

CHAPTER 1

PHASE 1: PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND PROJECT PLANNING

INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Society values success as a determining factor in achieving mastery of one's own life. Covington (1992:74) argues that there is a pervasive tendency to equate accomplishment with human value and that individuals are thought to be only as worthy as their achievements. The author states that it leads to the child at school level confusing ability with worth and a tendency for self-acceptance to depend on the child's ability to achieve competitively. Fabian (2002:1) identifies success on school level and the transfer from one school grade to the next as landmarks in the process of growing up. The process offers new opportunities for the child's healthy development and growth into maturity. Orton (1997:145) agrees with this statement and highlights the child's academic and social successes in school as a crucial part of his overall development. She warns that the child who experiences failure in school suffers from a poor self-esteem and often engages in problem behaviours as a way of compensating. It is therefore evident that the development of therapeutic guidelines for counsellors who support the retained child could bridge the gap between the child's emotional needs and his achievement in school.

International research on grade retention has a long history, but in South Africa few statistics exist on the exact amount of learners who are retained each year through the different levels of education, that is the foundation phase, the intermediate phase and the senior phase. The outcomes-based approach in the Department of Education in South Africa replaced the concept of year-to-year promotion or "passing", as well as the concept of "failing", by a notion of progression from one successfully completed task to the next, as stated by the Curriculum Development Minute 0059/2004 (2004) of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). It implies that the learner develops and progresses at different rates and times, as well as that the learner who needs more time to engage with the knowledge and skills in the current grade is

allowed to be retained. Retention is therefore viewed as an opportunity for the learner that does not progress. The WCED views outcomes-based education as a supportive system that places the interests of the learner first, instead of a punitive system where the child is punished for not achieving to set standards. Although the WCED demands a general management plan from educational professionals involved in grade retention, it fails to give guidelines on how the retained child should be supported emotionally.

From the above it seems evident that the child's experience of success in school influences his self-esteem. Jimerson, Anderson and Whipple (2002:453) state that grade retention affects the child's psychological development and enforces demands on the child for which, without the required support, he is not prepared. Therefore the retained child requires support to ensure that the effect of repeating a year does not negatively affect his self-esteem. For the purpose of this study the child in middle childhood development was the focus of investigation, because of the importance of healthy emotional and self-concept development during this phase of development.

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE CHOICE OF SUBJECT

Retention in the early grades is a common phenomenon that occurs internationally as well as in South Africa. Counsellors who work with the retained middle childhood learner can therefore benefit from guidelines from a Gestalt approach to support the child, thereby allowing him to develop optimally and to become master of his own life, despite the experience of being retained. The following reasons served as motivation for the undertaking of the research.

1.2.1 Personal motivation

Experience in practice showed the researcher that the retained child requires support to ensure that the effect of repeating a grade does not negatively affect his self-esteem and emotional functioning in general. From this experience it became evident that the expectation on schools to perform an educational function is still stronger than the expectation to provide a support function for the child's emotional developmental needs. After the child has been informed that he will be retained, whether it is first

seen on the report card or mentioned by the educator or parent, little provision is made to provide a support network for the child.

The researcher assisted the deputy principal of a Western Cape primary school in informing eight grade 1 to 3 learners of their retention. From this experience it became evident that the school environment does not allow for efficient support for these children. The interest in designing guidelines to assist counsellors who work with the retained child grew out of this experience.

Further interest in undertaking the study grew from the developmental dynamics of the middle childhood phase. The child's cognitive, social, emotional and self-concept development enables him to achieve an increasing understanding of his world and his place therein. Louw, Van Ede and Ferns (1998:322) emphasize that development that takes place during middle childhood and especially the child's experience thereof, prepares him for the challenges of adolescence. During this developmental phase acceptance by others influences the child's development of a healthy self-esteem. Research by Byrnes (1990:114) highlighted the contradiction between the belief held by parents and educators that retention is less socially stigmatizing for younger children and the trauma that the retention causes these children. It seems evident that as with any other developmental phase negative experiences, for example being retained, should be dealt with in a process of ensuring positive acceptance thereof and encouraging healthy development in general, despite the experience of being retained.

The researcher is of opinion that counsellors who work with the retained middle childhood learner should have a sound knowledge of the dynamics of the developmental phase, as well as an understanding of the meaning of the experience of grade retention for the child.

1.2.2 Professional motivation

Byrnes (1990:108) states the following: "To be held back or retained, to repeat a grade, or as one first grader clarified for me, 'Oh, you mean, flunking', is a phenomenon increasingly prevalent in American schools". Retention in the early

grades, according to Bogden and Purnell (2000:7), is often justified as providing more time for learners to mature physically, emotionally and socially. Although grade retention is still an accepted means of improving poor school achievement, critics argue that it is harmful to the child's healthy social and emotional development. The authors highlight the damage thereof on the child's self-image and academic self-concept. Research by Byrnes (1990:130) and by Bogden and Purnell (2000:7) conclude that retention is generally not an effective remedial strategy and that the retained child perceives it as a punishment and a stigma, not as a positive event designed to help him with his learning processes. Studies by these authors highlight that children being interviewed said that being retained made them feel "sad", "bad", "upset" or "embarrassed" and that the general experience is perceived as a personal failure. Failing a grade is seen as a stressful and stigmatizing event with long-term consequences for most retained learners. Bogden and Purnell (2000:7) emphasize that a lack of academic self-confidence can turn feelings of failure into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although the authors agree that it is not to say that retention is never an appropriate strategy to help individual learners, they do emphasize that grade retention should only be used as an option of last resort.

Fabian (2002:vii) argues that it is the responsibility of the educator to ensure that education outside of the home is a positive milestone in lifelong learning. She highlights how the high expectation on the learner to succeed places a range of potentially stressful demands not only on the child, but also on the educator and parents. The child already battles with the demands of developmental challenges. Grade retention further demands adjustment to change and the child in such a situation should be carefully prepared and supported.

Research indicates that educators are usually only aware of learner outcomes in the immediate years following retention decisions and have therefore a limited perspective regarding the efficiency of grade retention, as described by Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:452). Educators are therefore not informed of the strong connection between early grade retention and later school drop out. The authors highlight previous research that emphasizes the importance of effectively, efficiently and clearly communicating research findings to educators, educational policy makers and prospective educators. Tomchin and Impara in Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:453)

emphasize the need for staff development in which educators, counsellors and school psychologists (a) examine their own beliefs regarding retention, (b) are presented with research evidence about the short-term and long-term effects of retention and (c) are trained in school-wide classroom intervention strategies.

Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:453) report that temporary academic and socio-emotional improvements appear to be deceptive in anticipating long-term outcomes associated with grade retention. Their research on the relation between grade retention and dropping out of high school highlights that grade retention should not be considered deterministic of subsequent school withdrawal, but rather that the educational intervention of having the child repeat a year influences the child's subsequent self-esteem, socio-emotional adjustment, peer relations, school engagement and other factors that are also strongly associated with school withdrawal. They further emphasize that the child's early developmental history, including educational experiences, will influence subsequent development. Therefore, educational professionals are strongly encouraged to consider the effects of grade retention and how the child perceives it as punishment.

The child during middle childhood experiences life in the present, as referred to within the Gestalt paradigm as the "here and now". Fabian (2002:10) emphasizes the opinion of researchers who view children as "beings-in-the-present" and not only as "future-beings". It is argued that the child is part of the socio-culture rather than in the process of becoming part of society. Educational professionals should therefore be aware of what the child needs at this moment that will ensure healthy future development. It aligns with Yontef's (1993:7) view on Gestalt theory that approaches people holistically and encourages awareness through focusing on the here and now. The researcher was therefore of the opinion that counsellors who work with the retained child can benefit from therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach to support the child and his experience of the retention.

From the above it seems evident that educational professionals are not always aware of the traumatic experience and psychological damage of grade retention on the child. The problem to be researched was formulated as follows.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION

Fouché (2002b:118) states that the formulation of the problem engages the reader in the specific focus of the study and views it as the point of departure from which clarity about the study is sought. From the above-mentioned literature and the researcher's knowledge that there are no existing guidelines for South African counsellors who work with the retained child, the formulation of the problem was as follows:

There are insufficient guidelines for counsellors who need to render the necessary support to the retained child.

In the process of solving the above-mentioned problem the researcher defined the following aim and objectives.

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The problem formulation leads to the purpose or aim of the study, as well as what the object of investigation is going to be (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:78). The researcher agreed with Fouché (2002a:107) that the aim identifies the end result that needs to be achieved, while the objectives highlight the steps one needs to take in order to achieve the aim. The following aim and objectives were identified for the purpose of this study.

1.4.1 Aim

The aim of the study was to develop therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who work with children that experience grade retention during middle childhood, thereby enabling the counsellors to render the necessary support to these children.

1.4.2 Objectives

To achieve the above-mentioned aim the following objectives were identified:

- To gain knowledge by collecting information through semi-structured interviews with counsellors who work with retained middle childhood learners on their experience of grade retention, as well as with middle childhood learners that experienced retention themselves, in order to identify the most important aspects to be included in guidelines.
- To complete a literature review after completion of the empirical process on the theory and key concepts of the Gestalt therapeutic approach that will serve as a guideline from which the retained middle childhood learner can be approached in the process of supporting him through the experience of grade retention.
- To complete a literature review after completion of the empirical process on the dynamics of middle childhood that will serve as a framework from which the retained middle childhood learner can be approached in the process of supporting him through the experience of grade retention.
- To develop therapeutic guidelines that will serve a purpose to counsellors who need to support the retained middle childhood learner and to conclude by making recommendations that will benefit counsellors in practice.

From these objectives it was evident that the formulation of a research question guided the methodological process so as to gain better insight regarding the research approach to be followed.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

Fouché (2002a:106-113) warns that the research question should be formulated carefully and states that it involves matching the aim of the study. The research question aims to guide the process of enquiry and helps the researcher to stay within the parameters of the chosen research field. The following research question directed this study:

What are the most appropriate support components, identified from a theoretical perspective, previous research and professional expertise, necessary to develop therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who work with the retained middle childhood learner?

1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH

From the research question it was evident that an in-depth, rich and descriptive process was needed to complete this study. In order to justify this process a qualitative research approach was followed. Babbie and Mouton (2001:53) as well as Fouché and Delport (2002:79) emphasize that qualitative research is aimed at describing and understanding human behaviour rather than the explanation and prediction thereof. Qualitative research, according to Fouché (2002a:105), is based on the assumption that valid understanding is gained through accumulated knowledge that is acquired first-hand by a single researcher through the use of a research strategy, problem formulation and appropriate data collection. Patton (1990:46) further states that qualitative approaches emphasize the importance of “getting close” to the people and situations being studied in order to personally understand the realities and detail of daily life, thereby reaching in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon that is being studied.

The qualitative approach applicable to this study directed the use of semi-structured interviews with educators and educational psychologists who work with retained middle childhood learners in the process of gaining insight and understanding of their experience of grade retention. Semi-structured interviews with retained middle childhood learners increased the researcher’s understanding of the child’s personal experience of grade retention. The experience and input of all the participants were used in designing therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for supporting the retained middle childhood learner.

1.7 TYPE OF RESEARCH

The research study focused on applied research with an exploratory and descriptive nature. Patton (1990:153) argues that applied researchers work on human problems with the purpose of generating potential solutions to human and societal problems. It implies that the applied researcher attempts to contribute knowledge that will enable people to understand the nature of a problem in the process of better controlling their environment. For the purpose of this study the researcher addressed the needs of

the retained middle childhood learner by developing guidelines for counsellors who need to render the necessary support to the retained child.

In the process of directing research towards developing innovative interventions Rothman and Thomas (1994) applied the Design and Development model (D&D). De Vos (2002b:394) adjusted the D&D model to meet the exploratory and descriptive nature of the research process by referring to intervention research. Therefore, intervention research is a method in dealing with applied research within a structured, methodological and systematic process of design and development. The phases of intervention research focus on an exploratory and descriptive objective of research that is typical of qualitative research. For the purpose of this study the first and second phase were exploratory and the third phase was descriptive in nature. The exploratory objective depended on the use of literature reviews and interviews with people who had practical experience of the problem to be studied, thereby enhancing insight and comprehension (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:80). Semi-structured interviews with educators and educational psychologists who work with retained middle childhood learners provided important knowledge and a better understanding of their experience of the retained child, thereby assisting the researcher to develop guidelines for the necessary support of these children. Semi-structured interviews with retained middle childhood learners themselves identified issues and concerns that they experience as a result of the retention. A literature review served as a process of literature control for concepts that were identified through the empirical interviews.

1.8 RESEARCH STRATEGY

The qualitative researcher selects a research strategy that depends on the purpose of the study, the nature of the research question, as well as the skills and resources available to him. Fouché (2002c:272) further states that the research strategy will be determined by the choices and actions of the researcher and warns that it does not provide him with a step-by-step plan or fixed recipe to follow. The intervention research process, as described by De Vos (2002b:396), was used for the purpose of this study. Through applying the first three phases as well as the first step of the

fourth phase, the researcher reached the objectives of the study. The detail of each phase and step will follow.

1.9 RESEARCH AND WORK PROCEDURE

The research and work procedure was divided into four phases, each consisting of different steps. These phases were:

- (i) The phase of problem analysis and project planning.
- (ii) The phase of information gathering and synthesis.
- (iii) The phase of design.
- (iv) The phase of early development and pilot testing.

Each one of these phases focused on different and important aspects needed to design guidelines. By following these phases the researcher assured that the process of designing and developing guidelines covered every aspect within the chosen field.

1.9.1 Phase 1: Problem analysis and project planning

De Vos (2002b:399) separates a social problem from a personal problem due to the fact that a social problem reflects conditions of society that have negative effects on a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable. Collective action could better the situation. For the purpose of this study the researcher identified counsellors' lack of knowledge on the dynamics of middle childhood grade retention as a void that was addressed through the first phase of the D&D model of intervention research, namely problem analysis and project planning. The following five steps were executed during this phase in the process of analysing the problem and planning the research project thoroughly.

1.9.1.1 Step 1: Identifying and involving clients

De Vos (2002b:398) states that during this step the researcher identifies a population with whom to collaborate and whose issues are of current or emerging interest to themselves, researchers or society. The researcher identified educators and

educational psychologists with experience of middle childhood grade retention as educational professionals that need to evaluate whether the retained middle childhood learner should be referred for counselling. In addition the researcher identified middle childhood learners who themselves experienced grade retention as an appropriate means to guide the process of gaining new knowledge and insight into the experience of the person in the situation.

1.9.1.1.1 Description of the universe and population

Strydom and Venter (2002:209) define the universe as all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested. For the purpose of this study all educational professionals in the Western Cape, including educators and educational psychologists that rendered support services to retained middle childhood learners, were seen as the universe. A second universe included all middle childhood learners in the Western Cape that experienced grade retention.

The population refines the universe to the total set from which individuals or units of the study are chosen, as stated by Strydom and Venter (2002:198). The researcher identified educational psychologists from the North Metropole Education Management and Development Centre (EMDC NORTH) that rendered support services to schools in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, as well as all the grade 3 educators at a Western Cape primary school that had experience with retained middle childhood learners. The second population included all grade 3 learners at a Western Cape primary school that had experienced grade retention.

1.9.1.1.2 Description of the sample and sampling technique

Strydom and Venter (2002:199) agree that a sample is comprised of the elements of the population that is considered for actual inclusion in the study. The sample is therefore studied in an effort to understand the population from which it was drawn. Patton (1990:169) emphasizes that the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is captured in the different logistics that underlie sampling approaches. The author states that qualitative research typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples that have been purposefully selected. The logic and power of purposive

sampling can be seen when selecting information-rich cases from which the researcher can learn.

For the purpose of this study the researcher identified a definite purpose before the investigation commenced. Therefore, the researcher used purposive sampling as a method of the non-probability sampling procedure. The first sample included two educational psychologists at EMDC NORTH that have experience in rendering support services to retained middle childhood learners, as well as two grade 3 educators at a Western Cape primary school who currently had a retained middle childhood learner in their class. The first sample identified educational professionals with experience in the field of middle childhood retention, while a second sample identified the child experiencing the actual problem. The second sample therefore included three grade 3 learners at a Western Cape primary school who were currently repeating a grade. The amount of participants selected for each sample was influenced by the principle of saturation. Saturation refers, according to Strydom and Delport (2002:336), to the process of selecting cases and data until the amount of new information or the diversity of cases is completed. The authors warn that the researcher has to continuously evaluate all the collected data in order to know when the saturation point has been reached.

1.9.1.2 Step 2: Gaining entry to and cooperation from settings

Conversations with key informants allowed the researcher to gain access and knowledge of the organization and an opportunity to clarify the research purpose, methodology and mutual expectations. De Vos (2002b:399-400) states that these conversations lead to a better understanding between parties and encourage a collaborative relationship that enhances a dual sense of ownership of the investigation. For the purpose of this study it was necessary to gain special permission to interview the educators and educational psychologists involved with retained middle childhood learners, as well as with the retained middle childhood learners themselves.

Information about the research objectives, process and development of guidelines was discussed with the Head of EMDC NORTH and verbal consent was given to

approach the educators, educational psychologists and learners involved in the study. The deputy principal at a Western Cape primary school assisted the researcher in identifying and selecting the specific grade 3 educators with retained learners in their class, as well as the grade 3 learners that were currently repeating their grade. Each child's parent gave telephonic consent that allowed the researcher to have a semi-structured interview with their child, thereby identifying issues and concerns that they experienced as a result of the retention. The information that was shared telephonically in the process of receiving consent is attached as appendix 1.

1.9.1.3 Step 3: Identifying concerns of the population

De Vos (2002b:402) states that the researcher attempts to understand the issues of importance to the population and avoids projecting external views of the problem and solutions thereof. The researcher used informal personal contact methods to gain the required objective understanding. For the purpose of this study the researcher gained insight and knowledge about the support needed by retained middle childhood learners by using semi-structured interviews with educators and educational psychologists who work with retained middle childhood learners and with retained middle childhood learners themselves. The data from the interviews guided the literature control that included information that justified the results of the interviews.

1.9.1.4 Step 4: Analysing concerns or problems identified

De Vos (2002b:403) argues that the researcher must ask key questions that will explore the consequences that will help explain why the problem exists and why interventions have either not been successful or not attempted before. Semi-structured interviews with educators, educational psychologists and retained middle childhood learners led to a better understanding of the child's experience of grade retention and the support required. Analysing the results from the semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to develop guidelines for counsellors on how to support the retained middle childhood learner. The process of analysing the results is discussed in chapter four.

1.9.1.5 Step 5: Setting goals and objectives

De Vos (2002b:404) emphasizes that the setting of goals and objectives assist the researcher in clarifying the proposed ends and means of the research study. The aim of this study focused on the development of therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who work with children that experience grade retention during middle childhood, thereby enabling the counsellors to render the necessary support to these children.

To achieve the above-mentioned aim the following objectives were identified:

- To gain knowledge by collecting information through semi-structured interviews with counsellors who work with retained middle childhood learners on their experience of grade retention, as well as with middle childhood learners that experienced retention themselves, in order to identify the most important aspects to be included in guidelines.
- To complete a literature review after completion of the empirical process on the theory and key concepts of the Gestalt therapeutic approach that will serve as a guideline from which the retained middle childhood learner can be approached in the process of supporting him through the experience of grade retention.
- To complete a literature review after completion of the empirical process on the dynamics of middle childhood that will serve as a framework from which the retained middle childhood learner can be approached in the process of supporting him through the experience of grade retention.
- To develop therapeutic guidelines that will serve a purpose to counsellors who need to support the retained middle childhood learner and to conclude by making recommendations that will benefit counsellors in practice.

1.9.2 Phase 2: Information gathering and synthesis

It is crucial to determine what previous research has been undertaken to discover and understand the problem, as stated by De Vos (2002b:405). The following steps were followed in gathering information for the purpose of this study:

1.9.2.1 Step 1: Using existing sources of information

De Vos (2002b:405) states that a literature review consists of an examination of selected empirical research and reported practice related to the particular research problem. Relevant literature in the format of books, journals, Internet articles and previous completed research on the philosophy of the Gestalt therapeutic approach, as well as the developmental dynamics of the middle childhood learner and the possible effect of retention on the child's self-concept, enhanced the researcher's knowledge and insight into the problem. The literature review offered a framework from which therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who support the retained middle childhood learner could be developed. Literature from different fields of study was used, for example play therapy, psychology, social work and education. Although there were a variety of journal articles on grade retention that were written less than 10 years ago, the researcher experienced a shortage of books on the subject. It was therefore necessary to refer to books that were written more than 10 years ago in order to include dominant previous research that was still referred to in more recent articles. A balance was kept between the older and more recent reference works, thereby allowing for full representation of the topic.

1.9.2.2 Step 2: Studying natural examples

Interviewing professionals with knowledge and experience in addressing the research problem or individuals facing the problem, is valuable to the researcher and is seen as the dominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research (De Vos, 2002b:406). The author further states that the flexibility given by the semi-structured interview allows the participant maximum opportunity to share his expert experience on the subject. Semi-structured interviews with educators and educational psychologists who have experience of middle childhood grade retention, as well as with retained middle childhood learners themselves, were used for the purpose of this study to gain insight and knowledge on the dynamics of middle childhood grade retention.

1.9.2.3 Step 3: Identifying functional elements of successful models

No other therapeutic guidelines for counsellors who work with retained learners exist in South Africa. The researcher could therefore not identify elements from previous models or guidelines. Although the researcher was not able to analyse the critical features of previous programmes, guidelines or models that addressed the same problem in question, she was able to analyse the theory behind developing therapeutic guidelines in general. Therefore, the researcher investigated the methodology of developing therapeutic guidelines before attempting to compile therapeutic guidelines for counsellors who work with retained middle childhood learners.

1.9.3 Phase 3: Design

De Vos (2002b:407) identifies the following two steps that researchers should consider when guidelines of the D&D model are followed:

1.9.3.1 Step 1: Designing an observational system

“The researcher must design a way of observing events related to the phenomenon naturalistically, as well as a method system for discovering the extent of the problem and detecting effects following the intervention” (De Vos, 2002b:408). As mentioned previously, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with educators and educational psychologists with experience of middle childhood grade retention, as well as with retained middle childhood learners themselves, as an observational system to gain insight and knowledge on the dynamics of middle childhood grade retention.

1.9.3.2 Step 2: Specifying procedural elements of the intervention

De Vos (2002b:409) suggests that the researcher identify procedural elements for use in the intervention by observing the problem and studying naturally occurring innovations. For the purpose of this study the researcher identified and noted procedural elements that educators and educational psychologists with experience

with retained middle childhood learners have to comply with in order to effectively use and understand the therapeutic guidelines in practice. Studying literature on Gestalt theory, the dynamics of middle childhood and grade retention enhanced the researcher's ability to identify further procedural elements. The procedural elements could become part of an eventual practice model that could be used in supporting retained middle childhood learners. Thereby, the researcher optimized the use of the guidelines and enhanced its practicality for the target market.

1.9.4 Phase 4: Early development and pilot testing

Thomas in De Vos (2002b:409) defines development as the process by which an innovative intervention is implemented and used on a trial basis, developmentally tested for its adequacy, and refined and redesigned as necessary. This phase includes the following three steps:

- Step 1: Developing a prototype or preliminary intervention.
- Step 2: Conducting a pilot test.
- Step 3: Applying design criteria to the preliminary intervention concept.

For the purpose of this study only step one was executed. The researcher developed therapeutic guidelines that could be used by counsellors who render support to the middle childhood learner that experienced retention.

The study commenced with the identification of a researchable problem. For the purpose of this study the researcher identified the lack of therapeutic guidelines on how to support the retained middle childhood learner as a researchable topic. The researcher assessed the suitability of the research approach and formulated the problem within a research proposal that needed to be approved by an ethical committee. After approval for the study had been received, the researcher commenced with the empirical study. Semi-structured interviews were held with educators and educational psychologists who have experience with retained middle childhood learners, as well as with retained middle childhood learners themselves. A literature review served as theoretical reference for aspects identified through the empirical study. The data from the empirical study was analysed in terms of the

literature review and an attempt was made to verify information. Additional criteria that could be included in the guidelines were identified through the literature review.

1.10 VALIDITY OF THE STUDY

A qualitative study can, according to De Vos (2002a:353-354), only be evaluated as a successful grounded theory that contributed to the scientific knowledge base of the profession if it meets the criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated. The author argues that every systematic inquiry into the human condition must address the issues of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:453) highlight educational professionals' lack of knowledge on the dynamics of grade retention and emphasize the need to educate them on the implications thereof and the effects thereof on the retained child. A need therefore existed for the design of therapeutic guidelines on how to support the retained middle childhood learner. Designing therapeutic guidelines for counsellors was a comprehensive process. In the case of this particular study the following factors hindered the process:

- The researcher approached the problem from her background in the social work profession and therefore lacked experience in the educational environment.
- The researcher is Afrikaans speaking. This implied that she held a specific interpretation of attitudes, emotions and intervention.

These factors could have hindered the process of designing therapeutic guidelines for counsellors who work with retained middle childhood learners. It was therefore important for the researcher to continuously evaluate all the collected data in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the study and to know when saturation point had been reached.

1.10.1 Consultation with experts

The experience, knowledge and insight of educators, counsellors and educational psychologists who work with retained middle childhood learners, as well as retained middle childhood learners themselves, served as a valuable means of data collection.

The researcher approached the field with an attitude of “lack of knowledge”, true to qualitative research. This process ensured objectivity and uncontaminated entrance into the field. Participants were therefore seen as experts experiencing the “problem”. Their participation in the study therefore categorized them as experts. The identities of the following participants are kept confidential at their request:

- Participant 1: Retained grade 3 learner at a Western Cape primary school (referred to as C1).
- Participant 2: Retained grade 3 learner at a Western Cape primary school (referred to as C2).
- Participant 3: Retained grade 3 learner at a Western Cape primary school (referred to as C3).
- Participant 4: Grade 3 educator at a Western Cape primary school (referred to as T1).
- Participant 5: Grade 3 educator at a Western Cape primary school (referred to as T2).
- Participant 6: Educational psychologist, EMDC NORTH (referred to as P1).
- Participant 7: Educational psychologist, EMDC NORTH (referred to as P2).

1.11 ETHICAL ASPECTS

“Ethics is a set of moral principles that are suggested by an individual or group, are subsequently widely accepted, and offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students” (Strydom, 2002:63). Babbie and Mouton (2001:520) warn that the researchers’ right to the search for truth may not be at the expense of the rights of others. The researcher had the responsibility to ensure that the study complied with the following ethical requirements:

- Voluntarily participation that implied informed consent. Babbie and Mouton (2001:520) and Strydom (2002:65) warn that the researcher needs to be aware of hidden agendas, for example the prospect of payment for participation. Before the semi-structured interviews commenced and while obtaining telephonic consent for participation the researcher informed the participants of the goal of the

investigation, the importance of accurate and complete information and the researcher's credibility, as outlined in appendix 1. Thereafter each individual respondent was given the choice to participate.

- Protecting the participants against physical or emotional harm. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:522) and Strydom (2002:65) participants should be informed beforehand about the potential impact of the investigation and data should never be obtained at the their expense. The researcher informed the participants during the initial telephonic conversation of the possible impact of the investigation.
- Providing debriefing sessions in the process of assisting participants and minimizing possible harm. Strydom (2002:73) states that a research project must always be a learning experience for both participant and researcher and views debriefing as one way in which the learning experience can be solidified. During a debriefing session participants get the opportunity to discuss what it was like for them to take part in the research and to bring forward any unfinished business that they might still have as a result of the research. The researcher offered participants the opportunity for debriefing after the semi-structured interviews were completed, but none felt the need for it.
- Respect the right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Participants should have the right to decide when, where, to whom and to what extent their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour will be revealed (Strydom, 2002:67). The participants had a choice as to whether or not they wanted to have their identity revealed in the research findings and they all chose to remain anonymous.
- The researcher is not allowed to mislead the participants by way of written or verbal instructions, the actions of other people or certain aspects of the setting (Strydom, 2002:66). The researcher informed the participants that information gathered from interviews and a literature review would be used to develop therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who work with retained middle childhood learners.
- The research findings must be compiled in an accurate and objective manner, thereby informing the general public, colleagues and participants who participated in the investigation (Strydom, 2002:73). After completion of this study the researcher compiled a scientific document that will be available for reading to all interested parties.

- No sexual discrimination will be made. For the purpose of this study the researcher used the male reference form without any discrimination or preference.
- Interviews with participants were videotaped and kept until the research study had been published in a scientific format. The videos enhanced the process of analysis and served as a cross reference to the transcriptions of the interviews.
- The researcher is a registered social worker and therefore complied with the code of ethics of the South African Council for Social Service Professions. The code demands of a social worker to base social work practices on scientific knowledge, keep abreast of relevant developments and to participate in research.

1.12 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS AND KEY CONCEPTS

The researcher defined the following concepts in an attempt to avoid misunderstanding and to ensure that the reader attaches the same meaning to concepts referred to in the report:

1.12.1 Retained

For the purpose of this study the researcher defined the term retained as an educational intervention strategy towards the child who lacks sufficient abilities to progress to the following grade and is therefore held back in the same grade for another year. It implies repetition of the same curriculum for a second year in the hope of improving the learners' academic achievement.

