSING CONCERNS OF THE POPULATION	20
2.3 IDENTIFICATION OF CONCERNS OF THE POPULATION UNDER MAIN THEMES AND SUB-THEMES	20
2.3.1 Main Theme 1: Stress and Coping for Refugee Learners	21
2.3.1.1 <i>Trauma</i>	22

2.3.1.2 <i>Xenophobia</i>	26
2.3.1.3 <i>Lack of Support</i>	29
2.3.2 Main Theme 2: Second Language Concerns	32
2.3.2.1 <i>Interpersonal Communication</i>	32
2.3.2.2 <i>Academic Competence</i>	34
2.3.3 Main Theme 3: Socio-Cultural Factors	36
2.3.3.1 <i>Cultural Diversity</i>	36
2.4 CONCLUSION	39
 CHAPTER 3: INFLUENCES IMPACTING ON THE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF REFUGEE LEARNERS WITHIN THE SOUTH-AFRICAN SCHOOL SYSTEM	
3.1 INTRODUCTION	40
3.2 SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEE LEARNERS	40
3.2.1 An Ecological Approach	41
3.2.2 The Process of Adaptation	44
3.2.2.1 <i>Pre-Migration Influences</i>	44
3.2.2.2 <i>Trans-Migration Influences</i>	50
3.2.2.3 <i>Post-Migration Influences</i>	51
3.3 RESILIENCE	57
3.4 THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE LEARNERS INTO SOUTH- AFRICAN SCHOOLS	59
3.4.1 Multicultural Education	60

3.5 CONCLUSION	62
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CHAPTER 4: GESTALT PRINCIPLES TO ENHANCE THE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF REFUGEE LEARNERS

4.1 INTRODUCTION	63
4.2 THE DEFINITION OF GESTALT	63
4.3 THE GESTALT PHILOSOPHY	64
4.4 GESTALT PRINCIPLES	65
4.4.1 Awareness	65
4.4.2 Contact and Contact Boundary Disturbances	66
4.4.3 Dialogue	69
4.4.4 Boundaries	70
4.4.5 Unfinished Business	71
4.4.6 Organismic Self-Regulation/Homeostasis	72
4.4.7 Responsibility	73
4.4.8 Sense of Self	75
4.4.9 Children's Processes	76
4.5 CONCLUSION	78

CHAPTER 5: FUNCTIONAL ELEMENTS OF EXISTING SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES

5.1 INTRODUCTION	79
5.2 RECEPTION AND ORIENTATION GUIDELINES	79

5.3 A THREEFOLD MODEL OF CULTURAL/ACADEMIC/ PSYCHOLOGICAL (CAP) INTERVENTIONS	81
5.3.1 Differentiation Between Empowerment and Power	82
5.4 RESILIENCE EDUCATION: THE PORT MODEL	83
5.4.1 The Elements of the PORT Model	85
5.4.1.1 <i>Participation</i>	85
5.4.1.2 <i>Observation (Note Taking)</i>	85
5.4.1.3 <i>Reflection (Note Making)</i>	85
5.4.1.4 <i>Transformation</i>	86
5.5 A MODEL FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND ADJUSTMENT (THE OTHER THREE R'S MODEL)	86
5.5.1 Reasoning	87
5.5.2 Resilience	87
5.5.3 Responsibility	88
5.6 GOOD PRACTICE STRATEGIES FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS	88
5.6.1 Inclusive Classrooms	88
5.6.2 Pull-Out ESL Classes	89
5.6.3 Peer Tutoring	90
5.7 CONCLUSION	90
 CHAPTER 6: DESIGN AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT	
6.1 INTRODUCTION	91

6.2 DESIGNING AN OBSERVATIONAL SYSTEM	91
6.2.1 Observation Sheet No. 1: Background Information of Refugee Learners	91
6.2.2 Observation Sheet No. 2: Teacher-Parent Partnerships	93
6.2.3 Observation Sheet No. 3: Second Language Proficiency of Refugee Learners	94
6.2.4 Observation Sheet No. 4: The New School Environment	95
6.3 PROCEDURAL ELEMENTS OF THE INTERVENTION	97
6.4 GESTALT GUIDELINES TO ASSIST TEACHERS IN FACILITATING REFUGEE LEARNERS IN THEIR SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT TO A NEW SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT	98
6.4.1 Awareness	98
6.4.2 Contact	100
6.4.3 Dialogue	101
6.4.4 Boundaries	102
6.4.5 Organismic Self-Regulation/Homeostasis	103
6.4.6 Responsibility	103
6.4.7 Sense of Self	105
6.4.8 Children's Processes	106
6.5 CONCLUSION	107
 CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION	
7.1 INTRODUCTION	108
7.2 THE INTERVENTION RESEARCH PROCESS	108

7.2.1 Problem Analysis and Project Planning Phase	108
7.2.1.1 <i>Identifying and Involving Clients; Gaining Entry</i>	108
7.2.1.2 <i>Identifying Concerns and Analysing Identified Problems</i>	109
7.2.1.3 <i>Setting the Goal and Objectives</i>	109
7.2.2 Information Gathering and Synthesis Phase	110
7.2.2.1 <i>Using Existing Sources of Information</i>	110
7.2.2.2 <i>Studying Natural Examples</i>	110
7.2.2.3 <i>Identifying Functional Elements of Existing Models</i>	111
7.2.3 Design Phase	111
7.2.3.1 <i>Designing an Observational System</i>	111
7.2.3.2 <i>Specifying Procedural Elements of the Intervention</i>	112
7.2.4 Early Development and Pilot Testing Phase	112
7.2.4.1 <i>Developing a Preliminary or Prototype Intervention</i>	112
7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS STUDY	112
7.4 SHORTCOMINGS DURING THE RESEARCH	113
7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	114
7.6 CONCLUSION	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY	116

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory	43
Figure 3.2	Berry's Model of Acculturation	52
Figure 5.1	Resilience Education: An Ongoing Process	84

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Main Theme 1: Stress and Coping for Refugee Learners	21
Table 2.2	Main Theme 2: Second Language Concerns	32
Table 2.3	Main Theme 3: Socio-Cultural Factors	36
Table 3.1	Summary of Trauma Reactions by Age	46
Table 3.2	Losses Significant to Refugee Learners	47
Table 4.1	Prominent Characteristics of Children According to the DISC Analysis	78
Table 6.1	Observation Sheet No. 1: Background Information of Refugee Learners	93
Table 6.2	Observation Sheet No. 2: Teacher-Parent Partnerships	93
Table 6.3	Observation Sheet No. 3: Second Language Proficiency of Refugee Learners	94
Table 6.4	Observation Sheet No. 4: The New School Environment	95

APPENDIXES

A	Consent Form for Participants	127
B	Confidentiality Agreement for Participants	128
C	Semi-Structured Interview Schedule	129
D	Consent From the Department of Education	130

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CRMSA	Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South-Africa
ILO	International Labour Office
IOM	International Organisation for Migrants
LHR	Lawyers of Human Rights
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND PROJECT PLANNING

1.1 INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2006, Africa had hosted the second largest population of displaced people in the world (UNHCR, 2006:7). This population consists of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDP's) protected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), stateless persons, returned refugees, returned IDP's, and so-called others of concern. Children and adolescents represent the majority of displaced people in Africa. In South Africa and central Africa, these children comprise 54% of this population (UNHCR, 2006:10).

Since 1994, South Africa has become a prime destination for refugees and their families from across the African continent, fleeing their countries of origin for fear of their lives. South Africa was able to provide these people with safety and freedom, protecting them from violence and war. According to the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CRMSA), South Africa granted asylum (i.e. refugee status) to approximately 30 200 people between 2000 and 2006 (CRMSA, 2007:6).

With the escalating number of refugees in South Africa, refugee learners are becoming an increasing, yet special group in schools, where they are required to adapt to a new and foreign country, language and culture (Ahearn & Athey in Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen & Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:7). Anderson *et al.* (2004:9) also highlight the fact that one of the major challenges that refugee learners face is to adapt to a new school. Post-migration variables determine the success or failure of the refugee learner's adjustment. These variables have a vast impact on the learner's ability to learn and develop within school, and include the following:

- The learner's family's level of adjustment to a new country and circumstances.
- The degree of trauma that the learner experienced, and unresolved emotional issues.
- The extent to which specific social factors have stayed intact (family, extended family, friends and neighbours).

- Support services available in South Africa - as the host country - and the degree to which these are coordinated to support learners and families.
- The characteristics of schools and teachers – It is important to remember that it is not only the refugee learner that needs to adapt to the school, but also the school, teachers and peers that need to adapt to the learner.
- Developmental issues concerned with developmental tasks that the learner faces, such as the development of independence and establishing peer relationships.
- Factors such as xenophobia and discrimination from South African citizens.

(Anderson *et al.*, 2004:10).

Teachers play an immense role in any child's life, acting as protecting buffers and role models. It is thus important for these teachers to be equipped with the necessary skills when working with traumatised refugees. The purpose of this study is to ultimately provide South African teachers with the necessary guidelines for facilitating refugee learners in their path of socialisation and adjustment to a new school environment.

1.2 MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

According to Yontef and Jacobs (in Blom, 2006:17), Gestalt therapy is "... a radical ecological theory that maintains there is no meaningful way to consider any living organism apart from interactions with its environment". The researcher thus decided on using the principles of the Gestalt approach to establish guidelines for teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a foreign school environment, because there is a marked resemblance between the Gestalt theory and social adaptation. One of these resemblances can be seen in the Gestalt's field theory (cf. Schoeman, 2006:51). An individual's field is where he lives and what he is part of. It thus refers to the total environment in which the individual functions, including the individual and all significant people (Corey, 1990). According to the Gestalt theory, the way in which an individual makes contact with his environment has a special organisation and structure (Latner, 1992:1). The Gestalt theory describes in detail how individuals structure their experiences of their environment. This is called organismic self-regulation (Blom, 2006:26). The process of self-regulation is a way in which persons fulfil their needs. These needs are fulfilled both within the individual and from the environment. Clarkson (1999:7) states that the 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 emphasizes that

clients take control of their own lives and emotions and be able to live life to the full (Clarkson, 1999:27).

The researcher, together with social workers from the Lawyers of Human Rights (LHR), developed an educational board game for refugee and South African learners. The goal of the board game is to create support for refugee learners by educating both refugees and South Africans about the process of becoming a refugee, other African countries, South Africa and factors such as xenophobia. The game is played by 10 learners at a time, 5 refugees and 5 South Africans. The learners play the game in groups of two, a refugee and a South African. Each team should then answer question from a series of cards, which involves:

- Cards about refugees, becoming a refugee, different African countries, discrimination and xenophobia. For example, “Tell the group what you think a refugee is”. “Tell the group about your country”. “Tell the group what you think xenophobia is”.
- Cards about South Africa, being South African, living in South Africa, etc. For example, “What do you like about staying in South Africa?” “What do you think a rainbow nation is?” “How many official languages does South Africa have?”
- Fun cards with certain tasks that the teammates must do together. For example, “Stand on your right leg and touch your team mate’s nose with your left hand”. “What is your favourite song, and sing it to the group”. “Tell your teammate what you like about him/her”.

Whilst developing the board game and having learners play the game, the researcher found that refugee learners do not receive the necessary support from either teachers or peers. South African learners and teachers are not educated enough about refugees and the process of becoming a refugee, and because of this teachers do not have the skills to facilitate these learners in their social adjustment. The board game is designed to encourage discussion about topics such as refugees, discrimination, xenophobia, and support. From these discussions it was evident for the researcher that refugee learners have a great need for their teachers to assist them in coping with factors such as xenophobia, and helping them adjust to their new school environment.

From the above, it is evident that research with regard to guidelines for the facilitation of refugee learners and their social adjustment into their new school environment will greatly benefit teachers in their work with these learners.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When guidelines are being developed in research, intervention research would normally be conducted. Intervention research, according to De Vos (2005:394), is a study being carried out with the function of “conceiving, creating and testing” new ideas of improving quality of life. Schilling (in De Vos, 2005:394) sees intervention research as “... an action undertaken by a social worker or other helping agent, usually in concert with a client or other affected party, to enhance or maintain the functioning and well-being of an individual, family, group, community or population”.

Rothman and Thomas (1994:3) distinguish between three types of intervention research:

- Intervention knowledge development (KD) – Extending the knowledge of human behaviour concerning human service intervention.
- Intervention knowledge utilization (KU) – Linking the findings of KD to practical application.
- Intervention design and development (D&D) – Developing new and original interventions.

The goals of professional research can either be applied or basic. The goal of basic research is to refine theory by means of empirical observations (Fouche & De Vos, 2005:105). Applied research refers to scientifically solving problems and making recommendations to a specific group of people in a particular situation (Babbie & Mouton, 2004:28). In this research project, applied research was used, as this study sought to create specific guidelines to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge when assisting the refugee learner in his social adjustment to a new school environment.

For this purpose, the design and development model (D&D) was used. De Vos (2005:394-395) stipulates six phases of the design and development model:

- I. Problem analysis and project planning
- II. Information gathering and synthesis
- III. Design
- IV. Early development and pilot testing
- V. Evaluation and advanced development
- VI. Dissemination

Each of the above-mentioned phases includes various steps. As this study is a dissertation of limited scope, the design and development model was concluded up until the first step of phase four. This involves developing a prototype or preliminary intervention.

1.4 WORK PROCEDURE

The first phase of the design and development model is problem analysis and project planning.

1.4.1 Problem Analysis and Project Planning

During this phase, it is important to determine the problem for the research study. In De Vos (2005:395), Hastings identifies the difference between a social problem and a personal problem. According to Hastings (in De Vos, 2005:395), a social problem has harmful and undesirable effects on a large number of people, and has been identified by a specific group. This differs from a personal problem. Hastings (in De Vos, 2005:395) uses the following example to distinguish between a social problem and a personal problem – “If you have a toothache that is your personal problem. If millions are demanding a national programme of dental insurance, there is a social problem” (Hastings in De Vos, 2005:395). For the purpose of this study the social problem identified was the need for guidelines, in this case Gestalt guidelines, to assist teachers working with refugee learners in helping these learners adapt to the social changes that they experience.

During the course of this study the researcher was working at two primary schools in the inner city of Tshwane, where each school consisted of +/- 100 refugee learners. The researcher worked together with a multi-disciplinary team, consisting of play therapists, social workers, a psychologist and, very importantly, the teachers. The purpose of the multi-disciplinary team was to determine what each refugee learner’s strengths and needs are, and how to maximize these strengths and address the identified needs.

Whilst working so closely with teachers, the researcher found that one of the biggest challenges that teachers face is helping refugee learners settle into a foreign school and socialising with new peers. According to the teachers, refugee learners face multiple challenges every day. As a result of these challenges, it takes a great effort for refugee learners to socialise within their school environment. One of the main concerns of Shabalala (2008) and Malan (2008) is the fact that refugee learners come from different cultures and therefore possess different values than South African citizens. Due to the different cultures,

teachers experience an uncertainty in assisting refugee learners in their social interactions with their South African peers. Another concern according to Rikothso (2008) is the fact that these learners do not speak any of South Africa's eleven official languages - communication is thus a struggle. Together with the language barrier, refugee learners have to cope with the phenomenon of xenophobia. The concern of xenophobia results in refugee learners being discriminated against by their South African peers, making it difficult for them to adjust to their new school environment. Xenophobia refers to the fear of foreigners, or racial intolerance, and manifests in discrimination (LHR, 2003:10). In this regard, Samson (2008) mentioned that the discrimination that refugee learners have to endure from South African citizens is alarming. This is clear in research done by the South African Migration project (in Crush, 2001:2), where it was established that South Africans as a whole are not tolerant towards non-citizens living in South Africa.

Fawcett, Suarez-Balcazar, Balcazar, White, Paine, Blanchard and Embree (in Rothman & Thomas, 1994:27-28) categorise specific steps necessary for problem analysis and project planning. The first step is to identify and involve clients.

1.4.1.1 Identifying and Involving Clients

De Vos (2005:396) states that intervention researchers choose a population with whom to collaborate. According to Thomas and Rothman (1994:27) the researcher chooses a population and target sample whose problems are of immediate interest to clients themselves, the researcher, as well as the public. De Vos (2005:396) further states that in research there is always the simultaneous existence of population and universe.

Universe refers to all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested (Arkava & Lane in Strydom, 2005:193). In this research study, the universe was all teachers from the south of Tshwane. Arkava and Lane (in Strydom 2005:193) explain that the term population refers to individuals who possess specific characteristics. For the purpose of this study, the target population included teachers in the South of Tshwane, working with refugee learners.

A sample is a subdivision of the individuals drawn from the population (Strydom, 2005:193). Trochim (2001:50-55) explains that there are two types of sampling – probability sampling and non-probability sampling. For the purpose of this study non-probability purposive sampling was conducted. A purposive sample consists of elements that surround the most

characteristic and typical attributes of the population. The sample is thus based entirely on the judgment of the researcher (Strydom, 2005:202). During this study, the researcher selected eight teachers respectively from two primary schools in the south of Tshwane. The sample consisted of both Afrikaans and English speaking male and female teachers. These teachers had daily contact with refugee learners, and had sought advice from the researcher regarding the social adjustment of refugee learners.

1.4.1.2 Gaining Entry and Cooperation from Settings

According to De Vos (2005:396), in intervention research the researcher forms a mutual relationship with the representatives from the setting. These representatives help the researcher by identifying specific problems and implementing interventions. By working closely with the representatives of the setting, the researcher will achieve alliance and support in order to conduct intervention research. For the purpose of this study, the researcher gained written consent from the South African Department of Education (see Appendix D) to conduct research regarding the development of guidelines for teachers in facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. The researcher furthermore gained verbal consent from the principals of the two schools where the research was conducted. The principals then informed the teachers about the research project, where after the teachers were able to take part in the study out of free will.

Seeing that people were the object of the study, specific ethical aspects were considered whilst the research was being conducted. Zaiman (2003:67) explains that social research intrudes upon the private lives of people, taking up time and personal information. Strydom (2005:58) states that ethical guidelines should become part of the researcher's life, and that the researcher should internalize these guidelines. The following ethical aspects were kept in mind for the purpose of this study.

- *Avoidance of Harm*

Trochim (2001:24) explains that the researcher should not put participants in situations where they might be at risk of physical or emotional harm. It is the researcher's responsibility to protect participants from any physical discomfort that may emerge from the research project (Dane in Strydom, 2005:58). Emotional harm is more difficult to predict, but often holds much broader consequences. For this reason, the researcher has informed the participants of the positive and the negative aspects of the research. The participants have thus been

informed of possible negative aspects, such as emotional discomfort or stress to the participants. The positive aspects, however, included reassurance for teachers on how to assist and facilitate refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment.

- *Informed Consent*

All the participants received a clear explanation about the research project. Information such as possible advantages and disadvantages, the credibility of the researcher, and the goals of the project, were explained to the participants (Williams *et al.*, in Strydom, 2005:59). Participants were able to make an informed decision on whether they wanted to take part in the study or not. Written consent (see Appendix A) was obtained from all participants and was kept confidential.

- *Violation of Privacy/Anonymity/Confidentiality*

Participants were informed that information surrounding the project will exclusively be used for the purpose of the project (Trochim, 2001:24). Participants remained anonymous throughout the study to avoid any bias on the part of the researcher. Each participant used a number, which the researcher used to identify participants. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of refugee learners, the participants were asked to sign a form of confidentiality (See Appendix B).

- *Competence of Researchers*

Researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure the participants that they are competent to carry out their study (Strydom, 2005:63). Sieber (in Strydom, 2005:63) states that it is important that the researcher is adequately qualified and equipped to carry out a research study. With experience of conducting research whilst completing her Honours degree in psychology, the researcher is competent in conducting this research study. Sieber (in Strydom, 2005:63) also states that there is a possibility for the study to “fail or produce invalid results” if the project is not sufficiently supervised. The participants were informed that the study was undertaken under the supervision of a qualified supervisor.

1.4.1.3 Identifying Concerns of the Population

During this phase, the researcher attempted to understand the issues of significance to the population, using informal personal contact methods (Fawcett *et al.*, in De Vos, 2005:397).

There are two recognized approaches to research – the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. In quantitative research, the researcher's aim is to objectively measure the social world by testing hypotheses and predicting and controlling human behaviour (Fouche & Delpont, 2005:74). The quantitative researcher uses statistical procedures to determine whether his predictions are true. According to McRoy (in Fouche & Delpont, 2005:74), qualitative research takes on a holistic and interpretative approach. Trochim (2001:152) further points out that, when conducting qualitative research, the data is not recorded in numerical form, but involves interviews, field research, and video- and audio data recordings. The qualitative researcher's aim is to "... understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life" (Fouche & Delpont, 2005:74). For the purpose of this study, the researcher wanted to gain an understanding of the challenges that teachers face when assisting refugee learners to adapt to their new school environment. Therefore, the researcher made use of the qualitative approach.

In order to determine the concerns of the participants (the teachers), and to collect data, the researcher made use of focus groups. By using focus groups, the researcher was able to gain knowledge and understanding of how teachers think and feel about their own abilities to help refugee learners adapt to their new social environment (cf. Greeff, 2005:299). The researcher made use of a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix C) whilst conducting the focus groups, and facilitated a process whereby the participants discussed issues about the topic of refugee learners adapting to social changes and difficulties (cf. Casey, Krueger & Morgan in Greeff, 2005:300). Field notes, as proposed by Strydom (2005:281), were written down by the researcher whilst conducting focus groups. The researcher made use of observation during the focus groups in order to determine any non-verbal aspects from participants. Together with this a dictaphone was used to record information that was discussed during the focus groups.

1.4.1.4 Analysing Concerns or Problems Identified

In order to bring order, structure and meaning to the mass of data collected, the researcher used questions suggested by Fawcett *et al.* (in De Vos, 2005:397) when analyzing the collected data. These questions included:

- For whom is the situation a problem?
- What are the negative consequences of the problem for affected individuals?

- How would affected individuals want things to be different?
- What aspects have the participants highlighted as necessary for the development of guidelines?

(cf. Rothman & Thomas, 1994:33)

These questions helped to clarify the concerns of the participants, as well as aspects that needed to change in order for teachers to assist refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. During qualitative research, data gathering and data analysis takes place at the research site, although data analysis only takes place after data gathering (Strydom, 2005:281). The researcher also made use of Creswell's spiral of data analysis. The spiral of data analysis refers a method of analyzing data where the researcher "... engages in a process of moving in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. One enters [this spiral] with the data of text or images...and exists with an account or a narrative" (Creswell, 1998:142). Through the spiral of data analysis the researcher was able to get a sense of the information as a whole. The researcher then took the information apart by dividing it into different themes.

1.4.1.5 Setting the Goal and Objectives

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005:104), the goal of the research project is the broader and more theoretical idea of the end result. This corresponds with Zaaiman's definition of the goal of the research project. Zaaiman (2003:17) proposes that a goal is a general statement regarding the direction or purpose of the research. The objective of the research project is defined as the path the researcher will follow in order to achieve the goal of the project. De Vos *et al.* (2005:104) explained the difference between the goal and the objectives as follows: "The one (goal, purpose or aim) is the 'dream'; the other (objective) is the steps one has to take, one by one ... in order to attain the dream".

The goal of this study was to develop guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners, helping these children adapt and cope within their new school environment.

The following objectives were identified in order to achieve the above-mentioned goal:

- Information gathering and synthesis through existing sources of information (see 1.4.2.1), studying natural examples (see 1.4.2.2) and identifying functional elements of successful models (See 1.4.2.3).

- Design. This included designing an observational system (see 1.4.3.1) and specifying procedural elements of the intervention (See 1.4.3.2).
- Early development and pilot testing by developing a prototype or preliminary intervention (See 1.4.4.1).
- Drawing up conclusions and making recommendations to teachers as discussed in chapter seven under 7.3.

1.4.2 Information Gathering and Synthesis

Fawcett *et al.* (in De Vos, 2005:398) explains that, when doing intervention research, it is essential to recognize what others have done to solve the problem, in order not to “... reinvent the wheel”. The researcher thus made use of various sources of information whilst conducting the study on teachers working with refugee learners. These sources were found in existing literature and previous research specifically focused on this field. This included using existing sources of information, studying natural examples, and identifying functional elements of successful models.

1.4.2.1 Using Existing Sources of Information

It is important, when undertaking a research study, that the researcher makes use of existing information such as literature relevant to the particular problem (De Vos, 2005:399). For the purpose of this study, a literature review was conducted regarding influences impacting on the refugee learner’s social adjustment within the South African school system (see chapter 3), and the Gestalt approach (See chapter 4). De Vos (2005:399) is of opinion that intervention researchers must not only focus on literature within their specific fields, as societal problems do not confine themselves only to specific disciplines. The researcher thus also studied literature and societal questions from various social disciplines, such as sociology, education, psychology and social work.

The researcher aimed to develop guidelines for teachers facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment, using existing literature from the Gestalt approach, together with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory (See 3.2.1).

1.4.2.2 Studying Natural Examples

De Vos (2005:399) states that it can be useful to gather information of how community members facing the particular problem, have attempted to address it. For this reason, the

researcher conducted interviews with experts on the fields of developmental theories, the Gestalt approach, and the psychological well-being of refugee learners. Through these interviews, the researcher gained insight into which interventions might or might not be successful, and the aspects that may affect success (cf. De Vos, 2005:399). The following experts were consulted:

Ms. C. Freysen, play therapist at METT (Midcity Trauma & Therapy) Centre, Pretoria

Freysen specializes in Gestalt play therapy, has a great knowledge in child development, and also works with refugee children every day.

Mrs. R. Badenhorst, social worker at METT (Midcity Trauma & Therapy) Centre, Pretoria

Badenhorst is the founder of the METT Centre, has 15 years' experience in assessing children with various emotional problems, and also works with refugee children daily.

Dr. H. Schoeman, Gestalt expert, South Africa

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

1.4.2.3 Identifying Functional Elements of Successful Models

De Vos (2005:400) suggests studying critical features of previous programmes and interventions that addressed the problem in question. Whilst doing this, the researcher asked various questions regarding these programmes or interventions. These questions include:

- Is there a model programme, policy or practice that has been successful in changing targeted behaviours and outcomes?
- What made a particular programme, policy or practice effective?
- Is there a model, programme, policy or practice that was unsuccessful?
- What caused it to fail?

- What conditions (e.g. client characteristics, broader environmental factors) may have been critical to success or failure?

Whilst studying previous (successful and unsuccessful) programmes and interventions, the researcher was able to identify potentially useful elements, which in turn helped to guide the design (cf. De Vos, 2005:400). The identified models and programmes are discussed in chapter five.

1.4.3 Design

During this phase, issues such as designing an observational system and specifying procedural elements of the intervention should be considered (De Vos, 2005:400).

1.4.3.1 Designing an Observational System

De Vos (2005:400) states that the intervention researcher should design a method system for detecting effects following the intervention. With this system, the researcher will be able to measure the outcomes of the intervention. The observational system is closely associated with the process of developing the intervention, and provides a feedback system for refining early prototypes (De Vos, 2005:400). According to De Vos (2005:400), the following make part of the observational system:

- Definitions of the behaviours or products associated with the problem are defined in operational terms.
- Examples and non-examples of the behaviours or products are provided to help discern occurrences of the behaviours or products.
- Scoring instructions are prepared to guide the recording of desired behaviours or products.

The researcher developed observational sheets (see 6.2.1 – 6.2.4) that can be used, by the teachers, in combination with the established guidelines in facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment (See 6.4). By using the observational sheets, teachers will be able to self-monitor, self-record and directly observe elements of the social adjustment of refugee learners. The use of these observational sheets is discussed in chapter six under 6.2.

1.4.3.2 Specifying Procedural Elements of the Intervention

The researcher has set about procedural/practical elements for use in intervention (De Vos, 2005:401). These elements were specified in adequate detail in order for it to be simulated by other trained professionals. The procedural elements for using the guidelines for teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment are discussed in chapters six under 6.3.

1.4.4 Early Development and Pilot Testing

Thomas (in De Vos, 2005:401) defines development as the process whereby an intervention is implemented on a trial basis. Through this, the adequacy of the intervention is tested, and the researcher has the opportunity to refine and redesign the intervention. During the early development and pilot testing phase, according to Fawcett *et al.* (in De Vos, 2005:402), a “primitive design” is developed to a form that can be assessed under field conditions. This includes the development of a prototype intervention, conducting a pilot test, and applying design criteria to the prototype intervention concept. As this is a dissertation of limited scope, the researcher only conducted the first step of the early development and pilot testing phase, namely developing a prototype or preliminary intervention.

1.4.4.1 Developing a Prototype or Preliminary Intervention

During this step, a draft of the prototype or preliminary intervention was drawn up (cf. De Vos, 2005:402). This included, for instance, a detailed description of the intervention tasks, underlying principles of the protocol, as well as the roles and responsibilities of role players. The prototype or preliminary Gestalt guidelines in facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment, is discussed in chapter six under 6.4.

1.5 DEFINITION OF MAIN CONCEPTS

According to Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:29), it is necessary to define the main concepts involved in the study in order to determine the relationship between the different concepts. The main concepts of this study include refugee, trauma and loss, xenophobia, social adjustment and Gestalt guidelines, and will subsequently be discussed.

1.5.1 Refugee

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2005:1), a refugee:

- a) Is a person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of his country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear is unwilling, to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or unwilling, to return to it.
- b) Is a person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality.

For the purpose of this study, the term *refugee* refers to someone who is granted special protection to live in South Africa, because he faces persecution or other severe conditions in his country of origin.

In South Africa, a person only becomes recognized as a refugee after their status has been confirmed, until then they are known as asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2005:2).

Refugee children in South Africa are either unaccompanied/separated or accompanied. Unaccompanied/separated refugee children are children that enter South Africa alone and without a guardian. Accompanied refugee children enter South Africa with a parent or guardian (Timngum, 2001:5).

1.5.2 Trauma and Loss

The term *trauma* has been used and applied in many different contexts, resulting in a difficulty to understand its original meaning. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatry Association, 2000:463) defines trauma as:

... direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that

involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate (Criterion A1). The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror (or in children, the response must involve disorganised or agitated behaviour) (Criterion A2).

The DSM-IV-TR also provides a list of traumatic events, including sexual and physical assault, being kidnapped, being taken hostage, robbery, torture, disasters, witnessing death or serious injury by violent assaults, war or combat.

Rando (in Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:13) is of opinion that trauma can have significant influences on the refugee learner's ability to socially adapt to a new school environment. The author states that trauma can have various implications for social adjustment, such as post-traumatic stress reactions, depression, aggression and withdrawal.

An important factor accompanying the trauma that refugee learners experience is loss (Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:14). These losses include the loss of country and culture, the loss of familiarity and the loss of loved ones. These losses result in feelings such as helplessness, anxiousness and loneliness, acting as a barrier for social adjustment.

1.5.3 Xenophobia

Xenophobia is widely defined as the fear or hatred of foreigners by nationals against non-nationals. Xenophobia is largely based on myths and stereotypes, with foreigners often being scapegoats for domestic, social and economic problems. In South Africa, foreigners are often blamed for problems like unemployment, crime and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (LHR, 2003:10). The International Labour Office (ILO), International Organisation for Migrants (IOM) and the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2008:1) describe xenophobia as follows: "... attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity". Xenophobia manifests itself in numerous ways, ranging from violence and insulting terms to negative attitudes. Insulting terms commonly used in South Africa for foreigners are *amakwerekwere*, *amagringamba*, and *aliens*. Refugee learners also experience these negative attitudes, particularly in the school environment.

1.5.4 Social Adjustment for Refugee Learners

The purpose of this study was to develop guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners, helping these learners adapt to their new school environment. In order to develop these guidelines, the researcher had to gain a thorough understanding of the social adjustment of refugee learners.

One of the biggest tasks a refugee learner faces when arriving in a foreign country is adapting to a new school environment (Anderson *et al.*, 2004:9). The refugee learner's past and present experiences have a significant impact on the process of adjusting to a new school environment. Anderson *et al.* (2004:10) distinguishes between three phases that influence the refugee learner's social adjustment. These phases include:

- The pre-migration phase: This includes the experiences and circumstances of the refugee learner prior to leaving the country of origin.
- The trans-migration phase: This includes the experiences of the refugee learner in the transition from the country of origin to the host country.
- The post-migration phase: This includes the experiences of the refugee learner on arrival and living in the host country.

The social adjustment process and migration phases of refugee learners are discussed in chapter three.

1.5.5 Gestalt Guidelines

The researcher will firstly define the term *Gestalt*, followed by the term *guidelines*.

The term *Gestalt* refers to “.... the shape, the pattern, the whole form, the configuration. It connotes the structural entity which are both different from and much more than the sum of its parts” (Clarkson, Yontef & Jacobs in Blom, 2006:18).

According to English and English (in Schoeman, 2006:51), *Gestalt* is “... a form, a configuration or a totality that has, as a unified whole, properties which cannot be derived by summation from the parts and their relationships. It may refer to physical structures, to physiological and psychological functions, or to symbolic units”. Something can thus only have its characteristics as a whole, and if one takes it apart one cannot say that it still has the

same characteristics. The aim of the Gestalt approach is for a person to discover, explore and experience his own shape and wholeness.

Guidelines are defined as "...a set of principles for doing something" (Collins reference English dictionary, 1993, s.v. "guidelines").

Geddes and Grossit define *guidelines* as "Directions that point the way forward, lead or direct others" (1999: English dictionary, s.v. "guidelines").

For the purpose of this study *gestalt guidelines* will be defined as *directions* given from the perspective that every person is a whole with the ability to explore and discover his own shape.

1.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the project planning and problem analysis of this research study were discussed. The research methodology, ethical aspects and the definitions of the main themes formed part of this chapter. In the next chapter the empirical findings of the research study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research study was to develop Gestalt guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners. The aim of these guidelines is for teachers to facilitate refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. The Design and Development model was used as part of intervention research. The first phase of the Design and Development model, problem analysis and project planning was discussed in the first chapter. This included identifying and involving clients (see 1.4.1.1), gaining entry and cooperation from settings (see 1.4.1.2) and a discussion on how the researcher went about to identify and analyse the concerns of the population (See 1.4.1.3 – 1.4.1.4). Identifying and analysing the concerns of the population formed part of the empirical findings, which are discussed in this chapter. This was instrumental in the research process, and uncovered specific problems and challenges that teachers experience in their work with refugee learners. After the concerns of the population were analysed, the researcher was able to confirm the goal for the research study.

Focus groups were conducted to gain empirical data from two sample groups of teachers working with refugee learners. These sample groups were selected by means of purposive sampling (See 1.4.1.1).

Focus groups were aimed at identifying specific aspects influencing the refugee learner's ability to socially adjust to a new school environment. These aspects included:

- Xenophobia and/or discrimination;
- Language;
- Culture and values;
- Trauma; and
- Behavioural and emotional difficulties.

2.2 IDENTIFYING AND ANALYSING CONCERNS OF THE POPULATION

In order to identify the concerns of the population, a qualitative approach was used. By using the qualitative approach, it was possible to gain a thorough understanding of the challenges that teachers face when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment (See 1.4.1.3). The sample for this research project comprised of teachers from two schools in the inner city of Tshwane. Two focus groups were conducted, one at each school. Focus groups consisted of eight participants respectively (See 1.4.1.1).

After gaining a holistic and thorough understanding of the concerns of participants, the next step was to analyse the concerns of the population. Information gathered from the focus groups were analysed according to Creswell's spiral of data analysis (See 1.4.4.1). By using this method, the researcher was able to gain a sense of the information as a whole.

2.3 IDENTIFICATION OF CONCERNS OF THE POPULATION UNDER MAIN AND SUB-THEMES

The following main themes were identified from the collected data:

- Stress and coping for refugee learners;
- Second language concerns; and
- Socio-cultural factors

The main-themes, sub-themes and different categories will be discussed under the following headings.

2.3.1 Main Theme 1: Stress and Coping for Refugee Learners

MAIN THEME	SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES
Stress and coping for refugee learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss, deprivation and the experience of displacement • Resilience
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xenophobia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotyping, prejudice, social discrimination • Culture of violence
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attachment with parents and parent involvement • Lack of information available to teachers regarding refugees, the process of becoming a refugee

Table 2.1 Main Theme 1: Stress and Coping for Refugee Learners

The first main theme identified from the empirical data was the stress that refugee learners experience in their journey to South Africa, as well as life in South Africa. This also included the ways in which these learners cope with stresses, and how this influences their social adjustment to their new school environment. The researcher is of the opinion that the stresses that refugee learners experience are of great influence on their social adjustment to a foreign school environment. In this regard, Frater-Mathieson (2004:12) states that traumatic events and traumatic loss are difficult for any human being to overcome and adapt to. The author further argues that refugee learners are lacking in the necessary foundation of safety and security to achieve emotional, cognitive and behavioural competence.

Sub-themes identified from this main theme, and which will subsequently be discussed, included trauma, xenophobia and lack of support.

2.3.1.1 Trauma

Levine and Kline (2006:55) describe various symptoms of trauma presenting in school-aged children. These symptoms include: hyper arousal, dissociation, constriction and shutdown (or freeze) accompanied by feelings of helplessness. Briere and Scott (2006:13) also add depression and anxiety to the symptoms of trauma. These authors are also of the opinion that children are prone to reliving the traumatic event, having sleep disturbances, suffering from somatic complaints, and showing signs of unpredictable behaviour punctuated with fears and aggression.

Levine and Kline (2006:56) stress the importance of the developmental stage in which children find themselves when exposed to severe trauma. These authors state that children of school going age experience specific demands and responsibilities to concentrate and learn. When a child is thus exposed to trauma, the symptoms of the trauma will be more prominent whilst the child is at school due the additional pressures of academic accomplishment and socialisation.

Whilst conducting focus groups for this study, the phenomenon of the trauma that refugee learners are exposed to before migrating to South Africa, their journey to South Africa and their lives in South Africa, were great concerns for the participants. One participant commented that in his opinion "... any traumatic event is difficult for most children to understand". This comment resulted in a discussion on the trauma that specifically refugee learners experience. Another participant commented: "Although I know that refugee learners are exposed to trauma in many ways, I still do not understand exactly what they are going through and how to help them". On this note, another participant stated that she has "... read about displacement and the effects it has on the refugee learner". Another participant reflected that: "... not only have these learners been displaced from their homes in their own countries, but now they experience displacement in South Africa as well with the recent xenophobic attacks". Discussion continued with participants commenting on the fact that "... these learners cannot come to school, which means that they are falling behind on their work in the classroom". Participants were of the opinion that not only will they have to accommodate the learners that are falling behind in the classroom, but they realise that they will have to find a way to support them with the trauma that they are experiencing.

The challenge of working with refugee learners experiencing loss and deprivation was also a concern for participants. One participant stated that although she has had learners in her classroom who have experienced loss in some way, she finds it difficult to “... assist refugee learners, who have also experienced loss, but in a different way”. This participant further commented that “... the loss and deprivation that refugee learners experience are related to war and disaster, this complicates things”. A great concern for the participants was that they do not feel capable in assisting refugee learners in coping with trauma and helping them adapt with classrooms with more than 40 learners. In this regard one participant made the following remark: “... as teachers, our main concern is to teach learners, and it is thus difficult to find the right ways in assisting learners on an emotional level”.

Another concern that was identified from the discussion on trauma was “resilience”. A number of participants felt that refugee learners are “... incredibly resilient to trauma”. One participant commented that “... most of these learners were too young when they came to South Africa, and can thus not remember much of these experiences”. Another participant agreed that refugee learners seem to be very resilient, but disagreed that they do not remember much of their traumatic experiences. This participant noted that “... this does not mean that we, as teachers, should not go out of our way to help them adapt, I just don’t know how”. Kaplan (in Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:13) agrees that children are resilient, but states that it is wrong to assume that children will recover from the effects of accumulative trauma without any assistance and support. In an article from the Red Cross Foundation, it was said that the way in which a parent or other adult react to a child following any trauma is very important, and can help children recover more quickly and more completely (the American National Red Cross, 2001:1).

From the empirical data, two categories of trauma were identified:

- The experience of displacement, loss and deprivation
- Resilience.

These two categories will be discussed as follows.

- The experience of displacement, loss and deprivation

Displacement, according to Anderson *et al.* (2004:6), is characterised in terms of the loss of attachment to a physical place, and stressors associated with increased demands that result

from having to adapt and orient oneself in an unknown place. According to an article by The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), many refugees plan to return to their countries of origin in the shortest possible time. This, however, is not true for most refugees, and this "temporarily" displacement may stretch well over a decade. The result of this is that most refugee learners spend most of their childhood in refugee camps and shelters (UNICEF, 2008:1).

Anderson (2004:6) further distinguishes between three phases that refugee learners undergo when fleeing their country in search for freedom. These phases include the pre-migration phase (before fleeing their country), the trans-migration phase (whilst fleeing their country), and the post-migration phase (life in the host country). The experience of displacement, according to Anderson (2004:6), begins during the pre-migration phase and continues through trans-migration into post-migration, and is related to numerous loss experiences. Bemak, Chung and Pederson (2003:31) elaborate on these losses, and emphasise the loss of family, community and social networks, as well as the role of the deprivation (lack of food and/or shelter) that refugee learners often come into contact with. Severe deprivation in the form of insufficient food or water, lack of medical care, and inadequate housing is unfortunately characteristic of most refugee learners in South Africa today. The physical implications of severe deprivation are often more obvious than the mental health effects (Garbarino & Kostelny in Rutter & Taylor, 2002:5). Where physical development is stunted, cognitive and emotional impairments are likely.

As mentioned earlier, participants felt that they do not know how to facilitate refugee learners who have experienced displacement, loss and deprivation. One participant said that "... it is almost impossible to imagine what it must be like for a child to be exposed to extreme violence, persecution and hunger". Other participants agreed and stated that "... most refugee learners we work with are living in shelters, and are either separated from their parents or have lost their parents due to war". One participant mentioned that "... even just moving house can be very traumatic for any child", and further commented that: "I cannot even imagine what it must be like to be forced out of your house, and even your country, how can I even try to understand and help these children adjust?" All participants agreed with this statement and argued that, as with trauma, they do not have sufficient knowledge about refugee learners and their experiences in order for them to facilitate social adaptation.

A great concern for participants was the fact that refugee children suffer from hunger, and do not have adequate clothing. One participant commented that:

I know I am not allowed to, and I know I have crossed a very important boundary, but I have bought a girl new shoes. Her feet had blisters all over and I know her mother cannot afford new shoes, because they live in a shelter.

“How can you teach a hungry child, or a child that is shivering of the cold, or a child that can only concentrate on her aching feet?” was the response of another participant. This was a general feeling of most of the participants. In this regard one participant commented: “We are not allowed to provide for their physical needs, which influences their educational needs, and we are not provided with information on how to look after their emotional needs”.

- Resilience

As mentioned earlier, some participants noted that refugee learners seem to be very resilient. According to Masten, Best and Garmezy (in Anderson, 2004:53), resilience refers “... to the process of, capacity for or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances”. Tolfree (in Hyder, 2004:96) points out that refugee learners’ reactions to traumatic events will vary according to a range of factors. This may include age and developmental stage, physical health, previous experience, personality characteristics, and gender. The author also stresses that the refugee learner’s immediate social context has an important bearing on how these learners will react to trauma. Here, family and community support, as well as the school and peer-group, are important factors that will determine the refugee learner’s reaction to, and ability to adjust to, stressful events. Anderson (2004:54) echoes the above, by noting that predictors of resilience are environmental. Anderson further points out that “... some tools can be taught, environmental scaffolds can be put into place, and resilient outcomes can be promoted”.

The overall opinion of the participants regarding the resilience of refugee learners was the fact that these learners seem to have the ability to recover quickly from setbacks. In this regard one participant noted that “... most of the refugee learners really work hard in class, even though they do sometimes have behavioural difficulties”. The same participant felt that “... it is as if they have been through so much hardship, that they know they have to work hard, they seem to be more mature than South African learners”.

Resilience is an important characteristic of most refugee learners, and therefore plays an important role in this study. Teachers, however, need to know how to use this as positive reinforcement and as a way to empower these learners.

2.3.1.2 Xenophobia

Xenophobia is defined as an intense fear or dislike of foreign people, their customs and culture (See 1.5.2). Thsitereke (in Harris, 2002:2) argues that xenophobia in South Africa is misleading and is not limited to just a fear or dislike of foreigners, but rather "... an intense tension and violence from South African citizens towards foreigners". Valji (2003:4) echoes this statement, by commenting that although xenophobic thoughts and feelings may be rising all around the world, nowhere else do the appearances of xenophobia show such high levels of violence as in South Africa.

Participants agreed that, since the xenophobic outbreaks in May and June 2008, xenophobic feelings amongst learners have worsened in the schools where this study was conducted. One participant stated that "... xenophobia is an issue for everybody, even those not directly involved". Participants experienced an atmosphere of distrust and cruelty from South African learners towards refugee learners, which in turn resulted in the fact that refugee learners withdrew even more than before. One participant told the group about a 9 year old boy who was attacked and had his nose broken. Other participants mentioned children witnessing violence such as fighting, burnt down houses and "... people shooting each other".

For participants, xenophobia is a result of the perceptions that South African learners acquire from their parents. Two participants were of the opinion that black South African children in general grow up in a culture of violence, and this "... influences them in their behaviour and the way in which they react towards refugee learners". This appeared to be a big problem and challenge for all participants. With regards to this, one participant in particular commented that: "I feel like I am torn in two. On the one hand I want to stand up for the refugee learners, but on the other hand I still have to try and not be biased".

Other problems participants experienced regarding xenophobia included stereotyping, prejudice and social discrimination, which involves the different names South African learners are calling refugee learners. Participants were also of the opinion that South African learners learn certain stereotypes from their parents, which then become prominent in their

behaviour towards refugee learners. This aspect also creates certain problems that the participants need to deal with in the school environment.

Categories identified from the sub-theme of xenophobia include a culture of violence and stereotyping, prejudice and social discrimination, which will subsequently be discussed.

- Culture of Violence

As mentioned earlier, participants are of the opinion that South African learners grow up in a culture of violence. Harris (2002:14) defines culture of violence as “... a situation in which social relations and interactions are governed through violent, rather than non-violent, means”. Violence is thus the preferred solution to problems, and is perceived as “normal and legitimate”. Some participants felt that the culture of violence derived from the Apartheid era. One participant noted that “... the approaches of exclusion that were created during Apartheid contributed to xenophobic attitudes and actions today”. Hamber (1999:1) remarked that the existing levels of violent crime have been manufactured on the legacy of the civil conflict of the past. Apartheid promoted an idea of White supremacy over Black inferiority (Valji, 2003:18). Light skin was associated with freedom and privileges, while darker skin was associated with unlawfulness and criminality.

In this regard, a participant specifically commented that: “... it seems to me that black South African learners are biased against refugee learners with darker skin than theirs”. Another participant reflected on this by sharing that he once asked a black South African boy what made him different from refugee learners, and the boy answered that refugee learners were “real blacks”. This way of thinking seems to have been assimilated by black South Africans in general, thus being a contribution to xenophobic violence against black foreigners. Foreigners in South Africa seem to be “too black”, and because of South Africa’s culture of violence, these negative feelings are being dealt with through a violent and harmful manner.

- Stereotyping, Prejudice and Social Discrimination

Stereotypes involve generalisations about the "typical" characteristics of members of groups (Ferguson, 2004). Kreidler (1997:265) agrees with this definition, by stating that stereotyping is a mental image of a group based on opinion without regard to individual differences. Prejudice, according to Kreidler (1997:265) is a pessimistic judgement or opinion formed about a group without knowledge and understanding of the facts, while

discrimination refers to treating people in a less favourable way because they are members of a particular group. Discrimination is thus prejudice in action.