“To be held back or retained”, “to repeat a grade” or “flunking”, as stated by Byrnes (1990: 108), are all terminology referring to retention. The author states that grade repetition is intuitively thought to help children who are considered unable to deal responsibly with tasks typically assigned to learners in the next grade. “Children who lack basic skills, have poor work habits or are immature are all likely candidates for retention in grade” (Byrnes, 1990:130). The same author emphasizes that these children who are characterized as not being motivated to work, having poor self-esteem and being immature, are given another year in the same grade in the hope that time and repetition of the same curriculum will make them more capable learners in the future.

Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:441) describe retention in the same light as implied by the following words: “academic failure”, “grade repetition”, “flunked”, “failed”, “held back” and “grade delay”. Ferguson, Jimerson and Dalton (2001:327) agree by stating that “extra-year grade placements, often referred to as grade retention, have long been utilized as an intervention for children identified as at-risk for early school failure”.

1.12.2 Counsellor

For the purpose of this study the researcher defined the term counsellor as a professional person who renders the necessary support through the use of a professional child-counsellor relationship to the child that experiences or has experienced a traumatic event in his life that opens up the possibility for unhealthy psychological development. In addition the researcher viewed educators and educational psychologists as educational professionals who are in the position to refer the child in need of support to the appropriate counselling environment.

Counselling is a communication process, as viewed by Berk (2003:80). Drummond (2004:2) states that counsellors need to have a frame of reference or guideline to help them make decisions. Orton (1997:209) emphasizes that counselling involves forming a working relationship with the child to help him identify and explore concerns, gain new self-understanding and competence, discover alternative ways of thinking and behaving and implementing these changes in his everyday life.

“The child-counsellor relationship provides a link between the child’s world and the counsellor, enabling the counsellor to observe with clarity the experience of the child” (Geldard & Geldard, 2002:10). The counsellor therefore creates a permissive environment in which the child feels free to act out and to gain mastery over his feelings in safety.

1.12.3 Middle childhood

Louw, *et al.* (1998:322) identify the middle childhood period from approximately the sixth to the twelfth year of life. The authors state that although it is a period of relative calm and stability between the rapid development of the earlier pre-school period and

later adolescent years, it is nevertheless a critical period for the child's cognitive, social, emotional and self-concept development.

Miller (2002:154) refers to the ages of roughly 6 years to puberty as the beginning of the "industrial age" where the child enters the larger world of knowledge and work. Entry into school is seen as a great event. Successful experiences give the child a sense of industry, a feeling of competence and mastery, while failure brings a sense of inadequacy and inferiority, a feeling that one is a "good-for-nothing".

For the purpose of this study the researcher referred to the child in middle childhood as the child between the ages of 6 and 12 that experienced grade retention.

1.12.4 Gestalt Therapeutic Approach

Carroll and Oaklander (1997:184) define Gestalt therapy as a humanistic, process-orientated form of therapy that is concerned with the integrated functioning of all aspects of the child, namely his senses, body, emotions and intellect. They further argue that the Gestalt approach is effective for the treatment of most childhood disorders and disturbances in healthy, emotional development. The Gestalt approach, according to Carroll and Oaklander (1997:202), can be used to restore and strengthen the child's rightful path of organismic growth.

Corey (2001b:196) states that the Gestalt view of human nature is rooted in existential philosophy, phenomenology and field theory. The author views Gestalt therapy as a therapeutic encounter that is lively and experiential in promoting the child's awareness through reaching insight, self-acceptance, knowledge of the environment, responsibility for choices and the ability to make contact with others.

For the purpose of this study the researcher defined the Gestalt therapeutic approach as the counsellors' attempt to assist the child to focus on his wholeness, thereby empowering him to be aware of what he is experiencing at the moment, as well as being aware of both his strengths and weaknesses. By being aware of his feelings and abilities the child is allowed to deal with difficult situations in his life by compensating the one with the other.

1.13 RESEARCH REPORT LAYOUT

The research report consists of two important components. The first component is the continuous integration of the intervention research model within the research report. The second component consists of a specific literature review that relates to the empirical study where new data was compared with existing literature, thereby allowing the researcher to compile the guidelines.

Chapter two, three and four cover phase two of the intervention research model. The literature review was compiled in chapter two and three, thereby highlighting existing theory on aspects that were identified during the empirical study. Chapter four consists of analysis of the data that was collected during the empirical study.

Chapter two also focuses on the Gestalt therapeutic approach. Basic concepts within Gestalt theory are explored. The developmental dynamics of the middle childhood learner is discussed in chapter three, thereby highlighting the importance of school and the effect of grade retention on the child's self-esteem and emotional development in general. An explanation of the empirical data of the study is given in chapter four. The results of the semi-structured interviews with educators and educational psychologists with experience of middle childhood grade retention, as well as with the retained middle childhood learners themselves, are analysed.

Chapter five emphasizes the third phase of the intervention research model. Therapeutic guidelines for counsellors who work with retained middle childhood learners are compiled. A conclusion and recommendation are given, thereby highlighting the first step of phase four of the model.

A bibliography and appendices follow.

1.14 CONCLUSION

This chapter served as an introductory orientation with reference to broad views on the problem being investigated, the aim and objectives of the study and the procedure to be followed. The second phase of the intervention research model, namely

information gathering and synthesis, will commence in chapter two with a description of the Gestalt therapeutic approach.

CHAPTER 2

PHASE 2: INFORMATION GATHERING AND SYNTHESIS

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE GESTALT THERAPEUTIC APPROACH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The philosophy behind Gestalt therapy reflects a way of “being” that is based on a deep commitment to certain beliefs about people and their innate capacity to strive towards growth and maturity. Gestalt therapy is therefore an attitude, a philosophy and a way of “being” with people within a therapeutic context rather than a way of doing something to or for them. Gestalt philosophy, according to Mackewn (2003:125), proposes that individuals are active in the choosing and organizing of their lives and reality. Therefore, healthy existence is viewed in relation to the meaning people give to their lives, as well as the existential responsibility they take for how they live out their lives within their environment. Gestalt therapy is rooted in a range of theoretical principles that reflects this philosophy about human nature.

Oaklander (2001:46) identifies Gestalt therapy as a dynamic, present-centered, humanistic and process-orientated form of therapy that focuses attention on the healthy integrated functioning of the total organism, comprising of the senses, the body, the emotions and the intellect. The holistic approach emphasizes the here-and-now experience that is in constant change. Corey (2001b:195) agrees by highlighting the importance of allowing the child to do his own “seeing”, “feeling”, “sensing” and “interpreting”, as opposed to waiting passively for the therapist to give him insight and answers.

The Gestalt therapy literature presents a large body of theoretical concepts and principles that underlie the understanding of this mode of therapy. Frew (2001:124) and Parlett and Hemming (2003:227) state that Gestalt therapy is practiced with a theoretical foundation grounded in field theory, phenomenology and dialogue. These three concepts are closely related and highlight the assumption that people are best understood in the context of their ongoing relationship with their environment.

Therefore, the therapist aims at providing a context that will enable the child to describe, experience and to attend to moment-to-moment awareness of elements of his field. The emphasis is therefore on the subjective, or the world, as the child perceives it. The moment-to-moment awareness of the child's experiencing, as well as the almost immediate awareness of his blocks to such experiencing, are seen as therapeutic in itself.

Gestalt therapy has adopted Martin Buber's dialogical philosophy of relationship (1958), known as the I/Thou relationship, to capture the healing power of the relationship between the therapist and client. Parlett and Hemming (2003:227) emphasize that establishing a "subject-subject" relationship between therapist and client, rather than one that is "subject-object", is based on a level of respectfulness that is healing in itself. The therapist is fully present during the therapeutic encounter and growth occurs out of genuine contact between client and therapist. Through the relationship, as stated by Corey (2001b:206), the client acts as an active participant and makes his own interpretations and meanings. Awareness is thereby increased and the client decides himself what he will or will not do with his personal meaning. From the above it seems evident that a large body of theoretical concepts and principles underlie the comprehension of the philosophy on which Gestalt therapy is based.

Chapter two will highlight not only these concepts and principles, but also the interrelatedness between them that form the foundation of Gestalt therapy, thereby reaching an understanding of the ultimate goal of therapy.

2.2 DEFINING GESTALT AS AN APPROACH TO COUNSELLING

The original work by Frederick Perls (1969) on Gestalt therapy has led to an extensive collection of literature presenting the theoretical assumptions and principles that describes Gestalt therapy as it is practiced today. Clarkson (2004:15) states that Perls called Gestalt the therapy of the "obvious". It implies a disciplined focus on experiencing what is obvious in a given situation without pre-judgements or expectations. The author further states that the cognitive and experiential wholeness of every person, every moment, and every event is similarly central to the Gestalt

approach to counselling. Therefore, Carroll and Oaklander (1997:184) define Gestalt therapy as a humanistic and process-orientated form of therapy that is concerned with the integrated functioning of all aspects of the child. Gestalt therapy theory is rooted in psychoanalytic theory, Gestalt psychology, humanistic perspectives, phenomenology, field theory and existentialism.

“Gestalt therapy is a general philosophy and methodology and is applied in a great variety of styles, with a great variety of patients, in a great variety of modalities and settings” (Yontef, 1993:19). Hereby the author implies freedom to do therapy with spontaneity, liveliness and creativity, but with responsibility. Through therapy the child learns to fully use his internal and external senses, thereby becoming self-responsible and self-supportive. Gestalt therapy, according to Yontef (1993:128), helps the child to regain the key to this state of self-reliance.

Carroll and Oaklander (1997:184) argue that all the concepts and principles presented in the Gestalt therapy literature are relevant to an understanding of child growth and development, as well as child psychopathology and psychotherapy. Research by these authors demonstrates the process and the important value of Gestalt therapy with children.

2.2.1 The philosophy of Gestalt therapy with children

Oaklander (2000:31) identifies Gestalt therapy as an ideal discipline for either short-term or longer-term work with children. It is viewed as an effective approach to the treatment of most childhood disorders and disturbances in healthy, emotional development. Oaklander (2001:53) emphasizes the healthy infant’s capacity to use all of the aspects of the organism as he or she grows and develops, namely the senses, the body, the expression of emotions and the intellect. Unfortunate circumstances sometimes occur early on and result in the child starting to restrict, inhibit, cut off and block these important aspects of the organism. The author argues that the symptoms and behaviours that bring children into therapy are evidence of this phenomenon. The goal of a Gestalt therapy approach to children is therefore viewed as giving back to children those aspects of the self that they have lost.

Carroll and Oaklander (1997:202) emphasize that Gestalt therapy with the child creates the possibility for a process to occur whereby the child's energy can find its intended direction, namely in the service of meeting the ongoing developmental and growth needs of each child. The authors argue that such fulfilment brings the child into more nurturing interactions with all of life. Above-mentioned research warns that without adequate therapeutic intervention the child becomes a character in the world rather than a real, alive individual.

From the above it seems evident that Gestalt therapy with clients of all ages is rooted in a specific philosophy and belief in human nature. From this philosophy certain theoretical principles can be derived that will now be discussed further.

2.3 THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE GESTALT APPROACH TO COUNSELLING

The authors Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:32) argue that all of Perls, Hefferline and Goodman's ideas (1973) are interwoven and cannot be understood in isolation from each other. They view the holistic notion that everything is related to everything else, that all things and beings are mutually dependent upon one another and that a whole theory is more than the sum of its individual parts as the essence of the contribution made by Perls, *et al.* to the theory of psychotherapy. Although the authors identify a "Gestaltist mentality" as necessary to understand the spirit of interconnectedness of the underlying Gestalt principles to counselling, they further state that Perls, *et al.* viewed the harmonious approach to life as natural to each one of us, if we will only let go of our acquired habit of thinking in terms of dualistic and divisive contrasts and categories. The Gestalt way of thinking is therefore not difficult to acquire.

The Gestalt approach to counselling contributes a basic faith in and commitment to the self-regenerating and self-healing forces of the human being. Clarkson (2004:32) further states that the Gestalt approach emphasizes the unique individuality and responsibility of each human being as he freely creates a future in the present moment. The Gestalt therapist, according to Yontef (1993:50), "claims neither to cure nor to condition – but perceives himself as an observer of ongoing behavior and as a guide for the phenomenological learning of the patient". A full understanding of the

theoretical support for this entails an examination of the Gestalt therapy theory of holism, the field perspective and phenomenology.

2.3.1 Holistic approach

Holism is one of the founding principles of Gestalt therapy, as stated by Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:32), Corey (2001b:197) and Clarkson (2004:20). The holistic approach affirms the complexity of persons and events by emphasizing that a person cannot be divided into parts in order to study or treat that person. A person can thereby only be understood to the extent that we take into consideration all dimensions of human functioning. Gestalt therapists are interested in the whole person and therefore value the importance and interrelatedness of a person's thoughts, feelings, behaviours, body and dreams. Although different aspects of a person in the counselling process may be emphasized at different times, the therapist will always have as a guiding principle the integration of all the many facets of that unique individual, how the parts fit together and how the individual makes contact with the environment.

Clarkson (2004:20) views the holistic approach as essentially realistic and integrative, because it takes into account both the dark and regressive aspects of being human, as well as a person's innate strivings towards health, happiness and self-actualization. Human beings, according to Mackewn (2003:44), communicate through their whole beings, not just through their words. A person's body language might for example communicate those aspects of himself that he is less aware of. Each person's whole self therefore conveys distinctive personal messages and the success of the Gestalt therapist depends on his ability to explore the unique meaning of each individual person's non-verbal, as well as verbal self, in relation to the environment.

Modern people, as viewed by Perls (1948,1976), are capable of separating body and mind. Therefore, Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:36) argue that Gestalt therapy aims to re-establish the intrinsic holistic harmony of the individual by integrating all the disowned parts of the self and to make the person whole again. The human qualities and activities associated with both the left and right hemisphere of the brain are therefore valued within the therapeutic context. The creative aspects of therapist and

client within the therapeutic context are emphasized and a variety of experimental, playful and active approaches are used to synthesize body and mind, left brain and right brain into the concept of the whole person. Corey (2004:303) states that because the Gestalt therapist is interested in the whole person, no superior value is placed on a particular aspect of the individual and meaning is derived from how the individual makes contact with the environment.

2.3.2 Field theory

Gestalt counselling and therapy are based on field theory. Field theory refers to a set of principles that emphasizes the interconnectedness of the person with the environment. Yontef (1993:322) defines field theory as the “cognitive glue that holds the Gestalt therapy system together”. The field is phenomenologically defined and the exact nature of the field varies depending on the investigator and what is being investigated. Gestalt therapy studies people in their organism/environment fields and Yontef (1993:294) identifies the family, the school or the person's life space as examples of the environment.

Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:42) argue that within field theory a person's behaviour can only be understood in terms of his interdependence with his environment, because his social, historical and cultural field is intrinsic to him. According to Joyce and Sills (2003:24), it implies that a person is never independent or isolated, but always in contact and connected with everything else in a very real sense. Although “field” in general means everything, the authors define its use within the therapeutic context as more limited, depending on what the therapist and the client think are significant field influences in each circumstance. Two types of focus are used in practice, namely the experiential field and the larger field. The experiential field is unique to an individual and is defined as his reality or the way he organizes his experience through his immediate awareness. The larger field refers to the larger context in which the individual exist, including the physical world of objects. It implies that which is not in the person's immediate awareness, as well as all the latent possibilities and potentials of his evolving self-expression.

Field theory highlights both the importance of the context for understanding individuals, as well as the responsibility of individuals for co-creating and giving meaning to their environment. Therefore, Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:43) view human beings as meaning-seeking creatures. They emphasize that the person is active in the organization of his experiential field and in the creation of the meanings with which he endows it, both depending on his need or interest. Mackewn (2003:53) agrees and states that the value of any therapeutic intervention within the Gestalt approach is field dependent. The therapist needs to be constantly adjusting his approach to take into consideration the many possible and variable dimensions of the field.

2.3.2.1 Principle of figure and ground

Gestalt therapists are interested in how people organize their experiences into meaningful wholes, as well as the strong and inherent urge to complete or make meaning of their emotional life (Mackewn, 2003:15 and Parlett & Hemming, 2003:215). Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:43) further state that people differentiate their fields into polar opposites, namely things that can meet their needs and things that cannot. Those things that can meet their needs or interests become more figural, while their opposites recede into the background. The concept of figure and ground explains the process by which people organize their perceptions to form configurations that they endow with meaning. Life is full of these processes or patterns of gestalts of a life which form and when completed, dissolve, as stated by Parlett and Hemming (2003:215).

Mackewn (2003:15) assumes that it is an inherent drive in people to see completed emotional figures or gestalten against the background of the rest of the field. Closure is thereby reached in one of two ways, either through experiencing emotional satisfaction, integration, insight and completion, or alternatively through experiencing grieving, insight, letting go and subsequent closure. When people are unable to organize their experience to make sense or to achieve some sort of closure, they experience dis-ease or discomfort and interference with free functioning.

2.3.2.2 Satisfying the needs

Houston (2003:15) emphasizes Perls's suggestion (1948) that most of what a person does is in response to a hierarchy of need and want. The dominant needs at a given moment influence the process of figure ground formation, as argued by Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:43) and Corey (2001b:197). Mackewn (2003:17) agrees and emphasizes people's natural urge to regulate their physical and emotional needs. The author further states that people organize their experience, sensation, images, energy, interest and activity around their needs until they have met or otherwise resolved them.

According to both Houston (2003:15) and Mackewn (2003:17), a healthy person presents an awareness of the next need, which is then fulfilled, thus losing interest and making room for another need to emerge through a new gestalt formation. This implies a cycle of "self-other" regulation. The authors warn that the cycle does not ensure that a person can always satisfy his needs. Mackewn (2003:18) emphasizes the complexity of human needs and desires, thereby acknowledging the fact that the environment often does not currently offer the needed element or quality. By acknowledging the unfulfilled need, thereby experiencing and expressing the emotions evoked by the impossibility of meeting the need, a person can achieve closure. Emotions might include frustration, grief or disappointment.

The above-mentioned discussion again emphasizes the Gestalt holistic approach to people. People organize their field and make meaning of their experience according to their current needs and to the prevailing conditions in which they find themselves. Therefore, events and people can only be understood as a whole and in context. Corey (2001b:195) states that the approach is therefore phenomenological, because it focuses on the client's perceptions of reality and not that of the therapist.

2.3.3 Phenomenological perspective

The phenomenological perspective implies a disciplined focus enabling people to find their own meaning through experiencing what is obvious in a given situation without pre-judgement, as stated by Clarkson (2004:14). Yontef (1993:124) agrees and also

states that Gestalt therapy treats what is subjectively felt in the present, as well as what is objectively observed, as really important data. Thereby the Gestalt therapist pays total attention to the phenomenon (person, experience, or object) as it presents itself, without interpretation or expectations. According to Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:46), the therapist must open himself up to all the possibilities of the field and instead of interpreting the client's behaviour he must help the client to uncover his own unique sense of meaning and direction in life. The goal of phenomenological exploration then becomes awareness or insight. Each bit of information regarding the perceptual field of another person is thereby treated as if it is a bit of a jigsaw puzzle. Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:46) state that the therapist attempts to piece together the puzzle without prior knowledge of what image the completed puzzle depicts. Thereby the surface of the behaviour or experience is described in order to grasp its essence.

The above discussion on the Gestalt holistic approach rooted in field theory and phenomenology highlights the interrelatedness of the principles underlying the theory. The discussion will now focus on the positive view within Gestalt theory of human nature and how each person is seen as responsible for his own behaviour by being capable of making his own choices.

2.4 GESTALT APPROACH TO HUMAN NATURE

The theory of people in Gestalt is optimistic, assuming a tendency or capacity for growth and excitement. Parlett and Hemming (2003:211) view human beings as constantly developing and therefore regard people as exploring, adapting and self-reflecting beings in a process of continuous change. It implies that people are constantly making and remaking themselves throughout life. From the Gestalt view, as argued by Carroll and Oaklander (1997:184), the child is born as a fully functioning, integrated organism encompassing senses, body, emotions and intellect. The continuous change comes naturally and inevitably through the constant interaction with others and dealing with life's challenges, opportunities, possibilities and problems. The authors state that the Gestalt approach rests on the belief that anyone can, if they want to and have sufficient support, learn how to function in life with greater skill and satisfaction. It implies an inherent capacity to cope with life. It is

therefore important to discuss the interrelatedness between healthy and disturbed functioning.

2.4.1 Healthy functioning

From the Gestalt view, according to Mackewn (2003:21), healthy people are self-regulating individuals, able to respond flexibly to changing circumstances and to support themselves in many respects while accepting mutual interdependence with other people and the environment. Carroll and Oaklander (1997:186) state that all aspects of the child, that is physical, emotional and intellectual, function in a well-coordinated, wholesome manner. The continuing well-being of the child is therefore adequately supported internally and externally, thereby allowing for maturation, growth and learning. The experience of this integrated functioning, which is free of conflict or obstruction, results in a sense of aliveness and faith in his capacity to cope with life.

Mackewn (2003:22) states that the healthy child takes responsibility for the choices he makes in life and especially the meaning he gives to his life. He experiences his ability to actualize himself within the limits of his life circumstances and is continuously making creative adjustments at the contact boundary between himself and the world around him, responding to, acting upon, influencing, interacting with and withdrawing from the environment in order to meet his own needs. The author emphasizes that some children seem to be able to retain their ability to function creatively even under adverse conditions, while others have less self-support and require a more encouraging environment. Mackewn (2003:22) agrees with Parlett and Hemming (2003:214) that anyone, if they want to and have sufficient support, has the innate ability to develop greater and more flexible skills for interacting with their circumstances.

2.4.2 Disturbed functioning

Parlett and Hemming (2003:214) argue, “to be disturbed at times, is to be expected”. Disturbance, according to Mackewn (2003:22), refers to the loss of flexibility to adjust creatively to changing conditions. Disturbed functioning or ill health can either be a

result of a chaotic field or of individual patterns of repeated confusion and distress. The authors state that in situations where people are not comfortable and are not managing, they are likely to fall back on ineffective repertoires and responses that were once adequate solutions. They therefore become fixated on inappropriate habitual patterns of thinking, feeling and reacting in ways that interfere with functioning in present circumstances. Gestalt intervention therefore focuses on the exact ways in which people act stereotypically. Carroll and Oaklander (1997:188) state that the disturbed child needs help to restore healthy self-regulation, to reawaken an awareness of internal and external events and to be able to use the resources available in the environment to have his needs met.

According to Schoeman (2003:58), many people tend to fragment their lives, distributing their concentration and attention amongst several variables and events at one time. The fragmentation leads to an ineffective life style. The author argues that the Gestalt view of human nature is positive in that people are viewed as capable of becoming self-regulating beings that can achieve a sense of unity and integration of their lives. The discussion will now highlight Perls's five layers of neurosis (1970) that indicates how the child fragments his life and prevents him from succeeding and maturing.

2.4.2.1 Five layers of neurosis

Corey (2001b:199) emphasizes that to achieve psychological maturity the child must strip off five layers of neurosis, as first proposed by Perls as the "peeling of an onion" (1970). Schoeman (2003:60) states that the five layers form different stages in the counselling process and can therefore be seen as steps to a better Gestalt way of life. Perls (1970) identified the five layers as follows:

- The **phoney layer** consists of reacting to others in stereotypical and unauthentic ways. This is the level where the child plays games and gets lost in roles. Once the child becomes aware of the phoniness of game playing and becomes more honest, he experiences unpleasantness and pain.
- At the **phobic layer** the child attempts to avoid the emotional pain associated with seeing aspects of himself that he would prefer to deny. The child resists

acceptance of himself the way he actually is and develops catastrophic fears of being rejected by others.

- The **impasse** is the point where the child is stuck in his own maturation. The environment is manipulated to do his seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking and deciding for him. A sense of deadness and worthlessness is felt.
- During the **implosive layer** the child exposes his defences and begins to make contact with his genuine self. The child becomes aware of how he limits himself and begins to experiment with new behaviours.
- During the **explosive layer** the child releases a tremendous amount of energy by letting go of pretending to be who he is not. Energy that had been tied up in maintaining a phoney existence is now used to become alive and authentic.

Progression through the five layers of neurosis implies a deepening of awareness, viewed as the central goal of Gestalt therapy. Schoeman (2003:61) states that the child is thereby encouraged to help himself to mature, to take charge of his life and to become responsible for himself. The discussion will now further highlight the different goals within the Gestalt therapeutic approach.

2.5 THERAPEUTIC GOALS AND THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF GESTALT THEORY

Gestalt therapy emphasizes the child's ability to find his own goals through discovering his own potential to meet these goals. Parlett and Hemming (2003:223) regard the work of therapy to foster conditions in which individuals become active participants in developing awareness, self-support, integration and the ability to interact authentically with others. The child is encouraged to recognize his own expert status through developing greater self-awareness. The therapeutic journey therefore leads the child to realize that he is the author of his own life.

2.5.1 Awareness

Corey (2004:301) identifies awareness as the basic goal of Gestalt therapy and states that the promotion and encouragement of full and free-flowing awareness is curative or growth producing in itself. By defining awareness as a tool, Simkin (1998:41)

agrees with Oaklander (2000:31) that the therapist helps the child through awareness to become more conscious of what he is doing that causes dissatisfaction, thereby equipping himself with more flexibility and choice. According to Yontef (1993:145), awareness requires self-knowledge, responsibility for choices, contact with the environment, self-acceptance and the ability to make contact. It implies that without awareness the child does not possess the tools for personality change.

Parlett and Hemming (2003:217) argue that part of being aware relates to the five senses and the capacity to take information from our surroundings. The child can become aware of his process, sensations, feelings, wants, needs, thought processes and actions, as stated by Oaklander (2001:31). The author emphasizes the importance of providing varied experiences as the key to awareness for the child. Experiences are viewed as essential components of the therapeutic process that serve to strengthen the child's self, promoting good contact functioning, culminating in healing emotional expression and facilitating new and more satisfying ways of being in the world.

Directed awareness or "paying attention" can be aimed at a particular aspect of functioning, for example a tense part of the body, or it can be directed broadly to bring about a holistic perspective, for example paying attention to ways of relating, as stated by Joyce and Sills (2003:29). The therapist invites the child to take his thoughts and feelings seriously by reflecting back what he is hearing, by asking how he is feeling and by exploring his belief system with him. Through this he is invited to listen to himself and to bring his full awareness to bear on his experience and the way he makes sense of his world. By paying attention to the whole field the child becomes aware of what is out of awareness, thereby restoring or strengthening the here-and-now holistic awareness.

2.5.2 Organismic self-regulation

Gestalt therapy emphasizes the process of organismic self-regulation. According to Carroll and Oaklander (1997:184), the child is born as a fully functioning, integrated organism encompassing senses, body, emotions and intellect. Oaklander (2001:47) states that the organism constantly seeks homeostasis, thereby seeking health at all

times and attempting to satisfy its needs. Organismic self-regulation allows for the needs of the child to be met and supports integration of experience, resulting in learning, growth and fulfilment of the child's potential. The process is ongoing as there is a constant presence of various needs that disturb the equilibrium.

Oaklander (2001:47) emphasizes that since the child is changing and growing throughout his years of development to adulthood, the quest for balance and equilibrium is critical and problematic. The lack of emotional and intellectual maturity often causes the child to develop inappropriate ways of being in the world to ensure that his needs are met. The author states that although these behaviours and symptoms are the reason why the child is brought for therapy, it actually can be viewed as the child's fierce attempts to cope and survive in the stressful world, as well as the organism's attempt to attain homeostasis or sense of balance and peacefulness.

Yontef (1993:212) views organismic self-regulation as a natural process that functions through a process of contact and withdrawal. The process is based on assimilation by acknowledging the complete array of sensory, mental and emotional data concerning both the internal needs and the needs of the environment, as well as the internal and environmental resources. Organismic self-regulation therefore leads to awareness.

2.5.3 Integration

Carroll and Oaklander (1997:194) state that the child has to come to accept all aspects of himself before complete healthful growth can be possible. Gestalt therapy stresses the need for the child to re-discover, through assistance of the therapeutic relationship, his capabilities of self-support and emotional expression. Therefore, therapy provides the necessary intervention and challenge to help him proceed toward integration and a more authentic and vital existence, as argued by Corey (2004:301).

Corey (2001b:206) identifies a three-stage integration sequence, as first defined by Miriam Polster (1987). Through discovery, the first part of the sequence, the child is

surprisingly likely to reach a new realization about himself, acquire a novel view of an old situation or may take a new look at some significant person in his life. Accommodation, the second stage of the integration sequence, involves recognition of the availability of choices. The therapeutic relationship supports the child to expand his awareness of the world by trying out new behaviours. The third stage of the integration sequence, assimilation, reflects how the child has learned what he can do to maximize his chances of getting what is needed from the environment.

2.5.4 Polarities

Joyce and Sills (2003:136) argue that every aspect of a person is one side of a duality. The other side is out of awareness and forms the ground to that figure. Some polarities are clear, for example happy and sad, while others are subtler and unique to the individual's phenomenology. They emphasize that both sides are potentially necessary and define healthy functioning as the ability to flexibly move along the continuum of any polarity as the situation requires. Therefore, according to the Gestalt theory, alienation or the splitting off of parts of the self that seem too difficult to manage or integrate is an unhealthy process. It requires energy to keep the split-off part out of awareness and reduces the availability of new energy to respond in any emerging situation. Clarkson and Mackewn (1993:106) state that as the child gets to know his polarized characteristics and realizes that the opposite qualities are in fact complementary and can coexist, he increases his range and ability to move subtly between the poles of his existence. In this way he develops his potential for acting as a flexibly integrated whole organism, rather than as a group of separate factions at war with themselves.