Vrachnas, Boyd, Bagaric and Dimoupolis (2005:228) are of the view that refugees are “... often confused in the eyes of the community”. In relation to this statement, Lubbers (March, 2001) stated to the UN Commissioner that refugees are being confused by the public as possessing a criminal component. Bhavnani, Mirza and Meetoo (2005:219) are of opinion that refugees are seen as the “other” and easily become stereotyped because they are “marked”. Refugees are often seen as a social threat and a burden to public health, resulting in them becoming victims of public fears.

Stereotyping, prejudice and social discrimination is a great concern for the participants. Participants were of the opinion that especially black South African children grow up in a world where they have to accept certain things and situations as they are. These children are not allowed to argue with the perceptions of their parents, but are obliged to assimilate it, and make it their own. Due to the fact that they are too inexperienced in life to make up their own perceptions they take on their parents’ perceptions. This, according to a participant, results in the fact that “... children are soundboards for their parents”. One participant attributed to this statement by citing that stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination are like a triangle. This participant further stated that “Discrimination is the result of prejudice, while prejudice is a result of stereotyping”.

Another concern that participants had, was the fact that nobody at the school stood up and explained to the learners what the real facts regarding refugees were. One participant mentioned that this probably was: “... because nobody really has an idea about what these learners really go through and have faced in their lives”. Another participant reflected on this comment, and said that “Maybe, if someone ‘big’ or important at the school stood up and set the records straight, we wouldn’t have had so much trouble in our classrooms regarding the discrimination against refugee learners”. Another participant added: “... and maybe the refugee learners would have felt that the school is on their side and that we do not discriminate against them”. According to the participants, the stereotyping, prejudice and social discrimination that refugee learners come in contact with whilst interacting with South African learners involve comments such as: “You are coming here to take our jobs!”, “You are a real black!”, “Pack your bag and go back to where you come from!”, “Black dog!” and “*Amakwerekwere!*”

2.3.1.3 Lack of Support

Melzack (in Bower & Trowell, 1996:256) points out that most refugee learners have no adult caregivers, or have parents who are preoccupied and bothered by their own exposure to oppression and violence. Anderson (2004:61) further states that, most often, the parents of refugee learners are likely to suffer from Post-traumatic Stress, resulting in a lack of ability of these parents to help and support their children on emotional, as well as educational, level. The author adds that parental psychological problems generally are also linked to various disturbances in children, including adjustment difficulties and academic underachievement. The researcher is of opinion that these psychological problems that both refugee learners and their parents face will have a negative impact on the attachments that these parents and learners form with each other. According to Crisci, Kussin and Mayer (2008:1), attachment is the deep emotional bond formed between children and one or more adults, usually a parent or caregiver. The term “attachment” furthermore refers to the emotional relationship between adult and child that allows the child to feel safe and protected, and to know who to turn to in an upsetting situation (Robinson, 2007:19).

From the empirical data, it was clear that participants were concerned about the amount and level of support that refugee learners receive from their parents. One participant stated that “... it is as if the parents just don’t care about their children”. Another participant commented that “... it is almost impossible for me to get the parents to show up for appointments. I don’t know what it is, but they are really not bothered by their children’s educational needs”. Participants were concerned that the parents of refugee learners do not understand the South African school system. These parents are not aware of available support mechanisms, rights and entitlements, and teaching and learning methods. Participants believed that “... the reason for this problem is because of poor communication between schools and parents”. According to the participants, it seems that due to the fact that the parents of refugee learners do not understand English, they think that they are in trouble when the school makes appointments to see them.

An important concern identified from the empirical data regarding support for refugee learners, was the fact that participants feel that there are no adequate information available regarding the process of becoming a refugee in South Africa. In this regard one participant stated: “I think I would be better able to support refugee learners in their social adjustment if

I know and understand the procedures they have to go through when acquiring refugee status”.

The categories identified from the sub-theme of lack of support will be discussed under the following headings, and include: Attachment with parents and parent involvement; and lack of information available to teachers regarding the migration process when becoming a refugee in South Africa.

- Attachment with parents and parent involvement

Much research focuses on the parallel between parents’ unresolved traumatic experiences and attachments that are formed between parent and child (Lieberman 2004:338). Children’s ability to recover from the harmful impact of severe traumatic events is profoundly influenced by the child’s attachments and the parents’ ability to react in a caring and tender manner to the child’s response to the trauma. According to Lieberman (2004:338):

Traumatic events can derail a previously secure attachment by inducing in the parent emotionally alienating responses such as guilt, fear, anger, over protectiveness, and affective deregulation, and by damaging the child’s trust in the parent as a reliable protector.

Participants were of opinion that it seems as if most refugee learners do not receive adequate support from their parents regarding schoolwork and social adjustment. One participant noted: “Whenever I see refugee learners together with their parents, it seems to me that there is no bond between them”. Another participant added to this by stating that: “They do not look or talk to their children during appointments with me; it is as if they do not know their children”. “It sometimes seems to me like the parents are depressed or very anxious”, was the comment from another participant. This participant further stated that this probably could be because the parents are traumatised as well. Although participants have empathy with the parents, their concerns however are with the children, and one participant commented that: “It is so difficult to work with learners when the parents are uninvolved and seem to be emotionally absent”. Another concern that was mentioned by the participants is the fact that parents of refugee learners do not understand the educational system, and do not know how to access it. Participants are of the opinion that the school board has the responsibility to establish some guidelines for these parents, and that it should not be expected from the teachers.

- Lack of information available to teachers regarding the migration process when becoming a refugee in South Africa.

One of the biggest concerns of the participants was the fact that they do not have any knowledge regarding the process of becoming a refugee in South Africa. Participants were of the opinion that: "... we would be better able to support refugee learners should we understand what these learners are going through when arriving in South Africa". One participant noted: "I have heard that the process is supposed to take something like 180 days to get refugee status, but that it actually, in South Africa, takes years and years". This participant went on by saying that "... instead of finding a proper job, these parents are forced to do illegal jobs for much longer than they are supposed to, prolonging their deprivation and insecurities". Another participant remarked: "I didn't know this, and if I had, I would have been able to support these learners on a more sympathetic level".

The Lawyers of Human Rights (LHR) (2003:13-14) distinguishes between four phases asylum seekers have to go through when applying for refugee status in South Africa:

Phase 1: Arriving in South Africa

When any asylum seeker arrives at one of the borders of South Africa, claiming that his life is in danger in his home country, the immigration official must issue such person with a temporary permit. This permit will issue the asylum seeker 14 days to travel to the Department of Home Affairs' Reception Office (LHR, 2003:13).

Phase 2: Making an application

The applicant is now given an appointment for an interview with a Refugee Reception Officer. An asylum seeker permit is now given to the applicant, which he uses until the date of appointment with a Refugee Reception Officer (LHR, 2003:13).

Phase 3: First Interview

During the interview, the applicant will be asked about the reasons he is fleeing his home country. The applicant must provide documentation to support his claim. The applicant is now given a return date for an interview with a Refugee Status Determination Officer. While this interview should take place within 30 days, it seldom does (LHR, 2003:13).

Phase 4: Status Determination Hearing

The Refugee Status Determination Officer assesses the asylum claim and asks additional questions related to the application. The Refugee Status Determination Officer now makes a decision to grant or reject the application for refugee status (LHR, 2003:14).

This process, from start to finish, should take place within 180 days, but may take up to a few years (LHR, 2003:14).

The researcher is of opinion that the above-mentioned phases of applying for refugee status in South-Africa should be made available for teachers, in order for teachers to facilitate refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment.

2.3.2 Main Theme 2: Second Language Concerns

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES
Second language concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interpersonal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social Identity and Language
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusive classrooms and language

Table 2.2 Main Theme 2: Second Language Concerns

The second main theme identified from the empirical data was language concerns. In this regard Loewen (2004:35) highlights the fact that language has an important function in the task that refugee learners face when resettling in a foreign country. This author further states that “... the newcomer’s task of adapting to life in a new country is often complicated by the need to acquire a new language” (Loewen, 2004:35). Interpersonal communication, resulting in behavioural difficulties, and academic competency, resulting in frustration, were the biggest challenges for both participants and refugee learners they work with.

2.3.2.1 *Interpersonal Communication*

Hartas (2005:12) suggest that the refugee learner can use language in a “... functional way to request information or an object, protest inform and comment”.

Children use language to socialise with peers and adults, and engage in conversation. Hartas (2005:13) further remark that language and communication are essential for various aspects of functioning, including thinking, learning, showing empathy, and relating socially and emotionally with others. Hartas (2005:62) comments that it is almost impossible to think of the development of social skills in children in the absence of language. According to Gallagher (in Hartas, 2005:62), “Language is a primary means by which we make interpersonal contact, socialize our children and regulate our actions”.

A concern for participants was that refugee learner’s struggle to socialise with their South African peers and make friends with South African learners. The reason for this was because refugee learners, as was mentioned before, do not speak any of South Africa’s 11 official languages. This includes English. One participant argued that “... refugee learners do not seem to know who they are, they are very unsure of themselves, and I believe that this has something to do with the language barrier”.

The refugee learner’s task of settling into life in a foreign country is, as was mentioned earlier (see 2.3.2), often obscured by the need to learn a new language. Success of adapting to a new country can thus be measured by the successful achievement of the new language. Loewen (2004:41) is of opinion that the refugee learner’s ability to socialise and construct identity in his new school environment is related to the learner’s ability of learning a second language. It is thus vital for the refugee learner to acquire this new language in order for him to successfully adapt in a new community and school.

The category identified under the sub-theme “interpersonal communication” was social identity and language, and will be discussed as follow.

- Social identity and language

Hartas (2005:62) is of opinion that, through friendships children construct personal and social identities. These identities play an important role when children construct social awareness that influence their behaviour and social adjustment. Loewen (2004:41) defines social identity as the perception by the self and by others, and includes group membership, language and religion. Donahue, Hartas and Cole (in Hartas, 2005:63) agree with this statement, and is of opinion that language and social development are interlinked, and cannot be separated. With refugee learners, mother tongue is often the first thing to be lost, and with it a vital part of the children's identity. The researcher is of opinion that, because of refugee learners’

emotional vulnerability, the issue of identity may be complicated. Loewen (2004:41) agrees with this by mentioning that refugee learners do not only experience loss of possessions or people dear to them, but they also experience a loss of identity. Robinson (2007:111), however, argues that social identity is essential for language development. She states that changes and complexity of a refugee learner's social identity may impair his ability to learn a second language and make the necessary progress at school.

Most participants feel that, because of the language barrier between refugee learners and South African learners, it is difficult for refugee learners to make friends with their South African peers. One participant reflected on this by noting that: "Making friends is central to children's social world, and having friends is an essential emotional support". This participant further pointed out that, because refugee learners cannot socialise and communicate with their peers and teachers, they tend to present with various behavioural difficulties, such as aggression and withdrawal. One participant communicated the need to speak French or Portuguese in order to be able to help these children not only with their schoolwork, but also just to feel that they belong. A few participants mentioned that they have learnt a couple of words from refugee learners, and are of the opinion that this does make a difference. In this regard, one participant mentioned that: "Their faces seem to lift up when I greet them in their languages". Another participant, however, pointed out that: "... this doesn't help them to socialise with their classmates, and I really feel for them". This participant further noted that:

These learners need to have extra English lessons, but this is not happening ... I am an English teacher, but with 40 plus children in a class, it is almost impossible to help the refugee learners, I really wish I could do more.

The researcher is of opinion that the second language concerns that teachers face when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment, is an important aspect when developing Gestalt guidelines for these teachers.

2.3.2.2 Academic Competence

An important aspect that Coelho (1998:79) highlights, is the fact that it takes a lot longer for refugee learners to become academically competent in a second language than is generally recognised. According to Cummins (in Coelho, 1998:79), second language learners achieve

competency in basic interpersonal communication within two to three years, whereas it may take up to five years for these learners to acquire cognitive academic language proficiency.

The biggest concern regarding academic competency, as summarised by one participant, is the fact that refugee learners “... do not understand what is being said in the classroom”. According to the participants, refugee learners take a long time to learn the English language, and by the time they do, it is too late, as many of them often have to repeat the grade.

The category identified from this sub-theme was inclusive classrooms and language which will be discussed below.

- Inclusive classrooms and language

The debate on including refugee learners in mainstream schools was very prominent during focus group discussions. Some participants felt that refugee learners are being disadvantaged, as they do not understand the English language, and can thus not read or write in English. These participants felt the necessity for refugee learners to be taught in their mother tongue. Other participants, however, were of opinion that including refugee learners into mainstream schools were important. They argued that refugee learners needed to come into contact with the English language on a daily basis. By doing this, these learners would be able to “... learn English much quicker and they will be able to adapt much easier”. Loewen (2004:43) agrees with the latter opinion by mentioning that, by placing second language learners into mainstream schools, these learners would be exposed to different opportunities. They would be learning English, and they would be able to participate in activities and interact with South African learners. Ward (2004:31), on the other hand, argues that, should learners be “mainstreamed” too soon, without language support, failure would be inevitable. Learners’ first languages continue to be important for their linguistic, social and cognitive development. Therefore, schools need to promote the maintenance and continued development of students’ first languages. Coelho (1998:80) summarises this argument by stating that refugee learners have particular needs and that:

They navigate two cultures and establish their identities as bicultural, bilingual individuals in a multicultural environment. They have to learn the dominant language and culture in order to be academically successful and become integrated into the social life of the school; ... at the same time, they need the security and sense of identity that the home language and culture can provide.

In the researcher's opinion, when developing Gestalt guidelines for teachers facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to their new school environment, teachers should be guided in their communication with these learners within the classroom as well as on the playground.

2.3.3 Main Theme 3: Socio-Cultural Factors

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES
Socio-cultural factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acculturation Inclusive classrooms and culture

Table 2.3 Main Theme 3: Socio-Cultural Factors

The third main theme identified from the empirical data, is socio-cultural factors. Participants pointed out that refugee learners come from different cultural backgrounds to South African learners. Culture, according to Mehr (in Shade, 1997:5), characterises a group's preferred way of perceiving, judging and organising ideas, circumstances and events that they come upon in their everyday lives. Culture thus refers to rules or guidelines for individuals who share a common background, to mediate their interaction with their environment. In a report written by the UNCHR in Geneva (2001:30), it is stated that each society has a unique body of collected knowledge, which is reflected in its social and religious values and ways of interpreting the world around them. Culture also provides children with identity and continuity. During a refugee movement, social groups disintegrate and normal rules and values break down, resulting in a disruption of almost every aspect of a culture.

The sub-theme for socio-cultural factors identified from the empirical data was "cultural diversity", and will be discussed below.

2.3.3.1 Cultural Diversity

Culture in South Africa is about as diverse as it can be. According to the UNCHR (2001:30) merging and integration in South Africa's urban areas, along with the suppression of

traditional cultures during the apartheid years, means that the old ways of life are fading, but traditional black cultures are still strong in most parts of the country. Across the different groups, marriage customs and taboos differ, but most traditional cultures are based on beliefs in a masculine deity, ancestral spirits and supernatural forces. In general, polygamy is permitted and lobola (endowment) is usually paid. Cattle play an important part in many cultures, as symbols of wealth and as sacrificial animals (UNCHR, 2001:30).

The difficulties and challenges that cultural diversity holds were specifically highlighted by the participants in the focus group discussions. Two participants, for instance, commented on the cultural beliefs of most refugee learners. According to these participants, it seems as if refugee learners do not know how to respond when they are talked to, as they would only look down, not talk back or answer questions. On the other hand, another participant's concern was that: "... refugee learners do not have clear guides as to what behaviour is perceived as right or wrong in the new culture that they have to adapt to, resulting in behavioural difficulties such as aggression and withdrawal".

Oyebade (2006:130) reflects that, although most African cultures are very similar, there are some traditions and norms that differ from each other. According to Angolan and Congolese culture, for instance, age is very important in individual behaviour and social relations. Oyebade (2006:132) notes that, in Angolan culture, it is customary for young people to relate to their seniors in a respectful manner, because age is sacred. Greetings especially are valued and there is a form of greeting for almost every task and occasion. In Congolese culture, children are expected to greet adults with a handshake and perhaps a kiss on the cheek. In Somalia, a handshake is also used to greet elders, but only elders from the same gender. It is also considered impolite to use the index finger when talking to someone; that gesture is used for calling dogs (Minnesota Department of Human Rights, 2008:1).

Bennett (1997:133) comments that teachers tend to forget that refugee learners are raised in a cultural environment that is considerably different from the environment at school. The author also comments that these learners use so much energy in adapting to a new school and country that there is not much time left for learning in the classroom. Participants confessed that, due to cultural diversity, some teachers label some refugee learners because of their cultural beliefs.

One participant further stated that: "... not only the teachers are guilty of labelling refugee learners; these learners are victims to name-calling and labelling by South African learners

every day”. Anderson (2004:7) argues that refugee learners are often the kinds of learners that could find themselves “at the margins” or unlikely to have their needs met as a result of labelling. The process of labelling may also affect the refugee learner’s process to adapt to a new school environment and culture.

The categories identified for the sub-theme “cultural diversity” included acculturation and inclusive classroom and culture, and will subsequently be discussed.

- Acculturation

Acculturation refers to the cultural adjustments that occur when two or more cultures come into contact with each other (Anderson, 2004:68). Various processes take place when this happens. These processes affect development and behavioural adjustment. Due to the cultural diversity that refugee learners are exposed to, they should, according to Gardner (in Anderson, 2004:71) acquire “cultural competence”. By acquiring cultural competence, these learners will be able to “... carry out productive work and interact effectively with other individuals to achieve valued ends” (Gardner in Anderson, 2004:71).

Participants felt that, because refugee learners come from different cultural backgrounds, “... they are being discriminated against”. During the focus group discussions, participants voiced their concerns about how this discrimination is influencing the refugee learner’s identity and social adjustment. One participant commented on the roles and expectations of refugee learners in new cultures where refugee learners are seen as the minority, and thus take up that role by acting in a “pleasing” manner. This participant continued by stating that “... refugee learners are now always expecting to be treated as if they are of less importance to us as teachers than South African learners”.

Phinney (in Robinson, 2007:60) points out that: “... issues of cultural contact and the resulting identity conflicts are most obvious among immigrants and the children of immigrants, who on a daily basis face exposure to differing cultural expectations”. Refugee learners face the challenge of building their identities based on a selection of components from their culture of origin, and elements from the new culture in which they are now growing up. Anderson (2004:69) argues that, in cultural contact, one culture is always dominant. This refers to the “donor” culture of the host country.

Another aspect that Anderson (2004:69) highlights is the fact that when different cultures come into contact, conflict will arise. People tend to find interaction with persons different

from themselves more difficult than interaction with persons similar to themselves. Through acculturation, one cultural group has to take up the beliefs and behaviours of the dominant cultural group. Assimilation of one cultural group into another may be evidenced by changes in language preference, adoption of attitudes and values, membership in social groups and institutions, and loss of separate ethnic identification (Anderson, 2004:69).

- **Inclusive Classrooms and Culture**

Gay (in Nkomo & Vandeyar, 2008:1) reflects that respecting the individual differences of learners is truly what counts in effective teaching, not race, ethnicity, culture or gender. Nkomo and Vandeyar (2008:1) echoes this by noting that, through the cultural frames of reference to learners, teaching and its activities can be made more personally meaningful, and thus easier to master. Participants felt that they do not have enough knowledge of the different cultures that refugee learners come from, and that this is an important reason for most of the conflict between teachers and learners. Most participants, however, felt that whenever they did incorporate different cultures into classroom activities, the mood would be lifted, and learners would participate more effectively, and would interact more closely. The researcher is of opinion that this is an imperative aspect to keep in mind when studying the refugee learner's social adjustment to a new school environment.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The focus of the empirical study was to establish and explore the concerns and challenges that teachers face when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to their new school environment. From the empirical data and relevant literature, various suggestions were made that could benefit teachers when assisting refugee learners in their social adjustment.

The last step of the first phase of the Design and Development model was setting the goals and objectives. The goal of this research study is to establish guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners, helping these learners to adapt and cope in a foreign school environment (See 1.4.1.5).

In the next chapter, an in-depth literature review on the social adjustment of refugee learners in the South African school system will be conducted.

CHAPTER 3: INFLUENCES IMPACTING ON THE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF REFUGEE LEARNERS WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The first phase of the Design and Development model, as part of intervention research, was completed in Chapter two. The focus of the empirical data was to establish the needs and concerns of teachers working with refugee learners, gaining an understanding from their points of view. The problems identified from the empirical data were discussed in Chapter two.

In this chapter, the second phase of the Design and Development model was carried out, namely to gather information from relevant literature. From the empirical data it was evident that teachers felt the need to obtain knowledge and background information on the traumatic experiences that refugee learners are exposed to in their journey to South Africa, as well as life in South Africa. In the researcher's opinion, these experiences play an immense part in the social adjustment of refugee learners, and are essential to keep in mind when guidelines are developed for teachers in facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment.

In this chapter, factors influencing the refugee learner's social adjustment are studied in the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, together with a focus on aspects of the South African school system.

3.2 SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEE LEARNERS

A great number of refugee children are resettled every year in South Africa, where they usually do not speak any of the official languages, may or may not have family, and may experience racism and xenophobia (Harris, 2001:6). What happens to these children once they arrive, and how do they adjust to a foreign country and new school environment?

3.2.1 An Ecological Approach

In this chapter, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory will be used to discuss the refugee learner's social adjustment. The researcher is of opinion that Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a functional conceptual framework when studying the social adjustment of refugee learners. Anderson (2004:4) states that: "At the core, this theory conceptualizes development as the interactive life-long process of adaptation by an individual to the changing environment". In other words, the ecological systems theory looks at the child's development within the framework of the system of relationships that form part of his environment. To fully understand the child's development, one must not only study the child in his direct environment, but one must also study the wider and larger environment (Paquette & Ryan 2001:1). Bronfenbrenner thus sees the developmental process as interactive. Not only is the child's development influenced by the environment, but it can also be expected that the environment will be affected by developmental changes in the child.

Bronfenbrenner (in Hamilton *et al.*, 2000:5) defined the ecological systems theory as follows:

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded.

Bronfenbrenner (in Paquette & Ryan, 2001:2) distinguishes between five systems that influence the child in his development. These five systems are in constant interaction with each other and change in one system will also lead to change in all of the other systems. These systems involve:

- The Micro-system: This system refers to the individual child within the settings that directly impact on the child. This may include family, school and the neighbourhood. The structures within the micro-system are the strongest and have the greatest impact on the child's development (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:2).
- The Meso-system: The connections or interrelationships amongst the micro-systems form the meso-system. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, development will be optimised when strong links exist between the different micro-systems (Shaffer, 1999:64).

- The Exo-system: This system includes structures that the child is not a part of, but is influenced by it. This may include parents' work environments and the extended family. The child may not be directly involved in this structure, but will be affected by, for instance, whether his parents enjoy their work (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:2).
- The Macro-system: The cultural or social contexts in which the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems are imbedded form the macro-system. This may include laws, cultural values and customs. The macro-system represents the broad belief system that, for instance, dictates how children should be treated and what they should be taught. This influences the experiences of the child in his micro-systems, such as school and home. The interaction between these micro-systems is also influenced by the macro-system (Shaffer, 1999:65).
- The Chrono-system: This system encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to the child's environments. This includes the child's age at certain experiences, as well as the timing of these experiences (Shaffer, 1999:65).

Refugee learners are obliged to adapt to major disruptions in all five of these systems of the ecological systems theory (Anderson, 2004:4).

Figure 3.1 is a schematic representation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and illustrates how the above-mentioned systems influence a child's social development and adjustment. The researcher is of opinion that Figure 3.1 can also be applied to the social adjustment of refugee learners in their new school environment.