2.5.5 Contact

Joyce and Sills (2003:112) state the following: "The Gestalt therapist believes that part of psychological health is having good contact with self and others". Oaklander (2000:29) emphasizes that healthy contact involves the use of all the senses, awareness, appropriate use of aspects of the body, the ability to express emotions healthfully and the use of the intellect in its various forms such as learning, expressing ideas, thoughts, curiosities, wants, needs and resentments. It implies that when one

of these modalities is inhibited, restricted or blocked, good contact suffers and that fragmentation instead of integration occurs. The way in which the child makes contact will continually have to be modified according to the field conditions in each unique situation, as stated by Joyce and Sills (2003:112). For example, as the child grows, he develops necessary and normal habitual responses to meeting and managing his needs. However, problems arise when the habitual response is not updated for new or changed conditions.

2.5.5.1 Contact boundary and contact styles

Both Oaklander (2000:29) and Mackewn (2003:27) state that Gestalt therapy studies the individual at the contact boundary between the self and the environment. The relationship between the child and the situation allows the therapist and child to notice the patterns of how he connects or fails to connect to his surroundings and circumstances, thereby learning how he meets or fails to meet his needs. The boundary both joins and separates the child and environment. Oaklander (2000:29) argues that if the self is weak and undefined, the boundary is blurred and that contact suffers.

Disturbances of contact can either be situation specific or may become a general style of contact across a range of situations that influence all aspects of the child's way of making contact. Joyce and Sills (2003:112) argue that then the child is not free to make new choices or adjustments and therefore repeats the same response that previously seemed to be useful. In many situations the child may be unaware of his contact modifications, because it is conceptualized as a way of avoiding pain or difficult feelings.

Joyce and Sills (2003:113) and Mackewn (2003:27) view the following styles of moderating contact as disturbances or interruptions:

- **Retroflexion** occurs when the child holds back his impulse to take action, for example speech, expression of a feeling or behaviour. The withheld impulse interrupts the flow of energy. If the process is repeated frequently or if the impulse contains strong energy, suppressing it can lead to the energy being turned inwards

toward the self. It implies that the child does to himself what he really would like to do to other people or the environment.

- **Deflection** means ignoring or turning away either an internal stimulus or one from the environment, in order to prevent full recognition or awareness. The child often deflects from his feelings and impulses through endless talking, by laughing instead of taking himself seriously or by always focusing on the needs of the other. Deflection is an active process of avoiding awareness that means that the child will tend to also push away the therapist's interventions when they touch on the avoided material.
- **Desensitisation** is the process by which the child numbs himself to the sensations in his body or to external stimuli.
- **Confluence** is an inability to distinguish the interpersonal boundary and occurs when two people or two parts of the field flow together with no sense of differentiation. The feelings and wishes of another easily overwhelm the confluent child who responds as if they were his own.
- **Egotism** as a habitual modification is characterized by an excessive preoccupation with one's own thoughts, feelings, behaviours and effect on others. The preoccupation can be positive, admiring and self-congratulatory or critical and undermining. Either way it is an avoidance of real relational contact. Healthy egotism is the capacity for self-reflection.
- **Projection** involves denying or repressing a quality or feeling and attributing it to other people or institutions. It refers to the disowned parts of the self. When the child struggles with accepting a quality or aspect of his personality that is incompatible with his self-concept, he may effectively project it out of awareness onto another person.
- **Introjection** is a process whereby an opinion, an attitude or an instruction is unquestioningly taken in from the environment as if it were true. Assimilation of the introject does not occur properly and it becomes part of the child.

Perls, *et al.* (1973) viewed the above-mentioned boundary disturbances as neurotic only when used chronically and inappropriately, as emphasized by Clarkson (2004:53). The mechanisms tend to be interrelated to each other and become unhealthy when they are fixated on impossible or non-existent objects, deny the child awareness and when preventing meaningful integration of needs and experiences.

2.5.6 Experiment

Another unique dimension of Gestalt therapy is its fresh creative approach that allows the child to learn about himself through active participation and action. Mackewn (2003:133) describes the experiment as an active method of exploration of the child's experience that involves bodily and mental processes, rather than merely through verbal exploration. Corey (2001b:220) agrees by highlighting that the experiment allows the child to actually experience his struggles and conflict within the safety of the therapeutic relationship, rather than talking endlessly about his problems in a detached manner.

Mackewn (2003:133) states that the Gestalt experiment aims at supporting the child to participate in creative adventures, such as fantasy, visualization or movement, in order to do one or more of the following:

- To increase awareness of his own perceptions of and interactions with others,
- to develop and explore life themes which are important to him,
- to integrate experiential learning and bodily phenomena with cognitive understanding,
- to enable the child to explore all the forces that are active within the field and to create conditions in which he can see his life as his own creation and responsibility,
- to reach his personal impasses and see more clearly what are the different processes that are at work within himself, and
- to review his repertoire of behaviours and perceptions and thus possibly to choose to enlarge his range of options.

Through the creativeness of the experiment, according to Corey (2001b:220), the therapist challenges the child to become aware of and work with issues that are obstructing current functioning. In addition Joyce and Sills (2003:98) view the experiment as a way of loosening fixed processes, thereby expanding choice and responsibility. They argue that the opportunity to try new ways of being is one of the major healing factors in Gestalt therapy.

It seems evident from the above that the Gestalt therapeutic goals support the Gestalt belief that people have the innate ability to solve their own problems or to face difficulties. However, Gestalt therapy realizes that people sometimes get stuck and need assistance. The Gestalt therapist assists the child within the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship to see his situation more clearly, finding out how he forms part of it and experimenting with finding new solutions or ways to face the difficulty.

2.6 UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILD-CLIENT WITHIN GESTALT THERAPY

Oaklander (2001:54) states that children are complicated and fascinating. Even young children, according to her, have a wisdom about themselves that is awe-inspiring. In Gestalt therapy the therapist assists the child to share this wisdom through gently opening the doors to self-awareness and self-ownership. Through this the child is guided toward his rightful path of growth.

2.6.1 Sense of self

The way the child feels about himself is to a great extent determined by the early messages he receives about himself from the environment, as stated by Oaklander (1988:281 and 2001:51). She further explains that how the child perceives and values himself, determines to a great extent how he behaves, how he copes with life and how he manages himself. Negative messages become introjects that cause the child to fragment his life, for example a part of him might feel stupid while another part might be angry about this feeling. Though the child might know that something is wrong, he might not even be aware that he is not feeling good about himself. Oaklander (1988:281) identifies the following signs as examples of manifestations of a low self-esteem: cheating in games, giving away candy, being self-critical, withdrawn or shy, blaming others for everything and feeling unable to make choices and decisions.

Oaklander (1988:283 and 2001:53) aims through Gestalt therapy to give back to the child those aspects of the self that he has lost, but warns that the change must come from within the child himself. The child can only accomplish this by allowing and

accepting his bad feelings. The author emphasizes that as the child becomes re-acquainted with his senses and his bodily functions and starts accepting it, he is able to start feeling better about himself. Through activities involving experiences with the senses, focusing on similarities and differences between himself and others, the child starts viewing himself with new appreciation and enlarges his awareness of himself.

2.6.2 Emotional expression

A strong sense of self is a requirement for emotional expression that is an important step in the healing process, as stated by Oaklander (2000:30). She argues that the child who experiences trouble, who is grieving, worried, anxious, frightened or angry, will armour and restrict himself, pull himself in, inhibit himself and will therefore block healthful expression. The child does not have the inner support, cognitive ability or emotional maturity to directly express his feelings. By regaining his sense of self, the child feels more support within himself and moves toward emotional expression.

Oaklander (2001:51) warns that it is not a simple matter to help the child to unlock emotions and to learn healthy ways to express emotions in daily life. Therefore, the therapist depends on a variety of creative, expressive and projective techniques to assist his work. The child is allowed to come in contact with his inner, energetic strength through activities that enable the child to experience aspects of his self, defining it, feeling some power and control, making choices, achieving mastery and owning parts of the self. The self-nurturing process can be valuable in assisting the child to deal with negative messages in order to achieve integration. The author states that as the child moves through the therapy experience, he becomes more aware of who he is, what he feels, what he needs, what he wants and how to express these desires and needs. Oaklander (2000:51) emphasizes that what the child experiences within therapy will often carry over into other areas of his life.

2.7 CONCLUSION

From the above chapter it seems evident that Gestalt therapy is an experiential approach that stresses present-centered awareness and the quality of contact between the child and the environment. The underlying Gestalt principles of holism,

field theory and phenomenology support the Gestalt philosophy that the child is born with the resources and ability to be in rewarding contact with other human beings, thereby leading a satisfying and creative life. Field theory provides a way of thinking about the whole gestalt of the child, while phenomenology provides a process of defining, working with and increasing the child's awareness.

It seems evident that there is a focus on responsibility for self, the here-and-now, authenticity in the I-Thou relationship and on experiments that lead to awareness and wholeness. The focus in therapy is on directed awareness of sensations, feelings and thoughts. It is therefore evident that Gestalt therapy is a humanistic and process-orientated form of therapy that focuses attention on the healthy, integrated functioning of the total organism. In chapter three the developmental dynamics of the child during the middle childhood phase further highlights the integration of all the aspects of the individual in the process of understanding his behaviour in totality.

CHAPTER 3

PHASE 2: INFORMATION GATHERING AND SYNTHESIS

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD DYNAMICS AND THE IMPACT OF THE CHILD'S SCHOOL EXPERIENCE FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Middle childhood, also referred to as the middle school age or the concrete operational stage, defines the period of child development from about the age of six to the twelfth year of life. Kaplan (2000:456) states that it has historically falsely been viewed as a stagnant period of development with horizontal growth occurring and that it therefore has been considered as the calm before the storm of change that occurs in adolescence. He evaluates the cognitive, physical and social growth during middle childhood as more gradual and therefore emphasizes the need to search harder to find the significant changes that takes place. Wait (2004:131) agrees and states that earlier psychological theories have not considered middle childhood to be very important in the process of psychological development. He highlights the contrasting research of Erik Erikson on psychosocial development (1950, 1982) and Jean Piaget's cognitive-stage theory (1948) that emphasized the importance of this phase on the intellectual growth of the child, the enhancement of his competence level and the learning of fundamental skills of his culture. The child's accomplishments are balanced between the cognitive, emotional and social domain. The authors further agree that as the child in the middle childhood phase gains confidence in his skills, he begins to have more realistic images of himself, acquires personal standards for evaluation and evolves an initial assessment of his potential contribution to the larger community.

Entrance into school, a great event according to Miller (2002:154), highlights the beginning of the industry versus inferiority stage, a psychosocial crisis during middle childhood as described by Erikson's psychosocial development theory (1950, 1982). Wait (2004:143) argues that because there is strong emphasis on skills and accomplishment, the child constantly experiences external sources of reinforcement

that needs to be internalized in the process of self-evaluation. The child's judgement of his own level of competence, as well as his experience of success and failure, influence his self-esteem and his sense of worth as a human being. The child's experience of success in school is especially highlighted by Wait (2004:147) as fundamental in the forming of an opinion of himself. Experiences of failure, worthlessness and inadequacy are therefore viewed as negative influences on the child's self-esteem and leads to feelings of inferiority. If grade retention is therefore viewed as a failure to accomplish set standards of approval, the effects thereof on the child during middle childhood should be considered in the process of encouraging a healthy self-esteem.

From the above it seems clear why psychologists find that the child who emerges from middle childhood with a positive self-esteem, healthy relationships with his parents and peers, as well as a good feeling about his own academic and social capabilities, is ready to tackle the challenges that await him during adolescence. The challenges and the psychological changes that need to occur during middle childhood seem to lead the child on the road to becoming a healthy human being. The contribution of the theoretical perspectives of Erikson (1950, 1982) and Piaget (1948) on the cognitive and personality development during middle childhood will be highlighted in the following discussion.

3.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES THAT INFLUENCED THE VIEW OF MIDDLE CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Kaplan (2000:4) states the following: "Childhood is a time of mystery and charm". The author describes child development as the scientific study of the sequence of physical, cognitive, personality and social changes that occur to children throughout their childhood years. Although the author views each child as an individual and warns against generalization on the basis of developmental theories, he does value the importance of certain themes and issues that arises repeatedly. He further states that developmental theories arm professionals with knowledge that allows them to predict and explain how children will react to various experiences. Although the focus of this chapter is on the dynamics within middle childhood, one needs to understand major theoretical influences on how this stage of life is viewed as important in the

process of becoming a healthy human being. Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1948) provides a better understanding of the cognitive functioning of the child during middle childhood, while Erikson's psychosocial theory (1950, 1982) casts light on the child's personality development. A short summary of each of these theories indicates the important influence of a theoretical basis for understanding the cognitive and personality dynamics during middle childhood.

3.3 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Kaplan (2000:45), Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2002:29) and Berk (2003:250), all agree that Piaget's (1948) contributions to the field of child development are of great theoretical value. He viewed the child from an organismic point of view, as an active and growing being with his own internal impulses and patterns of development and therefore as a curious knowledge seeker. This discussion will focus on the major impact of Piaget's belief (1948) that the child's cognitive development can be viewed as occurring in a sequence of four stages. Kaplan (2000:43) states that each of these stages represents a qualitative advance in the child's ability to solve problems and understanding of the world. According to Drummond (2004:288) it implies that the child tends to think, perceive, organize and understand his personal, physical and social environment differently through these various stages of development.

3.3.1 Thought patterns within the concrete operational stage

Middle childhood, according to Piaget (1948), highlights entrance into the third stage of cognitive development, namely the concrete operational stage. Berk (2003:241) emphasizes that Piaget viewed the child's concrete operational reasoning as far more logical, flexible and organized than cognition was during the pre-school years. Piaget, as stated by Kaplan (2000:379) and Berk (2003:241-242), identified a series of accomplishments as typical for the child within this stage of cognitive development: These accomplishments are discussed as follows:

- The ability to conserve is seen as an achievement. Although the child might understand the underlying principle of conservation of number, volume, substance and weight, he might not be able to apply it across all contexts. Piaget (1948)

defined the gradual mastery of logical concepts as “horizontal decalage”. It holds implications for the child’s ability to think abstractly and implies that the child cannot come up with a general logical principle that can be applied to all relevant situations. He seems to work out the logic of each problem on a separate basis.

- The ability to seriate and to classify. The child becomes more aware of classification hierarchies and can focus on relations between a general and two specific categories at the same time. The mastery of these skills becomes evident in his tendency to collect things, for example stamps or coins.
- The child has a more accurate understanding of space, for example a better comprehension of distance, a more advanced ability to give directions and mastering of cognitive maps.
- The child experiences a decline in egocentrism and understands that other people see the world differently. Social interaction allows him to seek validation of his own view of the world, thereby becoming more sensitive to the feelings of others. His language becomes less egocentric, for example focusing on the “we” and “us” instead of the “I” and “my”.

It seems clear that entry into the concrete operational stage has a major impact on a child’s education. This stage of cognitive development permits the child to grasp the fundamental principles of the problems that the school poses to him. Therefore, Newman and Newman (1987:307) emphasize that the art of teaching lies in presenting challenges at a level of complexity that will be meaningful to the child, but just one step beyond his present level of ability. Kaplan (2000:377) warns that the child develops these accomplishments gradually, for example maturing intellectually enough to understand what is going on or to be emotionally emancipated from his parents to be able to form relationships with others. Berk (2003:249) identified the following three educational principles, as derived from Piaget’s theory (1948), as an important part of the concrete operational phase through which the educator must reach the child:

- Learning through discovery should be encouraged. The educator should provide a rich variety of activities designed to promote exploration, instead of verbally presenting ready-made knowledge. The use of arts and crafts materials, books,

measuring tools and puzzles for example, will encourage spontaneous interaction with the environment that will allow the child to discover for himself.

- Sensitivity towards the child's readiness to learn should be exhibited. Appropriate learning experiences build on the child's current level of thinking and by watching and listening to his learner, the educator does not try to speed up development by imposing new skills before the child indicates that he is interested or ready.
- Accept individual differences. Although all children go through the same sequence of development, it occurs at different rates. The educator needs to plan activities for the individual child in small groups rather than just for the total class, as well as evaluate educational progress by comparing each child to his own previous development instead of how he measures up to normative standards.

These principles had a major impact on education and how the child is viewed within the classroom setting. The educator is hereby encouraged to practice new ways of observing, understanding and enhancing a child-orientated approach to classroom teaching and learning. It is therefore evident why Piaget (1948) viewed the child as an active participant in his own development.

The important influence of the educational system on the child's cognitive development seems evident from the above discussion. As cognitive development set the standard for intellectual thinking, the child's emotional development during middle childhood sets the standard for establishing a healthy self-esteem. Erikson's psychosocial theory (1950, 1982) identified industry versus inferiority as the psychosocial crisis that influences the child's healthy personality development during middle childhood.

3.4 PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Papalia, *et al.* (2002:347) identify the cognitive growth that takes place during middle childhood as the enabling force that allows the child to develop a more complex concept of himself. The emphasis being on skill building, as identified by Newman and Newman (1987:284) and by Wait (2004:143), suggests that the child is preoccupied with the process of self-evaluation. In contrast to early childhood, the middle childhood years reflect a shift from physical to psychological perceptions of the

self where personality traits take centre stage. Kaplan (2000:421) states that the child's self-concept is influenced by his self-esteem, which in return is influenced by the child's sense of self-efficacy or level of confidence in his own ability. The discussion now further highlights the influential role of each of these processes in the development of the child's personality, as well as the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority.

3.4.1 Psychosocial crisis during middle childhood

Papalia, *et al.* (2002:8) argue that the study of child development is complicated by the fact that change and stability occur in various aspects of the self. Although they warn against studying the child as a bundle of isolated parts, they distinguish between physical development, cognitive development and psychosocial development in the quest to simplify their explanations. They emphasize development as a unified process where these domains are interrelated to one another. Psychosocial development constitutes the change and stability in personality, emotional life and social relationships that can affect cognitive and physical functioning, as defined by Papalia, *et al.* (2002:8). Anxiety about taking a test can for example impair performance, while social support can help the child cope with the potentially negative effects of stress on physical and mental health. Physical and cognitive capacities can, on the contrary, affect psychosocial development, thereby contributing to self-esteem and social acceptance.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1950, 1982) covers eight stages across the life span of a human being, as described by Miller (2002:146) and Papalia, *et al.* (2002:25). Through each stage a crisis, defined as a major developmental issue that is particularly important at that time and that will remain an issue to some degree throughout the rest of life, is presented. The crisis emerges according to a maturation timetable and must be satisfactorily resolved for healthy personality development to occur. Kaplan (2000:55) emphasizes that the successful resolution of each of the eight crises requires the balancing of a positive trait with a corresponding negative trait. This forms part of the individual's healthy emotional development. Drummond (2004:290) warns that when the negative forces have a stronger influence than the positive factors, the outcome leads to difficulties in adjustment and development.

The child needs to conquer the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority during middle childhood. The child's attitude towards work is now established, while an inner commitment to strive for success is also made, as stated by Wait (2004:145). Kaplan (2000:55) further explains that if the child's success in learning academic skills, for example reading, writing and mathematics, as well as a variety of social skills, are valued by others, the child develops a sense of industry and has a positive view of his achievements. On the contrary, the child who is constantly compared with others and always comes up second best may develop a sense of inferiority. Wait (2004:145) emphasizes that at the end of middle childhood the strength of the child's need and motivation to achieve success will be well established in his self-esteem.

Successful experiences allow the child a sense of industry that refers to an eagerness for building skills and performing meaningful work, as stated by Newman and Newman (1987:302), as well as by Wait (2004:145). Many aspects of work are intrinsically motivated. Skills are not only new, but also develop the child's sense of independence and responsibility, which on the other hand heightens the sense of worth. Experience of increased competence is not only encouraged by these self-motivation factors, but also by a variety of external reinforcement. Parents and the educators constantly encourage feelings of competence and mastery through grades, material rewards, additional privileges and praise.

Failure, on the contrary, generates feelings of worthlessness, inadequacy and a sense of inferiority. Miller (2002:154) even argues that the child experiences a feeling of "good-for-nothing". These feelings, according to Wait (2004:145), are encouraged by the child himself, as well as by the social environment in which he lives. Although the author acknowledges the fact that children differ and that no one child will be able to master all skills at the same level of excellence, he does emphasize the need for each child to learn this "life lesson" independently. Unfortunately the social environment provides differential reinforcement for success in some areas. Wait (2004:145) argues that during middle childhood success in schoolwork and in certain sport activities are more highly rewarded than success in other arenas. "Children are grouped, graded, and publicly criticized on the basis of how their efforts compare to someone else's" (Newman and Newman, 1987:304). Each child needs to learn how to balance the intrinsic motives for engaging in a task for the pleasure of the challenge

with the conflicting message that stimulates feelings of self-consciousness, humiliation and self-doubt.

The great value that the environment places on high achievers, as identified by Wait (2004:145), encourages a culture that sends a message to children that achievement in the form of winning is the only motive to achieve. Two types of messages that imply failure contribute to feelings of inferiority, the first reflects the child's lack of motivation and the second results in a feeling of learned helplessness by referring to the child's lack of ability. The experience of failure can generate a self-definition of being unable to meet the external standard of perfection and encourages a pessimistic view of the future. Feelings of worthlessness and self-doubt thereby encourage a negative self-esteem.

From the above discussion it becomes apparent that education is the main process through which the child resolves the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority. Meaning is given to success and failure while the child evaluates his ability and starts forming opinions about his strengths and weaknesses in different areas of performance. The school therefore tends to be the environment in which continuous attention is given to the child's success or failure and therefore plays an important role in establishing the child's self-esteem.

3.4.2 The development of the self-concept during middle childhood

The self-concept is seen as the "picture" a person has of himself, as defined by Kaplan (2000:421). Thomas (2000:365) agrees and refers to Perls, *et al.* (1973) who view the self as the "artist of life" that "plays the crucial role of finding and making the meanings that we grow by". Both these authors conclude that the self-concept reflects the person's beliefs about himself that allows him to differentiate himself from others and to have a sense of who he is and where he belongs.

During middle childhood the self-concept evolves from a combination of feedback that the child receives from peers, parents and educators, as well as his evaluation of his own subjective experiences. The evaluation of his experiences, according to Kaplan (2000:421), leads to a judgement of himself as being good, bad, aggressive, calm or

honest. The constant comparison with set standards of society, peers, parents and educators, as well as the child's newly developing cognitive skills, complicate the situation for the child. During the concrete operational stage the child reasons more logically, therefore making it possible for him to verify the attributes of his self. He seems to become especially good at developing a self-theory based on specific experiences, for example concluding that he is smart because he is good at reading and mathematics.

Kaplan (2000:422) further states that the decline in egocentrism enhances the child's ability to bear in mind another person's point of view. The constant comparison with others allows the child to test his self-concept, thereby developing the ability to imagine what others are thinking of him. Kaplan warns that the self-concept affects how information is processed, for example if the child thinks that he is bad, he will believe such feedback from other people. The self-concept can thereby set a self-fulfilling prophecy in motion. Papalia, *et al.* (2002:347) argue that the child's judgement about the self becomes more realistic, more balanced, more comprehensive and more consciously expressed. The child compares his real self with the ideal self. The authors emphasize that all these changes contribute to the development of the child's self-esteem or his assessment of his global self-worth.

3.4.3 The development of the self-esteem during middle childhood

The self-esteem, according to Kaplan (2000:422) and Papalia, *et al.* (2002:347), is self-evaluative and determined by the child's view of his own capacity for productive work. They relate a positive self-esteem to better adjustment, more independence, less defensive behaviour, greater acceptance of others, sociability, motivation to learn and better school achievement. The self-esteem is divided into feelings of worthiness, for example self-worth, liking and value as a person, as well as into competence, for example feelings that one can get something done successfully. Papalia, *et al.* (2002:348) argue that competence, or a view of the self as able to master skills and complete tasks, is the virtue that develops from successful resolution of the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority. Competence or self-efficacy therefore has a direct influence on the development of the child's self-esteem.

3.4.3.1 Self-efficacy

Albert Bandura's research (1982) on self-efficacy, as explained by Thomas (2000:215), enhances a better understanding of the child's personality behaviour. Newman and Newman (1987:285) and Thomas (2000:215) define the child's self-efficacy as his sense of confidence in his own power to perform the behaviours demanded in a specific situation. Self-efficacy judgements arise from past experiences, observations of others, verbal persuasion and one's physiological state. The value of Bandura's research (1982) lies in his specification of how self-efficacy develops and how it affects behaviour, for example in school. According to his theory, the development of self-efficacy depends heavily on observational learning, modeling and the consequences the person experiences from his actions. The child therefore acquires most of his sense of confidence from comparing his own performance with the performance of others whom he observes directly, indirectly and from what people say. Thomas (2000:385) defines these approving or disapproving reactions of other people that reveal the child's ability, as comparative assessments.

Thomas (2000:216) further states that self-efficacy, according to Bandura's theory (1982), regulates the child's social functioning through four major processes, namely cognition, emotion, motivation and selection. For example, as the child during middle childhood masters cognitive skills, he develops a strong sense of efficacy that increases his motivation to learn, improves his academic performance and hastens the development of an intrinsic interest in his studies. Kaplan (2000:62) states that the child's self-efficacy judgement affects his choice of activities, how much effort he expends, his level of persistence and is dependent on the task. The child with a high level of self-efficacy will, for example put more effort into a particular task than the child with a low degree of self-efficacy. Another example given by Kaplan is that the child might experience a high level of self-efficacy in solving mathematics, a low degree of self-efficacy concerning an oral presentation in front of the class and a moderate degree of self-efficacy concerning his ability to perform well in a certain sport. Newman and Newman (1987:286) further emphasize that the level of self-efficacy also affects how the child prepares to handle new challenges. They explain that the thoughts, emotions and preparation for action of those who are preoccupied with self-doubts differ from those who believe in themselves. Kaplan (2000:424)

states that the child's self-esteem can be improved by assisting him to achieve academically. He argues that although the child should realize that he is a worthy individual even if he does not achieve well in school, school achievement may help the child to develop a sense of self-efficacy.

3.4.4 Emotional development as part of personality construction during middle childhood

Berk (2003:394) defines an emotion as an expression of readiness to establish, maintain or change one's relation to the environment on a matter of personal importance. Papalia, *et al.* (2002:349) and Berk (2003:402) agree that rapid gains in emotional self-regulation occur after school entry. The child's comparison of his own accomplishments with that of his classmates and the value of approval by peers force the child to learn how to manage negative emotions that threatens his sense of self-worth. During middle childhood, as identified by Berk (2003:402), the child commonly fears poor academic performance and rejection by peers. The child's opinion of himself is affected by typical emotions such as pride and shame, depending on the awareness of the implications of his actions and on what kind of socialization the child has received.

Papalia, *et al.* (2002:349) further highlight the child's ability to verbalize conflicting emotions and view his ability to control negative emotions as a sign of emotional growth. The child is more apt to conceptualize what makes him angry, fearful or sad and how other people react to the display of these emotions. Therefore, the child learns to adapt his behaviour accordingly, becoming more empathic and more inclined to prosocial behaviour. Prosocial behaviour is viewed as a sign of positive adjustment where the child tends to act appropriately in social situations, be relatively free of negative emotions and to cope with problems constructively. As emotional self-regulation has developed, as stated by Berk (2003:403), the child develops a feeling of being in control of his emotional experiences or as he defines it, a sense of emotional self-efficacy. In this way positive self-esteem is encouraged.

From the above discussion it seems evident that social support is a major contributor to the child's self-esteem. Kaplan (2000:424) rates parents, peers and educators as

the most powerful forces shaping the child's self-esteem. He suggests that an environment that reinforces the child's probability of success should be created at home and at school, as well as contributing this success to the child's efforts and motivation. Although few children are competent at everything, each child has some areas of competence that can be reinforced. The author emphasizes that this may create a ripple effect that can lead to enhanced self-esteem in other areas. The dynamics of social development during middle childhood will now be discussed further.

3.5 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

The influence of peers and friends, according to Kaplan (2000:439) and Papalia, *et al.* (2002:359), grows substantially during middle childhood. The authors all agree that the child benefits from doing things with peers and therefore relate having friends with better adjustment, more positive attitudes towards school, as well as better academic involvement. The child's enhanced cognitive ability allows him to define friendship more in terms of mutual satisfaction than the earlier self-centered orientation to self-satisfaction. Friendship is also now perceived more in terms of a relationship between individuals that endures over time and conflict, instead of a momentary or transient positive interaction. The enhanced cognitive functioning that occurs during middle childhood stimulates the child's ability to take another person's point of view into consideration and as the child matures, his search towards psychological compatibility grows. Newman and Newman (1987:281) argue that the opportunity to function in social peer groups for work and for play moves the child away from the egocentrism of earlier childhood.