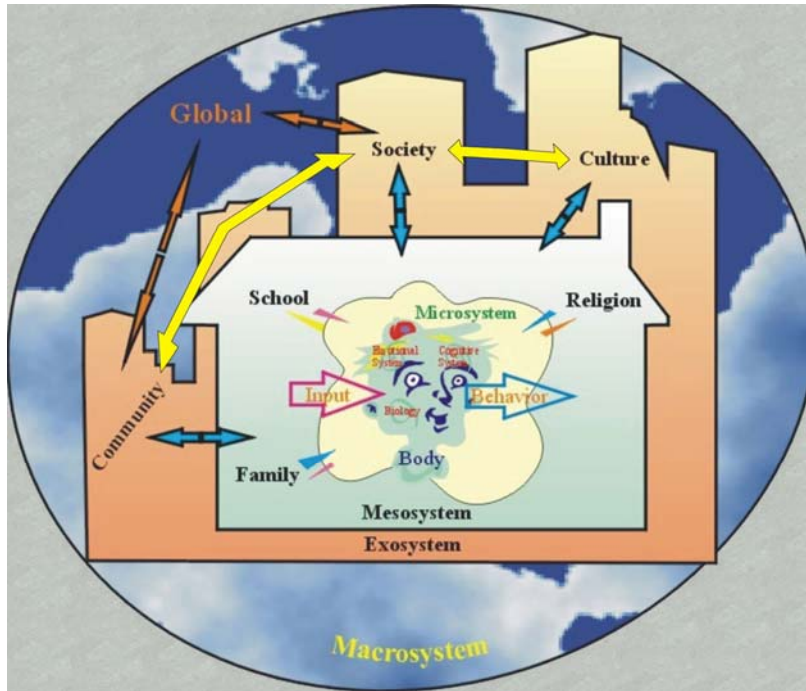


Figure 3.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Adapted from Paquette & Ryan, 2001)

3.2.2 The Process of Adaptation

Anderson (2004:7) distinguishes between three phases of adaptation impacting on the refugee learners' ability to successfully adjust to a new country and a new school environment. The first phase, pre-migration, includes the experiences of the refugee learner prior to leaving his country of origin. This phase is mostly characterised by oppression and/or political persecution. The second phase, trans-migration, refers to those experiences occurring in the transition between the country of origin and the host country. This could involve fleeing on foot through different countries prior to arriving in the host country. Finally, the post-migration phase is characterised by experiences that occur on arrival in the host country, as well as resettling and adjusting to the host country. Ben-Porath (in Pederson, Draguns, Lonner & Trimble, 2002:216) argues that the starting point of flight, the period of flight and the process of resettlement are important elements of the social and psychological adjustment of refugees. With regards to refugee learners, their past and present experiences are potential sources for stress and should thus always be considered when studying the social adjustment of these learners.

Pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration have an impact on personal and environmental factors of the development of refugee learners, and these influences will subsequently be discussed.

3.2.2.1 Pre-Migration Influences

A distinction can be made between refugees and other migrants primarily by the involuntary nature of their departure from their country of origin. Bemak, Chung and Pederson (2003:9) state that the sudden departure from their home countries result in refugees being displaced by events out of their control, such as war and political turmoil. Here, the disruption of the macro-system influences the refugee learner's meso- and micro-systems severely.

Research done on pre-migration influences, highlights the impact that trauma, loss, separation and deprivation have on the social adjustment process of the refugee learner. Pre-migration traumas may further hinder the refugee learner's psychological growth and development, creating a barrier for successful adjustment (Pederson *et al.*, 2002:216). Some refugee learners may have been exposed to severe violence, witnessing the death and torture of family members. Some may have been subject to attacks themselves, or may have been forced to participate in violent acts. Many have lived in hiding, perhaps living in shelters, as their homes have been attacked and destroyed. Others may have been fortunate enough to flee their home country prior to being exposed to these events. Nevertheless, traumatic loss and change in their micro-systems is a striking characteristic of most refugee children living in South Africa. They are faced with chaos, uncertainty, danger and complete disruption of daily life processes (Anderson, 2004:4).

- *Trauma*

Rando (in Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:13) notes that trauma can have significant mental health implications, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress reactions, helplessness and powerlessness, survivor guilt, and personality disturbances. These mental health consequences play an immense role in a refugee learner's ability to successfully adapt to a new school environment. Difficulties in concentration and memory problems in grasping new material and remembering old skills are common challenges amongst refugee learners (Kohli, 2007:35).

Frater-Mathiesen (2004:14) identifies various risk factors influencing the refugee learner's adjustment process. These factors include pre-trauma factors such as family dysfunction or

parental inadequacy, and prior experiences of trauma and traumatic loss; the nature and degree of the trauma, and the nature of the family response to traumatic experiences; loss of faith in self and adults, and inadequate support within the child's micro-systems. Pre-migration trauma is associated with psychological maladjustment for refugees and interferes with the process of adaptation (Pederson *et al.*, 2002:215).

Yule (in Kohli, 2007:34) has done extensive research on the impact of trauma on the refugee learner's adjustment. It was found that these learners tend to carry a sense of foreshortened future. As a result they find it difficult to plan. They experience life as fragile as a result of survivor guilt, and they tend to get disorientated by their own good fortune in comparison to those who were left behind or were killed. These learners are also troubled by repetitive and intrusive thoughts about traumatic events. Flashbacks, sleep disturbances, recurring nightmares and other stress related symptoms are regular occurrences in these learners' lives. Frater-Mathiesen (2004:15) agrees with Yule, and reflects that the most prominent symptoms of trauma in refugee learners are anxiety and fear. An excessive startle response and extreme reactions to mildly stressful events are also frequent occurrences for refugee learners (Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:15).

Subbarao and Coury (2004:19) are of opinion that the psychological impacts of trauma on refugee learners may not arise until months after being exposed to the trauma. Table 3.1 represents the various trauma reactions that Subbarao and Coury (2004:20) have identified in refugee children. The table illustrates these reactions by the different age groups of refugee learners.

TRAUMA REACTION	PRE-SCHOOL	SCHOOL AGE	ADOLESCENT
Fears and worries		√	√
Physical complaints		√	√
Attention and memory problems			√
Nightmares and sleep problems			√
Post-traumatic play	√	√	
Regression, separation and anxiety	√	√	
Anger, hostility and depression		√	√
Apathy, withdrawal and avoidance		√	√
Sadness		√	√
Sense of foreshortened future		√	√
Survivor guilt			√
Risky and dangerous behaviour			√

Table 3.1 Summary of trauma reactions by age (Adapted from Sabbarao & Coury, 2004:20)

A study done by Ahearn and Athey (in Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:15) found that exposure to war and persecution-related trauma can result in considerable setbacks in refugee learners' academic and cognitive functioning, making it even harder for these learners to adjust to their new school environment. Paquette and Ryan (2001:19) are of opinion that the refugee learner's cognitive abilities are dependant on his exo- and macro-systems. When these systems suffer disruption, the learner's cognitive function and capabilities will also suffer. Montgomery (in Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:15) is therefore of opinion that successful

adjustment to a new school after exposure to severe trauma depends largely on cognitive competence, self-esteem, coping strategies, a stable relationship with at least one parental figure, and support systems. According to the researcher this is an important aspect that needs to be kept in mind when developing guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners

- *Loss*

It is easy to observe the materialistic impact of war and political turmoil in terms of damage to the concrete environment. This may include the destruction of buildings, or the loss of services, such as power cuts and water supply. It is however, not so easy to observe the emotional losses that refugee learners have to suffer (Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:14). In their journey to South Africa, these learners are exposed to various losses – from losing their homes to losing parents and other loved ones. They have lost their familiar surroundings and familiar ways of doing things. With the micro-system affected, they may even feel that they have lost their parents’ support and attention in the new country. Table 3.2 indicates the significant losses that refugee learners experience.

Loss of important others	Many children have witnessed the death of one or both of their parents.
Loss of physical capacity	Children in war-torn zones may be injured or wounded.
Loss of parental support or protection	Many children become displaced and separated from their parents under war conditions. This can be very troubling to young children who can cope with the stress of war if they retain positive attachments to their families, and if parents can project a sense of stability, permanence and competence to their families.
Loss of home	The meaning of the term “home” is personal and very significant to the child’s sense of security; without this anchor, children (and adults) may develop symptoms such as depression and anxiety.

Living with distressed adults	The cumulative, negative effects of displacement produce high levels of distress among adults, which have disturbing reverberations for the children.
Family separation	Separation from loved ones results in emotional pain and in changes in the family structure.
Lost educational opportunities	Children in transition from one country to another not only lose the continuity of an educational experience, but also need to acquire a new language and the accompanying set of educational expectations in the new environment.
Poor physical environment	Often refugee families live in crowded shelters with minimal space for play activities or learning. Lack of privacy, high social density, and poor housing are common in these families.
Malnutrition	Dietary provisions in refugee settings usually are tailored to the needs of adults, not to the nutritional requirements of children.
Incarceration	Many refugee children are kept in refugee camps for prolonged periods of time. The stresses of an incarceration environment can seriously interfere with the normal growth and development of children.

Table 3.2 Losses significant to refugee learners (Adapted from Boyd Webb, 2003:346)

Together with the stresses of pre-migration and loss, the pressures and demands to adjust to a new school environment leads to “... strain reactions” in refugee learners when faced with various environmental stimuli, causing a barrier for social adjustment (Ekblad in Anderson, 2004:65). Anderson (2004:65) indicates that the major losses influencing the refugee learner’s ability to successfully adapt to a new school environment, is the loss of identity and

the loss of a sense of belonging. Encouraging and strengthening a sense of belonging in the classroom is thus seen as an important goal of recovery and adaptation.

Encouraging and strengthening a sense of belonging in the classroom, according to Fullilove (in Anderson, 2004:6) refers to “the psychology of place”. This concept elaborates on the importance of an individual to create a sense of belonging to a place. This need arises from three psychological processes, namely attachment, familiarity, and identity. Attachment refers to the bond between an individual and a much-loved place. Familiarity points to the individual’s knowledge and awareness of his environment. Identity indicates the individual’s sense of self-development in a familiar and beloved environment. The refugee learner suffers a wide range of losses – a loss of country, a loss of family and friends, a loss of social security and a loss of belonging. Thus, when these losses are referred to as “the psychology of place”, refugee learners have undergone losses in all three of the above-mentioned psychological processes (Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:21). The loss of a sense of belonging to a place holds significant stressors for the refugee learner’s social adjustment in his new country and school.

Another aspect that needs to be kept in mind in supporting the refugee learner to socially adjust to a new school environment is the fact that refugee learners move about a cycle of grief and loss (cf. Niemeyer in Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:18). The first phase of this cycle is *avoidance*. During this phase, the refugee learner responds with shock, numbness, panic and confusion, and is unable to comprehend the reality of the loss. The second phase is known as *assimilation*. The refugee learner now gradually absorbs the reality of the loss and experiences intense loneliness and sorrow. The last phase, *accommodation*, begins when the symptoms of the grief and loss lessen. The refugee learner begins to rebuild his social world that has been damaged by the loss. Neimeyer (in Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:18) emphasises the importance of the fact that each of these phases can last for months, and even years, affecting the refugee learner’s adjustment capabilities. Frater-Mathiesen (2004:18) elaborates on this, and points out that refugee learners have lost their “... whole world of relationships”, resulting in a more problematic and prolonged grief process. The refugee learner’s meso-systems are thus disrupted, influencing the micro-systems and evidently the adaptation process.

- *Deprivation*

A major experience of many refugee learners, and the result of the exertions of flight, is severe deprivation in the form of insufficient food, water, sleep, medical care and shelter.

Fleeing from their homes in search of safety is often accompanied by deprivation, and may result in both physical and mental developmental delays (Ahearn, Loughry & Ager, 2003:215). The severities of mental and physical delays are dependant on the degree and the length of deprivation, and are important factors in the adjustment of refugee learners. Davies (2004:57) argues that, should severe deprivation persist for more than two years, the capacity to recover will be significantly limited. Depriving experiences can have major consequences that persist long after refugee learners have ceased to suffer deprivation. According to a study done by the American Psychiatric Association (in Davies, 2004:58), prolonged deprivation may result in inattention and hyperactivity. This study found that deprivation extended over a long period of time has an effect on, and may change, brain function, leading to “disinhibition” and poor self-regulation.

Harris and Horne (in Eysenk, 2004:121) found that sleep deprivation affects brain activity, cognition, mood and behaviour. Decision making is limited and the startle response is heightened. Further studies on sleep deprivation indicate that loss of sleep leads to weariness and a tendency to be irritable and easily frustrated, impacting on the adjustment process of the refugee learner (Sternberg & Wilson, 2004:207).

From the above, it is evident that deprivation can hold severe consequences for the refugee learner’s adjustment capabilities in the classroom, ranging from concentration difficulties to other behavioural and emotional problems. This is also a prominent challenge that the participants highlighted in the empirical data (See 2.3.2).

3.2.2.2 Trans-Migration Influences

Refugee learners’ social adjustment is as dependant on trans-migration influences as it is on pre-migration influences. Trans-migration refers to the time and experiences between the pre-migration phase and the post-migration phase (Loewen, 2004:37). During this phase, refugee learners spend most of their time in refugee camps. Their micro- and meso-systems are influenced by a lack of stability and safety, and they face a constant disruption in familiar routines, and may spend months, even years in various refugee camps (Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:21). Continued exposure to trauma, loss, deprivation and separation will eventually result in significant setbacks for refugee learners. Psychiatric morbidity, dysfunctional behaviour patterns and competence in work, love and play are a few of these setbacks. Teachers should thus keep in mind that refugee learners’ traumatic experiences do not end as

soon as they leave their home countries, but can continue through their journeys, and even in South Africa.

3.2.2.3 Post-Migration Influences

The post-migration phase refers to the refugee learner's arrival in his host country, South Africa (Anderson, 2004:7). With cultural, social, economic, language and environmental factors, the core of this phase is for the refugee learner to establish new micro-systems, and adapting to new macro-systems. During the post-migration phase, various aspects come into consideration. Multiple sources of stress, such as language, familial support, culture shock, xenophobia, unemployment of parents, and health and educational factors are significant in the adjustment of the refugee learner (Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:21).

- *Acculturation*

Culture, according to Anderson (2004:69), is a central aspect of people's lives. With culture come history, beliefs, and ways of doing and communicating. According to Frater-Mathiesen (2004:24) "Culture becomes the glue that provides a community with meaning, cohesion and integration". Berry (in Anderson, 2004:69) suggests that "... all human behaviour is cultural in some respects; virtually no psychological phenomenon can be independent of the cultural context in which it developed". As indicated before, the refugee learner has experienced many losses throughout the pre-migration and trans-migration phases. One of those losses is culture or, as Ogbu (in Anderson, 2004:69) states, a way of life. Eisenbruch (in Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:25) refers to the term "cultural bereavement", where the refugee learner experiences various forms of loss of social structure, cultural values and self-identity. In other words, culture, as a macro-system for the refugee learner, is lost and affects his micro-systems, such as family and school. The adjustment process is thus interrupted.

Acculturation refers to the process whereby refugee groups adjust to being in contact with different cultures (Dona & Berry, 2003:171). Redfield *et al.* (in Dona & Berry, 2003:171) defines acculturation as "... those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups".

Dona and Berry (2003:172) has developed a model of acculturation where refugees ask themselves two questions: "Is my cultural identity of value and to be retained?" and "Are positive relations with the larger (dominant) society to be sought?" Should the refugee

learner answer “no” on the first question and “yes” on the second, assimilation will occur. In this case, the refugee learner gives up on his cultural identity and accepts the identity held by the host country (Dona & Berry, 2003:172). The behaviours of the refugee learner will now become similar to those of South African learners. Should the refugee learner’s answers to both questions be “yes”, integration takes place. In this case, the refugee learner maintains his cultural identity, and at the same time become part of the larger or dominant society. When the answer to the first question is “yes” and “no” to the second, a separation takes place. The refugee learner has no desire to relate to the dominant group, and still maintain his traditions and culture (Dona & Berry, 2003:172). Finally, should the answers to both questions be “no”, marginalisation comes into play. This is characterised by a loss of contact with both the refugee learner’s own culture and the culture of the dominant group (Dona & Berry, 2003:172). The process of acculturation, as Dona and Berry (2003:173) states, influences the refugee learner’s ability to adapt to his new school environment. Should, for instance, marginalisation take place, the adjustment process will be complicated. Integration would be the most favourable for the adaptation of refugee learners. Figure 3.2 is a schematic illustration of the above-mentioned strategies for acculturation.

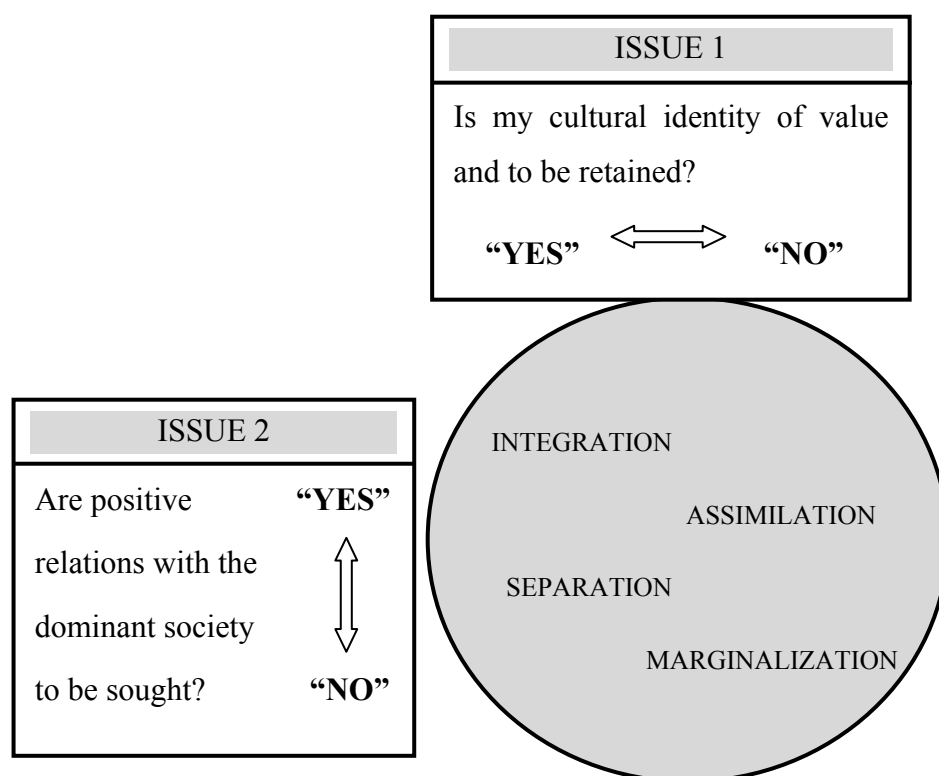


Figure 3.2 Berry’s Model of Acculturation (Adapted from Dona & Berry, 2003:173)

Although this model is focussed on refugees in general, the researcher is of opinion that it can also be used when studying the refugee learner's social adjustment, with the aim to develop guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners. The researcher is of opinion that refugee learners in their early childhood may not be able to understand and answer the questions that Berry refers to, but if explained to refugee learners in their middle childhood and adolescence, this model would be effective in developing guidelines for teachers facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment.

Herwartz-Emden, Kuffner and Landgraf (2006:40) state that refugee learners face a "specific supplementary learning" in different areas. The performance of acculturation is thus a very important requirement for these learners. Integrating new values, norms, symbols, and behaviour patterns is a great challenge for refugee learners, but can also assist in their adaptation process to a new school. Insufficient acculturation, according to Herwartz-Emden *et al.* (2006:40), may thus have an unpleasant effect on school achievement.

Anderson (2004:71) refers to the term "cultural competence" (see 2.3.3.1), which will allow refugee learners to interact adequately with teachers and other learners, and enable them to carry out productive work in the classroom. Refugee learners need to gain knowledge of the values, norms and beliefs of the dominant culture to be able to function sufficiently in their new school environment. An important aspect to consider here is cultural identity. Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001:100) refer to the term cultural identity as "... the recognition, categorization or self-identification of oneself as a member of an ethno cultural group". The society that refugees enter into has already established longstanding cultural beliefs and values. For these refugee learners the pressures of cultural change are often very intense. It is thus of utmost importance for these learners to adapt to the new cultural influences they experience.

- *Family Support*

One of the greatest, and probably the most important micro-system impacting on the refugee learner's adjustment process, is the family structure. Within the family systems, the refugee learner should enjoy safety, security, and loyalty (Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:22). The family thus has the biggest impact on the refugee learner's views of the world and on the learner's ability to cope with challenging circumstances (Geldard & Geldard, 2002:73).

The family, as a whole, is interactive. Each individual family member's thoughts, feelings, behaviour, perceptions and previous experiences will influence the feelings, behaviour and thoughts of the other members in the family (Geldard & Geldard, 2002:74). Each family member, including the child, will have adopted certain behaviours and thoughts to help them function within the family system. Through these thoughts and behaviours, individuals will have their emotional and physical needs met, reducing feelings of anxiety and discomfort. Unfortunately, exile and displacement hold severe consequences for the refugee family's image and sense of unity (Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:22). Some family members may have been killed or separated during the pre- and trans-migration phases, thus intact refugee families seldom migrate together. The life-cycle patterns of refugee families are disrupted through violence, trauma and loss, resulting in an imbalance of interaction, roles and boundaries within the family.

Papadopoulos (2002:131) stresses the importance of family attachment, and states that attachment is a pre-requisite of safety, especially in times of trauma and loss. Whilst refugee learners develop the maturational skills necessary to care for themselves, they need to form a secure attachment with at least one parent or other caring adult. This attachment protects them from danger and acts as an emotional buffer. Unfortunately, refugee parents have also been exposed to severe trauma and loss, leaving them with their own emotional stressors to cope with. The result of this, in most cases, is that the attachments between refugee learners and their parents are damaged, resulting in insecure attachments, and evidently emotionally unavailable parents (Frater-Mathiesen, 2004:22). This emotional unavailability of refugee parents is likely to cause even more anxiety and stress within refugee learners as the trauma itself. Where there is an insecure attachment with a parent, the refugee learner's perception of adult protection and safety may be altered, impacting on the process of adjustment (Papadopoulos, 2002:131).

Bowlby (in Howe, Brandon, Hinings & Schofield, 1999:12) studied the long-term impact of separation and hardships on children. The author believed that children exposed to severe trauma, loss and separation will suffer behavioural, emotional and social problems. In further studies, Bowlby and Robertson (in Howe *et al.*, 1999:12) distinguish between various phases of reactions of children separated from their parents. The first phase is to protest against the loss with, for example, disheartening crying. This is followed by despair, indifference and listlessness. The third and last phase is detachment, where the child will withdraw and show an apparent lack of interest in the lost parent. In this phase, it will seem as if the child is

recovering from the loss, but social relationships and interaction will seem mechanical. When studying Bowlby's hypothesis on how separation and loss affects the child, it is evident that the refugee learner's social adjustment to his new country and school environment will be severely impaired.

- *Second Language Concerns*

Language plays an imperative role in the resettling and adjustment process of refugee learners. As a result of their sudden and abrupt departure from their countries of origin, refugee learners, unlike other migrants, do not have the opportunity to plan for their lives in South Africa (Loewen, 2004:36). Other migrants might have months to prepare themselves for their lives in their new country, with the additional advantage of learning their new language prior to leaving their countries of origin. In addition to the sudden departure of refugee learners from their home countries, these learners are also exposed to severe emotional and physical traumatic stressors in their flight to South Africa. Refugee learners do not arrive in South Africa in optimum psychological and emotional conditions, because of the severe pre- and trans-migration influences. These pre- and trans-migration influences will impact directly on the refugee learner's mental health and academic abilities (Loewen, 2004:36), making it even more difficult to learn a second language, and ultimately adapt to a new school.

For many refugee families, the relationship between the school and parents are restricted (Baker & Seinkewicz, 2000:82). The reason for this may be due to a lack of understanding, alienation and antagonism between home and school cultures. The result is insufficient academic achievement for refugee learners. If parents cannot speak the same language as the school and teachers, they tend to feel isolated, they feel helpless and unsure when attempting to discuss their children's progress, and become reluctant to attend parent-teacher meetings and other school events (Baker & Seinkewicz, 2000:83). Concerns for the learner's academic achievement and social adjustment remain unresolved, impacting on his self-image and self-confidence. From the empirical data it was evident that participants were concerned about refugee parents not attending meetings with the school (See 2.3.1.3). Participants felt that refugee learners suffer from the fact that they do not receive adequate support from their parents, and that this influences their ability to socially adapt and perform academically (See 2.3.1.3).