The value of friendship, as stated by Papalia, *et al.* (2002:362), lies in its power to make the child feel good about himself. The authors argue that peer rejection and friendlessness during middle childhood may have negative long-term effects. Kaplan (2000:440) agrees and relates peer rejection and feelings of loneliness to poorer school achievement, lower aspirations and less participation in social activities. Newman and Newman (1987:282) state that the peer group seems to have a power to evolve norms for acceptance and rejection. The need for peer approval therefore becomes a powerful force and the child learns to dress and communicate in ways that

are acceptable to his peers. Papalia, *et al.* (2002:360) highlight the importance of popularity during middle childhood and emphasize the important influence of the opinion of peers on the child's self-esteem. They view popular children typically as higher achievers, better at solving social problems, having better cognitive skills and more able to provide emotional support.

It is clear from the above discussion how belonging to a peer group enhances the child's search for acceptance and approval during middle childhood. There seems to be an interplay between the value of friendship and the child's developing self-esteem. Although the child during middle childhood is capable of making significant contributions to the social group to which he belongs, it is clear that the social dynamics of the peer group play a part in supporting feelings of mastery or failure. The discussion will therefore now focus on the importance of the school milieu for the development of social networks during middle childhood.

3.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SCHOOL MILIEU FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

The school provides the milieu for the development of social networks during middle childhood. Louw, *et al.* (1998:358), Kaplan (2000:414) and Papalia, *et al.* (2002:326), all emphasize the paramount importance of the child's school experience during middle childhood. The child's achievement in school depends on a variety of factors, for example the nature of the school experience, the child's home and family, as well as the personal characteristics of each child within the school setting. The authors highlight the importance for each child to develop a feeling of confidence in his abilities through mastering basic skills, in so doing developing greater self-esteem and developing a more hopeful attitude towards the future. The interplay between the educational process and the personality development of the child will now briefly be discussed.

3.6.1 The school experience

The educational process exposes the child during middle childhood to challenges of increasing difficulty. Newman and Newman (1987:306) state that the child receives

continuous feedback about his level of competence, because he is given many opportunities to practice his newly developing skills. Participation in school provides the child with opportunities not only for mastery, but also for developing goals and standards for future skill development.

The characteristics and individuality of each school might have an influence on a child's healthy development. The child-centered approach, as identified by Papalia, *et al.* (2002:330), promotes cooperative projects, hands-on problem solving and close parent-educator cooperation. A nurturing environment is created to best suit the needs of the individual child and the educator is encouraged to motivate the child to live up to positive expectations, rather than to live down to negative expectations. The authors state that this self-fulfilling prophecy can boost performance to become self-perpetuating by fueling educator expectations, which in turn influences learner achievement as the child passes from class to class.

Berk (2003:626) values the importance of the school as a complex social system impacting on the child's healthy development. He argues that contact with a wider variety of peers contributes to the child's increasing awareness that others have viewpoints different from his own. Papalia, *et al.* (2002:359) emphasize the value of the peer group during middle childhood and states that groups form naturally among children who live near one another or go to the same school. The child benefits from doing things with his peers and therefore spends more time with others of his own age than during earlier developmental years. The peer group, developed through the interaction within the school environment, opens new perspectives and frees the child to make independent judgements. The peer group not only teaches the child how to get along in society by adjusting his needs and desires to those of others, but also offers emotional security.

3.6.2 The home and family

The family has an important influence on school achievement. Kaplan (2000:396) and Papalia, *et al.* (2002:329) all identify socio-economic status, parenting styles and the parent's involvement in the child's day-to-day school functioning as important factors influencing the child's experience of either success or failure in school.

Although all these factors influence the child's interest and motivation towards school, the means by which parents show approval for the child's accomplishments, are seen as crucial. Parents use either extrinsic or intrinsic means of approval. Although the authors rate intrinsic means of approval as more effective, they warn that even praise should be used sparingly, as it shifts the focus from the child's own motivation to the need to please others.

Papalia, *et al.* (2002:341) state that the family influences the child's learning by becoming involved in his schooling, motivating him to achieve and transmitting attitudes about learning. Kaplan (2000:424) highlights the family as one of the most powerful forces shaping the child's self-esteem. By creating an environment at home that reinforces the probability of success and attributing this success to the child's efforts and motivations, the parents help to foster the child's self-esteem. The safe and secure environment of the healthy family can therefore provide a nurturing milieu wherein the child can soundboard new experiences. Kaplan (2000:398) emphasizes the important value of concentrating on the home environment, parent-child relationships, home variables and child-rearing strategies.

3.6.3 Personal characteristics of the child within the school setting

Louw, *et al.* (1998:363) argue that the child's attitude towards school influences successful adjustment to the school environment. The manner in which the parents and educators behave towards the child and the way they assess the child's activities, greatly determine the child's attitude. The authors emphasize that feelings of self-worth and competence are encouraged by the more opportunities the child is given to participate in school activities. Therefore, positive self-evaluation encourages a positive attitude towards school.

The challenge for the educational system, as stated by Newman and Newman (1987:307), lies in helping the child during middle childhood to set realistic standards for himself and to be encouraged to strive for those standards so that he can ultimately experience success. They further argue that the art of teaching lies in presenting the child with challenges at a level of complexity that will be meaningful, but also just a step beyond his present level of ability. Thereby learning becomes a

tantalizing process in which the challenges themselves lure the child into expending effort to solve them.

Newman and Newman (1987:307) emphasize that the child thrives on hearing that he is doing well and perceives the message that he is not doing well as negative. It opens up a debate about the value of evaluating children on the basis of their achievements by grading it. Although the debate has not been fully answered in recent research, the conclusion is reached that school-related successes or failures influence the child's self-concept with respect to academic abilities. Newman and Newman (1987:308) further identify failure in school and the public ridicule that it brings as detrimental to establishing a positive self-concept. The child views the school as the voice of the larger community and if the child continuously fails to meet the standards set by adults in the school setting, there is no alternative but to incorporate a negative view of himself as a failure.

It is clear from the above discussion why the child's experience of school plays an important part in developing a healthy self-esteem. It again emphasizes the need for successful mastery of the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority. It seems clear that during middle childhood the child is constantly busy with a process of self-evaluation.

3.7 PROVISION MADE FOR THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD WITH PROBLEMS IN THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Kapp (2003b:47) states that at some stage or other the majority of children struggle to a lesser or greater extent with problems relating to their education and growing up. He further argues that some children are able to solve such problems themselves, while others require specialized help. The role of the parent and educator is highlighted in the timely or early identification of problems and therefore providing the child with the required assistance. The author emphasizes that successful assistance requires a thorough understanding of the nature of the experiential world of the child with problems. It therefore raises the question how the child with problems is defined and how the current educational system provides for the needs of such a child. These issues will now briefly be discussed.

3.7.1 The child with problems

Children's problems, according to Du Toit (2003:33), are manifested in various ways and appear at different ages. These problems are caused by interrelated factors that may be attributed to factors or deficiencies directly related to the child and his potential as a person or associated with deficiencies in his primary or secondary educational situation, or to circumstances in the environment in which he grows up. Although the literature identifies different categories of children's problems, for the purpose of this study the researcher will only focus on the child where a discrepancy exists between the attained levels of development and learning.

Du Toit (2003:25) identifies the gap between the child's attained level of development and learning and that which he is actually capable of, as a problem. The school-going child manifests this problem not only as a developmental delay, but also in scholastic underachievement and/or behaviour problems. When a discrepancy exists between the child's behaviour and/or school achievement and that what he is really capable of according to his abilities, he is viewed as an underachiever who needs special help. Derbyshire (2003:398) differentiates between the child that receives additional assistance in the regular classroom and the child that requires full-time remedial help outside of the regular classroom. He states that either of these children, depending on the nature of the problem, may sometimes have to repeat a grade in order to comply with the full curricular requirements.

3.7.2 Assessment in the South African outcomes-based system

South Africa's education and training system is designed to produce an outcomes-based education (OBE) system that will encourage everyone to be a lifelong learner who will be a responsible and productive member of society (Killen, 2000:vii). It implies that all decisions about planning, teaching and evaluation are guided by the following four questions:

- What do we want learners to learn?
- Why do we want learners to learn these things?
- How can we best help learners to learn these things?

- How will we know when learners have learned?

Circular 0108/99 (1999) of the WCED states that promotion through grades is replaced by progress through the curriculum in terms of critical outcomes. It implies that the child is assessed on the basis of his progression from one successfully completed learning task to the next. The educator is viewed as a facilitator and mediator that structures learning experiences that will pace the child's process in a way which will enable him to reach the required level of performance at the end of a mean of nine years. Progress is determined continuously as the educator assesses the learner. Inability to comply with the required criteria might mean that the learner will need to receive extra time and/or extra support to repeat the learning experience. The child and his parents are key partners in the learning process and are actively involved in the process of self-analysis and self-evaluation. The circular also emphasizes the importance of the child's ability or inability as not being static and that it must be viewed in the sense that difficulties in one respect can be more than compensated for by strengths in other respects. An educator must therefore develop skills that will determine the learning potential of the learner. The policy provides for the learner to be retained if it becomes evident that he is not progressing from one critical outcome to the next.

3.7.2.1 Progression and retention

Outcomes-based education is positively viewed as a supportive system that places the interests of the learner first, instead of a punitive system that punishes the learner for not achieving according to set standards, as stated by the WCED Curriculum Development Minute 0059/2004 (2004). It emphasizes that learners develop and progress at different rates and times. Progression implies that the learner is continuing to learn through achieving the outcomes. The document states that when it is clear that a learner is not progressing and evidently needs more time to engage with the knowledge and skills in the current grade, the learner may be retained. A multifunctional team is involved in the decision making process when the learner has not shown evidence of progression. The learner is only allowed to repeat once in a phase, that is the foundation phase, intermediate phase or senior phase. The educator, parent and learner should all be involved in evaluating the progress

throughout the year. The document emphasizes that the learner and his parents should be made aware in advance of the fact that he is not coping and might have to spend more time in a particular grade.

3.7.3 Educational placement for the retained child

Sands, Kozleski and French (2000:4) argue that changes in the world necessitate changes in what and how learners are taught. They emphasize the need for a unified educational system that responds to the needs of all children, despite their differences. Sands, *et al.* (2000:36) further state that differences among individuals are accentuated by their abilities and disabilities. They argue that when the educator understands that learners bring different strengths and needs to the classroom, he can personalize learning opportunities and learner outcomes and therefore support individual quality of life. They identify the importance of inclusive education to support the practice of including everyone, irrespective of talent, disability, socio-economic background or cultural origin, within the supportive mainstream school and classroom where all learner needs are met. By identifying the interrelatedness of the learner's cognitive, emotional, communicative and physical needs, inclusive education allows for a careful learning environment that meets the learning needs of each learner.

Current policy for South African schools follows the worldwide trend towards creating inclusive mainstream schools, as stated by Lomofsky and Skuy (2001:202). Educational programmes are designed on the basis of outcomes and are encouraged to take place in natural settings in real situations, thereby supporting the concept of natural environments for teaching. Arithmetic should, for example be linked to a shopping activity that requires the learner to prepare a shopping list with prices and have change ready prepared. The authors argue that these practices are consistent with the principle of outcomes-based education. Certain school and classroom adaptations need to be place in order to accommodate this type of diversity, for example academic expectations should be realistic, but not so low that they do not create a challenge. Lomofsky and Skuy (2001:203) state that some learners will generally learn more slowly than the average learner, but warn that they all should develop a feeling of competence through the experience of successful progress. Opportunities for success should therefore be allowed and created. The authors

highlight the building of positive self-concepts through acceptance, respect and praise for accomplishments and effort, as another example.

From the above discussion it seems evident that policy within the South African educational system is moving towards a philosophy that provides for the needs of all children, but also for the child in totality. According to this philosophy grade retention should be viewed as another significant problem experienced by some developing children. The child's experience of grade retention should therefore be valued and he should be assisted according to the philosophy that all children with problems should receive support.

3.8 THE EXPERIENCE OF GRADE RETENTION

Bogden and Purnell (2000:7) argue that retention in the early grades is often justified as providing more time for learners to mature physically, emotionally and socially. Research by Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:442) identifies the lack of research literature on the child's perspective on retention, despite the fact that the child himself is mostly affected by retention. They warn that the general public outside of academic circles are not aware of the potential long-term repercussions of grade retention and therefore emphasize the importance for educational professionals, researchers, parents and policymakers to be aware of the child's experience of grade retention and the impact thereof on numerous factors in the child's life. Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:453) highlight the importance of considering the child's developmental path across time, thereby recognizing that the child's early developmental history, including educational experiences, will influence subsequent development. Although a lack of recent literature on the topic exists, Byrnes (1990:109) states that it is important to understand the meaning of the experience of grade retention for the child and to look at how parents and educators view the use thereof.

3.8.1 The child's experience of grade retention

Most children perceive grade retention as a punishment, a personal failure or a testimony to one's inability to succeed in school and not as a positive event designed

to help them (Byrnes, 1990:129; Bogden & Purnell, 2000:7; Jimerson, *et al.*, 2002:455). It implies that many concerns about grade retention are justified. Byrnes (1990:129) states that in a culture where emphasis is placed on what one has in and does with one's brains, retention is indeed a particularly devastating indictment of the child's whole being. The author further emphasizes the fact that the child in general is sensitive to educator evaluation conveyed through school grades, even though the child might be uncertain of the exact basis for the appraisal.

A lack of recent research literature exists on the child's perspective of the experience of grade retention, as mentioned before. Although a study by Byrnes (1990) on the attitudes of learners, parents and educators towards repeating a grade are dated, for the purpose of this study the researcher will highlight her findings due to the direct relatedness to the study. Byrnes (1990:108-131) highlighted the following experiences and views of retained middle childhood learners:

- Despite the researcher's efforts to stay away from negative labelling of the retention experience, children automatically referred to the experience as "flunking".
- Many children did not feel comfortable to admit that they had been retained. In declining to say that he was retained the child reflected some shame or negative association with that fact.
- In response to how they "felt" about being retained, the majority of children replied with responses such as "sad", "bad" and "upset". The feeling was expressed in many different ways, for example "sad, it's no fun not to pass", "sad, I wanted to pass. Kids sing and tease if you don't pass", "real sad. Kids start calling you names" or "sad. Friends were going on and I was staying".
- Comments about children laughing at them, being called "flunker" and a friendship circle being made up entirely of other retained children indicate a feeling of being socially stigmatized by the experience.
- Closely related to the predominant responses of "sad" or "bad", were responses of "embarrassed".
- Although children perceive grade retention as a negative experience, they believe it is justifiable for academic reasons.

- Some children reported positive feelings such as “happy” when asked about retention, for example replying “happy” to stay in her grade because “I can learn more”. Positive acceptance of the retention experience is related to the child not experiencing it as stigmatizing.
- It was evident that many of the children who responded positively had mixed feelings about the experience.
- Regardless of how well or poorly the child might be doing in school, it appears that promotion or non-promotion may only be fully realized when the child receives his final report card. Decisions about promotion or non-promotion appear to be arbitrary to many children.
- Children confirmed that educators use threats of retention to motivate their classes to work, for example “Start working or ...”, “If you don’t shape up ...”.
- In response to what they felt was the worst thing about not passing, children replied with negative responses such as “being laughed at and teased”, “not being with friends”, “being punished” or “being sad”. Most children found it difficult to think of something good about being retained, responding for example with “nothing good about it”. Positive remarks were, for example that they felt their new friends they had made were the best part, while others mentioned that they liked doing their work better this year or “The work is easy”.

From the above-mentioned research by Byrnes (1990:108-131) it would appear that the retained child does feel anxious about the reactions of their peers and others to their status as “school failures”. Bogden and Purnell (2000:7) further highlight the harmful effect of grade retention on the child’s healthy social and emotional development and in particular the damage to the child’s self-image and academic self-concept. It raises the question how the educator views the retained child’s experience.

3.8.2 The educator’s view of the retained child

Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:453) state that although educators play a key role in the retention decision-making process, they are often unaware of the conclusions of retention research. They argue that educators have a limited perspective regarding the efficacy of grade retention, because they tend to be only aware of learner

outcomes in the immediate years following retention decisions. Smith (1990:143) identifies the complexity of the relationship between the educator and the retained child's parents when a decision about retention needs to be made. The author further emphasizes the educator's role in educating the parents in dealing with the situation, thereby encouraging acceptance of the retention.

Previously mentioned research by Byrnes (1990:108-131) on the attitudes of students, parents and educators toward repeating a grade, highlights the importance of studying the educator's view towards the retained child. Her research findings identified the following important opinions and responses:

- Younger children are most likely to be retained and educators often think retention is less socially stigmatizing for younger children.
- Although research findings indicate that repeating a grade does not improve a learner's subsequent performance, educators in general support grade retention for children who did not meet requirements of the grade and consider a variety of reasons as appropriate for academic retention, for example "lack of basic skills" or "emotional immaturity".
- Educators view retention as beneficial to the learner, for example because the learner is older and more experienced the second time, he "blooms", assumes "leadership" in the class, is "comfortable" with the environment and routine, has greater "self-confidence", "helps" the educator and "achieves more academic success".
- Educators characterize the retained child as typically emerging as an immature child who is not motivated to work and has a fairly low self-esteem.
- Educators consider it essential to inform parents early in the year of their child's possible retention.
- The perceived need to warn parents well in advance often led to educators labelling children as future retainees already early in the academic year.
- Varied responses were received on how the child is informed of the retention, for example leaving it directly or indirectly up to the parents, advising the parent how to handle it, assuming the parent would discuss it with the child in a constructive way or assuming that the children were well aware of their status on promotion or

non-promotion. Few incidences of meeting personally with the retained child were found.

- Educators in general appeared uncomfortable informing the child of his retention.
- Parents' reactions to their child being retained were often emotional.
- Most of the objecting parents eventually came to accept and cooperate with the school's decision.
- Educators reported either that they treated the retained child the same as any other learner, both academically and socially, or that they involved the child in special interaction. They would, for example make no mention of his retention to the class and treat the child as any other child starting the grade, or in contrast they would give the retained child extra responsibilities, such as delivering messages, setting out supplies or making special efforts to encourage the child with praise and attention.
- Educators showed concern for the child that was retained.

The educator's view that the retention experience is effective in helping low achieving learners seems evident from the above-mentioned research by Byrnes (1990:108-131). The author warns against educators that refer to retention as punishment by frequently using it as a threat to those learners they see as lacking in motivation to achieve. Byrnes (1990:129) emphasizes that there are few attempts to assist the retained child to deal with his fears and reservations about the experience. The danger of allocating the responsibility of this task to chance or to parents, who are uninformed in helping the child to feel more comfortable with and understanding his retention, is highlighted.

From the above discussion it seems evident that the child's experience of grade retention and the educator's view thereof have an impact on how the child interprets later experiences in life. Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:442) argue that later outcomes are a manifestation of a confluence of earlier factors that ultimately propel the child towards alternative pathways. The experience of being retained may influence the child's self-esteem, peer relations and school engagement. The retained child should therefore receive the necessary assistance to deal successfully with the experience of being retained.

3.9 CONCLUSION

It appears from the above discussion that middle childhood is an active period of growth where the child's expanding world enhances major changes in his cognitive, personality and social development. The development of work and social skills are crucial for later life stages, as is the child's increased capacity for social cooperation, self-evaluation and peer group participation. The major influence of the social dynamics of the family, peer group and the school environment all play a part in supporting feelings of mastery or failure. The child's level of self-efficacy not only influences his self-esteem, but also his self-concept. The contrasting view between how the educational system views grade retention as a positive intervention and how the child himself experiences it as a socially stigmatizing event, was highlighted. It therefore seems evident that middle childhood is a challenging period of development that has a major effect on later developmental growth and that the retained child during this life phase requires support in mastering the experience of the grade retention.

This chapter completes phase two of the intervention research model, namely information gathering and synthesis. Chapter four will highlight the third phase, namely design, where a discussion of the empirical results through data analysis and interpretation will occur. The empirical data will be triangulated with the literature review.

CHAPTER 4

PHASE 3: DESIGN

DISCUSSION OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS THROUGH DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

De Vos (2002a:339) states that qualitative research typically covers a spectrum of techniques, for example observing, interviewing and documentary analysis in the process of producing findings. Through the presentation of solid descriptive data the researcher leads the reader to an understanding of the meaning of the experience or phenomenon that was studied. The author defines data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Both Krueger (1998:17) and De Vos (2002a:340) highlight the researcher's quest to find patterns, making comparisons and contrasting one set of data with another in the search for general statements about relationships among categories of data.

For the purpose of this study chapter one gave a description of the research design, strategy and method that was followed. The literature review that forms part of the qualitative research process was presented in chapter two and chapter three. The orientating framework for the purpose of this study was defined through semi-structured interviews with "information-rich" participants, as defined by Patton (1990:184). Thereafter the literature review served as a literature control for aspects that were identified through the interviews. Krueger (1998:71) argues that it implies that through the purposeful sampling the researcher selects participants based on the purpose of the study. Therefore, the researcher selects participants with special knowledge or experiences that is relevant to the topic of the study. For the purpose of this study the researcher used purposeful sampling to select "information-rich" participants for the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were held with educators and educational psychologists that had experience with retained middle childhood learners. Through these interviews the researcher gained insight and understanding of their personal experience of grade retention, how it affects them

personally and their view on support services to retained middle childhood learners. Semi-structured interviews with retained middle childhood grade 3 learners identified issues and concerns that they experienced as a result of the retention.

The results from the semi-structured interviews that guided the literature review will be discussed in chapter four. These results will be categorized on the basis of the importance thereof to the participants of the semi-structured interviews. Interpretation of these findings led the researcher to develop reasonable and workable guidelines for future practical use as outlined in chapter five. The input and experience of all the participants of the semi-structured interviews were used in designing therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for supporting the retained middle childhood learner.

The researcher will highlight the process of data analysis and interpretation that was used and that led to the answering of the initial problem formulation, thereby achieving the aim of the study.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Creswell in De Vos (2002a:340) identifies five steps through which the process of data analysis and interpretation occurs. These steps will be highlighted to assist the reader in understanding the researcher's work method.

Step 1: Data collection and recording

Triangulation as research method enabled the researcher to seek out several different types of sources that could provide insight into the dynamics of middle childhood grade retention. Patton (1990:244) defines triangulation as the use of a combination of sources of information in the process to validate and cross-check findings, thereby providing a more comprehensive perspective on the same phenomena. The researcher adhered to the following procedure in accomplishing triangulation:

- The researcher was able to compile a more comprehensive study by triangulating the data from the semi-structured interviews with "information-rich" participants with that of a literature review.

- The researcher herself conducted all interviews.
- Data from the interviews with educators were cross-referenced with data obtained from interviews with educational psychologists that had experience with retained middle childhood learners.
- The data from the interviews guided the literature control that included information that justified the results of the interviews.

A research question developed as a result of the data recording process and was formulated as follows:

What are the most appropriate support components, identified from a theoretical perspective, previous research and professional expertise, necessary to develop therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who work with the retained middle childhood learner?

As part of the intervention research process the research question will be answered in chapter five.

Step 2: Managing data

Data were organized by transcribing the semi-structured interviews. Audio and visual tape recordings of the interviews were kept and listened to in the process of refreshing the researcher's mind as to the content of the interview. An example of one of these transcriptions is attached as appendix 5.

Step 3: Reading and writing memos

The researcher explored the data by reading through the transcriptions, breaking it into parts, highlighting and writing short phrases, ideas and key concepts in the margins of the transcriptions.

Step 4: Describing, classifying and interpreting

The researcher organized themes, recurring ideas and patterns of belief that linked the data from the various interviews to form categories.

Step 5: Representing and visualizing

The content of the categories and the literature review enabled the researcher to develop therapeutic guidelines for counsellors who support the retained middle childhood learner. The researcher will highlight the conclusions from this study in chapter five.

The above-mentioned steps allowed the researcher to bring order, structure and meaning to the collected data, thereby allowing the reader to come to an understanding of the meaning of the experience of grade retention and the required support. The categories of meaning that emerged from the data analysis process will now be discussed.

4.3 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Delport and Fouchè (2002:357) state that the qualitative researcher integrates the voice of the participants in the research report. They view quotes as more information-rich than data in the form of numbers and argue that the use thereof transports the reader directly into the world of the study. Direct quotations, according to Patton (1990:24), are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry. The author states that it reveals the participants' depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences and their basic perceptions. The researcher approached the educators and educational psychologists through the semi-structured interviews with the same question, namely "how do they perceive and experience middle childhood grade retention?" The interview agenda commenced with one neutral, fact-orientated question with minimal leads from the researcher, thereby assuming that the most valid and least reactive data are expressed in the participant's own words. The participant's initial response to the question therefore led to further questions. An effort was made to keep the participants focused on information from personal experiences.

A play therapy approach guided the interviews with the retained middle childhood learners. A projection technique was used to assist the participants in identifying their unique experience of grade retention. The researcher encouraged the learners to draw a picture that represented the feeling or feelings they experienced when they

were first informed of the retention. The drawing guided the rest of the interview. These drawings are added to the research report as appendix 2, 3 and 4.

The results of the interviews with the retained middle childhood learners, the educators and educational psychologists will now be discussed. The data are given from the theoretical considerations and paradigm of thinking as introduced in chapter two and three. Reference to the quotes of the different participants are indicated by the following symbols:

- Retained grade 3 learners: C1, C2 and C3.
- Grade 3 educators: T1 and T2.
- Educational psychologists: P1 and P2.

4.3.1 Discussion of interviews with retained middle childhood learners

4.3.1.1 Category 1: The child's emotional experience of being retained

The theoretical considerations in chapter three emphasized that the retained child does not perceive the experience of grade retention as a positive event and consequently experiences mixed feelings about it. The child expresses negative or positive feelings in different ways and categorizes negative labelling and loss of friendship as the worst experience. Chapter three highlighted the child's anxiety about the reaction of peers and others to their retained status, thereby confirming that it is a socially stigmatizing experience. The value that the child during middle childhood places on the approval by his peers influences his opinion of himself. The retained child tends to justify the negative experience with academic results. Responses to how the participants experienced grade retention identified their mixed feelings. Responses emphasized negative feelings that made them sad, while positive responses exhibited how they rationalized repeating the grade with better academic performance.

Exploration of the above-mentioned themes, as identified through various quotes by the retained participants, will follow:

- **Mixed feelings**

The following typical responses to the question that was asked highlighted the participants' mixed feelings about the experience of grade retention:

No, my hair is standing up. I wasn't that happy and I wasn't that sad when it happened. That I was shocked. Because I heard that I was staying back. No, no, no [Not a nice surprise or was it?]. It [hair] was also surprised, because my hair stood up, because I was shocked. (C1)

Ja. I felt like crying. Ja, it's very sad. To stay in the same grade again. That's tears [referring to drawing]. The mouth. It's like that [It's a sad mouth, it's not a happy mouth]. I was quite sad. Ja, it was not nice really, because all your friends move up and you're staying behind. I want to pass. Ja, but then I stayed back. (C2)

Ek het nou so bly gevoel en so 'n bietjie gedink almal gaan my weer, almal gaan my spot en dit. Dit het my 'n bietjie hart... [onvoltooid]. Dit het vir my gevoel dat ek 'n bietjie minder my maatjies gaan sien en, maar nogsteeds dat ek gaan meer oor leer dat ek weet wat ek in Graad 3, ag Graad 4 is, kan ek alles weer weet wat om te doen. Ja, maar die ding wat ek rêrig gevoel het, is bly. Want ek het geweet ek gaan meer maatjies maak. Net 'n bietjie, want ek het nou gedink dat ek nie baie meer my maatjies, my ou maatjies sien nie, maar ek, die meeste wat ek was, was bly [Ek wonder of jy ook 'n bietjie hartseer gevoel het?]. Jip. ek het nou myself, my hartjie geteken binne my, dat ek bly voel, dis hoekom ek 'smile'. En dat ek, dat ek weet as, dan ek hoef nie, ek hoef nie nou soos in sleg te voel dat ek oor, oor gaan, gaan doen nie. Want ek gaan meer maats maak. En dat ek weet Jesus is in my, dat ek kan konsentreer en dat ek weet dat ek hierdie jaar dit alles kan reg doen. Die bietjie hartseer hoe ek was, want dat ek nou gedink het dat hulle gaan my bietjie spot en dat ek nie baie my maatjies gaan sien nie. Ja, omdat ek my hart, hierdie een wat, wat nie, wat om bly is [wys na skets], wat nie rêrig bly is nie, klein geteken is, want ek het 'n bietjie hartseer geword en omdat ek hierdie een so groot geteken het, ek het baie bly gevoel. (C3)

The experience of mixed feelings was clear and present in all three participants.

- **Rationalizing the experience**

A tendency to rationalize the experience of grade retention with better academic performance was evident in the following typical responses of all three participants.

Well, I was better in my work. Another cool thing is that we are doing all the cool projects over again. (C1)

They have to work hard and do their homework [What advice can you give other children that need to repeat their grade?]. Difficult [And how did you find the mathematics last year?]. It's quite easy now [And how are you finding it this year?]. Yes, way harder [Would you say you're working harder than last year?]. That I pass. Ja, I will love that. Very happy and will forget about this one [It sounds to me as if you are looking forward to the day at the end of the year that you get your report card.]. Ja, but I think I stayed back for my own good. (C2)

En dat ek weer meer kan leer en dan is ek slim, omtrent die slimste in my klas. En ek is, dan hoef ek nie so agter te bly en nie my werk te kan doen nie. Ek was, ek was maar net bly dan hoef ek nie rêrig weer tussen die naweke deur hoef te leer en so nie. ... dis maar vir die regte keuse dat ek meer kan leer. Hm, wat ek nou dink is, sy kan sê 'julle het 'n bietjie goed om meer te leer. Maar julle het goed gevoel, maar julle gaan, gaan net 'n jaartjie agter kan bly, dan kan julle meer, meer weet en meer doen wat julle kan doen, en julle beste gee'. (C3)

- **Dealing with emotion**

It was evident that the participants experienced difficulty in conceptualizing and verbalizing the way in which they dealt with their feelings, which is typical of the dynamics within middle childhood. Typical responses included:

I threw it away. I don't know. I just started to be happy and do my work [What did you do with the sadness in your heart?]. (C1)

I don't really know [They wiped off the tears, but what about the sadness in your heart? How did that go away?]. (C2)

Ek het my, ek het maar net, ek het dit maar net toegeverf. In rooi. En in my bly hartjie gesit dat ek weet dit gaan nie sleg gaan nie. (C3)

- **Repeating the grade in the same educator's class and not being the only retained child in the class**

All three participants emphasized the value of repeating the grade in the same educator's class as the year before. Two of the participants valued the experience of not being the only child in the class that had to repeat the grade and identified the development of a new friendship as result of the shared experience. Typical responses were as follows:

And then I still remember they asked me which class I would like to be, 'a new teacher or with Mrs. H', so I said 'I'll stay wherever C2 is staying'. Because he is my friend. It didn't make me feel alone. I'm ok that I stayed with her. Well, there is one thing, if they stayed in the same class [How do you think one can help other children that need to repeat a grade?]. Now hm, if they go to the same class they will know all the work. You can tell them that they will know some of the work. (C1)

Me too [C1 is so excited that he is with you.]. It would have been boring all alone. Ja, I wasn't really a big friend of C1. We stayed back. Now we are big friends [So, what made that you and C1 became friends?]. (C2)

Ek het nie rêrig omgee of daar nie kinders saam met my agtergebly het nie, maar al wat ek was, ek was net bly vir hulle wat, dat hulle ook Graad 4 toe gaan. Nee, dit het my meer gehelp om by my Juffrou A aan te bly, want sy, want sy weet ek is nou goed in wiskunde en sy weet wat ek laasjaar alles gemis het, dit, en dit help my baie beter en dat ek nie sleg is en so En dat ek nie so geskok gevoel het nie, want ek weet dat daar 'n Juffrou is soos Juffrou A. (C3)

- **Actions after being informed of retention and responsibility to inform friends thereof**

The following typical responses by two of the participants reveal their actions directly after being informed of the retention. It further emphasized the burden they felt of having to deal with this news.

I just went back to class. And did my work. My friends we told. Me and C2. Ja. [That must have taken a lot of guts.]. (C1)

It was quite sad [And when you went back to class, how was that, after being informed?]. (C2)

- **Loosing and gaining friendships**

It was evident that as a result of the retention a process of loosing former friends and gaining new friends developed. Typical responses included:

I didn't know their names. It wasn't nice [Tell me how was it when all the new kids came into your class?]. (C2)

Dit het vir my gevoel dat ek 'n bietjie minder my maatjies gaan sien Want ek het geweet ek gaan meer maatjies maak. Ja, en dis nou my kans om nuwe maatjies te maak en nie net hoef te speel met my ou maatjies nie en dan kan hulle ook saam speel as hulle wil, as hulle nou soos in van die 'games' hou wat ons sou speel en so. (C3)

- **Labelled and stigmatized**

Responses by participants clarified the suspicion that retained learners might be labelled and stigmatized. The following typical responses highlighted the suspicion:

My brother says that I failed. (C2)

... toe het hulle my gesê die tannie is hier om my net 'n bietjie meer te help dat kinders nie lelik met my is nie en so aan. Ek het nou so bly gevoel en so 'n bietjie gedink almal gaan my weer, almal gaan my spot en dit. ... want dat ek nou gedink het dat hulle gaan my bietjie spot. Hulle het my, party kinders het my gespot. Hulle het nou soos in, hulle het nou gesê dat 'JC, JC' en 'JC puisie' en 'brilletjies'. Ek dink hulle was net lus om my te spot of dat ek agter gebly het. Druip [Het jy agtergekom dat daar ander woorde is wat mense gebruik as 'n mens praat van kindertjies wat agterbly?]. (C3)

From the above-mentioned themes it can be concluded that grade retention is an emotional experience for the middle childhood learner. It is also evident that grade retention is a socially stigmatizing event in the life of the child.

4.3.1.2 Category 2: Positive self-esteem is linked to a sense of achievement

Chapter three emphasized that competence or self-efficacy has a direct influence on the development of the child's self-esteem. It enhances the child's self-worth and implies successful resolution of the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority. Chapter three further emphasized how the view of the parents and educators act as a powerful force shaping the child's self-esteem. Responses by the participants highlighted the link between a positive sense of self-worth and accomplishment. Responses also highlighted how the child values his parents and educator's evaluation of his achievement.

The above-mentioned is revealed in the following typical responses:

Ja, because me and C2 know all the work [But I can see that you're smiling now.]. Happy [How does that make you feel?]. (C1)

Goed [Sê eers vir my hoe gaan dit met jou?]. Ja, want ek kan nou meer, ek kan baie goed konsentreer. Ek is baie, ek is nie meer baie agter nie. Ek is goed het ek al gesê, en by die huis, as ek daar by die huis aankom, merk my Ma net. Sy kyk nie of ek verkeerd is nie, want sy weet alles is reg. (C3)

From the above it seems evident that the child's perception of his level of competence has an influence on his sense of self-worth. A positive self-esteem is therefore linked to a sense of achievement.

4.3.2 Discussion of interviews with educational professionals (educators and educational psychologists)

4.3.2.1 Category 3: Educational professionals perceive grade retention as less socially stigmatizing for younger children

Chapter three identified that in practice the younger child is most likely to be retained and that educators view grade retention as less socially stigmatizing for younger children. It further emphasized that educators tend to be unaware of the conclusions of retention research. Although responses by both the educators and educational psychologists confirmed this perception, it also highlighted that although they perceive the younger child as unable to verbalize his feelings about the experience, they do accept that the experience of grade retention for the younger child leads to some kind of emotional experience. This perception led them to suggest that the child should be retained in earlier grades instead of later grades. Typical responses were as follows:

Nee, ek gaan glad nie so sê nie. Ek dink selfs 'n kind wat selfs pre-primêr moet herhaal, dit is vir hulle erg. (T1)

Ek wil 'n onderskeid maak. Ek gaan nie sê hulle is bewus van verskillende emosies nie. Hulle beleef definitief 'n emosie om te herhaal. ...so hulle beleef definitief een of ander emosie omtrent die hele situasie, maar dalk nie so intens of stormagtig soos 'n kind wat op dertien dit gaan herhaal nie. Hulle gaan nie 'n etiket aan daardie emosie kan sit nie, maar daar is iets sleg in die hele situasie wat dit betref en ek glo al bestuur 'n mens dit hoe wonderlik en al kry hulle watter ondersteuning ook al, jy kan nie 'n emosie uitsny nie. (T2)

... want ek dink hoe ouer hulle word, hoe moeiliker is dit. Ek, ek sou eintlik sê dat kinders behoort eintlik nie te herhaal na, na Graad 4 nie. En daarom dat ek voel daar moet meer gemaak word daarvan dat 'n mens moet gaan kyk hoe gou kan 'n mens

liewer 'n kind herhaal wat 'n agterstand het. Ek vind dat kinders in die grondslagfase redelik gou aanpas by so 'n situasie. Maar mens loop baie keer eintlik oor die kind. Jy weet, jy gaan nie eintlik altyd in diepte af nie. Ek, ek dink nie ons weet altyd wat dit aan 'n kind doen nie. (P1)

From the above-mentioned it can be concluded that educational professionals view grade retention as less socially stigmatizing for younger children and therefore support grade retention for earlier grades instead of later grades.

4.3.2.2 Category 4: Educational professionals support the reasons for grade retention, but warn that it can be a waste of time if not planned correctly

Chapter three emphasized that contrary to research findings that indicate grade retention does not improve the learner's subsequent performance, educators in general support retention for the child who did not meet the requirements of the grade. It highlighted the different reasons they perceive as beneficial for the child. Although responses identified with the perception that grade retention is beneficial to the child, it also highlighted that if not planned correctly and in support of the child, grade retention can become a waste of the child's academic time. Typical responses were as follows:

... kinders herhaal omdat dit vir hulle nodig is om te herhaal.... ... omdat hulle nie sou akademies 'cope' nie, maar emosioneel ook nie sou 'cope' nie. ... dis vir my baie positief, dis vir my baie goed vir 'n kind. Ek sien heeltemal die logika ja. (T1)

So die belewenis wat ek van hom het, is eintlik baie positief. (T2)

Met ander woorde, daar is baie tye in 'n kind se lewe wat baie keer op 'n baie hartseer manier verspil word deur so 'n herhaling. En voordat die kind nie werklik waar 'n individuele ontwikkelingsplan het wat saam met hom oorgaan of by hom is wanneer hy die herhalingsjaar doen nie, dink ek baie van die kind se tyd kan verspil word en die kind kry nie dan die volle voordeel nie. (P2)

From the above-mentioned it can be concluded that although educational professionals support the reasons for grade retention, they emphasize the importance of planning for the retention year in order for the child to benefit from the retention.

4.3.2.3 Category 5: Educational professionals perceive grade retention as an emotional experience for the child

Chapter three emphasized the importance of being aware of the child's experience of grade retention and the impact thereof on numerous factors in the child's life. Educational professionals agreed that the child perceives the experience of grade retention as emotional and highlighted the effect thereof on his social relationships with friends. They emphasized the socially stigmatizing effects thereof and identified practical implications for the child. Responses identified the relationship between achievement and a positive self-esteem.

The following typical responses will highlight the above-mentioned themes:

- **An emotional experience**

Educational professionals emphasized how the child perceives grade retention emotionally. Typical responses included:

Nee, die kinders het emosionele probleme daaromtrent. ... as 'n kind nou vir die eerste oomblik hoor hy gaan herhaal, dan is daai kind mos nou bietjie onstabiel oor die saak, 'jy kan seker nie, hoekom. Ek is nou teen die grond, hier stap ek nou weer in dieselfde ou klassie in, dieselfde Juffrou', ja, daai gevoel. (T1)

... maar dit is maar 'n moeilike ding vir die kind om te aanvaar (P1)

Ek dink moeilik. En dit is wat belangrik is vir die kind, dat 'iets gaan nou gebeur en ek is onseker, ek is nie gelukkig daarmee nie, en dit laat my onveilig voel'. ... is die kind wat herhaal, veral in die intermediêre fase, wie dan die gedragsmoeilike kind. Wie dan gedragsprobleme openbaar. En dit sluit nou aan by selfbeeld en sy sosialisering en dit is die kind wie nou skielik die uitdaging vir die opvoeder gaan wees. Ja, dit

gebeur soms, veral as 'ek nie veilig voel in die nuwe klassie nie. En ek word miskien gespot deur ander outjies. En nou om myself te laat geld en my eie 'dignity' te behou, raak ek nou moeilik en ek laat myself nie rondskuif nie. Ek is mos ouer as die res van die standerd'. (P2)

- **Socially stigmatizing effect**

From the following typical responses it is evident that educational professionals acknowledge the fact that retention has a socially stigmatizing effect on the child:

Hulle beskou dit nog as die lelike woord dop. ... die doppers bly agter en dop beteken nie ek kry 'n tweede kans nie. ... dis nie 'n skande om te herhaal nie. (T1)

Ek glo so dat as ek nie die klas verlede jaar voorberei het nie, dan het hulle hom hierdie jaar op die speelgrond gekry en dan het hulle hom onmiddellik gekonfronteer en gevra 'maar hoekom is jy daar en ons is alreeds hierso?'. (T2)

Ek dink so 'n kind word maar geïdentifiseer in die begin as 'iemand wat anders is'. ... dit is moeilik vir die kind, want ek dink nie hy word onmiddellik aanvaar nie Ja, ek dink dit gaan eintlik maar amper soos wat jy 'n gestremde kindjie sal help, dit is nie 'n gestremdheid nie, maar dit is 'n 'andersheid'.... Ek meen een woord daar op die speelgrond kan vir 'n kind geweldig erg wees. Kinders moet weet, ek, ons mag nie terg nie. Jy weet as 'n mens 'n reël kan hê soos ons stap in 'n reguit ry. Hoekom kan 'n mens nie weet ons mag nie terg nie? Skole gee te min aandag daaraan vir my. Dit moet 'n taboe wees. Want kinders word te veel geterg en van die kinders doen werklik ernstige emosionele skade op. (P1)

- **Influence on the child's self-esteem**

Two of the participants emphasized the negative effect of grade retention on the child's self-esteem. Typical responses were as follows:

Ek dink dit moet 'n geweldige impak op 'n kind se selfbeeld hê. Want ek dink ons het geen groter begeerte om te wil behoort en te wil bly by die groep waar jy is nie. Hier

gaan hierdie groep aan en hierdie kind is nie goed genoeg om aan te gaan nie. Hy moet bly waar hy is en hy moet dieselfde werk oor en oor doen. So, ek dink dit moet 'n baie negatiewe beeld op sy self en selfbeeld hê as daar nie van kante ondersteuning kom nie en vir hom die wete gee 'hoor hier, jy is okay'. Dit het nie net 'n dramatiese impak vir 'n kind nie (T2)

Die eerste aspek gaan te make wees met selfbeeld. Die intermediêre fase wat jou fokus is, dink ek, gaan baie daarop ingestel wees 'hoe ek vertoon teenoor my maatjie'. So, die selfbeeld gaan 'n moeilike storie wees. (P2)

- **Influences the child's social relationships with friends**

All four participants identified the effect of retention on the child's social relationships with friends as problematic. It was evident from the following responses:

Vir die eerste ruk is dit vir hulle 'n groot probleem, want maats is hulle probleem, dit gaan geweldig oor maats, 'my maats aanvaar my nie wat ek verlede jaar gehad het nie, want daar is mos nou fout met my'. Hulle kry nie erkenning by hulle maats as hulle 'n jaar herhaal nie. Hulle speel rêrig nie werklik met hom buite nie, want hy moet nou weer nuwe maats maak, wat dan die maats is in sy klas, wat dan nou natuurlik vir hom 'n emosionele probleem wek. So, hy moet leer om daarmee te 'cope', dit te kan hanteer. Dis vir hulle 'n groot, baie erger as die werk wat hulle nie kon doen nie, die maats is vir hulle baie moeilik. Maatjies het ook maar met emosie te doen, want ek meen 'hoe ek voel oor my maatjie, my maatjie voel nie meer dieselfde oor my nie, want ek het nou 'n probleem'. (T1)

Sosialisering hoor. Grootskaalse sosialisering, want baie keer sal 'n mens sien hulle, hm, hulle maak tog maats met die kinders wat by hulle in die klas is en nou gaan daardie maats aan. Soveel tyd hou hierdie vriendskap, maar later vervaag dit want hulle is weer in 'n nuwe klasopset en maak weer nuwe vriende. (T2)

En as jy nou moet ervaar nou gaan jou maats aan na 'n volgende klas. Jy moet nou met jonger kinders gaan sosialiseer maar geleidelik gaan daar maar 'n verwydering kom. Dit het dus sosiaal 'n baie groot impak op 'n kind. (P1)

‘n Ander aspek dink ek gaan wees sy sosiale beeld, want hm, ‘ek is nou deel van ‘n groepie en dis waar ek behoort, en hier verlaat my groepie my nou. En nou moet ek my lospluk daar, I’ve got to detach myself en nou moet ek vrede maak’. So, dit is die een area waar ‘n kind begelei moet word. (P2)

- **Relationship between achievement and a positive self-esteem**

The following typical responses identified the relationship between the child’s achievement and a positive self-esteem:

Emosies is die grootste deel van ‘n kind se bestaan wil ek amper sê. As sy emosies nie reg is nie, gaan hy nie reg funksioneer in die klas nie. (T1)

... hy net oor daardie hekkie kom van ‘moontlik is ek nie goed genoeg nie’. Ek glo dit het ‘n geweldige impak op ‘n kind om te weet hy moet herhaal, want dit kom daarop neer ‘ek was nie goed genoeg om aan te gaan nie’. (T2)

... want as die akademiese komponent nie reg hanteer word nie, dan kan die emosionele komponent afgeskeep word, omdat die twee so saamloop. ... wanneer ‘n kind ervaar dat hy, ons gebruik die woord ‘belonging’, dan kan hy begin om te ontwikkel en as hy dan ook kan begin om sy werk te verbeter wat hy die vorige jaar moes herhaal, dan begin hy duidelik die ervaring kry van ‘ek het sekuriteit’ en dan begin hy sy selfbeeld te verbeter en dan beïnvloed dit ook die kind se verhoudinge. So, dit begin maar alles daar by die ‘belonging’. (P1)

- **Practical implications**

Typical responses focusing on practical implications of grade retention for the child were as follows:

... hy kan nie sport doen saam met sy maats nie, want hy is te oud, hy moet saam met die Graad 2’s sport doen. Hy is altyd in ‘n ander groep, hy is nooit saam met die maats in sy klas nie. Wanneer hy in Graad 7 kom, dan moet hy by die hoërskool

gaan rugby speel. En dit is nogal 'n slegte ervaring vir so 'n kind, uhm, dit pootjie hulle nogal. Dit bly deel van hulle lewe. (T1)

... en 'n groot invloed is hulle sport, want skielik is hulle nie meer in die o.8 rugby-span saam met hulle maatjies nie, hulle is nou in die o.9 rugby-span. Hulle speel saam met 'n ander klas se kinders kan ek maar sê. (T2)

It can be concluded from the responses above that educational professionals perceive grade retention as an emotional experience for the child with socially stigmatizing implications that can harm his self-esteem negatively. It seems evident that there is a relationship between academic achievement and a positive self-esteem.

4.3.2.4 Category 6: Educational professionals emphasize the importance of support for the retained child and the conveying of specific messages

Educational professionals all identified the need for support for the retained child. Chapter three highlighted that educators either treat the retained child the same as any other learner or that they involve the child in special interaction as a way of encouraging his participation. Responses emphasized that the educators do involve the child in special interactions and that they also suggest that the child receives some form of one-to-one therapy. They further emphasized the need to convey certain messages to the retained child that will influence his own perception of the retention experience.

The above-mentioned themes are highlighted in the following typical responses:

- **Need for support**

Educational professionals and especially the educators emphasized the need for appropriate support for the retained child. Their responses were as follows:

Nee, ek dink ondersteuning is geweldig baie nodig (T1)

So, hy het absoluut ondersteuning van alle kante af gekry en ek dink dit het vir hom daardie nodige bietjie selfvertroue gegee. Dit kan 'n groot impak hê as hy nie ondersteuning het nie. (T2)

- **Involve the child in special interactions**

It was evident from the following typical responses that the educators involve the retained child in special interactions in the process of supporting him:

... in die klas moet daar baie ondersteuning plaasvind. Ek het gewoonlik vir daai kind meer takies. Hy ken mos die skool beter as die ander kinders. So, hy word bietjie gestuur, net om hom so bietjie te wys, die ander kinders moet sien hy is nie nutteloos nie, hy het ook 'n doel. Die kinders blom. Dit is vir hulle absoluut wonderlik om dit te kan doen. Hulle wil die erkenning hê. (T1)

Ek is 'n groot voortstander daarvan dat jy hierdie seuntjie op 'n manier spesiaal moet laat voel. Ek gee vir hom baie spesifieke verantwoordelikhede. 'Doen hierdie goed', hy weet byvoorbeeld waar al die Graad 2 klasse is. So, as daar een of ander inligtingstukke is wat versprei moet word, is hy die een wat dit moet doen. Hy is die een wat byvoorbeeld spesifieke verantwoordelikhede het. 'Maak elke dag vir ons die vensters oop'. Dat hy voel hy kry 'n bietjie spesiale aandag, sodat die res nou nie voel hulle is afgeskeep nie. Ja, hy moet ook darem voel hy is bietjie spesiaal, want hy was al voorheen in hierdie klas. (T2)

- **Further therapy**

Educational professionals identified the value of further therapeutic interventions in the process of supporting the child. Typical responses included:

Hulle kan ander hulp ook kry, een-tot-een basis. Ek dink om 'n spelterapeut se hulp in te roep is een van die beste dinge om te doen met so 'n kind. Dit bly deel van hulle lewe en daarom dink ek moet al van kleins af, klein, klein-klein, kan hulle al 'n bietjie terapie ontvang. Ek dink dit is nodig. (T1)

'n Kind het ook emosionele ondersteuning nodig. Ek dink dit is goed as mens hom later ook 'n paar sessies by een of ander sielkundige of 'n terapeut inskryf, dat hy net oor daardie hekkie kom van 'moontlik is ek nie goed genoeg nie'. Miskien net vir hom 'n paar werkswinkels gee om te 'hoe moet jy die situasie hanteer'. (T2)

- **Messages that need to be conveyed**

Educational professionals identified specific messages that need to be conveyed to the retained child. These messages included the following:

... hoor hier, jy is 'okay'. (T2)

Die kind moet beslis weet dat 'dit is 'n kans wat ek het om nou beter te doen, nie maar net om weer daar te wees nie'. 'n Kind moet eintlik die frustrasie en die, hm, ja, ek wil eintlik sê die teleurstellings wat hy gehad het van die eerste jaar moet hy eintlik kan oorkom met hulp, maar dan moet jy sukses hê. En dat die kind moet weet dit is 'okay' en hm, dit is 'n geleentheid en dat die ouers dit ook aanvaar 'ek word ondersteun' en 'in die klaskamer gee juffrou vir my om' en 'sy help vir my om nuwe verhoudinge of sosialisering met die nuwe maats'. Dan bou jy eintlik 'n weerbare kind op. (P1)

En net om die herhaal van die graad net te 'refrain'. Vir die kind gaan, gaan belangrik wees. Om dit in 'n ander lig te stel. Om vir die kinders die hele konsep van meer tyd in 'n ander lig te probeer stel. (P2)

The above-mentioned emphasizes the importance of support on different levels for the retained child, either through involving him in special interactions in the classroom or involving him in one-to-one therapy. The conclusion is made that the retained child needs to receive specific messages that will encourage his acceptance of the grade retention.

4.3.2.5 Category 7: The parents of the retained child experience the retention emotionally and lack knowledge on how to support the child

Chapter three identified that parents react emotionally to their child being retained and emphasized that they are uninformed about how to help the child to feel more comfortable with and to understand the retention. It further emphasized the educator's role in educating the parents to deal with the situation, thereby encouraging acceptance of the retention. Responses highlighted the importance of forming a partnership with the parents in assisting the retained child. The participants further emphasized the educator's responsibility in assisting the parents to accept the child's retention, thereby highlighting the magnitude of the parents' own emotional experience of the retention. It would appear from the responses that parents lack knowledge on how to support their own retained child and that educators have a responsibility towards educating them in this regard.

The following typical responses will highlight the above-mentioned themes:

- **Emotional experience**

The following typical responses acknowledged the emotional experience of the retained child's parents and the importance of supporting them:

... maar dit is ook vir sommige ouers baie dramaties as die kind moet herhaal. As gevolg van sosiale druk en prestige en al sulke tipe van elemente. Prestige in die gemeenskap is belangrik. ... die intensiteit waarmee die Pa die kind se teleurstelling beleef het. Hy het keer op keer gevra is dit as gevolg van iets wat hy gedoen het, is dit iewers waar hy in die proses gefaal het, want dit klink vir my in sy familie geskiedenis is daar 'n leerprobleem. Ja, en hy het meer as een keer teruggekom skooltoe, nadat ons die gesprek gehad het daaroor. Om net weer met hom daaroor te gesels. Jy kon duidelik sien vir hom was dit 'n geweldige emosionele belewenis dat sy seuntjie moes herhaal. Ja, ek dink baie keer dis meer as net een gesprek om net te sê 'jou kind gaan dit nou nie hierdie jaar maak nie'. Maar dat daar 'n opvolg gesprek is dat hulle ook hulle seer en emosie kan deel rondom dit, want ek dink baie

keer is dit vir ouers 'n skok aanvanklik en daar kan ontkenning wees om te sê 'hoor hier, dit kan nie wees nie'. (T2)

... ek voel as die ouers dit aanvaar, dan projekteer hulle iets positiefs daaroor aan die kind, maar baie dikwels het ons die probleem omdat die ouers dit nie aanvaar nie en dan is dit baie moeilik vir die kind. Ek dink dit is vir die ouers sosiaal onaanvaarbaar om te sien 'maar my kind moet herhaal of agterbly'. Veral vir die ouer wat sosiaal baie kompetend is, dink ek is dit baie moeilik. En hulle het ook hulle tyd nodig om daarby aan te pas, want ek dink as 'n mens stadig daar deur werk en hulle wys op die voordele en hulle begin glo ook dat die skool dit vir die kind ten goede sal laat meewerk. Dit is nou taal wat baie positief is, maar ek glo, ek glo daaraan. Jy weet 'n mens kan 'n ding so aanpak dat dit tot die kind se beswil sal wees. (P1)

Ek dink seker maar moeilik. (P2)

- **Important role of parents in a partnership**

Educational professionals emphasized the importance of forming a partnership with the parents of the retained child. Typical responses were as follows:

Hoe gouer die ouers oor die stappie kom van 'my kind gaan hierdie jaar herhaal' en uhm, of 'hy gaan 'n vierde jaar nodig hê in die gronslagfase', mens kan dit op verskeie maniere bewoord, maar hoe gouer die ouers dit weet, hoe gouer kan hulle die kind begin voorberei dat 'jy kry makliker werkies' of 'jou werkies is nou nie so baie nie, jy kry tien en die ander twintig, omdat jy dit nie alles kan klaarkry nie en jy kan nie cope daarmee nie'. En op die ou end kom die kind ook agter 'dit sal vir my beter wees om dit oor te doen' en 'dis 'n goeie ding'. (T1)

Definitief, maar dit is vir my baie belangrik dat die mense naaste aan daardie kind die meeste ondersteuning moet gee, want dit is hoe hy 'n vertrouensverhouding opbou deur sy juffrou en veral sy ouerhuis. (T2)

In praktyk is dit soms moeilik om die ouer altyd by te bring. Die ouer gee altyd maar net hul seën vir die hele proses en sê 'gaan voort juffrou', maar die ouer is deel van

die proses. En die ouers is daardie persone wie daardie rol moet speel om daardie tipe kind veiligheid te gee. Ek [opvoeder] kry nie ondersteuning van ouers nie. En dit is nog 'n ander probleem. Kinders wie herhaal, jy hoop en bid maar net dat daar 'n familie en ouers is wie saam met die skool hande gaan neem, 'n 'partnership' gaan hê om die kind deur te kry. (P2)

- **Lack of knowledge**

It was evident that the educational professionals identify a lack of knowledge on the part of parents as to how to support the retained child. Typical responses included:

Dit kan vir daai kind 'n probleem wees as sy ouers dit uitbuit en sê 'oe, jy is mos te dom'. Dit hang af van hoe kundig die ouers is om dit te hanteer en hoe die onderwysers dit hanteer, want jy kan 'n kind maak of breek. (T1)

Ons het sy ouers ingekry en waar sy ouers verlede jaar baie onbetrokke was, het ons hulle ingekry en die hele proses verduidelik Ek voel 'n mens kan nie altyd terugsit van die skool se kant af en verwag dat die ouers moet inkom na jou toe nie. Op 'n gereelde basis sal ek sy ouers laat inkom en vra 'hoe gaan dit by die huis, hoe beleef julle hom by die huis?'. Jy sien, ek skryf soms net 'n kort briefie en sê 'hoor hier, dit gaan goed met hom'. ... 'n oop kommunikasielyn as dit suiwer akademies is, dink ek is dit baie belangrik dat 'n mens 'n tipe van dagboek tussen die ouers het. ... want dan het ek en sy op 'n gereelde basis kontak met mekaar. ... ook dat sulke tipe van ouers vir ouerleidingssessies gaan. (T2)

Ek sou sê heel eerstens is dat jy gesprekke met die ouers, want ouers wat bewus raak daarvan dat hulle kind eintlik bevoordeel kan word met die herhaling en wat ingelig word oor hoe hy die kind moet ondersteun, want baie ouers Baie ouers weet werklik nie hoe om hul kinders emosioneel te ondersteun nie. Dus, hulle moet daardie inligting kry. Maar 'n mens kan tog net vir 'n ouer 'n paar basiese riglyne gee en bewus maak daarvan dat hulle moet luister na hulle kind, dat hulle ook ondersteun, dat hulle die kind moet laat ervaar dit is vir hulle 'okay' dat hy agterbly. Vir hulle is dit belangrik. Jy weet, hierdie warm verhouding teenoor die kind van 'ons is vir jou lief,

ons gee mos nie om nie, ons wil hê jy moet die beste kry en ons dink dit is vir jou die beste'. (P1)

... begelei die ouer tot daardie punt waar hy 'n tipe aanvaarding het. (P2)

From the above-mentioned it can be concluded that the parents of the retained child experience the retention emotionally and therefore need support and assistance in dealing with their child. It can also be concluded that the educator needs to form a partnership with the parents.