Westermeyer and Her (in Loewen, 2004:36) are of opinion that previous education experience can also affect the refugee learner's potential of learning a second language. In a study done by these authors it was found that refugee learners with lower levels of education in general are at greater risk for inadequate second language learning. With most refugee learners living in transition camps for months, and even years, it is most likely that these learners come from disrupted educational backgrounds, putting even more pressure on their abilities to acquire a new language in South Africa.

The micro-systems of refugee learners are extremely important for refugee learners' second language learning. The school, as a micro-system, directly influences the refugee learner's language development (Loewen, 2004:35), as this is where he will come into direct contact with the second language. The meso-, exo-, and macro-systems are also very important for the refugee learner when learning a new language. It is in these systems that the refugee learner will have to adapt to a new culture and other societal influences, and where acquiring the new language is vital (Loewen, 2004:37). The refugee learner's social identity and interpersonal relationships in his new country, South Africa, depends largely on his ability to communicate with his South African peers, teachers and other adults.

In this regard, Hartas (2005:13) highlights the importance of communication to human functioning. Thinking, learning, relating socially and emotionally to others and constructing an identity relate greatly to communication. According to Hartas (2005:12), efficient language development is essential for various reasons. Through language, children can interact socially with both adults and peers by carrying out conversation; language provides children with social knowledge of others' intentions, as well as linguistic skills such as greeting, apologising and negotiating; social strategies, such as turn-taking, is dependant on effective communication; and non-verbal communication, such as gestures, is also imperative for communication. Furthermore, social adjustment and emotional maturity are very dependant on communication (Hartas, 2005:61). Initiating games, sharing jokes, disclosure of thoughts, providing solutions to problems, and giving emotional support through emotion words are all significant to relating with peers and making friends. Without communication, though, this is not possible for the refugee learner (Hartas, 2005:62). Gallagher (in Hartas, 2005:62) states that "... language is a primary means by which we make interpersonal contact, socialize our children and regulate our actions".

Vygotsky (in Louw, Van Ede & Louw, 1998:90) supports the fact that language development is dependant on social interaction. Children, for instance, share responsibility for relating meaningfully with adults and peers. The role of the adult is facilitative, giving as much assistance as possible until the child can function independently (Hartas, 2005:16). The teacher's role is to assist refugee learners in the process of learning language, and supporting these learners to develop skills necessary for expressing ideas and generating solutions to problems.

Hartas (2005:14) distinguishes between various goals that refugee learners have to accomplish in the classroom in order to gain proper communication skills:

- Interacting with others, negotiating plans and activities, and taking turns in conversation.
- Listening to, and using, spoken and written languages.
- Sustaining attentive listening, responding to what they have heard by relevant comments, questions or actions.
- Listening with enjoyment and responding to stories, songs and other music, rhymes and poems, and making up their own stories, rhymes and poems.
- Expanding their vocabulary, exploring the meanings and sounds of new words.
- Speaking clearly and audibly with confidence and control and showing awareness of the listener.
- Using language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences.
- Using speech to organise sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events.

3.3 RESILIENCE

When studying the social adjustment of refugee learners, it is important to study resilience as well. Masten *et al.* (in Anderson, 2004:53) refers to resilience as follows:

Resilience refers to the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances. Psychological resilience is

concerned with behavioural adaptation, usually defined in terms of internal states of well-being or effective functioning in the environment or both.

From this definition it is evident that the resilience is relevant to refugee learners. Refugee learners are exposed to severe challenges throughout most of their childhood, and resilience is thus an imperative quality needed by these learners. Resilience, according to Anderson (2004:53), offers an alternative focus on refugee learners. The focus here lies more on solutions for positive outcomes for challenging circumstances than on the problems that these circumstances offer.

Sesma, Mannes and Scales (2005:282) state that resilience needs to be studied in the context of the child as a whole and in the light of multiple interactive influences. Here Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is of significance, as the refugee learner's micro-systems will influence his resilience factor. According to Sesma *et al.* (2005:283), family support, family communication, a caring neighbourhood, a caring school climate and parent involvement in schooling play an immense role in the refugee learner's resilience processes, and ultimately his social adjustment. Parents and teachers can thus strongly influence whether refugee learners develop the characteristics associated with resilience, or whether they develop a low self-worth and diminished sense of future (Masten in Golstein & Brooks, 2005:xiv). Brown, D'Emidio-Caston and Benard (2001:19) identify a range of strategies that need to be incorporated into the classroom in order to develop resilience in refugee learners:

- Decision-making: If given proper information, refugee learners can make coherent decisions.
- Emotion and Learning: The emotions that refugee learners experience directly and indirectly influence the learning process.
- Building on interests and strengths: Intrinsically motivated learning is more meaningful and more deeply connected to the life of the learner than extrinsically motivated learning.
- A healthy, democratic learning community: A pro-social learning community produces tangible educational giants.

Anderson (2004:59) stresses that caution should be taken when studying resilience in refugee learners because "Those who have overcome adversity more successfully than the norm are

not invulnerable”. When a refugee learner has developed resilience at one stage of his life, it is not guaranteed that that learner would not be overwhelmed by challenges later in life. Anderson (2004:59) adds to this by stating that it does not mean that when refugee learners appear to be resilient that they do not bear any scars. Even resilient refugee learners need support to overcome challenging circumstances.

3.4 THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE LEARNERS INTO SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

Refugee learners have particular educational needs as they steer their way through the challenge of creating their identities as bicultural and bilingual individuals in South Africa. In order for these learners to become integrated into their new school system they need to acquire a new language and gain knowledge and understanding of a new culture. Coelho (1998:94) states that schools that serve a multicultural, multilingual and a multiracial community have the responsibility of ensuring that all learners and parents feel valued and included within the school community. Furthermore, multicultural, multilingual and multiracial schools have to show pride in this orientation and an awareness of these different groups should be presented within the school (Coelho, 1998:95).

The term integration is difficult to define. The Collins Concise Dictionary Plus (in Bray, 2004:149) defines integration as follows: “1. Make or be made into a whole; incorporate or be incorporated. 2. To designate (a school, park, etc) for use by all races or groups”. When studying integration in South African schools, it is important to understand the history of South Africa (Nkomo, McKinney & Chisholm, 2004:1). The colonial and Apartheid experiences have had a significant impact on all South Africans and their identities. Nkomo *et al.* (2004:1) strengthen this statement by quoting parts of former President Nelson Mandela’s inaugural speech in 1994:

Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud ... Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world.

Unfortunately, racial discrimination still lingers on in a democratic South Africa (Nkomo *et al.*, 2004:1). Schools play a significant role in the quality of society, with the potential of having a major impact on the reconstructive process of integration.

When referring to school integration, Nkomo *et al.* (2004:2) elaborates on the key role of the school as meeting the needs of all learners enrolled, promoting meaningful interaction between learners in the classroom, on the playground and in extracurricular activities, whilst encouraging a human rights culture. Integration does not refer only to race, but to various other factors as well, such as ethnic prejudice, gender inequality and xenophobia (Nkomo *et al.*, 2004:2). Integration thus seeks to encourage inclusivity and social unity in schools.

3.4.1 Multicultural Education

The major goal of multicultural education is to restructure schools so that all learners acquire the knowledge attitudes and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse society (Ball, 2006:xii). Furthermore, multicultural education seeks to ensure educational equity for learners of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups, and to facilitate their participation as critical and reflective citizens in an inclusive national culture (Coelho, 1998:94).

Bennett (in Hart, 2008:1) defines multicultural education as teaching and learning based on democratic values that foster cultural pluralism; in its most comprehensive form, a commitment to achieving educational equity; developing curricula that build on understanding about different ethnic groups; and combating oppressive practices.

In relation to the above definition are Bank's (in Ball, 2006:xii) dimensions of multicultural education. The goal of these dimensions is to act as guidelines for teachers when practicing multicultural education. Bank's dimensions of multicultural education also serve as an instrument to gain a better understanding of multicultural education and what it entails. The five dimensions will be discussed below.

I. Content Integration

When teaching concepts and skills, teachers should use content from diverse groups (Ball, 2006:xii). Ethnic and cultural groups should thus be included within the context of the core curriculum, rather than just as an addition through the year. By including these groups "... we are in essence including the perspectives and voices often silenced through our traditional curricula" (Hart, 2008:1). Content integration gives all learners the opportunity to think critically about social issues, seeing that it is relevant in all of their lives, and encouraging them to deal with these issues in order to improve the society (Hart, 2008:1).

II. Prejudice Reduction

It is important to always keep in mind that learners have their own preconceived ideas about each other (Hart, 2008:1). These ideas are based on colour, race, ethnicity, neighbourhood and gender. Multicultural education seeks to address this issue constantly. Teachers must model positive actions and attitudes towards all learners, especially those of minority groups, setting constant examples (Ball, 2006:xii). This is important, as children pick up on the most subtle cues that teachers give them. Teachers must thus make a conscious decision to put their own preconceived ideas aside and model positive attitudes at all times. Teachers must also be committed to confronting prejudiced behaviour, making it clear what behaviour will be tolerated.

III. Equity Pedagogy

Education should create opportunity for all learners to achieve success, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity and class (Hart, 2008:1). Teachers must be aware of learners of different groups that might seem to fall behind.

IV. Knowledge Construction

Bank (in Hart, 2008:1) identifies five types of knowledge that are important for multicultural education, and that should be taught and encouraged in the classroom. Personal/Cultural knowledge involve the perceptions brought from home and from the community; Popular knowledge include the facts and perceptions initialised in the media; Mainstream academic knowledge is made up of concepts and explanations that are considered established by scientists; Transformative academic knowledge challenges the beliefs and concepts of mainstream academic knowledge; and school knowledge incorporates all of the above-mentioned types of knowledge. Textbooks and other school material consist of school knowledge (Hart, 2008:1).

V. Empowering School Culture and Social Structure

This dimension seeks to make links between the school and the community (Hart, 2008:1). Involving parents and the rest of the community in the school culture will create warmth, understanding and curiosity, as well as support beyond the classroom.

3.5 CONCLUSION

With a long and emotionally tiresome journey behind them, refugee learners face a difficult task in adapting to a foreign school environment. Experiences involving trauma, violence, loss, deprivation and separation have significant influences on the refugee learner, both internally and externally. Some were separated from their parents. Some have lost significant people in their lives to death. Some had to suffer severe deprivation and many days or months in refugee camps. These experiences are bound to cause feelings of confusion, helplessness, anxiety and fear for most of these learners, making it even more difficult for them to adjust. Together with this, they face the important task of learning a new language and adapt to a new culture.

It is essential for refugee learners to be facilitated in their adjustment to their new school environment. This is where the school and teachers play an immense role. From the empirical data and literature review some suggestions were made that could be helpful for teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment. The Gestalt philosophy and principles that influence social adjustment will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: GESTALT PRINCIPLES TO ENHANCE THE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF REFUGEE LEARNERS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research study was to develop guidelines, from a Gestalt perspective, for teachers working with refugee learners. The goal of these guidelines is to assist teachers in the facilitation process of the refugee learner's social adjustment to a foreign school environment. In Chapter three, the second phase of Intervention research, namely to gather information from existing resources, was carried out. In this regard, information regarding influences impacting on the refugee learner's social adjustment to a new school environment was gathered from relevant literature. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was used to gain knowledge on the refugee learner's social adjustment to a new school environment.

In light of the aim to develop guidelines, from a Gestalt perspective, for teachers working with refugee learners, information about the Gestalt approach is presented in this chapter. The researcher reflects on how the Gestalt philosophy and principles can be used to develop Gestalt guidelines for teachers facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment. The focus is on defining the Gestalt concept, the Gestalt philosophy and the principles of the Gestalt approach. For the purpose of this study, the following Gestalt principles will be discussed: Awareness, contact/contact boundary disturbances, dialogue, boundaries, unfinished business, homeostasis/organismic self-regulation, responsibility, sense of self, and children's processes.

4.2 THE DEFINITION OF GESTALT

The Gestalt concept is a German term with no equivalent in English (Blom, 2006:18). 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 Gestalt approach thus emphasises that every person is a whole entity with different abilities and shapes within a bigger environment (Goodwin, 2005:248). Wertheimer (in Goodwin, 2005:248) elaborates on this definition by stating: "There are wholes, the behaviour of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole". The Gestalt

concept, in other words, can be seen as an integrated structure or system where the parts are in relation with each other and with the whole (Corsini, 1999:413).

4.3 THE GESTALT PHILOSOPHY

MacKewn (1997:15) states that every human being has an “urge to complete”. By this, MacKewn is of opinion that when an individual looks at an incomplete item or object, that individual will automatically try to make meaning by guessing what the missing parts are. The individual will thus spontaneously see the whole of that object, instead of only the visible parts. Psychologically, an individual in other words manages his world (or field as it is referred to in the Gestalt approach) in a related fashion (Mackewn, 1997:16). With an inherent urge to make meaning out of his emotional life, the individual will therefore organise experiences into meaningful wholes. The reason for this is because the individual wants to see completed figures or *Gestalten* against the background of the rest of the field in order to enjoy emotional satisfaction. If the individual, however, fails to organise his experiences in order to make meaning, that individual will feel discomfort (MacKewn, 1997:16).

Yontef (1993:284) defines the field as the whole by which the parts are in direct relation and interaction to one another. Each separate part of the field is thus influenced by events in the rest of the field. Within the context of this study, the parts of the teacher and the refugee learner’s fields involve systems such as the school, home and church. The teacher and refugee learner, however, also form parts of their own fields. Therefore, the way in which they think and see themselves in the world form part of their fields. Latner (1986:4) adds to this, and states 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) further states that, because individuals are constantly interacting with, and form part of, their field, they have to gain awareness of themselves in the here and now.

Lewin (in Mackewn, 2003:16) argues that individuals constantly reorganise their fields and make meaning of their experiences according to their current needs. MacKewn (1997:17) elaborates on this by stating that they have physical and emotional needs and an urge to regulate themselves and meet those needs. Once a need (or figure) is met or resolved, it withdraws to the background until a new need emerges and the cycle starts over again. If it happens that elements in the field interfere with the individual’s ability to resolve a certain need, closure can be achieved by acknowledging the unfulfilled need and experiencing and

expressing the emotions that result from the impossibility of fulfilling the need (MacKewn, 1997:17). If it so happens that the individual experiences a conflict of needs, the dominant need will be priority.

Philippson (2005:2) bases the field theory on the following four principles which will be explained within the context of the study:

- The principle of organisation: according to this principle, the teachers' and the refugee learners' thoughts, feelings and behaviour are based on their interaction with their field at present.
- The principle of singularity: according to this principle, each teacher-field and each refugee learner-field is unique.
- The principle of changing process: Since the field is continuously changing, the teacher and the refugee learner must invent new ways to balance their needs with the possibilities within the field.
- The principle of possible relevance: according to this principle, any part of the teacher and the refugee learner's fields is possibly relevant to the situation.

The Gestalt approach thus suggests that every individual should be aware of the different elements that form part of his functioning in order to make meaning of it and to exist as a complete and whole person.

4.4 GESTALT PRINCIPLES

The Gestalt approach consists of various principles. The researcher is of opinion that the following Gestalt principles could aid teachers in facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment process: Awareness, contact/contact boundary disturbances, dialogue, boundaries, unfinished business, homeostasis, organismic self-regulation, responsibility, sense of self and refugee learners' processes. These principles will subsequently be discussed.

4.4.1 Awareness

Perls (in Blom, 2006:52) considers awareness as the ability to be in contact with one's own existence, to notice what is happening around and inside one, to connect with the environment, other people and oneself. Awareness further refers to knowing what one is feeling or thinking, and how one reacts in this very moment (Blom, 2006:53). One of the

core aspects of Gestalt, according to Yontef (1993:124), is for people 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”. The facilitation process of teachers assisting refugee learners in their social adjustment can thus only be effective when teachers become aware of the elements that influence the social adjustment of refugee learners. Likewise, for social adjustment to occur, the refugee learner should become aware of his own behaviour and how this behaviour influences him and others.

Aronstam (in Blom, 2006:53) reflects that awareness brings people in contact with their own needs and emotions, giving them the ability to take responsibility for who they are and what they do. This elaborates on Mackewn’s (1997:17) statement that closure can only be achieved when a person acknowledges an unfulfilled need and experiences the emotions that accompany the impossibility to fulfil the need. When there is full awareness, the refugee learner will be in contact with the most important events of his field. This awareness is based on the dominant need of the refugee learner. Teachers should thus enhance the refugee learner’s awareness in order for the refugee learner to know himself, the current situation he is in and how he is in that situation. When enhancing the refugee learner’s awareness, the teacher also enhances the learner’s ability to take responsibility for himself, his emotions and his behaviour.

The five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste) are imperative for the experience of awareness. Oaklander (1988:109) states that it is through “... our sensory modalities that we experience ourselves and make contact with the world”. Teachers can enhance refugee learners’ sensory awareness in the classroom, making it a fun activity for the whole class to enjoy. Oaklander (1988:110) gives various examples of how awareness can be heightened, and according to the researcher refugee learners’ awareness can specifically be heightened in the classroom through the following examples: Finger paint; playing musical chairs; looking through different colours of balloons; and bringing sample things for learners to taste. The refugee learner needs to become aware of himself by discovering who he is, what he feels, what he likes or dislikes, what he wants, what he does and how he does it.

4.4.2 Contact and Contact Boundary Disturbances

Contact is a vital part of human existence and experience. Blom (2006:29) is of opinion that no experience can exist without contact. The author further states that contact takes place as soon as an individual uses the environment to satisfy his needs. Oaklander (in Blom,

2006:29) is of opinion that healthy contact occurs when the individual makes use of all of his senses and is aware of his body. Healthy contact further depends on the ability to express emotions in a healthy manner, as well as the use of intellect to express ideas, thoughts and needs.

The teacher and the refugee learner are in continuous contact with each other, as they are part of each other's fields. Consequently, they affect each other's feelings and behaviour. Although teachers and refugee learners should always be viewed as in contact with each other and their environments, there must also be boundaries that distinguish them from each other and from their environment (cf. Blom, 2006:30). The contact boundary thus refers to the point where individuals experience the "I" relative to the "not I". Blom (2006:29) explains this by distinguishing between "... that which is within (part of) and outside (foreign to) the organism". Through this, the contact boundary connects individuals and brings them into contact with each other, but it also maintains a form of separation between them (Blom, 2006:30). When the boundary between individuals becomes unclear, lost or impermeable, a disturbance will occur (Yontef, 1993:137). These disturbances include introjections, retroflection, projection, confluence and deflection, and will be discussed within the context of the study.

- **Introjections:** This refers to opinions and beliefs that are forced upon the refugee learner and/or teacher. The learner and the teacher sometimes accept the views and beliefs of others without questioning it. A good example of this might be the recent xenophobic attitudes towards refugee learners. Teachers and learners thus take on aspects from their fields without considering the positive or the negative aspects (Blom, 2006:32).
- **Retroflection:** Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (in Blom, 2006:35) define retroflection as follows: "When a person retroflects behaviour, he does to himself what originally he did or tried to do to other persons or objects". The person thus behaves toward himself as he would like to behave towards others. An example of retroflection within the context of this research study would be when a refugee learner is told that it is wrong to be angry, and because of this the refugee learner does not express his angry feelings. The refugee learner now retroflects his emotions by developing psychosomatic symptoms, such as stomach aches.

- **Projection:** According to Blom (2006:33) projection implies that “... children do not accept responsibility for their own emotions or behaviour but hold others responsible for these”. The child thus disowns certain aspects of himself by mentioning reasons from the field to justify behaviours or feelings. An example in the context of this research study would be when the refugee learner blames his traumatic circumstances for his aggressive behaviour. Another example might be when a refugee learner says that the teacher is always cross with him, instead of acknowledging that he is cross with the teacher.
- **Confluence:** Confluence occurs when there are no boundaries between the teacher and the refugee learner, or the environment (cf. Blom, 2006:34). Thompson and Rudolph (in Blom, 2006:34) state that individuals “... may incorporate too much of themselves into others or incorporate so much of the environment into themselves that they lose touch with where they are”. Refugee learners may thus find it difficult to speak for themselves and thus find it difficult to formulate their own thoughts.
- **Deflection:** Deflection refers to when a person avoids direct contact with others (Blom, 2006:36). The refugee learner may avoid eye contact or change the subject of the conversation when interacting with a teacher. The refugee learner does not own and acknowledge his problems and feelings, and thus tries to avoid them by breaking contact. According to the researcher, it is important to keep in mind that refugee learners come from different cultural backgrounds than their teachers. In some of these cultures it is seen as disrespectful for a child to make eye contact with an adult (Oyebade, 2006:130). Teachers should thus be aware that the avoidance of eye contact in some cases may not resemble deflection. The researcher is of opinion that this is an important fact to consider when developing guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners.

According to Yontef (1993:11), if there is no clear contact boundary between two individuals, in this case for instance between teacher and refugee learner, confluence will occur, and healthy contact will not be established. The boundary that separates the “I” from the “not I” is thus not clear. In a situation like this, isolation would occur should the boundaries between teacher and learner be too rigid and not flexible. The environment and other people are thus not viewed as important for the development of the self. Clarkson (1999:57), on the other hand, states that a certain degree of contact boundary disturbance may

be part of coping and adjustment. Confluence between teacher and refugee learner, for instance, can be valuable when the teacher has empathy for the refugee learner and the trauma that he has experienced. It is, however, essential that the teacher encourages the refugee learner to move on and enhance the learner's awareness for healthy confluence to occur.

The researcher is of opinion that Gestalt guidelines will assist teachers in becoming aware of themselves and their own field, as well of possible contact boundary disturbances that may be experienced during the facilitation process.

4.4.3 Dialogue

An individual grows and develops through contact with other people. When people engage with each other, each organises the field in their own way (MacKewn, 1997:80). At the same time they influence each other and jointly shape the quality of their contact and interaction. Dialogue is thus imperative for healthy contact between teacher and refugee learner. Dialogue allows contact to happen and is thus more than just communication. MacKewn (1997:86) adds that, when individuals communicate with each other and show real responses towards each other, they should be aware of themselves and know themselves. The researcher is of opinion that good contact through dialogue between teacher and refugee learner can be helpful for the social adjustment process of the learner. Teachers should be truly engaged in the dialogue between themselves and refugee learners when facilitating learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment.

As mentioned earlier, the five senses are essential for awareness and contact making. When making contact through dialogue, teachers should take part in the dialogue with all their senses. Clarkson (1999:38) reflects that seeing and hearing alone does not guarantee good contact, but a full absorption of focused attention is essential.

Yontef (1993:4) identifies various characteristics of dialogue that are essential for good contact through dialogue:

- Inclusion: This refers to putting oneself in the experience of the other without being judging, analysing and interpreting.
- Presence: Being aware of oneself and engaging in dialogue with one's full attention.

- Commitment to dialogue: One should show interest, empathy and unconditional acceptance toward the other person.
- Dialogue is lived: One should enjoy engaging with the other person and should have the opportunity to experience and express oneself.

The researcher is of opinion that teachers should be aware of these characteristics, and should try to incorporate it in their daily contact with refugee learners.

4.4.4 Boundaries

An important aspect of any child's development is boundaries or limits (Blom, 2006:61). Boundaries in the classroom are essential and ensure a sense of what behaviour is acceptable and what behaviour is unacceptable. Blom (2006:61) states that: "When these boundaries are not available, children tend to feel anxious and their sense of self has no structure".

According to Landreth and Van der Merwe (in Blom, 2006:61), setting boundaries has various advantages. These advantages are discussed below, in the context of this research study.

- It brings the teacher and refugee learner into contact with the everyday occurrences in the classroom, and emphasises the importance of the here and now.
- It gives structure to the activities in the classroom, as well as the relationship between teacher and learner.
- It builds the refugee learner's self-control and makes both the teacher and the learner aware of their responsibilities towards each other.
- Refugee learners get an opportunity to explore what it feels like to make choices and take responsibility for his behaviour.
- It provides security and predictability within the classroom setting.
- It helps the teacher to accept the refugee learner and to maintain a professionally, ethically and socially acceptable relationship.
- The traumatised refugee learner may have experienced emotions such as anxiety and guilt. Setting boundaries creates emotional safety for this learner.

Blom (2006:65) mentions that, when setting boundaries, children should know that they should accept responsibility for their choices and the consequences of their choices. The author further states that setting boundaries “... contribute to children’s self-supportive behaviour, where they start to accept responsibility for themselves and their own choices”.

Landerth (in Blom, 2006:65) highlights certain steps that can be taken when setting boundaries. These steps will subsequently be discussed in the context of this research study:

- Step 1: The teacher should accept the refugee learner’s emotions and needs and reflect on the learner’s emotions when it occurs.
- Step 2: The teacher should communicate the boundary specifically. For example: “I can see that you are cross with that child, but you may not throw the pen at him”.
- Step 3: The teacher should set acceptable alternatives for expressing emotions, for example: “You may not hit other children when you are angry, but you may tell the child that you do not like what he is doing to you”. Should the learner break the boundary, the teacher should move through steps 1 to 3 patiently. Should the learner still break the boundary the teacher can move to step 4.
- Step 4: Set a choice to the learner in a slow manner so that the learner understands he has a choice in the punishment for breaking the rule. For example: “If you choose to hit that child, then you choose between apologising to that child, or leaving the classroom”. Through this, the refugee learner becomes aware that he has a choice and that the consequences are related to the choice that he makes (Landreth in Blom, 2006:65).

The researcher is of opinion that boundaries are essential for the facilitation process of social adjustment. Through boundaries refugee learners become aware of what is expected of them both inside and outside of the classroom.

4.4.5 Unfinished Business

MacKewn (1997:16) reflects that people have a natural tendency to continue and complete unfinished tasks and make sense out of incomplete information. According to the Gestalt approach, a person will therefore distinguish between all his needs. To restore psychological balance, the person would respond to the dominant need first. Should a person not be able to complete the present *Gestalt*, it will result in unfinished business (Clarkson, 1999:21).

Palmer (2000:87) elaborates on this by stating that unfinished business “pushes for completion”, and a person may feel discouraged by such incomplete experiences. If such a person should ignore the unpleasant feelings associated with unfinished business and not express or experience these feelings, that person’s ability to form clear figures will be limited and he will consequently not be aware of his needs in the present.

Corey (1990:323) notes that unfinished business includes events and memories that a person keeps in his background, but needs to be completed. This results in unexpressed feelings such as anxiety, rage, hatred, pain, hurt, guilt and grief. Until unfinished business and the emotions that accompany it are rectified and brought into awareness, they have the power to appear and reappear, creating negative emotional responses that will influence the person’s behaviour in the present (Allender, 2001:136). As it has been discussed in chapter three, refugee learners are exposed to severe trauma and loss and in the researcher’s opinion, the learner will have numerous memories and unresolved feelings surrounding this trauma and loss, resulting in unfinished business. As a result of this, the refugee learner might exhibit behaviour such as preoccupation, wariness, compulsiveness and self-defeating behaviour. According to the researcher, when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment, teachers should therefore be aware of the trauma that these learners endured in their journey to South Africa, and the possible unfinished business that refugee learners might experience.

Clarkson (1999:50) argues that, in Gestalt theory, when a person does not complete previous experiences, he will struggle to make full contact with himself, others and his environment. The researcher is of opinion that refugee learners might cause a stumble block for their social adjustment both in the classroom and on the playground, because they are constantly focussing their energy and attention on trying to complete these incomplete experiences.

4.4.6 Organismic Self-regulation/Homeostasis

From the view of Gestalt theory, a persons behaviour is regulated by a process called homeostasis or organismic self-regulation (Blom, 2006:23). The author describes homeostasis as the process “... during which an organism maintains its balance under different circumstances”. The process of self-regulation, in other words, refers to the way in which individuals satisfy their needs. These needs are satisfied from factors within the individual as well as factors from the environment. New needs result in discomfort until the individual finds a way to satisfy them and balance can be restored (Korb, Gorrel & Van de Riet in Blom, 2006:23). In order for refugee learners to grow and develop, they need to

maintain a balance between meeting their needs and reduce the discomfort of trying to meet these needs (Clarkson, 1999:21).

Organismic self-regulation, according to Clarkson (1999:21), depends on a person selecting what is nourishing to him and rejecting what is not nourishing. This process of self-regulation occurs through the person's five senses (smell, touch, taste, hearing, sight). MacKewn (1997:17) stresses that it is thus important for people to be aware of themselves and their own patterns of satisfying their needs. Yontef (1993:171) is of opinion that, when an individual can healthily regulate himself and reject what is unhealthy or not nourishing, he would be able to maintain a healthy balance. An example in the context of this research study would be that, when a refugee learner, for instance, accepts discipline and boundaries and rejects bullying and aggression, he would regulate himself in a healthy manner and social adjustment would take place. The researcher is of opinion that, when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment, teachers should help these learners become aware of themselves and their five senses in order for them to regulate themselves adequately.

Blom (2006:24) distinguishes between two ways for people to self-regulate, namely internal regulation and external regulation. Internal regulation is considered an inherent characteristic of all people. Korb *et al.* (in Blom, 2006:24) defines internal regulation as "... a spontaneous integral, natural part of the organism, biologically as well as psychologically". External regulation, on the other hand, interferes with the spontaneous process of internal regulation, and results in the needs of a person to be unsatisfied. This leads to fragmentation, and the person will no longer function as a holistic entity (Blom, 2006:24). An example of internal regulation might be when a refugee learner who needs support from a teacher will go to the teacher and ask for what he needs. An example of external regulation might be when a refugee learner is afraid of what other learners will say, resulting in the refugee learner not asking for the necessary support from the teacher. The need is therefore not satisfied and this often leads to fragmentation and an incomplete *Gestalt* for the refugee learner (Blom, 2006:24).

4.4.7 Responsibility

One of the core aspects of the Gestalt approach is that individuals should become aware of what they are doing, how they are doing it and how they can change themselves (Yontef, 1993:2). This includes knowing the environment, taking responsibility for one's choices,

self-acceptance and the ability to make contact. Individuals are thus responsible for the experiences in their lives (Clarkson, 1999:27).

Perls (in MacKewn, 2003:124) is of opinion that people are active in making choices and organising their lives and reality, taking responsibility for themselves and the meaning they give to experiences. Perls (in MacKewn, 2003:124) further states that even when a person is not personally responsible for the circumstances that he faces in life, he is still responsible for the meanings he gives to these experiences and the choices he makes regarding his behaviour and attitudes. In light of the above-mentioned, refugee learners therefore need to be made aware that, even though they are not personally responsible for their circumstances, they still have to take responsibility for their behaviour and emotions in order for them to successfully adapt to their new school environment. The researcher feels that teachers have a great influence on refugee learners' lives. It is thus also necessary for teachers to take responsibility for, and be aware of, their own emotions and behaviour as well when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment.

Sternberg and Subotnik (2006:7) distinguish between various ways to develop a sense of responsibility, a positive identity and self-awareness. This will be subsequently discussed in the context of this research study.

- Encouraging refugee learners to participate in leadership development activities.
- Providing opportunities for refugee learners to develop and voice their opinions, make decisions, hold responsible positions, express creativity, work as part of a team, and create classroom rules.
- Creating academic responsibility by developing the refugee learner's self-regulation skills and a sense of personal acceptance. This involves setting learning goals, managing their time wisely, seeking assistance when needed, and assessing what they learn.

In chapter two, the respondents shared the opinion that refugee learners seem extremely resilient (See 2.3.1.1). The researcher is of opinion that this characteristic of resiliency is a strong point of refugee learners that teachers have to develop when facilitating these learners in their social adjustment. Brooks and Goldstein (2002:9) link resilience and responsibility by highlighting the fact that resilient learners possess a sense of responsibility. The researcher therefore believes that guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners

should focus on resiliency as a strong characteristic of refugee learners, and that teachers should assist these learners in developing this characteristic in order to help them take responsibility for their behaviour and emotions.

4.4.8 Sense of Self

Oaklander (1988:280) states that no child is born with bad feelings about himself. How a child feels about himself is greatly determined by factors and messages he receives from the environment. Yontef (2005:81) agrees, and notes that: "... sense of self is a phenomenon of the field – it is so co-constructed by the individual and the environment". According to the researcher, the identities of refugee learners are thus formed and maintained by the whole field.

Oaklander (1988:281-282) is of opinion that children manifest a low sense of self in many different ways. However, children may not even be aware that they don't feel too good about themselves. Oaklander (1988:281-282) identifies the following signs of low sense of self in children: Whining, cheating in games, perfectionism, exaggerated bragging, antisocial behaviour, being self-critical, blaming others for everything, making excuses for everything, withdrawal, aggression, being fearful for trying new things, distrusting people, pleasing behaviour and constantly apologising. For Oaklander (1988:282) a child's sense of self is a very important aspect of learning, development and adjustment. From the empirical data the researcher believes that the above-mentioned signs of low sense of self are also applicable to refugee learners in the school setting. It is therefore important for the teacher to strengthen the refugee learner's sense of self when facilitating the social adjustment process.

Oaklander (1988:282) makes the following suggestions that can be used to help enhance a child's sense of self. The researcher believes that these suggestions can also be used by teachers inside and outside of the classroom to enhance refugee learners' sense of self, and views these suggestions in context with this research study.

- Listen to, acknowledge and accept the refugee learner's feelings;
- Treat refugee learners with respect and accept them for who they are;
- Give the refugee learner specific praise;
- Be honest;

- Use “I” messages instead of “you” messages, for instance: “I do not like it if I do not have your full attention” instead of “You always...” or “You never...”;
- Give the refugee learner responsibilities and opportunities to make choices;
- Remember the learner’s uniqueness, even though it may be different from the teacher’s uniqueness; and
- Avoid being judgemental, giving the refugee learner many prerequisites and needless advice.

These suggestions may be helpful for teachers and refugee learners in the school setting, improving the teacher-learner relationship and enhancing social adjustment.

4.4.9 Children’s Processes

Blom (2006:79) refers to a child’s process as the unique way in which the child presents himself to the world, as well as the way in which he satisfies his needs. The author further states that an important aspect of a child’s process is his temperament. Papalia, Olds and Feldman (in Blom, 2006:79) define temperament as “... a person’s characteristic way of approaching and reacting to people and situations”. According to the researcher, each refugee learner copes with traumatic experiences and social adjustment in their own unique way. Some refugee learners may, for instance, present with aggressive behaviour while others may withdraw. The researcher is of opinion that teachers should have a sound knowledge of each refugee learner’s temperament or process when helping them adjust to their new school environment.

Blom (2006:79) refers to the DISC temperament analysis when determining children’s processes. The author, however, stretches the important fact that the DISC analysis should not be used to label children, but it should be used as a guideline when working with children. The following aspects explain the DISC analysis (Boyd in Blom, 2006:79):

- Children may either be fast-paced or slow-paced and task-orientated or people-orientated.
- Children who are fast-paced are extroverts and thus focus their actions on their outside environment.

- Slow-paced children are introverts and tend to be more quite, shy, reserved and self-contained.
- Task-orientated children focus on doing things; they plan their activities and base their decisions on facts and data, rather than opinions and feelings.
- Children who are people-orientated focus on being with people and are more relaxed, caring and personable.

Fast-paced and task-orientated children fall in the “D” (directive/determined) behavioural style of the DISC analysis; children who are fast-paced and people-orientated fit into the “I” (interactive/influencing) behaviour style; the “S” (supportive/soft-hearted) behavioural style refers to children who are slow-paced and people-orientated; and slow-paced and task-orientated children can be described as “C” (corrective/conscientious) (Boyd in Blom, 2006:80).

The researcher is of opinion that the DISC analysis can be used by teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. The teacher can assist the refugee learner in his social adjustment by observing the learner’s behaviour, gaining knowledge of the way in which each learner presents himself to teachers and peers.

Table 4.1 is an illustration of the prominent characteristics of children according to the DISC analysis, which can be helpful for teachers working with refugee learners, helping them adjust to their new school environment.

Directive children (D)	Interactive children (I)	Supportive children (S)	Corrective children (C)
High self-confidence	People-orientated	Steadfast	Maintain high standards
Courageous	Emotional	Team player	Attentive to key details
Result-orientated	Talkative	Prefer familiarity	Self-disciplined
Demanding	Fun-loving	Helpful	Cautious
Competitive	Optimistic	Committed	Analytical
Change-agent	Spontaneous	Pragmatic	Highly intuitive
Direct	Seek social acceptance	Humble	Perfectionist

Table 4.1 Prominent characteristics of children according to the DISC analysis (Boyd & Rhom in Blom, 2006:80).

4.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the Gestalt philosophy and Gestalt principles associated with the social adjustment of refugee learners were discussed. It is evident that the awareness of both refugee learner and teacher is imperative for the facilitation process of social adjustment. Contact between teacher and learner is also important and good contact can enhance the refugee learner's social adjustment enormously. In the next chapter, functional elements of existing social adjustment interventions that could be utilised for this study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: FUNCTIONAL ELEMENTS OF EXISTING SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The second phase of the Design and Development model of Intervention research is to gather information. The first two steps of the second phase, namely to study natural examples and use existing information sources, were discussed in previous chapters. The third and final step of this phase is for the researcher to identify functional elements of successful models or programmes (See 1.4.2.3). Although this research study seeks to establish Gestalt guidelines for the facilitation process of the refugee learner's social adjustment, the researcher found other models that do not specifically focus on the Gestalt approach, but are still useful in establishing Gestalt guidelines for teachers. In this chapter, attention will be given to the following models and guidelines:

- Reception and orientation guidelines;
- A threefold model of cultural/academic/psychological (CAP) interventions;
- Resilience Education: The PORT (participation, observation, reflection, transformation) Model;
- A model for academic improvement and adjustment; and
- Good practice strategies for second language learners.

These models and guidelines will subsequently be discussed.

5.2 RECEPTION AND ORIENTATION GUIDELINES

Coelho (1998:54) notes that positive reception and orientation can have an encouraging effect on the newly enrolled refugee learner in the school environment. This will contribute to a positive integration experience for these learners, helping them feel at ease with their new academic programme and social life in the school. Refugee parents will also benefit from a positive reception and orientation. Through this, these parents will feel accepted and will want to establish a relationship with the school to contribute to their children's education.

The refugee learner needs to experience a positive first impression of the school environment and his new teachers. From the first day of school the refugee learner forms expectations of the school and how he will fit in. Should a school seem unwelcoming and unwilling to assist refugee learners and their parents in the important process of adjusting to a new school, these parents and learners may feel intimidated from the very beginning and future success will be greatly influenced.

Coelho (1998:55) identifies between various guidelines for the school and teachers to ensure a positive reception for refugee learners and their parents:

- Create signs and notices in English and display them in important locations around the school. A “welcome” sign should be included as well as signs of where the new learners should go to register.
- Establish a procedure for welcoming refugee learners and their parents. The school office staff is most likely the first with whom refugee learners and their parents have contact with when they arrive at the school. The office staff should thus be trained to receive these learners and their parents in a welcoming manner.
- Use the home language as often as possible. An interpreter can be useful when communicating with the refugee learner and his parents. It is, however, not always possible to have an interpreter at hand. In this case it may be useful for the teacher to learn some words of French or Portuguese. This will put the refugee learner at ease and will create a positive first impression.
- Allow enough time for the reception interview. It may take twice as long when using an interpreter. If an interpreter is not available, it may take long to explain certain concepts to the parents and the learner, such as the concept of a six-day cycle.
- Conduct an informal interview where the teacher can collect information regarding the refugee learner’s previous school experiences and physical health. The teacher may even ask questions regarding the immigration circumstances, but should always keep in mind that refugee learners and their parents may not be ready to share this information, since it reminds them of extreme traumatic experiences.
- Provide basic information regarding the length and structure of the school day, what the refugee learner needs to bring to school, and holidays. The teacher should not

overload the refugee family with information, but should try and establish a relationship so that orientation can continue over the next few weeks.

- A welcome booklet in the refugee family's home language can be very useful, and they can take it home to familiarise themselves with their child's new school and routines.
- Give the parents information about English learning programmes available in the community.
- A basic starter kit for the refugee learner may also be useful. The starter kit may include materials such as a notebook, pencils, an eraser, and a ruler. An English dictionary can even be included in the starter kit.
- Use other refugee learners - who have been in the school for a longer time and who are settled into the school – as “tour guides” to show the new refugee learner around the school. By doing this, the new refugee learner will have someone to identify with and realise that he is not the only learner going through the adjustment process.

The researcher is of opinion that the above-mentioned guidelines will be useful when establishing Gestalt guidelines for teachers in facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment, as this will put both refugee learner and parents at ease about the new school and teachers.

5.3 A THREEFOLD MODEL OF CULTURAL/ACADEMIC/PSYCHOLOGICAL (CAP) INTERVENTIONS

The goals of the CAP interventions are to facilitate the refugee learner's preservation of authenticity and connection to his native culture, academic achievement and sense of feeling fully alive in the school environment (Igoa, 1995:7). This intervention ensures a supportive and cooperative school environment for both teacher and learner.

The CAP intervention recognises the complicated tasks that teachers face everyday. Teachers have the task of examining the teaching practices they use, the policies they are expected to follow and the theories they adopt (Igoa, 1995:7). Regardless of this, the CAP interventions stress that the successes or failures of an individual refugee learner, and the way the learner experiences school, greatly depends on what happens in the classroom, what kind

of teaching environment the teacher is able to create and how the teacher is able to attend to the learner's particular needs (Igoa, 1995:7).

According to the CAP intervention model, refugee learners are more than just “language minority” learners. They are learners who have been exposed to severe trauma, not only losing parents and other loved ones, but also losing their culture. These learners need to be guided through the overwhelming process of adjusting to a new culture, school and language. With the following remark, Igoa (1995:9) summarises the responsibility and role of teachers in helping the refugee learner to adjust to a new school environment:

We as teachers need to help them open up to the new while they retain the old. We need to help them learn to succeed so they can be productive and contribute to worldwide civilization.

The first underlying message of the CAP intervention model is that the whole school system should change to accommodate the social adjustment of refugee learners – the teacher cannot do it all (Igoa, 1995:9). The school system should create a flexible and empowering environment so that teachers will have the confidence to show refugee learners how to stand up for themselves and voice their thoughts in a manner to be heard. The second underlying message of the CAP intervention is for the classrooms to change so that the teachers become more than just dispensers of information – classrooms should be humanised to best facilitate learners in their development and adjustment (Igoa, 1995:9).

5.3.1 Differentiation between Empowerment and Power

The CAP intervention model emphasises the importance to distinguish between the terms *empowerment* and *power*. Empowerment, according to Igoa (1995:8), refers to strengthening the refugee learner's sense of self-confidence that generates purposeful action. The meaning of power refers to the power that is invested in the school and is used to impose values, expectations or goals on the teacher and the refugee learner that they themselves do not generate or recognise. In the latter the school uses its power to control the teacher and the learner. Igoa (1995:8) is of opinion that the power invested in the school system can stand in the way of the teacher doing what is most effective for the refugee learner. This results in teachers feeling that they cannot express their full potential as teachers, as they have to give credibility to the way things are supposed to be done in the eyes of the school system. From the CAP interventions, it is clear that “... school failure is seldom, if ever a learner's fault

(Igoa, 1995:8)”. When the refugee learner’s environment is investigated, intellectual or emotional failures are often found to be the result of the flow between the learner and the teacher or school wherein the learner feels unloved and disempowered.

The CAP intervention model notes the importance of the teacher’s role when working with refugee learners. This role includes a facilitation process where the teachers help refugee learners to integrate their inner and outer selves and strengthening a sense of being at home with themselves and in the world (Igoa, 1995:10). Important aspects teachers should incorporate when assisting refugee learners in their social adjustment include the following:

- The importance of listening to the refugee learners;
- The importance of the feeling of security;
- The importance of understanding different cultures; and
- The importance of belonging.

The researcher is of opinion that the CAP interventions can be useful when establishing guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners, and that the CAP interventions can be integrated when teachers assist refugee learners in their social adjustment inside and outside of the classroom.

5.4 RESILIENCE EDUCATION: THE PORT MODEL

As discussed in Chapter 3, refugee learners are exposed to severe trauma and loss throughout their migration process to South Africa. Resilience is thus an essential quality needed by these learners (See 3.3). Resilience education focuses on positive outcomes for traumatic circumstances rather than on the problems that these circumstances have to offer. The goal of resilience education is to identify and develop the refugee learner’s interests and strengths, so that the refugee learner can thrive despite of challenging circumstances (Brown *et al.*, 2001:32).

The PORT (participation, observation, reflection and transformation) model emphasises resilience education as an ongoing, empowering and participatory process (Brown *et al.*, 2001:31). By using the PORT model, the teacher can develop and build on his own interests and strengths as well as the refugee learner’s interests and strengths. Resilience education is not seen as a means to an end but “It is an ongoing process, where the means and the ends

represent ongoing parts of a cycle of engaged participation” (Brown *et al.*, 2001:33). Figure 5.1 is an illustration of resilience education as an ongoing process.

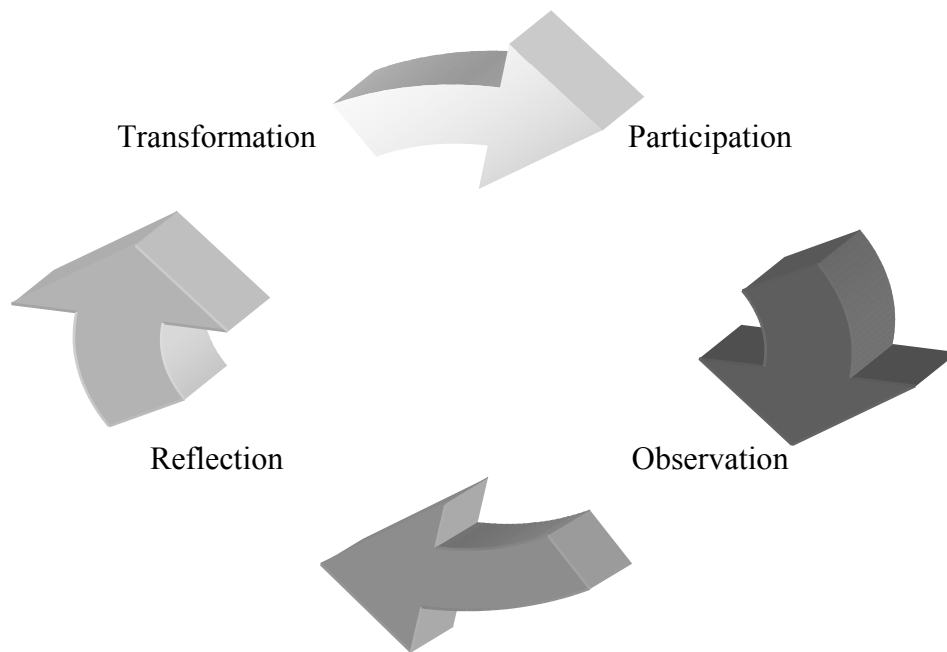


Figure 5.1 Resilience Education: An ongoing process (Brown *et al.*, 2001:33).

Brown *et al.* (2001:88) thus defines resilience education as “... the development of decision-making and affective skills within each person and connectedness between people in the context of a healthy learning community”. Based on this definition, Brown *et al.* (2001:88) distinguish between the following principles of practice to guide teachers working with refugee learners:

- Use strategies that engage learners’ intrinsic motivations;
- Allow learners to safely experiment with making decisions;
- Help create life goals, a “dream” that the learner endorses; and
- Encourage the exploration of emotions related to the difficulties that learners face.

Resilience education is useful in the sense that the teacher can apply this approach to all learners and not solely to refugee learners.

5.4.1 The elements of the PORT Model

The acronym PORT refers to a way of thinking and includes four elements: participation, observation, reflection, and transformation (Brown *et al.*, 2001:33). The PORT model is flexible and the teacher can choose when and how to implement each element.

Each of the elements of the PORT model will subsequently be discussed (Brown *et al.*, 2001:33-36).