4.3.2.6 Category 8: Educational professionals suggest that the other children in the retained child's class and school should be educated about the value of grade retention

Educational professionals identified how other children in the retained child's class and school perceive grade retention and that their lack of knowledge and insight can have a negative effect on the retained child. Responses suggested that other children should be educated about the process of grade retention, thereby minimizing the socially stigmatizing effect thereof. Typical responses were as follows:

Ek dink as mens ander kinders beter kan opvoed omtrent die saak van herhaling van 'n jaar, of 'n vierde jaar in 'n grondslagfase, of in 'n ander graad of in 'n ander fase soos intermediêr en nou senior, dan as die kinders net meer weet waaromtrent dit gaan, gaan dit makliker wees. Hulle beskou dit nog as die lelike woord dop. ... maar die kinders verstaan dit nie so nie. (T1)

... veral vir jou klas, dat hulle ook gewoon raak aan die idee 'hierdie maatjie gaan moontlik teruggehou word' en dat hy ook gewoon word aan die idee. (T2)

... daarom dink ek ook die nuwe groep moet eintlik ingelig word van hierdie maatjie wat nou by ons is gaan nou deel word van die groep en ons wil graag hê julle moet vir hom of haar ook as 'n maatjie aanvaar, wanneer die outjie nie daar by is nie. Ek weet dat onderwysers dit al op hierdie wyse hanteer het, om die outjie te stuur om iewers iets te neem en hy het net 'n kort geselsie met die klas om te sê 'ek verwag dit van

julle, want dit kon ook een van julle gewees het, of dit kon jou boetie, jou sussie gewees het'. Sodat, 'n mens moet net so 'n bietjie vir hulle help om net vir hulle om 'n bietjie empaties indien moontlik na hierdie maatjie te kyk. Dus, dit gaan meer oor hoe sensitief jy met hom is. (P1)

Responses highlighted that although the educator might educate the other children in the class about grade retention, there might still be a difference in how they respond. The influence of how parents in general perceive grade retention on the general perception children have of grade retention was emphasized. Typical responses were as follows:

Maar weet jy, ek doen dit [Jy stel voor hoe mens dit byvoorbeeld kan hanteer is om die kinders wat aan beweeg op te voed oor hoekom dit gebeur en wat die waarde daarin is.]. Maar dis asof die kinders dit nie 'kop' nie, asof hulle dit nie regtig inneem wat jy sê van 'ja, dis maar ok, jy mag maar 'n jaar'. Ek dink dit kom ook van die ouerhuise af. Onthou, ouers sê vir die kind 'as jy nie jou werk doen nie, gaan jy dop, die doppers bly agter en dop beteken nie ek kry 'n tweede kans nie'. Ek dink dis hoekom kinders dit nie so verstaan nie. (T1)

Weet jy, ek het regtig vir hulle fisies gaan verduidelik hoe werk dit dat jy wel vier jaar mag gebruik om Graad 1, 2 en 3 te doen en vir hulle gesê 'jy het 'n keuse', want 'n paar van die maats het besluit hulle wou ook nog 'n jaar bly. So, weet jy, kinders is eintlik wonderlik wat dit aanbetref. Vir hulle, hulle het onmiddellik gesê 'dit is reg so'. As 'n maatjie nog 'n jaar nodig het, om watter redes ook al, dan het dit vir hulle sin gemaak dat jy nog 'n jaar bly om seker te maak jy kan hierdie en hierdie aspek goed dek. Juffrou se stem dra mos nou baie meer gewig by hulle, as wat jy nou op jou eie hier op die speelgrond gaan verduidelik Kyk, die kindertjies by my in die klas weet hy het herhaal. En wat vir my wonderlik is, die seuntjie wat by my herhaal het dit so beleef dat hy dit nou uit sy eie sê 'maar ek het verkies om hierdie graad weer by juffrou te herhaal, want my somme was verlede jaar nie goed genoeg nie'. (T2)

From the above-mentioned it can be concluded that other children in the retained child's class and school must be educated about the value of grade retention.

4.3.2.7 Category 9: Educational professionals must be aware of their own emotional experience of grade retention and the responsibility it holds for them

Chapter three identified the key role that educators play in the retention decision-making process and the complexity of their responsibility towards the retained child and his parents. Responses emphasized that seniority enhances educator's ability not to perceive grade retention as a failure on their part and also highlighted their realization of the responsibility that it holds for them. Responses further highlighted their concern for the retained child and how in practice no provision is made for the efficient support of the child.

The following typical responses will highlight the above-mentioned themes:

- **Personal experience**

One of the participants identified the emotional effect that the retention of a child in his class has on him as a person. His response was as followed:

Ja, hulle [ander opvoeders] vat dit as 'n 'failure', maar ek het glad nie 'n probleem daaromtrent nie, omdat dit nie oor my gaan nie, ek staan heeltemal terug. Ek sien myself heeltemal objektief van die saak. Ek trek dit nie negatief of positief aan na myself nie. Nee, jy is nie veronderstel om dit te doen nie, want ek doen dit ook nie [Jy maak dit nie vir jou 'n emosionele belewenis nie.]. Jy moet maar die drukkies gee, jy moet maar. Dit is nie lekker nie. Mens distansieer jou partykeer moeilik daarvan [teenoor leerders wat besef hulle presteer nie op standaard nie]. (T1)

- **Responsibility**

Educational professionals emphasized that retaining the learner holds a responsibility for the educator. Typical responses included:

Weet jy, ek voel nie daardie persoon het gefaal omdat die kindjie herhaal het nie, maar dit plaas geweldig verantwoordelikheid op jou. So, dit plaas definitief 'n

verantwoordelikheid, want hierdie kind het reeds 'n jaar opgeoffer, sodat jy absoluut hierdie jaar vir die kind so vrugbaar as moontlik moet maak. (T2)

... die gewone, hm klaskamer bestuur en die hantering van die juffrou help eintlik om daardie kind te integreer in die groep (P1)

- **Educator's seniority**

The following typical response identified the educator's seniority as an asset in dealing with the retained child:

... as jy nou jare skoolhou soos ek, dan begin dit mos nou baie makliker raak, dan het jy mos nou al met baie sulke goedjies te doen gekry en dan het jy nou dit hanteer en geleer en by daai ou gesien en so gemaak, en dan weet jy mos nou hoe om so kind te hanteer. As 'n onderwyseres wat al baie jare met dit te doen gehad het, uhm, moet jy maar jou distansieer. Ek gaan nie sê jy raak hard nie, jy raak net gemaklik daarmee. Jy weet nou al hoe om dit te hanteer. Ek dink 'n onderwyseressie wat haar eerste jaar skool gee, gaan nie weet hoekom die kind so liefdevol probeer wees nie, hoekom die kind opspring en so aan nie. ... kyk ek weet nie wat die opleiding deesdae is nie, maar ek weet, uit my ervaring, ek sou nie geweet het nie as ek jonk is nie, ek sal dit nie op daai stadium dit ervaar, reg, maar ek meen, ek is nou al 'n ou hand, so ek weet, hier is, ek sien die tekens Jy sien dit maklik raak as jy geoefen is. (T1)

- **Concern regarding what happens in practice**

Educational professionals highlighted their concern for the retained child and how in practice no provision is made for the efficient support of the retained child. Typical responses were as follows:

Ek dink ek het gemengde gevoelens daaroor, want ek weet by party skole is daar ondersteuning vir hierdie kinders en by party is daar bitter weinig. En hm, dat daar nog baie van die ou persepsie oorstaan dat die kind wat herhaal sal beter vaar omdat hy hierdie werk moet oordoen. Ek dink ons weet dit is nie so eenvoudig nie. Ek voel

nie die herhalingsjaar word normaalweg optimaal gebruik nie. My vraag is net in hoe 'n mate hulle ondersteuning kry in die klasse. ... net deur die kind in te trek in die groep in en die kind te laat voel hy is 'okay' daar en die ander laat voel hy is 'okay', maar dit is maar moeilik met die groot klasse wat onderwysers moet kan hanteer. (P1)

... maar in terme van tyd en kapasiteit om dit te doen in 'n hoofstroom opset, gaan dit soms moeilik. Want klasse sal gemiddeld iets soos 35, soms is die klasse 40 en in baie moeilike areas waar ons oorbevolking het, het ons klasse tot en met 60 en meer. Skole of alle skole is nog nie heeltemal daar nie. Ek dink dan besef opvoeders maar 'ons het nie bronne nie, we don't have the resources om die kind te hanteer nie. Kan ons nie die kind uit die skool uit kry nie?'. (P2)

From the above-mentioned it can be concluded that the reality does not always allow the educator to fulfil his responsibility towards the retained child. The educator must therefore be aware of his own perceptions towards the retained child. Seniority can enhance the educator's ability to deal appropriately with the situation.

4.3.2.8 Category 10: The retained child and his parents must be informed early on of the possibility of grade retention

Chapter three emphasized that it is essential to inform the child and his parents early of the possibility of grade retention. Responses identified with this and highlighted the value for the child and his parents of knowing in advance of the grade retention. Typical responses were as follows:

Die oomblik wat jy agterkom en definitief besluit dat die kind, en in jou gemoed weet hierdie kind gaan nie volgende jaar na die volgende graad oor nie, dan moet jy dadelik werk maak daarvan en die kind begin voorberei daarvoor. So, as 'n kind vinniger weet hy gaan dit nie maak nie, en hy gaan dieselfde jaar moet herhaal, hoe meer hy dit weet en hoe langer hy dit weet, dit gee vir hom daai tydperk om dit, dit 'heal', sy hartjie raak gemaklik daarmee, hy is nie meer so emosioneel daaroor nie. (T1)

Ek dink alreeds hier by die einde van die derde kwartaal, want kyk ons weet al soos nou al hier is 'n kind wat dit moontlik nie gaan maak nie. ... daar 'n gesprek eers met hom is en dat ons die ouers ook inkry. Dit voel vir my goed dat die ouers ook eers met hom 'n gesprek het en daarom voel dit vir my as jy hier teen middel Desember vir hom sê 'luister Boet, jy gaan nou nie na die volgende graad toe nie', dink ek die impak is net geweldig en daar is nie tyd om gewoon te raak daaraan en hy wonder ook 'wat gaan my maatjies sê?'. (T2)

Ek dink dit gaan verskil van skool tot skool. Ek weet wanneer ek gewoonlik met 'n onderwyseres saam werk oor so 'n kwessie, dan probeer ons die kind voor die tyd sê, ten minste 'n maand voor die tyd al bewus maak daarvan dat dit 'n groot waarskynlikheid is. Ja, ja, want ek dink as die kind vroeg genoeg voorberei word, dan gaan hy dit makliker aanvaar (P1)

... en daarom is dit so belangrik dat kinders wie moontlik sal moet herhaal daarvoor voorberei moet word en opvoeders moet alreeds daai kandidate vroeg in die jaar identifiseer. Maar die derde kwartaal is die kwartaal waar die voorbereiding moet plaasvind, dit is nou ouers en kind. Sodat ons nie meer aan die einde van die jaar 'n tipe verrassing het vir 'n ouer nie, waar 'n ouer sê 'O! My kind gaan herhaal'. (P2)

It can be concluded from the responses above that it is beneficial to the child and his parents to be informed in advance of the possibility of grade retention.

4.3.2.9 Category 11: The retained child should be supported from a multi-disciplinary approach

Chapter three highlighted the complexity of the needs of the retained child and his parents. Responses therefore emphasized the need to support the child from a multi-disciplinary approach. They identified different role players that could participate in the process of supporting the child and his parents. Typical responses were as follows:

Die hele skool. As ek kyk na die onderwyser natuurlik heel eerste, dan al die ondersteuners wat jy kry, soos Mev R U, sy doen remediëring by die skool. Dan het

ons sielkundiges en dan is dit Mev VS wat al daai goeters vir ons reguleer en by al hierdie vergaderinkies insit. Die ouers natuurlik, ma en pa. ... ek voel hulle almal moet weet en almal moet deel wees van dit wat gaan gebeur en almal moet daar wees. Absoluut almal wat in die kind se lewe instap of is, daar is, moet deel wees daarvan, anders gaan dit, anders werk dit nie lekker vir die kind nie. Ek sal sê ons sal so 'n ondersteuningstelsel moet inbring in 'n skool. (T1)

Daar moet definitief sielkundiges of terapeute betrokke wees. Dit voel vir my daardie terapeute, daardie sielkundiges en die persoon in die skool wat die ondersteuningsdiensklas het, die persoon soos M wat ons koördineerder is van die terapeute, die spesifieke ouers, die klasonderwyseres. Hulle almal moet ondersteuning gee, want hulle gee ondersteuning vir my op verskillende vlakke. (T2)

Dit behoort nou die klasonderwyser en die ouers en miskien nog 'n onderwyser of twee en in die geval kan dit ook nog multi-dissiplinêr wees, en dan 'n OBOS persoon en die skoolsielkundige ook insluit. En as dit enigsins moontlik is dat die skoolsielkundige van tyd tot tyd 'n kort gesprek met so 'n kind kan hê, sal dit baie goed wees. (P1)

... praat van 'n sisteem wat 'n kind 'support', nie noodwendig net individue wat die kind 'support' nie. Ek as skoolsielkundige vorm deel van daardie sisteem. (P2)

From the above-mentioned it can be concluded that the retained child should be supported from a multi-disciplinary approach. It emphasizes the need to incorporate different professionals, such as educators, therapists and psychologists in the process of supporting the child and his parents. In addition it is essential that the parents form part of the team.

4.3.2.10 Category 12: Planning for the specific needs of the retained child during the retention year is essential

Chapter three highlighted the complexity of grade retention and the importance of providing the necessary assistance to the retained child and his parents. The complexity of the situation demands for thorough planning by all the parties involved

in the whole process. Responses revealed the need for planning of the retention year in general, but also according to the individual child's needs. The value of involving the child in the planning was emphasized. Typical responses included:

... ek voel daar moet beplan word vir 'n kind wat herhaal en die kind moet betrek word by daardie beplanning. As hulle meer 'n plan het soos ons nou gesien het dat daar struktuur is en die doelwitte van 'jy herhaal nou hierdie jaar, maar kom ons gaan kyk nou na dié area waar jy probleme het', ons sê dit is nou taalontwikkeling. En ons kry die ouer in om sekere dinge met hierdie kind te doen, as hulle nie RO kan bekostig nie of ons doen in die klas miskien ekstra begripstoetse om die taal te probeer ontwikkel, maar dat die kind weet 'ek gaan vir jou hier en daar iets ekstra vra om te doen, want ons wil hê jy moet bykomende vaardighede ontwikkel sodat jy nie maar net deur skraap aan die einde van die jaar nie, maar voel dat jy regtig voorbereid is om 'n sukses van jou volgende jaar te maak'. (P1)

Dat hierdie kind wat nou meer tyd moet ontvang, dan sal die opvoeder, sal alreeds 'n plan hê, maar daardie plan moet dan ... sal konkreet gemaak moet word waar ons kan sê 'okay, dit is wat die kind benodig'. Sodat daai kind, sodat die opvoeder veilig kan voel, die kind kan weet die volgende, dit is wat gaan gebeur. ... want as daar nie 'n duidelike plan is vir die opvoeder nie, dan gaan jy die kind hê wie 'neither here nor there' gaan wees. Dit gaan 'n kind wees wie die opvoeder alreeds voel, oordeel, 'ek gee op' en 'die kind het dit nou net nie' en 'kom ons berei die kind voor vir die vaardigheiskool'. Daardie tipe mentaliteit sal ontwikkel. Die kind wat dit nou nie gaan maak nie, die kind se 'ceiling', se plafon gaan Graad 6 of Graad 7 wees. ... en dit is die rede hoekom ons die program moet hê vir 'understanding the learner behaviour and responding to learner behaviour'. (P2)

From the above-mentioned it can be concluded that a thorough plan should accompany the child during the retention year. The child should be informed of the plan and should be involved in the process thereof.

4.3.2.11 Category 13: The retained child should be valued in totality and in the context of his field

Chapter two emphasized the Gestalt holistic approach towards the child as a whole person as well as the importance of integrating the different aspects of the child in the process of understanding him. It further highlighted that the child's behaviour can only be understood in terms of his interdependence with his environment. The child's interconnectedness with his family, the school and his personal life space should therefore be valued. Chapter three identified how the current outcomes-based and inclusive approaches in the educational system value the child as an individual and emphasized how the system should be designed to meet the needs of the child. Responses highlighted the importance of valuing both the child's strengths and weaknesses and how by being aware of the child's strengths the educator can assist the child to compensate for weaknesses.

The following responses emphasize the above-mentioned:

Maar dat daar nou gekyk word in diepte na hierdie kind en dat daar dan 'n plan opgestel word waar daar gekyk word na byvoorbeeld die emosionele faset van die kind se lewe, die verhoudingsfaset, hoe lyk dit by die familie en hoe lyk die akademie, en hoe lyk die kind sosiaal. Ag, al die verskillende fasette moet na gekyk word en dan word daar gekyk waar is die kind se sterktes, hoe ons dit kan gebruik om die kind dan verder te laat ontwikkel en dit dan nou eintlik te kan kompenseer vir die swak dele en dit miskien ook te verbeter. (P1)

Waar ons kyk na die hele kind. Dit sluit nou jou emosionele aspekte in, waar ons kyk na die hele kind. Ons kyk na sy 'belonging'. Sy geborgenheid. Ons kyk na sy 'mastery', dit wat hy kan doen en dit wat hy nie kan doen nie en ons kyk ook na dit wat vir hom onafhanklikheid bied en ook sy generositeit, 'generosity', dat ons na die hele kind kyk. Ons identifiseer sy sterktes en programme word saamgestel, planne word saamgestel om sy sterktes te mobiliseer. So, indien 'n kind miskien akademies nie vorder nie, maar ons identifiseer ander sterktes, dan mobiliseer ons die ander sterktes, juis om vir hom daardie tipe 'sense of achievement' te gee. Hm, maar dit is die grondslag dat die kind in sy totaliteit ervaar moet word. ... word daar ook gesê

ons kyk nie nou net na die kind se tekortkominge, maar ons fokus nou op sy sterktes, daai 'shift'. Waar ons kyk na die kind se sterktes en as ons hom assesseer kyk ons na sy groei en ontwikkeling, die 'here and nows are important and the only thing that is more important than that is the next step'. (P2)

The approach as mentioned above that focuses on the child's strengths instead of his weaknesses is typical of the current outcomes-based and inclusive approaches in the educational system. The following response further highlights the importance of such an approach to the child:

En dit is die een ding wat uitkomsgebaseerde onderwys beklemtoon. Dat dit is 'child based' en 'child pased'. (P2)

From the above-mentioned it can be concluded that the retained child should be approached from a holistic view and emphasis should be on both strengths and weaknesses. Another conclusion that can be made is that an attempt should be made to understand the child's behaviour from a field theoretical perspective.

4.3.2.12 Category 14: A caring environment in the classroom and in the school should set the standard for support of the retained child

Educational professionals emphasized the importance of a caring environment that encourages a belief in the retained child's ability and potential for growth not only in the classroom, but also in the school in general. In this way a message of acceptance of the uniqueness of all individuals is conveyed. Typical responses were as follows:

... maar ek glo in die ontwikkelingsbenadering wat gaan volgens ontwikkelingsbehoefte. Dat 'n mens moet werk op die kind se sterktes, dat die kind moet ervaar daar is altyd 'n kans vir my, dat 'n mens moet weet daar is nie maklike antwoorde vir elke kind nie, elke kind is uniek. Hm, dat mens die kind moet laat ervaar, hm hy kan eintlik sy probleme oorkom, maar dit wat hy nie kan oorkom nie, dit kan hy integreer en weer kompenseer met ander dinge, alhoewel jy dit mos nou nie in sulke taal vir 'n kind sê nie. ... en baie sterk moet gaan kyk na hoe ervaar die kind dit. Hy ervaar ook, want as daardie klimaat in die klas is dan wil ek amper sê, kan ons

amper al die ander goetertjies wat ons gesê het van die tafel afvee, want dit gaan alles in daardie respek vir die kind en omgee vir die kind vervat word. So, ek dink dit is vir my die goue perspektief. (P1)

Ek dink dit is nie die benadering wat slegs gemik moet wees op 'n betrokke kind nie. Dit gaan ook wees in watter mate die skool, as 'n hele skool en ook die klaskamer, 'n tipe 'caring environment' kan daarstel waar daai tipe atmosfeer of kultuur van sekere kinders is verskillend, sekere kinders leer verskillend en sekere kinders gaan teen verskillende paaie na dieselfde ding toe en om daardie tipe atmosfeer te skep binne 'n skool. So, dit is nie net 'n eenvoudige ding waar ons 'in zoom' op 'n kind. Die skool sal daardie tipe atmosfeer moet skep. Wat ook miskien 'n baie abstrakte ding is wat ek hier probeer verduidelik, maar om dit konkreet te maak binne 'n skool is die uitdaging, waar daardie tipe 'caring environment' in die klaskamer bestaan. (P2)

From the above-mentioned it can be concluded that a caring environment should be created in the classroom and in the school in general to support the needs of the retained child.

4.3.2.13 Category 15: The retained child should experience a sense of belonging

Chapter three emphasized the different needs of the retained child, thereby highlighting its complexity. Educational professionals referred to a general sense of belonging as the most important factor that the retained child should experience on the road to acceptance of his situation. A sense of belonging refers to the process of being part of a group and experiencing their acceptance. A typical response was as follows:

Ek dink daar is altyd emosionele ondersteuning nodig, want ek dink nie daardie bemeesterings aspek wat jy eintlik wil hê moet nou versterk, kan werklik versterk sonder die emosionele versterking nie. Dus, die kind se ervaring van 'ek word ondersteun'. Dit gaan vir my oor die bemeestering, dit gaan vir my oor die emosionele ondersteuning, dit gaan vir my ook daaroor dat die kind moet ervaar dat sy omgewing vir hom betekenisvol is, dat hy ook ander miskien in die klas kan help.

Dat hy nie net staan en voel maar 'ek is nou die outjie wat moet bakhand staan nie', dat juffrou miskien vir hom kan sê 'maar jy gaan altyd vir my die boeke uitdeel'. Dat hy voel 'ek het waarde en status ook'. Want dit is nog 'n ding wat deel is van weerbaarheid, dat die kind moet begin hoop kry, hy moet ervaar 'juffrou voel ek kan beter. Ek kan die werk baasraak.' Dus, die sosiale bindinge wat hy in die nuwe klas moet opbou en dan, hm die verhoudinge daar buite op die speelgrondwanneer 'n kind ervaar dat hy, ons gebruik die woord 'belonging', dan kan hy begin om te ontwikkel. En as hy dan ook kan begin om sy werk te verbeter wat hy die vorige jaar moes herhaal, dan begin hy duidelik die ervaring kry van 'ek het sekuriteit' en dan begin hy sy selfbeeld te verbeter en dan beïnvloed dit ook die kind se verhoudinge. So, dit begin maar alles daar by die 'belonging'. (P1)

It can be concluded from the above response that a sense of belonging enhances the retained child's acceptance of his retained status.

4.3.2.14 Category 16: Educators lack knowledge on how to support the retained child

In chapter three reference was made to the fact that educators appear uncomfortable informing the child of his retention and that they tend to leave the responsibility thereof to the child's parents, despite the fact that the parents themselves lack knowledge about how to support the child. Chapter three emphasized the educator's responsibility towards the child and his parents, thereby highlighting the need for proper knowledge on how to deal with the situation. Responses identified a general need for proper education for educators who work with the retained child, as well as a need for education and guidance on how to emotionally support the child in general.

Typical responses included:

Wanneer ons by die kollege of universiteit of wat ook al studeer, dit voel vir my, dan word jy meer op die akademie en die didakties hoe van aanbieding, wat doen jy in die klas, hoe werk dit, gaan oor les gee, dit gaan oor jy moet die kurrikulum, goed kennis dra van al daai goed. Ons het opvoedkunde, ons kry al daai goedjies, maar daar is ander dinge wat ons bietjie pootjie partykeer, soos jy sê, daar kom skielik 'n ding op

wat meer 'n sielkundige ding is. Wat ek dink ander baie beter sal kan hanteer as wat 'n onderwyser dit sal hanteer. So, ek voel regtig waar ons het mense nodig om ons ook op te lei in die proses om dit te kan hanteer. So, ek glo nie onderwysers is altyd opgewasse teen al hierdie goedjies van buite nie. Baie keer kom daar maar daaglikse goedjies op wat jy nie rêrig weet hoe om dit te hanteer nie, jy hanteer dit maar op daardie oomblik en jy bid maar ek het die regte ding gedoen, want opleiding om daardie ding te hanteer het jy nie rêrig nie. Jy het nie noodwendig daardie opleiding nie. So, mense van buite, soos wat ek nou gesê het, speltherapie, sielkundiges, al hierdie ondersteuning is bitter nodig by 'n skool. Dit sê nog nie elke ou weet presies hoe om dit te hanteer nie, so ons het mense nodig om vir ons te help. (T1)

'Okay', dit is nou baie lank gelede wat ek 'geswot' het, maar ek kan nie dink dat ons ooit daarvoor gepraat het nie. ... maar oor herhalers kan ek regtig nie onthou dat ons gepraat het dat hy moet so en so behandel word nie. Ek dink jy kan baie doen rondom dit. (T2)

Ongelukkig dink ek nie so nie, want daar is baie, baie meer aandag wat daaraan gegee moet word. Want onderwysers dink baie keer as daar gesê word hierdie kind het 'n probleem, dan dink hulle om nou 'n verhouding met die kind op te bou gaan nou verg dat hulle nou na skool met hierdie kind moet gaan sit en gesels, dat hulle miskien vir die kind met 'n taak ekstra hulp moet kan gee, maar 'n verbintenis is iets wat alreeds begin deur bloot die wyse waarop jy kyk na 'n kind of jou stemtoon as jy byvoorbeeld net sê 'Johan' [klem]. Maar as jy sê 'Johan' [sagter] en daardie lyftaal, die respek wat jy betoon. So, dit is daardie klein goedjies wat 'n verbintenis vestig tussen 'n onderwyser en 'n kind. Wat al klaar vir die kind voel 'maar hier is ondersteuning, hier is 'n positiewe klimaat en ek is ontspanne in die klas en juffrou of meneer glo in my'. Ek weet nie of onderwysers altyd bewus genoeg is dat jy vir die kind moet laat voel 'maar ek dink jy kan'. Dat jy die sterktes moet uitbou en die kind moet laat hoop kry 'maar ek is oppad na herstel'. En ja, ek weet nie eintlik of onderwysers altyd genoeg opgelei is daarvoor nie. Ek weet byvoorbeeld dat baie van hulle nie onderhoudsvaardig is nie, met ander woorde hoe jy nou die ouer moet hanteer. Dus, dis 'n lang pad wat 'n mens saam moet loop om daar te kom. (P1)

Deel van die opleiding wat ons aan opvoeders gee vir daardie program is om vir hulle te help om die hele paradigma skuif te maak. Want die moment wat hulle in staat is om dit te doen dan, dan voel hulle outomaties bemagtig, want hulle kyk nou na die kind deur ander brille. Hulle sien hom nou verskillend en hulle besef maar dit is nie net 'n kind wat nie kan lees nie, dit is 'n kind wat soveel ander kwaliteite het. Kom ek werk daarmee, om die sterktes te mobiliseer, om vir hom in staat te stel om daardie selfvertroue te ontwikkel. Ek dink baie opvoeders weet nie altyd hoe om Daar is baie van hulle wat weet ook, net daardie tipe aanslag het, maar dan het jy die ouens wat voel maar 'ek het nie tyd hiervoor nie, ek is hier om die kind te onderrig. Ek het nie nou tyd om te sukkel met hierdie ene nie, want sy het probleme by die huis', sal hulle gewoonlik sê. (P2)

It would appear from the above responses that educators lack knowledge in how to emotionally support the retained child.

4.3.2.15 Category 17: Placing the retained child with the same educator as the year before can be beneficial to both educator and child

Educational professionals suggested that placement of the retained child with the same educator as the previous year could be beneficial to both the child and the educator. Responses emphasized that depending on the child's developmental level he should be involved in the decision-making process in this regard. Responses further emphasized the important role of the parents and that the existing relationship between the educator and the retained child will determine whether or not it would be beneficial to everybody involved.