5.4.1.1 Participation

According to the PORT model, the teacher and refugee learner participate in every moment of life to varying degrees, and the level of contact that the teacher and refugee learners experience with other and the environment vary from moment to moment (Brown *et al.*, 2001:33). With resilience education the teacher creates an opportunity for himself and the refugee learner to become aware of the level of contact at a given moment, enhancing awareness of their own and the other person's needs. As a result of this awareness of participation, both teacher and refugee learner are able to make better decisions based on the understanding of each other's needs.

5.4.1.2 Observation (Note taking)

Observation involves noting the teacher and the refugee learner's experiences. Teachers are familiar with observation as a way of assessing learners' interaction and work. Observation through the PORT model entails broadening this skill (Brown *et al.*, 2001:33). Observation, according to the PORT model, refers to noting the participation of the teacher and the refugee learner at multiple levels (Brown *et al.*, 2001:33). These levels involve observations about the teacher's personal, internal self (intrapersonal), what the teacher sees happening between learners and other teachers (interpersonal), and what the teacher and refugee learner experience within the context of the school environment (systemic). The use of sensorial modalities, verbal and non-verbal communication, thinking, feeling and behaviour are important factors present at any given moment. Observation is thus the notation of the experiences of both teacher and refugee learner within these factors (Brown *et al.*, 2001:33).

5.4.1.3 Reflection (Note making)

Reflection refers to the interpreting of the teacher and the refugee learner's experiences. Here, it is imperative for the teacher not to be judgemental. Without judgement, the teacher

will be able to distinguish between his own perception and the interpretation of that perception (Brown *et al.*, 2001:34). The PORT model refers to two kinds of reflection:

- Content reflection involves the interpretation of the teacher and refugee learner of what they are learning about a situation (Brown *et al.*, 2001:34). This is the “what” experience: For example, what the teacher is learning about how to assist a refugee learner with xenophobia in the classroom or playground, and what the refugee learner is learning about how to handle this xenophobia.
- Meta-reflection is a “step back” interpretation of “how” the teacher and refugee learner experience the “what” of a situation (Brown *et al.*, 2001:35). Here the teacher steps back from the situation, but is still participating in it. This allows the teacher to gain an understanding about the meaning of patterns of behaviour and experience. Creating a brief space between himself and the refugee learner allows the teacher to make conscious choices about how to interpret the experience. Meta-reflection gives the teacher insight into his own interpretations of how refugee learners act and react, as well as how to intervene (Brown *et al.*, 2001:35).

5.4.1.4 Transformation

Transformation involves the teacher and refugee learner’s awareness of, and responsibility for, an act and reaction (Brown *et al.*, 2001:36). In every moment in the school environment there is an opportunity to act, interact and react. Each of these indicates the transformation of the interpretation of an experience into behaviour. Through resilience education the teacher creates the opportunity to transform participation, observation and reflection into informed action (Brown *et al.*, 2001:36). Observation and reflection provide an opportunity to the teacher to take time to determine what certain experiences mean to the refugee learner and what is important in the classroom setting. The teacher can now choose how he wants to transform this into behaviour.

5.5 A MODEL FOR ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT AND ADJUSTMENT (THE OTHER THREE R’S MODEL)

This model is designed to help teachers convey three important skills necessary for learners’ academic achievement and social adjustment (Cogan, Sternberg & Subotnik, 2006:229).

These three skills are referred to as *the other three R's*, and include reasoning; resilience; and responsibility.

The following three assumptions are underlying to the *other three R's* model for academic improvement and adjustment (Cogan *et al.*, 2006:228):

- Reasoning, resilience and responsibility can be learned;
- Once learned, reasoning, resilience and responsibility lead to increases in academic achievement and social adjustment; and
- Reasoning, resilience and responsibility derive the greatest power through their interaction with each other.

5.5.1 Reasoning

Cogan *et al.* (2006:230) is of the opinion that reasoning and critical thinking are two of the strongest predictors of academic achievement and adjustment. Teaching refugee learners problem solving – how to figure things out – is key to successful learning and social adjustment. Cogan *et al.* (2006:230) further states that the skills that learners learn under the heading of problem solving can have a great influence on their social development and evidently their social adjustment. These skills include planning, flexibility, resourcefulness and critical thinking, which involve the following:

- Planning entails looking ahead and making healthy choices;
- Flexibility entails changing plans when one's original strategy does not work out;
- Critical thinking refers to a higher order thinking that offers an understanding and deeper meaning to an event or situation; and
- Resourcefulness refers to seeking help when needed and using resources intelligently.

5.5.2 Resilience

Resilience allows the refugee to thrive despite challenging circumstances. Cogan *et al.* (2006:230) states: “Resilience provides individuals with skills to surmount life's challenges competently, to persevere, and even to capitalize on setbacks”. Resilience, according to the

other three R's model, is thus important for improving the academic achievement as well as the social adjustment process of refugee learners.

5.5.3 Responsibility

The other three R's model emphasises that schools need to pay more attention to *how learners use what they know* than to what learners *know* (Cogan *et al.*, 2006:230). Learners need to be taught how to take responsibility for their academic achievement and their behaviour. The concept of responsibility in the other three R's model thus incorporates social responsibility. Social responsibility, according to the other three R's model, includes "... the wisdom to be responsible for others as well as oneself – seeking outcomes that reflect the common good" (Cogan *et al.*, 2006:231).

5.6 GOOD PRACTICE STRATEGIES FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

After Loewen (2004:42) has studied factors influencing refugee learners' social adjustment to a new school environment and their learning of a second language, he found it necessary to consider what schools can do to help these learners in this task. Loewen (2004:42) stretches that, although he refers to "good practice", it must be kept in mind that good practice can vary depending on the circumstances. Furthermore, individual variations in language learning are a well-recognised phenomenon, as is variations in refugee learners' backgrounds. With this in mind, Loewen (2004:42) points out that good practice may work for one refugee learner, but might not be best for another learner. Keeping this in mind, Loewen (2004:42) identified the following practices as being helpful for refugee learners in learning a second language as well as for their social adjustment:

- Inclusive classrooms;
- Pull-out English as a second language (ESL) classes; and
- Peer tutoring.

These strategies will subsequently be discussed.

5.6.1 Inclusive Classrooms

According to Loewen (2004:42), refugee learners will benefit from being included in regular classes, since they will be motivated to learn English when participating in activities with English-speaking learners, both inside and outside of the classroom. If refugee learners are

separated from mainstream classes they would thus miss the opportunity to interact with English-speaking learners as their primary source of English. Rutter (in Loewen, 2004:43) further points out that separating refugee learners may result in these learners being labelled, which can have a detrimental impact on their social adjustment.

Franson (in Loewen, 2004:43) warns that, although including refugee learners in mainstream classes may be ideal, it should be “... well-planned and not simply implemented *ad hoc* to satisfy the latest dictates of theory”. Barnard (in Loewen, 2004:44) elaborates on this, and states: “... the transition (to the new school) is best managed by planned immersion experiences in mainstream classrooms”. Poor planning of inclusive classrooms may result in the refugee learner feeling overwhelmed and the strategy of inclusive classroom may be unsuccessful.

According to Loewen (2004:44), inclusive classrooms can be very successful, as these refugee learners come into social and psychological contact with the target language group, which is essential for the acculturation process. By denying refugee learners the opportunity to interact with learners in mainstream classes, teachers are denying them contact with English-speaking learners, ultimately damaging the social adjustment process.

5.6.2 Pull-Out ESL Classes

Loewen (2004:45) is of opinion that, while including refugee learners in mainstream classes may be considered good practice, there may be some occasions where withdrawing these learners is suitable. Reasons for this withdrawal may include helping total beginners with only basic literacy, focusing on specific problems or assignments, and allowing traumatised refugee learners to develop a trusting relationship with an adult.

As with inclusive classrooms, pull-out classes should be well planned in order for it to be successful (Loewen, 2004:45). It is important for the pull-out classes to be consistent with the content of inclusive classrooms. Pull-out ESL classes need to meet the needs of the refugee learner. If pull-out classes are not made relevant to the refugee learner’s needs, the learner may feel that he is losing valuable time that could be spent more productively in the inclusive classroom. Another aspect that should be kept in mind with pull-out ESL classes is that refugee learners may feel isolated and experience a lack of contact with their English-speaking peers, should these classes not be planned and managed appropriately (Loewen, 2004:45).

5.6.3 Peer Tutoring

Studies done by Gunderson (in Loewen, 2004:47) have concluded that refugee learners will benefit from practising English with English speaking peers. One practice that Loewen (2004:47) put forward to deal with this issue was the development of a peer tutoring or a “buddy” system in which refugee learners are paired with both first language and second language peers. The goal of the peer tutoring system is to have peer tutors to help refugee learners become familiar with the school system and the expectations of their new school. Peer tutoring also gives the refugee learner the opportunity to interact with his peers and to practise English. In addition, the English-speaking learner may learn from the refugee learner as well, fostering a mutual understanding between them.

Loewen (2004:47) suggests that peer tutors be trained for a short length of about six to ten weeks. Another suggestion is also that same sex tutors be used for younger learners, and that the tutor and the refugee learner have some common interests.

Refugee learners will benefit from peer tutoring in the sense that they are exposed to an increased amount of time of speaking in English. In addition, the social adjustment process of refugee learners will benefit from friendships made with English-speaking peers through the peer tutor system.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter was to identify and discuss the functional elements of existing social adjustment models and programmes that can be used to establish Gestalt guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners. Although the models and programmes do not specifically focus on the Gestalt approach, all of them complement the Gestalt principles.

In Chapter 6, the researcher describes the process of developing and designing Gestalt guidelines to assist teachers in their process of facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment.

CHAPTER 6: DESIGN AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on functional elements of existing social adjustment programmes and models. In this chapter, attention will be given to the last two phases of the Design and Development model of intervention research. This includes the design phase and early development of preliminary guidelines for teachers to facilitate refugee learners in their social adjustment – this being the aim of the study.

Attention will firstly be given to the design phase. The steps of the design phase include designing an observational system (see 1.4.3.1) and specifying procedural elements of the intervention (See 1.4.3.2).

6.2 DESIGNING AN OBSERVATIONAL SYSTEM

An observational system serves to measure the outcomes of an intervention. The measurement can be done through direct observation, self-monitoring or self-reporting (De Vos, 2005:400-401). For the purpose of this research study, the outcomes of the intervention will be done by means of self-monitoring, self-recording and direct observation.

In chapter 2, respondents have identified various problem areas and challenges they face when working with refugee learners. Using this information together with information from literature and functional elements of existing social adjustment programmes, the researcher has designed spreadsheets that can be used by teachers in conjunction with the established guidelines. Teachers will be able to use self-monitoring, self-recording and direct observation to assist the refugee learner in his social adjustment to a new school environment.

6.2.1 Observation sheet No. 1: Background Information of Refugee Learners

The purpose of this observational sheet (see Table 6.1) is for teachers to evaluate the knowledge that they have about the refugee learner's background and circumstances. With this sheet teachers can record on areas where they need to gain more awareness on, for instance what country the refugee learner comes from, the culture and home language of the learner, trauma that the learner has been exposed to, the learner's living conditions and previous formal education experience.

**Table 6.1 OBSERVATION SHEET NO. 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF
REFUGEE LEARNERS**

1. Where does the refugee learner come from (home country)?	(e.g. Angola; Cambodia; Congo; Ethiopia; Mozambique; Nigeria; Somalia; Zimbabwe)
2. What is the refugee learner's home language?	(e.g. French; Portuguese; Swahili)
3. What do you know about the refugee learner's culture?	(e.g. Does the refugee learner's culture allow him to make eye contact?)
4. What type of trauma has the refugee learner been exposed to?	(e.g. Loss of parents and other loved ones; torture; sexual abuse)
5. What is the refugee learner's living conditions?	(e.g. Does the refugee learner live with his parents?; Does he live with brothers/sisters?; Does he live in a shelter?)
6. Are both the refugee learner's parents alive?	(Yes/No; What other information is available regarding the refugee learner's parents?)
7. Does the refugee learner have any other formal education experience?	(e.g. Has the refugee learner received formal education in his home country?; Has the refugee learner lost time in formal education during his flight to South Africa)

6.2.2 Observation Sheet No. 2: Teacher-Parent Partnerships

This observational sheet (see Table 6.2) seeks to evaluate the partnerships that teachers form with refugee parents. These include welcoming refugee parents to their child's new school environment, involving parents in school activities and procedures, and providing information regarding the school curriculum and the roles and responsibilities of the parents.

Table 6.2 OBSERVATION SHEET NO. 2: TEACHER-PARENT PARTNERSHIPS

1. Are refugee parents made to feel welcome during their first contact with you and the school?	(e.g. Information packs regarding school policies and procedures such as public holidays and lunch breaks; Providing parents with a list of key school contacts)
2. Do refugee parents understand their roles, rights and responsibilities in supporting their child in school?	(e.g. Information sessions with parents; Translated information where necessary; Providing opportunities for parents to ask questions about their rights and roles)
3. Do refugee parents understand the school curriculum?	(e.g. Information sessions about outcomes-based education, inclusive classrooms and multicultural education; Providing opportunities for parents to ask questions about the school curriculum)
4. Do you involve refugee parents in school activities?	(e.g. Parent evenings; Sports activities; Cultural activities)
5. Do you encourage refugee parents to be involved in school structures?	(e.g. School council; After-school; Reading and writing classes)

6.2.3 Observation Sheet 3: Second Language Proficiency of Refugee Learners

The purpose of this observation sheet (see Table 6.3) is to evaluate the second language proficiency of refugee learners. Teachers are able to assess the refugee learner's listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of the English language as second language. Teachers can also assess their own efforts to assist refugee learners in learning English as a second language in order to facilitate these learners in their social adjustment to their new school environment.

Table 6.3 OBSERVATION SHEET NO. 3: SECOND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF REFUGEE LEARNERS

1. What strategies are being used when assisting the refugee learner to learn English as a second language?	(e.g. Inclusive classrooms; Pull-out ESL classes; Peer tutoring)
2. What is the refugee learner's level of English proficiency?	
• Listening	(e.g. Ability to understand spoken English, comprehend information and follow social dialogue)
• Speaking	(e.g. Ability to use English appropriately and effectively in social interactions)
• Reading	(e.g. Ability to understand and interpret written texts at grade-appropriate level)
• Writing	(e.g. Fulfilling classroom assignments at grade-appropriate level)

6.2.4 Observation sheet no. 4: The New School Environment

This observation sheet (see Table 6.4) seeks to evaluate the teacher's ability to create a safe, supportive and predictable environment for refugee learners. This includes setting boundaries, positive reinforcement and empowerment, and emotional and sensory awareness. With this observation sheet, the teacher will be able to self-monitor his ability to create a non-judgemental environment where learners from different cultural groups, countries and languages are accepted by their teacher and their South African peers.

Table 6.4 OBSERVATION SHEET NO. 4: THE NEW SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

1. Have you created a safe environment for the refugee learner?	(e.g. Clear goals, boundaries and consequences for inappropriate behaviour)
2. Have you considered common social adjustment issues that the refugee learner face?	(e.g. Adjusting to classroom expectations such as routines, participation, listening, sharing, taking turns and cooperating in group work)
3. Have you focused on positive reinforcement and empowerment for the refugee learner?	(e.g. Encouraging and recognising achievement; Giving rewards and praise for positive achievements; Avoid negative feedback)
4. Have you created an environment where different cultural backgrounds are accepted?	(e.g. Discussion groups/role plays on different cultural groups, countries and languages)
5. Have you involved the refugee learner in activities without being judgemental?	(e.g. Not judging the refugee learner on cultural beliefs, skin colour or physical disabilities)
6. Have you created an environment where the refugee learner's academic competency can be	(e.g. Setting goals in relation to learning blocks caused by trauma; Giving the refugee learner enough time to complete certain

improved?	tasks)
7. Have you created an environment where emotional awareness can be promoted?	(e.g. Involving the whole class in activities such as drawing pictures of their emotions)
8. Have you created an environment where sensory and bodily awareness can be promoted?	(e.g. Involving the whole class in dancing, seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling and smelling activities)
9. How do you deal with the refugee learner's emotional blocks, such as anxiety, guilt, depression, withdrawal, anger and shame?	(e.g. Writing, art and/or dancing for the expression of feelings; Showing genuine interest; Discussing feelings in a one-on-one situation with the learner)
10. How do you deal with situations where the refugee learner experience xenophobia and discrimination?	(e.g. Discussing feelings in a one-on-one situation with the learner; Group discussions in the classroom)
11. How do you enhance the refugee learner's sense of belonging in his new school environment?	(e.g. Having refugee learners teach you some words in their home language; Listening to refugee learners; Creating a feeling of security and belonging)

The above-mentioned observational system consists of four observation sheets wherein teachers can evaluate and self-monitor their own facilitation process of the refugee learner's social adjustment. Through this observational system, the teacher can self-record information on the refugee learner's background and field, self-monitor his relationships with refugee parents, evaluate the language proficiency of the refugee learner, as well as the new school environment as a whole.

6.3 PROCEDURAL ELEMENTS OF THE INTERVENTION

The purpose of the procedural elements is to provide details about the intervention to be used by trained change agents (De Vos, 2005:401). The author states that the procedural elements of the intervention become the eventual practice model, which is the final product of the research.

The researcher has developed the Gestalt guidelines specifically for the use of teachers working with refugee learners. It is imperative that teachers have a genuine desire to facilitate refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment.

The researcher suggests that the Gestalt guidelines be presented to teachers by a professional facilitator in group session. Important aspects of this presentation should include matters pertaining the following:

- The process of becoming a refugee in South Africa,
- Different cultural backgrounds of refugees in South Africa,
- The Gestalt approach, and
- Aspects of the social development of children over different developmental stages.

According to the researcher, only one group session will not be enough to convey the above-mentioned information. It is thus suggested that the amount of group sessions be left to the discretion of the facilitator presenting the sessions.

The following suggestions can be useful for the group sessions:

- The facilitator presenting the group sessions should have a sound knowledge of the Gestalt philosophy, as well as refugees, the type of trauma that refugee learners are exposed to and the challenges that refugee learners experience in their process of adjusting to a new school environment.
- Teachers attending the groups should be made aware of their responsibility towards facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment.
- The use of an ice-breaker at the start of the sessions is helpful to help teachers feel at ease with the group and the other group members.

- Video recordings, reading material, group discussions and role play will also be helpful in presenting certain information to the teachers.
- The facilitator should create opportunities for the teachers to interact with each other and share ideas and experiences on the topic of the social adjustment of refugee learners.

6.4 GESTALT GUIDELINES TO ASSIST TEACHERS IN FACILITATING REFUGEE LEARNERS IN THEIR SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT TO A NEW SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The following Gestalt guidelines will be useful for teachers facilitating refugee learners in the social adjustment to a new school environment.

6.4.1 Awareness

Awareness is a form of experience that can be defined as being in touch with one's own existence in the here and now (Yontef, 1993:2). The following guidelines with regards to awareness can be used by teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to the new school environment.

- Help refugee learners own their experiences of their new school environment, making them aware of what is happening to them in this moment.
- Focus on sensory awareness in the classroom. The refugee learner will only become aware of his own feelings when he is aware of his body and senses (see 4.4.1). The whole class can be involved in sensory activities, such as finger painting and musical chairs, making the learners aware of what they are seeing feeling, hearing and tasting.
- Enhance emotional awareness of refugee learners. By talking about emotions with the whole class and creating opportunities for learners to express their feelings, will help them become aware of what they feel, help them to own these emotions and finding healthy ways to deal with it.
- The educational board game, as discussed in chapter one under 1.2, can be helpful for teachers to create an awareness amongst refugee and South African learners regarding topics such as becoming a refugee in South Africa, xenophobia and discrimination.

- Focus on the refugee learner's dominant need (what is on his foreground). A refugee learner, for instance, would not be able to concentrate in class if he is hungry or is grieving for the loss of a parent. Refugee learners can be included in the school's feeding scheme, or can be referred to the school counsellor.
- Be aware that the refugee learner's past and present experiences are potential sources of stress. Be aware of the pre-, trans- and post-migration factors influencing the refugee learner's social adjustment (See 3.2.2.1-3.2.2.3).
- Be aware that, due to physical deprivation, refugee learners' development may be stunted, resulting in cognitive, social and emotional difficulties (See 3.2.2.1).
- Be aware of reactions and behaviours associated with trauma (see 3.2.2.1). Anger, depression, nightmares, a sense of foreshortened future and risky behaviour are just a few common symptoms of post-traumatic stress. The teacher should take time to show the refugee learner that he is there to help by discussing this with the learner.
- Instead of criticising the refugee learners' weaknesses, such as behavioural difficulties, empower the refugee learner and make him aware of his strong points, focusing on what the learner does well instead.
- Deal with each situation in the moment. Should the refugee learner, for instance, suffer from discrimination or struggle to make friends, make the refugee learner aware of his feelings in the present and give the learner the opportunity to express his emotions in this moment of time.
- Always keep refugee learners informed and involved in school activities. Through this, the refugee learner becomes aware of activities that he can participate in and what activities he likes or dislikes. By participating in school activities, refugee learners form relationships with their South African peers, becoming aware of behaviours that are acceptable or not and becoming aware of the needs of others.
- Teachers should be aware of factors that prevent them from making healthy contact with refugee learners. For instance, if the teacher feels overworked his relationships with learners are influenced and the social adjustment process of these learners will also be influenced.

- Teachers should be aware of their own unfinished business and unexpressed feelings. Teachers' own anxieties, guilt and grief influence their behaviour and ultimately their ability to facilitate refugee learners in their social adjustment. Teachers should take responsibility for their own feelings and seek professional help should it be necessary.

6.4.2 Contact

Contact takes place as soon as individuals use the environment to satisfy their needs (Blom, 2006:29). Healthy contact is dependant on the individual's awareness of his senses and his body. The refugee learner and the teacher are in continuous contact with each other. Through this contact, they influence each other's behaviour and feelings. The refugee learner should be able to express his emotions, needs and ideas in a healthy manner in order for good contact to occur (See 4.4.2). The following guidelines will assist the teacher in making healthy contact with the refugee learner in order to facilitate positive social adjustment:

- Make contact with refugee learners by showing them that they as individuals are important, and not the circumstances they are exposed to. To ensure this contact, talk *to* refugee learners and not *down to* them. Look past physical appearances, such as darker skin or physical injuries from war and torture.
- Acknowledge refugee learners and show a sincere interest in them. Teachers should show refugee learners that they care even though they do not share the same cultural backgrounds. Teachers should be interested in refugee learners, who they are and where they come from. A group discussion in class about different countries, cultures and languages, where refugee learners get the opportunity to share their cultural beliefs and traditions, will help refugee learners to make contact with their peers and their teachers. The whole class can then make collages on what they have learned about the different cultures.
- Making eye contact is a good way of making contact. It is, however, important to be aware of the different cultural beliefs that refugee learners grow up with. Some cultures perceive eye contact with an adult as disrespectful. Always respect the refugee learners' cultural beliefs, and do not force them to do something that is against their beliefs and traditions.

- Create opportunities for refugee learners to make contact with their South African peers. Encouraging South African learners to show the new refugee learner around the school and familiarise himself with the school procedures can be very helpful.
- Ensure healthy contact with refugee parents. By encouraging refugee parents to take part in school activities and by making them feel welcome, will enhance the refugee learner's social adjustment.
- Teachers should be aware of possible introjects, such as xenophobic attitudes from the media, that might have an influence on their behaviour towards refugee learners, and that may prevent them from making healthy contact with refugee learners. A group discussion in the classroom, on xenophobia and refugees in general, will also help refugees and South African learners become aware of their own behaviours and perceptions on this topic. It is, however, important that the teacher facilitate and guide this discussion to prevent secondary trauma in occurring.