The following typical responses highlight the above-mentioned themes:

Dis positief vir die onderwyser om weer eens daai kind in jou klas te hê en te kan sien hoe vorder daai kind. Die juffrou weet mos nou presies wat verlede jaar gebeur het en nou is hy weer volgende jaar by jou in die klas. Nou sien jy verlede jaar kon hy hierdie goed glad nie baas geraak het nie, maar hy is nou so goed, hy vorder dat hy amper akademies in die sterker groepe kan werk, en dis 'n goeie belewenis. Jy sien sy vordering, uit en uit. Ja, indien hulle 'n ander juffrou sou wees en omdat ons almal

opgelei is om te weet waarom dit gaan, glo ek dat sy dit ook sal kan sien, maar nie onmiddellik nie, want ek meen, sy sal nou eers byvoorbeeld die kind se boeke moet kry Op hierdie stadium het ons die kind die keuse gegee. Ek het dat Mev VS dit doen, sodat mens heeltemal uit die prentjie is, anders wil die kind nie sê nie en dink hy 'ah, my juffrou se hart sal seer wees'. Kinders is nog baie sensitief oor hoe die juffrou gaan voel oor die saak, so mens moet dit vir hom half apart doen, nie met juffrou. Die ouers speel ook 'n groot rol in die saak. (T1)

Mens moet gaan kyk na die hele breë prentjie. ... as jy goeie rapport met die ouers het.... ...as jy 'n goeie rapport met die kind ook het. Is dit vir my ideal dat hy terugkom na dieselfde situasie toe, want dit is vir hom 'n bekende situasie, dit is vir die ouers 'n bekende situasie en jy het die hele pad gestap met daardie kind. Jy, ek hoef nou nie 'n verslag te gaan uithaal wat ek geen insae in gehad het om te weet dit en dit is sy uitval en jy het 'n pad saam met daardie kind gestap. So, ek weet dit is die uitval en dit is die ouers se probleem. Hierdie is die tekortkominge ten opsigte van arbeidsterapie, so jy kan onmiddellik opvolg en weer aangaan waar jy die vorige jaar geeëindig het. Dis eintlik vir ons 'n groot voordeel daarin dat ons kan aangaan. (T2)

Dis regtig nie 'n vraag wat ek 'n duidelike antwoord op kan gee nie, want ek dink dit hang af van die juffrou. Ek sou sê as die kind 'n baie goeie verhouding met die juffrou gehad het, is dit baie goed. Maar natuurlik die teenoorgestelde is ook waar. As dit nie so was nie, dan dink ek is dit beter as die kind geskuif word, want ek dink om twee jaar saam met iemand te wees waar daar spanning is want dit is vir 'n kind 'n geweldige terugslag om by iemand te wees van wie hy nie hou nie. Ek dink almal moet geken word. En 'n mens sal baie gou ervaar hoe die kind voel oor 'n onderwyseres. 'n Ouer sal dit aan die hoof kan oordra Dit sal nou, dit sal, dit sal nie 'n onbekende faktor wees nie, omdat dit so belangrik is. (P1)

Dit hang af van die kind. Sommige kinders gaan moontlik daardie tipe geborgenheid ontwikkel het by 'n betrokke opvoeder en die kind gaan alreeds weet 'ek sukkel met hierdie werk, so ek vertrou vir juffrou'. So, ander kinders gaan weer voel maar dit gaan miskien nodig wees, want hulle gaan voel daar is 'n tipe beweging van een klas na 'n ander klas, alhoewel dit nou nie na die volgende graad is nie, so dit gaan afhang van en ek dink daar moet 'n duidelike evaluering gedoen word om vas te stel wat

gaan in die belang van die kind wees. En gewoonlik word ons gelei deur opvoeders. By sommige skole sal opvoeders sê 'ek dink dit gaan beter wees vir die kind as ons dit so doen, miskien na my kollega se klas plaas' en ander gaan voel 'ek verkies om die kind te hou, want ons verstaan mekaar lekker'. Afhangende van sy ontwikkelingsvlak dink ek dit sal goed wees om die kind te 'engage'. Om vir hulle te sê 'jy sien jy het 'n keuse'. ... maar die opvoeder en die ouers dink ek gaan die groot rolle speel om te bepaal. (P2)

It can therefore be concluded that the existing relationship between the retained child and his educator will determine whether it would be beneficial for them both to place the child in the same class as the year before. The child and his parents should be actively involved in the decision-making process in this regard.

4.4 CONCLUSION

A discussion of the categories of meaning that emerged from the results of the semi-structured interviews with retained middle childhood learners and educational professionals were presented in this chapter. The discussion of the empirical results formed part of the data analysis process. The results correlated with the literature review that was discussed in chapter two and three and therefore concludes the process of triangulation that was used for the purpose of this study. By triangulating the data from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the "information-rich" participants with that of the literature review, enabled the researcher to do a more comprehensive study. The different types of sources led the researcher to develop better insight into the dynamics of middle childhood grade retention, thereby reaching the objective of identifying a framework from which the retained middle childhood learner can be approached in the process of supporting him through his experience of grade retention.

The wealth of information and viewpoints generated by the semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to develop reasonable and workable guidelines for practical use in the future. These guidelines will be discussed in chapter five. An evaluation and conclusion of the total research process will also follow.

CHAPTER 5

PHASE 4: EARLY DEVELOPMENT

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Cook and Fonow in Shaw and Gould (2001:97) state the following: "Research should do more than merely describe the world; it should change it". According to the authors it implies that knowledge can and should result in action for positive social change. This research study was designed with a certain action-orientated goal in mind, namely to design workable and reasonable therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who need to support the retained middle childhood learner. The research results can therefore benefit practice, as is typically intended with intervention research of a qualitative nature. The research process that was followed guided the researcher through a systematic process of personal empowerment and theory generation.

Chapter one to four of the research report focused on the first three phases of the intervention research process, namely problem analysis and project planning, information gathering and synthesis, as well as the design phase. The research process has therefore developed to the first step of phase four, namely early development, where recommendations and conclusions in respect of the research study and process will be compiled in the form of guidelines, which was the original aim of the study. The guidelines will be compiled by integrating the data from the semi-structured interviews with educators, educational psychologists and retained learners with that of the literature review. Through these guidelines the researcher will attempt to motivate and stimulate the counsellor in practice to be aware of the dynamics of middle childhood grade retention, thereby empowering him to master new skills in the process of supporting the retained middle childhood learner. The counsellor needs to be aware of the needs of the retained child and must be willing to accommodate these needs in the therapeutic environment.

Conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the empirical study and the literature review will be made in this chapter. It is therefore important to evaluate whether the aim and objectives of this study were achieved and whether the problem formulation and research question were answered.

5.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

5.2.1 Chapter 1: Introductory orientation

5.2.1.1 Summary of the chapter

Chapter one served as an introductory orientation with reference to broad views on the problem being investigated, the aim and objectives of the study and the research procedure to be followed. Although the research study grew out of the researchers's own curiosity for knowledge on a self-identified need in practice, the researcher still had to plan the research process according to ethical and reliable standards based on accepted research methodology. Chapter one explained the researcher's motivation for the topic of the study and formulated the problem according to the research question. The chapter further focused on the research methodology, the ethical requirements to which the study complied and concluded with definitions on key concepts that were used throughout the research report.

5.2.1.2 Conclusions as to whether the aim and objectives of the study have been achieved

5.2.1.2.1 Achieving the aim

The aim of the study was to develop therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who work with children that experience grade retention during middle childhood, thereby enabling the counsellors to render the necessary support to these children.

The aim of the study has been achieved through the use of the intervention research model. The researcher integrated the data from the empirical study that included semi-structured interviews with educators, educational psychologists and retained learners with that of a literature review in the process of compiling therapeutic guidelines for counsellors who need to render support to the retained child.

5.2.1.2.2 Achieving the objectives

The above-mentioned aim was achieved through the following objectives:

Objective 1: The researcher gained knowledge by collecting information through semi-structured interviews with counsellors who work with retained middle childhood learners on their experience of grade retention, as well as with middle childhood learners that experienced retention themselves, in order to identify the most important aspects to be included in guidelines.

Objective 2: The researcher completed a literature review on the theory and key concepts of the Gestalt therapeutic approach that served as a guideline from which the retained middle childhood learner can be approached in the process of supporting him through the experience of grade retention. This objective formed part of the second phase of the intervention research model and commenced after the empirical process was completed.

Objective 3: The researcher completed a literature review on the dynamics of middle childhood that served as a framework from which the retained middle childhood learner can be approached in the process of supporting him through the experience of grade retention. This objective formed part of the second phase of the intervention research model and commenced after the empirical process was completed.

Objective 4: The researcher developed therapeutic guidelines that will fulfil a valuable function for counsellors who need to support the retained middle childhood learner. In conclusion recommendations were made that will benefit counsellors in practice. This objective served as the first step of the fourth phase of the intervention research model.

5.2.1.3 Conclusions regarding the research question

The following research question directed this study: What are the most appropriate support components, identified from a theoretical perspective, previous research and

professional expertise, necessary to develop therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who work with the retained middle childhood learner?

The researcher is of opinion that the research question has been answered successfully through the research process that was followed. The most appropriate support components identified for counsellors who work with the retained middle childhood learner were initially ordered into 17 categories from which 16 guidelines were compiled.

5.2.1.4 Recommendation regarding the way the problem was addressed

The researcher recommends that the intervention research model must be applied for all research purposes that seek to strengthen the social ties between the individual and the social environment. It allows the researcher to create human service approaches that will enhance the quality of life of the affected individual. For the purpose of this study the intervention research model allowed the researcher to successfully address the problem that was formulated and to design therapeutic guidelines for counsellors in practice who render support to the retained middle childhood learner in the process of assisting the child in the situation.

5.2.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical perspective on the Gestalt therapeutic approach

5.2.2.1 Summary of the chapter

Chapter two highlighted a theoretical perspective on Gestalt theory and principles as an appropriate approach for working with the retained child during middle childhood. The theoretical principles underlying the Gestalt approach to counselling and the therapeutic goals and concepts of Gestalt theory were explained. The chapter focused on how the unique characteristics of the child-client are met within Gestalt therapy.

Chapter two emphasized that Gestalt therapy is practiced within a theoretical framework grounded in field theory, phenomenology and holism and that the Gestalt therapist is interested in the ongoing relationship between the child and his environment. From the theory of Gestalt therapy it became evident that through

restoring the child's awareness of his own healthy and unhealthy functioning, the child is empowered to rely on his own ability to lead a satisfying and creative life.

5.2.2.2 Conclusion

The researcher is of opinion that the philosophy, theory and practice of Gestalt therapy can be applied with minimal adjustment to effective therapeutic work with children of all ages. Gestalt theory values the child as an unique individual and respects his ability to be in control of his destiny, despite the dynamics of his problems. The retained middle childhood learner needs to receive messages of positive belief in his ability to function as a healthy human being and can therefore benefit from the Gestalt approach to human nature.

5.2.2.3 Recommendation from chapter 2

The researcher recommends that the counsellor who renders support to the retained middle childhood learner must be aware of the Gestalt belief that through opening a child's awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses he is capable of being in control of his own path of growth.

5.2.3 Chapter 3: Middle childhood dynamics and the impact of the child's school experience for future development

5.2.3.1 Summary of the chapter

Chapter three emphasized the dynamics of middle childhood as a challenging and active period of growth where the child's expanding world enhances major changes in his cognitive, personality and social development. Theoretical perspectives that influenced the view of middle childhood development were discussed; focusing on typical thought patterns of the child as well as the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority that has a major effect on the development of the child's self-esteem. The chapter further highlighted the important influence of the social dynamics of the family, peer group and the school environment on the child's feelings of mastery or failure. Chapter three identified the contrasting view between how the educational

system views grade retention as a positive intervention and that of the child who experiences it as a socially stigmatizing event.

5.2.3.2 Conclusion

It became evident from the discussion in chapter three that middle childhood should be viewed as an important phase in the psychological development of the child. The child during middle childhood typically needs to conquer feelings of mastery and failure. The retained child is therefore more at risk of forming an unrealistic image of himself and needs support to positively deal with the effect of grade retention. From this chapter it became apparent that counsellors who render support to the retained child should be aware of the dynamics of middle childhood and should have a sound knowledge of the effect of grade retention on the developing child.

5.2.3.3 Recommendation from chapter 3

The researcher recommends that the counsellor who renders support to the retained middle childhood learner should have a sound knowledge of the dynamics of middle childhood grade retention. The counsellor should approach the child in therapy from a perspective that recognizes the child's developmental capacities and individual differences and to therefore apply a model built on strengths rather than failures.

5.2.4 Chapter 4: Discussion of empirical results through data analysis and interpretation

5.2.4.1 Summary of the chapter

Chapter four highlighted the process of data analysis and interpretation that was used and that led to answering of the initial problem formulation, thereby achieving the aim of the study. The empirical results that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with retained middle childhood learners, educators and educational psychologists were discussed as part of the data analysis process. The results were correlated with the literature review that was discussed in chapter two and three and therefore concluded the process of triangulation that was used for the purpose of this study. In addition the chapter identified categories of meaning that emerged from the process

of triangulation. Direct quotations, serving as a source of raw data that gave meaning to the experience and perceptions of the participants, were given according to the different categories. Interpretation of these findings led the researcher to develop reasonable and workable guidelines for future practical use.

5.2.4.2 Conclusions regarding the method of data analysis and interpretation followed

The researcher is of opinion that the method of data analysis and interpretation that was used served as an effective method to make sense of the massive amount of data that emerged in the process of producing findings. Significant patterns of meaning could be identified that could serve as a framework from which the therapeutic guidelines for counsellors who render support to the retained middle childhood learner could be designed. The process of triangulation enhanced the objectivity of the study.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS FOR THIS STUDY

The process of data analysis and interpretation that was discussed in chapter four led the researcher to identify 17 categories from which guidelines for counsellors, who work with the retained middle childhood learner, could be designed. Category 4 and category 12 both focused on the importance of thorough planning of the retention year. The researcher categorized them under the same guideline, namely category 4, when compiling the guidelines. The conclusions that were drawn are therefore divided into the following 16 categories:

- Category 1: The child's emotional experience of being retained.
- Category 2: Positive self-esteem is linked to a sense of achievement.
- Category 3: Educational professionals perceive grade retention as less socially stigmatizing for younger children.
- Category 4: Educational professionals support the reasons for grade retention, but warn that it can be a waste of time if not planned correctly.

- Category 5: Educational professionals perceive grade retention as an emotional experience for the child.
- Category 6: Educational professionals emphasize the importance of support for the retained child and the conveying of specific messages.
- Category 7: The parents of the retained child experience the retention emotionally and lack knowledge on how to support the child.
- Category 8: Educational professionals suggest that the other children in the retained child's class and school should be educated about the value of grade retention.
- Category 9: Educational professionals must be aware of their own emotional experience of grade retention and the responsibility it holds for them.
- Category 10: The retained child and his parents must be informed early on of the possibility of grade retention.
- Category 11: The retained child should be supported from a multi-disciplinary approach.
- Category 12: The retained child should be valued in totality and in the context of his field.
- Category 13: A caring environment in the classroom and in the school should set the standard for support of the retained child.
- Category 14: The retained child should experience a sense of belonging.
- Category 15: Educators lack knowledge on how to support the retained child.
- Category 16: Placing the retained child with the same educator as the year before can be beneficial to both educator and child.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING THE RETAINED MIDDLE CHILDHOOD LEARNER

The following guidelines are recommended based on the conclusions that were drawn:

Category 1: The child's emotional experience of being retained

The counsellor must be aware of the vast amount of feelings that the child experiences as a result of the grade retention and that his development might hinder

his own ability to express these feelings. The counsellor must be wary of the perception that because the child is young he does not experience emotions and thoughts as painfully as an older child would have. Retained middle childhood learners express feelings of sadness and shock as a result of the negative news and they are aware of the losses associated with the retention, despite their age. They are generally more comfortable with expressing their emotions and thoughts through drawing than through verbalizing their experience in an in-depth conversation. Their cognitive development allows them to rationalize the experience and therefore they tend to focus on simplistic advantages that the situation holds for them, for example being more advanced than the new children in the class, repeating stimulating projects and the comfort of returning to the same class and educator. The counsellor should value these advantages as viewed through the eyes of the child, despite the level of simplicity. This could lead to a combination of feelings of sadness and happiness about the experience, each of which should be dealt with according to the child's level of development. The counsellor should be aware of the socially stigmatizing effects of the experience and the child's inability to deal emotionally with the responses of other children towards his retention. The counsellor should therefore protect the retained child emotionally by assisting him to inform his friends of the retention. The child could benefit from an intervention strategy directly after he has been informed of the retention, instead of just allowing him to return to his class and his normal routine.

- Application to practice:

The counsellor should approach the retained middle childhood learner from a perspective that focuses on emotion and that values the child's unique developmental abilities. Play therapy techniques should be considered as a way of effectively assisting the child to express feelings and thoughts about the experience. The counsellor should value the child's perception of the experience and should assist him in ways to deal with his mixed emotions, loss of friendship, the reactions of others and the possibility of being teased. The counsellor thereby empowers the child to deal effectively with the experience of grade retention and to reap the benefits thereof on his own path of growth.

Category 2: Positive self-esteem is linked to a sense of achievement

The counsellor should be aware of the effects of the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority that the middle childhood learner should conquer successfully on his path of healthy development. The impact of this crisis on the child who repeats a grade as well as the implications thereof on how the child perceives his own level of competence should be valued. The counsellor should be aware of the fact that the child judges himself according to his perception of how others view his ability. The child that achieves according to the set standard feels good about himself.

- Application to practice:

The counsellor should be aware of the correlation between the child's achievement and his self-esteem. The counsellor should be aware of the effect of grade retention on the retained middle childhood learner's self-esteem and should assist the child to develop a positive sense of himself, despite the experience. The child should be made aware of his strengths and weaknesses and the fact that the one can compensate for the other.

Category 3: Educational professionals perceive grade retention as less socially stigmatizing for younger children

Research indicates that educational professionals lack knowledge on the dynamics of grade retention and also focuses on their misconception that the younger child experiences grade retention as less socially stigmatizing than the older child. Educational professionals support retention of earlier grades, because they perceive the younger child as unable to conceptualize his feelings about the experience.

- Application to practice:

The counsellor who renders support to the retained middle childhood learner should keep himself informed about research on grade retention, thereby ensuring that he is kept up to date with findings and suggestions on how to effectively support such a child. In addition this will minimize misconceptions about the effect of grade retention on the child.

Category 4: Educational professionals support the reasons for grade retention, but warn that it can be a waste of time if not planned correctly

The counsellor needs to be aware that while supporting the reasons for the child's grade retention, whether academic or emotional, the year could be a waste of time if it is not planned according to the child's needs. Thorough planning of the retention year is therefore essential in ensuring that the child benefits from the retention.

- Application to practice:

All professionals involved in middle childhood grade retention should participate in the thorough planning of the retention year, which should be based on the specific needs of the child. The child should be informed of the planning in so far as it is appropriate and he understands it.

Category 5: Educational professionals perceive grade retention as an emotional experience for the child

The counsellor should be aware of the emotional effect of grade retention on the middle childhood learner and the feelings of instability, uncertainty and self-doubt that might be experienced. The counsellor needs to monitor the child for any unusual behaviour and should intervene appropriately to enable the child to deal with his emotions. The counsellor also needs to be aware of how grade retention labels the child as being different and that other children of the same age do not perceive grade retention as a positive intervention. The experience of grade retention and the rejection by his peers negatively influences his self-esteem and holds new challenges for the child who now needs to initiate new friendships. The child therefore needs assistance and support to prevent him from developing a negative self-esteem and to encourage him to broaden his circle of friends. The counsellor should be aware of the fact that if the child's emotions about the experience of retention are dealt with effectively, it can have a positive effect on his achievement. Grade retention impacts on the child's whole life and the counsellor should be aware of how even the practical implications could give the child the feeling that he is different, for example not being in the same sports team as his previous classmates and friends.

- Application to practice:

The counsellor who renders support to the retained middle childhood learner needs to support the child in dealing with his emotions about the experience and the impact thereof on his whole life.

Category 6: Educational professionals emphasize the importance of support for the retained child and the conveying of specific messages

The counsellor should encourage all forms of support for the retained child, for example involving him in therapy or encouraging the educator to involve the child in special interaction in the class environment. There is no doubt that the retained middle childhood learner needs support in the process of dealing with the experience. Other professionals involved in the child's life need to be educated regarding the variety of support available and the messages of hope that need to be conveyed to him.

- Application to practice:

The retained middle childhood learner requires support on different levels that will encourage his acceptance of the retention. The counsellor needs to evaluate the needs of each child individually in the process of involving the child in the appropriate form of support.

Category 7: The parents of the retained child experience the retention emotionally and lack knowledge on how to support the child

Professionals involved with the retained learner falsely assume that the child's parents have the knowledge and skills to support the child and tend to be unaware of the emotional impact of the retention on the parents. The educator has a responsibility not only to educate the parents on how to assist and support the child, but also to support the parents themselves in their emotional experience of their child's retention and in the process of accepting it. A partnership between the educator and the parents allows for ultimate support of the child's needs on all levels.

- Application to practice:

The counsellor needs to be aware of the emotional reaction of the retained child's parents towards the news of the retention and should offer the appropriate assistance and support to them. The counsellor should educate the parents on practical ways to support their child emotionally. The retained child could be supported more effectively if a partnership is formed with his parents, thereby also helping the parents to accept the retention.

Category 8: Educational professionals suggest that the other children in the retained child's class and school should be educated about the value of grade retention

The lack of knowledge by parents and children in general on the reasons for grade retention enhances the socially stigmatizing effect thereof for the retained child. The counsellor needs to be aware of the fact that the other children in the retained child's class and school should be educated about the reasons and benefits of retention, as well as how to deal with the child who experiences retention. It will not only minimize the socially stigmatizing effect of grade retention, but will also encourage acceptance and a positive attitude of empathy towards the retained child.

- Application to practice:

The counsellor should participate with other educational professionals in the process of educating parents and children in general about the reasons and benefits of grade retention.

Category 9: Educational professionals must be aware of their own emotional experience of grade retention and the responsibility it holds for them

Grade retention affects everybody involved in the retained child's life. Professionals working with the retained middle childhood learner need to be aware of their own emotional reaction towards the child and his experience and should be able to deal with their emotions in a positive light in the process of fulfilling their responsibility towards the child. The educator's seniority might enhance his ability to deal effectively with grade retention. Professionals also need to be aware that the reality

of the current educational system does not provide for efficient support of the educator who has a retained child in his class.

- Application to practice:

Educational professionals working with the retained middle childhood learner should be educated on their own emotional experience towards grade retention and how to deal with it. Schools should be aware that seniority enhances an educator's ability to accommodate the needs of the retained child more effectively. Educational professionals should be made aware of their responsibility towards the retained child, despite the shortcomings in the educational system to provide for the necessary support for the retained child.

Category 10: The retained child and his parents must be informed early on of the possibility of grade retention

The retained child and his parents benefit from being informed in advance of the possibility of the retention. It enhances their acceptance of the situation. Supporting the child through special interventions should then already come into effect.

- Application to practice:

Educational professionals working with the retained middle childhood learner should inform the child and his parents of the possibility of the retention as soon as it becomes highly probable. The counsellor should then already involve the child in special support strategies.

Category 11: The retained child should be supported from a multi-disciplinary approach

A multi-disciplinary approach towards the retained middle childhood learner ensures that his complex needs are met. The school should develop a multi-disciplinary approach from which the child's needs could be evaluated and addressed accordingly. Professionals, including educators, psychologists and therapists, could all participate in the support of the child and his parents.

- Application to practice:

The complexity of the needs of the retained middle childhood learner requires a multi-disciplinary approach.

Category 12: The retained child should be valued in totality and in the context of his field

The retained middle childhood learner should be approached from a holistic perspective that values him as a person with different and complex needs, thereby encouraging awareness of both his strengths and weaknesses and the fact that the one can compensate for the other. The child's existence as part of a larger field should be valued and incorporated in the process of understanding him. His family, the school and his personal life space all influence the way he evaluates himself. The current outcomes-based and inclusive approaches in the educational system encourage an approach that values the child as an individual and uses a model that focuses more on strengths than weaknesses.

- Application to practice:

Professionals should support the retained middle childhood learner from a field theoretical and holistic approach that respects the influence of the child's field on his experience of the retention and that further encourages his awareness of both his strengths and weaknesses.

Category 13: A caring environment in the classroom and in the school should set the standard for support of the retained child

It is the school's responsibility to create an environment that supports the needs of the retained middle childhood learner and enforces a message of acceptance.

- Application to practice:

Professionals who render support to the retained middle childhood learner should participate in creating a caring environment in the school and classroom that enhances the child's acceptance of the retention experience.

Category 14: The retained child should experience a sense of belonging

The experience of grade retention enhances the child's feelings of being different and the need for a sense of security. The counsellor should therefore be aware of the child's needs and should encourage strategies that would meet his need for a sense of belonging and in this way assist him to accept the retention.

- **Application to practice:**

The counsellor should provide security for the retained child that would meet his need for a sense of belonging. The counsellor could provide security through educating the educator on how to involve the retained child in daily classroom activities and encouraging his involvement in friendships outside of the class environment.

Category 15: Educators lack knowledge on how to support the retained child

The counsellor who renders support to the middle childhood learner should be aware that educators lack knowledge on how to effectively support the retained child and that they tend to leave the responsibility for this to the child's parents. Educators do not receive training on the emotional aspects of grade retention and are therefore dependent on other professionals to educate them on the matter.

- **Application to practice:**

The counsellor who renders support to the retained middle childhood learner should educate educators on the emotional effects of grade retention and should advise them on how to support such a child and his parents.

Category 16: Placing the retained child with the same educator as the year before can be beneficial to both educator and child

Both the educator and retained child could benefit from placing the child with the same educator as the year before. The existing relationship between the child and his educator would influence such a decision.

- Application to practice:

Placement of the retained child with the same educator as the year before should be encouraged if there is an existing positive relationship between him and the educator.

5.5 SHORTCOMINGS OF THIS STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The guidelines serve as a framework that justifies the need for support of the retained middle childhood learner and does not intend to provide a specialized framework that must be followed in the therapeutic work with the child. It is the researcher's hope and intention that the study enhances and stimulates the curiosity of other professionals in the field of play therapy to investigate through further research the possibility of more specialized intervention strategies with the retained middle childhood learner. The researcher is of opinion that the study intensified the need for more specific therapeutic guidelines on how to support the child through the therapeutic process. For the purpose of this study the researcher found value in the research process that was followed in investigating the problem and therefore views the study as a valuable pilot study for a doctoral study.

5.6 FURTHER RESEARCH

Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:454) emphasize the importance of continuing and extending research on grade retention. The authors further recommend that the results of past and future research on grade retention should be disseminated to educational professionals as a means of influencing intervention strategies towards the child at risk of educational failure and that the information should also be circulated in mainstream society in order to educate and influence the general public. They highlight that the child's perspective on retention is largely absent in the research literature. Jimerson, *et al.* (2002:455) emphasize that "as it is the children themselves who are most affected by retention, it is crucial that further research ensures the inclusion of the voices of the students who are impacted by retention policies".

The researcher is therefore of the opinion that additional research is necessary to delineate interventions that reinforce and strengthen strategies on how to support the

retained middle childhood learner. As a result of this study the researcher identified the following areas of interest as possibilities for further research studies:

- Little information could be found on how the parents of the retained middle childhood learner perceive grade retention.
- Little information could be found on how the other learners in the retained child's class perceive grade retention. Intervention strategies could be designed on how to educate the other learners on grade retention and how to involve them in the process of supporting the retained child himself.
- The possibility of supporting retained middle childhood learners from a group therapeutic perspective instead of an individual approach could be investigated.
- A specific therapeutic programme to support the retained middle childhood learner could be designed.
- Little information could be found on how the siblings of the retained child perceive grade retention and how they could be involved in the process of supporting the child.

5.7 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

During the planning phase of the study the researcher became aware of how other professionals perceive grade retention as less traumatic for the middle childhood learner and how they assumed that the study would be of more value if focused on the adolescent for example. Upon completion of the research study and in the context of the conclusions and recommendations that were made, it became clear to the researcher that the child during middle childhood does perceive grade retention emotionally and do require support in dealing with the experience. It serves to prove that research is needed in all fields to either justify or verify perceptions on how children perceive experiences on their path of development. Professionals working with children should guard against basing their interventions with children who experience problems on their own assumptions.

For the purpose of this study the researcher attempted to motivate and stimulate the counsellor in practice to be aware of the dynamics of middle childhood grade retention, thereby empowering him to master new skills in the process of supporting

the retained middle childhood learner. Generalizations on the experience of grade retention and the required support can therefore not be made about the child in another developmental phase who experiences grade retention. The researcher recommends that each child should be evaluated in terms of the dynamics that are specific to his phase of development.

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APPENDIX 1

TELEPHONIC CONSENT

I, Ilse Schröder, am an enrolled student at the University of South Africa, presently doing the Master of Diaconiology (Direction: Play Therapy) degree. Dr Retha Bloem is my supervisor.

In part fulfilment of the degree I intend with my research study to develop therapeutic guidelines from a Gestalt approach for counsellors who support the retained middle childhood learner.

I hereby enquire whether you would grant me permission to participate, or to allow your child to participate, in a semi-structured interview for the purpose of my research study.

I, Ilse Schröder, hereby declare that I will treat all information given to me by

(Anonymous)

.....

as confidential. Information received will only be used for the purpose of the thesis, submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Diaconiology (Direction: Play Therapy).

Thank you for your cooperation.