6.4.3 Dialogue

Dialogue is important for healthy contact between teacher and refugee learner (See 4.4.3). Dialogue allows contact to happen, and is thus more than just communication. Both teacher and refugee learner should be fully involved in dialogue for good contact to occur. Good contact through dialogue can be established through the following guidelines:

- Find a balance between instructing the refugee learner to do certain things and listening to the refugee learner. Try to truly listen to the learner, in the classroom and on the playground. By listening to the refugee learner, the teacher will encourage him to express his feelings, becoming aware of himself and understanding himself and others better.
- Teachers should be aware of their body language towards the refugee learner. By looking at the refugee learner and showing open and warm body language, the refugee learner will feel more confident to make good contact with the teacher.
- Reflect on what the refugee learner is saying by repeating or rephrasing, for instance by saying: "I can see that you are upset with what that child said to you". This will allow refugee learners to express themselves and create an opportunity to encourage them to find their own solutions to social problems, with your help.

- Communicate with refugee learners through positive touch. If a teacher sees that a refugee learner is upset, he can put an arm on the learner's shoulder and say: "It seems like you are very upset right now". Through this, the refugee learner can see that the teacher really cares and are interested in what he is saying and feeling.
- Prevent misunderstandings through simple explanations. Teachers should explain to refugee learners why they want them to do certain things, for instance not talking while learners are working.
- Teachers should be aware of the messages they communicate to refugee learners. Instead of saying: "You never listen when I ask you to sit down in class", rather say: "I feel like you do not listen to me when I ask you to sit down in class". By conveying messages in this manner, refugee learners become aware of their own behaviour and the feelings of others. Through this, refugee learners also learn to take responsibility for their behaviour.

6.4.4 Boundaries

Boundaries are important in the school setting, because it creates opportunities for learners to make choices and take responsibility for their choices (Blom, 2006:62). Through clear boundaries the refugee learner becomes aware of specific rules, as well as what behaviour is acceptable and what behaviour is not acceptable, both inside and outside of the classroom, ultimately enhancing the social adjustment of the refugee learner (See 4.4.4). The following guidelines can be used by teachers when using boundaries to facilitate refugee learners in their social adjustment:

- Be constant when setting rules and boundaries in the classroom. Should rules not be consistent, refugee learners might feel unsure of what is expected of them, making them feel anxious and confused (See 4.4.4).
- Rules and boundaries should be applied to all learners, and punishment should be consistent. Should a refugee learner, for instance, get punished for certain behaviour and another learner do not get punished in the same way, the refugee learner may feel discriminated against and his self-control and ability to take responsibility for his actions will be damaged (See 4.4.4). This will consequently influence his social adjustment to his new school environment.

- Communicate boundaries specifically to refugee learners and reflect on the learner's emotions when setting boundaries (See 4.4.4).
- Give the refugee learner alternatives for punishment when he breaks a boundary (See 4.4.4). Through this, the refugee learner becomes aware of the consequences of the choices that he makes, helping him to take responsibility for these choices.

6.4.5 Organismic Self-Regulation/Homeostasis

In order to grow and develop, a person strives to maintain a balance between what is nourishing to him and what is not nourishing to him (Clarkson, 1999:21). This process is called organismic self-regulation. Homeostasis refers to the way in which a person maintains a balance in different circumstances (Blom, 2006:23). When a person can healthily regulate himself and reject what is not nourishing to him, he would be able to maintain a healthy balance. The following guidelines can be used by teachers in enhancing the refugee learner's ability to self-regulate and maintain a healthy balance in challenging situations:

- Encourage refugee learners to work out social problems for themselves, with the teacher's assistance. By doing this the refugee learner learns how to satisfy his most prominent need, taking responsibility and becoming self-regulating.
- Should a refugee learner come to a teacher with a problem, the teacher should help him find a balance by exploring with him certain options in handling the situation.
- Make the refugee learner aware of his support system, such as his parents, brothers/sisters and friends. Be sensitive and aware that some refugee learners may have lost these support systems in their journey to South Africa. In this case, teachers should help him form new support system(s) and assure him that they are there to support him.

6.4.6 Responsibility

One of the core aspects of the Gestalt approach is that people should take responsibility for themselves, the value that they give to their experiences and the choices they make regarding their behaviours and attitudes (Perls in MacKewn, 2003:124). The responsibility of teachers in the facilitation process of social adjustment is to make refugee learners aware that they are responsible for their own behaviours and social adjustment (See 4.4.7). Another

responsibility of teachers is to enhance the resiliency characteristic of refugee learners, as this is imperative for these learners' ability to take responsibility for themselves and the choices that they make (See 4.4.7). Teachers can make use of the following guidelines when enhancing the refugee learner's sense of responsibility:

- Enhance refugee learners' social responsibility (see 5.5.3) by creating opportunities for them to participate in team activities and taking up leadership positions, such as class leader or captain of a sports team.
- Create opportunities for refugee learners to voice their opinions in the classroom, on the playground and on the sports field. By listening to what refugee learners have to say about certain situations and topics, the teacher gives them the opportunity to take responsibility for what they feel and the way they react to certain situations.
- Involve refugee learners in creating rules in the classroom and other school activities, and let them help decide on punishment should a rule be broken. Let the learners know that their opinion regarding discipline is important.
- Create opportunities for refugee learners to make decisions. For instance, let them decide on the colour of their sports team's t-shirts or let them vote for who they want as this term's class leader.
- Enhance refugee learners' academic responsibility by teaching them time management, setting academic goals for themselves, letting them help each other in academic activities and encouraging them to ask for help should they need it.
- Develop the refugee learner's interests and strengths in order to develop his resilience. Resilience is important, especially for learners exposed to severe trauma and loss, and through resilience they will be able to take responsibility for their choices, feelings and behaviour (See 5.4). Here, the teacher should encourage refugee learners to participate in extracurricular activities, such as dancing or scouts. Through this participation, refugee learners build resilience by actively feeling that they are making a difference. Teachers should also ensure structure and routine in the school environment. When the refugee learner knows what is expected of him, resilience is also enhanced.

- Make the refugee learner aware that, even though he is not personally responsible for his life circumstances, he is still responsible for the meanings that he gives to these circumstances by deciding on his attitudes and behaviours. If the refugee learner, for instance, feels discriminated against at school, he has a choice to act like a victim or to tell the teacher and not be victimised.

6.4.7 Sense of Self

An important aspect that teachers have to keep in mind when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment is the refugee learner's sense of self. A strong sense of self is imperative for learning, development and social adjustment (See 4.4.8). The following guidelines can be used by teachers to strengthen refugee learners' sense of self when facilitating these learners in their social adjustment:

- Be aware of possible signs of a low sense of self in refugee learners, such as antisocial behaviour, whining, cheating, withdrawal, aggression and distrust (See 4.4.8).
- Focus on refugee learners' strong points instead of criticising their weaknesses, and focus on giving regular praise when the refugee learner has done well in handling a situation, such as for instance discrimination against him, or for displaying good behaviour in class.
- Respect the refugee learner's uniqueness and treat him with respect. When the refugee learner feels respected by the teacher, he will also learn to respect and accept himself in his own uniqueness.
- Never be judgemental. Refugee learners may look different from the teacher or South African learners, or he may have physical injuries due to war and torture. The teacher should accept the refugee learner despite, for instance, skin colour or disabilities. Should a refugee learner complain to the teacher about, for instance, his darker skin colour, find something to empower him with, such as his beautiful smile or how well he does in his school work.
- Use sensory and emotional awareness to strengthen the refugee learner's sense of self (See 6.4.1). By strengthening awareness, the refugee learner gets to know himself, gaining insight into his own feelings and behaviour.

- Encourage the refugee learner to find solutions for his own social problems, such as being bullied. Ask the learner what he thinks he can do about the situation, and facilitate a process where the learner chooses how to handle certain social situations in the classroom and on the playground. By doing this, the refugee learner learns to take responsibility for his behaviour and becomes aware of his own ability to deal with certain situations (See 4.4.7).

6.4.8 Children's Processes

The child's process refers to his unique way of presenting himself to others, as well as differentiating himself from others (Blom, 2006:79). The child's process thus refers to the way he acts and behaves toward others. This includes his temperament, the meaning that he gives to experiences, the way that he copes with traumatic experiences and the way that he adjusts. The teacher should have a sound knowledge of the refugee learner's unique process when facilitating him in his social adjustment to a new school environment. Guidelines that can be used by teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment and gaining knowledge of each learner's process include:

- Accept each refugee learner as a unique individual. Do not assume that all refugee learners are the same or will react the same way to trauma and other challenging situations. Teachers should get to know the refugee learner so that they can gain knowledge in the way that he copes with his circumstances and facilitate him in his social adjustment according to this.
- Never be judgemental. As mentioned above, each refugee learner will react to certain situations in their own way, accept and understand this and do not judge the learner for the way that he feels and behaves. Do not judge the refugee learner on where he comes from and events that he has been exposed to. As mentioned earlier, the refugee learner cannot be held personally responsible for his circumstances, and by accepting him for who he is, the teacher also helps him to become aware that he can choose on how these circumstances can influence him.
- Encourage the refugee learner in all of his activities and praise him for doing something well. By being truly encouraging and communicating this to the refugee learner, the learner will see that the teacher accept him as he is and that the teacher is there to help him in the difficult task to adapt to his new school.

6.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the observational system to be used by teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. The procedural elements of the intervention were also discussed. The researcher further developed Gestalt guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners, facilitating these learners in their social adjustment. The next chapter will involve the overall conclusion of this research study, as well as recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The last two phases of the design and development model of intervention research, namely the design phase and early development of guidelines for teachers assisting refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment, was carried out in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the researcher will evaluate the degree to which the goal and objectives of this research study has been achieved. Recommendations will be made for further study and the final conclusion of the study will be discussed.

7.2 THE INTERVENTION RESEARCH PROCESS

The design and development model of intervention research was carried out in this research study. As this study is a dissertation of limited scope, the design and development model was concluded at the first step of the fourth phase, namely developing a prototype or preliminary intervention (See 1.3). In order to evaluate whether the goals and objectives of this research study has been achieved, it is necessary to reassess the intervention process that was followed. This will be discussed in the following section under the four intervention phases that was followed.

7.2.1 Problem Analysis and Project Planning Phase

7.2.1.1 Identifying and Involving clients; Gaining Entry

The researcher identified and involved clients for this research study by selecting a sample of teachers from two schools in the city of Tshwane. The teachers have daily contact with refugee learners. The researcher gained written consent from the Department of Education (see Appendix D), as well as verbal consent from the principals at the schools. The researcher was thus allowed access to the information needed and completed the first phase successfully by identifying and involving clients and gaining entry to the community. This procedure is discussed under 1.4.1.1 and 1.4.1.2 in chapter one.

7.2.1.2 Identifying Concerns and Analysing Identified Problems

The researcher undertook an in-depth empirical study. Focus groups were used and consisted of 8 respondents from each school where the research study was conducted. Through the focus group discussions, the researcher was able to determine the challenges that respondents face when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. Whilst conducting the focus groups, the researcher made use of field notes, observation and dictaphone recordings to establish the concerns of the population with regards to the topic of this research study.

The collected data was analysed by means of Creswell's spiral of data analysis (see 1.4.1.3) and organised under three main themes, namely stress and coping for refugee learners, second language concerns and socio-cultural factors. This step of the first phase of the design and development model was successfully completed and the collected data was verified with relevant literature. This procedure is discussed under 1.4.1.2 and 1.4.1.3 in chapter one.

7.2.1.3 Setting the Goal and Objectives

The primary goal of this research study was to develop Gestalt guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners, facilitating these learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment.

In order to achieve this goal, the research was conducted within the framework of applied research and the design and development model was used as part of intervention research.

The objectives of this study included the following:

- Information gathering and synthesis through existing sources of information, studying natural examples and identifying functional elements of successful models.
- Design. This included designing an observational system and specifying procedural elements of the intervention.
- Early development and pilot testing by developing a prototype or preliminary intervention.

These objectives were achieved by the completion of the intervention research process.

7.2.2 Information Gathering and Synthesis

7.2.2.1 Using Existing Sources of Information

The researcher conducted two literature studies in order to gather information from existing literature sources. The first literature study, which was discussed in chapter three, focused on the influences impacting on the social adjustment of refugee learners within the South African school system. In this literature study, the researcher looked at the process of the adjustment of refugee learners within an ecological approach (specifically Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory) (See 3.2.1). These factors included the pre-migration influences (see 3.2.2.1), such as trauma, loss, deprivation; trans-migration influences (see 3.2.2.2); and post-migration influences (see 3.2.2.3), such as acculturation, familial support and second language concerns. Resilience (see 3.3) also formed part of this literature study.

The second literature study contained information from existing literature sources on the Gestalt approach. This literature study focused on the Gestalt philosophy, the definition of Gestalt and Gestalt principles to enhance the social adjustment of refugee learners. The Gestalt principles included in this study were awareness, contact/contact boundary disturbances, dialogue, boundaries, unfinished business, homeostasis/organismic self-regulation, responsibility, sense of self and children's processes. This information was discussed in chapter four. The Gestalt principles were incorporated in the guidelines for teachers facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment, as discussed in section 6.4 in chapter six.

7.2.2.2 Studying Natural Examples

The researcher consulted various experts in the field of refugee adjustment and the Gestalt approach. The experts provided the researcher with valuable information with regards to refugees in South Africa. The researcher consulted a social worker and play therapist, both working with refugee learners on a daily basis, with regards to the emotional and social needs of refugee learners. Another social worker, from the Lawyers of Human Rights, was consulted with regards to the process of becoming a refugee in South Africa and the trauma, loss and deprivation that refugee learners are exposed to. This procedure is discussed in chapter one under 1.4.2.2.

7.2.2.3 Identifying Functional Elements of Successful Models

In this phase of the design and development model, the researcher studied successful programmes and models that contributed to developing guidelines for teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. These programmes and models included:

- A programme consisting of guidelines on the reception and orientation of refugee learners in their new schools (see 5.2),
- The CAP interventions. These interventions provide information and advice on the cultural, academic and psychological factors that influence refugee learners in their social adjustment (see 5.3),
- Resilience education, providing guidelines in enhancing the refugee learner's resilience in the face of adversity (see 5.4),
- A model for academic improvement and adjustment (see 5.5), and
- Good practice strategies for second language learners. These strategies include guidelines for teachers in facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment; keeping in mind the challenges of learning a second language (See 5.6).

The researcher was able to incorporate elements of the above-mentioned programmes and models into the process of developing Gestalt guidelines for teachers. These programmes and models were discussed in chapter five.

7.2.3 Design

7.2.3.1 Designing an Observational System

The first step of the third phase of the design and development model was to design an observational system whereby the preliminary guidelines for teachers facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment could be self-monitored, self-recorded and directly observed by the teachers using these guidelines (See 6.2). The observational system consisted of four observations sheets that highlighted important aspects of the social adjustment of refugee learners. These aspects included background information of refugee learners, teacher-parent partnerships, second language proficiency of refugee learners, and

the new school environment of refugee learners. This information is discussed under section 6.2 in chapter six.

7.2.3.2 Specifying Procedural Elements of the Intervention

The second step of the third phase of the design and development model of intervention research was to specify procedural elements for the intervention. The researcher firstly specified the importance of the fact that the teachers using the guidelines should have a genuine desire to facilitate refugee learners in their social adjustment. Secondly, the researcher suggested that the guidelines be presented to the teachers by a professional facilitator in a group session. The group session should include providing teachers with information on the process of becoming a refugee in South Africa, the cultural backgrounds of refugee learners, social adjustment across different developmental stages, and the Gestalt approach. This information is discussed under section 6.3 in chapter six.

7.2.4 Early Development and Pilot Testing

7.2.4.1 Developing a Preliminary or Prototype Intervention

This was the final phase of the design and development model of intervention research, and included designing preliminary Gestalt guidelines for teachers working with refugee learners, facilitating these learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. Attention was given to various Gestalt principles. The gestalt principles used included awareness, contact, dialogue, boundaries, responsibility, organismic self-regulation, sense of self, and children's processes. This was discussed under section 6.4 in chapter six.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS STUDY

The researcher recommends that teachers incorporate the proposed guidelines into their daily contact with refugee learners. The researcher finds it important to stress the fact that the proposed guidelines should be seen as a basis to work from when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment, and not as a set of rules that can be followed directly.

It is further recommended that teachers commit themselves to the facilitation process of refugee learners. Teachers should show a true interest in these learners, accepting them for their own uniqueness and not being judgemental when working with these learners.

Teachers should broaden their knowledge on refugees and the process of becoming a refugee in South Africa. The researcher finds it necessary for teachers to be aware of this in order for them to make contact with these learners in an empathetic and truthful manner. The researcher is of opinion that teachers facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment should be aware of the emotionally tiresome journey that these learners have endured. Teachers should be aware of the trauma that refugee learners experience in their journey to South Africa, as well as the feelings of helplessness, confusion and guilt that may accompany these learners.

The researcher is of opinion that the Gestalt approach can successfully be used by teachers when facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school environment. The Gestalt principle that would especially be useful in this task is awareness and contact, seeing that teachers should be aware of the experiences of refugee learners and establish good contact in order to facilitate the adjustment process.

Other factors that influence the refugee learner's social adjustment include xenophobia, discrimination and prejudice. Teachers should set an example for South African learners in their behaviour towards refugee learners, treating these learners with respect and without judging them on factors such as their skin colour, language or culture.

Most refugee learners in South Africa do not speak any of the eleven official languages. This does not only complicate the refugee learner's academic achievements, but also his social adjustment. Teachers should keep this in mind and involve refugee learners in activities where they can learn English in order for them to communicate with their South African peers, making friends and rediscovering their sense of belonging.

Refugee learners seem to be very resilient. This is a characteristic that can be used to empower these learners in their social adjustment, making them aware that they are strong enough to overcome adversity.

7.4 SHORTCOMINGS DURING THE RESEARCH

The number of respondents used for the purpose of this study was limited, thus the findings of the study might be limited as well. The researcher would have liked to include refugee learners in the study as well, but due to financial and time limitations this was not possible. This issue could propose for further research.

Although the researcher found extensive information and other research on social adjustment of children in general, the researcher found it difficult to find information specifically on the social adjustment of refugee learners, and the view of the Gestalt approach on this subject. Some important aspects of the Gestalt approach might thus be neglected in the proposed guidelines.

The researcher did not focus on the full extent of the social development and adjustment of refugee learners, since the purpose of this study was to develop guidelines for teachers. Attention was given to the role of teachers and the impact that they can have on the refugee learner's social adjustment process to a new school environment.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Whilst conducting this research study, challenges concerning the refugee learner's social identity came to the foreground. The researcher only focused on limited aspects regarding the refugee learner's social identity in order to develop guidelines for teachers, and would thus recommend that more extensive research be done on this matter.

The researcher touched on the impact that trauma, loss and deprivation might have on the attachment that is formed between refugee learner and parent. The researcher is of opinion that further research on this subject would greatly benefit refugee families in South Africa. Since resilience plays a big part in the social adjustment of refugee learners, the researcher recommends that research on developing this important characteristic in refugee learners be done.

The researcher found that teachers have a great need for support in their work with refugee learners. It is thus recommended that research be done on the development of support systems for teachers, such as support groups and educational groups regarding refugees in South Africa.

Furthermore, awareness should be created at the Department of Education regarding the challenges that teachers experience in their work with refugee learners, as well as the needs of refugee learners in their new school environment. Through creating awareness, special support for refugee learners and their teachers will be made possible.

7.6 CONCLUSION

During the course of the research, the researcher has concluded that teachers play an immense role in the social adjustment of refugee learners. Refugee learners come to their new school environment from a background of severe trauma and loss. Some of these learners are separated from their parents or have lost their parents due to war and other violence. The researcher is of opinion that teachers are in the perfect position to help refugee learners to deal with emotional and social stumble blocks that accompany many of these learners' migration and resettling process to South Africa.

Should refugee learners not be facilitated in their social adjustment to their new school environment, it will be very challenging for them to achieve the necessary academic competency in order for them to succeed in life. Emotional feelings of guilt, shame, helplessness, anxiety and anger can stand in the way of refugee learners' cognitive and social development. It is thus an important part of teachers' daily contact with refugee learners to help these learners deal with feelings that drain their energy.

Teachers can facilitate refugee learners in their social adjustment to a new school, should they apply the Gestalt guidelines thoroughly. Teachers should make the Gestalt principles part of their everyday contact with not only refugee learners, but also with South African learners, as these principles can be helpful to assist any learner with social problems in the school environment.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Consent Form for Participants

CONSENT FORM

I _____ am aware that Carina Naude is doing research for the University of South-Africa for the purpose of establishing guidelines for teachers working with refugee children.

I am aware: (that)

- All information during this research study will be kept confidential, and that I will remain anonymous.
- All personal information will be handled in an ethical and professional manner.
- Information will be used for something other than this research study.
- I am part of this study out of free will and that I can withdraw at any time.

Signed

Date

APPENDIX B: Confidentiality Agreement for Participants

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I _____ am aware that Carina Naude is doing research for the University of South-Africa for the purpose of establishing guidelines for teachers working with refugee children.

I undertake that I will treat any confidential information disclosed by whatever means as being strictly private and confidential, and that I will take all reasonable measures to maintain its status as such.

Signed

Date

APPENDIX C: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

The following points formed the framework for the focus groups:

A. Trauma, Loss and Deprivation

1. Do you have any knowledge regarding the trauma that refugee learners are exposed to in their journey to South Africa and their lives in South Africa?
2. What is your general impression and knowledge regarding the trauma, loss and deprivation that refugee learners experience?
3. Are you familiar with post-traumatic stress reactions associated with violence, war and loss?
4. What do you understand about the term deprivation?
5. To what extent do you think trauma, loss and deprivation influence the refugee learner's social adjustment to a new school environment?

B. Xenophobia and or Social Discrimination

1. To what extent do you understand the term xenophobia?
2. To what extent do you understand the term social discrimination?
3. Have you been witness to xenophobia and/or discrimination towards refugee learners in your classroom and/or school environment?
4. How did you/will you handle the situation should a refugee learner fall victim to xenophobia and/or discrimination?

C. Language

1. Do you experience any concerns regarding refugee learners as second language learners? If so, what would you say your concerns are?
2. How do you think the language barriers influence refugee learners' social adjustment to their new school environment?

D. Culture and Values

1. In your work with refugee learners, have you experienced any concerns regarding cultural differences and values?
2. Do you have any knowledge regarding the different cultural backgrounds of refugee learners?

3. To what extent do you incorporate cultural discussions in your classroom?
4. Would you say refugee learners experience any difficulties in their social adjustment, as a result of cultural differences?


E. Becoming a Refugee in South Africa

1. Do you have any knowledge regarding the process of becoming a refugee in South Africa?
2. Are you exposed to resources providing information on this matter?

F. Social Adjustment of Refugee Learners

1. To what extent do you feel capable in facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment?
2. What do you think social adjustment entails?
3. If you could think of one guideline for teachers facilitating refugee learners in their social adjustment, what would it be?

APPENDIX D: Written Consent to Conduct Research (from the Department of Education)

22. May. 2008 10:39		No. 9337 P. 2/3	
		UMnyango WezeMfundo Department of Education	
		Lefapha la Thuto Departement van Onderwys	
Enquiries: Nomvula Ubisi (011)3550488			
Date:	07 May 2008		
Name of Researcher:	Bekker Carina		
Address of Researcher:	610 Olivia Street		
	Garsfontein		
	Pretoria		
Telephone Number:	0798894604		
Fax Number:	N/A		
Research Topic:	Facilitating refugee learners in a foreign school environment: Gestalt guidelines for teachers		
Number and type of schools:	2 Primary Schools		
District/s/HO	Tshwane South		
Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research			
<p>This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.</p>			
<p>Permission has been granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met, and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted:</p>			
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.3. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.			
<hr/>			
<p>Office of the Chief Director: Information and Knowledge Management Room 501, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2000 P.O.Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355-0809 Fax: (011) 355-0734</p>			

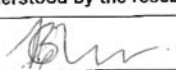
4. A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
5. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
6. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
7. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year.
8. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
9. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
10. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
11. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
12. On completion of the study the researcher must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and one Ring bound copy of the final, approved research report. The researcher would also provide the said manager with an electronic copy of the research abstract/summary and/or annotation.
13. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
14. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards



CHIEF DIRECTOR: INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The contents of this letter has been read and understood by the researcher.	
Signature of Researcher:	
Date:	07/05/08