APPENDIX 2

DRAWING FROM THE INTERVIEW WITH C1

APPENDIX 3

DRAWING FROM THE INTERVIEW WITH C2

APPENDIX 4

DRAWING FROM THE INTERVIEW WITH C3

APPENDIX 5

EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIPTION

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH P1

- R:** K, en dan gaan ek ook net hier ook aansit. Ek wil onmiddellik weer net baie dankie sê vir jou bereidwilligheid om vir my te help. Dit is vir my baie kosbaar, omrede hm jy hier, en ook die onderwyseresse met wie ek by die skool gepraat het, is vir my die mense met die eerstehandse inligting en die eerstehandse ervaring, so baie dankie daarvoor. K, net soos wat ek gesê het, ons gaan rêrig net baie ontspanne gesels. As ek vashaak, sal ek hier kyk, maar dit is regtig net soos wat gedagtes by jou opkom. Ek wil begin deur vir jou te vra wat is jou ervaring en wat is jou belewenis van 'n leerder wat 'n jaar herhaal?
- P1:** Ek dink ek het gemengde gevoelens daaroor, want ek weet by party skole is daar ondersteuning vir hierdie kinders en by party is daar bitter weinig.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** En hm, dat daar nog baie van die ou persepsie oorstaan dat die kind wat herhaal sal beter vaar omdat hy hierdie werk moet oordoen.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** Ek dink ons weet dit is nie so eenvoudig nie.
- R:** Hm, hm.
- P1:** Met ander woorde daar is baie tye in 'n kind se lewe wat baie keer op 'n baie hartseer manier verspil word deur so herhaling.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** Ek voel nie die herhalingsjaar word normaalweg optimaal gebruik nie.
- R:** Bedoel jy daarmee dat die emosionele komponent afgeskeep word?
- P1:** Ja, die emosionele komponent sekerlik, want as die akademiese komponent nie reg hanteer word nie, dan kan die emosionele komponent afgeskeep word, omdat die twee so saamloop.
- R:** Hm, Hm.
- P1:** En voordat 'n kind nie werklik waar 'n individuele ontwikkelingsplan het wat saam met hom oorgaan of by hom is wanneer hy die herhalingsjaar doen nie,

dink ek baie van die kind se tyd verspil word en die kind kry nie dan die volle voordeel nie.

R: So wie is betrokke by die opstel van so 'n ontwikkelingsplan?

P1: Kyk dit is nou 'n nuwe rigting in ons onderwys dat dit eintlik verwag word, maar ons is nou eintlik nog maar besig om die opleiding te verskaf aan skole.

R: Hm, hm.

P1: En daarvolgens moet elke kind wat dan nou 'n spesifieke probleem het, ek sal nou nie sê sommer enige ou klein probleempie nie, want dit vereis eintlik baie werk.

R: Hm.

P1: Maar dat daar nou gekyk moet word in diepte na hierdie kind en dat daar dan 'n plan opgestel word waar daar gekyk word na byvoorbeeld die emosionele faset van die kind se lewe, die verhoudingsfaset, hoe lyk dit by die familie en hoe lyk die akademie, en hoe lyk die kind sosiaal. Ag, al die verskillende fasette moet na gekyk word en dan word daar gekyk waar is die kind se sterktes, hoe ons dit kan gebruik om die kind dan verder te laat ontwikkel en dit dan nou eintlik te kan kompenseer vir die swak dele ...

R: Hm, hm ...

P1: ... en dit miskien ook te verbeter.

R: Hm, hm. Wie is almal betrokke by die opstel van so 'n ontwikkelingsprofiel?

P1: Dit behoort nou die klasonderwyser en die ouers en miskien nog 'n onderwyser of twee en in die geval kan dit nog multi-dissiplinêr wees, en dan 'n OBOS persoon en die skoolsielkundige ook insluit.

R: Goed.

P1: Maar ek sou nie sê elke liewe kind wat herhaal moet nou so 'n volledige span hê nie ...

R: Hm.

P1: ... maar ek voel daar moet beplan word vir 'n kind wat herhaal...

R: Hm,hm.

P1: ... en die kind moet betrek word by daardie beplanning. Natuurlik gaan dit afhang van die ouderdom van die kind. Jy gaan nou nie vir 'n Graad 1 wat herhaal sê maar dit gaan die doelwitte wees nie ...

R: Hm.

- P1:** ... maar jy kan tog vir daai kind aan die begin van daardie jaar, vir die kind sê ons gaan probeer om die kwartaal vir jou te help om hierdie boekie te laat baasraak.
- R:** Hm, hm.
- P1:** Die kind moet beslis weet dat 'dit is 'n kans wat ek het om nou beter te doen...
- R:** Hm, hm.
- P1:** ... nie maar net om weer daar te wees nie'. Doelwitstelling, baie belangrik hierso. 'n Kind moet eintlik die frustrasie en die, hm, ja, ek wil eintlik sê die teleurstellings wat hy gehad het van die eerste jaar moet hy eintlik kan oorkom met hulp, maar dan moet jy sukses hê.
- R:** En jy help hom eintlik om struktuur te skep. Hoe dink jy beleef kinders dit emosioneel om die jaar te herhaal?
- P1:** Kyk, met die nuwe kurrikulum en die progressie-beleid wat ons nou het, word daar verwag dat ouers reeds in die begin van jaar al moet begin met die bewusmaak van tekortkominge of agterstande wat die kind ervaar.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** Dus die ouer behoort in die begin van die derde kwartaal te weet as daar 'n baie groot waarskynlikheid is dat die kind 'n ekstra jaar moet hê, of soos ons sê meer tyd.
- R:** Hm, hm.
- P1:** Hm, in hoe 'n mate skole dit aan kinders verduidelik. Ek dink dit gaan verskil van skool tot skool. Ek weet wanneer ek gewoonlik met 'n onderwyseres saam werk oor so 'n kwessie, dan probeer ons die kind voor die tyd sê, ten minste 'n maand voor die tyd al bewus maak daarvan dat dit 'n groot waarskynlikheid is.
- R:** Hm, hm.
- P1:** En dat die kind moet weet dit is 'okay' ...
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** ... en hm, dit is 'n geleentheid ...
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** ... en dat die ouers ook dit aanvaar, want ek voel as die ouers dit aanvaar, dan projekteer hulle iets positiefs daarvoor aan die kind, maar baie dikwels het ons die probleem omdat die ouers dit nie aanvaar nie en dan is dit baie moeilik vir die kind.
- R:** En hoekom dink jy is dit vir hulle moeilik om te aanvaar, vir die ouers?

- P1:** Ek dink dit is vir die ouers sosiaal onaanvaarbaar om te sien 'maar my kind moet herhaal of agterbly'.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** Veral vir die ouer wat sosiaal baie kompetender is, dink ek is dit baie moeilik. En hulle het ook hulle tyd nodig om daarby aan te pas, want ek dink as 'n mens stadig daar deur werk en hulle wys op die voordele ...
- R:** Hm, hm.
- P1:** ... en hulle begin glo ook dat die skool dit vir die kind ten goede sal laat meewerk. Ja, ...
- R:** Ja, ek verstaan wat jy bedoel.
- P1:** Dit is nou taal wat baie positief is, maar ek, ek glo daaraan. Jy weet 'n mens kan 'n ding so aanpak dat dit tot die kind se beswil sal wees.
- R:** Goed K, so dit kom vir my neer op om vroegtydig vir die ouer en vir die kind in te lig en sal jy sê met ander woorde vroeg genoeg te begin met die voorbereiding?
- P1:** Ja, ja, want ek dink as die kind vroeg genoeg voorberei word, dan gaan hy dit makliker aanvaar, maar dit is maar 'n moeilike ding vir die kind om te aanvaar, want en ek dink hoe ouer hulle word, hoe moeiliker is dit. 'n Kind hier vanaf Graad 6, 7 vind dit verskriklik moeilik, want hierdie kinders is al in 'n portuugroep ingedeel.
- R:** Hm, hm.
- P1:** Ek, ek sou eintlik sê dat kinders behoort eintlik nie te herhaal na, na Graad 4 nie.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** Ek wil amper sê 'n mens moet probeer sê die laaste herhaling behoort in Graad 4 te wees, maar as dit dan nou nie gebeur nie, mens wil lievers daardie bietjie vaslegging hê. My vraag is net in hoe 'n mate hulle ondersteuning kry in die klasse.
- R:** K, my studie fokus nou meer op die kind in sy middel-kinderjare, so die outjie van 7 tot 12, en wat is jou ervaring van hulle emosionele belewenis? Jy het nou vir my gesê dit is erg en dit is nodig om hom te ondersteun en te help om dit vir hulle meer aanvaarbaar te maak, maar as jy nou moet dink byvoorbeeld aan 'n spesifieke geval waar jy betrokke was, hoe kon jy sien hoe die kind dit emosioneel beleef?

P1: Wel, ek kon sien dat die kind in die later middeljare dit baie moeiliker beleef.

R: Hm.

P1: Want soos ek gesê het, hierdie kinders het al verbintenis, baie sterker verbintenis wat partykeer oor 'n paar jaar kom en in daardie jare raak maats baie belangrik.

R: Hm, hm.

P1: En baie van die kind se sekuriteit in die skool hang af van sy sosiale verbintenis.

R: Hm, hm.

P1: En as jy nou moet ervaar nou gaan jou maats aan na 'n volgende klas ...

R: Hm, hm.

P1: ... jy bly agter ...

R: Hm.

P1: Jy moet nou met jonger kinders gaan sosialiseer...,

R: Hm, hm, hm.

P1: ... terwyl daar nogal die ding is van so ietwat van 'n meerderwaardigheid ...

R: Hm, hm ...

P1: ... van jou groep teenoor die jonger groep, en ons is die meer senior groep, ons is darem Graad 6, julle is Graad 5...

R: Hm, hm.

P1: Julle is eintlik nog maar babas!

R: Absoluut!

P1: En nou moet jy gaan sosialiseer met hierdie kinders en jy moet sien hoe jou groep aangaan ...

R: Hm.

P1: ... en jy moet nou uitgaan en dis nou pouse en jy gaan jou ou maats weer opsoek, maar geleidelik gaan daar maar 'n verwydering kom.

R: Hm.

P1: Dit het dus sosiaal 'n baie groot impak op 'n kind. En daarom dat ek voel daar moet meer gemaak word daarvan dat 'n mens moet gaan kyk hoe gou kan 'n mens liever 'n kind herhaal wat 'n agterstand het.

R: Ek verstaan, ek verstaan.

P1: Dit kan regtig 'n verbetering wees.

- R:** K, hoe lank sal jy sê, of sal jy sê in die begin van die nuwe jaar moet die ondersteuning aan so 'n kind voortgaan?
- P1:** Ek sou sê as die klasonderwyser dit kan doen.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** As hulle meer 'n plan het soos ons nou gesien het dat daar struktuur is en die doelwitte van 'jy herhaal nou hierdie jaar, maar kom ons gaan kyk nou na dié area waar jy probleme het'...
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** ...ons sê dit is nou taalontwikkeling ...
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** En ons kry die ouer in om sekere dinge met hierdie kind te doen, as hulle nie RO kan bekostig nie of ons doen in die klas miskien ekstra begripstoetse om die taal te probeer ontwikkel, maar dat die kind weet 'ek gaan vir jou hier en daar iets ekstra vra om te doen, want ons wil hê jy moet bykomende vaardighede ontwikkel sodat jy nie maar net deur skraap aan die einde van die jaar nie, maar voel dat jy regtig voorbereid is om 'n sukses van jou volgende jaar te maak'.
- R:** Goed. Dis amper vir my 'n 'hands on' benadering. K, en as ons nou dink wat jy gesê het dat 'n mens moet vroegtydig die kind inlig en begin voorberei dat dit 'n moontlikheid is dat hy gaan herhaal, ek wil graag kom by in die nuwe jaar. Is dit nodig om hom verder emosioneel te ondersteun of kan 'n mens nou maar net aanvaar mens het daaraan geraak aan die einde van die vorige jaar. Hy is nou in 'n nuwe klas, dat 'n mens hom kan los of dink jy daar is emosionele ondersteuning nodig aan die begin van die nuwe jaar?
- P1:** Ek dink daar is altyd emosionele ondersteuning nodig, want ek dink nie daardie bemeestering aspek wat jy nou eintlik wil hê moet nou versterk...
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** ... kan werklik versterk sonder die emosionele versterking nie.
- R:** Hm, hm.
- P1:** Dus, die kind se ervaring van 'ek word ondersteun' ...
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** ... en 'in die klaskamer gee juffrou vir my om' ...
- R:** Hm.

- P1:** ... en 'sy help vir my om nuwe verhoudinge of sosialisering met die nuwe maats'.
- R:** Hm, ek verstaan.
- P1:** Dan bou jy eintlik die weerbare kind op.
- R:** Ek verstaan.
- P1:** En, en as jy vir die kind dan kan help om bemeestering te hê en sekere vaardighede beter te kan hanteer. Al hierdie sake help eintlik. Hm, wat is daar verder nog wat ek aan kan dink? Dit gaan vir my oor die bemeestering, dit gaan vir my oor die emosionele ondersteuning, dit gaan vir my ook daaroor dat die kind moet ervaar dat sy omgewing vir hom betekenisvol is, dat hy ook ander miskien in die klas kan help. Dat hy nie net staan en voel maar 'ek is nou die outjie wat moet bakhand staan nie', dat juffrou miskien vir hom kan sê 'maar jy gaan altyd vir my die boeke uitdeel'. Dat hy voel 'ek het waarde en status ook.'
- R:** Ek waardeer nou soveel dat jy dit sê, want dit is 'n boodskap wat ook by die onderwyseresse uitgekóm het.
- P1:** Ja, ja.
- R:** Hoe hulle probeer om ekstra takies vir die kinders te gee en hoe dit hulle eintlik goed laat voel oor hulleself, hm en daai selfbemeestering aanmoedig wat jy van genoem het.
- P1:** Hm, hm, hm.
- R:** K, maar jy weet dit kom vir my neer op baie verwagtinge en baie verantwoordelikhede op die onderwyseres en ek is nie so goed opgevoed in hulle opleiding nie. Dink jy as 'n mens nou net dink aan skole in die algemeen, dat 'n onderwyseres of 'n onderwyser genoeg opleiding het hoe om 'n kind emosioneel te ondersteun wat dan nou herhaal?
- P1:** Ongelukkig dink ek nie so nie, want daar is baie, baie meer aandag wat daaraan gegee moet word.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** En iets wat ons nou die laaste tyd baie begin aandag gee hier vanaf OBOS is hoe onderwysers op 'n daaglikse wyse hulle verbintenisse of 'connections' met kinders kan opbou.
- R:** Hm, hm, hm.

- P1:** Want onderwysers dink baie keer as daar gesê word hierdie kind het 'n probleem, dan dink hulle om nou 'n verhouding met die kind op te bou gaan nou verg dat hulle nou na skool met hierdie kind moet gaan sit en gesels, dat hulle miskien vir die kind met 'n taak ekstra hulp moet kan gee, maar 'n verbintenis is iets wat alreeds begin deur bloot die wyse waarop jy kyk na 'n kind of jou stemtoon as jy byvoorbeeld net sê 'Johan' [klem].
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** Maar as jy sê 'Johan' [sagter] en daardie lyftaal, die respek wat jy betoon.
- R:** Absoluut.
- P1:** So, dit is daardie klein goedjies wat 'n verbintenis vestig tussen 'n onderwyser en 'n kind.
- R:** Hm, hm, hm.
- P1:** Wat al klaar vir die kind voel hier 'maar hier is ondersteuning, hier is 'n positiewe klimaat en ek is ontspanne in die klas ...
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** ... en juffrou of meneer glo in my'.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** Want dit is nog 'n ding wat deel is van weerbaarheid, dat die kind moet begin hoop kry, hy moet ervaar 'juffrou voel ek kan beter. Ek kan die werk baasraak.' Ek meen natuurlik volgens realistiese verwagting.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** 'n Kind wat herhaal gaan 'n mens mos nou nie verwag om nou 'n A student te wees nie, maar om beter te doen, want ek dink dit is Ek weet nie of onderwysers altyd bewus genoeg is dat jy vir die kind moet laat voel 'maar ek dink jy kan'.
- R:** Absoluut!
- P1:** Wat jy dink die kind kan doen. Soos ons netnou gepraat het. Dit gaan oor die sterktes. Dat jy die sterktes moet uitbou ...
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** ... en die kind moet laat hoop kry 'maar ek is oppad na herstel'.
- R:** K, dit laat my dink aan 'n ander vraag, hm en ek aanvaar hulle hanteer dit op skool, dat dit afhang van die skool hm, maar dink jy dit is tot die kind se voordeel, die kindjie wat dan nou herhaal, om die volgende jaar terug te gaan

na dieselfde juffrou of is jou mening dat dit beter is om hom by 'n nuwe juffrou te plaas?

P1: Dis regtig nie 'n vraag wat ek 'n duidelike antwoord op kan gee nie, want ek dink dit hang af van die juffrou. Ek sou sê as die kind 'n baie goeie verhouding met die juffrou gehad het, is dit baie goed.

R: Hm.

P1: Maar natuurlik die teenoorgestelde is ook waar. As dit nie so was nie, dan dink ek is dit beter as die kind geskuif word, want ek dink om twee jaar saam met iemand te wees waar daar spanning is en dit is ook nogal ook 'n faktor waarna 'n mens moet kyk. Gewis nou die kind sou nou nie goed gedoen het in Graad 1 nie, maar daar is baie spanning tussen die kind en die Graad 1 juffrou.

R: Hm.

P1: Die emosionele is so belangrik dat ek sou sê miskien moet 'n mens dan maar dink dis beter dat die kind dalk na 'n meer gemoedelike, aanpasbare Graad 2 juffrou te laat gaan in 'n skool, 'n klein skooltjie byvoorbeeld waar daar net een juffrou is vir elke graad en laat die kind dan nou maar liefste by die juffrou herhaal, want ek, dit is nou, ja, kyk, die Graad 2 is al die ouderdom van sewe, want dit is vir 'n kind 'n geweldige terugslag om by iemand te wees van wie hy nie hou nie.

R: En dink jy daardie keuse moet aan die einde van die jaar aan die kind gegee word by watter juffrou hy geplaas gaan word of dink jy die besluit moet binne die onderwys, binne die skoolopset geneem word?

P1: Ek dink almal moet geken word.

R: Hm.

P1: En 'n mens sal baie gou ervaar hoe die kind voel oor 'n onderwyseres. 'n Ouer sal dit aan die hoof kan oordra of aan 'n departementshoof. Dit sal nou, dit sal, dit sal nie 'n onbekende faktor wees nie, omdat dit so belangrik is.

R: Goed. K, so wie dink jy behoort almal betrokke te wees by die ondersteuning van so 'n kind? Jy het nou reeds genoem definitief die ouers, die onderwysers. Hm, wie, wie beskou jy nog as deel van die ondersteuningspan?

P1: Wel, as daar enigsins 'n OSLO [onhoorbaar] juffrou is, beslis sy.

R: Hm.

P1: En as dit enigsins moontlik is dat die skoolsielkundige van tyd tot tyd 'n kort gesprek met so 'n kind kan hê ...

R: Hm.

P1: ... sal dit baie goed wees.

R: Hm.

P1: Dit hoef nie 'n lang gesprek te wees nie. Sê nou maar dit sou een keer per kwartaal kon plaasvind.

R: Hm.

P1: Maar ek weet ook met hoeveel skole ons werk en hoeveel krisis daar opkom, maar daar sal miskien 'n kind of twee wees in 'n skool wat dit veral vereis.

R: Hm.

P1: ... maar almal sal dit waarskynlik nie so nodig hê nie. Ek vind dat kinders in die grondslagfase redelik gou aanpas by so 'n situasie.

R: Is dit?

P1: Hm.

R: K ...

P1: Maar 'n mens loop baie keer eintlik oor die kind. Jy weet, jy gaan nie eintlik altyd in diepte af nie. Ek, ek dink nie ons weet altyd wat dit aan 'n kind doen nie.

R: Ja, ek sal sê, my ervaring nou by E waar al die kindertjies wat herhaal het aan die begin van die jaar na my verwys is en ek spel terapie met hulle gedoen het. Hm, party het ek na vyf sessies getermineer ...

P1: Hm.

R: ... en daar is een outjie wat ek spesifiek nou langer aangegaan het en dit was ongelooflik interessant hoe waardevol dit vir daardie kind ...

P1: Hmmm.

R: ... was dat ek 'n langer pad met hom geloop het.

P1: Hmmm.

R: En dat dinge wat, byvoorbeeld soos hoe kinders hom gespot het, eintlik eers later toe ons verhouding baie sterker was ...

P1: Hm.

R: ... en hy meer gemaklik by my gevoel het, wel uitgekom het en hy dit kon deel.

P1: Hm.

R: So ek dink tog, jy weet my ervaring is dat dit van kind tot kind afhang en dit hang af van wat is jou moontlikheid hoe lang pad wat jy met so 'n kind kan stap, maar ek is ook baie realisties dat of... Ja, ek is realisties om te besef dat

die realiteit laat dit nie toe dat daar regtig 'n lang pad met elke kind gestap kan word nie.

P1: Hm, hm, hm.

R: Karen, so as jy vir my kan raad gee?

P1: Dit is hartseer.

R: Hm, dit is hartseer en dan hoop 'n mens maar net dat die huislike omstandighede is sterk genoeg dat daar die nodige ondersteuning kan plaasvind. K ...

P1: Maar ongelukkig is dit baie dikwels nie ...

R: Ja, ek stem saam, maar as jy vir my moet raad gee in terme van watter riglyne 'n mens kan opstel om beraders te help wat so 'n kind moet ondersteun, watter gedagtes kom op by jou?

P1: Ek sou sê heel eerstens is dat jy gesprekke met die ouers, want ouers wat bewus raak daarvan dat hulle kind eintlik bevoordeel kan word met die herhaling en wat ingelig word oor hoe hy die kind moet ondersteun, want baie ouers ... Jy weet ons praat nou nie net van ons hoogs ontwikkelde ouer nie.

R: Hm.

P1: Baie ouers weet werklik nie hoe om hul kinders emosioneel te ondersteun nie.

R: Hm, hm, hm.

P1: Dus, hulle moet daardie inligting kry.

R: Hm, hm, hm.

P1: En ja, ek weet nie eintlik of onderwysers altyd goed genoeg opgelei is daarvoor nie. Ek weet byvoorbeeld dat baie van hulle nie onderhoudsvaardig is nie, met ander woorde hoe jy nou die ouer moet hanteer. Dus, dis 'n lang pad wat 'n mens saam moet loop om daar te kom.

R: Hm.

P1: Maar 'n mens kan tog net vir 'n ouer 'n paar basiese riglyne gee en bewus maak daarvan dat hulle moet luister na hulle kind, dat hulle ook ondersteun, dat hulle die kind moet laat ervaar dit is vir hulle 'okay' dat hy agterbly.

R: Hm.

P1: Vir hulle is dit belangrik. Jy weet hierdie warm verhouding teenoor die kind van 'ons is vir jou lief, ons gee mos nie om nie, ons wil hê jy moet die beste kry en ons dink dit is vir jou die beste'.

R: Hm, hm. Om die aanvaarding oor te dra.

P1: Ja, ja. En, en dan dat die onderwyser dit dan ook so sal oordra, en dan wanneer hulle die kind in die nuwe jaar nou met struktuur moet ondersteun, dat hulle ook gaan help met verhoudinge in die klas ...

R: Hm.

P1: ... en ook op die speelgrond ...

R: Hm.

P1: ... word hy geterg soos wat jy nou net gesê het.

R: Hm, hm, hm.

P1: Dus, die sosiale bindinge wat hy in die nuwe klas moet opbou en dan, hm die verhoudinge daar buite op die speelgrond ...

R: Hm, hm.

P1: ... want dit kan 'n kind ... Ek meen een woord daar op die speelgrond kan vir 'n kind geweldig erg wees.

R: Hm, hm.

P1: Die skole moet baie sensitief wees daarvoor.

R: Hm, hm. Kinders moet weet, ek, ons mag nie terg nie. Jy weet as 'n mens 'n reël kan hê soos ons stap in 'n reguit ry. Hoekom kan 'n mens nie weet ons mag nie terg nie?.

R: Hm, hm, hm.

P1: Skole gee te min aandag daaraan vir my.

R: Hm, hm, hm.

P1: Dit moet net 'n taboe wees.

R: Hm. Absoluut!

P1: Want kinders word te veel geterg, en van die kinders doen werklik ernstige emosionele skade op.

R: Hm, hm.

P1: En ons het eenvoudig nie die, die manne- en die vrouekrag om daarmee te kan help nie.

R: Hm, hm. Goed, so jy weet jou raad is dat daar 'n pad ook met die ouers ...

P1: Hm.

R: ... gestap moet word en ek hoor ook dat daar 'n pad met die onderwyser gestap moet word.

P1: Hm, hm, hm.

- R:** 'n Onderwyser moet bemagtig word hoe om die emosionele komponente aan te spreek.
- P1:** Hm.
- R:** Hm K, dit het nou my laat dink aan iets anders. Hoe dink jy beleef die ander kinders in die klas, die maatjies, of nie noodwendig eers die maatjies nie. Net die klasmaats so 'n outjie in 'n klas wat herhaal?
- P1:** Ek dink so 'n kind word maar geïdentifiseer in die begin as 'iemand wat anders is'.
- R:** Hm.
- P1:** En hm, ek dink, hm die gewone, hm klaskamer bestuur en die hantering van die juffrou help eintlik om daardie kind te integreer in die groep, maar ek dink dit is baie, dit is moeilik vir die kind, want ek dink nie hy word onmiddellik aanvaar nie, en daarom dink ek ook dat die nuwe groep moet eintlik ingelig word van hierdie maatjie wat nou by ons is gaan nou deel word van die groep en ons wil graag hê julle moet vir hom of haar ook as 'n maatjie aanvaar, wanneer die outjie nie daarby is nie. Ek weet dat onderwysers dit al op hierdie wyse hanteer het, om die outjie te stuur om iewers iets te neem en hy het net 'n kort geselsie met die klas om te sê 'ek verwag dit van julle, want dit kon ook een van julle gewees het, of dit kon jou boetie, jou sussie gewees het'. Sodat 'n mens moet net so 'n bietjie vir hulle help om net vir hulle om 'n bietjie empaties indien moontlik na hierdie maatjie te kyk. Dus, dit gaan meer oor hoe sensitief jy met hom is.
- R:** Dis vir my so kosbaar alles wat jy sê, want jy vat dit vir my so mooi saam. Hm, ek kan hoor die, die verantwoordelikheid by die onderwyser en ek kan hoor dat dit amper neerkom om net vir almal te leer hoe, hoe om dit te hanteer.
- P1:** Hm, hm.
- R:** Vir almal dit aanvaarbaar te maak.
- P1:** Ja, ek dink dit gaan eintlik maar amper soos wat jy 'n gestremde kindjie sal help, dit is nie 'n gestremdheid nie, maar dit is 'n 'andersheid', 'n mens moet net deur die kind in te trek in die groep in en die kind te laat voel hy is 'okay' daar en die ander laat voel hy is 'okay', maar dit is maar moeilik met die groot klasse wat onderwysers moet kan hanteer.

- R:** K, ek voel daar is nie iets spesifieks ... Ek wil net kyk of dit orals loop. Ek wil net vinnig weer deurgaan. Dalk net 'n laaste vraag. Watter benadering dink jy behoort gevolg te word in so 'n proses om so 'n kind te ondersteun?
- P1:** Ja. Ek dink, ek kan nou nie al die punte opnoem nie, maar ek glo in die ontwikkelingsbenadering wat gaan volgens ontwikkelingsbehoefte. Dat 'n mens moet werk op die kind se sterktes, dat die kind moet ervaar daar is altyd 'n kans vir my, dat 'n mens moet weet daar is nie maklike antwoorde vir elke kind nie, elke kind is uniek. Hm, dat 'n mens die kind moet laat ervaar, hm hy kan eintlik sy probleme oorkom, maar dit wat hy nie kan oorkom nie, dit kan hy integreer en weer kompenseer met ander dinge, alhoewel jy dit mos nou nie in sulke taal vir 'n kind sê nie. Dus dit gaan vir my oor ... Ja. Ek sou sê die hele benadering van die ontwikkeling en en, en die ontwikkelingsbehoefte en, en baie sterk moet gaan kyk na hoe ervaar die kind dit. Hy ervaar ook, want as daardie klimaat in die klas is dan wil ek amper sê, kan ons amper al die ander goetertjies wat ons gesê het van die tafel afvee, want dit gaan alles in daardie respek vir die kind en omgee vir die kind vervat word. So, ek dink dit is vir my die goue perspektief, of hm benadering.
- R:** K, is daar enigiets wat jy vir my wil bynoem? Ek dink jy het vir my soveel kosbare goed gegee.
- P1:** Ek dink nie daar is iets wat ek meer wil sê nie, behalwe dat wanneer 'n kind ervaar dat hy, ons gebruik die woord 'belonging', dan kan hy begin om te ontwikkel. En as hy dan ook kan begin om sy werk te verbeter wat hy die vorige jaar moes herhaal, dan begin hy duidelik die ervaring kry van 'ek het sekuriteit' en dan begin hy sy selfbeeld te verbeter en dan beïnvloed dit ook die kind se verhoudinge. So, dit begin maar alles daar by die 'belonging'.
- R:** K, baie, baie dankie.
- P1:** Hm, dis regtig vir my 'n plesier!